

THE CLERK'S COLUMN

APRIL 2010

Elections

With election fever gripping the politicians to the sound of yawns from the general public, the Clerk is not prepared to stick his neck out, or insert his nose into, the political scene. But please don't forget that we have our own election on May 6th, to choose a new Borough Councillor for our ward. The presence of our Borough Councillors at Parish Council meetings is enormously helpful, and their often unreported work for our community is invaluable. This election is important to you, so you are urged to turn out and vote. And why not vote in the General Election while you are about it.

Information, information, information

As mentioned last month, this column hopes to follow the BBC's founder and to inform and entertain. At the moment there's rather a shortage of entertainment, but please don't stop reading, as there's no lack of information. One of the purposes of the Annual Assembly, which took place on March 6th, is to give parishioners an account of what has been going on and who are the worthy citizens who make things happen. It would be nice to think that the rather small turn-out indicates that most people are happy about what goes on and would like the people concerned to go on. But the work of the Parish Council and the many volunteers who run things is not just about pot-holes and applications for permission to extend kitchens or prune *Robinia Pseudo-Acacias*. There are lots of other things they would like you to know about, so the menu this month will consist of selected helpings of informative minced minutes.

From the Minutes of the Annual Assembly 2010

Chairman's Report. Cllr Griffiths, welcomed those present, including Cllr Andrew Gibson, HCC and Cllr Graham Stallard, TVBC, thanking them warmly for their work on our behalf. He also thanked Paul Stanton for his valuable service as Parish Councillor and Governor of the Village School, whose chairmanship of the board was crowned by the successful completion of the new school premises. Alison Barham was welcomed as his successor on the Council. Referring to the resignation of Arthur Peters from the Borough Council he paid tribute to the dedicated service he had given to the Borough and the Parish and expressed sadness at the loss of his much-appreciated work for the community.

He continued with a review of the past year's events and the issues dealt with by the Council as recorded by the Clerk in his characteristic newsletters. These ranged from the ongoing efforts to retain the telephone box and the mysterious disappearance of the "fingers" of the signpost to the serious problems arising from the development of the Airfield, the dangers of the junction at Red Post Bridge and the potentially disastrous effects of delays in the response of the emergency services due to the confusion of our Red Rice Road with the road of the same name in Upper Clatford.

In fact the re-naming of roads is the business of the Borough Council, but in an effort to solve the latter problem, and at the urgent request of several parishioners, the Parish Council became involved, and found itself forced to follow meticulously the procedures required by the Borough, whose survey had indicated a clear majority of "those affected" (defined as those whose addresses would change) in favour of extending the name of Duck Street to cover the whole stretch between St.John's Cross and Cattle Lane. It was saddening that this process had resulted in dissension, especially in a community with a strong tradition of friendliness and with a Parish Council so renowned for its determination to maintain its unique character as to be labelled (albeit with an undertone of warm admiration for its independent spirit) by the Chief Executive of the Hampshire Association of Local Councils as "difficult" or even "rebellious". Be assured that Mr. Steven Lugg (for it is he) is one of our most loyal fans and keeps asking for copies of this column.

Finance

The Clerk presented a draft statement of the Council's finances, explaining that the amount raised through the Council Tax had to be increased by £1,000 to help cover the almost total loss of bank interest and commitments to expenditure on the Churchyard and the War Memorial Hall fence. Even so, the reserves would be diminished, though the auditors require that Parish Councils should retain reserves equivalent to their annual income.

County Councillor's Report

Cllr Andrew Gibson reported on the problems experienced by the County in connection with road maintenance; an extra £12 million was being provided to clear the backlog of repairs. A lengthsman scheme was being tried out in a number of villages. He was continuing to press for improvements to the Salisbury Road, including St. John's Cross and for traffic calming in the area of the new school. The County was considering provision of up to 10 gritting boxes for the village, although several residents considered that the question of legal liability for possible injuries had not been satisfactorily resolved. He welcomed pressure from residents on the County, such as the recent petition requesting improvements to the safety of the A343 and St. John's Cross.

Cllr Gibson explained the County's position over Red Post Bridge and discussed the various possible solutions to its dangers. The bridge would be closed for six weeks in the summer.

He congratulated the Village Shop on its continuing success and announced that as part of the County's policy of encouraging small businesses, he had just presented Geraldine Heather with a cheque for £7,800. The thanks of all present followed him out as he left for another engagement.

Borough Councillor's Report.

Cllr Graham Stallard expressed his regret at the resignation of Arthur Peters, whose diligence, attention to detail and dedication to the interests of the Parishes in Anna Ward would be greatly missed. He was looking forward to being able to share the responsibilities with a new Councillor after 6th May.

All those present endorsed his tribute to the Borough's employees for their efforts to maintain provision of services, such as refuse collection and gritting, during the recent wintry weather. The Council would be under severe financial pressure in the coming year and would continue its drive to make efficiency savings without reducing front-line services. TVBC's share of Council Tax was only 9%, and our tax was in the lowest third of the 60 Test Valley Parishes

Planning permission for the Airfield application had finally been granted on 19th March. Cllr Stallard was alone in not voting for permission. However, it was clear that the Co-op would be more acceptable occupants than Tesco, and the efforts of the "STOP" organisation in general and of Dr. John Moon in particular had ensured the application of stringent controls on, for instance, traffic movements and noise pollution. Work on the Hundred-acre roundabout was due to start just when summer traffic was reaching its peak on the A303.

In connection with the Borough's development strategy, Cllr Stallard was determined to support the Parish Council's plans for the village "envelope" and to defend the current Local Gap separating us from Andover

Police Report.

P.C. Richard Jewell came along with P.C.S.O. Ross Hanley to assure us that there was a marked downward trend in all forms of criminal activity; for instance anti-social offences were down by 30% and "acquisitive" crime down by 34%. (Little did he know that an organised gang had stripped Wiltshire of some 30 Landrovers and was about to get away with another well-known one from outside Cllr Wilkins's house). Appreciation was expressed for the work of Neighbourhood Watch, and the Chairman mentioned the fact that the organiser, Mike Butt, well deserved the award of the Hibbert Cup for services to the community.

Parish Organisations

a. Abbotts Ann Action. Dr. Moon regretted the failure of the campaign to prevent the Airfield site from becoming a storage and distribution centre rather than a business park. The Chairman thanked Dr. Moon for his contribution to the efforts to limit the environmental damage and emphasised the importance of his input.

b. Archives. Mr. Tim Tayler had found that much of his work consisted of answering queries, often from outside the village. He has shown a party from U3A round the village and had made valuable contact with the County Records Office.

c. Fete Committee. Although the Committee's chairman, Mr. Andrew Bulpitt, had been unable to attend, Cllr Graham Whyte reminded the meeting of the hard work of the committee and other volunteers in ensuring the continued success of the fete, which well deserved the endorsement of Sir George Young as the one which he most enjoyed visiting.

d. Footpaths. Mr. David Downey was unable to attend, but the Chairman wished to underline the value of his diligence in walking the footpaths and seeing that they were in good condition.

e. Nursery School. Mrs Rebecca Bone expressed appreciation for the Parish Council's undertaking to replace the War Memorial Hall's fence and to allow the Nursery School to use a section of the storage shed in the grounds. She also thanked the Hall Committee for their support in allowing the School's opening hours to be extended to 3 p.m.

The school was recently graded as "outstanding" by Ofsted, which put them in the top ten of pre-schools throughout the country, and there was a waiting list for 2-4-year-olds.

f. Sports Field. Cllr Wilkins reported that Mrs Alex Nolan had recently been elected Chairman of the committee. Current issues involved repairs to the roof of the Pavilion, the need for measures to stop cars being driven on the field and the request by Abbotts Ann Players for space to locate a container to house their props and wardrobe. Mr. Brian Sims was heartily thanked for his work as voluntary groundsman..

g. Sustainability Group. Mrs Wendy Davies reported on the establishment of an informal group of people with a common interest in caring for the environment, both local and global. A "brunch" in the village hall with a film and exhibition had been well attended and had produced many excellent ideas. There were regular informal meetings at the Eagle and plans were being formed for contributions to the Parish Magazine. A project being currently studied was for an "Apple Day", perhaps connected with the Harvest Festival.

h. Village School. Mr Paul Stanton reported that the construction of the new building was now complete, and the process of equipping the school for opening after Easter was under way. Arrangements were being made for guided tours and there would be a formal opening in June. The contractors deserved everyone's gratitude for the way they had minimised disruption and for leaving the site in such good order. Mr. Stanton received the congratulations of all present on this achievement. Please don't ask what is to happen to the old school premises, as nobody knows; or if they do, they re not saying.

i. Village Shop. Mr. Donald Sorterup described another successful year. He thanked the Parish Council and the organisers of the Eagle quiz for their support for replacing the air-conditioning equipment and the County Council for the recent grant which would enable the purchase of refrigerated display units and other items which would help to "grow the business". They would continue with their successful fund-raising events. So far takings had held up well, despite the recession. Mr. Sorterup closed with heartfelt thanks to the volunteers; they reflected the health of the community spirit, and the shop could not manage without them.

j. War Memorial Hall. Mr. Andrew Hayter expressed his appreciation of the support of the Hall Committee, which included representatives of users of the Hall. The departure of the Primary School, which had provided a steady source of income, would be partly balanced by the extension of the Nursery School's hours, but there was still some anxiety about the effect of a possible fall in income on the standard of maintenance. Improvements had included the replacement of the heating system, with financial help from the Parish, Borough and County Councils; there had been

teething problems (including the unfortunate failure to heat the Hall for the current meeting), but the gas bills were down. A new dishwasher was now installed and the old chairs would soon be replaced by lighter folding seating.

The programme of fund-raising events was continuing; the recent Burns Night had been a great success as had the earlier Trafalgar Dinner; a Battle of Britain celebration was planned for 18th September. Some residents expressed anxiety that the afternoon use of the hall would limit its availability for private functions, such as post-funeral receptions, but Mr. Hayter explained that school use provided some two-thirds of the Hall's revenue and it would be extremely difficult to make up the loss of this income. In any case the Hall would be available after 3 p.m. He closed with an appeal for more people to take up membership of the 100 Club.

k. Website. Although Mr. Keith Saunders was unable to attend, the Chairman wished to express the gratitude of the Parish for his great contribution to the community in his voluntary maintenance of this excellent website

In closing the meeting the Chairman renewed his, and the whole community's, thanks to all the many public-spirited Parishioners who gave so much time and energy to ensuring the happiness and well-being of the Parish.

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING : 1ST APRIL 2010

"Least said, soonest mended" is one of the Clerk's favourite aphorisms. But while it is reasonable for most of the Agenda items to wait quietly in the Minutes, two of them are too significant to be left there. I quote verbatim from the draft minutes - first the definitely good news:

Under Matters Arising, Item a reads: *The Chairman reported on the site meeting at Red Post Bridge on 19th March which was attended by representatives of the County, Borough and Parish Councils with officials from HCC and TVBC. It was agreed that measures to reduce the dangers of the crossing could no longer be postponed; it was suggested that the problems might be solved by installing traffic lights or by altering the priorities between Monxton Road and Red Post Lane. A later email from Mr. Ray Alborough, Senior Transport Engineer, TVBC, appeared to favour, as a third alternative, providing two mini roundabouts and extending the 30 mph limit on the Monxton Road. The Clerk was instructed to write... in support of the latter proposal.*

Twelve members of the public attended because of the other item. Whether this is good or bad news depends on your viewpoint, or perhaps even your address. Under "Red Rice Road Renaming": *Cllr Graham Stallard reported on a meeting with Mr. Stephen Lees, Senior Planning Officer, TVBC, attended by the Chairman and Clerk. Mr. Lees had received some reasoned objections to the proposed change, and, out of concern for the divisiveness arising from the issue, had delayed authorising the change to Duck Street, suggesting that representatives of supporters and opponents of the change should hold a meeting in order to try to arrive at a compromise. If this gave rise to a second application TVBC would waive the charge of £400.*

The Chairman and Cllr Oram had visited the Headquarters of the Ambulance Service, and they described the way in which the latest technology had eliminated the possibility of ambulances being mis-directed, thus removing some of the anxiety which had prompted the proposal in the first place. The Chairman also explained that challenges to the correctness and legality of the Parish Council's proceedings had caused delays, tried everyone's patience and placed a disproportionate burden on himself and the Clerk. Opening the matter to general discussion the Chairman expressed his regret that the issue had been allowed to cause such dissension and hoped that the "breathing space" now offered could be used for restoring damaged relationships and arriving at a reasonable solution.

From the extensive discussion that ensued it became clear that no useful purpose would be served by holding the suggested meeting. Cllr Stallard undertook to inform Mr. Lees accordingly.

End of story?

The next meeting will be on 6th May in the Pavilion.

Adrian Stokes, Clerk