

ABBOTTS ANN PARISH COUNCIL

Newsletter: December 2008

Carbon Footprints

King Edward VII, alias Tum-tum, was well-known for conspicuous consumption, so he would have felt rather out-of-place in his Memorial Hall in Upper Clatford on November 22nd. The Hall was packed with people from seven or eight Test Valley villages, all interested in the Carbon Crunch, the Climate Crisis and the Fuel Famine, and they certainly got their money's worth - well actually more than that, because not only was it free, but everyone went away with a present of two low-consumption light bulbs and a Powerdown gadget that switches off your peripherals when you turn off your computer, if you see what I mean.

Our own Jo Dixon played a vital part in the organisation of the meeting, in which we were given half a dozen highly professional presentations, ranging from a survey of the global situation, to very practical measures which we can all take to stop our homes from spilling heat into the village street. We heard about more sophisticated ways of getting energy into the house by extracting it from the ground, the sun or the wind, and there were representatives of firms who supply the necessary gadgetry. The snag for the older members of the audience was the fact that the pay-back time for most systems is rather long- i.e. it takes several years for the savings on your bills to cover the cost of installation. However, particularly in view of the grants available, it is well worth thinking about.

Not everyone is convinced that climate-change is man-made, but everyone present had to acknowledge the scary nature of the Fuel Famine. Carbon emissions come from burning fossil fuel, and this is where the alarm bells were ringing. Oil is becoming more difficult to find and more expensive to extract, while demand continues to rise, so if we haven't already reached the situation known as "Peak Oil" (i.e. the point where new discoveries of oilfields cannot keep up with the growth of demand) we will get there pretty soon. Coal? Like oil, it's getting more and more expensive to dig up. Nuclear power? Even uranium supplies could run out. Biofuels? It takes an awful lot of acres to grow enough greenery to fill your diesel tank, and what about the acreage required for our daily bread? We can't run our tractors on olive oil, like canny French farmers, because we won't be able to grow olive trees in Hampshire until Global Warming brings back our summers.

Maybe someone, sometime, will find a way of making electricity from sea-water, but meanwhile it is up to individuals to do their bit, on the basis that every little helps. A splendid example was set by our MP, Sir George Young, who arrived at the hall fresh as a daisy, having cycled all the way from Penton. No wonder his silhouette is rather different from Edward VII's.

Non-Satanic Mills

Abbotts Ann and Upper Clatford were, of course, heavily involved through the work of Robert Tasker and his successors in the Age of Steam, which sadly lasted only about 200 years. The bellows for his foundry were originally driven by water-power from the Pilhill Brook. Our brook had been providing power since before the Norman Conquest, and Domesday Book records no less than five mills in the settlements of Abbotts Ann and Little Ann; it's not that long since the last workable mill off Mill Lane was demolished. Thoughts of re-instating the water-wheel to provide electricity for the village have to be dismissed, because it needs a great deal more energy to drive an effective dynamo than to grind corn, and our little brook isn't up to much more than powering, say, three or four lights on Church Path.

Megagoahead

So farewell then Andover Airfield. In the course of a very, very long meeting at the Lights on 1st December the Test Valley Planning Control Committee approved the application for the Megashed project. The clinching argument seemed to be that the most important thing was the provision of jobs. But this had a rather Alice-in Wonderland feel, because Councillors said that with all the new houses to be built in Andover, their residents will need jobs, otherwise they will all commute to Basingstoke. No one suggested that if the jobs were not available, there would be no need for so many houses, so round and round we go, as many of us will when trying to negotiate the incredibly complicated gyratory system proposed for the Hundred Acre roundabout. Although the mighty efforts of the STOP campaign have forced the developers to accept heavy restrictions on lorry movements, noise, landscaping and light-pollution, it was disappointing that the Committee took no account of the fact that ordinary motorists will want to take all sorts of alternative routes to avoid this junction, thereby turning our villages into rat-runs. Wasn't that the first thing we were worrying about right at the beginning of this saga?

Did you know?

C stands for "Commercial", so suddenly H.G.V.s have become H.C.V.s, so Councillors at the above meeting had to keep correcting themselves.

I still haven't discovered what, if anything, e.VOLve stands for, but it turns out to be a website directory, listing voluntary and community organisations in Hampshire. If you are interested in anything from apiary to zen, they will help you find a group of like-minded enthusiasts or a supportive organisation. Try tapping out www.e.volve.org.uk.

Employees of Mansfield District Council have decided to try to shame irresponsible walkers into clearing up after their dogs by spraying the offending product with pink paint. They must be desperate...

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING, 4TH DECEMBER 2008

Because the War Memorial Hall, was packed with villagers hunting the Whooperdink, the meeting got off to a rather late start in the Pavilion, which had been specially warmed up for the occasion.

Poles

Lamp no 2 on Church Path remained defiantly dark for all but a couple of nights, so the bring saga continues.

The obtrusive telephone pole next to Chapel Cottage is, not surprisingly, still there; since it is planted in the pavement, it is on County Council land, but so far nagging the Castle has only received a polite acknowledgement.

Planning

November had been a quiet month for building work in the village, but there were other important issues to discuss.

In connection with the application for a large dwelling at 20 Cattle Lane, two correspondents had queried the Council's policy that all buildings thereabouts should be of single storey design. One drew attention to the fact that "Formosa" is tall, so it is unfair to turn down other requests to put up tall houses. It is indeed an exception to the rule, but Test Valley approved the plans in the teeth of vigorous opposition from the Parish Council and our Borough Council representatives at the time; it also happens to be just outside the boundaries of the old Little Park Land Settlement. The other writer presumably had not read last month's Newsletter and so claimed that the proposed building did not breach the guidelines in the Village Design Statement, which has been officially adopted by Test Valley as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

The Council noted with dismay the decision to approve the Megashed application, but wished to record great appreciation of the work put in by the STOP organisation in general and by our Dr. John Moon and our Borough Councillors in particular. At least these efforts had forced the developers to make very substantial concessions to limit some of the environmental damage involved.

Test Valley's Core Strategy (i.e. their planning policies for the near and not-so-near future) was also discussed at length. Councillors had attended an exhibition in Upper Clatford which clearly showed that the plans included the "Strategic Gap" between us and Andover. However, they could not help feeling uneasy that our village, among others, is included in the "Andover" plan rather than the "Rural Test Valley" plan, though there is some doubt as to whether this would offer the same protection for the Gap. Another point that has to be watched is any reference to the "Westward Expansion" of Andover; we have to remember the frightening example of the way in which Charlton has been swallowed up. Be assured that the Council is on look-out duty.

Finance

The Council wished to express continued dissatisfaction with the servicing of the street lamps, so they resolved only to authorise payment of half the County Council's bill rounded down to the nearest penny, as speedily worked out by the Vice-Chairman on the back of an envelope.

As the Countryside Access Department at the Castle had turned down our request for funding of the proposed dog-bins, it was decided to seek other sources. These things do take time.

Burial Ground

Reviewing questions about the design of headstones in the Burial Ground, the Council had another look at the current rules, which are based on the directives of the Winchester Diocese but not binding on Parish Councils (as opposed to Parochial Church Councils); no doubt Health and Safety considerations were uppermost in the minds of the authorities. It was generally agreed that the rules are unnecessarily restrictive, especially as they seem to eliminate such specifically Christian symbols as crosses, which, we are assured, can now be made to conform with H & S requirements by using stainless steel fixings; it was also felt that strict uniformity could be reminiscent more of a military cemetery than of a country churchyard.

Archives

The Council receive a small but steady flow of requests or offers in connection with village history, which after all goes back beyond the Norman Conquest; recent items include requests for information about past inhabitants, notes and photographs about men whose names occur on the War Memorial and an interesting story about a Bellarmine Jar, of which more on another occasion. The Council ran out of time to discuss these at length, but it is very much in Councillors' minds that there is a great need for a central village Archive, with, if possible, a central village Archivist. The task would not be very time-consuming, but it would be marvellous if someone could volunteer. Surely there is someone out there, or in here, who would be sure of a warm welcome and an interesting time.

The Chairman, Councillors and Clerk wish all parishioners a very Happy Christmas and a New Year full of surprises.

The first meeting of 2009 will be on 8th January, back in the Jubilee Room at 7 p.m.

Adrian Stokes, Clerk