

ABBOTTS ANN PARISH COUNCIL

Newsletter: June 2009

Mind your language

It's fair enough for crafts to have their own technical terms, and thatchers (featured last month) are no exception. Their caves, spars, leggits, butt-ups, wrap-overs, yealmings, dressing and hazel sways, mean what they say to those who know, and the general public doesn't need to know. So three cheers for the Local Government Association, and their spokesman Mr. Stokoe (no misprint). He followed a lead given by Harrow Council, who wondered why the general public didn't know what they were talking about and resolved to stop using *Civil Enforcement Officers, School Crossing Patrollers and Civic Amenity Depots* by re-naming them Traffic-Wardens, Lollipop Ladies and Rubbish Tips. So he started producing his own list. It didn't take him long to find 200 items of council gobbledegook, ranging from the incomprehensible *conditionality, gateway review, predictors of beaconicity and improvement levers* to the needlessly complicated *democratic legitimacy (voted on), income/funding/revenue streams (money), social exclusion/funding shortfall (lack of money), interface/meaningful dialogue (talking), parameters (limits) and rationalisation (cut)*, not to mention *downstream*, which I think means "etc."

Consultation?

This is another word that seems to be in danger of losing its meaning. Much of the last 20 years of legislation decrees, in a nod to *citizen empowerment*, that all sorts of things have to be put out to consultation. So fat, expensive documents, stuffed with *menus of options*, come thumping through millions of letter-boxes or clogging up the internet, purporting to ask what we think about some proposal or other. Too often responsible citizens spend time translating, and responding to, these documents under the touching impression that their comments could make a difference. Well, over 90% of the residents of Kensington and Chelsea opposed Ken Livingston's proposal for the westward extension of the London Congestion Zone. He might as well have consulted his newts. And the honour of being the chosen location for the Olympic water sports seems to have gone to the heads of the Councillors of Weymouth, who proposed to cover a loved beauty spot with concrete, supporting a theatre, a marina, a ferry terminal, a 4-star hotel and 345 high-rise luxury flats giving spectacular views of the Olympic events, at a cost of £135 million and rising. 90% of the 2000 residents who responded to the "consultation" were opposed to it, but the Council claimed that a "silent majority" was in favour. The Councillor who thought of that wheeze must be an expert in *blue-sky thinking, outside the box*, and will undoubtedly go far, preferably, say the good citizens of Weymouth, to Outer Mongolia. Actually nothing much has happened, because the contractors have gone bust.

Nearer home we have been wrestling with Test Valley's *Core Strategy DPD* (i.e. Future Planning Policy), which is complicated but commendably free from luxuriant verbiage; unfortunately the Government Inspector's red ink says "Nice try, but return forthwith to the drawing board." So we still don't know, for instance, what will happen to our ambition to be designated as "Test Valley Rural" rather than "Andover Area".

Unnecessary Multiplication.

The last Newsletter commented, perhaps too flippantly, on the seven "equality strands" in a way that could be taken as implying that the three of these that concerned *gender* were insignificant. Actually, the intention was far otherwise, meaning to ask why these three could not be woven into a single strand. Your scribe was remembering a time, in the days when electric shavers were expensive rarities, when students were constantly reminded to apply *Occam's Razor* (try Google or

Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable; you may even find it expressed in the Latin of this mediaeval philosopher as *entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*: "No more things should be presumed to exist than are absolutely necessary", or more briefly "Be economical with the categories".) If only the Mandarins of the Powers that Be would have this principle engraved on their hearts, or at least stuck on a post-it on their computers, and stop multiplying quangos, enquiries, directives, consultations and indeed mandarins...

Litter. A big Thank-you from the Parish Council for those who helped with the Village Clean-up on May 10th. It's amazing how much litter is dropped from cars; and here is an example of legislation that hasn't been properly thought through. Suppose you observe litter being thrown out of a car. In a burst of public-spiritedness you take down the registration number and report it to the Borough Council, but it is very unlikely that anything will happen, through no fault of the Council. Government guidance stipulates that they cannot issue a fine unless the perpetrator can be positively identified; currently the matter can only be pursued by writing to the registered owner of the vehicle and asking him/her who committed the dastardly deed. But there is no legal requirement for the owner to comply, so one can hardly blame a Council for thinking that to pursue the offender would be a waste of time, paper and stamps. CPRE is lobbying the Government to make the owner responsible; but this would need legislation, and it seems that MPs and ministers are rather too busy with other things at the moment to have time to do any governing.

And finally...

Before the Clerk rides off on his hobby-horse, here is a short exercise in English Comprehension. The Institute of Local Government Studies has published a document called (I kid you not) *Strategic Service Partnership and Boundary-Spanning Behaviour: a Study of Multiple, Cascading Policy Windows*. Over to you, Mr. Stokoe.

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING 4TH JUNE

Telephone Kiosk.

Well, it's still there, but negotiations for transferring its ownership from BT to Abbotts Ann have ground to a halt, because BT can't find the documentation, or the cheque (£1) for its purchase, which were sent off in mid-January. We wonder why BT - once one of the most efficient and successful businesses in the world - finds that its profits have recently plunged deep into the red.

Planning.

The trend to extend existing houses rather than moving to larger ones is continuing to dominate discussions. Out of 8 applications, 5 involved extensions or alterations and one requested the retention of a bungalow which has been scheduled for demolition for 6 years. For details of the latter, please see the full Minutes.

The Council had queried the sudden appearance of a stable-block off Cattle Lane. It turned out that the suppliers had classed the structure as "mobile", which meant that Planning Permission was not needed. However, the Borough's grimly-titled Enforcement Officer disagreed, so this will be subject to a retrospective application.

An application for a grain-store in neighbouring Monxton was noted with some alarm, as it would involve the use of Cattle Lane by grain-lorries, which are well within the juggernaut definition. The Clerk is ensuring that the Planning Service is aware of our misgivings.

Parish hardware

Vandalism takes its name from a 5th century tribe of illiterate Teutonic nomads who specialised in smashing up almost anything remotely breakable, particularly in 455 AD when they ravaged Rome and despoiled it of its treasures of art and literature. The village notice-board is hardly a depository of art or literature, but someone evidently thought it rather fun to stove in its windows and, for good measure, to uproot the finger-post pointing to Church Path. Disappointing.

People occasionally try to drive along Church Path from the Old Rectory end, only to find themselves stuck like a recalcitrant cork in a bottle. One parishioner recently spent 20 minutes helping an elderly driver to reverse out of this bottleneck, and asked if a "No Cars" sign could be displayed. Well, actually the Council is trying to take Occam's approach to any proliferation of signs, so it was decided to investigate the feasibility of installing a visible physical barrier, rather like the one at the other end, well before the bottle-neck, bearing in mind that wheel-chairs, buggies and, of course, the old bier would have to negotiate it.

The Council continues to work on the replacement of the fence along the Duck Street side of the war Memorial Hall grounds. By the way, 1100 mm equals about 3ft 7in.

Nursery School

The Council welcomed Mrs. Rebecca Bone as representative of the Nursery School, who had earlier alerted the Council to the state of the fence. She asked the Council to consider measures to keep dogs out of the War Memorial Hall grounds and re-opened the question of storage for children's out-door play equipment. After discussion, she was asked to prepare a specification for a timber-built store on the lines of the existing one. It was suggested that it could be placed on the site of the old sand-pit, which is no longer in use.

Highways

The Council was interested to hear that HCC is considering supplying clusters of Parishes with lengthsman, who haven't been seen on our roadsides for ages. If their brief would resemble the work of the lengthsman of old, we should see much tidier roadside verges, hedges and ditches. Maybe even the drains - a regular topic of the clerk's correspondence - would not be permanently blocked. The Council reckoned that if they do materialise, they will need more equipment than the traditional sickle and shovel, as each one would have to cover some ten parishes.

The problem of traffic speeds has not been forgotten, but it has been decided not to jump into making any expensive provision until the new school is opened, since this will clearly have a major effect on village traffic for better or worse.

Finally, another big Thank-you, this time for all those residents who by their devoted attention to their front gardens, hedges, climbers, hanging baskets etc contribute so much to the enjoyment of our village scene.

Minutes and Meetings

Full Minutes are available in the Village Shop and on the Website.

The next meeting will be on 2nd July in the Jubilee Room.

Adrian Stokes, Clerk