

# **THE CLERKS' COLUMN**

**June 2010**

## **Hats**

Those who watched the State Opening of the new Parliament will have noticed a rather fierce Police Officer who signalled the approach of a procession of dignitaries with the cry "Hats off, Strangers!" Actually she seemed to be the only person wearing a hat anyway; but due ceremony had to be observed. Totally irrelevant to my theme, but worth remembering, is another incident which happened some years ago, when Lord Hailsham was Lord Chancellor. As he was processing through the this same central lobby, resplendent in full-bottom wig and gilded gown, he hailed a friend (not, I think, Mr. Kinnock) with a loud cry of "Neil!", with the result that the whole crowd of onlookers sank respectfully to their knees.

Anyway, the officer's order goes back to the time when almost everyone wore a hat, as is clear from any pre-war photos, but after the war there was a general abandonment of headgear, probably in a reaction against the compulsory wearing of uniform hats, including the heavy and uncomfortable tin variety. One of the better advertising slogans back then was "If you want to get ahead, get a hat" but it didn't work. But all is not lost, as the County Council has re-invented the HATs as Hampshire Action Teams. To provide a local focus, the County is divided into seven areas, one of which is our own Test Valley, chaired by our own County Councillor, Andrew Gibson, who is supported by all the Councillors in his area and a *dedicated* (their word) County Officer. Their introductory leaflet, appropriately illustrated with people wearing baseball caps or cycle helmets, assures us that they are not talking shops, but are there to listen to local people, find out what they want and get something done - their big buzz-word is *outcomes*. The leaflet quotes, as an example, recommending local priorities such as road improvements. These we know to be at the top of Councillor Gibson's menu, especially as he can frequently be seen hereabouts in the most impressive cycling rig on an even more impressive cycle with slim tyres that wouldn't take kindly to the rugged terrain of our crumbling streets.

In this connection, in his recent report to the Parish Council Cllr Gibson told us about the way he is using his enthusiasm for cycling to raise £1million for a cancer charity. He is organising 1,000 people, including Sir George Young for some of the way, but not apparently Dave or Boris, cycling from Winchester to Portsmouth. From there he will lead 30 of the keenest and fittest on to Gibraltar. I wonder if this amazing plan had anything to do with the announcement that the County Council has set aside an extra £12 Million for "catching up" with road repairs.

## **The Big Society**

The new Government seems to be happily working itself out of a good part of its job, by going for smaller and smaller government. A lot of professionals will be much relieved to be rid of the steady deluge of directives, surveys, targets and general Big Brother stuff that has left teachers, doctors, police officers (not to mention Parish Clerks) and UTCandA unable to get on with their proper jobs and lumbered with the feeling that they cannot be trusted to do so. I'm afraid that lots of bureaucrats and quangocrats will have to take early retirement, but if they have time on their hands, they would do well to sell their ivory towers to people like Russian oligarchs, who clearly think that governmental regulation is a joke, or to enterprising folk who want to make *things* rather than just money. Then they could perhaps look around their own neighbourhoods for something useful to do...Not a bad idea to treat us as grown-ups, no longer needing a state nanny, and the programme includes letting local people have more say in running their own affairs - hence the immediate suspension of schemes for unitary authorities which would close down all borough/district councils and centralise everything from strategic planning to rat-catching in a County Kremlin. So we expect a cluster of new buzz-words, like *mutuals*, *co-operatives*, *charities*, *social enterprises*, to signal opportunities for professionals and volunteers to make things happen at local level. Devolving more power to local government, says Mr.D.Cameron, is only the first step. Power shouldn't stay at that level, but be driven further into communities. Maybe Parishes will be able to get back to mending their own pot-holes.

### **Nuisances**

1. Cockcrow. Did you know that it is permissible to keep livestock on an allotment? Well, the Allotments Act 1950 states that it is lawful to keep hens and rabbits on allotments. Burnham Market in Norfolk is described in the press as an ancient 17<sup>th</sup> Century village (hardly what we Domesday Book folk call ancient) that has become so posh, with two thirds of its houses being second homes, that it is dubbed Chelsea-on-Sea. The village is riven with dissension because some allotment-holders are keeping cockerels, claiming that these are neither hens nor rabbits; but nearby residents, tired of being woken up at 3.30 a.m. by the crowing, are threatening the Parish Council with legal action on grounds of nuisance. The Parish Council has been forced to take legal advice; meanwhile an 82-year-old parishioner is quoted as saying “The complaints are from one or two holidaymakers from London who have never heard the countryside before. I just live a few houses away and never hear them. They should get up earlier.” Not perhaps a reliable witness if he suffers from presbycusis and should go to the NHS for a pair of hearing aids.

2. Hedgerow. Not a great nuisance, but here’s a gentle reminder for people whose property borders a bridleway, footpath or pavement that it is their responsibility to prevent the growth of hedges from obstructing or materially inconveniencing users of these rights of way. So do look out for those long bramble tendrils that seem to grow 3 feet overnight.

**Highways and byways.** Talking of footpaths, another gentle reminder... There is a public footpath along the northern edge of the Manor Close Playing Field, but it is only a strip along the fence about six feet (Oh all right, 1,830 mm) wide. Strictly speaking, the rest of the field still belongs to, and should be maintained by, the County Council and isn’t open to dogs or people.

We have been given notice of traffic restrictions for 6 months or so during re-surfacing work on the A343 between here and Kentsboro - sorry, not on Church Road or Mill Lane.

Work on Red Post Bridge has been put off until the depths of next winter. We have been assured that resulting traffic diversions will not send people down Cattle Lane, but if they want to get to somewhere like Grateley they will have to head for Amesbury first. Meanwhile the latest plan for controlling the crossroads at the bridge is to install traffic lights which will all stay at red until approached by traffic. Then it will be first come, first served. Sounds like a good idea, especially if “traffic” includes bikes and horses. We’re not sure about electric scooters or pedestrians with or without buggies.

Yet another reminder. Please don’t leave it to someone else to report road defects like blocked drains or pot-holes. There’s a straightforward procedure via the County Council website ([www.hants.gov.uk](http://www.hants.gov.uk)); it can’t do any harm if they receive multiple reports on the same problem.

And last but not least, under, for some reason, the Public Health Act 1925, Section 18, the *Test Valley Borough Council (Street Name at Abbots Ann) Order 2010*, decreed that Red Rice Road became Duck Street on 11<sup>th</sup> June.

### **PARISH COUNCIL MEETING, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2010**

#### **Welcome.**

The Chairman was glad to welcome our new Borough Councillor, Maureen Flood, who came hot-foot from Beech Hurst, where she has clearly been pushed in at the deep end with seats on the Northern Planning Committee and on the inquisitorial-sounding Overview and Scrutiny Committee. She was soon aware that the length of time taken up by topics discussed at meetings don’t necessarily reflect the importance of the issues.

Cllr Flood has already undertaken to look into comments from people disturbed at night, not by cockerels, but helicopters. Now that Prince Harry has got his wings...

#### **Green Issues.**

Wendy Davis and her colleagues in the Sustainability Group are now in a position to consider drawing up a more formal constitution. They are brimming with ideas, including plans

for a Big Lunch, a presence at the Village Fete, an Apple Day associated with the Harvest Festival, and regular reports in the Parish Magazine. So read all about it there.

### **Planning**

There seems to be no let up in building in the village, with three houses under construction in what are called “infill” sites (reminds one of the dentist), and activity in adding bits onto existing dwellings. This Council raised no objection to one not-so-big house, Belmont, turning into something somewhat more substantial. Meanwhile Councillors are keeping an eye on two other sites about which they had previously expressed considerable reservations on the lines of quarts into pint pots (No, I’m not going to decimalise that).

Noting that surveyors had been observed taking readings on the old school site, Councillors’ antennae began to twitch. They are all dendrophiles, so they do worry about trees. Yew trees live for hundreds of years, and the Council feels that the two fine specimens standing on the edge of the pavement there should be allowed to mature quietly for the next few centuries regardless of whatever development may take place behind them. By the way, did you know that yews were specifically planted in churchyards, not for their sombre colouring, but for the much more worldly purpose of providing a continuous supply of timber for longbows? Since they were poisonous, and churchyards had walls round them, they were out of bounds to cattle. What on earth then were two yews, and one even more poisonous laburnum, doing in the grounds of the village school?

Councillors were also asking what a rather grand neo-Georgian house would be doing in Cattle Lane rather than in the leafy boulevards of Hampstead or Richmond? No. 20 Cattle Lane is an important site, where stands, rather forlornly, the last unaltered bungalow from the old days of the Land Settlement; indeed, because of its historical significance, the Parish Council once had thoughts of asking for it to be listed, but concluded that its humble architecture would fail the test - though, mind you, even red telephone boxes (please don’t wake up that sleeping dog yet) have been listed. Over the last two years, the Council spent a lot of time successfully persuading a previous owner to resist the urge to build a rather grand neo-Georgian house there and to produce a design that suited the village scene. In the end he decided not to live there - perhaps he took note of our comment that the original design would make a very splendid house if he built it somewhere else.

Councillors were more than a little surprised to find themselves starting the process all over again with a new application for a different design which, in their unanimous opinion, was equally splendid, but completely out of keeping in terms of its dominant scale and profile with the surrounding area and with the general style of the village, let alone the spirit and letter of the Village Design Statement. Its 2-storey elevations were in conflict with the Council’s consistent policy that buildings in the Little Park area (and indeed in most other locations) should be presented basically as single-storey structures, with low eaves and any upper-floor accommodation provided in the roof-space lit by dormer windows. It has always been felt that new houses should not compete, but should settle down comfortably with their neighbours. And, yes, we do know that there is one house towards the eastern end of Cattle Lane that stands out in defiance of this policy. Actually this one isn’t within the boundaries of Little Park; nevertheless it was built like that in spite of vigorous objection from the Parish Council. So, with a collective sigh, the Council resolved to register a formal objection.

There’s always a steady trickle of applications for conservatories, especially from Burghclere Down, none of which have been turned down in living memory. There can’t now be many properties in Floral Way without an attached glasshouse. I’m sure they are all very careful not to throw even metaphorical stones.

There are other nuggets in the Minutes, which won’t appear for a while, because it has been decided in future only to publish the finalised version, not the draft form.

*Adrian Stokes, Clerk*