

THE CLERK'S COLUMN

MARCH 2010

Rules and regulations

If some readers detected a faint whisper of grumpiness between the lines of last month's Column, part of the explanation arises from the impact of ensuring the correct application of The Rules. Apart from 19th Century copies of The Times or, low be it said, Punch, it's hard to think of more indigestible reading than paragraphs with headings like *Provisions as to Grants, Extension to the Periods thereof and Matters concerning Rights or Supplementary Provisions as to Property vested in Official Custodian*, and so it was with relief that various heavy tomes were returned to what passes for the clerical filing system. Relief was short-lived, because what should arrive in the clerical Inbox with a metaphorical thud just before the March Council meeting but 28 electronic pages of a new, revised version of *Model Standing Orders for Local Councils*. This produced the same kind of trance-like state in the Clerk as the arrival of a Notice of Coding from the tax-man or a request to recite Jabberwocky. It also sent his computer into an advanced state of hyperactivity, the results of which had the brown wheely-bin filled to bursting point with pages printed upside-down and lines of print which might as well have been an early draft of Jabberwocky. Basically, though, all it is asking for is that Councillors, like anyone else, should behave in a civilised manner. Since all your Councillors do that anyway, it seems likely that the finished versions distributed at the last Council meeting have by now been filed under "Read later".

Still, there are lots of careful instructions as to what should happen at meetings. For instance Section 6(d) says *A motion to amend an original or substantive motion shall not be considered unless proper notice has been given after the original or substantive motion has been seconded and notice of such amendment, shall, if required by the Chairman, be reduced to writing and handed to the Chairman who shall determine the order in which they are considered*. That is, if the Chairman hasn't been reduced to a catatonic state. But there is something to be said for producing an amendment to writing, because Section 6(f) says *Any amendment to a motion shall be either*

i. to leave out words

ii. to add words

iii. to leave out words and add other words.

That seems to cover pretty well all you can do with a written document apart from correcting the spelling or adding some punctuation. I suppose if everyone gives up in despair Item 6(d)i enables anyone still awake to vote to leave out all the words, screw up the paper and put it in the brown bin.

The shortest sentence in the whole document reads: *Only one person is permitted to speak at a time*. Fair enough, but because these are Standing Orders one should not be surprised by Item 1(j); this says: *A person shall stand when requesting to speak or when speaking OR a person shall raise his hand when requesting to speak and stand when speaking*. Mind you, it does say *if the person has a disability or is likely to suffer discomfort...the Chairman may...permit an individual to be seated while speaking*. Of course, all this only applies while the Council is sitting...

And now we are threatened with a new Code of Conduct, although the old one is only 3 years old. Someone somewhere in Whitehall can't have enough to do.

An insult?

I bet you don't know who was described in the Daily Mail like this: "She has no grounding in politics, came from nowhere and has never been elected to anything. She is more suited to running a Parish Council than a major European institution." She turns out to be Baroness Ashton. When Mr. Brown decided he couldn't spare Mr. Miliband or Lord Mandelson to be Europe's High Representative for Foreign Affairs no-one seems to know why he chose the lady for this £328,000-a-year (plus numerous perks) job, with an office containing no less than 5,000 civil servants to run. From what the Daily Mail says, it sounds as if she might find it difficult to run a pencil along a ruler; so the above comments (which were made by a colleague in the Upper House) hardly qualify as a compliment to the hardworking unpaid folk who do run Parish Councils, few of whom are rich enough to sue a daily newspaper for libel.

Council Meeting, 4th March

The Council always welcomes visitors whether they come to listen or to speak, and it was a pleasant surprise that Mrs. Carol Bartholomew came all the way from Burghclere Down to see what was going on. The A303 is a barrier, but not a boundary, and we mustn't forget that this area has been part of the Parish since time immemorial; it is in the same Borough ward as Abbotts Ann, Little Ann and the Clatfords. It has a thriving community life of its own and doesn't seem to be bothered by being left out of the new parish of Andover- soon expected to become a town again. They do benefit from a lower Council tax, as we enjoy (wrong word) the tenth lowest level of tax of all the parishes in the county.

Offences

Early items dealt with included a report from our local PCSO, Ross Hanley, who told us about a couple of burglaries too close for comfort. Someone raided the new school site and made off with some tools and there was a break-in at the Poplar Farm when a lap-top was stolen. There are still people around casting covetous eyes on diesel and heating oil. Police were recently called to an outbreak of "rowdy and inconsiderate behaviour" on the Sports Field where there have also been incidents involving cars being driven around the field - not what it is designed for. People seeing this sort of thing going on are asked not just to mutter under their breath about today's young but to contact the Police with as much detail as possible. That's what the number 101 is for.

Fences.

Arising from earlier meetings was the replacement of the fence round the War Memorial Hall. This has been delayed partly by successive attempts to get an authoritative answer to the question: "How high should a fence round a children's playground be?" The replies from most experts consulted amounted to "Well... it depends," though no-one seemed unhappy about our first idea that 1100mm (three foot six and a bit in English) would do fine. Feeling that we are at last in the clear about the top and bottom of it the Council decided to place the order.

Planning.

We expected the recession to slow down the steady flow of applications, but the effect seems to be that people, for instance those with growing families, are not keen to move to a larger house, but are making their existing houses larger. This time there were even two applicants who wanted to change their garages into playrooms.

However, two projects for new dwellings also came up, both of them going back several years. The site at the corner of Cattle Lane and the Monxton-Andover Road went rather quiet for a year or so after the Council had struggled, successfully in the end, to prevent an ultra-modern structure of corrugated aluminium and stripy timber cladding from landing, like a crashed UFO, just past the viaduct. In the end our firm insistence on low-built dwellings with any second storey having dormer windows resulted in a much more acceptable proposal for two houses which reflect the style of the other newer homes on Cattle Lane. There's nothing wrong with Surbiton or Milton Keynes, but they don't belong in our part of Hampshire.

Mr. Li's application to squeeze in a little house next to 85 Little Ann Road goes back a long way, too. In fact the saga of the naming of Little Ann Road started with the sudden discovery that this and other properties were described as being on Clatford Road, Abbotts Ann. This made it look as if Little Ann was going to disappear after 1100 or more years as a separate settlement. After all, in the Domesday Book it is registered as rather richer by a plough or hide or two than Abbotts Ann, and belonged to the Priory at Wherwell, not to those monks at Winchester; and as for the association with Clatford - no comment. Anyway, the Council still thought the proposal was a squeeze too far and resolved to register an objection in spite of the Borough having ignored our previous objections and approved an identical plan.

We all have our hearts in our mouths if we drive across Red Post Bridge, so it is not surprising that the Council had grave misgivings about Network Rail's plans to strengthen and alter the structure. Clearly their design for the parapet could ensure that drivers on Red Post Lane would

see even less than now. They also propose to make things even worse by narrowing the roadway by installing kerbed walkways on either side. So we are urgently requesting attention to the following concerns:

1. Strengthening the bridge could lead to larger lorries coming our way
2. If they must have walkways, why not build them onto the outside of the structure?
3. Consideration should be given to the Council's earlier suggestion that the priorities be altered so that Monxton Road traffic gives way to traffic on Red Post Lane.
4. A site meeting should be held with representatives of this Council, Network Rail, Test Valley and Hampshire Highways.

Cllr Graham Stallard is making the same urgent requests. We are unlikely to get another chance to get this problem sorted once and for all.

Greening

The Council is determined to keep Abbots Ann as green as possible, and was delighted to back Wendy Davis's successful launch of the Sustainability project with a brunch and presentation in the War Memorial Hall on 20th February. The good attendance and high level of interest bodes well for a continuing contribution to the future of this little bit of the planet.

A vigorous champion of everything green is the CPRE, whose Chairman, the hilarious Bill Bryson, is busily running a campaign against litter, called Stop the Drop. Our problem is not so much that our residents drop it (apart from certain areas favoured by the younger generation) as that people in passing cars hurl it out of their windows, where it stays around the hedges and verges for years and years. Ideas, please.

Considering that traffic is one of the biggest anti-greening influences around, it is encouraging to hear that the developers of the airfield site are contracted to finance various improvements to the local environment, and that this may mean funding for traffic-calming measures in Abbots Ann and Monxton. This Council is well aware of people's anxieties about over-use of our streets and lanes whatever they are called - which reminds me to re-emphasise the fact that no-one has any plans to change house numbers or post-codes anywhere. We rather wish we were not so dependent on nagging (and being nagged about?) other authorities for everything connected with highway matters and could manage pot-hole repairs, street-names, verges, drains and so on for ourselves. Bring back the parish lengthman.

The Council approved the Chairman's plan for the village "envelope", produced for the Planning Service as our vision of the "settlements" of Abbots Ann and Little Ann. What it comes to is that everything that is not already developed is defined as Open Countryside, which puts severe limits on any encroachment into what is now green.

It is important to note that one place that is now green is the Manor Close playing field. Although things have gone rather quiet recently there is no change in the Council's plans, which have been given plenty of encouragement by Hampshire County Council, for it to be there for community use as an open space for recreation and/or cultivation. We know of no basis for any contradictory rumours.

Endings and Beginnings

Despite the weather's determination to contradict the rumours of global warming the new premises for the village school will still be ready for opening after Easter, as we were told by Paul Stanton. This will be the culmination of countless hours which Mr. Stanton has dedicated to the school's progress over several years as a Governor and Chairman of the Board, from which he has now decided to step down. He certainly deserves a break, and the whole parish owes him a great debt of gratitude as the school begins a new stage of its long and distinguished history.

If you want to know more, please look at the Minutes. The next meeting is, rather worryingly, on 1st April.

Adrian Stokes, Clerk