

ABBOTTS ANN PARISH COUNCIL

Newsletter: November 2009

DON'T DO IT YOURSELF

Someone once wrote “Those waiting for something to turn up might start with their own shirt-sleeves” and a whole industry has sprung up because people got fed up with waiting for *someone* to turn up to fix that trickling tap or wonky window. The over-worked plumber or the carpenter with too many customers has no come-back if you use your own spanner or screwdriver; but woe betide anyone who thinks that the same applies to an *Authority*. These bodies tend to react like lions woken from a deep sleep if someone tries to do their job for them. Which is where, once again, our old friend 01264 710278 crops up. A suggestion that money raised by the pub quiz could be spent on the refurbishment of the telephone kiosk seemed an excellent idea at first, but the Clerk’s efforts to extract a reply from BT, asking whether they would mind if we gave the thing a lick of paint, seemed to have got stuck in a queue, and recent news emphatically discouraged going ahead without permission.

October brought a bumper crop of doom-laden headlines. One read “Weeding Volunteers Breaking the Law” and concerned an Oxfordshire village where roadside weeds had been left to grow into “mini-hedges”; but a Parish Councillor who asked the County Council for advice on weed-killers was told that she could face prosecution unless she had a Street Operative Licence and Health and Safety Liability Cover. So she organised a team to pull the weeds up by hand, and the village was cleared within half a day. Later a County Council spokesman sheepishly admitted that the Health and Safety laws are in place so that people don’t endanger themselves on very busy roads such as dual carriageways. But he didn’t thank the villagers for doing the County’s job.

Another story was about a short stretch of road leading to a public car-park in Staffordshire; the County Council and the local estate had been wrangling for years about its ownership, while its pot-holes steadily increased in size and number. But when a local benefactor paid for them to be repaired, he was promptly told by the County that he could face legal action “by the owner”. Research so far has failed to turn up a law against mending someone else’s potholes.

Then there is the story of the wonderfully-named village of Hagworthingham, which was the setting for Tennyson’s poem “The Brook” (you know: *I come from haunts of coot and hern...*) where a faulty burglar alarm in an empty cottage had been keeping people awake for months. After repeated appeals to the Police and district council, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Parish Council, aged 67 and 72 respectively, took a ladder, cut the wires and restored peace to the delighted villagers, who could once again happily hear each other, and the Brook, trying not to get their tongues twisted round the bard’s lines - surely familiar to all Eng. Lit. teachers as the epitome of onomatopoeia -

I chatter over stony ways

In little sharps and trebles,

I bubble into eddying bays,

I babble on the pebbles

and so on for some 54 similar lines (I refrain from comment) ending with the familiar

Men may come and men may go

But I go on for ever.

When last heard of the two volunteers were bracing themselves to appear before the Skegness Magistrates’ Court facing a charge of causing criminal damage brought by the Police. Oddly, in my dictionary, the word before *onomatopoeia* is *onocentaur*, which is a mythical creature believed to be half-man and half-donkey. If the helmet fits...

Incidentally there is at least one hern on our own Brook, but where are all the coots?

Language of the Ages

As Tennyson knew very well, onomatopoeia works best with the old Anglo-Saxon words, because their sound reflects their meaning. So there is not a single Latin-based word in the whole poem. [Do I hear the clattering clip-clop of a hobby-horse's hooves? Ed.]. I am sure that the great Laureate was not responsible for the lament of schoolboys of old:

*Latin is a language that's as dead as dead can be;
First it killed the Romans, and now it's killing me.*

Well, the study of Latin was supposed to train the brain for clarity of thought and expression. So it's hard to understand how Boris Johnson, with his classically-trained brain said to be the size of the Albert Hall (with an ego to match?), allowed the post of Director of Programme and Project Management London to be advertised as follows:

"Our IM service offering is undergoing a period of change and our newly-created 'Your IM' team now supports TfL's business requirements and provides strategic direction and implements common policies/initiatives to integrate our data...." 64 words further on, it continues: "First class influencing skills are all essential as is PRINCE and MSP accreditations and ITIL and ISO 20000 knowledge." Anyone seeking clarification on the internet link provided would drown in a torrent of corporate babble in which the buzz-words *strategy* or *strategic* occur 16 times with no hint of what the strategy is, but emphasising "cross-portfolio leadership in a cross-modal, multi-functional, matrix managed IM organisation, whilst promoting the IM Vision ..."

Perhaps this was an elaborate Johnson Joke, but it certainly indicates that Latin (and indeed Greek) is far from dead, but lives on in dozens of languages and can still strongly influence our thinking. A vital part of ancient constitutions, with dozens of modern descendants, was the Senate; as the name implies, this was composed of senior citizens, whose years of experience were assumed to have provided enough wisdom to qualify them for government. Often no-one under 60 was eligible, and if you looked round the table in the Jubilee Room recently you might have thought that the same rule applied to the Parish Council. But looking at each other, and thinking that perhaps their average age should more closely reflect that of their electors, your Councillors have decided to do something about it. Read on...

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING, 5th November 2009

One hears that other Parish Councils frequently erupt in furious rows, but there were no fireworks at this meeting, and this Clerk, so far, has not had to minute any particularly heated discussions, or even more than a handful of non-unanimous decisions. The Agenda had to be re-organised this time, because our County Councillor was only just able to fit us into his tremendously busy schedule (he has 26 other Parishes on his beat); and our Borough Councillor also only had time for a short visit. Both had valuable contributions to make.

County and Borough Councillors

County Councillor Andrew Gibson has been making sure that the Powers that Be are well aware of the pressure from this and other parishes for a roundabout at St. John's Cross. He is not afraid of nagging away at the new Director of Hampshire Highways until she realises that the only way to shut him up is to do something about the cross-roads. He has also been researching those flashing roadside signs which peremptorily order you about - some showing the speed you are doing, some showing the speed which you ought to be doing and generally telling you that you should be doing it more slowly; even the simplest ones, however, cost some £2,000 to buy, some more to install, and £750 a year to maintain. A parish would have to be pretty desperate to invest in even one; Stockbridge must have run out of other ideas, though not of money, and have one on order. It will be interesting to know how much difference it makes.

Cllr Gibson also announced that Mrs Sandra Gibson has received a County Council Good Neighbour Award, and hastened to offer his congratulations - as indeed does this Council. Another welcome accolade for our neighbourhood!

Test Valley Councillor Arthur Peters came on next, and reported on his extensive research into the mysteries of Sat Navs, Google World, Multimaps, post-codes and telephone numbers. All of these are relevant to the problems experienced by residents of Red Rice Road in connection with the emergency services. One of his conclusions was that confusion was less likely if Duck Street remained unchanged, starting, appropriately enough, at the Pill Hill Brook and stopping at the Jubilee Oak, where the post-code changes from 7AZ to 7BG. So the main question for the next consultation should be "Is it OK to have a new name just for the stretch from the Jubilee Oak to St. John's Cross, and if so what would you like to call it?" The meeting was reminded that the old but well-preserved signpost at the Jubilee Oak points to Fullerton...

His final words were a bit disheartening; it looks as if whatever is decided won't happen until 2012.

New Councillor

The resignation of Mr. Paul Stanton had left a vacancy to be filled by co-option. There was little doubt among the present Councillors - six gentlemen and one lady, all of a certain senatorial age - that however wise, sober and experienced they may be, it would perhaps be a good idea to be joined by someone who had not seen it all before and for whom carpet slippers and the potting shed were still a distant dream - or maybe nightmare. So when Alison Barham offered her services, including, in her own words, "A younger, female, professional voice," it did not take the Councillors very long to decide to invite her to join them. So, having signed the statutory declaration that she would take that office and duly and faithfully fulfil the duties of it according the best of her judgement and ability, she moved from the chairs provided for members of the public, which must have been getting rather hard by now, and was welcomed to the better-padded ones round the table. So there is quite a drop in the average age.

Green envelopes

The Test Valley Energy Initiative continues to encourage us all to think about metaphorical greenness by making our carbon footprints a size or two smaller, and Cllr Oram had attended the latest meeting. No doubt many of us individuals are getting used to waiting for those low-energy lamps which seem to take as long to come to life as some teenagers at the week-end, but Cllr Oram told us that we are being urged to be like Petersfield and do something as a community. Despite thoughtful expressions all round, no cartoon light bulbs appeared overhead. Noticing a certain absence of bright ideas, Mrs. Wendy Davis, from the public gallery, volunteered to work on the problem on behalf of the Parish, an offer which was received with gratitude and relief.

On a more literally green issue, the Council had met a week or two before to make a draft map of the village "envelope", which is designed to draw a clear line round the areas where there might still be room for the odd dwelling to be squeezed in, but beyond which it would be a definite No Go area for developers. Mr. Tim Crouch of Beech Hurst had looked at our first draft and made some valuable suggestions which the Chairman was authorised to ink in on a second draft. This will now be part of the re-writing of Test Valley's Core Strategy (*Bzzzz*) which will eventually come back as a massive consultation document, be re-drafted, re-consulted, re-submitted to a Government inspector, and maybe implemented some time before 2099.

As for the square green field at Manor Close, the Council continues to press the County to decide whether they want to sell it, lease it, or what, and if so when. Not knowing the answers makes it difficult to work out a budget for future expenditure; we are required to produce our financial estimates for 2010-2011 before Christmas 2009 and auditors do not encourage the use of a crystal ball.

There was plenty of other business, including assuring Mrs. Rebecca Bone that the Nursery School's request for more storage had not been forgotten, asking Test Valley to do something about the unofficial rubbish tip at Red Post Bridge, dealing with dangerous trees and paying various bills, of which more details can be found in the Minutes. These are available as usual in the Village Shop, on the Website or on paper from the Clerk.

Adrian Stokes, Clerk