

THE CLERK'S COLUMN

September 2011

Only connect.

No doubt the corridors of Whitehall echoed with congratulations in triplicate when the new draft National Planning Policy Framework was published. Tons of paper and gallons of ink would be saved, now that the 1,000 pages of old rules would be reduced to 52. But they hadn't allowed for the Law of the Unexpected Consequences – will they never learn? – because this meant that people would read them. So the folk who run CPRE, the National Trust and English heritage (which is actually a Government quango) could master its contents on the train home. They didn't like what they read, nor did your Parish Councillors. Particularly worrying are the inclusion of a *presumption in favour of development*, together with the dropping of the guidelines on density and the priority of brownfield sites. It has been good to see this priority in action in Andover, though it's ironical that more than one big housing estate has been built on the site of a building merchant's depot.

Apparently there are currently enough brownfield areas available to provide for ten years' worth of house-building, but of course developers would much rather send their bulldozers into a nice green field than bother with demolishing some old factory. But guess what businesses make major contributions to political party funds and who persuaded politicians to make a u-turn on the protection of green belts. And don't forget what kind of business owns most of the land between Cattle Lane and Andover.

P.C.

There seems to be no end to batty pettifogging – now there's a nice old Dickensian word to apply to those who are obsessed with trivial details - but the trouble is that you never know where their next ambush is hidden. You can't be too careful, as a Somerset village recently discovered. Their cricket club suddenly got a demand for a ten-fold increase in its rates, because, according to H.M.Revenue & Customs, although its constitution said it was "open to anyone" it did not state explicitly that membership was open to anyone "regardless of sex, age disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion or other beliefs". The committee was happy to rewrite its rules with those exact words and to be newly classified as a CASC (I am sure you all know this stands for Community Amateur Sports Club). But it still took months of effort, with paperwork filling an inch-thick file, to convince the Revenue, based in the green and pleasant land of Liverpool, that it would not exclude (to quote the Daily Telegraph) any one-legged gay Inuit Druid pensioner who wished to join.

Getting about

Footpaths.

The Council's Footpaths Officer, Paul Kelly, has been busy with plans to improve the surfaces of various footpaths, and we hope to see the results before long. The proposal to remove the stile by the big gate on Dunkirt Lane didn't find favour with the landowner, because one day the field might be fenced again, but a kissing-gate or "chicane" would do nicely instead.

Still on footpaths, I have to issue my annual reminder about overgrown hedges. I'm sure that you are all busy keeping your garden hedges neat and tidy *on the inside*. But if a footpath or roadside pavement runs along the outside of your hedge, it's also your responsibility to see that its luxuriant growth does not obstruct the path. There are several places where this is happening, so please don't put away the shears yet. There is one particular area which seems to have been forgotten because hitherto someone else did the trimming, with the result that the people are no longer walking on the actual footpath at all; along the Northern edge of the Manor

Close playing field (still HCC property) the footpath consists of a 2 metre wide strip along the fence. The Parish Council is seeing about cutting everything back to the fence this Autumn as a one-off operation but isn't promising to take on a regular commitment

By the way, while on the subject of cutting and trimming, some of the machinery involved is incredibly noisy, as are many mowers. I have been asked to remind everyone that lots of people like to have a peaceful time in their gardens, especially at week-ends. Would it be too much to ask that these machines can be left in their sheds, if only on Sunday afternoons? In other parts of Europe it is at least socially unacceptable, if not illegal, to operate noisy machines out of doors on Sundays...

Also, thinking of Autumn, you may have noticed that most of our chestnut trees are prematurely turning a sickly brown colour. This is because of a wicked little creature called a Leaf-miner. When it has finished munching up the insides of the leaves, it goes to sleep in the fallen foliage under the trees. In the Spring it emerges as a rather dingy moth which flies up and lays another lot of eggs in the leaves. So if you want to break their destructive life-cycle, you are advised to rake up the leaves and not leave them lying about, or one day the trees may get too weak to produce any decent conkers.

Traffic.

Several Councillors from the Borough and the Parish (one of them on horse-back) turned up at a site meeting at Red Post Bridge to see whether some remaining snags could be eliminated. So we still need to watch that space.

We have heard that three items of interest to us are on the County's Access Plan list, namely the possibility of further improvements to traffic controls on Duck Street near the school and at St.John's Cross, plus provision of a footpath between the Garden Centre and the A303 underpass, to keep pedestrians off the Salisbury Road.

There's good news about buses. Other villages are not so lucky – for instance the nearest bus-stop for Longstock villagers will be in Stockbridge - but we have been assured that The Cuts will have little effect on services for Abbots Ann.

Maps.

The indefatigable David Downey has earned the gratitude of us all for completing two mighty projects, the first of which is the splendid revised Village Map, which is now on sale in the Village Shop. He has also up-dated the Emergency Map which shows the location of every building in the village and goes out to the likes of the Ambulance Service and the Fire Brigade. It has many other uses, and so there's one in the Village Shop.

Thinking Caps

By the time you read this, many of you will know a lot about the launch of the Community Consultation. The Parish Council is equally prepared for brickbats or bouquets, but really does want to know your opinions about Abbots Ann in the 21st Century. So please exercise the little grey cells...

The next Parish Council meeting is scheduled for 6th October at 6.30 p.m.

Adrian Stokes, Clerk