

ABBOTTS ANN PARISH COUNCIL

Newsletter: April 2007

A trip to the Zoo.

Apart from its wildlife, one of the attractions of the Marwell Zoo is its accessibility from all parts of Hampshire, another is its hotel, and a third is its enormous car park. So it was appropriately chosen as the venue for a gathering of that rare and endangered species, the Parish Clerk. On the Ides of March, several dozen mature specimens gathered to be brought up to date with such mesmerising parliamentary brainwaves as the 2007 Local Government Act, Land Registration, the Data Protection Laws and the Freedom of Information Act. These last two statutes interact bewilderingly and the prevailing feeling, after a dazzling display of expertise from the presenter, was “Thank Goodness this doesn’t happen in my village!” Ah, but it could, especially when your patch harbours that dangerous predator, the Greater Spotted Awkward Customer. The main message therefore seemed to be that the less data you keep, the greater your protection against the predator; in other words, if you haven’t got it you can’t be asked for it, so put it into the Recycling Bin. The legal penalties for withholding information are dire. Apparently Clerks could even be asked to produce the scribbled notes from which they write up the Minutes, though most of us find them hard enough to decipher ourselves after a day or two.

Beauty and the Beast.

An inspiring example of successful use of the Freedom of Information Act (FoI), not this time by a Clerk, but by a local retired investigative journalist, has recently come to light in rural Kent. In the peaceful parish of Wye the small but prestigious Agricultural College had been stalked and captured by the mighty Imperial College, London, and become one of their detached campuses (*Ed. Should this be campi?*). According to the *Daily Telegraph* and the ex-journalist’s book on the subject, Imperial had a “vision” of turning the College and its green fields (designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) into a world-beating centre of scientific research, costing £1 billion and providing 12,500 job opportunities and “housing of an appropriate range to cater for a broad spectrum of householders.”

This cunning plan had been secretly discussed for a year with the District Council (Ashford) and Kent County Council before the neighbourhood was stunned by the announcement that the two Councils and Imperial had signed a “concordat,” agreeing in principle to pursue the project. The text was full of the usual obfuscating jargon about regeneration, sustainability and employment prospects, which baffled the villagers all the more because Ashford, 3 miles away, has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country (as does Andover) and the village had nothing special to regenerate or sustain except the College itself which was being run down by Imperial.

The immediate reaction of the parishioners was, as one would expect, to form an action committee to go through the normal channels, but they felt as if they were facing a pride of man-eating lions with a pop-gun. It took the craft of the ex-journalist to use a far more effective weapon in the form of FoI, plus a dedicated website based in Utah out of reach of copyright laws, to expose much apparent skulduggery, including the fact that there had been two concordats, dated eight months before the public announcement, which included the proposed sale of a large greenfield area for commercial housing to finance the scheme, with an agreement to maintain total secrecy. To cut a long story short, when the whistle was blown, Imperial realised that any Planning Inspector who heard about this conspiracy would dismiss the plan out of hand; so Imperial backed out.

What has all this to do with Abbotts Ann? Tesco backed out of a scheme to build a vast warehouse at Farnborough in the face of local resistance, and here, as in neighbouring Parishes, we can hear the sound of ploughshares being beaten into swords.

Reprise for Little Ann.

Discreet use of the usual diplomatic channels has kept Little Ann on the map as a separate settlement, which dates from at least as long ago as 901 A.D. when it was a more valuable property than Abbotts Ann and belonged to Wherwell Priory. The Powers that Be have listened to the Parish Council and finally agreed that the road between the Poplar Farm and Pennymarsh, hitherto known simply as Little Ann, should, for the purposes of Government Directive BS:7666, be known as Little Ann Road, Little Ann, Andover. Sounds a bit dotty, but better than being lumbered, without consultation, with "Clatford Road", which we all hope is now consigned to the recycling bin. The idea is to make life easier for emergency services, gas-men or those rarely-seen road-menders; for the purposes of our friendly local postman there is no need to change our addresses, as he goes by the post-code anyway.

Spangle Jelly.

All sorts of oddities come to the Clerk's Email address, some of which are not mentionable in a family magazine. A recent arrival is www.spanglejelly.org.uk. You would never guess that it describes itself as "a county focussed AAA accessible website for social enterprises and the voluntary and community sector, offering recruitment with a difference. **Visit us now!**" So it isn't a new kind of ice-cream.

PARISH ASSEMBLY, 30th March 2007.

The formidable Local Government Act of 1972 insists that every Parish has an annual assembly to provide a kind of A.G.M. at which parishioners can hear from and speak to each other and to their elected representatives. It is said that a small turn-out indicates general satisfaction at the way things are going, so perhaps we should be encouraged by a total attendance of 26 out of an electorate of 1,838.

The main feature of the assembly is the presentation of reports from the Parish Council, including a summary of the activities and its ideas about how your money was and will be spent, together with presentations by the local Police, representatives of Parish organisations, such as the Sports Field Committee, the War Memorial Hall Committee, the Parochial Church Council etc., and, this time, an address by our County Councillor, Michael Woodhall. It is pleasant to report that all of these struck an up-beat note. The Minutes, and summaries of presentations, are available in the usual places.

Talking of turn-outs, here is a gentle reminder that Election Day for both Parish and Borough Councils is coming up on May 3rd. We only get the chance to exercise our democratic rights once every four years, so it isn't much to ask people to pop into the Village Hall to put a cross on a ballot-paper. Councillors - remember that they are all volunteers - could be forgiven for feeling that those who have voted have rather more right to encourage, criticise or nag than those who haven't bothered.

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING, 30th March 2007.

As four Councillors were unable to attend, business was somewhat more brisk than usual, though the Minutes, which are available in the usual locations, still run to over 1,000 words.

Andover Airfield Development

The Chairman reported that no formal Planning Application had been submitted, so that there was as yet no scope for formal objections to be raised. However, very useful informal contacts had been made by Mr. Ray Lucas and Dr. John Moon of Abbotts Ann Action with the TVBC Planning Service, while his own conversation with the head of Planning had indicated that the Borough authorities were not happy with the way in which Tesco and its henchmen had approached the subject so far. If they think that the Head of Planning is an easy pushover they are very much mistaken.

Meanwhile, a potential steering committee representing all interested parties is now up and running, in the form of RoADAC (Residents of Andover and District Awareness Committee) on which it is planned that Abbotts Ann Action should be represented. So, if there has to be a battle, we are getting ready for it.

Planning.

There was no objection raised against the removal of a restriction preventing the sale of 4 and 4A Gilberts Mead as separate properties, or against the addition to a conservatory in Hibiscus Crescent.

However, it was resolved to object to Mr. D.C.Li's plans to replace Jasmine Cottage with two 2-storey houses high up on the plot, where they were considered to be too dominating in relation to their surroundings, to be out of sympathy with the nearby Conservation Area and to form a highly visible "eye-catcher" from many viewpoints. It was also considered that the cramped nature of the on-site parking space would lead to more parking in the street, and we all know what that means.

Land registration.

During his outing to Marwell Zoo, the Clerk had been reminded that it was important that Parish-owned land should be listed on the Land Registry. This provides instant "proof of title" which is essential if land is to be sold (not relevant to us) or if we were to get involved in any legal process, such as criminal damage to property, boundary disputes or "adverse possession" which could include invasion by travellers. The Clerk was forcefully reminded of the latter possibility when he was stuck in a long tail-back the other day on the A343 behind a horse-drawn bow-topped caravan followed by a cart loaded with scrap metal.

"Youth Shelter".

Speaking for the Sports Field Committee, Mrs. Wilkins expressed concern that younger members of the community, especially those below the age for being full members of the Eagle's clientele, have nowhere to meet to exchange their innocent gossip, apart from the swings by the Village Hall or the "cuckoo-pen" on Church Path. The Committee was planning to look into the possibility of providing a meeting-place on the Sports Field, an idea which was encouraged by the Council, particularly if the young people themselves were to be involved in the project, as they were in the provision of the Skate Park.

Finance.

a. It was noted that the stones in the Garden of Remembrance had been cleaned, and it was considered that the result was well worth the cost.

b. It was considered important that the traditional practice of bell-ringing at St. Mary's Church should continue, so a contribution, the amount to be decided later, was promised towards the repair of the bell-frame in the tower.

c. It was realised that, like the Councillors themselves, the Clerk worked for the village for love (partly anyway); nevertheless in a review of the remuneration for the post the Council decided to raise the level a little further above the minimum wage than hitherto.

Correspondence.

a. The Council wished to congratulate the W.I. on its 90th anniversary. Mr. Oram is to join their celebrations in the Summer.

b. Another consultation. Test Valley's consultation on their Community Plan was considered to require little comment apart from the fact that it had much to say about transport, but little to say about traffic. It is known that for all local villages traffic problems are high in their list of worries, and though Highways are largely in the hands of the County Council, the Clerk was asked to nag the Borough Council as well.

Street Names.

The Council decided that it could not hold out against Government Directive BS:7666 and recognised the inevitability of the old, familiar road known as Little Ann having a separate name, and settled, with a sigh, for "Little Ann Road". There are as yet no plans to put up signs to this effect, though *in due course* we may find name-plates appearing at Webbs Lane/The Drove and at Dunkirt Lane. Watch those spaces.

Litter (again).

We are still awaiting a new, immovable rubbish bin at Red Post Bridge, and hope that effective contact can be made with Railtrack to stop all sorts of rubbish being tipped off the bridge across Red Post Lane. Meanwhile it is gratifying to see the other recently-installed bins at the bus-stops are, mostly, being properly used. The Council wishes to issue a second reminder that wheely-bins are not a pretty sight on the streets.

New Parish.

We welcome the creation of a new Parish Council at Enham Alamein, as this very special village has decided to detach itself from Andover. It is encouraging to know that people regard Parish Councils as a Good Thing.

Next Meeting.

Because of the election, the next meeting will be on the second Thursday of May, i.e. the 10th, when the new Council will hold its AGM.

Adrian Stokes, Clerk