

# *ABBOTTS ANN PARISH COUNCIL*

## NEWSLETTER: AUGUST 2006

**An Outstanding Parishioner.** It is heartening to know that our village can inspire loyalty and affection in even the busiest of people. Happily, too, these feelings are reflected back by the villagers in their appreciation of all that these busy people do for the community. Sir Michael Wilford will, of course, be remembered by all who met him for his personal qualities, not the least of which was his total lack of pomposity; and readers of these Newsletters will have noticed that this is in line with the outlook of your Parish Councillors, who mourn his passing not only at a personal level but as one who loved Abbots Ann and showed it in so many practical ways.

**Highways.** This seems rather too grand a word for Cattle Lane, but this unassuming road was the scene of a site meeting attended not only by our County Councillor, Michael Woodhall, but by Senior officials from The Castle (your Clerk was living in Winchester when this imposing pile was under construction across the road from the real castle; even before it was finished it was dubbed “The Kremlin”, but when the Clerk let this name slip into his conversation, Cllr Woodhall exhibited pained surprise, so perhaps the County Headquarters is treated with more respect these days). They all looked very serious, and made notes on clip-boards; they clearly understood the difficulties for lorries reaching the watercress beds when there is a weight limit (not to mention other hazards) on Red Post Bridge; they were quickly enlightened (no prizes for guessing by which Councillor) about the problems experienced by riders; they personally experienced the fearsome sight of an approaching 4-by-4 (aka SUV or Chelsea Tractor). Moving on to Duck Street, they had a good view of some of the closing skirmishes of the School Run, and listened carefully to comments about the Jubilee Tree Junction. Their responses were measured and diplomatic. Did we only imagine a murmured “in due course”?

**Children in cars.** Cllr Woodhall followed up his visit with a Memorandum, reminding everyone of the new legislation, coming into force on 18<sup>th</sup> September, about seating and seat belts for children. He points out that 50% of child injuries are in cars where seat belts were not used. The County Council has a strong commitment to road safety, and is undergoing a massive programme on school travel plans and safer routes to school; these plans involve teachers, governors, children and parents in combined efforts to find the most effective methods of getting children to school in order to reduce the amount of often unnecessary traffic at peak times. The Parish Council is very concerned about matters of safety and congestion, and requests parents to ask themselves the old war-time question: “Is your journey really necessary?” After all, shoe leather is cheaper than petrol and walking is excellent exercise.

**Regional Government (Cont’d).** According to the Sunday papers, a Very Important Expert has declared that all SEERA’s plans should be binned, and that there is masses of room to put all the envisaged households along the edge of the Thames Estuary; which is a very long way away from North West Hampshire. Airborne pigs might appear on the radar...

A more westerly part of the Thames Valley seems set to be tacked onto Hampshire and the Isle of Wight in a new PCT recommended to the DoH by the SHA (Strategic Health Authority, I think), meaning that a single Primary Care Trust, known as South Central, will run the NHS for about 4,000,000 people, including us. HCC does not seem to mind much about this, but is objecting strongly to the proposed merger of the ambulance services into a single trust covering the same area; after all, we are quite a long way from Surbiton.

Other grand governmental projects look like going into reverse. One is the projected merger of police forces (in our case this would have been an arranged marriage with *Surrey*), which was strongly opposed by almost every policeman in the country; the other involved the abolition of Borough Councils which left us imagining Beech Hurst turned into sheltered housing and direct rule from The Kremlin with no-one to stand up for our *neighbourhood* except a mini-mayor.

**The Charity Commission.** The Council is marginally involved with the Charity Commissioners, because, among other things, the Councillors are Trustees of the Recreation Ground for Children., i.e. the grounds of the War Memorial Hall. Mr. Milliband (remember him?) has appointed Dame Suzi Leather Chair of the Commission - sorry, I'll read that again -. Mr. M has asked Dame Suzi Leather to chair the Commission, which is now falling over itself to help Trustees to understand what they are meant to do. The latest offering concerns The Governance Hub, one of six Hubs developed by the Home Office under the Change-up programme. Odd, because changing up surely involves gears rather than hubs. Oddlier still, the helpful leaflet tells us that the hub is really an umbrella , and I quote, verbatim:

*The governance Hub is a partnership [that word again] of eight umbrella organisations: acevo, bassac, BTEG, Charity Trustee Networks, East Cornwall CVS, NACA, NCVO and Volunteering England.*

John Lasota, Head of the Hub, is encouraging, though he doesn't offer to unravel the acronyms or the mixed metaphors, let alone explain where East Cornwall's umbrella comes in. He says, "Good governance is the key to the health and sustainability (*bzzz*) of voluntary and community (*bzzz*) organisations. The Governance Hub is here to help you keep up with change and make the most of opportunities that come your way." Furthermore, the whole p\*\*t\*\*\*ship carries a ringing endorsement from no less a personage than Dame Anita Roddick of the Body Shop, so there is plenty of spin on the Hub.

**Lights.** Under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act a new form of pollution has been defined - Light. A spokesman named Mr. Sparks (really) indicates that anyone who finds artificial light a nuisance can get help from the Borough now that light pollution has become a criminal offence carrying fines up to £5,000. A spokesman for Jodrell Bank Observatory with an ordinary name waxed lyrical. "It's very sad," he said," that so few young people have had the chance to see how beautiful the night sky can be - the arc of the Milky Way under dark skies is truly magical. This initiative will make our skies darker and enable everybody to have more appreciation of our Universe." Fine words, though one wonders what planet he is on; the orangey glow which obscures the stars to the north-east of our village does not come from anti-social householders illuminating their desirable residences. Almost the same post brought both a query from HCC about any requirement for additional street lighting, and the news that Horden Parish Council was forced by a public outcry to reverse its decision to ban lights, including flashing Christmas set-ups, on graves in their cemetery.

**Electoral Register.** New legislation requires the Borough Council to take extra steps to ensure that no eligible voters are missed out. Every Autumn forms are sent to all households, but it seems that too many of these are not filled in and returned. So it is proposed that volunteer canvassers should be recruited to ring the doorbells of people who have not returned their forms; it is anticipated that canvassers will be rewarded at the rate of £1.50 per form collected. Anyone interested should get in touch with the Clerk, or directly with Clive Judd (for it is he) at Beech Hurst.

**Holidays.** Maybe this Newsletter reflects the fact that in the newspaper world this time of year is known as the Silly Season; what could be a more appropriate name for the time when you realise in whose sensitive hands the running of the country is left when the Prime Minister goes on holiday? Nothing like this happens in Abbots Ann. Although there is no Council Meeting in August, there is always a healthy quorum of Councillors in residence who can meet at short notice if important decisions have to be made, for instance about planning matters. Be assured that although cheerfulness keeps breaking in, your Councillors, and Clerk, take serious things seriously and welcome good ideas, even when the authorities make a dog's breakfast of presenting them.

**Meeting.** The next Parish Council Meeting will be held at 7 p.m. on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> September in the Jubilee Room of the War Memorial Hall. Members of the public are welcome to attend.

*Adrian Stokes, Clerk*