

# *ABBOTTS ANN PARISH COUNCIL*

*Newsletter: July 2007*

**The Smoking Gun.** There are surely not many laws which make it a criminal offence *not* to do something, but the new anti-smoking legislation imposes a duty on any person who occupies or is involved in the management of “smoke-free” premises to display the standard No Smoking signs; you can be landed with a criminal record for *not* doing this. There is also a duty to ask any person smoking in a prohibited place to stop puffing, though the law does not expect the askers to use unreasonable force or to place themselves in physical danger. Smoke-free premises are defined as those that are enclosed, or substantially enclosed with a roof or ceiling. The Secretary of State (anyone know which one?) is empowered to designate additional no go areas for smokers, such as sports stadiums, entrances to buildings and bus shelters; defining these will provide weeks of happy employment for civil servants wondering what to regulate next, varying as they do between large Wendy houses and mere roofs on poles. It has been noticed that chemists’ shops are fully stocked with nicotine patches and chewing gum, while sales of snuff are rocketing.

**Signs of the Times.** A correction is needed to last month’s story of the big yellow estate agent’s signs at the entrances to the village from the A343. The Borough’s Enforcement Officer was indeed swift to appear, but only after he had received a courteous but assertive complaint from the nearest landowner; the Officer does not appear to prowl the Borough looking for things to enforce, so it is up to public-spirited residents to spur Beech Hurst into action, or if they are reluctant to get involved, to contact the Chairman or Clerk of the Parish Council who have plenty of experience of nagging the bureaucrats at any level from Whitehall to the Weyhill Road. The same applies to fly-tipping, which looks set to increase following the introduction of the ABC.

A recent attempt to by-pass the regulations about illegal advertising has been nipped in the bud by Gateshead Town Council, who instigated the prosecution of the sinisterly-named Gorilla Media Ltd; the magistrates found them guilty, under the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements Act) 1992, of placing illegal signage by the roadside. This they did by mounting their large posters on specially-adapted vans which were left parked on roadsides.

**Consultations.** June was a record month in many ways - including, as the Chairman reports, an unprecedented amount of weed growth in the Pill Hill Brook, which explains why the water meadows are at a record level of squishiness. For local government there was actually an unheard-of month free of consultations. But July has started off with a whopper from Test Valley entitled CORE STRATEGY ISSUES AND OPTIONS CONSULTATION ON SUSTAINABILITY - APPRAISAL OF DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS. It seems to be a matter of assessing Issues and Options circulated for consultation last November, which I am sure we all remember in glowing detail (wasn’t it mostly about plonking thousands of houses at Picket Piece or, preferably, at North Baddesley?). These options are to be checked against the objectives from the Sustainability Scoping Report 2007, which adds a new verb to our long-suffering language. “How are you scoping these days?” “Not very sustainably, I’m afraid; my core’s all right, but I’ve got an issue with appraising my developments, which seem to have run out of options.”

**Windfalls** It is very helpful if people let us know about hazards such as fallen trees or obstructions to footpaths, but we hope it is understood that the Parish Council’s powers and resources are very limited, since the actual responsibility for clearance lies usually with the landowner or the County Council, so it is mainly a matter of us knowing a man who can.

A different kind of windfall recently came to the Parish of Willoughby-on-the-Wold in deepest Notts., when a stranger walked into a Parish Council meeting during discussion of correspondence and announced that he had a matter to raise. He sat patiently while councillors pondered suitable replies to an appeal for the Scout Hut roof, grumbles about blocked drains and a suggestion that they should follow the example of Bisterne, Kingston and Crow in Hampshire and hold a scarecrow festival. When he was finally asked to speak, he announced that he was a nephew of a well-known local resident, who had sold his farm and retired to a nursing home. "Uncle Walter instructed me to give you this," he said, handing the Chairman an envelope. It contained a cheque for £10,000.

### **PARISH COUNCIL MEETING, 5<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2007**

No such benefactors attended the meeting, but both our Borough Councillors were welcome visitors who, as always, made extremely helpful contributions to the discussions.

**Councillors.** Since this is technically a new Council, the rules require the election of a Vice-chairman, and the Councillors unanimously voted for Mr. Graham Whyte, who had chaired his Parish Council before he moved to Abbots Ann and so has great experience in this field, and indeed in many others.

Government officials, as if they, and we, have nothing else to do, continue to send down torrents of laws and regulations to discourage things like misbehaviour, poor planning, social exclusion, and climate change, not to mention disregard of core issues, sustainable communities and coping with scoping. Helpfully, however, they do organise training sessions, sometimes accompanied by tea and biscuits, for the clueing-up of Councillors new and old, and your representatives are duly signing on, though they manage to conceal their excitement.

**Planning.** The local villages certainly regard the Andover Airfield project as a Core Issue, and the distant rumble of the Tesco juggernaut is getting louder by the day. A new firm of developers has taken over and is trying to woo us with soothing words about traffic control, including colourful plans of an incredibly complicated new traffic interchange at Hundred Acre Corner, with two bridges, two roundabouts, three lanes and a one-way system which will probably find many would-be travellers heading for Basingstoke instead of Exeter. It has to be remembered also that it is not just Tesco to worry about, but there is also to be a big expansion of the army's activities at the old DLO Headquarters, where it is reported that a new 1,000-space car-park is planned; the junction at Red Post Bridge is the stuff of nightmares already, so maybe the unthinkable may have to be thought. Many Borough Councillors are keen to see an expansion of employment prospects, though the original idea for the Airfield site was for high-tech businesses which would require a more skilled workforce than warehousing; but the Powers that Be are at least prepared to listen, and the Head of Test Valley Planning has arranged an early meeting with Parish Council Chairmen and others, such as Abbots Ann Action, who are working hard to ensure that our villages are not turned into rat-runs.

Otherwise it has been a quiet month; perhaps the market for conservatories is now saturated, and the Council could not work up a head of steam about a new dormer at Beechy Leas, though Councillors were reluctant to recommend the felling of a couple of trees. They were, however, astonished at the permission for the thatched sign on the verge of the A343 outside the Poplar Farm Inn, not only because it appeared to have been installed on Highway (i.e. County Council's) land, but to be of such solid construction that a very nasty accident was just waiting to happen.

**Transport.** The Council has been invited to send representatives to the Test Valley Transport Forum, which holds regular meetings to discuss public transport issues; the Agenda is mainly concerned with buses, and Abbots Ann seems to be luckier than most villages in its bus services. As the meetings are held during working hours, it is not easy for Councillors to spare the time to go, but if parishioners do have views about local transport services and let the Clerk know about them, the Council will endeavour to represent them.

**Obstructions.** The weird weather has damaged trees and caused hedges to grow at double speed, so there have been many reports of blocked footpaths or impassable pavements - see above. A major cause of concern has been the large chestnut-tree branch looming over Church Path, but this should have been dealt with by the time you read this. Be assured that these trees, which are such an asset to the village not just as a source of conkers, are kept under observation, though their age does make their behaviour a little unpredictable.

Complaints have been received from residents in Bulbery about cars being parked on pavements and across driveways. It is realised that the roadways are narrow in places, especially in the approach to the Sports Field, but drivers are urged to think twice before blocking a pavement or obstructing an entrance.

**Dogs.** Mr. John Swann attended the meeting to emphasise the concern of many villagers about the continuing problem of the fouling of footpaths by dogs. He had been in contact with the Test Valley Dog Wardens, who were willing to act against the owners of offending dogs if they were reported; naturally neither Mr. Swann nor the Council wished to invite comparison with the Gestapo, and it was the Council's view that it was for the Borough, as the enforcing authority, to make any official appointments or delegation of powers. Test Valley was in favour of a centrally-placed bin, but the Council was unwilling to change its opinion that because these were obtrusive and expensive it would be better to encourage owners to take the product home for disposal. It was decided therefore to defer any consideration of bins but to investigate the possibility of having suitable poop-scoops available for sale locally.

**Finance.** The statutory notices referring to the availability of the 2006-07 accounts for inspection by the public have been posted on the central notice-boards and in the village shop.

**Reports.** Cllr Arthur Peters was optimistic about the army's plans for the expansion of the old DLO headquarters, since they included the building of high-standard residential accommodation and the provision of some 500 new skilled jobs.

Cllr Graham Stallard brought the meeting up-to-date with information about the proposals for the Andover Guildhall - an issue clouded with misunderstandings - and the ASDA development, which was going to lead to a marked improvement to a run-down area, including enhanced river-walks, though he acknowledged that the state of the river in central Andover was unsatisfactory, despite the efforts of the two TVBC river-keepers, who must be very bored with fishing shopping-trolleys out of the Anton. He was concerned about the problems arising from the new refuse collection arrangements, but emphasised that reversion to the old system was not on the cards, so that residents would have to be aware of the need to take sensible precautions to maintain hygiene, especially in warm weather - if we ever have any.

The War Memorial Hall's Hog Roast had been a great success in terms both of fun and fund-raising, and the proceeds of the raffle are to go towards the memorial for the late Margot Townsend.

The Footpaths Officer reported another broken finger-post to add to the one at the beginning of Church Path. The Clerk had written again to the County Council, with copies to our County Councillor, but the Castle still seems to have no money for envelopes or stamps.

**Future Meetings.** It was decided to hold a shortened meeting on August 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Sports Pavilion to avoid a massive back-log of business in September. Meanwhile the Council hopes that everyone, except perhaps the builders working on the War Memorial Hall roof, will have a relaxing August full of good scoping, and may all your core issues be sustainable.

*Adrian Stokes, Clerk*