

ABBOTTS ANN PARISH COUNCIL

Newsletter: March 2007

Annual Parish Assembly

Rather like Prime Minister's Question Time (though usually conducted with much more decorum) this offers the opportunity for you, dear reader, and all residents of the civil Parish, to check up on the activities of your democratically elected representatives and others who volunteer to make things tick. The atmosphere is not too formal and the meeting does not last much more than an hour. We can hear from our Chairman, our County and Borough Councillors and the public-spirited people who run (in alphabetical order) Abbotts Ann Action, the Fete, Neighbourhood Watch, the Parochial Church Council, the Sports Field, the Village Shop, the War Memorial Hall and the Website. There is time to criticise, encourage, discuss and suggest. Although a small turn-out suggests satisfaction, it means that feed-back is limited, and your representatives need to know whether they are getting things more or less right. See you at the War Memorial Hall at 7 p.m. on March 30th.

Andover Airfield Development

A very well-attended meeting took place on 16th February in our village hall, at which spokesmen for the developers presented plans, evidently thinking that the audience, composed largely of Councillors and others from Abbotts Ann, Monxton, Amport and Weyhill would be only too delighted to hear about a new industrial estate, including a Tesco warehouse nearly half a mile long, stretching from Hundred Acre Corner to Red Post Lane. Unlike Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego they found no angelic protection in the burning fiery furnace, and emerged distinctly charred. Their plans for some cosmetic landscaping cut no ice (how long does it take for trees to screen a building as high as our church tower?) and their assurances about a low carbon footprint collapsed when it transpired that the chimney for wood-fuelled heating would have to be little shorter than Salisbury Cathedral's spire to avoid kippering North-west Hampshire.

If they thought that some eye-catching tinkering with the roundabout at Hundred Acre Corner would solve any traffic problems caused by 2,000 commuting employees working a 24-hour day sending enormous lorries all over the south of England, they had clearly watched TV instead of doing their homework. They had no useful statistics, they had never seen the roundabout on a Friday evening as it is now, let alone felt a listed cottage shaken by current rat-run traffic, and indeed had failed to bring along anyone who could speak about traffic with any authority. They were left in no doubt that traffic issues were a major red rag already, and the western Parishes were prepared to behave like very angry bulls.

A photo-call at extremely short notice from the Andover Advertiser saw a substantial crowd of protesters in Red Post Lane on 21st February and provided an excellent opportunity for networking. Sir George Young is on the warpath, Abbotts Ann Action has received a call to arms and equivalent groups are coming together in other parishes; co-ordinated resistance to Tesco's plans is well under way.

Lottery Jiggery Pokery?

Lottery funding has recently been directed towards small communities and many villages have benefited; but concern that the Government may divert lottery money to meet the monstrous costs of the London Olympics has prompted a mass campaign to defend the voluntary sector's grant income. This could undermine the new local government agenda and the work of our little old friend the Compact Commissioner. Although we have no current applications in the pipeline for lottery funding, you never know, and Community Action Hampshire suggests making use of the way Government has made petition-signing surprisingly easy by letting you nag them by e-mail on www.petitions.pm.gov.uk/Defend-funding.

Creeping Centralisation

This threatening virus is blowing in our direction, since Wiltshire County Council has voted decisively to apply for unitary status. Borough and District Councils could disappear from over the border as early as 2008. Parishes are immune from direct infection, but just imagine what it would be like to have all our worries and troubles dealt with from Winchester Castle instead of our own dear Beech Hurst.

Did you know?

Wheels to work. Test Valley Community Services run a moped loan service for anyone aged between 16 and 25 who has difficulty getting to work. Those interested are encouraged to ring Zoe or Dick on 01264 362600 or to email transport@tvcs.org.uk.

Quit Smoking. Soon even the Eagle will be a no-smoking zone, but the NHS has a free service to help people to give up. The Clerk is not interested as he gave up in 1962, but group or individual appointments are available with specialist advisers all over Test Valley. More info from 0845 4663 or www.quit4life.nhs.uk.

More scams. HCC Trading Standards has issued a warning about letters and emails advising people of large lottery wins, including one misusing the name El Gordo, which is not a pseudonym for Gordon Brown, but a genuine Spanish Lottery. We are asked to report any such communications to Trading Standards (Consumer Direct) on 0845 040506

Litter bins. It did not take long for the bin placed at the lay-by by Red Post Bridge to disappear. The Clerk has asked for a new bin to be fixed to a post, but has been told there will be a delay because the firm making the posts has gone bust.

Biodiversity.

It has emerged that this is not a new buzz-word, but was coined in Rio in 1992, when 132 countries undertook to conserve wildlife actively, and not just to react by protecting creatures when they become rare - shutting the aviary door after the dodo has bolted was not good enough. Under the NERC (Natural Environment and Rural Communities) Act we now have a national Biodiversity Plan (in several fat volumes) aka the UK BAP, which defines priority Species and Habitat Action Plans (SAPs and HAPs - and no apostrophes, please). Each SAP and HAP is implemented, or meant to be, by a *partnership* of interested bodies, including a lead partner, a contact point and (*wow!*) a champion, who get together every few months to discuss progress, if any. Then there are little fleas and lesser fleas on their backs in the form of regional, county, corporate and company BAPs. So our friendly local water-voles have their own local SAP and HAP within the county BAP and indeed within the UK BAP, and lots of people will burn gallons of petrol going to endless meetings; it is doubtful whether any of them will put on their wellies and try conserving a few local voles, much, no doubt, to the relief of Ratty the vole. It is surely only a matter of time before a Whitehall Official living in an ivory tower with no garden, will think that because Ratty has a SAP, Mr. Mole ought to have one too. So make sure that your lawn-mowers are in good trim for a mass protest rally blocking Westminster Square.

Wheely-bins.

These are not pretty, but the village is, so the Council cannot over-emphasise how important it is to the village scene that bins should not be left on the street, or in a place visible from the street, for a moment longer than necessary. Please think about it.

Election Day.

May 3rd is the day of the elections for seats on the Borough and Parish Councils. Please watch the Notice Boards and Website.

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING; 1ST MARCH 2007

Andover Airfield.

Mr. Ian Marshall was a welcome visitor, and described the foundation of RoADAC (Residents of Andover and District Awareness Campaign) of which he is Chairman, with the aim of co-ordinating the defence of the interests of residents of areas under threat from such developments as the proposed Tesco distribution centre. In discussion it was emphasised that as yet no planning application has been submitted, so that any discussions with officials were on an informal basis; but Cllr Arthur Peters and Abbotts Ann Action are planning to meet the planners. It was agreed that the prospects were good for the presentation of a united front by the western parishes, and understood that pressure must be kept up for as long as it takes, so that the developers could not rely on "Protest Fatigue" to let them win.

Planning.

Out of eleven applications under discussion, only one attracted the registration of an objection. A new design for a house to replace the bungalow at 9 Farm Road, Little Park was considered to be too dominating in relation to the neighbourhood, and to present the appearance of 2 storeys with the potential to be converted into an actual 2-storey building; this is contrary to the Parish's clear policy for Little Park and Cattle Lane.

Concern that the chimney of the Poplar Farm Inn was still crowned with an ugly extractor fan, albeit now brown rather than scarlet, was tempered by relief that the reconstruction of the inn was at last complete (and perhaps by invitations to the opening party?).

Clerk's Report.

The Clerk was happy to report that the agreement with the Parochial Church Council on the future maintenance of the Churchyard was now in place, and that funding was available for ensuring the safety of the unstable monuments. Satisfaction was expressed at the cleaning of the memorial stones in the Garden of Remembrance.

He had responded on the Council's behalf to a consultation on the revised code of Conduct for local Councils, which had tidied up the anomalies regarding *prejudicial interests* mentioned in earlier Newsletters, which appeared to prohibit a Councillor from criticising car-parking arrangements if he/she owned a car. There are still some oddities, such, it seems, as the attempt to clarify the word "friend" by inserting "a person with whom the speaker has a close personal relationship." How close is "close" m'lud? The language of the whole 40-page document still needs simplifying.

He had been invited to download a consultation document on the Freedom of Information Act, but discovered that it ran to 159 pages. Enough said?

An alarmingly stern letter from the Audit Commission about the apparent non-payment of a bill was amicably resolved when it came to light that the Bristol postmen had delivered the cheque to the wrong part of the Commission's rambling office.

Village Organisations.

Neighbourhood Watch. It was noted that the policing arrangements had been re-organised (again), with the usual assurance that this would mean no deterioration in standards. The visiting mobile Police Station is now parking at the War Memorial Hall from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of every month. Last time the Clerk dropped in for a chat, the officer in attendance looked rather lonely.

Village School. Plans for relocation were reported by Mr. Stanton to be well up to schedule. It is expected that there will soon be a presentation in the village hall to explain the development.

Sports Field. Mrs. Wilkins reported the sad demise of the gang-mowers, and a sympathetic Council voted to contribute £1,000 towards the purchase of a replacement, since other budgeted items of expenditure had not been incurred.

Bell-ringers. An appeal for a donation towards the cost of work on the bell-frame was noted with a promise to help, but it was not yet possible to name a figure.

Correspondence.

Street Names. A letter from TVBC Technical Services had explained that under current regulations any address had to be referred to a named road rather than a village, hamlet or other fuzzy-edged area. Hence the irritating appearance from nowhere of "Clatford Road". They had, however, suggested that this could be changed, as long as it was designated as a road. So the Council has asked that we Little Ann-ites should henceforth live on, or off, Little Ann Road for planning purposes (there is no need to change anything for the Postman), and noted that this name already appears on the new village map. In the pipeline are plans to name Dunkirt Lane and Webbs Lane leading to The Drove, plus the elimination of the unnecessary third name plate for Abbotts Hill. It is promised that any new signs would be mounted properly on oak posts rather than urban recycled plastic.

Heraldry. The College of Arms was currently offering to grant heraldic shields to local authorities at the *reduced* price of £4,800. The Clerk had not pursued the matter.

A Senior Inhabitant. Mr. Jim Dance, who was born in Abbotts Ann in 1914 and whose family had lived at Pennymarsh (hence Dances Corner), had written from Australia to ask for documents to support a talk he was giving in Sydney on life in an English Village 94 years ago. Mr. Griffiths and Mr. Oram volunteered to help.

Future Meetings. The next Council Meeting will be at 5.30 p.m. on March 30th, preceding the Parish Assembly starting at 7 p.m.

Full Minutes are available in the Village Shop, on the Website or, by request, from the Clerk.

Adrian Stokes, Clerk