

CLERK'S COLUMN

MAY 2013

NIMBYLAND

Aren't we all members of the Nimby family? Wouldn't we all say "Not in my back yard" to almost any suggestion that anything from a flagpole to a nuclear power station should be visible from our home? We might sympathise, too, with our cousins in the Nimyn group (Not in my neighbourhood) or the Niaby party (Not in anyone's back yard); there's the Sobby family (some other blighter's back yard); or we could be Bananas (Build absolutely nothing anywhere near anyone). I hope lots of you responded to Abbotts Ann Vision's appeal for support for the Andover-Abbotts Ann Local Gap remaining in Test Valley's Revised Local Plan. After all, if Abbotts Ann as a whole has a back yard, it includes the countryside between us and Andover to the North of Cattle Lane, most of which belongs to a property developer who is not short of a bob or two. They join the Lomitby family (Loads of money in that back yard), and have to be told briskly to go and look for a back yard somewhere else. The Andover Advertiser has recently given space to those urban Bananas who suffer from Fruit (Fear of revitalising, urban infill, and towers). These aren't all the products of the Clerk's imagination, but I suppose that if there were Andoverians who didn't mind looking at more of Andover, they could regard the spaces separating them from Abbotts Ann, the Clatfords and Penton as *their* back yard, thus becoming a rarely-seen Okimby.

So what happens next? Some patient official at Beech Hurst will have to plough his/her way through the 1600 or so responses to their Revised Local Plan, including our own, drafted by the indefatigable Ray Lucas, arguing strongly for the retention of the Local Gap; then a final draft is published for consultation and further comments. The final final version is scrutinised by a higher authority who can still be grumpy enough to make us start all over again. Which is more or less why what we're doing now is our second bite at the cherry, with a splendid army of volunteers getting their brains and social skills into training for the Abbotts Ann Vision Marathon under their chief coach, Ray Lucas.

OUR COUNCILLORS

We gladly welcome back our re-elected Hampshire County Councillor, Andrew Gibson, to whom the Parish owes a great debt of gratitude for his interest in our affairs and his tireless work on our behalf. The same can be said of our two Borough Councillors. We hear that Cllr Graham Stallard has been appointed to the TVBC Cabinet, with the Environment Portfolio, and Cllr Maureen Flood is now Vice-chairman of the Northern Planning Committee. How they fit all they have to do in a day is a mystery, but in our experience the old saying applies: *If you want something done, ask a busy person.* We do ask a lot, and a lot does get done.

At the Parish Council's AGM, Bernard Griffiths was re-elected as Chairman; we have all lost count of the number of years in which he has led the Council, and no-one, except perhaps the Clerk, knows how much time, energy, expertise and local knowledge he applies tirelessly to the well-being of the Parish. Graham Whyte was confirmed as Vice-chairman and Lynda Stockings as a most valued representative of our outpost at Burghclere Down. All the other indispensable volunteers remain in post and will continue to run their organisations that contribute so much to the quality of life in Abbotts Ann.

As for the Parish Councillors, like those volunteers, most of what they do is not in the public eye. They assume that the rather small turn-out (about 2% of the electorate) at the Annual Assembly indicates a fair level of satisfaction at the way things are run so there's no reason for parishioners to use their right to come and grumble. Agendas provide a very mixed menu for Council meetings; members have

to get their heads around sudden switches from Nation-wide issues like the Jubilee, via issues with the County, like Manor Close or public transport, down to the small

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nitty-gritty things that can clog up the smooth working of village life. For instance, this year so far they have already had to consider 15 applications to fell, prune, crown-lift or perform other surgical procedures on trees; they keep a very wary eye on planning applications, especially if they pose a threat to the character of the village, as demonstrated, and up to a point protected, by our cherished Village Design Statement.

Current nitty-gritty issues provide typical examples of agenda items which can furrow many a Councillor's brow. For instance we have just been reminded that the road to Monxton is actually called West Hill from the Jubilee Oak to the end of the houses, where it transmogrifies into Monxton Road. Other causes for concern thereabouts arise from the disappearance of the Keep Left arrows at the Jubilee Oak, which were removed (together with most of its branches and without any consultation). So there are dreadful accidents waiting to happen when drivers coming from the Cattle Lane direction turn right without going round the tree. Another difficulty is caused by the excessive height of the kerb opposite the Village Shop, where pedestrians have had some nasty tumbles.

Most of those problems involve nagging the Borough or the County to do something about them, but then there are the routine tasks, like grass-cutting or inspection of playground equipment. Not to mention moles, brambles, bits of nasty barbed wire, muddy footpaths and rusty railings – things we ourselves can do something about, given time. Readers of this quirky Column will recognise the irritating subjects of boringly regular nagging, such as overgrown hedges blocking footpaths, abandoned bottles around the skate park, roadside litter and dog-mess. The trouble is that the responsible members of the community don't need to be reminded, while the irresponsible folk take no notice anyway.

You may not see the Council getting things done, but you wouldn't take long to notice it if they stopped. Oddly, the various Local Government laws don't actually compel us to do very much, but allow us to do almost anything lawful. So we support plans for a hugely improved Recreation Ground; we help the War Memorial Hall to re-design the kitchen and storage areas; we support Abbotts Ann Vision, Neighbourhood Watch, AAGA; we back up the Sports Field Committee, the Fete Committee and so on and on. The laws would *allow* one or two of our Councillors to achieve their dream (which, if expressed, the Clerk would probably "forget" to record in the official Minutes) of reinstating the village stocks, or a pillory, or even a ducking stool; come to think of it, the old telephone box would be handy as a short-term lock-up. But it wouldn't be *lawful* to use them to deter litter-droppers or graffiti artists. Anyway, Council meetings rarely fall on April 1st.

Adrian Stokes, Clerk