

# *ABBOTTS ANN PARISH COUNCIL*

## *Newsletter: March 2008*

### **DEMOCRACY 1**

A great statesman once said that Democracy appears to be the worst possible form of government, until you look at the alternatives. One of the snags is the fact that elections are such relatively rare occurrences that we forget that those who govern us are there because we chose them. This is especially true of Local Government, because our representatives are not living and working in far-distant Westminster, but right on our patch - our County Councillor's address is in Houghton, and our two Borough Councillors live in Abbots Ann and Little Ann respectively. So it is something of a nonsense to think, or write, in terms of *them* and *us*, because they are just as much *us* as we are. It is a bit more appropriate sometimes to treat local officials as *them*, and it is hoped that readers of these newsletters will understand that barbed comments about Beech Hurst or the Kremlin - sorry, the Castle in Winchester - are aimed at unelected bureaucrats rather than our elected representatives. So it would be a great pity if our Borough Councillors, whose contributions to the Parish Council's meetings are greatly appreciated, should feel that they are not two of *us*.

Meanwhile the Clerk is happy to record that it required no real nagging at all before TVBC swiftly responded to our request to remove the signs pointing to the defunct Trout Farm, and that several men in fluorescent jackets were observed busily clearing the litter from at any rate the side of the A343 opposite D\*\*\*bury M\*\*s. He was also received with great courtesy and helpfulness when he visited the Planning Office on the top floor of Beech Hurst; one reason for his visit was to ask, on behalf of the Parish Council, (a) whether tree houses, like any houses on the ground, required planning permission, and (b) whether householders needed planning permission to put solar panels, or, come to that, windmills on their roofs. The answer, in effect, was "It depends..." from which one deduces that the Planning Office is happier dealing with specific projects rather than vague general queries.

So if developers depart from an authorised plan, or someone constructs something without permission, a ton of bricks may descend from the Enforcement Team, which, according to a completely unconfirmed rumour, is led by a one-time colleague of Inspector Morse. He was called in not long ago to look at the bright red Thing on top of the Poplar Farm chimney, but it appeared that if this were removed the cheerful fire below would kipper any nearby diners; so the Thing is still there, but painted a sort of cow-pat brown.

We must not forget the useful services provided by the County Council, whose Highway people are leaning very heavily on the developers of the Airfield to get their act together on the issue of traffic. Also on a smaller scale, but nearer home, they have undertaken to sort out the dangerously wobbly bits of the two roadside beech trees near The Manor, which could at any time have fallen off with dire results. Oddly enough, the County Council has to clear this with the Arboriculturalists at the Test Valley Planning Office, who also consult the Parish Council.

### **DEMOCRACY 2**

Meanwhile in the Parish Council, our smallest unit of democracy, there has been a vacancy to fill. As no-one was proposing that a poll should be held, the Council was obliged, under the Local Government Act 1972, to co-opt a new member. This Council is currently limited to a membership of 7, which was frustrating because, in the event, three parishioners came forward, all of whom had a great deal to offer in terms of experience, enthusiasm and ability, making it a matter of some regret that only one could be co-opted. So it was that at the March meeting, after due debate and process, Mr. David Paffett joined the Council. The reason for our rather small number

of Councillors in relation to the size of the Parish was immediately questioned - the fact that there used to be only six provided no explanation; Councillors and Clerk are giving this some thought, bearing in mind, of course, that there tends to be a correlation between the number of members of a committee and the length of that committee's meetings.

## **PLANNING**

The Parish boundaries extend well beyond the obvious edges of the village itself as they date from a time when Andover was a small town centred on the High Street, and the A343 was little more than a farm track. Not all that long ago, Kingsmead consisted mainly of the grounds of one substantial house, and when it was eventually built over, the new residents enjoyed a relatively low-density, spacious environment. Since then, however, seven additional houses have been inserted into the south-west corner, which has already put the roadways and drainage system under strain and threatened to alter the character of the area. So it was no surprise that the March Council meeting received a substantial delegation of Kingsmead residents to request support for their resistance to the imposition of a new 4-bedroom house in the grounds of No 18. This support was readily promised, though the chances of success are uncertain; gardens count as "brownfield" and Planning Authorities (which include Planning Committees consisting of elected Councillors) are under pressure from regional and central government agencies to raise densities and encourage "in-filling". A major source of discontent among County and Borough representatives is that these centralised agencies, being remote and not answerable to any electorate, too often appear to treat democratic procedures as an inconvenience.

## **TIME-KEEPING**

Clocks tend to have an importance far greater than that of merely marking time, as we see from the way in which Big Ben, despite its comparatively short history, has become a sort of national totem. It feels all wrong when its great voice falls silent, and the same applies here, when the Church Clock stops. Investigations connected with water-damage to the electrical winding mechanism have revealed that it still won't tick properly, let alone chime, without a major overhaul, which involves erecting scaffolding to gain access to the face and hands and what lies just behind them - not a cheap exercise. While the scaffolding is there, it made sense to the Parochial Church Council to see about having the face refurbished, as it is looking rather tired - not cheap either. A plea for help from the Churchwardens was received sympathetically by the Parish Council, as it is considered that the clock is a major asset to the community as a whole, so that it is unfair to expect Church funds to have total responsibility for its upkeep. Fortunately the Council had budgeted for the costs of an election which might have happened last May, and so was able to promise funding for everything except the face-lift, which, it is understood, will be covered by a generous individual donation. So all is set for the tick-off.

## **DOGS**

The Council is very very tired of the steady drip, drip of complaints about dog mess. Certainly the use of plastic bags to remove the product from footpaths has increased, but so has the rather odd practice of then hanging the bag on a hedge or dumping it on the verge instead of in a bin. Most of us are fond of dogs, but not on taking home the mess of other people's pets in bags or on shoes or wheels. Please, dog-owners, think about it.

## **MINUTES AND MEETINGS**

The Council does discuss many more interesting items than the last; these are summarised in more detail in the Minutes, which are available in the Village Shop, on the website, or from the Clerk. The next Council meeting will be on 3<sup>rd</sup> April

*Adrian Stokes, Clerk*