

Annual Parish Report 2008

The Parish Council

At the Election in May 2007 only 6 people stood for the 7 available seats so all were elected unopposed. I am grateful to Cllrs Bond, Foot, Leggett, Newman and Walker for offering themselves to serve the Parish, some not for the first time, and thank them for electing me to be their Chairman.

Soon after convening the new Council it was decided that this vacant seat should be filled by co-option and we were pleased that three strong candidates responded to an advertisement placed in Whitchurch News. From these Cllr Meyer was elected as our seventh member and I am grateful to him for joining the Council

Parish Clerk

Last Summer our then Parish Clerk, Glyn Thomas, announced his retirement and we were most fortunate to secure the services of Mrs Sue Mordue who joined us in September. She has proved to be an asset to this Council.

Police

Early in the year this Council considered how we could ensure a greater police presence in the village and more involvement with residents. We presented Thames Valley Police with our "wish list" and in response Sgt Martin Siderman and PCSO Wendy Taylor attended the October meeting where they agreed to a somewhat modified list of proposals. PCSO Taylor did accept our invitation to walk the village with me to meet local residents, call on businesses and to see areas of note such as the recreation field. In light of recent events we will expect to have more contact with the police and have them attend monthly council meetings on a regular basis.

The three issues highlighted at a recent Neighbourhood Action Group as being of highest concern to this village and others was speeding, anti social behaviour and theft of farm machinery and equipment.

I would like to thank Cllr Newman who is the Chairman of the NAG and represents the village.

Planning Applications

Realising how significant the role of the Parish Council is in representing the views of the village in this important process, and whilst also admitting that not all of us, being newly appointed Councillors, had detailed knowledge of our powers we sought the help of Mr Jack Peters a past planning officer at AVDC. He came to speak to us on all issues surrounding the planning process and answered our many questions. I think we all agree it was very worthwhile and of benefit to us.

Footpaths

Maintaining the many public footpaths as permanent rights of way is something this Council believes in most strongly. We do report to the Rights of Way team in Winslow office of BCC any path that needs maintenance or when stiles etc need repair. For this we do rely upon villagers to keep us informed and work that is required. We are now investigating getting more kissing gates to replace stiles.

Bus Shelter

It is not every year that bus shelters, of which Whitchurch has only two, have featured so much on the Council agendas. This of course because of the fire aboard an Arriva bus whilst stopped at the bus stop in the High Street which caused severe damage to the shelter. This has now been replaced but not without a considerable amount of negotiating which is not yet complete and it is fair to say there is some disappointment in what we have. We hope this will be resolved soon. I should add however that this shelter was provided free and we still expect payment from insurance in respect of the original shelter so we could end up with three.

Lighting

The policy to replace the older style, and less efficient, street lamps with more environmentally friendly and more visually appealing lamps has been maintained. Over the past year a further 5 new lamps have been fitted. It is our aim to continue this replacement over the coming years.

Affordable Homes

Last year, having sought advice of the Rural Housing Enabler from Bucks Community Action we initiated a survey to establish whether there was a need for affordable homes in the village. On the basis of the survey data, published in August, there was enough evidence to warrant a scheme of eight units in Whitchurch. At present a suitable site is being negotiated and only when this is completed can the planning process commence. At that time there will be a full consultation within the village and this Council will take the lead to ensure everyone is fully aware of the project and will be able to participate in the discussion.

Recreation Field

Since the village took over responsibility of the green space behind The Meadows in November 2006 it has been the aim of the Parish Council to make the area a better place for everyone to enjoy themselves and to improve the biodiversity of the area.

The proposed plan for the children's play area is now available as is the layout of the recreation field showing the proposed planting of native trees and the creation of a pond to attract wildlife. The council is most grateful to those volunteers who have given their time and expertise to achieve this.

The Council has secured funding from various sources and it is hoped to commence work on the play area in the next few months.

I should add that the Council is pleased that the car park at the field is being used regularly and by more parents when taking their children to school, thus reducing the congestion in North Marston Lane. For this we thank Mrs Heron for acting as the gate keeper.

Communications

The Village Web Site continues to promote the village and carries information about the Parish Council and publishes minutes of all meetings. Since last Thursday it also displays the agenda for these meetings.

Village Organisations

The Council is very supportive of all village organisations and is disappointed to learn that many groups are failing to gain the help they need. At the recent AGM of the WCCA only eleven people attended. We must all encourage our neighbours to join in if they are able to ensure the survival of all organisations that do so much to improve the quality of life in the village.

On a positive note I am pleased to report that the Whitchurch Morris Men, celebrating the 60th anniversary this year of it's founding by two Whitchurch families, Alderman and Hogston, recruited three people at last week's May Feast.

We will aim to highlight these issues and to assist where we can by convening a Village meeting later in the year to which all local associations and organisations will be invited, along with agencies such as TVP and representatives from AVDC. This will be an opportunity for all these organisations to speak to a large number of villagers.

Promoting Whitchurch

The Parish Council always endeavours to do the best for Whitchurch and to promote the interests of villagers. For this reason and because we believe this village is as good as any and better than most that we have entered Whitchurch into the Best Kept Village 2008 and will be entering the Calor Bucks Village of the Year 2008 both run by BALC, Buckinghamshire Association of Local Councils. We look to everyone to assist in whatever way they can to ensure that Whitchurch looks it's best in every way, not just over the coming months when judging takes place, but throughout the year.

Finally this council will be investigating the production of a Parish Plan which would involve all people in the village and will help promote Whitchurch in the wider community.

Andrew Pain JP
Chairman, Whitchurch Parish Council