

MELKSHAM WITHOUT PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2004

INTRODUCTION AND QUALITY STATUS

At last year's annual meeting I said that the previous year had been the busiest yet but this past year has been even busier. However, it has been a very important year for the Council, as we have become the first Parish Council in Wiltshire to achieve quality status. To achieve this award the Council was tested against a rigorous set of Government quality criteria and has passed in all aspects. This is a tribute to all of our Councillors and especially to Mary Jarvis, our clerk, for all of the hard work she has done to ensure that we reached quality status. I was delighted and honoured to receive the award from the Lord Lieutenant of Wiltshire last Monday and the certificate is on display tonight. I regard this honour as richly deserved.

COUNCIL CHANGES

In April the Council was very sad to hear of the sudden death of Cllr Norman Nowell and during the year we were also saddened by the deaths of John Wesley who was a Parish, District and County Councillor and Geoff Baines who was a Parish Councillor for 27 years. In May 2003 Parish Council elections were held. Cllrs Susan Adams, Brian Mudge, Angie Barker, Pam Hartley and Gordon Hiscock stepped down and the Council welcomed new councillors Rolf Brindle, Ruth Gillings, Don Millard, Steve Podbury and Mike Sankey. Steve Podbury has since resigned and we are now in the process of co-opting a new councillor.

STAFFING CHANGES

The Council is pleased to have Margaret Mylchreest as our new Assistant Parish officer and she is an enormous help to Mary. Our caretaker, Andy Missen, has now taken medical retirement after a long period of illness and we are now in the process of appointing a new caretaker. I want to thank Andy for all of his work for many years in keeping the Parish tidy and doing the jobs that were needed.

PRECEPT

Next year's precept has been increased from £62500 to £65000 a rise of 4 % which is our first rise for two years. However, this does not mean a 4 % rise in council tax payments as the number of properties in our Parish has increased in the past year because of the development to the east of Bowerhill. The rise to the average Band D property will be 2.2 % to £27.60 per annum, an increase of one penny per week.

PLANNING

During the year the Parish has considered about 90 planning applications including some major developments such as the relocation of Westinghouse Brakes to the Estates and

General land at Bowerhill. This caused a great deal of work to the Parish as the access road to the new factory was on the edge of the land that was covered by our Village Green application and we had to amend our application to permit the road to be built. This was achieved despite a very tight deadline and I wish to thank all of the Councillors involved who worked so hard to enable this to be achieved. The work completing the roundabout and the access road is due for completion this week with an opening on Friday.

Two applications were approved against the wishes of the local community and against strong opposition from this Council. These were Westbury Homes being given permission for extra homes above the Section 106 agreement of 330 and Persimmon being granted permission for 13 new homes around the Grade 2 listed Bowerhill Lodge Farmhouse. A current application is for an extension to the Sewage works. The Parish Council has also commented on some town applications such as the GEC Housing development and the George Ward multi use game area.

Last Summer Mary and John Glover, our Vice Chairman attended a meeting to agree new Village policy limits for Berryfields and Bowerhill. We are pleased that the District Council has respected the need for village limits for these areas to prevent them being integrated into the Town.

We have also asked for the Spa to become a conservation area but there has been no action yet at the District Council. We have also supported the District Council with two history projects one for the erection of a RAF Melksham information board and for improvement of the old turbine site in Lysander Road, Bowerhill.

STREET FURNITURE

New furniture being purchased this year includes a new seat for Top Lane Whitley, two New seats for Berryfield and a new bus shelter for Bowerhill outside what was Citronics And re-located parish notice board for Sandridge. We have also financed a new street light for the Spa.

BOWERHILL VILLAGE HALL

I am delighted to announce that after all of the years of waiting, work has commenced on the building of the replacement Bowerhill Village Hall. Groundwork started last Tuesday and the building is due for completion in October. I must congratulate the Bowerhill Village Hall Trust members for all of their hard work and determination despite so many obstacles along the way. The extension to the Bowerhill School is due to start in about 8 weeks time so hopefully by the end of the year Bowerhill will have community facilities to be proud of.

COMMUNITY ACTION GROUPS

The Parish Council is delighted with the progress being made through the Action Groups at Bowerhill, Beanacre, Berryfields and Shaw and Whitley. There are now four Community Action Committee meetings per year when focus is entirely on supporting community-generated projects. We are working with the Beanacre Play Park Group to achieve a new play park: with Berryfields to obtain a new temporary Village Hall and with Shaw and Whitley to obtain a new amenity garden at Whitley. Bowerhill too now has a thriving group.

HIGHWAYS ISSUES

The Council has been involved in a number of highways issues such as:

Traffic Calming at Bowerhill

Speeding at Woodrow Road

Traffic calming at Semington Road after the by pass is opened

No waiting restrictions on Bowerhill Industrial Estate

Speed restrictions on A365

Shaw School crossing

Westlands Lane junction.

Beanacre has launched its own campaign for a by pass and the Council supports the case for a Beanacre by pass but not for the full Eastern by pass as it would be detrimental to other parts of the Parish.

YOUTH ISSUES

You will see from my written report on youth work that the last year has been a frustrating time for the Parish. The long awaited Youth Forum has been postponed again till the end of the year. The underlying cause is a national shortage of youth workers. The Council is willing to sponsor a youth worker for the Parish but there is no one available at present.

The swings at Shaw have been repaired and the Council supported soft play facilities at Cloverleaf in Whitley. An experiment to run cinema trips for young people was unsuccessful.

We are working with the Shaw and Whitley Action Group to secure and design a toddler friendly amenity area in Whitley and with the Beanacre Community Group to submit a grant application to the Countryside Agency for the Beanacre play area.

WEED SPRAYING

Due to the illness of our caretaker we engaged a company called "Complete Weed Control" to do the weed spraying around the Parish in 2003 that was very successful.

ALLOTMENTS

Julia Laird our new Allotment Warden has worked wonders at Berryfield Allotments. All of the paths have been cleared and rubbish of many years removed. The Allotments are now at their best they've been for years.

Thanks to Julia for all of her work.

The Council has now registered the land we own at Berryfields with the Land Registry.

GRANT AID

The Council continues to support village halls and local groups with grants. Also we contributed £1000 towards the Melksham Skate Park.

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

The Council has reviewed a number of documents such as:

CPRE Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill
Environment Agency Water Pricing Policy
Swindon and Wiltshire Waste Local Forum
Melksham Police Inspector changes
Future of District Council Area Committees
Closure of Melksham Job Centre
Melksham Railway station
BT Payphone Rationalisation
Wiltshire Cultural Strategy
Wiltshire and Swindon Structure Plan
Postal elections
Managing rights of way

CONCLUSIONS

This has been a very busy year for Melksham Without Parish Council and I wish to thank all of the Councillors for their hard work and support.

When I received the Quality Award I described this Council as being dynamic and pro-active and I believe what we have achieved this year proves this.

I also said that a Council is only as good as its Clerk and in Mary we have the best. I want to publicly thank Mary for all of her work this year and for many years.

Parish Councillors are unpaid and receive no attendance allowances and they give their time freely to help their local Community

Mike Mills
Chairman, Melksham Without Parish Council