

## **Chairman's Report Whichford and Ascott Parish Council**

As I sit down to write my first ever Chairman's report, I will try to give the Council and villagers a summary of what we have achieved for the year 2010/11

I cannot believe a year has passed since I found myself, as a result of an uncontested election in May, Chairman to a new revitalised Parish Council, following the retirement of Councillors Adams, Kinch and our Chairman Jim Keeling. Councillor Bromage, my Vice Chairman and I, welcomed three new members to the team, Councillors Bronwen Corrall and Maureen Rowley of Whichford, followed by co-opted Councillor Hilary Blakemore of Ascott.

In May, the new Coalition Government heralded change and Councillors participated in various training opportunities, equipping ourselves for what is undoubtedly going to be a challenging time ahead. Cuts are already impacting on our community with the sad and imminent loss of our bus service. I hope that as a Council we can meet the challenges ahead and continue to keep up with developments that will affect the residents of Whichford and Ascott.

In December we said goodbye to our Clerk Gordon Harris, who had been working unpaid since he officially resigned in May 2010 and we thank him for his five years service to the parish. We welcomed Colin Tebbs as new Clerk and Financial Officer to the Council at the beginning of December. For six months Colin has done a fantastic job and I want to thank him on behalf of the Council for all his hard work. Unfortunately, because of work commitments, Colin resigned at the end of April. However I have pleasure in announcing that our new Clerk, Mrs Elizabeth Jaworska will be employed from the beginning of June. I am sure we will benefit from her current position and experience as Assistant to the Clerk of Shipston Town Council and I am looking forward to working with her and the Parish Council.

As a result of the past two severe winters, which have tested residents' grit, we have lobbied the highways department to extend their gritting routes. So far we have been unsuccessful but we will keep up the pressure and are considering purchasing grit bins for areas left ungritted as a last resort so that we will be more prepared for the future. Attention was drawn to the potholes as they appeared down Whichford Hill and the poor road surface in Ascott and we thank the Highways department for dealing with these promptly.

Our beautiful Green continues to be a main concern, especially as we were informed that all the Horse chestnuts are sadly showing signs of a disease which will lead to their demise in the next five to ten years. The Council is investigating different options for replacing the trees in due course ranging from productive fruit and nut trees (Whichford and Ascott was once surrounded by orchards) to native species. Any suggestions welcome.

The Council is determined to improve the play area on the Green for the benefit of the children of the Parish.

We have helped alleviate the problem of the slippery rubber tiles on the play area, which was dangerous to young and old, by pollarding the big Willow in the corner of the Green. We also trimmed back the Willow by the bus stop, for safety. The lower branches of the chestnuts were also trimmed. In the future we hope to get a working party of interested parents together to help maintain and develop the area. If you are interested please contact a Councillor.

We liaised with the Flower Show committee and they have kindly agreed to help rectify the burnt pig roast area; 'making good' of this area after each flower show has now been added to the Green maintenance contract. We were very happy to renew the contracts for care of the green to Jo Harvey and Nick Blencowe and I thank them both for the superb job that they do keeping the Green looking lovely throughout the year.

The Council re-advertised the First Responder initiative and thanks to the generous response of the Flower show, Whichford Pottery, The Norman Knight and an anonymous donor we were able to raise £1000 towards the cost of a defibrillator. I would also like to thank on behalf of the Council and the residents of the Parish, Adam Jones, Whichford resident and paramedic, for agreeing to coordinate the scheme. Once the volunteers have been trained and the defibrillator purchased, we will be up and running. We still need more committed volunteers however.

The Parish Plan was distributed in the Spring and finally ratified by Stratford District Council in the Autumn. I want to thank the many volunteers of the steering committee for all their hard work over the years and Jim Keeling who set the ball rolling in the first place.

The allotments have continued to develop and there is now a community of happy growers producing fruit and vegetables. There are still plots available for anyone interested. Hopefully someone this year will be the recipient of a "Best Allotment" cup, kindly donated by the Flower show committee. Water has now been laid on. Thanks to Anthony Dyer for all his help. On behalf of the members of Chapel Garden Allotments, the Parish council would like to thank Greg and Angela Haynes for their continuing support and altruism in letting us use their land for free.

I want to thank Phil Ward from Warwickshire Rural Community Council, for helping with the housing needs survey which was distributed in March. We now have the results back and they make interesting reading which we will report back on in the future. If anyone would like to have a copy please ask a councillor or the Clerk.

The internal audit has now been done and I would like to thank Dick Dellow for his help.

In January the precept was set at £5000 which represents a modest increase.

Besides the usual day to day Parish business that we do, commenting on planning applications and reading the stream of correspondence, it has been an eventful year. At the beginning of 2011 a van crashed into the war memorial seriously dislodging it.

Thanks go to the folk who rallied round to reposition the large granite cross. There is still work to do on repairing the damage but it gives us an opportunity to make it better than it was before. To add to the overall drama and excitement, the year culminated in the Royal Wedding Picnic Celebration on the Green organised by a group of parishioners. The Parish Council contributed to and supported this event and by all accounts it was a great success. I would like to thank the organisers of this event for making such a wonderful day happen for the people of Whichford and Ascott.

Finally I would like to thank all the Parish Councillors for your enthusiasm, commitment and support throughout the year and also grateful thanks go to my two Clerks Gordon Harris and Colin Tebbs for all your help. I would like to thank Councillor Chris Saint and District Councillor Stephan Gray for their continuing support to me as Chairman and all the members of the public who have attended meetings. Your contributions are always welcome and appreciated.

Frances Lee  
Chairman Whichford and Ascott Parish Council  
May 2011