



PARISH ANNUAL MEETING

This year, the Parish Annual Meeting takes place on Monday 23rd May at 7.45pm in the Old School. This is your opportunity to hear reports of various village organisations and to have your say on any topic concerning the village. We usually manage to get the County Councillor and/or District Councillor to attend the meeting and give us their views. The meeting is chaired by the chairman of the Parish Council, but otherwise this is not a Parish Council meeting. Please do try to come along; we have several matters to discuss, such as the future of the neighbourhood watch scheme and whether we want any more houses built in our village, as discussed below.

Looking back over the last year, I can see the trends of the previous years continuing and even accentuating. The burden of paperwork, much of it of questionable relevance, which the Council has to struggle under has got worse. We have watched with some concern the developing plans for new housing in the Northampton and Milton Keynes areas, together with some expansion of Towcester. We have survived the inconvenience of road closures, even if we have more to come.

On the other hand, we seem to gain as a village through our co-operative efforts. We may not have stopped vehicles speeding through the village, but we gave several people a fright by operating the speed guns. The Church Fabric Appeal

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is nearing its target. The Village Fund is being started, both to raise money for community needs and to provide an organising body for the village fete and other events which we can all enjoy. The broadband system continues to provide the village with Internet access which is cheaper than anywhere else in the country and the website has been expanded to provide details of local activities. And of course, we have launched our own village newsletter.

Last Autumn several people helped with the Community Speedwatch programme, recording the speed of vehicles within the 30mph zone and identifying those driving at excessive speed. We will have another opportunity to participate for six weeks from the end of May until the Grand Prix weekend. As a longer-term deterrent, several people have suggested flashing signs showing vehicle speed, as recently installed at Silverstone and Whittlebury. Cost is one problem, about £5,000 each initially plus maintenance, but we could overcome that. The main question is whether they would deter the persistent offenders, who seem to ignore not only every sign but also the road conditions. The Parish Council is trying to get feedback on their effectiveness from other villages and will report at the Parish Meeting. Your views on whether we should try to install these signs would be greatly appreciated.

Every few years the District Council reviews its development policy. As far as Abthorpe is concerned this mainly affects where new houses can be built. The village is classified as 'restricted infill', which means that new houses can only be built within the village. There is a clearly defined boundary beyond which houses cannot be built; currently there are a few plots between existing houses but none on the edge, so there can be no expansion of the village. This summer the District Council is preparing a new policy under different rules. One question they will examine is whether the existing boundaries should be expanded. What are your views? Should we allow some expansion of the village to allow a limited number of new houses to be built? Would the village benefit, for instance, from a few new houses every few years? What sort of houses do we need: executive homes or affordable houses? Should we stand fast against any further encroachment on the fields surrounding the village?

This is both a complicated and an emotive topic. A landowner could stand to make a tidy profit if agricultural land is re-zoned for development. Existing services must be capable of serving more properties. I hope we can have an informed and rational debate at the Parish Annual Meeting.

Keith Fenwick

PEOPLE

Belated birthday congratulations to Mrs Ruth Charles, who celebrated her 90th birthday during Easter week, and to Terry Calvert whose 65th party at the pub was, by all accounts, a memorable event.

Amanda and Fraser Harcombe have recently moved to the newly built house in Main Street, elegantly named Oxford Landing, with their four children Nicole, Cara, Callum and Alfie. They have lived in Towcester for a while and like the area very much.

Our good wishes go with Judith and Tony Waddie from the Old Shoe Factory who are starting a new life in Switzerland later in June.

ABTHORPE TO TOWCESTER ROAD

As a result of the complaints about the recent work carried out on our road to Towcester, about 60% of it will be repaired and resurfaced. Mindful of the anger over the length of the closure last time, Atkins has planned the work for the May half term week. The road will be closed over three 24-hour periods during the last week of May (as yet we don't have the exact dates). We probably can have a reasonable expectation that this timetable will be adhered to.

Another Atkins initiative is the Street Doctor. Members of the public who spot faults such as potholes, blocked drains or broken streetlights can report them on 0845 601 1113 or www.northamptonshire.gov.uk. The guarantee given is that all reported faults will be inspected. A decision whether and when to remedy problems will be made based on safety criteria and budgets.

TWIN BIN SCHEME

Well, the green bins and recycling boxes have been delivered, along with instructions on what should go in each. You will have seen that the green bin takes only garden waste, but for keen gardeners who would like to make their own compost, which could then include kitchen organic waste such as veg peelings (not to be put in the green bins under legislation about animal by-products and the spread of disease), South Northants Council has arranged the supply of 200 litre composters at £12.50 and 330 litre ones at £17.50, based on collection from the Garden Centre in Spring Lane, Alderton. They can be delivered for an addition charge. Call 0845 1306090 to order.

For more details, call SNC Environmental services on 0845 2300266. They can also arrange collection of large items such as furniture for a charge of £15.

DOG FOULING IN THE VILLAGE

Our thanks to Mike Spalding and Caroline Egarr for suggesting that we have 'poo' bins strategically placed in the village. The Parish Council is looking into this - where they are obtained, the cost and, probably most importantly, the maintenance (emptying) arrangements. Any volunteers for a rota?!

VILLAGE OF THE YEAR COMPETITION

This is a competition open to all villages in Northamptonshire. We had success for several years when we entered its predecessor, the Best Kept Village competition, as you can see by the sign near the War Memorial. The current competition concentrates more on community activities and, with so much now happening in the village, the Parish Council decided to enter it this year. We have tried to demonstrate the range of community activities which take place and have also entered the separate Information Technology section. Initial judging takes place during late May. Appearance does still count for part of the marks, so please help by keeping the village tidy.

ABbA AGM

The Abthorpe Broadband Association will be holding its 2nd AGM on Tuesday 7 June at 7.30pm in the Old School. After the formal business an exhibition of digital photographs will be on display and four workshops offered on the subjects of: storage devices - saving photos whilst travelling; digital camera metering/focusing/composition; CD photo albums; and basics of a digital darkroom.

The exhibition is open to everyone in the village, whether a member of ABbA or not (although of course only members can participate in the formal AGM business), and the more entries the merrier for the four categories: landscapes; people; nature/still life; 'doctored' = artistic/comic. Neil Chanter (chanter@abthorpe.net) is co-ordinating the exhibition, so please get in touch with him for more information or to let him know that you are planning an entry.

Undoubtedly a little wine and cheese will be on hand to lubricate the evening.

SWIMMING WITH SHARKS

Philip Berry

Less than 10 metres from me was a Bull Shark, 3 metres of solid muscle and teeth, and you can see how aptly it is named. Twenty minutes later and the Bull sharks were replaced by 4-metre Hammerheads. Sounds like a nightmare, but it was for real. I was 35 metres below the surface of the Indian Ocean and a long way from Towcester where I learned to dive, just about as far as you can get from the sea in Britain. I began my diving qualification in 1999 with the local branch of the British Sub Aqua Club (South Northants BSAC)

after thinking about it for four years. My first dive was, as it is for so many, a one-off holiday dive in warm clear waters, in my case in the Dominican Republic. Towcester pool may not be as romantic, but it is warm.

My first dive in the English Channel was not quite the Caribbean. I dived on the wreck of the Baygitano, torpedoed in 1918. Colder and darker, but still hugely rewarding. Paradoxically, the poorer the visibility the more you see. Being forced to concentrate your vision on the small area lit by your torch beam means that you see things that you pass over in better conditions. On that dive not only did we see the sheets of metal that once made the ship, its boilers, its engine, chains and rigging, but huge numbers of marine life: lobster, shrimp, crabs (my buddy caught his tea), sharks (well, dogfish), beautiful cuckoo wrasse, two huge conger eels and much more. It may not have been as colourful as the Caribbean, but there was just as much going on.

Five years on, I have dived all over the world and the UK. Wrecks, reefs and corals around the British Isles and the tropics; yes, there are corals here too. I have swum with sharks in South Africa, with Manta Rays in Costa Rica, with stonefish in Jordan (definitely not for touching), with dolphins in Dorset and with the seals of the Farne Islands. And it is not just fun: it can be rewarding as well. Members of our local club were part of the team that discovered over 400 gold coins on a wreck from 1630 just off Salcombe.

Now I am starting to put back into diving some of what it has given me as an instructor by passing on my knowledge and enthusiasm. Our club can offer training for those who want to learn, as well as a structured and safe environment for those who already know how to dive but need someone to dive with.

If you want to learn more about diving, give me a call on 857531 or visit our website (www.snbsac.org).

Go on. Take the Plunge.

CHURCH FABRIC APPEAL

The Committee raising money for the renovation of the fabric of St John the Baptist Church has decided to continue their fundraising efforts until the end of 2005. Although the total for the original planned work has almost been met, a fitting finale to the work would be to complete the internal redecoration for which an additional £6,000 is required.

Eileen Vielvoye ran the London Marathon on 17th April in aid of the Fabric Appeal. She did splendidly, completing the course in 6h 35m 58s and raising £207 for the Church Fabric Fund in the process by way of a sweepstake to guess her overall time. Keith Plant guessed most accurately.

CHILLOUT SCHEME

South Northants Council is promoting this scheme to improve house insulation. Grants are available towards the cost of loft and cavity wall insulation. These are funded by British Gas and are carried out by established contractors. As well as the normal avenues for publicising the scheme, the District Council has decided that to maximise its benefits it is now being marketed by 'cold calling', i.e. someone could call at your house to explain the scheme. Anyone calling will have identification and will not enter your house. If you are interested, a second appointment will be made and you can have someone with you.

The Parish Council has not had an opportunity to consider the wisdom of cold calling in these circumstances, but would be interested to hear from anyone who has particular views.

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Northamptonshire Childcare Information Service has set up Jigsaw, the Children's Information Service. It provides a wide range of free and impartial information on childcare and child-related services for 0 to 14 year-olds. Examples of the information on offer cover: pre-schools, private and local education nurseries, childminders, out-of-school groups and holiday playschemes, toy libraries, music groups for under 5s, outreach workers to come and talk to groups - in fact anything related

to this wide age group. Tel: 01604 828400; email : jigsaw@jigsawnorthamptonshire.org.uk

VOLUNTEERS WANTED

The Alzheimer's Society does excellent work for those suffering with all forms of dementia, their families and carers, as well as conducting a programme of research. Alzheimer's Awareness Week in July is a fundraising opportunity for the Society who would very much welcome any offers to help shake collecting tins for a couple of hours in Towcester, at Tesco, Waitrose or in the market square on 7, 8 or 9 July. The experience of the public's generosity is described in their newsletter as 'uplifting' If you can help, please call Steve Andrews on 855833.

The local branch is also the recipient this year of donations by Colemans for recycled printer cartridges. So please drop them in to Colemans in Towcester to support a good local cause - and spread the word to others.

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

Neighbourhood watch is a scheme which enables any suspicious activities to be reported to the police and provides a means of circulating details of local incidents. It was established in Abthorpe about 15 years ago and is operated through a number of representatives spread around the village with a village co-ordinator to act as the main contact

point. David Hughes has performed the role of co-ordinator for several years but now feels he can no longer continue.

We therefore need a new co-ordinator for the village. At the same time, we need to consider how best to operate the scheme, given that the Internet and e-mail has made the job of distributing warnings much easier. We have already placed relevant notices on the village web site, but could go further. For instance, Wappenham send round warnings by email to those who opt to receive them. Of course, traditional methods must be maintained for everyone else.

This matter is on the agenda for the Parish Annual Meeting when we need to decide how this scheme will operate in future and find a new co-ordinator. Further information can be obtained from Keith Fenwick.

NEWS FROM THE NEW INN

Following the success of Terry Calvert's birthday party set in the 1940s, the 60th anniversary of VE Day will be celebrated during the evening of 7 May with the same war-time theme. Dress in clothes of the period, military or otherwise, and dance to a live three-piece band, called Bandwagon, playing music of the day. Authentic food of the era will be served. Come and join the fun from 7.30pm.

VILLAGE SUMMER FETE

As reported in the last issue, proceeds from the fete will benefit the village as a whole, and the organisers have decided on the vehicle by which this can be done. An Abthorpe Village Trust Fund is in the process of being set up with the aim of providing benefits for the village and supporting its residents. It is hoped that the Trust Fund will be ongoing through future generations of Abthorpians. Occasional social events are planned once the Church Fabric Appeal has been wound up.

Plans for stalls and activities at this year's fete on 25 June are galloping ahead. Old favourites will be joined by children's toys, art browsing, a stand with specific appeal to teenagers, plate smashing, and the Abthorpe Christmas card will be unveiled. A special emphasis is being put on children's games and activities including Venetian mask painting, llama rides, a competition to decorate a hat, and a central arena with events changing every half hour. More ideas are being firmed up, so we can expect a good array of entertainment for the afternoon between pauses at the Inn on the Green and the tea, cake and ice cream refreshments.

The pig roast in the evening is always a pleasant way to round off the day. The proceeds from this will

swell church funds, and this year the fete book and cake stall takings will also continue to benefit the church.

Several stall holders would very much like your help with saleable items: Jane Sandford at Willow Cottage in Main Street is gathering bric-a-brac; David Hughes is happy to collect your unwanted books, tapes, CDs and videos - please call him on 858060. Liz Haycock would like items for the tombola, and Jan Walsh is extending her plant stall to include any unwanted plants we can donate, so when we're out in our spring gardens now is a good time to pot up cuttings, etc.

EVENTS

Sunday 1 May

Forestry Commission guided walk in Hazelborough Woods near Silverstone to enjoy the bluebells. 2.30pm for two hours. To book: 01780 444394

Saturday 7 May

New Inn celebration for the 60th anniversary of VE Day

Monday 16 May

Parish Council meeting: 7.45pm in the Old School

Monday 23 May

Annual Parish Meeting: 7.45pm in the Old School - everyone very welcome

Wednesday 1 June

Flower arranging demonstration in aid of the Fabric Appeal: 7.30pm in the Old School; £5 including refreshments. Tickets: Carolyn Tomalin, 858316

Tuesday 7 June

Abthorpe Broadland Association AGM, digital camera workshop and photographic exhibition: 7.30 in the Old School

Saturday 25 June

Summer Fete: 2.00pm on the village green

BBQ: 7.30pm in the Old School

Sunday 17 July

Forestry Commission guided walk to discover the history of the ancient Hazelborough Woods. 10.30am for two hours. To book: 01780 444394

Sunday 11 September

Summer BBQ in aid of the Church Fabric Appeal