

HERTFORD HEATH PARISH COUNCIL



ANNUAL REPORT

YEAR TO APRIL 2008

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Looking at last year's report it is clear that Hertford Heath has gone from strength to strength – the highlight, of course, being the award for overall Village of the Year with the judges' comment being that our village "embraces the finest and most traditional qualities of village life". This we felt to be a fitting accolade to express what Hertford Heath is all about, putting the concerns of the people before picture postcard prettiness, fostering the events and organisations which make it a vibrant and thriving community – whilst at the same time safeguarding its unique environment.

Unable to let us rest on our laurels, the judges have once again visited the village, this time competing as Village of the Year for the Eastern region. The sun shone and the judges were taken on a whistle stop tour of the village highlights. In the meantime, the Village Hall had been transformed with displays from a large variety of local organisations, businesses and activities. The emphasis was very much people centred and as they walked round the judges were able to speak to each contributor in turn.

Mark Prisk had recorded a welcome and, as background interest, there was an excellent slide show of village pictures. The event was rounded off with a splendid tea and scrummy WI cakes. The judges commented that we had set a very high standard so we are waiting the results after their visits to a further seven villages.

I cannot single out individuals to thank, there are too many. You know who you are! It made me very proud of our community and everyone involved put in the extra energy and enthusiasm to make it a special day.

This event marked a culmination of months of work but most Parish matters are concerned with the small things which make all the difference. Once again we have lent our support and encouragement to special events, underwriting costs and involving ourselves in committees and working parties.

VILLAGE CELEBRATIONS

We do not underestimate the importance of such events which enable everyone to join in, especially the children and the elderly.

Our picnic and nature walk was sparsely attended but very enjoyable. A local naturalist, June Crew, led the tour of the pond and meadow, pointing out items of interest. She was keen for us to continue to preserve this valuable habitat and provided some hints on its maintenance. We were grateful to Irene Kerrigan who brought her two ancient tortoises and parrot to entertain the children. We are working to increase the attendance with perhaps a campfire, early evening get together instead.

The Fete and Fireworks are firmly back on the calendar, attracting more and more visitors. Profits from the Fete benefited many village organisations. It is great to have the school contributing posters and guys from the children. These were judged and exhibited for everyone to enjoy. This year we hope to incorporate

Halloween as our bonfire will be lit on 1st November. So watch this space for a fancy dress parade.

Our carol singing went ahead as usual, raising children's voices to the starts and a welcome contribution to the Khandel Light appeal fund.

PARISH COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

This remains a crucial voice, reaching into every household. Nobody can express ignorance as to what is going on in the village and what the Parish Council is doing about your concerns. It includes ongoing gripes about inconsiderate people who spoil our village. I like to think that our message of zero tolerance is finally getting across and that the selfish speeders, dog foulers, litter louts and the thoughtless residents who allow shrubs to obstruct the footpaths are beginning to change their ways.

An enormous thank you to Carolyn who takes a special pride in compiling the letter and manages to include a poem in praise of the village and useful snippets ranging from recycling to climate change.

VILLAGE WEBSITE

This is constantly being updated by the Clerk and continues to be accessed by many people, including those interested in our village history and others considering moving into the area. The internet access point remains in the Silver Fox and we have a second computer awaiting installation in the Townshend Arms.

POLICING

It has been another relatively peaceful year. Our PCSO Karen continues to be active, keeping an eye on the youngsters and maintaining their trust. Karen has been particularly active in encouraging safe parking away from the school. There have been one or two near misses when children run out between cars. The yellow zigzag lines are in place and now that the notice is in situ, the no parking laws can be enforced.

The Neighbourhood Watch remains vigilant and provides a useful network to alert us to crimes. Occasional car thefts and distraction burglaries still occur from time to time.

PARISH PATHS PARTNERSHIP

A booklet of walks will soon be available and these will specify those suitable for buggies and wheelchairs. Several stiles have been replaced with kissing gates and this project is ongoing with two more at Leafy Oak installed this week!

This year we hope to obtain funding enabling us to resurface the circular walk around the Wildlife Meadow. We are anxious to make it more accessible but at present the uneven surface will deter the elderly and disabled.

PLANNING

This remains an important role for the Parish Council. Any land suitable for development is a precious commodity and we are conscious of the need for low cost housing. At the same time we must consider overdevelopment and the effect on surrounding properties. This can be something of a balancing act, but we try to recommend what is best for the village as a whole.

PLAYING FIELD

We had an interesting meeting on the Playing Field with some of the village teenagers. They do have some unrealistic expectations regarding the provision of equipment. However, they chose the Freeride and that has now been installed. We are still considering providing a basket ball net and are looking at some form of solar lighting.

People are still parking on the Field and work is to commence very soon to grub out the shrubs and provide a car parking area.

VILLAGE GREENS

Once again, the greens have looked splendid with extra bulbs planted this year. We are grateful to Ray Tisbury, our volunteer warden, for removing dead branches and staking trees in the mini orchard. The new trees all look very healthy. We are hoping to have our own Christmas tree but otherwise the Greens are full and memorial trees will need to be carefully chosen to fit in the Meadow.

WILDLIFE MEADOW

There is little to add. A reasonable amount of water remains in the Pond since it was relined. The Parish Council is monitoring this and topping up the level during dry periods.

ALLOTMENTS

The waiting list reflects a revival of interest in people wanting to grow their own produce. The Parish Council has the responsibility to fully utilise the site and, after years of decline, it is good to see the land being worked. We have agreed to the erecting of small wooden sheds and asked plot holders to remove plastic Wendy houses. Colin Smith provided twice the quantity of free manure and it is being well used.

HERTFORD HEATH SCHOOL

It was great to see the children involved in our Village of the Year presentations. The judges were very impressed by the children reading their poems in praise of the village. With the emphasis more and more on healthy living, the children visit the Wildlife Meadow and the allotments, watching the progress of the crops. We hope to involve them again in all our seasonal activities.

HIGHWAYS

What they do best is to respond within 24 hours to reports of potholes and to fill them in at once. So keep phoning!. Fly tipping is also treated as a matter of urgency and items are removed immediately.

Unfortunately, they failed to agree to the request for a 20mph limit on the built up village roads and for effective traffic calming along London Road. A belated, rather piecemeal repair has been made to the footpath at the bottom of Church Hill but there has been no serious suggestion about that dangerous corner and crossing point. The Parish Council has not given up on this.

POST OFFICE UPDATE

In spite of rigorous efforts by our MP and Clerk, we are still in a wait and see situation, having been told that everything depends on the Post Office closure review in July at the earliest. In the meantime, the minibus continues to run on Mondays and Thursdays, the Country Store sells a limited number of stamps to residents, we have the offer of a front room to use near the Silver Fox, and the Parish Council has agreed to offer financial help with interest charges should a local shop propose opening as a post office.

VILLAGE HALL

The Committee are to be congratulated in winning a place in the Village Hall of the Year competition for the second year running. I have left David to explain what they are up to with the refurbishing and redecorating, not to mention the new windows.

IN CONCLUSION

Carolyn and I visited a local village for the launch of their very glossy parish plan. We realised that this seemed like window dressing. Our Parish Council is concerned with action – finding out through specific questionnaires what the village wants from us and trying to implement these things. Please get involved and respond to the issues that are important to you. We cannot work miracles but we do listen and take notice.

Thank you everyone for your time, enthusiasm and effort. If at the end of the day Hertford Heath is not the judges' choice, it is definitely my favourite place to live.

Mary Bourne
12th May 2008

