

HERTFORD HEATH PARISH COUNCIL



NEWSLETTER

Issue 13

May 2005

PLAYING FIELD UPDATE

The good news is that the Parish Council has received a further £1,000 towards the refurbishment of the children's play equipment. However, there is still a lot of fundraising to do if the Council's bold plans are to be realised.

Given the damage to the swings, the Council has decided to repair them as soon as possible and to paint the fencing and swings when the repair work is complete. Hopefully, that work will be done in the next few weeks.

The Council is seeking help with the painting and volunteers are asked to contact Mary Bourne on 500946 or Trevor Goodingham on 554293. All voluntary efforts will count towards any matched funding needed for the full refurbishment.



**No dog mess
Please**

Despite repeated requests not to do so, some dog owners continue to put dog mess in the small litter bins situated around the village. Even if put in plastic bags, such actions present a health and safety issue for the Council's two litter pickers who have to empty the bins by hand.

The litter bin in Trinity Walk is being used for dog mess, despite there being a proper dog mess bin just around the corner. The Parish Council has decided to remove that bin as a temporary measure. The situation will be monitored to see if one is needed there at all.

Dog owners are reminded once again that dog mess, whether in plastic bags or not, should not be put into the bins marked as above.

MOBILE POLICE STATION IN VILLAGE



Hertfordshire Constabulary's Mobile Police Station will be visiting the village on the third Wednesday of each month between 10:30am and noon, parking outside the Londis shop in London Road. The first visit is planned for 20 April.

The services offered include:

- Crime reporting
- Accident reporting
- Reporting cloned credit cards
- Lost and found property
- Lost dogs (not found dogs)
- Crime prevention advice
- Reports of abandoned vehicles
- Unoccupied premises notifications
- Advice on criminal law
- Recruiting enquiries
- General matters relating to local environments

and most other matters that people would visit a police station for.

This is a new venture for the Police in Hertford Heath. Do let them and the Parish Council know if you find it useful or, indeed, if you have any other comments on the timing, siting, etc.

CASUAL VACANCY ON COUNCIL

Anthony Oliver's resignation has led to there being a vacancy for a Parish Councillor. The procedure is that the District Council will advertise the vacancy. If ten electors demand one, there will be a by-election. If no election is called for, the Council will co-opt as soon as it can.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO ANNUAL PARISH MEETING ON WORK OF PARISH COUNCIL OVER THE PAST YEAR

I believe that the past year has, overall, been a good one for the Council and the village. Together we have achieved a lot, the Council is now up to full strength and I sense a general feeling of cautious optimism in the village, this opinion being based on receiving fewer complaints and more compliments in recent months. The community spirit was boosted by the Tsunami Appeal Sale, so effectively organised by the Village Hall Committee and so well supported by villagers. I was also pleased to learn that the WI is planning a party on the green in July, and has welcomed the suggestion that other village organisations should join in. Not quite a fete, but definitely a move in the right direction.

Good community activity only comes about as a result of much hard and dedicated work by all concerned. I should like to thank all the Councillors for their continued support and commitment, the Clerk for providing unstinting dedication to duty throughout the year and those parishioners who have participated in events and commented on the work of the Council. Thanks are also due to our extremely energetic and helpful District Councillor William Ashley, and to Nigel Copping for being such a supportive County Councillor for many years. Nigel is retiring this year and we wish him a long and happy time to enjoy himself after all he has done for the community.

There is, of course, still much to be done. We have progressed towards meeting the criteria for obtaining "Quality Parish Status" but we must not forget that an essential requirement is a contested election in 2007. The more the Council does, and the better it performs, the more people should be willing to come forward as candidates to join in the process of making Hertford Heath an even better place to live than it already is.

There was a successful open meeting at the Village Hall in May, to find out parishioners' ideas for the village. This was part of the larger village appraisal exercise which has guided the Council in several ways during the year, and was arranged as part of the Rural Enterprises project sponsored by the Countryside Development Agency. As a result of this, and the current exercise to gather information for our entry in the Best Village Competition, I think we have all learned much about the many activities which go on in the village. The sub-committee working on our submission for the competition has drafted a comprehensive response which I hope everyone will review so that nothing is inadvertently missed out – and everyone becomes better informed about the village.

COMMUNICATION

If the year has had any one dominant theme, it must be communication. The Parish Council Newsletter can only be described as a stunning success – thanks largely to the drive, design skills and dedication of the Clerk. After some initial distribution problems, it is now being safely delivered every month to virtually all the homes in the village. It is very readable and informative, and complements the items we continue to put each month in the Parish News magazine produced by the church. We also publish notices of meetings, accounts and other official publications on the parish notice boards. Consultation events have been held in the Village Hall about the Village Appraisal, Hertfordshire Highways' proposals for London Road and the East of England Development Plan. The Council is also keeping up with modern technology: the website has been updated and significantly improved, and I hope the hit figures will expand accordingly. If you have not seen it recently, try logging in to www.hertfordheath.com.

The Council is working hard to communicate and inform – but we still need more comment and feedback in return. As I said in my last report, it is no use the Councillors working harder and harder towards Quality Status if they cannot be confident in the support of the majority of the community. The Council needs to hear from the electorate, otherwise it cannot be truly

representative. I therefore ask everyone in the village to take an interest, to let the Council know what is important to them, and to support events and activities.

Communication applies on the wider scene too – not just within the village. The Council's membership of PREP (Parishes for Rural Environment Protection) has brought co-operation with 17 other villages in Hertfordshire and west Essex, presenting a united front in resisting the trend towards dominance by the larger urban communities and in opposing the twin threats of Stansted Airport expansion and the iniquitous East of England Regional Plan. The latter is the most dangerous threat we have seen for years: an un-elected "authority" being given powers by central government to usurp the planning responsibilities of the counties and impose gross building development in the Green Belt, the need for which is not proven. Despite the public meeting organised by the Council, and extensive publicity for the issue by both HCC and EHDC, a disappointingly small number of citizens bothered to write to comment. If democracy appears not to be delivering what we want, it is only because the majority of us do not care enough to participate in the democratic process. We ought to appreciate our rights and freedoms but, if we fail to meet our responsibilities, we run the risk of losing our privileges.

Together with PREP we have commented on the Landscape Character Assessment for S E Herts which was prepared by HCC. PREP has also made available to us the skills and experience of other parishes to help with our village appraisal, the move towards Quality Status and the preparation of a village plan for the future.

The Council has continued its efforts to keep well informed about issues in the wider community. Presentations have been given to the Council by EHDC staff on Leisure Opportunities in July, by the Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator in August and by the Affordable Housing Officer in November. In January the County Officer of the Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils attended and in February we had a visit from PC Paul Scott.

PLAYING FIELD

As usual, the playing field has taken up a considerable proportion of our time. Early in the year we received a report from the National Playing Fields Association on the overall use of the field. We have embarked on following their recommendations, starting with moving the teenagers' chat room. Fortunately the cost of this turned out to be less than we had feared, and some grant funding was obtained. Together with the football clubs, we have drafted an overall plan for improving the boundary fences, providing car parking, updating the children's play area, installing more facilities for teenagers and eventually building a replacement for the ageing football hut. The village football teams have done extremely well in recent seasons and, in order to allow their well earned promotion to a higher league, improved facilities are required at the field. We are currently seeking grants from various sources to help fund what will be major capital expenditure to deliver much improved facilities for several age groups. Most grants require a proportion of the cost to be raised locally, so it will be necessary to organise some serious fund raising activities in the near future.

HIGHWAY MATTERS

After years of begging the highway authorities to act to reduce the speeding on London Road, we were told last year that funds would be available for a limited project. The proposals were made public and discussed at a meeting in the Village Hall. The speed limits were lowered and extended in scope, and certain works were carried out to the kerbs and white lining. The results have been disappointing. The white lines look a mess, parking on the pavement continues and we have

had two tragically serious accidents since the changes were made. The Council is working closely with Hertfordshire Highways to make further improvements and with the Police to enforce the speed limits.

Another highway issue concerns Downfield Road. There have been four incidents of vehicles leaving the road and entering the garden of Downfield Cottage. Improvements to the drainage, signing and camber of the road have been promised for early in the new financial year. The surface at the Rush Green junction is dangerously uneven and we are told that is also now scheduled for improvement.

POLICE

Joint efforts by the Council, the School Governors and the Police have resulted in considerable improvement to the problems with inconsiderate parking outside the school. The co-operation of the publican at the Townshend Arms, in allowing parking there at the start and end of the school day, has helped a great deal and is much appreciated. The Council has requested Hertfordshire Highways to introduce formal parking restrictions to encourage considerate behaviour by drivers and facilitate enforcement.

I have to comment that, for most of the year, communication with the Police has been difficult and frustrating. Our local community officer, Paul Scott, has continued to patrol and respond to calls when he has received them, but he was not getting adequate back-up support. The Council's requests for information went unanswered and I understand many local residents have been frustrated by the inadequate response to non urgent calls. However, I am pleased to say that the situation has improved considerably in recent weeks. The new Chief Constable of Hertfordshire seems to understand the problems and is addressing them. We have seen more patrols in the village, some speeding tickets have been issued in London Road and there is a distinct possibility that the village will have regular visits from a mobile police station before long.

PARISH PATHS PARTNERSHIP

The Parish Paths Partnership scheme has continued. The reason why no physical work has been done in the year is because the Council was keen to complete the surfacing work on Bridleway 17. The cost was too great for one year's budget, so we negotiated a plan to use two years' funding, and the contract has now been placed for the work to be done soon after the new financial year has started - probably in May. Next year's project will be to complete the installation of proper gates to replace stiles on the footpaths, and to improve the way-marking.

PLANNING ISSUES

The most significant planning issue of the year has been the resurgence of the application for a golf course at Jenningsbury. Outline permission was given several years ago and this year detailed permission was sought. The Council objected strongly to the size of the proposed club house, and its non-compliance with the terms of the outline permission. The application was subsequently withdrawn, but it may come back. There is also the strong possibility of a renewed proposal for a south of Hertford by-pass, but let us hope the tunnel idea is preferred. Two applications have been granted for new housing in Woodland Road: after representations from The Council, some of the units will be affordable housing and the developers have agreed to make a contribution to the cost of new equipment in the children's playground.

VILLAGE GREENS AND WAR MEMORIAL

The programme of tree replacement has continued on the village green. This year we have planted two new ornamental hawthorns, a field maple and a rowan, the latter as a memorial. The flowering prunus trees have been trimmed, as have two large maples opposite the end of Rushen Drive. The little community orchard is developing steadily.

The war memorial has been professionally cleaned and repaired, and I consider it to have been extremely well done.

ALLOTMENTS AND WILDLIFE MEADOW

The allotments site has seen more improvements during the year with several overgrown plots cleared of scrub. As a result, instead of a waiting list of applicants for plots we now have some spare space available. The Wildlife Meadow was opened with a very successful picnic party in July and is settling in well. It is a pity we had to delay the excavation of a pond, but permission has now been granted subject to a new survey. It should be possible to do the excavation next autumn.

FINANCIAL MATTERS

Our Clerk has been a tremendous help to the Council, to me as Chairman and to the whole community throughout the year. We are very fortunate to have such a competent, dedicated and tolerant person in this role, who often performs beyond the call of duty. When the Council discovered that she was paid significantly below the level required to comply with local government guidelines, it moved quickly to resolve the anomaly. Next year's accounts will therefore reflect a significant increase in employment costs.

Thanks to the Clerk's hard work, and thanks to the helpful support of our Internal Auditor, the Council's accounts are up to date for the first time in some years. Over the year we have continued our policy of using the reserves for the benefit of the community, and they have now been reduced to a sensible working level. The Council is spending more than in recent years, but hopes the villagers agree that the results are improved services. I have already mentioned higher employment costs, the monthly Newsletter has to be printed and distributed, we have bought and planted new trees and we are planning large expenditure on the playing field.

To support this level of service delivery the Council decided to request an increase in the precept (the share of your Council Tax which comes to the parish). In percentage terms the increase appears large (50%) but, for the average household, this represents an increase of only 14p per week. I think this reflects how little of your money the Council has to work with. Also, by increasing the precept the Council can claim increased local effort to raise funds, and thus improve the level of grants available.

On a personal note, after many years as a Councillor, it is time for me to move on. I therefore intend to resign at the end of today's meetings. I am sorry this will mean the Council reverts to being below complement but I am optimistic that the atmosphere is right for at least two new nominees to come forward in time for a contested election in 2007. I should just like to thank all the Councillors and the Clerk for their support and friendship, and to wish the Council and the whole village all the best for the future.

Anthony Oliver
4 April 2005

VILLAGE SPEED LIMITS



The whole of the village is subject to a 30 mph speed limit. It would appear that not many people know this! The Police monitored the speed along London Road for a week in March. The average speed was over 40 mph. The results were such that the Police have requested that the location be adopted as a mobile site for the Speed Camera Van.

In addition, PC Paul Scott has been trained in the use of the laser speed detection device (as eleven residents will know to their cost). PC Scott spent an hour and a quarter and ticketed seven drivers who were travelling at speeds greatly in excess of the limit and cautioned a further nine drivers who were under the fixed penalty level. PC Scott hopes to carry out the exercise on a regular basis.

All drivers are reminded once again that parking on pavements is illegal. It obstructs the way for those pushing prams, for those who use motorised buggies and for those with guide dogs. The lines painted along London Road do not indicate that it is OK to park on the pavement. They are simply there to narrow the traffic lanes.

PARISH COUNCIL MEMBERS

Vice Chairman:

Bob Akers
65 Trinity Road
01992 420340

Other members:

Lynn Bonner
Mary Bourne
Andrew Crumpton
Trevor Goodingham
Martin Nash
Alison Scarll
Gillian Thornton
(vacancy)

Clerk:

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European Social Fund

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or ring Hertford Regional College for your copy on 01992 411400.
Alternatively, see www.hertreg.ac.uk or www.eastherts.gov.uk for details.

East Herts District Councillor:

William Ashley

01992 511313 (tel)
01992 511695 (fax)
william.ashley@eastherts.gov.uk

EHDC website:
www.eastherts.gov.uk

Hertfordshire County Councillor:

Nigel Copping (until 5 May 2005)

01920 870155 (tel)
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nigel.copping@hertsc.gov.uk

HCC website: www.hertsdirect.org

Highways fault reporting:

Telephone 01438 737320
Online fault reporting service -
www.hertsdirect.org/highwayfaults.

Non-emergency Police number:

0845 33 00 222

PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS 2005/2006

The Mission Room, Vicarage Causeway at 7.30pm

Monday 9 May 2005
Monday 6 June 2005
Monday 4 July 2005
Monday 1 August 2005
Monday 5 September 2005
Monday 3 October 2005
Monday 7 November 2005
Monday 5 December 2005
Monday 9 January 2005
Monday 6 February 2006
Monday 6 March 2006
Monday 3 April 2006

ALL MEETINGS ARE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

ALLOTMENTS

If you are interested in having an allotment in the village, whether a full or half plot, please contact the Council's Allotment Manager, Bob Akers, on 420340.