

CLAVERTON ANNUAL PARISH MEETING: 19th APRIL 2012

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REVIEW

Introduction

I would like to spend a little time reviewing the highlights of the past year and take a brief look at some of the key issues for the year ahead.

Six themes have dominated Parish Council activities in the last year -

1. Finance
2. Planning
3. Transport
4. Parish Council website
5. Broadband
6. Valley Parishes Alliance

Taking first Finance

Finance

We decided to set the precept for this financial year (2012/13) at £3,000. This is a reduction of £500, compared to 2011/12, and builds on that of the previous year to see the parish council tax falling by 25% compared to 2010/11.

The 2012/13 and subsequent budgets will include a new annual contribution of £250 to St Mary's, to reflect our use of the Church for meetings. In terms of capital expenditure, we also agreed to make a one-off contribution of £750 towards repairs of the Ralph Allen Mausoleum.

Turning now to Planning

Planning

Throughout the year representations were made on a number of planning and listed building applications (LBA). These included the LBAs for repairs to the **Ralph Allen mausoleum** in the graveyard of St Mary's and installation of a **Red Wheel Plaque at Claverton Pumping Station**. What is a Red Wheel Plaque, you might wonder? Well.....

The Transport Trust, a national charity established to promote and encourage the preservation and restoration of Britain's unique transport heritage, awards these Red Wheel heritage plaques to sites that have played an important role in the development of transport in Britain.

The Red Wheel scheme is similar to the English Heritage blue plaques awarded to buildings of significant historic interest. Claverton Pumping Station, which celebrates its bi-centenary next year, has been awarded a Red Wheel plaque to commemorate its importance in the heritage of inland waterway transport.

The Parish Council supported both these LBAs.

On the wider planning front there were important developments at B&NES and National levels.

In **B&NES**, the Draft Core Strategy - the policy framework for the location and level of new housing, jobs and other development over the next 20 years - was submitted to the government Planning Inspectorate in May 2011. Between January and March 2012 it was then subject to examination in public conducted by an Independent Planning Inspector. The PC contributed to these examination hearings by making representations on Green Belt, City of Bath WHS, A36/A46 link road and Bath flood compensatory storage.

The Inspector's report to B&NES was expected by around end June this year but will probably slip because the Draft Core Strategy now has to be tested against important national planning policy reform - the **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** - which was published in March. You will probably have seen and heard a lot of press comment on it recently.

The other important national development this year was the November Royal Assent of the **Localism Act** which hands significant new powers to Parish Councils. These include the Community right to bid, Community right to challenge and Neighbourhood Planning - again; there has been a lot of press commentary on these topics in recent weeks.

There are many issues related to the NPPF and the Localism Act but there is not enough time to discuss them in detail this evening. However, I would just like to mention the Localism Act's introduction of **Neighbourhood Planning** powers, one of which allows a Parish Council to prepare a Neighbourhood development Plan (statutory status). It can influence where new homes, businesses and shops should go and what they should look like and other considerations such as community buildings, highways, green spaces and renewable energy.

In response to the introduction of these new powers B&NES recently drafted a **Neighbourhood Planning Protocol** (*'My Neighbourhood'*) - a guide to how to get involved in planning issues, in particular how to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan. It is currently out for consultation and on the B&NES website.

I recommend you have a look at it and, if you have any questions on it, the NPPF, Localism Act or need guidance on useful publications/websites, please contact me or any of the other P Cllrs.

Turning now to transport

Transport

Securing an A36 speed restriction through Claverton Village remains our top priority. Having received the full support of the four West of England authorities (Bristol, South Gloucestershire, North Somerset and B&NES) in 2010, during 2011 we also secured B&NES' agreement to offer to design and implement our proposed scheme, i.e. on behalf of the HA which is actually responsible for management of the A36. B&NES even agreed to our invitation that they part-fund the scheme with the PC and HA. We subsequently met our MP (Jacob Rees-Mogg) to ask him to take up our proposal with the Transport Minister (Mike Penning MP).

In November we received the Minister's clear and encouraging advice that the HA could implement a scheme this financial year, i.e. 2012/13. Good news, we thought! However, at a March meeting with the HA (*they originally advised the Transport Minister*) we were informed that the scheme was only **'provisionally scheduled for design in 2013/14'...and that...implementation of the scheme is not currently included in the emerging Programme'**. This development is, obviously, completely unacceptable.

We have voiced our serious concerns with the HA and asked our MP, once again, to raise them with the Transport Minister, with a view to him further pressing for implementation of a speed limit scheme this year. It is all extremely frustrating but rest assured, we will continue the battle - we simply cannot and will not give up on the issue.

Less frustrating was our successful application to join the **B&NES 'Snow Warden Pilot Scheme'**. Under the scheme, B&NES have provided salt and a spreader and Richard Wright and Mark Mackintosh have volunteered to be our snow wardens. You may have seen them using the salt spreader to keep School Lane, the A36 access junctions, the top of Ferry Lane and the footpath from School Lane to the bus stop safe for use. I would like to thank them and John & Audrey Lippiatt for providing dry storage of the salt.

Most of us will have enjoyed a stroll along the River Avon, near to **Claverton Weir** and the Pumping Station. However, the huge popularity of this location has brought with it increasing litter problems and you may have seen the piles of rubbish that often accumulate near the gate and stile *but* are not taken away. This problem has now been resolved, having secured B&NES agreement to pick up the rubbish on a regular basis.

Good news for Claverton! It is now expected that the experimental 18 month **HGV weight restriction** for vehicles turning between the A36 Bathwick St and Beckford Road, in both directions, will start around late May/early June.

The ban, which we have been pressing for over many years, is primarily to reduce the impact of HGV's using Bath as a through-route. However, it should also benefit Claverton as it will reduce the number of HGVs passing through the village section of the A36 - it should not only be safer but also quieter.

Communication plays a key role in PC activities - I would, therefore, like to say a few words about the Parish Council website.

Parish Council Website

The Parish Council website (**www.clavertonpc.org/**) was launched in September 2011. In addition to information about the Parish Council and its activities, it also contains many direct links to local services, amenities and organisations. A set of maps of the Parish and wider area is also included.

We hope that you have found the website both informative and useful (particularly for newcomers to the village). Certainly, we have received enthusiastic feedback from neighbouring PCs and some B&NES Cllrs and we know that it is attracting a growing number of visitors.

Any suggestions for inclusion of new links or information are always very welcome. If you have any - please get in touch with Anna, Rodger, Mark or me.

This leads nicely to the issue of Broadband.

Broadband

For those in the Parish who have internet connections, poor broadband service continues to be a great frustration. The PC has, therefore, been busy on two fronts, trying to promote improvements to the service - one via **B&NES** applying for government funding and the other through direct discussions with **BT**.

B&NES had decided not to bid for government funding for improvements to rural broadband service. However, following representations by the PC and Alison Howell (who made an excellent presentation to B&NES), concerned B&NES Cllrs (led by Martin Veal), other PCs and local businesses, B&NES reversed its original decision and has now joined the '**Connecting Devon and Somerset Broadband Programme**' (*partner authorities - Devon, Somerset, B&NES, North Somerset, Plymouth and Torbay*) in a joint bid for Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) funding.

The 'Connecting Devon and Somerset Broadband Programme' should result in all homes and businesses in B&NES being able to access broadband speeds of at least 2Mbps by 2015 with 85% receiving superfast speeds of up to 24Mbps (100% coverage anticipated by 2020).

You may have already read in the March newsletter that B&NES residents are being asked to register their interest in faster broadband and show what speeds currently exist in the area. To do this residents are being asked to complete a simple survey on www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk or call a hotline on 0844 463 6887. The survey now runs till August 2012 and we would encourage everybody in the Parish to complete it.

In parallel to working with B&NES, we now have direct dialogue with **BT** regional management. This is providing a good insight into BT's plans and technology, and is very much keeping Claverton in their visibility. Although we have established that the current roll out of Fibre to the cabinet (FTC) in the City of Bath will not immediately benefit Claverton, BT has disclosed that there are likely to be extensions to this service, as well as technology upgrades, both of which could benefit us quite soon. BT is also keen to identify well defined communities to act as early trials and we have proposed Claverton as being keen/open to do this.

If you would like more information on the 'Connecting Devon and Somerset' survey or any other aspect of Claverton's broadband service, please get in touch with Rodger.

Staying on the theme of cross-border joint initiatives, I would like to say a few words about the Valley Parishes Alliance (explanation).

Valley Parishes Alliance

The Parish Council has continued to play an active role in the VPA.

A lot of time has been devoted to the **Kennet & Avon Canal** which runs through the entire length of our parish. Together with Bathampton PC, we wrote the VPA representation to Defra regarding the Government's plan to move inland waterways from BW into a new charity (subsequently named the Canal and River Trust - launch June/July 2012) and the VPA recommendations regarding the charity's future management of the Canal. We also represented the VPA on a BW steering group which has now agreed the moorings allocations between Bath and Devizes (Good news for Mill/Rose Cottages - retention of Ferry Lane 'No mooring zone').

Regarding the **B&NES Core Strategy** and related documents, we wrote the VPA representations on the Bath flood compensatory storage and Gypsies & Travellers consultations (current second consultation indicates no sites proposed in the VPA area).

The **A36 trunk route** is the most important road in the VPA area and, as I mentioned earlier, we (and other members of the VPA) met with the **Highways Agency** for the first time in March, to discuss various A36 problems. Notwithstanding our serious concerns about the Claverton speed limit scheme, we hope that regular meetings between the VPA and HA will help facilitate a better understanding of how we might go forward to our mutual benefit.

Finally, I would like to mention the **VPA website (www.valleyparishesalliance.org.uk)** which we designed and wrote. The site was launched last November and contains information about both the Avon & Limpley Stoke Valley and the activities of the VPA. It contains links to all member Parish websites and a reference section which includes topics of general interest (books and external websites), maps and a photo gallery (*you might be surprised by the number of notable people who have links to the valley!*). Hopefully the site is interesting and useful, particularly for newcomers to the valley area.

So - that completes the review of, what has been, a busy year.

I have enjoyed the privilege of being Chairman of the PC and would, therefore, like to thank my fellow P Cllrs and Andrea for all their support and hard work. I would also like to thank Bill Howe for continuing to be our Independent Auditor and, for her part in communicating PC news, Marian Mackintosh for her hard work in producing the excellent village newsletter.

Look Ahead

In the coming year the Parish Council will need to focus on the following key issues -

- Sustain campaign for A36 speed limit scheme.
- Sustain involvement in the B&NES Core Strategy and related supplementary planning documents (SPD), in particular the WHS Management Plan and WHS Setting SPD and respond to all other consultations on issues which could impact on Claverton.
- Further review and 'get to grips' with the NPPF and Localism Act, in particular Neighbourhood Planning.
- Attend ALCA and B&NES meetings (e.g. Parishes Liaison and Parish Cluster) and the Bath University Residents Forum - influence debates and decisions.
- Sustain involvement in management of the K&A Canal (under new Canal & River Trust).
- Keep the village access roads and paths safe for use in severe winter conditions and again request inclusion of Claverton Hill in B&NES's gritting scheme.
- Attend to 'everyday' maintenance issues, e.g. keep things tidy/clean & roads maintained.
- Sustain active role in the VPA - in terms of population we may be the smallest Parish but membership of the VPA affords us another opportunity to extend our 'circle of influence' on issues affecting both Claverton and the wider Avon & Limpley Stoke community area.
- Maintain the Parish Council website (encourage parish input)
- Sustain campaign to improve broadband service by working with B&NES and direct dialogue with BT management.

In conclusion

I would just like to remind you that *your* Parish Council exists *solely* to represent the interests of the whole Claverton community and that, in doing this; the most important aspects of our work are to listen and communicate effectively. The Parish Council, therefore, very much values parishioners attending the APM, our bi-monthly PC meetings or alerting us to their concerns and aspirations in other, more informal, ways.

Claverton Parish is a beautiful and special place, sitting within the high class landscape setting of the UK's only *complete* city afforded World Heritage Status. Its conservation and enhancement deserves the sustained attention of the Parish Council.

Thank you for your time and attention.

David Batho

19th April 2012