

## Annual Parish Council Report 2008-09

The Annual Parish Meeting is usually an entirely retrospective event when the Chair of the Parish Council reports on what has happened in the previous year; but tonight we are hosting a rather different kind of event where the focus is very much on looking forward.

Five years have passed since our initial Parish Plan and tonight – with the support of Philip Atkins, our Ward Councillor - we begin to launch our new one, so this is a very good moment to recap on the considerable achievements which have been made since the last Parish Plan in 2004.

We now have some excellent facilities for youngsters where previously there had been very little for them, and this past year has seen two major schemes come to fruition. First there is the Old Railway Line where the Denstone Youth Fund have installed a wealth of play equipment and a shelter. A small wooden train is to be officially sited at the far end of the play area once the lease has been extended and amended, and we have also been given permission to install a picnic bench near to it. We are very grateful for the help and support of John Quigley and Noreen Moore of Staffordshire County Council for their help and support with these additions to our recreational facilities. Then there is Robert's Green, a field next to the school where all of the games that need an open grassy space can be played. The Denstone Youth Fund, who have managed the Railway Line area, and the Tom Boden Memorial Sports Trust, who have provided the open space, have worked tirelessly to bring these different schemes to fruition. Both facilities are much appreciated by the youngsters in the village, and particular thanks are due to Debbie Andrew and David Boden.

Our web site - [denstonevillage.org.uk](http://denstonevillage.org.uk) - is fully operational, thanks to two people in particular. Rupert Evans was the initiator of the website, and the time and effort he put into getting us up and running cannot be underestimated. Our webmaster is now Paul Andrew who thrives on being given things to do and who would welcome as much new, up to date information as possible about village activities, clubs, businesses, meeting, outings. – You name it, if it's happening (or has happened) in the village, it ought to be available on our website. Please send anything to me initially – my email address is on the website already – and I will forward stuff to Paul who may now live in Somerset but is available at the touch of a computer key.

Under Dennis Parker, the community transport scheme continues to provide a much needed service for those who do not have their own transport, and we are very grateful to him for administering the scheme. If you want to find out more, talk to Dennis who is here this evening.

We live in a very beautiful and very well-cared-for village. This was officially recognised by our being awarded first prize in the Staffordshire BKV competition in 2008, and everyone in the village is to be thanked and congratulated. Not only was there no litter to be seen, but the judges appreciated how well tended the gardens, public land, and areas around local businesses were at all times during the three months of judging. We have an excellent team of official litter-pickers, but we would always welcome more members. If you would like to join the team, let me know tonight. Judging for 2009 begins on 1st May, so please do everything you can to

help in terms of not dropping litter, picking up after your dogs and even putting stray bits of litter that you may find into your own bins!

One area which caused real concern five years ago was the speed and density of traffic within the village, particularly along College Road which for a substantial section of its length had no footway. Thanks to the hard work of the Traffic Calming group, ably led by Joe Lewis and Caroline Salt, to the generosity of Denstone College and JCB, and to the commitment of Richard Rayson of Staffordshire Highways, the village is now a very different and very much safer place to walk and drive through. We still need to have the crossings marked properly by the school and along College Road, but Phase One is as good as complete and is a tremendous success. At some point in the not too distant future, we need to draw up plans for a possible Phase Two.

In the 2004 village questionnaire, local residents made known their desire to be able to buy fresh local produce. A mere five years later, The Denstone Farm Shop and cafe, run by Emma and Rupert Evans, is going from strength to strength, offering a wide range of local produce and winning numerous awards for the quality of its products. We congratulate Rupert and Emma on what they have accomplished; it shows what a Parish Plan can help to create.

So far so very good on what came of our last Parish Plan during the last twelve months, but what else has the Parish Council been doing? A great deal, is the answer, and I will take you as succinctly as I can through some of the most important issues we have dealt with.

Noise pollution, particularly at night, became a significant problem in the vicinity of the stockyard above the JCB factory, but JCB listened carefully to our concerns and have gone quite some way to resolving the problem for Stubwood residents. As far as Stubwood Tankers are concerned, we are actively monitoring the situation and reporting any concerns to the various authorities who are currently dealing with this issue. Another ongoing issue in which we have been involved for some years is that of Alton Towers' traffic, but in December 2008, the Merlin Group announced that there would be no new vehicular access route within the next ten years as the number of visitors was not increasing; so that would appear to be that.

Parking in the centre of the village continues to be a problem, with the Village Hall, the school, the tennis and bowls club, and The Tavern all attracting a significant number of cars to the heart of the village at different times of almost every day. We do need a larger car park, but finding suitable land for one is not easy. In Oak Road, residents sometimes have problems accessing their driveways because of parked cars, and we did discuss whether we should have double yellow lines along one kerb. We discovered that we would only be allowed to have double yellow lines along both kerbs, however, so have put this plan on hold for the time being, feeling that it would penalise the residents and their visitors at some times as much as it would help them at others. We were also asked to find land suitable for use as an allotment, and have been able to discover someone with part of a large garden they were happy to have used for this purpose. We have also been offered the use of part of another garden, if anyone is interested. Please do let the Parish Clerk know if you have any land you are prepared to let other villagers grow vegetables in, as I am sure that we will have more applicants for allotments in the years ahead.

We have recently appointed John Jilbert as our new village lengthman and welcome him warmly to his new position. Many thanks, too, to Peter Robotham, our previous lengthman who did a fine job. We are very pleased that Peter will continue to be in charge of checking the safety of the two Youth Fund play areas.

As far as the parish church is concerned, we have welcomed our new vicar, John Richardson, and Celia his wife to the village, and we hope that they will be happy here. We supported the church's Flower Festival when Councillor Anne Ratcliffe created the display for the lynch gate on our behalf, and during the course of this year, we have had several discussions about the Church Room - which is at present owned by the church and administered by the diocese - regarding whether some community use could be made of it, as well as our being able to benefit from a possible parking area in front of it.

What else has happened? Stubwood now actually has its village signs, we have bought the two telephone kiosks from BT so now have to decide what we do with them, and five new hawthorns have been planted along College Road to replace the old ones which were either diseased or growing at an increasingly alarming angle. Thanks to Fred and Anne Ratcliffe for that very valuable work.

So let me finish by coming back to where I started and to what will be our new Parish Plan. We have, as yet, no idea at all what it will say, as its contents will be determined by you, the residents of the village, and how you respond to the questionnaire that every household will receive this summer. The proposed questionnaire is displayed here tonight, but we welcome your thoughts on it. Have we asked the right questions? Are there areas we have included which don't need to be there? Are there issues you feel strongly about which you would like other villagers to think about? Please put any comments on the Post-it notes provided, and the Steering Committee will look at them very carefully. Please also talk to the representatives of all of the organisations who are here this evening to find out what they have done for us already or what they could do in the future. Tonight is the beginning of a process which really does allow you not only to have your say but to affect directly the direction we take over the next five years. Think of the Traffic Calming measures, the Play areas and the Farm Shop if you need any proof that Parish Plans can and do change life for the better, and we as a Parish Council will, with your support and encouragement, do our best for the good of the community. If you would like to be even more involved in shaping these changes, please speak to the Parish Clerk about joining the Vital Villages group. These people are the ones who turn the recommendations of the questionnaire into action plans, and they would value some new members who would bring fresh eyes and a fresh perspective to the future of the village. The present Vital Villages group have done a really excellent job, though, and I do thank them for all that they have achieved.

Without turning this into the Oscars, I would also like to convey my thanks to the Parish Councillors who have, without exception, been absolutely tremendous and who have put immense energy and endless time into effecting those changes which seemed appropriate, whilst putting a brake on others. I am extremely grateful for their help, advice and support, and what some of us may lack in experience in the role, we aim to compensate for in commitment and enthusiasm. The experience element will come! The greatest thanks, though, go to Bob Beaumont, our Parish Clerk, without whom little would happen. He is a fount of knowledge

and an expert on all things parochial. He does a first-rate job and we are very lucky indeed to have him.

This has been a very busy and eventful year. It has not always been plain sailing in calm waters – which is probably a very poor image for somewhere quite so far from the sea – but think about what has been achieved! And then think about the new Parish Plan and what we – Parish Council and Denstone residents working together - could achieve in five years' time.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for your attention, I would like now to open the meeting for public participation, but I do need to put a guillotine on any discussion at 8.30.

*Read by Cllr Jenny Richardson (Chairman Denstone Parish Council) to the Annual Parish Meeting on 27 April 2009*