

## **Denstone Parish Council Annual Report 2009-10**

At this time last year, I was introducing the idea of a new parish plan. Some initial discussions have taken place as to the directions in which we should now go, as far as developing the existing facilities within the village or creating new ones, but there is still much to do. The long hard winter did not help, but now that spring is here and our sap is rising, this seems a good time to capitalise on new-found energy and drive to see just how much we, collectively, can achieve before next April.

The 2010 Parish Plan will, we believe, focus on five main areas, the first of which concerns the Village Hall. There was a feeling within the village that it was time to think about the possibility of having a new Village Hall. The present structure does not have an indefinite life and, despite the fact that it was very successfully extended some years ago, it is not always big enough to cater for large events, not does it have enough rooms to allow a number of different activities to happen simultaneously. The Village Hall is undoubtedly a very popular, well-run, successful facility which we are lucky to have, but it has inevitable limitations. A public meeting on 26th November 2009 was in favour of our having a new, larger Village Hall.

The Village Hall Committee decided to get a valuation on an adjacent piece of land, and the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Village Hall Committee also visited other village halls in order to get an idea of the amount of total land area which would be needed. The land next to the present Village Hall land was professionally valued, but it is unlikely that the landowners would be willing to sell in the near future. It was suggested, therefore, that other options be looked at, and the possible formation of a working group will be discussed at the next Village Hall Committee meeting on 24th May.

Phase One of the Traffic Calming has brought real benefits to the village. We certainly hope that there will be a Phase Two project, which will extend the footpath to the bottom of Narrow Lane, but this will not be easy to achieve, principally because of finding the funding. Joe Lewis, who was a key figure in Phase One, has too many other commitments to allow him to continue with helping to lead Phase Two, so Councillor Caroline Salt needs volunteers to bring fresh ideas to this very important area of village life. She would particularly welcome residents of Narrow Lane itself to her working group, to help establish the 'proof of need' which is vital if we are to make any headway. We also believe it is important to investigate the possibility of making the roads around All Saints' School a 20mph zone at key times of the day.

We know that the issue of parking within the village must be addressed at some point, but it is not one which can be looked at in isolation. The two previously mentioned elements of the Parish Plan – particularly the Village Hall – really need to be sorted out first. For instance, changes to the Village Hall might mean that we had more parking provision around it. Equally, if the Parish or Church Room were brought into public use, then this might provide very useful parking spaces, too. Let me also say that we are very grateful to Denstone Farm Shop for allowing use of their parking areas for various village functions. At present, the feeling of the Parish Council is that, although the roads become congested at certain points of the day any parking infringements are relatively short-lived and the inconvenience experienced is less than would be the case if the village were covered in double yellow lines which would look

unattractive and would mean that none of us or our legitimate visitors could even park outside our own houses. We are aware that certain people do have special problems, however, and try to deal with these on an individual basis. If you do wish to participate in a working group on parking issues, please make contact with Councillor Bednall.

Denstone Youth Fund has had, relatively speaking, a quieter year with no current project to focus on. Despite that, they have successfully organised their annual bike ride, September's Denstone Show, a new event - the Casino Night - and most recently The Denstone Factor. DYF has been grateful for the support of villagers of all ages who have helped them at events and who have contributed to the successes they have had. The DYF AGM is on Thursday May 20th, and Debbie Andrews hopes that as many people as possible will attend - particularly the young people of the village. The Youth Fund needs people both to offer their ideas and to volunteer their services to this wonderfully successful organisation that has once again contributed so much enjoyment - and so much fun - to the life of the village.

Work progresses well on developing the old railway line. There are plans to improve the track-bed surface, and some work clearing brambles has been done by local volunteers, but the group would very much welcome some additional help to cut down overhanging vegetation and improve the drainage. The railway working group hopes to create an access from the railway line into the churchyard. Local natural history are needed to survey what is present and to suggest how this area could be developed as an amenity, with possibly a third notice board or a nature-trail leaflet. If you are interested in being involved, please talk to Councillor Bob Wright.

So that is where we are so far with the Parish Plan. What happens next is, to a large extent, up to you as residents of Denstone. Please volunteer. Please get involved. Please make things happen.

That is for the future. What of the past year? Let's start with the Best Kept Village competition. I know we did not come first - but we did come second and Stubwood came third. This year, Denstone and Stubwood are combining forces as one entry, so let's see what we can do to impress the judges. There is so much here for them to appreciate and admire, so don't let us be caught out by that odd bit of litter. We did have a very successful community litter-pick a couple of weeks ago, concentrating on the roads leading in and out of the village, and the volunteers collected thirteen sacks of festering rubbish. Do come and join us next time, so that we will be able to cover an even larger area.

Speedwatch ran successfully for much of last autumn, and as soon as the new signs and equipment have been received, the volunteers will be out again. New locations have been approved, too, so 40mph areas can now be checked on a regular basis, as well as the 30mph roads within the village. If you would like to join the Speedwatch team (and they would very much welcome some additional members) - see Mary Spencer this evening.

The upkeep and appearance of our immediate environment is always a priority. The Village Hall car park has been beautifully resurfaced, and clear exit and entry markings provided. Damage to the bus shelter on the main road was repaired quickly, as was a cracked display board on the railway line. The access to the footpath near the railway bridge on Denstone Lane has been improved significantly. The Garden Guild have planted a tree at the junction of Marlpit Lane and Alton Road to commemorate their 50th anniversary. We hope not to have to raise the level of the path outside the Post Office to allow wheelchair access as the authorities seem to have accepted the fact that even if a wheelchair could get in it, would be never be able to turn round

and get out again. Anyway, Bel is always happy to come to the door to serve customers who have severe mobility problems. Dog Control orders have been placed on Robert's Green and parts of the railway line, not to prevent dogs being there but to encourage owners to behave responsibly and thoughtfully.

A brand-new initiative this year from ESBC has been Neighbourhood Working, and from what we have seen of it so far, both in theory and in practice, we have been impressed. Andy Mason, who used to be the police inspector in Uttoxeter, is the Rural Co-ordinator for the scheme and he is our first point of contact for anything which requires various bodies or organisations to liaise or cooperate with one another for the benefit of the community.

The Parish Council have acquired new high-tech sandbags in case of flooding, and have applied for grit bins so that roads and pavements in the village can be made safer when it's icy. We helped to find the funding for the new date-stamp and electronic scales in the Post Office, as well as its refurbishment. We have encouraged the Staffordshire Youth Service mobile unit to come to the village on a regular basis to provide a space for youngsters to use. We have supported the initiative taken by Manor Farm in providing allotments for local people. Councillor Caroline Salt and Councillor Ann Ratcliffe decorated a Parish Council tree as part of the Christmas Tree festival in the church last December. We have tried to raise the profile of the village in the local press by providing the papers with articles and photographs. If you are organizing an event, please let Mary Spencer know in advance. If it is at all possible, she will come along and take a photo, write an article and send it off to the local papers. We have had less success with the village website over the past months, however. The transition to a different webmaster has been rather complicated, and nothing new has appeared on the website for quite some time. We are actively working on this, though, and things will improve. Bus stops have been moved further away from the new roundabout at the top of Oak Road, and a new stop has been provided opposite Greenfields. One real achievement that has been effected by our endlessly resourceful Parish Clerk is the acquisition and installation of the new fingerpost in the centre of the village which points the half-mile to Stubwood.

The Parish Council has been heavily involved in representing the views of the parish with regard to two major planning matters this year. The Sports Trust hoped to erect a MUGA – a Multi-Use Games Area - on Robert's Green but the children who used the area enjoyed having the large open grassy space for their games. The application was eventually withdrawn. Stubwood Tankers appealed against a ruling by SCC that, as what they were doing constituted an unlawful change of use of the land, the company should not be allowed to dispose of waste matter at Stubwood. This appeal, which was eventually heard by a Planning Inspector in February, was not upheld, and the ruling was given that all waste disposal, 'save to the extent necessary for the purposes of agricultural operations on the land' was to cease immediately.

There are many people to thank this evening. Firstly, may I thank Bob Beaumont, our Parish Clerk who makes everything run smoothly, efficiently and on time. Then there are the Parish Councillors themselves who have again given endlessly of their time, their experience and their skill - and given them with unfailing cheerfulness and good humour. My particular thanks to Councillor Chris Podmore who has decided that other commitments mean that he has had to resign from the Parish Council. Councillor Podmore made an excellent contribution in so many ways and will be greatly missed, although I know he will always be willing to help and advise us, and I do appreciate and value that. If you would like to put your name forward for possible

co-option to the Parish Council, please let Bob Beaumont know. Thank you, too, to the bodies who have provided funding for us, particularly, the SCC, ESBC and A4A, often through the auspices of Philip Atkins our Ward and Borough Councillor.

We lost our village gardeners last December, when Fred and Ann Ratcliffe retired. Fred and Ann did a wonderful job, and we are really grateful for the hours they put in, often in fairly unkind weather, to make sure that all was looking good. Pauline Jilbert took over as village gardener in January 2010, and the transition has been seamless. John Jilbert, Pauline's husband, is our village lengthsman, and they make a very effective team, looking after all kinds of areas that could so easily look unkempt and yet never do. Many thanks to both of them.

The Community Car Scheme continues to flourish under Dennis Parker. The service is vital to those who cannot drive themselves and it is so good to see the community – quietly and unassumingly - helping those in need. Then there are all of the movers and shakers, far too numerous to mention by name, whose hard work, expertise and dedication make sure that the secular and ecclesiastical wheels of this village keep turning. You know who you are, and we know how much you are valued.

Finally, let me turn the spotlight on some real local heroes, our First Responders. Almost weekly, we read in the local papers about how they have been actively involved in saving lives on many occasions. Cliff Bailey, and now also Mary Hollingshead, do a magnificent job. We always hope that we will never have the need to be personally grateful to them, but it is infinitely reassuring to know that they are so well qualified, so capable in an emergency and so quick to arrive if we do. Well done, First Responders, and many thanks!

So that is that, really. Lots has happened in the last twelve months and I have every confidence that lots more – most of it exciting, positive and beneficial to those of us who live here – will happen over the twelve months to come, if we all pull together for the greater good of all. Thank you very much.

*This is an edited version of the speech read by Cllr Jenny Richardson (Chairman Denstone Parish Council) to the Annual Parish Meeting on 26 April 2010*

<b>Summary of Accounts (Subject to audit)</b>					
To 31 Mar 09	<b>Receipts</b>	To 31 Mar 10	To 31 Mar 09	<b>Payments</b>	To 31 Mar 10
10,495.00	Precept	11,053.00	3,300.00	Staff costs	3,400.00
667.00	Lengthsman	572.25	1,948.42	Administration	3,062.37
255.00	Website links	15.00	464.37	Section 137	106.25
0.00	Insurance claims	125.40	561.60	Post Office s137	1,176.30
500.00	Parish Plan	5,190.00	57.17	Lighting	160.83
15,000.00	Traffic calming	0.00	598.75	Garden	573.02
100.00	Other grants	495.66	517.95	Lengthsman	829.89
60.75	Interest	2.53	211.99	Old railway line	536.98
2680.13	VAT reclaim	149.02	407.00	Village Hall	407.00
£29,757.88	<b>TOTAL</b>	£17,602.86	55.62	Vital Villages	2,722.03
			811.10	Play area	613.59
6540.04	Balance at 1 Apr	8366.10	258.49	Website	248.00
29757.88	Add Receipts	17602.86	15,000.00	Traffic calming	0.00
36297.92		25968.96	0.00	Cllrs expenses	51.68
27931.82	Less Payments	14861.53	1,050.00	Other	758.24
			2,689.36	VAT	215.35
£8366.10	Balance at 31 Mar	£11107.43	£27,931.82	<b>TOTAL</b>	£14,861.53

#### **Denstone Parish Council – Contact Details**

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#### **Member of Parliament for Burton**

Andrew Griffiths