

# Denstone Parish Council

## Annual Report 2010-11

Despite the fact that it is now four years since the present parish councillors were elected, there has been no election this year. Denstone is entitled to have nine councillors, plus a parish clerk, but as only seven nominations were received, those seven people were returned unopposed. I suppose, therefore, that we must have got some things right. Thank you for your continued faith in and support for us, and I can assure you that we will continue to work hard in the best interests of our community.

Councillors Ann Ratcliffe and Caroline Vernon (probably still known to many of you as Caroline Salt) are standing down this time, however, and I would like to pay tribute to the work that they have done and the sterling contributions they have made to many aspects of life here. You will probably be most aware of what Caroline has done to improve safety on the roads and pavements within the village, and Ann's loving care of the planted areas by the war memorial and fountain, but there has been much more, too, and they will be greatly missed.

When beginning to draft this address, I was most aware initially of what we had not achieved. We have not yet improved the parking situation in the village. We didn't win the Best Kept Village competition. We have still not fully met any of the targets we set ourselves after the last village survey. But - and this is a big but - we have actually made quite considerable steps forward in vital areas; and also our priorities have changed somewhat, partly as a result of our listening to more ideas about what parishioners did or did not want to happen in the village.

The Village Hall is an example of this. Last year, I spoke about a working group that was to be set up to discuss its future. Meetings were held, but there was so little actual support for the concept of a new village hall from those who use it now or who might use it in the future that Councillor Joe Bednall, who was chairing the meetings, decided that the group (and it was an extremely small group) should be disbanded, and things left exactly as they were. If there is ever to be a new village hall, this has to be because there is a driving force of enthusiasm for -and commitment to - the idea, and that just does not exist at the moment, despite what the questionnaire seemed to tell us..

There is much to say about the local roads and streets, most of it very positive indeed. The Highways Department has given great support this year to our attempts to control the flow of traffic within the village. New signs have been erected in various key locations, either advising large vehicles that roads are narrow, or that the best way to Alton Towers is to stick to the main road, regardless of what the sat-nav says. We are continuing to investigate the particular problems faced by the residents of Narrow Lane, and Highways will at some point present a scheme for us to consider. Highways are also involved with the condition and future of the Jubilee Tree which is suffering badly from having its roots compressed by the heavy traffic which cuts the corner. There are plans in the pipeline, apparently, to reconfigure this difficult junction, but I am confident that we will be kept informed about them. One of the laminated panels in the bus shelter on the main road was regularly damaged by stones from passing vehicles, but Councillor Edmonds has kindly constructed and installed a protective wooden shield which should prevent this happening in the future. If it's successful, we might patent the idea! We are very aware that, in the winter, we were lacking grit to keep the pavements - particularly those in the centre of the village by the shop and Post Office, and entrance to the village hall - safe, although a good job was done on the main through-routes, and we are grateful to the gritting teams for their hard work over many weeks. We have applied for new grit bins for the village but the outlay for these (including having them restocked with salt) is about £1000 each, and we cannot afford such an expense at present. If any parishioner could provide us with affordable alternatives, we would be very interested. If threatened by flooding, we have a stock of high-tech 'sandbags' which can be filled with water when needed and which then gradually deflate when the waters have receded. As yet we have not needed them however, and we hope that this continues to be the case.

Our Speedwatch volunteers - in their rebranded jackets - continue to do an excellent job. Every speeding vehicle is reported to the police, who then write a letter to the offenders - or even summon them to the police station for a chat - so this scheme does have teeth. We now have various 40mph locations which have been approved by the police, so this allows us to monitor the main road, particularly the stretch opposite Hawthorn Close where speeds are often excessive. The roadside verges, footpaths and the railway line have twice been given a good tidy since this time last year on our official litter-picks, and we are

very grateful to Mary Spencer who organises them, to the villagers who come along with high-viz jackets and a smile to fill bags with other people's rubbish, and to Andy Mason of Neighbourhood Working who lends us the metal pickers and hoops. Thanks, too, to the many people who, week in week out, pick up litter within the village; and possibly even greater thanks to those who don't allow their dogs to foul the pavements – or who do pick up after them. Please contact our new Neighbourhood Warden, Mike Carter, if you experience any problems with persistent dog-fouling. The Parish Clerk can supply you with contact details.

We are in the process of improving the surface of the footpaths that run from Marlpit Lane to The Weavers, and The Weavers to Alton Road. Councillor Simon Ratcliffe has obtained a large quantity of hard core which he will lay this summer. Also a new footpath will, we hope, make the journey to church both quicker and safer for members of the congregation, for the village school children on their official visits and, crucially, our highly respected organist, when a new gate in the fence allows access into the churchyard from the railway line. We think that all of the obstacles – such as establishing who actually owns the fence – have been overcome, and that this work can now begin. It should make a huge difference to a large number of people, and we are very grateful for the cooperation of the church in allowing this to happen.

Whilst we are on church-related matters, let me talk briefly about the Church Room. As you know, it is at present in urgent need of repair and renovation, and although it once had an active role within the village, it has never been used since the new First School was opened. Many hours have been spent discussing the future of the Church Room, but I can now let you know that two members of Denstone Youth Fund recently attended the Parochial Church Council AGM, and were delighted to be told that the PCC have agreed to renovate the Church Room. The PCC are going to obtain quotes, and then meet with DYF to discuss the next moves. DYF and its Chair, Councillor Jacquie Payne, are looking forward to working with the PCC on this very worthwhile project, which will benefit the whole village. Parish Councillors are wholeheartedly behind this scheme, which will significantly improve the leisure provision for local youngsters, and we will give it all the support that we can. Additionally, a dropped kerb will soon be installed which will allow vehicular access to the School House, and which will also enable cars to park on the tarmac in front of the Church Room. This will provide a few more much-needed spaces, particularly at school times, close to the centre of the village. Many thanks go to the PCC and to The Reverend John Richardson for their support for both of these schemes.

In January, Miles King of Midlands Rural Housing visited various sites in and around the village where it might be possible to build some affordable housing at some point in the future. Planning policy at national, regional and local levels imposes strict restraints on new housing development in rural areas. However, Borough Council policy does allow that where new housing would meet a specific, locally identified, need, there is the potential available to provide affordable housing on 'rural exception sites'. These are sites that would not normally be released for housing development.

Any affordable housing that might be provided on a 'rural exception site' would be subject to planning permission which has the effect of limiting occupation of the properties to local people on low incomes. Local people might be defined as including people who:

- Have continuously lived in the parish for at least the last five years.
- Have previously been a resident of the parish for at least five years and have family - such as a parent, child, brother or sister - currently living in the parish.
- Have current or confirmed permanent employment in the parish.
- Need to live locally to give support (i.e. care) to, or be supported (i.e. cared for) by a family member (parent, child, brother or sister) currently living in the parish.

The housing-needs survey carried out in Denstone identified nine respondents with a genuine need for affordable housing, eight of whom are currently living in the village. One respondent is living out of the parish and has a need to live closer to immediate family living in Denstone. Two are lone-parent families requiring low-cost family accommodation, and seven are people requiring small, two-bedroom homes. Several are young singles or couples who would like the opportunity to get on the housing ladder and have shown an interest in Homebuy, which is shared ownership

I should stress here that what is being proposed is not what might be termed 'social housing' but 'affordable housing' to enable local people with a proven connection to the village to remain in, or return to, Denstone. Miles King is now in the process of contacting the landowners of the various sites he looked at, then liaising with ESBC to assess their viability, and we are awaiting the results of his findings.

I hope that many of you log on to the village website which can be found at [www.denstonevillage.org.uk](http://www.denstonevillage.org.uk) and which provides a great deal of useful information. The webmaster, Carolyn Hinton, can be contacted directly via the site, so please approach her with any requests to place advertisements (for which there will be a small charge), or send her articles or pictures of village events. Please also send details of forthcoming meetings or activities of the clubs or societies within the village. There is no charge for these. Details about the recent very successful Easter Fair at the Farm Shop were to be found there, as was information about the Royal Wedding festivities, organised by the Denstone Youth Fund. I hope that everyone enjoyed the fun.

Much fun was had last summer when the church organised an extremely successful Scarecrow Festival. We entered as a Parish Council, and Councillors Caroline Vernon and Ann Ratcliffe may have done the stuffing, but it was our esteemed Parish Clerk who was stuffed; and resplendent he looked, positioned by his notice-board. I think that even he approved of what they had done! In September, Denstone Show will take place, so keep the afternoon of Saturday 17th free in your diaries. Councillor Barrie Hinton is chairing the show committee and he has already done a considerable amount of work in planning the event. There will, we hope, be a Fun Dog Show, a display of old vehicles and a barbecue, as well as several other new attractions, plus all of the old favourites. Jam will be still made, cakes baked, tomatoes presented on a plate and flowers arranged, just as normal! The Parish Council has taken over responsibility for the show and we are just beginning to realise what a monumental task of organisation we have taken on, even with five months to go. It makes us very aware of what a splendid job the DYF did in the past.

So, what more is there? Councillor Wright is in the process of expanding the *Walks around Denstone* leaflet. Some details concerning rights of way still have to be finalised, however, and this is always a fairly lengthy task. The head lease has been renewed on the Post Office, so its future – government willing – looks secure. A cracked display board on the railway line has been replaced. The situation with Stubwood Tankers has recently been clarified. A permit for the spreading of permitted waste has been granted by the Environment Agency, and details of the land-spreading plan have been approved for the fields farmed in Stubwood and Roston.

I would like to finish with some thanks, all of them heartfelt. I have already paid tribute to our retiring councillors, but my equally grateful thanks to the ones who will stay on to serve again. They are a particularly hardworking, conscientious, dedicated group of people, and they do a great deal of good. All of them are actively involved in the local community; they do not merely turn up for meetings and then disappear for a month, and I really do appreciate how much they have achieved over the year. I cannot say a big enough thank-you to Bob Beaumont, the Parish Clerk, who is the firm centre around which so much in Denstone revolves. The man is a fount of information, good sense and wise advice, and we are truly blessed to have him. Thanks also, of course, to Cliff Bailey and the First Responders (although that does make them sound like a rock band). We sleep more easily at night knowing that they are there if we need them. Thanks, too, to the increasingly mobile Dennis Parker who runs our invaluable Community Car Scheme, and to Pauline and John Gilbert, our gardener and lengthsman, respectively. This village always looks good, and it's largely thanks to them.

So, life continues and here we are once again at judging time for the Best Kept Village. Please keep up your usual high standards – i.e. don't let John and Pauline down - and continue to make this village the pleasure to live in that it is. We are all very lucky.

*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 2011*

## Summary of Accounts (Subject to audit)

To 31 Mar 2010	<b>Receipts</b>	To 31 Mar 2011	To 31 Mar 2010	<b>Payments</b>	To 31 Mar 2011
11,053.00	Precept	11,147.00	3,400.00	Staff costs	3,434.00
572.25	Lengthsman	696.25	3,062.37	Administration	2,855.45
15.00	Website links	0.00	106.25	Section 137	125.63
125.40	Insurance claims	161.79	1,176.30	Post Office s137	579.42
5,190.00	Parish Plan	0.00	160.83	Lighting	206.63
495.66	Other grants	525.36	573.02	Garden	565.36
0.00	Other	56.42	829.89	Lengthsman	1,159.57
2.53	Interest	2.48	536.98	Old railway line	383.83
149.02	VAT reclaim	251.31	407.00	Village Hall	386.00
£17,602.86	<b>TOTAL</b>	£12,840.61	2,722.03	Vital Villages	2,792.90
			613.59	Play area	962.00
8366.10	Balance at 1 April	11107.43	248.00	Website	283.49
17602.86	Add Receipts	12840.61	0.00	Traffic calming	0.00
25968.96		23948.04	51.68	Cllr expenses	171.38
14861.53	Less Payments	15073.00	758.24	Other	897.95
			215.35	VAT	269.39
£11107.43	Balance at 31 Mar	£8875.04	£14,861.53	<b>TOTAL</b>	£15,073.00

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Cllr Edward Edmonds, Holly Trees, 27 Marlpit Lane, Denstone, ST14 5HH. Tel: 01889 591044

Cllr Barrie Hinton, 16 The Weavers, Denstone, ST14 5DP. Tel: 01889 590299

Cllr Jacquie Payne, 22 Lady Meadow Close, Denstone, ST14 5EY. Tel: 01889 591003

Cllr Ann Ratcliffe, Kendal, Hollis Lane, Denstone, ST14 5HP. Tel: 01889 590405

Cllr Simon Ratcliffe, Filkins, Hollis Lane, Denstone, ST14 5HP. Tel: 01889 591339

Cllr Terence Swinson, Little Park Farm, Alton Road, Denstone, ST14 5DH. Tel: 01889 590341

Cllr Caroline Vernon, 10 College Road, Denstone, ST14 5HR. Tel: 01889 590236

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