

Denstone Annual Parish Council

Annual Report 2011/12

This year has undoubtedly had its highs and lows, one of the highs being the village show last September and one of our lows being the loss of Bob Beaumont, our Parish Clerk, although our loss is definitely Irena and the Churnet Valley Railway's gain - and I hope it's in that order. Much of our life as members of the Parish Council doesn't consist of highs and lows at all, though. There's an awful lot of patience required, a great deal of waiting followed, usually, by some action and eventual progress.

Situated as we are with a major industrial plant adjoining the village, a huge theme park just beyond the next village, and a large, predominantly day, independent school which is approached directly through the centre of the village, traffic issues are always going to be one of our major concerns, and this year has been no exception. Stubwood residents were very unhappy about the speed of some drivers along Stubwood Lane, particularly in the early mornings, and we had a very positive meeting at JCB last July to discuss the problems. JCB now have their own Speedwatch team to help monitor the situation and we have asked the County Council to consider extending the speed limit on the stretch of open road beyond the houses, too. Whilst at JCB, we also discussed the movement of heavy vehicles within their loading areas, as the reversing beepers were causing a disturbance at what the residents considered antisocial times of day and night. JCB listened carefully to all of our concerns and have promised to help as much as they can.

The County Council have supported our need to keep through-traffic out of the centre of the village by promising new signs on the main road advising all vehicles to go straight ahead to Alton Towers rather than turning left for a short-cut. The use of Narrow Lane is always going to be problematical as a result of the very narrow entrance/exit at the bottom, and some residents had wondered if we needed to alter traffic flow in some way in order to make it less congested, but after a mini-survey, organised by Councillor Caroline Vernon, was held there on a couple of mornings in term time, we decided that there really was no need to alter anything as the number of vehicles using Narrow Lane was not really significant. We will continue to monitor the situation and listen to residents, however. Overhanging trees on College Road were making it difficult for large vehicles to pass one another on their way to the College, but landowners agreed to our request to trim their boundaries, and this has improved the situation considerably. Parking in the village regularly causes problems, too, mainly because there is not enough of it. It is perfectly legal for residents to park on College Road, but we would continue to ask that car owners use their own off-road parking provision as much as possible, particularly at peak times. One evening we had a traffic jam when an event at the Village Hall had caused the parking to overflow beyond the shop and towards the narrow section of the road. A service bus could not squeeze through, so now we have some traffic cones that John Etherington will put out along that stretch of road when a large number of cars is expected at the Village Hall. There have been various problems with parking at the end of the old railway line, too. Residents have reported their inability to get out of their drives as parked cars were obstructing them, but PCSO David Higgs has been monitoring this and has spoken to the residents involved, too. The County Council has promised us an Access Protection Line across the gateway to the railway line to aid the residents and to allow access for emergency vehicles, and the First Responders are also being issued with a key to the gate for such contingencies. Part of the problem is that a sign in the village hall car park states that this space is only for customers of the Tavern and those attending events in the Village Hall. We have asked that this be amended, however, so that walkers are encouraged to park here. We have gained a new car park, too, in front of the Church Room which is for the general public as well as churchgoers. The Parish Council paid for the dropped kerb to be installed, and it is good to see that use is being made of this new facility.

Encouraged by Councillor Joe Bednall, we had hoped to create a cycle route between the village and Ryecroft School, but we need to rethink this. One alternative we are considering involves the installation of pedestrian crossings where the road over Lady Meadow Bridge and the road from the present JCB lorry park join the roundabout, as this would make it safer for children on bikes and for pedestrians who are heading for the school or

the lake. We are waiting to see what the response is from JCB and the ESBC Planning Office. We are eventually, I hope, making progress with improving the surface of the footpath between Marlpit Lane and the Weavers, and I thank Councillors Simon Ratcliffe and Terry Swinson for all that they have done to try to bring this plan to fruition. The work will, we anticipate, be done before the summer. We kept having to replace the glass in the bus shelter on the main road, but since Councillor Edward Edmonds designed and built a protective wooden barrier to go around it, there have been no further problems. It has been so successful that I think we should patent the idea. We are also trying to resolve the situation regarding the lane which runs downhill between Quixhill and the main road towards Doveleys. Bollards have been erected at the bottom to stop through traffic by vehicles – the lane will always be open to horse-riders and pedestrians – but the lane is still being used for a considerable amount of fly-tipping. Equally we do not want the bollards to appear until the fly-tipping has been removed.

We secured a grant to update the *Walks around Denstone* leaflet, and Councillor Bob Wright has been busy working on that. Paper copies of the walks will be available for visitors, the walks will appear on the website and, we hope, on a laminated board in the old telephone box on College Road which we intend to use as a local information point. Whilst mentioning the website, may I pass on the thanks of the Parish Council to Carolyn Hinton who has taken over as webmaster and who completely updated and redesigned the village website - www.denstonevillage.org.uk. - last October. Please do send me any pictures, articles or advertisements for forthcoming events, and I will make sure that they are passed straight through. Details of how to contact us are on the website. There are discussions underway with local businesses, too, about a signpost or noticeboard at the junction of College Road and the old railway line which would point visitors towards such local facilities as the Farm Shop, the village shop and the Tavern, none of which are visible from that point. Anything which we can do to support our local enterprises is to be encouraged, I feel.

Last year, we came joint-second in our category of the Best Kept Village Competition. Some villages have a special committee with its own budget to advance the BKV cause. We don't, relying on everyone to keep the village as clean, tidy and attractive as possible, and this approach works very well. If we could all be even more aware of stray bits of litter though, and pick up and bin things that we haven't dropped, that would help tremendously. We do have regular village litter-picks, followed by tea and biscuits in the Village Hall. When you see the next one advertised, I do urge you to come along and join in for an hour or so.

We have been involved all year in discussions with the church about the future of the Church Room which, although still owned by the church, might be available for use by local groups and organisations. Estimates for repairs are being sought, and possibilities for grant-funding are now being explored. There is still some way to go with this project, but we do seem to have turned an important corner, and I am very conscious of a great deal of goodwill and enthusiasm on all sides to try to restore, equip, manage and develop this lovely building.

The Parish Council is faced with a range of planning applications during the year. Many are for conversions of existing properties – sometimes involving a change of use, too – and a few are for brand-new buildings or facilities. Some are straightforward, and we certainly never raise objections for the sake of it - but others are less so. One application that is under consideration at present, for example, is the proposed extension to the JCB car park on the site of what was a copse of maturing trees by Lady Meadow Bridge. We have objected to the plan on the grounds that the trees were originally planted to provide a screen between the village and JCB and were, we believe, intended to be a permanent feature of the landscape. We have not received a response to our objections yet.

Last September's Village Show was the first of recent years to be organised by the Parish Council, and it proved a tremendous success. We tried to build on the success of previous years but expand its range a little, too, so we closed the main road through the village, held an informal dog show and had a display of old vehicles, too. Councillor Barry Hinton masterminded things and a very good time was had by all. We are well into the planning for this year's show on 8th September and hope to see as many of you there as possible. Programmes listing all of the various classes which you can enter will be available in the summer, so I urge you to sketch, jam-make, knit, cultivate, bake and photograph in readiness for the great event. The next big village occasion will be the DYF's Jubilee Hog-roast on the afternoon of Sunday 3rd June, however. See Councillor Jackie Payne for more details. It

will be followed by an outdoor church service on the railway line, and I do hope that both events will be very well attended.

There is much else that the Parish Council has achieved, but I will be brief. A new gate was installed between the railway line and the churchyard for the benefit of the adult members of the congregation as well as the children of All Saints' First School. It has proved a great success, thanks particularly to the efforts of Bob Wright and Ian Gustard. We are trying to support the Post Office as much as we can in an attempt to secure its future. Please use the Post Office as often as you can. Buy your stamps there. Draw money out. Post your parcels. Get your holiday euros. Every transaction helps. The war memorial is being re-pointed to ensure that it remains in first-class condition. The brook behind the shop has been dredged to prevent flooding in times of heavy rain. The Village Hall toilets are now open on a Sunday for all to use. The Parish Council is ever at your convenience!

Finally, let me turn to our Arrivals and Departures section. We are delighted that Terry Swinson joined us as a Parish Councillor last year, and Emily Whitehead became our new Parish Clerk at the beginning of April. Many of you will already know Emily, who lives in the village and has children at the village school. Hers is a key role, and we are very pleased indeed that she has accepted the position. One sad farewell is to John Jilbert, our lengthman who is retiring from the role at the end of this month. John has been a particularly fine lengthman, full of initiative, and always out and about, looking after the village and making it a safer and more attractive place. He has been absolutely splendid in the role and will be a hard act to follow – possibly why no one has, as I write, applied for the position. If you know anyone who would be willing to become our new lengthman – hours and rates of pay available on application to the Parish Clerk – please put them in touch with us.

And last, but by no means least, I come to Bob Beaumont, for twelve years our Parish Clerk. I cannot praise Bob's work as Parish Clerk too highly. He was always full of wise counsel, and sensible, practical advice backed by years of experience. He formed his opinions carefully and thoughtfully, never rushing to judgment. He knew how to achieve what needed to be achieved by friendly persuasion, never by insistence. He worked hard and set himself very high standards in everything he did. He was utterly discreet and always respectful of other people. He was well-organised and meticulous in all he did, taking a real pride in doing the best that he could for the village at all times. Not only did he know everyone in the village, and everyone know him, he also seemed to know everyone at the ESBC offices and the County Council offices, so he was a mine of information. Bob has made an invaluable contribution to the wellbeing of the village and the villagers for all of this time, and we cannot thank him enough, nor can we refrain from being just the tiniest bit nervous about what we will do without him. We wish him a very happy retirement from this particular role, but are delighted that we are not losing him from the village, or losing him as secretary of the Village Hall Committee

Finally, my thanks to everyone, to councillors, clerks and members of the community, who have helped with the smooth running of life in the parish this year. I have had a great deal of support from so many quarters, and I am very grateful for all that so many people do. Denstone is a good place to live in.

Jenny Richardson

This is an edited version of the speech read by Cllr Jenny Richardson (Chairman Denstone Parish Council) to the Annual Parish Meeting on 1 May 2012

Summary of Accounts (subject to audit)

To 31 Mar 2011	Receipts	To 31 Mar 2012	To 31 Mar 2011	Payments	To 31 Mar 2012
11,147.00	Precept	11,290.00	3,434.00	Staff costs	4,292.50
696.25	Lengthsman	699.00	2,855.45	Administration	2,635.47
0.00	Website links	255.00	125.63	Section 137	129.15
161.79	Insurance claims	0.00	579.42	Post Office s137	667.06

0.00	Denstone Show	1,416.00	206.63	Lighting	885.66
525.36	Other grants	183.00	565.36	Garden	644.32
56.42	Other	80.00	1159.57	Lengthsman	1,397.00
2.48	Interest	2.48	383.83	Old railway line	284.00
251.31	VAT reclaim	647.21	386.00	Village Hall	434.63
£12,840.61	TOTAL	£14,573.59	2792.90	Vital Villages	1574.89
			962.00	Play area	766.00
			0.00	Denstone Show	1,120.39
			0.00	Election costs	91.13
11107.43	Balance at 1 April	8875.04	248.00	Website	324.00
12840.61	Add Receipts	14573.59	0.00	Traffic calming	0.00
23948.04		23448.63	171.38	Cllr expenses	25.24
15073.00	Less Payments	16155.08	897.95	Other	304.66
			269.39	VAT	578.98
£8875.04	Balance at 31 Mar	£7293.55	£15,073.00	TOTAL	£16,155.08

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JUBILEE MUGS FOR SALE

If you would still like to order a commemorative mug for the Diamond Jubilee, please pop into the Post Office.

Mugs are £15 each and will be sold on a first come, first served basis. Mugs are Staffordshire bone china.