

AKELEY PARISH COUNCIL: ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

March 25th 2013

Each year I try to start this report in a different way. However, I have come to the conclusion that there is really only one satisfactory way to do this. I must thank the councillors (Elaine Rowlands, Mary Taylor, Stan Bennett, Brian Coxall, John Hockley and Terry Cavender) for their contributions, help and advice over the year and, also, say a special thank you to the Parish Clerk (Ellen Sayer) for keeping the finances in excellent order, dealing with all the e-mails and letters, organising our meetings and generally ensuring that all runs smoothly.

It is also important that I record a special thank you to Stan who retired from the Parish Council in January of this year. Stan has made numerous and invaluable contributions to village life over the years. Parish Council records show that Stan regularly attended Parish Council Meetings from 1967 onwards and, in 1968, made the vital proposal that the Parish Council should purchase the land which we now call the Recreational Field and on which the 'new' Village Hall stands. Eventually, Stan joined the Parish Council in May, 1976. So, there has been a total of 36 years service! Many, many thanks Stan.

The Parish Council has carried out its 'usual' duties over the year. The contractors we employ have kept the Recreational Field, Wildlife Area, Children's Play Area and Churchyard in excellent order – despite the weather! We must also thank the School for having the tree branches that overhung the Children's Play Area cut back. Also, thank you to Michael for keeping the village bus shelters clean and tidy. The allotments, which we manage, continue to be well used and maintained. We have also commented upon various planning applications – some of which have required more detailed comments, from a village perspective, than others.

The Akeley Parish Council website has been restructured. Thanks are due to Julie Dearden for carrying out this work and, in particular, for also volunteering to spend time each month keeping the Website up-to-date. John Norman has kindly given his time to setting up a community forum on Facebook entitled, 'Akeley News and Views', and is also acting as the moderator. The site is very popular and, although independent of the Parish Council, can be accessed via its webpage. Despite the 'electronic revolution' the Village Newsletter still remains a key part of village life and we are grateful to Hilary for her careful editorship and Naomi for ensuring that the paper copies are delivered.

The brazier that was constructed for the Golden Jubilee celebrations – which it must be commented were very successful – was handed over to the Parish Council by the organizing committee of the event. It is now added to the village amenities that are looked after by the Parish Council on behalf of the village.

In terms of more formal matters, the Parish Council reached the conclusion that it was not in a position to produce a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) as introduced in the Localism Bill of the present government. One of the main reasons for this was the cost – estimates vary, but it was likely that it would be more than £10 000. Currently, of the 113 Parish and Town Councils in Aylesbury Vale just 6 are intending to produce an NDP. In the new Vale of Aylesbury Plan (September 2012), Akeley has been classified as a small rural village. The number of new dwellings over the next 20 years has been set at 9 (and capped at 10). This figure is consistent with our response to the community survey that was carried out in late 2011. An alternative to an NDP is a ‘Village Design Statement’, although it is not clear whether such a document would be regarded as a material consideration in any planning application. An investigation of whether Akeley/Akeley Wood should embark on the production of a Village Design Statement is still ongoing.

The setting of the precept is usually relatively straightforward but this has not been the case for the coming year (2013 – 2014). Uncertainty and lack of information over what is to happen in future years, coupled with the change to a Localised Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme, has meant the Parish Council has decided that the best option is to increase the parish precept.

A key matter of concern to the Parish Council is that it needs to encourage new people to step forward and become councillors. The recent leafleting of Akeley/Akeley Wood to indicate that the Parish Council wanted to co-opt a new member produced only one reply. If you are interested in joining the Parish Council, please do not hold back – put yourself forward.

Overall, it has been a busy year for the Parish Council with some difficult issues to tackle. However, our aim as always has been to use the precept as effectively as possible and to represent village interests in a fair and balanced manner.

Finally, I would like to thank all those, including District Councillor Pearl Lewis, who have attended and contributed to Parish Council meetings.

Mike Mortimer, Chairman, Akeley Parish Council