

## **NEWTON & NOSS PARISH COUNCIL**

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### **THE CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT : March 2009**

I took over the Chairmanship in May 2008 from Jeremy Brown – a very hard act to follow – and have been supported very ably by my Vice-Chairman, Alan Cooper, and a strong Council. My hand has been held by Jacki as I have been led in the ways of Local Government. My backside has been kicked by Jeremy to keep me on the straight and narrow.

May 2008 was a time of doom and gloom. Firstly there was the question of affordable housing; nothing had happened for far too long and South Hams District Council (SHDC) seemed to be hampering our best efforts (as referred to in the 2008 Chairman's Report). The Parish Council (NNPC) had to do something – standing still was not an option. At a meeting arranged by our District Councillor, Suzie Cooper, we met with SHDC officers. In conjunction with a local landowner, it was agreed that we would plan for a small development at Butts Park but first we had to go through the process of another Housing Needs Survey; this was confidential and organised by the Community Council of Devon.

At the same time, the Boundary Review Committee had been set up by The Secretary of State to look at ways of governing Devon by way of one or more Unitary Authorities (similar to Plymouth and Torbay). This had been brought about by Exeter's failed bid for unitary status. Three main bids were on the table:-

1. We were absorbed into a greater Plymouth together with Ivybridge and Tavistock and everything in between, or
2. We got lost in a vast unitary council for the whole of Devon, with Ivybridge as a hub town having a community assembly, or
3. A new unitary authority would govern South Hams, Teignbridge and South Dartmoor, calling itself Rural South Devon and Dartmoor.

NNPC favoured the latter bid. We were promised the outcome of the Review in February 2009 but the decision has now been delayed because there is a further period of public consultation to 14<sup>th</sup> May; the two current options will be considered by NNPC on 8<sup>th</sup> April and are:-

- A. A Devon unitary authority comprising the existing County of Devon with no changes to Plymouth and Torbay, or
- B. An Exeter and Exmouth unitary authority, and a unitary authority covering the remainder of the County, with no changes to Plymouth and Torbay.

The next problem to arrive was a futuristic planning application for Bridgend; this brought 60 letters of objection to the SHDC Planning Department. NNPC objected strongly and was very disappointed when the application was allowed on Appeal. Who says we live in a democratic society! However, we have enlisted the support of our M.P., Gary Streeter.

We are very lucky to have halls and other buildings left to the two villages by past benefactors. However, after being a councillor for 2-3 years, I realised that all was not well with some of our assets.

- The Tilly Institute needed a new roof last summer; NNPC assisted with a grant.
- Having won Lottery funding, the Village Hall is in a very good state of repair and not in need of our help. However, the Revelstoke Room (Playgroup) has required some maintenance recently to which we have contributed.
- Built in the 1920s, the W.I. Community Hall is showing its age. The heating system has been overhauled and a new boiler fitted; the inside has been decorated but the floor partly collapsed and has been repaired. The roof is past its sell-by date and needs replacing or soon those ladies doing their keep-fit will need lifejackets in wet weather.
- The Reading Room in Riverside Road West came to us for financial help and some advice. I am not sure they wanted the advice but we gave it to them anyway.
- Pope's Quay has been repointed; some of the cracks were a concern and the work was very necessary.

- The Sports Pavilion in the Butts Park playing field was in a sorry state and there was talk of demolition when I first joined the Council. It is still there and I have a programme in place for enlargement and alteration to bring it up to Sport England's standards for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The electrical system has been renewed, painting has been completed inside and out, and the boarded up windows have been replaced with glass bricks.

I have asked the Councillors to undertake an annual asset inspection, just as we inspect all the footpaths each year, and all the village assets are being mapped.

In June I came to the conclusion that the Council needed a bit of spin. My idea was to initiate a logo competition to see if we could find a design for more modern and memorable stationery in a new format. From the 13 entries, the winning design was chosen at a full meeting of the Council and work on that is ongoing. Also introduced was a programme of targets as it is all too easy to get bogged down with work which arrives thick and fast. I don't know how Jacki keeps up with it all.

During the summer endless meetings took place over the Boundary Committee review, sponsored by DCC, SHDC and the Devon Association of Parish Councils. At the same time, we were alerted by residents of Bishops Court that all was not well after the changeover of care providers. I am pleased to report that with the help of our County Councillor, William Mumford, and the NNPC Bishops Court Committee, systems were reviewed and some fundamental changes were made for the better.

Our September meeting was almost a record, finishing at 11.00pm; there had been much discussion over proposals for the major redevelopment of The Green House and Crispins at Bridgend, Riverhaven in Riverside Road East, and Berberis and Westerly in Yealm Road. Planning applications continue to exercise much of the Council's time. Tom Taylor delivered his usual professional report on our footpath network and the maintenance required, most of which has now been completed.

Agreement on the final enhancement of the Donkey Path seems to be making progress, thanks again to Tom Taylor. Funding for the proposed Collaton to Butts Park link path has been promised by DCC and a small Committee led by Alan Cooper and Tom Taylor have been working hard on this project, meeting with contractors and DCC highways officers; we are hoping to receive planning approval next month.

The Works Committee set out again in November and agreed a work schedule for various areas including Yealm Steps, the Leas Path, the Tidal Waters path, Noss Voss and steps, Axworthy Steps, Kilpatrick Steps, the milestone and adjacent area at Bridgend. The damaged fencing along Passage Road was reported to DCC with a request for repairs. The Council learned that the free cash machine at the Co-op was to be removed and a short campaign to overturn this decision was successful – this is only a temporary reprieve so PLEASE USE IT.

In the autumn Jacki announced she wished to retire in 2010. We were all shocked as we rely so much on her hard work and great knowledge of the mysteries of local government, gained from her 21 years' experience as Clerk. The Employment Committee was given the task of finding a replacement. We had three very strong applications and appointed Shona McDonough to succeed Jacki.

The Budget Committee decided that in the current economic climate, our expenditure should be pegged at last year's figure – the Precept request was £39,245, the same as 2008. Affordable housing is being actively pursued. With the results of the Housing Needs Survey, a new NNPC Housing Policy was agreed by the full Council in January.

As a dentist I always tried to end my treatments on a happy and humorous note so I shall try to continue with this policy now. Could you please let me know the collective nouns for residents of Newton Ferrers and Noss Mayo – all answers on a postcard, please, to Baring House. I shall bring the entries to our next Annual Parish Meeting in 2010.

One last thought – God created the world in Six days, on the Seventh day he created Devon, then on Bank Holiday Monday he created Newton & Noss.

