

NEWTON & NOSS PARISH COUNCIL

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THE CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT : APRIL 2006

Another busy year has passed with its equal share of successes and frustrations. All my fellow Councillors have worked hard with their various areas of expertise and I am grateful for their warm and loyal support. We are all volunteers and many Councillors fit their duties around their proper day jobs. Jacki Eschbaecher, our excellent Clerk (and only paid Officer), continues to keep us on the straight and narrow. We were sad to lose the services of Mike Leonard-Williams but have been delighted to co-opt Suzie Cooper in his place.

Over the past year, the Council has met on 11 occasions to deal with routine business. Additionally, Members have attended a wide variety of forums and meetings to represent the views of the Parish. Meetings attended included Devon County Council, South Hams District Council, the Community Council of Devon, Devon Conservation Forum, Ivybridge & District Association of Parish Councils, Devon Association of Parish Councils, and the Ivybridge & District Community Transport Association.

Councillors have continued to be particularly active on the steering groups for the new sheltered housing and Consulting Room at Bishops Court, as Governors of the School (now soaring to new heights of achievement) and taking an active part – along with many Parishioners - in fundraising for the Village Hall. Extensive lobbying (written and at meetings attended) has also taken place with the District Council, the Regional Assembly and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to secure much needed more affordable housing in the Parish.

Councillors also represent the Parish on a number of local trusts and organisations including the River Yealm Harbour Authority, the Newton & Noss Village Hall Committee and the W.I. Community Hall. We have also been instrumental in re-invigorating our local Parish Cluster Group to share ideas and tackle issues which are common to our neighbouring Parishes.

Before reviewing the Council's progress against the Parish Plan objectives, it may be useful to summarise some of the other key issues which have been addressed.

As noted in last year's Annual Report, many of our road signs - and the enforcement of existing parking restrictions - have been poorly maintained and managed. A report was submitted to the Police and Devon County Council in June. The Police explained they were unable to undertake effective enforcement in many places because the County Council had not adequately maintained the yellow lines or enforcement notices. We have made many complaints to the County Council and they keep promising to make improvements but we are still missing many yellow lines and proper enforcement signs. Meanwhile, a significant proportion of our road surfaces continue to deteriorate. We shall keep pursuing this unsatisfactory situation with regard to our highways.

On a similar theme from last year, the parking problems around Noss Green continue to worsen. Lack of routine Police attendance is a cause for serious concern as is the lack of parking capacity provided by The National Trust. Peter Stitson has liaised with residents to suggest where new parking restrictions should be introduced and the suggestions will be submitted to the County Council and Police in May, after the Annual Parish Meeting. A meeting has been arranged with The National Trust to discuss the coastal car parks and an increase in parking capacity.

Speeding through many parts of the Parish remains a problem, regrettably caused by some of our own residents. We have to apply continued pressure on the authorities for proper enforcement action to be undertaken. We have also received complaints from residents in this and nearby Parishes about the standards of driving by the Ivybridge School Buses.

I am surprised about the amount of "nagging" at the County Council and Police which is required before routine traffic matters are addressed. It should not be necessary and a formal complaint to the Police Authority over the lack of resources devoted to traffic issues in this and neighbouring Parishes is being considered.

Regrettably, some District Council Departments seem to have adopted the same lack of responsiveness. Much time is spent chasing answers and action. For example, having taken over the management of the riverside trees near Junket Corner, we were required by the District Council to provide a Management Plan and this was submitted in the autumn. Works needing action before the nesting season had been identified but the final Tree Preservation Order approval was not received until mid-March.

The District Council is responsible for waste management – including the new collection system. Unfortunately, a more environmentally friendly bottle bank could not be provided in Newton Ferrers, so the cause of so much protest last year was removed. The bottle bank placed in the Noss car park seems to be more successful.

More recently Bishops Court has finally opened and we warmly welcome all the new residents. We would like to express our thanks to Sarah Roe, Mary Wilcox and the Yealm Medical Centre for their excellent work in developing the new part-time Consulting Room. This is being funded by the Parish Council and the Doctors themselves, as the Primary Care Trust will not provide the funds – except for a computer link.

For reasons which are not clear, we seem to have been able to retain our five red public telephone kiosks, two of which had been under threat. They have all been repainted and a “listing” application has been submitted for the kiosks outside The Swan and Newton Ferrers Post Office.

Our **Parish Plan** was published in 2004. It is the key document used by the Council to guide our long-term work in the Parish. There are six main headings as follows:-

Affordable Housing

This remains our prime long-term objective. Over the past year the District Council has almost doubled (from 25 to 45) its proposals for new homes in this Parish over the next decade. However, this remains substantially below the estimated requirement of 100 to 120 dwellings. We have fully engaged with the District Council, the Regional Assembly, Gary Streeter M.P. and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister regarding affordable housing needs in rural parishes. Outline plans for some sites have been submitted to the District Council and a further detailed response was made to the District Council’s Local Development Framework Core Strategy, identifying the District’s shortcomings with regard to Affordable Housing. Copies of these documents are available on the Parish Council’s website. We are hopeful some detailed proposals may be progressed this year.

Commercial & Business Development, Employment and Tourism

The Parish Council continues to believe that a successful retail and commercial base is vital to the sustainability of the Parish. We are delighted the Post Office has been “saved” and, although the Art Gallery closed, we welcome the new Tea Room at The Green. Let’s hope it is as well supported and successful as the café in Yealmpton.

As part of our affordable housing suggestions to the District Council, Members are keen to see the development of some small workshops for local skilled professionals and the expansion of successful local businesses. We are working with one group to provide enlarged light commercial facilities for the Parish.

The Parish Council’s website was launched in February. Much hard work was put in by the Clerk and Sue Hinchliffe [*and the Chairman. JE*] The site is updated regularly and contains the Council’s current documents, Parish Notices and useful local information. Development will continue and we shall try to add detailed footpath data during the year. Regrettably, our publication of the Village Design Statement has been delayed as a consequence.

Tourism is an important source of revenue to help support local businesses during the quiet winter months. Whilst traffic congestion and parking difficulties often result, we continue to support visitors because they are vital to our local economy.

Transport, Travel and Parking

Compared with many villages, we are well served by a regular bus service. However, the service does not enable easy access to after-school activities at Ivybridge, and visiting Derriford can be difficult. With the development of Sherford and its proposed public transport hubs, we continue to lobby for improvements to the bus service which may ease access to Ivybridge and Derriford. We support the Ivybridge Ring-and-Ride Bus and Community Car Scheme which offer an essential service, helping to minimise the public transport deficiencies.

I have already outlined the problems concerning the County Council and highways issues. I regret to report the proposed footpath link between Collaton and Butts Park has been delayed due to lack of County Council funding. However, thanks to the generosity of a local landowner, it may be possible to create an informal footpath along the old MOD land adjacent to the B3186. We shall be pleased to hear from other landowners along the B3186 who may be able to help us complete the route to Butts Park. In February a serious accident took place in the "Collaton Narrows" - had a pedestrian, cyclist or horse rider been caught in that section at the same time, the outcome could have been far more serious.

We continue to work with the County Council to maintain over 63 rights of way. We are keen to extend the network in Newton and Noss and landowners are invited to contact the Clerk; a link across the fields to Newton Wood would be particularly useful.

The long-term need for more parking is recognised. Any new plans for housing must have realistic parking provision for the occupants. We will seek to provide parking spaces in conjunction with any new housing developments.

Children and Young People

Thanks to the work of many leaders in the Parish, the Playgroup, Beavers, Cubs, etc. continue to go from strength to strength, attracting youngsters from neighbouring Parishes. Unfortunately, the Youth Club has closed but the YOYO Club meets in Yealmlton each Thursday evening. Newton and Noss youngsters are invited and we can assist with some funding if local teenagers attend. (☎ 881070)

Our commitment to provide a more exciting play opportunity for older children at Butts Park has not been forgotten. Although as landowner the District Council has given permission in principle, plans have been delayed due to the District Council's slow response and the Clerk's increasing work commitments.

Community Services and Facilities

I have already referred to the new Consulting Room and website. We continue to support the local halls and public rooms and are delighted Liz Woodd-Walker has led such a successful fund-raising campaign for the Village Hall. However, it was the Parishioners who won the television vote - many thanks to you all.

Last year, the Precept was raised by a significant amount, mainly due to a review of the Council Clerks' National Conditions of Service and the Lease on the new Consulting Room at Bishops Court. I promised the Precept would not be raised again unless absolutely necessary. Whilst our budget proved to be broadly accurate, the delay in the opening of the Consulting Room and one or two other projects, unexpectedly befitted the cash flow. Therefore, a rise in the Precept has not been necessary this year despite ever increasing costs.

In February, a set of good quality display panels was purchased and used for the Photographic Competition. They are available for hire for a modest charge – please contact the Clerk for details.

May 2007 – an Election

Looking ahead, the Parish Council's current term ends next year. Together with many other Parishes in Devon, we are keen to achieve "Quality Status" as this will place the Council in a stronger position with regard to the significant Local Government re-organisation which it is anticipated will have been completed in three years' time. Quality Status will also entitle the Council to apply for some Central Government grants – thus lowering our Precept! The only significant hurdle we face is to satisfy the criteria for an electoral mandate. At the last Election in 2003, insufficient candidates stood for election so three Members were co-opted, thereby disqualifying the Council from applying for Quality Status. At least two councillors have indicated their intention to stand down next year. If you are interested in becoming a Parish Councillor, please talk to Jacki Eschbaecher before April 2007. We are mostly friendly and work on non party-political lines.

It is vital that we have more than twelve nominations for twelve places.

Jeremy Brown,
Chairman Newton & Noss Parish Council

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