

## South Hinksey Parish Council

### CHAIRMANS REPORT 2009

#### **Opening**

Parishioners present are welcomed to this meeting and advised it is your chance to put your views and comments to the Parish Council.

Our Parish, although small has been busy transacting business throughout the year relating both to local issues within the parish, regional issues affecting the Vale District, the Oxford Green Belt, the County of Oxfordshire and national issues extending to the South East region. We have met eleven times on a monthly basis.

The Parish Council currently comprises a full complement of five councillors and one Clerk. Several changes have occurred during the year commencing with a new Parish Clerk, Sheridan Edward, who took over in January 2009 from Anne Wilson although there was a gap of three months during which the Chairman acted as Clerk. We were also pleased to welcome Elizabeth Halcro who joined as councillor in November 2008. I continued as Chairman and Maggie Rawcliffe agreed to act as Vice Chair.

#### **Finance**

Changes in Parish Clerks resulted in delays occurring in the submission of external and internal audits for the accounts of April 2008 but these have now been resolved and approved without any penalties due to the kind understanding and consideration of our auditors to whom we are most grateful. The next audits will be conducted in May 2009 and our present Clerk is now up to speed to deal efficiently with this. We started with a balance of £            in April 2008 and a precept of £ 9750 was agreed with the Vale. Excess funds were moved into a savings account during the year and we were able to reduce this year's precept to £8200 agreed at the March meeting. Main outgoings related to burial ground and other common area maintenance and village hall hire.

Income comprised burial ground fees and £3000 for the sale of some land at Chilswell Path. The woodland project was self financed from grants and future maintenance costs for the next ten years will also be covered by grants from the Forestry Commission.

We have three projects proposed for enhancing community land areas and some costs will be expended on these although this will be small. See below for further details.

#### **Highways**

The council have again been very active in pursuing possible improvements to the A34, the Hinksey Hill interchange roundabout and local roads and pavements in the Parish with a limited degree of success. The A34 was resurfaced during the year with a quieter finish and some repairs have been carried out to roads and pavement within the village. Efforts to obtain a 20mph speed limit in the village failed but the section of road from the top of Hinksey Hill to Boars Hill is to be provided with a continuing limit of 40mph resulting from our efforts. We plan to get Parker Road included in the village 30mph in due course. We made a number of representations to the Highways Agency directly and throughout the

regular traffic meetings held in Botley about local concerns on increasing noise and air pollution and dangers of accessing the A34 due to higher densities of traffic. Whilst the Vale District recognises these issues in their Core Strategy nothing is proposed by the Highways Agency. A more radical suggestion of creating an alternative routing for the A34 from Drayton to Didcot to the A40 and M40 has recently been made by us. An option to reduce traffic on the A34 by diversion to rail links is a possible longer term solution and the practicality of widening the existing A34 through North Hinksey or South Hinksey is impossible and totally unacceptable. Other means of diverting or reducing traffic flows have to be found. We also suggested other options of providing access from Chilswell and the village directly to the Interchange roundabout from the end of Parker Road or to Redbridge. Again these have been rejected by the Oxfordshire County Council.

Delays of daily traffic down Hinksey Hill and backing down onto the A34 in both directions are now becoming excessive partly due to the short light change for the hill traffic and due to the inadequate design of the roundabout itself. It is noticeable that beyond the next roundabout along the ring road towards Sainsburys there are no queues. We will continue to pursue the option of getting the roundabout redesigned and the traffic lights rescheduled. Outside of commuter hours speeding on Hinksey Hill still give rise for concern and we have proposed warning lights and periodic speed traps but little has been done.

### **Flooding**

We attended a number of sessions with the Environment Agency and other authorities during the year and the latest of these was held at the Village Hall in April. The Strategic Environmental Assessment document now published by the agency lists nine different options for dealing with flooding in the long term. They favour an option for creating a new waterway through the meadows from Botley to Redbridge that will flow under two new bridges in each location. A secondary option of utilising a holding lake upstream in the vicinity of Chimney Meadows is also proposed as an additional measure if found necessary. We are still in the process of deciding the Council's response to these proposals which have to be submitted by May. We organised a survey of resident views and requested responses through the Echo. Short term measures have already been completed by the Environment Agency and the railways authorities during the last year to improve the flow rate of water from Hinksey Stream to Hinksey Drain and into the Thames. Again Peter Rawcliffe of the South Hinksey Flood Group has been keeping us informed at each meeting of numerous meetings and proposals with the Oxford Flood Alliance and we are most grateful for his efforts and enthusiasm.

### **Pandemic Flu**

Maggie Rawcliffe has been attending meetings over the year relating to the possible occurrence of this flu. Remarkably such a threat has actually emerged over the last few weeks-Swine Flu. All parishioners have been alerted to the precautionary measures needed and we will continue to monitor this situation. Thanks go to Maggie for her efforts on this issue.

### **Burial Ground**

This has been kept in good order with regular grass cutting and a recent proposal to convert the unused vacant area into a flower meadow was approved by the Council in conjunction with the Church

who wish to do similar work in the churchyard. This will be done gradually over the next three years through adopting different grass cutting regimes, planting wild flower plants and seeds and monitoring progress. The area around the graves will continue to be close cut and sufficient space left for new graves to accommodate needs for the next five years. There were several burials during the year.

### **Planning Applications**

Most of these were for small extensions to existing houses and these were generally supported by the Council.

The Bodleian Depository Building proposed at Osney Mead Industrial Estate by the University of Oxford was finally turned down by the planning inspectorate on appeal in January. We are grateful to the Oxford Preservation Trust, the Friends of South Hinksey, the Oxford Green Belt Network and the Vale of the White Horse District Council in objecting to this development.

Other proposals for wind turbines were made for land in Chilswell but no planning application was made. The Council were not in favour due to adverse visual amenity effects and disruption of habitats.

The most recent application for a barn conversion in the centre of the village resulted in a number of alternative responses. The council are keen to try and get the parking problems solved by encouraging a new car park through this application.

### **Community Woodland**

New planting work was completed by the contractor and volunteers in Feb and March 2008. We are most grateful to the Friends of South Hinksey (FOSH) who initiated this project and to David Rees of the Oxfordshire Woodland Project who gave expert advice. A kind parishioner offered to mow the footpaths through the site several times in the year and some removal of ragwort was carried out by a volunteer force in July. The contractor has recently sprayed around the trees which have all grown well due to the favourable growing conditions throughout the year. Further maintenance days are being allocated for placing woodchip around the trees and controlling excessive grass growth. The site has also been kept clear of litter with regular visits.

### **Community Land**

The Oxford City Council has agreed for us to use land at a peppercorn rent to the rear of the Village Hall for community use. Discussions are currently underway to decide on what area will be fenced and whether new access gates will be provided. Sufficient access for the farmer and horse owners will be maintained. This land will remain as open, level, short mown grass for use as recreation events by parishioners or any group who may wish to hire the hall. Your comments on this will be welcome

### **Community Grassland**

A new proposal has been made to convert an area of one hectare of agricultural land owned by the Parish Council to a nature reserve at Chilswell (see April minutes). Briefly the idea is to enclose the area with natural hedging and trees, to create a pond and to permit wild flowers and low shrubs to grow within the site. An access path will be created with some seats to enable parishioners and other visitors to enjoy the natural attributes of the site. This project is still in the early stages as funding needs to be

obtained from outside sources before it can proceed. The Council have also not yet fully deliberated on the design of the proposed scheme. Your views will be most welcome.

### **Village Hall Committee**

We have supported the activities of this committee throughout the year and assisted in financing problems they experienced recently. We are grateful to note that the Oxford City Council continue to allow us to use the paved area formerly used as a cow yard as a car park. This facility together with the new community land area should help the committee to achieve more bookings of regular users in the future.

### **Website, Shinfo and Echo**

Linda Slater, committee member of the Village Hall has voluntarily continued as editor of these communication sources and Dave and Anne Markham run the website. We are most grateful to them all.

### **Oxford Green Belt**

The Chairman has represented the council at six meetings of the Network throughout the year and this is supported by over thirty councils in the Green Belt. The South East Plan which has just been published threatens to permit building in the Green Belt and implications this will have for further revisions of the Green Belt are being carefully watched.

### **Litter Campaign**

We have carried out a number of litter collections around the parish especially in the last few months and have managed to get Hinksey Hill, Betty Lane, the Interchange roundabout and the sides of the A34 cleaned up.

The Council have also requested the illegal dump at Redbridge to be cleared up and fenced off since this creates a number of toxic fires and creates huge quantities of litter along the ring road. The Oxfordshire County Council is at last taking action and money has now been allocated for this to happen. We are grateful to Bob Johnston our County Councillor for the efforts made in this regard. We trust the closure of the illegal dump will not give rise to another one being created elsewhere and we will be closely monitoring the situation.

### **Footpath Maintenance**

New surfacing was completed to the Devils backbone early in the year following the damage caused by flooding and the Council have alerted authorities to necessary repairs to stiles, cutting back of willow tree foliage and repairs to the bridge supports over Hinksey Stream. A proposal to establish a new bridleway from Redbridge through to Parker Road was made by the Rights of Way officer and commented on by the Council but there is no evidence of any decision being taken on this matter yet. The existing walkway across the meadows to North Hinksey is a permissive path granted by the owners and this was renewed for another two years recently. We have been making efforts to provide suitable stiles at each end of this path for cycle access and a decision are still awaited. Similarly the long saga of getting a cycle ramp built into the railway bridge accessed from the Devils backbone continues.

## Other Matters

Various councillors have attended the following events throughout the year and submitted reports

- *Oxfordshires 4<sup>th</sup> Local Environment Groups Conference* held in Woodcote at the Langtree Secondary School on Sat 26 April 2008
- *Volunteering and Neighbourliness in a Flu Pandemic* June 2008
- *OALC/AGM Introducing e-Consultation Hub to Councils* 9<sup>th</sup> June 2008
- *Your Vale Your Future* Workshop at Cumnor Village Hall on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> June 2008
- Oxfordshire Recorders Conference County Hall Oxford 28<sup>th</sup> Feb 2009-03-25  
Presentation of South Hinksey case study on Greening our Parishes
- BTO Survey for tetrads based on South Hinksey 14<sup>th</sup> March 2009
- Vale WHDC Core Strategy Workshop Botley 19<sup>th</sup> March 2009

The Council has also commented on publications from the Vale District Council and the Oxfordshire County Council as follows

- *Report from the Oxfordshire Partnership (OP) "From strategy to action- making things happen". Meeting 10<sup>th</sup> April 2008*
- *Report on the Parish of South Hinksey Litter Campaign 2008* April/May 2008
- *Flu Pandemic report* Jan 2009
- *Report on the meeting for the SEA of the Oxford Flood Risk Management Strategy* 6<sup>th</sup> Jan 2009

## Summing Up

The last year has been action packed and many problems had to be solved with the absence of a full time clerk for much of the time. Now that all positions are full we look forward to a more organised and less demanding year. The council continues to pursue projects that will bring about more community benefits as well as monitoring any deterioration in the quality of our existing environment . With central government promising to delegate further powers to the local level we look forward to the opportunity to contract out more cleaning and protection work ourselves rather than relying on other agencies who all seem to have higher priorities elsewhere.

Updated 07/05/09