

Middleton-on-Sea Parish Council

Chairman's Report for the Parish Council Year 2003/2004

To be presented at the Annual Parish Meeting on Thursday 27th May 2004 at the Jubilee Hall (rear hall), Elmer Road, Middleton-on-Sea. It gives me great pleasure and privilege to present my Report on the Parish Council. It has been a year of many achievements but also the untimely deaths of both Councillor Ron Jarvis and former Councillor Norman Robertson, the latter as a result of a road accident at Comet Corner.

I am very grateful to all Councillors and the Clerk for their support and understanding of the impartial but encouraging/facilitating role I have undertaken for a Council which pleases me to be non-political. Looking back on the year I see that the Parish Council has once again been very active in many areas which are shown below:-

(1) ADALC, Area Partnership & Codes of Conduct

All Councillors have signed the Code of Conduct and Matthew Copeland (Vice Chairman) has attended the Area Partnership Panel meetings, representing the Parish Council. My thanks go to him for his work and reports.

(2) Broadband Campaign

A Broadband campaign run by the Clerk and Vice Chairman, and supported by the Parish Council, ensured the parish was provided with a Broadband service, at a reported cost of some £300,000, in September 2003 despite previous statements from BT that the facility would not be available to the Parish in the foreseeable future.

(3) Development Control

The Development Control Committee has had a busy year considering in excess of 70 planning applications. A public inquiry was also held on July 2003, relating to Manor Farm House, at which representations were made by the Committee Chairman, Colin Mansfield. My thanks go to him and the other members of the committee for their hard work during the year.

(4) Finance

The Parish Council has increased its precept to £33,000, after remaining level for the 2 previous years, although it remains one of the lowest precept charges within the Arun District Council catchment area. Further, Parish Councillors decided not to accept the allowance to which they were entitled thereby saving £4,800 per annum. I am most grateful to the Finance Committee for managing the budget and finances so effectively.

(5) Footpaths

Mary Ross has taken over responsibility for inspecting the footpaths to ensure they are kept in good order, supplementing WSCC's footpaths maintenance programme which is undertaken every 9 months. Mary is also just commencing a review of the footpaths with particular emphasis on the impact of the Disabilities Discrimination Act 1995.

(6) Newsletter

The quarterly parish newsletter, Middleton News, has gone from strength to strength during the year and its popularity extends well beyond the parish boundary. It continues to make a financial surplus and as its advertising income has risen, its size has been increased from 12 to 16 pages with a glossy format and 4 colour pages. My thanks go to Angela Waller for obtaining the advertising and co-ordinating its production with the Clerk and to Pauline Allsopp for recording and distributing Talking Middleton News. Also to the advertisers, article writers and distributors who all contribute to its success.

(7) Parish Council Playing Fields

The Shrubbs Playing Fields continue to be the focal point for many parish activities. To ensure that both the field and pavilion were kept free of rubbish and in good order, a Field Warden, Mrs Celia Horne, was appointed in July 2003 and this immediately made a significant improvement on the overall cleanliness standards in that vicinity. Two new picnic tables were installed by the children's playground together with some football goal posts although the first set were destroyed by vandals and new wooden goal posts had to be subsequently fitted. Vandalism and anti-social behaviour has been an ongoing problem in the general vicinity of Shrubbs Field, including some examples of arson, and steps are being undertaken currently to try to reduce its frequency. In order to comply with the Disabilities Discrimination Act 1995, a new concrete path has been laid from Shrubbs Car Park to the Playground and a new wider gate has been installed. Two new benches were also installed along Elmer Road to replace two old benches which were beyond economic repair. My thanks go to Gerry Aldridge for his excellent work managing the field and associated projects.

(8) Plant-A-Bulb

Following previous years, wonderful work has been done in this past year with the Plant-A-Bulb Scheme; I'm sure most would agree that the Parish looked particularly beautiful when all the bulbs were in bloom. Thanks must go to all involved.

(9) Police

There have been many examples of vandalism and anti-social behaviour around the parish, although most of the issues are in the general vicinity of Shrubbs Field. The Parish Council have made many representations to the Police with only limited success. However, following a public meeting of the Sussex Police Authority on 29th March, which was attended by some 200 people and 3 Parish Councillors, a new initiative called a Local Action Team (LAT) is being piloted in the Parish by the Police, Parish Council and local residents with the intention of reducing anti-social behaviour. I would like to thank the Vice Chairman for driving this initiative forward and am very grateful to Norman Morrison for his attendance and reports to the Parish Council.

(10) Public Health and Keep Arun Tidy

During the year, ongoing dialogue with Arun District Council has enabled 2 additional dog bins to be installed in Southdean Close and Southdean Drive, respectively and a new recycling centre is being opened at Elmer. Representations are being made to Arun

District Council to improve and fence off the Shrubbs Drive recycling centre. The Parish Council has objected strongly to WSCC about the proposed Materials Recycling Facility at Ford, which if approved, will increase significantly the number of heavy goods vehicle movements along the A259.

(11) Residents Associations

The Residents Associations continues to meet regularly to discuss matters of common items of interest. My thanks go my Vice Chairman and Nicky Mills for representing the Parish Council at the meetings which I am sure benefit all parties attending.

(12) Roads & Transport

For many years this Parish Council has pursued improvements to the Comet Corner road junction with varying degrees of success, however, the dangers of the junction were brought into sharp focus following the fatal road accident on 31st July 2003. Mrs Mills led a Comet Corner Action Group, which was supported financially by the Parish Council, to raise the profile of this problem road junction by organising a petition and letters campaign, addressed to WSCC, and publicising the issue both in the press and on the radio. The petition, containing nearly 3,400 signatures, together with 1,440 individual letters were presented to the Cabinet Member responsible for Highways & Transport by Nick Gibb MP supported by many local people including County, District & Parish Councillors on 19th September 2003. The representations are now starting to bear fruit with red road warning markers and a 50 mph limit already installed at the junction and hopes of substantive junction improvements in 2005/6. Many thanks to Nicky Mills and her Action Group for all their hard work.

(13) Sea Defence

Following the issue of the draft Coastal Defence Strategy, Ros Willis attended the key consultees meeting in July 2003. Since that time she has attended a number of meetings with the Middleton on Sea Association and Arun District Council, some of which have been attended by Nick Gibb MP, with a view to progressing rapidly the required remedial sea defence works between Hannah's Groyne and Middleton Point. Many thanks to Ros Willis for taking on this challenging portfolio.

(14) Tree Planting

During the year, 15 trees were planted on 5 different sites and a new whitebeam tree was planted on the Village Green to replace one which had to be felled in January 2004 as it was unsafe. I would like to thank Colin Mansfield, Parish Tree Warden, for arranging and supervising all the works. To facilitate WSCC's requirement to have public liability insurance cover of £10 million when planting trees, the Parish Council has increased its cover from £5 million to £10 million to conform with their requirements.

(15) Village Action Plan

My thanks go to Matthew Copeland, Nicky Mills, Ros Willis and the many volunteers for progressing the Village Action Plan. The questionnaires were distributed to every dwelling in the parish during September 2003 and some 800 individual responses have been received. The group has arranged for the mass of data to be analysed and is now

putting the finishing touches to the Village Action Plan which will again be distributed to every dwelling in the parish.

(16) Village Pond

Mrs Willis has undertaken the role of Pond Warden with great enthusiasm during the year. She has worked in partnership with WSCC's Countryside Ranger and local volunteers to make the Pond and Green look very attractive and recently received a £500 grant from WSCC to support the work. The annual clear-up took place on 6th December when a large number of people assisted to tidy up the Pond and Green area. Many bulbs were planted on the Green together with 100 common reeds which were planted in the gully between Middleton Road and the Pond to act as an environmentally friendly filtration system. A new seat has also been installed overlooking the pond which has proved very popular with old and young alike. Many thanks to Ros Willis for all her efforts.

(17) Young People

The Vice Chairman has been very active in promoting the cause of local youth by (a) being involved, together with Arun District Council, in organising the Youth Leisure Event on Shrubbs Field in September 2003, (b) working with Arun District Council and Felpham Parish Council to promote the installation of a Skate/BMX park at Larksfield and (c) distributing the youth questionnaire as an integral part of the Village Action Plan.

I visited the 39 Club during the year and found there was plenty of room and that spaces existed for more youths to attend if they can get into Bognor. It may therefore be worthwhile considering whether some type of subsidised bus pass for youths can be supported by the Parish Council in the future.

Councillors

Finally, I would like to thank all Parish Councillors and also welcome Tony Edey, who was co-opted to the Parish Council in April 2004.

I am also very grateful and would like to thank Ted Chandler, John Wilkinson, Frank Ough and Ann Farley for their time and effort in Parish Council matters.

The Clerk, Members of the Public and District and County Councillors

We are very fortunate to have a Clerk with time and energy handling our day-to-day affairs in a most effective manner. My thanks to him and also members of the Public who attend our meetings, as well as our District and County Councillors, Barbara Oakley and Christina Freeman.

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Paul M Wotherspoon, Chairman, Middleton-on-Sea Parish Council 2003/2004