

# **ANNUAL REPORT OF FOWNHOPE PARISH COUNCIL FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 MAR 09**

## **INTRODUCTION**

At this time of year, when we are receiving another round of stiff Council Tax Bills, it is timely to report on what parishioners have been receiving for the share of the Council Tax which goes to the Parish Council –the Precept. This report gives a summary of some of the more important Council activities over the past year. If you have any questions or want to know more please get in touch with the Parish Clerk. Better still, come along to the Annual Parish Meeting in the Pavilion at 7.00 Pm on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> May.

We start with 2 pieces of good news.

Included in the section on Finances is the welcome announcement that for the 5<sup>th</sup> year running the Council has managed to avoid any rise in the cost of the Precept.

At the beginning of the year the Council applied to the National Association for Local Councils to be assessed for 'Quality Council' status. As part of the application an extremely thick dossier of evidence had to be produced to demonstrate that the Council was equalling or exceeding the set standard in every aspect of council work. In February we were awarded the coveted status at a special ceremony in Hereford. We are only the 7<sup>th</sup> council (out of 134) in Herefordshire to have achieved this – something which we are really proud of!

## **PROJECTS and ISSUES**

**Affordable Housing** At the last Annual Parish Meeting endorsement was given to the Housing Department's scheme to provide 8 affordable housing units in the Parish. Subsequent to the Meeting representatives from the Council and the Department walked around the village to examine all possible sites for housing. Each site examined was found to have significant problems and the issue now appears to have lost momentum. The Council continues to monitor the situation.

**Biggs Lane** Improvements to pavement and road surface along Biggs lane, which have been jointly undertaken and funded with St Mary's School, are now almost complete.

**Bus Shelters** Following lobbying by the Council a bus shelter has been provided on the B4224 at no cost to the Parish. The provision of a shelter in Church Croft is now being investigated.

**Court Garden** The previously forsaken area of land next to the Fire Station has now been re-landscaped and christened Court Garden. It will continue to be maintained by the Council.

**Dog Mess** Following concerns expressed over the amount of dog poo being deposited around the Village action was requested from the County Council Dog Warden. Regrettably, however, there are only 3 wardens for the whole of the County and their legal powers are very limited, such that the possibility of their ever catching and prosecuting any offenders is minimal. Similarly, their deterrent value is limited as they operate without publicity from unmarked vehicles in order to avoid being attacked by members of the public. Publicity and posters are the only remaining option.

**Flooding** Frustrated by the County Council's lack of action, the Council commissioned an examination of the stream bed around Tan House Bridge. It then produced a set of drawings showing the recommended depth and extent of dredging to avoid future blockages. Following a site meeting the County Council agreed to carry out the work. Some dredging has now taken place albeit not as much as we would like to see. The inability of the culverts and pipes at the lower end of Common Hill Lane to cope with storm water has been reported and the Council

continues to press for action. A stock of sandbags has been acquired for emergency use within the Parish

**Footpaths** All rights-of-way in the Parish have been inspected and a rolling programme of maintenance and improvements has been instigated.

**Pavements** The Council has been pressing for improvements to pavements throughout the Village. Whilst some improvements have resulted these have been considered unsatisfactory and the campaign goes on.

**Planning** The Council responded to requests from Herefordshire Council Central Planning Services by providing comment and recommendations on a total of 35 planning applications during the year. The majority of these required site visits.

**Road Safety** A number of proposals for safety improvements have been made by the Council but all have been 'put on hold' by the Highways Department pending the outcome of a County-wide review of Highway safety. At the Council's request, the Highways Department have carried out a traffic measurement exercise along the approach to the village from the Hereford direction. During this over 2,500 traffic movements per day were routinely recorded with speeds of up to 70 MPH being registered in what is a 30MPH zone. There is clearly a very serious road safety issue which needs to be addressed urgently. The Highways Department have refused to install a 'Speed Indicator Device' as no site can be found which meets all their criteria for one. They are now being pressed to address the problem by other means. Similarly, at the other end of the village, improved signage and street furniture have been requested to improve safety at the brow of the hill and approaches to the village.

**Recreation Field Hedges** Following expert advice that action was necessary to ensure their long-term health, the hedges around the Recreation Field have been professionally laid.

**Stocks** The issue about what to do about the Stocks has been rumbling on for years. In their present position, on the main road adjacent to the Church wall, they are at risk of impact from passing traffic and its associated detritus. They are also dangerous to visit and liable to flooding. Some years ago a plan was devised to move them around the corner to a quieter position in Caplor Lane. This was vetoed by English Nature who felt it would be improper to move them from what might (or might not) be their historical position. Since then, no more acceptable solution has been found. The Council have now asked English Nature to identify their preferred course of action. Their response is awaited with interest.

**Waste Disposal** Regrettably, despite lobbying, the County Council have removed the subsidy for the provision of the monthly visit by a waste disposal skip raising the cost from £38 to £380 per trip. The cost of providing an alternative from another source has been investigated and found to be unaffordable. The last visit will be in June.

**Web Site** The Council's web-site has been brought up -to-date and improved over the year. It now includes the Parish Plan together with all other Council policy documents. A 'Notice Board' section has also been added to display the latest information, including draft council minutes which are usually posted a week after each meeting.

## **WHAT THE COUNCIL DOES**

The Council's direct responsibilities include:

Maintenance of ditches and verges alongside minor roads under an agreement with the County Council. It also separately funds general maintenance work carried out by the same contractor throughout the Parish.

Grass cutting at Scotch Firs.

Maintenance of and improvements to rights of way.

Maintenance of the Play area and equipment next to the Recreation Ground.

Making recommendations on planning applications.

Outside of these areas the Council applies pressure, when necessary, on other agencies to ensure they carry out their statutory obligations to provide Fownhope with the services it is entitled to.

### **WHAT THE COUNCIL DOESN'T DO**

Day to day management and maintenance of the Recreation Field is carried out on the Council's behalf by volunteers from the Recreation Field Association, who are to be commended for all the hard work they put in.

The Council has no direct responsibility for maintenance of roads or pavements and defects with these should be reported to the relevant County Council department. However, should the County Council fail to correct any problems within a reasonable time, the Council will normally lobby for improvements in service.

The Council has no remit for road safety which is the responsibility of the County Highways Department. However, it has a long, and ongoing, history of campaigning for improvements.

Whilst the Council contributes to the content of the 'Flag', it does not produce or influence its content.

### **FINANCES**

**Summary.** The Council's finances are in good shape. By keeping a close control over spending and maximising income from grants it has been possible to increase the amount in the bank carried forward to the next financial year (09/10) significantly over the total for last year. Moreover, it has enabled us to avoid any increase in the precept which will be unchanged (£16,000) from the same level as in previous years. There has been no increase in the precept now for 5 Years, a record the Council is very proud of. However, we are very aware that we are entering troubled financial times and, in particular, the interest we earn on our deposit accounts has plummeted, whilst the interest we are still paying on the loan taken out in 1986 to build the Memorial Hall remains at a comparatively uxorious rate. The balance between deposits, loans and working capital is being reviewed and finances will continue to be kept on close hold.

**Grants.** A number of grants and donations have been successfully negotiated including:

Parish Paths Partnership (£1,200) for the maintenance and improvement of footpaths.

The Lengthsman Scheme (£1,252) towards the cost of the upkeep of our roadsides.

Community Projects Grant (£2,000) towards landscaping the Court Garden area next to the Fire Station.

Landscape Enhancement Grant (£1,000) towards the cost of laying the Recreation Field Hedges.

**Manpower** Manpower costs are a significant proportion of Council expenditure. Fortunately, the Council's 12 councillors all provide their time for no payment or expenses. The only direct employee is the Clerk who is paid for 7 hours a week @ £9.47 per hour plus out-of-pocket

expenses. A Lengthsman is contracted to maintain roadsides, cut grass and carry out general maintenance tasks at a rate of £9.50 per hour. A contract also exists to cut the grass at Scotch Firs 14 times per year @ £25 per cut.

A factsheet giving a snapshot of the Council's finances is below. A full set of accounts, down to the very last penny, will be presented for audit by the end of April and a copy of these will be posted on the Notice Board and web site. Requests for further details or explanations should be directed to the Parish Clerk who also acts as Financial Officer.

## **LOCAL DEMOCRACY**

Throughout the year there has been a consistently high turn-out of councillors at meetings with very few absences. A list of councillors and their contact details is at the end of this report.

Council activities have been well publicised through the Flag, a copy of which has been sent every month to each household in the Parish. Minutes and announcements have been placed on notice boards and the Council's web-site. Council meetings and agendas have been publicised well in advance. We have been gratified to see members of the public attending and participating in all of our council meetings - a sure sign of an active and healthy democracy. Members of the public are always given an opportunity to make their views known to the Council about any issue affecting the Parish, whether it be on the agenda or not.

We look to see further public participation in the future and urge anyone who has a concern or suggestion to make, or who would like to know more about a particular issue, to contact either the Clerk or any of the councillors. Their contact details are listed at the end of this report.

## Fownhope Financial Factsheet Financial Year 08/09

These charts provide a comparison of income and expenditure over the past 2 years.

(Figures for 2008/9 are a forecast)

| <b><u>Routine Expenditure</u></b>   |                  |                  |
|---|------------------|------------------|
|   | <b>2008/9</b>    | <b>2007/8</b>    |
| Memorial Hall PWLB Loan repayment   | £ 2,183          | £ 2,260          |
| Clerk's salary  | £ 3,604          | £ 3,227          |
| Clerk's travel & expenses   |                  | £ 754            |
| HALC Subs   | £ 234            | £ 188            |
| Insurances  | £ 800            | £ 644            |
| RoSPA Inspection fee  | £ 44             | £ 36             |
| Website expenses  | £ 29             | £ 65             |
| Audit costs   | £ 285            | £ 165            |
| Hire of meeting room  | £ 140            | £ 176            |
| Training and meetings   | £ 148            | -                |
| Monthly Waste Collection  | £ 93             | £ 38             |
| Lengthsman Grant  | £ 1,276          | £ 1,276          |
| Lengthsman Supplement   | £ 1,279          | £ 1,471          |
| Rec Field General Projects  | £ 694            | £ 2,768          |
| Footpaths   | -                | £ 80             |
| <b><u>New Expenditure</u></b>   |                  |                  |
| Hedge Laying  | £ 2,100          | -                |
| Court Garden Improvements:  | £ 2,914          | -                |
| Church Projects   | £ 500            | £ 2,000          |
| School boundary & access work   | £ 1,500          | -                |
| <b><u>Income</u></b>  |                  |                  |
| Hedge laying Grant  | £ 1,000          | -                |
| P3 Grant  | £ 1,200          | -                |
| Court Garden Grant  | £ 2,000          | -                |
| Precept   | £ 16,000         | £ 16,000.00      |
| EON Wayleave  | £ 87             | £ 84.00          |
| Worcs CC Interest   | £ 837            | £ 1,343.00       |
| NatWest Bank Interest   | £ 163            | £ 475.00         |
| Lengthsman Grant  | £ 1,252          | £ 1,252.00       |
| VAT Refund  | £ 4,550          | £ 338.00         |
| <b><u>Summary</u></b>   |                  |                  |
|   | <b>31-Mar-09</b> | <b>31-Mar-08</b> |
| Balance in Bank   | £ 37,401         | £ 31,445         |
| Loan from PWLB  | £ 14,385         | £ 15,184         |
| <b><u>Ring-Fenced Funds</u></b>   |                  |                  |
| Within the general reserve fund the following amounts have been identified to accrue funds for future identified needs or projects. |                  |                  |
|   | <b>31-Mar-09</b> | <b>31-Mar-08</b> |
| Rec Fld Track Maint   | £ 1,099          | £ 599            |
| Recreation Field Fund   | £ 5,232          | £ 4,323          |
| Venture Play Area   | £ 1,000          | £ 1,000          |
| Stocks  | £ 1,500          | £ 1,500          |
| Totals  | £ 8,831          | £ 7,422          |

## COUNCIL COMPOSITION

Clerk to the Council:

Jem Bateman                    01531 670655

Councillors:

|                 |               |
|-----------------|---------------|
| Martin Williams | Chairman      |
| Jean Boothman   |               |
| David M Clark   |               |
| Derek Colley    |               |
| Ann Corby       |               |
| Peter Daines    |               |
| Fred Jolley     |               |
| John Jones      |               |
| John Hardwick   |               |
| Hilary Mansell  |               |
| David Pascoe    |               |
| Gareth Williams | Vice Chairman |

**Addresses:**

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| Bateman Jem<br>Newlands<br>Little Marcle, Ledbury<br>HR8 2LA                             | Boothman Jean<br>34 Nover Wood Drive<br>Fownhope, Hereford<br>HR1 4PN         | Clark David M<br>Holyrood House<br>2 Ringfield Drive<br>Fownhope, Hereford<br>HR1 4PR |
| Colley Derek<br>Orchard Lodge<br>Fownhope, Hereford<br>HR1 4PJ                           | Corby Ann<br>Pippins<br>Capler Lane<br>Fownhope, Hereford<br>HR1 4PJ          | Daines Peter<br>Mill Farm Barn,<br>Fownhope, Hereford<br>HR1 4NT                      |
| Hardwick John<br>Oldstone Farm<br>Fownhope Hereford<br>HR1 4PJ                           | Jolley Fred<br>Scotch Bungalow Scotch<br>Firs<br>Fownhope Hereford<br>HR1 4NW | Jones John<br>18 Church Croft<br>Fownhope, Hereford<br>HR1 4PL                        |
| Mansell Hilary<br>The Woodlands<br>Fownhope, Hereford<br>HR1 4PA                         | Pascoe David<br>4 Nover Wood Drive<br>Fownhope, Hereford<br>HR1 4PN           | Williams Gareth<br>Caplor Farm<br>Fownhope, Hereford<br>HR1 4PT                       |
| Williams Martin<br>Parkers Pitch Cottage<br>Capler Lane<br>Fownhope, Hereford<br>HR1 4PJ |   |   |

Email address to contact the Council: [fownclerk@tiscali.co.uk.org.uk](mailto:fownclerk@tiscali.co.uk.org.uk)