

Chairman's report to the Hadley and Leegomery Annual Parish Meeting, 20th April, 2010.

Another year draws to its close; a year that has been marked by highly significant events, the most important probably being the registration of our Village Green. The application was extremely time-consuming and demanded careful scrutiny of the law and the facts relating to it. We had to engage specialist legal advisors at a cost, but not to have engaged them might have been at a much greater cost in terms of the probable loss of this treasured amenity to development. The community has greatly appreciated our success in this matter as they continue to enjoy this oasis of peace.

To mark this success, we are to hold a village fête to take place on Sunday, 20th June, and in this we will be assisted by our partner agencies, including the local police and volunteers. There will be all the usual attractions around Castle Farm, High Street, the shopping centre and the Village Green itself, from 12 noon until 4.00pm. Full details will be publicised once they have been finalised.

St. George's Day later this week, is being marked with traditional flags and bunting to raise public awareness and to encourage the celebration of England, all our freedoms and those English customs and traditions which we hold dear.

Those who fought for these values and paid with their lives will be formally remembered once more on Remembrance Sunday on 14th November, which will again be marked by a parade and services at both the War Memorial and the Methodist Church. The commitment of this council to our war dead is our major civic event and one which this Council is very proud to conduct to the highest possible standard in recognition of their sacrifice and that of their families. We work in partnership with the Leegomery & Hadley Branch of the Royal British Legion and this year we shall extend this act of remembrance by arranging a visit for their members to the National Memorial Arboretum near Lichfield, which is a beautiful centre but tragically, one which keeps the stonemasons far too busy as the new names of our young are carved into the memorial stones.

In December we are planning new pensioners' Christmas party arrangements which will now take the form of a traditional Christmas dinner in the alternative venue of Hadley United Services Club. The entertainment and the booking fee will remain the same, so we hope to make this an extremely enjoyable affair, just as all the others have been to date.

The next Carol concert for the primary schools children will also be a feature of the Christmas season. Because of the popularity of this event at Hadley Methodist Church, we were forced to take steps to accommodate all who wanted to attend so last year only Millbrook and Apley Wood school choirs took part, together with Hadley Orpheus Male Voice Choir. HLC Secondary and Primary choirs, along with Shropshire Male Chorus featured in an Easter concert, a new event, which all are keen to repeat annually. We have a rich choral tradition in the area and we should all be proud that this continues through the children in our schools.

We are delighted to welcome new Members to our number; Cllrs. Chris Harrison and Lisa Wilkes by co-option and Cllr. Sean Thomas by election last month, and we congratulate all of them. New Members are soon pressed into service as we utilise their talents; Cllr. Harrison is leading the Village Fête Committee and Cllr. Thomas will soon be put to work on a mission of planting and environmental improvements to augment his valued efforts over several years, in Apley Woods and in many other parts of Telford.

This is perhaps an opportune time to remind voters that anyone can stand for election to the Parish Council as of right, provided that they fulfil the necessary criteria. All the information necessary is available from the extremely helpful Democratic Services department at Telford & Wrekin Council.

Although we are merely consultees in the planning process and are often disappointed by decisions taken, we continue to take this duty very seriously and always assess each planning application carefully before informing the planning officers of our views. To illustrate this, the proposed development at the old Watkins Nursery in Apley was carefully debated here and our concerns duly presented to the planners. In spite of its being a significant and valued part of our local heritage, and against our opinion and those of residents, consent was given without conditions. We would assure the planning authority that we do understand the planning issues involved and would urge them to place more credence on Parish Council advice.

We continue to enjoy the best of service from the planning enforcement department and the police, and would highlight the Junction 6 nuisance as an example of partnership working at its best and in the spirit of the Parish Charter. Residents had been denied parking space; those with mobility problems had been unable to reach the health centre and shoppers unable to park in the car parks. The business had been carrying on in defiance of planning regulations and its sprawl caused untold inconvenience to local people. In spite of many attempts to dodge the system, persistence won the day and they were finally forced to relocate.

The Parish Council remains concerned for and watchful of Haybridge Hall and its future. The group dwelling now enjoys a new communal room. This was built by Wrekin Housing Trust to replace the wonderful communal facilities in the Hall. Unfortunately, this is too small to accommodate the luncheon club who have now had to move to Hadley Rest Room to continue this valuable social activity.

The life of this country is dependent on the work done by volunteers and many people would struggle without the help and support of caring and selfless individuals. We continue to provide grants to various qualifying local groups and are proud to help those who help others to find fulfilment.

To ensure the continuing excellent service provided by our police officers and CSOs, we have provided a new car for their use. Of course there are arguments that West Mercia Police already receive significant funding and our residents should not be expected to pay twice for the same service. Without a second car, however, our officers would suffer serious impediment when policing what is an extremely large parish. This subject was debated at length and as West Mercia Police were adamant that their car pool would not be increased for our officers, we finally agreed on the purchase. Our officers are delighted with our support and with the car and we thank them for all that they do to help us in this community.

Another significant development has been our decision to employ our own Youth Engagement Officer, Kirsten McCavery, and to launch the Youth Café which, although only a few weeks old, has been a resounding success with the young people. The funding for this important project, which was born of listening to what they wanted and acting upon it, has come from diverting funds from other youth provision. A vote of thanks is extended to Kirsten and to all the volunteers, as well as to Peter Beer for his advice and help.

As Spring is busy with her vernal duties, we look forward to the arrival of our flowers in hanging baskets and floral crowns. Residents and visitors alike never cease to appreciate the difference that these make to the environment and to their well-being. This year we are at long last able to provide similar displays in Leegomery when the new shops will be adorned with floral crowns to herald the new beginning. We have placed 8 large planters on High Street and further improvements throughout the Parish are being considered. If residents have suggestions for planting we shall certainly consider all reasonable requests in our programme of environmental improvements.

Our contact details are all on the Parish Council Website. The long-awaited launch of this feature now provides easy access to our activities and additional information is being added to keep all our people informed. I am confident that our website is of the best quality and reflects the image of this council.

The duties and responsibilities of parish and town councils are clearly defined in law but we do not shrink from our obligation to the people who elected us. Whenever we are asked for help, we do our best to provide it and to support the people who have put their trust in us. Although our powers are limited, we continue to use whatever influence we have in arriving at the right result. We do this because we believe that our local people deserve a good life and if we can help in some small way to help them achieve this, then we shall do our best to make it happen for them.

In closing, I should like to thank all our Members who continue to work hard for the common good. Thank you to my vice-chairman, Cllr. Hazel Durling, the Chairman of Finance & General Purposes, Cllr. Richard Dickens and his Vice-Chairman, Cllr. John Smart, together with our superb staff of Gail Lawrence, who has quickly proved to be a great asset to our Council; Helen Simmons, Vera Holland, Cliff Henderson and Kirsten McCavery. Our Clerk, Colin Potts, deserves the highest accolade for all that he did in respect of the Village Green. In addition, he continues to deal with every aspect of running this Council with professionalism and I thank him for his unfailing help and support.

Written by Councillor Pat Smart
April, 2010