

# Abbots Langley Parish Council



## Annual Report 2007 / 2008

Presented at the Annual Parish Meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup>  
April 2008 at The Manor House, Abbots Langley.

[www.abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk](http://www.abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk)

**Abbots Langley Parish Council**  
**Annual Parish Meeting 2007 / 2008**



1. **Chairman's Report**
2. **Reports - Chairman of:**
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3. **Financial Grants**
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[www.abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk](http://www.abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk)

**1. Parish Council Chairman's Report**  
**(Councillor Owen Roe)**

Welcome to you all and thank you for attending this Annual Parish Meeting for the civic Parish of Abbots Langley.

Local election at the beginning of May last year saw a number of changes among the Councillors, but the new faces have brought with them the same energy and devotion that we were accustomed to have from their predecessors.

There has been one departure however which I want to single out for comments. That is the death of Councillor Mrs Betty O'Neill, who died at the end of December. I feel we can best pay honour to her memory by trying to emulate her dedication to the interest of the residents of our village.

An election was held on the 27<sup>th</sup> March to fill the vacancy created by Betty's death, I am pleased to welcome to the Parish Council Stephen Giles-Medhurst.

Our former Clerk to the Council, Mrs Janice Dawes, left us in August and went to work part-time in a similar capacity in Sarrat. When I visited Sarratt Village Hall at the end of October I took the opportunity to call in on her and was glad to find her well and contented. In her place Tim Perkins has joined us as Clerk to the Council, completing the professional staff team. A team which has shown itself to be of the very highest quality.

I and fellow Councillors were present at the solemn occasions which took place during the past year, that is, Battle of Britain Sunday at Langleybury Church and Remembrance Day parades at St. Lawrence, Abbots Langley, Bedmond and Langleybury.

As Chairman of the Council I have attended a great many other events, too numerous really to list and of great variety, including the grand opening of the renewed Primrose Hill play area and judging the guys at the fireworks night celebrations.

My year of office as Chairman has been an eye opening experience for me. I have been enriched by observation of the many people who work so cheerfully for the local good.

Our local press is much in evidence and their reporting brings to local people news of what we are doing and also informs us of what is going on. I am wholly in favour of open dealings with our local media.

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Our local police too are well known to us. We are very well aware that keeping our village a decent place to live is down to their presence.

Our Committee Chairman will now present their reports, when these are complete, I will invite questions from the floor.

**2a. Planning & Highways Committee Report**  
**(Councillor Miss Ivy Young)**

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. I am Ivy Young and have had the honour and pleasure to be Chairman of Planning and Highways for a number of years.

Many changes have taken place during the time of my Chairmanship and this year's report is no different. To date the Committee have examined 350 applications in the Parish to extend properties, convert garages to habitable accommodations, demolishing old buildings to construct new and discussing Supplementary Planning documents relating to open space and play facilities on site within larger developments. We also expressed our concern where buildings were taking place in flood zones e.g Hunton Bridge (River Gade and Grand Union Canal).

Major expansions include Popes Road, School Mead, Bucknells Lane, Old Mill Road and others in Abbots Road, Hazelwood Lane, Hunton Bridge Hill, Primrose Hill: - as you can appreciate these cover many of the Wards in our Parish.

Although your Committee submit their observations to the Development Committee at Three Rivers, there is no guarantee that these are accepted and unfortunately Parish Council cannot offer further comments. However some applications go to informal hearings after appeals and we are notified accordingly. Relevant Enforcement matters are also listed for our information.

Even though it is already possible to check plans via modern technology ie website, in the near future TRDC intend to withdraw sending original copies of documents to Parish. This committee have indicated to District that this action will not be beneficial to our Parishioner's as the screen cannot compare existing and proposed plans at the same time. We will strive for continuation of paper plans.

At this point I take the opportunity to thank all Committee Members that visit the office to view plans, at leisure, for later discussion at meetings.

The Highways section deals with many aspects including:-

- a) Reviewing existing Transport Strategy for S.W Herts (our urgent cases relate to Bedmond Road and Lower Road).
- b) Road works programme for Herts Highways.
- c) M25 widening exhibition
- d) Bus shelters
- e) Consultation paper on options for bus passenger representations.
- f) Footpath maintenance
- g) Temporary closure of roads
- h) Street naming on new estates
- i) Waste Development Plan
- j) Information on Watford General Hospital and surrounding area relating to impact on roads from outlying areas.

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I apologise for this lengthy report but hope it has provided some insight of the responsibility of the Planning and Highways Committee.

Finally my personal thanks to Sue, Vice Chairman and all councillors for their conscientious input at the 24 meetings held in the year. Also my gratitude to Ann, our Planning Admin. Assistant who has been meticulous in providing the required information ready for meetings. Once again good teamwork everyone

**2b. Leisure Committee**  
**(Councillor Mrs Sara Bedford)**

**1. Introduction**

Every year, I begin my report by saying that the Leisure committee has been busy during the past year, but the fact that I am repeating myself once again does not make it any less true. We continue to meet on a monthly basis, with user group forums for halls users, sports groups and allotment holders.

**2. Play Areas**

We have continued to work on the installation and maintenance of play equipment across the area. Last August, we were proud to open the excellent play area at Primrose Hill, partly funded by S106 money from the Ovaltine development and our next project is the small and somewhat forlorn Lemonfield play area in Garston.

Unfortunately our play areas continue to attract mindless vandals and this can lead to delays whilst insurance claims are sorted out - this has for instance led to a delay in the repair of the bucket swing at Manor House.

**3. Halls**

The refurbishment of Henderson Hall continues to move forward, albeit more slowly that we would like. However we are about to have a grand opening of the new toilets, partly paid for by a grant from Three Rivers District Council. We hope to continue to work with users and gain grant funding to make further improvements.

There has been a large turnover of Trustees at Henderson Hall, maybe an inevitable consequence of age for some of the original trustees who have given many years of service to the community here. We have tried to recruit new trustees from across the community, but particularly from user groups and those that have a direct interest in the premises and sustaining its use.

The project for the rebuilding of Hillside Hall in partnership with North Herts Homes is reaching the stage of submission of a planning application. If all goes to plan, the old hall will be demolished towards the end of the year, with a new hall open in Spring 2009.

The council has been approached by residents of Primrose Hill regarding the possibility of a small community facility in that part of the Parish. This is still in the early stages, but there is a possibility that it could be funded from the S106 community facility grant from Ovaltine.

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**4. Open Spaces**

- 4.1 The council has continued to improve the quality of our football pitches in the Parish. Although we have had to increase the cost for hire, this has continued to keep below that of other locally run pitches. The need for sports pitches is continuing to grow and we have to limit use and increase the work carried out to ensure that the pitches remain safe and playable.
- 4.2 We have supported local sports clubs where possible, including an emergency grant last year to Langleybury Cricket Club for a drainage problem and smaller grants to other clubs to maintain and improve their facilities. We are also looking to support those clubs which have particular problems with vandalism, both as landlords and in seeing where grants could be obtained to improve security and other facilities. We continue to try to balance the needs of organised sports clubs with those of other residents to enjoy informal recreation with their families and friends.
- 4.3 A youth shelter has also been installed at Primrose Hill, being donated by Three Rivers. This has proved as successful as those at Manor House and Bedmond.
- 4.4 We have continued with a tree maintenance and planting programme, which has led to new oak and hornbeam trees being planted and work to trees elsewhere on our land. We are looking at ways that we can plant more trees, as these are both attractive and beneficial to the surroundings.
- 4.5 We have continued to have problems in a couple of our car parks where they are used by people working nearby, rather than by the users of our facilities. We are having to look at taking formal steps to prevent this overuse, particularly where it affects our own users.

**5. Allotments**

- 5.1 Our allotments continue to be popular, with a waiting list for plots. We are now moving to a system of starting the allotment year in October, which means that new allotment holders will be able to start tilling the land in preparation to start growing in the spring, thus not wasting most of a summer season.
- 5.2 We have been working with allotment holders to see if an allotment association would better meet their needs and allow them to grant fund work on the allotments.

**6. Conclusion**

I would like to thank not only the members of the committee for their work over the past year, but also the user representatives and those members of the public who have come to our meetings to inform our discussions.

I hope that the Leisure committee will continue to look for ways that we can support and improve the provision of leisure facilities and activities in the area and work with local residents to achieve these aims.

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**2c. Staffing Committee**  
**(Councillor Ms. Belinda Phipps)**

The Parish Council has a small team of dedicated staff. It is the responsibility of the Staffing Committee to make sure we have the team we need and the policies and procedures in place to make sure the Parish Council is in line with employment law and are staff have a clear framework within which to work.

This year the committee has met twice. One to plan the recruitment of the Clerk to the Council and as a result we appointed Tim Perkins who has made an excellent start as our Clerk.

Our second meeting was to start the process of reviewing and replacing our staff policies and procedures.

I would like to thank my fellow councillors who are members of this committee for their support over the year and look forward to the Council having such an effective team and such a good policy frame work in place that the committee will need to meet only very in frequently in future

**2d. Finance & Administration Committee**  
**(Councillor Keith Williams)**

The remit of the Finance and Administration Committee includes strategic monitoring of the Councils finances, budget and investments together with overseeing the effective use of the Councils assets and other administrative matters.

Abbots Langley Parish Council is one of the largest Parish Councils in the Country, both in terms of the services it provides to its Parishioners, as described by my fellow Chairmen and also in terms of its budgeted expenditure.

Our budget for 2008/9 is £630,000. We are budgeting for a trading income of £132,000 and the balance of £498,000 we raise through a precept, which is collected in your Council Tax bills on behalf of the Parish Council by Three Rivers District Council. The Parish precept in 2008/9 amounts to £61.64 for a Band D property. I should remind Parishioners that Parish Councils do not receive any income from Government Grants, nor do we receive any income from local businesses through their business rates - the only income we receive is from the Council Tax and our trading activities. You may be interested to know that of our trading income, £15,200 is raised from hire of sports pitches and allotments; £36,800 from halls and £60,000 (gross) from our bars.

Towards the end of 2007, the council undertook a stock take of our capital assets, which showed our vehicles, including the plant we use to mow and maintain our parklands, were on their last legs and the computers and in urgent need of upgrading. It was quickly apparent to my committee that a large amount of re-investment was required to bring the equipment the council uses up to modern and safe standards, in order to deliver the quality of service parishioners are entitled to expect.

The Council has put money aside in previous years for such eventualities and we authorised a program of upgrading vehicles, plant and computers. This means the Council went into the financial years with our reserves reduced to £120,000, which is close to the minimum level our auditor requires a council the size of Abbots Langley to have.

Following the withdrawal from the Parish Centre project by the Primary Care Trust, the Parish Council reviewed and reluctantly concluded that the Parish Centre project was no longer economically viable. This was a big disappointment, particularly to the Abbots Langley Community Centre who were the third party in the partnership. The Community Centre suffered a further set back to their rebuilding plans when the

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National Lottery turned down their application for funding. As a result the Community Centre has turned away from a rebuilding project and is looking to re-furbish their existing premises. I was pleased that the Parish Council was able to retain the money we had put into reserves to support this project through a tough budgeting year. However, the £25,000 earmarked for the Community Centre has been sitting in the Parish Council's coffers since 1996 and because this money impacts on our reserves position as well as the Council wishing to see this project move forward as expediently as possible, in January we asked the Community Centre Management Committee to confirm their plans and submit a complete application for funding by the beginning of May.

During the year the Parish Council has delivered on two major capital investment projects. Firstly, thanks to a grant from Three Rivers District Council, the Parish Council has commenced on the refurbishment of Henderson Hall and secondly as a result of funding from the developer of the Ovaltine site, we have invested in the upgraded Primrose Hill playground. These two projects along with some other playground equipment elsewhere in the parish amounted to over £100,000 of investment.

I have spoken in previous years of the increased charges the Parish Council makes for its halls and sports pitches to bring them into line with comparative facilities within our parish and neighbouring areas. However in doing this we do not wish to undermine the great work done for our community by making our halls unaffordable to local organisations. Through our grants program the Parish Council supports those organisations and we will be presenting grant cheques and free booking vouchers to many organisations later this evening. I would like to highlight just a couple of the organisations that provide such a valuable service to our community and which the Council will be supporting with grants in 2008/9. Firstly, Abbots Langley Citizens Advice Service who do so much good work supporting people when they need a little bit of help or advice. The Parish Council will be providing them with a new computer. Secondly, the Arc Community Church runs a non denominational drop in project for 12 to 16 year olds from a converted ambulance two days a week. The Parish Council has agreed to contribute £1,400, which is half the salary for an additional youth worker to work a third day a week. These are vital projects that work with the more vulnerable people in our community. By using the grants application process, the Parish Council can target its resources precisely to these and other groups where support will be most beneficial and is most required.

My thanks go to Caroline Byrne our Finance Officer for her diligent work in keeping our books straight and our bills paid and also our wider team who often work miracles with the very bare minimum of resources so that we can keep the council tax to affordable limits and provide a good service.

Mr Chairman, I will hand back to you to take questions from the floor and to award the Financial Grants, following this I will return to launch the Parish Council's new website.

**3. Financial Grants**  
**(Councillor Owen Roe)**

Grant cheques and certificates were be awarded to the following organisations, under the powers granted to the Parish Council in the Local Government Act 1972.

St Pauls Church Langleybury  
St Lawrence's Church  
Lions Club of Watford  
Royal British Legion  
Abbots Langley Women's Institute

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Royal Air Forces Association  
Abbots Langley Gardening Society  
Evers Club  
Abbots Langley Fairtrade Steering Group  
Watford & Hemel Hempstead Coeliac Group  
Abbots Youth Football Club  
Citizens Advice Service in Three Rivers  
National Childbirth Trust  
The Ark Community Church  
Abbots Langley Cricket Club  
Langleybury Cricket Club

**4. Launch of the Parish Council's Website  
(Councillor Keith Williams)**

Mr Chairman, it is my pleasure to launch the Parish Council's web site and as an administrative item this falls on my committee.

For many years it has been the source of embarrassment to me that one of the largest Parish Councils did not have a web site, especially when I went around the county with my former hat on as Chairman of the Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils and met some very small Parish Councils, who had very good sites.

I am very pleased that through the efforts of Tim and Dave, and their wider teams, that tonight, at long last Abbots Langley Parish Council will not just be joining them, but I suggest surpassing them by having what I consider to be one of the best Parish Council web sites not just in Hertfordshire but in the whole country.

The website contains a depth of information on the official side of Parish Council business, with details of its meetings, committees and how to contact your local Councillor and Council staff. Email is very much the communication tool of today and as such the Council will be encouraging communication with both Councillors and staff through our recently introduced personal email addresses, details of which you will find on the website.

You will also find comprehensive information on our venues, such as Manor House where we are now and the other venues that the Parish Council operate. There is also information on our allotments, playing fields and sports facilities.

I commend it to you all. I hope and expect that you will find it a valuable resource.

Our web address is [www.abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk](http://www.abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk).