

Abbots Langley Parish Council



Annual Report 2008 / 2009

Presented at the Annual Parish Meeting held on 1st
April 2009 at The Manor House, Abbots Langley.

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1. Parish Council Chairman's Report
Councillor Miss Ivy Young - Chairman of the Parish Council

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Annual Parish Meeting and thank you for coming.

As you will receive reports from Chairmen of the relevant Committees within Full Council, I do not intend to put forward precise details of issues within their domain.

My term of office has not only included many Council meetings that have taken place but attendance at various diverse events such as open days, fetes, concerts, forums, prize giving, our renowned Carnival, the Carol Concert and Remembrance Services in Abbots Langley, Bedmond and Langleybury.

It has been gratifying to know that all volunteers of many organisations continue to encourage unity within our Parish. As at this moment in time we have maintained our village outlook and I hope this will be sustained for many years.

I take this opportunity to thank our Clerk Tim Perkins, all the Administrative staff, the Facilities Manager, Community Warden and Works Team who care for and maintain our open spaces, halls and other tasks.

And finally I thank all my fellow Councillors for their support and especially all of you for caring about the Parish by being here this evening.

2a. Planning & Highways Committee Report
Councillor Mike Morton - Chairman of the Planning and Highways Committee

Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen, my name is Michael Morton and I have been the Chairman of the Parish Council Planning and Highways Committee for the past year.

Much of our time, as you would expect, is spent considering planning applications affecting the Parish on which we make comments and recommendations to the District Council, who are the planning authority.

We like to consider ourselves to be the hardest working of the Council's committees because we meet twice a month every month of the year and we also send a member to the Three Rivers District Council's Development Control Committee each month. However, this boast has taken a bit of a knock this year since new planning rules came into force from 1st October 2008. Under these new rules many more extensions and additions to homes are considered to be "permitted development", which means they do not need planning permission. This has meant that the committee now has probably only half of the number of planning applications to consider compared with before the change, maybe only 6 or 7 per meeting.

The applications that are left tend to be more contentious ones concerning, for instance, development in the green belt, of which there is still a great deal in the Parish, comparatively large extensions to houses, proposals to build new dwellings in what might be considered inappropriate place, high walls, garage conversions and so on.

The main larger developments started or proposed in the Parish in the last year have been the redevelopment of Hillside Hall, which will include a new hall with 10 flats above, the refurbishment of the Community Centre, and the redevelopment of Gade View Gardens.

We have recently been consulted on the Three Rivers Local Development Framework which aims to plan for the development of the District in the 20 years between 2001 and 2021. It takes into account the number of dwellings imposed on the district by central government, i.e. 4,000 in total. We consider this number to be far too high but the District Council has no choice in the matter. Fortunately a large proportion of this figure has already been built, and you will not be surprised to hear that Abbots Langley Parish has been by far the main contributor. The Local Development Framework has already attained a certain amount of notoriety because it has identified places where it considers the remainder of the 4,000 dwellings may be built, even though many of these places are in private hands and the owners have not been consulted. Three Rivers explains that it has been necessary to identify possible places so that it can

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appear to be achieving its target. If it did not meet the target, even if it is only in theory, then central government would impose its own choice of places which would probably be even less acceptable. We await developments, so to speak.

The Committee has also been busy in the area of highways, but it is local residents who deserve praise for their work in regard to roads C76 and C77, better known to you and me as Primrose Hill - Station Road, etc, and the Bedmond Road. Each of these roads has had a pressure group working their socks off to try to improve safety and I have to pay tribute to them here because, by and large, they have achieved their objectives. The C76 Residents Group has persuaded Herts Highways to open its purse to undertake a number of measures between Red Lion Lane and Home Park Link Road, whilst the CHRASH group are still negotiating with Herts Highways for safety measures in the Bedmond Road. We have a lot to thank them for.

We ourselves had a meeting with the Arriva bus company in order to express the dissatisfaction of residents with the number 6 bus service. I am pleased to report that there has been a marked improvement in the service in the last year. We were also worried by traffic speeds through the centre of Abbots Langley village and along Toms Lane. You may have noticed the black rubber strips put across Toms Lane and the entrance to the village recording numbers and speeds of vehicles. Our hope is that the centre of the village will eventually have a 20 mph speed limit.

Related to highways matters are the maintenance of the bus shelters that the Parish Council owns and the maintenance of some hedgerows, including the one in the Compasses Footpath which is causing us some concern at present. We are consulted when new roads need to be named and we try to suggest names that will have a local meaning but we are not always successful.

Other matters that have passed through the committee included planned closures of post offices in Hertfordshire, fortunately none in the Parish, proposed changes to airspace usage around the airports, on which no final decisions have yet been made, details of the redevelopment around Watford General Hospital, 3 Valleys consultation on their Water Resources Management Plan, and improvements to the Leavesden Country Park, including, I'm pleased to see, an "Older Persons" Play Park.

We expect the coming year to be just as busy as usual and local residents are always welcome to attend our meetings. Meetings dates are shown on the Parish Council website.

Finally I would like to thank the members of my committee for their support during the year, especially Leon Lay, the vice-chairman, who has stood-in for me when I have been absent, and on behalf of the committee I would like to express our special thanks to Ann, the committee's planning officer, whose knowledge, expertise and advice have guided us unerringly through the twists and turns of planning rules.

2b. Leisure Committee

Councillor Sara Bedford - Chairman of the Leisure Committee

Introduction

This year seems to have been a little calmer for the committee. With the support of the Clerk and staff we are now seeing the benefits of some of the previous years of work. However Leisure continues to be a busy committee; the highest spending committee, but also the greatest revenue earner.

Play Areas

This year, the Parish Council are installing a new play area at Lemonfield Drive. The Parish Council are investing £22,000, supported by an equal grant from Three Rivers.

Every year, all play areas in the Parish have a safety check and minor repairs are carried out to ensure the equipment can continue to be used. We hope to refurbish further play areas on a rolling basis in coming years.

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Halls

After the successful renovation of the Henderson Hall toilets last year, the refurbishments have continued with the installation of an interval bar. The hall will be decorated later this year and the Trustees are also looking to improve the stage facilities.

The rebuilding of Hillside Hall has unfortunately been delayed due to contractual negotiations. It is hoped that the work will start on site soon.

2008 saw another successful Abbots Langley Festival of the Arts. The council leader and I met with ALPA committee members to see what assistance the Parish Council could give to their activities and how to ensure the future success of the Festival.

Open Spaces

The Council continues to work with local clubs, improve the quality of our sports pitches and to look for possible sites for new pitches to support the growing need, particularly for young people.

We are currently supporting Abbots Langley Cricket Club in establishing new pitch at Bedmond.

A Tree Audit has been carried out to assess the work needed on trees in the Parish and this is now being followed through. We are always looking for opportunities to plant trees within the Parish and would be delighted if residents would like to plant a tree, whether in memory of a loved one or as a sponsorship

We continue 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 looking at a range of steps that can be taken to prevent this where it affects our own users.

Allotments

Our allotments continue to be popular, with a waiting list for plots. We have accelerated the process for issuing notices to quit to those allotment holders who are not cultivating their plots. This is fair to those who are waiting for a plot and also for other plot holders, who may suffer from a nearby weed-strewn plot.

We have changed the system for the allotment prize giving, so that an allotment holder with two half plots will be judged as if they were one, therefore allowing a greater range of growing to be shown. This was a suggestion of the allotment representatives to make the judging process fairer.

A new water system has been installed at the Manor House allotments, with the help of plot holders. The council is looking to improve security at all three sites, again with the support and assistance of the plot holders.

Users Groups

The Users Groups for Halls and Sports both met in late autumn. The Allotment Forum had to be postponed due to staff sickness, but will meet soon. The forums continue to be very useful to the Council and I would encourage users to attend and put forward their views.

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 given their time and expertise to inform our discussions. I would particularly like to thank Mrs Chris Driscoll, who has stepped down as Chair of the Henderson Hall Trustees after many years of service to that body.

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2c. Finance & Administration Committee

Councillor Keith Williams - Chairman of the Finance and Administration Committee

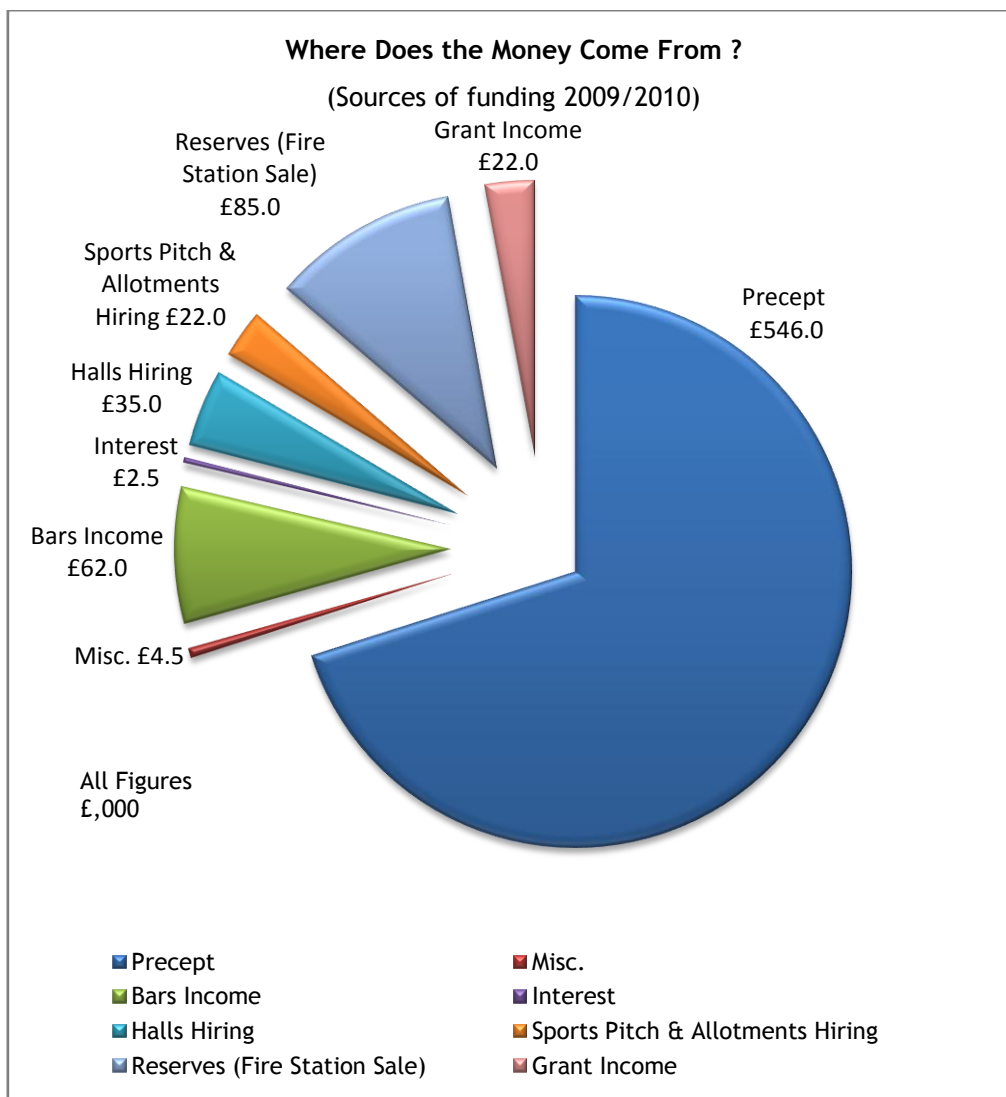
The remit of the Finance and Administration Committee includes strategic monitoring of the Council's finances, budget and investments together with overseeing the effective use of the Council's assets and other administrative matters.

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 reported elsewhere and in terms of its budgeted expenditure.

The financial year 2008/2009 ended yesterday 31st March, whilst final figures will not be available for a few weeks, the Finance and Administration Committee has monitored budgetary performance throughout the year and expect the final results to be in line with our agreed and published budget.

Looking forward to the financial year that starts today. The Parish Council's budget for 2009/10 is £778,885. The Council is budgeting for an income of £149,000 from grants and trading, the balance comes from reserves and £546,000 is raised through the precept, which is collected in Council Tax bills on behalf of the Parish Council by Three Rivers District Council.

The Parish precept in 2009/10 amounts to £66.80 for a Band D property. The Chart below details where the Parish Council's funds will come from:



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Parish Councils do not receive any income from Government Grants, nor any income from local businesses through their business rates - the only income Parish Councils receive is from the domestic Council Tax and trading activities.

Two factors have strongly influenced the Council's financial position over the last year.

Firstly, as reported in previous years, the Parish Council continues its program of renewing and modernising systems, facilities and upgrading plant. The Parish Council is making budgetary provision for improvements to its halls; playing fields and play areas as well as the day-to-day operation of those facilities, which will be reflected in the report from the Leisure Committee. As an employer funds must also be found not only for the remuneration of our paid staff, but also to provide them with safe and modern working conditions, further details of which can be found in the report of the Staffing Committee.

The Parish Council welcomes the modernisation that is going on at the Community Centre at present. This is long overdue and we congratulate the stalwart band of fundraisers who have worked for well over a decade raising money to bring this vital local facility up to date. In the coming year the grant of £25,000 promised by the Parish Council in 1996 to support the Community Centre will be paid.

Secondly, like everyone, the Parish Council has been affected by the credit crunch. The Council's costs have gone up, especially with regards to insurance and energy, but also basics like loam for the playing fields and paint to spruce up the swings and slides; but like Parishioners the interest we expect from our reserves which supports our expenditure has gone down. However, I am pleased to report that unlike some Council's locally, the Parish Council did not have any investments with Icelandic banks, so whilst the interest has gone down, our reserves are secure.

The tight financial year led to an increase in requests for grant aid from local organisations. I am pleased that the Parish Council has been able to keep its grants budget in 2009/10 at the same level as last year. The total requests for grants was in excess of £19,000 and some organisations will have been disappointed that the Council had to scale back their request, or not make a grant at all. Those decisions, which were very tough and fully considered, were made because of economic realities and the Parish Council is very appreciative of the great contribution that all voluntary and non-statutory organisations make to the welfare and recreation for the population of Abbots Langley.

The following organisations will receive financial support from the Council's grants program in 2009/10:-

- **St Paul's Church Langleybury** - £2000 for the purpose of maintaining the churchyard.
- **St Lawrence's Church** - £2750 for the purpose of maintaining the churchyard.
- **St Lawrence's Church** - £2500 for the purpose of resurfacing two footpaths within the church grounds - this is part of an ongoing program between the Church and Parish Council over several years to up improve these well used footpaths.
- **Lions Club of Watford** - £2000 for the purpose of the Abbots Langley Carnival and Firework Display.
- **Abbots Langley Cricket Club** - £500 for the purpose of maintaining the cricket square.
- **Langleybury Cricket Club** - £500 for the purpose of maintaining the cricket square.
- **Royal British Legion (Abbots Langley branch)** - £250 for the purpose of subsidising their hall hire costs so our local Veterans can meet.
- **Royal Air Forces Association (Abbots Langley branch)** - £250 for the purpose of subsidising their hall hire costs.
- **Bedmond Women's Institute** - £200 for the purpose of subsidising their hall hire costs.
- **Abbots Langley Women's Institute** - £200 for the purpose of subsidising their hall hire costs.
- **Abbots Langley Players** - £300 for the purpose of meeting production costs.
- **Abbots Youth Football Club** - £500 for the purpose of subsidising their pitch hire costs.
- **Abbots Langley Local History Society** - £50 for the purpose of publishing a local history booklet.

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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. I am also grateful for the work and wise counsel of members of the Finance and Administration committee through very difficult financial year.

2d. Staffing Committee

Councillor Ms. Belinda Phipps - Chairman of the Staffing Committee

The Parish Council's Staffing Committee does not have regular meetings, it normally meets twice a year on an "as required" basis, to review matters related to the staff that the Parish Council employs.

This year the Staffing Committee has met twice, agreeing new Contracts of Employment and a Staff Handbook, both of these were required to bring the staff's employment terms in line with current legislation and national agreements.

In addition the committee reviewed staffing policies and this year these have included Health & Safety, Inclement Weather and working hours.

Addendum to Annual Report

Finance & Administration Committee

Councillor Keith Williams - Chairman of the Finance and Administration Committee

The Parish Council is aware that some Parishioners have requested an explanation why the Financial Information provided by Three Rivers District Council with Council Tax demands shows an increase in net expenditure on Administration of £101,095.

The two largest increases in the administration budget are:-

Admin staff wages and salaries; which increased from £122,110 to £137,140. (£15,040). This is accounted for by nationally agreed pay settlements which ALPC is contractually obliged to pay plus increases in Pension costs and Employers National Insurance, which are prescribed by Government.

Improvements to Freehold Estates, which is a new non-recurring expenditure item of £85,000. This is made up of the capital receipt from the sale of the Old Fire Station and under current local government financial rules must be used on capital expenditure to improve remaining Council assets.

Whilst formal decisions on the use of this money have yet to be made by the Council, Councillors are considering spending this money on refurbishments to the Council Depot, Offices and Parish Council run car parks.

The full Parish Council budget for 2009/10 is available at the Annual Parish Meeting for Parishioners

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