

Abbots Bromley Parish Council



Annual Report

June 2006

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Introduction

The annual report

The purpose of this annual report is to make freely available information about the work of the Parish Council and other community organisations. The Council hopes that you will find the information useful and understandable.

This report aims to bring together in one place key details about the activities of the Parish Council in a manner recommended as good practice by the government for Quality Councils.

Summary to all homes

A summary of this annual report from the Parish Council is to be included in the June 2006 ***Bromley Bulletin*** distributed to all households in the parish.

Also available on-line

An electronic copy of this report is available on the village web pages where you can view it or print your own copy. Our web pages are at **www.abbotsbromley.com** and you will find the report in the Parish Council section under "Documents".

Council Members and Officer

Council Members

Philip Charles 840251 **CHAIRMAN**
Poplar Farm, Bromley Hurst, Abbots Bromley, WS15 3AY

Clive Cook 840928
Churchfields House, Bagot Street, Abbots Bromley, WS15 3DB

David Eatough 840061 **VICE CHAIRMAN**
Newsagent, Uttoxeter Road, Abbots Bromley, WS15 3EQ

Alan Elkington 841011
Fairview, Ashbrook Lane, Abbots Bromley, WS15 3DW

Bob Esling 840778
Town End Farm, Lichfield Road, Abbots Bromley, WS15 3DL

Linda Fox 840315
Coleshill Lodge, Lichfield Road, Abbots Bromley, WS15 3DN

Roger Jarman 840678
Wheelwright House, Bagot Street, Abbots Bromley, WS15 3DB

Kate McLoughlin 840409
16 St Nicholas Way, Abbots Bromley, WS15 3EB

Jean Needham 840481
Rose Cottage, Lichfield Road, Abbots Bromley, WS15 3DN

Officer

Eric Roy 840153
31 Goose Lane, Abbots Bromley, WS15 3DE
Email: parish.council@abbotsbromley.com

Working Groups and Representatives

Working Groups

The Chairman and Vice Chairman are entitled to serve, ex officio, on all groups

Working group	Member(s)
Competitions	Cllrs Elkington, Needham
Finance	Cllrs Elkington, Fox
Newsletter	Cllrs Fox, McLoughlin
Recreation	Cllrs Cook, McLoughlin, Needham
Rural Housing	(Inactive at present)
Traffic & Parking	Cllrs Cook, Fox, Jarman
Village Property	Cllrs Elkington, Jarman

Representatives

Representative	Member(s)
Finance	Cllr Fox
RCFS Governor	Cllr Eatough
United Charities	Cllrs Charles, Cook
Village Hall	Cllr Cook
Vital Villages	Cllr Elkington
Millennium Green	Cllr Cook
Almshouses	Chairman—ex officio
RISES	Cllr Fox
First Responders	Cllrs McLoughlin

**Reports to the Annual Parish Assembly
Wednesday, 10 May, 2006 at 7.30 pm
in the Village Hall, Abbots Bromley**

Introduction: This year as a trial, the Parish Assembly will take a different form from previous years, replacing the numerous verbal reports with a written statement and giving most of the time to a guest speaker. This document contains the reports submitted in advance of the assembly, and on which questions may be asked during the open forum.

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Parish Council Financial Statement
Notes from the Parish Assembly

Omissions: The following were also given the opportunity to provide input to this report, but had not taken up the offer at the time this issue was produced:

- Inspector A Mason, Staffordshire Police

Issue - Date: 2.0 – 18 May 2006

Changes: From issue 1.0 to 2.0:

- Addition of report from Borough Councillor Alex Fox
- Addition of report from Bernard Grundy, United Charities
- Notes from the Parish Assembly

1. Chairman's report on Parish Council business by Philip Charles

Some key aspects of the work of the Council in the past year:

During the year we have been consulted on 58 planning applications (compared to 73 in the previous year). These varied from tree pruning to a proposal for eight new houses on a site in Ashbrook Lane (subsequently withdrawn). A further application expected for the wind farm has not materialised, and the Parish Council currently has no indication of whether one will be made in the future.

Last year I reported that one of the more controversial applications had been for the redevelopment of the land at Ivy House. Although the Parish Council was content to support the change of use from light industrial to allow development of new homes on that site, the schemes submitted by the developer were not considered appropriate for the location. Rejection of the plans by East Staffordshire Borough Council was followed by an appeal to the Secretary of State, but In January the Inspector appointed to investigate, upheld their decision.

The village is fortunate to have many groups of dedicated volunteers who help make our community work. During the last 12 months the Council has been pleased to recognise and support their efforts with grants. In particular, the Council was able to support the Under 5s Project Playground with £8,000 towards equipment, the village hall with a grant of £2,400 towards the cost of improving access Community First Responders with £1,000 towards new equipment.

Anyone who has lived in the area for some time will have been aware of numerous accidents at the turn into Newton Hurst Lane (often referred to as the "Newton Turn"). In conjunction with Blithfield Parish Council we have been unsuccessful in negotiating with the County Council for improvements. After several years of trying, we have now resorted to assisting Blithfield in a local initiative to re-align the hedge which will improve visibility for traffic making the turn into the lane.

Speed through the village continues to be a major concern for many residents and I would like to put on record my thanks to the other volunteer members of the Community Speedwatch team who have given up their time in the last 12 months to support this helpful initiative. Others willing to be involved could contact Clive Cook to offer their services.

Last year I reported that our application for "Quality Council" status had been lodged. In June last year the Council were delighted to be told that this had been awarded. Abbots Bromley were the first Council in East Staffordshire to achieve this status and only the seventh in the whole of Staffordshire. Apart from the recognition this brings, we hope to see further benefits in the future with increased access to funding and more effective partnerships with other local authorities.

Our bi-monthly Saturday morning surgeries at 10am in Church House have continued to provide regular access to Councillors. These have created a useful additional means of communication.

Last year was a major milestone in the Best Kept Village competition when it reached the fiftieth year. This made our win as the Best Kept Village in East Staffordshire all the more significant. After some discussion, it was decided to use the £100 prize money from Tarmac to plant a commemorative tree on the village green. As this gains stature, it is hoped that it will serve as the basis for the village Christmas lights.

The play area at the Millennium Green is subject to a rigorous schedule of inspections to help ensure the equipment is maintained to a high level and safe to use. During the last year items which came up have been addressed by the Council to and these included some safety modifications to the equipment and a major expenditure on new bark.

As we look to the future, the Council has been made aware of essential water main replacement work planned for the main street this summer. This will inevitably cause disruption to residents and through traffic, but may provide some temporary respite from speeding vehicles.

Assuming that John Prescott does not delay the elections in May 2007, the present Parish Council is now entering the final year in office and would like to advise residents who have an interest in the future of their community that they will have an opportunity to stand for election next year. Anyone interested in finding out more about what this would entail, can contact the parish clerk.

2. Clerk's report on Parish Council finances by Eric Roy

The Parish Council finances are managed in accordance with a set of Financial Regulations available for inspection in the Parish Council section of the village web pages. This includes the employment of an independent internal auditor who visits twice each year to review the Council books and transactions in line with the national recommendations on the conduct of council finance. At the end of each year an annual report, internal auditor's report and supplementary information are submitted to the Audit Commission who perform an external audit.

Financial statements are attached as an appendix to these reports and will form the basis for the annual report of the Council. Where considered necessary and helpful, additional notes are included in those statements.

Current best practice for management of Council finance recommends that reserves not earmarked for specific projects should normally be maintained at around 20% of annual expenditure unless there are exceptional circumstances. Noting this, the Parish Council has taken steps to reduce the level of reserves and significant grants to the Village Hall, Community First Responders and Under 5s Project have aided this objective. This has resulted in an excess of expenditure over income amounting to over £7,300 in the year just ended.

Over £8,000 of reserves is currently designated as a "Recreation fund" and the Council expects to retain a significant portion of this against the eventual cost of replacing equipment on the Millennium Green when it reaches the end of its life.

3. Village Hall report by Mike King (Chairman of the Management Committee)

2005 was a further challenging year for our hardworking and dedicated committee and trustees. The matching of revenues and expenditure proved difficult as we all recognized the need to continue to provide funds for the future to cover known long term costs of repairs and maintenance.

As Chairman I would like to thank those who maintain and support our "200 Club", together with our Secretary Mike Green and Treasurer Peter Smith, who throughout the year have given much time and effort to our cause.

The quality of the fixtures and fittings within the Hall have to be maintained to the high standard we seek to achieve. The whole village should thank our caretaker Geraldine Sweeting for her continued dedication to offer all those who hire this facility a clean and pleasant Hall to use and enjoy.

Premises Licence

Our Government introduced new legislation this year in the form of Premises Licencing.

It goes without saying that whilst most people recognize that something needed to be done to control binge drinking in town centres, but to force this legislation on Rural Communities and Village Halls was totally unnecessary.

Very little thought had been given to its effect and the information available was, at best, confusing. Local Authorities did their best to interpret the legislation as it applied to Village Halls and this left your committee in some doubt as to the best action to take.

The provision for us to use "TENS" (Temporary Event Notices) were too restrictive and a full licence seemed 'over the top'. The need to appoint a Premises Supervisor who was suitably qualified also proved to be a barrier, as finding someone to take on that additional responsibility on a voluntary basis is onerous.

The Committee, however, agreed to apply for a "Premises Licence" and to meet all the obligations that that implied. The application was not cheap (£475.00 in total), but it does enable us to approve the sale of alcohol at events held in the Hall without the need of the hirers to apply for an individual licence. A charge to cover our annual cost is made, but this is the same as an individual application and will save the hirer time and inconvenience

Mike King became the Premises Supervisor, having completed the necessary course and taken the appropriate examination.

The Access Drive

The deteriorating quality of the access drive to the Hall has been the subject of much debate and criticism. The committee decided that precious funds should be used to improve this. We are most grateful for the local contributions, but in particular from East Staffordshire Borough Council (£5000), Staffordshire County Council Local Members Initiative Scheme (£1000),

Abbots Bromley Parish Council (£2400) towards the total cost of £12,036. We are all pleased with the result.

Our Annual Accounts (available separately)

Income at £15,486.74 was slightly up on 2004, but so were our costs (£14,517.23) but there were some exceptional items in the year (i.e. Premises Licence, water, gas and electricity charge corrections).

The net gain from normal activities was £969 with additional monies coming from interest on our sinking fund, increasing our profit for the year to £1587.00.

The contribution to the drive, however, from Hall funds amounted to £2386.00, leaving us with a deficit of just under £800 for the year ending December 2005.

2006

In order for the Hall to cover its cost revenues will have to improve. We have, however, decided that our charges will basically remain the same as 2005 with some minor changes on certain items.

We would thank all those who have or will use this Village Amenity and look forward to your continued support throughout another challenging year.

4. Abbots Bromley Community First Responders report by Colin Palmer

This report covers our first full year of operation.

Our volunteers have continued to respond to ambulance service 999 calls throughout the period.

Our availability stands at virtually 100% thanks to the dedication of our group members.

ABCFR is available 24 hrs per day, 7 days per week, and to date we have answered 422 emergency calls in most of the villages and towns in our part of East Staffordshire.

Our active responders effectively stand at 12. We have lost two members and gained two during the year.

Our vehicle has been reliable save for two periods of unavailability for repairs.

We maintained our service with the aid of the Staffordshire Ambulance Service, who were able to lend us vehicles for those periods.

Financially the group remains solvent, with help from fundraising which has included "Race Nights", football matches, and the selling of raffle tickets.

Other groups within the village have contributed to our charity when fund raising for their own efforts.

We have received continued support from Abbots Bromley Parish Council and from Uttoxeter Plus.

We have had several contributions from patients whom we have attended during our duties.

We received a grant during the period for the purchase of a LUCAS mechanical CPR device from the Lottery "Awards for All" scheme.

Possible future expenditures may include the acquisition of an electronic aided despatching system and eventually the replacement of our vehicle.

Currently we await the outcome of the proposed Staffordshire Ambulance Regionalisation proposals to see what effect this will have on our group and its operation.

We thank the Parish Council for support during the year and for their support in opposing the reorganisation scheme, which we generally feel could lead to a reduction in our effectiveness and in placing the lives of people in our area in greater jeopardy than needs be.

5. Community Transport report by Len Ferguson

Demand for transport during the financial year has been steady, with the majority of journeys being made to Queen's Hospital, Burton upon Trent, and to Lichfield and Stafford.

Other destinations have included Rugeley, Uttoxeter, Yoxall and Cannock, and once again we have been pleased to assist Staffs Association for the Welfare of the Blind with regular monthly runs to Uttoxeter for their meetings.

The scheme has again been able to boast nine drivers, but ill-health has limited the availability of some on occasions.

Rising insurance costs for Employer's Liability cover has proved a considerable problem this year and whilst our County Council grant has been fixed for the past two years at £450, insurance has now exceeded £250 of this sum. Added to this, the majority of hospital trips have been single journeys, resulting in less return from fare-paying passengers.

Consequently for the first time in many years, the budget has been exceeded by more than £80.

David Thompson is now operating as co-ordinator with effect from the beginning of April. His telephone number is 07767 877439.

6. Richard Clarke First School report by John Hough

Here is a brief summary of key facts, events and issues of the past 12 months.

Financial: The budget for 2006/2007 is about £375,000, of which £293,000 is staff-related costs. The respective amounts for 2005/2006 were £353,000 and £280,000.

This budget is finely balanced and we do not have any unallocated funds. We do, however, make appropriate use of the RCFS Endowment Fund – as we are obliged to do under Charity Commission regulations. This is not reflected in our budget, nor is the significant contribution from our very active PTFA. We also supplement our income by fund-raising and sponsorship, lettings etc. There are major changes planned in the way that schools are funded from central and local government, and this places more emphasis on the role and responsibilities of governors in managing the finances of schools.

Number of Pupils: The number of pupils on our roll varies widely from year to year, and it is this which determines our funding. In 1998 our number on roll was 145; in 2000 this had fallen to 123; and for 2001/2002 it fell to 107.

The current number on the roll is 118, but the forecasts suggest that this could fall over the next few years, maybe to as low as 105. The loss or gain of a few pupils can have a major effect on the financial comfort of the school.

We still take nearly 40% of our children from outside the catchment area, and without these we would have to change the class structure. These pupils are so important to the school, and we have completely re-designed our web site as part of our marketing effort to attract more children from further afield.

Class Sizes and Staffing: We are generally pleased with the class sizes and delighted with the teachers that we now have at Richard Clarke First School. However, when we have a small intake in a particular year, the effect will stay with us for five years. For example, we currently have a year cohort of 15 passing through the school when we have a notional class size limit of 30. We shall also continue to provide the best classroom support for our pupils, even if funding this places a strain on the budget.

Premises: We are working through the recommendations of the strangely named Tribal Audit on the various school buildings. Fortunately, the cost of satisfying the urgent needs could be met from our existing budget, but some of the projected ones look daunting. Visitors to Schoolhouse Lane will have seen scaffolding around the older part of the school during half-term when the roof had to be made safe. I should stress that this was a planned activity and not an emergency action.

Leadership: Our new head-teacher, Sharon Kelly, has now been in post for over a year and has already had a very significant effect. Richard Clarke First School was a very good school when she arrived, and it has continued to improve. She has an excellent deputy in Kay Hanson, and the whole teaching and support team are performing brilliantly.

On-going activities

Workforce Remodelling: We are making progress in satisfying this major government initiative, designed to remove administrative and supervisory tasks from teachers to give them non-contact time for planning and managing. This has been funded so far from within existing budgets but should lead to a better learning experience for the children and a better work-life balance for the teachers.

Improving Standards: Our recent Performance and Assessment Report (PANDA) placed RCFS pupils "well above the national median for their group" in Reading, Writing and Mathematics. Nonetheless, we are targeting reading and writing for even more improvement. We have had two OFSTED inspections so far. The first was very good; the second was even better. Inevitably, we ask ourselves how can we improve even further? There is a feeling that the next OFSTED could happen at any time. The process has been changed so that the school receives very little notice, but the nature is different insofar as OFSTED base their inspection on a snap audit of the school's self-assessment.

School Self-Review: Parents' Questionnaire: We conducted our annual survey of parents' views and received double our usual response. I think that this was a strong vote of confidence in our new head-teacher, Sharon Kelly.

Here is a summary of the results. Parents are asked to agree or disagree with each of 12 statements about the school.

<i>Statement</i>	<i>% Agree</i>
My child likes school	98.4%
My child is making good progress at school	96.7%
Behaviour in the school is good	98.3%
My child gets the right amount of homework	77.8%
The teaching is good	98.3%
I am kept well-informed about my child's progress	88.7%
I feel comfortable approaching the school with a question or problem	96.8%
The school expects my child to work hard to achieve his or her best	91.7%
The school works closely with parents	86.9%
The school is well led and managed	96.6%
The school is helping my child to become mature and responsible	98.4%
The school provides an interesting range of after-school activities	98.2%

Note: Each individual response is worth 1.6%.

I will skip over the excellent ratings and mention the invariably difficult issue of homework. The parents who disagreed uniformly divided into the 'too much' and 'too little' camps. The other slightly problematical areas relate to communication and closer work with parents. We continue to address all of these issues, but it is difficult to get the balance right for everyone.

Review of Primary Education in Staffordshire

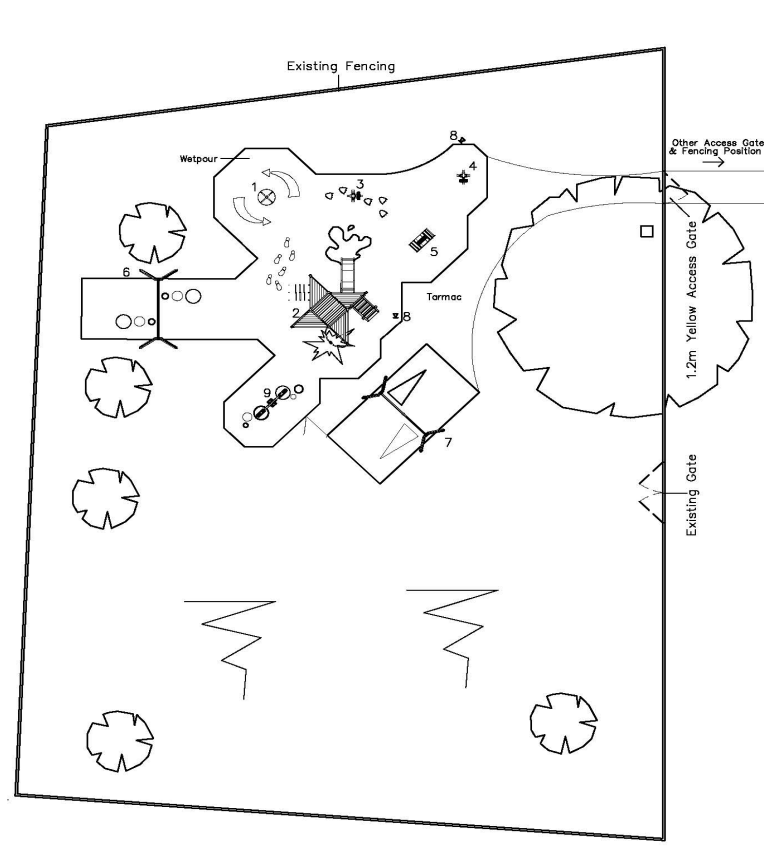
The study into the structure of primary education in Staffordshire has suggested that the three-tier system should come to an end but, as far as we know, there are insufficient funds available to implement the change – yet. We would be very disappointed if RCFS did not emerge with a stronger role in primary education in East Staffordshire. An earlier study aimed at reducing the number of primary places on offer in East Staffordshire was completed, and our school comfortably came through it unscathed.

7. Under 5s Project Playground by Steve Coxon

To date we have completed the formal part of our fund raising, which culminated towards the end of 2005 by agreeing contractual terms with the Staffordshire Environmental Fund (SEF). The main focus is now on delivering the installation of the project and addressing problems arising.

Product Key

1. Carousel
2. Finno Activity Tower
3. Duck Springer
4. Horse Springer
(For future installation)
5. Petal
6. Flat Seat Swing
7. Huck/Cradle Seat Swing
8. Chatter Talk Tubes
9. Grasshopper



Support and Expertise

In progressing the installation works we agreed that there was a need to engage a level of support and expertise, particularly in the formal procurement process. This is largely because

we have no legal standing as a project group and no formal contractual terms and conditions to support the usual procurement processes. As a result we approached the Parish Council in January and agreed a level of support to help deliver the final stages of the project. The Parish Council will procure the main element of the goods and services, this will provide a number of benefits:

- Equipment being procured under a formal, auditable process, with associated safe-guards and checks
- Warranty issues linking directly back to the final asset owner – i.e. the PC
- Ability to recover the VAT element and hence reduce the overall project costs

To date the Parish Council have placed an order for the equipment and delivery has been received into bonded store for installation at a date to be agreed. Work is in progress to formalise terms and conditions for the civil works and an installation date will be agreed – hopefully to commence within the next two months – subject to availability of the contractor.

Setbacks...

We had originally planned to initiate civil works in March/April, but various problems with the initial civil contractor, including communication, agreement of technical detail, etc. have led us to review our position. We considered our options, concluding that progression under the current conditions would be significantly detrimental to the project and immediate community and have subsequently taken the decision to utilise an alternative supplier. This has meant a major review of finances and additional work to determine a satisfactory way forward.

Finances

With a review of costs, taking into consideration the issues above, we are confident that the main element of the project can still be delivered, but this is subject to a number of conditions and we are taking a cautionary approach to ensure that we do not over-commit expenditure.

With progress made to date and with the help and support of the Parish Council, we have been able to meet conditions imposed by the one of our main funding bodies and committed the necessary expenditure to successfully recover costs before the end of the 2005/2006 financial year.

8. Village Action Plan update by Eric Roy

The “Abbots Bromley Parish Action Plan” was published in 2004 and identified fourteen actions grouped into eight key issues. This was the main output from the detailed questionnaire survey carried out the previous year and reflected the major priorities of the 57% of residents who participated in the survey. Anyone wishing to discover more or remind themselves can access all the key information on the village web pages at www.abbotsbromley.com/vv.

While many people were willing to say what they would like changed, fewer were ready to invest their time and effort in helping to bring about these changes. So progress on these fourteen actions has been patchy, and this report attempts to summarise briefly the current state of play on each of them.

Action 1 (Transport)

To improve bus timetabling and information about buses

Some work has been done to bring together bus timetables from different sources but has stalled at the point where this needs to be converted into a common format so that it can be distributed to homes in the parish and published on the web pages and bus stops.

Action 2 (Transport)

Discuss with local taxi/minibus companies possibilities of improving service or setting up new services particularly for the elderly and young at look at Community Buses

No activity yet – *volunteers required to pick up this action.*

Action 3 (Village environment)

Improve the village environment

Five possible improvements were listed and so far work has only been carried out on one of these to work with ESBC in attempting to reduce the incidence of dog fouling. *Volunteers are required to pick up the other improvements in this action.*

Action 4 (Village environment)

Create a Village Design Statement and have it adopted as supplementary planning guidance

A team have been working on this since early 2005 and engaged with others in the community who were interested in contributing. The resulting Design Statement is now with ESBC for consideration by Cabinet and should be starting the process of inclusion into the new Local Development Framework. Once accepted by Cabinet as a valid "planning statement" it is intended that a printed copy be provided to each home. The Design Statement and many supporting documents are available on the village web pages at www.abbotsbromley.com/vds.

Action 5 (Village facilities)

Develop village facilities

Four possible improvements were listed and so far work has been carried out on none of these. *Volunteers are required to pick up this action.*

Action 6 (Village facilities)

Update tourism guide including a village recording scheme

Two possible initiatives were listed and so far no work has been carried out on either of these. *Volunteers are required to pick up this action.*

Action 7 (Village facilities)

Promote village businesses

Five options were listed and so far no work has been carried out on any of these. *Volunteers are required to pick up this action.*

Action 8 (Village facilities)

Enhance visitor/tourist facilities

Three possible improvements were listed and some work has been carried out on all of these. Trial opening of tearooms in Church House on Saturday afternoons was conducted in 2005. This attracted too little support from local organisations to provide the manning and few customers. A review of signs identified the lack of adequate signage at the bottom of the village hall drive and a co-operative project supported by the affected organisations and ESBC resulted in the provision of a new sign. The toilets at the Goat were closed when the present landlord was unable to continue servicing them. The cost to residents of providing a good quality alternative is currently considered by the Parish Council to be too high to be a practical proposition.

Action 9 (Communication)

Improve village communication

Five options were listed and so far no work has been carried out on any of these. *Volunteers are required to pick up this action.*

Action 10 (Young people's facilities)

Develop activities for young people

Of the three options listed only one has so far been followed up and this is the development of the Under 5s play area dealt with elsewhere in this report. No work has been carried out on the other two. *Volunteers are required to pick up the rest of this action.*

Action 11 (Elderly and disabled)

Develop facilities for the Elderly/Disabled

Three options were listed and so far no work has been carried out on any of these. *Volunteers are required to pick up this action.*

Action 12 (Health and community)

Develop community based help

Six options were listed and so far no work has been carried out on any of these other than the development of the Community First Responder scheme covered elsewhere in this report. *Volunteers are required to pick up the remaining initiatives in this action.*

Action 13 (Traffic management)

See solution to speeding through village

Two options were listed and so far little work has been carried out on either of these. *Volunteers are required to pick up the remaining initiatives in this action.*

Action 14 (Traffic management)

Improve pedestrian safety

An option to lobby for a pedestrian crossing by the Bagot Arms was proposed but so far no work has been carried to advance this. *Volunteers are required to pick up this initiative.*

Conclusion

While the Vital Villages initiative was successful in identifying the key issues and proposing solutions, many of the potential benefits that could have accrued from this have not been achieved due to lack of volunteers to pursue all the proposed initiatives. There is a real

danger that the momentum created in the early stages of Vital Villages is dissipating, and the opportunities offered by the Action Plan will be lost.

The overall programme has been supported by Village Agents - Paul Sweetman in the survey stage and Penny Ward during the early part of 2005 - but depends heavily on local people to take initiative.

With financial and organisational support on offer from:

- The Vital Villages Steering Group
- Village Agent
- Parish Council
- East Staffordshire Borough Council

an environment was created in which much could have been achieved. A lot of this potential still exists, and those willing to take action on some of these challenging initiatives would find a high level of support for their activity. In many cases the amount of effort required to achieve progress is relatively small, and just needs one or two people willing to take some initiative and get the relevant organisations working on our behalf.

9. Staffordshire County Councillor's report from Philip Atkins

Uttoxeter Rural Division Annual Report May 2006

After last May's election the County Council had 32 Labour, 28 Conservatives and 2 Liberals with only some 260 votes deciding 3 Labour seats. I remain Conservative Group Leader and have announced a Shadow Cabinet which has been recognised by the Council. I am on the Combined Fire and Rescue Authority, Resources Scrutiny Panel and the Pensions Panel.

A lot has happened in the last year with budget overspends soon apparent and the Corporate Performance Assessment in December only awarding 2 stars, a fair authority.

The Council Tax, which forms some 85% of your bill, has risen this year by 4.94%, but at a cost of £19 million to balance the books, including a £7.5 million raid on reserves. There are further reserve raids of £3 million a year planned for the next two years.

This financial situation cannot continue. Schools are funded directly now by the Direct Schools Grant, which includes what the government thought the schools should have with the £11 million the County gave in addition, school reserves stand around £30 million and cannot be touched by the Council.

The numbers of children in looked after care has risen to nearly 670 at an annual cost of over £40 million. Our fostering payments are half our regional comparators. Only now is the Council looking at preventing children going into care.

We continue to run our own Adult Residential Care Homes when most authorities have put them in the private sector. The cost of Care in the Community continues to rise.

Highways maintenance needs £7 million to stand still. They have £6 million this year. Still money is haemorrhaging out of the Council and only now are strict measures coming into place to control budgets and procurement. All recruitment has ceased and several reviews are taking place.

To change the direction and culture of the County Council takes time and 12 major projects have now started, to name the ones with the largest impact:

The Service Review – a review of the relative priority of all services which will evaluate impact, efficiency and benchmark information and make recommendations,

Organisation Review – a review of management structures to introduce a more effective set-up taking account of future demands,

Customer First - the programme which will improve access to the Council and its services and joining-up of customer contact with all other Staffordshire public services,

Job evaluation / pay implementation – this involves the evaluation of all posts and is devising a new pay model and costs are spiralling upward

Local Area Agreement – a formal agreement between the Council, its partners and central Government departments, aimed at improving service delivery through seamless partnership working, are all evolving reviews.

The reason we have arrived at this situation is because of weak leadership, poor performance management and bad budgetary control. I have said that my colleagues will do all in our power to bring the Council back on course but reserve the right to criticise when and where appropriate. Staffordshire County Council does do some good work and could do even better.

Locally last years my Local Members Initiative Funds went to:

Staffordshire Buddies	£250
Mayfield & Ellastone Community First Responders	£3,000
Denstone Youth Fund	£2,000
Abbots Bromley Village Hall	£1,000
South Staffs Healthcare Trust Sensory Garden	£100
Rocester Memorial Playing Field	£1,000
Rocester Parish Council –Vital Villages	£450
Leigh Recreational Ground	£1,000

I tried to have £700 allocated to Newton Hurst turn improvements which could not go ahead and the £700 has been allocated to this year. I have already put forward some £5,200 of this year's £10,000 for local schemes.

I have been active in trying to stop the Staffordshire Ambulance Service and the Staffordshire Police regional mergers on grounds of local service. I have also voiced my concerns on services effect from the NHS PCT mergers.

This is a snapshot of the next few months' decisions by Labour's Cabinet at their meetings in April, May, June and July 2006:

- Charging Policy for Looked after Children
- County Council Fee Remission Policy for Adult Learners
- Integrated approach to the development of future Extended School and Children's Centre services
- Amendment to Contract Standing Orders/Procurement Process Review/Sub delegation arrangements
- Amendments to County Council Early Retirement Policy to reflect calculation of Added Years for employees with part-time service.

- Local Area Agreement 2007-2010
- Countywide Community Strategy ('Shaping the Future of Staffordshire')
- Best Value Performance Plan 2006-2007
- Older People Strategy Update
- Medium Term Financial Strategy 2007/08 – 2009/10
- Fourth Quarter Performance and Budget Monitoring Report
- Changes to the Supporting People Charging Policy
- Home to School Transport Policy
- First Quarter 2006/07 Performance and Budget Monitoring Report

The next couple of months will see a major change in the County Council with charges for some services and service cuts. There is at last a freeze on recruitment, although special cases are sprouting everywhere! The facts are Staffordshire county council is the second biggest Local Authority employer per head of population after Derbyshire. Job losses are inevitable.

10. Borough Councillor's report by Alex Fox

A. WARD ACTIVITIES

I have been very pleased to support and where possible take an active part in the Vital Villages scheme, which was launched two years ago with a grant from the Countryside Agency and support from ESBC. The survey completed by 60% of the village identified several areas for attention. I am pleased that many of these have been dealt with. I would particularly like to thank the small group who devoted a great deal of time and care to producing the Village Design Statement, which we hope will be used by the Planners to guide future developments in Abbots Bromley.

The Vital Villages programme has now more or less run out of steam. Funding has been obtained from Staffordshire County Council and my own WASP fund to run a second phase. I hope shortly a decision will be made to continue, albeit in a slightly different direction.

I am particularly pleased to report that the ESBC Community Spirit Fund (a fund of £100,000 set up in 2004/5 to support community activity) has given grants to a number of village organisations. Significant sums of money have been given to the Village Hall Trustees towards resurfacing the drive; the Bowls Clubs benefited substantially towards their new pavilion; and the new playground group also received a sizeable grant for the School House Lane project.

The Borough completed a Housing Need Survey for the village. 683 questionnaires were sent out and 148 were returned. I would be very pleased to provide a copy of the results for anyone who is interested. The conclusions are not very clear. There is no great demand for affordable housing, but there is a small group, of households who either need some affordable housing now or in the not too distant future. It is also interesting to note that of those who sent back the forms 24% work in the village.

The Government Inspector published his report on the Borough's Local Plan. The main findings are that ESBC cannot give planning permission for any further housing estates of more than nine houses. Even small developments are subject to a total windfall allowance of 175 houses covering all of East Staffordshire. The village boundary has been extended by the Inspector. It now includes the field with its entrance off Swan Lane and running east of Richard Clarke School. Also all of the rear garden behind Bromley House, Uttoxeter Road. Residents should note that the Inspector has made it clear that any housing development must meet current planning standards and in the current climate it is unlikely that planning permission would be given for these areas.

The Borough has continued to increase the recycling of household and garden refuse. Most houses are now included in the Brown Bin Scheme and this is working very well indeed. It is very unfortunate that a few outlying properties are not included, but the cost of collection has outweighed the advantages. Council bosses are looking at this to see if there is a way of including these in the collections. Bulky waste disposal facilities have also been improved so that it is now much easier to get rid of that old three piece suite or other large unwanted items by telephoning the Environmental Department.

B. BOROUGH WIDE ACTIVITIES THAT IMPACT ABBOTS BROMLEY

At Borough level a great deal of work has been put into reducing the Council's operating costs and trying to improve efficiency. Certainly Abbots Bromley has benefited from this with the ESBC portion of the Council Tax this year going up by 1.5% - the lowest increase for eight years.

Overall 13% more waste has been recycled. By 2020 no waste can be sent to landfill. By 2011 councils will be heavily penalised if more than the tonnage quota which will by then have been established, is exceeded. ESBC is playing an active part in finding how best a solution can be found and have been responsible for obtaining a £100,000 grant from DEFRA to investigate this whole area.

A concerted effort is being put into making the environment cleaner. Abbots Bromley benefits from an increase in visits from the mobile street cleaner and you may have noticed that some town areas are looking just a little bit smarter.

There has been a concerted effort with the police to tackle anti-social behaviour, as best we can in the current climate. Our joint efforts have led to a 34% reduction in anti-social behaviour. Some crimes in Abbots Bromley have risen and this is a slightly worrying statistic. Fortunately the number is small, but it needs to be watched nonetheless.

Following the election last year, the Government made it compulsory to offer free bus passes to senior citizens for travel within the district. ESBC have enhanced this by extending the free travel throughout the county. So far some 11,000 passes have been distributed. Whilst I welcome this concession, I am concerned that the rural community cannot fully benefit from this scheme due to very poor bus services. The other concern is that council tax will have to rise by quite a great deal to pay for this extended scheme if it proves increasingly popular in the urban areas.

The rejuvenation of Uttoxeter is now well under way and if you visit the town regularly you will start to see a number of changes. The station has been smartened up, Churchill

retirement homes are being built on the Angus McKinnon site and Taylor Woodrow has started to demolish the old cattle market building. A planning application has been submitted for this site and new houses should be available by December. By the end of May work on improving the town centre will have begun and once finished, the Friday market will relocate onto the improved traditional Market Place.

The first edition of the new ESBC newspaper was distributed to every house in April. The Council are responsible for ensuring, along with other agencies that residents are informed about public services. It is impossible to communicate affectively where there is no single local paper covering the area. Abbots Bromley fairs badly in the respect. The newspaper has been funded from internal savings and it will carry advertisements for job vacancies. Apart from the ESBC, the Police, Fire Service, Primary Care Trust, Queen's Hospital and the County Council are all partners in this venture and will contribute regularly to its columns.

11. Abbots Bromley United Charities report by Bernard Grundy

REPORT OF YEAR'S WORK 2005

The Trustees have met three times during the year.

The annual distribution took place on 9th December when 63 parishioners received a monetary gift, and the Trustees also agreed to a request for financial help for a special case involving a severely disabled resident of the Parish.

These gifts were paid out of the income of the Charities Investment Fund, and were in keeping with the aims and objects of the Charities.

Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly
held on Wednesday, 10 May, 2006 at 7.30 p.m.
in the Village Hall, Abbots Bromley, pursuant to notice having been given

Present:

Councillors: PJ Charles (Chairman), C Cook, DT Eatough, RT Esling, A Elkington, L Fox, RSV Jarman, KA McLoughlin, J Needham

Residents: D Thompson, L Ferguson, E Ferguson, P Roy, E Brown, S Wilson, J Alexander, J Alexander, J Latchford, J Latchford, K Jones, K Webb, V Webb, B Grundy, A Blower, L Williams, F Shutler, J Shutler, R Aitkenhead, J Knight, D Latchford, I Coxon, E Palmer, C Ronald, J Beard, K Mann, S Mann, M Shaw, J Hough, A Burrows, D Beard, J Latchford, C Brown, S Coxon, S Harvey, M Green, K Goodbody, M Tonking, S Davis, B Price, C Price, E Lampard

Guests: Borough Councillor Alex Fox, Mr J Carnell (South Staffs Water), County Councillor Philip Atkins, P Massey (Blithfield), M Smith (Blithfield), G Smith (Blithfield), P Nelson (Newton), P Atkins (Newton), S Hulme (Admaston),

Apologies:

Mr and Mrs Biggs, Mrs K Cadman, Mr King, Mrs Williams (Bowls Club)

The Clerk, Mr EA Roy was also in attendance

1. Chairman's welcome

The Chairman welcomed all present to the 2006 Annual Parish Assembly.

2. Presentation of the Jubilee Cup

The Chairman explained that Mr King was unable to be present to receive a certificate commemorating his award of the Jubilee Cup in 2005 but that this would be presented to him on a suitable occasion.

The Chairman in presenting the Jubilee Cup to Len Ferguson outlined many of his contributions to the community over several years including Parish Council, Richard Clarke First School and Community Transport.

In receiving the cup, Len explained that he had found his involvement in the community activities some of the most rewarding parts of his life. Working with others who were supportive and dedicated had made the tasks a pleasure and he thanked them for that. He went to say that his time co-ordinating Community Transport had brought him into contact with many in the village who would otherwise not have met and his life was richer as a result. He ended by introducing David Thompson who had recently taken over responsibility for Community Transport.

3. Accounts of United Charities

The accounts of United Charities were presented by Mr Grundy and were signed by the Chairman of the meeting.

4. Mr Jack Carnell

The Chairman introduced and welcomed Mr Carnell, the Managing Director of South Staffordshire Water, and invited him to address the meeting.

Mr Carnell introduced his talk entitled "Working for a Better Blithfield" by providing some background and suggesting that there were opportunities to improve many aspects of the site. Although there were still no definite plans, he would outline some of the issues and possibilities and would welcome feedback and other suggestions.

One of the key businesses on the site was the Angling Club - supplied by the fish farm. These were both in limbo pending the development of a clear forward plan that could take the club forward on a sound footing.

The sailing club is more successful and looks set to continue.

Blithfield might be a support (rather than primary) venue for the triathlon of the forthcoming UK Olympics.

Despite the presence of the angling and sailing clubs, there is little access by the public and currently nothing for them to come to. The possibility of developing shops and restaurant - with access that is safe and separate from fishing and sailing hazards - is one that needs further consideration. The aim is mainly to extend access rather than to develop commercial businesses. However, such access will always be subsidiary to the main business of supplying water. This type of development is likely to need subsidising especially in the early years.

An existing facility for small businesses at Stansley Wood is significantly underused, and may need to be re-engineered for other uses such as extending educational facilities.

He outlined a number of options, and said that there was a desire to appoint a senior full-time manager of the Blithfield estate. This person will develop a business plan and, after review, be responsible for moving this forward. The aim will be to invite participation in this process from the various stakeholders including the angling club, sailing club and local people. The buy-back of the angling club by South Staffordshire Water will be put into effect around the end of September.

There were various comments including:

- Infrastructure: This needs to be updated to support any new development and a modest solution may be effective. Major expenditure on infrastructure was out of the question as the aim was to enhance amenities not to build a business.
- Visitor numbers: At present it was not possible to predict numbers but it would be in hundreds rather than thousands. If access improvement turns out not to be possible, then the plans cannot go ahead.
- Rubbish: There is an issue with plastic bags blowing onto neighbouring land that would be exacerbated by more visitors. As these seem to come from the sailing club, the issue needs to be taken up with them.
- Focus: Recognising the continuing predominance of angling in the future plans seems to continue the elitist emphasis and does not address the issues that limit access for the bulk of local people.
- Wildlife: Noted that the importance of the site to wildlife needs to be maintained. Keeping that in mind would be a key constraint on future plans.
- Signs: Noted that the existing signing does not make it clear which areas have public access and a modest investment could help to maximise use of what already exists.
- Security: For those who live adjacent to the reservoir, there may be issues of security with increased visitor access and the presence of anglers using potentially hazardous equipment.

- Board: Could the management board include local representatives? Given the high number of stakeholders, it may be difficult to include everyone who would like to participate.
- Residential development: Has not been considered and Mr Carnell does not personally think it would be appropriate.
- Mains replacement: Mr Carnell was unable to provide any information.
- Buoys: The lines across the reservoir hold barley straw that plays a key role in reducing the build up of algae.
- Plans: A request for proposals to be displayed in the village might be possible although the main focal point of the consultation process would need to focus on the Council. It would be impossible to please everyone, but the plans would be based on consultation.
- Timescales: These are unpredictable due to the number of people who may wish to contribute – if a consensus builds quickly then it could be sooner, but if there are diverse or opposing opinions the process will necessarily be longer.

The Chairman thanked Mr Carnell for his contribution.

5. Open forum

The Chairman invited questions from the meeting on any topics relevant to the parish:

- Sculpture at the bottom of the village hall drive – an issue for the Village Hall Committee.
- Noted that the time given for the reports was not enough.
- Parking continues to be an issue with cars obstructing the pavement especially at the corner of the Goat where this forces footpath users into the road. Could a line be applied to the surface to control parking?
- The possibility of moving the bus stop from the Butter Cross to in front of the Almshouses was discussed but considered to be impractical due to the shortage of resident parking there.
- A brief outline of the plans for water main replacement was given – it was noted that this was long overdue.

6. Chairman's Closing Remarks

In closing the meeting, the Chairman thanked all those who had contributed written reports and invited those present to stay and chat over some light refreshments.

The meeting was brought to a formal conclusion at 20:32 pm.

Chairman

Date:

Abbots Bromley Parish Council

Financial Report 2005/2006

Prepared by: *Eric A Roy*

Eric Roy
(Responsible Financial Officer)

Date: 20 April 2005

This financial report was approved by the Council at their meeting on 26 April 2006

Chairman: *Philip J Charles*

Date: 26 April 2005

Abbots Bromley Parish Council General Fund - 2005/2006

	Last year actual £	This year budget £	This year actual £	Next year budget £	Notes
Balance brought forward	10951.76		13734.37		
Income					
Precept	17800.00	18200.00	18200.00	18800.00	
Interest	377.10	333.00	388.48	337.50	
Allotments	55.00	65.00	65.00	100.00	
Grants received	950.00	0.00	871.44	0.00	[1]
Devolved maintenance	510.00	0.00	225.00	0.00	
Horn Dance trader licences	224.00	100.00	275.00	100.00	
Total Income	19916.10	18698.00	20024.92	19337.50	
Expenditure					
Clerk salary/expenses	3549.85	3930.00	5858.37	5930.00	[2]
Insurance	996.31	1096.00	1054.51	1500.00	[3]
Audit fee	330.00	330.00	330.00	330.00	
SPCA/SLCC membership	383.00	400.00	422.00	435.00	
Local Council Review	39.00	41.00	42.00	43.00	
Stationery	59.30	130.00	110.29	160.00	
Travel expenses	0.00	100.00	0.00	100.00	
Training/books	296.31	350.00	55.50	175.00	
Hire of hall	141.00	290.00	352.00	345.00	
Newsletter	87.75	99.00	75.50	106.00	
Miscellaneous expenditure	171.54	800.00	1059.11	675.00	[4]
Devolved maintenance	585.00	0.00	350.00	0.00	
Footpaths	0.00	0.00	1022.40	0.00	
Speed reduction	1000.00	2000.00	130.00	2000.00	
Grass cutting	1440.00	1484.00	1523.20	1569.00	
Other village maintenance	431.00	750.00	3583.72	1500.00	[5]
Millennium Green	0.00	609.00	0.00	250.00	
Grant towards Under 5s	0.00	0.00	800.00	0.00	
Church floodlighting	32.60	412.00	0.00	600.00	
Floodlight repairs/maintenance	0.00	170.00	231.84	168.00	
Churchyard maintenance	726.00	752.00	752.00	775.00	
Church clock maintenance	100.00	100.00	100.00	120.00	
Village Hall - loan repayment	3322.54	3322.54	3322.54	3322.54	
Section 137 (see below)	3871.95	3699.00	3855.19	3715.00	
Net VAT - Outflow/(Inflow)	(429.66)	0.00	2,323.14	(2,374.31)	
Total Expenditure	17133.49	20864.54	27353.31	21444.23	
Surplus/(Deficit)	2,782.61	(2,166.54)	(7,328.39)	(2,106.73)	
Balance carried forward	13734.37	11567.83	6405.98	4299.25	

Notes regarding General Fund

General Fund balance held as follows at 31 March 2006:

Lloyds TSB current account	579.66
Lloyds TSB deposit account	11607.35
Less funds held for Recreation	(1,215.73)
Less funds held for Bagot Ward Vital Villages	(4,565.30)
Total	6405.98

Explanatory notes (refers to numbers on General Fund statement)

- 1 Includes grant of £500 towards village maps from ESBC
- 2 A new national agreement increasing both working hours and salary for the Clerk has been implemented by the Council, resulting in a major deviation from budget in the past year
- 3 An increased budget for insurance is to provide for extra cover needed for the Under 5s play area
- 4 Includes £840 cost of new village maps (£500 of which funded by ESBC)
- 5 Includes grant of £2400 towards resurfacing of the Village Hall drive

S.137 Payments

Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) enables the council to spend up to £5.30 per elector for the benefit of people in the area on activities/projects not specifically authorised by any other powers.

The limit for the year 2005/6 was $(1345 \times 5.30) = £7128$

Payments were made for the following purposes:

Grant for village agent salary/expenses	1444.00
Grant to Community First Responders	1000.00
Grant to Donna Louise Trust	500.00
Grant to County Air Ambulance	200.00
Grants to St Giles (inc £20 for certificate by K Cadman)	520.00
Grant to Village Design Statement	54.00
Quality Council award ceremony refreshments	7.19
Subscription to CPRE	25.00
Best Kept Village competition	75.00
AB Royal British Legion (remembrance day wreath)	30.00
Total	3855.19

Publicity

Section 5 of the Local Government Act 1986 requires the council to disclose payments on publicity. Payments were made during the year for the following purposes:

Bromley Bulletin newsletter	75.50
Total	75.50

Abbots Bromley Parish Council Recreation Fund - 2005/2006

Balance brought forward	13320.30
Income	
ESBC grant for Under 5s	5000.00
Grant to Under 5s from general fund	800.00
RISES grant to Under 5s	300.00
Bank interest	400.15
Cricket Club loan repayment	1000.00
Expenditure	
Under 5s equipment	12540.00
Bark top up*	140.00
Replacement swing seats	62.00
Surplus/(Deficit)	(5,241.85)
Balance carried forward	8078.45

* A second bark top up costing £687.50, was paid for from the General Fund

The Recreation Fund balance was held as follows at 31 March 2006:

Lloyds TSB savings account*	6862.72
In general fund accounts	1215.73
Total	8078.45

* During the year, two other deposit accounts were closed to retrieve funds needed for Under 5s

Bagot Ward Vital Villages Fund - 2005/2006

Balance brought forward	2902.60
Income	
East Staffs Borough Council	1600.00
Abbots Bromley PC	1444.00
Expenditure	
Agent salary/expenses	1094.30
Hall hire	265.75
Postage	11.82
Other expenses	9.43
Surplus/(Deficit)	1,662.70
Balance carried forward	4565.30

Abbots Bromley RISES Fund - 2005/2006

Balance brought forward	0.00
Income	
Recycling payment - Oct-Mar	376.69
Recycling payment - Apr-Sep	341.44
Grants made by RISES committee	
Abbots Bromley PCC	376.69
Project Playground	300.00
Tree for green	41.44
Surplus/(Deficit)	-
Balance carried forward	0.00
