

ANTROBUS PARISH COUNCIL
CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2009/10

As always the Parish Council's work in the last 12 months has provided a varied mixture:

- Formalities and finance
- Consultations and controversy
- Potholes, planning and playgrounds

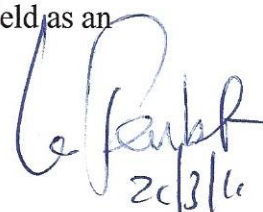
And the start of some exciting new projects, coupled with the winding up of some long running issues.

As regards the formalities we began the year with the disappearance of the Vale Royal Borough Council and Cheshire County Council, to be replaced on 1 April 2009 with the new unitary authority – Cheshire West and Chester (CWAC). This was closely followed by the commencement of the Electoral Boundary Review in Cheshire, with some minor changes proposed to our Marbury ward. These local government changes prompted some revisions to the Parish Council's own Standing Orders. As part of our preparations for re-accreditation as a Quality Parish Council we also undertook a complete review of the Council's Risk Assessment documentation.

Whilst the Council's finances remain sound we are very aware of the increasing financial pressures we are likely to face as the expected squeeze on local government expenditure starts to bite. The annual Precept of £8,428 set for the coming year reflects those pressures, as we expect some of our basic costs to rise whilst at the same time small rural parishes like Antrobus may well bear the brunt of cuts in areas such as highway maintenance, grass cutting and similar services provided by CWAC. However, the increased Precept amounts to less than £1.00 per annum for a Band D dwelling and we hope to be able to hold this figure for 2 years, as we have done in the past. Over the course of the last year the Parish Council has approved a grant to St Mark's Church as a contribution to the upkeep of the churchyard, and made grants of £50 each to the Friendship Club, and to the Village Hall Committee to assist with the purchase of new Christmas tree lights in the village centre.

The Parish Council is a statutory or recommended consultee body for many local and regional matters. This year the Council has been consulted on numerous planning applications affecting the village and on wider issues such as the regional waste strategy, transportation, open space and recreation, highways maintenance and gypsy and traveller sites. Individual Parish Councillors invest considerable time and energy in getting to grips with the mass of paperwork generated by these consultations, and the preparation of responses on behalf of the parish. In its turn the Parish Council also consults with its parishioners on matters of local importance, with open meetings held this year on several specific planning applications and the Wincham Incinerator proposal. Parishioners have been encouraged to address the Council on various topics and Councillors also had the benefit of a visit by our local Police Inspector to discuss local policing issues. Councillors keep in touch with different sections of the Antrobus community, sitting on groups such as the Village Hall Committee, the Antrobus Charity, the Parish Plan and the newly formed Youth Group.

Controversy in Antrobus is usually connected with planning, and this year was no exception. The proposal to develop part of the former Stretton Airfield as an


20/3/10

Autodrome provoked considerable local outcry and a sustained campaign by objectors. This application was ultimately refused by all 3 planning authorities involved but we may yet see a similar but smaller scale application for this site. The use of the grass airstrip at Fairbank Farm continues to cause concern, with local residents eventually commissioning their own aviation safety report. A third application, co-incidentally in the same part of the parish, relating to the construction of buildings at Hatton Farm, also generated much discussion linked to the apparent development of this site as a regional, recreational attraction. Parish Councillors have attended public meetings and taken on board the views of parishioners when considering these and other applications. The Parish Council is also expected to play a role in planning enforcement but yet again progress has been slow – the Council had hoped to see an improvement (with the greater resources available to CWAC) but so far this has failed to materialise.

Potholes, or the reporting and monitoring of highway repairs in the parish, featured on the agenda of every Council meeting in the last year. Poor quality, patchwork repairs often mean the same potholes re-occur time and time again. The severe weather in December and January exacerbated the situation but the Parish Council has to accept this is a county-wide, indeed national, problem and “A” roads and other key traffic routes will be given priority at the expense of our rural lanes. Looking beyond potholes the Parish Council has been involved in other highways matters such as the parking problems at St Mark’s School and, on a positive note, the installation of the new speed calming measures at the so-called “village gateways”. Another positive development, albeit a return to the subject of potholes, has been CWAC’s introduction of the “Report a Pothole” internet site which enables residents to report these direct, and which in some cases seems to produce swift results.

The children’s playground on the Village Hall field is the responsibility of the Parish Council, and was refurbished in April 2009 via a community service scheme. A number of small repairs have been carried out on the equipment over the last year, and regular safety checks are made by Parish Councillors in addition to the formal inspections. The facility is well used and fortunately incidents of vandalism remain rare, but the Council recognises that the equipment is now of an age where repairs and replacements must be anticipated and this has been allowed for in our budget.

New projects include the Youth Group, which has held two events, and which we hope to see develop into a formally constituted organisation involving adults and young persons throughout Antrobus. Parish Councillors have also taken part in several meetings aimed at identifying additional uses for the local church, so as to help preserve this important building for the village. The current proposal, whereby part of the church might be used as an environmental resource centre linked to the work of the famous local naturalist A.W Boyd, appears to be well supported and will no doubt entail further input from the Parish Council in the coming year. On a much smaller scale the Parish Council is currently acquiring the decommissioned red telephone box in the village centre for community use. Our new Communications Working Group has been busy reviewing how the Council communicates with our parishioners and also produced the very handy “Antrobus Quick Reference” directory distributed to all parishioners in February this year.



Handwritten signature of G. P. and date 21/3/11


Some long running matters were hopefully concluded this year, with the refusal of planning permission for the proposed rendering facility at Thellow Heath Farm. In December the owners' appeal relating to the use of Senna Green Farm as a rendering plant was also refused, so that the Planning Enforcement Notice, issued by the former Vale Royal BC, should now take effect resulting in the cessation of this unauthorised activity by the summer.

Other events of note, in no particular order, have included the award of a "Little Gem" certificate for the Village Centre in the Calor Community Pride competition, the Parish Council outing to the Lowry Gallery in October, the organisation of the annual village Litter Pick and the representation of the Parish Council in both the Fete procession and the Remembrance Day service. This Parish Council year concluded with the Chairman's charity event, a "Jitterbug Ball", which raised just over £2000 for "Help for Heroes" and two local charities.

But no annual report for 2009/2010 would be complete without a mention of benches, which with the playground and some road signs comprise the Council's only material assets. This year saw the installation of a new bench by the local Rotary Club in memory of John Corlett, the refurbishment of an existing bench which will soon be installed in the churchyard and the transfer of responsibility to the Village Hall Committee of a third bench, sited on the Village Hall field.

So once again, it has been a busy year for the Parish Council. My thanks to all my fellow Parish Councillors and our Clerk for their hard work and commitment, and the different but valuable contributions they each make to the business of the Council.

Deborah Hodd
Chairman
March 2010


20/3/10