

## ABBOTS MORTON PARISH.

### Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held in Abbots Morton Village Hall on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2008 at 7.17 p.m.

<p><b>Present:</b> Mr. C. Holt (Chairman), Mrs. N. Holland, Clerk to the Parish Council, Mr. Rob Mace, Community Outreach Officer from Wychavon District Council, PC Tony Carter and 23 parishioners.</p>
<p>1. <b>Welcome</b> – the Chairman of the Parish Council, Mr. Holt, welcomed everyone to the meeting. The Chairman thanked Mrs. Brewster for providing the refreshments.</p>
<p>2. <b>Apologies:</b> Dist. Cllrs. Mrs. Steel and Mr. Lee, Mr. M. Smith, Mrs. P. Ansell, Mrs. Dunstone, Mrs. Burton, Mr. Duck, Mr. Budd and Mrs. Payne.</p>
<p>3. <b>Minutes:</b> The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on the 17<sup>th</sup> April 2007 were proposed, seconded and agreed to be an accurate record.</p>
<p>4. <b>Matters Arising:</b> Nil.</p>
<p>5. <b>Chairman of the Parish Council:</b> Cllr. Mr. Holt gave the following report. For the first time in 24 years, elections took place last May for the Parish Council. There were 11 candidates for the 7 places on the Council and out of the 7 elected, three were new councillors. I am pleased to report that after the traumas and difficulties of the previous two years, the Council has had a positive and productive 12 months. The new Code of Conduct was adopted last September. The Parish Clerk in the person of Nicky Holland was re-employed on a permanent basis last November. I really must pay tribute to the excellent standard of her work. There is no question that the Parish Council could not function effectively without a Clerk of her calibre. The Council has met 6 times since the elections and responded as statutory consultee to 10 planning applications. Councillors have discussed and pursued a number of local issues including:- <u>FLOODING AND ROAD AND DITCH MAINTENANCE.</u> The Council employs a Lengthsman, funded by the County Council, to carry out routine repairs. Cllr Don Humphries met with the Lengthsman and the County Highways engineer following which the drainage system has been jetted and ditches cleared. <u>VILLAGE GREEN.</u> It has now been established that Wychavon District Council are the owners and negotiations are being pursued to have the ownership transferred to the Parish Council subject to payment of legal costs involved. <u>TRAFFIC AND SPEEDING PROBLEMS AT MORTON SPIRT.</u> The Council is having protracted correspondence with the Accident Studies Officer at the County Council, trying to get the imposition of a cautionary 25mph speed limit at this location. <u>WOODFIELD, MORTON SPIRT.</u> The Council is concerned that unauthorised commercial and industrial activities are taking place here and the Planning Enforcement Officer at Wychavon has been asked to investigate and institute enforcement proceedings if necessary. <u>HOUSING NEEDS SURVEY</u> This will be carried out later this year. <u>REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY AND JOINT CORE STRATEGY (Wychavon, Worcester City and Malvern Hills)</u> These are being closely monitored to ensure that we have early warning of any adverse impact locally. Cllr. Derek Spooner recently attended a workshop on the subject and reported back to the Council. Finally may I thank my fellow Councillors, Margaret Brewster, Angela Eason, David Ernest, Don Humphries, Lynne Pemberton and Derek Spooner for the unstinting and unpaid time and effort they devote to serving all residents in Abbots Morton. Can I now call on Cllr. David Ernest, to outline the review of the Working Party report and the action plans of the Parish Plan.</p>
<p>6. <b>Working Party.</b> Cllr. Mr. Ernest reported that the Working Party group convened two years ago to look at the future of the Parish Council. The three main points looked at were whether the Parish Council should a) wind up b) merge and c) continue. This highlighted many issues which resulted in several recommendations being made to the Council. The Parish Council reviewed those recommendations in March 2008 and the report was as follows: <u>1a) Limit the number of Council meetings to 4.</u> It was agreed that in order for the Council to run efficiently that bi-monthly meetings would continue. <u>1b) Meetings should be brief and come to the point in order to limit them to no longer than 2 hours.</u> It was agreed that meeting times have improved; the Chairman does his best to ensure that the meetings are finished within two hours. <u>1c) Sub-committees should be eliminated.</u> There is only one Committee which relates to Staffing, and this was considered to be essential. <u>1d) Discuss ways of minimising paper flow from Wychavon District Council and Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils (CALC).</u> Wychavon District Council – it is difficult for the District Council to be aware of items that interest smaller Parish Councils as</p>

each have different views. The paperwork amount has diminished. Worcestershire CALC – much of this is now sent electronically. This is then disseminated to members who can then decide if anything is relevant for an agenda item.

1e) Eliminate training costs of the Clerk and Councillors.

It was agreed that the Councillor training this year was essential as three new members had joined the Council. They found the sessions to be of great benefit. It also allows for discussion and networking with members from other Councils, which was found to be informative. It is anticipated that training costs will be reduced.

With the 'Power of Well Being' paper due to be released by the Government in the near future, and the review of Quality Parish Status requirements, there is a possibility that regulations will be introduced requiring Councillors and the Clerk to attend accredited training sessions. If Councillors have not attended training then do they have the knowledge and awareness to carry out the role effectively? It could be argued that training should be in place to avoid Public Liability Insurance issues.

The Clerk should regularly attend training sessions to continue to acquire the necessary professional knowledge required for the efficient management of the affairs of the Council.

As the Clerk also works for two other Parish Councils payment of these sessions is shared between the three.

2. Maximise income by seeking revenue other than the precept.

The following grants have been received this financial year:

Parish Lengthsman scheme.

Training Bursary scheme.

Litter Bursary which has benefited the Village Hall and Churchyard.

Relief of the risk of flooding to properties in the Parish.

Parish Paths Improvement scheme (P3).

3. Engage with neighbouring Councils.

If relevant this would be done. It was felt that it would be a good idea to foster Chairman and Vice Chairman contacts with neighbouring Councils.

4. Address all issues highlighted in the Parish Plan.

a) Maintenance of the Churchyard – at present the Council applies for the Litter bursary to which the Church Council receives £250 towards the maintenance.

b) Playground for Children – this had not been addressed.

c) Maintenance of Rights of Way – P3 scheme continues which is a yearly grant to maintain the footpath network.

d) Refuse Collection and Recycling – glass collection is now in place.

e) Roads and Transport – maintenance of highways monitored frequently with the Parish Lengthsman. The problem of parking in the village was mentioned in a Newsletter. Reduction of speed at Morton Spirt is at present on going. Gritting of roads has been initiated.

f) Police and Neighbourhood Watch – contact details are in the Parish Notice Board, mentioned in Newsletters, and are on the Parish website.

g) Email communication – Parish website in place. A Parish Council website is to be funded by Worcestershire County Council. A pilot scheme is in process, the next meeting is in April.

Q. It was asked if the money for training was from a bursary.

A. Yes, from DEFRA through Worcestershire CALC.

It was put to the meeting that the progress of the Working Party recommendations was satisfactory and that an independent review would not be required. Proposed: Mr. Burton seconded Mrs. Brewster and agreed by all present.

**7. Summary of accounts.** The Clerk to the Parish Council presented the draft accounts of the financial year ending 31.03.08. A copy can be obtained from the Clerk.

**8. Presentation of the Parish Plan certificate.** Mr. Holt presented to Mrs. Dykes, Mr. Carew-Cox and Mr. Nick Humphries the certificate and thanked them for all their hard work in producing the Parish Plan, including those members absent, Mrs. Dunstone and Mr. Smith.

**9. Mr. Rob Mace**, Community Outreach Officer, from Wychavon District Council gave an excellent presentation on services available from the District Council highlighting the forthcoming changes for Waste and Recycling services. He was thanked for attending.

**10. PC Tony Carter** – introduced himself to the meeting. He has been a Police Officer for 6 years and has worked in the Worcestershire area. He is based at Droitwich and covers 80 square miles which includes 12 Parish Councils and 7 schools. Kayley Perkins, Community Support Officer has now left to join the Police Force. Appointed in her place is Jennah Douglas. Tony can be contacted on 0845 777 888 as PC 3591 Ext. 3330. Concerns for rural policing are:

Dumping of rubbish – the Police are working closely with Wychavon District Council to try and control this problem. Enforcement is now the responsibility of the District Council.

Vehicles – if a suspicious vehicle is seen please record the number plate and let PC Carter know.

**11. Neighbourhood Watch** – Geoff Barker reported that the organisation is very active. Any issue affected locally is put on the website. Angela and David were thanked for their assistance with the website. Thanks were also extended to all the Co-ordinators in the rest of the Parish.

**12. County Cllr. report** – Cllr. Mr. Holt explained that the County took out a loan of 15 million to boost road repairs, especially to residential areas.

**13. Dist. Cllrs report:** None were in attendance but Dist. Cllr. Mrs. Steel sent the following report which was read out:  
In addition to being Council of the Year 2007 Wychavon has been given 4/4 for use of resources for the 3rd year in succession, the only Council in the country to do this, what an achievement!  
The new waste service comes on board during the next 12 months which will mean more can be recycled, so saving on landfill with 100% collection over the whole district. This improved service has been achieved with no increase in council tax beyond the 2.5% which Wychavon has made something of its own over the time I have been in office.  
The most pressing issue is the vexed question of the number of new housing that is a constant worry to us all. It is absolutely essential that we keep the Parish/ housing needs up to date so that we have something to identify if and when the time comes to say how many houses would be needed in the village. I would urge the Parish Councillors to take every opportunity to argue the case for very modest numbers at any meetings that arise in the future. Your presence means that you care.

**14. Church Council:** Mr. Brewster gave the following report:  
This has been another eventful year for our Church which remains a central part of village life. The number on the Church electoral roll has reduced from 21 to 17 mainly as a result of some residents moving away. The Church locking rota ensures that the Church is open daily and comments in the visitor's book and from several residents show how unusual it is to find a Church open and how beneficial it is to those who visit. It is surprising how many visitors comment in the visitors book that they have a strong attachment to the village over many years. Flowers are provided by a cross section of the community and the Church is always a delight at special events. We endeavour to send flowers to anyone who is ill or has particular problems. As a spiritual centre there are services virtually every Sunday when the Book of Common Prayer is used for the 6.30 a.m. services with a monthly service usually at 11 a.m. alternating with the occasional 9.30 a.m. service. Several services are lay-led and well attended by families who particularly appreciate Christingle, Motheng Sunday, Rogation, and Pet services besides Remembrance and Christmas special services. The younger generation now produces an annual nativity play besides active participation in other services both in this village and other Churches in the benefice. Particular thanks go to Delia Waldron and Isobel Carew-Cox and their families for producing a most excellent Christmas play.  
Our Church won the Best Kept Worcestershire Churchyard competition for at least the third time. This is particularly competitive and reflects the efforts of the PCC guided by Margaret Brewster. There was a special presentation ceremony by Lord Sandys of the CPRE in the village hall attended by many people from other Parishes and a light lunch and refreshments were served.  
Last September the PCC was surprised to find that Diocesan Research into Parish boundaries found that in 1939 Abbots Morton became joined with Rous Lench PCC. As a result of this our PCC has temporarily had to become a Church Council but it is anticipated that this will be rectified when appropriate bodies looking at Parish boundaries can reverse the 1939 decision. After consultation with residents concerned, a minor change in Parish boundaries has been agreed bringing in three properties to the west of the village being Gooms Hill Farm (Clarks), The Spinney (Pembertons) and Little Cottage Farm (Glyn & Angela Smith) to their proper place within Abbots Morton. This change in no way affects Local Authority Parish boundaries.  
October saw St Peter's congregation joining with the benefice at the Licensing Service of Fran Battin. This was an enjoyable occasion and much welcomed as we have benefited from and appreciated the commitment that she has made to Abbots Morton and the ARCH Benefice.  
St Peter's continues to play a vital role in our community, and one of the many challenges has been to ensure that this continues. On a purely practical level this involves the maintenance of the building and the payment of our Parish share. This has only been possible as a result of the hard work and dedication of all Church members. Within 2007 we therefore hosted a Flower Festival lunch (for 53 people) a Harp concert and our successful and popular Harvest Supper & Auction of Promises (67 adults and 8 children).  
A joint litter pick with the Village Hall has thankfully resulted in a contribution to Church funds. The PCC wishes to record grateful thanks and assures the village that the funds will be "ring-fenced" to make sure that they are used solely for our Church or Churchyard. A new vacuum cleaner has just been purchased. Fund raising events are vital for the financial security of the Church and also play a significant role in bringing the community together in relaxed and enjoyable circumstances.  
The 2008 year ahead for St. Peter's will continue to provide many new challenges. There are however a few key areas where our thoughts are focused at this present time

- 1) The resolution of the Parish boundary with Rous Lench so that we can once more become a PCC.
- 2) The Evesham Deanery Synod review of clergy and how this will impact on us as a Parish and within the benefice.
- 3) The continuing financial commitment that is made upon our Parish through both the Parish share and the maintenance of the Church building and Churchyard. The Parish share payable to the Diocese rises from £6063 to £6325 for 2008. This can only be achieved through regular fund raising events, collections and planned giving.

4] Finally an increase in the membership and commitment to St Peter's by members of the community. The roles and responsibilities that enables St. Peter's to function as an active Church within our Parish, are shared amongst a small team. All play a vital role in the life of the Church, and sharing and team work make these tasks easier. We need to consider ways to expand this team ensuring that St. Peter's survives for the future as a place for spiritual growth, guidance and a support for the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> life. It is within these areas that St. Peter's Church asks for your prayers and support for 2008 and beyond.

**15. Village Hall** – Angela Eason, Chair of the Village Hall Committee gave the following report:

2007 saw a merging of the old and new events. We had the traditional well loved Easter Egg Hunt, Quiz Night and Spooky Halloween. In addition we also saw a lot of new things going on – the Poker Night which was a success both in terms of ensuring the villagers of Abbots Morton are probably the best poker players in Worcestershire, helping to add to the finances of the Village Hall and most importantly enticing some new people into the village hall. The Pub Night was another success put on by the committee. The village hall was converted into a pub in June and opened by Suzanne Verdee. The night was hot and a lot of ale was drunk! The litter pick was again funded by Wychavon DC and this money was split with the church. Sarah hosted a party to say thank you to the helpers which went on until the early hours of the morning. The Pantomime at Christmas was deemed by all who took part (and villagers) a great success – oh yes it was. The children were delightful singing their songs from Oliver. I'm sure it will be an event that will be repeated from now on. – watch out for auditions. As part of our tenth anniversary year we held a Cheese & Wine night on 1<sup>st</sup> March to celebrate – which was very well attended by past and present villager.

The art and gardening clubs both continue to use the hall on a regular basis and we value the contribution they make not only to our funds but to the village community.

The committee has remained stable since last year and everyone – whatever role they play in the committee is valued. Thank you to everyone (and their partners) who continue to support the village hall. All members have agreed to stay on for which I am truly thankful as it really is a team effort. Trisha has decided she is too old to be a youth rep but wishes to stay on as part of the oldies.

#### **The Building**

It is hoped that villagers have noticed the improvements to the hall – including the painting of the windows and internal redecoration. We successfully bid for an extra parking place and this was completed in September after the committee and a few villagers undertook a major clean up at the front of the village hall.

Thank you to everyone for their support this year and we hope to see you at the play in May, perhaps the litter pick and most definitely the summer extravaganza in July.

**16. Public Paths Warden:** the following report was read out on behalf of Pat Ansell:

The majority of the footpaths in the parish remain in a satisfactory condition and are readily accessible. The heavy rain and subsequent flood damage that affected many of the county's footpaths were not a problem in this area, and, although it was extremely muddy, paths remained open. The Countryside Access team have been much occupied in getting paths repaired and opened again and some local issues had to take a "back seat", but things are getting underway again.

There remains the on-going problem of the few paths that are not easily walked, mainly FP 515 at the rear of New House farm and 6 smaller paths that link it with FP 500 and 501 going towards Inkberrow. There is a dispute with the landowner over the line of these paths, and communication is difficult. The Footpath Officer is aware of this problem and will (hopefully) contact the landowner and arrange to walk these paths with him, and then waymarker posts can be erected. This has been a problem for some time, and I feel that the time has come when it should be resolved.

The paths through Slade Wood are still eroded and require maintenance, but because this is a bridle path it is a more difficult and expensive problem to resolve. Although quotes for repair work were looked for, contractors felt it was a major operation and the matter is back with the Countryside Access team. The problem is with the steepness of the bank and the surface being churned up by horses

On a more positive note the footpaths are well used, and new ditch crossings have improved the walk to Wheethley Wood. A volunteer group visited in November and carried out some way marking, and local farmers/landowners are continuing to clear paths through crops and to keep stiles/gates in good repair.

Money for minor repairs and general upkeep of paths is still available from the PP3 (Parish Paths Partnership) scheme, and we have again identified work that could be carried out if the money is available, that is 5 waymarker posts, and 3 or 4 steps on FP 527 at the rear of the churchyard where the path goes up to the field. The path at that point is becoming eroded. In the past three years signposts and waymarker posts have been installed, ditch crossings replaced and the handrail by the church steps mended, all using the money available from PP3.

I would like to thank all the walkers and farmers/landowners who help to keep the paths open by letting me know of any problems.

I hope that the recently formed walking group enjoys the great walks in Abbots Morton and the surrounding parishes.

The Chairman requested that it be minutes to thank Pat for all her hard work which is entirely voluntary.

**17. Residents' Association** – report was given by Mr. Burton, Chair of the Residents' Association.

AMRA is different from all other parish groups in so far as it is not a social group; it is a pressure group representing its members although, of course, anyone can join and whether members or not, the whole parish benefits from what it achieves because its aims and objectives are to protect, preserve and enhance the area in which we live.

So far as membership is concerned, we have a strong core of members who are very loyal and supportive, most of whom renew their membership promptly by Bankers Order. Unfortunately, none of them is coming forward to serve on the Committee. Currently, we have three vacancies and unless these are filled the Committee will eventually fold and with it will go the Association.

After 20 years, during which time it has achieved great things in protecting and preserving this special part of Worcestershire, that is a great pity; in fact, in my view it would be a disaster.

A Residents' Association can achieve things and do things that are not possible for a Parish Council which has to operate within certain guide lines laid down by higher authority whereas a Residents' Association sets its own agenda. Both organisations have their place in the community and are capable of achieving far more together than either one could achieve on its own. In our case, we have worked closely with the Parish Council over the last year and we will continue to do so.

A classic example of this mutual co-operation is in relation to concerns expressed by residents about traffic at The Spirt. (By the way, most of the issues the Committee addresses arise from concerns expressed by members). We took up the matter with Worcestershire Highways who had erroneously painted a centre white line all the way up to the county boundary which they should not have done because it is policy not to paint centre lines where the carriage width is less than 5.5m. This centre line was giving drivers a false sense of security causing them to believe that it was safe to drive at speeds up to the 60mph limit provided they kept to their side of the line, despite signs warning of traffic in the middle of the road. This also led to the erosion of the verges when heavy vehicles try to do the same. The Highways Authority accepted their error and immediately had the line erased. This did not wholly satisfy our concerns so we put the Parish Council in the picture and asked for their support in trying to get better signage and a lower speed limit. I am pleased to say that the Council readily agreed and became the lead party whilst keeping us in the frame and seeking our input. Unfortunately, there is little as yet to show for our efforts but the Council continues to press the matter. (Incidentally, a lower speed limit through the Spirt is one of the action points in the Parish Plan).

Now you will know that most of the hill at the Spirt is in Warwickshire where the same white-lining error has been made. AMRA was well placed to take this up with Warwickshire Highways and did so a year ago. They claimed that their budgets wouldn't allow the work to be done till this financial year. At the same time, we took up the question of a sign to replace one which got damaged and then apparently stolen

This was supposed to have been ordered, but wasn't; it was then supposed to have been re-ordered, but wasn't. In January, we began to press for a reduced speed in line with what the PC was asking Worcestershire, but were told by the Road Safety Liaison Officer that this could not be done for a variety of reasons which we did not accept. (Incidentally, we decided not to involve the PC in this matter at this stage because it is outside the parish and because we felt it better if the two Highways Authorities were kept apart rather than being able to collude, so that, if we made progress with one we could use it to apply pressure on the other.) However, persistence does pay and after further correspondence and pressure last Thursday I met a Warwickshire surveyor on site.

He was unfamiliar with the road, having only once traversed it by car. It was frightening to stand there and observe the traffic - all over the centre line until almost the brow of the hill with none of it reducing speed. A huge tractor came which needed all the road, and, soon after, a lorry looking suspiciously like a gravel lorry needed two thirds of it. The surveyor was very surprised and volunteered that we needed a 30mph - an issue he agreed to take up with Road Safety Liaison Officer whose name I gave him. He also agreed to have the centre line obliterated, to replace the missing sign, add a 'sharp bend' sign, and improve the existing sign visibility.

We have a long way to go yet. What is more, as the surveyor said, if Warwickshire agree a speed limit then Worcestershire will have to fall in line so our policy of keeping the two Authorities apart seems to be working. Whatever the outcome, we will let the Parish Council know and will continue to welcome their support.

Another example of our working in unison with the Parish Council is 'Woodfield'. You may remember that there was concern about developments there following the arrival of new owners. We discovered information which heightened those concerns and we duly advised the Parish Council of them. The PC took the matter forward with Wychavon and they, together with the Parish Council and ourselves are continuing to monitor it.

I now want to bring to your attention the fact that there is a web site advertising 'Woodfield' for sale as a residential development with scope for the erection of three detached homes. The asking price is £750,000.

This site is not residential; it is agricultural. I think, therefore, that we shall need to talk to the Parish Council with a view to them putting Wychavon in the picture and suggesting that the owner be advised that it is agricultural land and that whoever buys it will have to apply for change of use and that this is unlikely to be granted.

On a broader front, the Central Government is currently reviewing planning legislation which will most probably result in planning decisions on major infrastructure projects to be taken by an unelected Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) which is likely to have a strong economic bias and too few members with environmental experience. Local communities will have little

or no say over such projects. (These are not my words, but those of CPRE who are watching developments closely).  
Apart from this, the Regional Spatial Strategy is going to place great pressure on Wychavon and who is to say that this pressure will not bear on us - if not directly, at least on the surrounding area. Who would have thought that an eco-town of 6000 dwellings would be built at Long Marston? The residents of Long Marston and Stratford did not think so. They are now organising protests, but because they had no pressure organisation in place they are playing catch up. In fact, they have now set up a group and appear to have been rescued financially by a secret donation of £100k. It is unlikely that they can stop the town being built, but the environmental damage on the surrounding area will be immense and they may well be able to influence how this is dealt with in the overall plan.

With the National population increasing exponentially who is to say that there will not be more such developments. Throckmorton was on the initial list and could be reconsidered in the future. There is always a temptation to believe that little or no development can happen in the countryside, but the countryside is under constant threat and the government seems not to care. May I remind you, therefore, that in the last few years we have been faced with an industrial estate at Morton Spirt farm, an asylum centre at Throckmorton, BSE disposal at Throckmorton, and Europe's largest open air amphitheatre at Ragley. Whatever your view on these, AMRA has provided, and continues to provide, a platform for comment and, more importantly, action.

I mention all these things because our community needs to be aware, alert, and prepared. The Residents' Association will continue to be all these things, but only if it continues to have not only a strong membership, but also members who are prepared to serve on the Committee. I hope, therefore, that you who are not members will consider joining and that some of you will consider joining the Committee.

**18.** No matters were raised by parishioners

**Meeting closed at 9.05 pm.**