

# Woodhall Spa Parish Council

## Annual Report For Year Ending 31 March 2009

### PARISH COUNCIL

This past year represents year 2 of the 4 year term of the Parish Council. In that time we have seen a number of changes in councillors. Tragically Sheila Roy passed away last year and Chris Astill stood down. Our new councillors are Eileen Pickavance who was, and still is, involved in our litter picking volunteer group and Will Saunders who chairs the Tree Group.

Our new Clerk, Amanda Bushell, also started in her new job with us in May. Amanda is also Clerk to the Hemingby Parish Council so she came with loads of experience which is always useful to keep us on the straight and narrow. Amanda is the engine room of the Parish Council making things happen and actioning all the decisions which we make at our meetings.

We also started this past year with Audrey Pestell as our Chair but she stood down for personal reasons and a new Chair was elected – David Clarke – and a new Vice Chair – Elspeth Mace.

This past year we have been consolidating on the good work made in previous years and establishing a sound basis for taking Woodhall Spa forward. The Parish Plan underpins much of the work we do as does the continual need to keep abreast of all the changes being implemented in local government.

To make us better equipped to meet the challenges facing Woodhall Spa in the future and to make us better councillors, we have made some fairly large scale changes to our working practices. For the most part these will be invisible to you; some, however, you might notice. We have increased the use of IT to both reduce on the amount of paper we create and need to refer to, but also to streamline our meetings so we can spend more time on the critical items. You may have noticed that we use IT for our public meetings and we will be expanding that capability; you might say we are joining the 21<sup>st</sup> century! We have also reorganised the Parish Council offices; the impact this may have on you is that we now have an area in which we have set up a PC with internet access and printing facilities. The idea is that this would be available to both councillors and members of the community who wish to access information on the Internet in any aspect of the work they may be doing for or on behalf of the community. If you wish to avail yourself of this facility please see Amanda or any councillor.

We have also achieved Quality Council status –thus the logo at the top of this report. Quality Council status means “councils achieve ever higher levels of professionalism and help to cement their position as community leaders”. There are currently 691 town and parish councils who have achieved this status and hopefully it underlines our commitment to serve you the residents of Woodhall Spa better.

We have also introduced surgeries at which you can attend a face-to-face session with 2 Councillors and bring up any points or areas of concern that you have. We follow up every point raised even if the responsibility lies with other bodies. The surgeries are on the first Saturday of every month in the library from 10:00 to 11:00; so far, they have been very successful. Some surgeries are also supported by our ELDC Councillors and PCSO.

We have revamped our newsletter to make it more appealing so it has a better chance of escaping a quick visit to the rubbish bin. The newsletter goes out 4 times a year and if you want to have something put in please contact Amanda. All our contact details and meeting times and locations are in the newsletter. As a last reminder, all our Parish Council and

Planning Committee meetings are open to the public. At the monthly Parish Council meeting there is an opportunity for members of the community to address the Council directly.

## **PLANNING**

As you may know, we are not the Planning Authority. For most type of planning applications the Planning Authority is ELDC. We are what is referred to as a statutory consultee. In other words, we are one of a number of organisations that automatically receive a planning application for observation or comment. Our responsibility is to understand the relevant planning guidelines and policies, understand the context of the application as it applies to Woodhall Spa and make any representation that we feel is relevant. That normally comes down to two choices – Support or Object with reasons.

It is vital to realise that any reasons for objecting to an application must be constructed within the applicable planning policies and guidelines – these range from national government planning guidelines (PPGs) down to Local Plans, such as the ELDC Local Plan which contain a number of policies which will guide the planning department. Each application is allocated to a professionally qualified ELDC planning officer. There is a support team who helps the Planning Officer. The Planning Officer visits the site of each and every application taking photographs. A report is compiled summarising the applicable planning guidelines and/or policies, listing the consultees' comments and observing on those where necessary and then prepares a recommendation with justification. The decision on the application will be taken by the Planning Officer or may be delegated to the ELDC Planning Committee where the Planning Officer presents the application to the Councillors who then either support the recommendation or make a contrary decision. It is permissible, with prior notice, for any member of the public to address the Planning Committee – a three minute slot is provided for. Noteworthy is the fact that this only applies to applications dealt with by the Planning Committee and not ones decided by the Planning Officer.

In the past we have had major disagreements with the way in which ELDC have interpreted national and even local planning guidelines. We have felt, justifiably, that they have interpreted guidelines as policy and not applied any latitude to the local circumstances. You can probably understand how a national planning guideline should be interpreted differently to an inner London borough to Woodhall Spa for example. That was not always the case with ELDC which the current incumbents will acknowledge.

Things are improving. That is due to a number of factors – the Parish Plan, change of personnel, and perhaps a more realistic approach on both sides. On our side, we have engaged on a series of initiatives to “be smarter” in this area – setting up a Planning Committee for less contentious issues, training, use of consultants. Invaluable support has also been from our ELDC Cllr where he can without compromising his position on the Planning Committee.

The major planning issues this past year were undoubtedly the Stixwould Road Caravan and camping facility. Due to the contentious nature of this application and the intense public interest we held an open public meeting. It's probably fair to say that there was a “full and frank exchange of opinions”. We did, however, also receive communications of support for the application. On balance, the Parish Council objected on the grounds of being outside the Development Area and that the proposed site would destroy one of the valued views as expressed in the, still to be adopted, Conservation Appraisal. We will be monitoring the 25 conditions that were placed on the applicant to ensure that they are complied with, although enforcement is the responsibility of the ELDC.

The second major application is the revised Cemex UK proposal to develop a sand and gravel extraction plant at Park Farm, Tattershall, between Lodge Road and the B1192. The application comes under the responsibility of LCC and not ELDC. This was a resubmitted application in response to several issues raised by the Planning Officer on the original

application. Of note to us are the traffic related issues. Basically, although some changes have been made – opening hours now delayed until 7:00 am and a reduced annual extraction tonnage leading to a reduced number of HGV traffic – the major issues from our original objections remain. Those are that the proposed traffic routing would result in 50% of the increased HGV traffic being routed through Woodhall Spa. The Parish Council found that the information in the Transport Assessment Appendix was both misleading and incomplete to allow for any meaningful assessment of the actual impact on Woodhall Spa. We did determine, however, that using the data provided in the Appendix the increase in HGV traffic would amount to on average for **an extra** 32 movements per day Monday – Friday and 16 on Saturday (up to midday) (Note that the site already has permission for an average of 80 movements per day of which 50% would be routed through Woodhall Spa). Most if not all of this seems to be routed down Station Road and the Broadway on to Horncastle to access the A-road infrastructure there. We see little justification in having any of the HGV traffic route through Woodhall Spa if the aim is to access the A-road systems. It is far quicker and easier to turn south from the site and access the A153. We also note comments made by our County Councillor at the April Parish Council meeting that he was in discussion with another councillor from a neighbouring ward to look at proposals that might be imposed on Cemex UK Ltd to provide changes to the road system in the village. Specifically, it was mentioned that Abbey Lane could be upgraded to allow HGV traffic, that Witham Road from the mini-roundabout could be widened to facilitate HGV traffic and that the mini-roundabout itself and adjoining roads might be modified. Having considered the suggestions carefully, the Parish Council firmly rejected these suggestions as not being in the best interests of the village. We have written to Cllr Hoyes and to the LCC Planning department expressing this view. We have also made our feelings known in the media. We invited members of the community to join us in supporting these views to your County Councillor and to the LCC Planning department. Sample letters inviting residents to sign in support were made available at the Annual Parish Meeting and anyone wishing to support the Parish Council's concerns can contact the Clerk or any other Cllr for further information.

Another application that would be of interest to the community is one from the owners of Bainland to move away from touring caravan site to one of a more semi-permanent nature. Bainland is strictly in Roughton Parish but its users both access our facilities and (hopefully) use our local businesses – restaurants, tourist facilities, Jubilee Park, etc. Unfortunately, due to the vagaries of Parish Council boundaries we get no contribution towards our Precept. Of concern with the application is the issue of drainage and the change in intended use – we do not support the change from a touring site to a static site. These have a habit of turning into permanent dwellings which is development by the back door.

The last planning related topic we wish to bring to your attention involved the Mall Hotel porch. As you may be aware during the recent renovation of the Hotel the “tree trunk framework” on the porch was removed and unfortunately destroyed. We quote from a letter sent by the Heritage Committee “The tree-trunk porch at the Mall Hotel, which echoed the Royal Hotel's veranda, probably dates from the earliest phase of Adolphus Came's building work, as it is clearly visible in early photographs. Similar features were used elsewhere by Came to emphasise the rustic character of his spa architecture but the Mall Hotel's porch was the sole surviving example until its recent removal”.

We (the Council and Heritage Committee) are working together to urge both the ELDC enforcement and conservation personnel that the tree trunk porch should be restored; we are content that it will not be possible to replicate exactly the original but “in the Came style” is what we would like. We have also informed the ELDC that the wood can be sourced locally.

Other related projects that we have been, or still are, engaged on include the following:

We are awaiting the adoption of the Conservation Appraisal conducted last year. One of the recommendations was to pursue an Article 4 Direction for the conservation area and the Parish Council supported that recommendation. Article 4 gives more power to restrict

alterations to houses to conserve and retain the look of the conservation area. Once the Conservation Appraisal is adopted by ELDC, we will be working with the Heritage Committee on the best way forward in seeking an Article 4.

We are looking at ways of protecting the open spaces in the village. This may not be possible as for example there is a proposal for a caravan site on the field known as the “show field” which currently has Protected Open Status.

We have adopted a policy on caravan sites which we hope can be used during the planning process.

We are also developing a Village Design Statement. “Prepared correctly, a VDS will provide a clear statement of the character of a particular village or town against which planning applications may be assessed. It is not about whether development should take place, but about how development should be undertaken so as to respect the local identity.”

Finally we are currently reviewing a draft policy from the Heritage Committee on the Spa Baths.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**

We are continuing to support our volunteer group of litter pickers, providing gloves, bags etc. Currently we have 3 volunteers and more would be very welcome. The Youth Club has also helped out. Last year we started looking at replacing some of the litter bins with smarter versions; this should happen soon.

We entered the best kept village competition and managed to get into the 2<sup>nd</sup> round!

The Parish Council supports the Tree Group with their good work around the village.

We are also looking at having a follow-on drainage summit to tackle the continuing saga of over flowing surface drains and sewers, as well as the many dykes that need attention. The recent flooding along Witham Road, Station Road and the Broadway highlighted that the present infrastructure is in need of remedial work. We also need to understand from Anglian Water what capacity there is left to accommodate new development.

## **CEMETERY**

We have taken over the management and maintenance of the Kirkby Lane cemetery which was previously undertaken by ELDC on our behalf. There should be significant cost savings as we have been able to source the work at more favourable cost; our Clerk has taken on the administration, backed up by Cllr Elspeth Mace so if you think you may have need to use the facilities please see them. We have also looked at the burial charges and have made adjustments to reflect the true cost. The aim is to make the cemetery cost neutral to the budget. We have engaged the services of a contractor to maintain the grounds to include pest control. A long term solution to the rabbit infestation will be a new rabbit-resistant fence that should be erected soon.

The cemetery is probably not the most exciting example of the work we do but it does represent the largest single source of expenditure in our budget and being able to tame these costs will bring benefit to as all as funds will be freed up to spend elsewhere in the village.

## **PARISH PLAN**

No Annual Report will be complete without a mention of the Parish Plan action list. As a Council we are aware that having adopted the Parish Plan some 3 years ago, it is our responsibility to continue to review and monitor the various items identified in the Action

Plan. Many of these are well in hand and you will see evidence of that in the various reports given by those organisations that sprang from or were nurtured by the Plan. On the web site you will see a whole section devoted to the Parish Plan and especially the Action Plan. We have colour coded the various items so that it is easy to see at a glance where progress has been made and where we as a community still need to take some action.

## **SPA BATHS**

As with all aspects of life there are triumphs and there are failures. One area that continues to challenge us as a community is the Spa Baths. We seemed to be making little progress despite the efforts of both Councillors and our Heritage Committee. One of the problems is that we don't as a community have a single vision for what we want done with the building. We have appointed Cllr David Hill to take the lead for the Council. David will be working with the Heritage Committee and any other interested community group to drive this issue forward. We stress that David's authority comes from the Parish Council and we approve all courses of action that are proposed.

## **PARISH COUNCIL INITIATIVES**

I'd also like to take this opportunity to report on how we are responding to requests made directly to us from the community.

We had a letter from G.S.L Goodwin asking when the village signs will be replaced and the black bin bags removed. Apparently, the bin liners are seen as a poor substitute for the signs! We are having the signs refurbished locally and we hope to have them put back before the end of May.

We had a letter from Mr Grant (amongst others) asking for something to be done with Kirkby Lane to address safety issues. We will be taking his request and the others regarding Kirkby Lane forward to the LCC Highways department.

We had a letter Mr Cooke asking for support in getting a hard-surfaced footpath from Turnberry Drive to the top of Alexander Road to access St Andrew's School. On behalf of the Parish Council our Chairman approached the School to see if they support the suggestion and join with the Council in pursuing the matter. We are pleased that the School Governors agreed to support and we will be working together on this. We'll be reporting back on progress.

In response to a request made at one of our surgeries to look at traffic problems on Spa Road we held a meeting with the Highways department, residents and Councillors. There were several suggestions made for more signage, however these signs would have to be statutory signs and it was felt that this would not be in keeping with the area. It was pointed out by Claire Smith (LCC Highways) that signs were sanctioned on a priority basis and there was not enough evidence to support any application for signs. It was agreed that a survey would be carried out by highways to gather information on the movement of traffic, i.e. speed etc. Once the survey has been done, then Claire will report back with the results. In the meantime, it was agreed that highways would have '**SLOW**' painted on the road surface at either side of the entrance to the Coronation Hall car park. This would cover the residential area and the car park entrance.

## **POLICIES**

In accordance with national legislation we compiled and approved our Freedom Of Information Act policy in December 2008.

## **GRANTS**

Section 137 allows the Parish Council to spend a percentage of the annual precept on those items that are not expressly provided for by existing regulations. For example, we can spend any amount of money on public amenities such as the cemetery, seats and litter bins. To accommodate the need to support local activities, we are allowed to provide funds with certain restrictions within a Section 137 umbrella. We have a formal grant application process for community groups to apply for monies available under these arrangements.

This past year we budgeted for £9340 for grants and awarded a total of £9053. Successful bids included the CAB, Cottage Museum, Cricket Club, Croquet Club, Woodhall Show, Short Mat Bowls Club, Coronation Hall and a contribution to the tree planting day to pay for refreshments. We also spent under S137 money in support of Remembrance Sunday and the Christmas Fayre Royal Square lighting, band and PA system.

## **CONSULTATIONS**

The following is a list of consultations and surveys that we responded to:

Review of Conservation Area Appraisal  
Future Services at Louth Hospital  
Comments on amended Conservation Appraisal  
East Midland Plan SOS Proposed Changes  
Big County, Big Skies, Big Future survey (LCC)  
Making and Enforcement of By-laws Consultation  
ELDC Local Development Framework preparation of Core Strategy document  
LCC Minerals and Waste Core Strategy Issues and Options  
ELDC Interim Draft Housing Policy Consultation  
ELDC Draft Landscape Character Assessment  
Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue 6 Year Action Plan  
Recommended Practice on Local Authority consultation

These are not as many as in previous years but it is still important to take up the opportunity to express an opinion, even though it may not be always apparent that the right questions are being asked!

## **FUTURE**

As part of our drive to better serve the community, we have recently agreed to sign up for the “Well Being” initiative. The power of Well Being will allow us the opportunity to many more activities on behalf of the community. Examples of such activities are: take action to support and save local amenities such as post offices, village stores or pubs, to introduce new facilities such as health clinics or mobile libraries, meals on wheels, gardening or handyman services for the elderly, given grants to schools or provide equipment or other resources, grants or prizes for talented local residents, erect memorials.

A reorganisation of local planning guidelines and policy is underway. You may know this as the Local Development Framework; the LDF is a suite of documents that will guide development within the ELDC area. This is a significant opportunity to input our vision for the future of Woodhall Spa into local planning policy. We have already started work and this will continue throughout the year – potential submissions include our VDS, policies on caravan site, aspirations for maintaining the open spaces of the village, our vision for the Spa Baths.

## **ACCOUNTS**

The year end accounts are on the following page.

**WOODHALL SPA PARISH COUNCIL**  
**END OF YEAR ACCOUNTS 2008/09**

		<b>Actual 07/08</b>	<b>Budget 08/09</b>	<b>Actual 08/09</b>	<b>Budget 09/10</b>
<b>BANK BALANCE AT 31ST MARCH</b>	ACCOUNT 1	15087.03	15087.03	15087.03	15087.03
	ACCOUNT 2	12837.73	19991.74	19911.17	12107.73
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>27924.76</b>	<b>35078.77</b>	<b>34998.20</b>	<b>27194.76</b>
<b>INCOME</b>	PRECEPT	37490.00	39500.00	39500.00	39500.00
	RATE REBATE	1639.96	420.00	420.00	420.00
	GRANTS	1150.95	0.00	0.00	0.00
	DONATIONS	135.00	140.00	302.72	
	VAT RECLAIMED	1630.80	1750.00	6939.89	3000.00
	CEMETERY	0.00	0.00	1767.00	5500.00
	MISC.			151.98	
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>69971.47</b>	<b>76888.77</b>	<b>84079.79</b>	<b>75614.76</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	PERSONNEL	7647.51	11000.00	9782.06	10289.00
	OFFICE UTILITIES	3139.34	2820.00	8546.99	2943.18
	OFFICE CONSUMABLES	461.93	2600.00	1288.48	500.00
	PUBLICITY	1994.57	2100.00	1059.63	1250.00
	PUBLIC AMENITIES	11008.87	17800.00	18796.98	7560.00
	CEMETERY	0.00	0.00	0.00	13050.00
	VILLAGE MAINTENANCE	1506.78	2500.00	1862.53	2500.00
	ROYAL SQUARE	347.48	2500.00	2546.12	2750.00
	11TH NOVEMBER		460.00	385.00	385.00

	AUDIT		450.00	384.88	415.00
	FEEES	1600.11	2335.00	1714.87	2170.00
	SECTION 137	6663.50	9340.00	9053.08	9000.00
	Misc.	579.81	840.00	840.00	0.00
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b><u>34949.90</u></b>	<b><u>54745.00</u></b>	<b><u>56260.62</u></b>	<b><u>52812.18</u></b>
	INCOME	69971.47	76888.77	84079.79	75614.76
	EXPENDITURE	34949.90	54745.00	56260.62	52812.18
	STAMP BALANCE	23.37	0.00	0.00	0.00
	TO CARRY FORWARD TO NEXT FINANCIAL YEAR	<b><u>34998.20</u></b>	<b><u>22143.77</u></b>	<b><u>27819.17</u></b>	<b><u>22802.58</u></b>