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# ABBOTSKERSWELL PARISH COUNCIL

## ANNUAL REPORT

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2014—2015

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### Chairman's Report – Annual Parish Meeting

#### *Abbotskerswell and its Wellbeing*

Elections come and elections go... so quickly, it seems. I wrote this report for my fourth Annual Parish meeting, the fourth and final year of this Parish Council, without trepidation over the election of new councillors forming a new Abbotskerswell Parish Council for 2015-2019.

Unlike four years ago when five councillors stood down, leaving only three, this year only two councillors stood down: Cllr Dave McNee and Cllr Julie Kniveton. My grateful thanks must go to both for their years of worthy service to the parishioners of Abbotskerswell.

The Teignbridge Electoral Office did not receive any extra councillor nominations, leaving the six current councillors who stood for re-election re-appointed in an uncontested election. The two vacancies are to be advertised shortly – watch the parish notice boards and please come and join us. Meanwhile we have built a very experienced and productive team of councillors, as you will hear when they give their reports.

My overriding memory of the last four years will be the introduction of the Localism Act, which is a misnomer as there is little evidence that decision making is being put into the hands of local people. The National Planning Policy Framework behind the Localism Act has severely limited local input into planning decisions because the old planning rules were ripped up and TDC planning officers now make more delegated decisions on our behalf than ever before, unless a Ward District Councillor intervenes.

We have to thank our ward Councillor, Mary Colclough, for working so hard on our behalf: prodding, probing, questioning and, occasionally demanding action from TDC. Well done, Mary!

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## Cont...

I shall wait for the outcome of the national and district voting on May 7<sup>th</sup> with some apprehension to ascertain what flavour of policies we might expect. Under the umbrella of austerity, we have seen our county and district services cut or devolved downwards to parishes to fund, which has meant your council and householders have had to pay up or lose them. The cost of servicing our public toilets is but one example of a cost we have had to bear, rather than lose them. We now have to spend many pounds, so that people can “spend a penny” in comfort!

Last year, with parish wellbeing in mind, I reported that a Steering Group was formed to start to develop our Neighbourhood Plan. With parishioners’ help much progress has been made and will be reported on later in this meeting. As the early data received within returned questionnaires is analysed, it is evident that many parishioners engage in sports and social activities, enjoy life in our community and have put on record the tremendous community spirit that exists in our village and its nearby hamlets. This is true localism, inclusive and supportive. Speaking on behalf of fellow councillors, this is what makes council work so pleasurable and rewarding.

## *TDC Local Plan*

Abbotskerswell Parish Council, together with colleagues from South Wolborough, presented a strong case and many hard facts to the Inspector at the Enquiry in Public held in September 2014. It took many months before the Inspector reported his findings in April 2015 and TDC Full Council subsequently adopted the Local Plan on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2014. Both chose to largely ignore local feelings and opinion.

The Inspector failed to adequately explain why he had allowed the green fields of Wolborough to be built upon, ignoring its importance to the wellbeing of local people, not to mention the significant environmental and ecological importance of providing a feeding and breeding area to many animals, such as the Greater Horseshoe Bat (GHB), whose population has been in steep decline over the last 100 years with 90% of the species lost.

Abbotskerswell Parish Council, supported by South Wolborough and other residents and groups in Devon, such as Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT), Community for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) and Highweek Action Group (HAG), could only appeal against the Local Plan once it had been adopted and APC engaged a firm of leading environmental lawyers to act for APC and subsequently we did lodge an appeal.

The Parish Council and its supporters successfully raised the necessary funds, but disappointingly our case was dismissed. On the advice of our legal team, APC are challenging this dismissal through the Civil Appeals Office in the Courts on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2015 at an oral hearing.

In stark contrast to Teignbridge District Council, Torbay Unitary Authority has adopted a stringent policy of protecting its Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for GHBs against inappropriate planning development and developers. Torbay’s approach puts Teignbridge District Council’s approach to shame.

**Our environment is worth protecting and enhancing! Our collective voice is gradually being heard and support is growing, but we still have some way to go.**

## *The Parish Council Team Structure*

Once again, the Parish Council has been well supported and strengthened by many Abbotskerswell residents who voluntarily support and serve on Parish Council standing committees or are called upon when a special need arises. Cllr Kevin Farrelly joined us as a newbie and enthusiastic councillor.

Although the TDC Local Plan has introduced many challenges, we have had a successful four years.

I must thank all my fellow Councillors, on behalf of Abbotskerswell residents, for their hard work, talent, enthusiasm and good humour. Special thanks must go to Sharon, Clerk to the Council, for her support and guidance to the Parish Council and for securing £100K+ of funding for the initiative which Cllr Bob Chambers will mention shortly.

The Council had three Standing Committees and one Steering Group:

Planning Committee	Bob Chambers, Wendy Grierson, Julie Kniveton, Dave McNee, Kevin Farrelly, Richard Whiffin (Chair)
Abbotskerswell Recreation Association	Bob Chambers (Chair), Ann Down, Dave McNee, John Whitehead, Co-opted: Dave Collins
Emergency Planning Committee	Bob Chambers, Sue Collingsworth, Simon Crawshaw, Andrew Edwards, Julie Kniveton (Chair), Dave McNee, Gill Still, David Munden, Dave Wilds
Neighbourhood Plan (AbbPlan) Steering Group	Charles Down, Kevin Eales, Andy Elliot, Wendy Grierson, Trevor Howard, David Munden (Chair), Paula Simmons, Richard Whiffin,

The Council also has Councillors undertaking the following duties:

Liaison - DCC Environment & Highways	Richard Whiffin
Footpath Co-ordinators	Dave McNee (lead), supported by Bob Chambers
School Governors	Richard Whiffin (lead) and Dave McNee
Stoneycombe Liaison	Richard Whiffin & Bob Chambers
Website and AbbTalk	Julie Kniveton
AbbPast Liaison	Kevin Eales
Teignbridge Association of Local Councils	Julie Kniveton

In addition the Council is supported by:

Allotments Association	Mrs Margaret Crompton
Tree Warden	Mr John Lewis.

### ***Four years... weather-wise***

Extreme winters of very cold weather followed by extreme winters of abnormally wet weather left our roads potted, cracked and unrepaired. A significant programme of pothole repairs and road resurfacing planned across the Parish for December 2013 was finally achieved in mid-2014. While highway perfection is the Holy Grail, *if you excuse the pun on holey*, I can report business as usual with the identifying problems, then reporting them to Highways Agency and with relatively timely reparations. The incredibly mild winter has helped.

### ***Emergency Planning Group (EPG)***

The Emergency Planning Group, which is a committee of the Council, continues to develop and update the Emergency Plan, including introducing new contact points, and a new EPG Leaflet. Cllr Julie Kniveton (Chair) will report on this later.

### ***The Travel Plan.***

The Council works closely with Devon County over highway matters and, by and large, this ensures that defects get rectified. The network of Public Rights of Way continues to be maintained and this is another area where your Council works closely with Devon County and with landowners. These will be reported on in detail later.

### ***The Abbotskerswell Recreation Association (ARA)***

The Abbotskerswell Recreation Association, which is a committee of the Council, has once again achieved much in the last year. The ARA draw and Bonfire Night remain very successful fund raising activities, providing much needed support to sports and social groups. Not wishing to steal his glory, I will leave Bob Chambers to report on Tennis Court News. Suffice to say I applaud what has been achieved and is being planned.

### ***Public Relations - Village Website, Parish Notice Boards and AbbTalk,***

The Parish Council seeks to keep parishioners informed about all its activities: minutes, notices and posters placed on the five Parish notice boards and published on the village website ([www.abbotskerswell.org.uk](http://www.abbotskerswell.org.uk)) and through articles sent to AbbTalk.

Grateful thanks must go to Cllrs Bob Chambers and Julie Kniveton for this work.

In addition, a team of parishioners volunteered to prepare, publish and distribute AbbTalk monthly. Its reappearance has been enthusiastically welcomed within the parish and the Parish Council offers its congratulations and thanks to the newly formed AbbTalk Association members, comprising Ellie Oakley (Editor), Carol Bickley (Treasurer), Felicity House (Secretary) with support from Andy Rose, John Whitehead, Tim Collins and Peter Bickley.

Supporting the AbbTalk Association are its dedicated distributors, our parishioners who ensure copies are posted through letterboxes to every house in the village. This facility has been invaluable and has been essential to advancement of our Neighbourhood Plan and other village initiatives.

### ***And much more....***

I and my fellow Councillors remain committed to representing all those residing and working in the Parish to the best of our ability, as fairly and as equitably as possible. Councillor names, telephone numbers and email addresses are published in AbbTalk and on the website.

Finally, may I thank you, Abbotskerswell residents, in your support to the Parish Council over the last four year. The Council is extremely grateful.

Finally, as the new Parish Council takes shape in May, extra hands, young and not so young, are always needed and supporters will be warmly welcomed. To join the team, just contact our Parish Clerk, Sharon Raggett.

### ***Chairman's Additional Note:***

#### **Newly Elected Councillors for 2015 - 2019**

**Cllr K Eales (Chairman),  
Cllr R Whiffin (Vice Chairman),  
Cllr Mrs W Grierson,  
Cllr Mrs M Colclough,  
Cllr B Chambers,  
Cllr D McNee,  
Cllr P Marino  
1 Vacancy**

**Ward Cllr Mrs M Colclough  
Ward Cllr Dennis Smith**

## Reports from APC Standing Committees

### *ARA Report – Cllr B Chambers*

The main achievement this year was the gathering of money and the opening of the new multi-use courts which has achieved a great success. Many thanks to Ann Down, John Whitehead and Sharon for raising the grant money. One unfortunate thing to report is that people are using the court without paying. This diverts money from other Parish initiatives. The Annual Firework Event continues to be a great success. Money is currently being raised to upgrade the play area surface and renew equipment which hopefully will be done this year.

### *Emergency Planning Report – Cllr J Kniveton*

The winter weather was kind to us this year and there were few problems for the Emergency Planning team to address within the village. Our trained gritting machine operatives have yet to practise operations with the gritter in the absence of any significant icy weather this year!

The Emergency Planning Group met on a quarterly basis throughout the year to consider any updates to the Emergency Plan, including the Emergency Leaflet distributed recently. Particular thanks must go to Sue Collingsworth and Simon Crawshaw for arranging production and distribution of the new emergency leaflet (now bright green).

We have been fortunate to have stability within the Emergency Planning Committee over the last twelve months and my thanks go to the group as a whole for volunteering their precious spare time to attend meetings and participate in supporting the emergency planning activities.

The roles of Flood Warden and Snow Wardens continue to be fulfilled entirely on a voluntary basis, and I am very appreciative to all for offering up their time. Dave Wilds has been invaluable in ensuring that significant watercourses have been kept clear, ensuring any risk of flooding has been kept to a minimum.

We have continued to have some issues with TDC providing residents of other parishes with contact details of our Flood Warden as an out of hours contact point for sandbags, and EPG have again addressed this accordingly. We also have sought to correct the delivery of sandbags to Church House instead of the Village Hall where they are stored for village use. Hopefully this will prevent a reoccurrence of the manual transference of sandbags in people's private cars!

A generally quiet year for Emergency Planning, save for an escaped flock of sheep on a winter's night. Our contact network was put to the test and the sheep soon safely secured again for a farmer to collect the following morning. Long may the settled conditions continue, however we have confidence in our village plan should we ever need to use it fully.

The Emergency Planning Group is a committee of the Council.

## ***Planning Report – Cllr R Whiffin***

Our major concern this year has been the legal challenge to the Local Plan and our Chairman commented on this in his report.

The Planning Committee considered at length an application from a major house builder to build up to 53 new homes on the field adjoining the Old Cider Works. After much careful consideration we felt we could not support this as it was outside the village envelope, contrary to the Local Plan, it would cause major traffic congestion and we had major concerns regarding biodiversity. The site is part of the strategic flyway for Greater Horseshoe Bats associated with the South Hams SAC, and there is evidence of exceptional dormouse and slow worm occupation. This application was finally rejected by Teignbridge District Council and we will wait to see if an appeal against this decision is submitted.

The Parish Council has been made aware that Heavitree Brewery are considering submitting a planning application for a small housing development at The Butchers Arms but to date we have not received any further details.

We are also aware a Housing Association is considering submitting a planning application for a small development of mainly affordable houses behind Hillside Cottages. This will meet the Parish need for affordable housing for many years to come and as such could be treated as an exception site under the Local Plan.

The committee has dealt throughout the year with a number of domestic applications for minor alterations, extensions and tree works.

## ***Neighbourhood Plan – Cllr R Whiffin***

The Neighbourhood Plan Group is chaired by David Munden and is run through a Steering Group comprising three Parish Councillors and representatives of organisations and interest groups in the village.

In June last year a Community Engagement Workshop was held to explain the need for a Neighbourhood Plan and record areas of residents' concerns and ideas for consideration. This was attended by over 100 Parishioners and the exercise was repeated at the School Fete.

The Steering Group has now been expanded to include more residents who are keen to be involved in the process.

Regular newsletters have been produced to keep Parishioners informed of our progress and provide an opportunity for all to become involved.

The group has prepared and distributed questionnaires to every home in the village and responses are due back shortly. In tandem with this we felt it important to capture the views of the children attending our village school and a simpler questionnaire was designed and has now been completed.

The next task we are shortly to embark on is a detailed analysis of all the questionnaires. In due course we will publish a summary of the responses.

The process was delayed somewhat during the year by the Parish Council's challenge to the TDC Local Plan and the proposed Wolborough development which the Steering Group felt might influence residents' views on our own Plan. However, once the outcome of the challenge was known, it was decided to get our own planning process back on track.

To date we have secured over £2000 in grants which has covered our costs so far.

## Reports from District and County Councillors

### *County Cllrs Report – Cllr A Dewhirst*

At County Hall the low point came when the Conservatives refused to allow Devon's Youth Parliament members leave to speak to the Full Council, a truly shocking incident that showed an uncaring and unattractive side to the County administration. Following this my colleagues and I called for a special Extraordinary Council meeting to debate the lack of transparency in Council decisions. We called the process fundamentally flawed and attempted to debate the closure of Children's homes and Old People's Homes – however despite almost every opposition Member speaking we heard not one word from the Conservatives until the Leader replied on their behalf that he had listened to our arguments and he rejected them! I do not need to tell you the result of the vote. The following month the rules were quietly changed to allow members of the public to speak to our Council.

I sit on the Farms Estate Committee and supported Farm Wise at the Westpoint Arena near Exeter, an event designed to take children on the food journey from field to plate. Last October Devon County Council farm tenants and 1400 primary school children from primary and special schools from across Devon attended this event. Farm Wise emphasised the importance for children to make that link between food production and what they eat and drink. It doesn't just come packaged from a supermarket but has had a life before that. Coppa Dolla Farm, a breeder of pedigree limousin beef, and dairy farm and ice cream maker Fairfield Farm, both in Teignbridge South, were there helping youngsters make this event a real success.

I was involved in the publication of two hard hitting County Reports. Our first on the appalling Educational Outcomes of Children in Care and those eligible for Free School Meals. We recommended a number of measures including: work to restructure the Virtual School; strengthening the role of the corporate parent; that good practice in the effective use of pupil premium is shared across schools and that placement stability for Children in Care be given an even higher priority. It is gratifying that all of our recommendations were accepted and implemented and we look to the autumn to see the results of the hard work being put in to improve the lot of these disadvantaged children.

The second report was on the controversial subject of Child Sexual Exploitation. This report was effectively hidden from view by being published on Christmas Eve – fortunately Spotlight got wind of this ploy and the Report has been widely read.

We found that there is no intelligence to suggest organised child sexual exploitation networks are operating in Devon, however Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is likely to be happening in the county on a daily basis. The report called for an urgent new database to be set up to record and map instances of child exploitation. Other recommendations were that Police and Social Care should raise awareness on child sexual exploitation with district, city, borough councils, housing associations and businesses; Child sexual exploitation should be declared a priority Public Health issue; training on CSE should be given to all frontline staff, including social workers, family practitioners, housing and licensing officers, all members and council officers and businesses; that all Devon & Cornwall police officers, police community support officers and specials receive CSE training and that there is rigorous monitoring of the Babcock LDP contract in terms of its programme to schools educating young people on the risk and threat of child sexual exploitation. These recommendations are all in the process of being implemented.

There are over 141,000 young people living in Devon and everyone needs to play their part to ensure all those under 18 live in a safe environment.

Finally from my Locality budget I disbursed £1,500 to Abbotskerswell's new sports area and made payments to Kingskerswell Village Hall New Roof Project, Ipplepen Village Hall kitchen project, Broadhempston Village Hall, enabled work to begin on Denbury's new Sports Pavillion, helped Coffinswell Social History Project, Kingskerswell Library and the young Navigators, Ipplepen Archaeological Dig, Dame Hannah Rogers and Newton Abbot Rugby Club Under 18 girls team.

### ***District Cllrs Report – Cllr Mrs M Colclough***

The structure of the Council has changed a little over the last 12 months with the defection of two more Cllrs the conservatives lost their overall majority the make up being as follows – 22 conservatives, 13 independents & 10 liberal democrats & 1 UKIP. Nicola Bulbeck remains as chief executive, the leader Jeremy Christophers & the chairman is Anthony Ballinger. Staff cuts have continued to take place. The Teignbridge local plan 2013-2033 was formally adopted on 6th May last year. Although it was felt necessary of Teignbridge to have a plan to help guide the future of the District, the question was raised as to whether this is the right plan. The voting was 27 for, 4 against with 8 abstentions. The challenge by Abbotskerswell PC that environmental issues were not properly addressed in the plan was dismissed, a decision which may be appealed by the PC. In the meantime the plan continues to control development. Moving on to the budget. This year saw no rise in the TDC portion of the Council Tax with a Band D property being frozen at the current rate of £150 per annum. The summary revenue budget for 2015/16 is £16.8 million includes the following: significant investment in waste and recycling to collect even more recycling and food waste from homes each week; continuing the free Sunday parking scheme across the district & no increase in car parking charges for the rest of the time; the 2.2% pay increase for staff, rural aid at £40,000, with the remaining £15,000 to prime a £25,000 grant fund for Teignbridge Villages in Dartmoor National Park.

There will be an introduction of an opt-in green waste subscription from Sept 2015. This controversial chargeable opt-in scheme is for a fortnightly garden waste collection. The collection of card, mixed plastics and food waste is on a weekly basis. The black bin with residential waste for landfill will continue to be emptied fortnightly. Bottles will go with cardboard & a sack will be provided for paper including newspapers. The tired fleet of refuse vehicles needs replacing. The council is again committed to providing affordable housing and employment opportunities to those residing in Teignbridge. It is hard to believe that four years have gone by and we are now facing an election with will inevitably bring about changes in the council's decision making body. Whatever the outcome it is important that TDC provides necessary services at the best value for money and I hope that whatever the outcome is on May 7th this will continue to be achieved.

## ***Reports from Parishioners***

### ***Tree Wardens Report – Mr John Lewis.***

Considering the extreme conditions of rain and wind experienced this year and last it is remarkable that we, in Abbotskerswell, have escaped major tree damage. A few of the old dead trees finally fell with no problems to vehicles or parishioners.

I have been advised to lookout for signs of various diseases and problems associated with oaks, chestnuts, ash dieback, and elms. I am glad to report that to date none of these problems have been found in Abbotskerswell.

A few trees within the village have been felled or pruned back. The usual reason is that they have outgrown the location where they were planted and now threatened structures of various sorts. There was one occasion, however, where a legal warning had to be given. This was where a tree was drastically pruned back by someone who had no right to do so. Let's hope this does not happen again.

Finally my role is as always to act as a link between parishioners with tree problems and the Parish Council / Teignbridge D.C. / Devon Council.

### ***Allotments Report – Mr John Lewis.***

In spite of the mixed weather we had last season, we managed to achieve a reasonable crop of vegetables / fruit. Enough to put up a good selection into the village annual flower / vegetable show.

Last year the allotments were opened under the National Garden Scheme for the second time. This was a great success. The visitors on the two open days seemed to be drawn to visit the allotments. Perhaps this was because they were different. The allotments will be opened again this year.

A new water meter / stopcock has now been installed at the entrance to the site. This gives full control to water used and allows for maintenance work to be carried out without causing problems to others. A facility a long time coming!

At last count there are 23 people actively involved on the allotments. Last year we lost 2 but gained 3 new ones. There is one full allotment and two half allotments available to rent. So there is opportunity for anyone seeking a healthy and productive hobby.

### ***Village Hall Report – Mr K Eales.***

This year we have built on the successes of previous years. Items of note are:

The village May Day event was successful and for the first time in 2014 run by the PTFA.

The Garden Show was successful again and was run by a Show Steering Group, led by Cheryl Ford. Again the early engagement with the School contributed significantly to the success last year. Sadly the Garden Show will not be led by Cheryl Ford this year as she stood down as a Trustee.

Apart from the contribution the Trustees all make to the wellbeing of our community by maintaining an important facility for sports and social activities, we also support the Parish Council by accommodating sandbag storage, salt storage and salt gritter on behalf of the Emergency Planning Group.

Project POWDER ROOM to refurbish the toilets was successfully delivered by Kevin Farrelly. It seemed to be a simple project at the outset, but proved to be very intricate in nature with many hurdles to overcome. However, job well done and the proof is that the new toilets have received much favourable comment.

Not all is smooth in the day to day running of the Hall but the problem with recycling and disposal of waste into the correct containers by users and the correct stacking of chairs and tables after events has improved considerably, due to close oversight by our hall manager and caretaker, David Wilds, who has contributed significantly to the Village Hall's well-being.

As said, the above are items of note. What does go unnoticed, and often un-thanked, is the myriad of small tasks and duties that are essential to the smooth running of the Abbotskerswell community hall. These tasks just get done quietly by cleaners, event supporters, Trustees, and the staff in Model Stores who take bookings and are in the front line to receive the occasional customer complaint, which remain thankfully few and far between.

I must thank all the supporters of the Village Hall on behalf of all Abbotskerswell parishioners and our wider customer base, who expect the facilities we provide to be ready, waiting and clean, which they are!

One project remains active:

Project CLEAN SWEEP to improve the main hall floor and is planned for the two weeks immediately after the Garden Show on the 1st August this year.

The updating of the Village Hall Constitution remains as an objective and we continue to operate under the conditions laid down in the 1971 Constitution.

I do not see any reason to immediately revise the Hall hiring rates, but as the rates have been held since January 2012, these should be reviewed by the new Trustees during 2015.

So, 2014 was good and our successes highly visible. 2015 will continue to build on the Trustee's successes it achieved in 2014.

## **The 2014-2015 Annual Parish Report**

**Chairman – Cllr Kevin Eales**