

HIGH BICKINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Mrs Di Carter, 20 Springfield, Four Seasons Village, Winkleigh, Devon EX19 8DP

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Chairman's Report - Annual Parish Meeting 2007 Held on Wednesday 14 May 2008 at 7.30pm In the Meeting Point, High Bickington

Once again I'd like to start by thanking our clerk, Di Carter, and Mike Leatham our Vice Chairman for their support and for covering for me in my absences, and my fellow councillors for all their largely unseen hard work for the village during the year, and a special mention for Chris Brown who joined us as a co-opted member and has taken on the responsibility for liaising with the Barton Meadow recreational area users.

Two years ago the parish's plan for a new school, village hall and affordable housing for local people was turned down. I gather from the Community Property Trust that the new plans for the Little Bickington Farm site are almost ready for us to see and re-submit for planning permission, and I have to thank fellow councillors David Brown as CPT chairman and Mike Leatham as Parish Council representative for all their hard work in sitting through hundreds of hours of meetings with County Council architects and committees to push this project forward so that young people in the village can get a chance of affordable housing, and the work that Peter Tucker has put into helping the school find a new site too. Meanwhile Rob Norton and his team are still doing a tremendous job in the existing school facilities.

More and more people are enjoying the Community Woodland which David Venner and volunteers have made such a pleasant place to visit with new picnic areas and constant maintenance work and I'm only sorry to have to report that this year our village has seen a rise in petty and childish vandalism – affecting the woodland, flowers in the churchyard and even some of our pensioners who have been bothered in a very cowardly way. Our thanks to Stella Burrows and Helen Carn for their work with police liaison through Neighbourhood Watch, and to our police support from Sally, Sandra and Melissa, but ultimately it will be our parish's parents and young people who help us to rebuild our village's community spirit.

The young people who asked to use the parish council land next to the recreational area at Barton Meadow have worked on it to develop their skills and tricks with bikes, and thanks to their involvement and Chris Brown and Peter Tucker's efforts the site is now safely fenced off and in regular use.

Stan Maskell and Roger Keen have been working hard monitoring the conditions of the roads, footpaths and byways on your behalf, and even after challenging weather conditions during the last year, mostly the roads are in better condition than they were, the Zebra Crossing and speed restrictions have finally been installed, and the footpaths, bridleways and green lanes are all cleared, passable and improved. In the coming year Roger is hoping to get signposts installed in the green lanes so that we do not lose their ancient names.

I thought I was going to have to represent you again to oppose the Winkleigh Biomass power station on your behalf in January, over fears about the increase we would see in heavy traffic and the damage growing elephant grass would do to wildlife, but fortunately when we started pushing them for all the detailed Environmental Impact reports and other evidence they should have prepared after the planners refused permission last time, the directors withdrew their appeal at the last minute. So for now that threat is gone, but of course something will have to be done on that site eventually. Meanwhile this year our Parish Council resolved in principle to support domestic renewable energy applications, so do start putting in your solar panel applications.

I have also been liaising with Burrington Parish Council over the move by the Devon Air Ambulance to Eaglescott, which everyone welcomes, but which none of the neighbouring parishes want to see as a Trojan horse for a huge increase in commercial and private flight activities and the selfish intrusion on everyone's enjoyment of their own gardens and loss of peace rural and quiet this represents, especially for our residents at Libbaton.

We have welcomed new and some returning friends to Fountain's Field, and I would just like to encourage our new residents to get involved in village activities such as the fete, cricket and football teams, the Christmas Market and Christmas carol singing, all revived or started and thriving in recent years, and especially to use village services and village craftsmen like plumbers, painters, gardeners and builders, and most of all the village post office, mobile fruit and veg van and pubs. We heard recently that Devon County Council is considering a rescue plan for some Post Offices threatened by closure, but until we know how many and which these are we won't know quite where we stand. Obviously we hope that High Bickington is spared, but in the meantime please support Tony and Lorraine as much as you can by using the shop and post office services they provide.

We have also all recently heard about the government's intention to get rid of one layer of democracy in Devon by abolishing the District and County Councils and turning them into one or several unitary authorities. The two main contenders at the moment appear to be a single authority for Devon excluding the existing unitary authorities of Torbay and Plymouth, which would both expand slightly; or an alternative of four unitary authorities with Exeter and East Devon; Plymouth and South West; Torbay and South Devon; and a new Northern Devon Authority stretching across the top of Dartmoor from the north Cornish coast to Somerset and the M5. We won't be properly consulted by government because they are not going to speak to us until mid summer, by which time they will have already decided, but if anyone has got views on which option they think is best for High Bickington please pass them on any of our parish councillors so that we can properly represent your views when we are finally asked.

Please feel free to come to Parish Council meetings and let us know your concerns and ideas for improvements to the village. Personally, from my work as an environmental and science journalist, I suspect that climate change and renewable energy is going to become more important and impact on us more and more in the coming years. For instance every major city in Britain and the world was built as a port, so if we see a one metre rise in sea level, which is very likely, although we won't flood here and cities like London will be defended, the sewers of those cities will be underwater, and as the residents of Gloucester found out last summer, it's that mess which causes the damage. We've all seen the recent news reports from China and Burma, and thankfully we're safe here from extreme weather and earthquakes, but what are we going to do as a village if a thousand climate change refugees arrive here from Exeter when their sewage system collapses? Meanwhile I hope our farmers have better harvests than last year, and that you all prosper in the coming year. Thank you for your attention and support.

Myc Riggulsford
Chairman