

NEWTON & NOSS PARISH COUNCIL

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THE CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT: APRIL 2007

It hardly seems a year ago since I wrote my last report. This time it feels like the "end of term" because the Parish Council is up for re-election on 3rd May. We shall be interested to see how you have judged our performance. Three councillors are standing down after a total service it would be impolite to mention. We shall be sad to say farewell to Mary Wilcox, Sarah Roe and Chris Woodd-Walker; the remainder of us await the outcome of your votes with baited breath! To those who are leaving us and those who remain, may I offer my sincere thanks for all their voluntary work on behalf of the Parish. At the time of writing there are fifteen candidates for twelve places which will ensure we have passed one milestone in aiming for Quality Parish status.

Over the past year, the Council has met on 11 occasions to deal with routine business. Additionally, Members have attended a wide variety of forums and meetings to represent the views of the Parish. Regular meetings attended include those with South Hams District Council, the Community Council of Devon, Devon Conservation Forum, Ivybridge & District Association of Parish Councils, Devon Association of Parish Councils, and the Ivybridge & District Community Transport Association. Councillors continue to be closely involved with the School, both the Village and WIC Halls, and the River Yealm Harbour Authority. Much work continues in trying to ensure our footpaths remain to a decent standard. However, with the County Council facing a tougher financial climate year on year, progress is difficult.

A number of new initiatives involving Parishioners and Councillors have been successfully launched or completed. In particular I would like to thank Robin Hogg and his team for their work on the Community Housing Working Group, as well as Rosemary and Colin Smith, Claire Sealey and Roy Fenner for their enthusiasm and commitment to the success of the Newton & Noss Network. The Consulting Room at Bishops Court is being used regularly by the Doctors and others providing health services which is particularly helpful for parishioners who cannot travel to Yealmpton easily.

With the help of William Mumford, the County Council was persuaded to promote a traffic order for the Parish which will sort out parking enforcement irregularities in Newton Ferrers and introduce three sets of lines at known problem/pinch points in Noss - with luck these new arrangements will be enforceable by the appropriate authorities. Speeding continues to be a problem, particularly near the water tower and Butts Park. Several tickets have been issued by the Police; sadly the main offenders are local residents! I am pleased to say some of our dilapidated road signs have been replaced and the new bus shelter at Collaton Cross is welcome. The maintenance standards of many of our highways continue to be a concern. Although resurfacing is carried out to a high standard, routine maintenance to reduce premature deterioration is irregular and infrequent. The standard of the Ivybridge school bus drivers seems to have improved.

The structure of rural policing has changed recently and we wait with interest to see whether there is a greater local presence and a more effective response.

The Parish Plan was published in 2004 - it is the key document used by the Council to guide our long-term work. It was drawn up in response to a detailed questionnaire sent to all parishioners. A majority of households replied and their views are represented in the Plan. Our progress to date is set out as follows:-

Community Housing

The ongoing provision of affordable housing, both for rent and private ownership, continues to remain a high priority. Our needs were properly identified for the Parish Plan and ratified in subsequent independent reports. The problems are not unique to Newton and Noss - the majority of rural England is unable to provide affordable homes for its people, particularly in the

National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There has been much talk by the Government of the requirement to solve the housing crisis but there has been very little actual delivery outside the Thames Gateway. The causes are many but the key local issues are:-

- i) An ongoing rise in the population of the South West through a net increase in migration and increased longevity of the population as a whole.
- ii) Increased family breakdown. There is usually one innocent party and children need access/space to stay with both parents.
- iii) Low local wages relative to housing costs.
- iv) Under-development in both the private and property sectors.
- v) Conversion of smaller dwellings into larger, more expensive properties.
- vi) Problems for pensioners with retirement investments which have performed poorly over the past six years.

As a consequence, the price of the average Newton and Noss property is twice that of the South Hams, one of the highest outside the South East.

Throughout the year we have continued to work with parishioners and the District Council on routes through which an ongoing modest development of community housing, both private and social, can be achieved to meet local needs. Our aim is to provide an average of between 5 and 10 properties per annum over the next decade, primarily available for parishioners to purchase or rent. No-one on the Council wishes to see large estates of houses anywhere in this Parish. All we are trying to achieve is an ongoing supply of appropriately distributed, well designed, modestly priced houses for those in difficulty in our community.

Commercial & Business Development, Employment and Tourism

The Council continues to believe that a successful retail and commercial base is vital to the sustainability of the Parish. Although the Post Office was "saved" last year, it is important that we all continue to use its facilities if it is to remain. Please withdraw cash and use the numerous counter services as often as you can.

As part of our community housing suggestions to the District Council, we remain keen to encourage the provision of modest commercial facilities to help local businesses prosper and expand. Regrettably, two schemes put forward in the past year have not been supported at District Council level. We shall continue to support suitable local initiatives.

The Parish Council website is accessed regularly from far and wide. We hope to add information about the Newton & Noss Network in the coming months to supplement the recently published booklet. Detailed work to publicise local footpaths on the site has been delayed due to my accident last year.

Many of our shops and pubs would not be viable without the benefit of summer tourism to tide them over the quieter winter months. We continue to try to balance visitors' needs with those of parishioners. Good footpaths and decent public lavatories are an essential part of our local tourist provision.

Pope's Quay is also an important asset which is primarily the responsibility of the Council. Recent surveys have indicated that major maintenance is required and tenders for its repair have been invited to ensure the longevity of the structure. The work may eat into the Council's reserves but contingency funds have been set aside for such eventualities.

Transport, Travel and Parking

Compared with many villages Newton and Noss are well served by a regular bus service. However, it does not offer easy access to after-school activities at Ivybridge and visiting Derriford

remains difficult. With the planned development of Sherford and its proposed public transport hubs, we continue to lobby for improvements to the bus service which may ease access to Ivybridge and Derriford. We support the Ivybridge Ring-and-Ride Bus and Community Car Scheme which offer an essential service, helping to minimise the public transport deficiencies. On a more day-to-day level it was noticed that the bus stop at Bridgend was not served by the afternoon bus – very confusing for visitors. We are in discussion with the bus company about moving the stop slightly so that all buses to Bridgend stop there. We are grateful to the County Council for providing the bus shelter at Collaton and hope the new yellow lines will be effective.

Children and Young People

Apart from the Cubs/Scouts, the facilities for children and young people remain broadly similar to last year. Most would not be possible without the dedication of many local volunteers. The Playgroup is planning to open a new session for toddlers whilst the Newton & Noss Network is working hard to promote activities for the young. The Ukulele group continues to prosper and NNATS aims to provide some workshops in the summer.

Community Services and Facilities

We continue to support the local halls and public rooms financially and by volunteering time. Following last year's successful fund-raising activities, Liz Woodd-Walker went on to lead a very effective refurbishment of the Village Hall. The project was on time, on budget and to the required quality. Many local groups are benefiting from the new facilities and have contributed to the fund-raising.

The Sports Pavilion needs some modest internal and external refurbishment and safety work. John Young and Peter Stitson have taken the project to their hearts and have been painting away merrily in the past few weeks. The electrical system is also being upgraded.

Two years ago the Precept was raised significantly to cover essential costs. At the time the Council promised to keep future increases as low as possible. This is the second year in which we have managed to keep the increase well below the rate of inflation.

May 2007 Election

To all of you who have put yourselves forward for this year's Election - many thanks. Whatever the outcome, the Parish Council will have the required number of elected councillors to meet the criteria for Quality Parish status. Good luck to everyone.

Finally, I should like to thank my Council colleagues who have rallied round to cover my duties following my hip fracture last September. Despite excellent treatment at Derriford, the accident rather took the wind out of my sails. Many Councillors have stood in for me at meetings elsewhere in the County at short notice when I suspect they would rather have been elsewhere. However, none of our work could be achieved without the dedication and patience of our excellent Clerk – Jacki.



Jeremy Brown,
Chairman Newton & Noss Parish Council