

This has been another varied year in the life of the parish council. 2009 has seen us operating with three different clerks. The former clerk, Miss Nikki Rush, having been on long term sick leave tendered her resignation last May and we wish her well with her continued recovery. Our thanks must go to Mrs Carol Williamson, our locum clerk, who has continued to help us throughout her recent bereavement and she is still helping us on an ad hoc basis. Mrs Gina Griffin was engaged during September, she stayed in the role for three months but decided Debenham was not for her and we are now ably assisted by our former temporary finance officer, Mrs Dina Bedwell, she having taken on the combined clerk/rfo position and we hope she is settling well into the role. We are and have been a Council of 10 over the last year and we would dearly like to fill the remaining three seats, not only to spread the workload but to ensure the village is properly represented geographically and with diversity. We would like to thank our County and District Councillors, Eddy Alcock and Kathie Guthrie, for their support and advice over the last year and I would personally like to thank Carol, Dina and the Vice Chair Mrs Frankie Winrow -Giffin for their valued help.

Early last year two members resigned their positions from the council, Ron Walters and Shirley Dalison. Ron had been a councillor for a number of years, chairman over the previous year, one of the people instrumental in the preparation of the Debenham Village Appraisal in 2002 and a member of the Woodland Steering Group. Shirley had been a councillor for only a short time but her local knowledge, availability and overseeing our use of Dove Cottage had been a huge help. We wish them both well for the future. Bringing our number up to 10, three new members have joined us during the year, Ian Baldwin, Jean Parnell and Laurie Stock. Although not a full council we do have a cross section of members with differing knowledge and experience to bring to the conduct of the council's business and I thank all councillors for their time and effort on behalf of the community.

The funding request from the DLC and the resulting work having taken up a large part of 2008/09, was quickly subsumed by the encroachment of the Lock Close Green. Quite rightly, we were inundated by letters, emails, and telephone calls by a huge number of parishioners concerned at the loss of the facility by the encroachment and with the valued help of our County and District Councillors and Carol, we pulled out all stops to have the offending obstruction removed from the Green. The situation is ongoing, as well as trying to register the Green as an open space we are also looking into its purchase to ensure its open space status remains for the enjoyment of the community.

Returning to the DLC I am pleased to report that we are in discussion with the management board about their needs for financial support and to date £3,500 has been offered towards the cost of a new central heating oil tank and ongoing support for similar projects is likely to be mooted for the future subject to agreement by the Council.

Other projects this year have included changes to the traditional iron fence between the cemetery and recreation ground, to conform to health and safety requirements and at a cost of £1400 the spikes have been replaced with hoops, a safer option but still in keeping with the traditional style.

The play swing safety surface at the Recreation Ground has had to be replaced; a large area in one corner having lifted became a trip hazard to anybody using it. The cost of the new surface totalled almost £2000 and we have to thank Cllr Mrs Winrow-Giffin for overseeing that project.

To increase the festive atmosphere of the village centre last Christmas, new and bigger tree lights were purchased at a cost of some £600 plus the cost of new automatic timers and we were fortunate to receive a contribution of £200 towards the cost of these items from The Forge Church, for which we are very grateful. Two members of The Forge also helped our Council working party to put up the tree and lights. However, we all were very disappointed that on New Year's Eve the Market Green tree and lights were totally vandalised. Whilst we appreciate people can become boisterous during festive celebrations this type of blatant vandalism was totally unacceptable, unfortunately we have been unable to identify the individuals responsible to obtain reimbursement from them for the damage. The tree and lights were hastily removed the following day by Cllrs Ian Baldwin, Richard Blackwell and Kevin Voller with help from Mrs Jane Baldwin and Mrs Vicky Voller and we thank them for making the area safe.

We received two presentations at meetings during the year, firstly the MSDC Conservation Consultant updated us on his appraisal of the Debenham conservation area, this is a standard practice every so often and he was recommending no changes in Debenham. It was a useful exercise and enabled us to put pertaining questions to him.

And secondly Mrs Ann Evans and Mr Robert Grimsey apprised us of the proposals for a Memorial Garden at the old URC burial ground. We are fortunate to have the services of Mr Grimsey, a Governor at the High School and Chelsea Flower Show gold medal winner. He has produced two plans for consideration, the objectives for the Garden being to provide a quiet place for contemplation, a picnic area for families, a place of learning, a remembrance garden and a hard standing for village functions, ie a farmers market, table top sale, charity sales, Christmas fayre. The plans are on display and hopefully you will be able to stay on until the end of the meeting to view them. We will be putting the plans out to the village via the parish notice board, website and at next Saturday morning surgery for comments and preferences.

Regarding the Saturday Morning Surgeries – these have been very poorly attended over the last six months with no members of the public dropping into Dove Cottage to air their grievances or praises. These are held on the first Saturday of every new quarter, notice is given and as well as two or three parish councillors, a local police officer and the District Councillor are usually in attendance. They provide an excellent opportunity for parishioners unable to attend an evening meeting to drop in to discuss any issues informally.

During the autumn we were made aware that young skateboarders were unhappy with the deteriorating condition of the present skatepark facility at the leisure centre and we were approached for support in replacing or refurbishing it. We are pleased to say that a Working Group has been formed consisting mainly of young people and a few adults and plans are progressing to obtain funds for a new park at the same site. The Parish Council has pledged some financial support and having attended one or two of the Working Party meetings the input, enthusiasm and level headed approach of the young people is impressive and we wish them well with the project.

During the severe cold and icy conditions of the winter concerns were raised at the icy and dangerous condition of some of our footpaths – the county council grit spreading having not extended to the public footpaths and so in readiness for next winter we have agreed the purchase of five grit bins. Five locations around the village have been identified and we are fortunate that our County Councillor Eddy Alcock has offered a contribution of £500 towards the cost from his County Locality Budget and we would like to thank him for his offer. The bins must be located on a route accessible by County Council vehicles for delivery of the grit. We now need to nominate individuals in the village prepared to spread the grit during icy weather; these people will be covered by Suffolk CC's insurance.

A number of community groups and organisations received parish council financial support during the year, these include: Debenham High School, £200 towards setting up its Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, the Debenham Late Night shopping event £100; the Debenham summer Arts Festival £250 ; The Debenahm Street Fayre £200; the Primary School McMillan Coffee morning £50; the Debenham Branch of the Royal British Legion £50; the Parent & Toddlers Group £30; the Leisure Centre Firework Party £100; local charities Homestart and Headway £100 each and a proposed new event to host a Childrens' Christmas Party for all village children has been pledged £300.

It was good to see greater use of Market Green over the last year with cake stalls, plant sales, singing Christmas carols around the tree at the late night shopping event and the newly introduced Apple Weekend in October organised by Dale Lawrence.

We would like to thank the Woodland Steering Group for their continued work at the Debenham Wood and Lake and to congratulate them on their recent nomination and runner up position in the Suffolk Creating the Greenest County Awards, landscape and biodiversity category – quite an achievement and recognition for the village.

The neighbouring allotments have become the focus of some popularity of late – perhaps due to all the gardening and grow your own food programmes now on television. We currently have a waiting list of approximately 15 residents for 30 individual allotments and we understand that it can be very frustrating for those having to watch and wait while others are busy growing their crops. We have therefore decided to include this as a future agenda item with the intention of looking at ways we might be able to provide more allotment land; in the meantime we would welcome any comments or suggestions of land that might be available for additional allotments.

I would like to thank Mr Barry Woods, the website editor, for the diligent and efficient way he runs the Debenham Website; this has proved to be a vital communication facility for the whole village.

Some 15 planning applications have been considered to date for recommendation to MSDC; this is slightly more than last year.

The year end accounts are not available for circulation this evening, the year end of 31 March having just passed. These will be available at the May meeting and publicised via the website after audit or copies can be requested from Dina after the May meeting. The precept for 2010/11 was set at

£61,290, a 8.7 % increase on last year, this takes into account support of the Leisure Centre in line with the public meeting held January 2009 and our support for the proposed new skatepark

Finally, with elections in mind, the current four year term of the parish council comes to an end next May 2011 so now is an ideal time for parishioners to follow the work of the council or talk to existing councillors or the clerk, so as to gain some knowledge of the councils work and consider putting themselves forward for election next year. The parish council operates at grass roots level and it is important to ensure the village continues to be represented by a keen and diverse cross section of the community.