

AVENING PARISH COUNCIL

Chairman's Report – 2005/06

Following my election as Chair of Avening Parish Council in May last year, I thought it wise to reflect back on my ten years as a Councillor and to use the not inconsiderable collection of observations and experiences that I had gathered as a means of deciding what the main foundations of my tenure as Chair should be. What would be the main thrust or objectives of my Chairmanship?

An average year in the life of any Parish Council brings a huge variety of predictable and sometimes not so predictable tasks and issues that have to be addressed. Often these are statutory or formal obligations that simply go with the territory and have to be completed. Others can arise at anytime and are tackled accordingly. It is the third category however that makes the difference. These are the home-grown tasks that we as a Parish Council can and should initiate as part of our obligation to retain and to enhance the quality of life here in Avening. Encouraging the development of such initiatives and restructuring the operational methods of the Council to ensure their delivery, were therefore at the top of my list.

In the last 12 months we have certainly fulfilled our obligations by, for instance, considering over 40 planning applications and subsequently offering our opinions and observations to the appropriate personnel at CDC. Our deliberations sometimes require Councillors to make site visits during their private time and to study plans and application documents prior to meeting CDC representatives. The Parish Clerk or Councillors also make themselves available to meet with Highways personnel from GCC to discuss traffic and road safety issues. The Parish Council were particularly active just recently in addressing the concerns of parents caused by the excessive parking of vehicles in the school bus lay-by opposite the Memorial Hall.

These and many more areas of Parish life are continually reviewed by the Council and action is taken wherever and whenever possible. But what of the self-initiatives that I mentioned a moment ago? Have we made progress here?

I firmly believe that yes we have. A new bus shelter has been installed and 2 others are being planned. Various projects that have originated from your comments in the Parish Plan are underway. Litterbins have been replaced. We continue to provide funding to the Avening Playing Fields Association to assist with their efforts to maintain and improve this vital facility. Our Charity Fund has once again donated money to voluntary groups within the village, enabling them to continue their excellent work. Evidence of our efforts to make a difference are perhaps best displayed by our organisation of this Saturday's Avening Spring Clean event when we hope good numbers of you will offer your litter-picking skills to improve unsightly areas of the village.

Delivery of service to the Parish and effective use of the money you provide us with has to be paramount in all we do. To this end we have begun to restructure ourselves and to adopt new ways of approaching the large number of responsibilities that fall within our remit. Two new sub-committees have been created, to manage financial and planning issues, giving greater focus to these specific areas, but also enabling the full Council more time to tackle more issues.

We are in the process of adopting a "portfolio holding concept" whereby each Councillor assumes responsibility for an important aspect of community life. The environment, businesses and services, highways, leisure, healthcare and crime are all embraced within this new initiative and an individual person will head up our work in his or her particular area. They are not intended to be experts, more a knowledgeable conduit between you and the external organisations that are there to offer help and advice. We will make ourselves as accessible as is sensibly possible and we hope that this will give you greater confidence when the need to talk with us arises.

Returning finally to my recollections of previous years in the Council, I always felt privileged to witness the work that was done, but equally sad to see it remain almost unnoticed by much of the community. I have to say that this was largely a result of the Council failing to publicise its activities and the benefits that were created. Not so anymore! We have actively engaged in correcting this shortcoming by creating a brand new newsletter (first edition going to press as we speak) and by constantly updating and improving the content of our website. Incidentally, the number of visits it receives from all parts of the globe is quite amazing! These and other forthcoming ideas are all designed to improve our communication with you the community, and in so doing hopefully make you more aware of all that we attempt to do.

So much has been achieved and is simply the result of enthusiastic and committed teamwork. May I therefore offer my thanks to all my Councillor colleagues and to Parish Clerks past and present, Caroline Braidwood and Deborah Cooke. I hope that what we have begun here will continue to flourish in the years ahead and will make a real contribution to the lives of everyone who is privileged to live in this remarkable community.

JON GREEN
Chairman
Avening Parish Council

18th May 2006