

# **ELVASTON PARISH COUNCIL**

## **Annual Parish Meeting : Monday 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013**

### **Chairman's report**

As I approach the end of my first year in the chair of Elvaston Parish Council, I look back on a year of significant change. On every front April 2013 feels very different to April 2012. I was honoured to assume the chairman's role following some four years as a councillor. During that time Elvaston felt like a typical rural parish; yes there were some major issues on the horizon but the day to day work largely consisted of planning issues, infrastructure, maintenance etc.

The warning signs that things would be different flashed almost as soon as I took the chair, when our clerk of ten years, Roger Hill, indicated his intention to retire. As it happened, we were fortunate to secure the services of Heidi Sargeant, from a very strong field of candidates, to replace him. With two novices as Chair and Clerk, our council was then confronted with three of the major issues confronting the parish, all of which had lain dormant for months, even years, springing to life. In no particular order, the advancement of plans for new housing resulting from Derbyshire's 'Preferred Growth Strategy'; plans to extend gravel extraction within the parish from land between Ambaston and Elvaston and an 'about-turn' on the anticipated outcome of plans by Derbyshire County Council to divest itself of the management and use of Elvaston Castle and Country Park and the decision to seek an alternative 'Preferred Bidder' to Highgate Sanctuary. The wet weather throughout 2012 also meant that flooding risks within the parish, particularly in Ambaston, were never far from our minds.

### **The Parish Council and Staff**

There has been a number of changes on the Parish Council in the last year. Councillor Hilary Coyle resigned from the council following many years of service during which she held the chair and was, for four years, one of our district councillors. Her clear thinking, ability to cut through to the heart of any issue and her support for the local community will be missed. Hilary has moved out of the parish and Elvaston's loss will, in all probability, be Shardlow's gain!

Hilary's resignation prompted the parish council to bring the rural ward of the council up to strength. A number of expressions of interest were received and Ralph McBride and Toby Mansfield were duly co-opted on to the council.

As has already been mentioned our clerk of ten years, Roger Hill, retired in August and has been replaced by Heidi Sargeant, who has set about

her new role with great gusto. Before her first council meeting Heidi commented to me that some of the parish notice boards could do with a spring clean. She has applied that desire to see things 'ship-shape', to every aspect of her work. If something is not right, Heidi will not let go until it has been sorted.

In December we learned that our 'lengthsman' of ten years, Patrick Casey, was seriously ill and unable to continue with his duties. Our thoughts remain with Patrick and his family at this time. As I write this report a new lengthsperson, Neil Mansell, has been appointed and is about to take up his duties. We welcome Neil and hope he will stay with us for many years to come.

2012/13 has undoubtedly been an extraordinary year for the Parish Council. I would like to thank all of my fellow councillors for their support and commitment during times of need. The 'Apologies for Absence' entries on council minutes have been negligible!

I would also like to thank the continued presence and input at our Parish Council meetings by our County Councillor John Harrison. This has been an exceptionally busy year for Councillor Harrison yet still he finds the time to attend nearly all of our meetings. I also wish to thank District Councillors Ann Watson, Neil Atkin and Peter Watson for their valuable support during the year.

### **South Derbyshire District Council – Preferred Growth Strategy**

In October SDDC published its consultation document on proposed housing growth in South Derbyshire. The Parish Council was disappointed that, faced with proposals for some 2000 houses within the parish, potentially quadrupling its size, our parish was not selected for one of the District Council's 'drop-in' exhibitions to explain the proposals to our residents. Thanks to the hard work of our clerk and the support of our district councillors, Neil Atkin and Peter Watson, that omission was rectified.

I would like to thank in particular the working party consisting of Paul Bickerton, Bob Sharp and Heidi Sargeant who helped formulate our draft response to the consultation and to all of our councillors for contributing their time and skills, gathering the views of residents via leaflet drops and then helping shape our draft into the final detailed response submitted to South Derbyshire District Council, just before Christmas.

There is a sting in the tail. Hardly was the ink on our response dry than we were notified of plans to build an additional 800 houses described as Snelsmoor Grange, within the City, but adjacent to our border. As we speak a response to this proposal is being formulated.

## **Proposals to Extend Gravel Extraction Sites**

In October 2012 a drop-in day was held in the parish to outline Derby and Derbyshire's updated Minerals Plan, which reviewed targets for extraction within the county up to 2030 and how to meet those targets. A significant extension to the existing Ambaston site northwards towards Elvaston is one of the options. We await further developments.

## **Elvaston Country Park**

Following years of discussion over plans to develop Elvaston Castle and Country Park as a conference centre, hotel and golf club, plans submitted to Highgate Sanctuary were rejected and that organisation lost its status as 'preferred bidder'. The County Council has now set up a partnership with National Trust to develop a sustainable long-term solution to the management of the estate. We understand that this will include forming a coalition of partners from public, private and voluntary sectors to realise the vision for this solution. The Parish Council looks forward to full involvement in any consultations that will arise as the result of these developments.

## **Other Issues**

I am pleased to report the satisfactory conclusion of several long term outstanding issues during the year:

In June 2012 the Parish Plan Group planned and put on a successful, well attended and very popular Diamond Jubilee Party in Elvaston Castle Courtyard, with entertainment provided by the Rolls Royce Brass Band and the Derby Rock Choir. Congratulations go to the Parish Plan Group for their hard work in making this event a great success.

In July 2012 the 'Rock and Bike Fest' took place on the Showground. Other than concerns over damage to the showground surface and unpublicised restrictions on parking by visitors to Elvaston Castle, the event passed without disruption.

In February 2013 the widening of the footpath between Borrowash Bridge and Elvaston Country Park was completed. The work was undertaken some six months earlier than we had been led to believe.

Also in February, the Shardlow Rd (Boulton Moor) bus shelter, which had been subject to repeated vandalism, was repaired using vandal resistant materials. So far the shelter remains intact.

In March 2013 the long awaited bus shelter at the Derby bound Elvaston Castle Gates stop was erected....just in time to protect passengers from the unseasonal cold weather.

There are some outstanding issues to which I would like to draw attention.

In 2011 the Parish Council resolved to purchase and install a heart defibrillator in the rural ward as response times by the emergency services potentially exceeded the recognized target level. The project has, thus far, been thwarted as we have been unable to find a suitable, secure site with the required power supply. The project has not been shelved and new proposals are currently being reviewed which, hopefully, will lead to this project moving towards a satisfactory conclusion in the not too distant future.

In October 2012 a number of residents of the Woods Meadow Estate complained to the Parish Council of antisocial behaviour originating from the adjacent Castle Croft Estate. As a result of these complaints the Parish Council did their best to reduce problems by requesting increased police surveillance of the area, encouraging residents to report incidents to the police as they happen and by alerting the Safer South Derbyshire Partnership Team. The Parish Council also encouraged the coordination of the South Derbyshire and Derby City cleansing services to ensure that the footpath that forms the interface between the two estates is kept clean and tidy. We also sought the erection of a new barrier on the footpath that will discourage the passage of motorcycles whilst permitting access by 'motability scooters'. The Parish Council, following advice, consultation with residents and after careful consideration, decided against requesting closure of the footpath. This activity has been included in the list of 'outstanding issues' rather than 'completed projects' as we are still awaiting the erection of the new barrier and, whilst the incidence of antisocial behaviour has significantly diminished since the complaints were raised, it remains to be seen whether this is a long term reduction or merely a reflection of the adverse weather conditions experienced this year.

The Floodbank that protects Ambaston continues to be a cause of concern. In addition to worries that the bank is insufficiently high to protect the village in the event of a significant surge down the River Derwent, there is evidence that the integrity of the bank is not what it should be. The Parish Council continues to press the Environment Agency to resolve this issue. We are heartened by recent statements by the Environment Agency that flood mitigation measures for the city must take into consideration their potential impact downstream.

Financially our parish is in rude health! We have identified funds for all of the projects that we have planned and within a precept that we consciously froze at the previous year's level. We have this year taken the opportunity to revise the day to day banking arrangements, taking advantage of the need for changes as a result of the retirement of our Parish Clerk. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Councillor Bob Sharp for his hard work along with that of our new Parish Clerk, to manage this change so effectively.

In conclusion I would like to thank all who have contributed to the activities of the Parish and its council over the last year. This includes our councilors, members of the Parish Plan group and our parishioners who have attended our meetings, even on cold winter evenings, and who have contributed their time and expertise to help us achieve our objectives. I look forward to continued support for our Parish over the coming twelve months.

Richard Strand – April 2013