

Aynho



The Apricot Village

Aynho Village Report

April 2014

THE PARISH COUNCIL

Chairman's Report

The Council – Changes in Membership

In May 2013 the previous Chairman, Colin Macklin, retired as he was moving from the Village. He was Chairman for three years and I would formally like to thank Colin for his significant contribution to the Parish Council over some seven years, both as a member and latterly as Chairman. It was his drive and determination which led to the adoption of the road calming scheme within the village. At the same time, Cllr Ian Parkes also retired from the Parish Council and I would like to thank him also for his valuable contribution - particularly for his role in looking after the village maintenance scheme.

In May I was elected Chairman and Cllr Fi Burge was elected Vice Chairman. We were joined by two new co-opted members during the year, Cllr Jake Shuckburg and Cllr Leslie Leighton, which has ensured we continue with our full complement of nine councillors.

Village Survey & Plan

I would like to thank the 65% or so of households who completed the village survey last month. I hope you found the survey of interest and that it helped to inform about the role and responsibilities of the Parish Council? The initial findings will be presented at the Annual Village Meeting on Monday 28 April in the Village Hall, to which all residents in the village are invited. The results from the survey will be taken into consideration by the Parish Council and used in carrying out its responsibilities.

Planning

The full list of all planning applications is shown below this report. Most residents will be aware that a planning application has been submitted to build three houses and a heritage centre on the site at Aynhoe Corner, as part of an enabling scheme which would also see the restoration of the park land and walls. The plans were on display at Aynhoe Park House in October and also at the community weekend. The proposal also envisages that residents will have access to the Aynhoe Corner site after completion of the scheme, as an area in which to walk. The Parish Council fully supported the application with a number of caveats in December 2013. The planners at SNC are still considering the scheme and it is expected that a final decision will be taken in the next couple of months.

SNC are in the process of creating a local plan much of which is aimed at looking at options for identifying areas for additional housing. We will use the feedback from the Village Survey to guide our input into the plan.

Maintenance

The visual appearance of our village is one of the characteristics that residents most appreciate and it is one the Parish Council attempts to maintain. There is limited assistance from NCC – but in the main it is our responsibility. I would ask that everyone tries, where possible, to help with the public areas near to their own homes. The two village “clean up” mornings, in March and in October, are part of this effort. My appreciation to those who have helped in the past - but we could always to a better job if there were a few more volunteers! If you are aware of areas which need attention, please either contact the Parish Clerk or go online and google ‘Streetdoctor SNC’ and follow the links. You will be surprised how quickly they can respond in some instances!

Parking

Parking, or rather the lack of parking, within the conservation area of the village, remains a problem. Discussions have taken place with the Highways Department of NCC – but the bottom line is that it is really up to us as a village to solve the problems and this severely restricts our options due to the potential costs involved. However, during the year two self-help schemes have been implemented under the leadership of Cllr Richard Hoddinott, one at The Glebe and a second in School End. In both cases these were “self-help” schemes and to some extent they had to be limited in scope as we could not obtain the necessary local support. Richard was most appreciative of those who gave their time to help with the work. However the Parish Council will have to bear in mind the likely level of local support for any further self-help schemes. Approval has been given by NCC for yellow lines to improve the flow of traffic near the junction of Banbury Road and Charlton Road.

Children’s Playground

During the year Cll Fi Burge has worked hard and succeeded in obtaining a grant provided by Virdador which will mean the equipment within the playground can be updated. The current equipment was in some cases only just passing the yearly ROPSA inspections. Work has started and should be completed by July. Together with village donations and the grant, the scheme has been virtually self-funding.

Community Weekend

In October last year Kay Anderson and Fi Burge worked hard to organise a very successful community weekend on the Sports Field. The weekend was well attended over the two days. The recent survey shows some 90% of respondents would like to see the weekend continue.

2015 Elections

There will be an election for the full Parish Council in May 2015. It would be very helpful if anyone interested in standing would attend some of our meetings to see how the Council works. The main qualification is an interest in the village community and the time available which would allow you to participate. Please come and see what you think. The Parish Council meets on the first Monday of every month, except January and August – meetings last less than two hours!

Thanks

Finally, I would like to conclude by thanking, firstly, the officials of the Parish Council – namely Sadie Patemia, Parish Clerk, and Roger Wertheimer as Responsible Financial Officer, for their hard work during the past year. Lastly I would like to thank to my fellow councillors for their contribution and support during the year - which is much appreciated.

Stephen Brook

Chairman

01869 811167

Finance

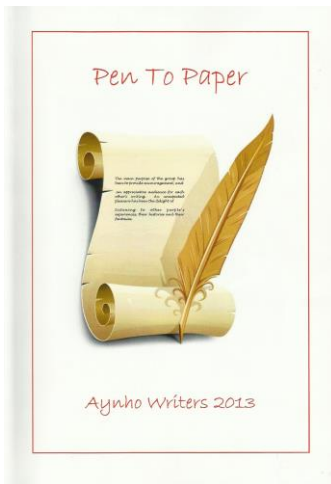
At 31st March 2014 the Council had £13,342 in its bank accounts, and assets to the value of £121,378. The precept is £21,060 towards a budget of £25,161. Internal and External Auditors approved the 2012/13 accounts during the year. The accounts are available for inspection under the usual rules for public funds.

Planning

This year Aynho Parish Council has considered the following applications.

Address	Outline of application	PC Decision	SNC Decision
Wensden Charlton Road Aynho	Change of use from agricultural to industrial/storage	Objected	Awaiting Decision
3 Bowmens Lea Aynho	Two storey extension to rear & conversion of existing loft space	Supported with conditions	Awaiting Decision
14 The Butts Aynho	Demolition of existing double garage, utility area and sitting room and proposed new extension comprising of larger double garage, cloakroom, utility room, kitchen and family room. Modification to some existing windows and removal of timber infill panels replacing with stonework. New modified driveway with dropped kerb	Supported	Awaiting Decision
7 The Square Aynho	Installation of a roof light in an outhouse and a new window (Retrospective)	Supported with conditions	Awaiting Decision
25 The Glebe Aynho	Single storey rear extension, loft conversion and replacement windows.	Support	Approval
Aynhoe Park Corner Aynho	Three new dwellings, new heritage workshop and associated parking, new gated access and landscape works.	Supported with conditions	Awaiting Decision
25 The Glebe Aynho	Single storey rear extension, loft conversion and replacement windows.	Supported with conditions	Refusal
7 The Square Aynho	The conversion of an unusable outhouse (other than for storage) into a self contained room. (retrospective)	Supported with conditions	Refusal
Aynhoe Park House Aynhoe Park Aynho	Change of use of part of the main house for holding events (weddings, parties etc.) and change of use of part of the house to Spa (Retrospective). Change of use of part of the main house from B1 (offices) to C3 (residential) including 7 self contained apartments. Change of use of garden building to an artisanal bakery.	Supported with conditions	Approval
Aynhoe Park House Aynhoe Park Aynho	Internal alterations to facilitate change of use of part of main house from B1 (offices) to C3 (residential) including 7 self contained apartments. Internal and external alterations to facilitate change of use of garden building to artisanal bakery.	Supported with conditions	Approval
Wensden Buildings Charlton Road Aynho	Change of use from agricultural to industrial/storage use	Objected	Withdrawn
6 The Square Aynho	Single storey and 1.5 storey extension to rear.	Supported	Approval
6 The Square Aynho	Refurbishment of a Grade II listed dwelling to return it to use with a single storey and 1.5 storey extension to rear.	Supported with conditions	Approval
2 Bowmens Lea Aynho	Replacement detached double garage with storage above	Supported with conditions	Appeal allowed
3 Bowmens Lea Aynho	Single storey extension to rear of property to create kitchen/diner, conversion of loft to create master bedroom and en-suite	Supported with conditions	Approval

AYNHO WRITERS



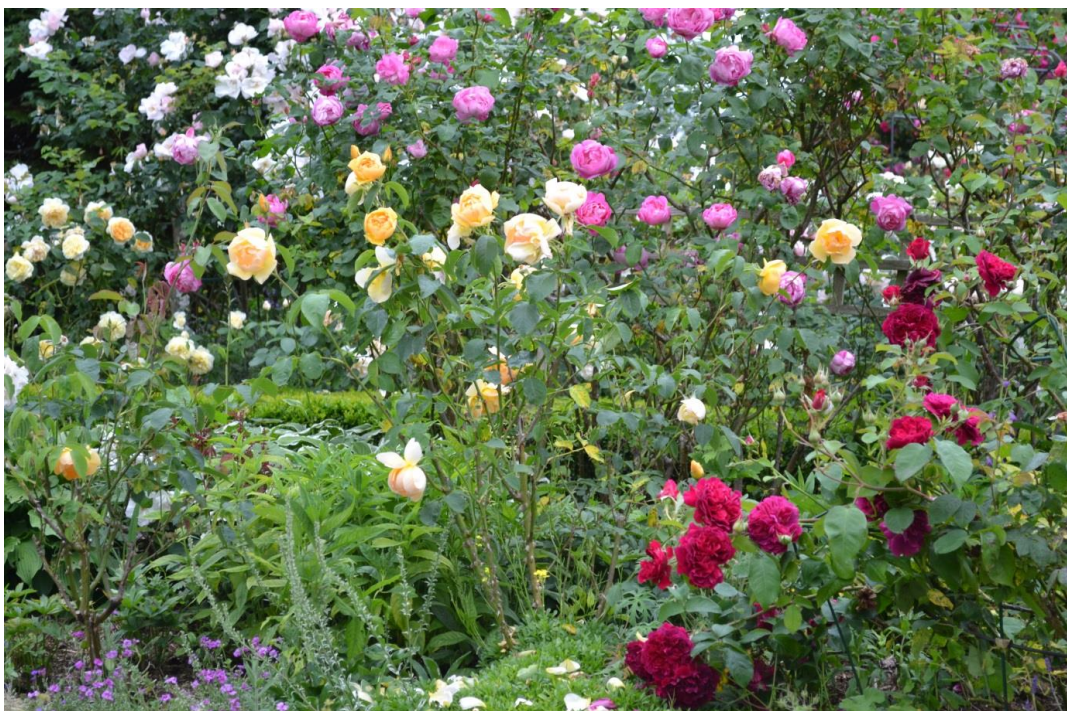
We now have three facilitators who each run the monthly meeting for four months. We have also lost some long time members who have moved away or find getting to meetings too difficult. As always these have been replaced by some talented new members over the last year so we are almost back to our maximum number again. Our annual publication this year, *Pen to Paper*, was edited by Jayne Ryman and published with a lot of help from Brian Reynolds so our grateful thanks to both of them. June Smith and Keith McClellan ran a successful writers workshop in October. Philip Davies had his novel accepted by a publisher who also had first option on the next one in the series leaving Philip with target dates to meet for future publication. The group were delighted at his success. We still have room for at least one more writer so if anyone is interested they are welcome to attend a meeting with no commitment to join unless they feel they would enjoy it. We meet on the second Saturday of the month from 10am to 12.30pm.

Brian Reynolds, 01869 811007.

AYNHO GARDENING CLUB

In 2013, the Gardening Club continued with its programme of meetings on the second Wednesday of the month from January to November. Meetings are usually in the evening in the village hall and involve a talk on garden-related matters or a slide show of beautiful gardens or wild flowers in the UK and abroad, followed by refreshments and time for a chat. Talks last year covered subjects including Pelargoniums, Herbaceous Plants, Growing Hardy Orchids and Easy Fruit and Vegetables in Containers, while the slide presentations ranged from Flowers of Iran to the Flora of Switzerland. We also had demonstrations on the Basics of Flower Arranging and how to make Christmas wreaths out of garden material.

In the summer months the club usually arranges two day trips to beautiful gardens. Last year we went to Capel Manor Gardens in Enfield in May and then Bodenham Arboretum in Worcestershire in October. We were hoping to see the autumn colour, but because of the warm season the colours were more summery than autumnal. One lovely July evening we went to visit a delightful private garden in Bledington. The way the garden had been designed and developed in about 15 years was amazing and a real lesson in what can be achieved by two people with a love of plants.



Our spring plant sale was held during Maytime in the Square. Fortunately it was a sunny day and people watched the May Queen and Morris dancing and bought plants and tools – much more relaxed than the previous year when it rained heavily. At the end of August, we held the Annual Flower and Produce Show. After a much better summer than the last two years we had a hall full of colour and the fragrance of flowers and baking. It is worth stating again here that the show is not just a Gardening Club event. It is for the village and is open to everyone who lives in Aynho. There are cookery and craft sections plus photographs and separate categories for children. It would be wonderful to have more children entering as it is such a good way to get them involved both in the natural environment and in their local community. The next annual Show is on Saturday 30th August.

Looking forward to the 2014 programme, there have been a number of changes on the committee. Annabel Bellamy is the new Chair and a varied programme of talks and visits is underway. There will be a day trip to the Birmingham Botanical Gardens in May and a return visit to Kew in September to enjoy the late summer planting. Non-members are welcome to join us on these days out. For information please contact Jean Skuce on 810034. We will also be making an evening visit to Manor Farm Herbs at Fringford in July.

Future talks include: Aspects of Garden Design, Easy Ways to Make Compost, Bee Keeping and the World of Roses. If you are interested in trying the Club, check the programme on the village website or phone Annabel Bellamy (810847) or Kath Arnold (811868) for details. Alternatively, please just come along to a meeting. Members do not need any particular knowledge of gardening techniques or plant names. We are a friendly group of people who enjoy spending time in our gardens and would like to learn a little more about plants and how to make the most of our outdoor spaces.

AYNHO SPORTS FIELD AND PAVILION (ASRA) AND THE PAVILION CAFE

The Pavilion and Sports Field continue to benefit from increased use, particularly the amenity track on which I am delighted to see all ages from dawn until dusk! The field has benefitted from a lovely new tree and my thanks to the WI for the purchase and planting of it.

As you know I am having a year off from the Cafe and fundraising events this year but I am still looking after the pavilion bookings so can be contacted for pavilion hire. The cricketers from Evenley should be playing again this season on a Saturday afternoon and there is a regular card playing group on a Monday afternoon if anyone is interested in joining them.

On a Thursday morning there are now 3 walking groups totalling nearly 40 people leaving from the pavilion at 10am and at least two evenings a week the space is let to rehearsing bands. This, along with party bookings and the Brackley kids football teams in the winter amass an income in excess of £1000 annually for the pavilion. Added to that is the income from the Park Club Draw which is around another £1000. A superb quiz and curry evening thanks to the hard work of Michael Johnson and his team for the past two years, plus donations from the Winter Lunch Club and ad-hoc donations and book sales give us nearly another £1000. During the past year we have used this income to contribute towards the pot for the new small playpark, build changing room seats and storage in the pavilion, decorate the changing rooms and add a new shed for storage and a new security light for those night time hirers. I'm always open to suggestions for new purchases so please get in touch.

The ASRA committee have not met for some time now and I have taken on more of a caretaker role at the pavilion, checking it weekly and administering keys, dealing with hirers, maintenance and grass cutting etc. I think it's about time to inject some new enthusiasm into the place as, after nearly 14 years looking after the place, my children have pretty much grown up and it would be good to start transitioning now to some younger villagers.

So, with this in mind I would like those interested in preserving our playing field and pavilion to come along to the Village Meeting on 28 April to plan a way forward for the future of one of our villages biggest assets. Whether this is by forming a new Committee or just attracting someone with an interest in the place, I am open to suggestions. Finally I'd like to publically thank Sue and Derek Hales from Brackley who have cut back trees and filled in potholes and found a new caterer for the walkers and started a card group...and they don't even live here!!!

If you would like to speak to me about anything to do with the playing field and pavilion please contact me on 01869 810019 or kaynho@lineone.net or drop in at 11 Portway. Please make the time to come to the village meeting if you can.

Kay Anderson, 01869 810019

ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH, AYNHO

After a busy Christmas with lots of carols and mince pies, the New Year started as a year of settling and foundations. Our new venture of Pizza praise, an all age family time of activities and worship on Sunday afternoons, has continued through the year. This now has a regular following of families and church members; the debate is still out whether Pizza or Hot dogs are best. Candles prayers, when the church is open and lit with candles for quiet reflection has also continued in the darker evenings and has been a place of fulfilment for many, as have the Steane Summer Services with their visiting preachers.

Opportunities for quiet reflection have also been available in the two quiet days we hold each year, these again have a regular following and we look to expand that in 2014 maybe with a quite away day to our diocesan cathedral at Peterborough

The new Taize style worship has also proved very popular over the year and has become a regular fixture. Taize offers a quieter reflective worship with its own unique style of music and the use of candles. If you haven't tried it yet you don't know what you are missing.

We have been fortunate to have Bill Richards join the ministry team to help lead family services at Hinton and Evenley. Bill is a Methodist lay preacher. This coming summer we are looking forward to training a curate Shemil Mathew who will be ordained deacon on 29 June - St. Peter's day at Peterborough Cathedral. Shemil will be with us for three years, he will be the new face on the block.

Our work with the church schools has continued with the foundation governors appointed by the PCC at both Charlton and Croughton schools. Both schools have also been supported with weekly assemblies by the Rector and support with RE lessons.

This year has seen the launch of a new venture called 'Open the Book'. This does what it says, through the telling of bible stories, it opens up the bible (the book) to young children. This year has seen teams going into Croughton School and Farthinghoe school, and also into Croughton Mums and tots group and pre school. If you know of a group who would like to hear more, then I would love to hear from you.

After Easter we are starting two new family services in Aynho and Croughton, with a shorter and all age family service format.

The summer holidays saw the continuation of the well established and popular holiday club at Croughton School. This year the theme was based around a theatre and called 'Show Stoppers'. Around 70 children enjoyed the week which ended with a special celebration service on Sunday at Croughton Church. More helpers are always welcomed to join the team.

Regular bible study has continued through out the year in the villages, and this has been enhanced by using a book called 'The Essential 100' which picks 100 readings from the bible to get a good flavour of the story, while missing all the boring beget bits.

The churches has been served well by their church wardens and PCC who have worked to maintain the church fabric and to make the churches a welcoming place for faces old and new. They have also worked hard with Church fetes and fund raising to help raise the £75,000 or so it costs to keep the buildings and churches in order. My grateful thanks go to everybody who has worked so hard. All money is raised or given by donation with no government or diocesan funding. If you would like to help maintain the church in your village, every bit of help would be appreciated, from time on clean up days, so sponsoring grass cutting, of a regular financial contribution. The church is there for the whole village, not just for Sunday worship, as national listed buildings they are everybody's heritage.

Our churches are also places of prayer and regular Morning Prayer is said in your village church throughout the year. If you have any prayer requests or thanks giving's I would always be willing to include them in our prayers, It is lovely at these short services to be encouraged by local villagers coming to join me in church-thank you.

Revd Simon Dommett

Rector of the Astwick Vale Benefice of Aynho, Croughton, Evenley, Farthinghoe, Hinton-in-the-Hedges and Steane.

AYNHO WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

Aynho WI has had a busy and enjoyable year in 2013, having not only a varied programme of talks but also its 50th anniversary celebrations. Lunch at the Cartwright Hotel was rounded off with looking through our considerable archives (the WI has been present on and off in the village since the 1920s) and sampling our colourful commemorative cake. Over the year our monthly meetings have listened to speakers on a variety of subjects including the roles of the EU and UK, the history of horse racing, complementary beauty therapies, working in the music industry, and the lore of gemstones. We have continued our occasional walks (weather permitting) and can be seen in action in the traditional WI sphere of teas and cakes at village activities such as the Church Fete and May In the Square. Members have been able to go on the varied courses offered by the WI 's Denman College, near Abingdon. We welcome new members and we are looking forward to the centenary next year of the Womens' Institutes foundation in this country in 1915 .

AYNHO BIODIVERSITY GROUP

The Aynho Biodiversity Group is a set of like-minded people who share a keen interest in nature and the environment. We meet occasionally throughout the year to discuss projects and activities in order to promote conservation and environmental issues around the village. We have a biodiversity page on the village website with a children's section providing information and activities as well as a Facebook page. We write a regular feature for the monthly newsletter called 'Bird of the Month' but this is beginning to diversify and include other animals as well.

We have recently completed a survey of Aynhoe Park, conducted throughout the year and consisting of approximately two surveys for each of the four seasons. We are now in the process of compiling a booklet showing our results. We have purchased two bat boxes for the village and as well as organising a talk by a member of the Bat Conservation Society at the annual Aynho Community Weekend we ran some 'bat' craft activities for children. In conjunction with the Gardening Club we organised a photographic competition for young people and promoted our activities at The Aynho Village Fete. We are looking forward to further enhancing the habitat for flora and fauna in the vicinity of Aynho in the coming year.





AYNHO HEALTH WALKS

There are three types of health walk on Thursday mornings. The Long Walk covers between five and seven miles, takes about two hours and attracts walkers from a wide area as well as from Aynho. We were very pleased that Ian Wilson qualified as a walk leader for these walks in addition to Brian Croft and Keith McClellan.

The short walks are the most popular. These cover about three miles and take about an hour. The latest development is the introduction of weekly track walks for those who for health reasons need to be able to rest frequently and to be able to stop without being far from home. All three walks have qualified walk leaders and back up leaders and all routes are risk assessed. Leaders here are Kathy White, Nigel Porter, and Sue and Derek Hales.

What we all look forward to arriving back at the pavilion for a cup of tea or coffee, a delicious cake and a good chat. Many of us also have lunch here, ordering our jacket potato before setting off and enjoying greatly after our exercise. Although Kay has taken a year off she has been replaced by another Kay and her assistant, Anita, who provide very similar high quality refreshments at very similar prices.



Walkers gathered for the anniversary walk before settling down to a celebration lunch

We celebrated our second anniversary in January with a lunch for fifty walkers at the Rose and Crown. Our thanks to Sue Hales for arranging that and for the tremendous efforts she has made to recruit a new refreshment provider.

More details are available on the village website under health walks. There are also regular descriptions of the most recent walks.

Keith McClellan

AYNHO RECORDED MUSIC SOCIETY

The Society has had an excellent year, with an average attendance of 19/20 for every meeting held on the first Wednesday of the month at 7.30 in the Village Hall. Encouragement is given for people to nominate a special item and the presentations are spread among the members themselves; naturally we miss Bernard's presence and expertise. As well as recorded music we have had some videos and live performances which were led by Douglas. It has been a very happy year with lots of heart warming and rousing music, not forgetting a very convivial half time break. New members will be very welcome and anyone requiring further information should ring me

Bob Mann, 01869 810264

AYNHO SHORT MAT BOWLS

We meet every Tuesday afternoon 2.30-4.30, with a tea break, in the village hall. There is an annual fee of £10 and £1 per session. We have a full compliment of dedicated members.

Jean Darby 01869 810373 or Doug Ward 01869 810723

AYNHO HISTORY SOCIETY

I am delighted to report that the society has maintained a membership in excess of 50. Our attempt to encourage members of the village to present their passion for history has continued with Richard and Rosemary Sermon presenting the history of Friars Well and David Jennings' insight into the world of archaeology.

Subjects covered include:

- Humphrey Repton - his impact on the Aynho landscape.
- Sex Drink and Death in the C17th.
- Archaeology - it's more than just Time Team.
- Friars Well a history and tour.
- Leisure and entertainment in Victorian and Edwardian Oxford.
- From Gough to Google, the development of printed maps of Oxfordshire.
- Before "The White Queen", the political power plays during the Wars of the Roses and the Battles of Towton and Edgcote.
- The Mitford Sisters and their family.
- Nothing much happened in Bicester.....except!
- Lord Nuffield - Morris Motors and his philanthropy particularly in modern medicine.

The Society presented the Cartwright Archive Exhibition at the Maytime celebration and such was demand, again at Aynhoe Park later in the summer. We were also present at the Community weekend and

ran the annual village walk. The highlight of the year has to be our War of the Roses Gala evening with two nationally renowned speakers. The hall was full to capacity with villagers and visitors from local Societies and schools. Thank you to Paul Duncanson for co-opting the speakers and persuading them to step down from premier to the village hall division!

Summaries of all the lectures are posted on the AHS section of the village web site. A number of items have been added to the society archive including a book written by Richard Blencowe (of Aynhno) in 1812, maps, photographs and artefacts including an "Aynhoe" brick made in the village brickyard.

The society continues to provide genealogical information to enquirers from around the world and guided tours to visitors from near and far. In the light of new information from Canada and from closer to home, the Compendium of Aynho's military history has been updated. As before, this is available on the village website; the chapter on the Great War being particularly relevant this year.

It was a delight to receive the memoirs of a Second World War evacuee. We always welcome information with a village connection; please don't think we know it all!

A special thank you to Peter Cole for his unstinting assistance and to all those who have supported the society be that at our meetings or at village events.

Rupert Clark
Chairman

AYNHNO COMMUNITY THEATRE

If anyone would like to get involved in ACT please get in touch with Kay Anderson. on 01869 810019 or kaynho@lineone.net. We are hoping to put on some Sunday afternoon readings this year so please keep an eye on the newsletter for more information.

Adderbury, Deddington & District PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

The Society seeks to provide a forum for like-minded photographers to meet in a non-competitive environment, regardless of technical ability, where experience and knowledge may be shared and developed through the activities of the Society. It meets regularly on the first and third Wednesdays of each month in the Apricot Room of the Cartwright Hotel. The Society's main activities include monthly presentations by outside speakers and its own members, regular workshops on digital camera controls and creativity in taking photographs, indoor studio and other workshops, occasional photo-shoots throughout the year, two annual exhibitions of members' work and one social event each year which have proved popular with members. In addition, the Society maintains its own web site (adandd.co.uk) that provides details on all its present and future activities. The Society welcomes all members, whose digital photographic skills and experience may vary from compact cameras through to single lens reflex cameras. Since its inception in July 2006, membership of the Society has grown steadily and includes people living in a wide catchment area of the towns and villages around Aynho.

Wendy Meagher

VILLAGE WEBSITE

There have been no great enhancements to the website in the last year but we have continued to provide information on behalf of many village groups. Some new groups have been added recently so please have a look at the site if you haven't been there for a while.

Thank-you to Jill Wightman who has taken over most of the day-to-day updates.

We are always grateful for anyone who can supply items for the website, preferably in a ready-to-go format. If you have anything you would like to put on the site please have a look at the sort of things that

are there already and see if you can present yours in a similar style - the less we have to do the faster it can be published.

In particular think about contact details, and whether you want your phone number or email on the site. We can provide @aynho.org.uk email addresses if you would like to keep your own email confidential.

If anyone has suggestions for information which you would like to see on the site, or maybe you would like to see your own Aynho-based group there, please let us know at web@aynho.org.uk and we will see what we can do.

Lawrence Wilkinson (web@aynho.org.uk)

SOUTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL

The new arrangements for the collection of our rubbish bins were introduced across the District last summer. For the first time residents are now able to recycle our food waste. The new system has settled down well and as a result South Northants is now recycling about 60% of its waste. This is good news as The Council is paid for the waste and rubbish it sends for recycling, and it also means that The County Council is having to pay less for the reduced amount of rubbish going for Landfill.

Planning issues both here and across the country continue to make headlines. Although the Government continues to talk about Localism, although not so loudly as a couple of years ago, they do now emphasise the need for more houses to meet the needs of an increasing population. In spite of the Council's plans for 1500 houses in Brackley and 3,000 in Towcester as well as plans for houses on the edge of Northampton, the district is seen as a prime target by developers. I realise that houses are needed, and the challenge is to see that they are built to the plans of the Council, not where an opportunistic developer or land owner has seen an opportunity to use the Nation Planning Framework to his advantage.

The funding of local government is a complex issue. So much depends on the annual grant from Central Government. And this year saw a 13.2% drop of just over £600,000. Although there have been some indirect grants this is still a substantial figure, and the demands on Local Government have certainly not reduced. The programme of joint working with Cherwell has continued and this has certainly bought about considerable savings. Work is now being done to expand this where practicable to Stratford District with work going on to effect an IT programme covering all three Councils.

Work has now started in Towcester at Moat Lane on the rejuvenation of a 10 acre site between Watling Street and Easton Neston Park which is a mixed development of houses, shops and offices including a new Library and offices for South Northants Council. On completion the present offices of the Council which although built only 30 years ago are in need of substantial repairs will be redeveloped for housing.

John Townsend
Rainsborough Ward

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

This report covers three things: first, the County Council Budget for this year, secondly, the Police Budget, and thirdly, the large number of houses being built across the border in Oxfordshire and the effect that this could have on our villages.

The nation's indebtedness means that during the next few years we are not going to see any relaxation of the financial restraints on the County Council. There is constant pressure to save money in order to keep the council tax at an affordable and acceptable level. During the last three years the amount of grants received from the government has gradually reduced and the council has had to offset this by reducing costs. In 2011/12 we had to save a total of £73m, in 2012/13 £28m, in the current year £32m, and in the year starting next month a further £40m. A total of over £170m spread over four years. The result is that the council has had to initiate different ways of doing things and Northamptonshire is now recognised as

one of the most efficient, innovative, and enterprising in England. This county has the lowest County Council tax in the country.

For the coming financial year the net revenue, excluding the school budget, is £423m with a contribution from the tax you pay of £225m. The biggest net expenditure is on Adult Social Care at £145m, followed by Children and Families at £114m, Environment, Development, Transport, and Highways at £75m. The remaining items, including the Fire Service, make up the balance of £90m.

This year, for the first time, the council decided not to accept the government's 1% additional contribution if no increase in tax was made. Instead the council decided to increase the tax by 1.99% resulting in an increase of £20 a year on a band 'D' property. If the council had accepted the government's 1% 'freeze grant' this would have amounted to £2.2m whereas the 1.99% increase will bring in almost double this amount which will remain as part of the base budget in subsequent years, something not guaranteed with the 'freeze grant'. The County Council have kept the tax at the same level for the past three years and have exceeded the promise made by the Conservative party in its 2005 election manifesto to keep any rise at or below the level of inflation.

Turning now to the Police Budget about which I guess you will know very little. I am a member of the Police and Crime Panel which is responsible for scrutinising and holding to account the Police & Crime Commissioner in the way he sets the priorities and utilises the police resources throughout the county. The panel is a joint body established collectively by each of the local authorities in the county, with the County Council acting as the host authority. The membership consists of ten councillors drawn from each of the local authorities according to a set allocation of places, plus two independent co-opted members from the local community. It's a relatively new panel set up after the Police & Crime Commissioner was elected in 2012.

The budget for the year 2014/15 gives a requirement of £121m, made up by grants from central government of £76.5m, and £44.5m from the precept. This is the amount you as tax payers contribute as a portion of the council tax and includes an increase for the coming financial year of 1.99%, equal to £3.84 for a band 'D' property. The big problem faced by the Police & Crime Commissioner is that the government is intending to reduce the size of grant by £6.5m during the coming four years. This is a reduction or saving of 8.5% before allowing for any cost inflation. He is determined not to reduce uniformed police numbers but, as 80% of costs relate to staff, this is going to be very difficult. Currently Northamptonshire Police share backroom costs with Cheshire Police and ways are now being explored to further develop shared services with other police forces and the Fire and Ambulance services. The Police and Crime Commissioner is also mounting a campaign to recruit more Special Constables and to vacate Wootton Hall which is large and costly. The headquarters will be relocated to a less expensive site.

I am becoming increasingly concerned about the number of houses being built particularly in Oxfordshire. Not only have we substantial developments in our own county in Brackley, Middleton Cheney and Kings Sutton but also very large numbers of houses being erected across the border in Bodicote, Adderbury, Banbury, Bicester, and Upper Heyford, all of which will generate more traffic through our villages. I am also particularly concerned about the affect on people wishing to shop in Banbury. There seems to be a complete lack of information being passed from one authority to the other regarding any plans to improve the Oxford/Banbury Road. This road is already very congested at peak times – just imagine what it will be like when 1,200 houses are built at Longford Park, Bodicote, plus possibly another 400 close by, and a development in Adderbury. Through the Assistant Director Highways at County Hall in Northampton I am trying to bring about much closer working between the two counties so that we are made more aware of the improvements in infrastructure that are planned.

Finally, I need to report on how my predecessor, Councillor Melling, spent his allocation of £7,000 under the Empowering Councillors' scheme. A total of £3,600 was allocated to Evenley Cricket Club for an artificial wicket, and £2,400 for Play Equipment at Greatworth Children Park. Of the balance of £1,000, I have given £450 to Kings Sutton Parish Council for the purchase of a computer for the use of the public in the Memorial Hall, and the balance of £550 has been carried forward to the current financial year.

Ron Sawbridge,
County Councillor for Middleton Cheney Division.