

Chair's Annual Report 2008/2009

This year's report shows that there has been an even wider range of activities and events within the Parish. There are now at least 70 local people getting involved in the range of issues and activities within the Parish. With this commitment things can change in a positive way within our local community.

I have to report obviously about the initiative that the Parish Council resolved to undertake last year, to develop a Parish Plan from the Village Appraisal. We have heard tonight how advanced we are in this process. The Parish Council was successful in a Lottery bid and a grant from Solihull Borough Council and has put in another bid for the publication and associated costs of the Parish Plan so that every household in the Parish will have their own copy. The independent Steering Group chaired by a volunteer local resident Iain Roxburgh and a number of volunteers now meet on a regular basis to steer this large joint initiative. This group includes representatives from the Parish Council. This is another step in enabling local people shape the future of our community with a plan of action and it will help influence decision makers especially Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council. The return rate of the Appraisal Questionnaire was 60% - a huge result and greater than the USA election return rate! There have been a number of public meetings about this which have been very well attended and up date newsletters have been delivered to every household and business. Iain Roxburgh and I including representatives from the steering group presented the results to Solihull Council officers and members in the Council Chamber. This event was hosted by the Mayor David Bell.

We have carried out our intentions of our communication strategy where we have improved communication with people and businesses in and around Meriden. We have had a number of public meetings which have included discussions about the Village Appraisal, Transport issues, Anti-Social Behaviour, and the Playing Fields development. All these have been very well attended. The website (www.meridenparishcouncil.org.uk) has continued to be used and contains pictures of the Parish Councillors, minutes of the meetings, links to other organisations and District Councillors. There is a "What's On" section thanks to the information supplied by the Meriden Mag and the Meriden Festival website, and a village blog where people can put their views and comments to the Parish Council.

Our involvement continues with Solihull Area Committee of the Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils where representatives from all the Solihull parish and town councils meet. I have been elected Chair again of this group and this has continued to raise the profile of Meriden. Issues that are common amongst all the Councils are discussed e.g. community speed watch, alcohol free zones.

Parish Councillors are now representatives on a number of committees: Meriden School Board of Governors, Conservation Committee, Village Hall Committee, Solihull Area Committee, SMBC Standards Committee, Police Rural Assembly, War memorial committee. We have also met with Meriden School Council where the children chose amongst themselves a piece of equipment for the present playing fields which hopefully will be installed by the summer holidays.

The development of the playing field on the Hampton Lane site and the new housing development on the existing playing fields has continued to move forward slowly. The developer has been identified by SMBC. This will be Taylor Wimpey and the Parish Council has asked them to have a public meeting to discuss the plans and hopefully improve working together. A date is being discussed at the moment.

The duck pond needs some extensive work. Investigations have identified that work needs to be done and this will be a joint project with SMBC and a Lottery bid will be done so that we can complete the work.

A joint initiative with the police begins this month, Community Speed Watch. This project trains people to use a speed device. From the Appraisal, key roads have been identified as problem areas. These will be targeted by the teams. Anyone who is interested please come and volunteer. Training is provided by the police and a full risk assessment is done by them to ensure the safety of all volunteers.

SMBC was overall winner in the city category of the national Britain in Bloom competition. The Borough scooped a silver-gilt award and 'Overall Winner' after representing the Heart of England region in the competition for the first time in 10 years. The Green was entered into the Heart of England in Bloom competition but was not put through to the final stages.

We set up a Football Academy during the summer holidays last year which was successful especially for the younger age group. We need a volunteer who can undergo or has a Level 1 Coaching Certificate so we can do this again this year.

The Remembrance Day service road closures had to be organised locally again by volunteers this year and which was done very successfully. This will continue in future years. Community surgeries continue to be held once a month at the library. Any member of the public can talk to the police representative and the neighbourhood coordinator from SMBC.

All of the allotments have been let this year. The Parish Council was assisted by the Mayor of Solihull, SMBC and the Probation Service in a "big tidy up". The allotment holders are now in the process of setting up their own allotment association.

The Meriden Festival grows from strength to strength and has had regular successful events including the Cyclists Memorial, Meriden Festival Fair (Centre Celebrations), Kinwalsey Tree Service and this year Jazz on the Lawn. The 5th Meriden Motorcycle Megaride took place on Sunday 8th June 2008 at the playing fields. Organised by the Rotary Club of Meriden in aid of the County Air Ambulance, the event began mid morning when a huge number of motorcyclists rode in from Leamington Spa. live music was provided by the Coleshill Brass Band, there were a falconry display and an exhibition of paintings by local artists from the Meriden Art Group. The Meriden Festival website has more information www.meriden-festival.org.uk.

The Meriden Mag continues to be delivered by volunteers to each and every household on a quarterly basis. It is an excellent means of communicating Meriden issues and information. The results from the Appraisal questionnaire showed that the Mag is by far the most used and valued source of information about Meriden and the events and activities in the Parish.

Alan Lole again organised The Meriden Tree of Thought, the fourth special Village tree, in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support raised £2310 through the dedication of a light in memory of a friend or loved one. This tree had over 1600 lights and looked spectacular. Next year we have been promised that the tree will not attempt to emulate the Leaning Tower of Pisa!

Julie Hall the Parish Clerk has been a great support to me as Chair and also the Council as a whole. She has nearly completed her CILCA qualification which is an essential criterion for us to Apply for Quality Parish status.

The goals for the Parish Council for the next 12 – 18 months are to:

1. Complete the Parish Plan
2. To complete the criteria to apply for Quality Parish Status
3. To continue to improve communication with residents, businesses, District Councillors and Officers from Solihull MBC.

Rosie Weaver
Chair
April 2009