

## **Colehill Parish Council - Annual Parish Meeting 19<sup>th</sup> April 2011, "Chairman's Annual Report"**

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, fellow councillors, honoured guests. Thank you for coming.

Once again I have left the writing of my speech until last minute – or rather until last night. I started it at about 10.30 last night and I finished it ... a few minutes ago. Blood from a stone is an expression that springs to mind.

I look back at my speech of the 20<sup>th</sup> April last year ([that was this meeting, 12 months ago](#)) and I am surprised. It was a good speech, did I really write that? How can I possibly improve on it? I talked about community and the importance of fostering and strengthening a spirit of community here in Colehill. My view there hasn't changed – and I hope that the view of this Council hasn't either. I also mentioned the good things which we had achieved – such as the first ever Colehill Country Fayre, the Community Newsletter, the Parish Christmas Tree, the playbuilder scheme at Olivers Park and the Safer Routes to School Cycleway ... but those things were all last year – and before. They still stand – as building blocks on which to further the improvement of Colehill.

Still in the pipeline when I delivered my speech last year we had the planning application for the proposed allotments on the land at "By-the-Way" and as you all know that application was rejected – and that was a grave disappointment. But did we give up? No we did not – and we now have a number of other possible allotment sites in place.

I always mean to keep a list of the events and meetings that I attend as part of my duties on the Parish Council, but it never gets written – I think in the last year it runs somewhere into the low dozens. Reading back over my "Chairman's Remarks" in the minutes of the last year I can see that as your Chairman I have represented Colehill at meetings in Dorchester, at civic functions in Verwood, Ferndown, Wimborne and at the District Council. On your behalf I attended the launch event of the charity "Diverse Abilities Plus" ([the new name for what used to be Dorset Scope](#)), I attended events at Colehill First School, the Church Hall, a Girl Guide Pageant, a few Scouting Award presentations and a community theatre production in the old Victorian Pump House. I have also continued to represent you on the Dorset Waste Forum, on the Wimborne Cemetery Management Committee, and to be the principal councillor on the Land Management and Conservation team ([indeed - since the unfortunate resignation of Joe Kingsmill I have been the only councillor so involved](#)).

Collectively, we at Colehill Parish Council have continued to be pro-active in promoting the interests and well-being of the people of Colehill. In the last year we have continued our good work on the Colehill Clarion newsletter and we held another Country Fayre ... but we have to look to the future, where a number of challenges lie ahead.

## **Colehill Parish Council - Annual Parish Meeting 19<sup>th</sup> April 2011, "Chairman's Annual Report"**

We all know about the challenges to the library and to the school crossing patrols. On both these issues the public are looking to the Parish Council for support and guidance. On the subject of the former, however (*for those of you who aren't paying attention that is The Library*), I was in a conversation with the Parish Clerk of West Moors recently: I mentioned the special circumstances occasioned by the legacy that supports their library, but she countered by saying that what we have and they don't have is a well-supported and influential Friends group. I spoke to Derek Henderson, the chairman of our Friends Group, earlier today. There is hope yet: in particular the Friends Groups across the county have united to form the "ADLIB" group (*that's the Association of Friends of Dorset Libraries – I had to look that one up*) and the group have put forward proposals, agreed by them all, which may mean that our library can be reprieved again.

In the immediate future we have the so called "Hamburger Junction" improvements at Canford Bottom Roundabout to deal with. It seems fairly likely that are we going to be able to do little to influence it, but what we can do, we must do. At the very least we must be seen to be involved and to report back on the issues. We may be able to achieve some benefits for our electorate by representation to the Highways Agency and County Council to mitigate delays and disruption during the works.

Another challenge is the rebuild project of the Colehill and Wimborne Youth and Community Centre (*aka The Reef*). What I can say about that is that fund-raising is on-going and that further support is being sought. We here at Colehill Parish Council have committed much already and we must remain at the core of this important feature for the youth of Colehill.

To come, this year and next year we have the intermediate and later stages of consultation on East Dorset and Christchurch's Core Strategy. It is important that we here in Colehill are represented and involved in the process to consider what development happens, particularly where it affects us, affects our schools, affects traffic through our village and where it affects our boundaries.

In the next term we have to continue to build on our successes with the "Colehill Clarion" newsletter and the Country Fayre event. We need to continue to maintain good relationships with the press and to continue to get the work of the Parish Council out there and into the public consciousness with press releases and positive stories and to publicise and promote the Parish Council, the community of Colehill and its other institutions. I also hope that we will continue to explore new avenues to publicise the work of the Parish Council.

Some of you may be aware that we have a presence on Twitter but at the DAPTC event, which some of us attended a few weeks ago, mention was made of Facebook – and that is an avenue that we have yet to explore. The take-up of our offer for clubs

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and societies to maintain their own pages on our website has not been well exploited as yet. Next month, after I have passed on the reins, and given the good will of my successor and the next Parish Council I hope that I may be able to address these issues and to expand and improve on our web and social media presence.

The DAPTC seminar, to which I refer, concerned the forthcoming Localism Bill. It is a huge document, which may bring considerable changes to the powers and responsibilities of Parish Council. The General Power of Competence, in particular, may be useful, if we can qualify for it. The abolition of the Standards Board for England (*Wales and Scotland apparently don't have standards*) and the removal of the rules about predetermination may offer opportunities and freedoms, which we haven't had before, but may also present pitfalls and leave us without guidance. In these things, as in many others, we will be dependent on our clerk to guide us and I'd like to take this opportunity to mention how much we all value Tracey's hard work, experience and level-headedness. I hope that in the next term Tracey will gain her CiLCA qualifications and that maybe Colehill can formally call itself a "Quality Council", even though we all know that we already are.

I'd like to mention our good relationship with the police and also our good relationships with the church, with the Guiding and Scouting movements, with our 6 local schools and with the business community here in Colehill. I hope that the next Parish Council will continue to maintain these good relationships and to be as inclusive as possible with all elements of the community. I had a lengthy chat with Steve Brett – our friendly policeman in Day-Glo yellow on a mountain bike – at the Conservation Workday on Saturday about inclusiveness. We could be in an "Us and Them" relationship with all of these other bodies – I'd rather we were all just "Us" – or perhaps that should be "We". It's something that Steve and Matt have achieved by their good relationships with the youth of Colehill and it's something that we need to continue to achieve for The Parish Council.

With the end of this Council term next month, we are sadly losing a few members. Keith Baker is leaving us due to work commitments; John Bell is leaving us after more years than he cares to remember; Coirin and Mike are also leaving us. It is disappointing that we who remain stand uncontested – I had hoped to be able to involve the members of the public in an election, so that they became more aware of what the Parish Council does and who their Parish Councillors are. Even though we advertised in the local newspapers, on the website, in posters around the village, did some personal arm-twisting and even "tweeted" about it as well – only a couple of dozen people came to our open morning on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March. The muted reception to our concerted efforts to get people to stand for election for the next Parish Council was a disappointment, but no-one can claim that we didn't try.

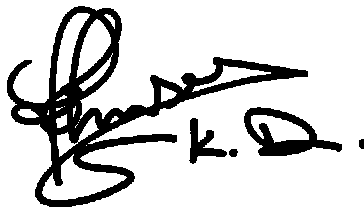
## **Colehill Parish Council - Annual Parish Meeting 19<sup>th</sup> April 2011, "Chairman's Annual Report"**

The good news is that we do have four new-blood councillors joining us next month and I hope that they will be worthy replacements and hard-working members of the team – and at least we have neither the cost of an election, nor do we have to advertise for co-options, as we had to four years ago.

My two years in the Chair are drawing to a close, but I know that my successor has plans of his own and is certainly going to continue in the quest for allotment gardens and for Parish Council involvement in any housing development that impacts on our village.

I hope that my talking about the future isn't seen as too prescriptive, bearing in mind that I will not be in the lead on much of what lies ahead. I hope and believe that much of what I have said will accord with the wishes and aims of Dave and of this Council – certainly as it stands (*or sits*) at the moment – and hopefully in the future.

It has been an honour to serve as your chairman – hard work and very frustrating at times – but still an honour. Thank you all for your support.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K.D. Johnson', with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Cllr. KD Johnson, 19<sup>th</sup> April 2011