

ICKFORD PARISH MEETING APRIL 2006

Finance – We have now finally closed off the outstanding annual audits that were being held by *Hacker Young* over the issue of the shop loan. There was no formal penalty for exceeding statutory limits on such spending but their invoice for the audit was effectively such a penalty. I'd like to thank Mary, our Parish Council clerk for securing a considerable reduction. This matter is now closed and we are back to a normal annual audit cycle.

The Parish Council set a precept for this financial year of £12,000. Insurance costs are again higher (about 10% annual inflation) and the increase is earmarked for further improvements to the Playing Area, more play equipment, fencing and so on.

Playing Area – Last summer, the new play equipment was installed. It's a fantastic achievement and the culmination of years of fund raising by the Ickford Play Equipment group and crucially, a successful bid for matching grant funding from AVDC. I think it looks great and those involved, particularly Dr. Anne Cook, should be congratulated for their sterling efforts.

More is planned and we have submitted one unsuccessful application to Rural Enterprise Scheme (RES) and have re-applied based on their recommendation. We have also removed some of the older equipment that failed to meet current levels of design and safety.

The new school Sports Hall is completed and as part of the cooperation agreement with AVDC, we have gained a hard surface from Sheldon Road to the Pavilion. There is still some negotiation continuing about some minor matters such as edging but we have gained what we intended which was a hard sub-surface. We have pulled out all the dead brush and trees along the school boundary and will re-plant, probably later this year.

We have budgeted for fencing or bollards at the Pavilion end to separate vehicles from the field.

The purchase of some adjacent land on the northern boundary is now complete. This will permit us to develop the youth area beyond the trees.

Footpath #12 - This is an east-west, cross village route, between Worminghall Rd (near the Rising Sun), along the backs of the houses in Golders Close and then across the fields to Rocker Lane. It has been closed for around 30 years with a muddle of claimed diversions, development and so on.

The Parish Council has been acting as facilitator, with the affected residents, AVDC and other landowners to try and resolve this long-standing issue by finding an alternate route. The current status is that all alternate proposals have been declined by landowners, including the Parish Council, which has twice considered plans to put part of the re-route across the Playing Area and twice declined for two main reasons: dogs and inability to close the field for events. We have worked hard to improve the field particularly for children and to then create a footpath where dogs cannot be excluded would be a backward step.

We have also been advised that the Parish Council would likely be acting beyond its powers to spend money to resolve such a private dispute over a

right of way. At the current time, AVDC have proposed to meet with the affected residents to review the situation and the Parish Council has no further role.

Highways – The Parish Council receives many requests for attention to Highways matters and we do our best to raise them with BCC and press for improvements.

We have confirmed that Bridge Road is now on the list for substantial re-surfacing works pending Capital allocation - which means there is no firm date. We have also raised other issues such as poor pothole repairs and water run-off. Again, it is primarily an issue of budget priorities but we shall persist in

We also raised several issues concerning with the bridges attempting to ensure they are preserved and maintained in good & safe order.

The increasingly congested parking in Turnfields was taken up with ADVC but the transfer of their housing stock to a Trust later this year means little can probably be done before transfer. We shall follow up with the Trust in July or so.

Affordable Housing – It is an increasingly long-standing action item by the Parish Council to seek a partner for the provision of entry-level rental accommodation in Ickford. This is necessary to retain youngsters within the community. We have been working with the Guinness Housing Trust for several years.

Current status is that GHT in substantial discussions with 2 landowners but the lack of a firm plan means we missed out on a formal funding allocation for this year. I am told that such lengthy projects are typical for rural housing schemes but the fact that this year's status is essentially the same as 12 months ago is not encouraging.

Nigel Bruin
Chairman