

# Colney Heath<sub>1</sub>Parish Council



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## MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF THE COLNEY HEATH PARISH COUNCIL HELD AT THE ST MARKS CENTRE ON THURSDAY 7<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2008 AT 7.30pm

**Present;-** Cllr's Reeves Chair-Cllr Rump –Cllr Cloke-Cllr Brazier  
Cllr J Day Cllr D Crump-Cllr J Henchley-Cllr D Horner

**St Marks Church;** - Reverend James Spanner.

**Clerk & Assistant Clerk;-** Mr J E Dean & Mrs Kim Parker-Mead

**Public Attendance-** 36 members of the Parish attended the meeting -as listed

### **Table Top Displays & information provided by the following organisations;-**

Treasure Tots Pre School:-Carolyn/Debbie/Karen- Pre School education-2.5/3.5 yrs  
Cllr J Day & Cllr Rump:- Photo Archives of "Old Colney Heath"  
Twining-Boissy St Yon:- Patsy Howard.

### **APOLOGIES**

Mr J Ely Highfield Trust, Mrs Margaret Corley past Chair, Cllr Brian Lee County Councillor "the Colneys." St Stephens PC- London Colney PC. CMS. HATPC.

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair welcomed councillors, speakers and everyone and opened the meeting. He reminded everyone to take a moment to view the information and displays from all the various local groups and other organisations set out in the hall after.

### **1. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2006**

Copies of the 2007 minutes were available to each person attending, the Chairman summarised these were then approved as correct;-

*Proposed By Cllr Day*

*Seconded by Cllr Horner*

### **2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

There were no matters arising

### **3. ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN Cllr P Reeves**

In this 60<sup>th</sup> year I was privileged to be elected to be Chair again in May 2007 in the parish and due to the early resignation of Cllr Margaret Corley I have now served the parish for 16 months when we normally only do a year. We each take it in turn and in that way the members of your council feel it's a fair way of sharing the Chairmanship.

This year Dennis Horner and Alan Cloke joined us when the elections ran last May and we are very pleased to have them on board.

We were all returned again in an uncontested election, which actually saved the parish money and Cllr Crump wrote an article about that in the Chronicle last year. The fees are quite astronomical and so we therefore saved paying that out. There are eight councillors, we currently have just one vacancy for Hill End Ward we would like to see filled. Since both Dennis and Alan joined us they have made very worthwhile contributions to the council. Dennis of course running the community bus amongst the many other things he does in and around the village and Church. And Alan with the long standing knowledge of the village, not forgetting his wife Mrs Cloke who served on the Vital Villages Committee along with Jean Horner as well.

As you know we have met at the Charles Morris Hall for the last few years and this year we cross the A414 to be the guests of the St Marks Centre. Perhaps appropriate because James Spanner is going to say a few words soon and tell us all about the new plans for the Church this evening. So I don't intend to keep you from enjoying the cheese and wine after, but my essential annual review and the formal part of the AGM will take us about 45 minutes-not too long and I hope you will find informative.

But first let me take you through the year and tell you about some of the things that have happened during this parish year with the parish council. Each May as I have mentioned we start our parish year by electing a Chair and Vice Chair for one year.

The 60th year began with what I am sure you will agree was a really good event with the installation and blessing of the Tyttenhanger Sign the function after that we laid on with a buffet and celebratory evening. Again I must thank Cllr Geoff Rump for his excellent work and organisation and the success of the evening. It was very interesting to see how popular the quiz turned out to be. We had about 120 people attend at the finish and every one I am sure had a great time. A pity we are not celebrating every year but look forward to our 65<sup>th</sup> or maybe 70<sup>th</sup> and hopefully the council will at that time recall what was done at 60 and do it all again. However since our last annual parish meeting we have tried to continue to do something different from time to time to continue the theme of the 60<sup>th</sup> year celebrations. However in this 60<sup>th</sup> year where we have tried to get a succession of different events it now looks by popular demand a yearly calendar event in Colney Heath in the foreseeable future?

We started over last Easter holiday on 17<sup>th</sup> April with a demonstration of grazing by having Sentry Farms bring cattle to the Furze Field to demonstrate what the grazing plan might look like; it was all part of the overall public consultation on commons grazing. The event enjoyed a warm bright spring day and was visited by about 150 people. CMS had an information stand and also organised a children's nature trail on the common. We feel it achieved good response as part of our consultation process.

In June we re opened Community Park as a quiet place after works to thin coppice and remove saplings and some dangerous trees. We invited the worshipful Deputy Mayor to our newly refurbished Community Park. We had obtained a grant of £4000 from CMS and the District Council to which we added £2000 for the whole works the installation of a disabled gate to allow safer access to the footbridge over the A414. A new field gate, and entrance gate to compliment hedge layering we did previously in December 2006, in keeping with the entrance to Colney Heath. We also celebrated by holding a tea party for the local parents and children. We had a fine sunny day and provided tea, lemonade and cakes for all of the children, including Treasure Tots Pre School and some children and parents from the Junior and Infants school.

In June 2007 year we found major problems with the electrical system in one of the council owned buildings which resulted in an unexpected expenditure on the pavilion in order to make the building safe. This rather dented our budget in this year and no doubt the Clerk will cover that item in the financial report following.

July brought another event which for the first time we took part in the St Albans wide Larks in the Park; this was in Roestock Park and proved very popular. About 200 people in all turned up with their families and children to enjoy the day. The weather started off wet but by the end of the morning the sun came out and we had a fine day. The theme was for various acts to rotate around all the events going on around the city sponsored by St Albans Arts. Two particular ones, the drum expert attracted a huge audience and the "Balloonatics" went round to the all the children making various interesting balloon shapes for them to take home. We also had the Charles Morris Hall Activities Committee to do an excellent BBQ the face painting proved very popular with all the children and there was a long queue.

For your diary we are going to hold the event again in Roestock Park- Assistant Clerk Kim Parker-Mead will tell you more about what we are planning later on.

This year all councillors were obliged to sign up to a government code of conduct the notice is known as- No 1159 we all signed up but I had personal reservations and so did many other councillors throughout the parish's. As to the imposition of this to invasive requirement especially those who volunteer their own unpaid time as well. However I am able to report this council all signed up, and we will continue to run and maintain a fair and transparent operation via the Clerk and the parish office. By the way if you would like to become a councillor we do have a vacancy for the ward of Highfield, if you fancy having a go at that then speak to any member or the Clerk.

In October council decided to commission a New Web Site, we had put this into our 2007-8 budget earlier in the year. Soon you will see the start in the presentation following by David Rodway Editor of the Chronicle. We intend to progressively expand this from the office to be a useful and important facility to all in the village. We gave various grants to local organisations including Charles Morris Hall, Boissy Twinning Association also celebrating 25 years, the Village Hall and the Old Friends Club for travel, the Football Club also benefited from being awarded a 1 year free lease in their 100<sup>th</sup> year along with the building insurance paid. This year the lease is up for renewal at the building and we currently considering a potential new lease.

The Oaklands Development plans came to us last October last year, the reservations we had which we put to the district council via Cllr Brazier. He had previously done a great deal of work consulting with the parish and Smallford Residents association. Clear opinions about the traffic, congestion and schooling concerned many of you, especially with the Oaklands Lane and Station Road traffic problems we have now.

During November we received details from ATISREAL that the Gloucester Playing Fields were to be sold off; we still have a tenancy and are still maintaining the land at cost to the parish. We had an emergency public meeting put what we considered a fair bid of £30,000.00 for the freehold; remember we have some protection under tenancy. Also the landlord and tenant act protecting us from being evicted. But they might raise the rent to an astronomical sum and force us out by default.

We made our offer and waited-Christmas came and went-nothing was heard. By January 2008- This was turned down and our offer was clearly too low. It was what we could afford; The Clerk went through all the financial options including getting a loan to pay back over 15 years. All is not lost-this council intends to fight any closure or development that might not be so easy in view of real estate demands. In our 60<sup>th</sup> year this was not good news at all. This council fully supports the Highfield Residents in a wish to keep as a public open space we intend to oppose any building on the site if it comes before this council. Cllr Brazier also got some good publicity in the local press challenging the Health Authority about selling off play areas. We also realise the problems of late underage drinking and are continually putting pressure on police to act. The matter of sales of alcohol to young persons is a nationwide problem, and no less a problem here. We get reports of broken glass and bottles collected by our staff when cutting the grass there. Unfortunately the illegal sales of high alcohol brands are routinely ignored by some shops selling to underage.

In December we held our annual over 60;'s Christmas Lunch this is always a popular event and 80 people attended for an excellent lunch. Jean and Dennis Horner looked after the arrangements and catering along with a willing band of volunteers and our thanks to them for all their hard work and making it a success. This month highlighted problems with vandalism and anti social behaviour in Tyttenhanger Green and other parts of the village. Increased incidents reported were rapidly brought to the attention of the neighbourhood police, extra patrols were then instigated a close watch kept on particular areas that residents had pointed out.

We are pleased to report that this seems to have quietened down now-the police meeting next week we will keep up the pressure to ban sales of alcohol to underage. Our November meetings are usually about setting council budgets and requirements for precepts in the forthcoming year and the Clerk will update you about this later. Towards the end of the year we were informed on the 12<sup>th</sup> December that we had lost the Public Inquiry to stop use of the Nukkies Farm site for Gypsies and travellers. That was a blow in view of the expense this council and St Albans has spent to stop this going ahead on a flood plain. We have lodged an injunction on the Secretary of State and expect the hearing to be in September. After the Public meeting we held in January 2008 Cllr Brazier and Cllr Day set up a fighting fund. You were all very generous raising over £2000 the rest of the £10,000 legal bill will be met by the parish council. The Clerk informs me that he can still manage to balance the books keep us in business and satisfy the auditor at the end of the year. We have plans to seek a further court order for recovery if we are successful in getting a judgement in our favour. We also have a petition with around 1000 signatures supporting the issue that has gone off to the High Court with the papers.

Incidentally the fighting fund is still very much open if you feel like exposing your cheque books tonight. Please speak to Cllr Brazier or Cllr Day.

We set the precept in January and did our best to keep the costs to Colney Heath in single low figures, the Clerk will tell you more shortly about that. Other issues that came before us were the continued fight to get flood defences for the vulnerable areas in Park Lane and other parts of the village. We held a morning public meeting with two Environment Agency representatives and gave residents the opportunity to say their piece, that very week Hilary Benn MP announced that funds would be made available for defences. Like most things such money is hard won and in our opinion we will have to keep chipping away at the edges to keep our place in the queue. Your council has agreed that at the appropriate time we will have our own flood risk survey done to help our cause on its way.

A regular uphill battle is the HHWP for repairs to our roads, last year Chris Brazier managed to get £70,000 allocated for highways improvements outside the school. Again we had a morning meeting open to all and asked Highways along, it was clear there is no joined up thinking about these works. The promised seventy thousand has disappeared which we had high hopes of obtaining. When you see how many people are involved it is staggering. We had a meeting of nine people from all sorts of organisations in the county with budgets who attended our meeting. God knows what the salary ratio was probably enough to pay for what improvements we all wanted. One thing came out that was positive at this meeting a representative of the HHWP school crossing safety group said work will be done before Easter to upgrading the crossing. This has been done in conjunction with HCC but whilst we are grateful for the improvements it still does not solve the wider issues. Tollgate Road wants to see VAS Vehicle Operated Signs, another meeting with residents and we will continue to do our best to fight for you. However the promised money never comes and we all get very angry and frustrated and every one blames the overspending in the city centre. It is high time in my opinion we had some better way of allocating road improvement money instead of this constant and disproportionate bidding process between councils and others.

In January we decided as part of the 60<sup>th</sup> year to fund a travelling Pantomime show- "Jack and the Beanstalk" for all the village children. This was very popular and a new event we thought was worth funding. It was all free- the staff from Treasure Tots provided drinks and raised some funds. We had a hundred and twenty people attend everyone enjoyed themselves it was a popular thing to do in the winter months. Our thanks to Assistant Clerk Kim for organising this, I think she has put in another bid to council to run it again next January so keep an eye on the chronicle if someone in your family would like a ticket. The date is likely to be during the first week January if we can get the same company. I am given to understand Kim is working on that.

We had news at the February meeting that there was a petition in Tyttenhanger to propose an application closing off Part of Barley Mow Lane for all traffic other than pedestrians and cyclists. Many residents see this as a solution to the problems with behaviour problems with some of the travelling community. Our council I have to say have not yet debated on this issue although we have asked HHWP for their opinions. The lane does provide a good short cut into the village of Tyttenhanger for many residents. But as we all know it has its share of problems with the control of the gypsy settlements. Again we have direct contacts to the gypsy liaison officer at HCC and he is always ready and willing to meet us and had attended council meetings. The council have regular ward meetings with the police, we are known in this area by the police as the "Colneys" and the support to the district is generated from the office based in London Colney by eight police officers both regular police and community support officers under Sergeant Helen Savage. Also amongst the team is PC Paul Coxall- known to the council.

This team have been working on the crime problems in and around the district, if you have any issues that we should bring to their attention then please let us know. Our next scheduled ward meeting with the police is 7.30pm -16<sup>th</sup> April at the village hall

We have to report a decline in the number of fly tip incidents this year and so it is some progress, although I have to say it might not appear that overall there has been a reduction. We keep a fly tip log in the parish office and you can report incidents to us. In 2006-7 we recorded 63 incidents and to date in this parish year we have 36 reported to us to date. Many incidents go unreported of course. One significant fact- a persistent fly tip individual was caught by HCC last year after an area operation by Police, District Council Officers, and others who was caught and fined very heavily.

*Turning to other matters,*

Many of you are seeking allotments and we are aware of the need, the council had to sell land that was used for allotments for the purchase of Charles Morris Hall. We have not been able to get any further land so far but we are seeking a fresh site and have put an article in the Chronicle. So if any farmer or land owner has spare or set aside land available please let us know. The Clerk in the meantime advises me he is going to set up a waiting list in case land does become available for allotments I feel this council has gone out to public a consultation again in conjunction with CMS regarding the grazing issue. We are very keen, this and CMS got a lot of adverse publicity and criticism earlier in the year. Unfortunately it became tied up with a completely different issue on Nomansland and Harpenden over some tree felling. Bad publicity resulted in all the proposed sites being lumped together over misunderstandings.

We are certain in the seven years since this project was started at Colney Heath we have adequately consulted. So if and when we decide to try grazing on a small part of Furze Field which we feel confident it will be for very sound ecological reasons and that our consultation has been more than adequate. It should not stop people using. The Treasure Tots Pre School continues to go from strength to strength we have a very good leader and team running the operation. Kim acts as secretary and our Clerk as the Treasurer. We absorb the office costs into the general administration. John does not take any salary for his managing input so we keep our operation costs right down.

This year we asked Cllr Crump to be the Chair after Margaret Corley left to live in Redbourne, he has managed to fit into the team very well. This year we have gained OFSTED approval for 34 children, we have a lunch club so infants can stay longer to help parents who work or want time out. Also links with the JMI Infants school and walk up to 10 younger children each day to and from the school to join the lunch club. It has proven very successful to local parents and as your council we are very proud to run and provide this excellent local service to the families in Colney Heath. Our staff have managed to get a very sound and positive reputation amongst the local people and we are able to offer places to all local children and some from London Colney. I take this opportunity to thank the leader and team for their excellent work?

This year we saw the occupation of the three new affordable homes in Smallford to be designated for local families. We understand that those from Colney Heath and who qualified to put their names forward on the list had consideration first. This council had made it quite clear to the District Council we were keen to see only local families in the properties. A promise was made to us two years ago we made sure it was kept. I have to say the new homes look very good and understand the properties boast all sorts of eco friendly ideas allowing to benefiting residents from low costs.

Several things I am sure may have been forgotten, it is always a difficult issue to try summing up everything about the year's work of our council in a short time, do come along to our meetings. This council is very committed to work with all the Residents Associations, other organisations, clubs, the scout and guide movement, village hall committee, the various institutes and other recreational organisations. Colney Heath is a thriving community, it works at it very hard at keeping it going and everyone in the village is totally committed, long may it continue. So next year, Cllr Chris Brazier is to take the Chair, when we plan to install new play equipment at Smallford, we have just ordered the new children's play furniture. The contractor has done a design schedule you can see on the parish table top. This makes our total spend on play equipment in the region of £40,000 over two years. All paid from the parish funds and

our cash reserves. We intend and are in process of changing and reviewing the lease of the Pavilion. The current lease has expired now, and this council are looking at wider issues and statutory requirements before offering or tendering the new lease. Cllr Rump has done a lot of work to see how we can obtain more funds to make this area available to more varied sports facilities. Quite large grants are out there we might qualify but it needs a lot of input to get this to happen and may take a year or so to set out our plans. The risk is we do all the work and we may not even qualify but we have to try and intend to do so. It is hoped we can take the facilities there currently with us on this ambitious plan. Either way it is essential the building breaks even on commitment and cover expenses in future with any newly formulated lease. So before I hand over to John Dean our Clerk to tell you about the finances I must thank my fellow councillors for their support guidance and diligence in dealing with many complex or difficult issues this year. I must again not forget our keen staff that looks after our parish gardens, mow the grass and commons collect the litter keep the graveyards area clean and well kept. To those who we employ to keep our grassed areas and gardens tidy, I am sure you will agree that it makes Colney Heath village look good place to live in. Not forgetting Tyttenhanger where I live as well.

Thank you all for listening and coming to our APM, there are some short interesting items including St Marks Church, our new website that David Rodway will explain.

After a short time for your questions after, then please join us for cheese and wine. I will call a halt at a time convenient for you to enjoy this. *So I will hand over to the Clerk John Dean to tell us more about the finances and how it all works for the parish and the community.*

#### **4. FINANCIAL REPORT FOR 2006-7 Clerk to the Council John Dean**

Time has flown by since last year when we all celebrated the 60<sup>th</sup> Diamond Jubilee Anniversary of this parish council and dedicated the sign at Tyttenhanger Green; every time I see it-it looks very good and very befitting to the hamlet village. *Now let me turn to the matters of finance;-*

I can give you a qualified confident overview of the financial position at Colney Heath. This parish year 2007-8 has just ended. We have spent our precept wisely starting the year by requesting £135,250 from District Council to run the Parish and a further income of £23,000 culminating at the end of the year spending about £174,000.00. It is a very busy parish including Treasure Tots we employ 15 staff on the payroll. The Chair mentioned each year in November we set out our budget and in January each year ratifies our precept application. In January 2007 Last year we set the budget for the 2007-8 year-running 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> March each year, just as the financial and tax year's institutions use. During our 60<sup>th</sup> Year-2007-8 your council undertook quite a number of beneficial new things and projects.

We added more money to the precept of £135,250 such as additional grants that are available other funding and use them to the good of the parish. In Clerks terms we refer to these as projects. One of the earliest projects last year was refurbishment of Community Park where we spent just over £6000 in works to rejuvenate a rather overgrown area near the A 414 into a much more pleasant area. We started in the previous December 2006 with the hedge layering and finished up with new disabled access gate, field gates and better security against travellers. We think it looks a lot better now it is mature and gives a pleasant view as you enter or leave the village.

Our Budget for the 2007-8 parish year was £154,000 made up of £135,000 from the precept and £20,000 we pulled in from other sources. We had to Budget £4000 for the election costs we did not have to use so we saved. So let me explain a bit more. At the end of the year March 31<sup>st</sup> 07/08 initial figures show we have finished up being £20,000 over Budget (£154,000) total spend of £174,000. There are good reasons and I will explain. This year we found the need to fund unexpected issues and new projects in the parish. This is typical of parish situations, you will get things that come along offering new money or part funded opportunities or buildings or external work with additional costs. If grants are available you take the opportunity to grab the funding, whilst it costs more and ruins the Budget there is always a benefit. Council had bad news in June in discovering a major problem in council owned building –the Pavilion. This was during the year we gave the club a grant to fund a free lease plus an insurance payment holiday to Colney Heath FC as part of 100th. The whole electrical system was found to be in a very unfit state and failed statutory inspection requiring a complete re-wire. Two contractors gave their estimates- the re-wiring was done in July at a cost of nearly £10,000. I can report the building a lot safer now for public use.

### **Lease of Pavilion-Expired March 31<sup>ST</sup> 2008**

This year a working group is looking at issues of lease and other possible funding opportunities to enhance the whole area to take educational issues into consideration. We will be drafting a new lease soon to take account of all the new regulations for public buildings. The lease will be quite different and up to date. The current tenant is aware, we are discussing with them and others on the future of that facility in Colney Heath. Cllr Rump and the committee are engaged on that now. For families and children we of course funded some of the costs of "Larks in the Parks" which we thought was very successful. We also funded a free under 14's pantomime for the children at the village hall just after Christmas- Which cost £700> *Kim will tell you more later.*

### **Other non budgeted expenditure**

In late autumn we looked at upgrading the path from Roestock Park to Roestock Lane with Disabled friendly gates (All DDA gates in the parish are fitted with a RADAR KEY that those who qualify can use to open the gate to go through) if you qualify these keys may be ordered-see us if you have a problem getting one.

For footpath 24 and we managed to get a grant from the Herts County Footpaths and Rights of Way via CMS for £3500.00. We have laid a level path of finely crushed concrete and the new gates at each, cleared out the roots and scrub. It produced accessible path for electric scooters and a better surface for all who use the foot path to the play area. The whole cost was just under £5000.00 your parish council funding the remainder and buying the DDA gates. (It will of benefit larks in the park) So with the facts already outlined you can see how we have produced this overspend but at the same time we have benefited from grants and improvements council has made. Another project was to continue the Commons works we are doing each year, now in year 4 this is mainly for coppicing, tree removal in various areas of the common to re-establish the open space. After all a common is a common and not woodland. This year we used the usual contractors who we can always trust to do a good job, they cleared the North West area by the water pumping station. Our plan is to allow more light and capture the winter sun in this spot in order to dry it out more and maybe bringing out the flora that might come back. The overall cost was £2000; a grant from Watling Chase funds via CMS gave CHPC £860 towards the works. We will do more again next winter to trim off the trees near the river bank, but that needs a lot more work over several years. Some of which should in my opinion be paid by EA funds.



### **Treasure Tots Pre School**

We are very proud of this Pre School which attracts children from 2.5 years to the nursery stage. Under the Leader Karen Chittenden and excellent team who have a table top display her to day. It has gone from strength to strength over recent time. We just received OFSTED approval for 34 children so we are continually improving this popular community school especially aimed at local families. Each child over three and a half years is qualified for a Govt grant of £8.50 per session up to five days P/w. Those parents who do not qualify T/T offer a subsidised daily rate until they qualify for HCC/Govt funding. Needless to say we are full up, we have a waiting list. You recall council took this on when the previous pre school packed up in 2004. This is now in its fourth year being run a community based school. I find lots of other parishes at our networking sessions keen to find out about it. This year we supported Treasure Tots much the same as last 2006-7 with grants for toys and equipment and support into the payroll Of between £36,000 & £43,000. The council grant to support this comes in at about £11000 per year. We are also getting extra funds by the start of the lunch club which has proven very successful. This is Karen's new idea to bring in more revenue. This council is very committed to this community pre school benefit. Cllr Derek Crump took over this year as Chair and the Council representative on the management committee. He took over from Margaret Corley who moved away. Just like Cllr Crump both his and my time as the Treasurer is given free of charge. Last year T/T turned over £39,000 This-year we expect to exceed that and likely to be nearer £44,000. We employ 5 part time permanent and 4 bank staff. If anyone wishes to see the T/Tots 2006-7 accounts they are available for public inspection. Again we think this is a quite a unique and very successful business supporting local families and children in Colney Heath.

### **Community Bus**

This council is committed to run the regular Friday Bus, Cllr Horner is in charge of this and with his band of volunteer drivers it is a popular facility. We have a budget this year for running this of £1500 -with the £2 fares contribution to the subsidy.

### **Grant Aid**

Last year we funded our Grant Aid to the value of £15,200. For this year 2008/9 we are reducing to £7200 with maximum grants of £2000. Any grants to be justified there is a strict criteria to reach the maximum, most request smaller sums say of £500. The sums are paid around the end of May to those that have applied. I have a list if anyone wishes to see, it -available to public for information. One grant is deferred.

### **Gloucester Playing Fields**

CHPC were prepared to put up £30,000 from reserves, it would have a severe dent afterwards- but council considered it worthwhile for retention of the open space.

### **Future Commitments**

Our reason for reducing grant aid is to allow more money to be available for much needed play equipment especially at Sleafshyde play area. We are in process of ordering new equipment. Works on the commons will continue and we are very keen to see grazing return to Furze Field. Pressure is also on preserving council owned land from illegal occupation. We may have to install gates, barriers or fencing or use removal services to reduce the threat. Our area suffers far more from illegal traveller activities than other parishes. Council will not stand by or tolerate illegal trespass.

### **Legal Issues**

In Hertfordshire we are all under intense pressure to provide more sites for Gypsies and we are under serious threat from not only Government intervention, a new plan under consultation from Regional Assembly. Plus the Community Law Partnership

campaign for more sites. One lawyer on the internet boasts he has successfully challenged over 64 appeals against local councils and won. Of these challenges a significant number were on sites allowed in the Green Belt after the appeals. What is clear from the Public Meeting and the work by Cllr Brazier and Cllr Day we are against any further sites in this area, we have already provided more than others. To that end the residents have established a fighting fund to support the legal action going on against the Secretary of State. I refer to the illogical approval of the Nuckies Farm site that is a perverse inspector's decision against the residents of this Parish. So far we expect to spend £10,000 and be warned we may have more costs from the hearing due in the courts in September or October.

### **Investments**

We ask ourselves how after the precept is paid, we can make our funds go further. All councils have to keep some reserves for a rainy day, most Clerks aim to keep about 50% of the precept. We have around £65,000 in the reserves which we use to give additional revenue support and maintain cash flow. In past years as you all know we have played the money markets with safer treasury reserves and interest rates. This year I am pleased to say we have made more than last year. In the parish year just gone we have made £1200 more than last at around £5200. A good free money sum that helps towards unexpected expenses that may come in. Careful cash flow predictions and keeping a strict control on the budget is important. We are waiting for the money to come for this year at the end of April to re-invest straight away. I plan to put a huge sum on reserve whilst bank rates are high at the moment. Unfortunately though with the troubled and bleak government economy and higher costs to us all- not good for most people I agree, but if we don't invest ourselves the banks will use our account money anyway to do the same thing.

### **Precept 2008-9**

This year the precept is £141,500 representing an increase of about 4.7% on last year, whilst not as much as we need it is seen as fair to the parish by your council. This represents about £57 per year to a current Colney Heath D Band property.

### **Conclusions**

The parish budget this year is really a standstill budget, at 4.7%-I see inflation is far in excess of RPI in the current state of the economy right now. The real prediction is it is over 5% for money (cash) proven with our gain from investments.

*But back to Colney Heath.>>*

We will continue to bid for grants monies and to try and exceed that we obtained last year at over £9200 in grants and part funded schemes. We will publish our parish accounts in the Chronicle later in the year after they are audited in June by RBS. By doing this we consider we fully comply with complete transparency and openness. With Treasure Tots included we turnover approaching £230,000 each year. It costs about £3000 a week to run this parish- that equates per household about a 75p a week, not bad overall. Average parish costs work out about £12/13,000 per month I hope you all consider this is good value for local community democracy. After audit in June Council books and accounts are open for 21 days for public inspection

Thank you for listening- My thanks to -Kim all other staff and councillors- If you have questions I will be pleased to answer, before I hand back to the Chair Cllr Reeves.

*The Chair Cllr Reeves thanked the Clerk for the overview of the finances and said he would invite questions from the public. There were no questions from the audience.*

### **ST MARK'S IMPROVEMENTS AND NEW CHURCH BUILDING**

James Spanner advised all present how the new building is scheduled to start in a few weeks time, and having got through all of the planning hurdles it was going to be a great step forward. He explained with the building scale model how the extension will develop and enhance the concept of the main church by a new open area of space to give greater opportunities for gatherings. He went on to explain how the church was able to afford the additions with a benefactor leaving a considerable sum in his will. This had started a separate reaction amongst those in the parish and the congregation to offer further cash pledges allowing the works to begin. The disruption will require the services to be moved into temporary accommodation and Mr Rose is allowing the JMI to be used for the time works are in progress. He added that it was planned to re-open in time for Christmas 2008 with all the building complete. It was all very exciting and the new facilities will be of immense value to the parish.


### **LARKS IN THE PARK:- Assistant Clerk -Kim Parker-Mead**

This year the event that was so successful last year is going ahead again, the date is the 29<sup>th</sup> June, Roestock Park. Together with Cllr Brazier the general organisation is progressing with meetings with the St Albans Arts event committee. This year we will see new acts and displays better than last year, and the parish council are keen to see an even better turnout than last. The event did not clash with JMI School Fete or Village Day being held later in July. Volunteers were needed and if anyone would like to help even if only for a few hours then this will be most welcome. Kim requested the contact via the parish office.

### **OTHER MATTERS RELATING TO THE PARISH & PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

- Cllr J Henchley had two issues to put forward from the floor,
- The ditches and gully's in Smallford Lane, Station Road Cllr Henchley said he constantly requested be cleaned out by the Highways Authority which to date have not been done.
- The second was the condition of the roads in Tyttenhanger needing serious works to pot holes and verges.
- The Chair thanked him for bringing this to our attention,
- The Chair said he hoped we had covered all the parish topics, the questions were answered. He thanked all those attending, and providing the displays, the parish staff for their hard work during the year. Adding that he was closing the meeting and all are welcome to stop & enjoy the food and a glass of wine.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm

  
John Dean  
Clerk to the Council