

REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE 2005/2006

One thing that impacts on our daily lives is the state of our village. Responsibility for keeping the streets free of litter is down to the Vale District Council. Grove Parish Council is responsible for the areas it owns and private property owners are responsible for their premises. There are three volunteer ladies who litter pick and now we are very fortunate to have Delia Dews and John Stead and their band of volunteers who litter pick for us once a month. This started with a clearance in aid of Children in Need last November and has blossomed since then. It should not, of course, be necessary if the Vale ensured their contractors did their work properly and residents had civic pride. Most of course, do, but obviously there are those who do not. It would, of course, be possible for the Council to employ a litter warden who could issue on the spot penalty tickets for people who drop litter, but I would be reluctant to go down that route as the Council has to work with the residents not police them.

We regularly report to the Vale on the number of rubbish bags that the band of volunteers collects and we leave it to them to take the matter up with the contractors. Much of the rubbish, however, comes from Millbrook Square and as that is private property the Vale's contractors are not responsible for keeping it tidy.

As regards Millbrook Square, we are making some progress here. (Councillor) Anthony Harker produced a questionnaire for the traders and all except one replied and generally replied very positively. We believe we can work with them and the Vale to keep the Square tidy and aim to continue with the progress we have been making. Ownership of the Square has changed again recently, but I have to say that the Clerk appears to be having a much more satisfactory time in his dealings with them than was the case with the previous two owners, so we are hoping to build on

that co-operation as we strive to keep the site tidy. As a last resort, once the Vale has decided on its policy regarding the Clean Neighbourhood and Environment Act, it may be possible to get an environmental order against the owners or traders in Millbrook Square, but we really need to concentrate our efforts on resolving the issue by co-operation not confrontation.

I would also mention that if anybody here wishes to join Delia Dews band of volunteers, they meet at Old Mill Hall at 9am on the second Friday of each month. Litter picker packs are provided courtesy of the Vale.

It was our intention this year to ask the schools to take part in a council sponsored poster competition concerning litter. However, Fairtrade also approached the schools about a poster competition so we have put our off until later this year.

The Parish Council continues to fund dog litter bins. We currently have 22 operated by the parish (as well as 8 provided by The Vale) at an annual cost of nearly £3,000. We intend to add additional bins when required and welcome suggestions as to their siting.

We have continued to lobby Stagecoach and Oxford County Council about bus services. We were delighted, therefore, when Stagecoach told us that they were re-introducing a proper express service to Oxford. Although this has meant some re-routing of the non-express buses I believe the benefits of the express outweigh any disadvantages. The re-routing does also provide a better service for residents in the newer parts of Grove. The Whites local service still provides a service to the Health Centre. We shall continue to press for an early morning service direct to Milton Park.

The Parish Council has continued to administer the Shoppers Service which takes residents of Grovelands and St John's Court to

Wantage on Wednesdays. We were fortunate that the County Council has increased their grant for this service, and we were also delighted to receive a cheque for £150 from the Vale Housing Association to help fund the service. It provides a useful service and at very little expense to the ratepayers of Grove.

The Committee is responsible for the cemetery in Grove. I believe that it is looking very pleasant at the moment. We are concerned about a crack that has appeared in the memorial wall and are currently trying to ascertain who is responsible for the repairs.

The County Council did indicate last year that they may fund a pedestrian crossing along the Denchworth Road in the current financial year. This will assist especially Mums and children on their way to school and the elderly going to the shops. We will lobby the Council to try to ensure this happens.

We invited Wantage police to attend our meetings. The Area Beat Officer, PC Palmer, and the Police Community Support Officer, Barry Gills, did come to a meeting and explained their roles and fielded questions from councillors and noted our concerns. We were grateful for their time. Inspector Hinchley also came to one of our meetings. We did ask him some searching questions. We explained that we wanted to work with the police but that they needed to respond to our concerns – which are concerns the residents of Grove have raised with us.. The difficulty, if I can call it that, is that Grove is a relatively low crime area. This means that we do not get the police presence which we believe the community deserves. The council receives numerous comments and complaints that police are rarely seen in Grove. It is the perception that the Police are doing nothing which is a concern. Inspector Hinchley pointed out they had done a number of things locally which seemed not to get any publicity so I asked him to provide us with figures which we could present to you. These have not so far been forthcoming.

We have made clear to the Police that we are very unhappy about the reduced opening hours at Wantage Police Station.

There are proposals afoot that local councils should help fund local community support officers. This would give us a say in the number of hours we had a police presence in Grove and a voice in his duties. The proposals do have clear advantages; however, as always this comes at a price. Council tax payers in Grove already pay large amounts each year towards the funding of the police. Now we as a Parish are being asked to consider raising our own funds (from the taxpayer) to help pay for policing. However, it is important we look at this over the coming year and my committee will do so.

Finally, I would like to thank my vice chairman, Dorothy Hadcroft, and all the members of my committee who have worked hard during the year not only attending our meetings but also representing Grove on a number of outside bodies. I would also like to make a special mention for Mr Harold Brew. He worked tirelessly on our behalf as our Passenger Transport Representative. Unfortunately last summer he had a stroke and has been in hospital or nursing home since then. Our best wishes go out to him.