

Alderley Edge Parish Council Chairman's Report 2012.

Last year I was able to report the opening of the Alderley Edge and Nether Alderley By-Pass, Melrose Way. Now how do you top that! Well, I think we have made a descent stab at it, but this year has been one of frustration as well as promise.

The most important issue surely must be the Medical Centre. Last year I said that we had to “achieve our goal of opening a new Medical Centre....to get planning permission and sign a contract within the next twelve months.” We almost made it! When the Doctors from the Alderley Practice approached us to ask if we would make land available here on the site of the Festival Hall; that they would engage contractors and with the support of the PCT, obtain planning permission for a new Medical Centre, it seemed as if we had been given our first real chance to achieve our stated goal. Following a successful Public Consultation by the PCT, an Application has now been submitted to Cheshire East Planning Department for approval and we can expect a decision in the next couple of months. Let me be clear. This development will be a magnificent achievement for the Village of Alderley Edge and a fantastic example of a Parish Council shaping its local Community, at no cost to the public purse. The existing facilities have no future, with a real risk that the George Street site might close and we would be without a Medical practice at all. The new centre will have state-of-the-art consultation and treatment rooms, a pharmacy and better parking arrangements for patients. This is not a speculative development or a PFI deal to benefit developers. This is a unique opportunity to deliver enormous benefit to residents of the village, since the costs will be met from future rents and when the capital has been repaid, the revenue will divert to the Parish Council. Meanwhile, it will allow our Doctors to plan for the future, to deliver the services needed for an aging population and to expand the range of treatments to the residents of this village. I hope everyone in the village will be able to see the benefits, and support the project.

It is now more important than ever that the Parish Council modernizes the remaining part of the Festival Hall, which is unaffected by the construction of the Medical Centre. We have started this process and it is the first job of the new council to select an architect to help us design and implement the changes to the Hall. We have appointed a Hall Manager, an ambitious and talented young man who has done a fantastic job in his first six months. I would like to congratulate Ashley on all he has achieved for us so far. Currently the Festival Hall is a burden on the Council Tax payers, and a significant proportion of our precept is raised to pay for management and maintenance. Our aim should be to produce a modern, flexible community hall which is also marketable to clients and events to generate enough income to be self-financing. This is the way to ensure that the Hall, as a community asset, has a long term future.

Securing the long term future of the Hall brings me neatly to a thorny issue, Allotments. Cheshire East Council started a process of transferring assets back to local Councils like ours. Allotments are included in the list, along with Parks, Playing Fields and others. A small but vocal group of Heyes Lane Allotment holders, some of whom don't live in the

village have claimed that we, as a Parish Council, are not fit to manage such assets, but I disagree. We Councillors, elected by the residents of this village, are ideally suited to manage and where necessary develop these assets for the benefit of residents. The Parish Council will provide a new Statutory Allotment site, to replace the Heyes Lane site and will wipe out the current waiting list of 40 as well as providing modern facilities. The release of the Heyes Lane site will allow the Parish Council to create a suitable access to the new Hall facilities, as well as creating extra parking capacity in the village. The relocation of the Heyes Lane Allotments will allow the Parish Council to consider locating the Trafford Road Repair facility to a corner of the Heyes Lane site, thereby saving local jobs and local services.

The impact of the new Medical Centre and a modernized Festival Hall could fall hardest on those who live close to the site, on Talbot Road and Stamford Road. The Parish Council will promote new traffic proposals with Cheshire East to address the concerns of local residents. When the AESG approached the Parish Council suggesting a land swap, it presented us with an opportunity to secure the long term future of the Hall and to address the current issues of using the Hall for popular activities such as Antique Fairs and the traffic issues of double parking on Talbot and Stamford Roads.

AEPC will apply to the Secretary of State to create a new Allotment site off Lydiat Lane, move current holders off the Heyes Lane site, and at the same time remove the waiting list for allotments through this new investment. This will not be a supermarket style car-park as some assume; I hope it will be a drive lined by trees and flower beds, with reinforced grass parking areas on part of the site. It will I hope look rather like a National Trust Car park as you see at Dunham Massey for example. It will also potentially allow public access to the open space currently imprisoned behind and threatened by the development on the Royal Oak site. Once the PC has accepted ownership of the allotments, we will consult residents, allotment holders and the wider village on these ideas and seek agreement and endorsement of a way forward. This process has taken far longer than it should, and still drags on, but I firmly believe we will win support and we will succeed.

I have mentioned parking, and this is another contentious issue for the Village. CE carried out a survey of parking, and produced a report, published on the CE website, detailing a number of actions and initiatives, including resident parking schemes on some streets. These schemes represent the culmination of hard work by groups of residents with CE and the Parish Council does not oppose these in principle. Indeed, with minor modifications to only one of the schemes, we would be pleased to see these progress. However the CE Report states that these schemes should go ahead when other works have been completed and this has not happened. The Parish Council is pressing CE to proceed with all the important elements of the report, such as repainting road markings, replacing and improving road signs and parking notices in addition to the residents schemes. We are still waiting.

The Parish Council in partnership with CE, has commissioned a report from a respected Consultancy, Hamilton-Baillie Associates, who work in the area of Traffic Management and Town Centre Design. This company was involved in the work which is now being completed in Poynton, using a 'shared space concept'. Although that particular solution, chosen to address Poynton's problems, is not applicable to Alderley Edge, we were interested in how a professional would see the problems which we do have, post-bypass, here in the Village. The Parish Council hopes that working with CE, we can publish that report and consult with the Village on how we might find solutions to those problems.

And so to my final point. We are always waiting for CE. Be it parking, allotments, road repairs, maintenance of the War Memorial, street cleaning, tree pruning, repairing fences, it goes on and on.....! When Cheshire East came into being, replacing MBC and CCC, we hoped, we thought things could only get better! Remember that song? Well unfortunately, those hopes have been dashed. Officers seem to be working in an environment where they have no direction, no purpose, no desire to make things better. We as a Parish Council must continue to strive to break through the inertia, to make things happen. I welcome the recent changes at Cheshire East and hope that new Political leadership will energize the council to deliver.

There are some people I should like to thank for their activities in the Village. Mitch Gilbert and others for his work organising the Xmas Lights switch on. Christine Munroe for her work organising fairs; I wish her and the team all the very best for the forthcoming May Fair. The Parish Council is working with Christine and Mitch to combine the Christmas Market with the Light switch on, by which we hope to enhance that well established community event. I would like to express my thanks to the British Legion for continuing to organise the Remembrance Day Parade. I would like to promise now, publicly, that we will not let CE off the hook over the War Memorial. We will have it properly looked after and maintained, there are no excuses.

My thanks to the Chairman of Plans and Finance, Frank and Joseph and the other Councillors who support the smooth running of the Council by devoting their time and expertise; Cllr. Schofield who sits on various committees regionally and always protects the interests of our local area; Cllr Maczkowiak for her work with residents on issues big and small, for not letting me forget about the War Memorial and for the work you have done managing the Hall for the last three years; Cllr. Lloyd as Vice Chairman of the Council and for the soon to be launched web site; Cllr. Joseph for our new apprentice; Cllr. Herald for improvements in the management of Alderley Park which have been achieved through hard and dedicated work and I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his tireless efforts in that regard; Cllr. Connor who took on the responsibility of the Jubilee celebrations, a huge piece of work and my thanks to her and the others involved.

I must mention our new Clerk, Anne, who was thrown in at the deep end replacing Kevin Ranshaw and you have done really well, thank you very much. Kevin, who left the Council in September last year was Clerk for ten years, and I would like to thank him for all his hard work over the years and wish him well in the future.

I want to thank my fellow Councillors, but especially Cllr. Keegan for supporting me in my role as Chairman; as our Ward Councillor, Frank, you work very hard for the benefit of the Village and its residents. We work well together and I think the next year is quite promising.