

MATLOCK TOWN COUNCIL

GREEN CHARTER – ANNUAL ENVIRONMENT AUDIT, MAY 2008

Cllr Martin Burfoot, Lead Councillor for the Environment, 2007/8

COUNCIL MANAGEMENT

The Council has continued to maintain the 26 miles of public footpaths in the parish, but this work has had to compete with other environmental maintenance work eg. the Bailey's Tump site and bus shelters. However, the contract with Derby and Derbyshire Groundwork has allowed the employment of a part-time Project Officer, who has supervised a team of invaluable and willing volunteers, mainly on Denefields, but on other sites as well, carrying out some very useful management and repair tasks. Also, the Council has taken on a further employee, who is assisting with open space and footpath maintenance work.

A comprehensive scheme to tidy, prune or fell some 80 or more trees planted by the Council over the past 20 years or so (mainly on road verges), or inherited on land such as the allotments site, is currently being carried out by a local tree surgery contractor. Current restrictions on roadside tree planting by the County Council has been a deterrent to further tree planting in recent years, and will be a particular obstacle to the Town Council's environmental enhancement plans in the future.

The new heating system at the Imperial Rooms has proved to be successful, but the planned revamp and extension of the building has not been progressed, mainly due to lack of a suitable external funding source. However, continuing cramped conditions for Council staff demands that some improvements, even medium term, will have to be agreed soon and a more comprehensive scheme linked to the town centre 'Masterplan' proposals in due course.

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Denefields, as last year, has continued to benefit from the regular efforts, not only of the Groundwork Project Officer, but also of an enthusiastic and willing group of volunteers working under his supervision. The group includes Bill Quinlan – our volunteer warden for Denefields.

Following last year's unexpected felling of the entire row of Lombardy Poplars, along its boundary with Matlock Town Football Club – during which a number of trees planted by the Council some 17 years ago were destroyed or damaged, more trees and shrubs have been planted by the Lead Member for the Environment and a new hedge has been planted along the east side of the same boundary (with the Cricket Club) by the Project Officer and his volunteers. Oak trees, grown and donated to the Council by a resident, have also been planted elsewhere in Denefields, particularly in the vicinity of Denefields Court and the volunteers have just finished replacing the dangerous and deteriorating steps down the hillside from below Lime Tree Road to Denefields Court, on the line of one of the several public footpaths which cross the site.

Bailey's Tump, off Asker Lane – the major project to restore and enhance this important and prominent Second World War site has finally been completed, and was formally opened, with the unveiling of a bronze interpretation plaque,

by Peter Attwater, amplified by the 'fly past' of a 'Lancaster' bomber on 10 May, marking the culmination of several years of volunteer effort in conjunction with the Town Council. The success of this project is mainly due to the physical effort of several members of the Civic Association, who have been involved in frequent work parties, along with the effective use of external grants, following detailed design and contract organisation work led by Ken Parker, the long serving Civic Association Secretary and the Council's Lead Member for the Environment. The Town Council's day-to-day management of the site will be crucial in maintaining the site as a useful area of public open space, but also as an important grassland conservation and wildlife haven, with grassland and hedgerow habitats, as well as a focus for wartime historians.

Tree Management A local arboricultural contractor is currently carrying out a comprehensive tree management and felling project, on behalf of the Town Council, under the supervision of the Lead Member for the Environment. This has included work on trees on the Council's Hillside site, various street trees and trees on the Council's Chesterfield Road allotments. Adequate replacement trees have also been planted - not only in Denefields, but also at Bailey's Tump and on the allotments, where the Council needs to exert its authority, in spite of opposition from some allotment holders to any trees on the site. It is also unfortunate that neither of the two principal councils is proactive as regards tree and shrub planting for conservation or amenity purposes, particularly on highway land.

Wildlife Conservation Projects More recently, apart from several impressive conservation projects at All Saints Junior School, and St Giles and St Joseph's Primary Schools, we have witnessed the efforts of a small group of allotment holders, who have been working with local school children to create a wildlife garden on the Wellfield site, at the same time harnessing excess water outflow from a spring to form two small ponds.

LITTER AND WASTE MANAGEMENT / RECYCLING

This issue continues to provoke complaints from residents, as in previous years. In particular, since the implementation of the Smoking Ban last year, both cigarette butts and chewing gum have become a serious problem in the vicinity of pubs and bars in Matlock town centre, where landlords are not providing adequate disposal facilities. The District Council does not appear to have any facilities to remove chewing gum from the town centre's already unsightly streets.

As in previous years residents continue to demand a locally accessible Civic Amenity Recycling Site, while the fly tipping of bulky refuse has undoubtedly increased in lay-bys and on verges alongside rural lanes around the edge of the town. While the excellent Saturday morning bulky waste collection service has survived recent service cuts by the District Council, it is obviously only a temporary replacement for a proper, permanently manned site – as provided last year in Ashbourne – but without any element of re-use or recycling.

As last year, despite the presence of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act, there remains no evidence that it has had any effect in Matlock whatsoever, and parts of the town remain beset by dog mess and littering is worst at weekends.

As always, the lack of information about the new street cleansing rotas in Matlock remains a mystery, even now that the District Council's own 'Clean Team' has taken over their CCT contract from Focsa. It is to be hoped that road sweeping and gully emptying can be carried out more efficiently in future and the problems of obstruction by roadside parking overcome. Otherwise, some streets, such as Snitterton Road, will scarcely ever be swept, nor gullies emptied and therefore flooding problems will be exacerbated. Many gullies have been blocked and some inoperative for years, thereby increasing surface water run-off. Despite Government advice there has still been no evidence of sustainable drainage techniques adopted for recent building developments, including Sainsbury's, the relief road and associated tarmac surfacing.

Household waste collection remains similar to last year, but there is still some evidence that a minority of residents are disposing of excessive amounts of residual waste. The 'green bin' compostable waste recycling system, now extended to include kitchen waste and cardboard, appears to be working efficiently and well supported by those residents with a wheelie-bin system. However, there is some concern from residents whose properties are less accessible or where wheelie bins are impractical to accommodate. A system using biodegradable plastic bags has been considered by the District Council, but apparently any decision to introduce it postponed until next year. As before, there has been no progress towards kerbside collection of additional recyclables, such as plastic and cans.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

This important topic has been included this year, given its raised profile nationally, but unfortunately there are still too few examples of renewable energy generation schemes locally. This could, in part, be a symptom of restrictive planning policies, probably justified in Conservation Areas, but also a result of poor design of domestic solar panels and wind turbines in the past, as well as the increasing tendency for additional bedrooms to be incorporated into the roofspace of new properties, thereby reducing the space available for panels. Revised planning guidance from the Government will, hopefully, augment the present advice, so that such proposals become more acceptable to the District Council, while improved technology and design should make such features less obtrusive.

It is highly regrettable that no renewable energy generation was included in the design of the new Sainsbury's store and likewise on the flat roofs of the proposed flats on the former gas-works site, on Bakewell Road.

Furthermore, one of the problems with the new supermarket is the degree of light pollution emanating from the site every night, which has illuminated half of Matlock since the day it opened.

MATLOCK'S TRANSPORT LINKS, PARKING AND TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

The past year has seen the completion of the main features of the town centre relief road – the most dramatic change to our transport links for many years, and yet, regrettably, a scheme which has been vastly over-engineered, encourages excessive speeds over short distances, but incorporates a succession of **traffic signals**, producing a polluting and uneconomic driving

style – stop / start and evidence of considerable congestion on Dale Road for most of the day, exacerbated by unnecessary delays caused by the Pelican Crossing. The phasing of the traffic signals is questionable and pedestrians using the new crossing or crossing the Snitterton Road junction simply do not feel safe. The frustration for drivers, and ammunition for their resistance to the one-way system over Matlock Bridge, is further reinforced by the unnecessary traffic signals at the Sainsbury's junction. It is patently obvious that a roundabout would have been ideal at this location, would have kept the traffic moving more consistently and would effectively shorten the longer route back to the town centre.

The entire scheme gives the impression of the worst possible tarmac, concrete and steel dominated 'urban by-pass' type of scheme, excessively wide and exacerbated by unsightly and wholly inappropriate **concrete walls** (allegedly demanded by Network Rail) and **steel crash barriers** throughout (courtesy of Derbyshire County Council), completely without any mitigation. The road is further urbanised by the extent and size of new **signage** erected and the unnecessary traffic signals already referred to.

Such a scheme, poor though it is could still have been ameliorated to some extent by a high standard of soft landscaping and a sensitively designed bus station and public car park. Regrettably, that has been far from the case, with as low a standard of landscaping as could have been imagined and a bus station forecourt, which is excessively large and, like the car park, exclusively tarmac paved. The **car park** is also badly laid out, with too much wasted space - particularly unfortunate given the shortage of parking spaces in the town centre. The only 'icing on the cake' is perhaps the design of the Bus Station building itself, marred to some extent by the '**ugly footbridge**' and ramp alongside it. This 'engineering' structure is completely unsuited to a Conservation Area site, adjoining a listed building and Victorian Station.

The **landscaping**, still presumably incomplete, lacks both structure and design concept, has been poorly implemented, contrary to the approved scheme and shows a lack of regard for any protection of the shrubs planted, as well as pedestrian desire lines.

A further negative feature of the development is the uncertainty surrounding the anticipated **residential development**, expected to commence immediately after completion of the relief road, but apparently fraught by worse contamination problems than originally predicted. The 'knock on' effect of this is the postponement of any associated infrastructure works, including new roads and the effective treatment of the unsightly, **former regraded quarry slopes** immediately behind the relief road and railway tracks. The railway, which could still prove to be a 'white elephant', divides the supermarket part of the development from the relief road and other associated infrastructure and car parks. It simply accommodates railway sidings demanded by Network Rail and also the notional Peak Rail extension into Matlock Station, still being negotiated, after several years of constant debate.

The new 'one-way' system over **Matlock Bridge**, tends to provoke a backing up of traffic into Crown Square during peak periods, and again has hardly been sensitively designed and surfaced. Nearby, the diverted **riverside**

footpath, which was supposed to be upgraded throughout, still appears to be unfinished, with a wide swathe of stone chippings and an unrestored river bank, adjacent to the new drain outfall, as well as a retained, derelict looking timber barrier.

At the opposite end of the scheme, the new raised **roundabout** on Bakewell Road is an appalling indictment of both principal councils involved in its approval. It is poorly constructed, un-drained, with no provision for vehicle overrun and features a further example of low standard and insignificant landscaping. It simply cannot be left in its present state and desperately needs to be re-designed to provide an attractive and meaningful focal point, as requested by the Town Council last year.

Finally, there have been a number of issues arising from the decision, not only to close lower **Snitterton Road** to through traffic, but to physically close it off even to access for residents to and from Bonsall or Snitterton etc. and create, instead, what has become a free, all day, linear car park. Signage at the bottom of the road is confusing, so HGVs are still accessing it, when an 'Access Only order would have been a preferable solution. The closure itself is badly designed; the turning head is too small and has become a parking bay; neither the residents car park nor the turning head have been landscaped; the supermarket access has appalling visibility for pedestrians and the waiting restrictions opposite have not been properly marked or enforced.

All these features of the scheme tend to downgrade its quality in the eyes of both residents and visitors. Overall, it must be the worst possible outcome that could have been imagined by interested residents and town councillors, who have had no responsibility whatsoever for the outcome so far.

The lack of convenient **car parking** facilities at a reasonable price, close to the town centre continues to provoke concern from traders, workers, residents and visitors alike. The District Council has so far refused to take responsibility for the problem, so town centre residents are still being forced to compete with daytime 'parkers'. It is to be hoped that the **Matlock Masterplan** can incorporate some imaginative additional facilities in due course.

The Masterplan discussions have not progressed in the past year as fast as predicted, so the current proposals have not been developed. Even the expected Traffic Study has not yet materialised, but several meetings have been held of the **Matlock Partnership** (comprising a range of stakeholders), promoted and serviced by the Town Council. The success of this initiative will depend on the achievement, in the short-term, of 'small wins', arising from the conclusions of several working groups, which have already been established.

TRAFFIC CALMING AND ROAD SAFETY

Traffic and road safety issues relating to this topic within the relief road and supermarket development scheme, have already been considered, so the main issues involving the existing town centre are restricted to reaction to the County Council's proposed traffic signals in Crown Square, including the removal of the landmark 'Crown' roundabout. Most people seem to believe that such a solution would be a visual, environmental, traffic congestion and

pedestrian disaster. What Crown Square needs, following the opening of the new relief road, which has removed much of the through traffic, are solutions which improve the climate for pedestrians, but also allow through traffic to move reasonably freely and without the daily 'peak period' congestion, exacerbated by the over-provision of traffic signals. The 'shared space' principles, now accepted throughout Europe by many eminent highway engineers, would probably benefit the town centre as part of the Masterplan proposals, and these ideas have been more widely aired during the last year, following presentations by Phil Parker, a leading British exponent of 'shared space' ideas. The promised, experimental pedestrianisation of the bridge needs to be carried out sooner rather than later, in conjunction with switching off the new Dale Road traffic signals and putting in place significant traffic calming and deterrent measures on Starkholmes Road, where 'rat-running' is becoming endemic.

TOWNSCAPE ENHANCEMENT

As in previous years, it has been the Town Council which has taken responsibility for enhancement schemes in the town, in conjunction with the Civic Association, in the absence of any initiatives by the County and District Councils. Smaller groups, such as the **Wild Thyme** Community Garden Project, have been working steadily over several years to develop their already impressive site.

The culmination of the Bailey's Tump restoration scheme, which has certainly enhanced the Asker Lane area, has been referred to previously.

HERITAGE CONSERVATION

Very few schemes have been completed during the year, except that the **HERS scheme** on Dale Road has been terminated by central Government funding cuts. However, a number of properties have been repaired or restored to their former appearance and their use extended. It appears that work has commenced on some ancillary parts of the **Riber Castle** site and there is currently a revised planning application for **Tansley Wood Mills**. The local Jehovah's Witnesses have recently completed the building of a very attractive new **Kingdom Hall** with associated unit paving, on Bank Road.

THE TOWN COUNCIL'S WATCHDOG ROLE

The Town Council has made representations on every planning application submitted in Matlock – as well as highway schemes and other environmental and policy proposals. These have included a Matlock Bank Conservation Area Analysis and revised boundary, as well as a successful campaign, on behalf of local residents, to resist the proposed re-siting of the County Council staff (NALGO) club to the former Chatsworth Gym on Wellington Street. This was finally rejected following an Appeal to the Secretary of State.