

## **MATLOCK TOWN COUNCIL**

### **GREEN CHARTER – ANNUAL ENVIRONMENT AUDIT - MAY 2007**

Cllr Martin Burfoot, Councillor with Responsibility for the Environment

#### **COUNCIL MANAGEMENT**

The Council has striven to maintain adequately the 26 miles of public rights of way for which we have responsibility to clear obstructing vegetation, under our contract with the County Council. However, the competing workload for Council staff, given other site maintenance and '**Matlock in Bloom**' responsibilities (eg. Denefields, Hillside, Kiln Park, Bailey's Tump, the allotments, seats, bus shelters, planting beds and planter etc.) has meant that some less routine tasks have been undertaken by other agencies eg. BTCV and **Groundwork** Derby and Derbyshire, with whom the Council has had a contract over most of the past year. We are grateful for their promotion and implementation of conservation projects and training events, with an enthusiastic group of volunteers. Hopefully, this group of local residents will not be deterred by the recent departure of the Groundwork Project Officer.

Council use of sustainable, renewable and non toxic products has, as ever, been maintained wherever possible.

Two new, energy efficient condensing boilers have been installed in the **Imperial Rooms** and this should both increase temperatures in winter and reduce costs. The Council has also commissioned an energy audit of the Rooms, with a view to installing solar panels etc. if feasible. However, the previous plans to revamp the toilets have been deferred in favour of a far more comprehensive scheme, which will only be possible with substantial external funding. This would ease the cramped conditions for Council staff and storage endured over recent years, and provide more and varied accommodation for community organisations and groups as well as commercial bookings, ie. a proper community centre, which the town badly needs. Discussions so far have only involved meetings with representatives of local performing arts groups and looking at a local architect's sketch plans, which the Council's Regeneration Officer has used to seek possible funding sources. Councillors have also made clear their opposition to wholesale demolition of these buildings.

#### **WILDLIFE CONSERVATION**

**Denefields**, a haven for wildlife close to the town centre, has been relatively undisturbed for hundreds of years and the Town Council has been a worthy guardian of the site. With help from the contract with Groundwork, and an enthusiastic and hard working group of volunteers, a number of conservation tasks have been carried out in recent months, as well as by BTCV last year.

Apart from being our voluntary warden for Denefields, Bill Quinlan has been one of the group of volunteers, so credit must go to him for his effort, enthusiasm and regular involvement. **Kiln Park** and **Hillside** are two small areas of open space which have continued to be managed by the Council as low key amenity sites, with nature conservation an important priority.

**Bailey's Tump** – work on this historic, Second World War site is now virtually completed, and credit must go to the Town Council's partner, Matlock Civic Association, for the hard work of its members, especially Ken Parker, in organising the Heritage Lottery funding and implementing the agreed scheme,

which hopefully will be a credit to the local community as an important area of open space as well as a grassland and hedgerow habitat. Ongoing and constant by the Council's staff will be vital if the site is to be maintained in its present character over future years.

#### LITTER AND WASTE MANAGEMENT / RECYCLING

The Town Council, as well as the Civic Association have continued to press the District Council to improve their routine maintenance, in order to minimise the number of litter 'blackspots' in the town centre, in particular following busy summer weekends and on privately owned land adjoining the public highway, where mainly business proprietors need to be persuaded to take their responsibilities more seriously. Chewing gum and cigarette butts also remain an eyesore in the town centre, and there is still no evidence of the former problem being tackled.

The continuing lack of a **Civic Amenity Recycling Site** to serve the central Dales poses a problem for residents and has undoubtedly increased the incidence of fly tipping in lay bys and on road verges around Matlock. The Town Council, Civic Association and residents need to be vigilant and vociferous in seeking to retain the ever popular Saturday morning lorry collection service for bulky household waste.

Over a year since the advent of the **Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act** there is still no evidence that any District Council staff have been trained to issue fixed penalty notices to 'littering' or dog fouling etc. offenders. The Town Council has been forced to provide several new **dog waste bins**, ever since the District stopped funding them, so the new Act has in practice had little effect in Matlock, as far as we are aware.

As in previous years, the lack of regular **road sweeping** and **gully emptying** continues to cause flooding problems in wet weather. Obviously, an audit is needed, to prove that an enormous number of gullies have been completely inoperative for years, and others persistently blocked. Local councillors or residents should not have to report these problems to the District Council.

The inclusion of **cardboard and kitchen waste** in material permitted in residents' green bins has been welcome. However, the lack of any progress towards extending 'blue box' **kerbside collections** for recycling to include cans and plastic, or the provision of town centre recycling bins for glass and cans etc. in conjunction with litter bins, has been disappointing.

#### MATLOCK'S TRANSPORT LINKS, PARKING AND TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

While work by Severn Trent Water to renew sewers has continued in the past year and disrupted (or 'calmed') through traffic in Starkholmes, that work was eclipsed by the long awaited commencement in January of work on the construction of the **Sainsbury's supermarket** and **town centre relief road**. Progress of the works has been impressive and accelerated by unusually mild and dry winter weather. Construction of the **new traffic island** and river bridge, now under way in Bakewell Road has inevitably caused additional traffic congestion, and some scepticism about the sheer height of the new road junction, compared to the existing road, as well as its finished appearance. Sainsbury's have been slow to respond to the Mayor's suggestion of a design competition for the new traffic island.

Works in the **Cawdor Quarry** area to construct the new road and public car park are progressing in accordance with the original schedule, but the removal of all but a minimum 150 temporary parking spaces at any one time has created problems for town centre workers, as well as shoppers and visitors. The already completed west end of the car park appears to be poorly designed and there has been disappointment that internal **landscaping** has been completely eliminated in the latest amendment to the scheme. Allegedly, the same will apply to the supermarket car park, thereby leaving an open view of the new store, parked cars, and traffic on the new road, from many residential areas on Matlock Bank, with associated increases in noise nuisance for many years to come. The Town Council, Civic Association and residents await with interest details of the apparently amended landscaping proposals for the entire scheme. Its ultimate success or otherwise will undoubtedly be determined largely by the quality and effectiveness of the external works and both hard and soft landscaping and tree screening.

**Car parking** itself will remain in seriously short supply, even after completion of the Cawdor scheme, so the District and County Councils need to investigate viable options for additional parking in the town centre eg. along Bakewell Road, west of the Dimple Road junction and as part of the Bakewell Road area scheme in the Masterplan proposals. 'Park and Ride' options should also be explored, otherwise Matlock will soon be at a disadvantage compared to its competitors.

As reported in previous years, there remains a serious and ongoing dispute in the **Matlock Bank** area between long-suffering residents and the **County Council** over on-street staff parking during weekdays. The continuing intransigence of the Council has been disappointing, despite many constructive suggestions for 'small-win' solutions on various streets, and yet it appears that the existing '**Prohibition of Driving**' Orders on several streets will be removed shortly. It is obvious to many people that the County Council needs to both increase its own on-site parking capacity at County Hall and in the vicinity of Chatsworth Hall, as well as extending and enforcing more effectively its car sharing scheme, among other possible solutions.

**Town centre regeneration** has been further discussed in great detail during the past year, as part of the extensive consultations over the **Masterplan**, still going through its various stages, currently under the auspices of the District Council. Design options for several key areas of the town centre, from the **Firs Parade** area, for instance, to the **Lido and Imperial Rooms** area have been put forward in some detail, by external consultants, as part of the required reports for ongoing public consultation, as well as consideration and ultimate approval by the Government. Hopefully, all these hurdles will be overcome and the finally agreed scheme progressed towards implementation.

#### TRAFFIC CALMING AND ROAD SAFETY

One of the original objectives of the Cawdor Quarry scheme, in the view of the District and Town Councils and Civic Association (in its 'Vision for Matlock') was the need to pedestrianise **Matlock Bridge** and most of Crown Square. In recent months the County Council's original commitment to a specified experimental period of **pedestrianisation** has been in some doubt, despite the fact that Sainsbury's commitment, through their planning consent, to

repaving and infrastructure works on and around the bridge will inevitably require temporary closure at some stage in the next few months.

As yet, there has been no consultation from the County Council about junction design proposals for **Crown Square**, despite the obvious urgency for an agreed scheme. There remain severe doubts that the scheme will achieve pedestrian safety, reduced signage, minimal 'cluttering' of the roadside and reduced traffic congestion compared to the existing situation. The likely segregation of traffic and pedestrians, with even more traffic signals, will undoubtedly exacerbate the present gridlock, with little relief for pedestrians and further damage to a valuable town centre focal point.

Discussions between the three Councils have been held in an attempt to agree an amenity lighting scheme for the revamped bridge.

One possible outcome of the **town centre regeneration** scheme may be a long awaited **highway repaving** scheme, preferably including areas of shared pedestrian / vehicular spaces to replace the present unsightly patched tarmac pavements.

#### TOWNSCAPE ENHANCEMENT

The Town Council has continued to enhance the town with **new seats** at the Park Head and extra floral planters. Plans are currently being discussed for a 'gateway' scheme at the Lime Tree Road / Lynholmes Road junction following a successful funding bid by a local community group on Hurst Farm. Other community initiatives, such as the **Wild Thyme garden**, impressed the **East Midlands in Bloom** judges last year, as did the part completed Bailey's Tump restoration scheme off Asker Lane, which is a credit to the Civic Association's efforts, and is now virtually finished. **Matlock** achieved a worthy **second place in the EMIB competition**, and Sheila Watts' garden in Dimple Road was awarded the 'best residential garden in the East Midlands' award.

#### HERITAGE CONSERVATION

The **Rockside** restoration and redevelopment scheme was finally completed during the past year, while **Riber Castle**, another long running saga, has seen absolutely no progress, despite having planning consent for well over a year.

The **Pic Tor** phase of the **Matlock Parks Heritage Lottery** funded project is now almost complete, with a new footbridge erected at Knowleston Place.

The **HERS scheme**, supported by the District and Town Councils and Civic Association, to grant aid **repair and restoration** works to properties in the **Dale Road / Matlock Bridge** Conservation Area has seen many additional schemes approved over the past year, but is shortly to be terminated, with the withdrawal of funding.

#### THE TOWN COUNCIL'S 'WATCHDOG' ROLE

The Council has made frequent representations to the District and County Councils about planning, highway and other environmental proposals, including reports concerning major planning issues and policies, waste disposal and children's play.

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