

**4. Reports. County Councillor, District Councillors, Parish Footpath's Warden, Parish Tree Warden.**

C Smith (County Councillor) reported that thanks to pressure from parishes using the Parish Lengthsman Scheme the County Council had dropped plans to reduce the expenditure on the scheme in the coming year. There was some £47k funds available for small items of highways work - that is £5.5/parish and any proposals should be sent to him as soon as possible.

Cllr Mrs S Young reported;

i) Scheme of Delegation on Planning applications.

In order to meet government targets there has been alterations to the Scheme of delegation to ensure that the Area Development control committee concentrate of the most major complex and contentious applications. Planning Officers now have delegated powers:

- a) Residential development of not exceeding four dwellings (including new build and change of use development) where the development is generally in accordance with Development Plan Policy.
- b) Tracks and driveways outside residential curtilages and where there is no objection by Highways Authority.
- c) Advertisements and other signage and displays - where there is no objection by the Highway Authority on highway safety grounds.

Members will be informed and retains the right to be reported to Area Committee. The head of Planning Services will be able to report applications to committee should they be contentious.

ii) Under Discussion currently by the council are;

Mid Term financial Plan to be sure the budget is on course.

The future of St Wulstan's Local Nature Reserve.

Revenues and Benefits Shared Services where these could be with up to 6 Distinct Councils

iii) There will be a Statutory Duty, from December 2006, to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people, eliminate discrimination and harassment, to promote positive attitudes, take account of people's disabilities and to encourage public participation by disabled people. The Council will do this by working with disabled people and groups, gather information about gaps in service provision, carry out Equalities Impact Assessment and as a result of information gathered take action,

iv) Funding to support the improvement of local facilities and the quality of life for the local community has once again been made available by Malvern Hills District Council.

£17,000 has been set aside for the Community Projects Grant Scheme for local projects which support the achievement of the Council's aims and objectives. Applications are welcomed from local voluntary and community groups as well as charitable organisations within the District: for grants towards projects or equipment that can benefit the local community.

Many different kinds of projects can be supported such as staging a particular event, funding a pilot or one-off initiative or the purchase of new equipment. The scheme looks to support smaller scale groups rather than large scale capital schemes and construction works but we will consider any scheme with total costs up to £10,000. Projects must compliment the Council's objectives to improve the quality of life and access to services for the local community.

A grant contribution of up to 75% of eligible costs of the project can be applied for up to a maximum of £1,000 per application. The applicant will be expected to match fund the grant with their own resources.

Cllr G Lowe - Footpaths Warden reported;

He was making slow but positive progress on setting up a programme of work for the footpaths contractor. He had received some 24 complaints of footpath problems and these were either scheduled for work locally or referred to WCC Footpaths office.

David Fowler - Parish Tree Warden. Report October 2006

The Tree Warden attended the West Midland Regional Tree Warden Scheme Forum that took place on Saturday 30 September 2006 in Kemerton Village Hall in Worcestershire. The Forum was organised and hosted by Worcestershire County Council for the benefit of Tree Wardens and Local Authority staff in the West Midlands region. There were two guest speakers in the morning, and the afternoon involved two visits to local orchards, which have recently been restored.

John Edgeley, Senior Lecturer at Pershore College of Horticulture gave an interesting presentation about the fruit and orchard heritage of the West Midlands. With Worcestershire once known as the *Forest of Fruit* this was particularly relevant to our local area. We learned that the Romans brought us plums, cherries and vines, and after they left in 410AD, little happened here until the Normans encouraged the production of cider in preference to drinking the local water. Pears were in widespread use in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, and pear trees live for around 250 years compared with apples, which last around 100 years and plums for about 50. Orchards were set out in rows in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and Worcestershire fruit production increased along with development of the canals that aided distribution. Fruit trees were often planted in hedgerows as markers for drainage outfalls. Damsons were grown to make dye for army uniforms and were planted in hedges to give protection and to provide fruit. Cherries were widely planted locally in the 1920s-30s.

Nick Dunn, Managing Director of Frank P. Matthews Limited's Nursery at Tenbury Wells (also known as *Trees for Life*) gave an interesting talk on the development of rootstocks, choice of fruit varieties and cultivation. He also gave an expert demonstration of pruning and grafting.

John Clark, the conservation advisor of Kemerton Estate gave an overview of the work of the estate and introduced the afternoon visits. The first was to Dufferns Orchard, a community orchard project brought back from neglect by local volunteers after the land was offered to the village in the will of a local resident. Had the residents not raised the £5,000 funds to purchase the orchard the land would have been offered to developers for building. In fact they raised £9,000 which has also helped to fund the renovation works.

The second visit was to the *Walled Garden* and Kemerton Estates collection orchard, which has 200 different varieties of apples. The afternoon closed with a demonstration of fruit pressing and juice and cider making. The whole event was a worthwhile and educational experience.

Your Tree Warden has also been avidly watching the BBCTV series *The Trees That Made Britain* to increase his knowledge, and he also visited the 1500 year old yew tree in Much Marcle churchyard that featured in the series. This was during the Much Marcle Big Apple weekend celebration of apples, orchards and local produce including cider and perry. This added to the feeling of how lucky we all are to live in an area with such a rich fruit growing heritage and how important it is that we do not let our orchards die out. Last month attention was drawn to the Worcestershire County Council offer to supply fruit trees of traditional local varieties at only £15.00 each and it is hoped that villagers will take up this worthwhile offer.

There was one enquiry from a local resident during the month, regarding Tree Preservation Orders and the enquirer was referred to the Malvern Tree Officer Chris Mayes for further advice.