Items for April Meeting

1 Having just got my Council Tax bill it is noted that the Alderbury precept has increased by 15%. In these times of financial stress why, is this?

Recently the APC seems to have been searching for ideas on how to spend excess cash to prevent observations being made and has a large amount of CIL money accumulating. This sort of increase is typical of a council in financial difficulties.

2 At the last meeting I tried once again to raise issues within the 3-minute timeframe and once again found this impossible. This is despite other persons raising issues which then took far more than 3 minutes (this often happens and is very annoying). When issues are raised there is no time for extended discussion and a more reasonable alternative would be to discuss items outside the time limit.

3 The pond at Matron’s farm does seem to be in poor condition compared with previous samples which I have taken to be representative of good pond water. A large amount of timber has been dumped in the water here and some of it has been removed. However, a large amount remains and has probably deoxygenated the water. A recent sample was dark brown and had a strong odour. The addition of oxygenating plants might help rejuvenate the pond.

4 The footpath outside Overton House on Southampton Road has collapsed. When this property was renovated a hedge was removed (along with several of the neighbours’ telephone lines). A fence was substituted which is now collapsing and a new laurel hedge has been planted. It is reported that at the same time a drain was blocked off. This is supported by the fact that no water flows in the drainage channel below this property and this may be the cause of the problem. Members of APC have been shown this and it has been reported on several occasions at parish meetings.

5 On the other side of Southampton Road outside the Heathers it is also noted that a drain does not operate and water flows across the road even in moderate rainfall. The cause of this is thought to be partial blockage of the drainpipe by cement and silt from building work. This has also been reported on numerous occasions.

6 The footpath between Junction Road and the school is now a stream flowing from the Land East of Wagtails and the Fir’s Road development. The land here is saturated and is causing flooding of this path, washing down silt which regularly blocks the drain outside the school. The football club have been faced with a serious problem as the water flows down and saturates the pitches. Causes are likely to be a combination of removal of a large number of trees from the Land East of Wagtails followed by constant removal of regenerating foliage and soil compaction due to the use of heavy plant on the site. This, with the poor drainage afforded by heavy clay soil which was poorly recorded at the planning stage and an increase in impermeable surfaces. It is not known what was finally built in the Fir’s Road development to ameliorate the flooding risk but there seems to have been some sort of scheme involving tanks at the upper levels and a pumping system to pump water upslope into these. It is not known whether this was built but certainly there were some very deep foundations at the upper levels and drainage has been a problem from the start of the project. It should be recognised that forecasts are for heavier rainfall for the UK in the future

7 At the March meeting two hedges were identified as needing attention. As we were into the no cut season this was too late to initiate work, and this should have been identified a month earlier. In fact, robins were reports as nesting in February of this year. The hedge at the corner of Sandringhams and Southampton Road has now been hacked about so drastically that there is little chance of it being any use to wildlife this year. Yet another village hedge lost.

8 Last Summer I was called out to investigate a noisy machine being used on the embankment in Kiln Close. It turned out to be a very noisy piece of equipment stripping all the vegetation from the site. The operator stated that he had done a comprehensive risk assessment before starting work. He insisted that the small trees he was felling were only ‘regenerated specimens’ as if they were thus not of any use. Since these were regenerating from previously attacked large trees this was a poor excuse for inflicting more damage and removing all the existing vegetation. It would be instructive to obtain a copy of this assessment which should have been lodged with a relevant body before work began. It was also within the no cut period. A number of residents protested the subsequent submission for removal of the embankment and building of 4 houses there which seems ridiculous.

9 There have been discussions about further building on land between Southampton Road and Alderbury bypass. It is not known what the substance of these talks has included but it was brought to light by the allotment association finding out that this was taking place. After some hassle a line of trees on this land were given TPO status by the WC tree officer. There is a spring on this land which runs diagonally across it. This has been running as a fast-flowing substantial stream of late. The lower part of the site has always been saturated and the vegetation shows this clearly. Any further construction on this slope will cause even more flooding problems. A public meeting was held to support an outline planning application which will no doubt be profitably passed on to a building company at some stage. It all sounded rather fanciful, and the company did not seem to be aware of the spring and stream. The event looked more like a fishing process for information to aid the application. They were interested in the Firs Road development as a test case for flooding amelioration. The measures they were proposing seemed rather farfetched. We seem to have already overreached the drainage capacity for this area of sloping land with its springs and issues. A portion of map showing the spring and stream was forwarded to the Parish Clerk some time ago.

10 It is reported that tankers are working to remove excess water from the sewage pumping station (Firs Road?). Is this now overloaded? The planning guidance allows developers to direct drainage water from gutters and housing drainage into the foul water system. This is then overloaded, and the sewage system cannot cope.

11 Recently there was a problem with a blocked storm drain in The Copse. This was cleared but this had not been done for 10 years and this is clearly unacceptable. Could the presence of other such drains be investigated so that they may be dealt with as necessary. There is also the matter of the culverted stream which drains down through The Copse and on to the sports field. This saturates the gardens of the properties upstream and has not been attended to for some time.

12 Unfortunately older trees do not have any legal protection. This is extremely concerning as they are usually the mother trees with the epigenetic information which is passed on to their offspring through their seeds and fruits. They also provide shade and nutrients to the younger trees, controlling their growth. All over Europe these large specimens are being destroyed and very few remain. They can be protected locally and Alderbury which is noted for its trees seems to be an ideal place for such protection to be afforded. The latest technology to attack these trees seems to be sonic tomography (not X Rays!) which can show variations in the density of the wood and possible hollowing. It is being used to justify felling or large scale chopping back of canopy. Since these large specimens are the ones which survive through storms when the smaller trees do not (as they have less developed root systems) there is a lack of logic here. The larger and older trees will become hollow in time but are no less stable for that. We have two older oaks in the amenity area at Oakwood Grove !! One has been killed by overzealous pruning and the other has recently been very heavily pruned despite having a vigorous canopy and seeming very healthy. Questions arise as to the connection between companies which provide the tomography service and those carrying out the felling. The branches which have been cut appear healthy and have they joined the stores of valuable wood which are held locally. Has the PC been remunerated for this material? Some timber has been given to residents for firewood. Will this be properly dried before burning and will it be used in properly regulated equipment?

13 Recent regulations have been introduced which require developers to increase the biodiversity on a development to 10% above the original. This seems to be deeply flawed and echoes previous environmental legislation which has proved to be ineffective. This includes tree protection where felling can be offset by planting elsewhere – a recent case at Ripon Cathedral highlights the problem here as the offset was set to be remote from the affected site. A vehement objection has been raised. The ill-fated carbon offset scheme led to widespread abuse with a great dal of fraud involved. There has already been a burgeoning market in biodiversity offset schemes which bodes ill for the future. A major problem exists in that the true value of many species is not known as are their interdependencies.

14 Within the village there is a deal of activity around planting trees. This is very laudable, but it must always be recognised that most planting scheme are not successful but do give the planters a good feeling. Preventing deforestation is far more effective in preserving biodiversity and ameliorating climate change. It should always be prioritised.

15 This year has not started well for birds and wildlife. The usual suspects are cutting their hedges and trees but it is hoped that sanity will prevail and that some of our lost species will return.