

## Hertfordshire Village of the Year 2009 Judges' Summary Report

### INTRODUCTION

We are always trying to improve the Village of the Year. Each year we look at the Entry Form and see if we can make it easier and clearer. This year there has been one major change. We now have three area winners, thanks to sponsorship by North Hertfordshire District Council of a Village of the Year North trophy. There has also been a minor change, the introduction of a graded award system. The runner up in each category has therefore been awarded a Highly Commended certificate this year. Judging is always difficult. Each village is different, not only in size and location but also in character. Sadly, not every village can win a prize but, simply by entering the competition, a village celebrates its own uniqueness and character.

### ENVIRONMENT

The judges look for new ideas and for villagers who take an active interest in their surroundings. A well-kept village means a caring village. Are there village greens, village ponds and rivers? School gardens cared for by enthusiastic children? Allotments that are well cared for and more popular every year?

Highly Commended: **Potten End**      Winner: **Park Street**

### BUSINESS

Businesses play an important rôle in village life. They provide local employment. Shops, as well as supplying people's needs, can be a hub of local information and offer other services such as photocopying and an internet connection. Businesses can also support local social and sporting activities. It's a two-way process. With the current local post offices closures, it is important for local people to support their village shop. We all need to be aware of the problems businesses face in order to survive and prosper. The winner in this category has a self-help group for local businesses which holds regular meetings providing advice, information and support, and also enjoys the support of the Parish Council.

Highly Commended: **Ashwell**      Winner: **Kimpton**

### PEOPLE

The village which has won the People category offers many activities for a wide range of interests. People of all ages are involved in the events taking place in their village and support the various activities. Their newly-built cricket pavilion was burnt to the ground because of an electrical fault but with great determination they have rebuilt the pavilion and it is ready for the matches this summer. A new public garden has recently been opened which is being planted and maintained by a group of volunteers. The first trees of an orchard have also been recently planted. People enjoy living in this village and feeling part of the community.

Highly Commended: **Wilstone**      Winner: **Redbourn**

### COMMUNICATIONS

The Communications section of the entry form asks for details of the publications produced in the village and information about notice boards, directories and web sites. These are looked at carefully by the judges. During the visit to the villages, judges observe how the people they meet interact with each other, and how they refer to other residents who are not present. It is how people communicate with each other and the outside world which interests us particularly. (Incidentally, we were interested to note that we could not find any web site which mentioned that the village in question was entering this competition!) The village which we have highly commended has an excellent web site: clear and informative, easy to use, up to date, with a particularly good section on local history and good links to other relevant sites. There is also a village newsletter issued free to all residents. These are both used to good advantage to help overcome a particular communication handicap for this entrant, namely that it is really three communities a mile or so apart. The winning village in this category has another brilliant web site. It also produces an amazing range of impressive, readable and informative printed documents including a Village News from the Parochial Church Council; a Parish Council "Who, What and How Much" document; a School Governors' News; and a Gardening Club Programme and Show Schedule. The judges were particularly impressed by the youth consultation process. They have also worked hard as a team in fighting the potential absorption of the village by the proposed Harlow extensions.

Highly Commended: **Hormead**      Winner: **Hunsdon**

### **PETERKIN AWARD**

This Rosebowl donated in 2002 by Margaret Peterkin, is presented at the judges' discretion to an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to Village Life. There were many nominations for the award this year, so it was a difficult choice for the judges. The winner is a tireless campaigner for village amenities. From the list of campaigns and activities on his nomination form, you might be forgiven for thinking he is retired and looking for things to fill his time. Not a bit of it! He is in full time employment.

Peterkin Award: **Mr Michael Wallis of Potten End.**

### **DOROTHY ABEL SMITH AWARD FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

This award, now in its fifth year, is given to a young person up to the age of 18 who has made an outstanding contribution to village life. This year it goes to a lad who is a shining example of someone who really cares. He is just 17 and has worked to encourage children become interested and active in the performing arts, often for the benefit of the older generation and charitable fundraising.

Dorothy Abel Smith Award: **Oliver Gordon of Ashwell**

### **SMALL VILLAGE OF THE YEAR**

A small village means a population of fewer than 500. Judges look out for that traditional good neighbourliness and community spirit which often comes from a self-sufficient group of people. This year's winner has a well-respected 19th century school, which attracts people from a wide area and has its own swimming pool and an ample play ground. There are several sports clubs and the Scouts are very active. The Village Green, a peaceful wood planted in recent times and a duck pond provide a great environment. As one resident puts it 'It's a nice place to live'.

Small Village of the Year: **Birch Green**

### **VILLAGE OF THE YEAR EAST**

This village does not rest on its previous achievements as some of its new initiatives testify. The past year has seen the formation of an Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Association and its school has achieved national recognition for its Eco Club. Visual improvements continue to be introduced along the main road passing through the village and a Rights of Way Map has been produced. A new village store has opened and a number of Carbon Footprint reduction measures have been identified. Not only its second consecutive win but, as last year's Hertfordshire nominee to the national competition, this village, this year's winner also achieved a regional prize in the Business category.

**Village of the Year East:** Woolmer Green

### **VILLAGE OF THE YEAR NORTH**

The inaugural year of the Village of the Year North Competition is not about the sleepy, the picturesque, but about villages which have a 'Golden Thread' of community spirit running through them. We saw excellent village halls and other community buildings, shops, churches, recreation grounds and facilities, competitive sports activities as well as hearing about diverse local organisations and initiatives. Some villages have lots of small and diverse businesses; others have a more agricultural base. It is never easy to compare chalk with cheese, but one thing stands out amongst villages that truly work, lots of people pulling together. Environmental projects and excellent communications endorsed by an outstanding Annual Year Book, eyes being drawn to the cleanliness of the village, the flora & fauna, a totally inclusive village atmosphere and a friendly place to live, all characterised the winner.

**Village of the Year North:** Ashwell

### **VILLAGE OF THE YEAR WEST**

The winner's Village Shop is amazing. It is clean, crisp and modern. There is a large range of stock and it is thriving, in spite of the fact that they have lost their Post Office. One local business, making surgical masks, is thriving, too, owing to the outbreak of swine 'flu'. The school is a centre of excellence and over-subscribed. There are new buildings and new projects in progress. This has the effect of drawing in people from out of the village to events. A new Scout Hut is on the stocks. Village volunteers look after the village green and the pond entirely by their own efforts, and their Old Green with advice from others. We have never seen a set of allotments more lovingly cared for.

**Village of the Year West and Overall Winner:** Potten End.