

Northamptonshire Best Village Competition 2011

As you all know, we entered this competition and a panel of three judges spent two hours with a few of us, firstly in the village hall where we went through the application form and secondly by a tour of the village. We were blessed with a beautiful sunny day and the village looked really lovely. Everyone made such an effort, so a BIG THANK YOU to you all for doing this. Mears Ashby did not win; the title in the "small village" category went to Gayton. We will get feedback in due course, but in the meantime one of the judges commented that we have a beautiful village. The taking part made us all aware of how much does go on in the village across a broad spectrum of the village population.

The following is a summary of the information which we provided, broken down into seven sections.

- 1 VILLAGE LIFE
 - Activities that go on in the village hall or other meeting place (listed in Village Life Magazine)
 - The Mears Ashby Society
 - Art Exhibition – annually
 - WI – monthly
 - Gardening Society & Allotment Society – regularly
 - Coffee morning – monthly (includes "bring & by stall")
 - Various fund raising activities
 - Wines from the Pigsty – twice a year
 - Various other activities such as six weekly yoga classes, monthly whist drives, weekly table tennis club, six weekly visit by chiropodist
 - Activities put on for the village by the Church/Religious Groups
 - Coffee morning – monthly (includes "bring & by stall")
 - Lunch Club – monthly (usually held at Overstone Church, but sometimes in Mears Ashby Village Hall)
 - Men's Group – weekly on an evening; Christian support Group
 - Pastoral visits
 - Church Choir – continuation by new leader of choir which ran for 63 years under previous leader; for all ages
 - MOSH – registered charity in existence for 2 years; pastoral; raises money for "Children's Worker" to work 30 hours a week in all Schools in the benefice and Sywell & Overstone Churches; for primary age up to 11 years of age
 - Fete – annually (in conjunction with School)
 - Cycle – those taking part nominate which church will receive half of proceeds; the other half to the Historic Churches Trust; the local contact is a parishioner
 - Carol Service – annually; 2010 held at Beckworth Emorium
 - Walk of Witness – Good Friday – from Overstone to Sywell, Mears Ashby and on to Hardwick for light lunch, followed by a Service
 - Coffee mornings held regularly at Hardwick Church to which parishioners within the Benefice welcome
 - Shrove Tuesday pancake race/Beetle Drive held annually at Hardwick
 - Fete held at Hardwick
 - Fellowship/Home Groups held weekly at Hardwick and Sywell
 - Fetes etc
 - Fete run by Church and School together
 - Safari Supper held annually – proceeds to charity
 - Ball held annually at Sywell Aviator to raise funds for The Hannah Payne Memorial Trust
 - WI Christmas singalong
 - Royal British Legion – participating in 90th anniversary celebrations "Great Poppy Party" week-end on 11/12.6.11
 - Street Party to celebrate Royal Wedding on 29.4.11
 - Arts or History/Heritage activities
 - Art Exhibition – annually in April
 - Millennium collage in Church – prepared by villagers leading up to 2000
 - Millennium Book – Names and photographs of village inhabitants in 2000
 - "From Ice Age to Space Age" written by W G Callis
 - How we welcome ALL new residents into village life
 - Welcome Newsletter prepared by the Mears Ashby Society given to newcomers – see attached
 - Village Life Magazine – initially a copy given to newcomers (thereafter there is a charge)

- Millennium Book and “From Ice Age to Space Age” often shown to newcomers
 - Visit by a member of the Mears Ashby Society
 - Visit by neighbours
 - How we welcome visitors to our village
 - Show visitors local publications about the village
 - Be chatty and friendly
- 2 COMMUNITY FACILITIES
 - Community Publications
 - Village Life Magazine - Every two months; Free initially; thereafter to pay
 - Notice Boards
 - Public notice board outside Village Hall – divided between (a) Parish Council notices, (b) WI notices and (c) Village notices
 - Parish Notice board outside Church
 - Many notice boards inside Church
 - Two inhabitants allow certain notices to be displayed on their garden walls
 - Access to sports and leisure facilities
 - Playing field (privately owned) on entrance to village from Sywell and Earls Barton
 - Football and cricket
 - Table tennis club held weekly in village hall during the winter months
 - Access to community transport
 - "The Earls Barton Help Scheme" - 01604 812526
 - Wellibus services
 - Social/affordable housing
 - Approximately 20 houses run by Wellingborough Homes (formerly run by the Wellingborough Borough Council Housing Association) - in Bakehouse Lane, Manor Road and Wellingborough Road. Available to the general public.
 - Village charities providing support to the local community
 - Town Estates Charity –
 - (a) Committee of 6 which meets twice a year
 - (b) Originally formed for provision of roads and bridges within the Parish and the maintenance thereof, but not any more.
 - (c) Now to provide support for the old and needy.
 - (d) Organise an annual outing to such places as York, London, Hunstanton and last year to Bath – free of charge to every village inhabitant, priority to elderly & disabled.
 - (e) Shopping trip organised in the past.
 - (f) Contribution to clock renovation, village hall kitchen & roof
 - (g) Contribution to setting up of Village Life Magazine
 - (h) Publicised in (i) Annual Report to the village; (ii) Village Life Magazine; (iii) flier to every village inhabitant.
 - Trustees of Sarah Kinloch (Educational Trust) –
 - (a) Committee of 7 which meets twice a year
 - (b) On Sarah Kinloch’s death in 1710, it was her wish that £200 be spent on buying land and for the rent to go towards the education of Mears Ashby children
 - (c) Grants to School
 - (d) Maintenance of School – donation recently of 10% towards new classroom
 - (e) Education of Mears Ashby children going to higher education & apprenticeships for under 25s.
 - Poors Close (Church Charity)
 - (a) Committee of 6
 - (b) Meets once a year
 - (c) Income from parcel of land in Glebe Road rented out to local farmer
 - (d) For New Year gift to the over 80s
 - The Hannah Payne Memorial Trust
 - Surveys carried out
 - Housing Needs Survey carried out – work in progress – need land suitable for houses to be provided for local people.
 - Parish Plan – locally, hope that Parish Council will update after the Elections, specifically aimed at planning (not general needs)

- Crime prevention
 - A Neighbourhood Watch scheme was set up separately from the Parish Council. However, on resignation of Co-ordinator, there is no-one to take over this role. Annual check-up is due any time, so held in abeyance.
 - Meetings every two months with Community Support, Earls Barton
 - Liaison between Parish Council and School regarding road safety
 - Lead and copper at church marked with Smart Water
 - Earls Barton police contribute information in Village Life Magazine
- 3 BUSINESS
 - We listed twenty local businesses
 - Local businesses support community life in many ways, apart from offering employment.
 - Donation and planting plants for the seven planters situated in the village
 - Donation of raffle prizes
 - Donation of Christmas Tree to school
 - Advertising in the Village Life Magazine
 - Lending trailers for helping set up fete etc
 - Employment opportunities
 - Village pub
 - School
 - Beckworth Emporium
 - Farm Labourers
 - Paper rounds
 - Facilities or activities to encourage visitors to our village
 - School – children attend from other areas
 - Village pub
 - Church – Church - Medieval church with 12th century stone font and 14th century “Doom painting” of particular interest
 - Cricket field
 - Football field
 - Nurseries – for purchasing plants
 - Beckworth Emporium – refreshments; purchasing plants
 - Waendel Wak – international event
 - Artists from other areas enter annual Art Exhibition
 - Aviation museum – memorial plaque
- 4 YOUNG PEOPLE
 - access to, any Crèches, Playgroups or Toddler_groups or clubs aimed at pre-school children
 - Church lead Mums & Tots Group held weekly at Overstone Church for the Benefice and run by Children & Families Worker
 - Groups helped or financed by community fund raising -
 - MOSH – registered charity in existence for 2 years; pastoral; raises money for “Children’s Worker” to work 30 hours a week in all Schools in the benefice and Sywell & Overstone Churches; for primary age up to 11 years of age
 - After School or breakfast clubs which are self-funded
 - Every day – football, cricket, ICT, cookery, film, stay & play
 - Youth groups/clubs in the village, or access to them in nearby villages
 - Scouts and Guides in Earls Barton and Wellingborough
 - Cricket for 15+
 - Football for 16+
 - School sometimes uses playing fields
- 5 OLDER PEOPLE
 - Transport scheme (as already mentioned)
 - Donations by local Charities – The Town Estate Charity and The Poores Close Charity make donations
 - Older people are involved in village life
 - Lunch Club – held monthly usually at Overstone Church
 - Coffee morning held on 1st Saturday of the month; stalls include “Bring & Buy”, Books, Gardening Society stall in season; raffle
 - Table Tennis Club

- Help schoolchildren at Knitting Club and Gardening Club at School
 - Previous head teachers involved in the 300 anniversary celebrations at School
 - Information support services for older people
 - At present there is an Age Concern contact
- 6 ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY
 - Environmental/conservation activities
 - The Mears Ashby Society's objects are "to help maintain and where possible enhance the environs and amenities of Mears Ashby
 - The Mears Ashby Society organises annual litter pick (19.3.11) and annual bulb planting (15.10.11), in conjunction with Parish Council appoints Litter Warden, removes ivy from trees at request of Parish Council, liaises with local Nurseries over planting of planters, restores village seats, supported renovation of village signpost etc
 - The Gardening Society set up in 2010
 - Allotments set up in 2011 – 11 allotments for inhabitants of Mears Ashby
 - Majority of villagers keep verges near them neat and tidy; many display hanging baskets
 - Two local farmer have planted crops to encourage wildflowers and birds
 - One farmer farms organically
 - Leaflets or maps, guides to support any of these activities
 - Map of bulb planting
 - Village Magazine produces bi-monthly walk with os map references and photographs
 - Tourist Guide – work in progress
 - There is a Footpath and Tree Warden
 - Litter Picks
 - Annual Litter Pick run by the Mears Ashby Society on behalf, and with support of, the Parish Council – part of the CPRE "Stop the Drop Campaign" – 19.3.11
 - Appointment in 2010 of Litter Warden who receives an honorarium funded by the CPRE (Council for the Protection of Rural England) and the Parish Council
 - Schemes to reduce its 'carbon footprint'
 - Bin collection by Council of recycled goods every other week
 - Sale of fresh produce on Gardening Society stall at monthly coffee morning run by the Church and held in the Village Hall
- 7 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
 - Websites regularly updated
 - Parish Council website – www.mearashbyparishcouncil.com
 - Church website – www.mearsashbygroup.org.uk
 - School website
 - Cricket Club website – www.mearsashby.play-cricket.com
 - Communication by e-mails used within these groups and also for Village Life Magazine, the Mears Ashby Society, Gardening & Allotment Societies
- 8 "YOUR VILLAGE"
 - What makes our village an attractive and special place for residents?
 - Mears Ashby is built in a most unusual format in that it does not have a main road passing through the centre, but instead has five different routes into and out of the "box-shaped" community. The village is pleasantly set out, more or less square, with intersecting lanes
 - Easy access to local towns
 - Easy access to main roads and Motorway
 - Friendly inhabitants
 - Newcomers welcomed
 - What makes our village an attractive and special place for visitors?
 - 12th Century medieval church
 - A memorial plaque on site of main crash site during World War II killing 16 crew members. Debris was scattered over local fields but the village was spared any damage.
 - Town Well, originally built in 1890, used to provide water for steam engine vehicles – an historical monument
 - Hall, a fine example of Jacobean architecture built in 1637 – privately owned