

Centre Piece for June Keys Magazine

Goodness, how time flies, we are nearly halfway through the year! How lovely the countryside looks now with the profusion of blossom and flowers as well as the brilliant green leaves. The Parish Council's grounds received a rather late first cut last week due to the wet weather conditions but now they can be seen in all their glory. The only slight problem was the loss of water in the Pavilion for the start of the cricket season – now thankfully restored.

The Parish Council's Annual Meeting was held on 18th May and this involves electing a chairman and vice chairman as well as all members agreeing to serve on two committees for the coming year. This year the Council said a sad farewell to their chairman, Mike Dobson, who has presided for the past 5 years. He is taking a well earned retirement from local government and is going to be greatly missed for his enthusiasm, wide knowledge, tolerance and great sense of humour. He has guided the Council through many challenges not least the floods of 2013 and the setting up of the volunteer flood warden programme and has been a great asset liaising with the Borough Council using his knowledge as former mayor and borough councillor. Members paid tribute to his valuable contribution to the Council.



However members were greatly reassured when Claire Sheldon was proposed and ratified as the new chair person. She has many connections in the village and is an experienced councillor so I am sure we can look forward to the Council continuing to respond to residents' needs whenever possible.

Following Claire Sheldon's acceptance of the responsibility of chairman, Mrs Margaret Coles was proposed and ratified as vice chairman. She has very ably chaired the Planning Committee and when necessary has represented the Parish Council's concerns at Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council's Area 1 Planning Committee on many occasions. We are all sure she too will prove to be an equal asset as vice chairman.

Most members of the committees remain the same and details of who sits on which Committee can be found on our website at www.hildenboroughpc.kentparishes.gov.uk

At the meeting members had invited Ms L Smith from Medway Valley Partnership working on behalf of KCC to design a flood alleviation scheme (FAS) to help protect houses which flood backing onto West Wood. She came to the meeting to explain the proposed scheme which included storing the flow of run off following heavy rain in two scrapes in the woodland, slowly releasing the water. It is anticipated that water would be stored for up to 48 hours. If these proposals are accepted they would form part of a scheme to include farm land further up stream. Residents should be reassured this should not impact on the footpaths throughout the woodland but will in fact be an asset as it will make the area more attractive to wildlife. The proposals will be considered further following a site visit by members in July.

Another important issue on the Agenda was the proposal by the Borough Council to reform the way Parish Councils are funded. These proposals include the withdrawal of the Financial Arrangement with Parish Councils Scheme (FAPC) and Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) from the Borough Council which currently together with the precept set by the Parish Council form our source of income. If these proposals are accepted they will be replaced with Borough Council General Expenses and the Hildenborough Parish Council Precept The Borough Council General Expenses should be fairer to Parish Councils, since currently we contribute towards the management of open spaces in the unparished area (Tonbridge), for instance the maintenance and development of the Race Course Sports Ground and other facilities in Tonbridge. In effect currently we, in addition to paying for our own open spaces, are also contributing towards facilities in Tonbridge.

In addition to the Borough Council General Expenses the Parish Council will set their own precept to cover their expenses for their own facilities. This will in effect result in a higher precept as we will lose the special allowances for maintaining the Churchyard, lighting, and Council Tax Reduction Scheme. The whole aim is to make savings of £400,000 by the Borough Council because they have a much smaller grant from the Government.

As you can see this is a very complicated issue and we await the outcome of consultations now underway. If you want to find out more and respond to the consultation go to the Tonbridge & Malling website and look at Public Consultation – Fairer Charging in Tonbridge & Malling.

Keep a look out on the Parish Council notice boards for information on the Village Open Air Service Picnic and Fun Day to be held on the Recreation Ground on Sunday 12 June. This is to celebrate HM Queen's 90th Birthday.

Don't forget if you have any queries or ideas do contact us either by email clerk@Hildenboroughpc.kentparishes.gov.uk by phone 01732 832367 or drop in at the Farmers' Market on Tuesday 14 June. At the Farmers' Market our publications and bus/train timetables as well as other information will be available.

Pam Gow

