

## **Centre Piece for February Keys Magazine**

With the Christmas and New Year celebration barely over, the first 2019 Parish Council meeting was held on 9 January. The day had been bright and sunny which had brought a renewed smile to people's faces during the day but by the time the evening meeting started it was drizzling. January always seems to be a dark and dismal month until the very end when the days are noticeably longer – something to look forward to.

It was a very short meeting this month as little had changed since the December meeting. However there were some important issues to discuss and decide. Among them was the Village Green. As has been reported in Centre Piece recently the Parish Council had received lobbying from some residents living around the Green to have it mowed, once again, on a regular basis so they had circularised those living adjacent to the Green to seek everyone's view. There, as was reported in the previous Centre Piece, a poor response. Most of those responding wanted it cut on a regular basis because of inconsiderate dog owners allowing them to foul the area and concerns over the aesthetic look when the area was seeding and dying back, as well as the fire hazard. After much discussion they decided they would have it cut regularly during 2019 and review the situation at the end of this time. There have been problems of getting the meadow established and although there had been some success, the fertility of soil seemed to be encouraging the grasses to be much stronger than the wild flowers we were trying to encourage, which then proved to be a challenge when the area was finally mowed in August due to the volume of vegetation to be removed.

Members were pleased to learn that the saga of the roundabout in the Recreation Ground has finally been completely resolved. The new roundabout was installed during the Autumn and now the damaged wet pour safety surface has been overlaid with a hard wearing green section to accommodate the heavy footfall area. It is hoped that the footpaths through both the Recreation Ground and West Wood play areas and approaches will have a solid tarmac surface (as reported in January Centre Piece) before the Spring which will help protect the safety surfaces from the damage sustained by grit from the present paths being transported by shoes to it. The wear has become obvious around the very popular cone climber in the Recreation Ground.

There have been issues raised by residents on local public rights of way and footways. Of major concern is where householders have allowed their hedges to overhang the footways narrowing the space available for pedestrians. It was reported at the meeting that at least one resident had sustained facial injury through this. It would be very helpful if you have a hedge bordering a footway you could check if this now overhangs the footway and if so ensure it is cut back to the edge of your boundary. The same problem occurs along public rights of way. This does seem to get overlooked but again the hedges on your property need to be cut back to the edge of your boundary or walkers may sustain injury, particularly as many of these paths are very narrow.

Other public right of way issues have included disputes with landowners over the use of footpaths along private roads and an invitation from the Planning Inspectorate to attend an inquiry into the diversion of two local footpaths. The Parish Council will be sending a member to this inquiry planned for June 2019.

Following the successful exhibition on the proposed extension to the Leigh Flood Barrier and the Hildenborough embankment some questions by residents have been addressed by the Environment Agency and we have also been asked to contribute to their Newsletter with an article about the Flood Warden Scheme in Hildenborough. This forms part of a series of articles covering flood protection schemes. The Parish Council has agreed to this and will be seeing the article prior to publication.

At the meeting on 9 January a response was agreed on the Library Consultation on the reduction in hours to libraries across Kent, including Hildenborough. It was felt that our library had been categorised in the wrong tier. It has been assessed as being a tier 5 library whereas current statistics would put in tier 3 which would increase the accessible hours! It would be such a shame to have to lose some of the facilities currently enjoyed by the local population including regular groups for young children or a reduction in computer facilities which are in regular use. To date the public petition has attracted over 200 signatures to support the popularity of this very valuable facility in our village.

Next month will see preparations for the local elections in May. This year the Parish Council will be involved and so they will be looking for eleven members. A number of members will be seeking re-election but there will be room for some new faces. Do think seriously if this could be you. The Council looks for members who are community minded, have ideas for improvements and the development of new facilities for residents of all ages. There are few qualifications necessary, just residency or working in the village (although there is a short qualifying period) as well as being 18 or over to name the most important. Watch out for the posters on our notice boards and website to give you more details on how to apply.

The Annual Parish Meeting draws near once again. This year it is a little earlier than it has been in the past with the change in Parish Council meetings to the second Wednesday of the month. This year it falls on Wednesday 13 March 2019 and will be held in the Jim England Hall at the Village Hall starting at 7.30pm – so do put this in your diary now so that it doesn't get overlooked. Apart from the usual Parish Council annual report and hopefully report from the police, Chris Rowley will be talking about Princess Christians Hospital. We are sure this will be of great interest to a lot of local people or just a way of extending your knowledge of local history.

Demand has recently been high for our latest publication 'Tales from a Kent Village, Hildenborough, as seen through the Parish Council Archives' so don't miss out on buying your copy. They are available direct from me or at the Farmers' Market on the second

Wednesday of the month – next meeting 12 February between 10 and 11 am. at a cost of £10.

As usual do let us have your ideas or queries by phone 01721 832367, by email or letter or just drop into the Farmers' Market on Tuesday 12 February between 10 and 11am when two members will be present together with copies available of local bus and train timetables.

*Pam Gow*