

CENTRE PIECE FOR JANUARY 2021 KEYS MAGAZINE

Hopefully by the time you read this you will have been able to celebrate and enjoy a very different Christmas to those of yesteryear. We now look forward to 2021 with mixed feelings knowing that all will not be back to 'normal' for some months but with the promise of better days to come later in the year.

The Parish Council had the future very much in mind at their meeting on Wednesday 9 December, 2021. It was not the usual December cheerful meeting looking forward to the holiday to come but more of anticipation and hope for better times in the year ahead. It was, as usual, the month when the budget for the following financial year needs to be ratified. This year the Council had been making plans to make improvements for all sections of Village's residents. For children there is the prospect of resurfacing of the cycle track, for all ages the planning of a footway around the Recreation Ground and a dog exercise area, more work to improve the Village Green, and input into highways improvements. This all does, of course, cost a lot of money and consequently not everything will be achieved during the coming year. The Council, will of course, seek out any type of funding grants that are available for these projects.

Currently Hildenborough has one of the lowest Parish Council Tax rates in Tonbridge & Malling (only one other is a few pence lower and most of the others a great deal higher). However, after much discussion the Council agreed to increase the Council Tax for Band D properties in the parish by £8.75 per annum to £43.75 per annum. This will enable the Council to undertake some of the projects mentioned above as well as to replace the very dilapidated storage facilities attached to the Pavilion and so work towards providing facilities in line with other Parishes in the area.

At this meeting the Council also took a very important decision and that is to seek the designation of Hildenborough as a Neighbourhood Area from Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council. If this is achieved it will involve a lot of work but the benefits will far outweigh this. It will enable the Village to shape its future direction within the Borough and bring with it the ability to help determine the needs of the community. However, this is a very big step to take and will require the input of a number of residents with various expertise and interests. Should the Borough Council accept the Council's application there will be more details available and an opportunity for you to participate in 2021.

A number of local residents attended the December meeting concerned about the disturbance to their lives by the loud 'hooting' throughout the day by mainline trains. I certainly noticed it during the warmer weather when I was working or sitting in the garden. The responses from Network Rail and others is that it is to warn pedestrians using the public right of way which crosses the main line of approaching trains. The crossing is situated to one side of a bend when the approaching fast trains may not be visible and the 'hooting' is to avoid pedestrians colliding with oncoming trains. Hildenborough residents are, apparently, not alone in experiencing this problem as along the main line to Ashford there have been many reports of disturbance caused by loud train warnings. The issue is to be taken to Tonbridge & Malling's Environmental Health Department as well as to Kent Association of Local Councils to see if a resolution to the problem can be found. A few years back the Parish Council did try to get the public right of way which crosses the main line re-routed and an alternative route was found via a tunnel under the line but unfortunately funding wasn't!

On the brighter side the Council understands that finally Southern Water have thoroughly cleaned the drainage channels around Brookmead, so hopefully it will help to avert yet another flood following heavy rain. There was also a response on a query raised over sewerage being discharged

into the Hawden Stream following heavy run-off. They supplied the various statistics and it seems this is within the regulated amount possible.

The Environment Agency has arranged more Flood Warden training which will include the results of modelling for proposals for the LFSA. You may remember that this is supposed to be completed by 2023 but the preliminaries have yet to be finalised – so watch this space for an update in due course.

If anyone is interested in taking part in a survey organised by the Faculty of Medicine of University of Southampton on the long term effect of COVID 19 I have the link. They are looking for a large number of people to take part.

The Council is very concerned about the increasing volume of litter accumulating throughout the village. We have had a number of volunteers come forward to 'do their bit' for the community and in addition two members of the Parish Council, Sandy Thomas and Ioannis Sklavenitis are setting up a litter clearing group. They are going to meet on the 1st Saturday of the month in the Recreation Ground car park, starting at 10am on 6 February. Equipment will be provided if you would like to join in with this worthwhile group to help to keep the environment of our village a pleasant place to be.

I hope by the time you read this we will not be experiencing the reality of the predicted traffic chaos following the country's exit from the EU and the implementation of border checks. Our County Councillor attended the virtual Parish Council Meeting in December and said that the County had plans for many different sites to allow lorries to wait up before gaining clearance to cross to Europe. This included, in the worst situation, diversion via Hildenborough/A21. Currently there are long queues because stock piling is going on increasing the volume of lorries by up to an extra 3,000 per day. At the moment Dover can accommodate the usual 10,000 to 12,000 vehicles a day but with the extra paper checks involved from 1 January this will reduce to 7,000. This looks like a recipe for disaster but hopefully, as they are aware of the situation, an acceptable system can be planned and executed.

Wishing everyone a Happy New Year and reminding you if you have any comments to make do contact me by email clerkhildenbroughpc@gmail.com or by phone 01732 832367 or drop by the Farmers' Market on the 2nd Tuesday of the month (13 January this month) and you will find a member who will listen to your query or idea.

Pam Gow