

Centre Piece for December Keys Magazine

Here we are again in Lockdown for the second time this year. It is all very disheartening to hear of coronavirus cases across the country rising so steeply once again. Whilst this area had a relatively low number of cases at the beginning of September, now rates seem to be rising daily. All this means we all have to continue to take care, maintain social distance, wash our hand frequently and wear masks when in enclosed spaces. Who would have believed this could happen this time last year!

We do, of course, have great sympathy for those directly affected by the virus and it is reassuring to see that the community comes together at times such as these with support systems for those in need in place. St John's Church have members who are willing to give support, and also have set up a food bank for those in need. Other services are available from the Borough Council and County Council as well as a number of charities. So if you are in need please do make contact either directly or via someone who can point you in the right direction. It can be very daunting to find the right way forward but don't give up. We try to keep contact details up to date on our website www.hildenboroughpc.org.uk and if in doubt do email me clerkhildenboroughpc@gmail.com or phone 01732 832367 and we will try to point you in the right direction.

In spite of all the problems, though, the Autumn colours are magnificent this year and when the sun shines they are vibrant. There have been so many beautiful photos on social media of leaves, reflections, sunset and sunrises it really does give you a lift during these dark times.

The Parish Council met as usual on the second Wednesday of the month, this time 11 November, when much of their business was concerned with finances. It is that time of year again when the budget needs to be prepared for 2021/22. This is proving very difficult this year because there are so many unknowns, for instance what will the 'new normal' be during that year, will we be able to meet together to enjoy sporting activities, music festivals and concerts etc. This all has a bearing on what the Council needs to achieve/can do. They have agreed that the storage adjacent to the Pavilion needs to be replaced and funding will be set aside for this as well as the ever increasing demand for financial support towards highways improvements.

There are several other projects at the planning stage which will be discussed early in the new year when hard decisions will need to be made on what can be afforded. The Council is very conscious, that unlike most other parishes, they do not obtain a large amount of council tax with which to progress these developments. They do of course always look out for grants/donations to help with improved facilities, for instance they received many generous donations for the new play and fitness area in the Recreation Ground. However, funding is now short from most sources and the Council finds itself being targeted to give support to areas once covered by County and Borough Councils. After much discussion they have agreed that they will need to increase the council tax by more than the usual amount in an attempt to address some of these costs. The exact amount cannot be calculated until December and will be reported to you all in due course.

On the brighter side safety improvements have been agreed for Nizels Lane and signage to help pupils cross the road from school buses at Watts Cross. Both of these projects are to be commissioned before the end of this year and should be in place before the end of the financial year (31 March) together with signage to deter large vehicles accessing Foxbush. This is one of the projects which the Parish Council, in order for it to happen, will be contributing funds towards.

Other good news is the older cameras in the Council's cctv system around the Pavilion have been upgraded and now display much clearer images. Let us hope this will deter people dumping rubbish as now they will in all probability be able to be recognised, reported and fined.

A big thank you to those who have recently volunteered to help with the litter clearance which has become a very big problem. Our maintenance contractor spends a good proportion of time litter picking which is taking time away from other repairs. Vandalism has been quite a problem, particularly graffiti writing.

The Planning Committee has been particularly busy this month with responding to the Government's White Paper on Planning Reform. Their comments will be on our website if you would like to read these. There are many concerns in the proposals, not least the algorithm, which no doubt you have heard about on radio/tv. This, if it is not changed, will result in our Borough Council needing to build many more houses than at present, whilst areas in the north of England will need to build less.

As most of you will know Berkeley Homes have requested planning permission for the conversion of office buildings into flats on the Oakhill site. The whole area providing 138 flats and 27 houses. Again you can read the Parish Council's comments on this on the website under Planning 2 November meeting.

The Council also received the news that the investigation into the Local Plan had been put on hold with the final investigation sessions being postponed pending answers from Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council on points raised by the Inspectors. This therefore results in further delays as the timed response from the Borough Council is early in the New Year.

Another piece of news is that the Borough Council's long promised (since 2015) investigation into parking problems in Hildenborough has again been delayed, partially because of the pandemic when all their resources have needed to be directed towards dealing with it. However, we are reassured, that it is on their list following completion of the Kings Hill investigation, but the bad news is that the proposals (which the Parish Council have not seen) will need to be revisited once it is known if employment habits will change and fewer residents and users of Hildenborough Station remain at a much lower level.

By the time I write the next issue of Centre Piece it will be nearly Christmas. Let us hope that we are all able to enjoy, if a somewhat changed, Christmas holiday. The Council wish all residents a Happy Christmas.

As ever if you have a query, want to make comment or suggestions do drop into the Farmers' Market to speak to our member present on the second Tuesday of the month, 8 December or email or phone me. clerkhildenboroughpc@gmail.com 01732 832367

Pam Gow