

CENTRE PIECE FOR AUGUST KEYS

It was a great disappointment, but the reasoning clearly understood, for the planned lifting of COVID restrictions in June not going ahead. This has led to the Parish Council meetings getting out of line with the deadline for Keys making Centre Piece news older than usual.

After a week of rain, much needed but none the less not welcomed by those trying to enjoy a weekend outing or short break, the Parish Council met on 23 June on a relatively sunny and warm day. It was an unusual meeting in that the whole Council could not meet in the Finzi Room in a COVID safe way, so six members met in the Finzi Room and other members joined via Zoom. The reason for this is because the date when Councils could meet altogether remotely had passed. Consequently, the Council is to try again to meet without restriction and had moved the July meeting to 21st when, hopefully, the current regulations will have been lifted.

It proved difficult to manage the meeting in this way due to the echo and lack of enough microphones in order that everyone could hear what was said. If this method is going to have to continue, a different technical system will need to be set up but at least it did enable the Council to discuss many important matters.

Again, there have been many reports of much litter across the village. Discussion included the current situation regarding the Borough Council's refuse contract with Urbaser which is, it seems, in complete disarray. One of the causes is the scarcity of HGV drivers but hopefully by the time you read this it will be resolved and 'normal service' will have been resumed. The litter group organised by Council members has proved to be very successful and popular with all age groups attending to help make the village a brighter and pleasant place to live.

Other areas under discussion included the Village Green. One of the lovely rowan trees planted a few years ago collapsed several times on the ground. It looked so healthy with blossom and berries setting but when the tree surgeon investigated they found the roots had been severed, we think, by an earlier gale when the tree fell from its stake. Unfortunately there was no remedy and it has now been removed and will be replaced in the Autumn.

The other topic regarding the Green under discussion was the addressing of the winter flooding there. It has not proved possible to get approval for draining this into the nearby main drainage system and the Council will, once again, look into the very expensive option of building an embankment to try to hold the water back from the houses backing onto the Green.

Have you noticed the poor condition of the ash trees in some places in West Wood? It seems that the dreaded ash die-back has finally hit them. The Council is awaiting the latest tree survey to see what their recommendations will be. At least one of the trees looks almost dead and we fear this will need to be felled. However, the good news is that, if this is the case, new native trees of a different species could be planted in their place which will grow to enhance the woodland once again.

The Council, as reported earlier in the year, had considered quotations for the replacement of the storage garages in the Recreation Ground and had agreed to award the contract but sadly, after agreeing to accept one there was no response from the contractor and consequently the Council has withdrawn from this. At the June meeting the way forward was discussed and several options were under consideration. A decision will be taken at the July meeting after further quotations are gathered.

The news reached the Council of the Inspectorate's failure to approve the Borough Council's Local Plan. At this time we await news of how the Borough Council is to take this forward. On the subject of planning the Parish Council is to review its Infrastructure Plan and bring it into line with the template provided by the Borough Council.

There were a number of highways related issues also covered during this meeting. The constant problem of speeding through, in and around the village was under discussion. SpeedWatch has been active and identified many vehicles speeding and some without tax and insurance. However, they are only able to monitor roads in a 20, 30 or 40mph limit areas whereas the speeding problem presents itself along Nizels, Mill, and Riding Lanes to name but three. The Council has been investigating the best way to obtain 'quiet lane' status which would enable more control of vehicles using these areas. Quiet lane status is a way of protecting the character of a rural lane as well as a way to provide community links and enhance usage for all road users. Campaign for Rural England have produced a useful document on the topic which can easily be found online. The Parish Council intends to look into how quiet lane allocation may benefit rural roads within the village and we ask residents to bring to our attention roads which they think may benefit from this status.

Among the doom and gloom of most highways issues there is one bright piece of news. The whole of the Brookmead area, later in the year, is to undergo surface treatment works along its footways and roads as will Mill Lane and London Road up to the Teal Café. In addition, soft landscaping will be undertaken at 5 different sites within the village.

Many of you will know that the plans for the expansion of the Leigh Flood Barrier has been agreed by the three local authorities involved. Planning is still underway for the Hildenborough Embankment, but plans may well have been presented to the Borough Council before you read this.

The Council will be responding to the consultation on boundary changes. This may involve Hildenborough's Borough Councillors. From 2023 the boundaries are to be amended with residents electing 11 fewer councillors across the borough. Added to this the parliamentary boundaries are also again under review. We do not have details of actual proposals yet, which will be able to be commented on prior to the Boundaries Commission decisions.

The Council is again endeavouring to attend the 2nd Tuesday of the month at the Farmers' Market so do look out for whoever is present and feel free to raise queries, give ideas etc which they will bring back to the following Parish Council Meeting. As ever though do make contact with me via email clerkhildenboroughpc@gmail.com by phone 01732 832367 or by post if you have any concerns or ideas.

Pam Gow