

Centre Piece for December Keys Magazine 2021

It does not seem possible that yet another year is rapidly drawing to a close. We are all hopeful that this year we will be able to share the Christmas festivities with family and friends. The Parish Council discussed many future projects at their November meeting to look forward to, not only in the first few months of 2022 but for several years ahead.

They gave the go-ahead to have the service road in West Wood resurfaced. This has over the past few years gradually deteriorated becoming at various places uneven and the vegetation gradually encroaching on the road. It is hoped that this can be completed before the end of the current financial year.

Two projects are to be put on hold for the time being, that of a dog exercise area or learner cycle track for West Wood's open area between the service road and the B245. This will be reviewed following the resurfacing of the road.

There are two projects for the Recreation Ground, first, one that it is hoped could be completed before the end of March and that is some type of non-intrusive lighting for the car park. This, it is hoped, could deter undesirable activities in the car park as well improving the security for those using it after dark. The Council will be looking carefully into the type of lighting to be used, since they are very concerned that overlooking residents should not be disturbed by this. It is understood that this should be possible.

Another project, highlighted in the annual safety inspection report of the play areas, is that of the resurfacing of the ball court with the intention of trying to eliminate some of the ponding which occurs there after heavy rain. This is a difficult problem to address as it is situated at the lowest point in the Recreation Ground and consequently where the water drains following heavy rain. This work will not be undertaken until the ground is dry, probably early summer 2022.

The ever present problem of litter has yet again arisen and in response, apart from the very active litter picking group meeting on the first Saturday of every month, the Council has set aside some funding for 2022/23 to install some recycling and more litter bins. It seems a missed opportunity not to have bins available when much of the litter could be recycled and saved from landfill.

One other project, again highlighted in the annual safety inspection report, is to have installed in front of the goals in West Wood and the Recreation Ground a suitable hard-wearing surface which would save the ground being gradually eroded and hopefully make it a pleasanter experience for those playing games there.

The biggest expenditure for the Parish Council is the problem of removal of trees suffering from ash-die back. The Council took the decision that in order to save expenditure that when an ash tree was in need of tree surgery because of dangerous dead boughs, to have the whole tree removed. This is cost effective since the tree will ultimately die resulting in at least two very expensive tree surgery events. As you will have noticed eventually all the work was completed in West Wood on the felling of the diseased trees. Early in December children from the village will be planting new trees as a replacement along the strip between the service road and the B245, so do look out for this. You may also see piles of logs from the trees which have been felled, these are to provide habitat for a variety of wildlife, so do keep a look out for these and let us know what you see moving in or living there.

Most of the meeting on 10th November was taken up with financial matters concerning expenditure for the rest of this year and projecting a budget for 2022/23. This has to be decided at this time of

year because the Parish Council has to be able to inform the Borough Council of its budget for the following year early in January 2022. Members have spent much time debating this in the Open Spaces, Finance Committees and at the Parish Council meeting. In the end they decided that in order to balance the budget and have sufficient reserves (these need to be at least 6 month's projected income) as well as make provision for the very expensive future tree surgery, they were again needing to increase the precept by 25%. This does sound a huge amount but, in fact, it will only be around £1 per month for Band D properties. The decision on this will be taken on the draft budget and precept at the Parish Council's December meeting.

Other financial matters included the decision on what donations for the benefit of the community the Council would make before the end of April 2022. The result was a unanimous decision for donations to be made to a number of charities which support residents in Hildenborough, as well as St John's burial yard upkeep, West Kent Neighbourhood Watch, Hildenborough Conservation Society and Hildenborough Food Bank all of whom also provide support or services for local residents. The minutes which will be available on our website will give you further details www.hildenboroughpc.org.uk/

The Council is very pleased to see the level of use now being made by various sporting clubs of the Pavilion and Recreation Ground. Very shortly we have Tonbridge Youth FC starting to use areas at the weekends, Tonbridge Athletic Club use the area on a Tuesday and Thursday evening, in addition to the summer games of Hildenborough Cricket and Stoolball Clubs.

Planning applications are considered by the Planning Committee at their fortnightly meeting. This Committee is delegated to make comment on behalf of the Parish Council and considers all planning applications in the Parish. There are several that have attracted much comment during the past year, including the re-development of the ex-Fidelity International and Volvo sites. Currently there seem to be three significant proposals which will result in change, that of the Cinnamon Square proposal to convert to flats, Raphael Centre's staff welfare block and the upgrading and extensive redevelopment of the Fosse Bank School site. The Parish Council is always grateful to know the views of residents directly affected by such plans, asking residents to make contact with them giving details of their concerns or support for such ventures. There are problems when it comes to accommodating a number of residents at the meetings because of the size of the venue generally used by the Committee, particularly times when COVID awareness is essential. That is why they ask residents to either let me know they would like to attend or to send in a copy of their comments to the Borough Council or combine concerns and send a spokesperson along to the meeting.

As ever do not hesitate to contact me if you have any ideas, queries or concerns and you can do this via email clerkhildenboroughpc@gmail.com by phone 01732 832367 or an ordinary letter.

Do not forget we have a representative at the Farmers' Market on the second Tuesday of the month. Next time it will be 14 December.

Pam Gow