

AYLESFORD PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - 21 MAY 2019

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

This is the end of my third year as Chairman of the Council and I feel I have settled into the role and still enjoying it immensely. I am working to maintain and develop the Council's aim of being an authority which spent very little on its community to one which is happy to spend for the benefit of its community whilst ensuring that each spend meets the community aspirations as well as providing good value for money.

During the year the Council reached a total of 16 members out of 20. However, during the year which was encouraging in terms of membership of the Council was also a very sad year with the death of Denis Elvy. Denis was one of our longest serving members and he will be missed greatly by the Council. With his eye for detail, his extensive knowledge and his expert advice on all staffing matters. Denis was just one of those members who was simply irreplaceable. He is a sad loss to the Council, his community as well as his family.

This was also the year of the election and whilst there was no election by going to the poll, 12 members were elected to the Council, including a new member, Omolola Oyewusi, and I welcome her to the Council and I am sure she will bring new and welcome ideas to the Council. That leaves the Council with eight vacancies which are five in the Aylesford South ward, one in the Blue Bell Hill ward, one in Eccles ward and one in Walderslade ward.

In the last 2 years the Council has suffered a number of unauthorised encampments on its land which takes time to remove and had a significant expense in clearing up afterwards. The Council felt that in order to protect its land it would need to add to the security measures at many of its recreation grounds. At Ferryfield a new height barrier as well as improvements to the bund barriers were undertaken together with the introduction of new barriers at various other locations. However, this was considered to be insufficient and so very substantial bollards were placed behind these barriers at the various locations at Ferryfield, Forstal Road Recreation Ground and Eccles Recreation Ground. These measures whilst not guaranteeing the security of these sites have made it easy for all of us to sleep at night.

Last year the Council made a decision to start taking part of the grounds maintenance work back in house relying less on outside contractors as well as reducing the costs to the Council. This was added to further this year by bringing back the cutting of the Forstal Road Recreation Ground in house leaving only the cutting of the Ferryfield and Cemetery, hedge cutting and special enhancement works being undertaken by outside contractors.

The Council is very aware that the longstanding play equipment in the Ferryfield is coming to the end of its life and is reviewing how it can develop the whole of this site to introduce exciting new features which would be very different to the existing play equipment. It is hoped that this exciting new project will be started in the forthcoming year.

At Podkin Meadow the Council is coming to the end of its project to tidy up an area where it had grown wild and been swamped by brambles and to finish its conversion into a meadow with wild flowers and grasses.

The Council has recently started working with the Medway Countryside Project team to look at ways of enhancing the Aylesford Old Pit also known as the Yoakley land. Work has started on improving access and making it an enhanced visitor experience. In July the Council with the Medway Countryside Project team will be holding a Bio Blitz event encouraging people to come and see and to volunteer to help maintain this newly revamped area. However, none of this work could have taken place without the very generous donation of £5000 from locally based firm of Gallaghers.

Over the past 3 years the Council has worked with its neighbours, Ditton and East Malling and Larkfield Parish Councils and with Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and Kent County Council to see what could be done to help alleviate the traffic congestion problems on the A20. As a result of these discussions the parishes had been able to get Kent County Council to undertake a traffic survey on the A20 to help identify the problems and their hotspots with a view to identifying the measures required to ease these problems. It highlighted that the worst 2 junctions were the two in this Parish namely the Quarry Wood Industrial estate/A20/Hall Road and the A20/Hermitage Lane with the last only getting worse with the new commercial development at this junction. However, it is looking more likely that new roundabouts will be introduced at both the A20/motorway roundabout junction as well as at the Quarry Wood Industrial estate/A20/Hall Road junction. It is hoped to see this work take fruition in the forthcoming year and the Parish Council will be at the forefront of making this happen.

At the end of the last calendar year TMBC agreed their final version of their Local Plan and published it for comment. Any comments at this stage would go direct to the Government Inspector appointed to consider the Plan and to determine the document for final approval and adoption for planning purposes going forward. The proposals going forward hinged on two main issues for the Council going forward and these were the very significant developments at Hermitage Lane (South Aylesford) and the development around Eccles at Bushy Wood. In terms of the proposed development at Bushy Wood around Eccles the Council accepted that the existing Plan approved the principle of development but it was felt that the proposal to treble the size of the existing village was not acceptable and that development of 500 dwellings whilst not ideal was the best way forward together with a number of community infrastructure improvements being implemented alongside these 500 dwellings. Additionally, the Council opposed the development at South Aylesford because it brought to an end the green lung separating Maidstone from the Medway Gap which if breached would lead to an urban sprawl spreading from the eastern and southern parts of Maidstone all the way to Leybourne. It was suggested that the 1000 dwellings proposed for this area would be better located to the north of Kings Hill where there is a better community infrastructure than at Aylesford as well as retaining a green lung between Kings Hill and the Medway Gap as well as retaining the same gap between Maidstone and the Medway Gap. The outcome of the Local Plan will be determined this year and the Parish Council will continue to put forward its views so that they are adopted by the Inspectors giving the right and pragmatic result for the Parish of Aylesford.

John Balcombe
Chairman