

AYLESFORD PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - 17 MAY 2016

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

This is the end of another year and in fact the end of my 4 year term as Chairman of the Council. This period for me has been most enjoyable presiding over a significant progressive change in how the Council ran its services from 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. My final report will review the past year and also take the opportunity to look into the future at what is happening in the forthcoming year.

The Council currently has 16 members out of a total of 20. Since 12 of the Council's existing membership was re-elected to the Council in May, 5 of the 8 vacancies remaining were filled by co-option leaving only vacancies in Aylesford South and Eccles. Recently the Council has lost Mick Ambrose who has been with the Council for a few years but has decided to leave Aylesford for the south west to be nearer to his family.

In the past 12 months the Council has continued to see the benefit of the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) which it put into the Ferryfield. The Ferryfield has also seen a continued use of this area by the junior football team APM Holtwood and by the Minis section of the Aylesford Rugby Club. The Council has been proud to give these clubs free use of the park as part of its policy to promote youth sporting activity in the Parish whether here or in any of its other parks.

The Forstal Road recreational ground is the home of the Aylesford Football Club but is also a very important recreational facility for all of the community in Aylesford. As part of its plan to provide facilities for the whole community the Council has in the past year renovated the old tennis courts and brought this piece of land back into community use. The Council has converted half of the site into a MUGA similar to that facility in the Ferryfield but has also retained the link to tennis by providing 1 court with fixed steel net. The use of these facilities is free and open to the community all year round.

In Eccles the Council has provided a new car park on the land next to the existing allotment site to the north of the current open space and existing car park for many years. This new car park is being used on a regular basis by many local residents and has eased, to some extent, the car parking problems in this area particularly at night time.

The new and modern skateboard park the Council has provided in Eccles has become a very popular attraction being heavily used by the young people of Eccles. Additionally the Council has also put a fence around the young children's play equipment in the recreation ground to provide greater safety and prevent dogs from accessing this area.

The Council has expanded the popular Christmas lights scheme in Blue Bell Hill and also put lights in the Tunbury Avenue area of the Parish in a tree at the junction of Tunbury Avenue and Catkin Close both of which have been very popular additions to the Parish Council's Christmas lights scheme. This year the Council is putting some lights in Eccles in the vicinity of the Christmas tree.

The Council has also provided 3 new pieces of play equipment in the Tunbury Recreation Ground in the area of the existing facilities. The new equipment is meant for use by older children which it was felt was less catered for in this recreation ground. At Podkin Meadow the Council has put in 2 pieces of toddlers play equipment following a request from local residents. Both of these are proving to be very popular.

The Council has continued to look at its internal policies and systems throughout the year and will be paying particular attention to the cemetery and allotments in the forthcoming year. The Council has also continued to refine its budgetary system ensuring that resources are being put towards new schemes in the future and thereby enabling the Council to continue to be able to respond to its community's needs.

The Parish Council has continued to pursue the scheme for the improvement to the village square despite the difficulties it has had with pushing forward with the design of this scheme. The Council believes that this improvement scheme in the village square will introduce a much fresher feel to the square making it once again a place where people would like to meet.

The Council has also undertaken a survey of its street lighting and was dismayed to find out their poor condition. The Council has, therefore, taken immediate action to rectify this problem and has appointed a contractor to make the necessary improvements to ensure that the Parish's street lighting is of a high standard. In making any repairs the Council is also looking to convert the lights to LED thereby reducing the running costs to the Council. However the Council accepts that this is a long term project and is planning on this basis.

The Council has also been pleased to have supported, including giving a grant of £20000, the scheme to reopen the Medway towpath within the Parish boundaries and once again having a direct link to Maidstone. Work will be commencing on this much improved path during the forthcoming year.

During the year the Council has worked with its neighbours namely Ditton and East Malling and Larkfield Parish Councils in discussion 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. Through these discussions the parishes have 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. These discussions will continue into the next year with a meeting likely to be held at the end of May/early June to receive the results of the survey and to start to develop the way forward. These discussions are all the more relevant in view of the Local Plan and the likely increased pressure on the A20 and adjoining roads arising from the pressure for more development of both housing and business.

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council are still proceeding with the review of their Local Plan and in particular they will be addressing how to accommodate the increased number of houses that will be required in their area as a result of the increased number of houses required in the south east. In the forthcoming year this consultation process will continue and it is very likely that the formal consultation process will start in the autumn and the Council will need to respond to this in a very positive way seeking the best outcome for the Parish.

Roger Gledhill
Chairman