

AYLESFORD PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - 19 MAY 2015

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

This is the end of another year and in my report I intend to review the past year and to also take the opportunity to look into the future at what is happening in the forthcoming year. This past year has seen a number of projects move forward but has also been a year of setting in place the foundations for the year ahead.

The Council currently has 15 members out of a total of 20. However 2015 is the year of the election and there was no elections for Aylesford Parish with 12 of our existing membership re-elected to the Council with 8 vacancies remaining shared between Aylesford South, Eccles and Walderslade. This year we are losing the experience and knowledge of Peter Homewood who has stepped down his public duties leaving both the Borough and Parish Council to concentrate on his County Council role where he is just coming to the end of a successful year as their Chairman. The Council has also lost Nigel Tiller, who has moved out of the area, whose sense of humour and challenge to the status quo will be sadly missed. This gives an opportunity for others and I hope all Members will work to see if these vacancies can be filled by co-option.

In the previous 12 months the Council introduced its first significant new facility for a number of years namely the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) in the Ferryfield. This exciting facility has been a great success with local children and is a very well used recreational facility. In order to enhance this new facility the Parish provided a new concrete path from the car parking area both to the MUGA and the play area. 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.

At the beginning of this year another recreational facility was provided in the Ferryfield namely a trim trail of 8 pieces of equipment which is aimed at older teenagers and adults wanting to get fit or retain fitness levels. This shows the Council's strategy of not just providing new recreational facilities but also to provide for all different age groups.

Previously the Council as a responsible landowner had commissioned and received a tree survey highlighting the trees on our land which requires work to ensure safety and the environmental well-being of the land and its surroundings. The work on that survey has continued into this year but this year the Council has also planted over 100 tree whips to replace and add to the trees lost through the recent but necessary work.

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 agreed to renovate the old tennis courts and bring this piece of land back into use. The Council intends to convert half of the site into a MUGA similar to that facility in the Ferryfield but also to retain the link to tennis by providing 1 court with fixed steel net. The use of these facilities would be free and

open to the community all year round. Work has already started on this exciting new project and it is hoped that this new facility will be open for use in the next few weeks.

The Council has been working with the Aylesford Trade Association to make people more aware of the business community in the village as well as making improvements to the village. Using a grant received from Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council new Christmas lights as well as a new sign welcoming people to the village and highlighting the local business community have been provided at the entrance to the village.

The remaining grant money will be used for the Parish Council led scheme for the improvements to the village square. With this improvement scheme in the village square the Council is looking to introduce a much fresher feel to the square making it once again a place where people would like to meet. The Parish Council is being supported in this scheme by the Kent County Council and Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council as well as local businesses. It is hoped that work will start on this project this summer.

The Council is also developing, in conjunction with English Heritage, a lighting scheme for the old bridge in the village which will provide a more secure and pleasant feel to this very popular and symbolic ancient monument in the village of Aylesford.

The Council has been looking to provide 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 and which has been delayed for many reasons but now with planning permission received this should be provided within the next few months.. This new car park when open will go part of the way to easing the car parking problems in this area particularly at night time.

The skateboard park in Eccles was a very popular and a very well used facility over the years. With it showing its age the Council decided that it needed to be replaced with a much more modern facility. The Council appointed Urban Ramps to build this new and modern skate park which has now been completed and is being used by the young people of Eccles.

The Council is looking to expand the popular Christmas lights scheme in Blue Bell Hill again this year. The Council has also agreed to put Christmas lights in the Tunbury Avenue area of the Parish placing lights in a tree at the junction of Tunbury Avenue and Catkin Close.

The Council has also looked at its internal policies and systems. The new website was introduced this year opening itself up for far more use by the community as well as providing easier access to Parish Council information. The Council has also reorganised its budgetary system ensuring a closer and much more accurate control over its finances for now and into the future.

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council are still continuing 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 the Council will need to respond to this in a very positive way seeking the best outcome for the Parish.

Roger Gledhill
Chairman