

AYLESFORD PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - 9 MAY 2017

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

This is the end of my first year as Chairman of the Council. This first year for me has been a very enlightening and also enjoyable time learning the ropes of the role of Chairman. I have continued with and looked to develop the work started by my predecessor Councillor Roger Gledhill on changing 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 first report will therefore 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 17 members out of a total of 20. Since last year the Council has filled the two vacancies in the Eccles ward by co-opting Colin Jones and Kylie Phibbs on to the Council. That currently leaves the Council with three vacancies all in the Aylesford South ward.

The Ferryfield has seen the continued use of this area by the junior football team APM Holtwood and by the Minis section of the Aylesford Rugby Club, and 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 Council is also very aware that the long standing play equipment in the Ferryfield is coming to the end of its life and is reviewing how it can develop this site to make it an exciting area for the children in the area to want to play.

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 renovated the old tennis courts converting 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.

The major issue for the residents of Eccles is the safety of the Bull Lane/Pilgrims Way/Rochester Road junction and a number of residents have come together to form the Bull Lane Safety Group who are campaigning to improve safety at this junction. Prior to the formation of this group the council had, together with the local county member, arranged for a traffic survey to be undertaken at this site and which led to a feasibility report on potential junction improvements at this location. In January the Bull Lane Safety Group held a well-attended public meeting which fed into the options arising out of the feasibility report. This report has now been published and agreement has been reached on an approach going forward which would in the short term see improvements to road markings and signs. Vehicle actuated signs as well as some minor junction improvements which would be funded by £20k from the KCC.

The popular Christmas lights scheme in Blue Bell Hill and in the tree at the junction of Tunbury Avenue and Catkin Close have continued to be well received by the public which is

also the case of the new lights in Eccles which have been located in the vicinity of the Christmas tree.

At Podkin Meadow the Council is looking to tidy up an area where it has grown wild and been swamped by brambles and to look to convert the area into meadow with wild flowers and grasses. This is the first year of a 3 year programme of conversion.

The Council had undertaken a survey of its street lighting and was dismayed to find out the poor condition of its stock and in the past year has taken the necessary action to rectify this problem to ensure that the Parish's street lighting is of a high standard. As part of this improvement the Council has converted about three quarters of its stock to LED thereby reducing the running costs to the Council. The Council will look to convert the remainder in the forthcoming year.

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. Work on this much improved path should be completed very shortly providing a wonderful new path for cycles and pedestrians all the way into Maidstone and beyond.

Over the past 2 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. Arising from this work with the KCC and TMBC, KCC have published a report setting out proposals for each of the junctions along the A20 including a proposal which would lengthen the section of the road split into 3 lanes exiting the Quarry Wood Industrial Estate. This proposal would have only a limited benefit and it was accepted that the long term solution to the traffic problems at this junction was set out in the Local Plan with the proposal for a new rear exit which would be funded by development.

In respect of the A20/Hermitage Lane junction and its current problems the Council has been working on this with the KCC and TMBC to see what can be done to rectify these problems. A scheme to help alleviate these problems by extending the 2 lane approach to the commercial development junction back to the A20 has being prepared by the KCC and work on this scheme will be undertaken in the summer.

TMBC have been consulting about the issues facing the Borough in respect for future development including the pressure on it from central government to provide new homes within its boundaries and also some of the options that could be adopted to deliver what is required by the Government through the Local Plan process. The Parish Council has responded to the draft plan put forward by TMBC in a constructive manner and the Council's response is set out on the Council's website. TMBC will be consulting further, in the next few months, on the Local Plan when it publishes its preferred way forward and I am sure the Council will take its opportunity to comment.

John Balcombe
Chairman

