

AYLESFORD PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - 8 MAY 2018

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

This is the end of my second year as Chairman of the Council and I feel I am now settling into the role whilst 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.

The Council currently has 15 members out of a total of 20. Since last year the Council has lost two Eccles ward members Colin Jones and Kylie Phibbs as well as long serving Blue Bell Hill Councillor Lin Brooks. I would take the opportunity to record both the Council's and my gratitude to Lin for the work she has done as a Councillor. That currently leaves the Council with five vacancies three in the Aylesford South ward, one in Eccles ward and one in the Blue Bell Hill ward.

The Ferryfield has seen the continued use of this area by the junior football team K Sports Under 11s 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 introduce an exciting new feature which would be very different to the existing play equipment. It is hoped that this exciting new project will be undertaken and completed in the forthcoming year.

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. The Council has 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. Following this the Bull Lane Safety Group held a well-attended public meeting which fed into the options arising out of the feasibility report. The KCC have now undertaken work at this site which seeks to improve safety at this junction though it is accepted that only a new or much improved road junction is the certain way of curing the problems at this junction and that this improvement will only be provided as part of works arising from new housing development in the area.

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. The Council will also be seeking to extend the very popular Christmas lights scheme in the Eccles area in the forthcoming year.

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.

The Council had undertaken a survey of its street lighting and was dismayed to find out the poor condition of its stock. It therefore made a decision to convert all of its street lights to LED and this project was completed last year.

The Council had the great pleasure of giving a grant of £20000 to the scheme to reopen the Medway towpath within the Parish boundaries. Work on this much improved path has been completed and a wonderful new path for cycles and pedestrians all the way into Maidstone and beyond is open and this new path has been very well received and used by the public.

The Council was also very pleased to provide a grant of £10000 to the new and innovative play scheme at the RBLI Base Camp which has been very well received by local children. This scheme has helped to complement the playground provision which the Parish already provides in the area.

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. 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. Following on from this work the County Council has now published a document entitled Forecast Junction Assessment for the A20 Corridor in the Tonbridge and Malling area which it will be able to use when assessing new major planning applications along this corridor. 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.

In respect of the A20/Hermitage Lane junction problems the Council worked with the KCC and TMBC to see what can be done to rectify these problems. The Council was very pleased to see the completion of the scheme to help alleviate these problems by extending the 2 lane approach to the commercial development junction back to the A20.

TMBC will be publishing their local plan for final consultation in the forthcoming year and the Council will need to consider this document very carefully. The Council will then need to respond in a constructive and positive manner to seek to ensure that its views and aims are included in the final document.

John Balcombe
Chairman