

REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE APC ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE (ESC) 2015-2016

This past year has been an exceptionally busy and challenging one for ESC as we continue to implement our modernisation and refurbishment plan, to improve many of the facilities within our large parish area.

In the region of £200,000 of Parish Council monies were spent on such projects last year, much of this recommended by the ESC.

In Eccles a new skateboard facility opened in May 2015 to much acclaim and design input from the local youth - replacing a smaller one that had reached the end of its useful life. Responding to comments made during the 2015 elections, we also improved the play experience for younger children by providing fencing (£11,500) around much of the existing Eccles-rec' play equipment. As such there should be less dog fouling and dog encounters within this area.

Also in Eccles the Parish Council has agreed to contribute up to £10,000 towards the installation of a new pedestrian crossing in the centre of Eccles across Bull Lane: With the remaining funds being raised through a KCC grant from our local County Councillor, Peter Homewood. As with all Highways matters considerable advance studies and data are required before installation, but this project should be fully completed by the summer.

Of wider Parish remit £20,000 was committed to the restoration of the River Medway Towpath, one end of which adjoins parish land at Old Bridge Garden in Aylesford. Although a small contribution compared to the £1.4m cost of the project, we felt that its completion would enhance the enjoyment of both visitors and residents, and may even increase visitor numbers to our Aylesford businesses.

Likewise, and despite initial misgivings by the Council, a number of footways are due to be upgraded to Bridle-path status, which will be of considerable benefit to our large horse-riding community.

In Aylesford we saw the opening of our new multi-sport facility on the Forstal Road recreation ground (Ferryfield rec' having been upgraded previously) by the Minister for Sport and local MP, Tracey Crouch and the facility is being enjoyed by many and differing users.

In addition a new swing-system specifically designed for disabled children has been purchased for the Forstal Road play area. It is hoped that this will be installed shortly and provide a rare but much needed facility.

New play equipment (circa £17,000) was also ordered and installed on Tunbury recreation ground; including the Viking Basket Swing, Rota Bounce and Matrix Agility System.

In Blue Bell Hill a historic milestone has been removed from ever greater layers of tarmac and restored. It will soon be reinstated by KCC.

Our Parish land, allotments and churchyards continue to be kept good order; and the on-going absence of vehicles from the Forstal Road recreation ground has resulted in a very good football playing surface of which we can all be proud. We have also sought to improve the health and well being our our younger residents by posting No-smoking signs within fenced play-areas.

On-going are both the tree and street-lighting surveys which have highlighted area of tree-management and lighting repairs that are currently being addressed. Indeed we have also entered into an ongoing maintenance agreement for our street-lighting to further improve our performance in this area.

All play-equipment has a rotating safety assessment and all highlighted repairs, including considerable sums on safety-surfaces, are dealt with.

Aylesford Parish is also looking to continue some support for the Summer Play-scheme, the funding and management arrangements for which were changed considerably by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council; as well as supporting many local events such as the Big Lunch.

Looking forward we are planning further improvements within Aylesford Village. Trees around the Old Bridge have been managed or felled already both for safety and to restore the area to the original garden intention; new trees being planted on the South Bank. The next large project will be a reworking and redesign of the village square in consultation with Kent County Council. We are also well aware that one large item of play equipment may need to be replaced in a few years and following our balanced-budget policy we are creating a reserve for this purpose.

Finally improvements are being made for the provision of Christmas lighting throughout the Parish. It adds a much loved and well supported flourish to local life in the festive season.

Christmas is still some time away, but much of the above should give us cause to celebrate. I would like to thank all the members of this committee for their time and dedication in both improving, maintaining and keeping safe, our facilities and landscapes; for locals and visitors alike.

Michael Base (Chairman of ESC)