

Centre Piece for April Keys Magazine 2018

Oh dear, with Easter fast approaching it continues to feel very unspring-like outside, with even the threat of more snow this coming weekend! Daffodils are now struggling to put in an appearance but, today, are sadly hanging their heads in response to yet more cold rain. However, it must improve soon and we are all, I am sure, looking forward to blue skies, sunshine, beautiful spring flowers and some warmth.

The Parish Council held their Annual Parish Meeting on 14th March which this year is a week earlier than in previous years, since the Council's change to meeting on the second Wednesday of the month this year. It was encouraging to see that a good number of residents were able to make the meeting. There was something for everyone with a number of organisations providing table top displays of interest to residents. These included the local Conservation Group, Gardeners, Historical Society, Tennis Club as well as Kent Search and Rescue and representatives of the Speedwatch scheme.

The evening had two aims, firstly to report to residents on the work of the Council during the past year and secondly to provide an interesting and informative evening for everyone attending. This year proved to be no exception. The main disappointment was that there was no representative from Kent Police to give a report, whose usual reassuring appearance failed to happen. It is to be hoped this is not a sign of things to come.

The Council's report was introduced by the Chairman, Claire Sheldon, who outlined the work that had been achieved in the Open Spaces area of their work. It is always reassuring and surprising how much has been achieved during the course of the year and gives a sense of satisfaction that the efforts of the past year have indeed been worthwhile.

Improvements had been achieved to the Pavilion providing up to date facilities for the provision of light refreshments as well as the renewal of lighting, flooring, new carpet etc and also the replacement of the concrete apron in front of the veranda which had been gradually deteriorating over a number of years.

Following the finishing touches to the Activity Zone, including the provision of further seating, safety surface repairs etc. the Recreation Ground proved to be a popular venue for various events. The Hildenborough Road Race again used the area for the start and finish of races, the Scouts held their very successful Party in the Park as well as the Great Kent Cycle Ride using the area as their first stopping off point. During the Summer a children's playscheme provided sporting activities for primary aged pupils.

I am sure many parents appreciate the newly extended safety surface in West Wood which results in the area being able to be used throughout the year. Added to that it is hoped the work undertaken by the Conservation Group in building brush bunds and installing peak flow barriers along the streams will help protect residents prone to flooding in that area.

A big improvement has been the conversion of the Council's street lighting to LED. This has proved to be of great benefit to those using the station during dark early morning and evenings. This lighting has, so far, proved to be totally reliable compared to the very frequent breakdowns of the previous lanterns.

The Chairman of the Finance Committee reported on expenditure during the past year. The projects of refurbishment of the Pavilion and wetpour installation and repairs total over £25,800, whilst maintenance of hedges, mowing, tree survey and surgery amounted to over £16,700. The LED conversion is expected to cost approximately £5,000.

A plea for more volunteer flood wardens was entered as one or two wardens were now not able to continue, and praise for establishment of the Medway Flood Partnership towards more joined up thinking in planning and reaction to flood management with multi-agencies actually meeting and working together.

Planning issues had, this year, been of less significance than in previous years. Although there was an increase in the number of plans commented on these were generally for extensions or infill development. The Local Plan was now not expected to be out for consultation until the Autumn following a directive from the Government to LEAs to increase the number of homes to be built per annum.

Looking to the coming year we can look forward to the results of the feasibility study into a possible installation of a footway along Stocks Green Road, the erection of the new reminder notices to motorists of the speedlimit along the B245 and of course the extension to the play equipment in West Wood and replacement of the roundabout in the Recreation Ground.

The evening was concluded by a most interesting and informative illustrated talk by Mrs Sarah Rogers from Riverhill House. She outlined the history of the family at Riverhill, starting with the purchase by Mr John Rogers in 1840 and the development of the house and gardens during its first hundred years. It was fascinating to hear that Charles Darwin had a hand in which plants to select for the Himalayan Garden and to know that some of his letters are still in the hands of the family. It was certainly developed into a very grand house and garden with not only an added East Wing, but two West Wings and an extensive kitchen area and the gardens grew to include terracing, rose garden, rock garden and pond and walled garden.

After falling into decline, the tv programme, House Rescue, did indeed rescue the decline of the house and gardens. Now the facilities on offer include renovated terracing, open area theatre, woodland area complete with Yeti to help children build dens, tea rooms and extensive car parking facilities. It is now truly a family friendly venue for a visit, as well as a venue for special events.

If you were unable to get along to the meeting, the draft minutes are available on our website www.hildenboroughpc.kentparishes.gov.uk which will give much more detailed information.

Don't forget you can contact the Council by email clerk@hildenboroughpc.kentparishes.gov.uk by phone on 01732 832367 (do leave a message if I am not in the office as this is monitored on a regular basis), by letter or do call into the Farmers' Market on Tuesday 10 April between 10 am and 11 am when two members will be available to listen to your queries, or note your ideas. The usual bus and train timetables will be available as will the Parish Council's publications of Tales from a Kent Village, Hildenborough (£10) and last remaining copies of This is Hildenborough from A to Z (£9.50).