

Centre Piece for January 2020

We wish everyone a Happy New Year and with the Christmas celebrations now a memory we look forward positively to the new decade. At this time of year it always seems dim, dismal and cold but we must remember that the day light hours are extending. Perhaps we could cheer ourselves up by planning a summer holiday!

However, it is good to look back over the past year to celebrate the achievements. The Parish Council has a number of new members since the elections in May and has fortunately been able, after a shaky start with only three nominations, to form a very pro active Council.

During the year we saw the repairs and top dressing of the car park in the Recreation Ground in Riding Lane, only spoilt by very inconsiderate drivers who removed cones closing the car park and insisted on parking in it when the contractors were trying to put the finishing touches by sweeping up the excess gravel. Unfortunately since that time the weather and leaf fall has been against us.

Talking of leaf fall brings me to tree survey which was carried out during the summer. A number of trees were identified as requiring some attention and a few have required felling. This work has now been undertaken, where possible, the logs and chippings have been left on site to encourage more wild life.

During the Autumn we saw the scouts fence off the area they are renting from the Parish Council next to the car park. This is to allow them to undertake outdoor activities. The only downside has been the problem of maintaining the gulley around Hildenborough Gardeners' Store. The scouts have agreed they will do this important job as it ensures the store does not suffer from runoff water running through it.

The Council is pleased to say they have now arranged a contract for a handyperson/caretaker to look after the day to day requirements of the Pavilion, Recreation Ground, West Wood and Village Green. His name is Andy Baker and he will be on site when required rather than on a regular basis as before. There is quite a winter back log for him to catch up on and he has already made a good start. One of the first jobs was to replace the salt bin on the corner of Riding Lane and Tonbridge Road. The vandalised bin will, hopefully, have been removed by the time you read this. Let us hope the salt/grit bins in the village will have little use this year. Just a reminder there are two in the Library forecourt, one on the corner of Riding Lane/Tonbridge Road, one belonging to Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council in their car park off Riding Lane and one of the Parish Council's in Brookmead. These bins are there to be used if the footways become slippery or other slippery patches. However, please do not try to melt the ice with hot water! I am sure most people will use common sense but it has been known for some people to think it is a good idea to melt the ice quickly forgetting that it will freeze again shortly after!

The main business at the Meeting on 11 December was mainly on financial matters. The budget for 2020/21 was agreed and the precept set (rate of Council Tax) accordingly. This year it has been increased to fund some highways improvements, improvements to the Village Green and the establishment of a website for the Parish Council to conform to new legislation making it accessible to all. The increase is to £35 for Band D properties with calculations being made on that for the other Bands.

One piece of good news regarding highway improvement is that the belisha beacons on the zebra crossing by the Medical Centre are to be upgraded to those with enhanced globes which contain a line of small white lights. The globe on the Medical Centre Side is to be offset to enable it to be visible and not hidden behind the telegraph pole. The Parish Council has been pressing for this crossing to be improved since it was installed a number of years ago so count this as a major success.

For many years we have had a caring and supportive community but recently there has been a lot of vandalism. We do not know whether the perpetrators are from Hildenborough or not. Substantial damage has been inflicted on the Pavilion with several holes and cracks which will necessitate the replacement of several of the weatherboards, not only that, a group set fire to papers leaving some melt damage to the safety surface in the new play area in the Recreation Ground. We will not know the extent of this until it has all dried out. There has also been a further spate of vandalism to litter bins. Three in West Wood were torn from their fixings and damaged, one beyond repair, also one has gone missing from the bus shelter opposite the church and another from near to the tennis courts in the Recreation Ground. This, to me, seems a totally pointless activity when there are so many other things to do which would benefit mind, body or soul.

There was some discussion at the meeting on the poor service provided by the new refuse contractor, Urbaser. It seems the Borough Council is working hard to get them to provide the promised level of service but there continues to be some issues with collections on the correct day and missed bins. Hopefully a reliable service will be provided in the very near future. Certainly this week we have received our collection on the correct day, the first time that has happened. However my plea is that they will replace the food waste bins upright on the ground rather than throwing them onto the driveway. I have noticed that some have already been damaged by this practice.

There will not be a member of the Parish Council at the Farmers' Market in January as they too are taking a break and will not be opening again in time for the second Tuesday. However, that does not stop you contacting me if you have any queries or ideas on the usual email address clerkhildenboroughpc@gmail.com (I think most people now have got used to the new address but just in case you haven't a reminder that emails to the old address are no longer received.) You can phone on 01732 832367 (do leave a message if I am not able to answer and I will get back to you providing you leave a contact number).

Best wishes for 2020

Pam Gow