

CENTRE PIECE FOR FEBRUARY KEYS MAGAZINE

The first signs of Spring have appeared as the snowdrops and primroses are struggling through the snow and ice to brighten up our gardens. The current low temperatures forced us into wrapping up warm to attend the first Parish Council Meeting of the year on 18 January 2017. Fortunately when we arrived we were welcomed by a beautifully warm Finzi Room which was much appreciated.

It was a busy meeting with preparations for the year ahead. One of the important items this month was the final confirming of the budget and setting of the precept. This coming year sees heavy expenditure for the Parish Council combined with new financial arrangements with the Borough Council.

The new financial arrangements result in a reorganisation of the way Parish Councils are funded which has been well aired in the National Press and on television. The Borough Council has withdrawn the allowances given to parishes in previous years which included a basic allowance based on the number of residents, and allowances for the maintenance of open churchyards, lighting etc. This amounted to over £10,000 for Hildenborough and consequently this year the Parish Council will need to collect this amount via the precept – that is the amount that each household pays which is listed on their Council Tax Bill under Hildenborough Parish Council. This year it will be increased to £30.39 for each Band D household and pro rata for all other bands. It is to be hoped that when combined with other claims on the Council Tax Bill this will not result in a large increase as the Parish Council's increased contribution should be balanced against a reduction in the claim of the Borough Council.

Expenditure has been set aside to pay for the conversion of the Parish Council street lighting to LED to bring it into line with the rest of the village. The council currently maintains twenty-six lighting columns. It is suggested that the lighting columns in Riding Lane around Vines Lane and Garlands are not converted but as the current bulbs fail they are decommissioned. Please let us have your views on this if you live in these areas. The Parish Council felt that nowadays these lights were not necessary as the road is used by few pedestrian after dark.

Another item of heavy expenditure is that of the refurbishment of the Pavilion kitchen. The facilities in the kitchen are now in a very dilapidated state and does not meet current hygiene standards. The Council also proposed to set aside a small amount for future expenditure on the car park in Riding Lane.

There continues, at this time, to be one outstanding item to be rectified in the new Activity Zone which has been well used and is a great success. This is the Trinity Cycle in the fitness area which we are promised will very shortly be addressed. The new play equipment is well used by children of all ages. The replacement platform on the zip wire is now in place. The Council did receive a query on whether the platform had been fitted the right way round which they took up with the manufacturers who confirmed that this was the correct layout. They said the current platform is less than a metre high and the risk of falls is therefore minimised compared to accidents which could occur through the introduction of a rail at the back of the platform. They said a rail could be misused as an elevated take off on the zip wire which in turn could lead to serious accidents. It is also hoped to have the roundabout repaired in the near future.

There is good and bad news about the War Memorial, the first is it is now listed by Heritage England in their Buildings of Special Architectural and Historic Interest Grade II. In their report they say “Hildenborough War Memorial is an elegant and ornate memorial designed by Henry Philip Burke Downing FRIBA with intricate carvings decorating the front face incorporating sensitive and distinctive figures of Christ flanked by St Mary and St John. The memorial displays a high level of craftsmanship and good quality materials and serves as a striking and evocative memorial to the fallen local men”.

The bad news is that there has been no progress reported from KCC who are responsible for the repairs that are necessary to the Memorial. The Parish Council will continue to pursue this.

If you are able to access the Parish Council Minutes on our website or visit the Library you will notice that we continue to look to make improvements to the Recreation Ground giving encouragement for increased use. This month they looked at the possibility of providing, at a future date, refreshments at popular times and also of providing an all weather path around the perimeter in order that runners (and others) could use the area throughout the year. Do let us have your comments on both these issues – you can ring me, email, write in, see members at the Farmers’ Market or attend the Parish Council Meeting to do so.

Another matter on which you may like to express a view has to do with parking and community facilities. Dame Kelly Holmes is looking into providing parking facilities for the village and she has approached the landowners of the field opposite the café in order to help alleviate the problems of parking in the vicinity. The owners of the field concerned are also looking into the possibility of improving the footpath running beside the field from the B245 to Stock’s Green Road and also into allocating part of the field for community use. What community use would you like to see? It could be sports orientated, environmental; maybe a wildflower meadow, there is an established pond, preservation of the iconic trees which have been decimated in recent years due to disease etc.

Other matters covered at the meeting included a review of the Parish Council assets and Financial Regulations both of which had been updated. The internal auditor had submitted his report which found no problems. A resolution to the meter reading dispute with EDF was found. Grounds maintenance and insurance cover were agreed for the year ahead, as was the addition of a further camera on our cctv system to give better coverage of the new Activity Zone.

Subscribers have been sending in their forms to be included in the list at the back of the forthcoming publication of ‘Tales from a Kent Village, Hildenborough, as seen through the Parish Council Archives’. Details of how to obtain your copy are included elsewhere in this edition of Keys or on the leaflet distributed with the January edition.

Don’t forget you can meet with members on Tuesday 14 February at the Farmers’ Market (10am to 11am), phone us on 01732 832367, email on clerk@hildenboroughpc.kentparishes.gov.uk or write to the usual address.

Pam Gow