

## **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2009-2010**

### **Borough Green Annual Parish Meeting – Friday 23 April 2010**

I would like to start by formally recording our thanks to my predecessor as Chairman, Councillor Charles Willsher, for his stalwart work and taking the helm for two quite stormy years. I am pleased that Charles decided to remain as a parish councillor after stepping down and remains our font of knowledge on many areas of the village as well as continuing to represent the parishes of our borough as local Chairman of the Kent Association of Local Councils.

As incoming Chairman I was also fortunate to retain as Vice-Chairman the services of Councillor Sue Murray. Her standing as both Parish and Borough Councillor was confirmed by her elevation to the position of Mayor of Tonbridge and Malling. Sue has carried out this role with much enthusiasm and has been a genuine credit to the village of Borough Green.

In June, 'Powers of Well Being' started to appear on the agenda with increasing frequency as an initiative to allow parish councils to undertake a wider scope of activities within their communities, along with the ability to allocate funding to areas currently outside their remit. Councillors have been attending training courses and receiving the necessary certification to allow us to make this happen in our village at some point in the future.

A change in street lighting maintenance contractors started the ball rolling for a complete review of the village lighting stock, along with consideration of the results of a questionnaire showing in favour of a new column installation, halfway down Station Road.

The Borough Green Bypass came up again, as an ongoing watch on the planning progress as promised by KCC Leader Paul Carter last year. It was decided to revise the council's position, with regards to not supporting developer-led funding for the project.

The four Chairmen of Borough Green, Platt, Ightham and Wrotham met to discuss the potential implications of a rail freight hub being proposed for the area following information received from developers.

Tenders were finally received for the refurbishment of the Memorial Pavilion, although unfortunately they were still over budget.

Following a change in the law, July saw an opportunity to modify our position of 'Declarations of Interest' in connection with Planning and Proposed Planning items. This was to allow all councillors more flexibility in making their views known outside of council meetings, so long as they remained open-minded!

Following elections on 4th June, we welcomed two new councillors; Mrs Emma Howden and Mr Michael Yianni.

There is a first indication that developers are going to bring forward an exhibition detailing plans for housing on Isles Quarry West.

The Potters Mede Pavilion proposals continue to make good progress, although funding opportunities are drying up, which in turn is starting to compromise some of the ideas we have been working on.

Following some last minute requests from Borough Green Junior Football Club, the contractor's price has been revised, but at long last, the council has agreed the budget and the refurbishment of the Memorial Pavilion can go ahead.

August's meeting (held at the end of July) was preceded by a meeting with the proposed developers of Isles Quarry West. Concerns were raised regarding the quantity and density of homes on the site, ahead of a public exhibition planned for three days time.

Potters Mede pitches are now coming under the spotlight following months of work and liaison with our neighbours Cemex, it now appears that we need a report from an Agronomist before we proceed any further. Meanwhile, the PM Pavilion Steering Group have been working hard and have revised their building specification based on reduced funding.

A new bus service for the village was confirmed at the September meeting. The X11 offers a service every two hours, twenty four hours a day, in both directions, between Chatham Maritime and Gatwick Airport. The bus was passing through the village and direct intervention by the parish council has now created the request stops in Sevenoaks Road. It was also announced that the Griffin 408 was another new service, now running between Borough Green and Swanley via Wrotham.

Planning applications continue to take significant time and show little sign of slowing, given the economic slowdown. A new application came forward this month for the complete redevelopment of the Esso site; to also include a Tesco Express shop. There's significant negative reaction in the village, particularly regarding a possible downturn in trade for existing retailers. The parish council found substantial grounds on which to formally oppose the application. However, on a positive note, we were encouraged by the possibility of new tenants on the Bourne Estate and had no objections to a conditional change of use for part of Unit 1.

It was with extreme regret, that this month, we received the resignation of Councillor Mrs Beryl Woodhams. Beryl had been our main point of contact with Cemex as the Chair of the Quarry Liaison Committee for many years; constantly ensuring that issues around noise, dust and mud on the road were all properly dealt with in her quietly efficient manner.

In the recreation ground, our large beech hedge received some serious attention and was cut back on all sides.

The children's play area slide had come to the end of its serviceable life, so a new one was ordered and installed by the end of October. Following some deliberate vandalism, another new net was purchased and fitted in the Tennis Courts.

External Auditors examined our accounts for 2008-2009; we received a clean bill of health along with the good news that there were no matters for attention.

Potter Mede could receive a welcome boost, following discussions with the developers of Isle Quarry West; we may have found a way to provide the missing funding to allow the building to be of the style we would like. We received news that our earlier application to the Cemex Community Fund for funding for the pitch enhancement at PM was successful and we now have to make a second round bid.

The J5Slips.org group requested financial support from the parish council to help the campaign for east-facing slips on the M25/M26 at Sevenoaks. It is felt by many, that this could provide a better traffic solution for the village than a local bypass.

November brought us the news that we had been awarded a 'Highly Commended' certificate from Kent Men of Trees for this year's entry.

The Memorial Pavilion is almost complete, but snagging issues are preventing us from putting into use.

The Kent Rail and Freight Terminal developers launched a website and had a press open day in Platt, to coincide with the first day of the KIG enquiry. Helicopters laid on by the PR company certainly brought the media running and drew attention away from Bearstead. A small number of vocal residents attended the parish council meeting to voice their concerns regarding the proposals. The council decided that it would have a policy of opposing any inappropriate development in the Green Belt and Kent Downs AONB, plus it would also join with others to fight development of this nature.

The weekend bulky refuse facility has been having problems with using the Station approach, so will now operate from Dene Lodge.

Applicants for the vacant councillor's position had now been interviewed for co-option; the council welcomed Mrs Vivienne Farina, who took up her position at the December meeting. Councillors were particularly upset on hearing that the Memorial Pavilion has been targeted by vandals who have smashed the glass plate covering the memorial stones.

Regrettably, short-term potential financial assistance at Potters Mede has now disappeared with the IQW developer going into administration. However, T&MBC are now aware of our feelings for Potters Mede and will re-schedule any future funding to this site if possible. The Cemex Community Fund has confirmed that we are to receive £15,000 towards our pitch enhancement; additionally we have also allocated some section 106 funds from the re-development of 20-22 Wrotham Road (now Stone Court).

Following heavy snow during December and early January 2010 started with serious fears about the ability of KHS to properly manage the roads and pathways in the village. It would seem that we were not alone with our concerns. KHS responded with a flurry of emails and new gritting policies. Councillors are now assessing the requirement for new salt bins around the village against new KHS location criteria, as well as reviewing the primary and secondary gritting routes.

The Memorial Pavilion was now at a level to be viewed and councillors made a visit one snowy, Saturday morning.

Finances have been difficult through the past year or two, not helped by the council freezing its precept for the 2009-2010 year. After lengthy discussions at both Finance Committee and full council, it was decided that during 2010-2011 we had to make up for the shortfall, as well as starting to provide for the future.

February brought us the news of the passing of both Mr Mike Gibbs and Mr Des Washford; both long-serving members of the community.

Buses and their lack of connectivity became a running issue for some for a couple of months; there still doesn't seem to be a solution if you want to travel to and from Maidstone Hospital at times that don't coincide with school hours.

We have been having issues with the users of Potters Mede car park for some time and consideration is now being given to a multi-stage approach aimed at stopping people using it for Wrotham School drop-off and collection.

The new streetlight for Station Road could soon be a reality! In March the council decided to instruct contractors to proceed.

Due to the continued wet weather, it was felt unlikely that the pitch enhancement works at Potters Mede will be able to start until later in the year. However, a turf expert from Hadlow College has now agreed to provide us with free advice. The Sports Hall may yet become a badminton facility; talks are still under way about suitability of size and location.

We regrettably received the resignation of one of our grounds men, Mr Bill Austin and I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his efforts in helping to maintain the few facilities this village has.

I am delighted to say that Kent Downs Area Of Outstanding Beauty 'Gateway' signs, the subject of much discussion during the year, now look set to become a reality and will help enforce the rural character of the village. Four signs look set to be installed by Kent Highways Services in the next few weeks, one on each of the main approaches to the village, with a fifth being reserved for installation when the Haul Road finally becomes adopted.

This is probably my best opportunity to say thank you to the ground staff and volunteers who have worked on our behalf to keep our open spaces in a useable condition. I would also like to record my personal gratitude to our Clerk, Hazel Damiral for keeping us in order, particularly with regards to the parish finances and record keeping.

Finally, I am pleased to report that yesterday, I attended a service of thanksgiving hosted by the Lord Lieutenant of Kent on behalf of Her Majesty The Queen, in appreciation of the work done by those involved in public service in the county of Kent. I was just one out of eighty county, borough and parish councillors assembled in the 650 strong congregation. In his address, the Lord Lieutenant spoke particularly of his immense gratitude, for the work carried out by *all* members of parish councils, that they do so tirelessly as volunteers. I would like to endorse those comments and add my own thanks to the parish councillors of this village for their support, loyalty and continued effort during the past twelve months.

Cllr. Steve Perry  
Chairman, Borough Green Parish Council  
23 April 2010