

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2009 - 2010

The year 2009-10 has been another busy one for the Parish Council.

Planning issues continue to occupy a lot of the Council's time. Although work is well under way on the development of Halstead Place, there have been frequent additional planning applications throughout the year regarding various issues on the site. Cllr. Bent will provide more detail on those matters as part of his planning report.

A planning application for Fort Halstead has still not been received, although discussions with the developer, Hines, began over 2 years ago. Hopefully, Cllr. Bent will also provide more detail on the background issues relating to Fort Halstead, and the work that the council has been doing as members of the Fort Halstead Working Group.

As far as **Highways** issues are concerned, the Parish Council has made it clear to Kent Highways that we are extremely dissatisfied with the level of service we received from them during the snows of last December and January. Roads were left ungritted, which resulted in bus services being diverted, and passengers being asked to leave buses at Park Corner and walk into the village. We have tried extremely hard to get a representative of Kent Highways to attend this evening's meeting to answer questions about highways policy, particularly regarding the gritting of roads, and more particularly bus routes, but, unfortunately, they are no longer prepared to attend evening meetings. As an alternative, we asked County Councillor Richard Parry to attend, if he was able to answer policy questions, (as he is also a member of the Transportation Board), but he recently went into hospital, and so was also unavailable.

We also asked Transport for London to consider re-routing the R5 and R10 buses down Watercroft Road along Old London Road, and back along Shoreham Lane. Inevitably, they would not consider implementing this change, although they were strangely reluctant to say why. The Parish Council has agreed to invite a TfL representative to a local meeting, to explain why they are not in favour of the change.

We were also involved in a major consultation about the introduction of parking charges for commuters at Knockholt Station. Cllr. Baldwin will no doubt provide further detail about this issue in his report.

We have also had a busy year, either refurbishing parish property, or introducing new facilities. During the year this Parish Room has been repaired and redecorated outside, at considerable cost; the fabric of the bus stop at the crossroads has also been repaired and repainted; and we have also introduced new lighting at the entrance to the Recreation Ground; this last item is due to the prompting of our 2 lady councillors, Cllr. Halliday and Cllr. Grosvenor. I would like to thank County Cllr. Richard Parry for the Member's Grant which he made available for the purchase and installation of the new lighting.

We have also had a request from a parishioner, to reinstate the old entrance to the Recreation Ground. Council has decided to seek advice from safety experts before a final decision is taken about this.

The Council agreed to fund the Bulk Freighter Service, and we have agreed to do the same again this coming year. We also have agreement in principle from SDC to hand over the land opposite

the houses in Beldam Haw to the Council for use as allotments. However, tying up the paperwork is taking an extremely long time, and the Council would like SDC to display a greater urgency than they have in the past to resolve this matter as swiftly as possible.

I mentioned in last year's report that we had increased the **parish precept** by only £14 across the board, which was an increase of .0025%. This year the precept has increased by £527, mainly because Council agreed to put money back into our reserves to cover some of the expenditure on the Parish Room. This amounts to a 1.3% increase compared with last year. Since we are told that inflation is currently running at more than 3%, I hope that parishioners will agree that we have again been successful in limiting expenditure as far as possible.

I would like to thank all the parishioners and councillors who took part in this year's parish clean up day at the end of April. We collected 15 black sacks full of rubbish. I think it is perhaps worth the Council considering whether we should have a second clean up day during the autumn, given the vast amount of rubbish we find discarded around the parish.

I would like to offer the council's thanks to the Rose & Crown for their continuing financial support for the flowerbeds around the parish, either through a direct donation or via one of their monthly quizzes. The money is greatly appreciated. I would also like to thank those residents in Southdene and Parkside who have provided additional flower boxes along the verge of Knockholt Road, and who continue to mow the verge and other grass areas so regularly. It does both them and the village proud.

Again, I would like to record the Council's thanks to our County and District Councillors for their assistance throughout the year.

Thanks also to the Clerk for the work she has undertaken on our behalf during the year, and for the assistance she has given me. The report and accounts for 2009/10 have already been passed by the Internal Auditor; and this is mainly due to the diligence of our Clerk.

It is likely that issues connected with the development of Fort Halstead will come to a head during the next council year, so our final year of office, before the parish council elections in May next year, is also likely to be an extremely busy one.