



Happy New Year! It promises to be a busy one for the Parish Council and we should shortly see progress on some of the major projects being undertaken as part of the Parish Plan. One of the frustrations is that the process of fund raising and approvals inevitably takes time, so that even though we are working on projects, the village doesn't see the results for a while. I am pleased to report that all that is about to change.

Martin Newman (*Chairman*)

RECREATION GROUND

The first phase of improvements to the recreation ground will be under way in the next month. The grant obtained from Ashford Borough Council for children's play equipment will cover the re-siting of existing apparatus, and the installation of some exciting new equipment. The new items have been selected by the children on the school's council. All of them will be located away from the road in the far bottom corner of the recreation ground as planned.

As luck would have it, one of the equipment suppliers we had asked to quote, Park Leisure moved recently onto the Pivington Mill estate. It is obviously in their interests to have an 'open-air showroom' just on the doorstep, so we have been able to secure a very attractive deal, of benefit to both parties. Park Leisure will also undertake regular maintenance for us and, from time to time, have offered to install new test items. Pluckley's children will therefore be the first anywhere to trial some new kit.

We shall also complete the fencing on the road side of the ground to help prevent cricket and footballs from straying onto the road.

At the same time, the skateboard ramps will be installed on the hard standing where the swings are currently located. This will be a temporary arrangement until the storage area is moved and, hopefully, a car parking space developed as part of Phase 2.

The petanque has already been moved to the top corner of the field. Unfortunately the bad weather has delayed the installation of the top surface but we should see competitions resuming by the spring. This corner was also levelled in preparation for the addition of a barbecue facility and seating.

Our aim is to have all the above done by the Easter holidays. Phase 2 will include the addition of a storage facility to the sports pavilion and provide car parking at the entrance to the ground. We also want to install a multi-games unit for older children on one of the tennis courts. All of this, of course, will be dependent upon further funds being obtained.

VILLAGE HALL

We expect to start work shortly on refurbishing the village hall. We have discussed various options with our retained architects and potential suppliers and propose to tackle the improvements in two phases. The first phase will ideally see the installation of a new ceiling with integrated heating, lighting and a sound loop for the hard of hearing. This will also have the effect of providing better heat and sound insulation. We would also like to open up a new French window, refurbish the oak floor, and redecorate throughout.

We await the result of grant applications. We have, though, already accumulated meaningful funds ourselves and from the Colyer-Fergusson Charitable Trust and County Councillor, Richard King. We'll soon start Phase 1 and will complete as much as funds allow. **Anyone who can give a few hours to help with decorating should please contact Mike Whatman (tel. 840044).**

Phase 2 will be to extend the hall to provide a larger, modernised kitchen; a lounge/bar area; and new toilets, including a disabled loo. The exterior look of the building will inevitably change to accommodate this and we will look to improve appearance and insulation. Drawings are currently being prepared and these will be shown at an Open Day so that everyone in the village can give their views before any decisions are taken. Needless to say, Phase 2 will require significant funds. Fulfilment will depend on obtaining village approval, planning approval and the funds.

TRAFFIC

We have begun the preparation of our own report on speed limits in and around Pluckley. This will be forwarded to KCC for consideration. The report will be drafted along the lines of the reports KCC normally commissions from consultants. The first stage of the exercise is to measure existing vehicle speeds and this is currently underway. The readings are purely for the purposes of our report and are anonymous.

Through the bad weather we have been communicating regularly with KCC Highways Department. We are also reporting any new potholes (you can do so too on 08458 247 800, giving the size and location of the pothole).

Residents were very clear during the Parish Plan exercise that traffic – and particularly heavy goods vehicles – was the biggest problem the village faces. Given that Pluckley is on a designated lorry route, there is little we can do about the unwelcome passage of HGVs through the village. What we can do, however, is avoid increases in the number of HGVs caused by new planning developments. We are very mindful therefore, when any new planning application comes before us, to consider the potential impact of traffic generated by the proposed development.

FORGE HILL

Halfway up Forge Hill, there is a 'pinch point' where the pavement becomes very narrow. It coincides with the end of Alan and Leita Davies' garden. They have very kindly offered to give up 18 inches or so of their garden at the critical point to enable a widening of the pavement. Indeed, they have already installed their new fence to allow for this. We will shortly be meeting with Highways to achieve this improvement.

BUDGET 2011/2012

As the above articles demonstrate, we need substantial funds to achieve those things the village has said it wants. We have, however, successfully reduced our running costs over the past year. We have also managed to secure some valuable grant funding already and shall continue to work to raise more funds by grants and by our own efforts. So, given the current economic crisis, we have decided to freeze our budget precept at this year's level (the precept is the sum we request from Ashford Borough Council and which is included in household rates).

LOCAL NEEDS HOUSING

We mentioned in the last report that the Parish Council was prepared to support a small development of 3 – 4 new units. This figure is in line with the need identified in last Autumn's survey in the village.

We are advised that a development of four units, in two buildings, is just about viable. We are also assured that applicants with a Pluckley connection will be given priority for the new homes. (The current arrangement gives priority to Pluckley and its surrounding parishes.) We have looked carefully at more than twenty possible sites around the village and come to the view that Westfields represents the most viable option, given the low number of homes involved. We have therefore asked English Rural Housing to draw up plans to present to the village. If you wish to take a look at the style and quality of their work, ERH have recently developed homes in Smarden, Charing and Egerton Forstal. No approval will be given by the Parish Council until the village has had the chance to comment.

THORNE SKIP

A trench has been dug either side of the skip opposite the Thorne Estate. This is to allow for the planting of hedges to screen it. Unfortunately, the weekend we were to collect the beech plants which are being supplied to us free by KCC, we were advised that they were stuck in frozen ground in Northumberland. We shall plant them as soon as they become available.

LOCALISM BILL

The Localism Bill, announced by the Government last month, is designed to give greater powers to your parish council. Clearly, there is some way to go before it becomes law, but broadly it sets out to achieve the following:

1. Neighbourhood Plans, produced by the Parish Council, will determine what is planned for the community.
2. The Parish Council can produce Neighbourhood Development Orders which can give automatic planning approval for specific development or types of development.
3. Developers will have to consult communities before submitting planning applications. Failure to reflect what local people want could result in refusal of planning permission.
4. Communities will have the power to hold a referendum. The local authority will have to take the result into account and advise how it plans to react.

We shall be watching the passage of the Bill through Parliament and shall keep you informed.

CAROLS AROUND THE CHRISTMAS TREE

In spite of a postponement for the bad weather, many villagers joined the school choir to celebrate the turning on of the Christmas tree lights. Carols were sung, mince pies and mulled wine were consumed, and the festive season got off to a splendid start.

Many thanks to the schoolchildren and the adults who baked all the mince pies. Thanks too to Paul and Sarah at the Black Horse who supplied the lighting of the tree throughout the holiday.

This was the second year we have celebrated the tree and we intend to make it a regular event.

HOG FAIR 2011

The Hog Fair will be held this year on **Saturday 2 July**. We do need some volunteers to help organise various aspects of the event so would anyone prepared to chip in please contact Martin Newman (tel.840231).

RESIGNATION

We are sorry to report that Jeff Moody has stood down as Parish Councillor. Jeff is finding that the workload at Elvey Farm and his interest in Egerton Players is preventing him from giving the time he would like to his role as councillor. We thank him for his contribution and wish him well.

YOUR PARISH COUNCIL

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The Parish Council meets in Pluckley Village Hall at 8pm on the third Monday of each month.