



BIDDENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

The **Annual Parish Meeting** and this month's **Parish Council Meeting** were held on Wednesday 10th May 2017 in the main hall of the Pavilion. The Annual Parish meeting is required to be held once a year; strategic matters are discussed and wide consultation on parish matters is sought.

At the main meeting, we heard very informative updates from Tom Perry on behalf of St James's lower school, Peter Applewhite regarding the village pond, Chris Jones on Cowslip Meadow and footpaths, Chris Spurgeon of the Cricket Club and Jason Thompson of the football club. It was good to hear largely positive developments from all our speakers; we are fortunate to have volunteers from across our community who make these ventures the successes they are.

After these reports, I presented the annual Parish Council report, which you can read elsewhere in this edition. There was also time for a public open session, which involved some debate around housing development, upkeep of the village's appearance, and road safety/speeding.

Following the Annual Parish Meeting, a normal meeting of Biddenham Parish Council took place. Present were Parish Councillors Graham Bates, Peter Chase (Chairman), Jon Gambold (also a Borough Councillor), Chris Gee, Francia Slade, Terry Platt and Joe Warren. Clerk Alison Southern, Borough Councillor Roger Rigby and one member of the public were also present. Councillor Krzys Osuch sent his apologies.

SPEEDING ON THE BROMHAM ROAD BETWEEN DEEP SPINNEY AND BIDDENHAM TURN.

Councillor Rigby and I recently met with Andrew Prigmore of the Borough Council, and we discussed the fact that our pre-Christmas speed survey showed that 73% of all traffic is exceeding the 30mph limit on Bromham Road. The fact is that most people do not "feel" the road is a 30mph zone. Nor do they see any signs confirming it is. This is because, in a built-up area, the highway code says you should assume the limit is 30mph if there are regularly spaced lampposts. Not everyone seems to realise this.

The suggestion has therefore been made to increase the speed limit to 40mph between a point somewhere around Days Lane and Deep Spinney. Arguably the road should never have been made 30mph – and let us not dwell on why it was; what's done is done. A 40mph zone would feel more appropriate to the road's nature, and what's more would allow us to put up 40mph repeater signs at appropriate intervals. It was resolved by the meeting to inform local residents on Bromham Road that this is our intention, and then ask Borough to formally begin the process – at which point consultation will occur for anyone concerned to make feedback.

I can report that another result of meeting Mr Prigmore was an agreement to paint white lines along the verges in Gold Lane. This will make drivers feel the road is narrower, and therefore encourage them to drive more slowly. We expect these lines to be painted during the summer months.

THE LOCAL PLAN, 2021 TO 2035

Bedford Borough Council recently opened a consultation period on how 8,250 houses need to be built between 2021 and 2035 across the area. Four large sites have been proposed, all north of Bedford, which could represent the bulk of this requirement. There is, however, a preference to also build houses within the official boundary of Bedford itself, which includes Biddenham, rather than outlying villages. We are sadly, therefore, a prime target.

Even so, most of the sites in and around Biddenham put forward for consideration have been rejected. Only two remain: land behind the houses on the stretch of Bromham Road down to the Bromham Bridge, and land to the west of Gold Lane. As your Parish Council, we will be making a formal response to these suggestions, but would

encourage any residents to also make their individual views known. Simply go to the Borough website and search for "Local Plan 2035".

Our response to the land behind the Bromham Road houses is that this is already designated green space between Bromham and Biddenham, under a policy called "AD42", and also part of the floodplain. An earlier application to develop 88 houses was rejected for precisely these reasons, and we cannot understand why this wouldn't still be the case.

Regarding the land to the west of Gold Lane, this is a very large area. Borough have said they cannot see why it would all be needed for housing, and are proposing to only allow building in the north-east corner between Duck End Lane and the Deep Spinney roundabout. We are nevertheless concerned that the rest of the area might still be put forward during the period to 2035, and would like to see at least some of it explicitly agreed as definitely, never to be built on – particularly the land immediately to the north of the village pond and the coffin path field.

APPEAL FOR PHOTOS

We would like to improve the gallery of photos of our beautiful village available on our lovely new village web site. If you have anything you think would be nice to include, especially the picturesque centre, please could you scan it in and/or email it to our resident web maestro Councillor Joe Warren, at joe.warren@biddenham.org.uk Many thanks!

DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 14th June 2017. Do please come along if you have anything you'd like to raise.

Peter Chase
Chairman



BIDDENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY

MAY 2017

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

My second year as Parish council chairman has seen a modest number of issues around the village, but on the whole things have been less eventful than the previous year. This is my report for the Annual Parish meeting, held on 10th May 2017.

Upkeep of our Village

I still delight in seeing our new sign, unveiled on a wet November Saturday in 2015. The sign base, Millennium sundial and war memorial were all cleaned, as promised at last year's meeting, but they may need it doing fairly often, by the looks of things.

Our move to be responsible for cutting of all grass verges, instead of some being done by the Borough's contractors, has gone well. There have been some transitional issues, but these have been dealt with very effectively by our clerk, Alison Southern and others, who I would like to thank. As a separate "job", Borough were continuing to use weedkiller in various parts of the village, and we have brought this to a halt as it does more harm than good. Thanks to Wendy Norris for her help in this matter.

The number of illegal encampments by travellers has dropped compared to the previous year, and the Borough Council has powers to move them on very quickly. The only recent invasions have been along the new bypass.

Road works

The new bypass was opened last April and has greatly reduced the level of traffic on the Bromham Road. Whilst it is generally working well, we await the outcome of an audit by the Borough which may suggest changes to lane markings at the Deep Spinney roundabout.

Following much consultation about a feature to be put on the roundabout, we have recently decided to proceed with either two pillars or one central one, saying "Biddenham" vertically and topped off with a likeness of the Biddenham Dovecote. These options are now with the Borough Council for approval.

In the summer, we endured many weeks of delay and frustration while the Biddenham Turn junction was remodelled and traffic lights installed. What was supposed to take about a month turned into two, and then three. I personally made representations to the commissioning department at Borough Hall, and would also like to thank our Borough Councillors for their help. At the end of the day, the contractors could not be sped up, having allocated too few resources to the job, and being hampered by harder than expected ground conditions. It was a lesson in poor project management, and I was particularly irritated to discover Borough had little means to impose financial penalties or incentives on the contractors.

Now the new lights are in, and the houses across the way have sprung up so quickly, we can see that the junction works fairly well. However, the three obvious issues are the erratic behaviour of the lights nearest town, the lane markings going away from town and the narrow width of the road directly opposite Biddenham Turn. A "stage 3 audit" has just been completed for Borough and we await with interest what they choose to do about these issues.

One fear regarding the new lights was that more rat-running might occur, since the lights might seemingly guarantee an easier exit from Biddenham Turn. However, that does not seem to have materialised. But speed

through the village, most notably along the Bromham Road, is still an issue. Your Parish Council continues to focus on these concerns. Gold Lane is due to be made safer by painting lines down both sides to make it seem narrower, and this *will* make people drive more cautiously. We are also keen to get views about increasing the speed limit between the Deep Spinney roundabout and Days Lane back up to 40 mph, since the 30 limit is so widely ignored (indeed our survey before Christmas showed that was the case by fully 73% of all vehicles). A 40 limit would allow us to put up more obvious signs denoting the limit, and encourage people to travel at the limit rather than just ignoring the law and going at whatever speed they fancy.

The Coffin path

The coffin path has gradually become reinstated by people using it, and following discussion with the landowner's agent I am confident that it will be ploughed around, not over, in future – if indeed a crop continues to be grown in the field at all. The next time anything may happen is November, so we will be pressing to ensure things are managed sensitively at that time.

A notable success was the designation of the path and the part of the field to its south as now being part of the Biddenham conservation area. We would have liked the whole field to have been incorporated, but in the end were very pleased with the outcome. My thanks go, again, to our Borough councillors for their support – especially Councillor Roger Rigby who arranged for Councillor Colleen Atkins, who holds the portfolio relating to the conversation area extension, to actually visit the field and see the site for herself. Tony Wood of the Biddenham Society and I went to Borough Hall to lend weight to our desire to see this designation go through. For once, it felt like the machinery of local government worked in our favour and recognised the depth of feeling – and the heritage – we attach to this important path.

The Web Site

We launched a new web site late last year. There was a lot of work in the run-up to this, which was led very ably by Councillor Joe Warren. I'd like to thank him sincerely for all his hard work. The site is now much more modern-looking, and able to accommodate pages from groups around the village who no longer have to set up their own website, with all the technical complications and cost that may involve. So not only is the Parish Council better able to communicate its work, but we have built a new facility for all-comers.

The Pavilion

As regards the Pavilion, I can repeat what I said last year. Bookings and income have remained buoyant. Costs are under control and reserves continue to be at a level which support larger, one-off expenses. For example, this year we have had the exterior and interior redecorated and LED lighting installed in the main hall. Car park lighting will be switched over to LEDs shortly too, all of which results in lower electricity bills.

The Local Plan to 2035

The Borough Council are asking for input to the "Local Plan", to run from 2021 to 2035. A number of random, and inappropriate, sites have been put forward for development in Biddenham. But the only two the Borough are allowing to progress are the largest two: land behind the houses on Bromham Road leading down to Bromham Bridge, and most of the land to the west of Gold Lane (but not the field around the cemetery nor the coffin path field). Comments must be in by 9th June, and your Parish Council will be making our views known about these sites. Please go to the Borough's website and search for "Local Plan 2035" for more info, and to make your own views known.

In summary

The recent April sunshine and spring's arrival showed off our lovely village at its best. We are lucky to have such a nice place to live, even if we don't all live right in the middle. We will continue to hear your concerns, be proactive, and act as best we can with the limited influence granted to us. I'd like to thank all my fellow Councillors, our two Borough Councillors, Jon and Roger, and our clerk, Alison Southern for their great commitment and effort.

Peter Chase
Chairman, Biddenham Parish Council

10th May 2017