The most recent **Parish Council Meeting** was held on Wednesday 13th May 2020 using the Zoom conferencing facility. Present were Parish Councillors Graham Bates, Stewart Briggs, Peter Chase (Chairman), Harry Fowler, Chris Gee, Alan Jacobs, Krys Osuch, Francia Slade and Joe Warren. Borough Councillors Jon Gambold and Roger Rigby, Clerk Lyn Lyman, Pavilion manager Deb Slade and 2 members of the public were also present.

ANNUAL APPOINTMENTS

At our May meeting every year, we ensure there are holders for every type of role the Parish Council needs to carry out. There are three sub-committees which divvy up scrutiny of planning applications for different parts of the village, a vice chair, notice board management, highways rep and even an inspector of the Pavilion children’s play areas. My thanks go to my fellow Councillors for their willingness to carry out these duties.

As regards my position as chairman, I was proposed and seconded to be so for another twelve months. However, I made clear beforehand that I will not be able to do the role beyond that period, i.e. after April 2021. It will be time for a change. I am taking up a new post as chair of a charity, and simply won’t have time to do both roles.

The clock is ticking and my successor must be found.

PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

This is the time of year when things grow most vigorously. Chris Horne, our contractor who looks after mowing all the verges in the village does not, however, have time (nor we the money) to go trimming trees and hedges all over the place. A member of the public complained, nevertheless, that weeds were sprouting from under people’s fences onto footpaths, and boundary hedges were unkempt in places, never mind footpaths becoming overgrown.

We will do what we can as your Parish Council. I have – since the meeting – had one modest success with a householder near where I live who dealt very promptly with an impressive array of errant foliage growing out from under his side fence panels.

But may I please implore those of you with bushy frontages to please keep them trimmed and tidy. Those of us out for our delay exercise do not want to have to stray into the road (for example at the corner of Gold Lane and Main Road) because the footpath has become more the domain of plants than pedestrians.

Cllr Gambold, on behalf of Mr Culverwell who could not attend, asked about Tommy – our soldier figure who stands beside the war memorial – and whether or not he would be disappearing now VE Day has passed. We decided not, as it is possible VJ Day may take on a greater significance given how the lockdown spoiled so many plans for VE Day 75th anniversary celebrations. VJ Day is in mid-August, so it was decided Tommy should stand guard right through the year, all the way to remembrance in November and beyond.

I must say, Tommy is a subtle and most poignant addition to our village scene.

My thanks must go this month to Cllr Krys Osuch, who took it upon himself to repaint the wooden bus shelter on Main Road. He did a fine job, at minimal expense to the public purse, and even ended up with a commendation from the Chairman of the Biddenham Society for his efforts. We further agreed to now varnish the bench within the shelter, and also the one by the war memorial at the same time.

PAVILION MATTERS

Deb Slade, who nowadays manages the Biddenham Pavilion in Deep Spinney on behalf of the Parish Council, attended our meeting. She reported that, since the lockdown, all bookings have ceased, as has income from the Manor Hospital for allowing staff to park their cars there on weekdays. We are thus devoid of income for a facility which will continue to cost money to keep in good order. Cleaning and caretaking staff have reduced their hours, but are not laid off altogether.

It was agreed to seek grant funding from Bedford Borough Council, to try to alleviate our financial plight. This looks quite involved, as the Parish Council is not a business, does not pay rates and doesn’t fall under various other criteria for schemes the Borough have on offer. Nevertheless, we feel we are in no different a situation to many other bodies which would qualify for support, and we will try to find out how we may be helped.

Hopefully, some bookings may resume in the coming months, and this ghastly period will seem like a nasty blip in history. Even as soon as July 4th apparently, when the government is expected to relax constraints on using community facilities.

Parking outside the Pavilion, since the gates are permanently locked, is becoming an issue again. Councillors decided to continue to keep the car park closed for now, since there are no bookings, cricket or other official events happening. Unfortunately, the car park is also used at times for nefarious purposes, and we wish to discourage these.

Since the meeting, I have had an email exchange with a resident living close by. Even though she wrote to complain about the anti-social parking in the Pavilion approach road of some arriving to play tennis or other ball games, she agreed with our decision to keep the car park shut.

We recently asked for a quotation from the Borough Council to convert a small patch of grass outside the gates into overflow parking spaces. This would alleviate the issue somewhat, but it turns out this grassy patch is also valued as somewhere children sometimes play. We will see what the cost estimate is and then decide what to do.

OUR NEXT MEETING – **IMPORTANT INFO**

The Parish Council meets every second Wednesday of most months. We very much welcome hearing from residents, there being a public “open session” near the start for anyone wanting to say something. Please call in and let us know anything concerning you about our village, or just listen. The date for the next meeting is **Wednesday 10th June** at **7.30pm**.

To participate, please ring **0203 051 2874** and then use your phone keypad to enter the code **912 526 0859** followed by the **#** key. Calls are national rate, I’m afraid. We cannot stretch to a service where we pay for your phone call via a toll free number.

Alternatively, and at no charge, you can use a computer or tablet by accessing the Internet and carefully entering **https://zoom.us/j/9125260859**

This information will be posted on our village website at biddenham.org.uk. Please keep viewing the site for important communications about Coronavirus measures.

STAY ALERT, CONTROL THE VIRUS, SAVE LIVES

Peter Chase
Chairman