The most recent **Parish Council Meeting** was held on Wednesday 9th September 2020 using the Zoom conferencing facility. Present were Parish Councillors Graham Bates, Stewart Briggs, Peter Chase (Chairman), Harry Fowler, Chris Gee, Alan Jacobs, Francia Slade and Joe Warren. Apologies were received from Councillor Krys Osuch. Borough Councillors Jon Gambold and Roger Rigby, Clerk Karen Cotton, three members of the public and “Great Denham action group” chair Brian Cox were also present.

OUR NEW CLERK

We were pleased to welcome to the meeting Mrs Karen Cotton, who has been appointed as our Parish Clerk and “Responsible Financial Officer” as of 1st September. Karen lives in the village and has varied experience from both business and voluntary roles. She has already got her teeth into things by helping to progress re-opening of the children’s play areas at the Pavilion, and she and I are now almost there with our annual audit process too.

PUBLIC OPEN SESSION

Following a summer in which trees, bushes and weeds seem to have grown more energetically than ever, a number of trees have been singled out for pruning to ensure people can still walk under them along footpaths. We were grateful to an attending member of the public who drew our attention to the cherry tree on Deep Spinney, near the junction with Gold Lane, next to the small electricity sub-station. The branches are now hanging down into the sub-station, as well as too low over the pavement, and the Clerk was asked to get this specimen pruned back as a priority.

Other trees in Darlow Drive, Main Road at Kings Corner and near the hospital will also be cut back.

Mr Glasper, who has helped procure and manage SID, our Speed Indication Device in Gold Lane, updated the meeting. He and others are also now an official speedwatch group. Borough recently refused them permission to monitor drivers on Bromham Road, so they have turned their attention to Biddenham Turn. After a fair amount of discussion, it was agreed we should also move SID to that road, and be ready to commission the Borough Council to carry out an official speed survey. Reports of speeding on Biddenham Turn suggest we will need to collect some hard evidence and then engage with the police to carry out enforcement activity. Watch this space!

GOLF COURSE ACTION GROUP

Brian Cox, a resident of Great Denham, attended the meeting at our invitation to update us on the activities of the recently formed action group (of which he is chair) seeking to save the golf course. The sad fact is that golfing will definitely cease in its current form from mid-October, and the land repurposed by its owner, the Old Ford End Trust (aka Wingfields). Brian told us how residents, particularly in Great Denham, feel their properties are being devalued by this change, and many residents of both parishes are deeply concerned about the possibility of house-building ultimately taking place.

The action group is appealing to the landowner to reconsider their decision. In common with both Parish Councils, the group considers the idea that repurposing the clubhouse and the greenkeeper’s compound will increase revenues from the land is highly doubtful. Is this simply a smokescreen for allowing the land to become “disused” and therefore easier to argue be used for housing? Brian explained the action group is suggesting retaining golfing as the land’s purpose, with local volunteers offering to form a new not-for-profit golf club which would pay the landowner a reasonable, reliable rent.

I followed up Brian’s comments with my own news about a call with the landowner’s agents on 4th September organised by our local MP, and which Mayor Dave Hodgson also attended. On that call, the agents agreed to regular monthly meetings with the two Parish Councils. We agreed that it is best for these to be separate from any communication between the agents and the action group, as we will want to adopt different tactics for influencing them. However, we will continue to communicate and coordinate with each other. The first such call is now scheduled for 2nd October.

If any Biddenham residents would like to help the action group, please email Brian at coxbrian0@googlemail.com.

COVID-19

At each meeting since April we have reviewed whether or not to step down our provision of Coronavirus support across the village. Sadly, the latest news is hardly allowing us to move in that direction. Parish Council meetings will continue to take place over Zoom, the helpline and email address will remain in place, and appeals for a new Covid health champion for Biddenham have gone out on the WhatApp street groups (and someone has now volunteered for this role).

One piece of good news, however, is that we decided we could re-open the play areas at the Pavilion. A new inspection regime has been organised, and a formal risk assessment carried out. Obviously, people will use these areas at their own risk, and there are special guidelines on notices that have now been installed. The Borough Council are continually reviewing their own play area advice, and it was agreed that we will follow it.

CAREFUL DRIVER SIGNS

Some of you may have spotted new “Biddenham welcomes careful drivers” signs near the edge of the village. We asked for these and they have been paid for by Bedford Borough Council. We are not entirely happy with where some of them have been put and may get them moved. But overall, these signs will “nudge” drivers to drive sensibly and help confirm Biddenham’s identity as a separate place within the crowded Bedford urban sprawl.

You may also be interested to know that Bromham Bridge (which is two-thirds in Biddenham) is to become a 20mph zone. New signs, including a speed sensitive light up one, for this speed limit are to be installed imminently.

Finally on traffic, watch out for the night closures of the A421 happening from now until 6th October. This will cause some disruption and long detours for traffic via our village.

TOMMY and REMEMBRANCE

You may be wondering where Tommy went, just as we head towards November and Remembrance. Sadly, Tommy was vandalised and snapped off at the base. But our ever-resourceful Borough Councillor, Jon Gambold, knows someone who is even now repairing him and making him stronger than before. So fear not, Tommy will return very soon.

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 full meeting is **Wednesday 14th October** at **7.30pm**.

To participate, please use a computer or tablet by accessing the Internet and carefully entering **https://zoom.us/j/524544164**

Alternatively, use a phone to ring **0208 080 6592** and then use its keypad to enter the code **524 544 164** followed by the **#** key. Calls are national rate, I’m afraid.

This information is provided on the village website at biddenham.org.uk.

Peter Chase
Chairman