The most recent **Parish Council Meeting** was held on Wednesday 13th January 2021 using the Zoom conferencing facility. Present were Parish Councillors Graham Bates, Stewart Briggs, Peter Chase (Chairman), Harry Fowler, Alan Jacobs, Krys Osuch, Francia Slade and Joe Warren. Apologies were received from Councillor Chris Gee. Borough Councillors Jon Gambold and Roger Rigby, Clerk Karen Cotton and one member of the public were also present.

SPEEDING

You will be interested to learn that the Speed Indication Device, recently moved from Gold Lane to Biddenham Turn, has been doing an excellent job of capturing data about speeding cars. The broad, straight road is the opposite of Gold Lane, and in turn the behaviour of motorists is quite different. We resolved to submit SID’s findings to both the Borough Council and the local police, and to ask them for their advice about what to do next. Suffice to say there is something for them to get their teeth into.

At the same time, we discussed whether to possibly get an average speed camera system for the village. These are expensive – a minimum of £60,000 – and can only be obtained by getting to the top of a list kept by Bedford Borough. Obviously, you need to get on the list in the first place, and this we have resolved to do. Although such a system may be controversial, we felt it better to get Biddenham on the list as soon as possible, so that we start working our way towards the top. If we later decide we’d prefer some other form of speed reduction, we can always choose to come off it.

SID will remain on Biddenham Turn for a while, and then move to Bromham Road.

GOLF COURSE LAND NEWS

As I reported after our last meeting, the golf course land between us and Great Denham has now been turned over to sheep grazing and hay production. Those going onto the land should keep away from electric fences, only use the public footpaths and, I’m afraid, not play golf! Bidwells, who manage the land on behalf of the landowner, are arranging for some signs, I believe, to remind people that the land is essentially private; they have and will continue to maintain the security of the old clubhouse building and the greenkeeper’s compound.

We (as in me, Cllrs Bates and Fowler) and Great Denham Parish Council continue to have monthly liaison meetings with Bidwells, and these are proving a useful way to maintain a civil dialogue.

You may have seen that one result of these meetings has been to get a statement from Bidwells about the land, which is up on our village website. A key point in this statement is that the future long-term use of the land is in abeyance until government policy for landowners is clarified. As a result of Brexit, the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy is due to be phased out in favour of something new called “Public money for public goods”. This bizarre terminology is meant to mean that a much broader, and more community oriented, set of values will be associated with land from which landowners can earn hard cash. So, for example, a country park may earn a landowner as much (or more) of a government subsidy than planting yet more wretched rape for rape seed oil.

More immediately, a planning application to change the clubhouse into a nursery has been submitted. If you wish to comment on this yourself, please go to the Borough Council’s planning website and search for the application using reference 20/02846/FUL.

As your Parish Council, we consider that the Borough Council’s policies put in place on behalf of the community should naturally be upheld. In that respect, it is difficult to see how a nursery is in keeping with the requirement that the land and its buildings are used for sport (this is Policy 99 of the current Borough-wide “Local Plan”). We therefore resolved to object to the application. If, however, a way can be found to ensure the policy is upheld after all (perhaps by re-establishing a smaller golf course – which a local group of residents have offered to run) then we would have no objection to the clubhouse being used as a nursery (or some other purpose).

GOLD LANE HOUSES

Yes, the flags and signs are up, the diggers have arrived and yet we are told there are twenty weeks of archaeological exploration happening first at the site for 250 houses off Gold Lane. Twenty weeks is quite a while, so we have been surprised to hear from local residents that significant earth moving has been going on. Our clerk is in dialogue with the land-owner’s agent (guess who – Bidwells) about what is really happening.

I know I am not the only one who still cannot believe Borough conspired in the ridiculous idea of providing one narrow entrance to this new estate just a few yards from the existing junction of Gold Lane and Deep Spinney. Quite sensibly, the initial way in for contractors has been to use an existing gate just up the way, off the broad curve of Deep Spinney. If only the overall estate could use this entrance! I just don’t understand how, if massive earth-moving equipment is permitted to get into the plot that way, why it can’t become the permanent entrance.

We will wait until the developer comes forward with their next phase plans, which will set out the internal road layout, and then make our continued concern about this entrance known again, as emphatically as possible.

PRECEPT

As a proportion of your overall Council Tax, the Biddenham Parish precept is a small amount and has been declining for several years. This is not because we are asking for less money to run the Parish Council, but rather that the amount requested is being shared among a growing number of households. This is, of course, thanks to housebuilding (mainly north of Bromham Road). This year sees a further such increase in residents, and so your contribution, if it rises at all, will only do so by a very small amount.

In considering our expenditure for the year from April 2021, we have allotted considerably more for tree pruning than in recent times. Trees seem to be getting faster-growing than ever (I’m sure that can’t be true!) and we must keep low-hanging boughs and hedgerows from getting in the way of people who are just trying to walk along our footpaths.

Talking of trees, we narrowly failed before Christmas to make arrangements to put up a festive tree in the new St Marys estate north of Bromham Road. We are determined that for Christmas 2021 there will be one, and therefore the budget for Christmas trees has doubled. Let there be no “bah humbug” around here: we were unanimous in our agreement to this allocation of funds.

OUR NEXT MEETING – **IMPORTANT INFO**

Please consult the biddenham.org.uk website for the date of the next meeting. 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.

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.

Peter Chase
Chairman