

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR FINANCIAL YEAR 2009/2010

Welcome to my report on the work of the Council during financial year 2009/2010. I hope it gives you an insight into the work of the parish council and the problems it sometimes encounters. In my report you will see that through careful budgeting and a review of our operations we have been able to make substantial savings for 2010/2011.

Grants & Donations

During the year we managed to obtain grant funding for the following :-

- 2009 Best Kept Garden Competition
- Hanging Baskets In New Road
- War Memorial Refurbishment/Cleaning

The Council also received the following donations from residents:-

- Donation towards a replacement seat in Kilnbarn Play Area
- Donations towards a replacement seat in front of St Peter's Church.

Donations made

From the money raised from holding raffles at parish council events, this Council made donations totalling £1,725.00 during 2009/2010 to the following charities and organisations:-

Ditton Pop-In-Club; Age Concern; Malling Area Volunteer Bureau; Victim Support; Ditton Heritage Centre, Kent Play Clubs, Children with Leukaemia; Kent Air Ambulance; Ditton Junior School; Ditton Infant School; Y2 Crewe Summer Scheme

All donations are funded through money raised by staff holding raffles at Parish Council functions and not through the precept.

Boundary Review

As I reported last year Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council undertook a boundary review during the year. This review was undertaken because the residents of the new houses built on the old Frantschach site, the majority of which were within the Ditton boundary, wanted to live in parish of East Malling & Larkfield and not Ditton. The result of the review was that the boundary was changed and the outcome is a shrinking of Ditton's historic boundary and

a considerable loss of properties and revenue from council tax for Ditton. East Malling and Larkfield, who did not oppose the boundary change, will of course benefit by an increase in properties and council tax.

Parish Rate

Every year the Parish Council is required to estimate how much money is required to run the Parish for the following financial year. To facilitate this, during October and November each committee undertakes a review of its income and expenditure and sets its budget for the following year. The committee budgets are then recommended to the Finance and Administration Committee which scrutinise them and recommend them to Full Council for approval.

Last year the amount Members calculated would be required was just over £223,000.00 which when divided by the number of properties we have in Ditton gave a Parish rate of £111.24 per household: The Kilnbarn Residents Club and the commercial operations are

not included in this figure as they are self supporting. It appears our estimates were accurate and we had a small surplus of income at the end of the year.

As previously advised, a review of the Council's entire operation was undertaken during the year and the recommendations of the Review Committee, including the franchising of the function bar operations, changes in working patterns, changes in the way insurances are purchased, amongst other recommendations were approved by the Full Council towards the end of 2009. These changes, plus the careful estimating of the various standing committees, resulted in a reduction in the estimates for the next financial year to £201,716.00, a reduction of £21,419.00. This would have allowed us to lower the Parish rate by almost £11.00 per household.

Sadly following a decision made by Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, over which this Council had no control, a boundary change was imposed on Ditton which will take effect on 1st April this year. The result is that Ditton is losing 274 properties to Larkfield Parish Council, which means that the cost of running the Parish now has to be shared by 274 fewer households and our hopes of reducing the Parish rate have been dashed. On a positive note and because of the hard work put in by the Review Committee, the savings we have made means that despite the loss of those properties our Parish rate for 2010/2011 will only increase by 64 pence per household. You will no doubt appreciate that Ditton Parish Council is bitterly disappointed that the hard work that was put in has not resulted in a saving to the parish.

Review

As reported above, the review of the Council's entire operation undertaken last year resulted in a huge saving in operating costs. The review will be ongoing this year and it is hoped that further savings can be made in 2011/2012.

Policing

Sadly our two neighbourhood police officers, Matt Roddick and Andy Dalton left us towards the end of last year to take up other posts within the Police Authority. We miss the working partnership we had with them but wish them well in their new positions. During February this year PC Becky Ballard joined us as the new neighbourhood police officer and together with the neighbourhood policing team of PCSO Robert Sayer and temporary Community Warden John Newton, they have continued in their predecessors footsteps of being very successful in maintaining a low crime level. On behalf of the Council I thank our neighbourhood policing team most sincerely for their commitment and dedication.

Twinning

Several twinning events took place during the year and the link between the two villages continues to prosper. More twinning exchange visits are being planned for this year. If you would like to take part in exchange visits, please contact the Twinning Association or the parish office. All visits whether at home or in France have to be fully funded by the participants, however a contribution towards providing refreshments for French visitors may be available from the Twinning Association upon application.

Promotions

Parish Council staff organised and run 4 dances during the year which raised a profit of £4,267.29. Profit from raffles held at these dances raised £817.98 and I thank the staff involved for their hard work.

Ditton Minors Football Club in partnership with this Council organised a May Day Fete on Monday 4th May 2009. This followed their football tournament which was staged over the

two preceding days. Unfortunately the Fete which incorporated games, arena events, stalls, BBQ, and many more fun activities was not well attended, therefore the Council agreed that it did not wish to organise a Fete during 2010 but would have no objection to anyone else organising one.

Ditton Quarry Nature Reserve

The newly designated Nature Reserve is being well used and is rapidly becoming a learning tool for local schools and organisations. It became a winter wonderland for children during the snow and many were seen dragging their sledges over the recreation ground to slide on the natural slopes in the reserve. Unfortunately some people left old baths and other items they had used as a sleigh and these had to be removed by the Council's staff because they were spoiling the area. Please, enjoy the area but if you take items into the nature reserve, please take them out with you when you leave.

Quality Council Status

This Council was successful in being accredited a 'Quality' Council in 2006 and accreditation lasts for four years. After that time a Council has to reapply for Quality Status to satisfy the accreditation panel that it continues to fully meet the criteria required for it to remain a 'Quality' council. I am pleased to report that the Council was successful in being reaccruited as a 'Quality' Council and I thank my fellow Councillors for their professionalism and the Clerk for her work on the application portfolio.

Emergency Plan

The Council, together with a group of volunteers, have been working on an Emergency Self Help Plan. It is intended that the Plan can be activated in an emergency situation when the emergency services are unable to get through and remain activated until the emergency services arrive and take over. The plan is now in draft form and it is hoped it can be finalised in the near future. When it is ready copies will be available from the parish office.

Youth Project

During the year the Community Warden, John Newton, asked the local youths if there was anything they felt was missing in the village and which they would like to see provided. Their response was 'somewhere to meet and socialise together'.

From this conversation the Community Warden got together the KCC Youth Field Officer, Youth Workers, KCC Warden Scheme, Parish Councillors, volunteers and youths to discuss how a youth meeting place could be achieved. He also approached the Parish Council to ask if part of the Cedar Rooms could be used to house a youth centre. The Parish Council agreed to the request and to support the project but advised that the Cedar Room would need extensive repairs, which the council does not have the funds to undertake.

This project quickly went from strength to strength with a steering committee and youth committee being formed to take the project forward. These committees are currently seeking grant funding to repair and refurbish the Cedar Room, so that part of the building can be used as a youth centre and also an additional hiring facility.

I thank the Community Warden for his dedication in getting this project off the ground and for continuing to be a part of it. I also thank the steering and youth committees.

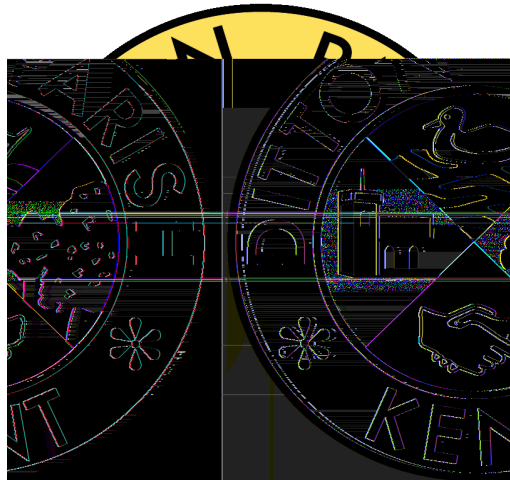
Projects for 2010/2011

With a curb on spending and the need to rebuild general resources, no major projects other than the Youth Project are planned for 2010/2011.

Finally I would like to thank my fellow councillors and the parish council staff for all their hard work, dedication and assistance over the past year and also the volunteer workers who help the council maintain the Nature Reserve.

Mike Porter
Chairman
Ditton Parish Council

Ditton Parish Council



CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

YEAR ENDING 31st MARCH 2010

