



CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2007/2008



Projects

I am pleased to report that, during 2007 CCTV was purchased and installed around the Community Centre in an endeavour to stop vandalism, anti-social behaviour and intimidation of hirers. This system is working well and has captured a few crimes and the taped evidence has been used by the police.

We have also purchased a mobile CCTV unit that can be deployed around the parish as needed to monitor specific problem areas, so please let us know if there is a particular problem area.

Unfortunately we were unsuccessful with our bids for grant aid to rebuild the Cedar Room, but thanks must go staff, councillors and residents, including youths, who worked so hard and put in so much time and effort on the project. I am, however, happy to report that all is not yet lost as we are now looking into the possibility of refurbishing the existing Cedar Room, which won't be as costly, but will still give the additional accommodation required. Grant aid will still be sought for this project.

Information leaflets for new residents have been compiled during the year and include lots of useful information and contact numbers. If you know of any newcomers to the village please let us know, so that they can be welcomed and provided with the information leaflet.

Public Meetings

Two public meetings were held during the year with residents and partner authorities to deal with specific issues:

- 1 to deal with problems of anti-social behaviour in Pear Tree Avenue and
- 2 to discuss, with Shepherd and Neame Ltd, the problems and concerns of residents regarding the opening of the new public house in New Road, The Kentish Quarryman.

Both meetings proved to be very useful and some deterrent measures taken in and around Pear Tree Avenue eased the problems there .

With regard to the new public house, although the Council realises it is not an ideal situation to have a public house in the middle of residential properties, it does appreciate that an established use as a licensed premises already exists there (it was formerly Ditton Working Mens' Club) therefore there was little the Council could do to prevent it opening, except object to the opening hours applied and to ensure security measures were imposed.

During the meeting an undertaking was given by the Brewers that they would only apply for an extension of opening hours until 11.30pm and not the 12.30am (Sunday to Thursday) and 1.30am (Friday and Saturday) as originally requested. They did say, however, that they would review this in the future.

They also gave an undertaking not sell any 'off sales' alcohol to any persons under 21 years of age.

We thank all our partner authorities for their support and participation in these meetings and especially the Police who played a major part and agreed to chair both meetings.

Residents are reminded that all meetings of the parish council are open to the public and details of meetings can be found on the website www.dittonparishcouncil.gov.uk or obtained from the parish office.

Big Lottery Grant

During 2007 this parish council submitted a 'Big Lottery Fund' grant application to the Borough Council's Play Partnership for consideration for inclusion in their combined bid for funding from The Big Lottery Fund for play provision in the borough. I am pleased to report that Ditton's application was one of four successful bids to be included. During January this year the Borough Council was advised that the Play Partnership's application had been successful and they were awarded £222,983. The grant for Ditton is for a Youth Shelter and Games wall. Ditton and Aylesford, whose application was also successful, will be the first two projects undertaken. A youth committee has been set up to enable the parish council to establish the style of equipment the youths would prefer, to ensure it is well used and appreciated by them. Staff, councillors and borough council officers are also a part of this committee. It is anticipated that the new equipment will be installed in the next few months.

We congratulate the Borough Council's Play Partnership on their success in obtaining a substantial grant, which we know from experience is no easy task.

Finances

The parish council's investment suffered minimally last year due to the downturn in the financial market, however, it is still producing a fair return of interest and yield.

By careful budgeting we have managed to keep any raise in the parish part of the council tax to just 0.1% for 2008/2009. This is a major achievement when see the increase that has been applied by other authorities.

As intended the interest from the Council's investment has been used to offset some of the running costs.

Twining

There continues to be a strong link with our twinned village of Rang-du-Fliers and several visits have been undertaken during the past year. Many more are in the pipeline for 2008/2009, including a visit in May from Le Marcheurs, their walking group, who will be undertaking an organised walk in the area. All residents are welcome to take part in visits.

Promotions

The Parish Council dances continue to be successful and the profit raised from ticket sales is used towards the running costs of the parish. During 2007/2008 the profit totalled £5,690.02. The profit from raffle ticket sales at the dances is used to make donations to local organisations.

This year donations were made to Age Concern, Pop-in-club, Heritage Centre, Ditton Infants & Junior Schools, Malling Area Volunteer Bureau, Victim Support, Malling Citizens Bureau, Ditton Heritage Centre & Kent Air Ambulance.

All local organisations are welcome to apply for grant aid and information on how to apply for a grant and an application form can be obtained from the parish office.

Police Support

We continue to receive a lot of support and close contact from our neighbourhood policing team and we thank them for their commitment to tackling anti-social behaviour and crime in the parish.

At the end of the 2007/2008 Financial Year there was a 29.7% drop in crime figures for Ditton. This equated to 81 less crimes committed during the year. Ditton had the 4th highest drop in crime figures in the Tonbridge & Malling area, the highest drop being 34.5%.

Warden

During June last year our warden, Tom Hawkwood, was seconded to Borough Green in a supervisory position. He has since been promoted to Supervisor and now works permanently out of Borough Green. It was with great regret that we lost Tom, but we wish him well for the future and congratulate him on his promotion. He is still greatly missed for the work he did with the youth of the village but we do still keep in touch with him.

We have been lucky to have temporary replacements during his absence in the shape of Paul Crispe and currently Steve Cross.

I understand that recruitment of new wardens has now taken place and a new permanent warden should be assigned to Ditton shortly.

Vandalism

Vandalism and crime is down in Ditton this year and that has to be as a result of regular police and warden presence and the purchase of CCTV equipment.

Volunteers

Several volunteers and volunteer groups operate within the parish and I would like to thank them sincerely on behalf of the parish council for the sterling work they do. Without people like these, the parish would not be such a vibrant community and a poorer place to live.

I would like to thank my fellow Members for all their support and hard work during my first year as Chairman of the Council. A substantial amount of 'behind the scenes' work is undertaken by councillors which is not necessarily realised by parishioners and I thank my fellow councillors sincerely for their commitment. I would also like to thank the staff; Sue and the administration team, Nigel and the grounds staff, Judith and the bar staff and Gina and the caretaking staff, whose hard work, support and commitment is very much appreciated by this Council. Finally, I look forward to serving the parish during 2008/2009.

Mike Porter
Chairman of Ditton Parish Council