

Borough Report 2016

This has been another year when financial savings have influenced all the work of the Borough Council, and another year when central government have seen fit to cut funding to Local Government with Tonbridge and Malling receiving the lowest payment per head of any of the Kent districts. We have also suffered from the loss of business rates due to the tragic and unexpected closure of Aylesford Newsprint, making this year particularly difficult and unfortunately does not bode well for the future provision of our services.

Our planners have been working hard on the production of the new Local Development Plan to provide the required new housing for the borough. They are currently scrutinising the suggested sites brought forward by the "Call for Sites", checking for viability before they go out for consultation later this year. Under government rules the Borough must find sites for a huge number of new homes over the next few years, so it is important that suitable sites are found whilst still protecting our villages and the Green Belt.

The new Seven Mile Lane roundabout has taken on Marmite status with some liking it and others not so keen. In the next few weeks the lane markings are to be changed to make it clearer to drivers which lane they should be in. What it has done is greatly improve the safety record of what was a very dangerous junction.

Work is about to start on building the new lanes on the eastern over bridge at Junction 4 of the M20. This will cause congestion while it is being built but, once finished, will greatly improve traffic flows. Plans to improve the site lines and safety of the Kent Street junction with the A228 are being worked up and Mereworth Parish Council will be asked for their comments before a public consultation. Proposals for traffic calming in Offham will be exhibited at the Parish Meeting and work should start in the Summer holidays.

It is gratifying that since becoming a charitable trust Leisure Services continue to be regarded as among best in UK whilst providing considerable savings to the borough council.

The decision to introduce parking charges in West Malling and Borough Green has caused mixed reaction, however, as all previous attempts to increase turnover of spaces in the car parks have failed and it becomes increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to park this is the obvious next step. It will of course also make a small contribution to the cost of providing the car parks and policing the parking activity in the borough.

The coming year will be increasingly difficult as further savings will have to be found but we will do all we can to ensure that front line services are protected.

Matthew Balfour

Ann Kemp