

Parish Council News

April 2020

Planning – a crook’s charter – or perhaps an invitation to lie, and most certainly a massive headache for your Parish and Borough Councils. Since our government ministers decided to rip away decades of protective planning legislation to be replaced by just 50 odd pages of guidelines, they also stripped away many of the protections for the countryside, the environment and the orderly development of housing. These protections have been replaced with a “presumption of development”, a veritable developers charter, supported by government inspectors with a clear mandate of approving developments come what may “because of the overriding need for houses”. This is often done regardless of the merits or otherwise of the scheme itself (in the green belt, AONB, flood plain and without adequate infrastructure etc.) and overriding all the views of the affected local communities, Borough and Parish councils, councillors and officers. Government MP’s and ministers would say not, and point to all their claimed protections, weasel words frequently not supported by the reality. Together with our Borough we are trying to ensure there is good communications with the Borough officers who must approve or not planning applications amid a fog of continually changing rules. Your Parish council does its best to input local knowledge, although we are conscious of the fact that we have no powers to decide anything. We can merely input our opinion on behalf of the community and should that advice not be followed, sadly take the brunt of local annoyance. It can all be rather frustrating for your councillors, but we are working hard with the Borough Chief Executive and his team to make sure we are properly consulted and kept adequately informed. With some form of traffic light scheme to enable us to have some opportunity to intervene before our recommendations are ignored, rather than learn about it, as now, when it is too late.

As mentioned in last month’s News your Parish Council embarked on a comprehensive **Parking Survey** covering all the properties around the Plain, on the High Street, West Road, Back Lane and North Road. The survey aims to ask every household how many cars they have, how many are parked in Goudhurst during the working day and separately how many during evenings and weekends and where they park. The survey will include all businesses, number of employees who drive into Goudhurst, with how many cars and where they normally park. This information is vital to enable council to establish how many additional car parking spaces are required to ensure there is sufficient space for residents and customers for our shops, cafés and pubs so we can keep our businesses flourishing and our village thriving.

About High Street traffic, residents will be well aware that many motorists insist on making matters worse by refusing to **give way** and let the on coming traffic clear. Even when doing so might speed their own journey. Whilst this may be obvious to most intelligent drivers (Goudhurst drivers of course) we had hoped to be able to provide some guidance and encouragement by putting up some signage to give priority to cars leaving the village at the church wall corner to Cranbrook or down by the pond and heading west towards Tunbridge Wells. But at a recent meeting between our Assistant Clerk, David Boniface our Highways Committee Chairman and an Officer from Kent Highways we were advised that this is not allowed on an “A” road. We did however receive support and encouragement for some of our other initiatives around the village about which more next month. So, whenever appropriate let’s try at least to help ourselves, by giving way at those two places to on-coming traffic.

Last month we reported that our e-mail server would be changing and we thought that the process would be straight forward. But we had not appreciated HMG rules whereby Parish councils cannot appropriate the name of their village without qualification. Parish councils are required to add the suffix **-pc** to their village name. So our new email address from April will be as follows Clerk@goudhurst-pc.gov.uk Emails to Parish councillors or our Clerks that have the name@goudhurst.co.uk should continue to reach us, as they will for the time being, be forwarded automatically.

The fundraising for the Goudhurst **Village Play Area** (on Back Lane adjacent to the Church Rooms) is now well underway which is very encouraging; though the subsequent survey shows we will also have to replace the flooring, much increasing the expected cost. So, thank you everyone who has so generously contributed so far. Your contributions are hugely appreciated but please keep them coming as we are not yet where we need to be.

Many of you will be aware that there have recently been **attempted robberies** in two of our wonderful village shops. Whatever the amounts stolen, the greater damage and distress has been to those manning their premises who have been faced with guns or knives or just intimidation. Together we, Council, businesses and community will need to work out a response plan so that everyone can feel safe and supported otherwise we may, as in many other places, simply lose our shops.

Your Parish Councillors: David Boniface, Craig Broom, Chris Ditton, Alan Foster, Antony Harris (Chairman), Phil Kirkby, David Knight, Barry Noakes, Caroline Richards, Jayne Russell, Guy Sutton and Peter Wood.