



Christmas and New Year celebrations have come and gone and it's time to look forward to the year ahead. Your Council will continue to work for you – not only to ensure that Pluckley remains an attractive, safe and friendly place to live and work, but also to enhance our environment, facilities and services for the benefit of all. Key focus areas here are to continue to develop and improve facilities on the Recreation Ground and at the Village Hall, more of which below.

We are still waiting to hear Ashford Planning Committee's decision on the huge 'Solar Farm' on the south-eastern edge of the village. We will be disappointed if this is given the go-ahead, but rest assured that, if it does proceed, we will work to ensure that its impact on our beautiful rural environment is minimised as far as possible.

Your Council continues to be very prudent with its finances, but we have been informed that some of the funding that we receive from the Government (via ABC) is being cut back. We need to ensure that we can maintain services and move forward with some village improvements (see later in this newsletter) and so, for the first time in six years, we are reluctantly proposing a small increase in the 'Parish Precept' part of the Council Tax for 2014-5. The exact amount of the increase will be decided at our January meeting. Rest assured that we will continue to budget carefully, and spend your money wisely.

At the time of writing we have two vacancies for Parish Councillors. Your Council will be looking to fill these as soon as possible, as we do need our full complement in order to function efficiently. We do have a couple of residents in mind, but if you are interested in volunteering, or finding out more about the role, please give me a call.

Safety also remains a priority, and we will continue to press for measures to reduce vehicle speeds, and to enhance pedestrian safety where we can.

Finally may I, and my colleagues, take this opportunity to wish you and your family a happy and prosperous New Year.

Chris Housman

PARISH PLAN

The Parish Council has met with Ashford Borough Council (ABC) to discuss the Parish Plan in the context of ABC's review of its 'Core Strategy' and the preparation of a new Local Plan for the Borough for up to 2030. As part of their review, ABC asked landowners throughout the borough if they wish to develop on their land. To date, the owners of four sites in Pluckley have come forward. In looking at any sites, the Parish Council will be mindful that residents have asked, through the Parish Plan, that any development should be of a small-scale and dispersed, and that the Village Design Statement must be upheld.

Having said that, two of the sites warrant further attention. These are the old coal yard to the south side of the railway station, and the Brickworks site. The owners of the old coal yard have suggested 6/7 homes and a car park for the station on their site. The Parish Council would have to bear in mind the benefit to the village of additional car parking at the station, if an application does come forward. A further issue would be that of access and sight lines for the entrance to the site.

The suggestion for the Brickworks site suggests many more homes but offers other significant benefits for the village: the removal of its existing approved use as an industrial site, a car park for the station, and the transfer to a trust of the rest of the undeveloped site to be held as a leisure amenity for the village. Because of these potential benefits, the Parish Council feels the proposal should be considered. Given the history of the site, however, and the strong views expressed by residents in the past, the Parish Council does not wish to respond on behalf of the village without residents having the opportunity to comment. To explain the proposal in more detail and to gauge residents' reactions, the Parish Council is calling a meeting on **Monday 3rd February** at 8pm in the Village Hall. All residents who wish to come are urged to do so.

LOCAL NEEDS HOUSING

The Parish Council has been advised by the developer, English Rural Housing, that they anticipate starting work on the four Local Needs homes on the Westfield site in the Spring of 2014.

QE11 RECREATION GROUND

A recent survey of the surfaces of our tennis court and our multi-games court has shown that both now need renewing. We always knew this would be the case but have delayed carrying out the work as long as we felt we could. The cost will be significant, around £12,000.

TRAFFIC

KCC Highways have investigated the running water problem on Forge Hill and are proposing to install a new drainage system to deal with the problem. We had urged that the work would be completed before this winter, given the serious accidents that occurred last year. Highways are currently seeking the necessary budget in an effort to carry out the work urgently. If they cannot find the necessary funding, then it will happen in the next budgetary year which begins in April.

VILLAGE HALL

The recently installed additional heating for the hall is proving effective and bookings have increased. This will help to minimise the loss that the hall runs at, which the Parish Council makes good each year.

We have struggled in these difficult economic times to raise the very large sum required to carry out phase 2 of the modernisation of the hall. This would have added a lounge/meeting room, a new entrance foyer, modernised the kitchen and toilets, and clad the exterior. We are therefore reviewing the project with a view to breaking down the improvements into more, less costly, stages.

The nature of the hall suggests that we tackle the new entrance foyer first. This could include new toilets. We also wish to freshen up the kitchen and provide new crockery. The likely cost of this work would be less ambitious and more likely to find favour with funders as we would then be able to contribute a more significant share of the costs from our own funds. We are currently drawing up the plans and seeking revised quotes for the work.

This does not mean that we have abandoned our aim to add the other improvements - simply that we will have to take them one at a time.

SIGNAGE

The village sign on Forge Hill, which was blown down in the last storm, is currently being repaired and will be re-installed as soon as it is ready.

In an attempt to alleviate the parking in the Street, a car park sign will be installed opposite the QE11 Field directing cars to the car park on the Recreation ground.

We anticipate that the work to remove the large trees in the garden of the Black Horse and replace them with new smaller trees set away from the wall will be carried out soon. The wall at the front of the garden will be rebuilt and the ugly wooden fencing can then at last be removed.

