

Annual Parish Meeting; chairman's report; 10<sup>th</sup> March 2011.

I'd like to begin my report by offering thanks to members of the PTA for their help with refreshments this evening. I thank Tom Harris who has moved away from the village and resigned his post. His will be a hard act to follow. Thanks too, to my fellow councillors for all their input into the many strands of activity this year. Discussions in committee, informally and at formal meetings have led to positive ways to tackle problems, and are driving various projects forward, albeit often at a pace dictated by other agencies, rather than the speed which we would choose. Thanks must go to our Borough and County Councillors, whose attendance at meetings with, for example, officers from Surrey C.C. and local parents, and whose diligence regarding issues such as planning matters and local schooling issues has been really supportive. Their regular attendance at our Council meetings, and the light they can shed on our debate is much appreciated. Thanks above all are due to our clerk, Alison Jones, who deals with us all in a calm manner, and keeps us all in check. Her professionalism makes her this council's greatest asset, and we would often flounder without her.

There have been some major matters to deal with this year, including the issue of secondary school choices for 11 year olds. Jeanette and Barry Armstrong worked hard to achieve a favourable ruling for this year's cohort, but parents will, in the future have to present a case to the County Council and show that Ripley youngsters are at a disadvantage as regards choice. Our thanks go to Barry and Jeanette for their tenacity with this problem. Planning matters have been to the fore. The borough council put together a strong case regarding the illegal travellers sites in our parish, and court rulings mean that the law will have to be obeyed. In other parts of the parish where planning policies have been overstepped, enforcement has put things right. The Suzuki site has yet to be developed. The owner has permission to build a number of dwellings there. As regards White Hart Court, we still await consultation with the borough.

Now for a whirlwind tour of the parish, stopping en route to mention some of the things that have happened this year.

At the four entrance points to the village the "welcome and watch your speed" signs are finally in place. These have taken three years to materialise, and we know they are not perfect, but we trust they will have some effect on the speed at which traffic travels through the village. The cost of these was shared between the parish and the borough.

I am pleased to report that all is well with our allotments. An improved water supply is in place, and there is a full take-up of plots, with a waiting list. A new sign has been put up. A slight increase in rental is proposed for 2012.

Next to the allotment site the bowls club are working hard on their facilities. We have met with their committee to discuss shared access and parking with allotment holders, and to help with the route of water and electricity supplies to their site.

Other sports facilities on the green are also developing. We are in discussion with Ripley Village Football Club about a new pitch on the green. These discussions involve the borough and county councils, and so are not fast-moving. There will be consultations with interested parties before any final decisions are made. Terry Sapsford does sterling work to keep the green in good shape, replacing posts and mowing among other tasks. New benches have been put in place, and some will have to be removed or repaired as they are no longer safe. The parish council is in consultation with Surrey Wildlife Trust so that a management plan can be devised. Their work for the football club made us realise that the wilder grassed areas need nurturing since they are more rare than the scrub woodland. We have been offered some finance to improve the barrier at the entrance to the car-park used when events are held on the green. The farmers market goes from strength to strength, and was named as National Rural Farmers Market of the Year recently. The village as a whole was highly commended in the Fuller's village of the year competition. The council is grateful to residents who have offered to repair potholes caused by the bad weather. Surrey County Council is monitoring encroachment and parking on the green, which is escalating to a dangerous point. They are consulting with the parish council. They have firm ideas as to the way they want things to be, and try to make us aware of the law concerning registered village greens. I should not leave the subject of the green without mentioning the hard work

which Alison put into skillfully managing the putting in place of our ball court. What an achievement! It is well used and worth all the effort, Alison!

Speaking of effort, and moving on to the High Street, I thank Chris Lee and his committee for the wonderful Christmas Market back in December. This event raised a large part of the cost of the Christmas lights, and was a major success despite the snow and ice. The lights are now all of the L.E.D. type, and cost little to run, but of course the cost of putting them up and taking them down escalates. Your help is needed now to help organise the Market for Sunday the 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2011.

Outside the parish, councillors have attended meetings like the local Joint communities meetings, and conferences, such as the Surrey Rural Conference held in May last year. Our over-arching organisation, SCAPTC, keeps us up to date and is on hand for advice when needed.

As for the future, may I remind you to come to the village hall on 19<sup>th</sup> March at 10 a.m. so that you can help with the process of cleaning up our village. Many hands make light work! Please return your broadband survey papers, so that we can work to improve the service to our village, and please take the trouble to vote on May 5<sup>th</sup> for your local councillors. The parish council is an increasingly significant body, and a local voice is important.