

Paddock Wood Town Council Chairman's Annual Report 2016

Achievements

It has been a very positive year where a lot has been done and many people have worked extremely hard during uncertain and challenging times.

Aside from the dove residing in the town centre Christmas tree, one of the highlights was the first Neighbourhood Plan Visioning event in March 2016 where a list of top ten qualities of Paddock Wood were identified by members of the community.

In order of priority they are:

Friendly, Safe, Accessible, Unique, Green, Open, Harmonious Enterprising, Traditional, Community Spirited.

This work will be developed further at the events on 27th 28th April to be held at St Andrews Church. Feria Urbanism, consultants for development of the Neighbourhood Plan will run these events.

I was born in the year when Paddock Wood Parish Council was established and feel proud to follow in the footsteps of my great uncle who served on it. During 1967 I witnessed the demolition of the Parochial Hall as some of us caught the train to school in Tonbridge. Forty-nine years later we have the Community Centre Project on a formal footing – looking at potential sites such as the Wesley Centre as well as a potential new facility on part of the Memorial Field that important gateway to the town.

Among other things the Council finished dredging Putlands pond, carried out work to the Green Lane Pavilion, fitted new allotment gates, put new benches in the old church yard to celebrate the Queen's birthday, and also put in new trees and a stile at Putlands.

Your Councillors have been working hard during the year. Some examples of particular interest include:

- ☑ establishing a Youth Council (Councillors Williams and Boyle),
- ☑ free parking and parking issues (Councillor Atkins)
- ☑ flooding (Councillor Turk)
- ☑ preserving Heritage (Councillors John & Meryl Flashman),
- ☑ the Hop-pickers Line, an important site to preserve (Councillors Moon & Sargison).

Foal Hurst Wood, which is ancient woodland, remains a special Town Council asset to preserve and educate all ages about our precious wildlife. Special thanks must be given to all the volunteers there.

To anyone who has not read the blog about the wildlife of Paddock Wood, you are missing a quality source of information!

The issues:

Like other areas across the country the town faces a lot of change in the future. Major planning applications for housing remain unresolved at the time of writing. This places particular demands on the Town Council Planning Committee. It is important to remember that the Town Council Planning Committee is a statutory consultee with no power to make a final decisions. It can however make

comments based on planning grounds for planners or the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Planning Committee to consider.

There are concerns about flooding, roads and infrastructure issues. Flooding has an impact on the cemetery, which I know is very distressing to residents and the Town Council is trying hard to mitigate against this. Town centre congestion, commuter parking in residential areas, speed of traffic and safety of pedestrians, litter, dog mess and concerns about the level of police presence all remain ongoing issues for the Town Council.

The demands of change and future plans: Councillor development and education

Expectations are likely to change with impacts such as devolution. As one example, delivery of health and wellbeing will provide opportunities to develop ideas at local level.

The Athletics track is used well, the facilities at Putlands continue to provide people with healthy activities and the Rugby Club uses Putlands field. The Chairman of Paddock Wood Football Club has great plans for provision into the future. Apparently many of his players are interested in Cricket too so perhaps one day Paddock Wood will have a cricket team once more? We must also still hope for a swimming pool!

I was recently approached about a singing group to benefit those with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) as research shows it improves prognosis. In collaboration with the lady who thought of it (a COPD patient) Canterbury Christchurch University, Woodlands Health Centre and the generosity of the Freemasons who provide a weekly venue with piano, the group is on its way to being established.

The amazing success of Paddock Wood U3A is another example which benefits a very large number of people some who might otherwise be lonely. It is a valuable opportunity for people to meet up and to work in groups.

In times of devolution, initiatives must take into consideration the views of the community but at the same time recognise what is wanted and achievable. This applies equally to the Neighbourhood Plan and all other community projects.

For any project where the Council is involved there are three important questions that it, (your Council), can and should be challenged about. The Council is expected to recognise this in spite of high expectations, by some of the community, of what it can realistically achieve!

Firstly does it have the power?

Secondly does it have authority (from the right people)?

Finally has it made the decision properly with all relevant considerations taken into account?

Some may have heard of Kids Company. The Charity collapsed and the example was recently cited at a Councillors' training session. Elected council members overruled and ignored advice from professionals. A fundamental question is always to consider is it 'legally' reasonable and the Town Clerk is knowledgeable about all this and / or has access to advise for both Councillors and members of the community.

The Town Council therefore cannot always deliver everything it might like to alone. There are times when it must rely on members with relevant skills and expertise. All authorities (KCC, TWBC and

Town and Parish Councils) are serving the same people with public money and are accountable to you. So basically your council certainly needs your help please!

Improvements to the skate park have been requested by young people recently. There have also been comments about the future use of the Memorial Cricket Pavilion as well as an enquiry about all weather cricket practice.

The Community

There are many, many local groups who deserve support and encouragement. The Social Club, Alzheimers, Derby & Joan, W.I, History Society...the list goes on and we must not lose sight of those organisations which may need support from the Council.

Congratulation go to Barsleys for reaching 125 years, and to Paddock Wood Business Association for organizing the great Xmas street event. Thanks are owed to the Lions, Lionesses and so many local groups for what they do. All volunteers are very generous and we are particularly proud of the achievements of Paddock Wood Community Advice Centre, the constructive hard work of Warrington Road Action Group, the Community Storehouse and of course the Police and our PCSOs.

Special thanks go to Nichola Reay and Claire Stewart in the office for their help during some very demanding events this year. Thanks also go to Kevin Butler and his estates team, not forgetting David Henshaw who has supported me as Vice Chairman. I should also like to thank all the Committee Chairmen and Councillors for the support they have given me and for dealing with all the challenges.

Chairing the Council

I believe that 3 to 5 years is long enough in a position such as this in today's world. Whilst experience is valuable there is a need to keep up with the pace of technology and change so that Paddock Wood is well placed for its future and with all generations represented in taking it forward.

New blood and ideas are needed. I have told the Council that this year will be the last time I will stand as Chairman, not only in the hope that the Councillors will support me to encourage others to learn the role, but also to work with the office towards a smooth transition, given the work the council faces in the future to remain vibrant and continue to represent you properly.

An important factor discussed with some other parish Chairmen recently is a need to develop the role to allow those in full time work to take it on without compromising too much of their time. Like a well run business where key figures don't need to be always present. This should be possible with efficient communication and use of modern technology. We already have very effective members who work full time. I hope that the right person will soon take my place and take the council forward into the new exciting era. Perhaps that will be you? We certainly have some people with great skills available perhaps more to come.

I will of course remain as your Borough Councillor and leader of the Neighbourhood Plan to support Paddock Wood our special and friendly town and hope to look forward to updating you again next year.

Sarah Hamilton Chairman 2015-2016