July 2015 Newsletter

Parking: I am continuing to lobby for businesses affected by the new Controlled Parking Zone in Pondcroft and Milestone Roads to be able to apply for permits, analogous to the ones available to residents. The current position is that the operation of the Zone will be reviewed after it has been in operation for six months, i.e. in September or October.

New council: first meeting has been held and the appointments have been held. I have been elevated to the vice chairmanship of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The function of this committee is to 'hold the executive to account'. To this end we examine many performance statistics and call each portfolio holders to present a report to us once per year. We occasionally have meetings devoted to specific, usually large, projects that we consider require close scrutiny: e.g. last year a meeting was devoted to examining the redevelopment of Hitchin Town Hall.

NHDC has published a new draft Corporate Plan. The corporate objectives for 2016 to 2021 are:

1. To work with our partners to provide a clean and safe environment for our residents, where diversity is welcomed and the disadvantaged are supported,
2. To promote sustainable growth within our district to ensure economic and social opportunities exist for our communities, whilst remaining mindful of our cultural and physical heritage and
3. To ensure that the Council delivers cost effective and necessary services to our residents that are responsive to developing need and financial constraints.

These are to be put before Cabinet on 16th of June and, I suspect are likely to be adopted, as they are closely aligned with the objectives of our previous plan.

Consultation on the Local Plan Preferred Options paper closed on 6 February 2015. About 8,400 comments were submitted to the council, which are now being processed, read and analysed. This is a vast number of submissions to process, and the software is struggling, particularly with submissions which included graphics and with the many submissions which were made in hard copy. It is unclear whether the analysis of the responses will be completed quickly enough to meet the current Local Development Scheme timetable.

Meanwhile the ONS has produced updated Household Projections for household formation in North Herts, which are available on the ONS website (https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-household-projections). Table 406 is the key table.

I have been contacted about the difficulty that refuse collection vehicles experience accessing some narrow roads in Knebworth. In Deards Wood Veolia attempted to collect brown bins, which of course contain food waste, on two days in one week in June without success because of anti-social parking, presumably by commuters. If your bin is not collected or there is some other problem with refuse collection, which is something that does happen from time to time, you should call NHDC on 01462 474000 or email service@north-herts.gov.uk. Customer support officers will contact Veolia on your behalf. Of course if you contact me, I will pass on your request to the relevant officer.

NHDC has limited funds, but does make grants to local organisations, as long as they are independent, not-for-profit and work for the benefit of the local community. Currently there is a Community Building Refurbishment Fund which has £15,000 available, a Playground Fund, with £10,000 available and an Environmental Improvement Fund, with £10,000 also. With the exception of the Environmental Improvement Fund, communities will be expected to raise at least 50% themselves. For further details see http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/community/grants or call 01462 474000 and ask for the Community Services Team.

Grants for Knebworth groups will be reviewed by the Southern Rural Committee, which meets four times a year. Grant applications must be completed in good time before we meet, and may be submitted on paper or filled in online. In our meeting on 11 June the committee approved £250 towards the cost of installing new pedestrian handrails on the steps to the footpath from New Close to Stevenage Road, and £200 towards the cost of the new Parish Council Website (which is about to go live).