NHDC awards grants every year of around half a million pounds. The existing policy for determining eligibility for grants largely dates back to 2002 and is no longer fit for purpose. The proposed revised policy puts some more stringent requirements on bodies applying for grants. One of the recommendations is that 'precepting bodies' (i.e. parish councils) be no longer eligible to apply for grants. Another is that no grant will be awarded to a body that has applied for grants in the previous two civic years. Southern Rural, along with the other area committees, will suffer an approximately 50% drop in the funds available for grants. This is a consequence of essential budget cuts.

It is recognized that parishes such as Knebworth may have difficulty raising funds for capital projects. A new capital funding scheme has been proposed which is designed to help both rural and urban capital projects. The idea is that village and community halls can be helped out when they have larger capital spending needs. The proposal is to make available a quarter of a million pounds annually.

The grants policy and the capital funding scheme are expected to be approved at Cabinet on 14th June. It is expected that the proposed areas for the Neighbourhood Plans for Knebworth (and Preston) will be approved at this meeting.

The current Grounds Maintenance contract ends on 31 March 2017. A few minor changes to the specification of the contract have been recommended. It is considered that the contract is going well and that the work represents good value for money. Under the contract NHDC gets parks, gardens, verges, cemeteries and outdoor sports facilities maintained.  Knebworth chooses to maintain its own recreation grounds.

On the matter of cemetaries, I will be going to inspect the Knebworth cemetery (off Wadnall Way). This has been subject to repeated bouts of flooding. Stephen McPartland MP as well as offices from NHDC will be present. It is hoped that improved drainage can be dug before next winter.

The current Waste and Street Cleaning contract ends on 8th May 2018. and the process of re-letting this has already begun. This is a critical part of the Council's services, and in fact represents around 45% of total costs. If affects every single household in North Herts and is considered to be well operated. The district comes sixteenth in the country for proportion of waste recycled.

It is expected that on 14 June, the NHDC Cabinet will approve the Neighbourhood Plan area for Knebworth. This is the whole of the parish. See the Parish Council article in this issue for further information about the Neighbourhood Plan.

Cllr Julian Cunningham will be attending the Parish Council meeting on 13 July at 8pm. He is the Executive Member (i.e. member of NHDC Cabinet) with responsibility for parking policy . An hour at the beginning of the meeting has been set aside to discuss parking problems in the village.

On 20th July it is expected that there will be an extraordinary meeting of the Council to approve a draft Local Plan. Work on the plan is proceeding at a feverish pace. The plan will be scrutinized by a planning inspector at a public enquiry, probably in 2017. Please check the NHDC website for confirmation that this meeting is going ahead.