

THE VIEW FROM THE PAVILION

The PC recently approved its budget for the coming year, a copy of which is available from the Clerk. It may also be viewed on the parish website, and a summary will be posted on the noticeboards. One of the highlights is an increase in the staffing budget, which is to fund a new post. In order to provide additional capacity within the council, the role of Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) has been disaggregated from the responsibilities of the Clerk and has been made into a separate position. I am pleased to announce that Mrs. Panetta Horn has been appointed RFO to the Council, and will take up her duties on February 3. Many of you will know Panetta as an active resident, particularly for her volunteering with our Scouts, and we welcome her acceptance of the post, which will offer vital support for the challenges that lie ahead.

Other highlights in the budget include: funding for the Road Safety Initiative, the priority for which will be the installation of yellow lines at Standing's Cross; mowing and hedging is a significant outlay - but re-tendering last year provided better value-for-money; and the allocation for Christmas Decorations - though relatively small - has increased over the past few years in response to representations from the community.

Many residents will be disappointed that the proposed development at "The Island Site" in Matfield has been granted permission. The manner of its approval, on the casting-vote of the Chairman, was evidence that there were some councillors on the Planning Committee who felt that a development on such a sensitive site ought to have been "tested" by the planning inspectorate. It is to be regretted that such an opportunity was not taken. Also to be regretted is the statement posted on social media by the agent for the developers, boasting what a "Great night" it was. Such a comment lacks the professionalism we should expect from an organization wishing to gain the confidence of local people.

The "fallout" from the meeting of the Planning Committee included several letters of complaint, about the proceedings, the role of the officers, and the actions of the Chairman. Those letters were sent to the Chief Executive, and copied to the PC. Councillors were concerned about the issues raised in the letters and asked the PC's independent planning advisor, Lindsay Frost, to review both the report considered by the Planning Committee, and the recording of the meeting. Mr. Frost concluded that there were no breaches of procedure or process, and no laws were infringed. His full advice to the PC is available from the Clerk, and may be viewed on the parish website. It has also been uploaded to the Facebook pages of both Matfield and Brenchley. The PC will not be taking any further action on this matter, but will wish to comment on the full application.

Finally, another plug for the elections to the PC, on May 7. Information about this appears elsewhere on the website.

Christopher Woodley
Chairman, Brenchley and Matfield Parish Council