

A Message from your County Councillor – March 2016

I never cease to wonder at the vagaries of the British weather. During February we visited two gardens open for charity under the National Gardens Scheme, Doddington Place and Mere House, Mereworth. At both the Snowdrops, Hellebores, Daffodils and Camellias etc were well forward due to the mild weather. Then on Thursday 25th February I made my last but one visit of the month to County Hall, for the Kent Environment Strategy Implementation Workshop to find snow laying at both Detling and Maidstone!

To continue last month's themes, the Annual Budget/Council Tax meetings went as predicted. A 3.9% increase from Kent County Council and 0% from Swale Borough Council. Added to Precept increases from the Police & Crime Commissioner and Fire & Rescue Service this means approximately £40 per year extra for Swale Band D taxpayers not allowing for any small change in individual Parish Council Budgets/Precepts.

The Participatory Budget Meeting at which most of my Local Member Grants Funding is allocated was held at Teynham Village Hall on the first Saturday in February. Many organisations based in or providing services to Swale East residents applied and in most cases were successful in securing funding. We even had a visit from a Dalek care of Swale Arts Forum. Luckily no one was exterminated as their bid for funding was successful!

The Inspectors Interim report on the Swale Local Plan was not unexpected in its content. She has opted for a house building target increased to 776 per year in line with the 'Objectively Assessed Need'. Importantly she has supported our twin track approach with most development in the Thames Gateway area of the Borough and far less in Faversham and the Rural Areas. We are now exploring options as to where the extra 3,000 required homes by 2031 could be built.

I have been extra busy in February with the County Councils Select Committee on Social Mobility and Grammar Schools meeting 2 to 3 times a week. I continue to explain how the Councils present policies are unfair to Rural residents especially the not so well off. It is promising how much support I appear to be getting. We will be finalising our recommendations during March.

Parish Councils I attended during February were Selling, Doddington, Boughton, Newnham and Dunkirk. I also had a meeting with representatives of Tonge Parish Council to discuss current planning and legal problems they are facing. Swale Borough Councillor Mike Whiting also attended. Following the fatal accident opposite the Dover Castle in Teynham I attended a meeting with Gordon Henderson, MP, Borough Councillors Lloyd Bowen and Mike Whiting, the Police and the Landlord.

I hope to see some of you at the various Annual Parish Meetings. If you are unable to attend please remember you can contact me anytime by phone or email on any Council related issue.

Andrew Bowles