

## **PEMBURY PARISH COUNCIL \_ A BRIEF HISTORY AND RECOLLECTION**

When looking back over the past 45 years, and seeing the historic issues of Pembury Village News, I wonder if those who were involved in the first Parish Council meeting held on January 1 1895 following the Local Government Act of 1894 would recognise their village. Prior to this the responsibility for the Parish was as an ecclesiastical parish, powers being transferred to the new civic authority from the church. It must have been a daunting responsibility for the newly appointed officers and councillors. Even at this early stage in its life, the Parish Council had limited powers, in the main as a consultative body to Borough and County, but was involved fully in the life of the community.

At this stage there were still the 4 hamlets from which the village as we now know it grew, Upper and Lower Green, Romford and Bo Peep. The greatest change came about in between the 2 wars and then major developments in the 1960's and 70's. I moved to Pembury in 1973 and having been the Parish Clerk at Frant soon found myself in discussions with Derek Betts, the then Chairman of the Parish Council. The Parish Council meetings were held at the Dower House, the offices of Tonbridge Rural District Council. In 1974 Tunbridge Wells District Council took over responsibility for parts of Tonbridge Rural, and in December 1974 Royal Tunbridge Wells Borough Council had its status confirmed. Since that time Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has become the planning authority for the village. I became a member of the Parish Council, and then on the retirement of Arthur Penn in 1979 I became Chairman following in the steps of Arthur Penn, the local builder, for my first period until 1987. I then rejoined the Council and was re-elected Chairman in 1996 until 2005 and served as Chairman for a total of 19 years. On his retirement Arthur Penn commissioned and presented a chairman's medal with the insignia of Pembury to the Parish Council.

The Parish Council has drawn its members from a very wide diverse and representative section of the village. Teachers, bankers, farmers, new arrivals, people who have lived here all their lives and others who brought talents to the community and to the Parish. Apart from one contested election the Parish Council has been apolitical, with members not following any political allegiances.

Over the years there have been many innovations and changes. Parish Council meetings were originally held in the former British Legion Hall, given to the Parish Council when the local branch ceased to exist. This old building was timber framed and draughty with limited facilities and asbestos in the roof and ceiling. There was no parish office, and review meetings were held at the home of Henry Plant, clerk from 1972 – 1990. Eventually, and with the assistance of millennium Lottery Funding set up to allow renovation of Village Halls, and with a very strong committee, including the architect Derek Hawes Richards. Our Lottery grant application was eventually successful. Funding was also awarded by Kent County Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. The Parish Council also provided funds from the Parish Budget together with public fundraising in the village. The Old Hall was demolished and the new Village Hall was opened in 2000; Parish

Council meetings were held there. and at the home of Barbara Russell until the refurbishment of the Recreation ground and the restoration of the Pavilion which led to the creation of the new Parish Office. The Parish Council operated with full meetings and separate designated committees, each with its own Chairman and separate responsibilities, such as Planning, Highways and Amenities. All councillors took part in these.

The Parish Council made representations and was represented at the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan inquiry in 2003/4, the inquiry which led to the construction of both By Passes and the inquiry into the new Tunbridge Wells Hospital at Pembury

One of the chief proponents for innovation in the village was Derek Hawes Richards, a local architect who lived in Hastings Road. He, with Henry Plant, published and printed for the parish council the first edition of Pembury Village news in 1975. This continues to be distributed to every household in the village. The historic advertisements tell their own story of a very active and engaged community with local shops and stores, Stan's the local hardware store and meeting place, a baker, 2 greengrocers, a haberdashers, local stores in most areas of the village, a chemist, 2 post offices and banks! There were 4 pubs, local farms, a library and a thriving and sought after Primary school and nursery. There were 2 doctors' surgeries. Parish Council meetings were well attended, attendance at the Annual Parish meetings was high, and all the local clubs and organisations wished to be involved. At times some of the issues discussed would be contentious, but the Parish Council has always been a cohesive unit, working for the benefit of Pembury.

This was the backdrop for the Parish Council's first canvassing of village opinion and wishes in Pembury 2000, the survey organised by a committee chaired by Derek Hawes Richards, which canvassed every household in the village. Difficult to realise that at this time the A21 ran through Pembury, there were no by passes, and the traffic at Woodsgate queued back to Bo Peep in the mornings and at weekends, and down beyond the school. This survey was followed by Pembury 2000 + and then Pembury, Our Village – Our Future. These documents have been used at local inquiries as evidence. The parish council has been actively involved and consulted on all the major projects over the last 50 years,

Almost simultaneously in 2000, and following construction and opening of the A 21 bypass in September 2018 (with a temporary bailey bridge connecting Pembury tp the Pembury Road) and thereafter the B2015/A228 northern bypass, Tesco opened a new store at Woodsgate Corner. Many would say that this changed the character of and the atmosphere of the village with the loss of small shops and businesses but there was intensive consultation between the Parish Council and the representatives of Tesco. An established planning committee has reviewed all mayor projects, the most recent of which (prior to the Local Plan inquiry) was the construction and opening of the Tunbridge Wells Hospital at Pembury. The Parish Council has no planning powers but as a consultative body has a strong voice in representing the views of the Parish.

The Parish Council has also introduced other charitable events, such as Pembury Fireworks. The idea was that of Bob Allen with the formation of Pembury Chest to raise

**funds for local groups in the Village. The Parish Council supported and provided land for the building of the Scout and Guide “Hut” on the recreation ground boundary. What has been remarkable over the years has been the cohesive non -political membership of the councillors, each bringing specialist talents and local knowledge, for the benefit of Pembury. Being a member of the Council involved at times discussion of serious and/ or contentious issues, but there was time as well for light-heated moments and fun.**

**The hope is that Pembury will retain its own separate identity, that the proposed developments behind Hastings Road on the land between the bypass and Hastings Road and elsewhere will not fundamentally change its character, and that the original councillors from 1895 would not be too dismayed at the impact of the increase in the population from 1,500 to now in excess of 8,500, with buildings and houses on what would have been green fields, open spaces and agricultural and orchard land.**