

## HOW WE FILLED THE PARISH COUNCIL VACANCY

In order to decide how to fill the vacancy left by Margaret Barbrook the parish council took advice from Ashford Borough Council and Kent Association of Local Councils to ensure it used best practice to co-opt a new member. The resignation of one councillor does not require the whole council to be re-elected. However if 10 parishioners had requested an election in writing within 14 days of the vacancy being published on parish noticeboards on 7<sup>th</sup> December then an election would have been required. The cost of mid term elections of this type must be paid for by the parish council (Ashford Borough Council have advised that typical costs will be between £2000 and £4000) and with full council elections due in May 2011, this would probably not have been the best use of parish council funds.

The parish council followed the correct procedure in advertising the vacancy and would have been acting within the law if it simply approached individuals to fill the vacancy by co-option. However, it decided that a more open and transparent approach would be to notify the parish of the vacancy via noticeboards, local press, parish news and parish council website and then formally interview candidates to select the best suited.

An information sheet describing the role of a parish councillor was issued to each candidate and they were interviewed using an identical list of questions. The facts identified during the interviews were documented and circulated to all councillors. The council considered these facts and following a ballot co-opted Ian Walker to the council. Each candidate was informed of the decision the following day and the unsuccessful ones (David Hayes, Darril Ling and Helen Tharp) thanked for the interest they had shown and encouraged to put their names forward when future opportunities arise.

Parishioners have not needed to vote since 1999 because in 2003 and 2007 the number of candidates putting themselves forward for election did not exceed the 9 needed to form a council, so under the rules for parish council elections no voting was required and all candidates were deemed to be democratically elected. The current council ends its 4 year term in May 2011 (just over a year away) and if there are more than 9 candidates then the electorate will have the opportunity to vote.

Chilham Parish Council  
February 2010