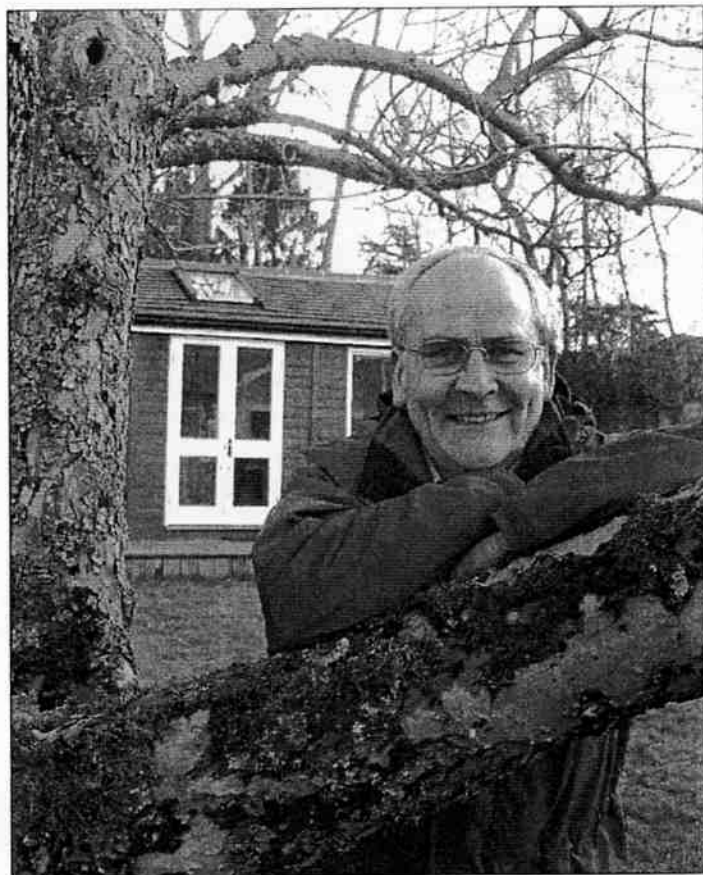


How will our garden

grow ?

Psychologist Simon Hewson (right) explores the nature of communities and what makes them work — why we need our ‘hardy perennials’ as well as our ‘delicate blooms’ — and what living in New House Lane for the past 20 years has meant to the Hewson family



WE LIVED up north before we came to Canterbury in 1987. People warned us about moving south - ‘Nay, it’s Maggie’s ‘cartland, they’re all stand-offish and the beer’s lousy.’ Well, we soon discovered that East Kent was far more varied than monotheistic Thatcherism, that people were both interesting and interested, and I understand that there are plenty of good local beers to try.

When we moved into New House Lane, I did have a concern that this was essentially a ribbon development, with no apparent central focus. However, like most families with youngsters, we were just keen to get settled in to our new home and get on with our lives. Over the following years, we have learned that a community is not defined by its physical layout and that the Hilltop community has very distinctive qualities.

But I’m getting ahead of myself. I’ve been asked to contribute something about communities partly as a psychologist and partly as someone coming from elsewhere. Being aware

that psychologists are notorious for using incomprehensible terms, I set to thinking about what would be a useful model or metaphor with which to explore some ideas about what’s important about communities. It finally struck me, probably because, since retirement, I’ve not been able to avoid those gardening chores, that a garden might have some features similar to a community. I’d like to suggest four:

1. A garden is made up of many ‘members’, mainly plants and some animals, but as a garden it is more than just the sum of its parts. It derives its particular character from the balance and interplay between its different constituents.
2. We cannot totally predict and control everything that happens in a garden. Which new seeds will ‘take’? Will a late frost scupper spring growths? What wind-blown ‘strangers’ will appear? How will they change the garden?
3. Equally, although we can’t completely control them, we exert a huge influence over gardens through our own efforts (or lack of them!) – digging, planting, pruning, seeding, fertilizing. It never ends, does it?
4. A garden is really about growth, sometimes slow,