



'We wear our community identity lightly, but that's fine by me - imagine living amongst The Archers!'

sometimes fast, but always inexorable. Flora and fauna are not machines that can be switched off for a while.

So, in suggesting that a community is like a garden, I'm suggesting that a community is a living, changing, entity, whose members come and go, whose development we cannot dictate but can actually influence for good or ill. Now, to propose a garden as a model for a community is not perfect, and I'm sure that at least some readers will be asking whether community members are part of the garden or actually are the gardeners. You're right, and actually both options are possible. But to focus firstly on us as part of the garden does invite some humorous speculations:

- Who is the community convolvulus, needing regular cutting back if not eradication?
- Who are our hardy perennials who can be relied on to play their parts year after year?
- Who is our mighty oak, our symbol of strength and inspiration?
- Who are our more delicate blooms, who need much care but who are worth it?
- Who is our mangel wurzel – not pretty but does the job and fills a hole?

Any nominations? However, that unique phenomenon called human consciousness enables us to be both part of the natural world as well as (somewhat) detached observers of it. This means that we can be both garden and gardener. Translating this to the community, we are both part of it but also can have views about what it should be.

It's the latter role which I'd like to focus on. What do we want our community to be? Like a garden, a community may have many functions, which could include a pleasant, safe environment, in which youngsters may happily grow whilst vulnerable people are

protected; mutual support; sharing enjoyable activities; securing improvements in local amenities and services; and hopefully making good friends. Or it could be none of these things. Let's just have our bins emptied and the streets swept and leave the rest alone. The important point is that our community is what we want to make of it. No one else will do this for us (although a little more help from certain quarters would perhaps be welcome). Luckily, we have the Hilltop Community Association as the organ for getting all our views aired and shared. The Community Plan is but one example of HCA's energy and competence; *Hilltop News* is another.

If I may make a final 'gardening' observation it is that you have to keep at it – so it is with our community. We can't just leave it all to the HCA committee, neither can we expect them to be there forever (but Colin's a great Gandalf, don't you think?). Community renewal can involve all of us according to our talents.

Let me finish by saying what living here means to me. My professional studies and training convinced me that humans are essentially social and co-operative. As an example, our capacity for language, an almost uniquely human attribute, would not have developed in a non-social species. So belonging to a social group is a key part of being human. In fact, most of us belong to many social groups – through work, or recreation, or religion, or politics, or special interests. Hilltop gives us a particular focus for a residents' group. I really appreciate it because it's understated but active; nobody's in your face but things get done and people are happy to help when needed.

I've never felt a stranger here and I hope I'm not the only one who feels easily accepted by others. We wear our community identity lightly, but that's fine by me – imagine living amongst the Archers! For me, Hilltop is a caring community which enables us to have a lot of fun. How do we want to see it go forward? Now, if you'll excuse me, the Head Gardener wants a flowerbed cleared ...

