

Chairman's Report 2023

I am pleased to say that all eight parish councillors in post last month were re-elected without ballot.

We welcome our newest councillor Mrs Sarah Cassidy who has been elected to fill our vacancy.

Parish Website

I would remind everyone that the Chislet parish Council website is the first point of call for information on Parish Council meetings, minutes and agendas, there is also a contact form that can be completed and sent to Geoff with any questions or queries you may have.

Planning

There have been no major planning applications in the parish during the past year although we are still in dispute with City Council over the "informal" planning permission given to the unofficial Traveller Site at Puddledock Wood.

We have also had a presentation from Hannafin who are proposing to build four up market properties on the old Nethergong woodyard, their initial planning application has been withdrawn to amend the designs of the dwellings but the Parish Council and immediate neighbours of the site are strongly in support of the application and wish it to go ahead as soon as possible.

There has also been a retrospective planning application last month for formation of access and gates 2 Highstead Meadow, Boyden Gate Hill which the Parish Council has objected to.

No decision has yet been made on the retrospective planning application for the enlarged digestate pit in Marley Lane on the Parish boundary with Hoath following objections from both Parish Councils.

There is no further update on the proposed Solar Farm and to date no planning application has been submitted.

Parish Litter Picker

I know this is a matter that has concerned many of you so I will explain the background to you and I hope you will understand that the Parish council had no option other than to make the decision that we did.

When the Councils accounts for 2021/2 were audited our auditor flagged up a concern that due to changes in taxation law it was no longer legal for the Parish litter picker to be self employed, she must now be an employee.

In light of this information Geoff contacted Kent Association of Local Councils our professional body, I consulted a firm of chartered accountants I have connections with and the answer from both was that our auditor was correct, we are dealing with public money and must adhere strictly to the letter of the law.

This was discussed with the post holder who was offered a contract as an employee giving amongst other things paid holiday sick and leave and a modest pay increase as an incentive but unfortunately for her own personal reasons she did not wish to change.

Having exhausted all possibilities it was decided in November to draw up a contract of employment to take effect from the 1st of January 2023 and to send it to her for a final decision.

At that point our litter picker resigned of her own free will, at no point was she sacked and Chislet Parish Council have done everything in their power to persuade her to return but to no avail.

The position has now been advertised but as yet there have been no applicants.

Proposed Parish Hall for Upstreet

We are no further advanced with this proposal and have been informed by City Planning that the site we propose to use is unsuitable.

Speeding

This is still a problem throughout the parish with parishioners regularly approaching us on the subject.

While we are hugely sympathetic to the problem we are acutely aware that both the local authority and Kent County Council have no available budget.

At the beginning of the year KCC carried out a detailed speed survey over seven days at each end of Upstreet and also outside the village post office.

Their findings were that the driving speed in the centre of the village was acceptable, however vehicle speeds entering and leaving the village were a little higher but did not require any further action other than possible extra markings painted on the carriageway.

During April speed checks were also carried out at various points in Chislet, four drivers were found to be exceeding the limit by more than 5mph and were issued with penalties.

Capitol Projects and Expenditure

We have no large projects planned at present, particularly as the Ecclesiastical Parish is currently in an interregnum at the moment so although we have a small sum set aside to help with the cost of a new central heating boiler as the Chislet Centre is also used as a main hall by the school that is now on hold.

Investigation is also underway to move the Upstreet defibrillator from the Royal Oak to the telephone kiosk outside the village shop in Upstreet as there are currently access and maintenance problems at its current situation.

We are also enquiring as to the cost of replacing one of the wooden benches outside the church to commemorate the coronation of King Charles III.

We have been advised by KCC that there is no grant available so what ever we provide will be modest in nature.

Grass Cutting

We have revised the grass cutting contract from April 2022 as the price had increased considerably and the Concurrent Function Grant no longer covered the full cost so with read regret we decided we could no longer maintain the Churchyard.

A different contractor has now been appointed who will cut the grass in the cemetery on an "as and when agreement" at a much lower cost than was paid before, this reduced cost will be fully covered by the Concurrent Function Grant.

However I would remind everyone that we are not a wealthy parish, we do not have allotments or a village hall that we can hire out to supplement our income.

We have the support of Rachel Carnac our Ward Councillor but we are far from Canterbury, neither are we connected to either Herne Bay or Whitstable and have few parishioners nor high value properties to generate income for Canterbury City Council meaning that our value to them other than a potential development site is also small.

Year by year we see our funding grants cut until we have now reached the point where our income no longer covers our obligations, this means looking into the future we will have no alternative but to reduce or completely remove some of the services we currently provide.

Thank you for coming this evening and, as I say every year you are our eyes and ears so if you see anything you think we should know about please contact any one of us by phone or our clerk via the Parish website

These details can be found on both the Parish noticeboards, on line or in the Parish magazine.

Are there any further questions you would like to ask us?

Best wishes

Jackie