

As you have all been aware since last May this has been my last year as chairman of Chislet parish Council and this time I have been able to leave it to others to give you an overview of what the Parish Council have achieved over this past year.

When I first moved to Upstreet over forty years ago the parish was a very different place.

Upstreet was still very much linked to the pit with many of the residents, retired miners and their families, indeed I can still remember Welsh being spoken in the village shops and social life revolved around the two village pubs, the Ship and the Royal Oak, both now closed.

There was two shops, one was the post office stores and the other sold greengrocery and hardware, a butchers, a restaurant and a fishmonger and mobile library visited weekly

There was also a thriving Women's Institute which met in the Roadside Cafe courtesy of Mr and Mrs Marchetti.

Chislet was an agricultural village with most residents linked one way or another to the land with their lives revolving around church, chapel, the newly converted Chislet Centre and the Gate Inn.

Over the years that has changed beyond all comprehension as residents have passed on or moved away.

I have been a Parish councillor for over twenty years and chairman for fifteen and during that time I have noticed gradual but important changes to our community, particularly since covid.

I suppose the most obvious change is that people don't seem interested in participating in activities, the old idea of volunteering for something for the good of the community in general seems to be a thing of the past, all organisations be it Parish Council or local charities find it increasingly difficult to recruit volunteers as their older supporters wish to stand aside and no one younger comes forward to take their place.

In the past the Parish Chairman was always either the Vicar or the tenant of Chislet Court Farm but by the time I joined Parish Council that tradition had gradually passed away as the vicarage moved to St Nicholas at Wade then Minster in Thanet,

There has not been a representative from the church on Parish Council for several years as the Vicar now resides in Minster in Thanet and there are no church wardens currently in post.

However until three years ago Mike Wilkinson of Chislet Court Farm, albeit not chairman, was an active member of the council, Mike has now retired but the farm is still happy to support the Parish where it can although currently they have no presence on Parish Council.

We worked closely with the school and for several years a member of the PTA sat on Parish Council but sadly as time has passed by this contact has slowly been lost although we are trying to work more closely with the school through our participation in the Christmas Fair and the Chislet Summer Fete during the coming year.

The major concern to us as parish councillors and indeed our parishioners is that the administration of some of the surrounding farmland has passed into hands outside the parish who have little or no concern regarding the comfort or the welfare of our parishioners.

This land user has constructed a digestate pit between Chislet and Upstreet without full planning consent to store the by-product from the production of "green energy" their main source of income, which is served by huge tankers moving vast quantities of liquid fertiliser between the aerobic digestate plant at their main area of operation at St Nicholas at Wade to the pit in Marley Lane along narrow unsuitable country lanes already width restricted by legally parked cars.

This development is currently under consideration by the Planning Inspectorate and continues to be used until a decision over its lawfulness is decided.

There is the proposed construction of an onshore wind farm on the marsh between Chislet and St Nicholas at Wade which is at present on a "back burner" but by no means abandoned.

We have the ongoing problem of the residential caravan site developed again without planning consent on farmland off Nethergong Hill which CCC seems to be totally incapable of enforcing against despite the constant intervention on our behalf by our Ward Councillor Rachel Carnac.

We have seen year on year a gradual reduction of the financial support we receive from our KCC Councillor Alan Marsh as the cost of Adult Social Care continues to rise, we are of course always grateful for whatever contribution Alan can make to our various projects but this can no longer be relied upon on every occasion.

There also seems to be an ever increasing dependency on digital media, be it smartphones, social media or on line conferencing facilities again not something I find to be of benefit to all members of our society, particularly the elderly.

Whoever is elected as Parish Chairman this evening will of course receive my help in whatever they choose to do but will be facing new challenges that happily I have never had to deal with.