

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING REPORT APRIL 2019-MARCH 2020

Every April, the Parish Council normally hosts its Annual Parish Meeting (APM) at the Memorial Hall in order to outline what it has been up to in the preceding year and what its plans are for the following 12 months. However, since the end of March this year, the pandemic has meant that regular monthly Parish Council meetings were initially suspended then, when the legislation was changed to allow it, replaced digitally via Zoom. Permission to hold digital meetings was not enacted in time to organise such a meeting for the APM, so Council agreed to cancel this year's meeting, but give an outline of its activities over the past 12 months on the Parish Council website.

PARISH COUNCIL

Since April 2019, the make-up of the Parish Council has changed, with Roger Simpson's retirement, after 11 years of dedicated service to be replaced as Vice-Chair by Mike Brewin and with Jan Budworth, Sue Knights, Gill French and Mark Julio joining the team. Linda Thomas remains our much valued Clerk as does Marian Hemsted our internal auditor. We work closely with our Borough Councillors, Mike Taylor, Wendy Palmer and Tim Shaw and KCC member Harry Rayner.

FINANCE

In January 2019, the Parish Council agreed a budget of £53,788 for the period April 2019 to March 2020. In view of significant spending on new street lights, and the additional equipment at the Spoute Recreation Ground it was decided to increase the precept by a further 10%. This meant an increase of £6.09 per annum to a Band D property. Looking ahead, in January of this year, there were changes in expenditure to reflect the replacement of the column street lights, an approved overspend on the Spoute play equipment and an increase in Sec. 137 expenditure to include a donation to the primary school for resurfacing of the driveway. In order to cover this expenditure and retain a healthy reserve, an increase in the precept for 2020/21 was agreed at 20%. This will mean an increase of £14.40 for a Band 'D' property. The overall budget was set at £53,254.

PLANNING ISSUES

TMBC's Local Plan, with its proposal for over 3,000 new homes to be built in Borough Green, has been with the appointed Government Inspector since the beginning of 2020.

Preliminary hearings are scheduled to be held in October 2020, having been postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Since December 2019, parish councils within TMBC have been engaged in a protest against the Borough Planning Department's plans to restrict parishes' consultation times on planning applications. We have lost the battle and may have to schedule occasional additional Council meetings to allow discussion from Councillors and members of the public in contentious planning cases.

Within Plaxtol, a significant appeal decision to deny a development at Shrubshall Meadow once again reinforced the opposition to non-linear development within the Parish.

It is regrettable that the former butcher's shop at the top of The Street, has remained empty and with its windows covered for some months now. The lease for the florists will expire in

July 2020 and the Parish Council is anxious to see what proposals are in hand since the shop is listed as an Asset of Community Value.

In January, 2020, we approached a Shipbourne Councillor who has a great deal of experience with planning issues, to see if we could design a planning training module for our new councillors, as well as those from two local parishes. As with so many other initiatives, this has been put on hold because of coronavirus but we will hope to reinstate it when conditions permit.

RECREATION GROUNDS

Parish Council has invested a total of £20,671 towards the cost of new and renovated equipment at the Spoute and is extremely grateful to a number of local organisations who donated to support the project. We were intending to invite them to a Thank You reception in the recreation ground but a combination of terrible weather earlier in the year and recently the coronavirus outbreak has curtailed this and instead we have only been able to write to all concerned. The donors are Fairlawne Estate, KCC and Harry Rayner, Sevenoaks Lions Club and Jon Austen, Tesco Riverhead, Waitrose Sevenoaks, individual donations and assistance from parishioners who wish to remain anonymous and support from Plaxtol Primary School's PSA and from Plaxtol Playtime.

Special thanks for their efforts also go to Jane Denham, Marius Carboni, Merran Hilton and Sian Ricard.

STREET LIGHTS

The Parish has a total of 15 street lights, a mixture of 6 full columns and some 9 brackets. During 2019/20 we replaced 4 bracket lights and the whole of the column outside Kingscote in Church Hill. Feedback on the LED lighting has been very favourable. In the coming months there will be a major operation to replace the remaining five columns in The Street which will involve a street closure by UK Power. This will have to be done in a school holiday period.

BASTED MILL PUBLIC OPEN SPACE. (BMPOS)

In March 2019, the Parish Council gave notice to TMBC that it wished to withdraw from the Management Committee of this area over our concerns that the Borough Council were not prepared to indemnify us against significant financial liability in the event of unforeseen major repairs or damage.

Plaxtol's contract consequently ended in March 2020 and our reluctant withdrawal will be followed by those of both Platt and Borough Green who similarly failed to obtain the required assurances. TMBC will now take over the management of the site. In doing so, they will lose a great deal of commitment and expertise from the Committee, not least from Keith Johnson and Roger Simpson, Plaxtol's representatives.

PARKING AND BUSES

The introduction of double yellow lines on School Lane, outside the Memorial Hall, has proved a great success. Despite cynicism about enforcement, local motorists, notably parents dropping off or collecting children, have overwhelmingly complied with the restrictions.

The introduction of similar yellow lines just below the Papermaker's Arms, which was initially opposed by some residents, was re-visited this year with a proposal to shorten their length after several major delays to bus services. Unfortunately, by the time most opposition had been withdrawn, we had missed the scheduling for installation within the next two-three years. KCC member, Harry Rayner has undertaken to see if there is any way to speed the process up, but progress is likely to be very slow. In the meantime, Marius Carboni and his team are investigating other alternatives.

Due to a combination of low usage and access delays, Go-Coach decided to terminate the 404 Service to Sevenoaks at Ightham apart from the school runs. The 222 Service continues to run as normal.

POLICING.

The period under reviews has been relatively free of any major criminal issues although a small group of youths still manage to cause occasional problems at the School grounds, the Spoute rec. and the Cricket Club in the late evenings. There have also been occasional spates of thefts from sheds and outbuildings. PCSO Mark Thomas remains our local contact.

PRIORITIES FOR 2020/2021.

In the period until March of 2021, the Parish Council's main priorities will be to closely monitor our budget; to oversee the major installation project for the new Street Lighting; to keep a close eye on developments with the Local Plan in the Autumn and to refine our procedures to ensure we manage the new restricted consultation periods on planning consultations from TMBC. We will also look forward to welcoming Mark Hiddleston as our new co-opted councillor in August. Above all, however, we will need to closely monitor the development of the Coronavirus pandemic and ensure that nothing the Council does will put the safety of our residents at increased risk.

Patrick Thomas
Chair of Plaxtol Parish Council.