

Frittenden Annual Parish Assembly 2021

Chairman's report

Because of Covid restrictions no Annual Parish Assembly was held last year. This report covers the year to 31st March 2021, but where relevant I have noted issues from the previous year

The Council

Since the last Annual Parish Assembly (APA) held in 2019 we have been pleased to welcome Councillor Sarah Murray who was co-opted as councillor to fill the vacancy left after the 2019 election.

During the year we have held 11 monthly Council meetings, and 1 additional planning meeting. Attendance by Councillors averaged 92% (2019/20 also 11 meetings +1 planning meeting, 86% attendance. Attendance by the public varied from 0 to 3 (2019/20 0-4). Councillors Fairweather (Borough) and Holden (County) regularly attend our meetings and PCSO Simon Humphreys has also attended.

On March 24th 2020 at the beginning of Covid we passed a resolution delegating Council powers to our Clerk to act on our behalf, in consultation with the Chairman and Deputy Chairman, to enable the council to function effectively in the absence of formal meetings. Since April 2020 all meetings have been held by Zoom but this facility will not be possible after this week as legislation permitting this lapses on 8th May. We will resume physical meetings on 22nd June. Until then we will operate using the delegated powers.

I have summarised our activities below. These are arranged alphabetically rather than in any order of importance. Although all Councillors are collectively responsible for each of these activities, I have noted the names of Councillors who take the lead in particular areas.

Aerodrome (Lead Councillors Lester Gosbee and James Tuke)

After the end of the first lockdown in 2020 there was a significant increase in activity at the aerodrome, partly due to the number of pilots needing to refresh their flying skills for certification purposes. The contrast with a prolonged period of aircraft silence led to several complaints from residents. These were taken up by our representatives at an extraordinary meeting of the Headcorn Aerodrome Consultative Committee in August 2020. Specific problems have arisen because of failure to adhere to approved flight paths due to pilot error or to changes to flight paths caused by wind conditions.

This year so far one resident has complained to the council. The first action should always be to contact the Aerodrome itself. If this fails to bring an appropriate response then notify the council which will act through its representatives on the HACC but it should be noted that provided the aerodrome is operating under conditions laid down by planning there is little that the council can do as this is a legitimate commercial operation employing up to 80 people and giving pleasure to many more, as well as causing some noise nuisance.

Affordable Housing/ Community Land Trust (CLT)

At the 2019 APA the possibility of securing Affordable housing on a rural exception site had just fallen through due to the withdrawal of the site. Since then a Community Land Trust has been set up and is seeking sites for affordable housing but as your parish council has found over many years this is a long a difficult task. Some Affordable Housing must be provided within the site allocated

for housing under the draft Local Plan. The CLT are investigating the possibility of working with the any potential developer of this site. The Parish Council is actively supporting the CLT as it is keen to ensure that good quality, genuinely affordable housing is available in our parish.

Amenities *(Lead Councillor Heather Cullingworth)*

Unfortunately during the first lockdown the playground was closed due to concern about Covid but was reopened in early summer. Since then the playing field and children's playground have been inspected weekly by one of a team of three. Cllr Cullingworth is now supported by Cllrs Gosbee and Murray in this work. We are very grateful for the long service given by Roy Latham and ex-Councillor Janet Croucher.

Reports of these routine inspections are presented to the Council and minuted. Remedial action is taken whenever appropriate. A full annual inspection is carried out annually RoSPA and their recommendations implemented.

A new bench has been provided thanks to the generosity of a local resident. The fence adjoining the parking area needs replacing. We are investigating this at present.

The tree in memory of Annie Bull had to be replaced due to the severe dry weather. A new one has been planted, partly funded by the Women's Institute and kindly planted by Cllr Fairweather.

Amenity Vehicle

Visits by the Civic Amenity Vehicle (the Saturday rubbish lorry) has been suspended since the first lockdown partly due to the need to reschedule services but also because of the difficulty of ensuring social distancing at the vehicles collection points. We await TWBC's decision.

Broadband *(Lead Councillor James Tuke)*

The Parish Council is very grateful for the work done by Lance French to secure fibre to the premises (FTTP) broadband throughout the parish. Thanks to his persistence most residents who wish to opt in have now been connected or are about to be connected.

Community Shop *(Lead Councillors Lester Gosbee and Rosalind Riley)*

At the last APA we reported on progress in starting up a community shop. A Community Benefit Society (CBS) has been set up and is now leading this initiative. The Parish Council, acting on behalf of the CBS, has applied for and obtained planning permission for a single story building on land at the rear of the Memorial Hall Car Park. Progress has been complicated by some technical issues which are currently being resolved.

The Council has provided modest financial support and will consider providing more in due course. Meanwhile the need for a Community Shop has been demonstrated by the success of Stable Stores, set up in the early days of lockdown in response to a need for facilities in this village while people's movements were restricted. We are very grateful for the initiative of Sean and Rosie Croucher in providing this facility.

Dog fouling

This continues to be a source of annoyance to residents. The council provides two dispensers of bags for dog's mess – at the entrance to the field and by the War Memorial. Do encourage people to use these and please ensure that no mess is left on the playing field as this is a significant health hazard for children.

Finance

The precept for the coming year remains unchanged at £17,000 having previously been increased by £500 for the year 2020-21. Frittenden continues to have the lowest rate of precept in the Borough.

Our accounts for the year to 31st March 2021 will be available on the Parish Council website once they have been audited.

In the last year we opened accounts with Unity Trust Bank for the Hardship Fund. Having seen how efficient their service is we have moved our Council bank accounts to Unity Trust Bank. These accounts are operated online, which has been a great benefit during lockdown. We now incur bank charges but benefit from a considerable increase in efficiency.

Footpaths

In March we appointed Carol Wilken as footpath warden. Her role is to walk the footpaths regularly and alert KCC Public Rights of Way staff of any problems. In future she will submit a brief annual report to this council on the state of our footpaths and draw our attention to any pressing issues.

Hardship Fund (*Lead Councillor Anthony Staples*)

When the lockdown arrangements were announced in March last year it was clear that there could be people in financial difficulty due to restrictions on their work. Despite Government support some people, especially the self-employed, slipped through the net. Councillors and members of the community saw a need for a simple flexible fund which could meet their needs sympathetically and without excessive bureaucracy.

The Fund operates within a defined set of rules approved by the Parish Council but is financed by public donations. Administrative costs are met by the parish council, ensuring that all money donated goes to the beneficiaries. The fund is managed as a subcommittee of the parish council, with three FPC representatives and two residents. The sub-committee committee meets on Mondays whenever a grant application has been received in the preceding seven days. Payments are made by bank transfer the following morning.

So far the Fund has made grants to 11 different parishioners, and a total of £15,810 has been made. Some £5,233 from the original public donation remains undistributed but we are still receiving calls for support. The Fund will be wound up no later than six months after Covid restrictions have been lifted by the Government. Meanwhile if you are aware of anyone in need due to Covid restrictions please contact our Clerk. All grants are made in strict confidence.

Planning (*Lead Councillor Richard Vernon*)

During the year the Council has considered 39 planning applications, including:

- 9 home extensions, (3 in previous year);
- 9 barn conversions, (9 in previous year);
- 1 new build applications, (3 in previous year);
- 32 other matters (e.g. amendments to, or clarification of, earlier applications, new access points, tree preservation issues, etc.), (19 in previous year).

The majority of applications within the parish were uncontroversial.

The Parish Council has responded to the Government Planning White Paper last autumn and to the Model Design code more recently. Both raised some issues of concern

Roads and verges (*Lead Councillor Lester Gosbee*)

Some improvement to road surfaces in the village has occurred over the last two years as part of the continuing battle against potholes but the state of our roads is not good and many of the concerns highlighted in previous years continue.

Road edges are poor and encourage drivers to cling to the centre of the road and the highways contractors still fail to empty gullies properly in the Street, leading to flooding during heavy rain

Residents can contribute to the condition of our roads and verges by avoiding casual littering; ensuring hedges do not encroach on the pavement or the highway, and of course avoid parking near junctions.

Like many parishes continue to suffer from fly-tipping and urge residents to report instances immediately. If action is not taken promptly report it to a councillor and we will take up the issue on your behalf. .

We have provided a salt bin on Grandshore Lane at the top of the hill.

We are grateful to Cllr Gosbee for his regular inspection of verges, road surfaces, and salt bins and following up problems.

Speedwatch (*Lead Councillor Anthony Staples*)

Speeding is a concern of residents. We have tried and failed to persuade KCC to extend the speed restricted area as part of our input into the Highways Improvement plan. We have responded to the Consultation "Vision Zero" road safety strategy for Kent. PCSO Simon Humphreys has been trained in the use of speed checking equipment and will be carrying out checks periodically in our village. We are grateful to Councillor Fairweather for persuading Kent police to carry out checks in this village following concern about this issue.

Meanwhile we have resumed carrying out Speedwatch tests (suspended for nearly a year during lockdown). As a result of concern over speeding some more volunteers have come forward and we now have 11 active volunteers enabling us to carry out checks on most weekdays while we have the kit, which we share with Sandhurst Parish council.

The principle benefit of is to raise awareness of road safety and speeding in particular. More volunteers are always welcome. Typical commitment is two hour's in each four week period. Some initial is needed but this is done online. Do contact me if you would like to join our volunteers

Telephone Box (*Lead Councillor Rosalind Riley*)

The telephone box is now in regular use thanks to work done by Stephanie Andrews and Cllr Cullingworth.

Trees

We received a grant from the KCC Community Fund for tree planting. A small grove of birch trees has been planted on Cllr Gosbee's land just behind the War Memorial. We hope that this will enhance the view as people walk along Biddenden Road and that it will encourage insect and bird life. With the grant and a small top up from the Parish Council we were also able to augment the stand of birch trees in the Burial Ground in Mill Lane.

We are grateful to Cllr Holden for his support in securing this grant.

The TWBC Local Plan (*Lead Councillor Richard Vernon*)

Considerable progress has been made on the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan. The final draft is now open for consultation (until June 4th) and all relevant papers can be seen on the TWBC website. We would encourage residents to look at the draft and make comments if they have specific concerns.

During the development of this plan no new issues have arisen for Frittenden and the Parish Council feels it has been listened to regarding housing allocation. Only one of the various sites offered for development has been included in the final draft, a site on the East of Cranbrook Road just beyond the speed restriction sign, where 20-25 houses are proposed. The Parish Council supports this. We will be submitting our own comments before the deadline date

Village Clean-up Days (*Lead Councillor Heather Cullingworth*)

We have held one Village Clean-Up Day, on 29th September (and two in the previous year). Due to Covid restrictions and the reluctance of TWBC to provide the usual amount of equipment attendance was limited 12 volunteers, but 22 sacks of rubbish were collected, an indication of the vast amount of litter and fly-tipping that we are suffering from. We are very grateful for their help as well as to Sean and Rosie Croucher for providing us with a headquarters, to Ivor and Carol Jauncey for the use of their field, and to Dick Munton for his truck and to the many parishioners who pick up litter in their own areas throughout the year.

We have bought 40 sets of litter picking equipment for a total cost of £363. These will be on use at our next litter pick on Saturday 22nd May, 9.30. Do join us if you can. With our own kit we will no longer be dependent on the availability of kit from TWBC and now have equipment available for short-term use by individuals

Finally I'd like to thank:

- Our Parish Clerk Emma Nightingale, for her cheerful and efficient support over the last two years.
- Our County Councillor Sean Holden and Borough Councillor, Andy Fairweather, both of whom regularly attend our council meetings as well as being ready and willing to take forward issues on our behalf whenever needed.
- Bernard Millard, our auditor.
- Simon Humphreys, appointed as PCSO last year, and Adam Osborn, our Community Warden.

I have already mentioned Lance French and Sean and Rosie Croucher. Lance's work has been recognised by KALC and a certificate presented to him earlier this year. Sean and Rosie's contribution to our village was recognised by TWBC and they too have received a certificate. In both cases FPC was pleased to recommend them for recognition. TWBC also recognised several other parishioners whose activities, often away from the public gaze, have made life better for people in our parish during a very difficult period. They are examples of what we see as the essence of parish life and we are very grateful for all they do.

It is frustrating that due to the practicalities of social distancing we cannot publically celebrate the organisations and individuals who contribute to village life. The Annual Parish Assembly is an ideal way to do so. We intend to do this at a separate meeting later in this year, in our newly improved Memorial Hall. Watch out for details in due course.

Anthony Staples

Chairman, Frittenden Parish Council

5th May 2021