

Chevening Parish Council

Annual Report for the Year to 31st March 2017

Highways

Whilst Kent Highways have indeed studied just how the junction of Westerham Road and the A25 can be improved, the reality is that there is not enough money and a change in the near future is unlikely. We will continue to raise it with KCC as it has a significant impact on village life.

On a similar note, the construction of new east facing access for the M25 is unlikely in the immediate or even near future. Whilst there has been discussion and mention of potential sites, we are unable to comment until the results of a Traffic Survey have been received. We will of course keep the Parish informed should progress ever be made with funding and proposals put forward for consideration.

I am pleased to report that in response to local concerns Chipstead Village will soon be subject to a 20 mph speed limit. This has been a lengthy process but tireless efforts by the Council and not least our Parish Clerk have ensured the project's momentum. A map will be available to study at the Annual Assembly.

Many of you will have noticed the recent improvements to the verge on Sailing Club Road, which is owned by and therefore the responsibility of the Parish to maintain, with assistance from the Sailing and Angling Clubs, and Cheshire Homes. I mention this purely as an example of where Council Funds are used, and I think it important that parishioners are aware of the quite considerable costs involved in what might be seen as perhaps trivial obligations:

Streetlights (both energy costs and service contract) £8k budget

Grass cutting and gang mowing £16.5k budget

Trees and ground maintenance (repairs to fencing etc) £10.5k budget

Some of you may not be aware of the Community Infrastructure Levy, which is a small source of income to the Parish from significant local building projects, and which we are empowered to spend on construction and repairs for the benefit of the local community. Sevenoaks District Council has been charging on qualifying development since August 2014 and to date this has amounted to £2,800. This was spent on Sailing Club Road, as above, but we were assisted by a donation of £1000 from the Bricklayers Arms.

Following on from this our continued thanks to our Speedwatch Volunteers, who will no doubt be able to assist in ensuring that the 20mph limit is observed. New volunteers will always be welcome.

Potholes and the condition of roads continue to be a problem, especially in the light of the current austerity measures. I would recommend residents make use (repeatedly if necessary) of the on line reporting facility which can be found

at <http://webapps.kent.gov.uk/KCC.KHSFaultsGIS.Web.Sites.Public/Home.aspx>

I am pleased to report that a direct request to Kent Highways for assistance in cleaning out drains along Chevening Road was answered, which will assist in the prevention of flooding, particularly in Darenth Close.

Chipstead Lake

It is perhaps unfortunate that the project to purchase Chipstead Lake has not progressed any further this year. The Parish Council view is that it cannot come anywhere near purchasing the Lake itself and that it is not sensible to spend further time and money pursuing what is a desirable aim unless and until a realistic and manageable method of purchasing it becomes known. The Council will be happy to look at any proposals sent its way.

We will however continue to oppose in the strongest terms any attempt to develop the land around it, as the owner would wish to, and which we are frequently told is opposed by the local community.

We have, in the last month been made aware that the Lake has now been sold on to a company, which may or may not have links to the previous owner Mr Deschauer. Efforts are being made to establish with some clarity just what the new owner plans to do with the Lake.

Dryhill

We are not aware of any progress in Kent County Council's proposal to sell the park. That said, it may well yet become available for sale in the coming year and it may be that the Parish Council has an opportunity to purchase it, together with a responsibility to maintain it. We would be interested in hearing any suggestions from parishioners should the site become available.

Parish Plan

We have reviewed the contents of the Parish Plan, noting that whilst some elements have been completed, e.g. Improving the childrens' playground, there are others, such as building a cycle route along the abandoned railway track, which have been found to be unrealistic. The spreadsheet showing the status of the various elements of the Parish plan will be published on the Parish Website. Your Council, and particularly Councillor Dalton, is working on a "Welcome Pack" which will be supplied to all new residents when they move into the Parish, comprising of useful information and contacts. A central theme of the Council's business is to promote Community Cohesion and Involvement, and we feel this innovation will help to achieve this. Once completed it will be available on the Parish Website as a download should you wish to use it as a reference guide.

Sports and Activities

The Council continues to work with local sports clubs to promote the availability of recreation facilities and opportunities. Whilst we note Chipstead Football Club's continued success, we remain aware of our responsibilities with regard to the local taxpayer, and a requirement for accountability with public funds.

Planning

It is appropriate to mention that your Parish Council invests a considerable amount of time in reviewing and commenting on local planning applications, but it is important to remind parishioners of what the Council can and cannot do. In the first place, Planning Applications are approved or refused by Sevenoaks District Council, not Chevening Parish Council. Our role is merely to comment on behalf of the Parish, and so far as is possible reflect local feeling. I must stress that the Parish Council does not have a right to decide on the future of any planning application, and if we object to something we are sometimes overruled, just as we often are when we support something. The decision remains the responsibility of Sevenoaks District Council. We do nevertheless review all applications, as requested, and give our considered thoughts with the overall good of the community uppermost in our minds. I would urge you all to look at planning applications which are sent to you, and to send in your thoughts to Sevenoaks District Council.

Andy Clark

14th March 2017