



Chevening Parish Council

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Dear all,

The last fortnight has been amongst the most challenging the Parish Council has ever met, and certainly a testing time for me personally. I will attempt here to give as clear a picture as possible of what your Parish Council has been doing on your behalf.

I must ask that everyone bears in mind that Chevening Parish Council is not a Local Authority, and has no Regulatory or Enforcement powers. None whatsoever. We are also not in any way responsible for supervising the activities of other independent entities within the village. That is not to say that we are not interested; far from it, but it does rather frame our ability to respond to situations as immediately and robustly as we might like to.

Within days of the Corona Virus Restrictions coming into effect we put together a system of matching local volunteers with vulnerable members of the Parish. I am delighted to report that the system has worked very well, with several hundred deliveries of prescriptions and groceries taking place over the last few weeks. I must also mention the most significant contribution of Charlotte Divall in this regard. Charlotte was instrumental in assembling a list of volunteers via Facebook, before administration of the scheme was taken over by our Parish Clerk.

Whilst Emergency "Food Parcels" were available via the Local Authority, and indeed we made them available, the Parish has not on the whole found it necessary to access them.

Your Council, from the outset of this crisis, did not wish to take over on every initiative which sprung up across the Parish. This would not have been practical, and would also been something of an insult to the perfectly sensible arrangements made by neighbours, friends and relatives.

In this regard, I note and commend the various and numerous acts of public spiritedness which have helped everyone to stay in touch and support each other. Well done all.

The situation locally has recently moved from uncomfortable but relative calm to a mass deterioration in the quality of life for anyone living in Chipstead as hundreds of visitors have descended on the area around the lake. What has been described as a "Perfect Storm" of fine weather, many people not attending school, college or work, and a lack of entertainment facilities and amenities being open has caused an unprecedented crisis. I will be honest and concede that this Parish, like every other I am aware of, was not ready for it, and is still struggling to find a solution.

The most significant factor affecting our response is the ownership of Chipstead Lake. The lake and the land around it is privately owned, and the Parish Council has no more authority over, responsibility for or control of it than it does over your private gardens. Likewise the administration of the Sailing and Angling Clubs.

We are in daily contact with Kent Police, who have so far failed to respond in a meaningful way. I have personally emailed the local police, the Community Safety Team, and the District Commander. None of them have responded with anything approaching a robust response to the problems of drug taking, under age drinking, mass trespassing, criminal damage, litter and anti social behaviour. For a variety of reasons, they simply will not engage.

I have made it clear to our local MP that when Kent Police say they will “show a presence”, sending a PCSO along to walk around serves no useful purpose. I have stressed that we need warranted police officers to intercept and deal with the many young people who are visiting the area, in particular Sailing Club Road, supplying and using drugs.

I have also written to the Chipstead Lake owners, who have so far said that if the government is prepared to pay for high resolution CCTV, then they are prepared to install it. For a private landowner I have to say that this is a completely unrealistic suggestion, and we will urge him to address his responsibilities.

Notwithstanding the outstanding work done by local volunteers, we have decided to employ staff to carry out thorough litter sweeps of the area. It is not fair for local residents to have to put up with assorted detritus and drug taking paraphernalia, or to have to put themselves at risk collecting it up.

We will also be putting up signs warning of the dangers of swimming in the lake.

Consideration has been given to closing both Sailing Club Road and the Rec Car Park, both of which are owned by the Parish Council. After extensive discussion we have concluded that for the moment this is not worth the knock on effect on day to day life in the village. This will not please everyone, but it does demonstrate the fine balancing and judgement calls necessary when considering the needs of the whole community.

Your Parish Council, all of them unpaid volunteers, are striving, and will continue to strive, to maintain the quality of life of Chevening Parish Residents. It is far from straightforward, and frequently unpleasant, but we will do our best.

An update (no doubt not as long as this one) will be posted on the Parish Council website each week.

Thank you,

Andy Clark.