

**Appledore Virtual Village Meeting
Draft Meeting Minutes
15th March 2021, 7.30pm**

Present

J Perkins (Parish Council Chairman) S Birch, T. Blaney, R Hiskey, H Hennig, S Honor, L Jenkins, A Knight, B & T Knight, J McNally, G Morgan, F Smith, D Stephens, A Templeton, C Wilkinson, D Winter, County Councillor M Hill, District Councillor M Burgess, M Philo (Clerk). Gary?????

Apologies were received from L Kerrigan and C Vane.

Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone. Local groups had not been asked to report due to Covid-19 having virtually closed down all activities.

Minutes of the last Parish Meeting

The minutes of the 18th March 2019 were agreed. Proposed by Roger Hiskey and seconded by Charles Wilkinson.

Report from the Chairman of Appledore Parish Council

Every year I say that it has been a bit of a challenge; a bit like Brexit, and here I am saying it yet again! It certainly has been a year like no other.

As this council year draws to a close, and this is my last year as chairman, it has been an honour and privilege to serve residents of Appledore.

I need to start by thanking Lyndsey Jenkins for running the Covid-19 Buddy Help Scheme. This began with a leaflet drop and many phone calls and emails later the system was in place to help your neighbours, and a great success it proved to be. A big thank you to all who gave up their time, and those that still are, to become helpers.

If you would all like to cast your minds back 20 years, the Parish Council of the day had the chance to purchase the field next to the Doctors Surgery from KCC.

Luckily, they had the foresight to do so and paid £3250 for it. I believe a comment at the time was " we will never be able to sell it for development as we will never get everyone to agree on how to spend the money ". Times don't change!

But at midday on Friday 12th March, the sale was finally completed. The hall refurbishment will begin in about a month. This has been a monumental amount of work and a big thank you must go to Chris Vane for the hours of work he has put in.

During the year Charles stepped back from his Highways duties, to allow his able assistant Helen to take up the reins. Much has been achieved by the pair of them - notably the speed reduction and improved signage. There is still more work to be done in Phase 2 of the Highways Improvement Plan, but this has been delayed for all the obvious reasons. Thank you: Helen and Charles.

Roger has attended a seemingly endless amount of Zoom meetings set up by various organisations, from green agendas to planning policy. He always follows this up with very concise reports, so thank you Roger for your efforts.

All the meetings have been on zoom this year, so sadly Derek has not been able to attend due to his internet problems. He has beavered away in the background; so, thank you Derek for your contributions in difficult circumstances.

A big thanks to Beverly Gray and Tom Henessey for their continued hard work keeping the village clean and tidy. Bev has obviously been doing the toilets, which have been fully refurbished and look fabulous.

Mary... Thank you for all your hard work throughout the year.

Council members.... an enormous thank you to you all, without your tireless efforts we would not have achieved what we have, and as we hopefully get the better of the virus, we can look forward to a brighter future and a normal life for everyone.

Report from County Councillor Mike Hill

This report provides an update on some of the work Kent County Council (KCC) has undertaken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic over the past twelve months.

It is almost a year since the country went into a national lockdown in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic and the restrictions and measures put in place to control it have had an impact on virtually all aspects of life. From the start of the pandemic, Kent County Council (KCC) has needed to respond to a huge number of unprecedented challenges, urgently adapting how it works and working with our partners to find new ways to continue to provide our services and meet people's needs across the county.

In the summer of 2020, the challenge for KCC shifted from that of immediate response to starting to address the economic and social consequences of COVID-19 and planning a route to recovery. The period from October 2020 to early January 2021 was characterised by a much larger upswing in COVID-19 cases than in the first wave. The County Council's focus had to switch again, and huge efforts were put into contact tracing activity and asymptomatic testing as well as supporting the county through another lockdown. The detection of the 'Kent variant', resulted in a period of intensive partnership work as authorities took action to minimise its impact.

The County Council's five crucial actions for responding to COVID-19 are:

- Reminding residents of the importance of adhering to rules and guidance;
- Developing widespread testing, both for people who are symptomatic and symptom free;

- Effective contact tracing; and
- Explaining and enforcing rules for businesses.
- As far as possible continuing to deliver public services to our residents.

Delivering with our partners

The Kent Resilience Forum (KRF) is a multi-agency partnership to plan for and respond to emergencies. It includes representatives from key local public services and facilities such as Local Authorities, Police, Fire, NHS, Environment Agency and many others. Kent County Council is a lead agency within the KRF. From March 2020, KRF's strategic command structures were activated to oversee vital workstreams to respond to the pandemic as it took hold. This enabled partners to be able to leverage in support locally and from Government and apply a programme management approach to what were diverse tasks and responsibilities. This included the convening of Cells and workstreams.

Whilst the Districts were leading on the co-ordination and provision of Community Hubs, KCC added resilience and capacity to the process by developing the Kent Together webpage and phone line. As of 28 February 2021, 5944 requests have been made to Kent Together.

The Kent Support and Assistance Service (KSAS) has worked with the Districts and other statutory partners to provide discretionary support in the form of supermarket vouchers, school uniforms, white goods, school meal vouchers, and much more.

The voluntary and community sector (VCS) has played a central part in supporting individuals and communities during the pandemic. In the early stages of lockdown, the decision was taken to award £200K to Kent Community Foundation's (KCF) Emergency Fund. This was in recognition of the need to provide support to VCS organisations facing financial difficulty due to lost income. In December KCC launched a Strategic Recovery Fund to provide grants to the VCS to support adaptation and recovery post COVID-19. 145 applications were received, and it is hoped that all eligible applications can be funded.

Impact on Business

The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been severe: the UK economy contracted by around 11.4% in 2020. Within this, the sectoral impact has been diverse, with 'shutdown sectors' in hospitality, retail and the creative arts especially badly hit. The Government's emergency response has been substantial. It is likely that total Government financial support to businesses in Kent and Medway amounted to around £2.5 billion in 2020. This is in addition to payments made to employers to retain staff furloughed under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

In August 2020, Kent and Medway Economic Partnership adopted the Kent & Medway Renewal and Resilience Plan. The Plan sets out principles to support the county's recovery and outlines workstreams through which activity is being driven to support business and jobs.

Public Health

KCC's Public Health team have been working closely with the NHS and Public Health England (PHE) at both local and regional level since the beginning of the pandemic. Public Health consultants have provided expert advice on response and recovery planning and work closely on a daily basis with NHS colleagues to address regional issues across the health system. Consultants were involved in the initial rollout of vaccinations to health and social care workers (particularly in care homes) and are now working with partners to address vaccine uptake.

Testing of symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals is key to managing infections. The Testing Cell provides leadership in all aspects of testing, including the setting up of ten Local Symptomatic Testing Sites (LTS), two Regional Testing Sites (RTS) and the direction of Mobile Testing Units (MTU) where needed. There has been additional testing arranged for care homes where outbreaks are suspected. Asymptomatic testing for COVID-19 was initiated in December and with initial military assistance, 24 sites have now been set up across the County using Lateral Flow Devices.

KCC and partners have worked together to understand the impact of the pandemic on both public mental health and mental health services. Advice and support have been provided on KCC's website and a 'One Stop Shop' for mental health information has been developed with partners. Suicide prevention work has been enhanced through monitoring and modelling of risk. Vulnerable groups have been identified and offered psychological and emotional support including for those with existing mental health problems, carers and frontline workers. Support for people who have been suddenly bereaved has also been commissioned.

Adult Social Care and Strategic Commissioning

Adult Social Care, along with other KCC frontline services took immediate steps in responding to the enfolding challenges associated with the COVID-19 crisis. The Directorate worked tirelessly to ensure that there was appropriate support in place for all providers, including the distribution of much needed Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

As care providers in the county came under financial pressures as elsewhere, and to help maintain the resilience of the local market, KCC stepped in and responded with practical financial support by making two payments totalling £13.5 million, to all residential, nursing, homecare and supported living and supporting independence providers, (including providers located outside Kent) looking after people placed by the council.

Children's Social Care

Throughout the pandemic, keeping vulnerable children safe and supported has continued to be a key priority. Integrated Children's Services have adapted their service

provision as required and in the early stages of the pandemic made thousands of calls to vulnerable children and young people to check on their welfare as well as maintaining face to face visits where needed. Since September, routine face to face visits have resumed across all children's social work and early help units, taking care to follow infection prevention and social distancing measures.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the pre-existing pressures on the county to receive Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). KCC was forced to take the difficult decision in August that it was unable to accept new arrivals until a solution could be found by the Home Office to fairly distribute the children to other councils. As numbers of new arrivals dropped going into the winter, and some young people were transferred, these duties were resumed on 7 December.

Schools and Education

KCC has provided information, advice and support to schools throughout the pandemic to assist them in adapting with the changing circumstances. There has been a constant dialogue between KCC and Headteachers. KCC has offered a wide range of support to help schools and families adapt to home learning. KCC has helped to allocate IT devices to vulnerable Kent children through the Government's IT devices initiative to support remote learning.

The pandemic and necessary restrictions have had a significant impact on the lives of children and young people and providing emotional and mental health support is an important priority. HeadStart Kent is an existing scheme that offers a wide range of advice, information and toolkits to parents, staff and schools to improve the emotional and mental wellbeing of children and young people.

Since the start of lockdown, KCC and partners have developed a virtual youth offer, delivering a range of exciting and innovative activities to young people and helping them stay connected to other young people.

Community Wardens

During the past 12 months of the pandemic, the KCC Community Warden Service has been reprioritised to support the most vulnerable in our communities, working alongside the Community Hubs. Community Wardens have supported between 3,600 and 4,500 vulnerable individuals during the lockdowns. This is in addition to their role of providing information, advice and guidance to their communities on the frequently changing/evolving COVID rules. It is anticipated that the demand for the Community Warden Service will increase as restrictions begin to ease and the warden role begins to broaden out again, as the associated issues with public spaces reopening and a return to group gathering will require close multi-agency working to resolve.

Trading Standards

Since March 2020 Trading Standards has been given additional responsibility for the enforcement of the Regulations covering the restriction and closure of businesses, to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Over 4,000 referrals have been received from the public covering issues such as scams, fake PPE, and prohibited shops trading. The service is providing advice and guidance to the public and businesses on COVID-19 restrictions. The service is tackling the proliferation of COVID-related scams and financial abuse by implementing a social media and digital plan to inform and help protect residents and businesses.

Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) and Waste

Social distancing measures and a booking system have been installed at the HWRCs, to provide a COVID-safe environment for employees and residents.

Libraries and Registration Services

During the closure of libraries, work was quickly undertaken to develop and promote digital library services and enable easy online joining so customers could gain immediate access to e-books, e-audiobooks, e-magazines and e-newspapers. Use of these resources has increased by 94%. A varied programme of virtual activities has been delivered throughout the year. As the initial lockdown eased, Home Library and Postal Loan services returned and a new book service 'Select and Collect' was developed for people to get books without having to enter a library. When possible, use of computers has been provided where essential. A phone befriending service was quickly established from April for vulnerable libraries customers. The LRA service is proposing a phased recovery programme that will see the service take sensible, safe steps over the next three months. LRA's recovery closely reflects the Government's roadmap: Essential library PC use resumes from 15th March and the reopening of libraries for browsing and study space commences from 12th April.

In March 2020, all Registration services were suspended with the exception of death registrations. As key workers, the Registration teams across the county have delivered 16,247 death registrations since 1st April 2020, a 26% increase on last year's figures. Face to face birth registration appointments were re-established in June, working to clear the backlog of 4,000 outstanding births. Socially distanced wedding ceremonies were introduced in July, although from November's lockdown only emergency ceremonies were allowed to continue and birth registrations were again suspended. March 2021 sees the return of face-to-face birth appointments and ceremonies (from 29th March)

The Archive search room will reopen in April for bookable appointments.

Country Parks and Public Rights of Access (PROW)

KCC's Country Parks were able to stay open throughout the pandemic, with only a brief 6-week closure of the carparks during the first lockdown. Individual Parks have been between 50% and 220% busier than normal. PROW have experienced up to a tenfold increase in users on certain routes. Both Parks and PROW attracted a considerable number of new users across the year, which reflects the value of these local assets particularly in contributing to the wellbeing of our residents during this challenging time.

Coroner Service

There has been a significant increase in numbers of new death referrals to the Coroner Service. Straight-forward inquest hearings have been conducted virtually, but a substantial backlog of more complex inquests (with or without a jury) has developed. Existing court facilities were not COVID-19 compliant for jury cases and so an additional venue was established. The increased workload is expected to continue through summer 2021 and may run into the next winter period. Courts have resumed a full timetable to address the backlog.

The new variant of COVID-19 put significant pressure on the NHS and in turn, its mortuary capacity, creating some delays from point of death to releasing the deceased into the care of a Funeral Director. In response to the escalating death rates in December, Aylesford Temporary Place of Rest (TPoR) was set up to provide additional capacity to support the hospital mortuaries across the County. It was mobilised within 48 hours and for the first six weeks of 2021 and the facility held between 130 and 200 deceased at any one time. Over the course of its operation, KCC has closely monitored and responded to the NHS Trust and funeral directors' needs for chiller, bariatric and freezer provision at Aylesford TPoR. Modelling analysis indicates that, by mid-March, hospitals will be back within their mortuary capacity and Aylesford TPoR will no longer be required.

Transport

The Department for Transport (DfT) allocated the County Council £1.6m for Emergency Temporary Active Travel schemes in June 2020 to encourage walking and cycling. The aim was to create safe spaces for these activities to continue the significant growth they experienced during the first lockdown. Due to the deadline imposed by DfT and the prospect of losing significant inward investment in the County, twenty-four schemes were implemented in the first tranche without it being possible to undertake the usual public consultation. Subsequently a number of these schemes were dropped in response to the feedback received about them. However, the majority remain in place and KCC was successful in gaining a further £6.4m for larger, permanent schemes for the second tranche of the programme, which are now the subject of full public consultation and engagement in order to implement them successfully.

Buses

The Public Transport team have supported bus operators to adapt to reduced demand and new restrictions. This has included supporting them to develop new cleaning and

operating processes to keep users safe and adapting network provision to changing demand over the last year. KCC has supported bus operators with continuity payments to keep the network stable.

Councillor Hill will be standing for re-election on the 6th May. There will be no campaigning due to covid-19 just leaflet drops. He had enjoyed supporting the parish council which is one of the most active, in particular on the highways front.

The financial difficulties that the county council faced this year are not only the result of the pandemic. The grants from central government had eased the pain. It will be even harder to balance the budget next time.

Central government has decided that Marston is now no longer required for lorry parking but everyone will have to wait and see what happens. The Xmas border closure should not happen again.

Report from District Councillor Mick Burgess

We all know that the past 12 months have been unique in the history of local government. Most of the decisions were passed down from Central Government. The Leader of the Council together with the CEO have been publishing very frequent updates over the year to Parish Councils and others.

Brexit & 10a

The main and most obvious outcome for Ashford Borough with Brexit, so far, has been the movement and parking of lorries. Currently, but ever changing, there is parking in Kent at Dover TAP; Operation Brock; New Sevington Site; Manston airport & TAP256 plus of course the regular Truckstop's at Waterbrook; Stop 24 Dover Harbour. All of which has been helped by the completion of junction 10a of the M20.

Covid

Residents will no doubt have been keeping a close eye on developments regarding the spread of Coronavirus (COVID – 19), especially in light of Public Health England (PHE) confirming the first case in Kent on Monday 2 March 2020

On Monday 15th June 2020, the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund provided the council access to an allocated fund of up to £116,814 to put in place measures to establish a safe trading environment for businesses and customers, particularly in high streets. So, it was disappointing that a second national lockdown had to be introduced. Concerned by the rising numbers of COVID-19 cases across the country, the Government's response to control the spread of the virus is to return to the mantra that underpinned the first lockdown – stay home, protect the NHS, save lives. Subsequently we had our third lockdown which we are now very carefully coming out of. Most of the arrangements that I mentioned at the beginning of this pandemic are still operating, others have been stood down but with easy access to restart if necessary.

Finance

Ashford's reputation as the best location to start a business was been confirmed by data. There were 1,635 business start-ups based in the borough in 2019, more than any other district or borough in Kent. With a 9.5% increase in company formations in 2020, according to the Centre for Entrepreneurs and Companies House, Ashford is best placed to continue seeing a growth in start-ups year-on-year

As we are all aware these figures have taken a terrific hit due to the pandemic. Everyone in these industries is keeping their fingers crossed that Covid will continue to subside so they can open up again.

Climate Control

In Jan 2020 in order to support this initiative, it was proposed to offer ten free tree saplings to each parish, as an incentive to participate in this project. In return, ABC asked each parish to provide simple data, size and number of trees for example on the tree stock held within land owned by each parish council. ABC itself is in the process of planting 6,666 trees by Aspire at Chilmington and across the Borough

A CLIMATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE has been set up by ABC and is continuing to meet virtually as have all the other committee meetings of the ABC since the start of the pandemic. Not only does this help to control the spread of the virus, but also reduces the amount of travel required by about 95% and therefore the emissions are less as well which helps the climate agenda

Tenterden

Tenterden among UK's best town centres and has been named the UK's third best high street in a national survey by retail experts and analysts Harper Dennis Hobbs. The research looked at a thousand shopping areas across the country, considering several factors.

Census

Census 2021 to be held on 21st March, will provide a snapshot of modern society which everyone will benefit from Households across Ashford borough will be asked to take part in Census 2021 this spring. I would like to stress how important it is for us to know who lives in our borough so that ABC can make sure our services are tailored to the residents

Refuse Collections

During the bank holiday periods, recycling and refuse collections may take place on different days. Residents can look up their bin collection day, download their collection calendars and report missed collections.

Council Housing Enquiries

The Housing team is working with new process for dealing with enquiries from members and also our MP, which will run as a pilot for six months. This is to ensure that the enquiries on housing issues are tracked and responded to in a timely manner. This will also allow each enquiry to go to the correct team leader for investigation. When this pilot is finished and successful, hopefully the plan is to roll it out to the rest of the borough.

Parish Council Grant

The ABC Overview & Scrutiny Budget Task Group highlighted the need to consider a one-off grant to those parishes disproportionately affected by the proposed removal of Council Tax Support Grant. A one-off grant passed by full council which is to be funded in 2021/22 from the Service Contingency Reserve now that the 2021/22 budget has been approved.

A resident stressed that the district council needs to help with rejuvenating the high street. Tenterden rents are at London levels and thus prohibitive to local businesses.

Mick and Michael were thanked for their regular attendance at the parish council meetings and their support.

When questioned about the possibility of Ashford Borough Council losing its authority for planning due to the backlog of applications, councillor Burgess advised that there had been a risk about two years ago but a consultant had been employed to resolve issue and a new head of planning employed. Currently there was no fear of this.

Public Questions

Residential Enabling Car Park Court Lodge

A resident advised that Court Developments had advised him that if the application for a sixth property in the wooded area along the road was refused, they would moth ball the site. The council was unaware of the comment.

Councillor Burgess as part of the planning committee, regularly sees developers apply to increase the number of dwelling to maximise profits, just like any other business. The current application for a bungalow with access from narrows would be viewed as a separate application to the car park. The council would be considering how to respond to the application at the April meeting.

Residents and the parish council are regularly frustrated by the planning system and several residents voiced their opinion that it appeared pointless that residents and the parish council were consulted because planning officers gave little weight to their comments. A call was made for the district councillor to support the parish more and for developers to be held to the original approved plans. District councillors had reduced influence on the outcome of applications as most applications are delegated to officers. Applications in parishes rarely exceed the threshold of 50 dwellings and above to automatically be considered by the planning committee of 12 councillors.

No.1 The Street

Concern was expressed whether the commercial unit will be used. If not, will it be left empty. The concern was that the unit would be converted to a residence. Councillor Burgess advised that listed buildings laws make alterations very difficult.

Future Residential Development for the Village

Councillors were asked about their opinion on any further development and preserving the charm of Appledore. Restriction on future development in Appledore are provided by the Local Plan and policies Hou3 and Hou5 relating to the built confines in the parish.

Village Plan

It was suggested that the village plan should be updated. An update after the refurbishment work to the hall had been completed might be an appropriate moment.

Section 102 (community levy applied to large developments) Funds for the Allotments

In response to query it was advised that the money would only become available two thirds of the way through the residential build on the former council field.

Update on Broadband

The price quoted for the scheme would require additional funding as the KCC grant pot was empty though there was a possibility that KCC would bring out another grant. Rural for G was suggested as another route available to improve broadband speed for some properties.

Elections

Concern was expressed about the recent low turnover of councillors in the parish council, preferring that the democratic process of elections be upheld.

Meeting Closed

9.00pm