

LEIGH PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held on 18th April 2011 in the Small Village Hall, Leigh commencing at 8pm under the chairmanship of Cllr. Colin Stratton-Brown.

1. **APPOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Cllrs. Sykes, Johnston and Croft.
PRESENT: Cllrs. David Bennie, John Knock and Stratton-Brown. Sgt. O'Toole and PCSO Ann Kingscott, parishioners Sally Bresnahan, Helen Everett, Beverley Doherty, Linda Paige, Patrick and Diane Wood, and the Clerk Janice Butler.
2. **MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY HELD ON 19TH APRIL 2010.**
These were approved and signed by the Chairman.
3. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PARISH ASSEMBLY HELD ON 19TH APRIL 2010**
None.
4. **PRESENTATION FROM NEIL GUNN OF THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY**
Neil Gunn presented to the meeting the issues facing the Leigh Barrier. The Barrier was built in 1982 and after the 2000 flood, it was decided that procedures needed to be revised. We are more likely now to experience more frequent flooding before water is stored. From extensive research it was found that there were 6 options for flood defence, ranging from storing water at Edenbridge, or Leigh and making the barrier bigger, which would cost in the region of £5-8m. The national spend is around £400m (decreased from £600m) and as the needs for Edenbridge are greater than for Tonbridge, it is unlikely that changes to the Leigh barrier will happen in the near future. Neil circulated maps that showed what would happen at current and potential impounding levels. The Chairman asked whether an extra metre on the barrier would be followed by an extra metre on embankments, to which Neil replied that the rail line, bridge and embankment to village had to be protected although detailed design has not been carried out as there is no approval to raise the barrier. The Chairman reminded the meeting that the original agreement was that the land would not flood more than 12 days a year. County Cllr. Lake asked why houses are allowed to be built on flood plains, eg. Ashford. Neil replied that the Environment would not 'allow' but were consulted by local authorities, and he believed that building on flood plains was not sustainable. He was also asked about the effect of polytunnels, and stated that it was difficult to reach a conclusion whether these worsen flooding, although there are steps that can be taken to alleviate drainage: if the issue was well managed then there should be little problem.

There followed reports from the following bodies.

5. **POLICE REPORT**
Sgt. O'Toole and PCSO Anne Kingscott gave their report noting that there had been 32 reported crimes committed in the parish during the past year, which was an increase of 1 from last year. This included 15 cases of burglary/robbery and theft, 8 cases of criminal damage, and 3 of motor vehicle theft. They observed that Leigh was still a very safe place to live, and reported that the annual figures for Peshurst and Chiddingstone Causeway were 40 and 38 respectively. For the moment at least the problems around the Green have decreased. In response to questions, Sgt O'Toole confirmed that patrols would continue, especially as neighbourhood policing was going to be increased and placed at the forefront of policy. Generally speaking the crimes were committed by adults rather than those under 18, and from outside of the parish. Copies of a list of local police contact names and numbers were left at the meeting.
6. **SEVENOAKS DISTRICT COUNCIL**
The Clerk read out the report from District Councillor Mrs Alison Cook who had sent apologies for her absence. It had been a particularly difficult year for the District Council (SDC), dominated by the need to find £4million in savings over the next few years. Despite a dramatic reduction in Government grant SDC has made a commitment to hold Council Tax at the current level until 2012/13. Savings are being achieved by a combination of initiatives, working with other local authorities to share service delivery and through partnerships with the voluntary sector – an example of this being the gifting of the minibuses in order to preserve this important service for older people and those with disabilities. The reorganisation of the refuse collection rounds has saved £100k whilst still retaining the weekly collection for both black and white sacks. Any

redundancy is seen as a last resort, fortunately this has been kept to an absolute minimum with staff either taking early retirement or being redeployed or through redefining job specifications. SDC is seen as one of the best financially run councils in the country and the Leader of the Council, Peter Fleming, was invited to address a Parliamentary Select Committee on budgetary best practice. The Core Strategy and the Local Development Framework have involved a substantial amount of time and resources. In early January the SDC learned that the Inspector had found the Core Strategy to be sound requiring only minor amendments. Amongst other planning matters the Strategy details how housing numbers required over the next fifteen years can be achieved providing a sustainable mixture of housing tenure while at the same time retaining the Council's strict Green Belt policy. Locally the provision of affordable housing in Chiddingstone Causeway and Charcott has been completed, allowing more young families to remain in the area.

Despite the financial pressures, SDC has continued to fund many local voluntary organisations including the Citizens Advice Bureaux of Edenbridge and Sevenoaks and Swanley under a three year Service Level Agreement.

The Select Committees have been monitoring a wide range of issues from regular updates on the proposals for the new Pembury Hospital to the planned improvements to rural stations by the rail operators. The Biggin Hill management gave an account of their activities whilst the services provided by Arriva and the other transport providers were put under the microscope. Members also received twice yearly from Sencio and the Stag Community Arts Centre.

Almost a third of district councillors will be standing down at the end of the current four year term in May. New members will need to ensure that the budgetary measures which have been put in place remain on track and that further opportunities for developing shared services are pursued vigorously. SDC will need to implement the emerging Localism Bill and take on its obligations in respect of preventative health and well-being in light of the pending changes within the NHS as GP consortia take over responsibility from the Health Trusts.

Chairman Stratton-Brown commented that the Green Belt appears to be safe but the impact of the Localism Bill will become clear later.

7. KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

County Councillor Peter Lake reported that they are setting the budget in the most difficult fiscal circumstances that has been faced for a very long time. The coalition government has pledged to remove £149bn national budget deficit over the lifetime of the current parliament and it is inevitable that local government will have a significant part to play. Kent County Council (KCC) have undertaken an authority-wide reorganisation which will be the key to deliver savings, but does mean the loss of more than 1500 posts over the next four years.

Some grants from central Government are being cut and there are increasing demands on council services, particularly in Childrens' and Adult Social Care, yet in difficult economic times KCC are keen not to increase the burden on local council tax payers. Therefore the council tax will be frozen for 2011/12 but this will have a significant effect on services to the public. At the same time KCC are being asked to join closely with Health and as a result Public Health is moving under the KCC umbrella. As part of the reorganisation of the NHS there will be a Health and Wellbeing Board. At the start of last year KCC were told that there was to be a 'blitz' on potholes and certainly there were real signs of progress in this area but Cllr. Lake expressed frustration at seeing potholes painted up by the Highways inspector and then no work undertaken and the painting fades away. Kent Highway Services has been reorganized and hopefully we will see a much better service in the future. Cllr. Lake referred to the dropped kerbs on the footpath alongside Hall Place which are still outstanding and were promised 18 months ago but at least the areas have now been marked up for the work.

Leigh Primary School remained in good shape and achieved excellent results. Like many schools it remains very popular and there have had a number of appeals from local parents desperate to get their children to schools in Cllr. Lake's division. He has indicated that he is prepared to offer £2,500 from his member fund towards the new classroom with a similar sum of money coming from the same fund next year. Both Cllr. Lake and Sir John Stanley MP remain concerned about changes to the funding formula for our schools although they agree that a simplified more transparent funding arrangement is better but they are determined to protect village schools because they do play an essential role at the heart of our community.

Cllr. Lake thanked the chairman, the councillors and clerk for their patience in helping to deal with the various issues over the past year.

Cllr. Knock asked that the continuation of the Saturday bus service from Leigh to Tonbridge be investigated by Cllr. Lake, and School Governor Beverley Doherty thanked Cllr. Lake for his support during the last year.

8. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT OF ACITIVITIES 2010/11

1 Membership: There have been no changes in councillors during the year, the final year before elections to the new council. Councillors were David Bennie, Peter Croft, Rick Dyton, Alan Johnston, John Knock, Graham Marchant, Heather Powell, Roger Sykes and myself. Roger and Heather are not standing for election and we thank them for their contribution, Roger has been a Councillor since 1999 and has been a great help with the Finance and Planning. Heather joined the Council in 2005 we are especially grateful for her contribution over the question of a playground. During the year Alan Johnston underwent major heart surgery and he is now recuperating. We wish him well for a full recovery.

2 Playground: during the year the questionnaire was distributed and the replies analysed. Council came to the view that there was not sufficient support for a playground on either The Green or the school playing field so decided not to proceed further.

3 Finance: we were fortunate that our finance is in the capable hands of Roger Sykes and Janice. Roger regrets he is unable to be present so Janice will present the Finance Report.

4 Planning: the Parish Council considered 47 planning applications, an increase from 34 last year. Council either supported or had no objections to 42, commented on 4 and opposed 1. We understand that Barchester Health Care refuses to accept the decision of the Inspector who rejected the application and continues to pursue this through legal action. The Council was saddened by the loss of the GlaxoSmithKline research facility at the Powder Mills. At present the site continues to be zoned for industrial use.

5 Roads: potholes are an issue. When notified, our Clerk can take them up with KCC highways so please let her know of any you spot. Councillors would have preferred to see more salt used to clear the snow from roads and pavements as we believe that salt is more effective than grit and it leaves less mess. Our Clerk continues to attend meetings to push for a footpath linking Knotley Hall and the existing pavement opposite St. Luke's church. Sadly, despite pressure, Kent Highways is not proposing to resurface Greenview Avenue.

6 Transport: the Parish Council was disappointed that SDC is withdrawing the bus service for the elderly and infirm but it is hoped that voluntary organisations may step in. The Parish Council will consider giving support to these organisations when more details are known. There have been no comments on the bus services to Tonbridge. Turning to the Hildenborough station service, regrettably some drivers on the evening runs continue to depart just as the trains arrive. However we are grateful to KCC for continuing with this service but it could do with more passengers. Regrettably, despite continuing pressure from our MP, Sir John Stanley and KCC and the local railway passenger associations, we are stuck with the hourly service with no direct trains to Gatwick. South East Rail's failure to provide services and information on the main line from Hildenborough during the snow was most disappointing.

7 Village Halls: we must again express our thanks to Helen Everett, Alan Johnston and the rest of the Management Committee team for the vastly improved state of the halls. We also thank them for managing the finances so well that they have not called on the council for help paying for the insurance.

8 Environment: KCC Landscape Services continue to maintain the Green for us and it has continued to look well. We have agreed that Shaylor's Fun Fair should come again this year, opening on the 17th, 18th and 19th June. Brian Brooker cuts the grass round the War Memorial and many thanks to him for keeping it looking so attractive. Burslems has cleaned the Memorial and it is looking much better and the inscriptions are more legible. Again I would like to make a special mention of all the work cutting grass, trimming trees and general tidying up around the parish carried out by Peter Croft. We are very fortunate to be able to call on Peter whenever something crops up.

9 Aged Persons Dwellings: work was carried out to enable us to join SDC's scheme of accredited landlords, as well as to gain an improved Energy Performance certificate to meet modern standards. An annual Gas Check certificate and an Electrical Safety certificate were arranged and the minor works necessary have been carried out.

10 Youth: after four pilot youth club meetings, efforts to provide activities for the 11 to 16 year old through PayPlace sadly came to nothing as it was considered there are not enough in that age range to produce a critical mass.

I would like to thank all our councillors for their work and support over the last four years. It has been a pleasure as well as a privilege being Chairman. We must also thank District Councillor Alison Cook and County Councillor Peter Lake for all their work and the time they give up to looking after our affairs and their regular attendance at our meetings despite their other commitments.

It is very true to say that the council could not function effectively without a capable and efficient Clerk, and we must thank Janice for all her hard work over the last year.

Beverley Doherty asked whether the Parish Council had been consulted on the closure by SDC of the public conveniences in Leigh, and the Chairman replied that the costs of maintenance and repair due to vandalism made it prohibitive to take on.

9. PARISH COUNCIL FINANCE REPORT

The Clerk reported on the Parish Council's finance for the year 2010-11. The precept granted by Sevenoaks District Council was £18,500 and will remain at this level for 2011-12. Other income includes £7,847 from the rental of the Aged Person Dwellings (APD) and £400 from Shayler's Fun Fair. Total expenditure for the year was £22,667 and includes £4,840 on the upkeep and enhancement of the parish eg. grass cutting, £2,665 on maintaining and improving the APDs and £2,075 on grants to local organisations. The internal audit for 2009-10 was again generously carried out by Colin Stevens, and he has kindly agreed to do the same for 2010-11. His reports are included in the Annual Return submitted to the Audit Commission, which were approved for 2009-10 and will be submitted for this financial year by the end of May.

10. LEIGH UNITED CHARITIES

Sally Bresnahan informed that the charity receives money from the Saxby Wood freehold and the income for the last financial year was £47k and expenditure was £42k. There were 95 beneficiaries at the end of January 2011, with 79 coming from Leigh. Most of the beneficiaries received one off Christmas gifts, followed by monthly costs for fuel. Other donations were associated with children at school, funeral costs and rental assistance.

11. CRANDALLS CHARITY BEQUEST

Colin Stratton-Brown stated that the charity was set up in accordance with the will of Richard Crandall who was living at Holmwood, Vine Court Road, Sevenoaks when he died on 11th April 1932. Under his will, after various bequests his relations, he left the remainder of his estate in three equal parts, two parts to be invested in the names of the Trustees appointed by the Will and of the Rector of the Parish of Chiddingstone and the remaining part in the names of the trustees and the Vicar of the Parish of Leigh. Mr Crandall directed that the income of the part called "the Leigh Fund" shall be applied for the benefit of persons of whatever age who reside in the Parish of Leigh and who by reason of illness, age, physical incapacity or infirmity are in want of assistance. He provided that a Leigh Committee consisting of the Trustees and the Vicar of Leigh, the Churchwardens and the Chairman of Leigh Parish Council should administer the distribution.

For 2010 the local committee received income from the trust of £2,800 and made grants of £2,640 including £600 to the school, £200 to the Tennis Club to help with the provision of tennis for Leigh Primary school pupils and £1,300 to the church to support the work of youth worker David Bennie.

12. LEIGH PRIMARY SCHOOL REPORT

Headmistress Annie Lawrence sent her apologies and Chairman of the Governors Beverley Doherty reported that it had been an outstanding year for the school, achieving a 'Good' Ofsted report with 7 areas 'outstanding'. Mrs Wallace Holman departed as headmistress after 9 years at Easter, to be replaced by Annie Lawrence who will be focusing on standards of teaching and learning, such as the different ways pupils learn. There is a new Curriculum Head, Chris Taylor, who will be introducing a new pupil tracking system ensuring that there will be a progress meeting six times a year for each pupil. Class 4 has been refurbished, and the new dedicated computer suite was very popular. The school has been reaccredited for the green flag as an eco school, and the pond at the school playing field has been formally opened, dedicated to Harry Lucas who bequeathed money to a wildlife area. Pupil numbers are increasing, with 142 in September 2011 and 150+ anticipated for 2012. The major challenge is that due to full capacity despite the addition of a conservatory, there is a need to extend. All options have been explored - there is planning permission for a mezzanine floor for Class 5 which cost around £96k, to be hopefully completed by September 212. Funding sources are within the school, KCC and PTA. Beverley thanked the volunteers to the steering committee and other support in the community, and welcomed

suggestions on how to further improve communication and relationships between the school and the outside community.

The Chairman wanted to acknowledge Beverley's involvement in the Royal Wedding celebration and thanked her on behalf of all.

13 VILLAGE HALLS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Helen Everett presented her Chairman's report, which detailed the focus placed by the Committee on the updating of the outside of the Halls and reviewing and overhauling the day to day procedures for running the Halls efficiently, which includes a new Health and Safety Policy. The Halls have been running at a profit for the last few years enabling the Committee to build a fund for regular maintenance. This has included refurbishment of the Small Hall kitchen, new noticeboards for both Halls, new outside lighting and signage, updating of fire alarms and emergency lighting systems, replacement of dead cherry tree at the front and landscaping of the Doctor's surgery area. Helen thanked the members of the Royal British Legion (RBL) for giving their time and skills. There have been some problems with the new lighting which will be fixed during the summer. The charges for the Small Hall were raised for the first time in the 10 years whilst still maintaining the policy of keeping charges as low as possible for the community. Although the annual accounts are still being finalised, regular income from pre-school, RBL, Doctor's surgery and various clubs it is anticipated that profit will be around £4,000. All arrears from energy bills have been paid. Over the next 12 months plans include redecoration of the Large Hall and purchasing of new chairs, refurbishment of windows, further signage, writing a history of the Halls, overhauling the hearing loop system and installing new outside lights.

14 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND ITEMS FOR REPORTING

Diane Wood raised concerns about the increased use of the pavement by cyclists and wondered if anything could be done. A general discussion took place with suggestions including a mention to the Play Group and the police for ideas. County Cllr. Lake stated that parking on the pavement was also a problem, particularly for those with prams.

The Chairman thanked all for their attendance and reports.

Cllr. Knock thanked the Chairman for his service to the Parish Council over the last year.

The meeting closed at 10pm.

Signed.....

Chairman

Date.....