

**MINUTES OF THE LEIGH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD IN THE SMALL HALL,
HIGH STREET, LEIGH ON MONDAY 23RD MARCH 2015 AT 8.00PM**

PRESENT: Cllr. C. Stratton-Brown (Chairman), Cllr B. Doherty, Cllr S. Smith and Cllr R. Swallow
APOLOGIES: District Cllr A. Cook and County Cllr C. Pearman
ABSENT: Cllr D. Bennie, Cllr P. Croft, Cllr A. Johnston and Cllr G. Marchant
IN ATTENDANCE: The Rt. Hon. Sir John Stanley MP, District Cllr Jill Davison (Chairman SDC),
Mr Neil Gunn (Environment Agency), PCSO Anne KingScott,
Mrs L. Kleinschmidt (Clerk) and members of the public

Cllr Stratton-Brown welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly The Rt. Hon. Sir John Stanley as he kindly agreed to attend the Annual Parish Meeting for only 25 minutes as he had return to London in order to cast his vote in The House of Commons.

Sir John Stanley said that this was his very last constituency engagement before he retires as MP after the 41 years of his parliamentary career. Flooding has been a huge issue for his constituents to the east of the Leigh Flood Storage Area but pressure from MPs has ensured that the Government has agreed to fund £17.7 million towards the project to increase capacity of the storage area in Leigh and work to improve the River Beult further downstream. Issues relating to Gatwick have also been very important. A careful analysis has been carried out on the statutory compensation available to help people insulate their homes due to increased noise. Sir John said that, previously, he managed along with other MPs to get compensation for residents suffering from noise disturbance from motorways and large roads. Sir John was instrumental in achieving an extension in law for people whose homes had been seriously depreciated in value due to noise of the M20. This was an important change in law. Ten days ago, Sir John Stanley wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport to say that a similar compensation scheme should be available to residents who are suffering from the impact of aircraft noise. Sir John said that the jury is out on the issue of the second runway at Gatwick Airport. We do not know what the Airports Commission will recommend but this will be announced shortly, after the General Election on May 7th. Sir John said that he has done all he can to help in this matter. He has helped to form the Gatwick Co-ordination Group of MPs in order to maximize the political pressure they can apply, and he made a speech in the House of Commons recently to say that the Gatwick Airport Ltd case is flawed and GAL is failing to disclose vital financial information in the public domain. Sir John has also written to the Chairman of the Airports Committee, setting out full grounds of objection, and a copy has been sent to all constituents who wrote to him on this matter. Sir John said that at 2pm today he went with other members of the GCG to No. 10 Downing Street in order to pass two documents to the Prime Minister. The first document was a letter from the six campaigning groups around the airport: GACC, CAGNE, CAGNE East, GON, PAGNE and Plane Wrong, and the second document was the GCG's own submission to Sir Howard Davies. Sir John said that if Gatwick is successful in its proposal for a second runway, there could be 60 million passengers flying into Gatwick per year. This would ruin the lives of those living under the flightpath. The issue will go to the next Government and, if there is a change in Prime Minister, the six campaigning groups and the GCG will want to send the same information to the new Prime Minister. Sir John said that he knows that there is serious noise disturbance from aircraft in his constituency. He said that, if one looks objectively, he believes that the Airports Commission will make a recommendation for one of the two Heathrow options. The remit from Government is for increased airport capacity with a hub airport. It is absolutely clear that it should be Heathrow, as Heathrow has immensely superior road and rail network connectivity. GAL's proposal showed a minimalistic spend on infrastructure, and they would look to the taxpayer to meet the shortfall. Sir John said that he would be amazed if the Gatwick proposal is chosen, and he hopes that this area continues to enjoy the tranquility that we all love. He added that Leigh is a lovely village, and the village green, primary school and shop are wonderful amenities.

(Sir John Stanley left the meeting at 8.20pm)

The Chairman welcomed the Chairman of Sevenoaks District Council, Cllr Mrs Jill Davison.

D.Cllr Mrs Davison said that Leigh and Edenbridge do share a lot of the same issues: the impact of aviation, flooding and various planning issues. The changes to planning laws recently have created problems as far as affordable housing is concerned as the Government decided that contributions towards affordable housing provision in the district will not be payable for developments of under ten dwellings, or five dwellings in rural areas. SDC is having to find an innovative way of funding affordable housing in the district. There is a development in Dunton Green, which will include approximately 60 affordable housing units. There will be some rental units and some shared-ownership units, which allows purchasers to buy a proportion of the dwelling, and rent the remainder from the housing association. These dwellings will be available in October. SDC is running a new initiative called Switch & Save which is helping residents save money on their energy bills by finding the cheapest tariff for them. In total, the scheme has saved residents £16,000 since January. From April, SDC will have a new customer relationship scheme set up on their website. There is good news on voluntary sector grants and the Big Community Fund was successful in funding capital expenditure projects throughout the district. SDC has started a new voluntary sector award scheme, the closing date for which is the end of April. There are various nomination categories:

Charity Project of the Year This award is for any voluntary sector project that operates in the Sevenoaks District. Nominations can be received from staff, volunteers or from those who benefit from the project or by the charity itself.

Best Community Club/Group of the Year This award is for groups who can always be relied upon to help out at events, raise funds or campaign on local issues.

Young Volunteer of the Year This award is for a young person aged 24 or under who stands out as someone with very special qualities. They may give up their spare time to volunteer, or contribute to the welfare of others or their community as a whole.

Best Business in the Community This award is for companies that can demonstrate commitment to having a positive impact on their community through supporting local issues or causes, voluntary or fundraising activities.

Individual Community Champion This award is for individuals who make a special effort to enhance other people's lives. They may do something that is particularly meaningful to their community or beneficial to the environment in which they live.

Lifetime achievement There are people in the District who have been making a vital contribution to their community for many years and this award aims to recognise their contribution.

Community Safety This award is for individuals or a group who have volunteered to address community safety issues, by setting a project up for young people, community litter picks, neighbourhood watch, speed watch initiative or another community safety project.

Sports/Health and Wellbeing This award is for individuals or clubs or organisations who have supported others to achieve recognition through sports, or helped people get fit and active through keep fit groups.

Mark Hammer asked whether there is a way that affordable housing can remain affordable for local people? D.Cllr Mrs Davison said that there is limited staircasing which allows shared ownership dwellings to be sold back to the housing association, who then sell the property at a reduced percentage. This keeps it affordable.

The Chairman welcomed Mr Neil Gunn from the Environment Agency.

Mr Gunn reported that the Environment Agency made a plan in 2007 to retain the existing Leigh Flood Storage Area until 2025, and new evidence in 2010 reiterated the plan. Paul Carter, Leader of Kent County Council, wrote to the Environment Agency after the severe floods of 2013 to ask how much funding was required to make the necessary improvements to protect properties in Tonbridge and further downstream. The total amount required is £37 million. Paul Carter wrote to the Government to say that KCC would pay half the cost. This amount is now in KCC's capital programme. The legal documents were last week completed which will allow the first phase of the project to commence. This will cost £1 million.

The contract for the construction has already been awarded and the outline design will be carried out, at which point the Environment Agency will discuss the scheme with the planning authority, Natural England, KCC etc. in order to gain the necessary consents. Then the landowners will be contacted who own the land that will be effected, the legal framework will be drawn up, and then construction companies will be invited to tender for the work. The plan is to have the capacity to store the maximum amount of flood water as possible at Leigh. The maximum allowed is 28m. above sea level. The crest of the proposed new embankment will be 29m. The second phase will be to prepare a detailed design in 2019, and construction will commence in 2019-22. The current structure must continue to offer Tonbridge and areas further downstream protection whilst the project is undertaken. The Environment Agency has secured funding from a different source to build an embankment from Hilden Farm to the all-weather pitches at Tonbridge School, which will protect Hildenborough. The Environment Agency has surveyed the river through Tonbridge and found that the river cross-section was more or less the same as it was in the 1990s which shows that the river is self-cleansing and, therefore, dredging is not necessary.
(Mr Gunn left the meeting at 8.50pm.)

The Chairman welcomed PCSO Anne KingScott from Kent Police.

PCSO KingScott reported that although she has no formal crime statistics to report, residents can view these online at www.police.uk. Leigh remains a very safe area. Anti-social behaviour is very low. The only two reports recently are (i) cannabis smoking on The Green and (ii) use of a trials bike in the field to the rear of Greenview Avenue. If anyone has any information on these two reports, or any other crime, please can they contact the Police on 101. If there is a report of a burglary in the area, the PCSOs will target that area with leaflets to give residents information on shed alarms etc. This has been found to be most useful and beneficial to residents. The Police will be running a property marking event in the area, together with safe registration plate. The date and venue for this event will be advised soon. There is a new neighbourhood watch co-ordinator for the whole of Kent, and he is working to re-establish local links. The Country Eye initiative is still running which helps farmers. There is also a new equine initiative which includes events to mark tack in an effort to deter burglars. PCSO KingScott reiterated the need to report suspicious issues by calling 101 or if a crime is in the process of being committed, or in an emergency, one should call 999.
(PCSO KingScott left the meeting at 8.55pm.)

The Chairman welcome Mr Daniel Eaton, Headteacher for Leigh Primary School.

Mr Eaton reported that the school had an Ofsted inspection in 2014, and the Governors, teaching staff and parents were delighted with the report, which praises a lot of what happens at the school including good teaching and high attainment. Academic achievement is very good at the school and last year's SATS results were the best for many years. Children's progress is also very good. Mr Eaton said that the school is passionate to ensure that the children receive an all-round development. 18 extra-curricular clubs are held for the children each week, including pottery, bee-keeping, French, orchestra and sport. Arts is also an important aspect of the children's learning. This year, the school took over the entire theatre at The Stag in Sevenoaks and, last year, they took over the E.M. Forster theatre at Tonbridge School. The children attend concerts and the school choir visit residential care homes. They also take part in the Arts Festival. Sport is important to the school and children have two sports lessons each week. The new cricket nets will be installed soon. The school receives sports premium funding and, this year, the money was used to improve outdoor learning for the children, linking to work undertaken in class. It has been hugely successful. There are many school trips, last year Key Stage 2 children went to Ypres; 95 children went and 160 people in total. The Friends of the School are an active team, mainly parents, and there is a good PTA which raises a lot of money for the school. Local people come into school to hear the children read, this is extremely beneficial to the children. This year, the school hopes to run events to commemorate the 70 year anniversary of VE Day.

The school would be interested to hear from local people who remember VE Day so that they can share their memories with the children. There are a few challenges ahead: (i) school places – it is likely that this year will be the first year when children from the village will not automatically get a place at the school. Pressure on places is huge, especially with the new housing being built in the village. The current PAN is 23, and there are more applicants than places. The school is having early discussions with the local authority on how this can be managed. (ii) parking – this is a difficult issue and a school group has been formed to try and alleviate parking issues. Walking buses and staggering school times are both being considered. Mr Eaton thanked the Parish Council very much for its support of the school and, recently, for the £600 contributed towards new playground markings. He also thanked the community and the general good-will for the school.

Reverend Kevis said that he is pleased that there is a good relationship between the church and the school.

1. To approve Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 14th April 2014

Cllr Doherty proposed that the minutes be approved, and all were in favour.

2. Questions from members of the public, matters for reporting and diary dates

None.

The meeting closed at 9.10pm.

The following reports were circulated as a hand-out for residents to read at their leisure.

Chairman's Report of Activities in 2014/15

Chairman's Annual Report to the Parish of Leigh for 2014-15

1 Councillor John Knock – Sadly Councillor John Knock died on Thursday, 12th March. John Knock had lived in the village since a small boy at the village school in the 1940's. Ever since he has served the village of Leigh and the wider community in many capacities.

He was elected to the Parish Council in 1979. He was Vice-Chairman from 1993 to 1998 and Chairman from 1998 to 2005. At various times he was a member of Planning, Finance, Public Transport and Footpath committees. He was a Governor of Leigh Primary School for over 16 years and was a member of the Finance and Community and Pupil Committees. He was a Trustee of the Leigh United Charities from 1988 and a Trustee of the Crandall Trust from 2003. He was a member of Leigh Cricket Club since at least the 1950's, Honorary secretary for 37 years, a trustee of the Club and Junior Section organiser and coach for very many years. He was a member of Leigh Royal British Legion Table Tennis Club and was the Junior Section organiser and coach and Honorary Treasurer for 35 years. He was President of the Club and also President of the Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells District Table Tennis League. He served on the Leigh Village Halls Management Committee where he was an active participant since at least 1980. And finally he played the trombone in the Village Green Stompers from 1976 to 2007.

He was an active and extremely helpful member of Leigh Parish Council. Cllr Knock was a man of principle who worked tirelessly for the things he believed in and would make Leigh a better place in which to live and work. He was keenly interested in getting the best value for money for any project and insisted that apart from a small contingency fund within the Annual budget, no monies should be included in the precept which might result in a higher Council tax for residents. Amongst the many things he did was to redraw the footpath map originally drawn by his late father. This now hangs in the pump house which was repaired at the instigation of Cllr Knock. I must add that was a great help in supporting me, his successor as Chairman of the Council.

John Knock was devoted to the village of Leigh for over half a century giving his time and expertise freely in so many areas. He made a major contribution to the life of the Community, especially its young people. Very many people have cause to be grateful for his help, his interest and his unflagging enthusiasm. He was particularly held in affection and respect by the generations of youngsters whom he coached at cricket and table tennis.

For over 40 years John Knock organised the junior sections of the village cricket and table tennis clubs providing the young with activities and encouraging them to progress in these sports to the best of their abilities, even to international level, and to participate in teams competing with other young people. He also ensured that there were second-hand cricket whites and equipment for those youngsters whose parents could not afford it.

The poor and old also benefited from John's help as, by virtue of his personal knowledge of the inhabitants of Leigh, John was instrumental in ensuring no-one who needed assistance slipped through the net of help provided by the Leigh United Charity and the Crandall Trust charity.

2 Gatwick – Our major concern during 2014/15 was aircraft noise. We are all well aware of the increases noise from aircraft flying into Gatwick. At a recent seminar at Gatwick arranged by Gatwick Airport Ltd., slides were projected showing the flight paths taken over recent years. The slide for 2014 showed a dramatic increase in the number of aircraft turning over Leigh onto their final flight path to Gatwick. It was evident that the final flight path had been extended to make it easier for the air traffic controllers to space aircraft landing to maximise the aircraft using Gatwick. Your Council has been proactive in trying to stem the noise blighting the community. We have been members of the Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign Group for many years and have now joined the Aviation Environmental Federation and Airport Watch. Most importantly we are full members of the High Weald Councils Aviation Action Group.

Eleven parish and town councils are full members, three associate town and parish councils and five town and parish councils are copied in. The aims of the Group are that there should no increase in noise in the High Weald from aircraft arriving at or departing from Gatwick Airport and no night flights between midnight and six am. The supporting principles are:-

1. **No Second Runway:** The rejection of the second runway application at Gatwick Airport as being too great an increase in noise and therefore too damaging to our environment, tranquillity and quality of life.
2. **Maximum Respite:** To reduce noise for any particular community or individual we support the introduction of a policy that offers maximum respite for all affected based on geography, not size, of population which should include:
 - a. The provision of a programme of planned rolling respite for all blighted communities around which communities can plan.
 - b. The abandonment of the policy which targets rural areas, areas of tranquillity and areas of low density population for the concentration of flight paths over them.
3. **Maximum Safe Height:** The introduction of regulatory discipline to control noise and annoyance, including minimum height restrictions for landing aircraft and meaningful financial penalties for noise-related incidents in order that unnecessary noise from low flying aircraft is reduced to a minimum.
4. **Noise Measuring:** The adoption of noise measurement standards to replace noise averaging (as represented by the current use of the 57dB LAeq yardstick) to better reflect the actual impact of individual noise events, based on the latest technical opinion on Noise Disturbance and its correlation with health issues, supported by more noise meters in order to more effectively monitor noise reduction targets.
5. **No Night Flights:** The cessation of all night flights between the hours of midnight and six am in order to eliminate the most disturbing aircraft noise for our communities.
6. **Aircraft modification.** The agreement of all airlines to retrospectively fit a modification to all Airbus 318, 319 and 320 aircraft in order to reduce noise from these aircraft.

Your Parish Council fully agrees and is signed up to these aims and supporting principles.

The Council set up a working party of Councillor Sue Smith, Ian Harris, Stephen Smith, Mark and Judith Hammer and myself. During the year this working party has prepared the council's response to the Gatwick Airspace Consultation, the London Airspace Consultation, the Airports Commission Delivery Discussion paper, the Gatwick Airport's Consultation on a second runway and the Airports Commission Consultation on an additional runway in the South East. This has kept the working party very busy and we are very grateful for all the work put in to generate these responses. In addition the council leafleted every house in the parish to keep everyone informed and to encourage parishioners to respond to the Airports Commissions consultation. I should mention that our Clerk, Louise, puts in a tremendous amount of work as she also acts as clerk to the HWCAAG. The costs of the Group are shared by all member councils.

3 Planning – During the year your Council considered fifty planning applications. Led by the Planning Committee, the council supported 41 applications, objected to five and did not comment on four. In general the Council supports those applications which do not have a significant effect on neighbouring properties and are not out of keeping with nearby properties. Each application is studied by the Planning Committee and we are very grateful for the work put in by members considering each application. The thirteen houses in Hollow Trees Close are now occupied. The demolition of the buildings at the Old Powder Mill site is complete and the removal of hard standing should now be progressing. I must thank Councillor Beverley Doherty for chairing this committee.

4 Flooding and Drainage – The Council is appalled by the failure of KCC Highways to solve the flooding at 2 Blackhoath Cottages, Gales, Powdermill Lane, Coppins Road and Lealands Avenue. Continual pressure has been put on KCC by our Clerk and we are very grateful for the additional pressure put on by our KCC Councillor, Clive Pearman. Regrettably it has taken a long time but, at last, we seem to be getting somewhere but much remains to be done. We were fortunate to be able to rely on Graham Marchant's expertise and many thanks to him for the time he has spent at meetings with KCC.

5 The Green – We are conscious that the soccer pitch and the area opposite the school become unusable too easily in wet weather. The Council has had that area vertidraind and sand spread. This has enabled the Soccer Club to play more frequently on the Green. To further improve the Green, the Council has agreed that a land drain should be laid between the school play area and the soccer pitch. This should enable both the school and the soccer club to increase their usage. Councillor Rob Swallow has kindly masterminded this project.

6 Roadside Verge Cutting – A cluster of Leigh, Chiddingstone, Hever and Penshurst parishes was set up to take over the cutting of the verges from Kent County Council. The objective is for the parishes to be able to take control of the cutting and improve this service. This has been a success and we are currently waiting to hear from KCC what contribution they will give the group for 2015/16.

7 Rural Broadband – The fibre optic cable has now been laid to the village. It is hoped that the remaining houses in the village which cannot now be connected will soon be. Our thanks go to Councillor Rob Swallow for all his efforts in pushing this.

8 Defibrillators – Mr and Mrs Charlesworth have kindly given two defibrillators to the village. One is located at 15 The Forstall, and one is located on the outside wall of the Large Village Hall in the centre of the village. Both of these defibrillators were given by the South East Ambulance Service to Mr and Mrs Charlesworth in memory of their son, Victor, who sadly passed away in April 2013. Although ready for use, we hope they are never required. A training event on how to operate the defibrillators has been arranged for Saturday 11th April from 10am to 12 noon in the Small Village Hall. Please contact the Clerk if you would like to book a place. The event will be free of charge.

9 Other issues - Among other issues, your Council also attended to the following:-
The maintenance of the Aged Persons Dwellings on The Green
The mowing of the Green adjacent to the War Memorial and other small areas

A free Summer Family Fun Play Day which has again been arranged for this summer.

The Old Burial Ground (behind the Village Halls)

Various tree applications

The trees on The Green

An interactive speed sign adjacent to Upper Kennards on Hildenborough Road. KCC have installed a speed monitor to check the necessity for an interactive sign.

The provision of the bulk refuse freighter

The pond by Crandalls

10 Finance – The year to 31st March is not yet complete so there can be no full report. However it is developing in line with the budget. Councillors were pleased to be able to approve the parish precept with only a 0.4% increase over 2014/15.

11 Concluding Remarks – Once again I must thank all our Councillors for their work and support during the year. The Councillors were David Bennie, Peter Croft, Beverley Doherty, Alan Johnston, John Knock, Graham Marchant, Sue Smith, Rob Swallow, myself and John Knock. Louise Kleinschmidt continued as our Clerk. I am privileged to chair a council where we all work together for the benefit of the village. In addition to John Knock we now know we will be saying goodbye to Councillor David Bennie, who is standing down at the District and Parish Elections on 7th May. We are sorry to lose him and must thank him for keeping us in touch with the young people of the village.

Very many thanks to Councillor Alison Cook and Councillor Clive Pearman, our District and County Council representatives, for their untiring efforts on behalf of the parish and, when their other commitments permit, their attendance at our meetings. Councillor Alison Cook is also not standing for re-election. Alison has been our District Councillor for many years and we must thank her for all the time and effort she has put in to looking after the parish. .

I must also thank Louise for her untiring efforts for the Parish and, I suspect, working many more hours than her agreement. All of us on the Council appreciate the fact that we have the benefit of her extensive professional knowledge.

County Councillor Clive Pearman

1. Introduction:

There are nine distinct spheres of responsibility for each County Councillor and as set out in Kent County Council's Constitution. Of those spheres, six are 'inward-facing' and are concerned with the contribution which each Councillor is required to make with regard to the provision of a wide range of services provided by the Council across the county. The other three spheres are 'outward-facing' and are concerned with the responsibilities which each County Councillor has towards the Parishes whom he or she represents by virtue of having been elected by them in the first place.

This report is, therefore, a combination of those two spheres of responsibility and of the activities which I have undertaken over the past year in order to meet the responsibilities within them. That said, in many instances, the activities never start and end within a twelve-month timescale, let alone within the period of one Annual Parish Meeting and the following one. Most of the activities are on-going; some will start off in the year under review, whilst others will end in that year.

I have addressed the review under headings in an alphabetical sequence. All are, obviously, important as they relate to the expenditure of public money, but which are more or less important than others in the sequence is a matter of personal preference or judgement. So, without further ado, let me address the first topic.

2. Aviation:

This subject has its origins in Edenbridge Town Council's first and formal response to the increasing volume of aircraft landing and taking off from Gatwick Airport almost 4 years ago, and certainly many months before the Davies Airports Commission began its various phases of consultation on the need to increase airline capacity, based upon the concept of a hub airport. The focus then, and now, was and is to prevent all night flights into and out of the airport as the most positive respite arrangement which could be introduced for the benefit of all of those residents living under the existing flight paths.

With the unstinting support of the Rt. Hon. Sir John Stanley M.P., our local Member of Parliament, we began a series of contacts and correspondence with a range of senior politicians and representatives of the business community in this highly technical and specialised field. Whilst the burden of the work was shouldered by three Edenbridge Town Councillors, the work was undertaken in the name of and with the full support of that Town Council. All activities were progressed against a carefully thought-out strategy and a unified purpose, objectives and guiding principles. A few months after this process began the Airports Commission, chaired by Sir Howard Davies, came into being and, with the possibility of a second runway at Gatwick Airport being recommended, our initiative moved up a significant notch!

Following my election as a County Councillor in May of 2013, five of the six parishes in my ward joined together and formed the High Weald Councils' Aviation Action Group (HWCAAG) based upon the same set of purpose, objectives and guiding principles which Edenbridge Town Council had originally defined. And, one can say, "The rest is history!" Having 'set the ball rolling', neighbouring Parishes and, eventually, District, Borough and County Councils around Gatwick Airport, and a group of MPs from the constituencies around the airport, including Sir John as one of the founding members, have taken his advice and guidance one stage further, formed themselves into the Gatwick Co-ordinating Group at Westminster, have all fallen in line and objected to the second runway proposal. Whilst providing much of the oil which has made this machine work smoothly and consistently, my real and personal achievement this last year has been in helping to bring Kent County Council to a realisation that it ought to change its stance from that of supporting the proposed second runway to actually openly opposing it, and that change took place at the very beginning of this year and to the relief of everyone involved in this campaign.

The Airports Commission consultation now having formally ended, and a decision on the various options due sometime this coming summer, let no one be in any doubt that, if a second runway at Gatwick is recommended and built, this part of West Kent will be subjected to an horrendous increase in noise pollution throughout the twenty-four hours of each and every day. In addition, with the need to, literally, accommodate the estimated 122,000 workers, many of whom will be economic migrants from Europe and beyond, required to both construct the new runway and staff the associated servicing needs of the enlarged airport, the burden on all public services – housing, schools, health, roads and transport – will be tremendous. And as the proposed second runway will be financed by private-sector capital, the financial burden of providing for all of the needs of this enlarged population will fall on local council tax payers! Coupled with this will be the loss of the natural environment which is one of, if not the most, attractive reasons for living in this part of the country. Although the Airports Commission consultation might have ended and we are now in 'a waiting game' situation, the battle will continue to prevent the proposed second runway from becoming a reality and, in the meantime, to focus our efforts on achieving 'no night flights' at Gatwick.

3. Budget:

This is never an easy subject to address at County Council level as it tends to get beset with party-politics and, frequently, bad behaviour as the competing political philosophies work themselves out in the annual County Council budget meeting which, this year, took place on the 12th February. In the event, the budget was agreed and the necessary savings, at around £91m, will be achieved by a variety of means. One key aspect here will be for the County Council to become more of a strategic commissioning authority, providing its statutory services through a variety of different business arrangements such as a trust, a joint venture with other private or public sector organisation, a LATCo, which is a similar arrangement to that of a private sector public limited company but where profits are returned to the host organisation, in this case the County Council or, possibly, by establishing a private sector company to deliver the services.

Each service provided by the County Council will be subjected to a business scrutiny to determine the best way forward including, of course, that the service continues to be provided by the County Council. With my business background, this is an approach which I wholeheartedly support and which I discharge through my membership of the County Council's Commissioning Advisory Board.

4. Education:

The primary schools in my division continue to do well and, whenever possible, I meet with the head teachers to discuss the outcome of Ofsted Inspections and any problems or issues which they are facing and where my support could be beneficial. I also provide the link between an appreciation of the implications of proposed changes in the local parish population profiles and of the implications for the provision of education in light of any population changes, and of the need to review the provision of the educational services in that locality. In this vein, having identified the increased demand on Leigh Primary School which the new housing development on the old Powder Mills site will create, discussions are now moving forward to use neighbouring land to the primary school to build an additional classroom in order to meet the increased demand which the number of new homes will create. This is, not unexpectedly, a challenging project as it depends upon gaining the support and co-operation of a number of organisations and private individuals.

A similar situation has arisen in Edenbridge as a consequence of the decision to bring forward what had previously been the reserve land to the west of Enterprise Way and where a developer has submitted an outline plan for the construction of somewhere in the region of 300 new homes. In late summer of last year I began conversations within the Education Directorate of Kent County Council about this issue, and of the need to increase the classroom provision at our primary school. This initiative has now progressed and the Education Officer for North and West Kent, Ian Watts, following full discussion with, and the agreement of, Dr. Rosemary Addison, has commissioned a full investment appraisal with the intention of building more classroom space at the school in advance of the construction of the new homes. Dr Addison has already agreed that she will increase the size of the intake for this forthcoming educational year by 30 pupils so as to meet the existing and increased demand for places at the school.

With Central Government having recently allocated more funds to Kent County Council to be spent on accommodation where increased pupil numbers make this necessary, the construction at our primary school should proceed without any problems. I will, of course and having initiated this project, keep a watch on it to ensure that it does move forward and meet the intended outcome.

The summer did not pass of uneventfully for me with regard to education. In September I was asked to represent 5 families in Edenbridge, each one of whom had applied for a travel pass for their children as they moved from primary to senior education, and each application had been rejected. With some pointed observations with regard to the processes which the County Council had pursued in the handling of all aspects of this process, 4 of the 5 appeals were adjudged to be valid and the original decisions overturned without having to go through a formal hearing. Common sense prevailed. The original decision in the fifth case was, however, adjudged to be valid and the case therefore went to appeal. Representing the family, I was able to successfully demonstrate to the Appeals Panel that the original decision was perverse, as a consequence of which the appeal was upheld. Five very happy families for whom each one was shown that the system does work in favour of the individual against the bureaucracy of the organisation.

5. Youth Services:

This is yet one more initiative which I began two years ago as a Town Councillor when Kent County Council proposed to outsource the commissioning of Youth Services. With the enthusiastic co-operation of all of the groups in Edenbridge who were then providing these services locally, they agreed to form a consortium and, in the event, successfully bid for the contracts to provide these key services. As the County Councillor and member of the Education and Young Peoples' Cabinet, I have now been able to influence how the discharge of these services has been monitored and reviewed so as to meet the needs of our local providers rather than the bureaucracy of County Council. The work and success of the consortium members is now held up at County level to be a model version of the attainment and maintenance of high standards in this important area. The consortium is well-placed to successfully compete for the new contracts when the re-commissioning takes place next year.

As a consequence of and following the recent survey of the needs and expectations of young people in the Parish, I have been able to continue to allocate funds from my Combined Members' Grant Fund to those identified needs and to the benefit of all. Being able to allocate funds so speedily has given the younger members of our community the reassurance that they have been listened to and heard, and that their views have been accepted without compromise or condition. That there are one or two aspirations which the young people identified and which will require sizeable investment will be a real test of us all – County, District and Town Councillors – in working together to try and help realise those aspirations. Wherever possible, when approving grants, I am making it a prerequisite that the organisation concerned endeavours to reach out to all of the other Parishes in Sevenoaks South so as to make the services more accessible to the wider community.

6. Highways:

No surprises here! This is one long and never-ending saga of pot holes and localised flooding of properties in the proximity of blocked drains, gullies and ditches! For all of the six Parishes in my division, these are the key areas which I am expected to immediately resolve the numerous problems with a magic wand! I wish that were the case. Invariably, there is no straight and easy solution, with flooding problems often the result of either repeated and longstanding neglect of gullies, ditches and drains, or where remedial work has previously been undertaken by a contractor or team from Kent Highways when, in truth and in law, the work should have been undertaken by adjoining landowners! It has been very convenient to either plead ignorance or to 'turn a blind eye' as the situation warrants in such instances.

Inevitably, every road user wants the local roads to be a racing track surface – smooth, even and with no bumps, let alone potholes, but this has never been possible! Although Central Government has recently allocated additional funds to enable the County Council to undertake more pot hole repairs, there will never be either enough money or a sufficiently large and permanent workforce to enable the repairs to be undertaken within a day or two unless, that is, they are really dangerous, in which case the repairs will be affected more speedily. The repairs are, of course, dependent upon the prevailing weather conditions. In terms of fairness, other than for dangerous potholes, the request for a repair has to find its way into the system and be dealt with in sequence.

In this case, therefore, and with my County Councillor's hat on, I must side with the business-end of the solution – there are systems in place for recording the problems and addressing them in sequence or where real danger is present and therefore I, and everyone else, will just have to 'grin and bear it' or, more appropriately, drive a bit more carefully, or leave home a little earlier so as not to have to rush. For those of us who have travelled around the local area during the past few weeks, I am sure that you will all have come across cars in ditches, either upside down or facing in the wrong direction, or where very recent damage to hedgerows has created a new access point to neighbouring fields, indicating the combination of poor driver judgement compounded by excessive speed!

Given the dangers which some drivers pose to all other road users and as evidenced by the instances referred to in the above paragraph, I have nevertheless been able to make a contribution to improving the safety of local people. From my grants pot of money I have paid for warning signs and road markings on the notorious bend in Hilders Lane, and with the full support of Edenbridge Town Council, paid for the construction of the 'missing' piece of footpath in the High Street in front of The Star Public House. Work is also in progress to assess the need for and implement an interactive speed sign in Leigh, a project which seems to have 'fallen between the cracks' in years gone past, and to improve the road environment either side of the Long Bridge in Penshurst, with the accompanying need to make this part of the road and bridge area a priority routing' as the bridge is clearly not wide enough for two vehicles to pass each other when actually on the bridge. In all of these cases, and others which I have commissioned, my contribution has been based upon needs and requests which stemmed from the local community in the first place.

7. The Natural Environment:

County Council responsibilities range over a number of aspects of protecting and maintaining the natural environment and, although there are no specific aspects in this Parish, it is located in the Green Belt and, therefore, must be protected from any interference other than where real and specific needs arise which would warrant an incursion into the green belt. With 93% of Sevenoaks District being declared Green Belt land and to be protected accordingly, it is not surprising that pressures will from time-to-time be exerted on it.

At the moment, the Greater London Council is endeavouring to exert pressure on all of its neighbouring counties and districts to 'give up' some of the Green Belt land in order to meet the housing demands of London. Such attempts will continue to be rejected, and I will play my full part in that resistance.

8. Concluding observations:

I frequently ask myself if my contribution as a County Councillor is worthwhile and positive, the more so when faced with unjustified demands or expectations from many residents that the County Council immediately addresses and solves all of their problems. I have had to learn and apply patience in large doses, contrary to my natural tendencies! In addition, and a lesson which I have learned from my business experience, is that there are always individuals who emerge from the proverbial woodwork at the eleventh hour and fifty-ninth second to claim that the success is all down to them and them alone. As a County Councillor, nothing could be further from the truth! Discharging the responsibilities which fall to a County Councillor can only be met by co-operation and joint working, and where no one person can remotely claim sole responsibility for success. If I have been able to achieve anything, or make any real and positive difference, it is because of the willing help and support of a lot of people, often un-sung, be they fellow councillors and staff at any tier in the local authority structure, or members of the public who have been prepared to stand up for what they have believed in. Challenging it has been but, equally, satisfying and rewarding and, quite often, humbling in the face of the adversity which some people face in the community of Kent. Roll on the next year!

District Councillor Alison Cook

A Report to an Annual Parish Meeting of Leigh Parish Council to be held on Monday 23rd March 2015

It may be a hackneyed phrase to say what a privilege it has been to represent Leigh as its District Councillor and yet that is the simple truth. After 28 years I can still remember vividly waiting for the count to begin at the W.I. Hall in Edenbridge and then the realisation that I had been elected. Many things have changed over this period.

One of my first encounters with the Planning Department was to oppose the building of service stations on the A21 and being hauled over the coals for going against the views of the grandees of the Council who were minded to agree the proposals albeit with strict conditions. It is also sobering to recall that one of my first challenges was being sent to the College at Easingwold in Yorkshire to consider the steps that would be required in the event of a nuclear war. Some things though never seem to change such as the need for more housing and the state of the drains.

With the creation of West Kent Housing Association, SDC became the first Authority to conduct the wholesale transfer of its housing stock and by so doing becoming debt free. This financial freedom together with high Interest rates gave the Council an opportunity to invest, renovating many of the old Council houses particularly those in St. Mary's Ward in Swanley, providing new leisure facilities such as indoor bowls, flumes and fitness suites as well as environmental schemes and community projects. Some plans never came to fruition such as the dry ski slope and sailing facilities at Greatness but on the whole it was a productive period. There then came a change in the Council's fortunes as interest rates began to fall and financial pressures started to bite. The bulk of the Council's Leisure operation was taken over by Sencio with a grant from SDC, the exception being the Bowls Clubs whose members were given 25 year leases to run them. In order to maintain a balanced budget a three pronged approach was instigated which included selling off odd parcels of surplus land and buildings such as the Stag Theatre, which is now run most successfully by Sevenoaks Town Council.

The ongoing situation of low interest rates, restrictions on raising Council Tax and Government's continuing reduction in grant support has increased the pressure on SDC in extending its proactive approach to working with partner organisations and sharing services and staff with other local authorities. Some years ago the Council introduced a ten year budget plan and most recently embarked on creating a property investment policy with the aim of becoming independent of Government support in the future.

The whole way in which the Council conducts itself has altered dramatically over the last 28 years; gone are the days of the old Committee system now replaced by an Executive Cabinet of Portfolio Members supported by Advisory Boards made up of Backbenchers but chaired by the relevant Cabinet Member. Also over recent years new responsibilities have been introduced such as Health and Wellbeing, Safeguarding, and a greater involvement in promoting business investment into the District to name but a few. Planning law and guidance is a constantly moving target especially now with the urgent need to provide more housing and especially more affordable homes. Sevenoaks has sufficient land to meet its current requirements but there is constant pressure on preserving the Green Belt. Leigh too has grown and seen changes but then it is said that in order to stay still change is necessary, so the village has welcomed Well Close, Home Farm Close, Gibbs Field and Hollow Trees Close. Recycling took off in earnest with the introduction of glass and paper collection receptacles in the Crandalls followed some years later by the introduction of the black and white sacks to separate recyclable material from ordinary household waste and more recently the garden waste initiative.

50 years ago Leigh finally got its first Public Toilets after thirteen years of campaigning, facilities which were later rebuilt as part of the Jessica Hall complex. Sadly due to constant vandalism they were closed and after much negotiation were acquired by the School for possibly conversion into a music room or a much needed new classroom. On a more positive note the Large Village Hall benefited from a grant from the District Council to make improvements including the provision of disabled toilet facilities and I had the honour of cutting the ribbon and declaring them open for business.

On the transport side the village has benefited from the commuter bus and I still have happy memories of been rung up well after midnight to be asked when the bus would arrive. Also after many years of trying Leigh finally got lights installed under the railway bridge.

What are the challenges and the opportunities of the future with the imminent development of the Powdermills site, the sale of Hall Place, the needs of the school and of course the outcome of the debate around Gatwick versus Heathrow?

During my time as District Councillor I have enjoyed many opportunities to learn new skills such as how to run an Emergency Centre and to sit my City and Guilds exams to become a radio ham now a redundant art due to the birth of the mobile phone. I have had the pleasure of chairing various committees, to have been Leader and Chairman of the Council but above all I have been fortunate to have served such a wonderful ward. In this I have been greatly indebted to the Parish Council which does so much for the community and has supported me in my endeavours.

My thanks to you all and every good wish to my successor.

Leigh United Charities

The Trustees of Leigh United Charities wish to convey their deepest sadness over the death of their Chairman John Knock as over the years that he has been with the charity he always acted in a professional, fair and responsible manner and he will be very much missed by myself and all the Trustees.

Leigh United Charities received funds of £46,737 during the year 1st February 2014 to 31st January 2015, this is from rent of the land in Saxby Wood to West Kent Housing, rent from Cherry Tree Cottages and interest from investments.

Funds to the value of £45,350 where paid out during the year, 61 beneficiaries in Leigh and 13 in Hildenborough. Not all of these received monthly assistance but all receive the Christmas gift, delivered in December. 4 of these had additional funds to help with financial issues, help with funeral expenses and a couple had health requirements. There were also an additional 4 beneficiaries that had one-off payments, help towards university books and money towards a bicycle for a disabled child.

Funds were also given to Leigh School and we continue to pay regularly for speech therapy for children of the parish attending Leigh School.

We had 6 people leave us but only one joined so if you know of anybody on limited income or benefits please tell them to contact me or the Trustees to discuss if they meet the criteria for assistance.

Sally Bresnahan
23rd March 2015

The Charity of Richard Crandall for the Poor of Leigh

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 to relations, he left 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 for the time being of the Parish of Chiddingstone in the County of Kent and the remaining one part in the names of the Trustees and the Vicar for the time being of the Parish of Leigh in the County of Kent. The following are extracts from the will relating to the Leigh part.

“And I direct that the income of the “Leigh Fund” shall be applied for the benefit of persons of whatever age who reside in the Parish of Leigh aforesaid and who by reason of illness age physical incapacity or infirmity are in want of assistance in such manner as the Leigh Committee hereinafter mentioned shall in their absolute discretion think fit” He provided that the Leigh Committee should consist of the Trustees of the Leigh Fund and the Vicar of Leigh the Churchwardens of the Parish Church of Leigh and the Chairman of Leigh Parish Council.

Since then the purposes have been widened to cover, more or less, any charitable objective.

Last year, 2014, the Local Committee received income from the Trustees of £2,740 and made grants of £800 to the school, £300 to the Tennis Club to help provide coaching for Leigh school children, £240 for physiotherapy, £165 for the hire of the hall for Sixties Stretch and £1,300 to the church as a contribution towards the work of David Bennie, our Youth Worker.

Colin Stratton-Brown
18th March 2014