

**MINUTES OF THE LEIGH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD REMOTELY VIA ZOOM,
ON MONDAY 12TH APRIL 2021 AT 7.00PM**

PRESENT: Cllr J. Kaye, (Chairman), Cllr R. Britain, Cllr G. Marchant, Cllr B. Skipper,
Cllr S. Satterley and Cllr S. Smith
ABSENT: Cllr P. Croft
APOLOGIES: Cllr R. Lake and Cllr G. Rogers
IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs L. Kleinschmidt (Clerk), County Cllr P. Lake, District Cllr J. Osborne-Jackson,
and members of the public

Cllr Kaye welcomed everyone to the meeting. Cllr Kaye paid tribute to Prince Philip who has sadly passed away.

1. To approve Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 20th May 2019
Cllr Smith proposed that the minutes be approved, this was seconded by Cllr Marchant and all were in favour.

2. To hear report by Kent Police
The following report was provided by PCSO Samuel Rustrick
Leigh is one of the quieter areas that Kent Police deal with and this shows with the limited number of calls we get. The local PCSO for the area is PCSO Rustrick, along with covering several others area Leigh is an area he patrols regularly. Hopefully soon there will be another officer joining to be able to increase the visual presence in the area.
Due to the rural nature of the village a lot of crimes committed are what we would expect to see in areas with a lot of countryside. These are crimes such as shed / out-buildings break-ins, catalytic converters being stolen and trespassing. Due to being in lockdown for the last year it has had an impact on the amount of calls and reports that have been made this past year. Due to less vehicles being on the road we have a decrease in the amount of nuisance vehicles and bad driving in the area. Officers have completed speed checks on Penshurst Road leading into Leigh but it didn't highlight this as being an area where people were speeding. We will be happy to do more checks if different areas are highlighted as having a speeding issue. We did see an increase in calls for fraud occurring in Leigh this increase wasn't just specific to Leigh as across the county we have seen a large increase in this crime. The advice we give to protect yourself against fraud is to not give any personal details out over the phone and do not open any emails or texts that look unusual or suspicious. It is important for everyone to stay vigilant when it comes to fraud calls. A lot of the calls to Leigh were to do with Covid breaches and people not following the guidelines. This has had a big impact on the police and has led to some adaptation on how to police the rules. We had just over 30 calls for Covid breaches in Leigh for the last year, which is considerably less than other areas. Hopefully soon this will be a thing of the past and the community can start to enjoy the outdoors safely again. We have seen an increase in calls for nuisance youths in the area especially the second half of the year. Where possible the youths have been spoken and any offences caused have been dealt with. Words of advice and the parents would have been spoken to in order to prevent more reports coming in.

3. Chairman's Report of Activities in 2020/21, plus question time
Cllr Kaye reported as follows:
It has been a startling and difficult year with the covid-19 pandemic having a dramatic impact on us all. Hearteningly the Leigh community spirit has really shone and I thank everyone for their positive and friendly attitude over the last year. One example of this spirit, one of many I am sure, was the Leigh Volunteers Group which was a well organised community volunteering effort which had some 100 enthusiastic volunteers helping those who had to isolate, in particular during the first lockdown. Thank you to everyone involved. We are lucky indeed to live in a parish of such kind people, and of course lucky to live in a beautiful setting.

Over the year the Parish Council has operated as normal holding all its meetings remotely via zoom. These have gone very well and our only upset was a young fellow who claimed to be from the Nigerian Embassy, living variously in Leigh and then Chiddingstone, who eventually managed to join one meeting and proceeded to present foolish pictures to the camera. He was soon evicted.

This note summarise a few issues that have taken up time or been causes for concern. If you would like any further details on Parish Council matters please speak to any councillor, or have a look at the comprehensive minutes on the website or on the notice boards. And, of course, anyone is always very welcome to attend the monthly meeting on the first Monday of the month at 8pm, currently via zoom, and hopefully soon once again in the Small Hall.

Planning

This is one of the key areas of activity, the PC of course only has an advisory role but with the help of our District Councillor James Osborne-Jackson we are able to influence planning decisions. Our Chairman of the Planning Committee continues to be Cllr Graham Marchant. Please remember neighbour comments are taken very seriously by the SDC committee. The Parish Council considered 41 applications, of which they supported 10, opposed 8, had no objection to 9 and submitted a no comment response on 14. There are a number of applications that cause concern, of particular interest to many at the moment is the application for a horse cremation facility at Sevton Farm, Powder Mills. We are engaging with Sevenoaks District Council on this matter.

Roads and footpaths

The biggest issue on roads and footpaths was the sudden popularity of so-called wild swimming at Ensfield Bridge with up to 100 cars parked on Ensfield Road causing obvious chaos and the huge number of people swimming in the river and walking and picnicking along the river. Huge amounts of litter are routinely left behind and an alarming patchwork of burnt grass from portable barbeques. The parking and littering is inconsiderate and dangerous. We are working with the relevant authorities and Peshurst Estate to try and solve the problem. An application to divert the footpath is currently being prepared so that access to the field can be stopped.

Many people have drawn attention to the speed of the roads around Leigh, and indeed the fact that the part of Hildenborough Road that lies in Hildenborough parish has a 40mph speed limit whilst the roads around Leigh do not. We continually press Kent County Council on the subject and encourage everyone to write with concerns to Michael Payne who is the KCC Cabinet member for Highways and Transport.

Likewise, please do report potholes and other road related issues on the KCC website which has a good map-based reporting site.

During lockdown we have been unable to carry out any litter picks, though we hope that this can resume soon. In the meantime there are numerous people in the village who regularly put on a high visibility jacket and go and collect litter. Thank you to all of you, it is really appreciated and I am convinced that if a road has no litter on it people are less inclined to drop litter. Meanwhile fly tipping remains a menace. Please do report it if you see it.

Swathe and Visibility cutting of Verges - Our Parish Council continues to co-operate with three other parishes to take over responsibility for cutting the verges. We receive funding from KCC for this function, who retain the responsibility and liability. KCC only used to carry out one – rather poor – cut a year and the Parish Council think that it is very worthwhile spending a little more in order to achieve three cuts. This vastly improves road safety for all road users. We are aware of the interest in allowing wildflowers to flourish on verges and quite agree with this, however for safety reasons we will continue to cut one mowers width of all our verges.

Leigh Green and Charcott Green

Thank you to the 70 or so people who responded to our survey of opinions on building some form of fence, or spaced posts, around the Green to prevent traveller encampments or other unwanted access onto the Green. Many strongly held views were shared and the council concluded that for now we will not build a fence but instead have earmarked funds to cover the costs of any encampment removal and clearing up. This remains an issue in our district and we will remain watchful of the situation. Further information is available on this subject.

It was upsetting that a bench was recently destroyed by a vehicle driving on the Green, but regrettably there were no witnesses and no information has been brought forward so there is no action that can be taken.

On this subject we are happy to consider requests to erect a bench on the Green though it is of note that if you stand on the corner by the war memorial there are already 15 benches in sight. As we periodically receive notes telling us that a particular bench is in poor condition we are forced to reflect that these donated benches ultimately become a maintenance issue for the Parish Council, a subject that we will be discussing further. The Green is looking good and we are working with Landscape Service and the sports clubs to ensure that it is properly maintained. At Charcott Green we installed grasscrete and oak posts to stop traffic causing damage, and to prevent parking on the grass.

Cricket Pavilion

Cricket Club is considering options for onward management of the pavilion once built and, until the club is comfortable with a way forward, the committee cannot make the application to the charity commission. It is right that the Cricket Club has time to consider how it wants this taken forward and hopefully the project will proceed in the coming year.

APDs

These are in a sound condition. The Parish Council holds reserves for the time when any significant repairs are needed.

Affordable Housing

Given the lockdown we have not been able to progress with identifying suitable sites for affordable housing. A further call for sites, and possibly a housing needs survey, is proposed this year.

Trees

The Parish Council owns some 40 trees and has them all surveyed every year. We do heed advice to ensure they remain in the best possible condition. The Well Close row of conifers were removed and replaced with slower growing conifers which appear to be doing well.

Leigh in Bloom

The Parish Council is grateful for the sterling efforts of the Leigh in Bloom team, who have been busy improving many areas of the village. They won a silver gilt award in the Village in Bloom competition last year. The team will be working on improving Leigh Station this year, hopefully with some funding from the Community Rail Partnership.

Gatwick

This last year Gatwick has been conspicuously quiet and we've probably all started to forget about it. Gatwick however still holds expansion plans, 40% by using its emergency runway on a routine basis but 60% from more intensive use of its existing runway. I encourage everyone to continue to write to your MP and the Minister of State for Transport to ensure that there is no expansion without due scrutiny. The Parish Council continues to be a member of the High Weald Councils Aviation Action Group and the Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign.

Finance

The year to 31st March is now complete and a finance report is circulated tonight. The accounts were on the whole to budget. Councillors decided to increase the parish precept for 2021/22 to £48,000 to cover the ongoing needs of the Parish. This amounted to a 6.1% increase over 2020/21. The precept for Leigh Parish remains one of the lowest of all the parishes in the Sevenoaks district. A Band D property's council tax in Leigh is £50.75, up from £47.84 per annum, and the average for the district is £93.936

Concluding Remarks

My thanks to all Councillors, Graham Marchant, Sue Smith, Peter Croft, Sean Satterley, Richard Britain, Brett Skipper, Glynis Roger and Richard Lake. All our councillors are volunteers and give their time freely and energetically. Very many thanks to Councillor Peter Lake, our County Council representative, for his untiring efforts on behalf of the parish. Peter is retiring this year and we wish him all the very best for the future. We will miss your energy. Thank you to James Osborne-Jackson, our District Councillor, for all his energetic work. Your work is valued. And thank you very importantly to Louise, our Parish Clerk. You do a great job and we really appreciate all that you do and how you deal with so much on a regular basis.

4. To present the Leigh Community Award 2020 and 2021

Cllr Kaye announced that the winners of this year's Community Award is Leigh Village Post Office and Store for providing a lifeline to the parish during the Coronavirus pandemic. The Parish Council and local residents are indebted to you for continuing to provide a first class service, always with a smile.

The winner of last year's award is Colin Stratton-Brown for a huge contribution to Leigh as member and Chairman of Leigh Parish Council, as member and Chairman of HWCAAG, as member of The Royal British Legion, as Churchwarden and Crandalls Trustee.

5. Report by County and District Cllr Peter Lake

County Cllr Lake reported as follows:

I share all that has been said about Prince Philip, his death is a great loss to this country. I hope that everyone has coped ok with Covid. This is my last Annual Parish Meeting for Leigh as your District and County Councillor. I am very proud to have represented Leigh. This Parish Council is more active than others, and the representation of the parish and its residents is top of the agenda. I am ashamed that I have not managed to reduce speed limits on the B2027 from Hildenborough to Leigh but there is light at the end of the tunnel and I have enlightened officers at KCC. I have helped with housing problems over the years and got children into their preferred school, and helped the young and the elderly. Thank you all for your support over the years and for the parting gift.

Cllr Marchant said that, as the longest serving member of the Parish Council, he would like to reiterate the huge effort that Peter Lake has put in over very many years for the parish.

6. Report by District Cllr James Osborne-Jackson

District Cllr Osborne-Jackson thanked Cllr Kaye for his kind words. He said: I pause to reflect on the Covid victims nationally and for the Duke of Edinburgh. The past year has been tragic but goodness has been drawn out of people in Leigh and it is heartwarming how the volunteers came forward at short notice to help. It is good to see the school cope with the situation. I will make sure that Leigh gets the best possible service from SDC. There has been a tricky situation over the last summer and I met with the legal representatives from Greene King and also with the Fleur to try and achieve a positive response for the pub and the parish. It is now listed as an asset of community value. I have pushed Southern Rail to reintroduce a school time service. The Community Partnership is providing seats and lights at Leigh Station. The wild swimming at Ensfield Road river bridge has been a concern and people have left litter and parked irresponsibly. I am trying to get approval for the introduction of double yellow lines at the bridge. I have met with the District Commander for Kent Police, and the bridge is on the hot-spot list for police patrols. I have had constituency work locally and I am a Trustee of the Friends of Leigh Cricket Pavilion. Thank you to a great team on the Parish Council and to Peter Lake.

Cllr Smith thanked District Cllr Osborne-Jackson for all he has done this year for the parish.

7. Matters for reporting and diary dates

None.

Cllr Kaye thanked everyone for attending. The meeting closed at 7.40pm.

LEIGH PARISH COUNCIL - FINANCE REPORT FOR YEAR 2020-2021

The Parish Council's financial year runs from 1st April until 31st March. The precept for the year 2020-21 was £46,000. This sum, which is generated from residents' Council Tax, is paid to the Parish Council by Sevenoaks District Council. The precept for 2020-21 has been increased to £48,000. Our grateful thanks go to Mr Roger Sykes for undertaking our internal audit, and the Audit Commission signed off our Annual Return confirming that the accounts were in good order.

Annual memberships have been renewed to the following:

Kent Association of Local Councils	£727.64
Action with Communities in Rural Kent	£80.00
CPRE £36.00	
Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign	£10.00
Kent Playing Fields Association	£20.00
Society of Local Council Clerks	£113.50
Information Commissioner's Office	£35.00

Grants have been awarded as follows:

Leigh PCC – contribution towards repair of church clock	£150.00
Leigh PCC – contribution towards the Directory	£300.00
Leigh School – grant towards maths based learning aids	£1,100.00
Leigh in Bloom	£208.45
Leigh Tennis Club	£635.00

Below is a summary of the Parish Council's Income and Expenditure for the year 2020-21:

INCOME	£	EXPENDITURE	£
Precept	46,000.00	Salaries	10,323.98
Contribution towards tree work	175.00	PAYE	4,154.50
APD rental	14,069.00	Pension contribution	5,389.25
Sale of garden waste bags	173.95	Mileage and petty cash	684.00
		Stationery	56.57
		Telephone/Broadband	217.72
		Office Expenses	967.85
		Website	890.98
		Bank charges	0.00
		Insurance	1,126.15
		Audit/Accountancy	300.00
		Chairman's Expenses	0.00
		Subscriptions	1,157.14
		Hall Hire	140.00
		Courses/training	60.00
		Village Green & trees	3,632.18
		Charcott posts and grasscrete	6,025.00
		Litter / dog bins	1,489.90
		Grants	2,393.45
		APD	1,161.69
		Refurbishment village sign	1,734.78
		Defibrillators	510.00
		Verges	802.43
		Sundry	133.73
	60,417.95		43,351.30
		Surplus of Income / Expenditure	17,066.65
		Transfers to/from reserves: APD:	2,000.00
		Election expenses:	200.00
		Planning contingency:	500.00
		General contingency:	500.00
		Surplus after transfers to reserves	13,866.65