

**MINUTES OF THE LEIGH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 24TH APRIL 2023
AT 8.00PM IN THE SMALL HALL, HIGH STREET, LEIGH**

PRESENT: Cllr J. Kaye, (Chairman), Cllr R. Britain, Cllr P. Croft. Cllr A. Holt, Cllr G. Marchant, Cllr G. Rogers, Cllr S. Satterley, Cllr S. Smith and Cllr B. Williams
IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs L. Kleinschmidt (Clerk), County Cllr Margot McArthur, District Cllr Peter Fleming, District Cllr Richard Streatfeild and 45 members of the public

Cllr Kaye welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. To approve Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 25th April 2022
Cllr Satterley proposed that the minutes be approved, this was seconded by Cllr Holt and all were in favour.

2. Chairman's Report of Activities in 2022/23, plus question time

Cllr Kaye reported as follows:

"Your Parish Council meets every month here in the small village hall. These meetings are open for everyone to attend, and attendees are always welcome. So, please, if you have any concerns please do come to a meeting – usually first Monday of the month at 8pm. This report summarises 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 board.

Planning

This remains one of the key areas of activity, the Parish Council of course only has an advisory role but with the help of our District Councillor 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 54 applications, of which they supported 10, opposed 12, had no objection to 5 and submitted a no comment response on 27. It is important to understand that we are advised to say no comment when we don't have any particular concern to raise. It is not a negative thing, simply that we have nothing to add.

As we all know a local developer, Whitehall Homes, has submitted a planning application for 39 dwellings on the land at the end of Greenview Avenue. The Parish Council is firmly against this proposed development one of the primary objections, amongst many, being access. The road around the village green is too narrow, very much too narrow in places especially by the veteran oak tree. You may have seen that on Monday 17th April Whitehall Homes put in yet another document regarding how they would arrange access, and making much of the fact that a contractor, BAM, is accessing the field for works to the railway. We continue to push back on this and I noted that over 350 documents, mainly letters of objection are associated with this planning application.

On a wider note Richard Streatfeild visited a Parish meeting by invitation and shared some interesting local plan information with us. In summary Sevenoaks has a need for around 13,000 new dwellings in the period 2025-2040, of which 7000 can be constructed on brownfield sites in the larger towns. This leaves 6000 to be built largely on green belt. Counting the number of villages in the district this would mean a theoretical average of 140 dwellings per village. Clearly there is great pressure to build as we all know.

Turning back to Greenview Avenue I don't believe anyone is being a nimby rather there is heartfelt concern that the core of the village, the village green will be negatively impacted. We quite understand the need for housing. However it is worth noting that in the recent past Leigh has added Gibbs Field (10), Powdermills (77), Hollow Tree Close (13), the garage development (7) – over 100 dwellings and Well Close is only some 40 years old. And the infrastructure remains the same.

On the subject of planning we are reviewing the Village Design Statement which was produced some 20 years ago and needs an update. This is a document that can be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document and can be most helpful to demonstrate that the village has thought about its housing, design and characteristics, and how any future developments can be sympathetic to existing dwellings and enhance the area.

Affordable Housing

We still seek sites for affordable housing, though no new suitable sites have been identified. Of course, the developer seeking to build at the end of Greenview Avenue makes much of this. Of note as well is the fact that in villages such as this there are older people, looking to downsize, but not move away from the village. Provision of this type of housing is clearly something that would help Leigh to free up family houses.

Roads and footpaths

We all know how bad potholes are around here – our County Councillor, Margot McArthur advised us that in February 8000 potholes had been filled in. Please do register potholes on the KCC website. We continue to have reports of residents' concerns regarding the speed of the roads around Leigh. We don't like it either however KCC insists that the roads leading into Leigh are not deemed to require limits because there is no history of accidents or fatalities.

The works on the flood barrier by the Environment Agency are underway. It is of concern that this work will involve the closure of the footpath under the railway from Greenview Avenue, and a closure request of 6 months is to be asked for though work is expected to take a shorter time. So far no request has been made.

We have carried out two litter picks during the last year and there are also 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. We are carrying out another litter pick on the Monday of the coronation weekend and we plan to litter pick over a wider area, hopefully with a safety vehicle in particular for Hildenborough Road and Ensfield Road.

Leigh Green and Charcott Green

We go to considerable expense to maintain the green and are grateful to those who put in the effort to keep it that way. In the past year it has been cut 13 times, fertilised twice, rolled and verti-drained and most recently it has been reseeded. We hope for conditions to ensure best possible germination.

Parking on The Green is getting out of hand so we have erected signs reminding people that parking on the green is only permitted with the approval of the Parish Council. If you have an event, or run a club, and need parking please contact Louise. Other than this parking is not permitted – at this stage we cannot engage in the time and effort to enforce this on a rigorous basis but if needs must, perhaps we will have to. We ask for everyone to help in this.

We have installed posts on certain locations of the green to prevent traffic mounting it in the south east corner. We cannot install posts along the southern section despite the obvious damage because to do so would prevent the dustbin collection lorry from accessing that part of the village. We also have no installed grasscrete as a footballer or cricketer chasing a ball, or falling, would potentially be badly hurt by the eggbox like surface.

Shayler's funfair asked if they could come back to Leigh, however their request was after the cricket club had set its fixtures. It was proposed that they suggest an alternative date but we have heard no more on this subject. We would be grateful for people's views on this.

There are some 15 benches on the green, almost all are memorial benches. These have been treated with clear Danish oil – this will be a rolling programs in order to preserve them.

Aged Persons Dwellings

Having refurbished No 2 The Bungalows last year, we have now refurbished No 1. Both are tenanted and now in very fair condition, though we continue to build and hold reserves in order to maintain these two bungalows and to ensure that we keep these dwellings occupied by eligible village residents.

Trees

The Parish Council owns some 40 trees and has them all surveyed every year – generally they are in good condition. A lot of work has gone into the Old Burial Ground which is a vastly improved space. There are some 100 graves on that site and a grant has been obtained to erect a notice board describing the history of this site.

Gatwick

Gatwick continues its plans to use its emergency runway, now referred to as the "Northern Runway" as a routine use runway. Their objective is to increase flight movements from the current maximum of 52 an hour to 60 an hour, increasing to 65 an hour by using the Northern runway. To achieve this would mean the airspace width would be reduced to 4 nautical miles which would have a material impact on Leigh, Penshurst, Chiddingstone and Hever.

Please do keep alert on this subject and respond to consultations, and ask your MP to represent your views. The Parish Council continues to be a member of GACC Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign, and I'd encourage everyone to join and to refer to their informative website. We are also members of the Aviation Environment Federation.

Coffee Caravan

Action with Communities in Rural Kent sent their Coffee Caravan and Information Hub to Leigh again this summer. Over the winter the Parish Council has taken this over and it has been held in the Scout Hut with some excellent turnouts. Thank you Louise for driving this and to the Ladies Choir for April's event. Any other group that can run this on a Friday morning would be very welcome.

Hildenborough and Tonbridge Medical Group

We have received notification that HTMG have decided not to re-open their surgeries in Weald and Leigh. This is a very disappointing development and we have been in contact with the practise for some time to encourage them to keep the Leigh surgery open. They have sent a recorded presentation for tonight's meeting though we do not have the technology to play it. Any further queries should be addressed to the surgery.

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 2023/24 to £51,500 to cover the ongoing needs of the Parish. This amounted to a 3.41% increase over 2022/23. 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 £54.04 per annum, up from £52.26 per annum, and the average for the district is £100.61.

Concluding Remarks

We have Parish Council elections coming up in a couple of weeks' time and once again the election is uncontested. Peter Croft has resigned and is being replaced by Alice Backlog. Thank you to Peter for his many years as a councillor, and Alice thank you for standing.

My thanks to all our councillors, Graham Marchant, Sue Smith, Sean Satterley, Richard Britain, Glynis Rogers Amy Holt and Bruce Williams.

We continue to have individuals, or groups, coming to the Parish Council to sometime express their views in extraordinarily strong terms. Please remember that councillors are just volunteers with no particular training or powers, here to help but actually on a fairly narrow remit which includes the following:

We are a consultee on planning and rights of way issues, we work with the rural housing enabler on affordable housing schemes, we represent our parishioners on aviation issues, highway issues, and the on-going concerns with bus services for example. We are proactive and tackle any issue that has an impact on our parish, but we often can only lobby other organisations such as the County and District Council. We maintain and protect our trees and land (The Green, The Old Burial Ground and Charcott Green). We support parish clubs and societies and are keen to help local projects through our grant funding budget.

Thank you to Councillor Margot McArthur, our County Council representative, for her representation for our parish. Also thank you to James Osborne-Jackson, who was our District Councillor, for all his energetic work and continuous engagement with our community. He has now disappeared off to an overseas posting. And of course thank you to Malcolm Silander and Michael Gemmell Smith for coming along tonight whilst we seek a new councillor.

And thank you very importantly to Louise, our Parish Clerk. Louise was ill with covid during April's meeting. As if I needed reminding that without Louise we, or at least I, would be quite underwater. Your calm, generous demeanour is a huge asset and we value your work so much."

3. To present the Leigh Community Award 2023

Cllr Kaye announced that the winner of this year's Community Award is Cherry O'Neal or her role as Editor of the Leigh Church and Community News, also as a member of Leigh Performing Arts and Leigh Ladies Choir, for undertaking the Church Intercessions and being a member of the Church Band.

4. Report by County Cllr Margot McArthur

County Cllr McArthur reported as follows:

“Thank you Cllr Kaye for inviting me to send you some notes giving a brief review of the year at KCC.

Budget - a vexed subject this year

KCC will, for the first time in more than twenty years, see a significant overspend at the close of the financial year, which will have to be met from our reserves.

The biggest factors causing cost pressures are in adult social care, notably older people’s residential services; the growth and increasing costs of school transport, in particular for SEND students; and sharply higher foster placement costs, reflecting the challenges in foster care recruitment and higher costs for more specialist placements

Children’s Services

July saw our Children’s Services rated Outstanding by Ofsted

This has been a journey of a little over a decade from being rated Inadequate

Migration, asylum and UASC

Last year saw a large number of small boat crossings and as part of this the number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) referred to KCC was a record 1,400. However, because of the agreements that we reached with government in 2021 - the Kent council tax payer is not exposed to these costs. We have around 500 UASC in our care, and we also provide a Reception and Safe Care service for 120 UASC before they go to other councils. The large overall number of asylum seeker arrivals, has meant that we have seen 5 hotels for accommodating asylum seekers, 3 ‘bridging hotels’ for Afghan families and 2 UASC hotels open in the last year. This, coupled with concerns over how plans for increased asylum accommodation in the south east is to be reconciled with other duties such as homelessness, led all 14 Kent council leaders to write to the Home Secretary in November. to oppose unsuitable proposals for use of hotels, in some cases with success.

Ukrainians in Kent

We have welcomed the biggest number of refugees from Ukraine of any area in England. The initial tasks of carrying out checks, establishing systems and making payments were very challenging. In the year since guests started arriving under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, 3,274 guests have come into the County. There are 349 Ukrainian children in our primary schools and 234 in our secondary schools.

Buses

We had major challenges last summer over bus services; while we were still taking forward the £2.3m reduction in subsidies agreed in the 2022/23 budget, the bus industry was facing a crisis brought on by higher fuel costs, staff (especially driver) shortages and falls in usage. This was a national issue, but particularly chimed in Kent because of the high use of commercial bus services for school travel and the popularity of the Kent Travel Saver. Our transport team did a remarkable job in working with operators to reduce the impact of route cancellations, especially on school journeys.—The announcement in February of an extra £155 million government funding to extend some transport support until 30 June bought time to establish a somewhat longer-term package, but the sector remains under severe pressure. KCC continues to provide free home to school transport for those children attending their nearest school.

We have major questions to address about the best way to secure our network, and school transport in particular, and on that basis, we have established a cross-party Member group to review and advise on the way ahead.

Roads and potholes

Extreme winter weather took a heavy toll on our roads. In the December/ January period, highway reports were five times the level of the same period a year ago. While constrained by tight funding and inflationary pressures, we have since January been stepping up the pace of repairs; you will, I think, have noticed the increased number of local road closures that reflect highway works. 14,000 potholes have now been repaired. The government’s budget announcement of £200 million for roads funding, meaning some £6 million for Kent, is a welcome addition and we are looking to deploy it as quickly as possible.

Environment and waste

It is over a year since, we confirmed that we would keep the booking system for our Household Waste Recycling Centres. Our surveys of customer satisfaction get a big positive response. Last May we opened our new HWRC at Allington, Maidstone, which is highly energy efficient and environmentally advanced. It is next to our existing Energy from Waste plant, which along with high recycling rates, ensures that only an irreducibly tiny amount of Kent’s waste goes to landfill.

Book donation banks are being rolled-out across the network of HWRCs.

You will now be able to leave your books for reuse in a dedicated container, rather than sending them for recycling or energy recovery. The books are checked and if they can still be read, they will be sold to retail and wholesale customers. The Group also donate books via literacy programmes to promote reading. It's a great initiative with far reaching benefits and the next step in KCC's reuse initiative.

Furniture reuse at Allington HWRC

Following the success of a furniture reuse trial, the scheme has been installed at Maidstone HWRC. KCC is partnering with a charity, which supports individuals and families who find themselves in crisis through homelessness, domestic abuse, addiction, financial need, unemployment, relationship breakdown and more. Customers using the HWRC can deliver their unwanted furniture such as chairs, tables, wardrobes and bookcases, and after being assessed by site staff, reusable items are placed in a dedicated container. The furniture will then be collected and sold in the charity shop to raise funds for the charity and their outreach work. Many of the items will also be 'gifted' to local people in need. It is hoped to roll this out to other HWRCs once it is running smoothly

5. Report by District Cllr Peter Fleming, Leader of Sevenoaks District Council

Cllr Kaye welcomed District Cllr Fleming to the meeting.

District Cllr Fleming reported that the housing target numbers have gone but the Government is looking for 300,000 new homes each year. The Sevenoaks district is 140 square miles and 93% is Green Belt land. 60% is AONB, of which 12% is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest. There is therefore a lot of protection on the land in the district which is restrictive in terms of building new homes. Leigh parish has done its bit in development. As the Planning Authority, SDC is charged to have a Local Plan. It took 4 to 5 years to get the last draft Local Plan to the point of inspection. However, the inspector found that SDC had failed on its duty to cooperate with neighbouring districts. This meant that the whole process had to start again. SDC is moving forward in an effort to give people more certainty. The council is (i) promoting the best and most efficient use of land in existing settlements including privately owned brownfield sites that are not on Green Belt land. This will be consulted on between November and January; (ii) discussing with neighbouring authorities regarding the duty to cooperate; (iii) considering the release of Green Belt land under only exceptional circumstances. The last Local Plan said that Green Belt land would only be released for exceptional use to satisfy the local needs of the community. None of the sites put forward were tested last time. The closest one is in Edenbridge which was on Green Belt land for a new medical centre. This development has now started on site. Consultation with the public under Regulation 18 will commence in the autumn. In the spring 2024, the new draft Local Plan will be published and subject to consultation with the view to adopting it in the summer 2024. Planning officers consider applications by looking in favour of sustainable development. Additional information has been requested by the planning officer in respect of the outline application on land south of Greenview Avenue.

There will be changes to waste collection for 85% of the district who will have their collection days changed. This will save a huge amount of money and reduce the number of miles travelled by the freighters.

This district has taken the largest number of refugees from Ukraine across Kent. The Homes for Ukraine scheme was successful and thank you to everyone who is taking part in the scheme.

Sencio informed SDC that they will be insolvent and the two leisure centres had to close. Both Sevenoaks and Edenbridge leisure centres will be re-opening.

6. Questions from members of the public

1. A resident asked what is considered to be sustainable development in Leigh and what are the key factors for sustainability. District Cllr Fleming said that in 2019 SDC had an aim for net zero by 2030. The council has reduced emissions by 39% and water usage must now be considered, together with how people move around, where they work, where they go to school etc. These considerations are taken into account as sustainable development. It is difficult to attract GPs in this area and there is now no health satellite provision in Leigh. It is important that older people have somewhere to move into in the villages, and people who grow up here should be able to afford to live here. There is a national housing crisis and the Government is seeking to build 300,000 new homes nationally per annum. Leigh is a community that is engaged and this is very useful.

2. A resident asked when does the County Council get involved in planning matters. District Cllr Fleming said that KCC is a statutory consultee and will look at the impact on the highway from new development, and also school places which comes under a school plan involving the number of anticipated birth figures. County Cllr McArthur said that a number of planning applications go straight to KCC such as applications at schools and mineral plans.
3. A resident said that planning approval was given for a horse crematorium in the parish a couple of years ago. A planning condition was that a hedge should be planted to screen the development. This has not happened, who follows this up? District Cllr Fleming said that there are planning development officers, the conservation team and planning enforcement officers. It would be enforcement officers who should be contacted regarding breach of planning conditions, such as the hedge mentioned.
4. A resident asked whether resources are available to ensure that statements made as part of planning applications are factually correct. District Cllr Fleming said that the validation process will ensure that the correct drawings and documents are submitted, and penalties could be imposed if an applicant knowingly does not tell the truth.
5. District Cllr Richard Streatfeild asked for clarification on how land supply is calculated in the district. District Cllr Fleming said that land supply is an issue in the district due to national planning designations against development, such as AONBs and Green Belt. It is a challenge but it is balanced. Whilst the district may get a nominal number for development, SDC believe that they can deliver the housing numbers needed by increasing densities and by developing brownfield sites in towns. Infrastructure should be provided by development for the community.

Cllr Kaye thanked District Cllr Fleming for coming along to the meeting and for giving an interesting report.

7. Matters for reporting and diary dates

Cllr Kaye reported that the Coronation event will be held on Saturday 6th May from 6pm on The Green.

Cllr Kaye thanked everyone for attending. The meeting closed at 9.20pm.

The following was circulated as a hand-out: Leigh Finance Report.

Leigh Parish Council
Finance Report for year 2022-2023

The Parish Council's financial year runs from 1st April until 31st March. The precept for the year 2022-23 was £50,500. This sum, which is generated from residents' Council Tax, is paid to the Parish Council by Sevenoaks District Council. The precept for 2023-24 has been increased to £51,500. Our grateful thanks go to Mulberry & Company for undertaking our internal audit, and the Annual Return will be approved at our Parish Council meeting on 23rd May before being sent off to Mazars, our external auditor, for review.

Annual memberships have been renewed to the following:

Kent Association of Local Councils	£733.58
Action with Communities in Rural Kent	£90.00
CPRE £36.00	
Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign	£10.00
Kent Playing Fields Association	£20.00
Society of Local Council Clerks	£135.00
Aviation Environment Federation	£36.00
Information Commissioner's Office	£35.00

Grants have been awarded as follows:

Leigh Football Club	£500.00
Action with Communities in Rural Kent – Coffee Caravan	£150.00
Leigh in Bloom	£1,079.43

Below is a summary of the Parish Council's Income and Expenditure for the year 2022-23:

INCOME	£	EXPENDITURE	£
Precept	50,500.00	Salaries	13,473.73
Grant from KCC	2,000.00	PAYE	4,738.27
APD rental	15,600.00	Pension contribution	7,060.38
Sale of garden waste bags	22.00	Mileage and petty cash	1,033.65
Wayleave	14.60	Stationery	89.04
Coffee Corner	93.96	Jubilee	182.75
		Office Expenses	986.15
		Website	197.47
		Village Green posts and signs	1,454.40
		Insurance	1,652.81
		Audit/Accountancy	300.00
		Chair's Expenses	103.09
		Subscriptions	1,240.58
		Defibrillators	384.99
		Village Green Beacon	1,880.00
		Village Green & trees	8,783.89
		Christmas tree & stand	167.50
		Litter / dog bins	2,128.76
		Grants	1,729.43
		APD	12,259.47
		Play event	300.00
		Repairs & maintenance	934.20
		Coffee Corner	179.50
		Advertising & Publicity	60.00
	68,230.56		61,320.06
		Surplus of Income / Expenditure	6,910.50

Louise Kleinschmidt
Clerk & Responsible Finance Officer