

SHORNE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Parish Assembly held on 18 April 2019 in Shorne Village Hall

PRESENT Mr R Lane (Chairman)
 Mr R Theobald
 Mr J Bugg
 Mr R Hardy
 Mr C Rea
 Mrs S Lindley
 Miss P Clifton
 Mrs L McCluskey

ALSO IN KCC Cllr B Sweetland
ATTENDANCE 24 Parishioners

Mr Lane welcomed parishioners to the meeting.

Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 May 2018

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Mr Lane reported as follows:

A Parish Council is the first tier in local government. In addition to our formal Parish Council meetings and Committee meetings where business is conducted, we are required by law to hold an Annual Parish Meeting or Assembly between 1st March and 1st June. This is where we report on our activities over the past year and it is also an opportunity for parishioners to raise issues and ask questions. We also provide an opportunity for other organisations to report on their activities.

This is my first report as Chairman of the Parish Council. This year's Parish Assembly is a little earlier in the year than in the past. This is partly because we were scheduled to have Parish Council elections in two weeks' time, followed by our AGM where Members will be elected to the Committees and it is appropriate that the report on our activities over the past year is presented by the Members who were responsible for the activities, whilst they are still in post.

I am pleased to report that the Parish Council election was uncontested and the existing Councillors have been re-elected.

I'd like to thank my Vice-Chairman, Robin Theobald, for the valuable advice and support he has provided me over the past year. I would like to congratulate Robin for achieving admission as Honorary Freedom of the Borough, in recognition of his eminent services to the Borough of Gravesham.

My thanks also go to my fellow Councillors for their good work over the past year. I would like to give my particular thanks to Lisa McCluskey, who took over from me as Chair of the Footpaths, Properties & Greens Committee last year, and to Susan Lindley, who continues to chair the Planning & Highways Committee, keeping a close eye on planning issues affecting the parish, and making sure that KCC gives proper attention to our roads. I would like to commend Susan on the excellent response to the Lower Thames Crossing consultation she submitted on behalf of the parish.

With elections this year, there was no guarantee that any of us would continue as Parish Councillors. But it is with particular sadness that I have to announce that Russell Cooper decided not to stand for re-election. Russell was an active member of the Parish Council for seven years, and we shall miss his valued input and pragmatic advice. This means that we have vacancy on the Parish Council, which we shall endeavour to fill by co-opting a suitable volunteer.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to our Clerk, Theresa Martin, who has decided to retire after 33 years of faithful service with the Parish Council. In that time, Theresa has seen many Councillors come and go, and has brought a sense of continuity to the Parish Council. Loyal to the end, Theresa has agreed to continue until we have found a suitable replacement and to help her successor settle into the role. I am sure that all Councillors, past and present, will join me in wishing Theresa a long and happy retirement.

Grant to Shorne C of E Primary School

In April last year we made a grant of £1,448 to Shorne Primary School for the replacement of much-needed extractor fans in the toilets. This need had been identified earlier in the year by Cllr John Bugg, who is the Parish Council's nominated member on the Board of Governors. John has also undertaken important work helping to supervise the contract to replace the school roof.

GDPR

On 25th May last year, the General Data Protection Regulation (or GDPR) came into force, and there was considerably conflicting advice about how this would impact the Parish Council. Since most of the information we deal with is already in the public domain, we decided to apply a light touch with regards to GDPR, but it made us think about, and document, how we deal with the storage and sharing of data. It also encouraged us to adopt a dedicated email domain for Parish Council correspondence, rather than use our own personal email addresses. This makes it easier to keep track of correspondence and to recover information if we receive a data request. It also makes it simpler for parishioners to get in touch with us, since all our email addresses are now just our names @shorneparishcouncil.org.

CCTV

Last year we reported on the installation of a CCTV system in the village, which was funded via a KCC Members' Grant sponsored by Cllr Bryan Sweetland. I am pleased to report that it has proved useful on several occasions, and images have been shared with the Police from time to time. I am particularly pleased to report that it was used to make a full recovery of costs after a vehicle struck the window of the Village Hall, causing £1,880 worth of damage.

AED

Just before Christmas, we installed an AED, an automated external defibrillator, outside the Village Hall. This was jointly funded by the Parish Council and the Village Hall, and again supported by a KCC Members' Grant sponsored by Cllr Sweetland. The AED is easy to use, with clear audio and visual instructions provided. It is accessible 24 hours a day via a code which is provided by the 999 operator in an emergency. This is one facility which we hope never has to be called upon, but it is comforting to know that it is there if ever the need arises.

SID

I am also pleased to report that the Parish Council has recently agreed to invest in a community operated speed indicator device, or SID, which monitors and displays the speed of passing vehicles. This will be similar to the unit in use in Cobham and Sole Street, and it is planned that our unit will be moved periodically between posts that will be installed in Pear Tree Lane, Tanyard Hill, and Thong. In addition to educating drivers and slowing traffic, the SID will gather valuable data regarding traffic volumes and vehicle speeds through the village, and can be used by our local Speedwatch volunteers.

Mobile Phone Masts

On perhaps a less positive note, following the withdrawal of the proposal to install mobile phone equipment in the Church tower, the Parish Council has received two enquiries from mobile phone infrastructure providers investigating the possibility of installing a mast on Parish Council-owned land near Mill Hill Lane. Whilst the first enquirer felt that the site was unsuitable and withdrew their interest, the second company has been more persistent.

Whilst the Parish Council has not initiated either of these approaches, we are aware of recent changes to legislation that gives infrastructure providers legal rights to compulsorily acquire the land under certain circumstances, and to claim compensation from local authorities that obstruct them. We have therefore granted them permission to survey the site for suitability, so that we can obtain further information without prejudice.

My own view is that there is a certain degree of inevitability that some form of mobile phone mast will be installed somewhere close to the village centre at some time in the future. We need to consider whether it is in the best interests of the Parish that it should be on Parish Council-owned land, where we may have some influence on its design and appearance, or whether it should go on private land, or land owned by Gravesham Borough Council or KCC, such as the roadside verges and greens in the village. In these circumstances, any influence we may have on the location or design would be limited, and the Parish would not benefit from any payments from the infrastructure company.

Website

I would like to once again draw your attention to the Parish Council website at <https://www.shornepc.kentparishes.gov.uk>. This is where we publish our programme of meetings, agendas, and minutes of meetings, as well as official notices, news items and our monthly newsletter. It also includes our contact details, and useful links to report fly tipping, potholes, footpath problems, etc. Please do not rely on our notice boards, as we cannot guarantee that these are always up to date, and important information may be covered up or removed. And for those who use social media, we also have a Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/shorneparishcouncil> which includes more news items and news of local road closures.

Local Plan

I cannot conclude my report without mentioning the potential threat to the parish from the latest housing targets for the Gravesham Local Plan. As reported in the 2014 Annual Report, Gravesham's original target of 4,600 new homes between 2011 and 2028 was considered unsound, and the target was increased to 6,170 new homes in order to obtain endorsement by the Planning Inspector. However, in 2018 this housing target was increased to 8,000, and Gravesham Borough Council has said that this target cannot be met without allowing up to 2,000 new homes to be built on what is currently classified as Green Belt land. The Parish Council will oppose any proposals which impact on the strategic gap between the built-up areas of Gravesend and the Medway Towns.

Bob Lane

Chairman of Shorne Parish Council

REPORT FROM CHAIR OF PLANNING AND HIGHWAYS COMMITTEE

Mrs Susan Lindley reported as follows:

This is my fourth year as Chair of the Committee, and first of all I would like to thank the Vice-Chairman, John Bugg for his assistance, Theresa Martin and all the members of the Committee and specifically Robin Theobald for all his help and advice.

Planning

This year the Parish Council has reviewed and made representations on 87 planning applications of various kinds affecting the Parish (including three outside our boundary). This is an increase of 26% on the previous year (69 applications), which itself was up by over 60% on the year before that (43 applications). It's been an interesting year!

The three outside our boundary were for a storage and distribution facility for ready-mix concrete lorries at Scalers Hill, an estate of 300 houses near Strood Fire Station and a four-storey block of 64 flats at Marling Cross. We objected to all of these.

Thirteen were non-residential of which four related to the Country Park and other woodlands, two were for change of use of existing agricultural barns (which cause concern over increased traffic) and two were in connection with a large new barn at what is now going to be New Green Farm apple orchards - you can watch that being built presently. One was hoping to increase land values prior to the Lower Thames Crossing, the Crematorium are wanting a more impressive entrance and someone wanted to put another 30 metre high telecoms mast at the Inn on the Lake but that application was withdrawn.

There was a very complex application at the Nuralite Industrial Estate (entered via Higham) to create a large business park that would greatly increase traffic through Higham, and we objected to that. We had sympathy for but have had to object to a proposed garden centre at Hartshill Nursery, again because of consequent increase in traffic.

That leaves 71 applications on 47 domestic properties, compared to 61 applications on 53 domestic properties last year. That statistic doesn't take account of repeat applications across the year ends but does begin to convey some of the difficulties of playing "spot the difference" with what are sometimes very complex and difficult to read building plans.

All applications are examined very carefully, and generally some kind of comments, of varying levels of detail, have to be submitted. All comments sent in by SPC can be viewed on the GBC website plus are recorded in the Planning and Highways Committee minutes, as is information about individual planning problems.

The detailed analysis will be published in the minutes of the next Planning and Highways Committee meeting. Some areas of the Parish cause a lot more difficulties than others. Most applications are reasonable and proportionate but some are “over-the-top”, very inconsiderate to neighbours and the rural environment and to the Parish as a whole.

Over the last few years there had been a temporary relaxation of planning rules (e.g. eight-metre deep rear single-storey extensions permitted without full consultation) but happily this is coming to an end soon. Since last year I can also say that it is now quite rare for us not to be consulted by the Borough Council, who do I think value our input.

Planning matters particularly worth mentioning:

- Lower Thames Crossing: The Lower Thames Crossing is our biggest “Planning matter”. After the “non-statutory” route consultation in 2016, we knew that a “statutory” consultation would follow at some point. The months leading up to the end of September were relatively quiet with not really a lot happening (the “calm before the storm” perhaps?), and no further information coming from or meetings held with Highways England (HE) – at least, not with the Parish Council. We were aware of meetings HE held with business groups, a KCC + Medway + GBC meeting in May and a briefing to MP’s in July (which Bob Lane had been kindly invited to by Adam Holloway MP). HE were meanwhile undertaking some wildlife surveys and aerial surveys of utilities (cables, drains, gas pipes etc) locally. During this time however, joint working/meetings started happening between the Lower Thames Crossing Association (of which Bob Lane and Susan Lindley are both members) and GBC, and that group also met with HE early in July. The meeting was very frustrating though as HE stuck to their old script even over items where we had heard confidentially through other means that changes had already been made, and they refused to show us any updated plans. As an example, only a few days after the meeting a revised (enlarged) “red line boundary” (borders of land required to build or operate the LTC) was published without it having been previously mentioned as being imminent, which made a mockery of the supposed collaboration.

By 4th October, there had been no new information or meetings since early July, but HE published the official notices announcing that there would be a 10 week statutory consultation between 10th October and 20th December 2018. As with the 2016 consultation, about 1500 pages of information and a variety of maps and charts were published as multiple documents and all of it had to be read through in conjunction with the 2016 documents to try and work out what had changed. Confusingly, the information on important matters like traffic volume and air quality changes etc, both of which will deteriorate, was presented completely differently so comparisons could not be made with previous figures. Some information was published with a superficial overview, which in some cases had very misleading charts, accompanied by other documents so detailed that average readers would not have a hope of understanding what read like somebody’s university PhD thesis.

As regards changes since the previous consultation, we had already been told that the junction with the A226 had been removed, and rumours that the tunnel entrance had been moved 600m further south were proved correct. However there were many aspects where

modifications that we had previously advised as essential had not been adopted, such as a very wide “green bridge” being needed at Thong Lane. There was a fly-through video released though which helped understand, and reveal the design deficiencies of, the vastly complicated and greatly enlarged junction with the A2 and the new feature of having side service roads. These changes greatly increase the loss of Green Belt land and woodlands.

HE held various consultation events in the area. Parish Councillors attended the nearest (Cascades 1st November, Shorne Village Hall 3rd November) and the mobile exhibition located at the Village Hall on 26th November to assist parishioners and ascertain their opinions. The Parish Council website and various Facebook groups were used to publicise the consultation locally.

We waded through the documents to the best of our abilities and our response is available for you to read on the Parish Council website at <https://www.shornepc.kentparishes.gov.uk/lower-thames-crossing-consultation-response/>. It focused on themes rather than going into minute detail. We also met with officers at KCC and GBC to ensure that the Parish viewpoint was incorporated into their highly detailed official submissions.

Overall there were 28,000 responses submitted to the consultation but nothing has been heard since. We understand that the analysis of and response to the points everyone made in their responses will not be published until the next stage in the process which relates to HE applying for a “Development Consent Order” as the proposals are classed as a “Nationally Significant Infrastructure” project. The date for this is unclear at the moment but when it happens there will only be 6 weeks available in which to read all the documents, analyse them and respond. Rest assured that we will again do our best to liaise with GBC and KCC and to ensure that all salient points are put across, to cast as much doubt as possible on the project and to achieve the most improvements that we can. We will continue to press for increased tunnelled/cut-and-cover length, wider “green bridges” and greater environmental mitigation for severely affected residents.

Recently we were informed that HE are taking over their previously closed lorry park at Marling Cross (fencing has already been erected) as a works compound for on-going geological and other ground investigation and environmental studies and they may also be again using the smaller compound at Queens Farm that they used previously.

- Fence erected across Burdett Avenue: At approximately this time last year a householder at the end of Burdett Avenue erected a fence that would have enclosed part of the adjacent field and also fenced completely across the end of Burdett Avenue so blocking residents from directly accessing Footpath NS156. The field owner promptly took legal action and that fencing was removed very rapidly. It was easily established that the highway runs right up to the field fence but still took several months for KCC to achieve removal of the fence by the householder, and it was only eventually removed on 12th September.
- A visitor from the frozen north: Parishioners may not all be aware but the Shorne Parish northern boundary is in the middle of the River Thames – this was highlighted last Autumn when “Benny” the Beluga whale took up residence for several months particularly in Shorne Parish waters near Shornemead Fort.

Highways

It has overall been quite a successful year for resolving Highways issues.

- New local managers (again!): Last year I reported that we had a new KCC local Highways Steward and new KCC Highways Managers for Gravesham. Unfortunately, this year I am doing the same – the rapid changes of personnel are unhelpful in getting highways matters progressed.
- The KCC on-line reporting tool: I make no apology for mentioning this again as it is the best way of reporting highways (and footpaths too) problems and getting them fixed. We strongly encourage residents to use it – you can pinpoint the fault on a map, see if it has already been reported, describe where and what it is, and upload photographs so that there is evidence and no doubt about the severity of the problem. See <https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/report-a-problem>

Highways matters particularly worth mentioning:

- Resurfacing of Cob Drive: I was very pleased that, having photographed all the potholes and reported the problem to KCC, the whole road was resurfaced in the summer (unfortunately they didn't repair the footways as well but that is a different matter!). It was a good quality job done in only two days and the contractors came back only a few days later and reinstated all the school entrance markings.
- “Stream” surfacing on Tanyard Hill: This was mentioned last year and since then it's been a see-sawing time for this again currently on-going problem. Thanks to the persistence of a householder, KCC were eventually nagged into investigating the soggy verge on Tanyard Hill. They said that water was flowing along the BT ducting and leaking out of it. Something that they did resolved the problem....we thought! Since a few months ago it had however been observed that water was draining off from the woodland and going into a drain but then coming back out of the next drain down, so KCC were asked to clear the drains. They came and did that, which seemed to work but then the gremlin struck again and the soggy verge has reappeared. Pressure is being put on KCC again to resolve the problem definitively (we hope).
- Traffic speed and calming on Brewers Road, The Ridgeway, Pear Tree Lane: This was also mentioned last year. We were generously provided with £2000 of funding from County Councillor Bryan Sweetland's Member Grant funding, and this was used to pay for traffic volume and speed surveys, which were done in October 2018. We are hopeful that the results mean that it will be possible to get the speed limit reduced along Pear Tree Lane. We presently await responses from KCC experts.
- Yellow lines proposals: After having discussed our parking problems in Shorne with KCC for several years now I am pleased to report that we have been able to make some progress. Consultations were held recently over installing yellow lines at the corners where Bowesden Lane joins Pear Tree Lane, which should help with parking associated with the See Ho, and on the two straight sides of Chestnut Green, which will improve sightlines on leaving Tanyard Hill. This coming year we intend to focus attention on the area around the Country Park and the junctions with Forge Lane near the school.

Susan Lindley

Chairman of the Planning and Highways Committee

The Chairman thanked Mrs Lindley for her report.

REPORT FROM CHAIR OF FOOTPATHS, PROPERTIES & GREENS COMMITTEE

Mrs McCluskey reported as follows:

I have just completed my first year on the Parish Council and also my first year as Chair of the Footpaths, Properties and Greens Committee. I would like to thank Bob Lane; Vice-Chair of the Footpaths, Properties and Greens Committee and my fellow Councillors for the advice and support they have given me in my efforts to maintain and improve our environment.

Footpaths

There are 13 miles of Public Rights of Way or Footpaths as they are sometimes called within the Parish. Most of the Footpaths and bridleways in Shorne are maintained by Kent County Council. Unfortunately, KCC are suffering more severe cutbacks in Government funding, resulting in a negative impact on the maintenance and cutting back of the vegetation along the footpaths. It's down to us all to make sure any problems with accessibility to the footpaths is reported to KCC before they become impassable. There is a link to the KCC reporting page on our website.

Properties

The Parish Council does not own a great deal of property. We have a couple of brick- built bus shelters on the Gravesend Road which are now over 60 years old and showing their age. These will need to be replaced sometime in the future and could prove costly.

Greens

KCC have been responsible for the maintenance of our roadside greens and verges since 2017. KCC is only responsible for cutting the 'urban' grass and this only happens 6 times a season and means that they can become overgrown during periods of excessive growth. The Parish Council considered taking over the maintenance of the verges from KCC, however the money offered was not sufficient to cover our costs and we do not have the capability of taking it on ourselves. The Parish Council continues to carry out supplementary Spring cutting of the verges where bulbs are growing and helps in keeping on top of the growth.

Our supplementary verge cutting (where bulbs are planted) has been increased from 4 cuts to 5 cuts this year, with an extra cut in June. We do this because KCC will not cut these verges (in Tanyard Hill, Post Office Green, and Chestnut Green) until the flowers have died back in June, by which time the verges are very long and untidy. The work we carry out helps keep the village centre looking neat and tidy.

There are 4 areas of common land that the Parish Council owns and is responsible for maintaining. These are the Recreation Ground, Shorne Common Rough between the Ridgeway and Woodlands Lane, Shorne Common (by the Scout Hut) in Mill Hill Lane and Crabbles Bottom between Crutches Lane and Bowesden Lane.

The Recreation Ground is leased by Shorne Football Club and the grass is maintained by Gravesham Borough Council. However, the entrance to the recreation ground has been suffering in the recent winter months and in need of repair. Harlex Haulage very kindly came to our rescue and offered to do the repairs for us and thus now reducing the many puddles so huge thanks to them. The padlock on the gate was also replaced this year after the previous one broke. A tree survey was carried out here in November 2018 and has shown that essential remedial tree work is needed on four trees within the recreation ground. We are currently awaiting final quotes for this work.

Shorne Common Rough had a new sign installed at the end of December last year however by the end of February, the sign, not the posts had been taken by someone. A very kind non-parishioner from Riverview Park has replaced the sign for us free of charge. One of the chestnut butts is missing and will be replaced in the next few weeks.

Shorne Common in Mill Hill Lane has had the play equipment refurbished to comply with the results of a safety inspection which had been carried out earlier in the year. The annual maintenance and bark spreading will be carried out in the coming weeks.

Crabbles Bottom is an area of 27 acres of woodland, meadow and ancient orchard between Crutches Lane, Bowesden Lane and the Wainscott Bypass owned and maintained by the Parish Council. We employ various contractors to cut back the footpaths and bridleway to make easy passage for visitors to walk through. We also have the grass in the orchards cut to prevent the brambles and nettles taking over completely. Again, this year we have had to replace more of the fencing alongside the bridleway as well as the wooden gate at the entrance. Hopefully if the weather is kind to us over the next 12 months; repairs to the fencing may not be necessary. We also added 3 metal signs to the entrances this year; to put a spotlight on this beautiful area and encourage visitors to walk, ride, bring their dogs and if they wish pick some of our lovely apples from the orchards and blackberries from our bushes.

We have added vegetation control in Bowesden Lane, so access to Crabbles Bottom is maintained for horses and walkers.

KCC Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan

I am pleased to inform you that KCC has adopted the revised Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). I contributed to this back in September and the final version was effective from 15th December 2018 until the end of 2028 and available to view on their website.

Litter Patrols

In the last year numerous litter patrols have taken place in all areas of Shorne. Over 100 volunteers gave up their time to attend no less than 4 litter picks and collecting in excess of 150 bags of rubbish.

In March, Shorne's litter patrol was co-ordinated with another 42 litter pickers from Cobham and Chalk, and we joined hands with them at Halfpence Lane and at the Crematorium, making a clean sweep from Sole Street right through Shorne village and Pear Tree Lane to the Lion Garage.

Michael Gardens Play Area

The play area in Michael Gardens; Shorne West has been given a small refurbishment by Gravesham Borough Council. The baby swing has been replaced and the toddler climbing frame and slide has been repaired and repainted. There are now also two benches located within the play area which have been installed after pressure from the Parish Council to Gravesham Borough Council.

Telephone Boxes

It was brought to our attention earlier this year that the two red telephone boxes in the village were looking a little tatty. I contacted BT and asked if they could come and repair the broken

glass panels and give them a little spruce up, which they did very quickly after my initial request. BT are looking to sell off old red telephone boxes and in the future if we want to keep these little pieces of our heritage, it may be that the village and its parishioners may have to take responsibility for them.

Lisa McCluskey
Chairman of Footpaths, Properties & Greens Committee

The Chairman thanked Mrs McCluskey for her report.

REPORT FROM GRAVESHAM BOROUGH COUNCILLOR

Cllr Theobald reported as follows:

There are a number of issues affecting the Borough Council. Firstly, in order to keep the Council running it needs to be on a sound financial footing. The funding the Council receives from central government out of general taxation has been cut by over 40% and is still being reduced. In the first instance, the Council looked to increase efficiency and reviewed its services with a view to increasing revenue and reducing costs. There are, however, limits to what can be reasonably achieved before services to the public begin to suffer. You may have noticed public toilets being closed.

The Borough Council has been receiving a 'new homes bonus' - a payment made from central government tied to the number of houses built. This is being phased out.

The Council holds balances, some of which it has invested in property which is giving a reasonable return to boost its income. With continued low interest rates, cash in the bank is not giving a good return.

The Thatcher government centralised the collection of business rates and redistributed funds. Areas with a lot of industry like Gravesham tended to lose out. The Government is now returning business rates to local authorities to compensate for some of the lost revenue but it is also clawing back a proportion.

The Council has also been looking for savings by sharing services with other authorities. Gravesham has some joint back-office services with Tonbridge and Malling and joined with Medway to share their legal services.

The Government limits how much local authorities can increase the council tax each year before holding a referendum on the increase. This year the limit is 3% and Gravesham's tax increase is 2.97%.

On the planning front, the Borough Council consulted last year on revision to the local plan. The current plan was adopted in 2014 and has interim approval until 2019, conditional on the Council undertaking a Green Belt review to identify land to be released for future housing. The approval was also conditional on the immediate release of the land off Coldharbour Road for housing. After the election, the new Council will need to produce a revised plan to be placed before a government inspector at an examination in public. It is important that the plan is approved if the Council is to be able control development in the future.

This document, entitled Site Allocations: Issues and Options, is the subject of consultation under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

Robin Theobald
Gravesham Borough Councillor

The Chairman thanked Mr Theobald for his report.

REPORT FROM KENT COUNTY COUNCILLOR

Cllr Sweetland, KCC Councillor for Gravesham Rural Division, reported as follows:

It continues to be a very busy year at Kent county council. At the moment we are just about to agree our budgets for 2019/20 and the council tax will be increased by just under 5% this year. That sounds like a big increase but the council tax element is just under 3% and then there's the 2% adult social services care charge which the government introduced a couple of years ago.

Again this year our funding from central government has been reduced by around £50M.

Over the last few months I've had a number of meetings with Highways England, Kent County Council Highways and the Borough Council on the plans to build the Lower Thames Crossing. Together with our MP, Adam Holloway and Bob Lane, I've met with Tim Jones from Highways England, he is the Project Director for the LTC. We had a fairly positive meeting and he explained some of their plans which included the enormous construction site that will be built adjacent to Thong and close to the Southern Valley Golf Course, which will close, probably within the next two years, if not sooner. The site will be the base for around 2000 construction workers and this is quite worrying for local people. The only positive I can see and something that I've been pushing for is that these new jobs should be offered to local people. There is also an opportunity for dozens of new apprenticeships to be created for local young people.

However, I don't think local people fully realise the extent and size of the construction site at the moment. I, together with representatives from the Parish and Borough Council will continue to protect the interests of local people as much as we possibly can.

Over the last 12 months I've been asked by several Parish Councils to fund quite a lot of traffic monitoring on local roads which may be useful to provide statistics as to the direction of traffic, the speed of traffic and whether the vehicles are cars or lorries. We can use this when challenging some of the Highways England assumptions.

We must not forget that KCC has many other responsibilities, such as services for young people and older people, social services, schools, libraries, trading standards, planning, recycling, responsibilities for flood risk, and so on. My role as a county councillor is also changing. I'm more and more involved with school appeals, school transport appeals and planning issues. I'm always happy to meet with local groups and parishioners to discuss any issue concerning the County Council and when necessary I will attend Parish Council meetings if there is a specific issue that I can help with. Recently I facilitated a number of events hosted by Matthew Scott, Kent's Police and Crime Commissioner. I hope that these events have proved useful.

I have also been involved in the fight to protect our precious greenbelt. I am disappointed that the Borough Council hasn't pushed back on some of the housing targets handed down by central government. I'm also concerned that the necessary infrastructure funding is not going to be there to support the new houses that are being planned. I also don't think it's necessary to build on huge areas of our greenbelt. For example, if Gravesham agrees to the house build targets the government would like to see, there will not be enough senior school places in the Gravesham Rural areas. The same will apply for other important public services as well.

On a positive note, our local schools in Gravesham Rural are all improving with many achieving OFSTED ratings of good or excellent. This is been largely down to the hard work of the teaching staff and governors supported by Kent County Council.

My job is made so much easier by having six excellent Parish Councils and several Community Associations. As a County Councillor I am in Maidstone for about 2 days a week. I chair two committees covering Policy and Resources and Property. I also serve on several other committees including Personal and the Kent Fire and Rescue Authority.

I am always available for any parishioners who need help or advice with any of KCC services and my contact details are at the bottom of this report.

As a KCC Member, I have a discretionary grant available which next year is being reduced from £20,000 to £15,000. Wherever possible, I discuss with local groups or Parish Councils where best to allocate the funding which is usually spent on community projects or small scale Highways work that might need doing.

Over the last year, I have used the grant funding to:

- Help fund an educational summer camp for 1st Higham Scouts
- Funded various traffic surveys across Gravesham Rural (including the A227)
- Helped with the renovation of Harvel Village Pond
- Sponsored 'Picnic on the Green' at Meopham
- Refurbished the Memorial Hall kitchen at Istead Rise
- Provide a number of public access Defibrillators / AEDs around our villages.
- Provide road signs (No HGVs etc.), Yellow Salt /Grit road side bins, Verge posts etc.

Bryan Sweetland

Kent County Councillor: tel. 07976 309171, but email is best: bryan.sweetland@kent.gov.uk

The Chairman thanked Cllr Sweetland for his report.

REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES OF LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Village organisations were invited to give brief reports on the year's activities. Apologies for absence were received from the Sheila Theobald Dancing School, Flower Arrangers, History Group, Pre-School, Probus, and the Women's Institute. Reports received were available for the public.

Reports were received from Sheila Theobald Dancing School, Dickens Country Protection Society, Early Retirement, Flower Arrangers, Pre School, Probus, Shorne ARA, Shorne

Bellringers, Shorne Scouts, Shorne Short Mat Bowls, Shorne Wood Country Park, Stages, Women's Institute and Shorne Village Hall Management Committee.

The Chairman thanked the representatives of the organisations for their reports.

Matters Raised By Parishioners

There were no matter raised by Parishioners.

There being no further business, the Chairman brought the meeting to a close at 9.27pm and thanked everyone for their attendance.

