

Shorne Parish Council

— Borough of Gravesham —



THE PARISH COUNCIL MATTERS

December 2019

Proposal for Mobile Telecommunications Mast at Shorne Common

Shorne Parish Council has received a formal proposal from Galliford Try, on behalf of Cornerstone and Telefonica, to install a 25 metre high lattice tower base station in an 8 metre x 8 metre compound on Shorne Common, off Mill Hill Lane. They have asked for our views prior to their formal planning application to Gravesham Borough Council.

This proposal was neither initiated nor is it welcomed by Shorne Parish Council. It is on parish land which was provided to the the parish council by the Earl of Darnley for the purpose of providing “a Recreation Ground intended for the use of the inhabitants of the Parish”. We have informed Galliford Try that we do not agree with their proposal.

We are aware that under recent changes to The Communications Act 2003, infrastructure operators can apply to the courts to compulsorily impose an agreement on the landowner to permit the infrastructure company to acquire the land for their equipment. Should they decide to go down this route, we have informed Galliford Try that the Parish Council is minded to oppose any such application through the courts. We have also informed Galliford Try that should they submit a planning application to install the equipment as proposed, we will strongly object to the application on valid material planning grounds.

We recognise the need to improve mobile network coverage in Shorne, and have expressed our willingness to work with responsible infrastructure providers to find a solution that achieves this objective whilst minimising the adverse impact on the local environment, and we are confident that the majority of Shorne residents would support this approach. However, we consider that a proposal for a 25 metre high lattice tower and an 8 metre square compound located within a locally-valued amenity is both insensitive and inappropriate, irrespective of ownership of the location.

Should they still intend to pursue this proposal despite our opposition, we have urged them to hold a public consultation meeting to outline their proposals, and to allow local residents to ask questions and express their concerns, before they submit a formal planning application. Shorne Parish Council has offered to facilitate and publicise such a meeting on their behalf. However Galliford Try has informed us that their client does not intend to hold a public consultation meeting.

We will keep residents informed of developments. Further information including plans of the proposed installation is available on our website at <https://www.shornepc.kentparishes.gov.uk/>

Shornemead Level Crossing Closure

Parishioners may recall that in November 2009, Network Rail closed Shornemead Level Crossing without any prior consultation or notice. It wasn't until 2016 that the crossing was reopened, following a great deal of work by members of the Parish Council to ensure that the crossing was recognised as a public right of way.

As a result of irresponsible behaviour of a number of individuals, including widely publicised CCTV footage of an incident in October this year where a youth on a motorcycle narrowly escaped being hit by a train, Network Rail has obtained permission from Kent County Council for an emergency closure of Shornemead level crossing. Shorne Parish Council was neither consulted nor informed about this.

Network Rail state that there has been a considerable number of 'near miss' incidents since the crossing was reopened in 2016. As a result of this, in September this year they installed covert cameras at the crossing. The results were alarming. In the first couple of weeks of the cameras going live, footage of two near miss events was recorded, including the incident mentioned above. In addition there were numerous other examples of users crossing with motorbikes, despite it being a pedestrian-only crossing. With a 70mph line speed and 183 trains a day passing over the crossing, including during the hours of darkness, they considered that the crossing posed an unacceptably high level of risk to both users of the public footpath and to train operations, and this led to Network Rail's emergency closure of the crossing.

Network Rail inform us that they will be using the 6 month closure period to examine their current risk mitigation measures and to develop an option for permanently stopping up and diverting the crossing, possibly using a pedestrian footbridge. That is clearly the Parish Council's preferred choice in order to maintain a safe, public right of way, and we shall be pressing for this option.

Footpaths

Footpath NS156 from opposite the See-Ho down to Swillers Lane has been cut back and is now passable. However, it is noticeable that a number of footpaths in Shorne show a distinct lack of regular usage. Kent County Council spends a considerable sum on cutting back vegetation from footpaths across the county every year, but with their financial constraints they are always looking for ways to save taxpayers' money. They could be forgiven for thinking it is not worth paying out several hundred pounds to keep a footpath open if it is hardly used. If this happens, the footpath would quickly become overgrown and may be lost forever. Regular usage helps to keep the grass flattened and the vegetation at bay, so we all need to do our bit.

Parish Council Meetings in December and January

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| Thursday 5 th December | - | Parish Council Meeting. (This will be a short meeting, and no significant business is expected to be conducted.) |
| Thursday 9 th January 2020 | - | Parish Council Meeting |
| Thursday 23 rd January | - | Planning & Highways Committee |

The meetings will commence at 7.45pm in the Committee Room in Shorne Village Hall.

Since this is the last issue of the parish magazine until February 2020, we have published our meetings scheduled for January above. In the meantime, parishioners are invited to log on to our website at <http://www.shornepc.kentparishes.gov.uk> and to follow our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/shorneparishcouncil to keep up to date with any important news and events affecting our parish. On behalf of the Parish Council, I wish all our parishioners a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Bob Lane
Shorne Parish Council