

LINTON PARISH COUNCIL

<http://lintonkent.org>

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21 April 2018

Chairman's Report to the Parish Annual Meeting 24 April 2018

Good evening everyone, thank you so much for coming. Having a Parish Annual Meeting is a legal requirement from the Local Government Act of 1972, but the meeting has its origins in medieval times or before and this is democracy at its most fundamental level. Everyone is entitled to come, everyone is entitled to speak and I hope you will do – ideally, briefly and to the point!

I will now tell you what the Parish Council's been up to since the beginning of last year. We are very fortunate to have two distinguished speakers tonight, and in order to leave room for them and for any questions you might have, I will skate through this rather quickly. A written copy of this will be circulated with the minutes and I will put it on the Linton Website as well.

I want to start with planning issues. Since January last year we have had to review 29 planning applications, which is easily a record, including three of the most significant ones in our recent history, namely Hill Farm medical centre, Vicarage Field housing, and the Wares Farm Industrial Site. This last is the largest factory development in the whole of the Maidstone area for some time. As I said in my report last year, and with no disrespect intended to the applicants, this factory is in completely the wrong place. Developments of this kind in the rural countryside are specifically forbidden, by several policies supposedly enshrined in the MBC Local Plan, and it is a matter of personal distress to me that despite our best efforts, we were unable to persuade the Borough Planning Committee to adhere to or enforce their own stated policies. In my view, once this factory is built and working, and the existing site in addition no doubt will be re-let, it will change the whole character of our village as we currently know it, and not for the better. We are where we are, however, and we are working with Berry Gardens Ltd and Alan Firmin Ltd to see how residents' concerns can be fed through and where possible, addressed. Recently another application was made, seeking to ease conditions attached to the original planning permission, and we are also responding to that. Our letter can be viewed on the Linton Website and I have a few paper copies here. Overall, the three sites I mentioned account for a total of almost 500 documents, some of them very long and very technical. I want to pay a special tribute to Cllr Cresswell, who has read and digested almost all of them and without whom we couldn't have dealt with these applications as we have.

Moving on from planning issues, here is a list of some of the other things we have been involved in, both last year and this:

Highways matters, in particular trying to persuade KCC to fix potholes, repair signage, and make our roads safer. I'm very grateful to my deputy Chairman, Ian Firmin, for working hard to keep our roads in good repair.

CCTV – the system in the church car park has been completely replaced and is now working well and producing clear images. The PC are very grateful to Messrs Alan Firmin Ltd, who have kindly funded the entire cost of the new system, £2,050.

Defibrillator – following a suggestion from the Village Hall Trustees a defibrillator has been purchased, commissioned and fitted to the wall outside this building. I'm very grateful to our KCC councillor Paulina Stockell, the Linton Walkers, and the Staplehurst Masonic Lodge, for donating funds towards the quite considerable cost.

Cornwallis Playground – Cllr Potter inspects the playground every month, and produces reports, and we fund any necessary maintenance and ensure it is carried out.

Litterpicks – we have held four of these during the year, and collected well over 100 bags of rubbish. I'm grateful to all who have helped with this, the volunteers themselves, Ian Firmin who organises the equipment and bag collection, and also Loddington Farm and Clockhouse Farm, who have kindly provided minibus rides to drop off the collectors. It's been one of the most rewarding things we've done, and if you haven't taken part in this I recommend it. And you get a drink and a chat afterwards.

Speedwatch – you will hear from our Co-ordinator shortly, meantime I will just say I think it's a really worthwhile initiative that has been proven to work, and allows us to do something for ourselves to bring down traffic speeds on the A229.

Neighbourhood Watch – our Co-ordinator Cllr Pat Burden keeps a steady flow of information and helpful advice coming our way. Very few crimes take place in Linton in fact, but it is always good to be forewarned.

Allotments – we get reports at all our meetings from our highly professional allotment manager Jane Sawyer, who you will hear from shortly, and we deal with the paperwork and any funding requirements.

Parish News – sadly no longer a monthly production, but thanks to Kath Cooper it still pops up from time to time, and I assist with the content and the PC shares the production costs with the church.

Linton Archivist – the Parish Council has appointed our first official Linton Archivist, David Sendles, to manage a growing stock of old photographs and papers; and you will hear from him later too, and it will be fascinating.

Boundary Markers – the Parish Council asserts ownership over the 37 boundary markers so far identified around the borders of Linton, old and new, and seeks to maintain and protect them as far as possible.

Maidstone Local Plan – despite its all-too-obvious shortcomings, the Parish Council has had to review drafts of the plan (which has 335 pages) and consider how it may affect Linton. Though there is no mention of the Wares Farm Development anywhere in the plan, which on the other hand *does* say "Development proposals in the countryside will not be permitted unless they accord with other policies in this plan and will not result in harm to the character and appearance of the area."

KALC – The Parish Council are members of the Kent Association of Local Councils, we attend their meetings, and review minutes, papers and proposals.

Village Hall – The Parish Council are owners and Custodian Trustees of the Village hall and its land, and we supply a representative to the managing committee, who reports back to all our meetings.

Linton Almshouses – another fine community resource, for those in need that have Linton connections. We were recently asked, and were happy to supply, a representative to join the Almshouse Trustees.

The **Linton Conservation Plan** – under review since 2008, it has caused us a fair amount of work over the years. We will come on to that shortly!

The Parish Council does not have a great role to play with the annual **Yuletiders lunch**, the **Linton Cream Teas weekend**, the **Friends of Linton Church**, or with the Church itself but in each case, one or more of our Councillors does, and it all helps towards an impressive Linton community effort.

I'm sure I've missed a lot out, but before we move on I want to mention a bit about the Council itself. We've held twelve meetings since the beginning of last year. None of us succeeded in attending all twelve, but two of us managed eleven and every Councillor came to more than half of them. None of us get any pay or even expenses, and I'm happy to be able to say that every one of them has contributed. I want to thank all the Councillors for their support while I've been Chairman. I have decided that although I'm going to continue as a Parish Councillor at least for the current term, I will not be standing as Chairman at the Parish Council Annual General Meeting next month (May 14th). I've only been Chairman two years, but it has been an exciting and a very busy time. It has not been the sinecure I was assured it would be by my predecessor! But nevertheless I have immensely enjoyed doing it.

I want to finish by saying one final "thank you" to everyone who has helped, everyone who has contributed, everyone who recognises that it can be more fun to give a little back, than it is to take. You are why although it is small, Linton is still punching well above its weight, and is still a lovely place to live in and a thriving community.

Thank you

Jerry Whitmarsh

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