

Due to the Medical Emergency it is over 2 years since we last met for an Annual Parish Meeting and I felt it important to at least give you a written report on some of the Parish Council's activities during this period.

In May the Parish Council held its first Public meeting for over a year. In the meantime we had been `meeting` by Zoom which, once we had got used to it, proved very effective. Indeed , I expect in the future many of our sub-group meetings will continue to be held in that way especially when they are scheduled for a dark, wet, and cold winter's evening !

Since we last met under the Chairmanship of Denis Cruse, and following the recent elections there have been many changes in the Council. In particular 2 longstanding members Denis and John Francis have retired. Many of you will be aware of Denis` dedication and professionalism; he was a popular and wise Chairman. We thank him greatly for his 16 years service and you will be pleased to hear he has offered to continue as the village Flood warden !

Less well known about is the work of John Francis. As the Council's financial officer John contributed massively to modernising and overseeing our finances, dealing with all the regulatory hurdles of modern life with lashings of common sense and occasional humour. The final important retirement was that of our Clerk, Barbara Uren. Barbara was Clerk for 13 years . Her encyclopaedic knowledge of village history, planning and the workings of Local Government were hugely valued by Denis and myself and we also owe her a big thank you.

The good news is that we have some new blood. Tracie Dodd was appointed Deputy Clerk just over a year ago and after various training courses was promoted to Clerk in November. She is doing really well. Also, following the Elections in May we were delighted to welcome Graham White and Tim Cornick as new Councillors. As many of you will know, Graham has done an outstanding job as Chairman of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering group over the past 4 years ; and Tim a retired lawyer and long time resident of Furnace Lane had already been contributing to Planning matters as a non-elected member of the Planning Committee. They will both be great additions to the team.

Before reporting on more general matters I would like to thank a number of people and organisations for their contributions to village life during the pandemic. As some of you may be aware we were all asked by TWBC to nominate `Local Heroes` during the pandemic. In no particular order they are:

St.Mary's Church Caring Group

Dawn Beeby and volunteers of the Lamberhurst Community Outreach Support Group (LCOS)

The Staff of St. Mary's Lamberhurst CEP School

Jo Harvey and all at Fidgets

Alison Marshall of Teise and Coffee

The staff of the George & Dragon Pub

Holly Roberts (Aged 16)

Alison MacFadyen

Mike Hughes and the staff of Moby Dick's Fish & Chip Van

**Dr Cameron and Staff of The Surgery
Shioban and all the staff at Victoria Stores**

**And lastly all the unsung heroes of Lamberhurst –
who pulled together and quietly helped their neighbours, family and friends in many and various ways.**

I would now like to turn briefly to some of the projects and activities the Council has been involved with over the past 2 years.

Under the leadership of Dawn Beeby our Communications Sub-group has been very active. In late 2019 with the help of Charlotte Bellingham (a village resident) we launched an attractive and informative new website which I hope you have all had the chance to view. Also, we now have an active village Facebook page to communicate more immediate news such as road closures , vaccination news etc.

Lamberhurst is very fortunate to have over 35 acres of Common Land and Green Spaces to enjoy. However this brings with it responsibilities and quite a workload; it absorbs about a quarter of the Council`s annual expenditure. During the past year, largely for insurance purposes we commissioned a professional tree survey. This led to quite an extensive programme of tree surgery for safety reasons. Further work was also undertaken on Common Land at Hook Green implementing recommendations of the Woodland Management Plan prepared for us by consultants a few years ago. Some of this work has been grant funded by Lund a conservation charity funded by the Rausing family.

Road safety in the village has always been a hot topic. The development of a Highway Improvement Plan (a so called `HIP`) by the Transport Sub-group (led by Rolf Smith and Sam Nicholas) provides, for the first time, a proper process for dealing with highway issues of public concern . The group have had a number of meetings with KCC to try address problems of safety and speeding as well as other issues such as unnecessary street lighting and signage. It is an ongoing battle !

Under the Chairmanship of John Uren the planning group has met frequently. Apart from many smaller applications they have scrutinised and commented on larger applications such the developments at Pelverers Farm and Court Lodge.

During the past few months the Council succeeded in purchasing the Chequers Field from Shepherd & Neame. This we believe is a great addition for the village and will be managed by the Playing Field Association together with their existing grounds.

Before finishing I should update you all on progress with the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP). I am delighted to tell you that the `Referendum` version of the plan is now in the hands of TWBC for (hopefully) final ratification. If all goes well we expect the referendum to take place in the early Autumn. Before that we plan to hold a Public Meeting to present its key messages. The NDP has been a major piece of work and, on behalf of all the residents of Lamberhurst I would wish to thank Graham White and Sam Nicholas in particular, but also many others, for the work they have done on our behalf over the past 4 years. It has without doubt been a bigger and more complicated project than we all anticipated and it is only through their tenacity that we have reached this point. Whilst 4 years is a long time it might interest you that we have overtaken a number of other Parish`s along the way and I think I`m correct in saying if things go to plan we will be only the second/third parish in the Borough of TW to have their plan `Made`.

I hope you have found this report informative and hopefully next year we will be able to return to `business as usual` and have a public meeting.