

Report for meeting of Vinters Park Residents Association AGM on 25th April 2018

Our thanks to the Residents Association for inviting us to the meeting today and allowing us to present an annual report to you.

The continuing cuts in Government finance over the past 7 years to both Borough and County Councils finances is making life very difficult when trying to get anything done. It has, unfortunately, also required that some non statutory services such as weed control and grass cutting have particularly been affected and others such as tree replacement have had to be stopped altogether. This situation can be frustrating for residents and Councillors as problems that we used to be able to deal with in days can now take weeks and even months or cannot be done at all. The art of making things happen, from a Councillor point of view is to continue to apply pressure and to make sure that what you need doing is on the list when money is made available.

As Councillors, we report anything we see that needs dealing with such as lights not working, potholes. Broken street nameplates, overhanging hedges etc. Borough Councillors deal with the many aspects of planning, play areas and control of our parks, waste collection, parking including Park and Ride, heritage issues, Licencing, social housing, local environment and of course tax collection. County Councillors you deal with highways including drainage, school and waste planning, education, All aspects of adult and children's services, social services, waste disposal, soft landscaping and country Parks, emergency planning, public health and libraries We do not control the police although, with others, we have an overseeing role in relation to the Police Commissioner. We have a different relationship with the Fire Brigade with Councillors from KCC and Medway Unitary authority forming the membership of the Kent and Medway Fire Authority.

Overall we act as the middle man or woman between the residents and the Council and others when residents are having problems that they cannot resolve direct through the normal contact systems.

Before I go onto general items, I still as County Councillor get a small devolved budget which I can use to deal with local problems in North and East Wards. This year about 25% of the money has gone on Road and other safety initiatives with more going on dealing with resurfacing of pavements and replacement trees. The remainder is used to support local organisations or charities.

Update on local issues:

A249 Bearsted Road Maidstone Major Infrastructure Improvement

Following the successful National Productivity Investment Fund bid, Kent County Council has been awarded £9.399m of Government allocation combined with £1.5m developer contributions and £500k Maidstone Borough Council investment to deliver a congestion busting improvement on the A249 Bearsted Road including the widening of the carriageway between Bearsted Road and Bearsted Road/Newcut Road roundabouts.

The outline design commenced in December 2017 and numerous investigatory works are ongoing which will assist in the design of the scheme. It is anticipated that engagement with the local community and stakeholders will commence in the summer

months with a newsletter being distributed to the surrounding businesses and residents accordingly.

It is anticipated that the detailed design will be completed by December 2018. The construction phase of the project will then start in the summer of 2019 with an 18 month construction period.

In connection with the above, KCC have submitted a Growth and Housing Fund bid to Highways England for release of funding to deliver the signalisation and localised widening of M20 J7

Play areas and green spaces – 2017 was a good year with the planned improvements to 33 of the main play areas throughout Maidstone having been completed, including Ashurst, Upper Fullingpits Wood and Penenden Heath. Also through grants and 106 planning money we have instigated the formation of a new Historic Garden at Penenden Heath to celebrate the history of this area.

Marks and Spencer– Eclipse Park – In late 2017 Waitrose unfortunately withdrew their application for a new Maidstone Store. This is now being replaced by a proposal for a new M & S store and Following the exhibition at the Hilton, talks between M & S representatives and Maidstone Borough Council has been ongoing. As yet we do not have a date for submission of a planning application

New urgently needed local Schools still delayed

It has been a number of years since the Government took away the responsibility for providing new schools from the County Councils,

Both the Senior and Junior schools much needed in our area continue to be delayed, The Maidstone School of Science and technology sited behind the existing Invicta and Valley Park schools is subject to a formal planning appeal with a Government Inspector due to take place in May.

The developer submitted the appeal on the basis of non-determination one day before the application went to the Planning Committee with a recommendation for approval. It seems that they object to the landscaping conditions and to providing a contribution to support improvements to the local bus service needed to accommodate increase in usage.

The Junior and special school on KIM land is awaiting decisions by the Government's Education and Skills funding Agency and we have no information as to when and whether a planning application will be made.

Another pot-hole blitz – There is another pothole blitz ongoing partially funded by the Government. If you see a pothole please report it using the Kent County Council web site or ring 03000 418181 or let Ian know.

Speedwatch – Once again Speedwatch has been delayed for a number of reasons. I hope to attempt to start it again during May. More volunteers required.

Lastly I want to congratulate the Residents Association team for the excellent year. Dealing with the serious problems of the leaks and then putting in place new ideas such as the coffee mornings, which I can recommend to you, all to help bring the local community together.

