

Annual Parish Meeting Presentation – 25 September 2023

Welcome everyone to our Annual Parish Meeting and a particularly warm welcome to our guest speakers - PC Gary Morris from Kent Police, and Simon White.

I'd like to kick off proceedings with an update on what's been going on in and around the parish this year so far.

Inevitably, I'll start with planning (which always seems to dominate our activities).

But it's pleasing that we have two success stories to talk about!

People say there's no point objecting to planning applications because developers always win.... Well, we've proved that not to be the case.

Firstly the five houses proposed for Cellar Hill – permission was refused by Swale Planning, but the developer appealed. The Parish Council wrote a four page letter supporting the objections of residents and 12 days ago the Planning Inspector dismissed the appeal.

Surprisingly, he didn't agree with us that the development would harm highway safety and Cellar Hill as a rural lane, but fortunately he considered those matters to be neutral.

He did however judge that the development would cause harm to the character, appearance and significance of the Cellar Hill and Greenstreet Conservation Area, and to the settings of the many listed buildings in the immediate vicinity. This was due to the loss of the site's undeveloped nature, and the visual contribution the site makes to these heritage assets.

So, whilst being designated a Conservation Area doesn't prevent new housing being built, it does help and proved a significant factor here. I'll come back to this point in a minute.

Our second success was on land to the West of The Street. We arranged for the developers to make a presentation to residents, following which we conducted a survey. We had nearly 100 completed questionnaires and the result was emphatic: 85% said leave the plot as it is and 80% didn't want any

houses built there. The developers did state they would walk away if there was no community support, some people were sceptical about this but they were true to their word.

I think it's fair to say that if we hadn't engaged with the developers as we did, they would almost certainly have slapped in an application and I've seen much worse plans approved. So we'd have ended up not only with the housing, but would have lost the opportunity to shape what it looked like.

Having said that, not all developers are as decent as this lot, and we can't rule out another developer coming along at some point.

Then there's the application to build 10 but really 50 houses East of Lynsted Lane. This was refused by the planning committee, but again the developer appealed. I don't have a good feeling about this one. The reason being, rather unusually, the Inspector has written to the developer - to say, if they were minded to allow the appeal, would the developer agree to certain conditions being met.

These conditions include things like providing parking spaces for existing residents; securing approval from the Council to a scheme of works to facilitate the safe movement of traffic and pedestrians; approval of plans to offset biodiversity loss; and agreeing a Construction Method Statement including, interestingly, "methods for dealing with complaints from local residents".

I think it's highly unlikely the Inspector would write such a letter if they were minded to dismiss the appeal. Equally unlikely is that developers would not agree to these conditions. So, despite all the work we've put into this and we've had tremendous community engagement, I don't think this one is going to go our way. Which of course will open the floodgate to the extra 40 houses.

On a slightly bigger scale, the plan to build 380 houses in nearby Tonge went to a public enquiry that was scheduled to last 8 days but was over in just one. SBC had already dropped its objections, so I think that's almost certain to go ahead.

As is the plan to build another 300 houses off Frogmal Lane in Teynham which already has outline planning permission - although the full application hasn't yet been submitted so it's not yet a done deal.

But it seems even the Roman sea god Triton is powerless to stop it.

On a macro level, the Swale Local Plan is on hold. As you know, four out of five options in the most recent Reg 18 consultation included more development in Teynham/Lynsted, so this threat remains.

The latest thinking at SBC, yet to be approved, is that:

“members defer a decision as to a timescale for the future stages of the Local Plan Review until such time as the national planning landscape is clearer - but independent of this process, to proceed to develop the evidence base regarding local development need and potential, with this process to be wholly reflective of local circumstance rather than central targets”

What hopefully this means is that we come up with an alternative but evidenced housing number that's lower than the government target. We'll have to wait and see, but I don't think we're going to see a new Local Plan approved and adopted before the end of 2025.

I mentioned earlier the Cellar Hill Conservation Area. This is being reappraised because it's on the Heritage at Risk Register maintained by Historic England. I was a bit concerned when I heard the word risk, thinking it might mean risk of losing the status - but what it actually means is the risk of damage from out of scale or inappropriate development impacting the area. This in theory makes development that degrades this rural setting less likely to secure approval.

A very constructive site visit took place 10 days ago with the consultant appointed by SBC to conduct the review which was attended by residents and parish councillors.

Discussion points and images provided by residents and the Lynsted with Kingsdown Society drew attention to the wider envelope in which Cellar Hill sits and the consultant was sympathetic to the view that surrounding fields should be considered when talking about the impacts on the Conservation Area itself. He seemed to agree that the open meadows and orchards towards Lynsted Lane are important to Cellar Hill and would be spoilt by the raised roof lines of development.

We wait to see what his report concludes. However it's encouraging to note that a recent appraisal of the conservation area in Hartlip included a recommendation to extend its curtilage - so there's the real possibility of Cellar Hill not only being re-confirmed as a conservation area, but being extended as well.

Over the year we have been working with KCC Highways to try to slow down traffic in Lynsted and Kingsdown. Village gates have been installed in Kingsdown and we continue to negotiate for a 30mph speed limit there.

In Lynsted, 30mph repeater signs have been erected and 30mph roundels have been painted on the road from the A2. "Pedestrians on Road" warning signs have been installed and we're negotiating with KCC for a "rumble strip" before the Swedish Houses.

Further improvements being discussed are a 20mph speed limit between Swedish Houses and The Vallance; and warning/painted lines "narrowing" the road from Toll Lane to the Lynsted village gate.

A significant drain on our budget has been the 41 streetlights for which we're responsible. In our last FY they accounted for 47% of our income. In addition to regular maintenance, tree pruning and the cost of electricity, we've had to fund numerous repairs – mainly as a result of vandalism, I'm sorry to say.

The saga of the Church wall continues but we seem to be winning the argument for traditional methods to be used in its restoration, as opposed to a cement-based wall with flint added afterwards which KCC were insisting on. A structural engineer and a stonemason are now drawing up designs for approval.

Missed bin collections have been an issue over the past few months, particularly in Cellar Hill/Cambridge Lane where Biffa were claiming they couldn't get their vehicles through. Overhanging trees and bushes have been cut back and the route has now been permanently scheduled on the narrow access vehicle round – so hopefully things are improving.

Air Quality remains a concern, particularly along the London Road, and with my Borough Council hat on I persuaded the environment committee to purchase mobile monitoring equipment to record the levels of particulate matter – which is caused by braking and tyre wear. PM2.5 and PM10 as it's known

cause strokes, asthma and affects lung development amongst other nasty health effects.

The Air Quality Management Area in Teynham/Lynsted should be the first monitoring zone and I'm hoping the data will help the Parish Council when arguing against excessive housebuilding because of course new houses bring extra cars with them.

In other news:

- We've installed a defibrillator in the garden of the Black Lion
- We co-ordinated a leaflet drop to all residents containing info from the Lynsted Community Garden, Lynsted fete and the Black Lion as well as the PC newsletter
- We carried out a litter pick in April. We had 20 volunteers and filled 35 bin liners in just two hours - so we're planning to make this a regular event
- We've written to KCC objecting to the proposed closure of the Faversham recycling centre
- And for the first time since I've been a parish councillor we're now at full strength with the recent co-option of Nigel Tiller onto the Council

I hope this has been a useful round up of what we've been up to.

JULIEN SPEED
Chairman