

## **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – APRIL 2019 TO MARCH 2020**

The last year has seen a great deal of change for the Ash Parish Council.

I would like to begin by offering heartfelt thanks to Graham Foat, who has provided unstinting service to the Ash Parish Council, and other parish organisations over the last 43 years. His knowledge and guidance over the last four years that I have been a councillor have been very gratefully received.

A new Ash Parish Council was elected in May 2019 comprising myself, Andrew Harris-Rowley as Chair, Martin Porter as Deputy Chair, with councillors Kevin Ellis, Peter Chandler, Jeffrey Loffman, and Jacqueline Wilkinson (re-elected), together with several co-options of Martin Humphries, Marion Owen, Leanne Steed, Len Rogers, and John Turner.

I am very happy to say that with three female councillors and a female clerk, the council now has a much improved gender balance, and I hope that this will be reflected in the decisions the council makes and the work we undertake going forward.

There has also been a great deal of change at Dover District Council (DDC). We now have two DDC Ward councillors instead of three - Trevor Bartlett as the new Leader of DDC, and Mike Connolly as the Chairman of DDC. We also continue close dialogue with Sue Chandler in her role as a Kent County Councillor (and she also remains a District Councillor for Sandwich).

### **Key Priorities for 2019 -2020**

The parish council must continue to provide good service to our local community, and therefore needs to be proactive in managing issues and effective in delivery of enhancements for the parish. To that end, one of our first actions as a new parish council was to decide on 3 key priorities for delivery in 2019-2020. These are:

#### **1. Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP)**

Delivery of the NDP has moved forward significantly over the last year and has included a number of consultations whereby parishioners could view and provide input. We hope to complete the NDP in 2020, but there remain several hurdles for us to clear. We owe a significant debt of gratitude to Chris Turner for his continuing efforts to get this long and complicated project completed, together with all those who have provided valuable input and guidance. Chris is no longer a parish councillor but continues to give his time to get this important project over the line.

#### **2. Upgrade of the Children's Play Area in the Recreation Ground**

We are looking to provide a bright, safe and welcoming play area for children of all ages in the parish. Work has already begun on the first phase for younger children and is due to be completed in April (weather permitting) providing all new equipment, improved accessibility and inclusive play items for children of all abilities and needs. The work has been paid for from Ash Parish Council reserves together with generous donations from the Jack Foat Trust and other local charities, a KCC member's grant, and money from a new development. Thank you to everyone concerned. There will be a public opening for this phase, and further phases in the future to provide further equipment near the aerial slide for older children.

#### **3. Highways Improvement Plan (HIP)**

The HIP is also being phased because of cost and time available. Phase I will begin soon and you can expect to see new gateways at Ash village entry roads, road markings to reduce speeding and improve traffic safety, and improved signage. Phase I is due to be completed in 2020. We will then be looking at options for phase II which will look in more detail at specific traffic "hot spots" across the parish.

There are many other areas that need our focus e.g. sustainability and the environment, digital working etc. These will be added to the list as soon as resources allow.

As we look at these projects and at the work more widely that the parish council undertake, we have tried to ensure that we deliver improvements for all age groups, for example youngsters with the children's play area, youth with sponsorship of Pie Factory Music youth club, or older folks with ongoing support for the Village Hall with its coffee mornings etc. It is also important that whilst Ash village is a focus due to the number of residents, we must also support the smaller outlying hamlets.

We have also been working to improve the way that the parish council communicates the work that it is doing. You will have received the – very useful – Ash Parish Directory with this notice, and will now receive it annually going forward. Along with our continued use of noticeboards, parish newsletters etc. we have begun announcing news and updates on local Facebook pages so that we can reach a wider audience of all ages. We are also currently reviewing our web-site with the aim of making information quicker and easier to find while ensuring it fulfils all data privacy regulation requirements.

Planning has become an important focus over the last year. We have created a planning committee to handle the number of applications for new builds as well as the usual applications for extensions and other improvements. The committee has been well attended by parishioners who have provided very open and clear feedback to the council, and has helped to manage multiple planning issues in the parish e.g. retrospective applications, unplanned traveller sites etc.

Whilst these priorities have kept the council very busy, we continue to provide regular management, maintenance and improvements across the parish. This last year we have carried out a number of improvements: in the recreation ground the toilets and furniture have been repainted and new boot scrapers have been added. New dog bins and signage have been added in the recreation ground and Chiltern Fields.

After investigation, the long-endured water leak on Cop Street was found to be from Southern Water and was repaired this year. Weddington Lane has been partially cleared and temporary steps installed until the final path can be cleared and then the council will apply to have it 'designated' that is recorded as a Public Right of Way.

A successful litter day was carried out again in July. The defibrillator was installed at the Ash Village Hall entrance and is listed with the emergency services and is accessible 24 /7. I was particularly pleased that the village fete was a great success and I hope it will continue.

On a final note, and quite importantly for the parish, the Ash Parish Council met with DDC to discuss charging for The Street Car Park. Our strong recommendation to DDC was that charges are not introduced, and the car park remain free for use, ensuring that those who need to drive into the centre of the village are not penalised. We await a decision which is due in April.

Thank you to everyone who has input to the work of the Ash Parish Council this year, and to those in the parish who have so helpfully provided guidance and their time.

Andrew Harris-Rowley  
March 2020