

**MINUTES of the CHART SUTTON ANNUAL PARISH MEETING  
held at 7.30pm on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2024 at Chart Sutton Village Hall.**

**PRESENT:** Cllr P Forknall as Chairman and Parish Councillors S Waring, V Underdown, M FitzGerald MBE, R Sagrott, C. Webb and Mrs L. Windless, Clerk to the Parish Council. They were joined by County Councillor Lottie Parfitt-Rid, KCC Warden, Dawn Riach-Brown plus 14 other speakers / attendees.

**1. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME**

The Chairman welcomed all those present.

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received and accepted from Parish Councillor, Paul Ward and Borough Councillor, Steve Munford.

**3. MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCILLOR, STEVE MUNFORD**

Cllr Munford was not present at the meeting.

**4. KENT COUNTY COUNCILLOR, LOTTIE PARFITT-REID and KCC WARDEN, DAWN RIACH-BROWN**

KCC Warden, Dawn Riach-Brown explained that the team is now down to 6, with 3.5 wardens covering Maidstone, 1.5 wardens covering Tonbridge and Malling plus 1 team leader. With such a reduced team the focus has to be on areas of deprivation although wardens will always be available to speak to residents and can be contacted on 07969 58418. Dawn covers Parkwood, Shepway and everywhere within a 3 mile radius. The Public Protection – Kent Facebook page provides useful information on how to avoid scams etc. 'No cold caller' stickers are available from wardens who can make visits to vulnerable residents.

Cllr Fitzgerald suggested KCC should rethink their decision to reduce the number of wardens. Cllr Parfitt-Reid advised that she had asked for a piece of work to be done on this, asking for more wardens and felt that it would save KCC money in the long term.

Cllr Parfitt-Reid had provided a written report which had been circulated to Parish Councillors in advance of the meeting and is detailed below.

Prior to the budget, KCC received news that central government was giving some additional support to local authorities which, with the exceptionally challenging financial pressures all councils are under, is very welcome. Of the £600M announced, £500M is new funding for Councils with responsibilities for adult social care and children's social care. The benefit to KCC is around £12.9 M however this really doesn't address the structural issues we are faced with and difficult decisions to ensure the Council's sustainability will have to be made.

**Adult Social Care**

Adult social care is still, and probably will be until the whole sector is reformed, the biggest and most troublesome aspect of our statutory responsibilities. Many transformative initiatives are happening which are starting to show green shoots of delivery but it is early days and the problem is ever increasing. There is a big push to increase the uptake of direct payments.

We have launched a new 'Enabled Lives' service with a raft of digital technologies with the aim of keeping people living independent, healthier and longer lives in their own homes.

I have been asked to serve on the adult social care committee and I am looking forward to contributing to this department.

**Children's Services:**

I have constantly sought assurances that the money from the closure of the Marden's children's centre will be invested in staff and people to deliver a comprehensive and reliable outreach service for residents. I have also been reassured that no closure will happen until we know what, where and how the service will be delivered. Our meeting with the team was positive but now we need to see actions. My concern is that things are happening at a snail's pace and then suddenly it's all change so I will keep asking for updates.

**UASC:**

We continue to press for a comprehensive national transfer scheme as this is the only long term solution to enable us to dispatch all our legal responsibilities. This is after all a national issue and must be treated so. Reception capacity for 9 sites is being established to comply with the court judgment from last July, no such site is currently in our division.

## Highways

### The state of the road network

The state of our roads is blatantly clear for all to see and the situation is not good. We are of course at the worst time of year for torrential rain and coupled with freeze / thaw over the winter, the damage is unprecedented. This is unquestionably a national problem but of course that provides no comfort to residents. Recent correspondence with Neil Baker, our highways cabinet member, has emphasised that to repair and bring up to standard our entire network would cost £700M and if all assets were included it would be in excess of £1B. This puts the government's allocation of £134M over the next 10-11 year into context - it will help but is hardly transformational. On a positive note we are bringing the pot hole blitz forward and the funding does give us a degree of confidence to set longer term plans.

### Utility roadworks

This is probably the number one issue I get contacted about - emergency road closures. These spring up instantly and seemingly with no thought or consideration for planned or scheduled works that are going on nearby. Consequently we have set up a Project Team to look at the issue. This is not least because a significant percentage of utility roadworks are classed as emergencies, based on their own definition of the term, This means KCC gets no notice of them and only has to be informed two hours **after** they start. It should be noted that over 30% of road closures are done under emergency powers.

On a final and personal note, whilst I have many concerns regarding the KCC budget I felt it my duty to vote it through. Things are very challenging but nothing compared to the consequences of having to issue a 151 notice. There was however a saving put forward of £1.3M which involved the allocation of approx. £330K to MBC to assist with recycling, which was to cease immediately. On the surface it would be easy to conflate this with money that could be used to save the Household Waste Recycling Centre but they are different things. This money is vital for the borough and would in the long term save KCC money in the form of gate fees at the Allington incinerator by diverting recycling to material recovery facilities in advance, therefore sending less waste to Allington. It also helps us hit recycling targets, allowing us to reclaim PRN. An amendment was put forward by the opposition to restore this payment to the 4 boroughs which I explained to the leadership team I felt I must support and therefore voted for this amendment.

With reference to residents' questions, Councillor Parfitt-Reid stated that KCC sometimes repair potholes on a temporary basis prior to carrying out permanent repairs. Temporary repairs should be marked up on the ground with a 'T'. A pothole blitz is about to start. Specific potholes were mentioned and Cllr Parfitt-Reid asked residents to contact her with reference numbers so she can investigate.

In her role as Borough Councillor, Cllr Parfitt-Reid spoke briefly regarding initial problems with the new MBC waste collection contract.

## **5. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING HELD ON 24<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2023**

It was discussed and resolved "**that the Minutes be agreed as an accurate record**". This was **Agreed** and the Chairman was authorised to sign off the official copy.

## **6. PARISH COUNCIL REPORT**

A copy of the Parish Council Report was provided to all attendees. Copies of the Report including draft receipts and payments figures for 2023/24 will be produced with the June edition of the Village News.

## **7. REPORTS OF LOCAL ORGANISATIONS**

### **(a) Mr Mike FitzGerald, MBE for The Royal British Legion Sutton Valence and District**

This is the 100<sup>th</sup> year of our Branch and we celebrated it on May 16<sup>th</sup> last year when we organised a coach outing for 100 members and friends to Leeds Castle followed by a Celebration Dinner at the Weald of Kent Hotel in Headcorn. The Sutton Valence Combined Cadet Force raised the flag and Vicar, Fiona lead the Prayers. It was a day when we could remember those members and supporters who have managed our branch and supported the British Legion for the last 100 years. We hope to continue to serve the armed forces and their families for many more years to come.

Our branch was very privileged to receive the FREEDOM OF THE BOROUGH at the October Maidstone Council Meeting.

Currently we have 40 plus members, and we really would like to attract new members from the village to come and help provide sustainability for the future while enjoying the friendship and fulfilment of raising funds and providing activities, engaging with the young and not so young. We have lunches and

coffee mornings, quiz nights and afternoon teas, responding to suggestions. Membership is £19 a year which supports the Legion and ensures it is able to run its National events and promote the Poppy appeal. All our events are for everyone to share, to bring joy, happiness and friendship to the community.

**(b) Ms Heather Knowler for St Michael's church, Chart Sutton**

2023 saw St Michael's church holding regular services – generally two per month, plus additional ones at Easter, Christmas, the Battle of Britain service and Remembrance Sunday. We also held a Carol service just before Christmas in the village hall and a pancake service at the beginning of Lent.

In addition, we run a few fundraising events with a focus on the outdoors. Tea on the lawn at Chris and Sue Webb's house - a beautiful setting for tea, cakes and games. The other event is the Sale on the Green – usually held on the Saturday of the May bank holiday, this year at 10am on 4<sup>th</sup> May. We will have plants, books, cake, a selection of jugs and pots and the usual tombola.

We have not had any heating in the church for the last two years but we are looking into a system involving heated pew runners and are in the process of obtaining specifications and costings.

Our vicar, Fiona has announced her retirement as of 1<sup>st</sup> September. Over the last 10 years or so, Fiona has led the Benefice of the Suttons and Headcorn with good humour and has got to know a good few Chart Sutton residents during her time here. The process of seeking a new vicar cannot start until after her departure and it could take a year or so before a new vicar is in place.

We would like to thank everyone who contributes to the life of the church. While we are a small congregation we are very aware there are supporters who help keep the churchyard looking good, help with cleaning, provide and arrange flowers and support fundraising events. We are also grateful to the Parish Council for the donation they provide towards the upkeep of the churchyard

**(c) Mr Peter Forknall for Mrs Joan Johnson Trust**

The Trust meets 4 times a year. Income for the last year was £568 with £450 given to residents in need. Applications to the Trust are always welcomed.

**(d) Mr Steven Waring for the Chart Sutton Community Shop (Shop on the Green)**

The shop has been running for approximately 11 years and is an important community facility, run entirely by volunteers. More custom is needed to ensure its long term viability. There have been a few problems with the Post Office not turning up but this is outside our control. The Parish Council has recently agreed to give an annual grant to the shop to cover toilet maintenance costs.

**(e) Mrs Valerie Underdown for Speedwatch**

There has been very little done with Speedwatch in the last few months due to the terrible weather we have had. On more than one occasion I have booked in a session only for it to rain before we have gone out. The high winds have also been a problem as the equipment is in danger of being blown over. I am hopeful that the next few months will see an improvement and we can start back up again.

The village has not been without cover as the Police van has been around and continues to catch those who think our village is a race track.

**(f) Mrs Valerie Underdown for Neighbourhood Watch**

After a few years when it was very quiet, things have picked up again and there is a Police officer dealing with Neighbourhood Watch matters. I receive regular communications from her and these are circulated to the group of residents who have opted to receive them. These can be about fraud, countryside crimes or how to protect your property. If you are not on this e-mail list and would to join please get in touch.

**(g) Mrs Valerie Underdown for the Chart Sutton Book Club**

We still soldier on even though we are reduced to just 5 members. The third Wednesday of the month sees us in the café at Millbrook Garden Centre, discussing the latest read. 2.30pm is the time so if you feel like joining us, come along. If you can let me know in advance, I can get a copy of the latest book for you. I usually collect it from the library on the preceding Monday.

**(h) Mrs Valerie Underdown for the Amenities Committee**

The committee is a group of people who arrange the social activities of the village - coffee mornings, afternoon tea, jumble sales, all done to raise money for the Christmas dinner. Unfortunately these events haven't been very well attended this last year, so much so that it things don't pick up we will have to start charging for the dinner which is something we don't want to do.

**(i) Mr Peter Underdown for Chart Sutton Short Mat Bowls**

I run the short mat bowls club which has been in existence since 2000, with 3 of the original members still playing. We play on Friday evenings and at the moment have 15 members which is sufficient to allow everybody to play without having to sit out a game.

**(j) Mr Peter Underdown for Chart Sutton Village Hall**

The hall is run by a committee of which I am Chairman. The hall is a very popular venue with varied lettings from yoga and pilates to dog training, children's dance classes and the aforementioned bowls club. It has been described by many who hire it as cosy and friendly.

**(k) Mrs Christine Parkes for the Three Suttons Helpline**

The Three Suttons Helpline continues to give lifts, mainly to medical appointments, to the people who live in the villages of Chart Sutton, Sutton Valence, East Sutton, Langley, Kingswood and Broomfield, and to the patients of surgeries in those villages. The Helpline is run entirely by volunteers and users of the service are encouraged to give donations, if they can afford them, towards petrol and the running of the scheme.

Over the past year over 300 lifts have been given. Last year there were about 240 and there were about 400 in the pre-pandemic year.

This year, most of the lifts have been to Maidstone Hospital (c.75), Sutton Valence surgery (c.59) and Langley surgery (c.56). Other lifts have been to other local hospitals, surgeries, dentists, eye clinics, foot clinics and for essential shopping.

Most of the lifts have been for residents of Kingswood (c.119), then Langley (c.94) and then lower numbers for the other villages (between 4 and c.40). There were about 24 lifts for residents of Chart Sutton which is a much smaller number than in previous years.

We have about 18 volunteer drivers but we are always delighted to welcome new people to join us.

We are extremely grateful to Chart Sutton Parish Council for giving their financial support to this scheme for many years and for being able to give our reports at the Annual Parish Meetings.

**(l) Mr Chris Webb for Sutton Strollers**

Sutton Strollers has its origins in the 1970s. It is a local walking group that meets on the 3rd Sunday of every month at 1.30pm at a pre notified starting place, normally within the curtilage of the 3 Suttons, but occasionally out of the immediate area.

We have an e-mail list of around 40 contacts and normally walk for around 2 hours. We use local footpaths when rain permits and in recent months have had between 4 and 10 walkers each time, plus dogs. This year we revived our New Year's Day walk with a tea afterwards; the tradition had fallen into abeyance during Covid but I am glad to say it was a great success this time and we are grateful to the Gullands for hosting the event.

I normally take this opportunity to also mention the monthly 'First Thursday' walking group who set off from Chart Sutton village hall car park at 11am and walk down to the Lord Raglan for an informal lunch and chat. Afterwards some of us return on foot as well but it is certainly not obligatory.

Anyone is welcome to join either or both walking groups. If you would like to be put on the contact list please get in touch.

**(m) Miss Catherine Hampson for Sutton Scouts**

The Scout Group is doing well. Recent activities include climbing, axe throwing, zorbing, bell ringing, and fire lighting. The cubs took part in a sleepover at The Mall in Maidstone to raise money for a homeless charity. A summer camp will be taking place in Hamlet Wood in Coxheath. The group took part in the remembrance day parade at Sutton Valence and will attend the St George's Day parade as well as helping run the BBQ at the D-Day anniversary event in June. The clothes bank in the village hall car park generates funds for the group and a fundraising Christmas fair was held in Sutton Valence village hall.

**8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Cllr Webb took the opportunity to publicise the 3 Suttons D-Day 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary event taking place in Sutton Valence on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2024. The event has been publicised in the Village News but posters will be going up soon. All residents are invited to attend.

**The Chairman closed the Meeting at 8.20pm.**