

Chairmans Report – East Sutton Parish Council – May 2016

Last year I started my report by saying that the Parish Council has many rolls in the local community but increasingly it is Planning that occupies much of our time. The year before I made a similar comment and nothing has changed over the period. Whilst East Sutton has not seen the type of large scale development which has affected neighbouring villages, Maidstone Borough Council still do not have a local plan in place and this, together with higher confidence in the property sector, has resulted in a great increase in development applications in Sutton Valence and Headcorn. This coupled with large scale development, which is already taking place to the southern side of Maidstone, will greatly increase pressure on our local amenities and infrastructure. I know personally that travelling by road from our Parish into Maidstone is an increasingly slow and congested process and whilst there has been much talk of a Leeds Langley By-pass connecting our part of the world through to Junction 8 of the M20, it seems that if it were ever implemented, this would be many years into the future.

At the time of making this report nothing more has been heard regarding the Governments proposals for East Sutton Prison, talk of closure for the time being has subsided. There has, over the last 2 years, been much talk within the Parish Council about whether we should produce a neighbourhood Plan. Janet, our Clerk, sent a flyer around the community asking for peoples thoughts but very little response was forthcoming. I understand that other Parishes who have attempted to produce such a plan have, to a degree, been frustrated by the long winded process and I think, at the time of making this report, only one plan in the Maidstone Borough Area has been set in place. As I have said previously, East Sutton would not attempt to produce such a plan without support from Parishioners. Neighbourhood plans can be useful in setting out either the overall vision for the Parish or perhaps concentrating on one or even several specific sites, for example the Prison, detailing the communities hopes and aspirations for any future development.

If you were to ask members of this Parish Council what is the most difficult aspect of our role, I am sure that, in unison, they would say Planning. In a small community where virtually everyone knows everyone else, Planning Applications are always dealt with “without fear or favour” and yet, during the course of this last 12 months, four members of this Parish Council received complaints with regard to the handling of one application, from a member of the community. Maidstone Borough Council have a process to deal with such matters and after this was formally investigated I am pleased to report that all members were cleared of any wrong doing. It did however serve to point out that there is, perhaps in some members of the public’s minds, a misunderstanding as to the role of a Parish Council. We are not here to decide Planning Applications, we are simply consulted as local representatives to offer to Maidstone Borough Council Planning Department comments based on local knowledge and where possible on Planning grounds.

From a Parishioners point of view it is probably roads, particularly during the winter months, that are of most concern. For many years past there have been no significant road improvements in the Parish, the Local Authority simply reacting to damage by filling pot holes, allowing the edges of roads to erode and the verges to become wider as people insist on driving over them. With constraints in budget I do not see the

situation improving and some roads, such as Morry Lane and Friday Street are on the verge of becoming impassable for some vehicles. Malcolm will shortly give you an update on the Highways situation within the Parish.

Fly tipping continues to be a problem. Our lane was recently targeted. For some inexplicable reason someone deposited half a dozen sacks of general rubbish which were then broken into by foxes and crows with litter being spread right up the road. I would urge you to report immediately any incidents of fly tipping, either to Maidstone Borough Hotline or to Janet.

But, on the positive side, what a wonderful place East Sutton is to live in, a good community spirit with a large proportion of the population getting involved with events around the Parish. Last Saturday I attended the Flower & Coffee Morning at East Sutton Prison held on behalf of the Church which was really well attended. The Filmer Hall Committee continue to put on events which are really well supported and one to look forward to in the very near future is the Queen's Birthday Barbeque on the 10th of June which, weather permitting, will involve the use of the playground area for sitting out, hopefully on a warm balmy early summer evening. Other organisations continue to prosper within the village including the Cricket Club, Bell-ringers, Whist Drive and Drama Group.

We are also very grateful for the support we receive from our Local Councillors, Jenny Wittle for the KCC, Martin Round from Maidstone Borough Council and grateful thanks to our outgoing Maidstone Borough Councillor Richard Thick. I would also like to offer welcome our new Maidstone Borough Councillor representative Shelina Prendagast and thank her for her hard work in dealing with the Solar Farm Application at Tonge Farm. This was absolutely invaluable and I look forward to her support and input at future meetings.

Finally, I would like to offer my thanks to Janet, our Clerk, for her professional help and guidance through the very complicated business of running a Parish Council and also thanks to my fellow Councillors: Malcolm, Graham, Elizabeth and Jonathan, for their continued hard work and support.

TIM A. TURNILL, MRICS