

Report to Fawkham Annual Parish Meeting 2020

I am sorry I cannot present this report in person, I am in a vulnerable category in the current emergency and anxious to avoid a by-election; accordingly I am isolating myself for the time being.

This my fifteenth year as your County Councillor. I also represent Hartley, New Ash Green, Ash, Hodsoll Street, West Kingsdown, East Hill and Knatts Valley. I have had a busy year locally with the usual schools appeals, transport appeals and highways issues. I am watching your negotiations with Kent Highways over Valley Road; the issues over traffic speeds are almost generational and almost impossible to solve. I arranged a speed survey a number of years ago and generally speeds were within acceptable limits. Unfortunately there are always those who drive at excessive speeds and it is a truth that they will not observe limits whatever they are, and the police will not enforce them.

The most time has been expended on the consequences of the flooding incidents we have experienced since June 2020, relieving the floods and trying to improve highway drainage infrastructure to prevent further damage to people's homes.

One of the casualties of the financial privations of the last five years is the cuts to the youth service, barely able now to be described as such.

I am (or have been) at County Hall four or five days a week. I have many committee duties and have completed service on select committees on Affordable Housing and also Loneliness & Social Isolation. I am chair of the Governance & Audit Committee.

The changes at County Hall over the last few years have been profound; almost everything we do and the way we do it has changed to reduce costs. Much work has been outsourced and there is a continual need to examine the success of the commissioning that has taken place. In the area of social care a lot of the outsourced work has been undertaken by the charities in Kent.

This year our grant from central government was better than we expected and has enable us to trickle money into visible services like the Community Wardens (there will be more of them) and highways. Government grant after the last few wet winters, coupled with money from KCC budgets has enabled us to deal with potholes with more vigour than before, using local engineering firms to do the

work. The work will never be finished and we shall always have a backlog of maintenance. Currently it is excess of £600m.

KCC recognises the sharp increase in environmental concerns (Extinction Rebellion invaded our council chamber recently) and a new Leader at KCC, Roger Gough has appointed a Cabinet Member for Environment. I am myself a member of the Kent Environment Strategy Cross-Member Working Group with a wide-ranging brief but too few powers.

KCC will be vacating Sessions House in the next year or so. The building was constructed in stages from dates ranging from the 1840's to 1939 and much of the building is not safe to use. It is certainly not fit for purpose. The probability is that Invicta House will be altered to accommodate more people and there may be space available in the huge redevelopment of the area surrounding Maidstone East Station.

I would encourage the Parish Council and local people to contact me on matters that concern them. An insoluble problem for me has always been that Fawkham's Parish Council meetings are invariably on the same night of the month as Ash-cum-Ridley's. Theirs is a much

larger community than Fawkham's, but if you will let me know when issues arise locally that I can assist with, I will come to Fawkham.