

BREDGAR PARISH COUNCIL



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2019- 2020

My first year as Chair of Bredgar Parish Council. A year that has mostly been unremarkable but that has ended in extraordinary times due to the Covid19 / coronavirus pandemic. I have pleasure in setting out some of the achievements and concerns of the Parish Council over the past year.

Appointments

Following the elections in May 2019 we welcomed two new Councillors Michael Day and Carole Charman onto the Parish Council. Unfortunately Carole needed to step down during the year but she has since been replaced by Stephen Parfitt. The council has its full complement of seven Councillors. Teresa Hudson continues as our highly valued Clerk to the Council and Responsible Financial Officer, as well as being our website coordinator, alongside myself.

The following appointments have been in place through this year:

Brian Clarke Chair: KALC, GDPR & IT.

Penny Twaites Co-Vice Chair: Representative to the Governing Body/Local Monitoring Committee of Bredgar School.
Responses to Residential and Local Planning.

Jane Ingram Co-Vice Chair: Post Office Support. Village Hall Representative.

David Priestley Councillor: Pond Warden. Pest Control. Heritage.

Beverley McCourt Councillor: KCC Highways. Thatcher and Eleemosyary Charities Representative.

Michael Day Councillor: Footpaths. Parks & Gardens. Pest Control.

Stephen Parfitt Councillor: Parks & Gardens.

Finance

The Parish Council increased the precept by 1.5% for the financial year 2020/21, approximately in line with inflation. The increase being needed to fund forecast increases in soft landscaping costs and to maintain funds for our outstanding projects list. Reserves are in place to assist with unexpected expenditure and for improvements requiring capital expenditure. The Parish Council have continued to supplement our precept with funding from grant applications during the year. We were successful in obtaining a further £1000 KCC Sports Grant towards the Recreation Ground

fencing project during the year. The Responsible Financial Officer and Councillors closely monitor expenditure throughout the year.

Planning

Councillors have reviewed Planning Applications and submitted comments dilligently during the year. Three of our Councillors attended to present the views of parishioners at the final appeal hearing of Old Half Acre site in Blind Mary's Lane. The inspector rejected the appeal.

The council submitted responses to two SBC consultations during the year, the Swale Landscape Sensitivity Assessment and the Swale Heritage Consultation. Both of these responses are available on our website.

The council remains a member of the 5 Parishes Group, which meets several times a year to discuss issues that are common between the Parishes of Bredgar, Rodmersham Green, Tunstall, Milsted and Bapchild.

Projects

The Parish Council have undertaken one significant new project over the last year, continuing the replacement of the recreation ground fencing. The poplar trees in the adjacent field to the northern boundary of the ground had become dangerous in recent years with several falling in high winds causing damage to the existing fence. The Parish Council requested that the landowner of the field pollard the trees to mitigate the risk to recreation ground users. When that work was started it quickly became apparent that the trees were at the end of life and too large to be pollarded safely. Therefore it was agreed that they should be removed and the landowner agreed to replace them with a native hedgerow in due course. Once the trees were removed, the Parish Council arranged for contractors to install the new fencing. The landowner will be planting out the new hedgerow shortly.

The Parish Council have a project list published on our website that briefly outlines future works that will be considered in the village. Parishioners are encouraged to suggest new projects to be added to the list. Please contact any Councillor to have a project added. Selection of projects to become active is made at council meetings and contributes towards our financial planning. Unfortunately the projects planned in our February 2020 meeting for this summer have been delayed by the Coronavirus pandemic lockdown.

Maintenance of the Village

Grass cutting (soft landscaping) and maintenance of border areas continue to be one of our main costs and core services. The soft landscaping contractor has kept the grass well cut this year, although we have experienced some damage which may have been caused by a new larger sit on mower being used without sufficient care. A gardener provides regular weeding and maintenance in border areas and Jubilee Garden. A rose in Jubilee Garden was replaced following damage and a few new bulbs planted to provide some spring colour.

The War Memorial flower tubs have been looking splendid and well maintained for us by one of our parishioners, Julie Ann Harris, who kindly took over these tasks from Susie Hickman.

The Pond was given a thorough weed and clean up last summer by a working party of Councillors and volunteer residents.

No new maintenance was performed by the Parish Council this year in the Cemetery. The adjoining house owners have been working hard to replace the wall on their boundary with the cemetery. This was started after consultation with the council and is progressing well. Cemetery maintenance is a major part of our future project list and we anticipate increasing expenditure there in the coming months and next year.

The council have been working closely with KCC to implement improvements to drainage at various locations around the village. The most visible improvement is a drainage ditch from the junction of Silver Street, Gore Road and Wrens Road. In the event of a significant rainfall event this allows water to drain down into the recreation ground, eliminating flooding in the road and risks to properties. New fencing was erected by KCC to prevent access into the drainage ditch from the children's play area. The council are continuing to work with KCC to reduce flooding risks in other areas of the village.

Following concerns that the new duck house was sitting lower in the water a working party was arranged to assist Heather Spratt in installing additional floatation. This was completed successfully and the duck house remains in regular use by ducks, moorhens and as a landing point by the grey heron.

Traffic in the Village

The 20mph scheme had to be abandoned as it does not satisfy KCC policies. The council commissioned two new speed surveys seeking speed limit reductions in Swanton Street and Bexon Lane. Unfortunately the results of these tests were not helpful in gaining KCC agreement to lower the speed limits.

Concerns were raised at our Parish Meeting last May regarding the number of HGVs attempting to negotiate the narrow lanes within the village. The subsequent advice obtained from KCC was to complete a Highway Improvement Plan. This process is now being monitored by Councillors and may be engaged with in the future.

The team of volunteers running Speedwatch have been active last year and briefly this year before the lockdown. A request for more volunteers had a disappointing response. The Parish Council strongly support this activity as it will strengthen any future requests we make for highway improvements and urge residents to consider joining the team.

General Matters

Our PCSO has been active in the village through the year and kindly reports in to Parish Council Meetings when he is able to attend. He has held several Police surgeries in the Farmshop over the year.

KCC have now scheduled the delivery of fibre upgrade for Swanton Street broadband into the BT programme for Kent. Delivery is forecast for late 2020 or early 2021.

The Cricket Club Lease was completed last June. The new lease covers 30 years and is a more comprehensive model than the previous lease. The lease enables Bredgar Cricket Club to apply for grants to build a new pavilion

The village Neighbourhood Watch scheme operates independently of but with the full support of the Parish Council. After many years good service Nigel Osmer stood down as Village Coordinator and Stephen Parfitt took over the role.

Coronavirus

The lockdown due to Coronavirus has severely impacted all of us and the Parish Council has tried to play its part in supporting vulnerable residents. The Friends of Bredgar Church (FOBC) quickly organised themselves to work closely with Bredgar Farmshop to provide community support to vulnerable residents and the Parish Council have been supporting them wherever possible. We have linked FoBC with the County and Borough Councils' community response and provided additional volunteers for shopping deliveries and similar needs.

I would like to close this report by thanking everyone who has helped the Parish Council look after our village over the last year. I'd like to thank all of our Councillors for their commitment and time given to the Parish Council. On behalf of the whole village I would like to thank the Friends of Bredgar Church and our village Farmshop for their tremendous recent actions in supporting us all during the coronavirus lockdown. Looking forward, I hope that everyone keeps well during the uncertain months ahead of us as the whole country works together to beat the coronavirus pandemic.

Brian Clarke
Chair
Bredgar Parish Council

13th May 2020