

## SLRA AGM 15 March 2022 Chair's Report

As we hopefully emerge from the worst of the pandemic your Committee has reflected on the lessons that we have learned from the last two years.

We are now using Zoom for all our Committee meetings and will probably continue to do so into the future. We also gave thought to how we could streamline tonight's meeting to make your attendance at our AGMs more valuable. We believe you primarily want to hear from, and ask questions of us and your elected representatives. So, to save time this year the Secretary, Treasurer's and my Chair's report are now being made available to you electronically in advance.

**Don't forget you can still ask questions of us during the resultant extended Open Forum.**

Despite the on/off restrictions during the last 12 months much has happened.

**Planning and Development.** The greatest threat to our Mission Statement **to Protect the Rural Nature of the Area** remains poorly controlled housing and commercial development against which we are always vigilant. To this end we review all Planning Applications, large and small, which arise in our area and, if appropriate, respond to any consultation.

But in July 2021 we became aware that across both the Ashford Borough and the surrounding areas any such large scale development became impacted, and effectively stopped, by the Natural England concerns of nitrate and phosphate pollution of Stodmarsh Lakes and the Stour river catchment areas. The immediate practical effect of the NE advice was that planning applications for housing development (and some other types of development involving overnight accommodation) within the Stour catchment area cannot be approved until a process of formal assessment and mitigation of the potential effects on the Stodmarsh Lakes has been demonstrated. **More on this from our Speaker at the AGM.**

Dealing now with the major issues in our area:

**Elvey Cottage** - after robust objections from the SLRA and others this was refused by ABC and that decision upheld by dismissal of an Appeal by the Planning Inspectorate. ABC are now in discussion on Enforcement action to be taken on the unapproved building.

**Lenacre Hall Farm** – after a full planning application for 21 dwellings on land at Lenacre Hall Farm was refused and the Appeal dismissed, an earlier hybrid application for up to 79 new dwellings was resubmitted. Again the SLRA reiterated its objections and, with others, opposed. However immediately before the November 2021 Planning Committee the application was withdrawn.

But despite the constraints of the adopted BA&E Neighbourhood Plan, any forthcoming review or underperformance against the Ashford Local Plan 2030 means we must **watch this space!** for any attempts at resubmission.

**Eureka Park** - the developers, Quadrant Estates, launched a public consultation on their outline proposals. The SLRA responded, criticising their use of the Covid pandemic as an excuse to hold their consultation online only and again reiterated our concerns. The Developers held Zoom meetings with the affected Parish Councils to which I was invited both as a Parish Councillor but also as representing the SLRA.

In December a formal outline planning application was submitted for a reduced number of housing units and commercial space with on-site environmental mitigation proposals. The SLRA acknowledged that the plans now show NO vehicular access into Sandyhurst Lane but sought details on the means of enforcement and asked for it to also be confirmed as a condition throughout the seven-year construction phase. We also commented on road safety issues affecting SHL and acknowledged that, whilst the required landscape buffer behind properties along Sandyhurst Lane was mostly in evidence, it should be extended to include **all** relevant points.

In response to members concerns we also raised a number of other environmental issues and seek to be included on any Master Planning Group.

As I commented earlier, we shall remain vigilant on these **and any future applications.**

We have continued to strengthen our ties with, and support to, our three local Parish Councils.

The SLRA were pleased to positively contribute to the development of the Boughton Aluph & Eastwell Neighbourhood Plan, which largely complements and supports our Mission Statement and vision for the future of the area. The Plan was adopted by Ashford Borough Council in October and must now be used in the planning process.

**Traffic issues.** Obviously our collaboration with the Parish Councils extends into road safety issues so I am pleased to acknowledge that, following our campaign for speed management measures in Sandyhurst Lane, Westwell Parish Council has used our data as part of its wider Highways Improvement Plan (HIP) submission and successfully secured KCC funding towards some behavioural change measures for the 30mph part of the Lane including enhancing its perceived rural nature by white lining at the edges rather than through the centre of the road and painting "30" repeater signs on the road surface.

We now look forward to working closely with BA&E PC as they develop their HIP to include their part of the Lane.

**Infrastructure & Environment** The SLRA, again working with Westwell Parish Council, brought to the attention of KCC several dangerous deep holes which appeared in footpath AW134, between Sandyhurst Lane and Kingsland Lane. KCC closed the footpath for three weeks in April/May whilst the landowner was required to make repairs to ensure the footpath's safety. Further repairs were made in June, after some holes re-appeared.

In December, following complaints from a member, we raised with Westwell PC the issue of the damaged and overgrown footpath between Potters Corner and Watery Lane making its use by joggers, pram and mobility scooters users unsafe and, in parts, impossible. As a result, KCC have arranged for an inspection visit by our Parish Warden to which we are invited.

Flooding has again been an issue and the SLRA has worked with partners and residents to get remedial action implemented.

We also raised the issue of unauthorised tree felling on Eastwell Estate with both ABC and Forestry England and are continuing our pressure for enforcement and mitigation action.

**News and Alerts.** We continue to monitor the websites of the relevant public bodies for local news, events and issues affecting our community and keep our members informed by our own website, members emails and or quarterly summaries.

**Neighbourhood Watch.** We continue to receive and circulate local updates of crimes and ASB in our areas sent from the NHW team at Kent police and ensure we share any reports of suspicious activity reported to us by our members to the local community. **Let's continue to act to protect ourselves.**

**Covid -19.** From the outset of the pandemic we facilitated and publicised details of the network of our members who kindly volunteered to help and support those in the community who we were vulnerable, unable to get out for shopping or just needed a friendly phone call. **On behalf of our Community we thank you.**

Now looking forward to the Summer when we will join the whole country in celebrating HM The Queen's Platinum Jubilee we do not want to compete with anything planned elsewhere so a Working Group has been set up, led by John Hobbs and Fred Dunkerley to liaise with Sandyacres and the Parish councils. **Your suggestions for events are welcome** - please email us!

On a more sombre note, the Boundary Commission England (BCE) has already undertaken an initial consultation and has a follow-up one planned in March/April on their proposals to equalise the size of electoral Parliamentary Constituencies by rearranging the Constituency boundaries.

We have publicised the local proposals on our website, but the Committee felt this was too political an issue for this Association to take any position on your behalf.

Details of a Petition supporting the position of Westwell PC is also accessible from our website.

**Conclusion** - a busy year past and, we are sure a busy one to come.

Personally I would like to thank all my fellow Committee members for their continuing commitment and efforts over the year and promise you our continuing best efforts in the future. If anyone wants to join us on the Committee, please contact us.

**Finally we welcome our new members but also thank you, as well as them, for your continued interest, care and support to this. OUR Community.**

