

FRINDSBURY EXTRA PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT 2012/14

2013/14 was another busy year for the Council, with progress made on all our projects in addition to our normal functions.

During the year we considered over 70 planning applications, an increase on the previous year. In addition, there were two “neighbour consultations” under the new planning legislation. The only people who can comment are the immediate neighbours and the applicant must demonstrate he has notified them. Although the Parish Council cannot comment, I am including these applications on our agendas so that councillors have the information and can inform curious members of the public if some building work comes to their attention. The new application for Sainsbury’s mentioned in last year’s report was in fact several applications submitted as conditions on the previous planning consent. These conditions have now been discharged. The construction of the store and park and ride facility will hopefully start sometime soon – I know at least one of our councillors can’t wait!

Two different developers gave presentations to the Council on schemes in the parish. One was MHS Homes who owned Wayne Court, a home for the elderly. This was no longer suitable for its purpose due to current legislation and they wanted to demolish it and replace it by some houses and flats. This caused huge opposition locally, mainly because of rumours of who would be occupying the dwellings. There were also questions of overlooking some properties and gardens. The Council objected on planning grounds but the development was approved by the planning authority, Medway Council. We have recently been asked by Medway Council for suggestions for a name for the flats. Cllr Etheridge did a lot of research and came up with Rose’s Mill Court. This suggestion has been passed on to Medway Council.

The other developer is Taylor Wimpey, who wish to build a development of 68 dwellings, including some flats, on land occupied by the former Temple School. The former Chapter School in Cliffe Road will become part of Abbey Court School, a school for children with special needs. The initial drawings we were shown revealed a single entrance/exit road off Brompton Farm Road, using the old Temple School gates, effectively making the development a cul-de-sac. As in all developments with houses and flats, the flats were positioned on the edge of the development. However it was clear Taylor Wimpey and their planning consultants hadn’t done their research properly – the flats were shown as being sited facing Brompton Farm Road, directly in front of the Chairman’s house! (and of course the other houses at this point in the road). The flats could easily be sited on the other edge of the development, facing what will become part of Abbey Court School.

Still on planning, permission has now been given for the development of the MoD site in Lower Upnor. Parking for the business development on the site will be available in the evenings and at weekends for visitors to the village, bringing the parking nearer to the village facilities. It will also stop the need for visitors to drive to the other end of the road. There will be parking at the other end of the site near the castle for coaches, which will free up the car park in the other part of Upnor. Only 20 houses will be built as the enabling development. Now that the future of this site is known, we will be able to progress our environmental enhancement project of the riverfront in Lower Upnor. This was put on hold as the proposals for the MoD site could have compromised our plans.

Grants were made to Kent BCTV Tree Warden scheme, Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal, Blind Veterans UK (formerly St Dunstan's), SE Ambulance First Responders, Victim Support and the Memorial Hall. As usual, a ceremony for laying the poppy wreath was held in the hall foyer on Armistice Day.

Councillors continue to represent the parish outside the parish council. Cllr Millsom attended the police liaison meetings (when notified of them) and reported back to the Council and Cllr Miller kept us informed about neighbourhood watch. Cllr Moore continued as Chairman of the local area committee of the Kent Association of Local Councils. Cllr Mrs Revell was our other representative. Cllr Hicks with his Medway Councillor hat on was chairman of Medway's Rural Liaison Committee and Cllr Coomber was the parish representative and also the committee vice-chairman. The Parish Council's interests are well represented at both KALC and rural liaison meetings.

Wendy Williams has done great job as our Footpaths Officer, walking the paths and reporting problems to Medway Council and also trying to keep the paths clear. Dave O'Meara remains Assistant Footpaths Officer and we welcomed Oliver Hulf as our second Assistant Footpaths Officer, who is doing great things in Upnor.

Our communications with the residents of the parish have improved. Webmaster Clive Stanley continues to provide us with an excellent service and an informative website. Last autumn saw the first issue of a parish magazine. This is supported by advertising, with the emphasis on local and is delivered to all houses and businesses in the parish. Since this includes the Medway City Estate, it is a huge undertaking, one which previously councillors felt unable to provide. The publishers, Community Ad Ltd have experience in this field and organise the advertising, printing and delivery, so all the parish council has to do is supply articles. At this point I'd like to remind councillors of this and the fact more articles are needed for the next issue.

Concerning the plans for Manor Farm which will donate land to the Parish Council to maintain partly as allotments and partly as public open space, the developers gave an update last autumn. They have been working to secure the barn against further damage. Progress on their visionary project is frustratingly slow but it's better to get it right than rush it and make mistakes.

Crest Nicholson handed the public open space portion of their "Liberty Park" development to the parish council, together with the play park they provided as part of their planning conditions. The multi-use games area (known as a MUGA) was sited on this land but only became usable when it could be completed last spring. The Parish Council is now responsible for the maintenance of the landscaped part on the right hand side of Spire Way as you go in. The area on the left is still to be landscaped and handed over for maintenance purposes. We have indicated we would like it seeded for wild flower meadow. They asked if they could put a pond in the far corner, near Four Elms roundabout. We declined for safety and insurance reasons and suggested a copse of trees, which could include paths, glades and nature features such as scrapes and bug hotels. Originally the play park only included cradle swings, we added swings for older children with a basket swing that can be used by mothers and babies and the disabled as well as everyone else. We needed to name this open space and after much head-scratching and various ideas, we've called it Wainscott Fields. Simple is best.

Play equipment for the under fives was installed on the Recreation Ground, with financial contributions from Crest Nicholson, National Grid and the Rural Liaison grant as well as the Parish Council.

The upgrading of the Memorial Hall was completed and the Parish Council was able to move into its new room. This has given us more space for members of the public to sit in on meetings of the Council and means we no longer have to go upstairs, which was not compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act. A disabled member of the public could have complained he was being prevented from attending a meeting. Luckily nobody did, but now we can accommodate anybody for whom stairs are difficult or impossible.

Finally we were able officially to open our new facilities. On 2nd August the toddler equipment, Wainscott Fields play area including the MUGA and our new parish room were opened jointly by Mark Reckless, MP; the Mayor of Medway, Cllr Josie Isles and by our own Chairman. Thanks go to Park Leisure for providing a free-style footballer and Crest Nicholson for the refreshments.

We now look forward to 2014/15 when we'll be picking up the Lower Upnor Riverside project and continuing the development of Wainscott Fields.

Roxana Brammer
Parish Clerk