

Annual KCC report to parishes and town council, 2019 – 2020

The 2020 KCC budget included more funding for the maintenance of our 4,400 miles of Public Rights of Way, more for community safety, including seeking to enhance the capability of Community Wardens, and extra funding for youth services. As always, the pressures on funding remain for Adult Social Care and, after the very wet weather, on highways maintenance.

Paul Carter, the Leader of Kent County Council, stood down in October 2019 after several years of hard work and commitment in challenging financial times. The new Leader is Roger Gough. He has made some changes to the Cabinet and has appointed a Cabinet Member to look after the environment and waste management, a welcome appointment. Mike Hill keeps his portfolio for Community Services and I remain as his Deputy. I also represent KCC on several charities: Kent Music, Rochester Bridge Trust, Turner Contemporary, and Kent Community Foundation as well as serving on the Kent and Medway Fire Authority.

I have been chairing a cross party working group on libraries where we have discussed the importance of libraries, their future, their funding and their branding for a bright future. There are still 99 libraries in Kent. We have looked carefully at visitor numbers over the hours all the libraries are open and have been able to make some savings by keeping the libraries open at the most popular times. We carried out extensive consultations before making changes last year. We have also been trialling Library Extra in some libraries. With a special pass people can go to a library out of hours and use computers and the library facilities. This is proving popular and we hope to include more libraries in the scheme once the current pilot has been fully evaluated.

Since October members have been working with officers on a new Five Year Plan setting out our priorities for the County over the next five years. We have had an excellent consultation response. A document outlining a new Civic Society has also been out to consultation as we recognise the importance of community engagement and the importance of working with, as well as for, the wider Kent community.

Reporting of highway faults online has been successful but it has been a struggle to keep up with reports of potholes and flooding. Residents have been very patient with us and tolerant of the huge inconvenience, and worse, due to the construction of the M20 extra lanes causing traffic to be diverted to the A20. Many residents have had to suffer with noisy and heavy traffic driving past their homes at all hours, especially at night. I have long pressed for a reduction in speed on the A20 from 50mph to 40mph from near the BP garage outside West Malling to the Trottscliffe Road and am happy to say that this has been partially improved in that it will now be 40mph as far as 210 metres short of Roughetts Road. This is not just a safety measure but also an attempt to improve the amenity of all those who live both sides of this stretch of the A20 and who often have difficulty getting safely out of their parking places and crossing the road.

Nonetheless, heavy traffic and rat running are high on the agenda of most of the communities I represent and there does not seem to be an answer to this although I hope that more efficient and smooth running motorways and trunk roads will serve to attract the traffic back and away from the villages. I continue to help with road problems and safety with funding from my member grant but

also support many other schemes such as sports facilities, village halls, playgrounds and charities. Any remaining funding will be carried forward to early 2021.

KCC is also very aware of the scourge of litter and fly tipping and have committed extra funding to tackle this, in co-operation with the police. We also urge you to check that firms that companies offering to dispose of your waste, and those accepting ads to do so, are properly licensed waste carriers with a valid license number. Fly tipping in Kent is reducing and we will continue trying to eliminate it and fine the perpetrators.

Finally I would like to thank all parish and town council members, and their clerks, in my division for all their support and appreciation of the work we do together. And a special thank you to Snodland, especially their Chief Executive for all the work behind the scenes in finally managing to rationalise the speed limit on the A228 Snodland by pass and for the toucan crossing near Holborough Lakes. This is to help the many young people who need a safe crossing to get to school and for those who walk or cycle to the station.

Sarah Hohler

KCC member since 1989 for Malling North