



SANDGATE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Date: 4th May 2021 Time: 6.00pm

Online

Present: Chairman Cllr Tim Prater
Councillors Nina Bliss, Michael Fitch, Gary Fuller, Vanessa Reay,
Tracy Stephens, Guy Valentine- Neale, Adrian Watts and Lewis
Whitnall,

Parish Clerk: Mrs G Thomas

- 1. Apologies for absence – Cllr Nabin Siwa**
- 2. Acceptance of the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting – 20 May 2019**
(It is noted that there was no Annual Parish Meeting in 2020 due to covid restrictions)
Agreed by all who attended
- 3. Chairman’s Welcome and Yearly Overview**

Normally the Chairman’s remarks would review the year, and the advances made, in the last year. However of course there was no Parish Meeting in 2020, so this will be a review of much of the last two years.

Firstly, we should remember the passing of so many friends and colleagues over the past two years. They include our former Chairman and friend Robert Bliss, last summer, and also others that have given so much to our village, including Val Knight, and recently Chris Carter, and just last week Zoe Varian.

I’ve spoken at other meetings though the year about Robert, Val, Chris and others, but wanted to make special mention of Zoe.

Zoe was a Parish Councillor until 2011, a pioneer behind the Sandgate Farmers Market, and a stallholder, and trustee of the Chichester Hall, when few others would be so, and Chairman of the Sandgate Heritage Trust until very recently; working tirelessly to maintain the Fire Station building that means so much to the village.

We will miss them and other, and their different influences on our village and lives, very much indeed. I’d like to take a minute’s silence to remember Zoe, and indeed all those that we have lost in the last year. *(Councillors fell silent for a minute of remembrance)*

The last year has been incredibly hard on our town and country, however it has also been uplifting, seeing the residents pulling together to support their neighbours across town. Our thanks go to all those who have helped local residents through the year, including the fantastic 3 Hills Folkestone Community Hub that has delivered so much support to those across Folkestone. They and the volunteers who worked from there tirelessly have assisted with shopping, getting medication, answering questions and more. Thanks go to anyone ,who in their own way,have helped friends, relatives and neighbours through the last 15 months.

We should also thank all those volunteers supporting the vaccination programme. Volunteers are still needed at both the Civic Centre and FOLCA vaccination centres, without those volunteers the vaccination programme simply cannot be delivered, and despite the huge support in the first months of the programme, it is getting more difficult to get volunteers at this time. If you can help with a few hours at a vaccination centre each week, you can sign up to do so online at <https://appt.link/folkestone-drive-through-centre> – please email or call the clerk for the address if you didn't note that down.

But in particular, we wanted to thank another group that have had to change so much, work so hard, and evolve in the last year. Our businesses throughout Sandgate are all small independent traders, and have had the huge challenge of Covid on top of the usual difficulties of running a business. We wanted to recognise that they have gone the extra mile to change their business and serve their community by opening where they can, offering takeaway and delivery options throughout the lockdown periods.

They have also been getting ready to welcome people back as soon as they have been able to legally do so, and it's to their credit that we see so few empty shop units through Sandgate as this time. We really look forward to the moment that we can see all of them back fully open, and know the community at large will remember that we need to support them to come back stronger.

And we're delighted to say that it's not just the Parish Council that thinks our businesses are special and deserve our thanks, but that a KALC Community Award 2021 has been, uniquely, been awarded to all the businesses in Sandgate. I have a copy of that award here, and it will be on display, with pride, in the Library in the near future.

There were additional challenges brought by that time last year, it brought a huge number of visitors to our area, and with them, issues on our seafront and the Lower Leas Park. We pushed for and got changes for the better management of the park to deal with that. There was also a significant move including parking changes, a BBQ ban, traffic management, new bins and extended toilet opening hours which made a real difference to the use of the park. I'm delighted to confirm those measures will also be in place this year.

In 2020 Sandgate was delighted to receive the Seaside Award for the eighth year running. We are the only beach in Folkestone & Hythe to get the award, which requires cleanliness, a mix of facilities, and an annual application process, that has been led by Nabin Siwa and the Beach Management team. We await the announcement of the 2021 awards in the next couple of weeks with real anticipation, and hope that the ongoing work to keep Sandgate beach a great place to enjoy and visit, continues to be recognised by the judges.

As you'll know Sandgate remains the only Parish Council in Kent, and one of very few nationally, actively delivering a Library Service. That commitment and flexibility has seen Sandgate meet the challenge of delivering services through the pandemic in a way barely matched elsewhere in the district. We have one of only three libraries in the district offering library services at the moment, with almost any other library our size having been closed entirely for much of the last 15 months. Whether it has been offering click-and-collect services, delivery books, or the current full browsing service, we would like to publicly thank Gaye and the library staff and volunteers whose commitment are making that happen.

It has been our experience in running services like the library and Sandgate Park that made us confident that we could also run other areas better than the District Council too, and in 2020, we completed the transfer of Fremantle Road Park, the greens alongside the Esplanade / Battery Wall and by the Sir John Moore Memorial to Parish control on a long lease.

The transfer of Fremantle Road Park has already led to something of a renaissance for the park, with maintenance and improvements not seen for many years, and the change has been widely noticed and recognised by residents through the Valley area. Our contractor Harmers & Son has been instrumental in both delivering and advising on that across the whole park, as they have in the other areas we maintain, but we also owe special thanks to Leonie Wootton on the Sandgate Community Garden and Incredible Edible collective locally, who have developed the garden plots and planters at the front of the park, and whose labours you will rather excitingly see literally starting to bear fruit over the coming months.

Speaking of the Sandgate Community Garden, it's now just over two years since work began on that, on a plot in Saga's Enbrook Park, and it's fantastic to be able to watch the development of that and their varied side projects through Sandgate and beyond. We've been pleased to help record that process by taking Leonie's weekly diary and photos and give that a "home of its own" on the Parish Council website and via our Facebook page. It makes a fascinating read right back to week one, and is a great testament to what has been achieved.

We've also been delighted this year to fulfil a longstanding aspiration of many and get a recording CCTV system in place and commissioned through Sandgate, covering Sandgate High Street and Castle road Car Park, Sandgate Park and Golden Valley Parade. More signs to promote its operation are going up, and we've had the first request for evidence from the cameras to support a resident who had their car written off in a road accident in the High Street, for which we were able to provide useful footage. We clearly hope that the CCTV will reinforce the belief that Sandgate is, on the whole, a really safe place to live and work.

It would be tempting to think that the inability to meet in person has stopped the Parish Council meeting at all, but that has massively not been the case. After a brief hiatus in March and into April while legislation was passed, we were one of the first Parish Councils in the area to get back into meetings, including holding the Annual Meeting. We have met in Full Council and committees online ever since, with meetings broadcast most times (where technology allowed) via Facebook and with a protocol in place and published on our website to allow for questions to, and representation at, full Council and planning meetings.

The legislation to allow online Parish Council meetings lapses this Friday and the government have not renewed it. We will therefore be returning to face to face meetings in the near future, but hope to try to retain online broadcast of meetings. We also hope the government will listen to the current consultation on allowing the possibility of online Council meetings in the future, and would, if permitted, to use a mix of online and in person meetings. The last year has been a pretty heavy crash course in the use of Zoom, but having been through that learning curve, there is much to like which would be a huge shame to lose.

To briefly look forward, you will find details on the Parish Council website and our Facebook page of the Sandgate Walking Tour series for 2021, which builds on the really successful walks led by Tony Quarrington that we started last year, despite the challenges. These really are an excellent couple of hours for visitors and local residents alike, and with forthcoming dates being 15th May, 5th June and 19th June, they are thoroughly recommended.

As of next Monday, the rubbish and recycling collection rounds across the district are being revised for the first time in 10 years. Every property should have confirmed their new delivery day and cycle by the end of this week, and the details will also be available as of Friday online via the "MyAccount" section of the district website. In the Sandgate area, there will be two different collection days depending on your road: Wednesday or Thursday, so there are changes for a significant number of us

On the subject of rubbish, there is Sandgate Beach Clean as part of The Surfers Against Sewage Million Mile Beach Clean on 15th May. The clean-up welcomes all volunteers, and will be targeting inland areas as well as the currently pretty clean beach, and is in addition to the sessions regularly organised by Nabin. The meeting point is by the Boat House cafe on Granville Parade at 10am, and all would be welcomed.

Finally, this has been a hugely challenging year for everyone, locally, nationally, and internationally. That Sandgate has managed to not just keep going, but achieve, and move forward is due to the support of a huge number of residents locally, but special thanks really are due to our councillors and clerks who have taken up the challenges of an entirely new way of working, and not just made it happen, but risen to it to continue the ongoing rise of a village. Thank you all.

4. Public participation and questions - There were none

5. Any information items - There were none

6. Date of the next Annual Parish Meeting – 17 May 2022