



SANDGATE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Date: 19th May 2025 Time: 6.30pm

Present: Chairman Councillor Tim Prater
Councillors Hazel Barrett, Michael Fitch, Gary Fuller, Simon Horton, Rosa Morris and Guy Valentine-Neale.

1. **Apologies for absence – Cllrs Susan Claris, Kirsty Hogben & Peter Hickman**
2. **Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting 20th May 2024 having been circulated, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.**
Proposed by Guy Valentine-Neale
Seconded by Simon Horton
Agreed by all

3. Chairman's Welcome and Yearly Overview

The following was read aloud by Chairman Cllr Tim Prater:

Firstly, welcome to the Annual Parish Meeting.

This is an opportunity to outline the work of the Parish Council and others to those in the Parish annually and offer the chance for people to ask questions on any aspect of our work. It's not a Parish Council meeting, but hopefully still allows a useful chance to reflect on what we have done, and what we plan to do.

So firstly, nothing happens without people making things happen, and I want to say some thank you's to those people that have made things happen for Sandgate over the last year.

Gaye and Chani, as our Parish Clerks, who make **everything** happen, and keep us legal.

And thanks to Gaye again who lights up this place with her experience and enthusiasm and makes it simply the best library in Kent, but who could not do so without our staff Theresa and Heather, and the volunteers that make the place work, week in, week out. And on that note, congratulations to the library volunteer team who have been nominated for Folkestone and Hythe Excellence in Volunteering Award for volunteer groups that go above and beyond to help others across Folkestone, Hythe and Romney Marsh. They absolutely do, and I'm absolutely delighted for them.

Those who work with us to make the Parish better – from Harmers, and Vic in particular, for service and resourcefulness that just makes things happen. Luke for CCTV, Christmas Lights and all things cherry picker, Michael for keeping our library together, Spearpoint for their

excellent tree works to Sandgate and Fremantle Park this year making sure our trees are safe and continue to thrive.

Town and Country for their now annual Granville Parade toilet deep clean, and especially David and the team at the Boat House for their often thankless task keeping the Granville Parade toilets open and clean. I've been reminded just today that you should budget £10-15,000 a year for that cleaning works and keeping them open. Due to our contract with David and the team, the Parish actually get that for no direct cost to the Parish. It is due to them we can continue to offer free toilets to the community, and I can only ask the community and visitors to help them help us. Please leave the toilets as you find them, put toilet paper down the toilet, and don't write on the walls. Simple things that would help so much.

Thanks to the community groups and organisations that make Sandgate special, from the 2nd Sandgate Scouts (no, there is no 1st Sandgate Scouts) who are not only helping to educate, engage and entertain beavers, cubs and scouts from 6-14 years old, but also are making great strides with the refurbishment of their hall, with a new roof now within range of replacing the old one. To the Sandgate Society, and in particular Sal Kenward, for their huge range of activities through the year, the magnificent Sandgate archive and their stewardship of the Old Fire Station (and in which Guy and myself have to declare an interest, as volunteer trustees).

To our local schools, with Folkestone School for Girls and Sandgate Primary actually in the Parish still being some of the best schools in the county. However also thanks to all schools our local children attend both primary and secondary: no-one loves school every day, but almost all feedback I hear on them are that they are caring places to be, doing great things to bring out the best in our children daily.

Thanks to the Tower Theatre for their incredible range of shows and productions, at what is one of a very few amateur company owned theatres in the country, right here in Sandgate. The range of performances FHODS, from plays to musicals, gigs, and lobby shows, put on is remarkable, and the standard really high. If you haven't been for a while: please do. <https://towertheatrefolkestone.co.uk/> I was there at the weekend for a Midsummers Nights Dream, and although I'll spare you Bottom jokes, I have never before wanted to play a wall so much.

Thanks to our local businesses, that make our High Street and the Golden Valley vibrant and interesting places to be. Businesses come and go from time to time but we should thank and support them all where we can, and in particular we look forward to welcoming the opening of Mimosa and Nepali Kitchen in the near future. And to Chris Buck, who after over 30 years as left his High Street shop for the last time: thank you for your commitment and years in Sandgate.

And thank you to our Parish Councillors for what they do in both meetings, but more especially around Sandgate on our behalf every day. Special mention to Simon and Susan for their Chairing of the Environment and Finance committees, as both are great examples of making sure they don't just talk about issues: they get on and sort them. And although every Councillor does a range of things, from engaging with businesses and residents to sprucing, are clean-ups,

reporting problems, volunteering at the Sea Festival and more, I'd also like to say a special thank you to Rosa for planting, maintaining and bringing Sandgate into bloom at locations through the village, but also for saying Yes.

And finally a personal one from me. Thank you to every single person that voted in the 1st May County Council elections in Cheriton, Sandgate and Hythe East. And, frankly, special thanks to the 2,051 who voted for me, and those that helped my campaign, and now have me as your County Councillor. I'll do all I can to represent you, as I hope I always do.

I have now definitely missed at least some people I should have thanked by name. To them, both my thanks, and my apologies.

So: what has actually been achieved in the last year? Lots.

Sandgate Library

Let's start here in the library where we've added a new built in cupboard to help keep everything tidy, finally completing the children's area carpeting and the new murals.

We've also seen a massive investment in new book stock – over £6,000 a year. That will continue over the next five years, completely refreshing the existing stock but also adding to it and extending the range of our book offer.

We also have a new rolling agreement with KCC to continue providing the library service. The original expired a little time ago, and it seemed logical to turn that into a rolling agreement, which will remain in place unless notice is given to terminate, to give some certainty whilst there is uncertainty over the future of Kent County Council.

Sandgate 20mph Zone

It was only in August last year that we heard that in response to ongoing requests, chasing, representations, petitions and more that Kent Highways had agreed that, subject to consultation, they could support a limited length 20mph zone on Sandgate High Street, but only if funded externally.

The informal consultation we ran on this had a huge response of 300+ people, with 95% of people in support of the scheme. Many, rightly, would like to see a longer 20mph zone, but that would not be accepted by Kent Highways right now: get what we can, and extend it.

After the informal consultation, the extent of the zone was slightly extended so it now runs from pretty much the library to Coastguard Cottages, and includes all roads off to both sides of that stretch (with Military Road only extending just up above the junction with Gough Road). That went to formal consultation, and that has closed.

We're awaiting (expected early June) the officers report on that consultation as to whether there were specific and meaningful objections that require the scheme to be referred to the Joint Transportation Board – a meeting of District and County Councillors – or go straight to implementation. Money has been set aside for the scheme by Gary and myself as District

Councillors working with the Sandgate Society, and above that £5,000 the Parish Council also has earmarked money to be spent on getting the scheme in place, if needed.

Also on road safety, you many have noticed CCTV cameras and speed monitoring currently in place on Sandgate Esplanade. That's part of a Kent Highways investigation into the feasibility of improvements to the pedestrian facilities on the Esplanade. The surveys will be active for a week, and then once the data is sent back it will be analysed as part of the assessment. No promises on anything yet, but a good sign that they are, at least, listening.

Sandgate Speedwatch

The Parish has also funded new equipment for the local and excellent Sandgate Speedwatch team, managed by the now award-winning Simon Hill, which increases the effectiveness and capability of the team.

If people would like to join the volunteer Speedwatch team, who essentially raise awareness of the speed of vehicles as they pass through our area, you can find out more and join the team (just Google "Sandgate Speedwatch"). <https://sandgate-pc.gov.uk/2023/11/28/join-sandgate-speedwatch/>

Speedwatch are there to remind drivers that there is NO road in Sandgate where the speed limit is higher than 30mph. There is a particular speeding issue in North Road and West Road where many vehicles seem to assume there is a different limit: there is not. I'm pursuing "repeater" signs there to remind people that the speed limit remains 30mph unless they pass a sign saying otherwise, and there are no signs that say otherwise: it's a 30mph zone throughout.

And when the new 20mph zone is in place then after an introductory period, Speedwatch will be able to operate on the zone to further reinforce the speed limit there.

CCTV

The CCTV system we installed about 5 years ago now through the village and overlooking Golden Valley shopping area and Sandgate Park continues to be useful in assisting police with their enquiries. It has given them valuable evidence to assist in making arrests and prosecutions, for issues ranging from significant motoring offences, arson, and even in the last few days theft from a vehicle in Castle Road Car Park.

The system is checked weekly, and we have invested in it over the last year to improve coverage on cameras that were "dropping out", and investment that seems to be paying off.

Sea Festival 2025

Briefly on the Sea Festival: I hope everyone would agree our 2024 Festival was, as ever, excellent, and we're aiming to learn from that and further improve for 2025.

Thanks to additional and generous sponsorship from the Roger de Haan Charitable Trust, this year we'll have not just the now traditional fireworks display on the evening of Saturday 23rd August, but also two professional music stages this year on both the Saturday night and through Sunday 24th on Granville Parade and Castle Road Car Park. Both stages will be hosted and managed by local music hero Alex McNeice and feature a range of local talent: we wait to see if we can beat the joy of "Freddie Mercury" on the beach on Saturday night from last year!

As ever there will be the seafront market, and events happening in venues, pubs, bars and clubs throughout the village, and all local businesses are not just able to take part, but actively encouraged. We want to see as many different events and offerings, in as many different venues, as we can to turn the seafront festival into a genuinely village wide one.

On a few other issues: in the last year we've spent a few thousand of repairing and replacing equipment in the Granville Parade toilets: the fittings are sadly quite bespoke, and quite expensive. We try to keep as many cubicles open as much as possible, but do have to close them in response to breakdown, and sometimes vandalism and misuse. Additionally, we're edging closer putting a solar array onto the Boat House which will meet a significant percentage of its electrical needs, and save the Parish money in the long term, and less at the mercy of fluctuations in global energy prices. We fully accept this has taken longer to deliver than we hoped, but had some exciting obstacles which we have mainly overcome, and although we've said this before, we hope the panels will now be in place this year.

Sandgate and Fremantle Park

In October last year we've also invested around £30,000, much of it funded through lottery funding we successfully bid for, into replacing soft play surfaces at both Sandgate Park and Fremantle Park. This makes for much better, brighter and safer play areas, and also reduced closures due to the failure of the old surfaces requiring repairs, and indeed cost of trying to keep patching what was there.

We also have annual tree reports done into the condition of all trees across our parks and owned lands, and make sure we undertake, at the right time of the year, the works that those tree professionals recommend. A lot of those works were done in the early spring this year, removing dead trees, cutting back those that need it and in one case adding a branch support recommended to stop a tree splitting.

Although the works are expensive, and look like we're doing damage, without them we would lose many more trees from our parks, and be faced by potentially serious injury. And even in the case of the hardest pollarding, the trees are already regrowing, as they always have in the past!

Folkestone Sports Centre and Princes Parade

You may have seen in the news today confirmation that the Shepway Sports Trust, backed by Roger de Haan, have secured the ownership of Folkestone Sports Centre and have bought it from the administrators. They are committed to reopening the sports hall, swimming pool and other facilities, and this is fantastic news for the community as a whole. They are also aware

through that there do need to be refurbishment works to ensure this is both a centre we can be proud of now, and in the future. They will be starting those works soon, and make a significant investment in the fabric of the building, probably seeking support from partners like the district council to do so. I'd suggest reopening will take a while however, but is now, I hope, very much secured.

Wilberforce Road Car Park water course works

And only today, I'm happy to report that Folkestone and Hythe District Council are in the process of clearing the water channel on their land above the Wilberforce Road Car Park. It's not been maintained, or even looked at, for decades, and the obstruction of years of mud and slime is both holding water back so leaving the adjoining land and path boggy, but also that mud and slime is leaning on the retaining wall by the car park, and that weight is not going to help.

The intention over the next couple of days is to remove several tons of slime, open a water channel down through the area from bridge to wall, create proper water channels through the wall, and remove the sludge blocking water flow under the bridge, which should really help the neighbouring land too. After I did some gardening and investigative works there to identify the problems, I sent the details over to Aarron at F&HDC who has been able to look, decide a useful way forward to protect the area, and their wall, and ordered the works. To return to an earlier theme: thank you Aarron!

Local Government Reorganisation

There has been a concern for many years with different tiers of Council that there were too many layers, and too much confusion amongst residents as to which Council did what, and who to report issues to.

Sandgate has trailblazed a project to resolve that problem locally. With my now serving at Parish, District and County Council I can hopefully act as that one-stop point of contact.

However, it seems my election to every Council nationally has been deemed inviable as a wider solution. There are therefore proposals being brought forward for all areas with County and District Councils to instead have Unitary Councils to replace both layers.

In Kent, that is expected to do away with Kent County Council, Medway Council and 12 District and Borough Councils, and replace them with 3 or 4 large area unitary authorities. Discussions are still very much ongoing on this, but there was a proposed timeline that suggested elections to those new authorities, when boundaries agreed, in May 2027, with them taking on the responsibilities of the Districts and County from May 2028, but that is far from certain. There is much to dislike in the proposals, and as yet many unanswered questions, including whether the new Unitaries can stand the cost of the Adult and child Social Care which is pretty much responsible for bankrupting Medway and 18 months away from doing the same in Kent

However there seems currently to be no proposal to impact on the existence of Town and Parish Councils, and indeed there is significant enthusiasm, locally at least, to see services and assets delivered and held as locally as possible.

Specifically, that could mean things the district owns and does, rather than being passed “up” to the new Unitary authority instead gets passed to Town and Parish Councils. I very much want to see that, and unlike some others in the area, I do want Parish Councils to get those opportunities too, and will argue for that at every level.

However in order to overcome the fear some principal councillors have over if Parish Councils are “up to it” we have in Sandgate already achieved General Power of Competence status <https://www.slcc.co.uk/qualifications/gpc/status>, a key nationally recognised benchmark. In the next year to reinforce that we aim to go for the highest level of the Local Council Award Scheme we can <https://www.nalc.gov.uk/support/local-council-award-scheme.html> - that’s an award not held by many Town Councils nationally, let alone Parishes.

Thanks for listening: that’s it! I’m happy to try to answer any questions I can on any of this report, anything I’ve forgotten, or District matters. Given my first formal meeting of Kent County Council isn’t until Thursday I haven’t got a LOT of updates from there, but I’ll do my best to answer those too!

-A point was raised regarding future acquisitions of assets and the necessity to fully understand the implications of taking on these items.

- 4. Public Participation – there were no members of the public present**
- 5. Any information items – there were none**
- 6. Date of the next Annual Parish Meeting – 18th May 2026**