

Ashford Rural West Forum
(Weald area)
Monday 27 June 2011
Smarden Village Hall 7:30 pm

Present: Richard King (KCC), Martin Newman (Pluckley), Alison Richey (Egerton), Richard Brazier (Little Chart), Alastair Boyd (Bethersden), John Lowing (Smarden), Clair Bell (ABC), Tim Bratton (High Halden) and David Geoghegan (notes).

Introductions

Richard King opened the meeting by reminding us why the forum had been set up and that within his division he had split the Parish Councils into two such forums. He asked each of the attendees to introduce themselves and say where they were from.

Actions from previous meeting

- **Highways: Richard had a meeting with Andy Corcoran from Transport to sort out and improve the signage at Pluckley. It was agreed Andy should be invited to the next meeting.**
- **Richard had a meeting with John Burr the Director of Highways and made the point about HGVs using inappropriate roads.**
- **There was disappointment that KHS seem to encourage and support planning applications that Parish or Borough might object to – the Highways support of the Future Biogas plant application in Charing was a point in question. Support for some of these applications will result in more HGVs using inappropriate roads.**
- **Councillors were not happy about the proposed sheltered accommodation in Smarden. Orbit South Housing Association seems to be driving the project. ABC will means test residents, who must be on the housing list to qualify. Richard, Clair, Robert will meet with Jennifer Shaw to discuss the concerns about the project.**
- **Bethersden also has affordable housing issues. An exception site has been identified but the land owner is now hoping for general use as things are dragging on with ABC planning and the Parish has been advised to raise the issues with members.**

Vision For Kent

Details were given about the consultation from the Kent Forum on building a better Kent. The leaflet and return envelopes were distributed. The feedback was “it’s good to be consulted if real notice is taken but this is a light weight exercise and useless”. There was surprise that care for the environment was not one of the big ambitions. Also it was agreed KCC and the Kent Forum could do more to put pressure on BT to roll out faster broad band to rural locations and improve access for the villages.

Highways Issues

Richard said he had agreement from local residents to get the slip road on the A28 to Biddenden closed off.

There was a complaint about the sign to Saracens Dairy in Swan Lane. It was felt the pointed sign was too big and a potential danger.

Richard said many Parish Council had asked for new salt bins which he was happy to fund from his Highways budget and PCs could ask for bags of salt now ready for next winter. Why salt bins were bright yellow was questioned. Richard agreed to ask if they could be green.

Pluckley Parish council had funded its own speed measurement report with help from Bethersden which will be copied to Richard.

Borough Issues

The ABC housing consultation is now going on. The Leader, Peter Wood, is now circulating all cabinet papers to PCs which was appreciated. Cllr Neil Bell was seen as doing an excellent job as chair of the Planning Committee. Nevertheless there was concern at the interpretation of planning regulations by officers. Producing farmers are told they don't need planning permission for new barns even where the produce is being cultivated on other land; even outside the district. Parish Councils would like a say on such issues.

Parish council issues

In Pluckley the Pinnock Paddock traveler site application had not gone to planning committee yet. Martin will email details to Smarden PC so that they can respond.

It was agreed ABC need to identify a new traveler site ASAP and perhaps a small group of councilors, led by Robert Taylor, might need to progress this. Particular as the traveler site in Charing was given a temporary two year order which could become permanent if an official site is not found soon. Richard agreed to check the legal position of this.

In Egerton the local needs housing has made a positive difference.

The Smarden and Pluckley primary schools may become an academy.

Any Other Business

Richard talked about his grant funding streams and said he would welcome any declarations of interest by email for projects that provided community benefit and that Parish Councils could also ask for £250 towards next year's Jubilee celebrations. He had already agreed Gerry Clarkson could have £3000 towards the Charing pavilion.

The Forum ended and agreed to meet again before Christmas.