

**Minster Parish Council**  
**Chairman's Annual Report**  
**2019/2020**

This year began as a time of change and this theme has continued through to the current time.

We began with significant changes to the Parish Council itself, having 5 vacancies to be filled at the time of the election in May 2019. We were fortunate in having 5 very good and successful applicants who brought a wide range of experience and skills to our team.

Cllr. Whybrow, who had been a youth representative previously, was welcomed back but unfortunately found that his business and new home meant that he could not devote as much time to his role as a councillor as he would have liked and stepped down after a few months.

Sadly, Cllr. Taylor resigned at the end of 2019 due to a move out of the area; she had been an active member of the Council for 4 years and was a very effective Chair of the Planning Committee in which she developed considerable expertise.

So we began 2020 with two more vacancies. Again we have been fortunate in gaining two new and enthusiastic councillors who will, I'm sure, enhance our skill base. The Covid 19 lockdown has meant that both are in the unusual position of not yet having been able to take up their posts in the normal fashion and meet their fellow councillors.

There was also a change on the streets of Minster with the departure of Community Warden Aaron Kluibenschadl and the arrival of his replacement Karl Aylett. He has been a welcome addition to the parish.

Last May we saw the process of the Local Plan Inspection taking place. I represented our council to express our concerns about the proposed developments in the village itself and the huge increase in housing in Thanet without the necessary infrastructure in place. Many representatives from across the island spoke at the hearings and we had hoped for change.

However, it is fair to say that when the result came out earlier this year we had made little impact; in some ways the Inspectors had made the situation worse. In the case of Minster, the number of houses was not reduced, with the report supporting a greater number of houses on one site than the current applicant had requested; furthermore, they removed the requirement to provide land for an extension to the cemetery.

Planning has continued to be a contentious issue throughout most of the year with a number of significant applications being considered for this parish.

The council reflected the views of many local people in expressing their objections to the planned Parkway Station, a new station just minutes away from our own railway

station and built on good agricultural land. Not only did KCC and TDC reaffirm their intention to continue with this project, the latter committed £2 million to support it.

An application to develop 'Manston Raceway' in Ebbsfleet Lane on the site of a long derelict go-kart track was subject of healthy debate, both between residents and our own councillors. The indications are that due to planning anomalies this may go ahead.

We then had the surprise visit of Mr Joseph Jones of the Gypsy Council UK to our October meeting when he informed everyone that he was negotiating with the owner of the lorry park next to Minster services to create a 15 pitch traveller site. This coincided with TDC's announcement that they had formed a working party to identify two sites in Thanet which would be suitable for travellers. It is an understatement to say that there followed a period of unrest! At this time the site in Minster is now subject of a planning application for retail units and food outlets together with the mobile unit already in situ; we have not had a decision from TDC in relation to other sites in Thanet.

On the subject of the Minster Services, it was agreed that Costa Coffee could build a café and drive through next to the Premier Inn.

I will end the subject of planning on a positive note relating to Manston Airport; last year we received news that Riveroak Strategic Partnership had acquired Manston Airport so the application to build 3000+ houses was withdrawn. Good news! We await the outcome of the DCO.

In October, Cllr. Quittenden led a survey on Highways matters. So many residents have raised various issues over a period of time and he felt it was right to give everyone the opportunity to express their views and provide suggestions.

1900 questionnaires were distributed and several hundred were returned. After analysis the key points were raised with KCC Highways and many have been addressed, some are still to follow.

We must accept that this parish was never built to accommodate the level of traffic it now endures but we will continue to mitigate that wherever possible.

One thing that has caused disruption in this village is parking, a constant cause of congestion by a few thoughtless drivers. This year we produced an advisory parking notice which councillors could place on vehicles parking without due consideration for other road users. This has resulted in some improvement around the centre of the village.

We decided to effect some positive change on properties relating directly to the parish council. Firstly, I felt that the parish office was very definitely in need of a face lift and thanks to a volunteer working party it is now fresh and bright and with some much more user friendly furniture. It is a far better environment for Kyla and Clare, our highly valued Clerks, and their hard work & dedication is what make this parish the envy of our neighbours.

The Pavilion on the recreation ground is used for a wide variety of activities including child care, dancing and dog training, although primarily designed as a sports Pavilion.

It is a great venue, an asset to our community and is in a delightful location. We decided that a revamp would make it more appealing and hopefully encourage greater use. Work has been carried out to open up the main area, remove the old unused bar area, redecorate, improve the lighting and replace the blinds, as well as improving the changing rooms to better accommodate football referees.

It is thanks to a great deal of work by our own staff that this work was completed in the holiday period so the activities of current users were not disrupted.

On the subject of parish council property, we have started to explore the possibility of relocating the parish office due to the increase in rent from KCC for our current premises and the uncertainty over the renewal of the lease later this year. Plans are being prepared to develop the site of the Pavilion and these will be considered, subject to cost, by the council in the next few months.

The weather was ideal for our excellent Firework display this year and the crowds seemed larger than ever. This year, for the first time, we collected donations for a local charity and people were extremely generous; the money was given to the Scouts and the Christmas Lights fund.

The Christmas trees brighten the village throughout the festive period and although there was no festival or late night opening this year there was a great atmosphere.

In the New Year we were looking forward to the village coming together to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE Day; plans were in place for a huge picnic with entertainment.

Sadly, as I write this, we are in a lock down which not only means the cancellation of VE Day celebrations but also the Minster Show, and the other events we usually enjoy.

This is a difficult time for everyone and it is not the way I would have wanted to conclude this annual report.

However, in the midst of a national lock down it is heartening to have seen so many residents coming forward to help their neighbours. We are also benefitting from our local businesses who have continued to provide such a good service in very challenging circumstances.

So, despite the impact that the Coronavirus will have for some time to come, our residents have proved the value of community and made many of us recognise how fortunate we are to live in Minster.

**Cllr Penny Gimes**

**Chairman**