

Shadoxhurst Village Forum

Notes from the Hustings and 11th Village Forum meeting held in the Village Hall on Thursday 27th April 2017

- To maintain the quality of life for all in the village
- To generate issues that could be put to the Parish Council
- To re-kindle community spirit and engender friendship
- To build a social feeling in the village
- To suggest things that will bring people together
- **With a vision to create and develop a positive community spirit.**

1) Welcome

David welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The first part of the evening would be a special 'hustings' meeting. All the candidates from Ashford rural south, who were standing in next week's Kent County Council election, had been invited to speak to us. No reply had been received from UKIP and the Labour candidate was unable to attend tonight. David welcomed the three candidates who had come along.

2) Hustings

i) Geoff Meaden (Green party)

Geoff Meaden, who is actually the Green candidate for Ashford rural east, introduced himself, then explained he was standing in for his partner, Marilyn, who was at another meeting tonight. Geoff is a retired university lecturer, currently working as a consultant for the Food & Agriculture organisation which is part of the United Nations. Geoff has been a Green party member since 1978. He told us that the unfair electoral system of 'first past the post' makes it very difficult for the Greens to get elected.

ii) Chris Grayling (Liberal Democrat)

Chris Grayling joined the Lib Dems in July 2016. Previously he had been a Labour member, but Jeremy Corbyn had disappointed him. Chris was a teacher and so he is fully aware of the detrimental impact that funding cuts are having on schools. He believes that most problems in the country are due to lack of funds. Chris told us he is a proud Englishman – but ashamed to be English the way our tolerance, our love of Europe has just been thrown away. He does not want a hard Brexit.

iii) Mike Angell (Conservative)

Mike Angell explained that he was the standing councillor. He had previously spent 30 years in the navy and 6 years working on offshore oil rigs around the world. In 1997 he was approached to stand for Kent County Council. Mike explained that his view of being a representative as a county councillor is to establish a position where he listens to what people have to say rather than tell

them what he feels they ought to be thinking – because if he doesn't listen, he doesn't know what's going on. He has 9 parish councils on his patch and tries to attend as much as possible. Mike told us about some of his current KCC responsibilities including the Health overview scrutiny committee and Ambulance Service.

Mike then went on to say that he knows we have a problem here with speeding traffic through the village, and that we would like the speed limit to be reduced to 30mph. Mike arranged a site meeting which took place, but the council was running out of money by the end of the financial year. His intention is to work with the Parish Council to try and get it reduced to 30mph (including Tally Ho Road). He felt our Parish Council had produced an excellent case, but may have to contribute financially.

David thanked all candidates for speaking.

3) Questions from the floor:

i) "Government policy states that a village like ours should have a 30mph speed limit. As elected county council members, you become leaders of the traffic authority supposed to enact government policy. I'm not suggesting this should overpower policies that say there needs to be a crash casualty record, but that quality of life issues should be alongside them and government should provide funds to back up their own policy. What would you do to make it happen?"

Response from Geoff Meaden: if one village has it, why not Shadoxhurst? Ask Bethersden how they did it. Ask KCC why they haven't done it. If they prevaricate I would visit Mr Balfour (in charge of transport at KCC) and explain your situation.

Response from Chris: It should be 30mph because it's government policy. But there's no money.

Response from Mike: There's about £400,000 set aside for Chilmington Green. I will speak to officers about perhaps accessing some money. There is a plan where a lot of speed limits are being changed but we can only afford to do so many a year because it's an expensive and legal process.

Bilsington and Ruckinge are sharing the cost of Speed indicator units. Every now and then they move them to try and get speeds down. This might be another option. Let's discuss this in detail at a later date.

Ian commented that for SIDs to be effective the speed limit needs to be correct in the first place.

ii) "What about a 30mph limit on Criol Lane? This is currently a single track road with the national speed limit. As increasing numbers of cars, lorries and farm vehicles use it, it will only get worse – especially with Chilmington Green. What are your thoughts?"

Mike asked the questioner to leave his details, but he thinks Criol Lane will be redesigned because it will be an access road to Chilmington Green. Mike said he will get this confirmed. David pointed out that we need to look holistically at the village speed limits and not just do little bits at a time."

iii) "Regarding development – I and many other people think we've enough 4 or 5 bed houses. Please give us your views."

Response from Geoff Meaden: Development is a huge problem across the country. Central government have told the Councils that this is a local issue, that Local people should decide, but local people don't have a say because it's all dictated from central government. Districts have been told to increase their housing numbers, which is reasonable in many senses, because so many people can't afford a house. Houses are too expensive for first time buyers. There should be a great increase in council houses, they were all sold without replacement. Our priority would be to have some development, but the development would mainly consist of smaller, affordable houses, and the vast majority would be council houses. I can't understand why Ashford took on Chilmington Green – it's going to cause a lot of problems – for Kent County Council too because they will have responsibilities regarding infrastructure.

Response from Chris: I am anti-development within villages. Should be focussed on Ashford. We haven't got the infrastructure, e.g. no mains gas.

Response from Mike: I agree with both other candidates to some extent. Infrastructure is very important. The days of the Parish Council having a needs requirement have been swept away. If you put more houses into a village eventually you'll need a school. Many children in this area are bussed to school in Tenterden, there will be four new schools at Chilmington, and an application for a secondary school will be made shortly, but they will serve the needs of the new development and in any case they will take time. The village can grow quite happily if the Parish Council explains what it needs for the people who may want to live there. We need services for children of all ages and for elderly people. We need a good bus service. We need infrastructure and this takes an enormous amount of structural planning. This won't happen overnight, so we need to be very careful about what the limit is for the number of houses we build in the village areas.

The questioner asked for clarification: **"are you saying you're for development?"**

Response from Mike: No, I'm not. I am for what the Parish Council needs – I'd like to go back to the old needs system rather than it being imposed upon – I think that's wrong.

iv) " I was surprised to hear that there is a planning committee at Kent County Council because it seems to me that all you plan are houses. If you go into Ashford the facilities there are going down and down. So what plans do you make to regenerate town centres and make them attractive places to go?"

Response from Geoff Meaden: I agree. We lack funding for everything. The government says it is increasing funding, but our population is increasing. The government is too chicken to increase taxes. But if we pay more taxes we get more equality and we can improve our town centres, education, hospitals and roads.

The questioner asked: **“What do councils actually do to encourage and support new businesses?”**

Response from Geoff: There are enough different projects in the county that are geared towards economic development. There are many industrial parks but they are just not being filled, likewise office space is not being used. A big office block in Canterbury has just been converted into flats. Money is being spent inappropriately.

Chris Grayling left the meeting at this point.

v) “What’s going on at Duck Lane is unbelievable. I can’t get out of Duck Lane, lorries are wrecking it. The business should never have got planning permission. The woodland has been destroyed. There has been no screening. It looks like Stalag 18 with high fencing. We are having to live with all this. I feel that no one will listen”

Response from Mike: I am following what’s going on. A certain matter has been referred to the police for investigations. Let’s hope that something happens.

Candidates were thanked for their contributions.

Refreshment break

4) Notes from the last meeting 16/3/17

Notes had been circulated and David asked people to let him know if there were any comments about them.

5) Cllr Brad Bradford

Cllr Bradford said he knew that many of us had been ‘living and breathing’ the planning application (for the land between Park Farm Close and The Hollies) and that it had been at the forefront of our minds for a long time. He explained that between the February Parish Council meeting (where he had said that he would support the Parish Council whatever their decision regarding this planning application) and the Planning Committee meeting on the 15th March he had attended 34 meetings as a Borough Councillor, with dozens of conversations about dozens of things, in many places including on the stairs, so if someone asks him “when did you find this out? if I say genuinely I don’t know or can’t

remember you're going to have to accept it. Equally, I find email a shoddy form of communication". Cllr Bradford explained that he had many things going on during this period of time, and that "this wasn't a primary focus of my attention. It doesn't mean I didn't treat it properly or deal with it with a great deal of thought just before the planning meeting".

Question: "Why did you change your mind?"

Cllr Bradford told us the mistake he made was to say to the Parish Council that he would support them regardless of their decision. He realised nearer to the planning meeting that he should never have said this. He felt, however, that he hadn't made the bigger mistake of "knowing what I know, I could have gone to that planning meeting and thought they don't know what I know, I'll just go along with what I told the Parish Council, I'll work hard and support refusal. Let's face it, if I'd supported refusal, it would have been refused, make no bones about it, I won that application and know I did, deliberately." Cllr Bradford said he did what he thought was right on the night.

Question: "I want to know what you really believed when you first said you would support the Parish Council. If you believed so strongly, and gave an opinion on one side, what made the decision to change your mind?"

Cllr Bradford explained that as he'd told the Parish Council he thought their game plan was wrong, he believed that no Parish Councillor could have thought he absolutely believed in refusal of this application. He had said what he said because as a Borough Councillor he wanted to support the Parish that had elected him.

Question: "why didn't you support the Parish when you said you would support them, and then you just turned tail and you don't even tell anybody that you're going to do it".

Cllr Bradford: " yes I did, and now you're wrong, again". Cllr Bradford said that a week before the planning meeting he had spoken to Mr Richmond-Coggan (Parish Councillor) in the pub and asked what the Parish Council were minded to do. Mr Richmond-Coggan told Cllr Bradford that the Parish Council were all against it. To which Cllr Bradford stated he replied "in which case I've got a problem because I'm not sure I can support that". He explained that he wasn't sure because as a Councillor he is required to remain objective and listen to all the evidence up until he speaks at the planning committee meeting.

Cllr Bradford stated that he listened to all the speakers at the planning meeting and then decided there were just two questions to consider: "If I fight this application and get it refused, do I honestly and truly believe that the land won't be developed? The answer is no, I don't". The second question was "in that case, do you think you will ever see an application this good for that piece of land in the village? and the answer is no".

In his address to the planning committee Cllr Bradford said he had a duty to support development in our villages, to make sure that Gladman style appeals don't wipe out the villages. Cllr Bradford believed that if he had supported

refusal, the developer would have gone ahead with the appeal for the previously refused 15 house application, and that this would have been won by the developer. Having been given planning permission in principle for this field, the developer would then have made a new application for a larger number of houses.

Comment: "What I'm hearing from you is what many of us heard from the developer when he came round to Park Farm Close, and people felt they were being subtly bullied into doing something they didn't want to do – accept the development , or get something worse. We're being pressured into accepting things we don't want to accept – and now we'll lose the pub field as well because of this".

Question: "from a technical perspective, could Jarvis still put in another application?"

Cllr Bradford stated that this could happen, although he felt it was unlikely. When asked if he would support an application for 25 or 30 houses there, he said that he would not.

Question: "Why did Ashford Borough Council produce the site plan for Jarvis?"

Cllr Bradford explained that it is normal for the planners to collaborate with developers to work out a suitable plan.

Question: "why can't Ashford Borough Council complete their development plan?"

Cllr Bradford explained that the Council was currently working on the plan, but like all policies and plans it's now 'off the table' and so wouldn't have made a difference to this case. Now any developer can go anywhere in the Borough and put in for planning permission. This is because Ashford Borough doesn't have a 5 year land for housing supply.

Question: "why did you propose the motion to allow this development?"

Cllr Bradford told us about the protocol at planning committee. It is normal practice when you speak about an application and you're the ward member to give your address then support it by a proposal to refuse or permit. He said that normally the Chairman would remind the ward councillor if they forgot to make a proposal.

Question: "As a civic leader can I appeal to you, on behalf of every villager in this district, to get the Council to prioritise getting its own house in order because the reason we are not protected by the policies we had before is primarily because Ashford Borough Council has failed to meet its own unachievable targets. It still promotes itself as an area of growth. That needs to be addressed, and until it is, you'll have no choice but to keep letting people like us down".

Councillor Bradford said the reason the housing targets couldn't be met was because "every single village in the Borough does what you did. Every time someone says we want to build 12 houses at a density of 8 per hectare – you say you can't build here – get yourself sorted out Ashford Borough Council – get your housing land supply because it's affecting us – but we don't want any houses here."

Question: "But aren't the housing targets unrealistic?"

Cllr Bradford said the government, not Ashford, sets the targets. The decision to build Chilmington Green wasn't the council's idea either.

Question: "Surely we don't have to be an area of growth. That's a political decision by Ashford isn't it?"

Cllr Bradford stated that he wasn't allowed to comment on political decisions due to the forthcoming elections.

Question "It's taken years to get going at Chilmington so now you're building in the villages".

Cllr Bradford explained these things take a lot of time, it's not that the council isn't trying. He said that members of the planning committee did not like the position that Ashford was currently in, and some were concerned that they wouldn't be re-elected because of the situation.

Question: "How does the potential £50,000 cost of an appeal impact on your duty as a Councillor, for us?"

Cllr Bradford said his duty as a Councillor to us was to get the best deal he could for our village. He also represents the Borough as a cabinet member, but he doesn't base a decision on saving appeal costs to Ashford Borough Council.

Question: " when is the new Development Plan going to be finished?"

The plan has been out for consultation, and there has been a call for more sites. It will probably come back this year for more consultation and then be published next spring (2018). But without the 5 year land for housing supply, the plan is irrelevant. It's a crisis. That's the situation the Council is in.

Question: " when we met with planners earlier this year, even they were concerned that the balance had now tipped away from any form of local democracy, the balance was in the developers favour, and although they hoped the new plan would identify enough housing to meet their targets, they didn't actually think they would be able to maintain targets for more than 1 or 2 years at a time. So this problem is not going to go away until the housing target figures are reduced and made more realistic".

Cllr Bradford said there is lots of work going on in the Council to try and deal with this. They were lobbying the government about unfair rules that made the current situation unsustainable. So he didn't think this would go on forever.

Question: "at planning committee you asked why no one had supported the brownies and guides when they had to leave their hall. 1) Why did you raise it 2) I heard you had a hand in getting rid of the guides and brownies. Would you like to comment?"

Cllr Bradford stated emphatically that he didn't get rid of the brownies and guides. He said he could explain this at length to anyone who wanted to hear, although not at this meeting. Regarding the reason he raised it at planning committee – it was to win the committee over by persuading them that the same people who'd written all those passionate letters about how the

development would be so bad for the village didn't really care so much because they had let all the clubs and societies close.

Question: " You did what you wanted. You didn't represent us. We elected you to represent us. I think you should resign because you didn't represent us".

Cllr Bradford said he was a Borough Councillor, and he was working hard doing important work regarding health issues in the Borough. He had no intention of resigning, and we can exercise our vote at the next election. He reiterated that he did what he thought was best on the night.

Question " What is the point of Parish Council decisions if the Borough Council just overturn all our decisions?"

Cllr Bradford explained we were in a difficult situation right now. A year ago things were different. No one at planning wants to be in this situation. Most Councillors just want to be re-elected, including Cllr Bradford. No one wants to see houses right across the Borough.

Question: " Don't Councillors still have choices? There were other Borough Councillors on the committee who did speak up for us. They said the site was not allocated for development and that this was exactly the sort of case where they had to use their consciences, listen to what people in the villages were saying, about how worried they were of being joined up with large developments like Chilmington Green."

"I made the choice that I thought was right on the night".

David said he hoped a line could now be drawn under this matter – and that we could move on and be positive about what we can do.

Cllr Bradford told people that they could meet him or phone him, but he felt email was the worst form of communication.

6) Village Events

The Parish Council are developing a village vision, based on the things that you have told us are important to you. We are passionate about Shadoxhurst and will share our ideas with you at the meeting on Saturday 13th May. We will send out information before the meeting to everyone in case you can't be there.

The dog show is Saturday June 24th at Green Farm.

Harvest festival event last weekend in September on the recreation ground.

Later in the year – a murder mystery (Peter Webb)

The showcasing Shadoxhurst event has created interest for new clubs – a sewing club, poetry, village history and Spanish conversation. More details will come out in the newsletter. Let David know if you have any other ideas.

7) Village petition for reducing the speed limit on Hamstreet road

Please sign Sally's petition if you can. The aim is to put pressure on Kent County Council to reduce the speed limit from 60mph to 40mph. The petition is available at the coffee club or on line at <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/reduce-speed-limit-to-40mph-on-ashford-hamstreet-rd> David thanked Sally for her work on this.

8) Village protection policy.

David, Sheila and Carol are going to see our MP Damian Green tomorrow (as village residents) to let him know about the detrimental effect that government and Ashford Borough Council policies are having on our little village regarding development and to ask how he can help us.

David explained that the Saxon Shore parishes are trying to get together and come up with a village protection policy. This is related to the local plan, and if Shadoxhurst is to do this too, then we need help with research, taking photographs around the village etc as we undertake this big task. If you are willing to help – please let David know.

9) Improving our communications

Volunteers are needed to help deliver village newsletters. Can you help? We are also considering sponsorship or adverts to help pay for the newsletters.

Talking face to face is often best, although not always practical. We are still trying to increase the village email data base, but this is ongoing.

10) Village updates

The bus shelter at Farley Close has now been repaired.

We're still waiting to get the road name signs done.

Carol - The green cabinets have all been installed in the village for superfast broadband, but other work away from the cabinets is still ongoing and will take a few weeks. We'll let you know when it's ready and what to do. In the meantime don't get locked into a new deal will penalties for early exit!

Colin - The amount and size of trucks using Church Lane and Duck Lane continue to cause concern. The roads are unsuitable for this sort of use. We can't find out what's in the storage company at the end of Duck lane – surely the fire service should need to know.

11) Date of next meeting

A special resident's meeting to share and talk about our village vision – Saturday 13th May 2017 at 2pm. Please come along – you'll be very welcome.