



## PARISH COUNCIL OF EYNSFORD

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# Annual Parish Meeting 11<sup>th</sup> May 2018

## Parish Council Reports

# Governance Report

*Cllr Sarah Boyle – Chair of the Council*

It's been another busy year for the parish council and I would like to thank all of the councillors who give up their time and expertise for the benefit of our village.

In June we had to deal with damage to the willow trees at Common Meadow which required urgent attention - further details of this are covered in the Recreation report – and this required the updating of our Financial Regulations and Standing Orders to deal with emergency situations like this.

Also in June we were pleased to welcome pupils from the schools in our French twinning village in Camphin to Eynsford. As well as spending time in the school, they had a tour of Eynsford including St Martin's Church, the ford and the castle.

In July our Parish Clerk Holly Ivaldi gained the Certificate in Local Council Administration. This will help us to become a Quality Council if we decide to do so.

In August we ran two family fun days which were held at Anthony Roper Primary School. These were well attended and were supported on one day by additional activities from Sevenoaks District Council. Thank you to Farningham District Council for financial support and to the school for the use of their grounds.

In September we were pleased to meet our two new PCSOs Jane Wright and Peter Jones who will be covering Eynsford as well as a number of other parishes in the district.

In September new signs were unveiled in Camphin en Pevele, France to show their twinning with Eynsford. Our twinning group are working on erecting similar signs in Eynsford which the parish council is supporting.

In October I attended the special service to remember Alexander Pitcairn whose tomb was discovered in a hidden vault during the reordering of St Martin's Church.

Councillors have started writing articles on our website blog about different areas of interest or events that they have attended. Do have a look at [www.eynsfordparishcouncil.org.uk](http://www.eynsfordparishcouncil.org.uk).

I attended the Kent Association for Local Council's AGM with Cllr Malcolm Richardson in November where we had the chance to comment on current issues.

As usual we took part in the Act of Remembrance at the war memorial on 11<sup>th</sup> November where I laid the wreath on behalf of the parish council.

In December I attended the official unveiling of the public art installation at Eynsford station organised by Eynsford Village Society. Thank you to EVS and to all the artists involved.

Since December we have been researching and implementing the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations. This has involved reviewing a number of our policies and documents. Thanks in particular to Cllr Theresa Durrant, Cllr Phil Ward and Deputy Clerk Naomi Wolfe for their work on this.

In December we set our budget for the financial year 2018/19 and agreed that we would ask for a precept of £77,440. The process is always a close balancing act between what we would like to

achieve and what is a reasonable amount to ask from tax payers. Copies of the budget are available to read at the Annual Parish Meeting.

I hope you have enjoyed reading our newsletters which are delivered to all household in the parish four times a year. We try to include a mixture of articles from the council and article from outside agencies and organisations. We would be pleased to receive your feedback.

In January councillors were asked to vote on who should receive the Community Award from the list of those nominated by parishioners. We were delighted to choose Margaret Newbold to receive the award which will be presented at the Annual Parish Meeting.

Finally we were sad to hear of the deaths of Audrey Gee and Guy Hart-Dyke who both played important roles in the village. Guy Hart-Dyke served on the parish council, and Audrey Gee was a District Councillor for many years. Cllr Kirby attended Mr Hart-Dyke's funeral on behalf of the parish, and we will be represented at Mrs Gee's memorial service later this month.

# Planning Report

*Cllr Philip Ward – Chair of the Planning Committee*

Probably the single most important planning issue that has been ongoing throughout the past year, yet probably the least visible, is the new village hall. It's not a particularly complex process but much care is needed to ensure the development committee delivers the most appropriate and most cost effective hall for the village. The committee is due to meet with Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) planning team later this month for a 'pre-application meeting'. This is where we can present our outline plan and discuss key planning issues with the planners. It's an opportunity for us to gauge how acceptable a full planning application may be, and where we may need to tweak or indeed overhaul the application if necessary before actual submission later this year.

This effort is a partnership approach between trustees of Eynsford Village Hall and the Parish Council, with each group providing representatives to the development committee. This joint approach is working well and aims to deliver a brand new, modern, multi-functional village hall to serve the village through this and into the next millennia.

On housing development we have seen a steady stream of applications for extensions sideways, upwards and to the rear all over the village. The following developments are of particular note and may be of interest to residents.

Institute Cottage – A new application is currently with SDC pending a decision for a single dwelling replacement of the existing building. The Parish Council has supported this application as the existing building has little historical value, is not listed, is clearly beyond economic repair and becoming quite and eyesore within the Conservation Area.

Lydith, High Street (rear of) – Late last year, an application was received to build 2 dwellings at the rear of Lydith which backs onto the lower section of Pollyhaugh. The Parish Council objected to this application largely due to the inappropriate size and positioning. SDC were of a similar opinion and refused the application. Unsurprisingly a new application is due with us shortly so we will assess this in due course.

Former Green Keepers Shed, Upper Austin Lodge – Following the closure of Austin Lodge Golf Club, the green-keepers sheds at the far end of the hamlet became redundant. As these were only installed to service the golf club and due to the unique undeveloped location in the AONB and Green Belt, the Parish Council objected to the application. Alas, SDC took a contrary view and granted the application for a large single dwelling on the site. I recently noted the site has been cleared of the sheds and I expect building work to commence shortly.

Land Adjacent to Sorrento, Station Road – For a number of years now the Parish Council has been objecting to various applications for a new dwelling on land adjacent to Sorrento and behind Stack House and others. Late last year, it went before the SDC Development Control Committee which again refused the application, however, the applicant, as is their right, took the application to appeal with an independent but government appointed inspector. The inspector approved the application and their decision is final. Looking for positives, the inspector has in mitigation, placed a number of conditions on the development, which address some of the concerns of the Parish Council but it is still a disappointing decision.

Bluebell Bank, Station Road – After a prolonged process and with support of the Parish Council approval has recently been given for a new driveway to be constructed at the front of Bluebell bank to facilitate parking for the property. This is a sensitive location being on a winding stretch of the High Street and in the Conservation Area, but the benefits of off-road parking in a congested area persuaded the Parish Council to offer its support.

New Tree, Riverside – By the time you read this a new tree may have already been planted on the Riverside green. The tree is an Acer redrum, which should add a marvellous splash of colour to the area.

Sevenoaks Local Plan Consultation – Barely has the current Local Plan been adopted and SDC are making plans for a new Local Plan. This is actually a very important process as it defines what, where and how development should take place right across the district. This takes time and much effort and Parish Councillors have been taking part in a number of consultations and workshops to help SDC gather evidence for the new plan which will cover the period through to 2035.

On a more jolly and final note, and for those who don't read The Sun Newspaper, (Headline – *'Praise Your Glass, a village church is bidding for a 13-hour daily booze licence for its live music shows five nights a week'*), St Martin's Church has applied for a premises licence to allow the serving of alcohol and live music throughout the week. This will allow for greater use of the magnificent church for community events and functions. Parish Councillors, renowned for a tipple, of course offered their full support.

# Highways & Transportation Report

*Cllr Malcolm Richardson – Chair of the Highways & Transportation Committee*

**Street Lighting** - all lights in the village are new LEDs, with the exception of five which have concrete columns. These are due to be replaced in the near future at which time the new bulbs will be installed.

**Rail Users Group** - this group was initiated due to concerns expressed by residents in respect of issues with the rail service from Eynsford, including frequency of cancellations, lack of advance notice, reliability, and possible use of Oyster Cards. The benefits of liaising with the Sevenoaks Rail Travellers Association was also discussed. In addition we have been active in trying to discuss the proposed changes to the timetables with both Thameslink and Southeastern. (and with Michael Fallon MP).

**School Parking (1)** - a new yellow line was installed last year from the school to Mill Lane which has appeared to be successful in lessening congestion during drop off and pick up times. However, the Council is still looking into the practicalities (and 'knock on' effects) of installing a yellow line on the opposite side of the road from the school to the Five Bells.

**School Parking (2)** – last year, the Scouts kindly allowed parents dropping off or picking up their children at the School to park within their car park off Priory Lane (next to the Parish Office). In addition, they also installed a new pedestrian gate so that parents and children can walk towards the School in greater safety away from cars entering and exiting the site. We hope that this area will shortly be concreted (or similar) to make use of the gate easier.

**A20/A225 Road Improvements** – together with Farningham Council, discussions have been held with KCC concerning the dangerous stretch of the A20 close to the junction with the A225. These discussions are ongoing.

**Bonfire Night Parking** – following last year's show, which led to some disruption to traffic in the village due to parking along the High Street, discussions will be held with the organisers to try and limit such problems this year.

**Pavement Improvements (outside Fountain Court)** – Following pavement improvements undertaken last year by Kent Highways, the water leakage onto the pavement along the High Street was improved. However new leakage has appeared some yards along from the original location and we are again in discussions with Kent Highways for new work to be done to stop this second leak.

**Station Car Parking** – due to the shortage of car parking at the station (and beyond), we are looking into the possibility of creating extra spaces to the south of the bridge in the lay-by, together with a new access to the London bound platform, by both steps and/or a ramp. Discussions will be held with both Network Rail and Kent Highways.

# Community & Environment Report

*Cllr Ferne Haxby – Chair of the Community & Environment Committee*

It has been a busy year for the Community & Environment team at the Parish Council. There have been a range of initiatives that have been completed this year. These include:

## *Defibrillator at Eynsford Station*

- We recognise the importance of emergency assistance that can be offered to people, whilst waiting for professional help. We are extremely fortunate to now have two defibrillators in the village, one located at the village hall and a new one that is situated outside the booking office at the railway station.

## *Restart your heart day*

- Councillors supported this drive by undertaking basic CPR training at the Parish Council. This is also to be part of the Annual Parish Meeting.

## *Dementia Café*

- The Eynsford and Farningham Dementia Café was launched in February at Eynsford Village Hall. The Café brings together those people living with Dementia and their carers to meet, chat, do activities and gain advice and information from resident professional organisations such as Bluebird Care, Carers FIRST and the Alzheimer & Dementia Support services. So far meetings have included, making easter bonnets, learning about safety from telephone calls and emails and enjoyed songs from the swing era of Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin, to name a few. The next meeting sees the group supporting Dementia Awareness Week with a display and forget-me-knot planting. Avid knitters and crochet -ers from around the village have been making flowers to support this worthy cause. The Café meets on the second Friday of each month.

## *Disability/Access Survey*

- We carried out a survey with our businesses and public areas within the village to raise awareness of those people that may have difficulty accessing premises. The survey also gave information and help that can aid businesses when people are visiting them.

## *Affordable Housing*

- As part of the strategy for encouraging affordable housing within the area, the Parish Council completed their input into the Sevenoaks District Council Housing Strategy. This ensured that Eynsford had a say in the development of the strategy affecting our area.

## *Commonwealth Day Service*

- We attended the Commonwealth Day Service, an event that was happening in all parishes and areas across the country in celebration of the commonwealth nations.

## *Loss of Barclays in Farningham*

- The Parish Council contributed to the comments against the closure of Barclays in Farningham, expressing concerns for the elderly and vulnerable in accessing banking facilities.

Other projects are more long term or are planned for the future and these include:

*Darenth Valley Landscape Project.*

- The Parish is represented on the project that is working along the Darenth Valley, looking at projects that can maintain and enhance the area of outstanding natural beauty that we are lucky enough to call home.

*Coffee Project – through Action Rural Kent*

- A new project for 2018/2019 seeing a mobile coffee stall coming to into operation in 2018/2019. Watch out for further developments.

Part of the work is to support local projects and groups in their work. Projects that are supported enhance the lives of the local population as well as providing advice, help and support to the community and the area.

**Donations made by the Council to local community projects included:**

- Art Project – EVS
- Lights of Love
- Woodlands Trust
- Trident Magazine
- Eynsford in Bloom
- Darenth Valley Youth Music
- Victim Support
- Poppy Appeal
- St Martin's for Grass cutting
- St Botolph's for Grass cutting
- Eynsford & Crockenhill Rights of Way
- Rural Age Concern
- W.I
- Dementia Café

# Recreation Report

*Cllr Alan Cooke – Chair of the Recreation Committee*

## ALLOTMENTS

Periodic inspections of each plot have been carried out during the year by the PC in order to improve the general tidiness of the site. If any plot appears to remain uncultivated then the tenant is given a period in which they can make improvements and if none is made then the tenant is asked to hand back the plot to the next person on the waiting list.

The parish council also prepared a Management Plan for the allotment, formalising roles and responsibilities for both the 'Allotment Authority' and tenant which is to be read in conjunction with the Tenancy Agreement and is to be published on the council's web site along with the updated Risk Assessment.

Further volunteer work parties carried out cutting back overhanging foliage along the main access path and the removal of some small trees to certain plots, in order to improve the light. A weekend work party was arranged and plot holders were asked to attend and tidy up the site. Although very few plot holders turned up, there were a number of volunteers ready to roll up their sleeves and remove rubbish and cut back hedges and help to dig over plots. Much of the debris collected will be removed into a skip provided by the parish council. In addition the parish council paid for N W Kent Countryside Partnerships' team to clear part of the nature area again.

Another initiative considered by the council was to build a communal composting bin. However, after much discussion, it was considered impractical as what goes into these bins has to be controlled to avoid pernicious weeds spreading on to the allotments plots.

Parking in the designated allotment spaces still remains an issue. Registration numbers are to be requested from plot holders so that parking users can be monitored.

## HARROW MEADOW

The 2017-18 season started with the return of Eynsford Football Club, which play on Saturday afternoons, and Riverside Wanderers playing their matches Sunday mornings. Once again, due to the exceptionally wet weather, numerous games had to be cancelled, although the bottom goal mouth remains in a reasonable condition. The length of the pitch was extended back to its original length having been shortened the season before to allow the grass in the goal mouths to recover.

The general tidiness of the changing rooms this season has much improved and the installation of a new water heater for the home changing room has been welcomed by both teams. The showers in the away dressing room constantly drip but does provide hot water for those visiting players.

The proposal to build a new village hall on Harrow Meadow is progressing towards submitting a planning application to Sevenoaks in the summer of 2018. The current drawings show the new hall adjoining the existing changing rooms alongside the western edge of the meadow and with car parking extending to the entrance in Bower Lane. To accommodate the new hall and parking it will be necessary to turn the football pitch through ninety degrees. This results in the pitch needing to extend partly into the farmland to the north, which has been agreed in principle with the land owners.

A major consideration in the design of the hall was to position the pitch at least 10.0m from the face of the new hall and at a level not to impose significantly on the view when looking out of main

windows of the hall. Due to the steep contours of the farmland, there will be significant earthworks to provide a 'flat' pitch and the cost of this work is added to the build cost of the hall.

The parish council is holding back on spending the refurbishment budget for the changing rooms such as resolving the damp, until a planning application on the village hall development has been granted.

In October, a meeting was held with the Kent FA in order to assess the condition of the existing football pitch. In the main, their report identified that the length of grass, percentage of ground cover, percentage of weed and disease were within acceptable limits. However, the type of desirable grass was significantly lower than that recommended and that immediate action should be taken. In addition they recommended de-compaction of the soil twice a year as well as regular surface slitting.

The parish council will review the recommendations along with the level of cost involved, however, given the proposal to turn the pitch through ninety degrees, if planning is granted, relaying the pitch should overcome most of the problems.

The parish council reviewed the rental and a modest increase was accepted by the teams.

## **PLAY AREA**

A regular inspection of the play equipment is carried out throughout the year and most minor defects are rectified. The equipment is also inspected by an external consultant in accordance with EN 1176:2008 and provides a risk assessment of the play equipment and identifies maintenance in the high, medium and low risk categories. There are currently no items considered in need of urgent repair. However, the play area surfacing may need to be repaired or replaced at some stage. The condition of some timber support members, where they are built into the ground, are exhibiting rot and will need monitoring on a regular basis particularly to the trim trail.

## **RIVERSIDE**

Again, the annual inspection recorded that sections of the low timber post and rail along Riverside is continuing to deteriorate and is in need of urgent repair. Competitive quotations for the replacement of this fence have been obtained and work should start in May/June time.

Continued misuse of this area has occurred by certain members of the public during the summer. The chain installed across the river, to prevent people driving up the weirs, was removed. This has been replaced and will be repaired when broken.

The parish council are looking into planting a semi mature tree on riverside, which will need an appropriate tree guard. The actual species will be decided on advice from a specialist.

## **COMMON MEADOW**

In the early part of summer, when the cricket ground was looking splendid, a large bough snapped on one of the five old willow trees that are located alongside the river in Common Meadow. In the space of a few days the parish council was able to arrange for a tree surgeon to take the broken limb down, make safe the area and clear away the debris. A week later, another bough snapped from the same tree and a tree surgeon was on hand to make the area safe. It was considered prudent that while the tree surgeon was on site he should carry out an inspection of this particular tree, to assess whether there were any further risks of falling boughs.

One of the willows we know was planted around 1988 and given the trunk diameter of the other four trees these must be at least 50 years old. Therefore, given the age of these trees, the parish council had concerns regarding their condition. It was agreed that competitive quotations should be obtained from tree specialists to inspect all the willow trees by use of ropes and to carry out a 25% crown reduction of all these willows.

The inspection revealed no significant disease and the crown reduction was carried out. As a result of this work, initially the trees looked somewhat bare but we are pleased to report they are now looking good.

A request was made to the parish council to permit a 'Summer Ball' to be held on Common Meadow. This would be a "black tie" event aimed at bringing the community together with any proceeds going to the cricket club and new village hall fund. Initially there were mixed feelings between councillors as to whether this should be allowed to go ahead. However, it was agreed that the organizer be allowed to promote the event subject to certain conditions and by completing a formal contract. The event is due to take place at the end of June.

## **OTHER**

The parish council has employed a specialist company to carry out an inspection and report on the condition of those trees in the conservation area.

Members of the parish council have attended 'Flood Warden' training and although the council has not formerly appointed a Flood Warden or developed a 'Flood Plan' the council holds a considerable amount of useful information. The Flood Warden is the main coordinator with the other emergency services and will receive flood warnings from the Environment Agency. The Plan will cover arrangements, should a severe warning be given, for the most vulnerable. The Flood Warden will also, following an incident, liaise with the emergency services to understand if improvements can be made, to give advice regarding insurance claims and to facilitate disposal of contaminated waste. There are a number of products on the market that can assist those properties most at risk to flooding such as toilet bungs, anti back-flow valves, flood gates and Eco bags, which can be used instead of sand bags.

# Sevenoaks District Councillor for Eynsford Annual Report

Michael Horwood – District Councillor - e-mail: [cllr.horwood@sevenoaks.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.horwood@sevenoaks.gov.uk)

It has been another busy year for Sevenoaks District Council, not just because it is reviewing its Local Plan (a planning document which lays out where and how much development should go over the next 14 years in the District), but also in continuing to adapt to Government reductions in funding.

The council has come a long way in maintaining a high level of service whilst having its main revenue support grant from Government not just reduced, but scrapped altogether. In 2010, out of an expenditure budget of £14 million, Sevenoaks District Council used to receive around £4 million towards that budget from the Government. As of last year, we received zero pounds towards the bill. Where we received the equivalent of £55.95 of funding for every single man, woman and child in Sevenoaks District in 2010, we now don't receive a penny.

Despite that, the Council's budgetary performance has been resilient, partly due to the 10-year financing model we began in 2011. Rather than look year to year and have to make knee jerk finance reactions as a result of unexpected Government cuts, as part of the plan, our finance officers anticipated the elimination of the grant altogether by the end of this year, meaning we were able to forward plan and begin conducting large and forward-looking efficiency savings seven years ago. The Council has also used its savings to invest in revenue streams like property rental, which have generated far greater returns than nominal interest in a bank account would.

So why is this important? One of the most common things I hear is that 'Sevenoaks District Council only collect my rubbish, all for the thousands of pounds I pay in Council Tax'. First of all, it's important to bear in mind although we have the unenviable job of charging and collecting residents' Council Tax, we only receive 12% of the overall bill, around £280 per year for a Band D property, with the majority of the council tax bill going to Kent County Council, the remainder goes to the Fire & Rescue Service, the Police & Crime Commissioner and Eynsford Parish Council.

It's also important to bear in mind Sevenoaks District Council does not just collect rubbish. That may be the high visibility service we do, but there are many other services that we have to provide. Planning policy and planning applications, planning enforcement, social housing and administration, environmental health, building control, emergency planning and civil enforcement are all services we have to provide as a statutory duty, in addition to non-statutory services like maintaining three leisure centres in the district, and providing funding for sports and health programs.

However, one thing that we recognise, as it is the most visible service, is the importance of the weekly refuse collections. We are now the only council in Kent and one of the few councils in the UK that continue to operate a week in, week out weekly refuse collection for both rubbish and recycled materials.

Whereas many councils have moved to a fortnightly collection, some councils in the UK have moved to a monthly collection – where you will not get your black rubbish, full of waste that can smell, attract rodents and insects, collected for a month. And if that's unimaginable, some councils are actively considering 6-week refuse collections.

But not Sevenoaks. We are committed to a weekly refuse collection for our residents, and whilst our finances endure, it will remain the cornerstone of the council's operation.

Turning to one of the other high profile and more contentious functions we undertake, planning has also taken a step up in the work we do. As I mentioned at the start, Sevenoaks District Council has undertaken a review of its Local Plan. The Local Plan is a district-wide planning policy which states

where we need to build homes for the future. It is a long and arduous process, and one that creates much worry for residents, due to the many transparent hoops we have to jump through. You may recall the horror in mid-2016 and last year of pieces of land around Eynsford being proposed for mass development, like the land at the back of Eynsford Rise and the land at the back of Priory Lane, with land being put forward that could have seen over 1,000 houses in the surrounding green fields being added to the village.

My personal view and priority has always been to protect Eynsford as much as possible from inappropriate mass-development. The simple fact is, even if we allowed a 1000, or even thousands of homes to be built in and around Eynsford, it would never make homes affordable for the average family. The housing pressure in the South East of England, particularly North West Kent, is immense, due to the huge population overspill of London.

Building on all the Darent Valley fields wouldn't create homes for children or grandchildren, it would just create more homes as an extension of London, with the green belt, historic surrounds and beauty of the Darent Valley lost forever. That is why I have done everything I can to fight off inappropriate mass-development.

Now we are half way through the review, I'm pleased to say that Sevenoaks District Council is in the process of removing inappropriate sites as options to take forward in our first draft Local Plan, which will go out to consultation this summer. However other wards haven't been so lucky, with landscapes, views and amenity potentially due to change quite dramatically. Just to put it in context, an independent inspector has said we need to build over 13,000 houses up to 2032 – which is nearly 690 a year across the district.

That all said, it doesn't mean there could be no development in Eynsford at all. In the Planning Advisory Committee meeting in June we will find out which sites in the village (if any), as well as across Sevenoaks District could be potentially taken forward.

In the draft consultation of the Local Plan, which will be launched after the committee and the district council meeting in the summer, if any sites in Eynsford are proposed to be taken forward, then residents will have the chance to comment on them (and any others anywhere in the District). It is important to state that this process is not deciding 'what' should be built on it, but the principle of 'if' the land should and can be built on, to try and meet that 13,000+ housing number. It is very important when this consultation is launched, that residents comment at this point and I will ensure the Parish Council, the Eynsford Village Society and the local Facebook groups are aware when it does.

Finally, it is with a heavy heart that I must state that this will likely be my last report as Eynsford's District Councillor, as I will be stepping down in the role in May 2019 (the next local election). Having first been elected in 2011 and re-elected in 2015, I have been honoured and humbled by the way the Eynsford community has welcomed me and supported me throughout. Although I can't say I've accomplished everything that I've wanted to, and whilst there have been difficult decisions to make in the past seven years, I have always tried to keep the village as it is - treasured by so many residents as one of the most beautiful, picturesque and pleasant villages to live in, not just in Sevenoaks District, but in the whole of Kent.

If you are interested in standing as a candidate in the District Council elections, I'd be delighted to have a chat with you to talk more about the role, the time commitments and the expectations.

# **Kent County Councillor for Eynsford Annual Report**

*Roger Gough – County Councillor - e-mail: Roger.Gough@kent.gov.uk*

Things have changed a little since last year. Because of boundary changes that came into effect at the County Council elections last May, Eynsford is now part of the new County Council Division of Sevenoaks North and Darent Valley. This is a large, rural and banana-shaped Division – the second biggest in the County by electors per County Councillor – which runs from Swanley Village to Seal Chart, and it is my privilege to represent it.

I also serve as Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education, overseeing the Council's work with schools, Early Years, children's social services, youth services and much else.

Highways issues are always an important part of my local Member role, in Eynsford as elsewhere. With money ever tighter – in particular, with social services making ever greater demands on the budget and so putting pressure on areas such as Highways – it is fair to say that the approach taken is inevitably cautious and more restrictive (for example, tighter adherence to Department of Transport guidance) than was the case in the past. Nonetheless, we continue to pursue new initiatives, including further parking restrictions and better parking and crossing near the station.

A year ago, we had seen the new yellow lines installed outside Alton Cottages, but this has been followed up with other measures: bollards either side at the crossing point near the Priory Lane junction, a sign warning motorists of pedestrians crossing and pavement resurfacing. There has also been what appears – after many attempts – to be a successful resolution of the flooding by Gibsons Place, through drainage works carried out by Kent Highways last summer.

The recent severe weather was of course a big test for Kent Highways. Their focus was on keeping primary routes open; these are, as the name implies, quite major roads for which the County Council is responsible, such as the A225. Secondary routes will often get attention too, but on this occasion the pressures of continuous cold and recurring snowfalls on the primaries meant that efforts were focused on them. Clearly this raises problems for people living (as I do, and many of us do) on more peripheral roads, and it is something that I will always seek to help through salt bins, deployment of hand salting crews and the like – but there is little scope for deflecting Kent Highways from their core mission when conditions are very severe.

The heavy snowfall has, of course, also worsened the pothole position. Each year, in the spring, KCC puts together various funding sources for the 'Find and Fix' campaign, also known as the pothole blitz. In the last financial year, some £5.2 million was committed, and we covered the equivalent of 18 Wembley pitches, or 117,000 square metres. However, in January we were already seeing 4,000 pothole enquiries – the highest level since the floods of January 2014 – and that was before the Beast from the East. Recently we have been running at some 1,400 notifications per week. The Leader of the County Council, Paul Carter, announced in our February budget debate, that a further £2 million is being released, with more likely to follow.

Our current pothole budget for 2018-19 comes to £7.5 million. Since 1 March, we have filled in over 11,000 potholes, some 1,400 of them in Sevenoaks District, and carried out 16,000 square metres of patching (for multiple potholes), re than 3,300 square metres of that in Sevenoaks.

With regard to Education, the County Council faces growing pressures on secondary school places as the increased number of children in primary school moves into the secondary phase. On National Offer Day in March, we were able to meet some 80% of families' first preferences, and over 95% of families secured one of their preferences – broadly in line with last year, in spite of a significantly larger cohort. Nonetheless, numbers are forecast to continue to grow; in response to this, we are looking to an expansion of Trinity School in Sevenoaks by what is called 2 Forms of Entry – in other

words, taking an extra sixty pupils for each school year, starting with the current Year 7s and gradually, year by year, adding the extra numbers through the entire school. This builds on a temporary expansion begun last year. In addition, last September saw the new Weald of Kent Grammar annex in Sevenoaks open its doors, and this year it has certainly made offers to girls from Eynsford. To the north, we are also expanding secondary schools in Wilmington.

Last month saw National Offer Day for Reception Year in our primary schools. We have expanded primary schools significantly in recent years to meet rising numbers, and as a consequence of that we have this year been able to offer almost 90% of families their first choice of school. Almost 98% have been offered one of their preferences, and the number of those ‘allocated’ a place – in other words, who have been offered a school that was not one of their choices – is at a record low. Anthony Roper Primary School was comfortably subscribed but under much less pressure than in the past, which tells you something about the overall position on primary places

The County Council has recently set its budget. Over recent years, with government grants declining and with ever-growing pressures on social services budgets, both for children and for older and vulnerable adults, we have had to realise savings now of the order of £600 million. In the budget, we have raised council tax by 5% (the maximum 3% allowable without a referendum, plus the 2% ‘precept’ for local authorities with social care responsibilities). This is clearly something that we undertook very reluctantly, but the recent example of what has happened in Northamptonshire makes it very clear what the financial risks are now facing local authorities and County Councils in particular.