

OATEN HILL & SOUTH CANTERBURY ASSOCIATION



SUMMER NEWSLETTER

digital edition

JUNE 2021

No. 19

Summer 2021 – Welcome to the New Normal?

FROM THE OHSCA COMMITTEE

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This newsletter is being produced by the OHSCA committee at a time of both rapid change and continuing challenge. Our excellent editor Greta Cotterrell has been called away to look after someone very close to her who is recuperating from intensive care, having been infected with covid-19. Our membership secretary, Green Team supremo, and stalwart committee member Sophie Scott is recovering after a fall. Another prominent member of OHSCA, Sarah Perkins, has passed away. As the country moves to a possible further relaxation of pandemic restrictions against a background of increasing rates of infection yet again, we remain uncertain as to what we should and should not do in terms of the long hoped for return to normal social contact. And Canterbury itself is faced with many

changes affecting housing, transport and social care. In this issue, in addition to the usual mixture of regular reports, we have a focus on planning and related issues.



A rare moment of near-normal OHSCA social activity – the annual plant share, 31st May 2021 – a day of glorious sunshine!

FROM THE CHAIR

So far as Covid is concerned, we seem to remain in a complex state with divided omens about future opening up. On the one hand I, with the family, have just had the surge test for CT1 (negative you will be relieved to hear I am sure) indicating our numbers are rising, and betraying increased government anxiety as they try to map the spread of new variants. On the other hand, experts are saying if we have had two jabs (quite a big if, if you are below 40), our immunity will hold against them.

OHSCA is no doubt following the natural trend to cross fingers and enjoy ourselves as best we can while we can. The Plant Share was our first 'real' event, and it was enjoyed enormously, and we will be holding our first face-to-face committee meeting in a couple of weeks! After all the months of Zoom this will also in a spooky way be enjoyable, as we try to wade in to the complexities of Canterbury Council's reconstruction plans.

UN Sustainable Development Goals Forum

I am a member of this, mainly in a personal capacity but I wanted to tell you a little of what the group tries to do. Our government adopted the UN SDG policy in 2015 along with the other 193 members of the UN, and government policy is bound by the goals. What are the goals intended to achieve? The clue is in the name – the Policy vision is simply that as the world develops materially, this is not a sustainable form of development, if the benefits of development are skewed in favour of the haves, and the have-nots are ignored.

If you search <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/> you will get the detailed picture. The goals outline 17 key areas where poorer countries are increasingly being left behind, in terms of standards of living, standards of water/air quality, political freedom/ education, healthcare, stable government, effects of climate change, and more. The intention is to look at the differentials between the richest and poorest, and to develop arguments and policies for re-inventing development so that its benefits are more widely spread. It is a form of very moderate re-distribution of potential wealth, that is – *future* wealth must be more equally distributed.

As well as supporting the national effort (<https://local.gov.uk/un-sustainable-development-goals-guide-councils>), a local Forum exists to review our own local patch: Kent and Canterbury. By identifying pockets of deprivation, we hope to work with agencies such as CCC or KCC to develop action plans. If you are interested, get in touch through the website:

<https://www.inclusiveeconomypartnership.gov.uk/projects/canterbury-sdg-forum>

Canterbury Alliance for Sustainable Transport (CAST)

Another group I belong to, loosely representing OHSCA, is this transport group. We are a sub-section of the Canterbury Climate Action Partnership (CCAP – see p. 4), which exists to collect together like-minded people wanting to progress measures to reduce carbon use – in line with the CCC Resolution of 2019. This commits the council to reduce carbon use in its own estate/operations to zero by 2030.

Our first objective is to lobby the Council on the issue of timing: we believe this is too slow, and measures should be brought in earlier – other local authorities have done so, why not Canterbury?

Our second objective is to lobby the Council to apply these standards to all activities over which it has control, not just its own estate. This particularly means Building Regulations, where some local authorities have now begun to require fairly massive improvements in performance – including the energy used in making building materials/transport etc. and the energy needed to run the building, are both massively reduced, and offset by use of renewable energy sources etc. We believe we are making some progress here, as the latest version of the new Local Plan for 2040 includes many of these measures, but the timeframe is too slow.

Our third objective is to educate residents about why all this matters, why they should support it, and what they can do about it themselves. If you want to know more or get involved, go to:

<https://www.ccap.org.uk/cast-the-new-canterbury-transport-strategy-2020/>

Tim Carlyle, 3rd June 2021

PLANNING REPORT

Canterbury's portal shows an increase in activity in the typical range of development, and numbers are more or less back to pre-Covid levels, but they remain fairly small scale, and very few are remarkable in any way. Most are passed. We comment on details and standards, and there are some gross over-

developments – such as 15–18 Longport where a very useful post office and general store with bedsits above is proposed to be refitted and enlarged as a bigger, single purpose HMO.

68 Old Dover Rd remains undecided: this has had four incarnations since a very traditional style four storey student house was given permission in 2015, featuring many different modern architectural styles. After the refusal of a bland modern box in 2019, a new confused semi-modern mix was put together, which we objected to, leading to further revisions that now give the building a mock-Georgian style throughout, but it is still too big. The jury is still out.

The main thrust of the development industry remains the large scale expansion of Canterbury. Mountfield Park is now going for a second Judicial Review, led by Tom Lynch, a long-time Barton Ward resident. You will have received paper and electronic appeals for more money to



ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT THE MOUNTFIELD PARK DEVELOPMENT?
"Mountfield Park" (also known as "South Canterbury Urban Extension") is the largest development that Canterbury City Council has ever considered – 4,000 houses/flats, and over 750,000 square feet of other buildings, mainly commercial.
The Council quietly granted Planning Permission to a developer, Corinthian, on 3 February.

support this over the next year or two – after your very generous support of the first round of legal activity. We support this venture and wish him well, but do not hold out any strong hopes of eventual success. The grounds – inaccurate financial appraisal methods, disregard for some of the crucial environmental evidence against the development, and the appearance of new hotels in the master plan that are not in the Local Plan – are as good as the first Review, and that got nowhere.

However, dwarfing Mountfield Park is the new outline housing plan in the Options for the 2040 Plan just being published by CCC, which states that our council supports building 14–17,000 new houses in addition to the 18,000 already agreed (which includes Mountfield Park). Given that Canterbury's size in 2015 when the last Plan was debated was approximately 12,500 houses, we will see a near quadrupling of Canterbury. The biggest areas earmarked for development are between Spring Lane and Littlebourne Road. We will be alerting you to how proposals for development will be presented for consultation. The question is, is such a scale of building the only way to raise money for new roads, and are new roads the only way to tackle congestion?

As a second arrow to the bow of CCC, the Queen's speech made it clear that the whole planning system is to be overhauled, to speed up development by requiring Local Authorities to create new Local Plans placing all land in their areas in one of three categories Growth, Renewal or Protection. Any planning application in a Growth Area that satisfies new Guidelines to be drawn up, will get automatic permission. No more objection processes.

And as a third arrow, CCC are now proposing to change the committee system of governance back to the cabinet system, because it will be cheaper and quicker. See the Appendix to this digital Newsletter [p. 9 et seq.] for full details – the CCC proposals, and two letters of objection. There is a petition on the CCC website – I suggest you read the details and give them your views. See also the following page, just before 'E-scooters', where there is a further comment on this issue, and a direct link to the online e-petition.

Tim Carlyle, 4th June 2021

PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS

It has been a busy few months and it is clear that there will be a further series of significant formal public consultations during the remaining part of 2021.

Canterbury City Council has and will no doubt continue to be particularly active. It is important that OHSCA collectively, as informed by members, together with individual members on their own account, makes full use of these opportunities to make our views known

Two significant CCC consultations have already concluded, namely the Corporate Plan and the Climate Action Plan. The Council's responses to the results of the consultation are both to be found in the agenda papers for the CCC Policy Committee meeting held on 27th May:

<https://democracy.canterbury.gov.uk/documents/g12630/Public%20reports%20pack%2027th-May-2021%2019.00%20Policy%20Committee.pdf?T=10>

The remit of the Corporate Plan was confined possibly rather too narrowly, in the minds of some, to activities directly under council control as opposed to a wider overview of the economic social and environmental needs of the area as a whole. The absence of any measurable performance or financial targets in the plan was disappointing, as was its modesty of ambition.

In sharp contrast, the Climate Action Plan was widely welcomed as comprehensive and credible with a wealth of data to underpin the objective of zero net carbon for CCC's activities by 2030. It is to be hoped

that the examples of good practice now being adopted by the City Council (and indeed KCC which issued its own plans last year) can be extended into wider parts of the public and private sectors.

One other important document presented to the CCC Policy Committee on 27th May was the draft of a forthcoming consultation on the Local Plan which will focus on the long term vision and will form the backcloth for detailed work to follow. Local Plans are updated every five years and include designation of sites for housing. It is very important therefore that they are exposed to rigorous public scrutiny before being adopted.

Three other CCC public consultations underway at the time of writing, all accessible via the CCC website (<https://www.canterbury.gov.uk/>) are:

- The redevelopment of the St George's area which could involve the relocation of the market, tree felling and new planting together with new and smoother paving. Closing date 21/06;
- Vehicle anti-idling enforcement. Closing date 21/06;
- A questionnaire on future acquisition of electric vehicles. Closing date 21/06.

Another very significant CCC consultation anticipated shortly (see also p. 3) is a proposal to reintroduce a cabinet system of decision making to replace substantial parts of the committee style governance implemented four years ago after pressure from community groups such Campaign for Democracy Canterbury District. An e-petition opposing possible changes closes on 31st July. Go to and scroll down:

<https://democracy.canterbury.gov.uk/mgEPetitionDisplay.aspx?ID=126&RPID=17329063&HPID=17329063>

E-Scooters

There is a KCC consultation following the decision by the Department of Transport to allow a formal trial of these machines in various cities and towns across the country including, as we all now know, Canterbury. The chosen contractor here is Bird, who have chosen, wrongly in the view of many, to colour their scooters black rendering them almost indistinguishable from the ubiquitous leisure machines which legally should only be used on private land. A condition that their users flout at will.



The Bird machines have a white band on the handle bar column and can be used on roads as all riders are required to have at least a provisional driving licence. Reports of misuse of Bird scooters should be reported via email to Canterbury@Bird.co.uk. A test message to that address elicited a response within 5 minutes, whereas a telephone call to 01484509145 was met with an anonymous answerphone.

On attempting to register a comment on the KCC website I learned that the initial consultation ended on 3rd May, despite the scheme continuing until next March. However, a further KCC consultation is now open, to coincide with commencement of Phase 3 of the trial, which extends coverage to include Wincheap and Sturry Road. Go to:

<https://letstalkkent.uk.engagementq.com/escootertrial> and click on "have your say".

The phase 3 consultation ends 12.00 on 31st August. Any views members have regarding the trial should be relayed to our Councillors. Illegal use of leisure scooters is a matter for the police.

ACRA – Alliance of Canterbury Residents Associations

ACRA had its AGM on 15th April and appointed the following officers: Chair – Stefan Colley – from Barton RA – replacing retiree Sue Langdown; Vice Chair – Tim Carlyle (OHSCA) – previously vacant; Treasurer Janet Morgan – Littlebourne and Stodmarsh Roads RA – re-elected; Minutes Secretary – Rick Norman – St Michaels Road RA – re-elected; Business Secretary – David Kemsley (OHSCA) – re-elected. The main items discussed at the AGM were Mountfield Park, e-scooters, and air quality.

CCAP – Canterbury Climate Action Partnership

With Chair Carl Wright and Secretary John Yard, CCAP continues to thrive. The open forum last met on April 20th and considered among a wide range of topics reports from KCC and CCC leads, plastics free Canterbury (lead Pat Edwards), biodiversity, trees and hedges, and a climate action week later in the year – to include awards for sustainable innovation.

Please check out the website for further information: <https://www.ccap.org.uk/>

David Kemsley, 22nd May 2021

Sarah Perkins (1952–2021)

In April, many friends and neighbours were greatly saddened to hear of the death of Sarah Perkins.

In 2008 Sarah and Phil Perkins were founder members of ‘SCRA’ – South Canterbury Residents



Sarah and Matteo

Association, which grew out of the former South Canterbury Action Group. This had sprung up almost overnight in face of the threat to turn a care-home on South Canterbury Road into a large block of flats with underground car parking. That battle won (twice), concern then switched to CCC’s plans for the infamous Football Hub on Ridlands Farm – and when that was also defeated, further opposition to the grandiose sports centre CCC proposed to sanction and even underwrite. Sarah and Phil put much time and effort into those campaigns. Although the ultimate fate of Ridlands, once earmarked for public open space, remains uncertain, during ‘lockdown’ the local community made much use of the fields and public footpaths they did so much to retain.

As SCRA developed, Sarah’s great interest in plants and her expertise as a gardener became apparent. She was at the forefront of the plant and produce shares that are now, and continue to be, a local tradition. And later also a prime mover, together with Alison Culverwell, in the formation of GIG – OHSCA’s *Gardening Interest Group*. In this way, Sarah contributed much to the network of friends and neighbours that now underpins ‘SEA’ – OHSCA’s *Social Events and Activities* group.

An architect by training, when the opportunity arose to buy the other half of their South Canterbury Road house, originally a large villa that had been divided, Sarah and Phil took it – and a fantastic restoration came about. Not least to the very large rear garden that was beautifully recreated – the setting for a memorable OHSCA garden event, *Tapas on the Lawn* (9th July 2017). Sarah’s involvement as a Trustee of Greyfriars and the Franciscan Gardens also enabled OHSCA to run two very successful *Christmas Fairs* in the undercroft at Eastbridge Hospital.

About eighteen months ago Sarah was diagnosed with a mesothelioma, a form of cancer caused by exposure to asbestos at some time in the past forty years. Phil devoted himself to her care. She died peacefully at home, cared for by Phil and her daughters. Sarah is greatly missed by us all.

SEA NEWS

Given the very sad news about Sarah Perkins, it was perhaps fitting that the first ‘hands on’ SEA event since March 2020 was the annual Plant Share, which took place on Monday 31st May. After months of wet and then un-seasonally cool weather, the 2021 Spring Holiday was a warm and glorious sunny day. Numerous plants of many descriptions came and went, with very little left unwanted by the end. Although the ethos of these neighbourhood events is that all is free, some always feel a need to make a donation – for plants received, or the tea or coffee. Some £40 was given in total – a useful contribution to OHSCA funds, for which the organisers were grateful. At one point we were quite close to the maximum permissible of 30 gathered in an open space (page 1) – a measure of success, with a real ‘feel good’ factor as old friends and some newer members and guests were able to gather together for the first time in 15 months.

As I write these notes, there is a threat of further prolongation of pandemic restrictions, right here in Canterbury. In light of this continuing uncertainty, SEA is still unable to put together a programme for the remainder of 2021 that we can be fully confident will actually happen. Indeed, nothing is certain. Even so, here is our tentative programme for the rest of the year:

- The twice-weekly local walks (originally known as ‘towards 10,000 steps’) were re-instated on 29th March. Take up has been low, but on some occasions six or more have joined. On one recent day there were just two (photograph). If you wish to come along and see if anyone else has turned up, be at the entrance to the old K&C hospital main gate (as in picture), at 9.30 sharp, on Wednesdays and Fridays. Walks last about an hour, go at moderate pace, and when dry usually make use of the footpaths over Ridlands Farm and through the nearby orchards (enjoy these areas while you can? – see page 3).
- In 2018, SEA convenor Lorna Durrani instigated the very enjoyable monthly coffee meetings at a St George’s cafe – now itself a Covid victim. Well, subject to restrictions, we are about to try again. Tuesday 22nd June,



11 am, at No.35, 35 St Margaret's Street CT1 2TG. The formula will be the fourth Tuesday of the month. So, if successful, we will continue on Tuesday 27th July, 24th August, and 28th September.

- We are contemplating a summer 'lawn' event, as in previous years, but no decision yet. Contact social@ohsca.org (or 01227 768 624) for any updates, and watch for round-robin OHSCA emails.
- The Annual Picnic in the grounds of St Augustine's Abbey will take place early this year, on Saturday 10th July. Start 12 noon. Free entry for CT1 & CT2 residents. If not a member of English Heritage, bring evidence of your address. There is seating but you may prefer to bring your own. Bring food and drink sufficient for your own party – on this occasion, unlike the past and because of Covid, we suggest no sharing. If the weather is bad, cancelled! Contact social@ohsca.org (or 01227 768 624) if needed.
- The Gardening Interest Group is being reformed. Although open to all members, this group runs a separate email list and Facebook page so those uninterested do not get unwanted messages. GIG will be holding a "gardeners' get together" on Sunday 27th June at 3 pm, to meet, share gardening news, and plan some trips to gardens. For details, or to get on the list, please contact social@ohsca.org.
- The 2020 butterfly walk had to be cancelled. So we are going to try again, with the same 'target' species and place: Sunday 22nd August for the very local Silver-spotted Skipper at Lydden Down National Nature Reserve, near Dover (see <http://www.ohsca.org/publications.html>). Hosted by *Butterfly Conservation Kent Branch*. Car-sharing would of course be desirable but even if we are able to proceed, it may not be permitted or advisable. Numbers may have to be limited. More details closer to the time. If in doubt but interested, contact Dick Vane-Wright via social@ohsca.org, or 01227 768 624.
- If the AGM is able to go ahead in October in a 'normal' fashion, SEA will organise refreshments to make this something of a social occasion as well. No date or venue fixed as yet.
- This year the annual Spring Party at the Kent & Canterbury Club had to be cancelled. There has been a strong suggestion that we should have an autumn equivalent this year, in November. But in light of all the uncertainties, and the relative complexity and significant ticket cost necessary for these events, we have decided not to pursue this. Hopefully, we can reinstate this traditional Spring event in March 2022.

Dick Vane-Wright, on behalf of SEA subcommittee

INSECTS: PESTIFEROUS and PERPLEXING

How many of your favourite pullovers are full of holes, how many of your carpets have bald patches? In South Canterbury, we seem to have a great upsurge of depredations caused by a pestiferous little moth.

The vast majority of moths have larvae that feed on green plants and adults that drink nectar from flowers. Key components of most ecosystems, they are vital for cycling nutrients, some are good pollinators, and they provide food for numerous other creatures, including birds and bats. The few species of unwelcome moths that eat our woollens belong to a whole group of exceptions – the Tineidae, or 'fungus moths'. The larvae of almost all species belonging to this family feed on fungi, lichens and/or detritus.



Although no more than a quarter inch long (5–6 mm) when its wings are folded (as in this picture by Patrick Clement), the common clothes moth, *Tineola bisselliella*, can be a serious pest. Their whitish larvae feed not only on wool, but also other natural fibres and sometimes stored foods, including grains. They will also develop on shed skin and other detritus in those corners of our homes that even Mr Dyson, J Edgar or the Shark seem unable to reach. The widespread use of products 'moth-proofed' with insecticides, as their potency decreases with time, has led to an ideal opportunity for natural selection to hasten the evolution of resistance. *Tineola* and its few wool-chomping chums (e.g. the case-bearing clothes moth) are not as easily controlled by insecticides as they once were.

How can they be controlled? Cedar oil or bags of dried lavender in drawers and wardrobes are thought to prevent initial infestation. Clothing can be stored in air tight bags and containers to prevent attack. Freezing to minus 8°C for several days or heating fabrics to 49°C for over 30 minutes kills all life stages and can be done using a domestic freezer or washing machine. Dry cleaning will also destroy them. For carpets and upholstery, vacuuming helps eradicate infestations. Pyrethrin insecticides can be sprayed on fabrics which cannot be treated by freezing or cleaning. These instantly destroy moths and do not leave persistent toxic residues like many other insecticides. But do note that although pyrethrin-based formulations are considered 'safe' for humans, other mammals and birds, they are highly toxic for fish and kill all insects indiscriminately, including bees. You can find more information at <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/take-part/identify-nature/common-insect-pest-species-in-homes/clothes-moths-identification-guide.html>.

Sitting quietly by your open fire you might well be perplexed by the sudden appearance of beetles. So it was that on 24th April Frazer Spence contacted me with concern: "We have had visitors. Sitting in our lounge from time to time you notice something flying around. On closer examination it looks like an adult beetle. It's brownish-orange, has two long antennae, and is not a brilliant flier . . . We have tried to locate

their source ... the only obvious culprit is the log basket ... I thought I ought to alert you in case there is a plague descending on South Canterbury and that an alarm call should be sounded? Would it pose any threats to health, the fabric of the house or our well-being?"

Frazer brought me several of his visitors in a jar, which led to my pronouncement 'A longhorn beetle, family Cerambycidae, nearly always associated with living or dead wood.' Some of these Puckle Lane specimens now reside in the National Collection at London's Natural History Museum, where curator of beetles Max Barclay kindly offered closure: the tanbark borer (*Phymatodes testaceus*). This variable species, reddish-orange, tan brown or blue with orange thorax (picture), ranges from 8–16 mm in length. The eggs are laid in or under the bark of standing or fallen timber. The larvae tunnel beneath the bark and later bore into the sapwood. It can take up to three years to produce adults, which usually emerge in April and May. Formerly a pest of economic importance in Europe, it rarely causes problems in the UK. Although these borers certainly came from Frazer's logs, they pose no threat to health – nor to structural timbers, furniture or wooden objects, as they will only lay their eggs in the bark of cut or fallen timber, or living trees.

Dick Vane-Wright



photo: Gerhard Elsner (Wikimedia Commons)

MEMBERSHIP

If you have not yet paid your subscription, due 1st January, please send a cheque for £5, with a completed form (<http://ohsca.org/pdfs/OHSCA%20membership%20form%202021.pdf>) if possible, to Sophie Scott, 27 Ersham Road, Canterbury CT1 3AR. Alternatively, if you bank online you can make a direct transfer to: 'Oaten Hill & South Canterbury', sort code 60-04-27, a/c 90612094. Please put your address and SUBS as the reference.

GREEN TEAM

The planters by the Fire Station are finally about to get their makeover. OHSCA is very grateful for your donations which have helped make this repair work possible. A litterpick will be organised, but as yet we still do not have a date. Please look out for details by OHSCA email.



Trees

Over many years, Oaten Hill & District Society raised funds for planting trees in our area – a cause vigorously pursued by its successor organisation, Oaten Hill & South Canterbury Association.

Your donations for trees continue to be put towards greening our environment. If you have suggestions for future plantings – species or locations – our Green Team will be delighted to hear from you (contact: see page 8).

Pictured here are three 'OHSCA' trees at Lesley Avenue. Planted during 2013, this photograph was taken on 12th May 2021.

OHC – OHSCA HEALTH CARE

OHC group members continue to attend NHS Patient Participation Group meetings. In April we heard about the proposed establishment of a *Citizens Panel* that NHS Kent and Medway (now based in Ashford) is working on. This initiative has funding from NHS England. The intention is to recruit a very large, fully representative sample of the public from which to gather feedback on NHS services. Members will be recruited by a professional market research company. If approached, do please consider accepting an invitation to become a member of this new panel. You can find more at:

<https://www.kentandmedwayccg.nhs.uk/get-involved/ways-to-get-involved>.



OCCASIONAL PHOTO QUIZ No. 1

As reported in the Canterbury & District KM Gazette (May 27, p. 16), the 3 m (10 feet) high air-conditioning units added, without planning permission, on top of the new STEM building on Canterbury Christ Church campus have been greeted with protests, including from Historic England. While it is true that several views of the cathedral have been compromised by this ugly new skyline, as shown in this recently taken picture, there are still some wonderful views of the cathedral to be had. But can you work out from where Sophie Kemsley took this photograph?

Answer in the autumn newsletter.

OHSCA COMMITTEE 2020–2021

Chair:	vacant
Tim Carlyle	Vice-Chair/Planning subcommittee rep.: vicechairtc@ohsca.org
Marion Bell	Hon. Secretary/Main OHSCA Contact: 13 Wells Avenue, CT1 3YB Tel: 07713 025245: secretary@ohsca.org
Jane Pollok	Hon. Treasurer: treasurer@ohsca.org [co-opted October 2020]
Sophie Scott	Membership Secretary/Green Team/Planning subcommittee: 27 Ersham Road CT1 3AR Tel: 01227 456285 sophie01@btinternet.com
Tim Chancellor	Committee member/website coordinator [resigned December 2020]
David Kemsley	ACRA /SCA rep./OHC subcommittee/Press Liaison: press@ohsca.org
Helly Langley	Committee member/Planning subcommittee
Denis Linfoot	Committee member/OHC subcommittee
Dick Vane-Wright	Committee member/SEA rep./OHC subcommittee

Weekly CCC planning bulletin vicechairtc@ohsca.org

Local History Group rep. *Derek Ray*: for information about OHSCA Local History Publications, contact history@ohsca.org or see publications on OHSCA website

Acting SEA convenor *Dick Vane-Wright*: social@ohsca.org

Newsletter distribution *Deirdre Hawkes*

Tree champion *Helly Langley*

Events bulletins (vacant)

Newsletter editor *Greta Cotterrell*: gretaohsca@gmail.com

Website Coordinator *Lucy Fletcher-Jones*: website@ohsca.org

If you are uncertain who to contact, please direct your enquiry to the Honorary Secretary (contact details above).

Note: ACRA = Alliance of pan-Canterbury Residents' Associations; SCA = Southern Canterbury Alliance; OHC = OHSCA HealthCare subcommittee; SEA = Social Events and Activities subcommittee

Some useful contacts

- For problems with student neighbours contact University of Kent student community liaison officer: 01227 816156 or email communityliaison@kent.ac.uk
<https://www.kent.ac.uk/studentservices/community/index.html>
- If you are concerned about security or have an urgent query and need to talk to the Canterbury City Council 'Out of Hours' team, their number is 01227 781 879. This redirects to CCC Control Room staff on duty 24/7.
- To report illegal parking:
https://www.canterbury.gov.uk/info/20062/parking_fines_and_restrictions/43/report_illegal_parking
- To report graffiti (with possibility of removal depending on circumstances)
https://www.canterbury.gov.uk/info/20044/vandalism_and_graffiti/55/report_graffiti

APPENDIX – two letters critical of the proposed return by Canterbury City Council to the cabinet system of governance, and an article about Cllr Fitter-Harding, Leader of CCC, and his case for the changes he wishes to make (third page).

LETTER 1 (24th April, KM Gazette)

Cllr Fitter-Harding says he wants to change Canterbury City Council back to the Leader and Cabinet system, because the present Committee system is “inefficient and slow”. He needs to remember that there is more than one way of being “inefficient and slow”.

When we had the Leader and Cabinet system previously, a few years ago, it was extremely slow and inefficient because it produced bad decisions, as a result of not listening to people, and then spent months having to unpick them and reverse them. The obvious examples come to mind. One was the Westgate Towers traffic trial. Another was the proposal to sell off Kingsmead Field for housing. It eventually came to be recognised that these were bad decisions, but the Leader and Cabinet resisted that conclusion for a very long time, and the correcting of them was a long and painful process.

This wasn’t just a matter of the personalities involved (though that had something to do with it). It was because the original decisions were made by an Executive in which there were no dissident voices, and in which no one criticised the Leader or presented him with an alternative view. All the opposition had to take place outside the actual decision-making body.

Many of us remember having to listen to those awful meetings of the Executive, when all the Cabinet members spent the whole meeting telling the Leader how wonderful his decisions were and how all the critics were totally misguided. I can think of nothing more inefficient. This is, if not inevitable, at any rate a built-in feature of the Cabinet system, in which the members of the Cabinet are hand-picked by the Leader and dissenting voices are excluded.

We all want good decision-making. But what Cllr Fitter-Harding needs to remember is that good decisions emerge from a process of debate and disagreement, in which different views compete and decisions have to stand up to criticism. That understanding of good decision-making is at the heart of liberal democracy, and we ignore it at our peril.

(continue to page [2])

LETTER 2 (8th May, KM Gazette)

The Leader of Canterbury City Council wants to bring back the discredited ‘Leader and Executive’ system for conducting council business. There are many examples from the recent past illustrating why it is discredited. The notorious Westgate traffic trial is the most obvious. They are examples of ill-thought-out decisions, made in haste, from which the Executive was reluctant to back down because it included no dissident voices.

The Executive in its previous incarnation was also, however, prone to the opposite defect. It was much too slow to take action on some key issues. It was composed of a small unrepresentative group of councillors and was, as a result, blind to important problems, because Executive members had no direct experience of them.

A classic case was the huge growth in the number of HMOs in certain areas of Canterbury. The Executive was composed overwhelmingly of councillors from outside the city. Consequently, when Canterbury residents urged the Council to take action and limit numbers of HMOs in order to preserve balanced communities, the Executive simply failed to grasp the nature of the problem. “We all have to put up with noisy neighbours sometimes” was the sort of comment with which our concerns were dismissed.

It wasn’t until the Executive system was replaced by the Committee system that we got effective action with the introduction of the Article 4 Direction. It happened when all parts of the district were represented on the decision-making committees.

The council Leader has now abolished the Canterbury Forum, along with the other Area Forums. In doing so, he has diminished the opportunity for Canterbury people to make their concerns known. If he succeeds in bringing back the Executive system, all the important decisions will be made by a small group chosen by himself. The likely result will be that Canterbury city residents will have no one to represent them in the making of decisions about their community. Their voices will go unheard.

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COUNCIL GOVERNANCE SYSTEM SET TO CHANGE

Leader's bid for return to controversial cabinet

By Gerry Warren

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The leader of Canterbury City Council has unveiled his bid to return to a controversial cabinet-style of governance.

Ben Fitter-Harding wants to scrap the existing committee system, which he claims is "inefficient and slow" and demotes the role of the majority group, while putting too much power in the hands of council officers.

"The system is broke and residents deserve better," he says.

Now, with the backing of fellow Tory members, he is proposing a new leader and cabinet system, similar to the type which existed under former leader John Gilbey until it was scrapped in 2015.

But his motion for change, which is due to go before the full council for decision next Thursday (April 29) is unlikely to go down well with opposition councillors, who will likely see it as a further power grab.

It will also likely anger local campaign groups who have been

calling for increased democracy.

Cllr Fitter-Harding has already come under fire for, what some say, is his authoritarian style of leadership, but he insists it will work better for residents who can judge him and fellow Conservative councillors at the next local elections.

It is also being timed to coincide with an internal reorganisation of the council, which he says will make it easier for portfolio holders to work more closely with service heads of departments at the authority.

Explaining his thinking, he said: "Back in 2015, a seismic shift occurred at the city council, the effects of which have steadily snowballed over the last six years and brought us to where we are today."

"Under this existing committee system approach, elected councillors have a very limited role. We pass a corporate plan, setting out priorities for the years ahead, and then the council's officers bring reports about various things to committees for us to decide upon.

"That all sounds very nice,

until you realise that the councillors elected to keep the place free from dog poo, make sure planning breaches get sorted out and get the bins collected each week actually have very little involvement in how the council runs.

"I think in terms of accountability it's actually far better for our residents to have a cabinet in place with portfolio holders and a leader who is a figurehead of the council."

Cllr Fitter-Harding likens the existing set-up to a "permanent coalition", adding: "It's inefficient, slow, and with control placed primarily with council officers who, although are excellent in many different ways, are not elected by residents and don't answer to them."

Under the new system, which would be implemented in May next year if approved, the council would be led by a cabinet of Conservatives, with portfolio holders directly overseeing critical council functions.

Cabinet members will have more ability to direct officers before and after decisions are

taken.

Statutory committees, like planning and licensing, would remain but there would be a new overview and scrutiny committee to examine and challenge proposals.

Cllr Fitter-Harding admits his style is more authoritarian than his immediate predecessors and expects to "take the flack" when things go wrong.

But he also argues that the district elected a majority Conservative administration to deliver on the party's objectives, which he says are being stifled by the committee system and officer control.

Opposition councillors were due to learn of the move when the agenda for the next full council meeting was released yesterday (Wednesday).

An embargo was placed on the details until the publication of the agenda, which had not been circulated to councillors at the time the Gazette went to press, stifling our ability to source reaction.

See next week's Gazette for the response of opposing groups.



Council leader Ben Fitter-Harding has explained why he wants to return to a cabinet-style system of governance