

Appendix A

Barkway Parish Council Meeting – 9th June 2020

ANNUAL REPORT TO BARKWAY

COUNTY COUNCILLOR FIONA HILL – ROYSTON EAST AND ERMINE DIVISION

We have ended the 2019–2020 and started the 2020–2021 Council Years in unprecedented times. The terrible and tragic situation caused by the COVID-19/Coronavirus Crisis has affected everyone in so many ways. It has shown, yet again, how invaluable the NHS is and made us appreciate, even more, all the key workers who have provided frontline services, at the risk of their own health. Communities have also worked together to ensure that the most vulnerable residents are cared for and many new groups have been formed, including in Barkway, with volunteers providing services such as shopping, collecting medicines or contacting isolated individuals, many of whom would normally attend a club or meet friends. I would like to record my personal thanks to all key workers and volunteers for their wonderful work.

Every department in Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) has been impacted by COVID-19 and with updates and developments from the Government and Public Health England almost every day, the Council has been working hard to ensure the safety of residents whilst, at the same time, providing the vital services needed, particularly for the most vulnerable.

Adult Care Services has been working in conjunction with Public Health and Children's Services to ensure everyone who needs a food delivery receives one and no individual is left isolated and without the care they need. The Council is very aware of the impact that this period will be having on mental health. The need to support care homes is imperative, particularly in ensuring Personal Protective Equipment and testing is available, so that all carers and residents are protected, including domiciliary care, where additional funding has been allocated for carers to receive a pay increase.

It has been extremely important to have strong links with the schools, where staff are carrying out a vital role for vulnerable children and children of key workers, in addition to providing educational and pastoral support to pupils, learning from home and now have the unenviable challenge of a safe and gradual return to school for pupils.

There has been a huge amount of work with community organisations and the voluntary sector, where the Fire and Rescue Service, HertsHelp, Team Herts and the Health Hubs have been heavily involved. It is amazing how many people have signed up to volunteer during the last few months.

There has been a great deal of work taking place to balance the wish for reopening Waste and Recycling centres, against the social distancing necessary for the safety of all. Our local centres are now open with strict guidelines. North Hertfordshire District Council has also resumed the garden and kitchen waste collections. Libraries, unfortunately, remain closed for now, but will open as soon as safely possible.

The budget was agreed at HCC, with a 1.99% increase, plus 2% which is ring fenced for Social Care. This will protect service delivery and maintain support for the most vulnerable residents. For both the last and forthcoming financial years, Adult Care and Children's Services form 60% of HCC's gross revenue spend, amounting to over £600 million. An average of £1.4 million will be spent on Highways issues in each County Council division, through the general budget and Highways Locality Budget. 90% of schools in Hertfordshire have received a good or outstanding Ofsted and we are lucky to have such a good school in Barkway, with such committed staff.

I have been working with Barkway Parish Council on a range of issues, including the Local Plan, notably the opposition to BK3 which, in my opinion, is unsustainable, various Planning and Environmental problems, such as, currently, the Wisbridge Reservoir, Section 106 funding, to ensure the community of Barkway benefits following various planning approvals, speeding and various Highways issues. During the current pandemic, Barkway Parish Council has continued its inclusion of the community by initiating virtual meetings and there are also virtual Councillors' surgeries being held in Royston, which I have participated in. It is good to have the feedback from residents and hear their views.

At Government level, supported by Sir Oliver Heald QC MP, I have raised the issue of lack of accountability for utility companies and developers, with the Minister and I am campaigning to improve the lives of carers. I have also been promoting awareness of Mental Health issues, Sepsis and Dementia, all of which are increasing and can have devastating effects.

I am delighted that the community Locality Budgets and Highways Locality Budgets (HLB) have been agreed, again, for next financial year. These allow individual County Councillors the discretion for funding in their specific divisions.

Some Highways schemes implemented in Barkway, through the Integrated Works Programme and HLB, over the last couple of years, were surfacing and patching in Newsells Road, High Street, Buckland Road, Cambridge Road and London Road. There are now vehicle crossovers in Cambridge Road and a Speed Indicator Device at the end of the village. This financial year there are schemes agreed for work in Royston Road, Whiteley Hill and Gas Lane.

I have also been delighted to allocate my community Locality Budget funding to Barkway Playgroup for online learning journals and the Dream Foundation which ran workshops in the school. I am working with the Parish Council and groups, including Royston vs Coronavirus, Royston Community Transport, Royston Old Barn, the Dream Foundation and Garden House Hospice, to help with additional grants for Personal Protective Equipment, support for individuals and virtual programmes, to reduce isolation and ensure residents have all they need and are able to participate in activities during the pandemic.

I am extremely grateful to the Clerk of Barkway Parish Council and all the Parish Councillors for welcoming me to and supporting me at their meetings and for the work carried out to ensure the wellbeing of residents and the protection of the village. Thank you also to all the dedicated individuals and groups, working in Barkway, to make it such a vibrant community, particularly in this very difficult climate and to District Councillors Gerald Morris and Tony Hunter, for their support, ensuring we all work together, as District and County Councillors, for the benefit of Barkway.