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Kirklevington and Castle Leavington Parish Council

Annual Report of the Chairman

May 2023 – May 2024

The village has continued to grow since my last report, the 145 homes on the Story site are now very nearly completed and sold, the builders anticipate being completely off site by August – all houses are now roofed. The show home disappeared a long time ago and the site is noticeably quieter with less construction traffic, though there is a flurry of activity around the MUGA which was installed some months ago as the toddler playpark is in the process of being installed.

Taylor Wimpey are about a third of the way through their build of 97 houses, when I met with them a couple of weeks ago there were around a dozen occupied with the same again in build and around half a dozen currently empty but for sale. The construction traffic for this site has been everyone's biggest bugbear this past year, so many reports of speeding and uncovered wagons, mounting pavements, blocking roads, but most of all damaging the road surface and creating many, many potholes on the old road surface (thankfully not the new one on Forest Lane). The year has been spent complaining to SBC and the planning department about the large number of condition breaches – with the vast majority being discarded and/or ignored. We did arrange for regular monthly cadence meetings with TW following the height of their escalations last year with the constant procession of water tanker lorries right through the day and night without rest; having to empty the suds due to a very high risk of local flooding. Once this work was concluded the need for the meetings reduced and most has been covered by email thereafter.

We have had no further progress on the Duchy site since the last chairs report, this is largely due to the fact that NWL need to run a new sewer pipeline between Ash Grove STW and Conyers school, right through the middle of that site, I am sure once this is concluded (15 months' work which commenced in March) we will see the building work begin.

I mentioned in my last Chairmans report about the number of vehicles using Forest lane since the developments began (noting that the Storys development do not use it), based on our SID (traffic Counter) from the junction of Pump Lane\Forest Lane we can see that 1.66% of vehicles sped along Forest Lane between May 2023 – April 2024 down on 1.76% in May 2022-> April 2023 - versus and 1.89% between the same period 2021 -> 2022. The traffic count has risen again to 409,822 for the same period, up from 390,126 in 22/23 and 369,364 in 21/22. Please note that this only captures traffic information from eastbound traffic along Forest Lane and does not include anything from Highgrove, Jasmine Fields, or Springfield Grove.

At the time of writing the Website visitor count is 29,356 which is around a 10k increase since last

year. We sadly had to switch of residents posting on our Facebook page due to a small number of people writing offensive comments and incorrect statements – whilst we needed to approve all posts before they went public, there was no mechanism to audit follow on replies so malicious content may become public before we got to hear about it. This issue combined with the incessant requests for people wanting to advertise eventually led to the decision to use the page for information only and to not allow posts from residents, that said there is another FB site (St Martins Green) ran by residents that still continues, and people have been signing up there as well.

The Kirklevington to Conyers\Yarm\Stockton Number 7 Arriva bus service has now been running for over 18 months (began on 30th October 2022) We still have the odd issue with the bus laying over where it should not, but if anything, the bus drivers should be praised for putting up with the construction traffic sharing the same road as them in the village. Numbers are up, largely due to the school runs, but time will tell if after the 5 years' service the numbers will allow the service to stand up for itself.

In the November we once again ran the Halloween trail, each year it seems to grow in size and popularity (often from people outside the village) there were around 100 people again pounding the streets that night collecting sweets and treats. The concern that the competition element was putting people off seemed misguided and by removing the competition element it seems the number of entrants dropped slightly; even though we had an increase in the number of houses. I will be suggesting we run it as a competition again this year to add to the fun.

This coming year's Kirkfest is scheduled to be held on the weekend of 8/9th June – this date has been selected specifically so the children are still at school and therefore not likely to be on holidays and miss the events with the school joining in with the activities again as per last year. Due to a very poor adoption of the scarecrow competition last year (only 4 entries!) we have decided to retire this activity moving forward – we used to get literally dozens of entrants even in my time as chair, but it seems that the Halloween event seems to have taken over the scarecrows now. We have invited people to decorate their house in honour of the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings, again we are not expecting a large take up on this activity neither. We consulted with the whole village (~600 houses) about introducing a sponsored youth club in the Village hall to help entertain the hundred or so children we have living here – each house was sent a questionnaire with £20 Amazon voucher as a prize to a random applicant, this also did not seem to encourage people to participate as once again only 4 replies were received and one of those was from a parish councillors family. I think we need to accept that the majority of people enjoy attending arranged events but do not necessarily want to get involved in them, but without their involvement we may end up cancelling more as time goes by.

We have now replaced the very tired looking playpark noticeboard with something a lot fresher and also containing a noticeboard for advertising upcoming events. There is specific signage on the board to deter people from bringing dogs, alcohol or tobacco into the play area. We have been in discussion with Storys about placing a noticeboard at the entrance to their site (alongside where the show home used to be) – they have agreed and we are just waiting on finding out if it needs planning permission or not – then the Parish Council will provide it and Storys will install it.

We have also installed 2x new benches in the village, the one by the bus-stop on The Green was fully paid for by the William Hall Trust and the one by St Martins Green was paid for by the Parish Council. The William Hall trust also match funded the Parish Council contribution towards a defibrillator to be installed at the Village Hall, the trustees of the hall will pay for the upkeep and required electricity to keep this functional for many years to come – thank-you again to everyone involved. It is believed that it has already been used in the short time it has been installed.

The biggest activity I have been driving is the speed reduction on the A67 from the Shell petrol station (Crossroads) roundabout right through to The Crown – we have a planning order\TRO in right now for public consultation to reduce it in its length from 60mph down to 40 mph – we will hear of its outcome beginning of June but we are confident there will be no issues- more so given the sheer number of accidents happening now at the junction by The Crown. These accidents seem to be becoming more frequent and more serious in nature as time goes on. We are also well on our way with discussions to reduce the road outside the Crown to just 30mph which will make crossing the road safer and contribute to a safer road junction.

As always, I like to end with a big thank-you to all members of the Parish Council for their continued involvement and specifically to Ruth Mazonas who works tirelessly behind the scenes as clerk and responsible financial officer to the Parish Council. I would further like to thank the William Hall Trust for their continued support and grants towards numerous projects in the village; also, I would like to acknowledge the great work of our litter pickers in the Parish, local historians, choir, church helpers and the many people who take time to trim the grass verges, water the plants, tidy up after disrespectful dog owner etc. So much goes on silently behind the scenes – it is all duly noted and appreciated by everyone.

***Nigel De Badgecoe
(Chair since January 2021)***