

**MINUTES OF DOWNSWOOD'S ANNUAL PARISH MEETING  
HELD BY ZOOM VIDEO CONFERENCING ON  
TUESDAY 6 APRIL 2021 AT 7.45 PM.**

**Present:** Cllrs Weeks (Chairman); Cheesman; Butler; Alden-Morris; Brooks; Fairhurst; Mrs T. Irving (Clerk); Atul Kantaria - Spires Pharmacy (part); 1 Downswood resident.

Apologies: Cllr Newton.

1. Welcome by the Chairman of the Parish Council, Cllr. Martin Weeks.
2. **Apologies:** Cllrs Rajalingam (received retrospectively as Zoom link received late- unsure meeting was going ahead); Newton – computer problems.
3. **Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting held on 7 May 2019** were agreed as a true & accurate record of proceedings and were signed by the Chairman.
4. **Reports from invited groups and associations.**

- **The Willington Players 1920-21**

Needless to say, the restrictions of the last year has meant that the activities of the group have been severely restricted. With the Hazlitt Theatre closed, rehearsals would have been pointless even if the restrictions had allowed them to continue. Such activities as we have been able to put on for the members via Zoom have included putting together audio plays, quizzes and the occasional get-together and we are hoping to be back at the Hazlitt in the autumn.

David Bicker  
President

- **Spires Pharmacy** 4 The Spires Centre, Deringwood Drive.

**A year battling Coronavirus**

**The story from the perspective of community pharmacists on the NHS frontline in Downswood, Maidstone**

*16<sup>th</sup> March 2020 lockdown was advised by the PM. 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 lockdown became mandatory.*

Coronavirus showed us all how quickly life can change and this certainly applies to your local pharmacies, which stepped up to do their duty – and more – during the pandemic.

A year on from when the virus hit our shores, pharmacy teams across the country are weary, but proud of their work on the NHS frontline and determined to 'keep calm and carry on'.

With GP surgeries, opticians and dentists forced to suspend services or provide care remotely, many patients have turned to pharmacy teams for face to face help in the community. By November 2020, over a third of people had gone to their pharmacy for advice because their GP was unable to see them face-to-face due to COVID-19 safety measures at the surgery.

As the virus took off, our pharmacy in Downswood, Maidstone had to juggle ever busier, longer and more stressful days.

In March 2020, we dispensed nearly 50% more prescriptions than the previous month. The number of home deliveries provided by our pharmacy increased three fold in that time. Phone calls to pharmacies rang non-stop! We increased our working hours and had to hire locum staff to manage the workload.

Perhaps inevitably, there was a surge in demand for medicines and the public began to worry about shortages. By and large, pharmacies (and the rest of the supply chain) were able to keep the flow of medicines coming albeit late. It relied on people being responsible and only buying the medicines and supplies that they needed at that moment to treat themselves and their families. We also asked patients who take medicines for a long term medical condition to order repeat medication in plenty of time, to avoid unnecessary delays.

The vast majority of patients were magnificent throughout, and pharmacies were inundated with offers of support from managing queues to delivering medicines. We cannot thank those people enough!

In the early days of the first lockdown, we had to think quickly about how to manage the flow of patients. We had to adapt to the situation and had to change the way we worked for safety of our staff and customers. We had to manage queues have floor markings, instal screens at the counter adopt cleaning routines to prevent cross infections. It was strange then, strangely normal now.

From April 2020, pharmacies began delivering medicines to the 'shielded' population as part of an NHS scheme. There were over 400,000 medicines deliveries in that first month.

A year on and, thanks to the vaccines, there is now light at the end of the tunnel. It has been wonderful to see many pharmacists offer to become involved in the vaccination programme – a must-win battle against the virus.

Success for vaccinations is not only about total numbers receiving jabs, but also the reach into communities, including certain ethnic minority groups. The public has a

high level of trust in their local pharmacies and that can be an important factor in overcoming doubts and misapprehensions about COVID-19 vaccines – including within some BAME communities where take-up has been lower. We can now provide Covid-19 testing and are considering offering a vaccinating service.

COVID-19 has underlined the key role pharmacies have as part of the NHS family. Pharmacists have worked closely with other professionals, such as doctors and nurses, to provide the best possible care as part of the local healthcare team. Sadly, we have also lost some of colleagues due to the pandemic and many more have suffered from Covid.

The pandemic has also shown the importance of having a vibrant network of pharmacies operating close to where people live, work and shop. How on earth would the NHS have coped with the pressure otherwise?

After all this, it is frustrating that pharmacies are still having to argue for decent funding. Many pharmacies are running deficits and there is a clear injustice in the way pharmacies have been financially penalised for staying open during the pandemic. We have incurred significant extra costs to keep services going over the last 12 months, which have not yet been reimbursed.

But we are delighted at the reaction of the public to our efforts. People recognise that pharmacy teams across the country have stepped up and saved lives. A National Pharmacy Association survey shows that 89% of people believe pharmacies are playing an essential role in the COVID19 crisis.

At Spires Pharmacy, we will continue to do our utmost for our patients and communities, who have been through so much and deserve nothing less.

Atul Kantaria

## **5. Chairman's report:**

Chairman's notes – APM 06 April 2021 We have all had a very difficult and challenging year – we were last able to hold an Annual Parish Meeting in April 2019 as last year, in the early days of the Covid epidemic it was decided to suspend all meetings for a short while. Our 2019 / 2020 year, which included a very successful Olympic, and the Parish Council participating in the annual DCA Fete seems but a distant memory. Our 2020 / 2021 year was eventful but not for good reasons – as I mentioned initially all meetings and council activities were suspended, although members of the Parish Council worked on an initiative to encourage neighbours to help others who were self isolating and worked with the local pharmacy when some difficulties caused by increasing demand and the restrictions caused by Covid precautions were noticed there. Parish council meeting were able to re-commence from the safety of our own homes via Zoom. All of the events usually undertaken by the Parish Council had to be cancelled – which sadly included the Olympic and although the Christmas lights shone brightly through the parish we were not able to

have Father Christmas at the community hall to help us all turn on the lights. Fear not, provided we are able to do so safely all of these events will be back again this year. One of the biggest challenges we faced last year was our fight against Bellway homes to develop the land adjacent to Otham Church in Church Road. Despite a valiant effort and many hours of hard work by all those on the Planning Sub Committee the developer appealed when MBC members granted permission and ultimately when the appeal was held by the National Planning inspectorate – I sat on behalf of the Parish Council for over a week as this was held by remote meeting and provided evidence on behalf of Downswood to the Planning inspector but unfortunately the legal arguments for the permission being granted were too great and sadly the development will go ahead. We will continue to monitor activity and work to ensure that the promises of mitigation to traffic congestion are stuck to. We have formed a small finance sub committee and formulated a new workable budget for this year and are working towards improving the financial reporting that councillors need to make informed decisions as to what funds we have available for regular and statutory commitments and projects within the parish. We have been lucky enough to receive a KCC Members grant which has paid for an outdoor Table Tennis table to be sited in Mallards Park and this will be in place and ready to use in the next couple of weeks. We have plans this year also to increase planting, especially of wild flowers in areas of Downswood so we continue to enjoy a green and pleasant space to live. It has saddened me to learn of the increase in anti social behaviour within the parish, especially over the last couple of months. I am sometimes conscious that reports of this via social media may well be at times sensationalised but none the less we are of course all aware of the serious nature of this. We are therefore very grateful for the assistance we have received from our PCSO and our County Councillor Gary Cooke and Borough Councillor Gordon Newton in resolving these issues.

## **6. CLERK/RFO'S REPORT – Teresa Irving**

### **DOWNSWOOD PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 6 APRIL 2021**

CLERK/RFO'S REPORT 2020/21 Whilst some payments are still outstanding, to date the parish received a total income of £41,094.68. This mainly comprising of the Precept - £34,000, VAT refund (for the period 2019/20) - £1,278.03 and 2 Grants from Cllr Cooke of £4,500 (table tennis . Litter Picking Contributions and the Parish Services Scheme (£297) make up the remaining payments. The total expenditure for the year amounts to £30,193.63 although, again, further invoices may still be outstanding. This excludes VAT of £1,438.88 as this will be reclaimed. Donations this year totalled £805 and comprised of: £50 each to: Folly Wildlife, The Swan Sanctuary & Marie Curie. £150 – Kent, Surrey and Sussex Air Ambulance, £55 Royal British Legion wreath, £150 to St Nicholas (choir donation) and £300 Heart of Kent Hospice. My thanks to everyone that has continued with their support throughout these difficult times. Teresa Irving Clerk to Downswood Parish Council

## **7. Questions from Members of the Public – There were no questions.**

**There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.30 p.m.**