



Ashtead Independents

Keep national party politics out of local government

Green Lane Crossing

3rd May 2021 by admin

The issue concerning the Green Lane Crossing over the railway has been around for a number of years now with Network Rail suggesting closing the crossing apparently due to safety concerns. I, Cllr. Chris Townsend, have had many meetings with Network Rail, Surrey Rights of Way, the ARA and local MV councillors (Cllrs. David Hawksworth and Pat Wiltshire) on this over the past few years. We have challenged Network Rail on their views on the risk factors should the crossing be closed and its impact on residents having to walk a considerable distance to get across the railway at either the bridge at the bottom of the Woodfield or actually the level crossing at the station itself. We felt there are dangers/risks in both those alternatives and had become aware that the matter had appeared to be closed.

However it now appears that the whole situation is coming to the SCC/MVDC Local Committee in the summer of this year. We, the ARA and various residents, have substantial evidence that there is a Right of Way across the railway in Green Lane and we will provide that at the meeting. We are all totally committed to keeping that crossing open and will work with all parties to ensure we get a sensible and practical solution.

Cllrs. Townsend, Hawksworth and Wiltshire

Ashtead Pond

3rd May 2021 by admin

Ashtead Pond Maintenance Agreed – Work to start in July

Councillor Pat Wiltshire (Common Ward) has had a very productive meeting with Alex Bagnell (Head of Parks MVDC) today and he agrees with her that the pond is now a terrible mess.

Pat has asked for the bank by Barnett Wood Lane to be dug out and all the rampant sedges, willow, and reed-mace to be removed (along with the bindweed and brambles etc). Then she has asked for a suitable base material and to re-seed the bank with a robust grass mix. Then it can be cut regularly and we should have a nice, green, grassy bank leading down to the pond.

They are going to bring in a digger and then make sure that the bank has regular maintenance. Pat says of course, what is suggested is not the truly natural pond-side vegetation but she thinks it would be far better for everyone. At least we will be able to appreciate the pond and the ducks. She has also asked him to remove the netting from the end of the pond where people like to feed the ducks, and to make it more people/duck friendly. She also hopes to improve the vista for people sitting on the benches.

Well done Pat for stepping up to get something done!



Ashtead Independents

Keep national party politics out of local government

GREENING THE DISTRICT – TREES AND HEDGES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND HUMAN HEALTH

1st May 2021 by admin

The Council revises its Council Strategy every five years and, amongst other things, in 2019 we were successful in getting the inclusion of “Protect and enhance the natural and built environment, and ensure our areas of natural beauty and wildlife are well looked-after”. Previous to that, the importance of the natural environment and wildlife had not featured. We also secured the first-ever permanent appointment of a dedicated Tree and Countryside Officer within Mole Valley District Council.

Later, the Council declared a Climate Change Emergency, but it was only in June 2020 that the new Administration issued its Climate Change Strategy. They mentioned Surrey Council’s (SCC) aim to plant 1.2 million trees by 2030 but, apart from that, only described a potential project of “Facilitating tree planting schemes in the District, through direct MVDC activities and supporting community initiatives”. Aiming to get action, at the Council Meeting in February 2021, we motioned that there should be plans to plant trees wherever possible on MCDC-owned land. Our Motion was not accepted, but March saw the announcement that “work started this month” to seek opportunities to plant on Council-owned land.

Global warming led to announcements of a Climate Change Emergency at global, national, and local levels. As far back as 1988, the United Nation formed the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to make global assessments; the next assessment is due in 2022. Along with other greenhouse gases, high carbon dioxide levels correlated with global warming. Nearly all plants are important because they take carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and release oxygen.

Surrey has more trees than any other county in England (24% land cover) but it also has precious open habitats such as chalk grassland, heathland, wetland, and old field edges – with species that are important nationally and internationally. This means that great care must be taken in choosing sites for tree planting; we should consider parts of parks, recreation areas, around playing fields, and along roads. MVDC owns many sites where, as well as taking carbon from the air, trees and hedges could obscure unattractive buildings, prevent unauthorised encroachment, and mitigate noise and air pollution.

We have been urging the planting of native species for several years, and now this is an almost routine condition placed on developers where trees and hedges are removed. Native species must have high priority because they support our native species of small mammal, fungi (including lichens), and invertebrates; many can only thrive in association with specific native plants. Hedges also trap carbon but are also marvellous reservoirs for diverse wildlife, even in the absence of trees. The older the hedge the more species-rich it will be. Some on the Downs to the south of Ashtead date from the Bronze Age, and others in Ashtead Village are remnants of ancient field boundaries going back to the Middle Ages. The importance of hedges is recognized in separate legislation from that relating to tree protection and at last, we are now seeing their importance also recognized when planning decisions are being made.



Ashtead Independents

Keep national party politics out of local government

Ashtead is lucky to have kept many Victorian and Edwardian properties with large gardens, often with mature trees and old hedges. They are so precious for keeping high species richness; they provide corridors for the movement of increasingly endangered animals such as frogs, hedgehogs, and badgers, from garden to garden. We will continue to argue for their protection in the planning process, and for Tree Protection Orders (TPOs) to be issued more proactively in the years ahead. This should prevent trees being felled by developers before planning applications are even submitted.

There is still much to be done, but we are pleased that, after our years of agitating, at last some progress is being made towards appropriate tree planting in the District and, hopefully, MVDC will set a good example by planting on Council-owned land. This needs to be an ongoing process which will provide a legacy for future generations of which we can be proud.

Cllr David L Hawksworth CBE

Cllr Patricia Wiltshire (Vice Chairman)

HOW MANY NEW HOMES CAN WE TAKE IN ASHTEAD?

1st May 2021 by admin

Local planning authorities must have an approved Local Plan to direct how many homes are to be built and where. In the absence of a current Plan, or if there is a short-fall in the associated five-year supply figures, Planning Inspectors weight these when ruling on appeals against planning decisions. The absence of a current MVDC Local was key to Inspectors' approving the development of new blocks of flats in Woodfield Lane in Ashtead, and on the former Royal Oak site in Leatherhead.

A draft new Local Plan, Future Mole Valley 2018-2033, was released by the Liberal Democrat Cabinet last month. This plans for 449 new homes to be provided every year over this period. That figure is based on a Government formula required to be adopted nationally and based on a ratio of mean earnings and mean house prices in a district. The theory is that increased building reduces house prices, and so makes homes more affordable. A lower figure, 319 homes per year, had come from a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) in 2016. Your Independent Councillors challenged that figure, as a result of which the consultants involved made clear that this was just a starting point for discussion. It seemed difficult to justify even that number with almost no homeless and modest numbers needing social housing in the district. I went on record as suggesting a figure of around 1000 over the next Local Plan period would better reflect actual local "need".

The new draft aims to distribute new development throughout the district, and figures based on percentages of the current population have been used to justify the proposals. I consider that philosophy fundamentally flawed, as it implies that densely populated areas will always become forever increasingly dense. The National Census figures reveal that the population of Ashtead increased by 175 % between 1851 and 1901, 423.8 % between 1901 and 1951, and another 36.9 % between 1961 and 2001; from 2001 to date it has increased by another 24 % to about 16,750. Ashtead is therefore 69.9 % larger (three times the size) than in 1951 – and the draft proposes a 9% increase in the number of households on top the 2011 Census figures suggesting Ashtead will have around 18,000 residents by 2033 – a rise of 33.4 % (a third more) since 2001.



Ashtead Independents

Keep national party politics out of local government

This pattern of growth is unsustainable, detrimental to our quality of life, lacks the necessary supporting infrastructure, and means the loss of Green Belt designated specifically to restrict such expansions. Further, it will not address our real need for social housing while social rents continue to be a percentage of the market rate. Your Independent Councillors continue to challenge the demand being placed on the district by Government, and currently await a response from the Prime Minister's Office.

In the meantime, I feel we should press the Liberal Democrat Cabinet to change its strategy and direct much of the demanded new development into the southern parts of the District, including greenfield outside the Green Belt.

Cllr David L Hawksworth CBE

Leader, Ashtead Independents

Alley Action – A new initiative of the Ashtead Independent Councillors

1st May 2021 by admin

The concept of Alley Action was prompted by comments made at the Ashtead Residents' Association 2019 AGM by Chris Townsend (Ashtead Independent County Councillor). He explained that due to the reduction in levels of government support to local Councils, if anything was going to be done to improve the state of the network of alleyways in Ashtead this would need to be addressed by volunteers. The alleyways are a particularly appreciated feature of the Village in providing key car-free routes between roads and are much used by school-children as well as adults, but are liable to become affected by overgrowing vegetation as well as deposition of unsightly litter.

Ashtead Independent Village Ward Councillor Alan Reilly took this very much to heart and being desirous to give something back to society, launched Alley Action with an appeal for volunteers. The number of volunteers gradually grew, and working parties were initiated at 10 am on the first Saturday of each month and last around two hours. The number able to turn out on a particular Saturday varies, but is now generally around twelve. Work has now been carried out on several different alleys in Village and Common Wards, and Alley Action is very keen to increase the number of volunteers and to be alerted to alleys in need of particular attention.

All bags of rubbish and garden debris collected are piled at the road end of each alley section and are collected by 9 am, generally on the following Monday morning by Mole Valley District Council.

Chris Townsend was able to fund some high-visibility vests and distinctive baseball caps for use by the volunteers and also some advisory boards to explain what was going on from his Ashtead allowance.

Work was suspended last Spring due to the current pandemic, but now I am pleased to advise that after a 14 month break, Alley Action will re-commence on Saturday 1 May at 10 am when more work will be done on the alley that runs from Agates Lane to Northfields by the A24; Councillors Chris Hunt and Alan Reilly will both be there!



Ashtead Independents

Keep national party politics out of local government

All [ADULTS ONLY, OR ALSO CHILDREN IF SUPERVISED?] are welcome to come and help, and we particularly need more volunteers from Park and Common Wards. If you wish to help, just turn up with your favourite secateurs, brushes, shovels, or other tools! If you bring any power tool it must only be used by you. Alley Action is not insured and volunteers all work at their own risk.

Contact Councillor Alan Reilly on 01372 802489 or councillor.reilly@molevalley.gov.uk if you have any questions, and he will inform all those on his list of the sites to be visited on the next Alley Action Saturday.