18/03/2020

Dear all,

I know there are many things to think about during these uncertain times, but I wanted to share some good news with you regarding the preschool, and just provide / reinforce some other important messages for the village at the moment.

Good Neighbours

Firstly, please be safe. Be considerate and be helpful to those who need it. You will have seen the message from Julie Redfern regarding the Good Neighbours initiative in Great Chesterford. Julie and others have been working to instigate a plan to help those who cannot help themselves when times are difficult. Adverse weather being one, but clearly the Coronavirus situation is another very good reason to think about those who may need help in the weeks and months ahead. Many residents might not have access to email, or internet shopping, and others might need help if self-isolating for any number of reasons. Please look out for them, and please do pass on the details of Carol Hatfield email echat5028@gmail.com tel: 01799 530120 or Julie Redfern email julie@tindelles.co.uk  tel: 01799 530308.

New Nursery

Good news – we have a resolution. As many of you will be very aware, this project sadly stalled and the Parish Council (Mike Mitchell in particular) has been working very hard indeed to resolve the situation, which ended up with legal resolution and thankfully avoiding a Court Hearing. The situation arose because of a falling out between the original parties chosen to build the new nursery and provide the child care provision.  The building of the new nursery was to be largely funded from public money (Department for Education (DFE) and Essex County Council (ECC)) on public land owned by the Parish Council.  One of the original parties alleged rights over the part built new nursery, the Parish Council did not agree with that view and the Council commenced legal action at Cambridge County Court to resolve the dispute.

A mediation took place between the parties in mid-February.   Mediation is a process that contains confidentiality obligations on both parties and hence we have had no choice but to stay absolutely silent on the matter to date. But we can say that the settlement of the dispute now allows the Parish Council to proceed with completing the build of the new nursery and to put in place child care provision. The Parish Council was supported by the DfE and ECC  throughout the process and the settlement of the dispute has been met with encouragement from both to the Parish Council to proceed as quickly as possible to complete the nursery.  Representatives from the Parish Council are due to meet with the infrastructure and business delivery teams from ECC in early April.  The intention is to have a plan in place to move the new nursery project forward and for the Parish Council to report further at the AVM.  Likely outline present timescales are to have the build completed latest early/mid 2021, delivered to a child care provider (to be chosen)  and the new nursery open in mid -2021.

Similar to the Local and Neighbourhood Plan efforts, it may have seemed at times as if nothing was happening but I can assure you huge amounts of work was going on behind the scenes and will continue to be in order to deliver this fantastic facility for the village.

Neighbourhood Plan

Given the Local Plan situation and the issues for UDC surrounding their 5 year housing land supply, there is very real importance to get the Neighbourhood Plan for the Chesterfords finalised. Hopefully you will have seen the message on GoogleGroups and the flyer inside your copy of the Local this week. We had planned a series of “pop-up” events to share the progress made and the sites selected for potential development in the future. These were planned for  Great Chesterford and Little Chesterford. Given the Prime Ministers Statement on Monday, we will of course have to reschedule these. They will be rescheduled as appropriate, but the Neighbourhood Plan Team will be in touch with you again shortly.

Axis Land Application, London Road

You will of course be aware of this application for up to 76 houses and that UDC resolved to grant permission subject to a s106 agreement. Both Parish Councils are seeking to work with UDC to ensure as far as possible that the impacts of this development are fully mitigated. We understand there will be some disappointment the scheme was granted consent but it was out of our hands.

Precept

Many will have seen that this has had to be increased substantially this year. We agonised over this decision over a number of meetings but the ultimate conclusion was that we were left with no choice but to increase it this year. We had to have sufficient funds to deal with the myriad of issues we have had to endure, and had to plan and budget for more to come. Thankfully, even since we set the precept, we have resolved the issue of the New Nursery and we hope the threat of NUGC is over for the time-being at least. Coupled with other issues such as the Neighbourhood Plan needing to be finished as soon as possible this year, we are very hopeful that Parish finances will be much improved come December when the process starts again. As a result, we would hope to achieve a material reduction in next year's Precept.

Dog Mess

I needn’t say much. If you have a dog, please respect others. In this day and age, and with the other far more important issues we all face at the moment, it is embarrassing to even have to ask. Please bag it and bin it. No excuses.

VE Day

Gareth, Wendy and Julie (and others) have been working on a celebration with a theme of “Celebration of Peace and Reconciliation”. The Idea being to remember all those who gave their lives for us and to provide a venue and format to bring the Chesterfords community together. Sadly, again circumstances have meant we are going to have to postpone this until later in the year. A very kind villager has donated their flagpole to us so will have a flagpole on the day flying a flag on the day that has been designed by the school, we hope the flagpole will serve to mark the anniversary, to give us pause to reflect as we pass by it and become a focal point of other events in the future.  Members of Chesterfords Local History and Archaeology Society have been researching the men of Chesterford who died in World War Two, we will be putting out silhouettes showing the houses where they lived and will be publishing their stories each week through to VE Day.

Local Plan

As we currently understand it, UDC are taking advice from professional advisors and the very clear advice, which we would be surprised if it was not followed, was for UDC to "start again". The costs and risks analysis very much support this approach. We believe that the UDC  Extraordinary Council Meeting pencilled will go ahead on 31st March to make a formal decision on what they will do next. This meeting will include extended time for public speaking, so register early with UDC (committee@uttlesford.gov.uk) if you want your say, assuming it is not cancelled due to the Coronavirus too.

That’s all for the time being. I am consistently amazed by the dedication and hard work so many people (not just Parish and District Councillors, but many, many others) put into this village, for the benefit of all.  Please stay calm, stay safe, stay thoughtful and kind to others and follow the guidance on how to stay safe on the various local and national Government websites.

We are sure that once this national situation has all blown over, the village will come together and have a great celebration.

Kind regards

Tom

Tom Newcombe

Chair, Great Chesterford Parish Council