

all Charles address to Cabinet.

Cabinet Thursday 21 April 2016

New Ash Green Village Centre

5. – Response to decisions made by Cabinet in response to petition relating to New Ash Green Village Centre, submitted to Full Council

Thank you for the opportunity to say a few words.

I must first acknowledge the efforts of Lesley Bowles, Alan Whiting, Mark Bradbury and, now Robin Cooper in trying to make progress with this seemingly intractable problem. The main issue we face locally is the almost total absence of any obvious results on the ground. That is perceived by local people as a lack of action and interest by the Council.

Indeed much of what has been achieved has had either a neutral or negative impact.

- Pigeons still roost in the centre, some deterrents have been partially successful but as fast as one is implemented the birds find new roosting and nesting sites.
- Only **two** (not three) of the Section 215 Notice requirements have been complied with.
- Planning permission for the removal of the shop front canopies, instead of their repair, was refused. But the possibility of an appeal against that decision means that the Section 215 Notice cannot be pursued until July.
- The deteriorating glass overall roof had to be partly dismantled as a result of action by the Council's building surveyors when it became dangerous but it is now a worse eyesore than before and after two months the promised repairs have not been done.
- A report to all New Ash Green residents was promised by Cabinet but nothing was done – the copy you have at Appendix A is an article I wrote for the village newsletter last December in the absence of anything else. People are still waiting for the Council's report.
- An Environmental Visual Audit was carried out last month and identified 15 specific issues. But identifying them is only the first stage and the relevant authorities must be required to take action to put them right. And there are more, for some of which I have provided photographic evidence and there are others hanging over from previous audits that have still not been attended to.

Meanwhile, the centre's infrastructure continues to deteriorate. Wood is rotting, paint is peeling, paving is lifting, litter is accumulating, pigeons are breeding, maintenance is no more than firefighting.

I have painted a bleak picture yet New Ash Green is still somewhere that people want to live. For perhaps one in ten of the District's population the village centre is the nearest convenient location for day-to-day needs of shopping, schools, library, surgeries and other vital services. The appalling and worsening state of the centre lets down the whole area whilst the perceived inaction of the Council puts the Council and its elected Members into disrepute.

What must be done?

- Communication between the Council and residents must be improved. An honest but comprehensive report must be provided for every household.
- We have the opportunity of a new Local Development Plan to review and strengthen the present site allocation, in the same way that the Swanley Masterplan is working for the Swanley centre where many of the same issues are evident, albeit on a larger scale.
- There must be further thought given to the application and enforcement of available powers, like further Section 215 notices, Street Litter Control Notices, or Dangerous Structures, putting the Council in a more proactive role to secure short-term visible improvements.
- The landowners of the centre, and their architects, must be put in no doubt that local people, and the Council that represents them, need a village centre that is fit for purpose. That must be communicated at the highest level and backed up with workable proposals for actions within an achievable timeframe.

We cannot allow the momentum on this issue to be lost. It must not be kicked into the long grass. Local people demand action and they deserve it. I trust the Council will not let them down

Councillor Cameron Clark
Ash & New Ash Green