

## **St Martha Parish Council**

### **Chairman's Report: PC Meeting Thursday 9 October 2025**

#### **Fire on Blackheath Common**

I attended the Blackheath Village Society AGM on Tuesday 9 September at Blackheath Village Hall as a member of the BVS, like other residents of the area, and also the meeting was aware that I am a St Martha Parish Councillor. The recent fire on the heath was discussed. Unfortunately, Surrey Fire Brigade and Waverly Borough Council weren't at the meeting. Womersley Parish Council, which includes the Ward of Blackheath, also discussed it at their meeting on 18 September, attended by Waverley Borough Councillor, Jane Austin. Next steps were discussed including the importance of communications with Waverley over the new forthcoming Blackheath Common Management Plan and details of future works contracted to the Forest Commission and the sharing of these plans with residents of Blackheath.

I circulated on 30 September, for Councillors' information only, further updates from Blackheath Village. I also asked Councillor Bob Hughes whether there would be a report from Surrey Fire Brigade and recommendations.

#### **Consultation on Local Government Reorganisation in Surrey - Neighbourhood Area Committees Seminar (NACs) – SALC & SCC seminar**

I attended a webinar on the Neighbourhood Area Committees. 4 are currently being piloted in rural and urban areas, in parished and unparished areas. I circulated my notes on this seminar.

#### **SALC Employment Rights Bill - webinar**

I attended an Employment Rights Bill webinar for Parish Councillors and circulated brief notes to Parish Councillors and the presentation slides. This has implications for our Parish Council policies and Clerk's contract amongst other things.

#### **Surrey ALC Councillors' Forum**

I attended the first part of this Forum on 1 October.

#### **Upgrades the Tangley Level Crossing and Chilworth Station Level Crossing**

Upgrading has taken place at both the Tangley Crossing at Chilworth Station Crossing. The new Yodel alarm system at Chilworth Station was being tried out for much of Monday 22 September! Network Rail said that the alarm volume will be adjusted over the first week after commissioning. Unlike the old system, the alarm only sounds when the barriers are lowering. The old alarm sounded during the entire closure. Observing the alarm now after completion at the Station, it seems not to be too intrusive. The kerb has been widened by the Station and the planter moved and is no longer needed where it originally was placed by Highways.

Having queried, on behalf of a resident, night light pollution at the Tangley Crossing due to the continuous use of daylight spectrum lighting at night and the impact on wildlife, Network Rail responded that the light installed at the crossing will be a directed spotlight aimed at the crossing. It will have shielding that is designed to minimise light leakage to avoid disrupting both lineside neighbours and wildlife, which will further reduce its impact.

In terms of the traffic pollution and congestion due to the longer time that the level crossing barriers are down at the Tangley Crossing, the team is looking into whether additional

signage can be installed on the road asking drivers to turn off their engines while waiting, which would help reduce noise and engine pollution.

BBC Surrey contact the PC to see if anyone would like to comment on behalf of the residents living nearby about the impact during the 2 weeks of upgrading works. Danielle Newsome, Guildford Borough Councillor, was also approached.

I have asked Network Rail if the large orange camera boxes at Tangley Level Crossing are still in use and if not, can they be removed. They are looking into the matter. They may have been put there by SCC Highways.

### **Jessie's Seat/the Chilworth Chicken**

As part of the upgrades to the North Downs Line, clearance along the track was done by contractors (Coombes) in order to keep sight lines clear. In doing so, very sadly they badly damaged Jessie's Seat (a topiary memorial to commemorating an accident and death of a railwayman at this part of the line outside Chilworth in 1892). Clearly this damage to the topiary was a serious mistake and is currently being investigated by Coombes and Network Rail. They are keen to consider how to rectify this and next steps were considered at a very productive meeting on 3 October between Network Rail, myself, the contractors, and two other members of the North Downs Line Steering Group. I am hoping there will be images of proposals to send round to the Parish Council in advance of the November Meeting for the PC's consideration. Outline proposals will be sent shortly. Everyone was keen that the Parish Council should have a strong say on behalf of the community.

As part of the Network Rail trying to correct the situation as much as possible, I was also able to raise the matter of the state of the Gatekeeper's Hut. NR seemed interested in the idea of restoring the building. I suggested it could in some way be used to tell the story of Jessie's Seat and some of the history of the Station and area. Possibly using the outside and windows of the building and then opening it up on special occasions – Heritage open Days?

### **Pay Phone at Chilworth Station**

There is a fault close to the phone box and now the upgrading of the Crossing has been completed BT is hoping to mend this and reinstall the phone and BT will keep us informed.

### **Water Pipes and Drainage on St Martha's Hill**

After 10 years of discussion between Surrey County Council, Thames Water, Chilworth Manor and the Albury Estate, Sir Graham Wrigley from Chilworth Hill was pleased to announce that work finished on 18 September to the water pipes and drainage on St Martha's Hill. (A note went in the October edition of the Chilworth Magazine.) The work recently undertaken was to cover the water pipes which were a safety and health hazard and a risk to some 600 houses in the St Martha's end of Chilworth. New drainage gulleys were also put in to mitigate the future risk of erosion. There has been erosion in the area due to recent extreme weather conditions. Sir Graham also said that the pathway to St Martha's is now open and much safer to walk even though still steep! However, the alterations to the footpath haven't met with universal approval as one St Martha residents has written to GBC (not SCC), copying in the Parish Council, raising his concerns about the possibility of the increased danger to pedestrians from speeding cyclists illegally using this footpath.

### **Vera's Path**

On 30 September, I met with Emma Coles, from Surrey Hills, and Sara Grisewood, South East Community Rail Partnership, to look at the condition and accessibility of Vera's Path as Surrey Hills has some funding to spend on access and is interested in possibly using some of it to improve this footpath. Unfortunately, this and access to and from the station seems too challenging to be a funding project but Councillors are asked to consider if there is anything else in the Parish that might benefit from it.

### **Rail to Ramble Podcasts – Whistlestop Arts**

I met, along with Emma Coles from Surrey Hills and Sara Grisewood from SECRP, with the people who run Whistlestop Arts and are interested in making a podcast related to our area and linking in with Rail to Ramble. They have been commissioned to create four podcasts celebrating the heritage, nature and creativity in the Surrey Hills via the railway. We discussed possible people who might be interviewed and they are hoping to make recordings in November. This project is supported by the Surrey Hills Access for All fund. So far, the following have agreed to talk: Sarah Sullivan, an expert on the Arts and Crafts movement and its influence on Blackheath; Debbie Toynbee with her knowledge of the Gunpowder Mills Site; and Sara Grisewood of CRP talking about the railway and inspiring local women. I have also been asked to add my thoughts about the area.

### **Visitors' LECTERN Map outside Chilworth Station**

Work on this visitors' map for outside the Station is ongoing by artist Claire Watson. Sara Grisewood contacted Network Rail and they are not against having the lectern on the green outside the Station. The majority of this land is owned by Network Rail. However, consideration is still being given to the best site for it. The back notice board of the Bus Shelter is still something the Community Rail Partnership is considering.

### **Parking in Dorking Road**

The matter of parked vans working in Dorking Road near the junction with Blacksmith Lane was raised by a resident and I went and spoke to the contractors who moved one of their vehicles and said they would try and park a little further down the road in order to improve the sight line coming out of Blacksmith Lane.

### **Farnborough Airport**

An interesting recent post on a local network about Farnborough Airport.

*'The airport employs only 190 people. Half its revenue is from fuel sales (no jobs there). It makes a loss and has debts of £550m. This is not surprising as Macquarie owns the airport and they owned Thames Water and left it with huge debts. Most of the businesses at the airport have nothing to do with private jets. The ones that are flights based also make a loss or are foreign registered. When the airport collapses with huge debts, what's going to happen to the alleged jobs and economic generation? The reality is that weekday flights have been falling since 2022 so the airport wanted to boost weekend leisure flights – it doesn't have a licence to operate leisure flights!'* How true this is I have no way of verifying. It doesn't appear to have a license for general leisure flights and there are frequent complaints and legal challenges regarding planning breaches.