

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PARISH OF BOXLEY

Boxley Parish Council Chairman's Report for the year 2016/2017

This is my first annual report and may I start by thanking everyone for their support in my first year as Chairman of the Parish Council.

It has been an extremely busy year for the parish council especially with regards to planning and the **Environment Committee**, chaired by Wendy Hinder has undertaken sterling work to represent the parish council, local communities and residents. The parish council made strong representations to the Local Plan Public Inquiry and employed an agent on behalf of the parishioners to try to effect change to protect the Lidsing and Capstone area. Unfortunately, the Planning Inspector was not minded to support this view. The Parish Council also objected to the proposed development at Gibraltar Farm in the Medway area as it sees the proposed development of 450 houses as the precursor to massive development across the plateau area. Despite four days of attendance at the Public Inquiry and evidence being given again the need for housing over ruled common-sense. Medway Council is now proposing in its draft Local Plan to allocate large areas for mixed development just outside the parish boundary. In view of the impact of additional traffic from all this development the Environment Committee is now very active in pressing KCC Highways for improvements. The production, after a meeting with County Councillor Paul Carter, of a highway report on the adverse impact of commuter parking in Grove Green, too much traffic on local roads and all the problems associated with all the additional development gained residents support. I appeared before the Maidstone Joint Transport Board to submit the report and the parish council is now awaiting the outcome.

The parish council is working hard to support its community and along with the grants that are made available for local organisations it decided to place in its 2017/18 budget a sum of £40,000 to pay for highway improvements and a further £15,000 for additional maintenance and I am proud to say, on behalf of the parish council, that this is an extremely proactive stance and shows the parish council is willing to go the extra mile.

The Environment Committee are involved in many local issues and I commend the committee members for their diligence and hard work. Residents appear to appreciate the fact that not only are their concerns and views taken on board but through the community alert system they are being kept updated.

The **Estates Committee** ably chaired by Vic Davies has also been extremely busy planning improvements for Beechen Hall, looking after Dove Hill Allotments, the burial ground and of course Weaving Diamond Jubilee Orchard, the play area of which now has a magnificent slide depicting the fruits of the orchard. With the support of Kent Downs AONB a grant was received from Tesco's for this and for some educational work with the local school. The installation of kestrel boxes at the orchard, allotments and on Weaving Heath I think indicates the commitment of the parish council to all its residents.

The creation of the Beechen Hall Extension Working Group to take on the project to extend the small room meant more hard work for a small group of councillors and the office staff. This group has worked extremely hard to get to the stage where a project manager can be employed to take it further. It is still early days but I have no doubt that with this team of able people the project will be a success. Whilst I would not generally single out individuals for recognition it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge Councillor Paul Dengate's dedication and hard work in this group.

I would also like to acknowledge the hard work of the Beechen Hall staff who keep it in excellent conditions and who are also representatives of the parish council when they meet hirers of the hall.

Our third committee, **Finance & General Purposes**, kept a careful eye on expenditure throughout the year and set a budget for 2017/2018 which only includes a small rise in the precept, part of which was caused by the Government withdrawing its grant to parish councils. Under the watchful eye of its Chairman Ivor Davies this committee ensures the parish council works prudently and that it also supports local organisations with grants, ranging from hundreds to thousands of pounds. The committee also plays a vital role in ensuring that the parish council works in an open and accountable way and that by the use of policies and procedures residents can, by accessing the website and attending meetings, see this for themselves. It is from this professional approach that the parish council has managed its reserves and is now able to release money to pay for the highway and additional maintenance work that is planned.

Boxley Parish is large and has many halls, beautiful areas and habitats which all need some form of maintenance. For many years volunteers have given up time, money and effort, often back breaking effort, to keep these facilities and areas open and safe for visitors. This is not without problems, especially in the North

Ward with off road bikers, and of course with the financial situation and the cut in services things are not getting easier. The pool of volunteers also seems to be getting smaller and it is hard work attracting new members, so I am appealing for more volunteers to come forward to help their local groups. The parish council financially supports many of these organisations as it recognises that without all the volunteered hours our parish and communities would be poorer off.

Thanks go to

Vinters Valley Nature Reserve

Walderslade Woodlands Group

Friends of Boxley Warren

Sandling Village Social Hall

Weaving Street Hall

Grove Green Hall

In this past year the parish council has purchased equipment for volunteer litter pickers and many quietly go about keeping our roads, footways and open areas clean and they are especially thanked for doing this seemingly never ending task. There are numerous other groups including The Scouts, Brownies, PTAs, community groups that use the halls etc. that add to the rich tapestry that is a community and again appreciation is given.

Parish council's are having to think out of the box and all are developing strategies to get work done by co-operating with volunteer groups. This year the Walderslade Woodlands Group put in the dew ponds in memory of Alan Springate and their position helps stop flooding in a nearby area.

With the help of Councillor Paul Dengate the parish council has gradually expanded its use of the internet to reach its parishioners. With the hard work of the office staff the parish council keeps its website updated with news, agenda and minutes, Facebook is also used but in recent months due to various planning and highway issues at Grove Green the Community Alert E-mail system has proved invaluable not only in keeping residents updated but also allowing them to have an easy conduit to the parish office and therefore the council. The parish office still uses letters and the telephone for residents not on computers but increasingly it is the computer that is allowing information to flow to residents. With the proposed development in or adjacent to the parish the work of the office will not decrease and if residents are not signed up to the Community Alert system I would recommend that they do so. This increased use of the internet does bring about extra work as the public now expect almost instant answers so my and the councillors thanks go to the office staff Pauline Bowdery, Melanie

Fooks and Angie Candy who juggle deadlines, projects, reports and whatever is needed to keep councillors and residents informed and able to work.

With elections and changes in personal circumstances there is always some turnover in a parish council and this year we said hello but also goodbye to Robert and Susan Martins. In the coming year there are going to be many challenges facing the parish council and the community however it is hoped that with hard work and a bit of luck that the parish flourishes and improves.

Bob Hinder

Chairman Boxley Parish Council

8th May 2017