

Boxley Parish Council Chairman's Report for year 2014/15 to the Parishioners of Boxley

As anyone who reads the minutes of our meetings (readily available on our website) will be aware, we have had another busy year. This is therefore only a summary.

Firstly I wish to thank Wendy Hinder, our Environment Committee chair, for the time and effort she spent resolving the illegal lorry-parking problem in Old Chatham Road. We shall now seek support from other parishes in persuading government to tackle what is a nation-wide problem. Meanwhile, KCC Highways have at last tackled the problem of overgrown vegetation in Walderslade and Lordswood following our representations.

Much time has been spent on considering planning applications. Where there was good cause and material considerations under planning law we objected, mainly successfully. Applications that were allowed often bore mitigating conditions suggested by us.

This brings me to MBC's emerging Local Plan defining, amongst other things, the size and location of residential development throughout the borough for the next 15 years. In our contribution to consultations, we have been very conscious of both the housing shortage within the parish and residents' desire to avoid irreparable damage to a local environment which they cherish. However, although most development is likely to be south or east of central Maidstone, we not necessarily in the clear and even parts of the parish within the Kent Downs AONB may no longer be sacrosanct. Outside the AONB, and following objections from the parish council and local residents, MBC have rejected developments adjoining Ancient Woodland in Lordswood and at the top of New Cut Road. However, as MBC do not yet have a defined Local Plan, these may be difficult to sustain at appeal.

We have considered a possible Boxley parish Neighbourhood Plan. As this would have to be community-led, we sought the views of residents. Although well publicised, the response was very disappointing. In view of this apathy and after due deliberation, your council decided, for the present, against proceeding.

The Estates Committee under Vic Davies's chairmanship had another good year. Lettings of Beechen Hall were well up as this is a splendid venue for meetings and family celebrations. Melanie Fooks, who manages the hall, and her team of caretakers are to be congratulated. We are now considering ways to extend the facilities. Elsewhere, the Weaving Diamond Jubilee Orchard, remains a source of enjoyment to local residents while further west, the Dove Hill allotments go from strength to strength. This following a highly successful formal opening by BBC Radio Kent's Andy Garland.

In my last report I paid tribute to the sterling conservation work by Bob Hinder's Friends of Boxley Warren volunteers. This praise I reiterate – but sadly have to report that following threats and physical assault by bikers illegally crossing the site, operations are suspended. This, coming on top of two thefts and demolition (twice) of the Lidsing Road gate, is disheartening for all concerned.

On the financial front, the parish precept for 2015/16 is slightly higher than that for 2014/15 when MBC erroneously billed residents for almost 6% less than we asked for. However Boxley's precept remains second lowest in the borough.

2014 was the year in which the whole nation united in commemorating the centenary of the First World War. The parish council erected a plaque beside the Boxley war memorial recording that the fallen are not forgotten; planted two young trees in Grove Green which will commemorate in 2018 the ending of hostilities; and prepared a leaflet explaining the significance of the war memorial with brief details of those who fell. Incidentally, do visit our website or Facebook page. On both you will find details of our Community Alerts service whereby subscribers receive news by e-mail of matters of specific interest to their local area.

In conclusion I wish to thank my Vice-chairman, Pat Brooks, the committee Chairmen, their Vice-chairmen (Bob Hinder and Paul Dengate) and all other councillors for their work this past year. Most importantly, I wish to thank Pauline Bowdery and her staff in the parish office, who achieve so much; and you, our residents, for your continuing support.

Let us continue to work together for a better Boxley.

Ivor Davies
13 April 2015