

CHAIRMANS END OF YEAR REPORT 2018 – 2019

BOXLEY PARISH COUNCIL

The end of another year that was full of dreams, emotions and occurrences and much dedicated hard work both by Councillors and office staff.

I would like to start by commending all Committees for their dedicated efforts throughout the year.

It was with great sadness earlier in the year that we all said a fond farewell to a former long serving Councillor Pat Brooks. She will be remembered for many attributes not least one where she could put her finger right on the pulse of whatever was being discussed and come forward with very clear and succinct suggestions. Unfortunately her health declined and she I know very reluctantly decided to step aside and created a huge void at the meetings. I can still see her arriving with bundles of newspapers and clippings she had amassed between meetings to keep Pauline and the other office staff busy.

However, we were most fortunate to have Pat apply to become her replacement and what a bonus that has turned out to be – welcome to your first Annual Meeting of the Parish.

It has also been a year where one of my own visions has been realised by the creation of a traffic working group with a neighbouring Parish Bearsted. This is a step I feel should have occurred much sooner but perhaps all that has happened in Grove Green pushed us into setting it up. It has also led to meetings and discussions between Parishes on a range of issues and this is what I would like to continue and develop - not work in isolation. More of that situation later in my report.

Dealing firstly with the Environment Committee chaired very ably by Wendy Hinder they have gone through an incredibly arduous and difficult period with planning issues being top of the list. All will agree that there cannot have been a year with so many contentious issues to work on and I am grateful for the dedicated efforts of this Committee. The two Schools proposal for Popes Field must head the list but not to forget the work done on Gibraltar Farm, parking issues in and around Grove Green, Innovation Centre planning proposals and latterly the East Hill proposal off North Dane Way.

Meetings were many throughout the year with perhaps the public meeting at Grove Green Community hall being one of the more contentious. Much involvement with our MP, KCC and MBC has occurred and included many hours of trying to get the residents living adjacent to New Cut opportunities to get a full night sleep. The Planning Meeting at MBC for the two schools will probably be remembered most for the (and here I will not hesitate to describe as shambolic) way in which it was announced at the very last moment that it would go ahead as a bitter disappointment to very many of our residents. Many had planned to attend only to decide not to when messages came out from MBC that legal had recommended postponement due to local elections. Again this year the Environment Committee decided to take the decision to purchase more daffodil bulbs to be planted around the parish and a welcome bunch of volunteers again helped out in planting.

I turn to the Estates Committee again this year ably led by Vic Davies. They too have been extremely busy with top of the list being the successful completion of what is now called the Acorn Room. A very smart new asset to Beechen Hall that has brought forward nothing but praise from people who have used the facility. It was particularly enjoyable to invite dignitaries including the Mayor Cllr David Naghi and past Parish Council Chairs to the official opening and for the past Chairs and recipients of the Community awards to see that we have recognised their contributions to our community and beyond by the installation of the Honours Boards. The committee even gave of their time and hard work one weekend landscaping outside the entrance. There remains a section to be completed but I am sure this will be completed soon.

Finance and General Purpose Committee chaired most ably by Ivor Davies has certainly ensured that again we have had a balanced budget with no financial hiccups along the way. They ventured into new territory by taking out a Public Works Loan to cover some of the cost of the hall extension but under Ivor's beady stare it was all carefully calculated so as not to put an increased financial burden on the parishioners.

Planning permission has finally been granted by MBC for the possible development of housing on Wildfell Close. This will enable implementation of the Woodlands long term management plan but as yet it does not appear that any developers have expressed an interest.

During the year the many volunteer groups have continued their extremely valuable work and the community and parish council are extremely grateful. Sadly, we saw the demise of Boxley Warren Volunteer Group but we are extremely happy to welcome the formation and work of a new group the Friends of Weaving Heath and Woodlands.

Here I now reach the most important aspect to report on; that of our extremely able and dedicated office and caretaking staff. We reluctantly received the resignation during the year of one of the Caretakers but were very successful in appointing a very able replacement. However it was with the greatest of reluctance that I received the resignation letter from Pauline our Clerk for more than 20 years. I could easily write a book pontificating about the excellent qualities that she has brought to the job but you would be here for breakfast! She is unique in that she can almost sum up a situation instantly and come up with the correct solutions and answers long before the rest of us have even started to digest what the problem is. Her reputation spreads far and wide and we will not be the only ones to miss her vast cauldron of knowledge. We have to accept that we will not find another Pauline but hopefully there does exist someone who will perhaps emulate her but in a different way. Hopefully by the end of this week and interviews that replacement may be able to indicate to us that they will join the team. We do however still have Melanie and Angie and that will enable us to introduce the new clerk in a very sensitive manner. They are both so helpful and do their work to very high standards and I have no doubt they will be found to be a great asset by the new Clerk. It is I find very reassuring having Mel and Angie quietly dealing with a myriad of matters and problems and keeping a discreet barrier between residents and councillors.

Pauline has made my task as Chairman so straightforward and dare I say without many problems because her manner is such that she will grab a chair, thrust it in your direction and say "right let's get it sorted !"

I will end by saying that much more needs to be said regarding the huge contributions that Pauline has made to Boxley but a future time awaits for this.

Cllr Bob Hinder

Chairman Boxley Parish Council