

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PARISH OF BOXLEY

Boxley Parish Council Chairman's Report for the year 2015/16

Once again it is time for me to report to residents what we on the Parish Council have done on your behalf during the past year.

Consideration of planning applications has again formed the bread and butter of **Environment Committee** meetings, chaired by Wendy Hinder. We successfully opposed a small housing development on the corner of New Cut and Bearstead Roads but were less successful with the developer's appeal against MBC's refusal of outline planning permission for 89 houses off Gleamingwood Drive, Lordswood. Parish council representatives attended throughout the four-day public enquiry and stated our case but disappointingly the Inspector found in the developer's favour. There were other major developments where we had no material objections but had our comments taken into account by MBC. These included the new supermarket at Eclipse Park and the new hospital unit on the KIMS campus.

Wendy, with support from MBC and KCC ward member Paul Carter, achieved after a long battle a ban on lorries parking in lower Old Chatham Road, Sandling. The overnight noise of refrigeration units coupled with the waste left behind, both human and otherwise, had caused real distress to local residents. We also took the whole issue of lorry-parking on residential roads to the AGM of the Kent Association of Local Councils and will now be considered by the National Association. We also, with the help of Helen Whately MP, who attended our November council meeting, put the problem before the Minister for Transport and had a letter published in the national press.

Although some of our plans for minor highway improvements have been delayed by the difficulty in obtaining approval from KCC, we eventually persuaded Kent Highways to improve the warning signage at the Lidsing Road/Pilgrims Way junction. This followed a number of incidents of vehicles crashing into and destroying a succession of gates at the entrance to Boxley Warren. We have been less successful in denying quad-bikes access to the Warren because of legal obstacles, but we shall persevere. In the meantime the Friends of Boxley Warren are very limited in what work they can do because of harassment by bikers, in one case leading to physical violence. This is a great pity because there is a danger of this section of the Pilgrims Way and adjoining national nature reserve reverting to the disgusting rubbish dump of a decade or so ago.

Better news for the other open areas in the parish. The Walderslade Woodlands Group is very active and regularly receives compliments from local residents who have this asset on their doorstep – particularly now when the bluebells (all English!) form swathes of colour over areas that were densely overgrown until cleared by the Group only a few years ago.

Down in the south, the Vinters Valley nature reserve forms a welcome oasis and the parish council is pleased to be paying for improvements to some of the paths. But the Trust is desperate for more help; any residents who are interested should contact them direct. Nearby we are in the process of improving the Weaving Street entrance to the Diamond Jubilee Orchard to make it safer for children. As for the Dove Hill Allotments, there is now a waiting list for plots – tenants having enjoyed a bountiful harvest and hopeful for something similar this year despite the late Spring. These both fall under the supervision of our **Estates Committee** ably chaired by Vic Davies (no relation).

The Estates Committee also has responsibility for Beechen Hall, Walderslade, an increasingly popular venue for family events, meetings, etc. These and the regular sessions held by Age Concern, fitness and mother-and-child groups are highly valued by the community and the council is currently reviewing whether an extension to the premises is warranted and/or affordable.

Our third committee, **Finance & General Purposes**, kept a careful eye on expenditure throughout the year and set a budget for 2016/17 requiring no increase in the parish precept. Recently installed new accounting and computer systems are giving increased productivity, much needed by our over-worked office in view of the ever-increasing demands made on parish councils by higher levels of government.

The committee made grants to a number of community-led bodies or have assisted in their obtaining outside funding. These include:

- Vinters Valley nature reserve
- the Friends of Boxley Warren
- Walderslade Woodlands Group
- the Friends of Boxley Church
- various village halls, both for exceptional maintenance projects and to assist each in converting their formal status to that of a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) to give the trustees additional legal protection.

Apart from arranging and minuting meetings (115 A4 pages this past year alone) and heavy involvement in all of the above, **the parish office** has responded to a wide range of residents' enquiries and requests for help as well as running the council's popular Facebook page and Community Alerts e-mail system. It has also prepared briefing notes and agreed responses to a number of national, KCC or MBC consultations covering a broad spectrum of issues including:

- the draft Maidstone Local Plan – we expect to attend the Public Enquiry that will follow
- the proposed Lower Thames Crossing (Highways England)
- KCC Libraries, Registrations and Archives service
- two consultations related to a revised National Planning Policy Framework, one of which will radically change how planning applications are handled and could give the parish council a right of appeal.

Somehow the Clerk also found time to publish a number of leaflets including the very interesting guide to the Boxley War Memorial, which I commend to you all. For Pauline's dedication and that of the Assistant Clerk, Mel, and their assistant, Angie, I and my fellow councillors are extremely grateful. Equally to the caretaking staff in Beechen Hall who keep it in such excellent condition.

Membership of the council is changing. Farewell to Ann Spain after more than 21 years on the council, Geoff Smith who has moved out of the parish and Martin Hinchliffe who is deeply involved in community affairs elsewhere did not stand for re-election; I wish them all well. In addition, Alan Springate sadly passed away on 7 October 2015; without his contribution council meetings are not the same. The Walderslade Woodlands Group, in which Alan was very active, intend building two dew ponds as a permanent memorial. Lynn Clarke was co-opted as Alan's successor.

I myself am now at the very end of my term as Chairman. It has been a rewarding, if demanding, experience starting with the 2012 Royal Visit just three weeks in. Highlights since then are difficult to choose but obtaining Village Green status for perpetual protection of the Walderslade Woodlands and the purchase of land at Dove Hill for what are now flourishing allotments immediately spring to mind. It is however now time for me to retire to the back-benches and hand over the helm to someone with fresh ideas, working as always for a better Boxley. I hope he or she receives the same valuable support from fellow councillors and the office as I have. I am confident they will

Ivor Davies
Chairman
Boxley Parish Council

9 May 2015