

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PARISH OF BOXLEY

Boxley Parish Council Chairman's Report for the year 2017/2018

Another year has flown by and in my last annual report I couldn't imagine it getting any busier for the parish but it promptly did and shows no signs of abating in the near future.

The planning and the **Environment Committee**, chaired by Wendy Hinder has again undertaken sterling work to represent the parish council, local communities and residents. The parish council made strong representations concerning the proposed school at New Cut Road and will continue to do so at the Public Inquiry. The important issue for all the residents is the traffic and parking that will be generated, and the parish council will ensure that at the Public Inquiry the needs for Road Traffic Orders to stop commuter and school parking is made totally clear.

The Parish Council objected to two additional houses on the edge of Boxley Village and this has also gone to Appeal. I must acknowledge and thank all parish councillors who undertake additional work by attending Public Appeals or helping local residents to make their views known at the right time.

The parish council was unsuccessful, due to safety issues, in getting an improved pedestrian crossing at Grovewood Drive North but has paid for pedestrian crossing signs to be erected by KCC.

The **Estates Committee** ably chaired by Vic Davies has also been extremely busy on the planned improvements for Beechen Hall, looking after Dove Hill Allotments, the burial ground and of course Weaving Diamond Jubilee Orchard. This coming year it will take on responsibility for Franklin Drive Open Space and it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the work of Borough Councillor Wendy Hinder and the large donation received from Gallaghers which has paid for additional play equipment.

Beechen Hall Extension Working Group Vic Davies, Lynn Clarke, Ivor Davies, Paul Dengate, Kaz Macklin, Pat Sullivan, Pauline Bowdery and Melanie Fooks, have worked extremely hard to ensure that the project to extend and refurbish Beechen Hall is a success; with no increase in the Precept. £90,000 of council reserves will be used and for the first time ever the parish council has applied for a Public Works Loan of £90,000 which will be repaid from the hall hire fees and so future hirers. This time next year I hope to be reporting the successful completion of the work.

This year after 20 years of service one of our Caretakers Maggie left and it is right to acknowledge her long service and 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**, under the watchful eye of its Chairman Ivor Davies, has ensured that the parish council works prudently and that it also supports local organisations with grants, ranging from hundreds to thousands of pounds. The committee 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 without increasing the precept which is still one of the lowest in Maidstone.

Without the diligence and hard work of councillors this parish council would not be able to operate. Not all battles are won but residents appear to appreciate the fact that not only are their concerns and views taken on board but where possible the parish council tries to get action to alleviate any issues.

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 again using my report to appeal for more volunteers to come forward to help their local groups. The parish council financially supports, using part of its precept, many of these organisations as it recognises that without all the volunteered hours our parish and communities would be a poorer place to live.

Thanks go to

Vinters Valley Nature Reserve; Walderslade Woodlands Group

Friends of Boxley Warren; Sandling Village Social Hall

Weaving Street Hall; Grove Green Hall

The parish council also welcomes and adds a new group, Friends of Weaving Heath and Woodlands, to this list.

Individuals often quietly contribute to the wellness of our parish and communities by litter picking, reporting potholes, litter and flytipping and these are extremely important contributions. A very special thanks must go to our Clerk Pauline who arms herself with sacks and litter picker to keep Walderslade Woods Road free of litter. Noticed and recognised by many as a wonderful gesture to us all. There are numerous other groups including The Scouts, Brownies, PTAs, community groups etc. that add to the rich tapestry that is a community and it gives me much pleasure to be able to officially thank everyone for their hard work.

The arrival of the General Data Protection Regulations has put, like most organisations, the parish council in a bit of a spin. It has resulted in an enormous increase of work on the parish office and a complete review of all the systems. The majority of the work has fallen on staff with councillors being approached for help and views. After years of building up the community alert e-mail lists there had been a worry that residents might choose not to opt in but I am delighted to say that most residents see the value of this alert system and the lists are very healthy. The fact that the law is changing only builds on what we already do today – and that is to give your personal information the respect and security it deserves

My thanks and the councillors go to the office staff Pauline Bowdery, Melanie Fooks and Angie Candy who ensure that we all meet on the same day, have the relevant paperwork to read and that residents queries and questions are answered or passed to the relevant committee for consideration. We are appreciative of a very efficient and tightly knit team.

With elections and changes in personal circumstances there is always some turnover and in January we welcomed Ann Brindle as a parish councillor but this May we will say goodbye to Maureen Waller and Pat Brooks who have each served for over 25 years, they will be sorely missed. Borough Councillor Derek Butler also decided not to stand in the election and his service, although not as long as Maureen's and Pat's, is also acknowledged. In the coming year the Walderslade community might finally get a properly financed community woodland but there is also the threat of more development just beyond the parish boundary so your parish council will remain vigilant. Another issue the parish council will keep pushing is the need for improvements in the M2 junction 3 and A229 highway infrastructure. It has involved the four MPs and hopes to keep pressure on Highway England and KCC to do improvements.

Finally, we have a very dedicated councillor in our midst who, in all winds and weather has delivered monthly a copy of the Downs Mail to many residents in Walderslade, my sincere thanks to Ivor Davies for carrying out this task.

Bob Hinder

Chairman Boxley Parish Council