

ANNUAL REPORT



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

It has been an unusually busy year. In addition to the normal, ongoing duties of maintenance in the village and monitoring planning matters, we have also made significant progress in tackling the various initiatives that residents asked for in the Parish Plan.

The Working Groups have done an excellent job, as you can read below. The process of formulating ideas, winning approval, and obtaining funding all takes time and effort. We are indebted to our funders: Ashford Borough Council; Colyer-Fergusson Charitable Trust; County Councillor, Richard King; and Kent County Council for the support they have given to enable our projects to move forwards and improve life in our community.

We have again decided to 'freeze' the budget requested from Ashford Borough Council, given current economic conditions. Even so, through keeping a tight lid on spending, we have been able to save some money this year with the result that we are able to match some of the grant funding and contribute ourselves towards the improvements sought in the Parish Plan. The remaining plans are, however, ambitious and we shall need significant further funds to deliver them. This will demand further successful grant applications and support from the village for fund-raising activities.

Last year, we had a very successful Hog Fair. The sun shone, thousands came, and a good time was had by all. It is regrettable that, through a lack of volunteers, we will not be repeating it this summer. Halloween and the carols around the tree at Christmas were also very happy occasions and, hopefully, will now be annual fixtures.

I would particularly like to thank our Borough Councillor, Clair Bell, who has been immensely supportive of Pluckley in the various planning issues that have arisen.

Next month, your Parish Council's term of duty ends and a new council will begin their four year term of office. I believe we have provided a very firm base upon which to build in making Pluckley a better place to live.

Martin Newman

PARISH DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT TENTERDEN AND RURAL SITES

As anticipated, this document was finally adopted last autumn, with no significant changes from the earlier drafts that affect Pluckley. The village is not included in the list of villages to receive housing development.

As it happens, the housing targets set for Ashford have now been removed, so quite how many houses will be built in the borough is under question. Pluckley, though, will see only small-scale, dispersed housing, if at all, in keeping with what residents have said they wish.

PARISH PLAN

In terms of improving life in the village, the Parish Council adopted the Parish Plan in December 2009 as its remit for action. All residents have had the opportunity to contribute to the Plan and continue to have input as the proposals for implementing the improvements come forward. In the 15 months since adoption, good progress has been made.

Of the 21 initiatives listed in the Action Plan, 12 have been dealt with, six more are currently in hand, and just three have yet to be tackled:

Dealt with:

2. Continue to support small-scale, dispersed development only. We achieved Pluckley's removal from the DPD list of villages to receive development.
3. Defend the village Design Statement. Ongoing with each planning application received.
4. Continue to resist developments of more than 10 houses. Done, and ongoing.
7. Continue to support junior football, under 10s play area, cricket, skateboarding and tennis provision. Recreation ground improvements have already commenced with new play equipment. Further improvements are planned (see under Recreation Ground below).
10. Publish a guide to health services locally. Done and distributed to all homes April 2010.
11. Explore the possibility of a practice nurse attending clinics. Explored with Charing Surgery. Not viable given stringent new hygiene regulations.
12. Look into extending the Special Landscape Area and Conservation Areas. Done. In fact, SLAs are being superseded as planning areas, and all of Pluckley is earmarked to be included in the new classification.
13. Look into the practicalities of hosting a farmers' market. Done. Insufficient support rendered this impractical.
14. Support Wealden Wheels in providing more information about their services. The Parish Council again donated £1,000 and publicises them in newsletters and on the website.
15. Publicise the Parish Council's activities better. The website has been significantly enhanced and the PC reports quarterly to the village through Communicate, delivered to every home.
19. To press for parking controls and explore the options for additional parking at the station. We have found no satisfactory solution (see under Traffic – Parking below).
21. To seek to control the numbers, size and speed of HGVs passing through the village. We monitor all planning applications and object where we perceive that they are likely to generate additional HGV traffic (see under Traffic – HGVs below).

In hand:

1. Continue to seek Local Needs units. Last autumn, we confirmed there is a need, albeit a reduced one, of just four homes. We currently await a proposal (see Local Needs below).
5. Consider how to provide more parking for village events. We plan to install a much-needed car park in the corner of the Recreation Ground in the next phase of development there (see under Traffic - Parking below).
6. Consider a new or improved village hall on the current site. We have commenced phase 1, improvement, and presented proposals for phase 2, extension (see under Village Hall below).
8. Explore further the interest in, and possibility of establishing, a Youth Club. This is currently being looked into.
16. To press for the 30mph limit to replace the current 40mph limit zone. We are currently preparing a Report to send to KCC Highways covering this. See under Traffic – Speed below.
17. To press for an extension of the current 40mph area. As 16. above.

Yet to be tackled:

9. Explore further the setting up of keep fit classes and a walking group. The latter is catered for by a number of local groups already. The keep fit class idea will be looked into.

18. To secure the installation of inter-active ‘flashing lights’ to control speed. This is just one possible solution and it will be covered in the Speed Report mentioned under 16 above.

20. To consider utilising the 154 volunteers to give Speed Watch a proper trial. This also will be covered in the Speed Report.

TRAFFIC

It was clear from the input to the Parish Plan that this is the issue that concerns residents the most. Unfortunately, it is also the most difficult to improve. We are tackling it on a number of fronts: parking, HGVs, speed, and our relationship with Highways Department at Kent County Council.

Parking – We plan to install a car park in the front corner of the Recreation Ground. This will provide much needed safer access to the recreation facilities and encourage a broader spectrum of people to use the area. It should also act as an overflow for the village centre, alleviating the congestion there. We did seek grant funding from Ashford Borough Council for this in phase 1 of our proposals but it was rejected. We shall continue though to seek funds from elsewhere.

Parking at the station is trickier. We have discussed this at length with Ashford Borough Council and no satisfactory location is currently available. In any event, as long as free parking is available along Station Road, many motorists will avoid the car parks. We have encouraged the police to check for illegal parking and they have done this on several occasions.

HGVs – Given that we are on a designated lorry route, there is a limit to what we can achieve. We have vigorously resisted those planning applications that would bring additional traffic. We have also made the point to planners that, just because we are on a lorry route, it does not mean that the roads are suitable for the size of lorries coming through.

Speed – Ideally, we would like a lower speed limit throughout the village. KCC have told us they have no plans to review rural limits. We are therefore preparing our own report for them along the same lines as they normally receive from consultants. This will make recommendations about which limit, and where, throughout the village. The report will be presented to the village before it goes to KCC.

We recognise that we might make more headway if we work in concert with other villages. We initiated therefore, with the help of Action with Communities in Rural Kent, an Inter-Village Traffic Forum. A number of local parishes are participating. The first issue this forum is tackling is to reduce speed limits between villages. It is felt that 60mph is simply too fast for many of our rural roads. A proposal has been put to Kent Association of Local Councils that the limit should be reduced nationally to 50mph on all rural C class and unclassified roads. More than 50 Kent parishes have supported this and KALC will put this as a formal proposal at the AGM of the National ALC. If accepted, then NALC will lobby HM Government.

We have also asked all the parishes in Ashford borough how they feel about applying a consistent speed limit at all village boundaries (as in France). If this idea is supported, then we will commence lobbying for this too.

Highways Department – Our relationship with KCC Highways Dept has improved over the past year. One result has been that the village received a much better service dealing with ice and snow this past winter. At the inter-village traffic forum we will shortly meet the new Head of Highways Dept to run through with him where we think they can improve further their service to villages.

VILLAGE HALL

The Parish Plan called for a new or improved hall on the existing site. We took advice and were told that the hall is sound and has a period charm. We would be most unlikely to gain funding to knock down and build a new hall. The Working Group has therefore developed a two phase programme of improvement and refurbishment in phase 1 and extension and further improvement in phase 2.

Phase 1 is already in hand with a new ceiling, insulation, heating and lighting all now in place. A hearing loop for the hard of hearing is also being installed. A new French window, refurbished floor, further insulation and redecoration will shortly follow. The cost of this, £28,000, has been met through previous fund raising and through grants obtained from KCC, the Colyer-Fergusson Charitable Trust and County Councillor Richard King.

The plans for phase 2 will extend the hall, adding a new lounge/meeting room, upgrading the kitchen, and installing new loos, including a disabled loo. The exterior will be clad to further improve insulation of both heat and sound. These plans are about to be presented to the village. They are, however, dependent upon us gaining further funding. We estimate £110,000 is required. This will mean more grant applications and more fund-raising activities.

RECREATION GROUND

The Parish Plan requires that we continue to support the sporting clubs and play facilities provided. We also wish to encourage a broader range of residents to use this facility in the heart of our village. The Working Group therefore proposed a range of improvements, which the village has accepted.

Phase 1 has already started. New play equipment, selected by the children on the School Council, has just been installed. Our thanks to Park Leisure, newly arrived at Pivington Mill, for the deal that they offered the village. We were successful in obtaining funding from Ashford Borough Council to cover this cost. The petanque piste has been moved to the top corner of the field where it attracts the evening sun. A barbecue pit is to be installed alongside and there are plans afoot for a summer season of petanque challenge matches. The low perimeter fence will be extended along the road side of the field to make the field more secure.

Phase 2 will look to add a car park at the entrance, and improve the sports pavilion. The pavilion was finally completed last autumn and became the responsibility of the Parish Council. Much needed storage will be added to accommodate the needs of the football and cricket clubs, the school and the Parish Council. We also plan to move the disabled shower room to open up the lounge area so that the pavilion can then be hired out as a venue, e.g. for children's parties.

We then wish to install a multi-games unit at the top of the field as a facility for the older children in the village. Further funds will be needed to achieve Phase 2 and these will be sought through grant applications and fund raising.

PLANNING

We have had another busy year considering 33 planning applications. Once again the majority of our recommendations supported applications and were then approved by the planning officers. Where we had serious concerns about adverse effects of an application on Pluckley we have requested the application be considered by the Planning Committee at ABC, should the planning officer's decision not agree with our request to refuse. We represented the village at these meetings, supported by our Ward Councillor Clair Bell, and were again successful in getting the recommended decision overturned on a number of applications. When these were appealed we sent our objections to the planning inspectorate and in about half of the applications the inspector refused the appeal.

The new government's 'Localism Bill' has promised to devolve more of the planning policies currently enforced by central government to local government, reflecting their promise of involvement and consultation with local people. John Bunnett, CEO of Ashford Borough Council has sent out strong signals of his support for this. However, this will not mean that Parish Councils will be making decisions on planning applications but that more of the policies will be made by local Councils and hopefully more appropriate to local conditions and needs.

Currently the Core Strategy adopted in 2008 is still in place and remains the legal framework for planning and development across the Borough. We remain under threat from major applications under the old framework and an application at Westwell Leacon could have very serious consequences for Pluckley. A review of the Core Strategy will be undertaken and approved as soon as possible allowing the Borough to decide how many and what type of development is needed. The process that allows Parishes to present their views to the Planning Committee is also being reviewed to allow a more equitable opportunity to do this. This should allow the Borough and Parishes greater power to protect our villages from unwanted development.

The Parish Council will continue to monitor planning applications, not only in Pluckley, but also in other areas, where they have the potential to cause detriment to Pluckley, in particular by the creation of additional vehicle movements, especially HGVs.

Jackie Allen

LOCAL NEEDS HOUSING

As it was some years since the need for affordable housing was checked, we surveyed the current need last September. This confirmed that the need remains, though for many fewer homes than previously. We therefore reduced the number we would support from six/ten units, to four.

We comprehensively reviewed the entire parish for potential sites and, bearing in mind the willingness or otherwise of landowners to release space, concluded with Ashford Borough Council that the only viable location was Westfields. We were naturally anxious to preserve the views and intrude on existing homes there as little as possible. The fact that there are to be only four new homes now helps in this regard.

Drawings for the proposed homes are currently awaited. They will be shown to residents as soon as we receive them.

OLDER PERSONS HOUSING

We continue to work with Ashford Borough Council, and our neighbours in Egerton, Little Chart, Smarden, Biddenden and High Halden, to consider the provision of accommodation for older people living in our community. The aim is to develop a purpose built scheme for older people to serve all the parishes, enabling older residents to remain living, with support if needed, close to family and friends.

In spring 2010 more than 50 residents responded to a survey of housing needs for older people (aged 50+). Some key findings of the survey were:

- 1/3 of respondents may be looking to move to more suitable accommodation within 10 years;
- many people would just like more suitable ordinary housing, but around 40% would be looking for some kind of 'sheltered' accommodation;
- 63% of respondents would be looking for 2 bedroom accommodation;
- the factors that were most important to respondents were being close to local facilities, close to public transport and having own self-contained accommodation;
- 60% of respondents stated a desire to live in a 'neighbouring parish' if suitable accommodation was not available in Pluckley.

The ABC Project Team have now appointed Orbit South to undertake detailed investigations into potential sites for development of a sheltered/extra care scheme for around 40 'units' (a mix of one and two bedded), and to put forward more detailed plans for what such a scheme would look like.

No suitable site has been found in Pluckley, but potential locations in other local villages have been identified. Currently, a site in Smarden is being investigated, with Orbit putting forward possible designs for an Extra Care scheme – which would include extensive communal facilities. Chris Housman is our representative on the project team, and will keep you posted on developments through our newsletters. In the meantime, if you want to find out more please contact Chris.

WEALDEN WHEELS

In 2011 Wealden Wheels started its 8th year of providing affordable Community Transport in our increasingly transport deprived area of rural Kent and I'm pleased to say that this year *Hothfield* has decided to join us as our 7th sponsoring village alongside *Charing, Egerton, Pluckley, Smarden, Challock and Chilham*. We continue to enjoy high demand from these villages and over 10,000 passenger journeys were carried out for our members last year!

We are particularly grateful to Chris Housman and Paul Ticehurst from Pluckley who took over at the end of last year when our coordinator took a 3 month sabbatical to visit relatives and friends in Australia. They kept the vehicles going out and the revenues coming in most efficiently!

We have just taken delivery of a further minibus. This was funded by grants from Ashford Borough Council and Kent County Council as well as some of our own reserves built up for this purpose in previous years. This provides even greater capacity for our members. Regrettably a significant number of our members are not able to drive the vehicles themselves and rely on our volunteer drivers. We are very short of these at the moment and if a few more people could find just one day a month to drive for us, many groups in real need would be very grateful.

To find out more about us, or to help us with occasional volunteering, ring 01233 840514 and ask for Kevin or look us up on our new website at www.wealdenwheels.co.uk.

Alan Davies

PLUCKLEY POND WARDEN

I have had another enjoyable year peering and poking in ponds. Most ponds I survey do not change much year to year. However in a recently cleared pond the balance is changed and it can take a year to settle and recolonise. Some ponds become choked or overgrown and are difficult to survey but may contain many species hidden away. Sunny or shady ponds have their own characteristics and all are essential in providing habitats for different species.

After a long hard winter ponds have woken up. I saw my first newt in my pond on 5th January. Last year I found the first newt egg on 25th March. Has anyone seen strands of toad spawn in their pond? I would love to know.

There have been reports of dead frogs being found after the thaw. In some cases hundreds of them. I do not have frogs in my pond and I would be interested to know if anyone has experienced this. Research is being carried out to find the best way of preserving pond life in freezing conditions. In the past it has been recommended to keep an area of unfrozen water supposedly minimising the effect of trapped poisonous gases. If there are fish in the pond it is not advisable to bash a hole in the ice as the shock waves may kill the fish. Float a ball on the surface to keep an airway open.

If you have not yet got a pond do create one as you will not be the only one to benefit and enjoy it. Some of the things that ponds are good for are bats, birds, water voles, grass snakes, frogs, toads, newts, dragon and damsel flies and many beetles and bees.

NB. Please do not buy Parrots feather, Canadian pondweed, New Zealand swamp stonecrop, Floating pennywort, Curly waterweed (not to be confused with Curled pondweed). These are alien invasive plants and are spreading into waterbodies and causing harm. If you are getting rid of any of these plants burn them. They can be spread by birds, on boots and wheels etc.

I am happy to be contacted about ponds on email rosrowan@hotmail.co.uk

Ros Rowan

PLUCKLEY GARDENING SOCIETY

It was sixty years ago that keen gardeners in Pluckley made a universal declaration of independence from Little Chart Gardening Society and formed their own society for the appreciation of all things horticultural and social.

In 2010 we carried on some of the earlier traditions and made some additions too. As ever, the Spring and Autumn Shows formed the centre of our activities and attracted exhibits from all age groups, including the children from Pluckley School who entered vegetables from their allotment garden which is sponsored by PGS. It was pleasing to see more entries from children as this was one of the main aims behind sponsoring the allotment. The Plant Sale alongside the Spring Show was again a popular feature and so will be repeated in the coming year.

Local events started with a talk on beekeeping in March which was attended by a dedicated few members plus others from the wider community. This was followed by the evening spent at Madrona Nursery where we were able to see the full range of the many plants and enjoy delicious refreshments. This is a popular venue as there are many less usual plants there and the setting is peaceful and relaxing. The trip to the lovely Beth Chatto Garden in June was not as well attended as anticipated but was enjoyed very much by those who did go.

Supping Pimms on a lovely summer evening in a local garden never fails to delight our members and this feature in July was no exception. This year the programme also included a talk on making gardening easier to manage which almost fitted the bill of combining business and pleasure!.

Our final trip in this special year ended with a very special visit. After being on the waiting list for some time PGS came to the top and allowed us to take a party to the private gardens of Buckingham Palace. The cost of transport to the venue was paid for from PGS funds. In addition to seeing the splendours of the state apartments we then had a guided tour when we meandered where Queen Victoria and Prince Albert planted trees to commemorate special anniversaries of their own and Prince Charles is said to have wooed Princess Diana. Despite being right in the centre of one of the busiest cities in the world it was remarkably tranquil when the peace was not disturbed by the traffic which was close by nor the barking of a single corgi.

All of the above events preceded the 2010 AGM in October which, quite fittingly broke the mould for what an AGM should be as it was our sixtieth anniversary after all! After the presentation of the accounts and election of officers we dined on fish and chips. Our President, Jill Highwood, then cut the huge commemorative cake made by Jenny Heathcote, a previous Chairman and we toasted the past, present and future members of Pluckley Gardening Society with champagne. The visiting speaker commented that she had never been to an AGM with such friendly members and such a full agenda.

Despite being very traditional PGS also embraces new things and during 2010 took the momentous step of contributing to the Pluckley Village website. For details of all our activities in the coming year, look for us in the clubs and societies section. You can also contact us by e-mail at PluckleyGardeningSociety@gmail.com when we will be delighted to hear from you and to welcome you to our very happy band of members if you do not already belong.

Pat Mors

Chairman

PARISH ASSEMBLY

All are invited to the annual public meeting of parishioners on Friday 15th April at 7.30pm in the Village Hall.

It is your chance to question the Parish Council, have your say, and enjoy a glass of wine.

BROADBAND

If you would like to see an improvement in broadband speed and reliability in Pluckley, then go onto our website www.pluckley.net where you will find a link to short questionnaire. We need to offer evidence of poor service to make the case for improvement.

HONORARY RESIDENT OF THE YEAR

All electors are invited to nominate one villager who they feel has done the most to enhance life in our village.

Nominations, with reasons, should be sent to the Clerk (see below/somewhere!) by **12th May** please.

ELECTION REMINDER

Thursday May 5th is the date set for local elections. So, to ensure you have your say in who represents you in local matters, turn up at the Village Hall and vote.

YOUR PARISH COUNCIL

COUNCILLOR	E-MAIL	TELEPHONE
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Andrew Wickham (Vice Chairman)	wickhamandrew@yahoo.co.uk	01233 840902
CLERK		
Graham Smith	clerk@pluckley.net	01622 890596

The Parish Council meets in Pluckley Village Hall at 8pm on the third Monday of each month.

Published by Pluckley Parish Council, 15 Orchard Glade, Headcorn, TN27 9SS

Printed, on recycled paper, by Headley Brothers Digital, Ashford www.headley-digital 01233 623131