

Pluckley Parish Council

Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2007

Janet Gwillim's

Chairman's report

I have decided to call it a day and will not be seeking re-election in May. I have been a parish councillor for 31 years, the last eleven as chairman and it is now time to give others a chance to show what they can do.

During my early time as a councillor, Mr W L (Slottie) Dawes was chairman, he was extremely strict about how many items I could bring up each month, looking back I must have infuriated him with my questions, but I had been asked to bring up items by the parishioners. I was the first female to be elected to the parish council and often got into trouble! Other councillors at the time were Mr Tony Highwood, Mr Jim Winder, Mr John Oxley, Mr George Homewood, senior, and Mr S Cooper. Mr Errington was the clerk.

We had no speed limit in the village and no footpath from the Thorne to the village, something the PC fought long and hard for

Annual Parish Assembly
Monday 23 April
8pm
Pluckley Village Hall
Everyone welcome

Following the business side of the evening we have invited Meridian Newsmen and Sports Reporter, Iain McBride, to give a short talk

All candidates for borough & parish elections will be invited

and it all finally came about. The rubbish tip in Chambers Green Road was fought against, not only by the parish council but also many individuals as well, unfortunately in the end the tip did get planning permission, was filled, and is now closed. Pivington Mill has developed over the years and the council has urged Ashford Borough Council and Kent County Council not to allow the site to expand until the road structure to and from the site was greatly improved. Our pleas fell on deaf ears, the road is now near collapse in places, and the lorries still use the Egerton Road. More recently, planning permission was sought by a firm wanting to use the brickyard site as a recycling works, planning permission has not been granted.

An application for a gypsy caravan on land at The Pinnacle was passed by Ashford Borough Council

amongst great opposition from at least 75 householders.

These are just a few of the items that have been on the agenda over the years.

There were only half the houses in the village when I was first a parish councillor and everyone knew almost everyone!

There were five shops and parking outside the paper shop on Forge Hill was the norm to get the papers, pay the bill, or to buy sweets: not so much traffic about, of course we could not do it now.

Through the parish council we produced the Village Appraisal and the Parish Design Statement. Planning officers at Ashford Borough Council do use the Design Statement when looking at applications in the village, so it is worth looking at if one is planning a new property or extension.

Most of the time as a councillor, I was working as a community midwife; married to a local farmer and raising two children; as well as serving at some time on the playgroup committee, tennis club, sports association, Cancer Research collection organiser, Grapevine, Friends of St Nicholas Church, and the Dering Organ Appeal as well as organising various events from the Queen's Silver Jubilee through to the Hog Fair and Halloween. When I look back I wonder how I did it. They do say ask a busy person!

I am now going to enjoy granny-hood whilst new faces sit on Pluckley Parish Council .

I wish my successors good luck and keep up the fight!

Pluckley Hog Fair
28 July

This year in aid of Pluckley church



Have you visited...?

Pluckley website (www.pluckley.net) continues to keep residents and visitors to the parish up-to-date with the latest news from the parish council, but information about local clubs and village activities. The events page is updated weekly and all Pluckley events can be found there (as long as the parish council is told about them).

Also updated, as soon as the information comes in, is the Neighbourhood Watch page. It can be found via the Council pages.

New to the website is a photo gallery of village events, and another of village scenes – if you have a photograph you feel may be suitable do please email it to clerk@pluckley.net together with

details of who took it and what it is about.

The classified pages are not as used as they could be – not only is there ‘for sale’ and ‘wanted’ but also ‘situations vacant’ and a ‘property for sale or hire’ section.

Designed by Chrysalis Computer Solutions, the Clerk to the Council, Jackie Grebby, is responsible for keeping the site up-to-date.

The cost of the site is minimal (approximately £160 p.a.) but gives invaluable information, with an average of 1,788 hits a day from around the world. It is hoped that, with local businesses paying a small charge for either a page on the site, a link to their own site, or both, the website may eventually become self funding.



Noise

The parish council often receives complaints about noisy neighbours, usually barking dogs, but recently a helicopter making regular landings and we have received several calls concerning this.

The advice is that residents should contact Ashford Borough Council Environmental Health Department on 01233 330225 and keep a log of all instances of disturbance for a month. This will help the authorities consider what action they are able to take.



Recreation Ground

Please take note:

The practising of golf is not permitted on the recreation ground.

Also prohibited are all unauthorised:

- motor vehicles, including go-karts and scooters, with the exception of wheelchairs;
- overnight camping;
- metal detecting;
- the flying of model aircraft; and
- horse riding

Dog owners are expected to clear up after their pets.

The entrance to the recreation ground is to be kept clear at all times to allow access for emergency vehicles.

The new sports pavilion

Alan Davies, Chairman, Pluckley Sports Association

The Pluckley Sports Association represents all village organisations involved in sport and recreation and contains representatives from the football, tennis and cricket clubs, the primary school, Pluckley Senior Citizens' Club, and the parish council. Its function has been to improve the sporting facilities available to villagers and for the last few years has worked hard at raising funds to provide a sports pavilion on the village recreation ground.

This year was the year when all this work came to fruition and immediately after the 2006 Hog Fair (the proceeds of which were dedicated to the pavilion) we started construction on the north side of the recreation ground. You can see that the exterior of the building is now nearing completion and that we are currently working on providing the internal plumbing and electrical fittings, kitchen equipment and flooring. I would like to thank all the people who have helped to raise funds over the past seven years, and in particular I would like to recognise the many members of Pluckley Cricket Club whose contribution of over 150 days of skilled labour has been the major factor in enabling us to complete this project this year.

We anticipate that this project will be completed in late spring. Watch the village notice board for an announcement about our opening celebrations!

The Village Meeting Place

Ann Murray

This pop-in coffee morning, on the first Tuesday of the month 10am to noon, was started to encourage people in Pluckley to meet, chat, and get to know each other. Pluckley is a diverse mixture, a long, spread-out village. To work well as a community, village members to get to know others, especially newcomers, to Pluckley.

The Village Meeting Place is separately funded by several charities but is quite independent of the church for its running costs. The church was chosen as a centre as it is warm, has a small kitchen and, very importantly, a toilet and is near the shops. The cost of a real cup of coffee and a homemade piece of cake is just 50p!

Toddlers, mothers, and grandparents of the preschool children being picked up at noon are most welcome. Dogs coming back from their walk with their owners often visit.

Do come, you will be made most welcome.

Does Pluckley need affordable housing for local people?

That is what we asked last year.

And the answer came back: Yes we do need some. Approximately 8 to 10 houses in fact.

Pluckley Parish Council is working with the English Rural Housing Association and Ashford Borough Council to find a suitable site – one that would normally not be allowed for building upon.

The aim of an affordable scheme is to give local people, who have strong connections with the parish and who cannot afford open market housing, a chance to stay or return. Many villages in the area have benefited from schemes like this, which are generally small-scale and carefully designed to fit in with the existing architecture.

The aim is to help sustain village communities by providing schemes, which reflect the needs of local people.

Rubbish

The parish council continue to be concerned about the amount of rubbish not only scattered from passing cars and people just disregarding litter etiquette but also grass cuttings and hedge clippings dumped in farmers' fields and in hedgerows opposite households. This is a dirty habit, grass cuttings can be dealt in peoples' own gardens and can make good compost, or taken to the council depot in Brunswick Road, Ashford, for disposal. Anyone seen dumping grass cuttings will be reported to Ashford Borough Council.

There are facilities for recycling glass, waste paper, and recently cans at the village hall. The parish benefits by approximately £2,000 a year from these. A further skip, which takes not only paper but also cardboard, may be found at Pluckley Thorne. In this instance the proceeds go to Riding for the Disabled. There are no facilities for recycling shoes or clothing in the parish. Dumping such items only results in a reduction of recycling credits paid to the parish.

Honouring a resident

Following on from last year's award to Angela Bates of an award as Honorary Resident of Pluckley for outstanding contribution to the village, it's now time to vote for this year's recipient.

The award confers no material honours, or special privileges, nor does it entitle the person to participate in the proceedings of the council meetings or in any ceremonial events. It is purely and simply for merit. It is open to any village inhabitant, except for parish and district councillors, and paid employees of the parish council. They must be nominated by an elector.

There is only one vote per resident and nominations should be forwarded in writing (including fax or email) to the Clerk to the Council to the address on the back page by 9am Saturday 14 April. Please state your reasons for your nomination in not more than 50 words. In the event of no suitable names being forwarded, Pluckley Parish Council reserves the right not to grant the award in any given year.

Bonfires in the village

Russell Keep

It would appear that despite previous attention being drawn to bonfires being lit during the day rather than at times when people are less likely to be outside in their gardens, or have their house windows open, some within the village continue to 'blight' others by selfishly lighting-up during the daytime.

I would like to bring to the attention of those that are being affected the stance that Ashford Borough Council takes in such circumstances.

Ashford Borough Council has a code of practice which advises people to burn between sunset and 10pm only. The Environmental Protection Act 1990 states that bonfires should not cause a smoke nuisance. If they do, then an abatement notice can be served against those individuals causing the nuisance.

You can direct your complaint to Ashford Borough Council, Environment Health Office, for the attention of Linda Hodges or Carolyn Logan Taylor; phone numbers 01233 330645 and 330571.

Please be aware of others that live in the village wishing to enjoy village life during the day time.

Wealden Wheels

Alan Davies, Finance Director, Wealden Wheels



Wealden Wheels has continued to provide affordable Community Transport to the villages of Charing, Challock, Egerton, Pluckley and Smarden during 2006/7. It is an organisation that is owned and (primarily) run by these five villages. We started operations almost three years ago using one MPV. Significant take up after our first few months of operation led to an expansion programme and we currently operate three vehicles (including a 14-seater wheelchair lift vehicle) and have acquired 173 member organisations. We also provide a service for Kent Play Clubs in which we transport children to Smeeth school's after school Play Club.

Our original business plan provided funding for a period of three years (i.e. until end March 2007). Our expansion and consequent successful negotiations for further funding has now resulted in us being adequately funded for a further 12 months.

Our current priority is to transition from a grant funded operation to a predominantly volunteer run operation, so that we can continue operating with the minimal of external financial support In the longer term. To this end, last year was a major volunteer recruitment year. We now have some 22 registered volunteers and at the end of last year some 35% of our journeys were being handled by these volunteers. Our activities for 2007 are aimed at doubling this level of volunteering (some self drive hire accounts for most of the rest) which would then provide the basis for a long term sustainable Community Transport operation for our villages.

If you can help us, even with a bit of occasional driving when it's convenient to you, you will be helping to keep this service going for your village. If driving is not your thing then we also need volunteer assistance in running the office. If you feel you can help with either of these please ring our coordinator, Kevin Parry, on 01233 713613.

Unsocial parking

That is perhaps the best way to describe the current parking problems around the village.

Pluckley Station

The parish council continues to monitor the problems in the area of the station, and are urging the police to take action, prosecuting those drivers who leave their vehicles in areas considered dangerous

Section 217 of the Highway Code says:

DO NOT park your vehicle or trailer on the road where it would endanger, inconvenience or obstruct pedestrians or other road users. For example, do not stop

- anywhere you would prevent access for Emergency Services
- opposite or within 10 metres (32 feet) of a junction, except in an authorised parking space
- near the brow of a hill or hump bridge
- opposite a traffic island or (if this would cause an obstruction) another parked vehicle
- in front of an entrance to a property
- on a bend.

In addition:

Section 222: You **MUST NOT** park on a road at night facing against the direction of the traffic flow unless in a recognised parking space. [*Laws CUR reg 101 & RVLR reg 24*]

Section 223: All vehicles **MUST** display parking lights when parked on a road or a lay-by on a road with a speed limit greater than 30 mph. [*Law RVLR reg 24*]

The Street

The parish council is aware of the increase in parking throughout the day in the Street, and this is being monitored.

The Village Hall

The car park is private property for users of the hall. The parish council is working with Ashford Borough Council to have unauthorised vehicles removed.

The Budget...

The parish council meets in October or November each year to discuss the council budget for the following year and the precept they will need from Ashford Borough Council. Although it was expected that costs would be likely to rise by 3%, it was agreed to increase the budget for 2007/8 by just 2%, taking advantage of the unexpected bonus of an extra £1,091 received in recycling credits.

The council expect to go into the new financial year with £1,600 in funds – just sufficient to cover necessary payments in April before the first half of the precept is received.

This year's budget includes £2,000 earmarked for repairs and improvements to the children's play area on the recreation ground; £1,000 towards the new sports pavilion; while costs for running the village hall will amount to some £8,100. Funds set aside for unexpected emergencies were last year set at nil: a situation not to be recommended. In fact advice is that parish councils should set a budget of 40% of their precept for 'contingencies.' Pluckley Parish Council felt that this is excessive and have included just £2,000 this year for emergencies.

Parish councils are allowed to spend money on several items, outside their remit – this is called the 'Free Resource' power and Pluckley is allowed to spend up to £4,800 during 2007/8 – if, of course, the money is there to spend! But the parish council has only earmarked £150 for this option.

So, although the precept has risen – just a little – it has been kept far lower than it might have been.

Pluckley Neighbourhood Watch

Regular notices are sent by email. To join the mailing list please send a request to: NHW@pluckley.net or telephone the Clerk to the Council on 01233 840575. If you do not have an email account please speak to a neighbour who you know does, and ask if they would pass on any information to you.

Useful numbers:

The Ashford Neighbourhood Watch office phone number is: 01233 896126

Ashford Police Station: 01233 611055;

Crimestoppers: 0800 555111;

Victim Support: 01233 647253;

Community Safety Unit 01233 660747 or email csu@ashford.gov.uk

Planning

The parish council sees on average four planning applications each month. In the majority of cases the comments of the council are upheld.

Some of the more controversial applications over the past year have included a change of use from grazing to residential; stationing of one mobile home and one touring caravan and utility room for a gypsy family in a field in Monday Boise Road. The parish council, having received many letters of objection from parishioners passed these on to Ashford Borough Council together with their recommendation that the application be refused. However, the decision of Ashford was that it be approved for the following reasons: the development would respect the context of the site and would not be harmful to the visual amenity of the area; any potential significant impacts on the amenities of nearby dwellings can be satisfactorily mitigated by conditions; the scale, location and design of the development would preserve the character and appearance of the Kent Special Landscape Area; the traffic movements generated by the development could be accommodated without detriment to highway safety; and the applicant has demonstrated that there is a need for the proposed installation in location.

Light pollution was the subject of a planning application and appeal just over the border in Little Chart at Chart Court Farm. Pluckley Parish Council wrote supporting Little Chart Parish Council and Ashford Borough Council and the Planning Inspectorate upheld the decision not to allow the 12 lighting poles with floodlights around the ménage, also supporting the enforcement notice issued. The two other appeals relating to this site: continued use of 14 existing loose boxes; conversion of a redundant building to provide 10 loose boxes were both allowed.

Some of the more minor, but important, applications brought to the parish council's notice are for fences adjacent to the highway. These are usually 'retrospective' applications as many residents are unaware that such fences should not be more than one metre in height.

Current planning applications are brought to each council surgery held on the fourth Saturday of each month. It is always possible to bring paperwork for earlier applications and decisions on request.



Mobile Phones

Register your mobile phone for free on the National Mobile Phone Crime Units web site at www.immobilise.com

Burglar Alarms

Anyone with Burglar Alarms should be aware that they need to register 2 keyholders. These should be registered with the Police and the Environmental Health Department. Failing to register leaves them vulnerable, if entry has to be made to silence the alarm.



Recreation ground access

Thanks to a grant from Kent County Council, via Cllr Richard King, a new disabled access ramp and gate on to the recreation ground was installed in February.

Thursday 3 May 2007:

- *Parish Council Elections & Ashford Borough Council Elections*
- *Polling Station Pluckley Village Hall, 7am to 10pm*
- *There are 9 seats on Pluckley Parish Council*

Become a councillor

There are around 10,000 community, parish and town councils in England and Wales; they are corporate bodies and local authorities. They have a powerful voice to represent local people.

Parish councils are the part of local government closest to the people: They serve the smallest area and are responsible for the most local of matters. Very importantly, these councils can “precept” - raising a sum collected with the council tax each year to improve facilities and services for local people.

Parish councils have a number of basic responsibilities in making the lives of local communities more comfortable, many of which are often taken for granted. Essentially these powers fall within three main categories: representing the whole electorate within the parish; delivering services to meet local needs; and striving to improve quality of life in the parish.

Parish councillors represent the people living in their local area at the closest level to the community. When decisions are being made they are there to put your views across. Councillors are elected by the public every four years.

Visiting your council is the best way to find out what happens there. By law, ordinary people are allowed to be present at most council business.

Most parish councillors are not party political. If you wish to stand as a party political candidate, you are also welcome to do so. Contact your party’s local office Conservative Party (www.conservatives.com), Green Party (www.greenparty.org.uk), Labour Party (www.labour.org.uk), Liberal Democrats (www.libdems.org.uk), for more information.

The Electoral Commission has a guide on candidates at local elections in England and Wales (<http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/elections/Candidates.cfm>).

Key dates:

Notice of Election – 5pm Tuesday 27 March

Close of Nominations – Noon Wednesday 4 April

Publication of Statement of Persons Nominated – Noon Tuesday 10 April



A sign of the times?

James Ashby

The more observant among you will have noticed the disappearance of the Pluckley sign up by the Egerton crossroads just before Christmas – and no, it wasn’t removed by persons unknown! The original plan was to have the old sign ‘spring cleaned’, the paintwork retouched as required, and then it was to be re-hung.

A nice idea, but one that did not take account of the English weather, or the ability of softwoods to resist rot. Sadly, it would have cost more to repair the old sign than to have a new one made.

The solution has been to take a high quality digital photo of the old sign, work some digital magic on it to ‘repair’ the cracked and faded paintwork, add a shadow to it to make it look more 3D, and then to print the image onto a new type of sign board which is backed by marine grade ply to resist the ravages of the weather.

The new sign is expected to last for around two and half years with no maintenance – after which time we can replace it again. Overall this should mean that the parish council saves money as we will not need to pay for any annual maintenance (which was running at £100 a year for the old sign).

This time, it took around three months to find a printer who could not only do the job to the required standard, but also not throw his rattle out the pram when we chased up the sign – now we have found one, it means that we can re-order the next sign before we need it, and then simply replace the worn out one.

Pluckley Parish Council Meetings and Committees

Pluckley Parish Council usually meets on the second Monday of each month, at 8pm in Pluckley Village Hall. Other committees generally meet on fourth Mondays.

Details of meetings will be published on the Pluckley website (www.pluckley.net) as soon as they are available. You will need Acrobat Reader® to access them. All meetings of the council are open to the public and everyone is welcome to come along.

Agenda are displayed in the village a minimum of three working days before each meeting. On the agenda is a 'public session' – this usually lasts 10 minutes and allows any residents to address the meeting.

Council members regularly attend meetings of Ashford Borough Council's Parish Forum, Weald Police Forum, and Kent Association of Parish Councils.

2007 Meetings dates

(these dates are subject to change and there may be further meetings if a need arises.)

* = Annual Meetings TBA = Date to be agreed

Jan 8	Full Council	June 11	Full Council
Jan 22	Plans Committee	June 25	Plans Committee
	Recreation Committee		Recreation Committee *
	Village Hall Committee	July 9	Full Council
		July 30	Plans Committee
Feb 12	Full Council		Village Hall Committee
Feb 26	Plans Committee		Committee
	Recreation Committee	Aug 13	Full Council
		Aug 28	Plans Committee
Mar 12	Full Council		Recreation Committee
Mar 26	Plans Committee		Committee
	Recreation Committee	Sept 10	Full Council
	Village Hall Committee	Sept 24	Plans Committee
			Village Hall Committee
April 16	Full Council		Recreation Committee
April 23	Annual Parish Assembly	Oct 8	Full Council
April TBA	Plans Committee	Oct 22	Plans Committee
	Recreation Committee		Recreation Committee
May 14	Full Council *	Nov 12	Full Council
May TBA	Plans Committee *	Nov 67	Plans Committee
	Village Hall Committee*		Village Hall Committee
		Dec 10	Full Council

Contacts

Parish Clerk:

Jackie Grebby, Giles Farm, Pluckley, TN27 0SY Tel: 01233 840575, Fax: 01233 840087
clerk@pluckley.net

Pluckley Parish Councillors

James Ashby
Andrew Buchanan
Peter Campbell
Alan Davies
Janet Gwillim (Chairman)
Russell Keep
Ann Murray
Trevor Oliver
Andrew Wickham

Member of Parliament

Damian Green Tel: 01233 820911
email: greend@parliament.uk
website: www.damiangreen.org.uk

Kent County Councillor:

Richard King 01233 756592
richard.king@kent.gov.uk

Ashford Borough

Councillors:

Andrew Wickham 01580 879601 (office hours)
Robert Taylor 01233 850994
robert@pluckley.net

The parish council holds an open morning (9:30 to 10:30am) on the fourth Saturday most months in the village hall.

Council minutes and current planning application are available for inspection. Other documents within the public domain may also be viewed if an application is made in writing to the Clerk to the Council at least 5 days before the surgery. All residents are invited to attend.