

Pluckley Parish Council

Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2009

Martin Newman

Chairman's Report

First of all, an apology for the late production of this Annual Report, prompted by the resignation of the Parish Council and the delay before the new one was in place.

2009 has been a very busy year for Pluckley Parish Council with a great swell of interest in what has been happening, especially around the question of Pluckley being in Tier 3 of the Ashford Local Development Framework (LDF). I don't think anyone can remember parish council meetings being so well attended in the village hall, for some time.

We have now been taken off Tier 3 and I am confident that we will now put our differences behind us and concentrate on trying to deliver for the village the things it has said it wants: traffic control, an improved village hall, more services and better communication.

We have worked hard to reduce the parish council budget for this year. Last year there was a jump in the precept. This was due in part to monies which we needed to put aside for contingencies. Luckily we have not needed the contingency money so it has been rolled over to this year, thus

Ashford Borough Council's LDF

The Local Development Framework (LDF) is replacing the current planning system and was introduced as a result of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004



allowing for a modest reduction, though Ashford Borough Council is trying to push new responsibilities our way for which the parish must budget. We shall continue to contain costs wherever possible..

The newly rejuvenated storage facility on the recreation ground is now operational thanks to a modest contribution from parish funds and help from Community Payback, who provided the workers. The Junior Football Club has gone from strength to strength swelling in numbers and has even started winning matches.

There will not be a Hog Fair this year as no one came forward to organise it, but we hope to be able to restage this in 2010. Please let us know if you are interested in helping.

But the village has not been bereft of outdoor entertainment: the church held a successful traditional village fete on 20 June in the gardens of the Old Rectory.

I am pleased to say too that Pluckley Stores has been entered into the Rural Retailer of the Year competition and has been shortlisted. The judges will be visiting the shop on Wednesday 5 August. Please do support your local shop.

Pluckley & the LDF Core Strategy – the current position please see page 3

You can read all the LDF information available by looking on www.ashford.gov.uk and typing Local Development Framework in the search window. If you have any problems accessing the internet, then the parish clerk or any parish councillor will be able to lend you a copy.

Planning

by Jackie Allen

The parish council considered 24 Planning applications and 7 appeals this year. In the majority of cases the comments of the parish council were upheld. They also supported Ashford Borough Council [ABC] in a three-day appeal against refusal to permit a retrospective planning application with our ward councillor (Clair Bell), two parish councillors, and the clerk in attendance in which the appeal was refused. There are currently three appeals outstanding relating to refusal of a retrospective planning application and subsequent enforcement notice for an alleged unauthorised building and alleged unauthorised use of land and buildings. Two of these appeals will be heard by hearing and the third by Public Inquiry in Ashford. The parish council is supporting Ashford Borough Council in these matters.

Once applications are received they are usually discussed at the next parish council meeting held on the second Monday in the month, following receipt of acceptance of the application by Ashford. If decisions are needed before the next parish council meeting convenes, a plans committee is called for the fourth Monday of the month. While the parish council does not notify applicants advising them when their application is being considered, details of all applications to be discussed are shown in advance on the relevant agenda. This is put up on the parish council notice board outside the village school and usually in the Thorne Bus Shelter and the village hall. (Unsocial parking in the station area usually

means that access cannot be made to the bus shelter opposite the Dering Arms.)

Those of you with access to the internet can find details of planning applications, decisions, appeals and enforcement notices at www.ashford.gov.uk or www.ukplanning.com together with any comments relating to the application. You may also submit your own comments to ABC who will include them on their website. After a decision has been made all comments are removed unless the application has gone to appeal.

The parish council do not make decisions on planning applications: they are merely consultees to ABC along with other consultees. Pluckley Parish Councillors take their planning responsibilities very seriously, trying to keep a balance between supporting the right of property owners to enjoy their homes and properties and preventing

development that may infringe on other people's enjoyment of their homes and surroundings.

Development that may cause concern is unauthorised building works, change of use of buildings and land, expansion under permitted rights, and expansion of businesses to a size that was not originally envisaged. We will continue to closely monitor all such activities where we believe this will be to the detriment of the village and its residents. We also monitor applications that are not in Pluckley if they have the potential to be detrimental to Pluckley.

Current planning applications are brought to each council surgery held on the fourth Saturday of each month 9:30 to 10:30am in Pluckley Village Hall Committee Room. It is always possible to bring paperwork for earlier applications and decisions on request.

Managed housing for the elderly

By Martin Newman

Pluckley Parish Council is currently in the early stages of exploring the possibility of providing managed housing for elderly residents. This is an inter-village project. The other villages involved are Biddenden, Charing, Egerton, Little Chart, High Halden, and Smarden.

The idea would be to provide a number of homes, with communal facilities and, possibly, a resident warden, in one of the villages. The project would need to be based close to transport links and other services and facilities. It is expected some homes would be rented and some shared equity, so could suit present owners who are finding their existing property too much to manage but wish to retain ownership.

Such a development could be sited on an exception site, like local needs housing, and would therefore be outside some of the usual planning restrictions for suitable sites

At this stage we are still finding out about the possibilities, so if anyone has any views, or would themselves be interested in such accommodation, would they please contact Martin Newman on 01233 840231.

LDF core strategy – the current position

By Andrew Wickham and Martin Newman – Chairman and Vice-chairman

Given the expressed wish of the Parish Council and the lack of suitable sites, Pluckley has now been dropped from Tier 3 of the LDF Core Strategy of Ashford Borough Council. This is in the publication version of the Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD, which is open for consultation until 11 August.

What does this mean?

Assuming this document is approved, residential development in the village would then be as it has been for the past fifteen years or so, i.e. limited to scattered 'windfall sites' of fewer than five dwellings. This is as the village wanted in its input to the Parish Plan.

We remain committed to seeking the development of Local Needs homes, which have nothing to do with Tier 3. These are homes built specifically for local people, for rental or shared ownership. The target we have agreed with ABC is 6-10 homes.

For further information, try ABC's website: www.ashford.gov.uk and look under Planning and Building Control, then Planning Policy.

Pluckley Brickworks

Jackie Allen

Since my report last year, there has been no development on the former Brickworks site. A planning application for a light industrial unit on the site in conjunction with housing on the adjacent garage site had been submitted and was subsequently refused by Ashford Borough Council [ABC] planners.

A further planning application for the construction of an alternative haul road was submitted in September 2007. Pluckley Parish Council put forward an unprecedented five pages of objections to this, fearing it was the first step in further applications for the construction of industrial buildings or another attempt to get permission for a waste recycling centre. This application is still live and we understand ABC is awaiting receipt of further information from the applicant.

During ABC's extensive Local Development Framework [LDF] process, started in 2003 and adopted in July 2008, two sites on the Brickworks were submitted for consideration for housing development. These sites were the subject of considerable discussion at the Pluckley Community Workshop organised by ABC in January when an invited cross-section of Pluckley residents had the opportunity of expressing their views to four very senior planning managers and officers. An ABC report on the workshop shown on the Pluckley website includes the two Brickworks sites. One site was immediately ruled out. The other site, which encompasses the brownfield area, was seen as a unique opportunity to create an environmental sanctuary and public open space utilising the lake

that could be used by local people. However, it was understood that to enable this open space limited development would probably have to be provided as a trade off for the developer. It was clearly identified that commercial development is not desired in this location.

The village identified their preferences, but what will be allowed? There is no doubt that there is a justified planning objection to housing development because of the distance from local Pluckley village services; there are also a number of other policies for which this site does not meet the necessary planning criteria for housing. Whether being removed from Tier 3 of the LDF Core Strategy would rule out housing instead of industry is presently unclear and we are awaiting further clarification. Is there a possibility that some housing development may be accommodated to enable the release of other development, principally additional car parking for the station? Could this be enabled even without housing? Again, we await clarification.

This site has B2 industrial development permission, but the village does not want any development that will create more than a modest number of traffic movements: most particularly HGV vehicles. The traffic capacity of roads in Pluckley has already exceeded its limit and the parking problems in the station area are creating serious highway dangers and problems for nearby residents. We shall continue to keep a constant watch on developments and work with ABC planners for a satisfactory outcome for the future of the Brickworks site.

Pluckley Village Hall

Mike Whatman

Your village hall has had a steady stream of bookings for all types of activities throughout the year.

The lawn came into its own for weddings and parties in the summer, having lovely views across the countryside together with being enclosed to keep children safe.

Why not after school come and hold your children's party here, with lots of room for them to play their party games inside or outside safely, all at a reasonable hourly rate?

The village hall hiring fees are very flexible from hiring at an hourly rate, daily rate, and special wedding package being from 4pm on the Friday through Saturday to midday on the Sunday all for £160

Please consider your hall for your events, kindly contact the clerk for more information, who will be glad to discuss your requirements.



Pluckley Station Action Group (PSAG)

Pluckley Station Action Group held two meetings this year, one in June 2008 and one in February 2009. Jo Morton has attended numerous Meet the Manager sessions at London stations, and in September 2008 Chris Clark attended Southeastern's Stakeholder Forum on behalf of PSAG, asking questions about extending the platform and parking capacity. Southeastern's answers suggest that there are no plans to extend the platform or provide additional car parking, but that both situations remain under review.

In February 2009, Chris Clark chaired a public meeting at the Dering Arms. This focused on the issue of parking around the station and was attended by local residents and users of the station. PC Kerry Dunne and PCSO Paul Moorey attended and told those present about recent developments. Kerry & Paul had been to the village to observe the number of cars parked outside the station car park. Despite the perception that cars parked outside the car park might belong to people from outside the village, a spot check confirmed that of 40 vehicles, 75% belonged to people from Pluckley and about 10 belonged to people from Charing.

The police have the power to issue a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) of £30 for causing an unnecessary obstruction. They had exercised this power the previous week, issuing two FPNs in connection with parking on the hatched area at the entrance to the car park. Parking in a dangerous position e.g. too near the bridge over the railway is a criminal matter. The owners of cars found parked in such positions were going to be sent a letter by the local Roads Policing Officer explaining the legislation, to discourage them from doing so again.

After a lively discussion, the group agreed that restrictions on street parking are not desirable without sufficient parking capacity at the station. The group therefore agreed to work with the police and Kent Highways to prepare to introduce parking restrictions, to be brought into effect and enforced once there is sufficient parking capacity; and to look at sites in the vicinity of the station where additional parking capacity could be provided.

In the next year, we will continue to pursue these issues, as well as pressing Southeastern and Network Rail to maintain/improve the train service to/from Pluckley. We will also consider the possibility of attracting additional facilities such as taxis and refreshments.

For more information please contact Andrew Buchanan (buchanan@pluckley.net) or Andrew Wickham (wickhamandrew@yahoo.co.uk) or Jeff Moody (jeff.moody@pluckley.net).

Old pavilion = new storage

Many of you will have noticed the work being done to the old sports pavilion on the recreation ground.

Although the parish council has got permission for a new storage building near the new pavilion, it will be some time before sufficient funds can be raised. In the meantime, the old pavilion at the other end of the recreation ground is being renovated with the help of Community PayBack. This means that the cost is confined just to the purchase of materials.

The parish council is very grateful for all the help that the Probation Service has given the parish and the hard work that is being done by Community PayBack. The council is also very grateful to Countrystyle Recycling for donating of one of their skips to take away the rubbish created by the renovations

The Pluckley Parish Plan or Vision for Pluckley 2020

So, what's been happening since you all filled out the questionnaires?

This, together with the workshop held on 11 September constituted the village's input towards the Parish Plan.

A parish plan looks at the aspirations, problems and issues within a village and *then* puts forward suggestions for resolving them. This is done through the formation of an Action Plan. This Action Plan needs to be approved by Ashford Borough Council and is adopted by our own Parish Council.

At the July Parish Council meeting, Working Groups were set up to develop all the issues coming out of the village's input. These Working Groups will concentrate on specific topics eg. Traffic, Leisure and Services, and will propose the formal Action Plan for realising the village's aims over the coming months.

We expect to have the Plan finalised in the Autumn. It will then be published and distributed around the village. It will also then become the Parish Council's remit for action on behalf of the village.

Wealden Wheels

Alan Davies, Finance Director, Wealden Wheels

April 2008 to March 2009 was an exciting year for Wealden Wheels for a number of reasons. For our previous four years the majority of our funding had come from the European Community's Rural Development Fund. This funding stream came to an end last year and we therefore had to replace it with further funding. I'm glad to say that Kent County Council listened carefully to our arguments that we had made a significant contribution to meeting local rural transport needs and awarded us a most helpful grant from their Rural Transport fund. This together with further contributions from organisations in our 'patch' (thank you Challock Goose Fair Committee) together with further member growth and some operational economies enabled us to balance the books and to continue to provide a good level of service to our Communities.

The village of Chilham, next door to our northernmost member village Challock, having heard of us from their neighbours applied to join and are now a full village member.

During the year we also discussed partnership with East Kent Strokes (EKS), an organisation dedicated to helping local stroke victims, and after helping them acquire a suitable flexible (wheelchair or seats) vehicle, have set up a partnership whereby we manage their vehicle (maintenance, insurance bookings etc.) and we share the benefit with them when we use it for our members.

Finally, our increased size of operation (four shared vehicles now) and the need for larger office and more storage space led to us moving from Charing to The Old Granary at Pevington Farm where we now have better secure storage for the vehicles and our equipment and we share the costs of a larger office with East Kent Strokes. We are most grateful to Andrew Wickham and his family for providing us with an affordable home here!

Recreation Ground

We are obliged, for health and safety reasons, to remind you that the following unauthorised activities are not allowed:

- golf practising
- 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.

Thank you

Bonfires – a code of practice

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, phone numbers 01233 330225.

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

Noise

The parish council often receives complaints about noisy neighbours, usually barking dogs.

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.

Beware children playing!

The increasing number of vehicles parked on Westfields' roads is causing concern.

The parish council draw residents' attention of the need to consider children's safety in that area.

Pond Report

By Ros Rowan, Pond Warden

The really cold spring delayed amphibian activity this year by about three weeks. There were numerous letters in the papers from people worried that the frogs had failed to spawn but Spring eventually arrived.

I went on a course titled *Getting Toads out of a Hole* run by the Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group at the new Singleton Environmental Centre. The project was launched in November 2008 as an initiative aimed to collect information about amphibian populations in general and specifically toad populations. A lot of attention has been given to monitoring the Great Crested Newt populations but this is not the case for toads and frogs and grass snakes. I am surveying for all these species this year which will help the Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group to identify toad and frog breeding sites, to get a better understanding of toad distribution in the country and to identify important toad sites and to develop a habitat suitability for toads. I would be grateful for your help too and there are forms for you to take and fill up during the summer to monitor your gardens which you can return to me or to the address on the form. It would be very exciting to have such a mass survey of the area so do please take part and tell your friends as I have plenty more forms.

The only toads I have seen locally this year were two dead ones on the road in March, but I was lucky to be included in a night survey of some of the ponds round Sissinghurst Castle and saw plenty that night.

I have only seen one pond with frogspawn and no toadspawn.

So far I have surveyed twelve ponds in Pluckley this spring. Nine ponds are in agricultural land and three are garden ponds. Great Crested newts were in all the garden ponds and in one of the field ponds. Good habitat for foraging and hibernation is vital to the survival of the newts and the surveys may indicate that gardens are really important places. Please leave rough areas where you can and piles of logs and stones. Compost and muck heaps are good places for grass snakes and slow worms to lay their eggs. Adult newts spend only a short time in the water so a pond that dries out is still important.

I have had a fellow BTCV student to help me with night surveying which has made it much more fun and rather safer. A big thank you to Sean. I have made thirty nine visits to the ponds starting on 21 February when I saw the first Great Crested Newts and in March I saw the first egg. Surveying will go on for another couple of months to try to find out whether the newts have bred successfully

Village helpers required

Can you spare some time to help the parish throughout the year at different times, occasionally for an odd hour or so or for longer when we hold events like the Hog Fair.

Nothing that is strenuous. Just tidying, trimming, and cleaning up areas around the village and generally helping at events, with the times that suit you. You will end up meeting other villagers and have a laugh on the way.

If you would like to join our merry team, please telephone Mike Whatman on 840044 who can explain more. Go on come and join us.

Pluckley Gardening Partnership

By Pat Morss, Pluckley Gardening Society

Politicians waffle on about building community spirit, promoting healthy eating, children getting enough fresh air and exercise , reducing our carbon footprints , protecting the environment, strengthening international links, getting people of different ages and varied backgrounds working together etc. etc. etc. The list is endless and it is rare that one single enterprise can do all these things but this is what is happening in Pluckley with the Pluckley Gardening Partnership.

With effect from November 2008 Pluckley Gardening Society - mainly rather older - decided to sponsor and assist Pluckley Primary School - definitely very young - with the plot of land alongside the churchyard adjacent to Station Road. At that time the patch looked very sad with the weeds slowly re-claiming their former territory – saving the local environment - so the first act was to recruit some muscle to fight this particular battle. Pluckley Gardening Society and Community Payback - people from very different backgrounds - willingly meet this challenge by attending every Monday morning to do the heavy digging, and lay out the plot according to the overall plan drawn up by Vivien Hunt, head gardener from Godinton House – using local expertise. The boundary has been planted with multi-coloured *cornus* and *salix* fronted by lady's mantle so that there will be colour throughout the year. Raised beds are being created thanks to a generous donation of compost from CountryStyle - a local business - with one for each class for vegetables and two extra ones for herbs and perennial flowers. A diamond bed is waiting to be planted up with wigwams for sweet peas and climbing beans, flowers and corn on the cob but the blackcurrant bushes, raspberries and rhubarb are getting on with growing already to provide fruit for the summer – all to encourage healthy eating.

The teachers and children are currently choosing what they want to sow and plant and will soon be out at the patch in the centre of the village – getting fresh air and exercise - encouraged by passers by looking over the newly cleaned boundary wall – improving the heartbeat of the whole village.

Government targets – easy peasy! Perhaps we should start on the economy next!

Allotments in Pluckley

Problem

The village has no allotments. The parish council has no funds with which to purchase land if it became available

Solution

There must be many vegetable plots in villagers' gardens that are now no longer in use and are slowly becoming overgrown. Likewise there are many people in the village that would like to grow their own vegetables but do not have the space. The villager with the unused vegetable plot needs to meet the villager that wants to grow vegetables, they both then can agree times and days when the plot can be worked.

Benefits

- 👉 The grower gets lots of vegetables.
- 👉 The plot is not overgrown anymore and sets off the garden beautifully
- 👉 Just as important both villagers have got to know another villager.
- 👉 Both villagers are happy.

If you would like to participate in the scheme please contact Mike Whatman on 840044. With your details and requirements then hopefully we can get you both to meet each other and agree times and days.

Disclaimer: this is not a parish council run initiative and the parish council can not be held responsible for any problems.

Pluckley Parish Council Meetings

Pluckley Parish Council usually meets on the second Monday of each month, at 8pm in Pluckley Village Hall.

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.

An agenda is 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 Local Councils.

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

Council minutes and current planning applications 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.

The parish website

www.pluckley.net continues to keep residents and visitors to the parish up-to-date with the latest news from the parish council, and 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.

There are two photo galleries: village events, and 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.

Advertising on the classified pages is free to all residents.

The cost of the site is minimal but gives invaluable information, with an average of 3,500 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.

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