

# **ANNUAL REPORT 2014-5**



## ***CHAIRMAN'S REPORT***

Welcome to this Annual Report from your Parish Council for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015. Besides telling you what your Parish Council has been up to over the past year, it includes reports from village organisations and looks forward to the year ahead.

A Parish Council's term of office aligns with the Government's and so your Council has to stand down. Anyone wishing to be a Parish Councillor (including existing Councillors) had to be nominated and seconded. Pluckley elects nine Parish Councillors. However, only seven names were put forward. These seven will therefore be elected unopposed, with no need for a vote, on the 7<sup>th</sup> May. Your Parish Councillors are shown on the back page of this report. I'd like to welcome Sue Beattie and Mike Whatman as new Councillors (although Mike has been one before!), and welcome back all my colleagues who have decided to continue to give up much of their spare time to carry on the good work. I would also like to thank Paul Ellard and Chris Warricker, who have stood down, for their work and support over the past year. This does mean that we have two vacancies, and we will be looking to co-opt two people to fill these. I would be delighted to hear from anyone who would like to be considered.

Turning to the year gone by, it's been a year of steady work to keep the village running, rather than any major developments. A large part of Council meetings tends to be taken up with 'planning' issues, the largest of which was an application to build 50 houses on the Brickworks, to which we objected. It is clear that the Borough Council's housing development plans means that we need a robust strategy in place to reinforce our local Plan. We are therefore preparing a Neighbourhood Plan which carries more weight with Local and Central Government (see later).

Some of the less routine things taking up our time this year were: refurbishing the village hall kitchen, planning the village hall extension, repairing the Pavilion after a break-in, putting non-slip paint on the Pavilion steps after a minor accident, seeing the Westfields 'local needs' homes built and occupied, welcoming a new Neighbourhood Watch Coordinator, removal of the recycling facilities at the hall, arranging the Christmas tree (replacing the first one!) and sending the Village Sign for refurbishment.

Here's to 2015! Please don't hesitate to speak to any of your Councillors if you have any issues or concerns about life in our village.



## **FINANCE**

The Parish Council finances are in good shape with income just exceeding expenditure last year, and a 'war chest' building up for envisaged expenditure. The full Income and Expenditure figures to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 are available from the Clerk, or viewable on the website. Proposed expenditure next year includes the hoped-for major improvements at the Village Hall, traffic and speed control and QEII recreation ground (see items below).

In view of the anticipated cost of the Village Hall development in particular, we have reluctantly asked for a significant increase of 31% in the Precept that we receive from residents via the Council Tax.

## **PARISH PLAN / NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

The updated Parish Plan, which was adopted in 2013, continues to set the agenda for the Parish Council. The main objectives are to support the volume and style of development residents have called for, further improve the Village Hall, increase social activity in the village, and contain the volume and speed of traffic as far as possible.

You may have seen that Pluckley has recently been accorded formal 'Neighbourhood' status. We decided to apply for this in order to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan. This plan will set out the sites, size and style of development that would be acceptable to residents and, when adopted, will become part of Ashford Borough Council's (ABC's) Local Plan. This will give the Plan higher status in planning terms and offer the best control that the village can hope to achieve over what happens in development terms.

The Neighbourhood Plan process will specifically address development within the Parish, with the existing Parish Plan and the Design Statements remaining valid alongside it. To produce the Neighbourhood Plan, discussions will be held within the village through a series of workshops, meetings will be held with developers and landowners, and we will be liaising throughout with ABC. We hope to complete the Plan during 2015. **Workshops are planned for the evenings of 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> May at 8pm in the Village Hall. If you would like to participate in one of them, please contact the Clerk.**

## **PLANNING**

We have seen more planning applications this year. We now deal typically with four applications per month. We are keen to support applications wherever possible, with the majority being subsequently approved by Ashford Borough Council, although there have been some significant differences of opinion between us and ABC this past year.

The Brickworks site has long been a thorn in the village's side, and a planning application was received in mid-2014 to build 50 houses a small industrial unit and a free car park. Your Council felt that this number of houses is not sustainable, and objected. The application has apparently been placed on hold, so we have no outcome to report.

As this report goes to press we still have no news on the outcome of the Dowle Street Solar Farm appeal (we objected to this application), where the Government Inspector's decision seems overdue.



## **QE11 RECREATION GROUND**

The court of the multi-games unit was resurfaced this year at significant cost. We have also installed a new swing at the bottom end of the field. This concludes the programme of providing new equipment that we embarked on five years ago.

Further action will be needed, however, as the second tennis court will need to be resurfaced before long and this is a costly item.

We are planning to install a defibrillator at the pavilion which can save lives in the event of cardiac arrest. The pavilion is also having a security alarm and lighting fitted subsequent to an attempted break in in 2014.

## **LOCAL NEEDS HOUSING**

The approved development of four new homes at Westfields (two 1-bedroom and two, 2-bedroom flats) is now complete, with the properties all being occupied by people with a strong Pluckley connection. These homes accommodated all the Pluckley names on the waiting list so, for the moment, we see no pressing need for further 'local needs' homes.

## **TRAFFIC & ROADS**

Traffic continues to give rise to concern within the village. The recently expanded operations at the clay extraction site towards Smarden have seen more HGVs passing through the village. Whilst we were powerless to prevent a long-since approved activity, we have asked for the operating hours to be restricted. We have also written to the owners to instruct their drivers to observe the speed limits, which few seem to do. We continue to monitor all planning applications for their possible impact on traffic and object to any that are likely to generate high levels of traffic, particularly HGVs.

In an effort to restrict the speed of vehicles through the village, we are acquiring a speed control sign which can be mounted at various locations. This has proved successful in other local villages, notably Harrietsham, and we consider the investment to be money well spent. We still want the existing 40mph limit area to be reduced to 30mph and shall be continuing to press KCC to achieve this.

The issue of on-street parking around the station remains, and has actually worsened in recent months. The Neighbourhood Plan will afford an opportunity to take a strategic look at all the sites in the area to search for the best solution. We do not anticipate, however, that this will easily be resolved given the likely increase in commuter traffic and the high cost of parking at Ashford and Headcorn.

The problem of water flowing down Forge Hill was partially tackled over a year ago, but some problems remain. We have been promised by KCC that further drainage will be installed to remedy the problem.

Potholes continue to cause problems, residents are encouraged to report these to KCC Highways, where there is an excellent on-line process for tracking repairs.



## **VILLAGE HALL**

The Village Hall has had a good year. Supported by an active committee it has been well taken care of and has had a reasonable number of hirings. Our hall is an excellent venue for family and children's parties, being large enough, but not too large, as well as for meetings, shows and fitness classes (for example – 'pilates' on Wednesday mornings: contact Nicci on [nicci.mcbride@btopenworld.com](mailto:nicci.mcbride@btopenworld.com)).

In the autumn, a very popular Quilt and Craft show benefitted hall funds by over £1,000 and this event will take place again this September when we hope to surpass last year's success, with an additional exhibition of about twenty Canadian Red Cross quilts to complement more local exhibits. If you have any textile works to display, contact me on 840280 or Sue on 840544. This addition to the funds meant that we needed less support from the Parish Council, much to their delight!

Plans are well under way for an extension to provide a new entrance foyer and toilets, to include a disabled toilet at long last. This will depend, however, on us being able to raise support from Grants to match the amount promised by the Parish Council.

Hall bookings are now being handled by me on 01233 840280 or e-mail me at [Judith.pool@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:Judith.pool@hotmail.co.uk). Please see the Parish Magazine for full details. My thanks to everyone who has supported us this year.

***Judy Pool (Chair of Village Hall Committee)***

## **NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH**

There is a strong feeling amongst NHW people that it works better if the areas are small and manageable: for example a single street or road or small groups of houses. The current system of having one coordinator arguably does not work as well as it could because Pluckley is made up of the three centres of the Village centre, Pluckley Thorne and Chambers Green, all over quite a wide area. So for example if a house in the village gets broken into, this will be of more concern to the immediate neighbourhood than it might to those who live further away.

With this in mind we are looking to implement a system of multiple coordinators to look after smaller areas. A good start might be to split the role into three for the village, Pluckley Thorne and Chambers Green as a start and then move over time to further subdivide these areas. In this way we may not need a single coordinator as now although there may be a requirement for an overall position as a single point of contact. We are planning an open forum in the village hall in the summer which will be a chance to gather as many views as possible. In the meantime please get in touch if you are keen to help look after a smaller area. Please email [NHW@pluckley.net](mailto:NHW@pluckley.net) or call 07900 433403.

If you don't already get the NHW email Bulletins, there is a free subscription page on the Pluckley Parish Council website at <http://nhw.pluckley-village.co.uk/>.

**PLEASE REMEMBER CALL THE POLICE ON 101 IF YOU SEE SOMETHING  
SUSPICIOUS OR ON 999 IF A CRIME IS IN PROGRESS.**

***Martin Chambers (Neighbourhood Watch Coordinator)***



## **WEALDEN WHEELS**

Wealden Wheels has just completed its 11th year of operation and continues to provide affordable Community Transport to the villages of Challock, Charing, Chilham, Egerton, Pluckley, and Smarden (who all support our work with annual grants) and the surrounding areas.

We have also just finished the first full year with Liz Reid and Chris Housman sharing our Coordinator's role and I'm really pleased to say they have had a very positive impact on recruiting new members and particularly new volunteer drivers, on whom we are so dependent.

We have noticed an increase in members from areas outside our core Parishes. We have therefore introduced a 2-tier pricing scheme with higher rates for members outside these Parish boundaries. This ensures the grants we get from each founding Parish Council are directly subsidising fares for members within these villages.

In order to maintain affordable hire rates for our villages we work to keep our costs as low as possible. We have rationalised our fleet down to 3 vehicles and would like to replace our largest (17-seater), oldest vehicle which is our most expensive to run. We applied in December to a new Government Community Transport Initiative to provide new minibuses to local community groups and we have just heard that our application has been successful! We will shortly have a much more reliable and cost efficient vehicle to help us to maintain affordable services.

To find out more about us, or to help us (*we always need more volunteer drivers*), please call 01233 840000, or visit our website at [www.wealdenwheels.co.uk](http://www.wealdenwheels.co.uk). You can also 'like' our Facebook page for all the latest news!

***Alan Davies (Wealden Wheels Finance Director)***

## **POND REPORT**

I was less active last season as my husband was unwell, but this year I am back in action. I spotted the first arrival of a smooth newt on 25<sup>th</sup> February, frogs' spawn on 9<sup>th</sup> March and great crested newts a day later – also some eggs. Newt offspring have a 50% mortality rate. Some eggs are laid upon water plant leaves which grow above the water level and perish and if a pond dries out before the larvae develop lungs they also die, and some get predated. However, they lay lots of eggs and good years follow bad ones.

I have been out surveying and enjoying being back in action with my wellies and clipboard which can prove eventful: Recently I was nearly pushed into a pond by an over-friendly horse. Having survived that, I got back to my car to find my keys missing, so retraced my steps and spotted them in the grass where I had squeezed under an electric fence!

I shall continue monitoring until July. Do contact me if you think I might help in any way or if you have an observation to share at [rosrowan@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:rosrowan@hotmail.co.uk) or 01233 840253.

***Ros Rowan (Pond Warden)***



**PLUCKLEY GARDENING SOCIETY**  
**'Whosoever plants a garden plants happiness'**

The Annual General Meeting for 2014/15 marked the end of an era when we paid tribute to our retiring President, Gill Highwood, who was standing down. Prior to the activities that have become a tradition at our AGMs (fish 'n' chip supper, quiz, photographic competition accompanied by a glass of wine) we learned of her long and varied association with PGS since joining in 1963. Over the years she carried off many cups, particularly for her roses and her delight in all flowers was always apparent when she came to the Shows. Gill will be a hard act to follow but we are sure the task is in safe hands as June Heathcote was elected as our new President. We are confident that her enthusiasm and skill with all things that grow in the garden will take us forward.

Looking back on the past year, once again the wonderfully unpredictable English weather held some surprises. A long spell of warm sunny weather followed a wet spring. Any work in the garden was rewarded with beautiful blooms and abundant fruit and vegetables so that the tables in the Village Hall at the Autumn Show were laden with exhibits.

Now that the snowdrops and primroses are in the hedgerows and daffodils are dotted everywhere, even the most languid amongst us feel the urge to get out there to peer at the soil which has appeared cold and wet for months to find the first green shoots. We have already held the 'intellectual' item on our calendar – an entertaining and informative talk on propagating plants by Steve Bradley from BBC Radio Kent and enjoyed seeing the snowdrops and hellebores at Broadview Gardens in Hadlow - where the restaurant had delicious cakes too! The next big item on the calendar was the Spring Show on 11<sup>th</sup> April. Exhibitors set up their wares in the morning which were judged by an RHS approved adjudicator. Then in the afternoon the doors of the village hall were opened for the general public to come and enjoy the colours and fragrance - accompanied by delicious refreshments which are a feature of every PGS event! Plants and ornamental pots were also on sale and proved very popular.

PGS is renowned for its relaxed and sociable approach to gardening and we do have members from surrounding villages. We also reach out to other societies and have agreed to join the Tenterden Challenge in September when we will enter our exhibits in cross society classes. (A bit daunting but we are confident that we will be able to hold up our heads against whatever competition there is).

New members are always welcome and there is a place for you even if you are happy to let someone else do the donkey work whilst you stand back to admire the flowers. Visiting gardens of all types and sizes, near or further afield, is a very important part of the life of PGS and the 2015 calendar of events now available on the village website. If you want to find out more or book a trip, Julie Bennett will be happy to hear from you on 07845 163822. You can also find out more about us on the village website, so we look forward to meeting you to share conversation and enjoyment of all things gardening.

**Pat Morss (Chairman of PGS)**



## **PLUCKLEY PANTO**

Pluckley Panto is still recovering from the recent sad loss of two of its major players, Dave Richens and more recently, Mike Cowdry but is picking itself up, dusting itself down, and starting all over again.

We celebrated our 30<sup>th</sup> birthday this year with a production of Robin Hood which was very well received by all our audiences. Profits meant that we could finally go ahead and order our large shed which is now installed in the village hall garden (thanks to Dave Clements). This will house all our equipment currently stored in the green lock-up container situated at the north end of the hall. This will then be removed to allow access to the garden when the new extension at the south end is constructed.

The Group is still very much a family affair with members aged between 6 and 70. We are always looking for new talent, especially those in their mid-twenties/thirties and more especially men of any age! We also need stage managers and bar staff. If you think you can help, please get in touch with me on 840280 or any group member that you might know to find out more. Our thanks go to everyone for this year's success and we look forward to seeing you all at next year's show.

***Judy Pool (Pluckley Panto Unlimited)***

### **HONORARY RESIDENT OF THE YEAR**

All electors are invited to nominate a villager who they feel has done the most over the past year to enhance life in the village. Nominations, with reasons, should be sent to the Clerk (see below) by the Annual Parish Meeting on **18<sup>th</sup> May** please.

The recipient of our 2014 award – Dave Clements – will be presented with a Community Award from the Kent Association of Local Councils at the Parish Assembly. It is hoped that this award will be presented by the new High Sheriff of Kent - William Alexander.

### **PLUCKLEY ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY**

The annual Parish Meeting/Assembly will be held on **Monday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2015, at 7pm in Pluckley Village Hall**. The meeting gives you an opportunity to find out what has been going on in Pluckley over the past year and to look forward to what will be happening in 2015. We're planning the same format as previous years:

- Informal presentations from the Parish Council, Borough Council and guest speakers
- A 'mini-exhibition' of village life with representatives from village organisations
- A free glass of wine or soft drink and a chance to meet your Councillors

Please come along if you can and help make it a successful event!

*Please note that Annual Statutory Meeting of Pluckley Parish Council will follow this Meeting at 8:30pm. This meeting is, of course, also open to the public.*



## **YOUR PARISH COUNCIL FOR 2015-6** (from 7<sup>th</sup> May)

<b>Chris Housman</b>	<i>chris.housman@pluckley.net</i>	<b>01233 840139</b>
<b>Martin Newman</b>	<i>martin.newman@pluckley.net</i>	<b>01233 840231</b>
<b>Tim O'Connor</b>	<i>tim.o'connor@pluckley.net</i>	<b>01233 840843</b>
<b>Paul Smith</b>	<i>paul.smith@pluckley.net</i>	<b>01233 840037</b>
<b>Carol Washer</b>	<i>carol.washer@pluckley.net</i>	<b>01233 840078</b>
<b>Mike Whatman</b>	<i>mike.whatman@pluckley.net</i>	<b>01233 840044</b>
<b>Sue Beattie</b>	<i>sue.beattie@pluckley.net</i>	<b>01233 840029</b>
<b>Clerk: Graham Smith</b>	<i>clerk@pluckley.net</i>	<b>01622 890596</b>

The Parish Council meets in Pluckley Village Hall at 7.30pm on the third Monday of each month, except August. All residents are welcome to attend.

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