

ANNUAL REPORT 2013-4



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Welcome to this Annual Report from your Parish Council for the year ending 31st March 2014. Besides telling you what your Parish Council has been up to over the past year, it also includes reports from several village organisations and looks forward to the year ahead. We hope that you will find it both informative and interesting.

For my report I have been looking back at the Parish Council's work over my first 12 months as Chairman. Many of these issues are covered in more detail later in this report.

Last April double-yellow lines were installed around the Station along with white 'gates' marking a new 30mph limit (within days of installation one gate was stolen!). The Parish Council had not sought these measures, but accepted that the need arose from dangerous parking in this area.

In late spring we held a residents' meeting to update our Parish Plan, which was delivered to all households in the village. We were delighted to receive 'thank you' letters from all the pupils at Pluckley School for the extra storage provided by the new Pavilion.

In the summer Pluckley held its first Festival of Art which was a notable success, with participation from the school and many local residents. Paul Ellard is to be thanked for his very hard work on its organisation.

In September we received an application for a huge 'ground-based photo-voltaic array' (solar farm!) on farmland in the south-east of the village. After careful consideration the Council voted (unanimously) to object to this application. ABC's Planning Committee also rejected it at its meeting in February. However, the applicant has now appealed, so the saga continues.

In the autumn we purchased some supplementary heating for the Village Hall, which has made it a much more comfortable space! We have also just refurbished the kitchen with a deep clean, new cabinet doors, crockery and cutlery. Plans have also been drawn up for a new entrance and toilet facilities – all we need now is the funding!

I'm saddened to report that we have had several instances of vandalism, break-ins and thefts this spring (including an attempted break-in to the Pavilion, necessitating extra security measures as a result). Rest assured that we take crime very seriously and we will be working very closely with the Police and other bodies to ensure your safety and security.



I'm sorry to report that several Councillors have had to step down during the year due to combinations of work commitments and personal circumstances. I would like to record my thanks to Tony Evans, James Ashby, David Hocking, Helen Baird and Andrew Wickham for all their work as Councillors. We welcomed Carol Washer and Paul Smith on board in January and Tim O'Connor in April. The remaining vacancies should be filled by the time you read this.

I would also like to thank several people who help around the village: David Heasman (street sweeping), Jenny Johns (tidying the QE2 Field), Cyril Hoad (looking after the bus shelters), Sue Exell (village hall cleaning) and Dave Clements, who has done lots of maintenance work around the village hall without charge (and who has just refitted the kitchen there).

All in all, quite an eventful year! We start this year with several new Councillors, with lots of fresh ideas. We will continue to spend your money wisely, and work on your behalf to ensure that Pluckley remains an attractive and safe place to live and work.

Chris Housman, Chairman Pluckley Parish Council

FINANCE

The Parish Council finances are sound. The full Income and Expenditure figures for the year to 31 March 2014 are available from the Clerk, or viewable on the website. We are though, looking at several demands upon us for expenditure (see QE11 ground, Village Hall, Traffic below) and so, for the first time in six years, we have asked for a modest increase in the Precept we receive from Ashford Borough Council of 5%. This will show on your Council Tax bill as only 1.2% increase on last year because, then, we received a one-off additional payment from ABC.

PARISH PLAN

The Plan, which was adopted last year, continues to set the agenda for your Parish Council. The prime objectives are to support only 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.

In February we held a public meeting, with Ashford Borough Council participation, about potential housing development in the village and we will follow the line residents gave at that and in the Parish Plan. We are re-addressing the Village Hall improvement. Having failed to secure grant funding for the extension planned under phase 2, we have decided to break this improvement down into stages. Each stage of course will be less costly which, with matched funding from us, will give us a better chance of securing grants. The initial intention is to build a new entrance foyer, with toilets, onto the southern end of the hall. The plans are now being submitted for Planning Approval. (See below for further plans to improve the Hall.)

Social activity in the village will depend largely on volunteers coming forward. To date, we have added table tennis and wine tasting to the activities in the hall.

Traffic control remains a key, and challenging, issue but one to which we give high priority (see below).



TRAFFIC

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.

We are also endeavouring to have the existing 40mph limit area reduced to 30mph. To date, KCC Highways have advised that the calming measures this would require are too expensive to install. We are exploring the options here. One measure we can take is to set up a regular 'Speedwatch' for which we already have the necessary equipment. All we require is volunteers to man it. Would anyone happy to join in doing this please contact Martin Newman.

The long-standing problems created by the parking at the station have blighted the past year. The new yellow-lining scheme and speed limit area have not resolved the issue. As we advised at the time, they have simply moved it a few yards up the road. This is currently being reviewed. The solution will not be easy to find. In the past, the high tariff car park has been largely empty while cars parked along the road outside. This is no longer the case. Given the increased housing development elsewhere in the borough, Ashford, Pluckley and Headcorn station car parks are now full or nearly full. The approved large development at Chilmington can only make things worse. While the suggestion of providing a new large car park seems positive, this could simply have the effect of attracting more cars, as Headcorn found. This point was key in the objection by residents at the recent public meeting to possible housing on the Brickworks site.

The weight of traffic through the village is exacerbating the problem of potholes. Any resident can report a pothole to KCC by logging on to the website www.kent.gov.uk and clicking on Roads and Transport. You will then see a portal for reporting potholes.

The problem of water flowing down Forge Hill has been partly tackled. There have been several accidents here with vehicles sliding on ice in the winter. Recently, KCC Highways constructed a French drain to collect the rising spring water, rather than it running across the road, from where it will feed into the drainage system which is considered adequate. A further drain, lower down the hill, is now required to complete the work.

OLDER PERSONS' HOUSING

As previously advised, Pluckley has joined a cluster of villages (Bethersden, Biddenden, Charing, Egerton, High Halden, Little Chart and Smarden are the others) to achieve the necessary volume of demand to make a purpose-built development of homes for the elderly viable. The location identified for such a development is Charing.

LOCAL NEEDS HOUSING

The approved development of four homes (two 1-bedroom and two 2-bedroom) will commence on site at Westfields any time now. This supply meets the need identified and supported by the village for mostly young people. Applicants with a Pluckley connection will have priority over all others. Anyone interested in applying for one of these homes needs first to register on ABC's Housing List.



PLANNING

There has been an increase in planning applications this year. We now deal typically with three applications per month. We seek to support applications whenever possible, with most being subsequently approved by Ashford Borough Council.

However, one issue has been the number of applications for solar installations in fields adjacent to properties. Depending on size, these do require planning permission. While the Parish Council favours solar energy, it does not support panels appearing on land that is designated for growing. This contravenes Government guidelines and the Village Design Statement.

QE11 RECREATION GROUND

The court of the multi-games unit now urgently needs to be resurfaced. We have delayed this expenditure for as long as possible but can no longer avoid it. This will be done within the next few weeks. The cost will be significant, around £9,000. We shall also be installing a new swing, as planned, at the bottom end of the field.

With better weather in front of us, the petanque piste should be used more. We also intend to build a barbecue facility alongside for those summer evenings.

SMELLS AND FLIES

Fewer problems were experienced in 2013 than previously. Our liaison with the Environment Agency and Ashford Borough Council has ensured that the storage and spreading of manure has been monitored regularly to ensure the Code of Practice is adhered to.

VILLAGE HALL

Pluckley Village Hall now has a new Management Committee consisting mostly of representatives from the various groups who use the hall. The Committee and the Parish Council have agreed amended plans for an extension to provide new toilets and an entrance foyer, and an interim refurbishment of the existing kitchen (which is now complete thanks to Dave Clements).

The new heating has made an enormous difference to those using the hall in the winter; indeed, the Saturday night Panto audience was over warm and doors had to be opened to let fresh air in, never heard of before!

We are hoping to establish a 'Hundred Club' to help us raise funds and will once again ask for your continued support as we strive to improve this local amenity for everyone. We are still in need of a bookings clerk and treasurer, so if you are someone who could help us, please let us know by ringing Judy (840280) or Chris (840139). Thank you!

Judy Pool, Chairman Village Hall Management Committee



WEALDEN WHEELS

Wealden Wheels has just completed its 10th year of operation providing affordable Community Transport to Challock, Charing, Chilham, Egerton, Hothfield, Pluckley, and Smarden.

In recent months there have been some major changes in the office: in December we said goodbye to John Bridger and in January Kevin Parry retired after being with us right from the start 10 years ago. We wish them both well, and thank them for their hard work. They will be missed, but hopefully not for long as both have promised to return to do some driving for us!

We have two new members of staff, Liz Reid (full-time) and Chris Housman (part-time). Liz has joined us from The Kent & East Sussex Railway where she organised all their events as well as the volunteers to help her run them! Chris has been a valued volunteer for several years and we welcome more involvement from him in the day to day organization.

As well as our new staff, we've also got a brand-new minibus! 'Mollie' is a 13-seater Renault which was purchased for us by the Government's Community Transport Fund through the enthusiastic support of Kent County Council. She has an electric tail lift to facilitate easy access for passengers with mobility problems and seats can be removed to accommodate wheelchairs.

To find out more about us, or to help us with volunteering, *we do need more volunteer drivers*, ring 01233 840000 and ask for Liz or Chris or look us up on our website at www.wealdenwheels.co.uk .

Alan Davies, Director

POND REPORT

The dreary winter seemed to drag on but, at last, spring is here and the ponds are brimming and waking up. I saw the first great crested newt in my pond on February 17th - the first recorded in Kent this year. The first egg appeared on March 5th – another early record. The water forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*) is a lovely native marginal plant which flowers from June to October and newts lay their eggs on any of the leaves which are under water. I recommend it.

I have really enjoyed visiting ponds in some gardens in the village in the daytime armed with net and boots and seeing a wide diversity of plants and water creatures and getting to know the pond owners. To monitor the Great Crested Newts I visit the ponds after dark, with an especially powerful torch, my recording sheet, pen, reading glasses and long distance glasses. I hope not to drop anything or fall in! I send my recordings online to the Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group.

Ponds are so interesting, beautiful, and environmentally important. A small pond can teem with life so why not create one if you do not have one and it is safe to do so?

Ros Rowan, Pond Warden



PLUCKLEY GARDENING SOCIETY

'Whosoever plants a garden plants happiness'

The long wet winter did produce serious flooding across the country but although many local fields and gardens area were waterlogged we did escape the worst. Now, as the days grow longer, the urge to get out into the garden, get some dirt under the fingernails and plant for the coming year gets stronger every day. But being a gardener need not only be hard graft – especially if you are a member of Pluckley Gardening Society because throughout the year the following events have been arranged.

- On 18th February, a wet and wild night, Sue Marshall from Iris of Sissinghurst gave us an insider's view of what it is like to be an exhibitor at Chelsea.
- April 12th marked our Spring Show and Plant Sale. The weather always plays a vital part in this Show and the late spring reduced the number, but not the quality, of the daffodils, tulips and hyacinths so that Carmen Gunther, June Heathcote, Sue Risdon and Mary Walker were still worthy winners of the cups. The quality and number of exhibits in the flowering shrub and flower arrangement classes helped to provide a lovely welcome to everyone who came.
- On 21st May we have arranged an afternoon trip to the Walled Nursery in Hawkhurst. This is set within a Victorian walled kitchen garden with 13 glasshouses and many original features. Transport is by Wealden Wheels and, if the coach is full then members will share cars.
- 15th June is a full day outing to the RHS garden at Wisley. The cost of transport is subsidised by PGS and so it is possible to have a really lovely day out at a cost of £5 for members and £12.50 for non-members.
- 26th June is another of those events that PGS do so well. A glass of wine, some delicious nibbles and a wander round Sue and David Steward's lovely garden – what better way to spend a summer evening?
- On July 16th we will be going to Knowle Hill Farm in Ulcombe (near Maidstone) which is a one and a half acre garden surrounding a 15C house overlooking the Weald of Kent. It has featured in many publications and is part of the National Garden Scheme so you can be sure it will be something special!
- 10th August is when Great Comp Garden is holding one of their event days. There will be something for everyone – specialist nurseries with plants to tempt you, a jazz band to serenade you and refreshments to keep you going. We could not possibly miss this and so PGS will be taking a party via Wealden Wheels.
- We in PGS know from past experience that admiring plants, chatting with like minded people and wandering round a garden whilst sipping a summer drink makes all that digging and mowing worth while which is why we have planned another chance to do just that. This is on 19th August when there is to be a Pimms Evening at The Hollies in Mundy Bois. Fingers crossed that we will be blessed with warm sun but we know there will be excellent company.
- 6th September is when we will be holding our Autumn Show when the Hall will be packed with plants, vegetables and produce. A great atmosphere when once again all are welcome.
- Finally, we will round off the 2014 gardening year with our own unique Annual General Meeting. The business of the evening is kept to a minimum to allow time for the Quiz, the photographic competition and fish and chip supper.



Pluckley Gardening Partnership is entering its fourth year which means that after the Easter holiday children from the primary school will be working in the garden next to the churchyard which is managed by members of Pluckley Gardening Society. The next time you have a while to spare, glance over the wall to see what is happening there. If you are lucky you might even be there when the children are digging, weeding or bug hunting and we are hopefully sowing seeds in them to be the gardeners of the future.

So, as you can see, gardening is not all hard work and aching limbs – it can be fun if you are a member of PGS. The annual subscription is only £7.50 per family/garden. If you would like to join us you can telephone Pat Morss on 01233 840686 or e-mail us at pluckleygardeningociety@gmail.com. If you would like to book a place on any of the outings please use this e-mail or telephone Julie Bennett on 01233 629533. We would love you to join us. Enjoy your Garden – we in PGS certainly do!

Pat Morss, Chairman of PGS

PLUCKLEY PANTO

Sadly this past year has seen the loss of Mike Cowdry, who had been with the group for 28 years. Mike played anything we asked of him, from Dame to villain, he didn't mind. He will be very sorely missed. We also lost Rayner Missing, who despite being an Egerton-ite had appeared in the odd Pluckley Panto or two and again is missed and remembered by us all.

This year we presented a digitally re-mastered version of a previously performed Pluckley pantomime, The Princess and the Pearl, re-introducing the Trotters, The Pink Pig, the Armitage-Shanks family, and our villain, the Dreaded Lurgy. Set in the 1950s or thereabouts, rock and roll prevailed together with bobby socks, pony tails, frothy coffee, milkshakes and a juke box of course. We were delighted to welcome Jonathan Cowdry to the group, (following in Father's footsteps!) along with Tamsin Exell, Jack Buchanan and Alex Rowlands. We welcomed back Helen Hocking, Gary Boodle and Nick and Charlotte Rowlands.

We would like to thank all our audiences for their support this year. It has been a difficult time for us following the sad loss of Mike in the Spring of last year but we have all been uplifted by great audience numbers and wonderful participation of everyone who came along. That may be due in part to the amazingly warm hall with its new heating system. (Any prospective hirers please note, we now have a warm hall!) Thanks to you we have been able to cover all our costs comfortably and have enough in our account to purchase a new, 16'x10' wooden shed to install in the Village Hall garden to replace the container lock up that we use for storage at the present time. We now just need to provide the shed base, so any help, physical, advisory, or financial would be very welcome. Because of your support, we are confidently looking forward to next year. Thank you,

Judy Pool, Pluckley Panto Unlimited

OUR LOCAL SHOPS AND PUBS

Part of what holds our community together is our local shops and pubs. Residents have said that they wish to remain a rural village of limited size, so it follows that we ALL need to patronise our local shops and pubs if they are to survive. So, please help them – and the community – by shopping in Pluckley whenever you can.



HONORARY RESIDENT OF THE YEAR

All electors are invited to nominate one 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 **16th May** please.

PLUCKLEY PARISH ASSEMBLY

The annual Parish Meeting/Assembly will be held on **Monday 19th May 2014, 7pm to 8:30pm 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 2014. We're planning the same format as last year:

- Informal presentations from the Parish Council, Borough Council and guest speakers
- A 'mini-exhibition' of village life with representatives from village and external 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 General Meeting of Pluckley Parish Council will follow this Meeting. The AGM is, of course, also open to the public.

PLUCKLEY IN THE GREAT WAR

This year marks the centenary of the start of the Great War. St Nicholas' Church, the Parish Council and the Pluckley & Little Chart branch of the Royal British Legion invite the village to commemorate this event – and particularly to remember the residents of Pluckley and Little Chart that gave their lives. There will be a Church service on **Tuesday 4th August** (the day war broke out) and an exhibition in the Church from then until 11th November. More details will be available soon.

YOUR PARISH COUNCIL

| | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Chris Housman (Chairman) | <i>chris.housman@pluckley.net</i> | 01233 840139 |
| Paul Ellard | <i>paul.ellard@pluckley.net</i> | 01233 840349 |
| Martin Newman | <i>martin.newman@pluckley.net</i> | 01233 840231 |
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| Paul Smith | <i>paul.smith@pluckley.net</i> | 01233 840037 |
| Carol Washer | <i>carol.washer@pluckley.net</i> | 01233 840078 |
| Clerk: Graham Smith | <i>clerk@pluckley.net</i> | 01622 890596 |

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.

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

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

