

**1 MINUTES OF THE OTHAM ANNUAL PARISH MEETING  
HELD ON MONDAY 29 APRIL 2019 AT 7.30 P.M.  
IN THE VILLAGE HALL**

**Present:** Cllrs Rachel Gray (Chairman); Robin Gardner; Valerie Moon; Gordon Newton (part) OPC & MBNC; Mrs T. Irving (Clerk); PCSO Zoe Turner (part); Dr Hugh Vaux – Friends of Otham Church & resident; 13 residents (in addition to the above).

**1. Apologies:** Cllr Heather Drake; Cllr Gary Cooke (KCC); Eileen Day – Village Hall Secretary; Bearsted FC; Orchard Spot.

**2. Minutes of meeting held on 23 April 2018.** The minutes were discussed and agreed as a true and accurate record of proceedings & were duly signed and dated by the Chairman.

**3. Reports were heard from the following:-**

**PCSO Zoe Turner – Maidstone Neighbourhood Team, Kent Police:**

Otham has maintained a fairly low level of crime during the past year.

Crime levels throughout the year have their peaks but I am pleased to say that we are sustaining the reduced level of crime overall that we have benefited from over the past few years. This thankfully has been possible through the support of the community and the Parish Council.

We have dealt with a number of issues throughout the year, which have included the following:

- Provide a visible presence in my wards and surrounding areas.
- Follow ups on the victims of burglaries/breaks to give crime prevention advice and information booklets.
- Helping neighbours to try to sort out their disputes, this on most occasions means linking in with the housing associations where applicable.
- Linking in with the Kent County Council Wardens and other agencies to help out with many problems that arise.
- Speed enforcement checks and speed monitoring checks throughout the area.

We are always trying to keep on top of any nuisance youth issues in the village. As with the previous years this has not been a major issue, any incidents of this type of behaviour have been swiftly dealt with to good effect. We encourage residents to call in any incidents of this type of nuisance behaviour.

Theft of tools, petrol mowers/trimmers are reported on a non-regular basis. Typically sheds are broken into and the goods removed. I would ask all residence to report any suspicious activity, vehicles driving past slowly or any occupants paying more than the usual amount of attention to the surrounding area.

I have and will continue to provide the visible presence and first class service that the Kent Police is renowned for. As well as Otham I cover Bearsted and Downswood.

Anyone wishing to contact me about any issues or crime prevention advice can call the non-emergency Police number 101.

Thank you for your continued support in making Otham safe.

### **The Friends of Otham Church have had another successful year.**

We have had four concerts in the Church which were given by Bel Canto, Lees Court Music, and an organ recital by Trevor Brearley with a fascinating demonstration of the instrument's capabilities. At the last concert of the year Milos Milivojevic gave a virtuoso performance on the classical accordion.

Other events included a successful Bridge Afternoon which included a delicious tea.

At the AGM in October, Kate Kersey gave a talk based on her recently published book, 'Remembered, Otham and Willington in Two World Wars'. This reminded us of the service and sacrifice by the inhabitants of the two parishes.

We thank everyone for their support BUT we would warmly welcome new members. If you are interested in helping, please do contact **Hugh Vaux** on 01622 861245.

**Ellen Purvis – Early Learning Steps Pre-School:** With 12 children on the books, the nursery is currently running at a slight loss, but we are hoping that things will pick up.

The nursery was very pleased to receive a grant from KCC for toys when it first started.

It is open Monday to Friday from 9 am to 12 noon and 12.30 pm to 2.30 pm.

### **Bearsted Football Club (written report provided by David Cowan - Commercial Manager):**

Bearsted began the current season with high expectations on the field, and whilst our results over the season have been mixed, our highlight was to have had a good run in the F.A.Vase competition, where we reached the last 32 clubs in the country.

Had we reached the final, we would have been treading the famous Wembley turf where the final is played.

Off the field, the club has been steadily providing better facilities for all age groups to enjoy, as well as making sure we build on our goal of maintaining our community spirit within the Otham and Bearsted area.

As you know, we enjoyed hosting our official opening of our Floodlights to many football dignitaries within Kent, as well as inviting our local MP, Helen Whately, together with David & Stella Trench from your own Parish Council, as well as Fabienne and Jon Hughes from the Bearsted Parish Council.

We hope that the football club has become a vital asset to the local community, and look forward to welcoming you to our home ground and facilities again in the not too distant future.

**Cllr Gary Cooke – KCC** (written statement)

I am not providing an annual report as I provide regular updates to the parish council. If local residents wish to raise anything with me concerning KCC services I am always available to provide whatever help and support is required.

**OTHAM VILLAGE HALL COMMITTEE – Eileen Day - Secretary**

Village Hall Committee members:

Robin Gardner, Gordon Newton and Kevin Hipkins (Parish Council representatives)  
Ellen Purvis (Pre-School representative)  
Eileen Day and Jocelyn Chambers (Co-opted members)

Early Learning Steps pre-school now operates in the hall every weekday and this finances the upkeep of the building.

Other hires are very few, but have included its use as a Polling Station and as a rest point for the KM Charity Walk in June.

Although no repairs have been carried out this year, those planned for the future are the installation of another electricity socket in the main hall and replacement door locks.

If anyone is interested in assisting the village community by joining the Village Hall Committee, please contact Eileen.

**4. Otham Parish Council: Chair's Report – Cllr Rachel Gray:**

**Council Membership:** Following the resignation of Cllr Knottley, we now have 7 parish Councillors: Cllrs, Drake, Gardner, Gray, Hipkins, Moon, Newton and Trench.

**Clerk:** Teresa Irving

**Membership, Associations and Statutory Bodies**

Campaign to Protect Rural England  
Action with Communities in Rural Kent  
Kent Association of Local Councils  
Society of Local Council Clerks  
Joint Parishes Group

As in previous years, I would like to formally record the activity of the Council over the past year.

### **Finance**

Otham Parish Council continues to maintain a range of services on a modest budget and despite our plans to upgrade the play area, we have frozen the precept payable by residents this year.

### **Planning**

Since last year's meeting, despite our opposition to its inclusion in the Local Plan, representatives of both Otham and Downswood parish councils have continued to meet with representatives of Bellway Homes, DHA planning and their architects regarding the design of their planned development in Church Road, adjacent to the church. If we fail in our aim to have this whole development thrown out by the Borough Council, then it is our hope that, by participating in the design process, the development will cause the least harm to our village and will provide some benefits for our community, such as safer pedestrian routes and safer parking for church users. The first outline application for the site has been submitted to MBC this month and the parish council have submitted objections to the application and have distributed a planning edition of our Ragstone newsletter to all Otham residents with information on how to submit their own comments on the planning application. It is our hope that a large number of residents submit objections to show the strength of feeling against yet another large scale development in our village.

The normal routine planning applications continue to come in front of the Parish Council's planning sub-committee and we continue to review each one on its merits with regard to current planning regulations.

### **The Bicknor Wood housing development**

Construction of the new Bicknor Wood housing development began in August, causing some disruption to residents in the form of the noisy piling works, road closures, hedgerow removal and site traffic. The developers offered neighbours condition surveys of their properties before works commenced so that claims can be made if the ground works cause any structural damage and they have made some efforts to keep the Parish Council informed of works and to respond to any complaints from residents about the site. Currently, the sales complex is under construction and Gore Court Road is closed whilst the new site entrance is being built, but it is likely to reopen very soon. The developer anticipates welcoming the first residents in August this year, with an estimated completion date of the summer of 2022. The new road names, chosen by the parish council, have been approved by MBC and are a selection of names of historical Otham families and names of Otham residents recorded on our war memorial.

### **Otham Neighbourhood Plan**

Our Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group has continued to meet monthly and has made good progress towards producing a Neighbourhood Plan for Otham. We have now produced a draft plan which explains our vision for Otham as a green lung at the edge of urban Maidstone and includes planning policies which address our 5 key areas of heritage, green space, travel, the built environment and leisure. Our plan does not include any new housing allocations but instead attempts to protect Otham from further development. Maidstone Borough Council are supporting us in finalising

our draft plan so that we can enter the next phase which is the Regulation 14 public consultation. If the plan is well received, we hope to then proceed to the final consultation stage and adoption of our plan. I should like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who have given up so much of their time to prepare and write this plan. They have all done a fantastic job!

### **Village Green**

This year, the Parish Council have paid for the replacement of the Village Green play area fencing and 2 associated benches and are currently considering upgrading the play area through the renovation of the existing climbing frame and the construction of a trim trail and net swing for older children, whilst retaining the beauty and tranquillity of the Green. We are also pleased to have facilitated the installation of 2 further benches on the Green in memory of John Mills and Thom Walker. I would also like to thank Cllr Newton for repairing and cleaning the war memorial and David Marchant for donating a new tree.

### **Litter Picking**

Our annual litter pick took place on 24 February and a number of Parish Councillors and villagers turned out to collect litter from the verges in our lanes and from the public footpaths. Thank you to David and Stella Trench for collecting the sacks of litter from around the parish for collection by MBC. We have also installed a new litter bin on White Horse Lane near the football club to tackle the street litter. Thank you to Cllr Moon and Cllr Newton for arranging this.

**Christmas Carols** – This was another successful event this year with local residents gathering in Stonecare's great hall to sing carols beside a roaring log fire. Mulled wine and mince pies were served in the library during the interval and it was a great opportunity for residents to come together. I would like to thank Shaun and ... French, our generous hosts for the day, and David Marchant and the Choir from Otham Church for providing the music.

Also special thanks to Cllr Trench for buying the provisions & Cllr Gardner and Annie for setting up on the day. Thanks to you all, it all went smoothly and was a great event.

**Village Fete** – In June we had another stand at the village fete to seek the views of local people on the 5 green spaces in the village that we were considering allocating as Local Green Spaces in our Neighbourhood Plan for Otham. As expected, we discovered that all of the sites were well used by local people and held in high regard. Our findings were then shared with the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. Thank you to all councillors who helped to set up and man the stall on the day.

### **Communications**

Three editions of the Ragstone have been published in the last year to provide residents with information and to seek their views. The Parish Council have also continued to use Facebook as a means of communication and have created a new Parish website, which is easier to use for both residents and administrators. I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in setting up and updating these communication platforms. I would also like to thank councillors for delivering the Ragstones to every home in our growing village.

Finally, I would like to thank Teresa and all of the councillors for their invaluable support and assistance throughout this year.

## **5. Otham parish Council: Teresa Irving, Clerk/RFO's Report:**

During 2018/19 the parish received a total income of £20,469.45, which is higher than in previous years due to a grant of £5387.50 from Maidstone Borough Council for play area fencing (this was match funded by OPC).

The remainder of income was from the precept - £12,268., parish services scheme- £1,464, a donation of £1,000 from the Mills family (part of which was used for a bench which was dedicated to their son), a VAT refund of £344.49 and interest of £5.46.

As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 there was £16,916.43 cash at the bank.

With neither the annual income nor expenditure exceeding £25,000, the council will be able to consider if they wish to declare themselves exempt from an external audit. This means that a limited assurance review will not be required, but Sections 1 & 2 of the Annual Governance Statement must be approved and published on the council's website before 1 July 2019.

Whilst the parish council agreed to retain the 2019/20 precept at the same level as 2018/19 (£12,268), due to the Band D Tax base reducing this meant there are less Band D equivalent properties in the parish, so each property had to pay more to fund the same precept.

Councillor Gray's role as Chairman has been particularly challenging this year and I would like to record a special thank you to her for the many hours that she has spent continuing to oppose development in Otham, and working with the Neighbourhood Plan Group.

I would also like to thank all the councillors for their continued support and hard work throughout the past year. Cllr Newton regularly phones and emails me with Borough updates, Cllr Cooke regularly attends council meetings and a special thanks to the residents that take the time to attend meetings and report issues within the parish.

## **6. Questions from members of the public:**

The following is a representation of the several questions raised, mainly relating to traffic concerns.

### **Q. What can be done about the speeding cars and volume of traffic down the lanes?**

A. A speed survey was recently carried out by PCSO Turner. Whilst the perception is that the traffic is travelling too fast, most of the traffic is legally correct. PCSO Turner will try to carry out another survey as soon as someone is available to assist her.

A request to KCC for various traffic calming signage was refused.

White lines for Church Road are imminent but this had to be paid for by Otham and Downswood Parish Councils.

The council will continue to try and get something done.

**Q. Can HGV's be stopped?**

Gore Court Road/Bufkyn Way is the official route for site traffic but it has been noted and reported to the developer that site traffic is travelling through the village.

No HGV signage - except for farm traffic - to be investigated.

**Q. Could the single white lines in the village be extended further down Otham Street?**

The council to investigate.

**Q. How is the planning enforcement notice being progressed for Bramley?**

The Inspectorate has upheld MBC's decision. The owner now has another 2 months to take action before it becomes a criminal matter.

Graffiti painted on the fence was offensive and has since been painted over.

A brief planning update was provided by Councillor Newton.

The proposed H1(8) Church Road application has been called in to the Planning Committee by Councillor Newton. He will be asking all members to attend the site to view the proposal for themselves.

Despite rumours to the contrary, the Garden Village is not believed to be coming back.

It was noted that the resident of Corner House, Honey Lane does not receive a copy of the Ragstone (to be added to the circulation list).

**There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.35 p.m.**