

**MINUTES OF THE OTHAM ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD ON MONDAY 29 APRIL 2024 AT 7.30 P.M
IN THE VILLAGE HALL**

Present: Cllrs Kevin Hipkins, Clint Hickmott, Mick Read, Jenny Hollingsworth, Sally Christodoulou. Teresa Irving (Parish Clerk), PC James Phillips, Eileen Day – Otham Village Hall, Terry Dine – Bicknor Wood Residents Community Group, Trevor Sturgess – Friends of Otham Church, 5 Members of the Public.

Councillor Hipkins chaired the meeting.

1. Apologies: Received from Otham Fete Committee and Rumwood Cricket Club.

2. Minutes of meeting held on .

The minutes were discussed and agreed as a true and accurate record of proceedings & were duly signed by Councillor Hickmott.

3. Reports from invited groups and associations:

Bicknor Wood Residents Community Group – Terry Dine.

A few events have been organised for children in the wood, and a Christmas event was also successfully arranged.

A fence has been erected around the perimeter. One area was not fenced, due to a natural barrier. The group would like to thank the Parish Council for their help with this

There has been no problem with motorbikes for approximately one year.

Police Report – PC James Phillips

I am currently responsible for Bearsted, Downswood, Leeds, Otham, Kingswood and Shepway, although this will reduce as time goes on and more officers are recruited.

I have been asked to deal with incidents regarding catapults, but this brings certain challenges as it is not considered a deadly weapon. The other issue is that age 10 and over can be dealt with criminally, under 10's cannot.

Police have operations running to deal with nuisance bikes. Between 1 January and November 2023, 159 calls were received about nuisance bikes.

Whilst a lot of bikes have been seized, it unlikely to be stopped completely. No burglaries have been reported since I have been in the area. However, a person filming all the houses in Honey Lane has been reported.

If you witness any non-emergency problems, please report the incident via 101. Emergency situations always need to be reported to 999.

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Friends of Otham Church – Trevor Sturgess

The Friends of Otham Church was founded more than 20 years ago by former Otham resident Dr Hugh Vaux to give financial support to special projects at St Nicholas Church, itself a thousand years old.

It now serves the people of Otham, Downswood, the new Bicknor Wood development and the Parsonage Place housing development next to the church. We do not fund routine maintenance as we see that as the role of the Parochial church Council.

However, the council is facing huge bills with the imminent replacement of tiles on the tower. Many have been damaged by woodpeckers. As a Grade 1 Listed Church, plastic replacements resistant to the beaks of woodpeckers are not permitted. We may need to chip in there if sufficient grant funding cannot be found.

Issues: As part of the new housing development by Bellway, the Diocese of Canterbury negotiated for a car park. This has been achieved and handed over to St Nicholas. But a condition of the creation of the car park was that it could only be used for church events. This means it has to be locked after each event. A resident complained that it should be open at all times. However, this is not possible. That sounds a nice Christina thing to do. But unfortunately, we are bound by a legal covenant. The Friends have put up signs to tell people that if they park outside church events, their vehicle could be locked in. Bellway have also been concerned about travellers, potentially parking their vehicles there and damaging the image of their new development.

Events. Several fundraising concerts, including a Christmas celebration. Full church on each occasion. A concert is being held next Sunday May 5 at 3 pm. Admission is free, but donations welcome. And, of course, you are all welcome.

Friends run an annual trip by coach to a Promenade Concert at the Royal Albert Hall. 40 attendees last July. We're doing it again this summer, probably in August.

Achievements: Initiated and funded new tarmac path from the car park path to the church.

Marketing: We designed a flyer for local distribution via the Net magazine in Downswood and Madginford. To continue across Bicknor Wood and later Parsonage Place, but this will be distributed by volunteers. We also have a stand at Otham Fete.

Current projects: A new church sign for St Nicholas. At the moment, there is nothing to tell passers-by what the church is called, let alone what services and events it offers. I was surprised to discover that the Diocese has no rules about what a church sign should look like. We are having a sign designed and created by a specialist firm which Friends will pay for.

We welcome new members to support our wonderful church.

Otham Fete Committee – A written Report.

The Otham with Langley Church Fete took place on Saturday 17th June 2023.

The fete was run along the same lines as in previous years, with traditional stalls and items for sale including cakes, books, plants, fruit, preserves and fun games for all the family.

The arena events included the 'Woofs Dog Show', dancing and children's races. With pleasant sunny weather, the event proved to be very enjoyable for all those who attended.

The organising committee is currently planning again for this year's event which will take place on the village green on Saturday 15th June.

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Rumwood Cricket Club

It was noted that Rumwood Cricket Club has merged with Linton Park Cricket Club

4. Otham Parish Council: Chair's Report – Cllr Kevin Hipkins:

Council Membership;

Kevin Hipkins

Clint Hickmott

Val Moon

Teresa Irving - Clerk

Mick Read

Jenny Hollingsworth

Alan Chard

Sally Christodoulou [new member]

Membership associations

KALC

SLCC

CPRE

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Activity

Increased activity with village hall. OPC has helped to finance maintenance/repair costs.

Yoga /Wine and Cheese/ Association with Church Fete Committee

Installation of defibrillator and cabinet.

Traffic Calming. Various attempts made to address the reported issues, which include traffic surveys of Green Hill and Otham Street. However, due to no street lighting, Highways has advised that the majority of traffic calming measures are unsuitable.

Bellway Homes agreed to display 30 mph banner on Parsonage Place land, Church Road.

Bin stickers given to residents.

New map board on Village Green

Proposed redesign of play area.

Oak tree planted to commemorate King Charles III Coronation.
Parish election to take place in May 2024.

Finance.

No change in the parish element of the council tax for each resident.
Donations to Heart of Kent Hospice and St Nicholas Church

Grants: Fencing for Bicknor Wood Group/Refurbishment of Village Hall

Thank you to all council for continuing help and Teresa for her great support and patience

5. Otham Parish Council: Report from Clerk/RFO – Teresa Irving

The following figures are all subject to confirmation and are subject to an internal and external audit.

The parish received a total income of £143,841.14 during 2023/24.
This includes 2 x CIL payments in the sums of £32,694.02 and £76,759.13, totalling £109,453.15

The remainder of income was: £27,075. from the precept, £1,561.68 Parish Services Scheme (a small increase of £46.68 from last year), £3,404.27 VAT refund and interest on the saving account in the sum of £2,347.04.

Larger expenditure items included: Maintenance of the Village Green - £3,390, defibrillator & cabinet + installation - £1994, Map Board £925. Donations in the sums of £200 to Otham & Langley PCC & £100 to We Are Beams. A grant of £1,000 to the Village Hall for electricity and heating and CIL Grants to Bicknor Wood Residents Community Group for £2,882.40 and £10,184.83 to the Village Hall.

As of 31st March 2024, the bank balance stood at £334,543.

Mr Michael Subert will be carrying out an Internal Audit on 1 May. Once signed off, the Annual Governance and Accountability Return will be sent to the External Auditor for examination.

My thanks to councillors for their help and for the contributions that they have made during the past year.

6. Questions from members of the public:

A question was raised regarding the forthcoming election on Thursday, 2 May.

For electoral purposes, the parish of Otham will be abolished and divided into two wards: Otham North and Otham South. Otham North will be represented by 4 Parish Councillors, and Otham South will have 5 Councillors.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.05 p.m.