

Reports from Parish Clubs & Organisations



for the

Annual Parish Meeting

held in

Grafty Green Village Hall

on

Monday 17th May 2021

Boughton Malherbe Parish Council - Annual report by Ron Galton

Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic, we were unable to hold a Parish Meeting last year, and the planned Parish Council elections did not take place. This resulted in the existing Parish Councillors continuing to serve as normally as possible for an extra fifth year. My annual report this year is therefore mainly covering the period May 2019 to May 2021.

On behalf of the Parish Council, I want to thank everyone in our community who has helped to organise and run all the events that took place before the intervention of Covid, supported and publicised by our excellent Malherbe Monthly magazine. Without these events, we would not have a close-knit community, with the feeling of goodwill and helpfulness towards each other that is so important, and I am sure we all look forward to the day when we can fully resume our social activities.

I feel that I must say a special "Thank You" to Rob and Nick Eastwod for keeping the shop and post office open throughout the pandemic despite all the difficulties they have faced. The shop has been a lifeline for many of us.

A special thank you also goes to Rosemary and Mike Smith who look after the Village Green and keep it looking neat and tidy for everyone to enjoy. They also, as do other parishioners, pick up rubbish from our roadside verges left by inconsiderate strangers, and the Parish Council is most appreciative.

Throughout the last two years your Parish Council has been busy dealing with all the regular issues and new ones that happen and keep us on our toes, with the added difficulty of conducting all our public meetings by Teleconference over the last year.

In particular we have dealt with many planning applications, and attended appeals. We have had regular contact with KCC regarding the condition of our roads and ditches. We have also attended many conferences and meetings with MBC, KCC, our MP Helen Whately, our Police and Crime Commissioner Mathew Scott, and the Kent Association of Local Councils. We have also co-operated with other local councils such as Lenham, Headcorn, and Ulcombe on issues with which we are jointly concerned. Councillors have also attended training meetings and conferences in order to keep up to date with best practice.

Among its many activities, the Parish Council has provided a grant to Platts Heath School, and another to the village hall for an upgrade to the kitchen, provided assistance when needed during the Pandemic, persuaded MBC to provide a maintained rubbish bin on the Village Green, provided a new footpath gate to replace

the stile on the path from Woodcock Lane to Headcorn Road, provided lighting to the footpath beside the Kings Head, organised litter picks and arranged for Maidstone Borough Council to adopt the litter bin on the verge outside St Nicholas Church.. At Christmas 2018 and 2019 we held a successful Christmas Tree celebration event on the village green organised by Annie Allum which unfortunately we could not repeat in 2020 due to Covid restrictions.

Other projects have been in the pipeline for some time, including a proposal for an additional speed indicator device to support the traffic calming scheme, an information board on the village green for walkers, and more recently to replace more footpath styles with kissing gates.

In 2017 we received a donation of £100,000 from Quinn Estates who developed Boughton Park, and in January 2018 we consulted with residents for suggestions as to how we should spend the money.

Unfortunately, government constraints on our spending meant that our options were limited, but a front runner was the request for a traffic calming scheme through the village and work began to investigate how this could be achieved.

We engaged consultants recommended by KCC, and it took a year for them to produce a scheme that seemed to prompt more questions than answers, but it was a stepping stone in the process and we then engaged KCC to advise us from that point onwards. It still took another 2 years of very hard work to finally arrive at a scheme that was the best that could be achieved, and the price was affordable at under £20,000 to implement the construction works based upon the final design drawn up for us by KCC. The works should start around the middle of 2021.

The whole three-year traffic calming process was a roller coaster with hundreds of Emails and other documents on file, and many public debates with passionate and challenging opinions on all sides, but all contributions, particularly practical assistance, were invaluable and the Parish Council thanks everyone who became involved

As you can see, it has been a very busy, exhausting five-year term for the Parish Councillors, and I thank our Clerk Chris Hume, and all Parish Councillors for all their support while serving with me in their various roles, including Annie Allum, Cathie Brown, and John Collins who each did sterling work at a very difficult time before they resigned

In conclusion, I offer my very best wishes to you all and hope that the current pandemic situation will continue to improve and we all stay safe.

Headcorn Morris

As you are all aware, this past year has meant that we have not really used the Village Hall for our practice. Our ladies side will still want to use the hall for the coming winter months once restriction have been removed and they hope that things will get back to how things were.

I am sure that we are not the only club/ society who have experienced this during the lock down and we wish the Village Hall committee all the best for the coming year especially now you have lost a full years subscriptions.

Thank you for keeping this facility open and we look forward to using this fine facility in the near future again

**John Bentley,
Sec. Headcorn Morris**

The Honywood And Douglas Charity (211272)

This Almshouse charity provides independent living accommodation for people over the age of 60 who have lived in the parishes of Lenham and Boughton Malherbe for more than two years. Situated centrally in Lenham and therefore close to all amenities, there are currently 26 housing units, all of which are currently occupied.

Following the purchase in December 2019 of a property in Lenham High Street, planning permission has been obtained for its conversion to provide another three housing units. Work should start later in 2021, with the units ready for occupation in 2022.

The Charity is managed by a Board of 12 Trustees, two of whom are appointed by Boughton Malherbe Parish Council to serve four-year terms. The parish's current representatives are David Chantler and Mike Davidson. Vacancies are advertised in Malherbe Monthly, Grafty Green Post Office, and the Church Porch.

2022 will be the 400th anniversary of the charity's original foundation – what better way to mark this than with further expansion!

John Collins, Treasurer

Report from St Nicholas Church for the Annual Parish Council Meeting

This year has been both eventful and uneventful for St Nicholas. Due to the pandemic we sadly had to drastically reduce the number of services as well as cancel our popular cream teas and regular coffee mornings. On the other hand, many of the services and prayers went online and were accessed by a congregation which does not usually come to church. Other services moved outside so that we could worship in safety. The recent Easter service in the churchyard, with new born lambs playing beyond the altar was a particular joy. We have also welcomed Charlotte, our new curate to our benefice and have enjoyed getting to know her on zoom and during the occasional services.

It has been a time of reflection for the PCC, of how St Nicholas can meaningfully serve the wider community in the future, post Covid. The aim is to preserve all the aspects of worship which the members of the regular congregation value and add that which would be of benefit and service to the rest of the village. The PCC has decided to focus on promoting projects that benefit the Natural world as well as the local community and we have already benefited from a mission fund which has provides funds for these plans. The first plan is to create a wildlife haven in our churchyard, the second plan is to adapt parts of our church so that they can be used for all year hospitality and to promote ecological living. A wildlife counting event is planned for June.

We have started a joint project with Platts Heath School to grow bee and butterfly friendly flowers which the children will plant in the churchyard. The school children have also been invited to build an insect hotel and visit regularly for wildlife events and picnics. Another project has begun with the Grafty Green Gardening Club, who have generously donated their time and plants to make our churchyard even more beautiful and wildlife friendly. Plans in the pipeline include a pop-up Eco shop which promotes local produce and zero waste products and we hope for a return of cream teas and cake sales if the pandemic permits this. We have all learned the value of knowing your neighbour in this last year and we are all keen to engage with the community to understand how we can best serve their needs in the future.

Vanessa Goodwin

59 Bus Service

Having been chosen by KCC to be one of five pilot schemes as it 'explored innovative and sustainable ways of providing transport to rural communities in Kent', what was intended to be a year long trial commenced on 17th February 2020. The infrequent Monday to Friday off peak and Saturday service running to and from Maidstone Town Centre was replaced by a more frequent feeder service running between Grafty Green and Sutton Road Morrisons to connect with the high frequency services from there to and from Maidstone Town Centre.

However, just five weeks after the trial's introduction, already over eight months later than planned because of problems with the provision of a layby opposite Morrisons, the first Covid-19 lockdown was introduced and since then travel by public transport has been positively discouraged by government, making conclusions from the trial impossible to measure.

This has been drawn to KCC's attention and KCC has recognised that use of public transport has been devastated by Covid and the necessary lockdowns, and has resulted in dramatic reductions in passenger numbers. The trial has now been extended until at least July 2021, and when the time is right there will be a publicity push to encourage residents along the route to make more use of the service.

As well as Covid, and particularly between Kingswood, Ulcombe, and Grafty Green, the service has also been plagued by more road closures, planned and unplanned, than I can ever remember, and with no publicity provided about the impact on the bus service, it has become blighted by reliability / punctuality issues.

In due course there will be a review of the trial feeder service, including the timetable and the route. If we are to try and keep a bus service in Grafty Green, it is important therefore that parishioners let the Parish Council know what they want their bus service to look like in future. Be as creative as you like, but do please send your views to Chris Hume, Clerk to Boughton Malherbe Parish Council, so that they can be fed into the review.

John Collins

Boughton Malherbe Parish Council's representative on the East of Maidstone Transport Group

Dazzle Stars

Dazzle stars is a drama workshop for children. Our last class was in March 2020 we were hoping to put on a production of Snow White during April but as we all know this was not to be. However, I am very much hoping that the prince will come along very soon and we can start our dazzle class again. Once the hall is reopened and I have worked out how to social distance very excited children we will return. Until then take care and I am hoping to see the Dazzle Stars soon. Dazzle Stars Wednesday 4 to 5 pm

Gail Kelly

Community Warden

I would like to send my apologies. Since last summer I have been heavily involved with the newly formed Maidstone Task Force which takes up approximately 4 days a week of my time. At present (where man power allows) I have only been able to give Headcorn a day a week of my time (on top of my deputy team leader role), which leaves me little or no time for other areas at present. Obviously, I still link in with John Boyd who keeps me informed with what is happening in the local area. If we do receive a referral for the Grafty area it will most likely go to our support Warden Dawn Riach Brown who has access to the Warden Van and covers neighbouring Ulcombe and Langley.

Stuart Ellesmere

Yoga classes and Gardening Club

Yoga classes - continues, apart from a few weeks last autumn when I used the village hall on a Wednesday evening and a Thursday morning, with restricted numbers, the classes have been delivered via 'Zoom' which has kept us together as a group. Naturally, we are keen to begin again to meet in person which I hope will be 19th May for a few weeks and then again after the hall roof work is completed and as it is summer I will be delivering classes outdoors.

Grafty Green Gardening Club - the Club has maintained a few activities we were able to make some garden visits last summer and had our Autumn Show.

There is a reduced membership so far this year which reflects the current situation, but we have planned a full programme for 2021 which has had some alterations already

but we managed some zoom meetings which were well attended. Unfortunately, not all are members are able to access computers or devices and therefore are unable to take part but I have recorded a zoom meeting which I will be able to relay at a later date in the village hall.

Our first activity is the plant sale on 8th May on the village green followed by a garden safari in the village on 12th June. After that we have outings booked for the summer and hopefully we will be back in the hall from September/October.

Sue Burch

Grafty Green Village Hall

After hosting our annual pancake evening at the hall on the 25th of February last year who would have imagined how events would have shaped our lives so dramatically over the following year. As a committee we feel that the Village Hall is at the centre of our friendly village community in normal times hosting Parish Council Meetings, Yoga Classes, Drama Classes, Morris Dancers, the Bowls and Gardening Clubs, for the first time an art class, coffee mornings and a host of other activities and social events that bring us together as a community

During the first lockdown we worked hard to adopt the COVID secure protocols necessary to keep us all safe and this enabled us to open briefly in the summer before the second lockdown when we hosted some Yoga and Art Classes together with a friendly bowls match. Sadly, these tentative steps were halted with the second lockdown.

We have been working towards opening the hall up as soon as it is safe to do so and have taken the opportunity to carry out some timely renovations to the Hall. This is not an exhaustive list but we have replaced both the fire doors, carried out landscaping to the flower border and have instructed contractors to replace the roof which has served us well over the last 40 years but is now showing signs of age. This work should hopefully be carried out in the middle of June. We have also refreshed the Village hall website.

Your meeting tonight is an encouraging sign that we are now hopefully on an upward trajectory, we are in the process of liaising with our regular hirers to ensure that everything is in place for their safe return to the hall and we are hopeful of a safe and ordered opening up of the hall and it's facilities shortly after the roof replacement has been completed.

We will be holding the Village Hall's annual public meeting here next Monday at 7.30 pm on the 24th May and if you would like to find out more about the work that the committee undertake on your behalf, have any ideas about how the Hall could be used for the benefit of the village in the future please come along we would be pleased to see you.

Jon Thompson
Village Hall Chairman

P.S. A note for your diaries – we have booked the Christmas Pantomime, (Dick Wittington), for 4pm on Saturday 29th January, 2022.

Short Mat Bowls

Short Mat Bowls has not met since 23rd March 2020 regarding government covid restrictions. We did manage to secure a national organising body SafeClub Certificate in November 2020 whereby demonstrating strict compliance conditions would have enabled a very restricted format of our game to be played. Ironically within days of gaining the certificate lockdown 3 occurred and negated any play / meeting. Going forward is dependant on restrictions being eased, whether members wish to play within the Safe Club Certificate restrictions (which are onerous) if and when applicable or to simply wait until all restrictions are lifted and there being minimal risk

Chris Wheal

Police (PCSO)

Our PCSO, John Boyd, has been called away to help with the murder enquiry for Julia Jones, PCSO. He apologises that he cannot produce a report this year but asked us to refer to his report from the last annual meeting below:

Boughton Malherbe has maintained a fairly low level of crime during the past year. Crime levels throughout the year have their peaks and troughs 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:

1. Provide a visible presence in my wards and surrounding areas.
2. Follow ups on the victims of burglaries/breaks to give crime prevention advice and information booklets.
3. Helping neighbours to try to sort out their disputes, this on most occasions means linking in with the housing associations where applicable.
4. Linking in with the Kent County Council Wardens and other agencies to help out with many problems that arise.
5. Speed enforcement checks and speed monitoring checks throughout the area.
6. Patrols of outlying areas to deter and stop vehicles known for scrap metal thefts. This has been backed up with pre-arranged Policing Operations County wide involving numerous authorities and scrap yard inspections.

We are always trying to keep on top of any nuisance youth issues in the village. As with the previous year this has also not been a major issue this year and 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.

As with most areas in life the police have changing priorities and budgets, I am pleased to say that my area hasn't changed this last year which continues to be the Headcorn ward with Lenham and Harrietsham.

I have and will continue to provide the visible presence and first-class service that Kent Police is renowned for.

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 Boughton Malherbe safe.

PCSO John Boyd - Maidstone Neighbourhood Team

Shellina Prendergast – Kent County Councillor for Maidstone Rural East **Annual Report May 2021**

The last year has been an incredibly tough period for all our communities and businesses. As we take our first steps to get the country out of the restrictions, I want to thank all of you for having played your part, showing much resilience, patience and resolve in helping to get the virus under control and supporting each other through the difficult times.

Uniquely in the country, Kent has confronted not one but two – or three – huge challenges: Covid-19, the end of the Brexit transition and the arrival of large numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children last spring and summer. Kent County Council has been there with residents and businesses throughout this – supporting the vulnerable through the “Kent Together” scheme, securing millions of items of PPE, rolling out community testing and supporting families, businesses, and the many voluntary and community organisations on the road to recovery. Below are some examples of the work in key areas led by Kent County Council during this time:

Kent’s Children, Young People and Families

Head Start Kent, a programme that has enhanced the mental health and well-being of young people in the county since 2016, has been awarded extra funding to continue its vital work for an additional year - <https://kccmediahub.net/headstart-kent-awarded-additional-years-funding745>

Supporting families under financial pressure in the crisis, supporting the voluntary sector in working to tackle financial distress, Free School Meals in the October half term and since, and the £10m Helping Hands scheme to support individuals, families and businesses.

Kent County Council has protected tax payers from the cost of the arrival of large numbers of young asylum-seeking children through a new and increased funding deal agreed with Government last summer. We continue to press the Government to establish a sustainable National Transfer Scheme which will ease the pressure on border authorities like Kent.

Reconnect – a universal community-based programme of activities currently being developed to help children and young people reconnect with their pre-Covid-19 lives.

<https://kccmediahub.net/ambitious-kcc-led-community-programme-will-help-children-and-young-people-reconnect-with-their-pre-covid-19-lives745>

91% of Kent schools are rated as good or outstanding. The challenge of a rising school population has been met by building out places for an additional 25,000 students over the last ten years.

Supporting Communities and the Voluntary Sector

The Library Service introduced the popular Select and Collect and digital services while maintaining the important Home Library Service – a vital link for many vulnerable residents.

Over 4000 miles of Public Rights of Way saw increased usage of up to 100% in places and the 9 Country Parks have never been busier.

Community Wardens, already highly valued before the pandemic, played a vital frontline role supporting and protecting those who were vulnerable and in need of help.

Support for the cultural and sports sectors facing the considerable challenges as a result of Covid-19.

Investing in communities and the voluntary sector, most recently through the Crowdfunding Kent initiative where Kent County Council committed £500,000 to co-fund community projects that help recovery from the pandemic.

Launched the Kent Together initiative working with communities and borough councils to provide 24/7 help and support to those who are vulnerable and isolated due to the pandemic and in need of essential supplies including food and medication.

Delivered over 1000 care phone devices to vulnerable and isolated residents, enabling them to connect with friends, families and carers during lockdown.

Brexit Transition

Along with local and national partners, Kent County Council made huge preparations for the end of the Brexit transition to ensure that roads and services remained open for residents and businesses.

When the French Government shut the borders just before Christmas, KCC staff, Members and partners worked tirelessly to resolve the crisis. Transition plans were adapted, testing centres were set up and welfare measures were put in place for those stranded by the closure.

Backing Kent's Businesses

Helping businesses during the pandemic has been at the core of our work – investing in the Kent and Medway Covid Help Line, assisting more than 14,000 businesses and making

millions of pounds available in affordable loans to help businesses survive and prosper as we come out of the current crisis.

No Use Empty scheme, supported by £12m of support last year, provides interest free loans to small, local builders to bring empty properties back into use. The scheme has delivered almost 6500 homes on brownfield land, safeguarded hundreds of local jobs, created new homes and improved derelict areas of land.

Broadband for Businesses and Homes

Kent County Council has worked with the government agency BDUK to deliver better broadband across the county and several communities within Maidstone Rural East have benefitted from this. This has included:

- Delivered faster broadband connections to over 140,000 homes and businesses across Kent that would otherwise have been left with no or slow broadband.
- Provided funding to over 2,000 rural homes and businesses (without superfast broadband connections) through the Kent Top-Up Voucher programme.
- Enabled access to superfast broadband of at least 30mbps to over 95% of homes and businesses in Kent.

Roads and Rail

Committed another £10m to this year's pothole blitz after a year in which Kent Highways filled in almost 50,000 potholes and patched the equivalent of 50 full size football pitches.

Invested £11m in a road resurfacing programme and five-year maintenance plan.

Kent County Council launched the Vision Zero Strategy for road safety which not only has an ambitious aim for reducing or eliminating road accident deaths by 2050 but represents a new way to engage with communities and address local road safety concerns.

The Kent Rail Strategy 2021 positions KCC to influence future plans for Kent's rail services.

Protecting our Environment

Commitment to reach Net Zero for our own services and buildings by 2030 together with projects and funding in place to deliver this target along with a plan for Kent as a whole to achieve this by 2050.

Launched an innovative Plan Bee for pollinators, ambitious work on biodiversity and plans, already underway, to plant a tree for every resident in Kent.

Less than 1% of waste collected in Kent goes to landfill; the rest is recycled or turned into energy.

The above is just a flavour of the work at Kent County Council. As we emerge from Covid and lockdown, we are working to build a better future for Kent: standing up against national targets for housebuilding in the county while securing the services and infrastructure we need so that they come with, not after, any development; supporting both young and older people after this toughest of years; and costed plans in place to protect our environment and achieve net zero.

This is a time to feel optimistic. My thanks again to all of you for the part you have played in helping and supporting our communities and for taking the steps and following guidance to reduce the spread of Covid 19. I am very proud to represent residents of Maidstone Rural East – together we make a great community!

Shellina Prendergast

Annual Report: Maidstone Borough Council Member Martin Round

Summary/Key Points

- 1) It has been a tough year and 2 years since last report
- 2) Difficult times have made the Politics worse and achievement more challenging in Opposition in Policy, Actions and budgets whilst organisation had to change
- 3) I personally have led from the front to challenge Lib Dem/Labour Leadership that fails to grasp Rural priorities
 - a) Vice Chair of Planning 2019-2020
 - b) Vice Chair of Economic Regeneration & Leisure 2020-2021
- 4) Planning issues-MANY-and all forms of Enforcement remain the weight & priorities of the Ward
- 5) Different roles of Council Membership mean I am spread thin so it takes more effort, I thank Karen Chappell-Tay and welcome my new Co Ward Member.
- 6) Local Plan Review-on going
- 7) Engagement with MP includes much work with MHCLG on National Planning Review
- 8) Further engagement with MP on EA matters and Flooding concerns
- 9) Engagement with Home Secretary on local Crime
- 10) Golding Homes, under scrutiny
- 11) Boundary Commission, Review imminent
- 12) Covid Grants, generally a great success
- 13) Thank you

Its been a difficult 18 months, let alone a year, for all of us and in many different ways. The only certain thing has been uncertainty. Whilst we are moving back to some forms of normal practice and we have resumed Elections and Annual Meetings it has been a time of void and poor engagement in some respects

Because of Covid most processes and admin systems have been postponed, cancelled, amended or forgotten. Effectively this report must reflect 2 years, because Local Govt matters such as one set of Elections and any by-elections were put back for another year and all Members and those seats, that were due for Elections, were asked to stay on for another year with no Annual Meeting last year. With a finitely balanced majority, the Coalition in Leadership were able to optimise that. This is something that at some point always matters in Party politics and sadly it immediately lessened my parties influence in opposition as one of my groups Members simply could not and would not stay on due to personal issues/family health matters. I am a Conservative where we are the Opposition. However even in opposition my group has challenged the Coalition Leadership on matters, very often more relevant to the rural areas, but we have also challenged and succeeded in making our points in town affairs, (such as air pollution, traffic, the bus station, the Museum, the Theatre). But where the Leadership parties ensured their "dead weights" hung on we actually lost a "Front bench" spokesman and Chair of Audit, someone that was

not just a seat and a vote but one with some gravitas and authoritative insight.....and then we lost another Member and again a vocal one; the Deputy Mayor who sadly passed due to a sudden illness, just before Covid actually gripped the nation. This all coincided with my own very serious illness that took me away for some months, however Covid actually gave me the time and far less demands on travel to enable a good recovery.

Another factor in our organisational knock-ons meant that several Members, that would have resigned where that seat would have had an Election with a new candidate/Member, those Members "hung-on" just so their vote was precious in Committees and Council meetings. These Members were rarely active or contributory. Whilst Teleconferencing made meetings easier to attend some just attended to secure a precious vote. It also meant that some did not take attendance that seriously, so some others had to be much more attentive and contributory!

But being a Council Member is not just attending official Council or Committee Meetings. The Constitutional system means that few Members can actually be involved or aware of every single matter presented at every Meeting. That's why some of us want to change it! Briefings, Training sessions, Workshops, "pre-apps" for Planning or Site visits, Chair and Vice Chair Groups and specialist focus or sub-groups that may be convened are also relevant. These can actually be much more important or informative and beneficial and gives an opposition group more opportunity & influence in directions. We also have meetings for our own political groups and my group also has its own "Strategic Group" of "Front bench" spokespersons where we ensure we cover every matter on a weekly basis. I serve on that with the Economic Regeneration, Leisure & Culture/ERL role as Vice Chair of Committee. I also sit on Audit and Standards Committee and the Policy and Resources Committee. As a VC there are many more meetings, especially if there are difficult issues or serious challenges! This also tends to lead to other roles. It does mean you are better informed and then you make sure you keep on being informed and thus this leads to more activity and work, especially if you impart that knowledge to others: often. As a Member it also gives access to some people where you can dig for more information too! So, I dig often. Such knowledge may be seen as power, but if it is beneficial for my residents, my community and a better Borough, then surely it is worthwhile. Would the community want, if they knew, that their elected Members didn't partake in these meetings and groups and their Members were happy to be ignorant and less enabling or active? Some Members are literally never seen, and when they do get seen, they don't say anything. I am not of that model!

I can seriously say I rarely have a day off or away from Council business in some guise or another, unless I can actually get away somewhere. And that's been almost impossible in the last year. Although I have kept away from Planning issues directly, in terms of Committee work since my illness, this does however remain my biggest demand and of course I maintain my training and insight in this respect. And could still be called up. The role of VC of ERL is naturally aligned to Planning issues with matters such as

Strategy/Policy, Transport plus Businesses/Employment, Training and Estate/asset management all interwoven.

I am looking forward to welcoming a new Co-Member after the Elections, but I must thank Karen for her filling the breach over the last couple of years after a mid term by-election was necessitated. But other than another Co-Member once these Elections are over I suspect it will be "the same old same old" and just further episodes of those same issues.

And the new Member will have to find their roles and vocation. Members, being volunteers, take up roles they hope to fulfil. Every Member is different. There are several fundamental roles:

Council Meetings/Committee work and roles and very often a greater or lesser political activity (some

choose very little, some are more able and choose more and take Chairs or VCs!)

Political work; this may be for your local Association writing leaflets or social media, raising funds,

campaigning to being part of the thinking and direction for the Party "in the Council House/Town hall" or the organisational aspects of the Party locally/nationally.

The Civic or civil roles, engaging in the community and doing various works and/or taking part in

"outside body" roles. There is also the ultimate role becoming Deputy Mayor and Mayor. This can involve a few pleasant events and charity raising activities, none of which we have seen for about 15 months.

Case work: dealing with issues raised by generally single individuals where they have a problem. This

ranges from Housing matters, Planning issues, Neighbourhood and boundary problems, litter, public nuisance from smoke and smells to rodents, and many concerns about Crime and anti-social behaviour. This includes issues where we and MBC are not the statutory authority or the provider, but we still nonetheless may be involved or we refer to others.

Ward work: this is where there may be repeated and same case work matters or where we realise there

is a broader concern and it needs to be addressed somehow. This can also be where "top down" strategic issues or actions evolve that are affecting the Ward or they are likely to.

Few Members can get involved at all levels, and every level has its own demands and degree of work or more work, especially if you do work on a key project or priority; it simply takes too much time. In the Headcorn Ward there is a lot of Case and Ward work that I choose to prioritise both reactively and pro-actively. That tends to dictate my time and energy.

But the Planning issues have been the bulk of Ward work over the last 2 years, for the benefit of this report and most of them relate to enforcement. The biggest area of work, although it comes in different forms, is chasing up on Enforcement matters. Its case work

and Ward work. It happens every week. When I did serve as Vice Chair of Planning, I requested regular updates on the work of Enforcement teams to Committees. That seems to have been neglected due to Covid and a lack of personnel unable to go out and visit places and people. When we did have reports Headcorn Ward made up almost 50% of the whole Boroughs concerns. The other 50% were invariably in close and neighbouring Wards like Staplehurst. But the nature of Enforcement was changing, and our Officer teams were literally being less responsive. So, with like minded Members (you have to get several people animated to make an impact), then my Group pressed Officers into some better response. The frequent staffing reviews and incessant turnover of personnel in this work meant there was a lack of momentum and therefore some of us had to press and lobby Officers and try to make headway with some of the Elected Members from other groups. But as I report March/April 2021 there has been some recruitment and improvement. That is something that just continues, trying to impress upon Officers and "townie" Members how much this matters to Rural areas and its residents.

Some elements of this work are frustrating as we cannot inform the public what we are doing, how and where as this alerts people whilst it increases tensions or sensitivities. It is also very easy for things to be misinterpreted and in an age where any action or opinion is likely to upset somebody, then certain things are kept quiet. It also protects those of us that are active, as I personally don't want another "Code of Conduct" enquiry or other threatening legal action hanging over me.

Nonetheless Enforcement work covers many areas: Environment and waste crime or littering, fly tipping and the dumping of various commodities in inappropriate places. Then there is Planning that covers occupations of fields by caravans or mobile homes and recent increases in another field of work where new homes and those developments have not provided the necessary conditions that were required or quality standards have not been fulfilled. Add the issues of Flooding, Water and Drainage plus Trading Standards. Anti-social behaviour and various manners of crime then the Ward is very demanding. As Ward issues these matters require endless dialogue with MBC Officers and referrals with follow-up to other agencies. But I take it further. As in some cases I do not believe some Officers will push for the answers or solutions.

I believe the Planning system and some Laws and Policies need review. Whilst I do not sit on the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee I make sure I attend periodically and engage in many parts and processes of the Local Plan Review. There is much we may not like in respect to Planning, but whilst much of it is contained in National Law, I still want to see improvement in quality standards and indeed type, size, design and the sort of provision we currently provide. We must also see greater thought and action in the bigger scheme of things such as roads, schools, doctors, Children's and Youth provision and care support. If we are to have more housing then we need to have better homes, better served by better services. So, I lobby where I can to promote better housing especially for the elderly and disabled and better access to

housing for the young. We also need a better way to provide homes for our Gypsy and Traveller population. This could be addressed far better.

I engage with our MP and discuss the roles of Planning Inspectors, who seem to favour anybody and anything anywhere! With my MP I have met Senior Officers of the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government on this matter and how Enforcement seems to be impotent on certain matters. These are the people that set the policies and laws and write them! We have also met Environment Agency Directors to discuss their reluctance to tackle some local issues.

Whilst I mention some big elements of work and dialogue there are also many other issues that all form my work.

Golding Homes: Whilst several Housing Associations provide Community/Affordable Housing in the Ward, a large part especially the old stock, is managed by Golding Homes. In the last 2 years I have actually had a major increase in case work reflecting tenants in these homes. There have literally been some horror stories. This is reflected across the Borough. My fellow Members in Park Wood and Shepway have been inundated with high/heavy case loads in this respect. This culminated in meetings with Officers. In early 2020 as Covid arrived Golding Homes were placed in the Housing equivalent of "special measures" by their inspection body. There was an immediate restructure with new management and new approaches. Some Members met Officers to update and scrutinise and develop better lines of communication for action early 2021 and we await the next chapter!

As mentioned above I continue to engage both locally and nationally with the Environment Agency on matters such as flooding and drainage, waste crime and the management of SSSI/Site of Special Scientific Interest. It is still work in progress.

A burial Ground is the hoped for ending at Redhill Stables. This work continues.

I do serve on Outside bodies & continue to be a Director of ACRE/Rural Kent and although this is project work that reacts to rural issues it has been a struggle getting the projects and getting them funded, nonetheless the Coffee caravans thrive that setup in isolated villages and bring people together over a coffee and then discuss local issues, signpost and refer, and even advise further. Rural Housing initiatives also thrive.

I also serve as a go-between for Headcorn Aerodrome and sit on the Aerodrome Consultative Committee dealing with issues that range from the use of firearms in re-enactments, low flying shows, public safety and National security and Defence. It may not strike people, but after Lydd Headcorn is the next air runway from Europe or the nearest to Europe without 24 hr Border Force security. It is also very convenient for a RAF Chinook to practice Emergency and Humanitarian efforts or refuel before the English Channel. Local communities are all very supportive of the Aerodrome and it is popular amongst most

residents and thankfully we get very few complaints, however a minor enclave of local residents who choose to live near the Aerodrome now seem animated to find fault with the planes and the Aerodrome and now challenge the authorities with the processes that approve the activities. This increases my work.

As part of the work in the Policy and Resources Committee we have agreed to undertake a Boundary Review. The Boundary Commission will review Ward numbers and make-up and relevant "democratic representation" in terms of how many Members the Council should have. The Borough has got bigger to 178,000 residents and as such the 55 Members and the size of Wards needs address as proportionately the current set-up does not fairly represent good democracy. There are umpteen possible ways to deal with it. The Constitution that works on Elections in thirds, three out of every 4 years does not help! So, this may be a way of getting a better democracy? But it will take months of work.

And I couldn't conclude a report without mentioning the impact and issues of Covid in some way. Maidstone Borough Council have been one of several authorities at the forefront of many aspects of work for Covid. MBC are the statutory Public Health authority, so formed part of the multi-agency County and Regional responses to the National crisis. This meant staff were deployed in unfamiliar roles and some functions of the Council were suspended. And like most big organisations we set up a response committee approach with various actions and procedures for our own organisation.

Like so many we worked from home using laptops. We set up Skype for meetings with Teams in readiness. Business rates were suspended and with other income deplete the Council finances were looking to be inadequate. Adjustments were made. Some Members were directly involved whilst others advised or input in certain ways. It gives me great pride to say that Headcorn had one of the first Covid assessment Centres and one of the most productive Vaccine Centres at the Aerodrome. Local Doctors and staff from several practices locally achieved wonders and served nearly all of the Wealden areas right into the edge of Sussex.

Covid also meant local Councils were charged with awarding, processing and monitoring Business Grants. Businesses come under the role of Economic Development and regeneration as well as our Rates Collection services, so that took some organisation and responsiveness. MBC performed it magnificently and exceeded the performance of other Councils

up and down the country. I am proud that in my role as VC of ERL and member of Audit Committee the overseeing role fell on my Committees shoulders. In Headcorn Ward I have personally intervened on several and the total of Grants has been nearrising daily. The grants can never make up for lost trade and not all qualified for a grant; it was never a perfect solution, but that help will have saved many from much worse.

I thank Parish Councils for all their work during this difficult time and lets hope we can now truly look forward.

I also thank Residents for their brave tolerance and generally very good following of rules and protocols in such difficult times.

Martin Round

Malherbe Monthly

During the past year with the restrictions imposed on us by the Government in regard to the Covid 19 pandemic we have had to curtail our distribution of the magazine.

Whilst we have been able to produce the magazine in its normal format and content we have been unable to distribute it widely throughout the parish and the surrounding areas as before.

In this context we have hand delivered it to all the households within the village of Grafty Green and left additional copies of the magazine at Grafty Green Post Office and Boughton Malherbe Church Porch thus enabling parishioners who have not had their magazine delivered to obtain a copy.

Additionally, the magazine has been uploaded to the Parish Council website each month enabling anyone with internet access the ability to view and read the magazine.

Usually, we would print and distribute 465 copies but this has reduced to 200 copies through the past year. Consequently, we have not charged any of the advertisers fees for their adverts as we believed they were not getting the exposure their adverts signed up for prior to the onset of Covid 19 restrictions.

It is hoped to resume full production and distribution as soon as possible after the Government hopefully removes all Covid 19 related restrictions on June 21st.

Michael Hitchins



Grafty Green Parish has continued to maintain a low level of crime during the past year. This 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:

- Regular patrols by a dedicated vehicle for ASB hotspots in the area
- Joint agency work involving various partners including local housing providers and MBC.
- several operations in the area around rural crime. In Particular a regular rural operation called Op innovate.
- Follow ups on the victims of burglaries/breaks to give crime prevention advice and information booklets.
- Patrols of outlying areas to deter and stop vehicles known for scrap metal thefts. This has been backed up with pre-arranged Policing Operations County wide involving numerous authorities and scrap yard inspections
- Kent police Community Policing Team and the Rural Task Force monitor and patrol the area on a regular basis
- Visits to those on quarantine to follow up on behalf of the border force

Can all residents please pass on any information that they deem suspicious. Including where possible descriptions of persons and vehicle registration numbers. This really helps on building information around activity within the rural areas

We do encourage residents to call in any incidents Anti Social Behaviour..

I would also like to reiterate that residents call 101/999 for any incidents that occur and not just post on Facebook. We need to know!

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 Grafty Green Safe

PCSO John Boyd - Maidstone Community Safety Unit.