

WEST KINGSDOWN
PARISH COUNCIL
REPORT



2020/21

The Parish Council is responsible for the civil parish which includes West Kingsdown, Woodlands, Knatts Valley and East Hill.

We have 11 Councillors who make up the Parish Council.
They serve a four year term which expires May 2023.

This report provides an opportunity for the Parish Council to account to local residents on the way it has discharged its responsibilities and Managed the Council's assets in the previous twelve months.

Chairman's Report 2020/21

The year started in May 2020 with the Covid restrictions in force and therefore no face to face meeting could take place. Meetings moved to using zoom for virtual meetings in July and from that date regular monthly meetings have taken place. Parish Council meetings are preceded with the opportunity for members of the public to ask raise issues and ask questions. The General Purposes Committee meets monthly and often looks are matters in detail and then making recommendations to the full Council. Both meetings are preceded by a Planning Committee Meetings where Members consider the planning applications made to the Sevenoaks District Council based on planning considerations. The Parish Council's comments are then forwarded to the District Council. The Council's precept was considered and set at a Finance Committee Meeting in January and this will provide the finances to run the Council for the following year. All of the meetings are open to the public, but they are not public meetings.

The Council works closely with the Old School Management Committee, the Church Woods Management Committee and the Village Hall Management Committee. Each of these is an independent registered charity and your Council is represented on them. They perform an important role in looking after village assets and the work put into them by their volunteer committee members is of considerable value to our community. Managing these assets in this way enables them to apply for grants which the Parish Council will not be eligible for. Reports from each of the Committees are included in this document.

One of the more onerous roles for a Councillor is to be Chairman of the Planning Committee and Mrs Josie Watchorn has continued in this office for the past year. Her knowledge and expertise in planning matters and the history of planning applications in the village has been invaluable to the Council.

Roy Barry has ably assisted us in the consideration of the village footpaths and regularly walks them drawing our attention to matters of concern for which he is thanked.

Jackie West our KCC Warden plays a valuable role in our community which is very much appreciated by parishioners and Councillors alike.

The Parish Council works closely with our District Councillors, in particular Ms Lynda Harrison who is not only a District Councillor but also our Parish Clerk, assisting us in matters relating to the functions of the District Council.

Our Kent County Councillor David Brazier attends Parish Council meetings and is always responsive to queries from the Council, individual Councillors and parishioners. If you have concerns about aspects of the County Council's functions which you might not wish to raise via the Parish Council then do not hesitate to contact him directly.

In September we welcomed West Kingsdown Football Club to use the facilities on the Gamecock Meadow, but however their ability to play games has been cut short by covid restrictions. David Diboll also continues to work for the Council in a paid and voluntary capacity as well, thank you David.

Lynda Harrison, our Clerk plays an invaluable role as the public face of the Council and looks after day to day business and our finances in an effective and efficient way.

As we come to the end of the second year of the 4-year term of this Council may I record my thanks to my fellow councillors for their time and commitment, serving this community as volunteers for the benefit of all who live here.

I look forward to continuing to work to serve you all and hopefully bringing to fruition during the next year, projects we are currently working on.

Cllr Pat Bosley, Chairman

Councillors

Mrs Pat Bosley	Chairman of the Parish Council and Finance Committee
Mr Graham Christie	Vice Chairman of the Parish Council
Miss Jodie Holdstock	Chairman of the General Purpose Committee
Mrs Margaret Richards	Vice Chairman of the General Purpose Committee
Mrs Josie Watchorn	Chairman of Planning Committee
Mrs Ian Bosley	Vice Chairman of the Planning
Mr David Land	
Mr Steve Gray	
Mr Dave king	
Mr Ricky Spiller	
Mrs Lin Spencer	

Due to the Pandemic that hit the world all Parish Meetings went to virtual and were held via Zoom

Everything carried on as usual via Zoom (virtual Meetings) Full Parish Council Meetings are held monthly, with the exception of August due to holidays, and the General Purposes Committee meet on the second Monday of each month. These meetings continued to be open to the public and press to attend.

Minutes of all the meeting are available from the Parish Office, published on the Parish Council's new website www.westkingsdownparishcouncil.org.uk.

In April of each year the Annual Parish Meeting is held which is an opportunity for the Parish Council to report on its activities and for local electors to speak on local issues.

Parish Office

This year in March 2020 the office closed at the Gamecock when a total lockdown was announced due to coronavirus pandemic. The Lines were diverted and the Clerk worked from home full time to be able to help residents during difficult times and to continue to carry out Council work. The office itself has remained closed for the past year.

Code of Conduct

In accordance with legislation the Councillors conduct the affairs of the Council in accordance with the Code of Conduct set out by the Sevenoaks District Council Standards Committee. Councillors receive regular updates regarding changes in legislations. 2019*20 saw elections which happen every 4 years and some Councillors retiring and not re standing and some new faces to the Parish Council.

Publicity

The Parish website continues to be maintained and updated with information for the community. The Parish Council also continues to provide information to parishioners with its regular newsletters printed in SEKAM, the St Edmund's Parish magazine. Notice boards are also used to publish dates of meetings. The Clerk also posts items of interest on the West Kingsdown residents Facebook page, although not run by the Council, residents have found the information useful. Notice boards are Hever Road, Gamecock Meadow, East Hill and Knatts Valley, as well as a notice board in the entrance hall of the library.

Kent County Community Warden Scheme

We continue to share our Community Warden Jackie West with Fawkham and Hartley and value the contribution that Jackie makes to this community, she regularly engages with local community groups and helping the elderly and vulnerable with welfare issues.

Jackie has become a great asset to West Kingsdown, providing a visible presence within our community and liaising with groups and organisations and at the local school. Jackie always goes that extra mile to help where she can, she has certainly been called to this in the pandemic and has supported many families and residents and has had close links with the Community Cupboard and other agencies. She is always very efficient in her role. Her report is attached.

Hever Road Shops

The Parish Council continues to maintain this important central area in the local community. It is regularly litter picked by Sevenoaks District Council and when icy David Diboll who is employed by the Parish Council grits the area. The Parish Council has agreed to pay SDC to clear the car park to the rear although not owned by the Parish Council for the benefit of the users of the shops. This year saw the first time the Parish Council put up lights at Christmas which was well received and gave a bit of Christmas cheer in tough pandemic times.

Allotments

The Parish Council manages 26 allotment plots at two locations, the Recreation Ground and by Beacon Row, London Road. We have seen some holders retiring from their allotments due to various reasons but all the plots have been filled and currently there are no vacant plots.

Land owned by Parish Council

The Parish Council continues to maintain land it owns in Millfield, Meadowbank, Thornbank, Oakland's Close, Chancel Close, Hever Avenue Recreation Ground, Gamecock Meadow, School Lane and the Burial ground. The grounds contracts have been awarded for 2019-2022 and we look forward to working with those firms allocated the contract to keep the village looking nice and cared for.

Future Projects

The Council has begun to look into affordable housing scheme to help the needs of residents, Councillors have met with English Rural who has been discussing with local landowner the possibility of using their land. Discussions have been slow but are positive with a land owner.

Finance Committee

The Finance Committee, under the Chairmanship of Cllr Mrs Pat Bosley, meets to set the budgets and the precept for the forthcoming year in January. In July the committee met to carry out the annual review of employee's salaries, due to national increase in the minimum hourly rate. Parish met again in November to consider grant applications made to local organisation for financial assistance from the Parish Council.

The Finance Committee also monitors the Council's accounts which are managed on a day to day basis by the Clerk, to ensure that expenditure is in line with budgeted allocations.

Regular internal audits are carried out and annual external audit as well. Finally the accounts are submitted to the Audit Commission in June of each year.

(this date has been extended due to the coronavirus Covid – 19) The Council has increased wages in-line with legislation to meet the minimum living wage hourly rate.

Burial Ground

The Burial Ground is inspected regularly and general maintenance and tree works have been carried out. The Council are looking to extend the burial Ground as in approximately 10 years there will be a need for more space.

Planning Committee

During the period from 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021 the Parish Council were invited to comment on 73 planning applications. This was a considerable increase on last year when we commented on 54 plans. The fact that only 28 of the applications were for properties within the Village Envelope and 45 were for the Green Belt once again indicates the pressure there is for development within the more rural parts of the Village.

Over the year 37 planning applications were determined by Sevenoaks District Council – the same as in 2019/20. Of these 22 were approved and 15 refused. 18 of the decisions related to the Village Envelope. Of these 13 were approved and 4 refused. One application was withdrawn – probably because planning approval was not needed.

Within the Green Belt 19 proposals were determined. Of these 10 were approved and 9 refused.

The difference between the number of applications commented upon and the number determined by Sevenoaks District Council is due mainly to the re-submission of applications that are refused and also applicants changing their minds after permission has been given and then re applying again for something else.

There have been 4 Appeal decisions in the past year, 1 on a property within the Village Envelope and 3 in the Green Belt. All were dismissed.

There have been five Approvals of applications that relate to multiple properties on a site. These are a barn conversion at Terry's Lodge Farm, replacement of the Old Post Office, Woodlands Golf Course, each with four new properties and developments of 5 new dwellings at the end of Viking Way and 8 at Bamfield in Kingsingfield Road.

The year has seen further relaxations of the planning system. It is now possible to convert a barn into 5 dwellings instead of 3 and to put two extra floors on top of your house, unless it is in the AONB or in a terrace. The worrying thing is the proposed further easing of the rules at a time when there over a million extant planning permissions in the South East alone.

Meanwhile, the Sevenoaks District Local Plan remains has not yet been adopted and remains in limbo along with the plans of some other Districts.

J Watchorn

General Purpose Committee

The main business of the Committee covers public footpaths, maintenance of the Parish Council's Burial Ground, the Gamecock Meadow, the Recreation Ground (Hever Avenue) and the various open spaces in Millfield Road, Meadowbank, Chancel Close, Oaklands Close, Thornbank, the School Lane Garden and the land at the bottom of Neal Road.

The grounds and gardening contract for the Parish were tendered and let to new suppliers. Regular inspections of the Recreation Ground in Hever Avenue were undertaken and all identified maintenance has been completed.

Inspections of the Skatepark and Adizone Gym have been undertaken on a regular basis. No major problems but minor points identified in the course of these inspections have been rectified. The telephone kiosk outside the McColls Shop in Hever Road has had a defibrillator installed inside and this has been registered with the ambulance service for the use of the community in the event of a medical emergency.

The litter picking volunteers were unable to meet during this year due to covid restrictions but it is hope they will resume when government guidelines allow they have tackled roads and hedge rows and tidy up the car park behind the shops in Hever Road.

Dog fouling continues to be a problem across the Parish and several articles have been published in SEKAM asking dog owners to ensure that they pick up after their pets.

In conclusion I would like to thank Mr Roy Barry our voluntary Footpaths Officer for their hard work during the past year.

Jodie Holdstock – Chairman of General Purpose Committee

Church Wood Report

As many others have said, “It has been a year like no other.” During lockdown Church Wood has provided residents with a place to exercise and enjoy nature and, for families, a place for their children to let off steam and run free. Numbers using the Wood have increased dramatically but there have been good and bad sides to this.

Whilst it has been good to see so many people out and about it has had its downsides. The increased use of the paths has resulted in them being churned up and many doubled in width. Excess rubbish, in the form of cans, bottles and snack packets, has also been a problem. However, it has been heartening to see more people taking it upon themselves to pick up the rubbish - a trait not seen for many years.

The Management Plan has been completed and approved as, more importantly, has our Countryside Stewardship Scheme application. The Committee now has the daunting task of putting it into action. Work parties resumed when the first lockdown eased. Foot paths were cleared and ivy cut back. Just as coppicing was starting we went back into lockdown.

The dormouse programme was also suspended for the year. However, as the last lockdown eased boxes were checked and the many squirrel damaged ones replaced with those made by a Member of the Committee. The good news is the first survey of the year takes place on 17th April 2021.

Now the rain has stopped and the sun put in an appearance, the celandines, wood nemonies and violets are out in force, soon to be followed by bluebells. What better place to take exercise and lift your spirits!

J Watchorn

Old School, School Lane

This community site, owned by the Parish Council, is leased to and managed on a day to day basis by the Old School Management Committee [Registered Charity No. 1088339].

The buildings are used by Pre-School, Kings Church and The Dance Conservatoire. The old School building is used by Pre-School and local organisations, including a Gardening Group, Railway Club and a Camera Club and is available for meetings and parties. However, this year has seen restricted use of the facilities due to covid regulations.

The Management Committee meets regularly to oversee the site and carry out day to day maintenance and has ordered new windows to replace those at the rear of the old building.

Mrs Pat Bosley, Chairman of the Trustees

Village Hall report

This community site, owned by the Parish Council, is leased to and managed on a day to day basis by the Village Hall Management Committee [Registered Charity No. 302776].

The Village Hall report is given to the public at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Parish Council.

The last year has seen limited use of the hall due to covid restrictions. Following the flood in June 2019 the hall re-opened in early 2020, but then to close again in March. It was possible to open in the summer when restrictions were lifted but then close once again in December 2020. At the time of writing the hall is closed and it is hoped it will open for limited use on 12th April and then by a wider section of the community on 17th May 2021. The halls and Committee Room have been redecorated as the Trustees believe that it is important for the building to be maintained in a good condition. The trustees recognise the very valuable job carried out by the dedicated caretakers, Graham and Robin, especially with the additional requirements to the cleaning schedule brought about by the coronavirus. The Committee has started to install "flood protection" around the building and this should be completed during March 2021.

During the year the Chairman, Vic Codling, retired and the Trustees place on record their appreciation and thanks for his years of commitment and work for the benefit of the hall and community.

Thanks is expressed to the members of the Management Committee and for the time they give in helping with odd jobs, gardening, rubbish clearing and hall maintenance.

The Annual General Meeting is usually held in July and it is very much hoped that this will take place this year.

Ian Bosley, Trustee Treasurer.

Sevenoaks District Councillor For Fawkham and West Kingsdown Ward.

I continue to work for the benefit of residents and the villages of West Kingsdown and Fawkham.

I have been the lead Volunteer for Care in the community an initiative set up to help coordinate volunteers during the pandemic. We have helped with shopping, Prescriptions, dog walking and whatever else we have been called to do. I say we, I can't have done this without many volunteers who have offered their time to help the community and I can't thank you enough for your community spirit you have all been amazing.

Our District Council meetings have continue but have been virtual and I continue to sit on Health and Housing committee, Housing liaison group, Finance and Governance Committees. I have also attended various training sessions relating to planning which have been provide virtually by SDC and have been very informative.

I have helped with the Community Cupboard a foodbank to help the community and the wider areas and continue to actively support them and the brilliant work they have done particularly during this pandemic and look forward to the new extension they have secured planning permission for as sadly the need for food banks increases.

I took part in the "Clean up Sevenoaks Campaign" and was out collecting litter with my daughter, it's amazing but also sad how many bottles of vodka (empty I might add)and plastic bottles and polystyrene packaging from takeaways you can find in the road and hedgerows. Thank you to all the residents who have been out during lockdown litter picking helping to make our village tidier.

Cllr Lynda Harrison

Cllr.Harrison@sevenoaks.gov.uk

Brands Hatch Liaison Group

The Liaison Group has not met this year due to the suspension of racing and the closure of the racetrack whilst in a pandemic.

Lynda Harrison and Steve Gray
Parish Council nominee to the group.

The Community Cupboard

‘Everyone needs a little help sometimes’ started as our ethos and has never been truer word

Originally providing support from the boots of our cars and with minimal donations, we were extremely fortunate to have been offered the premises by West Kingsdown Parish Council and The Community Cupboard has quickly become a fixed and welcomed asset to the community. We have rapidly grown, over the last 18 months into a community support hub, which is located in the garage next to the village hall in West Kingsdown.

As a Foodbank, we offer a non judgemental and friendly welcome to those who contact us. Working not only with referring agencies but also with individuals and families that self refer, we aim to retain the dignity that people are entitled to. As an independent service, we do not operate on a voucher scheme and our users are not numbers, they are people that need support.

During the period April 2020 to March 2021, we received donations totalling 36,687 kilos of which 34,075 kilos were distributed in our support parcels. These horrendous figures not only demonstrate the level of support that we have been able to provide during Covid-19 but also account for many families and individuals who struggled behind closed doors, unable to receive help because they didn't fit the criteria of other support services. Having supported 551 families during this 12 month period covering a wider area of Sevenoaks, we are pleased that we have been able to increase our donation points to villages and locations further afield to support this.

Many people wrongly assume that such an affluent area would not require a food bank. With the vast majority of our users in employment, struggling to make ends meet, this assumption could never be further from the truth. As an independent Food bank and signposting service, we are able to adapt to our community and the demand and needs that present.

The appearance of Covid brought further challenges. Rather than closing our hub when the pandemic started, we instantly increased our opening days and provided support 5 days a week. We have built fantastic relationships with the community, local and national businesses and are extremely proud to have forged secure and trusted relationships with other support services, charities and government bodies.



With 2020 now firmly behind us and unprecedented figures reported for the past year, we yearn to see a reduction in our statistics, this has however not been the case.

With an additional 78 families registered already in 2021 (totalling 319 individuals), we are preparing for the continuation of required support levels and as a team are working tirelessly to meet demands.

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With space at a minimum inside the building (due to the increase of users), we are delighted that we have now been granted planning permission to extend the building. This will provide additional storage areas for the products required to continue to meet demand.

Community support has been outstanding throughout and we were delighted to be named as Community Heros by Laura Trott MP MBE within her weekly awards. We were also chosen for The Community Award by DA3 magazine. Having featured in The Kent Messenger, The village Advertiser, The DA3 magazine and various other publications, we are confident that we have significantly raised our profile across the Sevenoaks District.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank West Kingsdown Parish Council and the community for their continued support and to acknowledge the difference that this support makes to an extensive amount of local residents. Tracy, Vee, David & Helen The Community Cupboard Team

Kent Community Warden Service: Annual Report 2021

The over-riding objective of the Kent Community Warden Service is *'to create safer and stronger communities'*. The role of the Community Warden is ever evolving, prompted by the changing needs of our communities and other strategic requirements placed upon our Service.



Naturally, during the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, our duties were re-aligned to best serve our communities during that unchartered period. We have since transitioned to a recovery / 'business as usual' footing, where it is envisaged we will remain. Current priorities are defined by our Community Safety Business Plan 2020-21:

- ! Delivery of core Community Warden Service Priorities - Providing a reassuring presence / support for our residents; responding to community needs; facilitating solutions to local concerns; and addressing issues of loneliness & social isolation.
- ! Undertake CSU tasks with / on behalf of partners to address local issues and concerns (inc. supporting community hubs during the Covid-19 response and recovery period).
- ! Deliver the Trading Standards scams project through support of individual scam victims; and strengthening communities' resilience to scams.
- ! Working with partners, inc. Adult Social Care, to safeguard and support vulnerable individuals, enabling them to live safely and independently in their own homes.

- ! Provide an operational and welfare response for communities in the event of an emergency *e.g.*, surge testing in response to a variant detected in the ME15 area in February.



Notable Community-Based Activities

I have continued to support my communities in a visible and proactive fashion this past year. The focus of my work has inevitably involved extending support to those most in need. This has been a challenging time as residents have required a greater degree of specialized support, compassion and sensitivity. For example:

- ! Working SDC's Private Sector Housing Officer to arrange assessments of vulnerable persons' mobility needs which informed what adaptations were needed in their home to enable them to remain living there safely and independently.
- ! Whilst we look forward to community-based groups returning, I have stayed in touch with residents through socially-distanced home visits. Apart from checking on welfare, this helps offer companionship, reducing the sense of social isolation and loneliness.
- ! Supporting vulnerable residents in accessing services is a major part of my working day *e.g.*, liaising with the GP and Mental Health Crisis Team on behalf of a gentleman living with deteriorating mental health; and signposting family members to ADSS for carer support on behalf of a loved one living with dementia.
- ! Assisted families newly facing financial hardship *e.g.*, signposting to Porchlight's 'Live Well Kent' programme, West Kingsdown's Community Cupboard and SDC's HERO Team.

On a positive note, it has been very rewarding to see residents working together to support others. I hope this element of community spirit is a lasting legacy of these difficult times.

Jackie West | Kent Community Warden Service | Sevenoaks - Tunbridge Wells Team |
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