



Offham Parish Four Year Review



David Stretton, Chairman



2011 - 2015

Chairman's Report

Council Elections

2015 is an election year for the Parish Council. This coincides with the National and Borough elections. At the time of writing it is not entirely clear how many of the current Councillors will be standing for re-election, but I would anticipate that there will certainly be opportunities for others to join the Council, irrespective of whether a formal election is required or not. If there are an insufficient number of candidates [max. seven] standing for election, a process of Co-option takes place to fill any vacancies. Details of the election process are available on the website or can be obtained directly from TMBC offices.

The internal organisation of the Council is determined annually by the members, with election of various officers and responsibilities for specific tasks or attending appropriate external committees allocated accordingly. The Parish Council may also create Working Groups to manage specific Village Projects or events, with many non-Councillors having significant involvement with the organisation of the activity. The May Day Working Group is the most important and longstanding example of this.

In common with all Public Sector organisations, there has been a significant increase in the amount of "red tape" associated with our activities. Policies for complaints procedures, risk-assessments, standing order provisions, audits and the like have received scrutiny in the past few years and the number of emails seems to have increased exponentially! None the less, OPC has made tangible

progress in various areas and has adopted an approach to some which have not made an impact on Tax payer revenue!

Innovations, Events & Activities

One fairly recent innovation has been the inauguration of Community Awards. Anyone can make nominations for these Awards, which must be received by OPC by mid January. Thus far, OPC has adopted the annual KALC Community Award scheme, but has developed it to include an Offham Community Award scheme in order that three members of our Community are recognised annually. In its first year [2014], Gloria Pearson was a deserved winner of the KALC Award for a multitude of services to Neighbourhood Watch, The Offham Society, Offham Primary School and various other Clubs and Societies in the Village. Ron Marchant and Joan Phipps received the Offham Awards for their years of service to the Parish Council, allotments, village events on the Green and various other activities.

This year, we honour John Lander, who receives the KALC Award for his contributions to both Offham and Addington Parish Councils and their respective PCCs. Plus of course his roles with TMBC - latterly as an Alderman of the Borough. Phyllis Jones and Colin Wolfe receive the Offham Awards. Phyllis has given unstinting service to the Village Hall Committee, acting as the Booking Agent for as long as I can remember. She is also ever-present at the Lunch Club and, with her husband, Brian, ran the Village Youth Club in years gone by. Colin seems to keep the Methodist Church running almost singlehandedly and has been a

Parish Councillor and very active resident over many years. Both thoroughly deserve the Awards.

After some thirty years of deliberation, the issue of the Offham Pond has finally been grasped and resolved! This is largely due to the efforts of Cllr. Frankling and his helpers, including Cllrs Pierce and Oliver, who have created something for the Village that should hopefully last for many years to come. Since its completion, the voices of dissent have virtually disappeared - possibly because the project has been entirely financed from donations and fund raising activities and not from the public purse! There is a full section devoted to this work elsewhere in the Review.



- Cllr David Frankling, Chair, OPC Planning Group

As part of the fund raising work, we have introduced the Annual Photographic Competition and associated Calendar. Cllr. Williams has been instrumental in the sales of these and, in the two years to date, almost £1000 has been raised. It has also given the opportunity for many residents to demonstrate their skills with their cameras, with many artistic and creative works of beauty being shown. The introduction of

sponsorship of individual pages in the Calendar has added to the revenue, whilst providing an opportunity for advertising local businesses as well as clubs and societies that operate within the Village. At the time of writing entries have closed for the 2016 Calendar - so please get snapping for the 2017 version!

The other main fund raising activity has been the introduction of another annual Quiz held in the Village Hall. A hot supper has been provided each year, courtesy of Cllrs Williams and Frankling respectively. Both quizzes held so far have been very well supported with 15 teams taking part in each [in spite of my questions that some deem rather difficult!]. Sponsors have been incredibly generous in providing prizes for the raffle, which this year enables a floating duck-pond to be added to the attraction. Would be tenants are not expected to apply in writing [!], but may need to join a waiting list, given that pairs of ducks have already been sighted on the pond.

Following on from the success of the Jubilee celebrations on the Green and the earlier Millenium Party, The Offham Society are planning a Jazz Evening in June this year, but this time the event will be making good use of the Cosgrave Field. More details are included in the later item in this Review.

Transport issues continue to exercise us much of the time and the anticipated further development of Kings Hill will undoubtedly add to the pressure on our local roads. The recent speed sign display at the western approach to the village has had some beneficial impact on speeds in that direction, but much more needs to be done if we are really going to subdue the impact of through vehicles on the Village. To that effect, OPC received an excellent response to the questionnaire distributed last year. Results of this have been distributed to KCC Highways and TMBC. Highways consultants are in the process of producing a traffic calming plan for the Village, which we expect to be financed by Section 106 funds provided by local developers.

The problem is going to be to provide effective measures without urbanising the village. We hope that there are some creative minds working for KCC!

Traffic control was the main theme for the 2014 APM and this was well attended, as were the previous three. Visiting speakers and panellists have comprised some influential local dignitaries including our current MP, the senior director of the local hospital, members of other successful Parish Councils and various sports personalities, including Olympic athletes. This year we had hoped to arrange a pre-election hustings with all constituency candidates attending. However, we now appreciate the problem currently experienced by the national TV channels in getting all to agree to such debates! The date of the APM is set for April 17th. It will focus on recent local developments and seek opinions from those gathered on prospective projects for the coming years. Details of the Agenda will be circulated separately.



Cllr. Barry Oliver - unofficial pond goldfish remover!



Lynne Mackie -OPC Clerk and RFO

Finance

Having already reported how the Parish Council has managed to finance certain projects in the Village by various fund raising and sponsorship activities, we have been keen to keep payments from local households as low as possible in respect of the precept paid for

from Council Tax. Certain changes to the way in which funding from the Borough have led to slight reductions in the household base used to determine these payments. Never the less, for the past three years we have attempted to leave the "penny rate" at the same level. Whether the predicted period of zero inflation to come will apply to all areas of Local Authority charging, time alone will tell.

Maintenance Contracts

These have just been agreed. There have been a few problems and subsequent comments about state of The Green this year. The unseasonably cold weather early in the season meant that cutting could not commence until early April. This was followed by a dry summer and a preponderance of wispy, long grass, which was not cut cleanly by the cylinder mower used by our contractor. We are now investigating whether it is possible to use different equipment to better effect, including the option of collecting and /or mulching cuttings periodically.

FCC/Infinis Landfill Liaison Group.

Yet again the company controlling the old quarry site has changed hands! Given the change of personnel, this has rather upset the regular pattern of Liaison meetings, which had in any event been reduced to two per year. In the past twelve months, the meetings have been resurrected, with one site walk and a normal round the table meeting last month. In general, activity on the site has lessened and there appear to have been fewer issues with "hotspots". Infinis is still converting the gas to electricity in the compound to the rear of White Ladies, the operation is well past its peak and that the number of generators in operation has recently been reduced to just two. Having said this, gas will be extracted from the site for many years to come and improved technology will also enable the operators to generate electricity from "poorer quality" gas.

The Parish Council has expressed concerns that site is still not up to

standard and pointed out the need to improve maintenance to the Teston Road boundary in particular. Excessive weed growth on site not only looks unsightly but also causes a nuisance to local landowners via seed migration. A further site walk will take place in the summer and this will precede the next Liaison meeting. There were also questions raised about the recent gas migration identified to the south of Comp Lane and a perceived increase in noise levels from the generator site. This latter complaint linked with the latest annual noise survey, which recorded significantly higher levels than the previous survey. Both KCC and TMBC have been very proactive in supporting us in pursuing our concerns and the first indications from the new site operators are that they are also keen to address any issues in a positive manner.

Annual Parish Meeting 2014

The 2014 APM focussed on traffic issues in Offham, the interested audience gathered to see if the Consultant commissioned by OPC had been able to come up with a miracle plan to rid us of the growing problems of increased traffic through the Village. Alas, we were for the most part disappointed, given that suggestions for calming measures were seemingly unimaginative and certainly would not impress the majority of a concerned and multi factional audience. Quite clearly, where one lives within the Village is a key influence on ones perception of both the problems and potential solutions.

On a more positive note the measurements taken by the traffic counters at either end of the village by the Consultants and KCC suggested that traffic volumes and speed levels were not as high as public perception would believe them to be and indeed, not having changed much from surveys conducted some years earlier. However, statistics can always be questioned and many felt that the timing of the counts was not optimal in collecting data.

We anticipate that further discussion of these issues will take

place during the coming APM, to be held on April 17th.

Traffic Calming Follow Up

With the 2014 APM as a background, OPC convened a meeting with TMBC and Highways personnel to discuss the way forward. We were delighted to see so many high ranking executives from the various groups in attendance and it soon became apparent that our concerns were being taken seriously and that funding should be made available for appropriate schemes to be implemented. It was however stressed that any such scheme must have significant majority backing from residents and this led to a comprehensive questionnaire being distributed around the Village. Response to this was high and although views were generally expressed on respondent location, there was plenty of material to inform decision making. Additional views were also collected from a focus group, which was established to look at a particular area of concern near the centre of the Village. Having provided Highways and other parties with copies of the results and subsequent analysis, we now await the conclusions and recommendations that will eventually appear from Highways appointed consultants. We might hope that something will appear by the time of the APM, but this may well be over optimistic!



Cllr. Martyn Begbey

OPC's opinion is that something needs to be done to safeguard the Village against the expected future increase in traffic through the Village that will result from approved developments at Kings Hill and other sites in the area. To achieve this without detriment to the visual beauty of the Village will not be easy, but we hope that some design creativity may help to

preserve the rural nature of the location whilst protecting it from the intrusion of ever increasing traffic movement.

Blaise Farm

The Liaison Group has met quarterly throughout the year. Various changes to personnel involved with site management have led to a much more proactive approach in dealing with odour issues at the site. The Group now has an independent Chair [from Tonbridge & Malling B. C.] and the Environment Agency has upped its profile in dealing with the issues.

Offham residents that are most affected by the problems regularly attend the meetings and receive a copy of a log of odour related incidents experienced within the village. I am glad to report that both King's Hill and West Malling are now also more actively involved in monitoring and reporting any problems.

Key communication links for all of the parties involved are published later in this Review.

It would appear that remedial work and improved management practices at the site have improved the situation quite considerably in the past year or so. In an eighteen week period to mid-March for example, there were only five odour complaints that could be traced to the site. We look forward to further improvements!

The latest news is that KCC have awarded NES the contract to handle "pure food waste". This will almost certainly mean that the new Aerobic Digestion plant will be built and that any such waste will be contained within purpose built premises. It is hoped that the state of the art technology will deal with potential problems before they are created for the local population.

No doubt many of you will have been made aware of the fatality that occurred on the site last year, when a mound of compost waste collapsed on top of an employee. The inquest recorded a verdict of accidental death and no blame was attached to NES. However as a result of the incident, NES are helping the HSE to formulate

improved management plans for handling stockpiles of materials in industrial situations in order that safety standards can be improved in all similar premises.

Joint Parish Council Transport Consultation Group

This group has also met quarterly throughout the year. Most Parish Councils within the MAP area are now represented and our views are put forward to key KCC members and staff as a result. In the past year, the Group has developed more formal links with other groups, such as KALC, JTB and PPP, which allow us to put forward ideas and resolutions for consideration by the decision making authorities.

Aside from regular input to our meetings from the Police Speedwatch Co-ordinator, the Safety Camera Partnership and J5Slips representatives, we have been privileged to hear KCC Cabinet Members, Senior Highways and TMBC executives and Air Quality Management Consultants as guest speakers.

At the most recent meeting, this March, Steve Humphrey, TMBC Director of Transport and Planning, spoke about the Local Plan, its implications for traffic and transport infrastructure and wider issues of airport expansion, Thames crossings and pollution. In total, TMBC need to find sites for a further 13500 houses in the area during the next twenty years or so. Nearly half of these have been identified already, but, with brownfield opportunities running low, the Green Belt may come under pressure. A review of this is being undertaken. Mr Humphrey confirmed that net immigration was not a factor in determining the required increase.

From Offham's perspective, we were gratified to confirm that a Calming Scheme for Offham had been prioritised by Highways together with Kent Street improvements to receive Section 106 funding from Phase 2 development at Kings Hill. Other noted improvements were to be made to Junction 3 on the M20, the Tonbridge bypass and rail links to London, particularly a high speed link to become available from

Snodland. It was also good to hear of TMBC's continuing commitment to sensible consultation on the Local Plan and associated issues. It was also reported that, rather surprisingly, funding for our local bus services would be maintained and that an additional route to serve the GP practice in Borough Green would be added.

Although it would seem that **Speedwatch** is now better supported and resourced by civilian police workers, it lacks support locally. If it is to be resurrected in Offham it really needs more enthusiastic support from a group of keen volunteers to man it. Choosing better locations within the Village might have brought more satisfactory results originally and it should be possible to agree these once other traffic calming measures have been agreed and put in place.

- *Cllr David Stretton*

Planning and the Parish Council

Offham Parish Council, as with all Parish Councils, has a role in the County and Borough Council's planning applications decision process. OPC is a 'Statutory Consultee' for all planning applications within the Parish. Tonbridge and Malling refer all applications to OPC and the Council has 21 days to comment on the application. Within Offham PC, there is a planning group that consists of four councillors; the committee meets monthly and reviews all applications sent to it by Tonbridge and Malling BC. Parishioners are more than welcome to discuss their own plans, or those they may have concerns about, with the group members who are:

David Frankling, Paul Nelson, Barry Oliver and Martyn Begbey

OPC, in part, acts as the local eyes and ears in respect of planning for both the Borough and the County and will look at all applications concerning:

- The general impact on the village of the proposed development: will it be positive and enhancing or could it be negative?

- What the impact will be on traffic volumes and vehicle access.
- Whether the design, appearance and materials being proposed 'fit in' with the village.
- Whether loss of privacy and/or loss of light for neighbours could be a problem.
- Whether the scale of the development is suitable for a small village.
- What the impact will be on our open spaces and the village facilities.
- Whether there will be associated noise, smells and general disturbance issues.

The Parish will also give local knowledge input to the County and Borough on things such as: drainage, soil, traffic access problems and other pertinent information that the County may not necessarily be aware of.

Overall though, the Parish Council looks to protect and enhance the historic village we have and to keep its charm and character, not just for its current residents, but for future generations as well.

Planning and the Future

Over this term the Government have made changes to the planning regulations in the UK, under their 'national planning policy framework' and the 'localism act' which, as well as simplifying the planning process, has a bias towards driving more residential development which in turn will inevitably lead to more development across the UK. These changes have resulted in Tonbridge & Malling BC developing their own 'Local Plan' which will cover development in the borough till 2032. This plan is currently being worked on but will most likely involve a 10%+ increase in the annual house building rate in the Borough,

which has already been quite substantial!

Parishes will continue to have a say in local development, but there will be more development. So overall we are likely to need to play a far more active part in planning to ensure our village retains its character and grows as we would wish it to and is not adversely impacted by increased local development. – **Cllr. David Frankling**

Lighting trees in the village for Christmas

The Christmas of 2013 for Offham saw the lighting of the Oak tree on the Green outside 'Walnut Cottage', this was generally welcomed by the village and as a result in 2014 we also lit the large Pin Oak on the main Green. Our view, and that of most people, is that this has greatly improved the Christmas feel of the village and has proved a positive addition to the festive spirit.

Lighting these trees and doing so safely has however involved a lot of work in laying cables under the Green and climbing the trees to install the lights. So we would like to thank Adie Marchant and Ross from the Kings Arms for their climbing skills. Chris Tutte and Phil Slate for supplying and digging in the cables and for Chris Jenkins and Phil Slate for most generously agreeing to power the lights.

– **Cllr David Frankling**

Improving and Maintaining The Village Environment

At long last the verges behind the village entrance traffic calmers have been sorted out, with "Offham Henge by Aldon lane. Grateful thanks go to Gallagher's for the generous donation of the rag stone chippings and the large rag stones. This now makes for a long term maintenance free area. Evergreen shrubs have been planted in the verge opposite Spadework which makes an attractive addition to the eastern village gateway; this area is being cared for by a villager, Suzanne Young, who is also tending the border around the car park on the corner of the Teston Road and Pepingstraw Close.

A sack of daffodil bulbs, having been donated by a villager, have been planted on the Green and will hopefully provide a lovely show for many years to come.



Cllr Wendy Williams

O.P.C. applied for, and was given, 420 free tree whips by the Woodland Trust. Helped by Cllr Pierce, these were distributed to villagers and planted in gardens and hedges to replace those lost in last year's storms.



Cllr. William Pierce

I have attended a number of lectures on behalf of the village as the Tree Warden. If you have any concerns regarding trees around the village, please let me know. The Jubilee Oak on the village green is to be registered and become a Heritage Tree.

I make an inspection once a fortnight on the play equipment in the playground (for insurance purposes). Many bolts are tightened and plastic caps replaced on a regular basis. New nets for the goal posts have been ordered for the spring. It is a great facility well used and thankfully not abused.

Please do not panic if one day you see the top of the Quintain missing, it is being removed for repairs to be carried out.

The 2015 calendar sold out by the end of November, thank you for your support. The money raised is helping to make Offham even more attractive. The 2016 calendar will be on display in the Tea Tent on May Day.

– **Cllr Wendy Williams**

May Day



May Queen Procession



May Pole Dancing

Fortunately, the weather proved much better for the 2014 May Day. Consequently, turn out and cash flows were much improved on the previous two years and funds were made available to support various projects within the Village.

Thanks and congratulations must go to the very committed Working Group and their helpers who spend hours organising, erecting and removing the various stalls and equipment needed to make the event run successfully. If you are able to help this year, either with setting up or clearing up, please contact a Group member [Claire Innes, Anne Turner, Chris Tutte, or Richard Dyer]

In order to secure insurance for the event, the Working Group has had to be constituted as part of OPC, but apart from slightly more complex financial arrangements, the Group will be functioning much as it has done in the past.

– **Cllr David Stretton**

Trees in Offham

Offham Parish Council is responsible for the maintenance of trees growing on the Green, Teston Road Playing Field, the Cosgrave Field and along a short section of Church Road. The Parish Council receives expert advice on the tree maintenance programme from Liz

Guthrie, Landscape Officer for Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council. Where the trees are in a conservation area such as the Green the Parish Council has the same duty as a householder to apply to TMBC for permission to cut, lop or top.

Our fine Wellingtonia tree standing in a corner of the Green is a member of the *Sequoiadendron* family closely related to the giant American Redwoods. Beloved of the Victorians, in Britain the tree was named *Wellingtonia gigantea* after the Duke of Wellington, who died in 1852. Our Wellingtonia is relatively youthful as they can live for more than three thousand years and, in their natural state, can reach a height of over 100 metres! They are covered in a beautiful, soft spongy bark – you can punch them quite hard and feel no pain.

The ivy that was smothering our Wellingtonia has been removed. As has most of the ivy growing around the hedges at the Rec. and the walls of the Pound. With a little help, the Wellingtonia should continue to provide pleasure to humans and a home to a host of wild life for many years to come.

– **Cllr Wendy Williams**

Carols in the Pub

It was another great year for Carols in the Pub with The Kings Arms packed to the rafters. A festively attired Christine Halliday-Saddler led the enthusiastic singing which some people say could be heard from West Malling! She was accompanied by the incredibly talented Elaine Ford on the keyboard. An additional treat this year was a beautiful repertoire played by a trio of flautists, the Silberlicht Trio, including Offham's very own professional musician, Pam Palmer.

Apart from all mentioned above, thank you to everyone else that helped with this year's event including The Kings Arms for being such great hosts and providing delicious mulled wine & mince pies, to May Day for subsidising the aforesaid refreshments, and to Gary Briley for providing the sound system.

– **Jane Jordan, Rachel Godfrey & Phil Airey [Carols on the Green Committee]**

Offham School

We recently learn that the School's Headmistress, Ruth Powel, is introducing a new "meet and greet" scheme that will allow parents to simply drop their children off in the Car Park, where they will be met by staff and escorted to the safety of the School buildings or playground. Drivers will thus have no need to park and the whole process should improve the flow of traffic both within the car park and in Church Road. Anything that can be done to improve that is a very welcome initiative indeed!

– **OPC**

Borough Report 2015

Yet again all the council's work has been overshadowed by the need to find savings, and once again Tonbridge and Malling have exceeded their target, hopefully pushing back the time when our reserves will be used up and the necessity to borrow to meet our obligations would become another call on our budget. Once again it was deemed prudent to raise Council Tax by 1.99% (1p per day) to protect our services for as long as possible.

Savings of £2.8 million have been achieved over the past four years through shared services, taking advantage of technological changes and doing some things differently.

An approach that is independently assessed by our auditors as "a strong focus on effective financial management" and "an effective framework to address financial pressures and to deliver planned savings."

We can be justifiably proud of our recycling service, where we see residents recycle or compost 43% of household waste. Almost 90% of waste collected is made use of through reuse, recycling or energy recovery with only around 10% of waste going to landfill. We can be proud that most of our waste is dealt with locally, with around 85% being dealt with in Kent.

The 'Love Where You Live' campaign continues to inspire local support and activity. This Council is an Ambassador Authority for national Love Where You Live campaign and a lead authority in the Love Kent campaign (with numerous local projects, including: Bash the Trash events; the Street Monitor scheme; Voluntary Litter Code for businesses; Bag & Flag dog fouling events.... to name but a few).

The successful establishment of a new Leisure Trust - achieving annual revenue savings to the Council of circa £500,000 – has meant that exceptionally high standards of service delivery are maintained.

The quality of our leisure facilities and increased leisure activity within the Borough continues to be excellent. The Easter and Summer programmes for young people and the Youth Forum have been maintained.

Sports participation rates across the borough have increased by 6.5% as measured by the Sport England Active People Survey, placing the Borough in the upper quartile in Kent.

Initiatives have included Spring into Sport and the Young Cricket Leader Programme and we have supported voluntary groups in staging the Tonbridge Half Marathon and provided continued support for local clubs.



Cllr Matthew Balfour

Local community groups, town and parish councils through the Community Enhancement have been supported, with awards being made to over 200 community and voluntary groups and 20 town and parish councils.

For a second year running, the Council's support to local town and parish councils had included New Homes Bonus income within the overall settlement. Rather than facing a 13.4% reduction or £23,011 in cash terms, our support is a 1.3% increase or £2,232 increase, resulting in a net benefit to the parishes of £25,243.

T&MBC have been key members of the successful lobby group that has secured the dualling of the A21 between Tonbridge and Pembury. And will continue their efforts in securing East Facing Slips of junction of the M25.

Crucially, they have helped secure a total of £4.36M from the Local Growth Fund to improve Junction 4 of the M20 and to enhance Tonbridge High Street, along with a share of a further £4.89M to improve local rail stations including improvements to accommodate new HS1 services at Snodland.

Considerable success has been achieved in securing investment from the government's Affordable Homes Programme. Over £7 million of capital grant funding has been allocated to our housing association partners between 2015 and 2018 to provide new affordable homes. We have seen the highest number of affordable units proposed across the 2015-18 programme, with 283 homes constructed or in the pipeline.

T&MBC has consistently featured within the top three authorities in Kent for the most successful implementation of Help To Buy. And critically, has a local housing allocations policy, bringing practical changes to ensure affordable housing to go to those households who are local and in most need of housing assistance.

The Local Development Framework - has delivered a robust land supply for new development, making sure we have been able to protect the best natural and historic features of this Borough through our Development Control function.



Cllr Anne Kemp

We have continued our strong influence on rail and bus services by lobbying for better public transport services, highlighted by our 'Rail Manifesto' and facilitating new improvements such as the successful bus/rail interchange at West Malling.

We look forward to continuing to work with you and for you for the next four years for the good of our communities and protection of our villages.

Borough Councillors: - Ann Kemp and Matthew Balfour

KCC Members Annual Report to Parish and Town Councils - March 2015

KCC has had a challenging year, yet again, with savings of over £90,000,000 needed in order to deliver a balanced budget. As part of finding these savings KCC reviewed every area of its activities. This does not mean that services will be out-sourced, though this is one of the options, particularly for back office functions, but more about how better services can be provided more efficiently. Any major change has to follow a public consultation. Budget savings had been sought, for example, in the community wardens service but a huge response to the consultation meant that the wardens have, in the main, been retained.

An extensive 12 week public consultation on our plans to modernise our libraries, registration and archives service by the creation of a charitable trust has begun. The trust concept, our preferred option, would give the service more freedom and flexibility to grow and develop, generate additional income and

seek additional grant funding which is not available to KCC. Under the proposals, KCC would remain accountable for the services and would contract with the charitable trust to provide the existing services to all Kent residents, with free access to books and ICT facilities, while also maintaining the historic archives.

Hard work in Kent's primary schools is paying off as results in Key Stage 2 SATS are showing significant improvement. The percentage of pupils reaching the appropriate level in every category - reading, writing, English, spelling, punctuation, maths and science - at Level 4 and above has gone up in the last year. The combined figure for reading, writing and maths in Kent has improved by 5%.

We have decided to press ahead with converting our stock of 120,000 street lights to LED with Central Management System technology. This will reduce our street lighting energy bill by around 60%, meaning that we can return every residential area to all-night lighting, which may be dimmed a little after peak hours. The new technology will also enable lights to be monitored remotely so faults can be detected as soon as they develop. It will also be better for the environment. Conversion to LED could start later this year or early next and take three years to complete and will be done in two phases, starting with residential areas.

A lot of work has been done since the devastating floods of just over a year ago. An army of flood wardens has been trained, work has started on how best to increase the capacity of the Leigh Storage Barrier and specific schemes are under way.

We have told the Airports Commission that we do not think there should be a third runway at Gatwick and we are lobbying to reduce the impact of those living in West Kent whose lives are blighted by the changes to where flights into Gatwick are now routed. At last work is under way on the A21. And the extra carriageway on the M20 over bridge at junction 4 is keenly anticipated. We also

await a decision on providing extra capacity at the Dartford Crossing, or a new crossing, our preferred option.

On schools, we have funding for three new primary schools at Leybourne Chase, Holborough and Kings Hill and we are awaiting a decision from the Minister about the development of a grammar school extension in Sevenoaks, to relieve some of the pressure on the excellent schools in Tonbridge. The need for the M26 slip roads to serve Sevenoaks has also come up the agenda once more.

For me it has been an interesting year as I was appointed as Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities a year ago. I am also a trustee or director of Kent Music, the Kent Community Foundation, the Rochester Bridge Trust and Turner Contemporary, and a member of the Kent and Medway Fire Authority. I remain very committed to supporting the arts and culture (in the widest sense of the words) and the essential role they play in the health, education, regeneration and happiness of our communities. We need to take a strategic view and work with existing organisations and volunteers, across the sector, to make sure the money we have is spent well.



Cllr Sarah Hohler

This financial year, my grant allocation has been spent as follows:

Defibrillators for Addington, Birling and Trotts-cliffe. Water project for Leybourne Riding Centre for the Disabled. 2014 summer activities for young

people in the Borough. Play equipment for Stansted playpark. Community centre refurbishment, under floor heating for the new scout centre, Christmas lights and tree, parking provision for the cemetery, all for Snodland. Streetlight updating for Ryarsh.

On highways, I have cleared and cleaned signage on the A20, made safety improvements on Oxley Shaw Lane and Rectory Lane South in Leybourne, finally got a flashing speed sign for Offham and tried to alleviate the pressure of long-stay lorry parking at the A228 Ham Hill layby. – **Sarah Hohler Member for Malling North**

Offham “Steam Rally”

Having experienced two very damp years for the Steam rally, normal service was resumed for 2014. Although perhaps attendance was slightly down on peak years, there was still enough congestion to force a number of would be exhibitors to arrive late, survey the space available on the Green and return from whence they came rather than risk their precious motors manoeuvring through the maze of vehicles already parked in prime position! Certainly it proved an act of some skill for the Steam engines to exit Comp Lane and turn into their normal positions which were waiting for them opposite the King’s Arms.

Let us hope for good weather this year, whilst also hoping that the sun shines and the temperature further improves on 2014!

- **Cllr.David Stretton**



Classic Cars at the Steam Rally



One of the early Steam Rallies

St. Michael and All Angels, Offham Annual Report to Parish Meeting - 2015

St Michael’s Church has sought to continue its efforts to carry out its life and ministry within the context of the community of Offham. We are pleased that, for a village of our size, attendance each Sunday is stronger than average and major festivals are always very well attended.

Two major strands in the year came in the form of the Quinquennial report and the appointment of a Musical Director. The 2013 Quinquennial is now a major project as we set to work on how we might implement the repairs required and raise the £125,000 needed to do the work. At year end, no grants have been received but much groundwork has been laid.

We were delighted to appoint Stewart Biggs as our new Director of Music with effect from 1 September 2014. Stewart’s appointment has been a positive development for the worshipping life of our community. Our organ is reaching something of a crunch point and with PCC consideration and Stewart’s guidance, we hope to make good decisions for the future.

During the year, we were able to take up two opportunities to strengthen our relationship with our diocesan link church of St Michael’s, Jõhvi and Pühajõe in Estonia. In snowy January, our Priest-in-Charge David was able to visit their Clergy Conference as part of a Rochester Diocese delegation and then (in much better weather) during August, David took a group of parishioners from Offham to visit our friends and receive a very full and hospitable tour of their lovely country. We hope to return the favour in coming years.

There was a good congregation representing the whole community for the tenth Offham Village

Service at 6.00 p.m. on Sunday, 22nd June with this year's theme "Offham at War". Recognising the activities in our nation this year to mark the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, a poignant service was held in which a number of links between our village and the events of one hundred years ago were recounted in the context of prayer and worship.

Like the Village service, Mothering Sunday, the Harvest Festival, Christmas festivities (including the Christingle and 'Carols in the Pub') and Easter services are important for a much wider range of people in the village and we're delighted to play host to such important community gatherings.

The Churches in Offham once again delivered cards to each house outlining the services over the Christmas period. Members of the congregation also took part in events organised by Churches Together in Malling, particularly the Good Friday Walk of Witness in West Malling. During Lent, study groups on five weekly evenings were arranged in collaboration with the Methodist Church using the tape recorded York Course. This was very successful, and was well attended.



- Rev David Green

Offham Methodist Church

We are now part of the Weald Circuit and included in the rural sector with Horsmonden, Hawkhurst and East Peckham, where Rev. John Butt, Minister in charge, is located. He has responsibility for this group of small Churches. A change, allowing us to retain our 11:00am morning worship in our "free" style led by

both Ministers and lay preachers is as planned; this is frequently followed by coffee time. On the first Tuesday of each month, our "Tea and Chat" is still well supported; folk can come and go between 2:00 and 4:00pm giving opportunity for conversation with friends old and new over a cup of tea. During 2014 we raised over £600 for charitable work, including Heart of Kent Hospice and Maidstone Care For Homeless; we retain our only Church fund raising effort, moving on from calling it "Plant Sale" with its new label "Autumn Sale"; this year it raised £425. The main use of Hall for last 3 years has been by the Montessori play group led by Nicola Schilling, who's illness, lasting for few weeks period in February, led to its closure; it was pleasing that the children's search for a new location led to success. We are now exploring how best the Hall can be used for all ages in village. When speaking of age we, in common with other rural Churches with our older congregations, find it more difficult to complete all the running challenges and are thankful to those in the village who give time to support us in our work.

- Colin Wolfe



The objects of the Offham Society are to stimulate interest in Offham by encouraging high standards of planning and architecture, the preservation of features of general public amenity or historical interest and by co-operating with our local authorities, other village societies and voluntary organizations with aims similar to those of the Society. The Society is intended to be a focus for everyone who has the interests of our beautiful village and its surrounding countryside at heart and wishes to keep it a good place to live in.

The Programme of Events in

2014 included an illustrated talk at the AGM on 'Olympic Park Legacy & Regeneration' by Duncan Innes, former Olympic Park Legacy Company Executive Director of Real Estate, who led strategic development of land within the Olympic Park. We visited Orchard Place Farm for a guided tour, giving us a unique insight into how a successful strawberry grower has evolved within the village of Offham. This included a visit to Hugh Lowe Farms Ltd pack house, where we met Marion Regan, the Managing Director, to see at first hand the methods of preparing and packing strawberries for the market. In the autumn we had a footpath walk visiting the remains of Blaise Chapel and then on to the nearby lake on Kentfield Farm to hear about rural game pursuits, not to mention the wild boar facility. The day was rounded off by Tea and Cakes. In October Jill Speed from Spadework gave a talk marking 30 years of the Spadework charity and 20 years at their site in Offham. The year was rounded off with the ever popular quiz "Offham Trivial Pursuits".

The Committee has been working hard on the **Offham Society programme for 2015**, which includes a visit to the Twitch Inn at Douces Manor and a talk on 1940s Escape, Evasion and Sabotage. In the summer we have arranged a Lazy Sunday Jazz afternoon concert in the Cosgrave Field in conjunction with St Michael's Church to help raise funds in aid of church fabric repairs. Planned for the autumn is a visit to East Malling Research and then our **Annual Trivial Pursuits** on Sat 14th November.

During the year the Committee has kept a constant watch on local planning issues and has assisted the Parish Council in making representations to local authorities on matters important to the preservation of the rural character of our beautiful village.

- Mike Rowe



- Cllr Paul Nelson

As many of you will already know, OPC's Vice-Chair, Paul Nelson was taken ill on holiday about a year ago and underwent emergency surgery. He is still undergoing a course of treatment and remains his normal cheerful and positive self, in spite of the ordeal. He has naturally had to step back from his roles with the Parish Council, the Offham Society and the Tennis Club, but I am sure that you all will join with us in wishing himself and his wife Lynn all the best for the future and wish Paul a complete recovery in the coming year, fully restored to his normal active self.

Cllr. David Stretton

Neighbourhood Watch In Offham

While the police rate our village as a low crime area, the incidents which have been recorded in Offham this year show that we cannot be complacent. Some of our residents have been unfortunate in suffering either theft, intrusion or 'scams'. Most worrying is the rise in the number of scams, either by telephone, emails or by cold-callers. These have now become extremely convincing and even the most aware among us has been caught. Therefore it is worth emphasising- NEVER give your pin number to anyone, even if you think the bank is calling. They categorically do not ask for pin numbers at any time. Store your house and car keys well out of sight in a cupboard or drawer - burglars have been using long-handled poles through letter-boxes to hook them out.

Resist 'cold callers' claiming your roof is in need of repair, that your trees obviously need to be pruned, or perhaps they have spare materials available and could resurface your drive. Their final

charges are rarely been the same as verbally quoted. It is sensible to get a written quote and use recommended suppliers.

Water, gas and electric companies very rarely visit without appointments. If you are unsure, keep them out.

Sadly it is usually the elderly who are subjected to distracted theft and burglary and some residents have had this experience. The suspects work in pairs and while they appear genuine in appearance, one will engage us in conversation while the other uses the distraction to steal our handbag, wallet or valuables. These incidents are usually carried out in supermarket car parks or by cold-callers to our home saying they need access for some 'essential' reason. Again - do not let them in.

It is always rewarding to hear that so many of you, our members, are now wise to these tactics and have dealt with them effectively. All our NhW Road Co-ordinators automatically receive "e-Watch" twice weekly which reports police incidents in our area. Therefore any warnings which might affect the village can be passed on to residents quickly.

Village Neighbourhood Watch Coordinator

Hedgehog Productions In 2014 we put on a supper theatre (Officers and Gentlespies) at Offham and Addington village halls which helped the Offham Society raise funds for the hall and HHP raise funds for their chosen charities which last year were, Cystic Fibrosis, Christian Aid, the Royal British Legion and St Margaret's church. This year we are putting on a variety show at Addington village hall on the 15/16th May and another supper theatre at Offham and Addington in November. In Spring 2016 we hope to put on a Pantomime or a musical.

- Graham Halliday-Saddler

Offham Lunch Club

If you are prepared to help with this very worthwhile activity or

would just like to enjoy the convivial atmosphere and a hot meal, either in the Village Hall or, occasionally, at a restaurant, please give Phyllis Jones a call on 01732 843946" - **Phyllis Jones**

Offham Village Hall

Mondays - Pleasure Painters:10.00 to 12.00. [C.R]

Main Hall Yoga 10.00 to 11.15
Table Tennis 8.00 to 9.00pm.

Tuesdays- Baby Explorers 9.00 to 1.00pm. Scottish dancing 6.00 to 8.00pm.

Wednesdays-
MotherandToddlers9.30 to 11.30,
Beavers 5.00 to 6.15pm Bridge 7.30 to 10.30pm.

Thursdays- Zumba 9.30 to 11.30,
Lunch Club 12.00 to 2.00pm.
Malling Art Club [last Thursday in the month] [eves]

Fridays - Cubs 5.45 to 7.30pm
Scouts 7.30 to 9.00pm.

[n.b. all termly apart from T/T. PP, Art Club and Bridge]

To make a booking please contact Phyllis Jones

- Tel: 01732 843946



Cake Sale at the Village Hall

Congratulations to the Village Hall Committee for the improvements made during the past year. These have made a vast difference to the Committee Room, which appears larger, lighter and significantly warmer during the winter months!

Various events have been held during the year including two quiz nights, a dance, a table top sale, fashion shows and a second Murder Mystery evening.

If you have further ideas for fundraising events or wish to make a booking for a private function, please contact a Committee member.