

Chairman's Annual Report 2015/2016

By rotation, the Parish Councillors' term of office ended in May 2015. With the exception of Paul Nelson, all applied to stand again, joined by Phil Slate, who applied to fill the vacant slot. As there were only seven applications, the election was uncontested and all applicants were appointed to the Council.

Paul Nelson, who served two terms as a councillor and also as Vice Chair, sadly passed away in February this year. Paul contributed greatly to both the council and the village in general and will be sadly missed.

Along with the usual parish activities, the village enhancement plan has been a major focus this year, following the presentation and approval of the outline plans for it at the Village Annual Parish Meeting in April last year. Kent Highways have, during the past 11 months, further worked on the plan and the final plan was presented to the village at this year's APM (26th April 2016). There were over 120 villagers present and, following a discussion, a vote was taken and overwhelmingly supported, with only one villager voting against. The work is scheduled to start over the summer this year and is expected to take 12-14 weeks to complete. Disruption will, unfortunately, be quite major during this period but will be worth it for the longer term benefit. Plans are available both electronically and in paper form to view if required; please contact the Parish Clerk for these.

Village Projects

The pond has matured well over the year and three broods of ducklings hatched there in 2015. Additionally, another brood has recently hatched in March 2016. Annual maintenance is being carried out in late spring to keep the surrounding area and pond in check.

The PC have purchased the village red telephone box from BT, under their 'adopt a box' scheme. We will be fitting it out with a defibrillator, which we were lucky to have donated by the British Heart Foundation, and also using it as a 'Book Share' mini-library. We hope to finish the 'Book Box' over the next month and will then have an official opening. Our thanks to Chris Tuttle from the village, who kindly upgraded the power supply in the phone box for us.

The play area in the recreation ground has had the wet-pour rubber surfacing repaired this year, whilst the PC have personally refurbished two of the benches there.

The two oak trees on the Village Green were again lit over Christmas and the power was again kindly supplied by Chris Jenkins and Phil Slate. It is also the PC's intention to light the roof of the bus shelter, for this coming Christmas.

The historic village Quintain was removed for a couple of weeks and refurbished by the Parish Councillors; it is now in tip-top condition.

Fund Raising

The PC's two fund raising activities, the Calendar and the Quiz Night, were again very successful and raised over £1400 towards village improvement projects. Thanks must go to the Calendar sponsors, the Photo Competition contributors and also to all those who donated the raffle prizes for the Quiz Night. Thanks also to the Parish Councillors and villagers who helped with the quiz night and in selling the calendars.

Finance

There will be no increase for householders contribution to OPC this coming year, the typical Band D rate remains at £43.23.

Funding for both Kent County Council and Tonbridge & Malling has been further cut this coming year and it is very likely they will both have to look at potential cuts to their services.

We expect the funding to the PC to be reduced next year (2017-18), so there is likely to have to be an increase to the precept then.

The PC made donations to village organisations again this year. Each of the following received £50: The Methodist Church, St Michael's Church, Offham Lunch Club, West Malling Scouts, Age Concern, Offham Toddler Group and the Darby & Joan Club.

Blaise Farm Composting plant and Offham Landfill site

The council regularly attends meetings on 'Blaise Farm' and at a recent one it was announced that the installation of the 'Anaerobic Digester plant' has been deemed not to be economic and the project has been cancelled. Whether or not this is a permanent scrapping of the plant is yet to be clear. We understand that the food waste the digester was meant to process will continue to be shipped to another facility in Bedfordshire. Over the last year there has also been a substantial reduction in malodour reports.

The Restoration and management of the Landfill site owned by FCC Environmental is monitored by regular meetings with the owners, the environment agency and Ifinis (who manage the gas extraction). OPC attend these meetings and regularly express concern that the site maintenance is not at a standard we would expect.

Broadband

The council continues to lobby for an improved broadband service for the village

Farm Traffic

This has been a source of considerable discussion in council meetings due to the level of complaints from residents. Large refrigerated lorries being the main concern. The council are in discussion with the farm about the problem and Stephen Betts regularly attends the Council meetings. No obvious solution to the residents complaints caused by these large vehicles is currently in sight.

Community Awards

Three Community Awards were made this year, to those people who have worked tirelessly over the years in support of the village. These were made to Paul Nelson and Stuart Betts, who both received the Offham awards, and to Mike Rowe, who received the KALC (Kent Association of Local Councils) award.

Councillors' Volunteer work

As Chair, on behalf of the village, I would like to thank the Councillors, who carry out a lot of the maintenance and project work themselves, saving the village considerable expense. Their efforts are greatly appreciated.

David Frankling
Chairman
Offham Parish Council