

## **Chairman's Annual Report 2018/19**

### **Annual Parish meeting**

The APM this year was held on 16th March in Offham Village Hall and was attended by over 40 villagers.

As well as the Parish Council (PC) report, there was an update about St Michael's Church, by Mike Rowe, on behalf of Rev. David Green, who was unable to attend. Mike gave an update on attendances, which are now up by 30% and spoke about the new children's groups started at the church, along with some very popular and informative Bible courses.

The success of the village 1918 Armistice Centenary commemorations was discussed and special thanks was made to all those who contributed. Particular thanks was given to Suzanne Young for her work on the 'Lest We Forget' booklet - copies of which are still available for £5 each.

There was a presentation by David Carey, from the Kent Tree and Pond Partnership, about how tree and pond wardens operate in Kent and the invaluable work they do as volunteers.

KCC councillor, Sarah Hohler, gave an update on Kent County Council and its funding problems in budgeting for services. Sarah is part of a KCC working group, to look at how libraries in the county operate and said all 99 current libraries will remain in service; however, the opening hours will be shortened. Sarah also spoke about the HGV traffic and parking problems in Kent.

Sarah is on the Board of the Turner Contemporary in Margate and said it is hosting the 'Turner Prize' this year.

Sarah was formally thanked for her continuing support of the village and in particular her financial support for both past and future village projects.

TMBC councillor, Matthew Balfour, unfortunately could not attend, so I highlighted the biggest issues that TMBC have had over the last year being: The finalisation and submission of the 'Local Plan'; The terms and scope of the new 'Waste Contract' and its implications and the ongoing budgetary constraints facing TMBC.

At the meeting, we recognised three villagers, whose contributions to Offham over the years, have been 'above and beyond':

Stephen Betts - was given the Kent Association of Local Councils award, for his support of the village over the years and also his work with St Michael's church. Stephen's award was accepted by his wife Ann.

Martyn Begbey - was given an Offham Parish Council award, for his contribution to May Day over the years and for his work with the Parish Council, along with other groups in the village.

Barry Oliver - was also given an Offham Parish Council award, (with much sadness, posthumously) for his support and active participation in village projects and also for his considerable contribution to the Parish Council. Barry's award was accepted by councillor Phil Slate, who will in turn present it to Barry's widow Jane.

Following an approach to the Parish Council from 'Rural England' (a housing association), who encouraged us to carry out a 'housing needs survey', there was an extensive discussion at the meeting about affordable housing in the village and in general. Following the discussion, there was a vote on whether villagers felt we should carry out the survey. No-one voted for the survey and apart from four people abstaining, everyone voted against the survey. This was, in the main, due to concerns about what village development it could lead to. The results of the discussion will be taken to the next Parish Council meeting, to decide whether or not to commission the survey.

Draft minutes of the meeting are available to view on the Parish website.

### **Parish Council Changes**

During the year, Steve Rickett was co-opted onto the council, replacing Barry Oliver. All of the councillors finish their four year term of office in April this year and elections will be held on the 4th May, to appoint a new council. Several of the existing councillors will not be standing for election again, so there will be several vacancies for those in the village that would like to join the council. Applications need to be made to TMBC by the 4th April. If there are more than seven applicants, an election will be held on May 4th. If, however, there are insufficient applicants to fill all seven positions, then it is possible for councillors to be co-opted after the 4th May.

## **Offham in Competitions**

Councillor Wendy Williams entered the village into two competitions this year, the first being 'Parishes in Bloom', where we received a '**Silver Gilt**' award!. The second was the 'Kent Men of Trees' competition and Offham was the outright '**Winner**'!

Our thanks go to Wendy, and her merry band of supporters, for their hard work and tremendous efforts, without which we would not have done so well!

## **Blaise Farm and Gallaghers Quarry**

There have been complaints about the blasting effects and vehicle noise coming from Gallaghers quarry and the Parish Council, and in particular Steve Rickett, is now in regular contact with them, to liaise and discuss villagers' concerns. Steve, on behalf of the PC, is also now also in regular contact with Blaise Farm Composting Plant, to monitor their on-going maintenance programme and to discuss villagers' concerns over malodours and fly infestations. It is important that villagers complain directly to these organisations, if there is a problem, as well letting the the Parish Council know.

Contact details are:

Jim Wooldridge - Principle Planning Officer KKC at [jim.wooldridge@kent.gov.uk](mailto:jim.wooldridge@kent.gov.uk)

Bill Bowley - Gallagher Quarry Manager at [bill.bowley@gallagher-group.co.uk](mailto:bill.bowley@gallagher-group.co.uk)

Sarah Hohler - our County Councillor at [sarah.hohler@kent.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.hohler@kent.gov.uk)

Rosemary Ricketts - at the Environment Agency at [rosemary.ricketts@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:rosemary.ricketts@environment-agency.gov.uk)

The PC are also co-ordinating a log of the blasts and effects throughout the village; please mail our clerk, Lynne Mackie, at [clerk@offham-pc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@offham-pc.gov.uk) for this.

## **Planning**

Tonbridge and Malling Council have, after a period of public consultation in November and December last year, now submitted their 'Local Plan' to central government for consideration. Two planning inspectors have been appointed and the plan is now under consideration; we await their comments. There were over 2,000 complaints during the consultation period and just over 200 notices of support, one of those being from the Parish Council. The main development areas within the plan that will affect Offham are:

Up to 15 homes at 'Barfield House' in Teston Rd Offham.

The proposed 'Borough Green Gardens' development - 1,700 homes in this local plan period.

Additional phases at 'Kings Hill' - circa 900 additional homes.

The proposal to introduce a new 'Green Belt' area, running from Kings Hill to West Malling on the east side of Kings Hill.

As usual, during the year there have been several routine planning applications in the village, in which the Parish Council were consulted. One stood out again, by provoking another unprecedented level of objections from villagers. This was the re-application by Kentfield Farm, (albeit amended to include holiday pods) for a marquee to be attached to the existing Lapa building,

and to hold up to 28 weddings and events a year there. The application went to committee for decision and had 5 villagers, including the PC, speaking in opposition. Due to the level of village and committee members concerns, and after considerable debate, the applicant was given a one-year temporary approval. Several conditions were imposed, mainly regarding the numbers of attendees, traffic management and noise.

If villagers feel that there is genuine nuisance, from extra traffic and noise from an event held there, then villagers should register their complaints with TMBC planning, who will consider whether or not to give permanent approval.

## **Broadband**

The new fibre connection to the distribution box, opposite Spadeworks, was commissioned last year and the majority of the village should now have access to much faster broadband. Again, our sincere thanks to Sarah Hohler, who pushed for some of KCC's funding for this to be directed to Offham.

## **Donations**

The Parish Council, as usual, made small donations this year, to organisations that are closely aligned to the village. This year we gave donations to:

West Malling Scout Group  
Offham Lunch Club  
St Michael's Church  
Age Concern  
Heart of Kent Hospice  
Kent Tree and Pond Partnership

We also made a donation to Malling Lions, for their much appreciated help in running the 'Race Night' for us.

## **Green Spaces, Trees and the Churchyard**

The recreation ground has, as usual, been well used over the year and the children's play area has again, had quite a large amount of refurbishing work. This will be an on-going expense for some years to come. Our thanks to Wendy Williams, who does a great job in looking after the green spaces and recreation ground for us.

The village looked really beautiful again this Spring, with a wonderful show of daffodils. We have also planted bulbs around the new gateways on the green and these are just starting to bloom now.

The Parish Council has continued its grant to the Church, for the up-keep of the churchyard, although Tonbridge and Malling Council no longer give funds to the PC for this.

## **The old landfill site (Offham Quarry)**

After some lobbying by the The Parish Council, the regular liaison meetings have now been reinstated, allowing us to liaise more effectively with the landfill managers and the Environment Agency.

## **JPCTCG (Joint Parish Council Traffic Consultative Group)**

A group of some 15 parishes meets quarterly, to discuss traffic and related issues in the borough and also seeks to lobby on issues that affect our villages. The recent main topics of discussion have concerned: the desire to implement motorway slips at Junction 5 on the M25; areas of air quality management and the new Thames crossing and general HGV issues in Kent.

### **Village Projects and fund raising**

Defibrillator awareness and CPR sessions took place last year in the village hall and were attended by over a dozen villagers. Our thanks go to Kathryn Frankling and Susie Williams for giving their time in running these.

The Race Night, in February, was another huge success and sold out within a week of the tickets going on sale. It broke all PC fund-raising events records and generated £1,600! This, along with the annual calendar sales, contributed well over £2,000 this year for 'village projects'. The Christmas lights looked great again this year; our special thanks must go to Keith, in Hope House, and Phil Slate, who kindly enabled us to have an electricity supply for the lights.

The PC is also planning to refurbish the old village well, outside Walnut House, this year.

This year, there have already been two work parties for the village pond. Another one is planned in April, so more volunteers would be most welcome - please come and help us make this an even more beautiful place for our residents and visitors (our gorgeous ducklings!)

### **Council Tax and the Village Precept Tax**

The Parish Council Tax was increased slightly for this coming year, so that we can fund the £1,000 a year donation to the village hall, that was agreed last year. This means that the total receipt for the Parish Council amounts to £21,400 for the year and equates to £55.41 for a band D household.

### **Environmental Improvement Scheme**

The Environment Improvement Project has been completed over the last year, with the final part being the resurfacing. Unfortunately, as I am sure you are aware, some of the tarmac loads were sub-standard, resulting in some lumpy areas. Highways will be carrying out remedial works, to correct the lumpy and other substandard areas, in April.

The Parish Council will commission another traffic speed count this year, to enable us to objectively measure the effectiveness of the scheme. The new mobile SID (Speed Indicator Device) is now operational and is proving to be very effective. Our thanks to Steve Rickett and Colin Ellis, along with their wives who ably assist, in managing the device for us.

### **Parish Council meetings and helpers**

The Parish Council meets the first Tuesday of the month, at 19:30, in the Village Hall Committee Room and villagers are welcome to come along and have the opportunity to contribute.

The Parish Councillors are all unpaid volunteers and, you may have noticed, we do an increasing amount of the maintenance jobs in the village ourselves. We are, therefore, always looking for volunteers to help with either specific work parties or just in general, to keep our village beautiful. We would like to put together an e-mail list of helpers, who we would mail when there are group jobs to be done that require your help. If you would like to help occasionally, then please e-mail myself or the Parish Clerk.

I would like to thank my fellow Parish Councillors and volunteer helpers, for all of their hard work throughout the year and for the time they have given up to support our lovely village - it is much appreciated.

Finally, as I am stepping down from both the Chair and Parish Council this April, I would like to thank everyone for the huge support that I have personally received over the years.

David Frankling

Chairman  
Offham Parish Council