

COMMUNICATE WINTER 2014-5



FROM THE CHAIRMAN *(Chris Housman)*

Welcome to the Winter edition of our newsletter. I hope that you will find it both interesting and enlightening. I'll start by wishing you all the best for the New Year, and hoping that you enjoyed your Christmas. In that respect, a sincere "thank you" to Sarah and Paul at *The Black Horse* for allowing our Christmas tree to be illuminated from their premises. I hope you all agree that it makes a really festive focal point for the village, along with the lights on our local shops. There are two main issues from me this time:

Elections

As I'm sure you are aware, there is a General Election on May 7th. However, you may not be aware that your Parish Council also has to be elected on that day. All the current Councillors have to stand down, but can, if they wish, stand for re-election. It is likely that one or more Councillors will not wish to stand for a further term. In any event, anyone who has lived or worked in the village for at least a year (with some exceptions) has the opportunity to stand for election as a Parish Councillor and have a real say in how Pluckley is run and financed. I do encourage you to consider standing (you just need to be proposed and seconded by two residents).

If you'd like to find out more about eligibility, the election process, and what a Parish Councillor actually does, please contact me for a chat, or our Clerk (Graham Smith) who can send you a booklet. In addition, the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) is running a number of awareness events aimed at members of the public who are interested in making a difference in their local area and standing for election. The nearest meeting to Pluckley is on **10th February** at 6:30pm in the Council Chamber at the Ashford Civic Centre.

On the subject of Councillors, I'm delighted to welcome Sue Beattie (who lives in Station Road) who has been co-opted as a Parish Councillor in place of Debbie Breach who stood down last year. Sue will be with us until the election, when we hope that she will stand as a candidate!

Finances & Budgets

This is the time of year when we have to set our expenditure budget for 2015-6, and decide how this can be funded. In 2014, **£25,300** of our income came from the Parish precept - the small part of your overall Council Tax bill that comes to the Parish. This represented **£54.51** per annum for a 'Band D' household – just over **£4.50 per month**. A further **£7,600** then came from various grants from ABC and/or KCC.



For 2015-6 these grants are reducing by **£2,100** (with an even greater reduction from April 2016), so we need to make up this shortfall. We are also anxious to press ahead with the next phase of the Village Hall improvement which the village has approved, and this will require around **£7,000** more than we currently have in 'savings' (see later in this newsletter)..

We only have two options for raising extra money: cutting our expenditure, or raising the precept. Over recent years we have worked hard to reduce expenditure wherever possible and further savings are not realistic. We have therefore, reluctantly, requested an increase of **£8,700** in the precept, representing an additional **£1.60 per month** per Band D property. We trust that you support your Council in this action.

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

(Paul Smith)

Your Parish Council has applied to Ashford Borough Council (ABC) to prepare a 'Neighbourhood Plan'. Although this is similar to the Parish Plan, it is far more rigorous and, once accepted, carries legal Planning Status. It enables the village to choose where new homes, shops or offices can go, say what they are to look like, and set out any new infrastructure that is needed. The Plan will cover the entire Parish, looking at all sites within it.

When we prepared our 'Parish Plan Update' two years ago, we were deterred from going down this route, but we now feel that it is the best way for the village to have a real input into the way it develops. Preparing the Plan will entail a considerable amount of work and will require close liaison with ABC and input from residents, landowners and developers.

Before ABC can give us the go-ahead there has to be a consultation period where people can give their views. This has just commenced and runs to 2nd March, and you can give your views at www.ashford.gov.uk/consult. As soon as we are given the go-ahead, we will be appraising residents of the programme and telling you how you can get involved.

We understand that the application for development on the old Brickworks site has been withdrawn for the moment, but that it may be re-submitted once ABC has reviewed its allocation of potential development sites in its forthcoming revised Local Plan.

We still have no news of the Government Planning Inspector's review of the applicant's appeal on the solar farm.

LOCAL NEEDS HOUSING

(Chris Housman)

The four new homes on Westfields have now successfully been allocated to people with a Pluckley connection and they should be taking up residence very soon.

There has been a suggestion from ABC that four semi-detached 3-bedroom homes could be built at the Thorne Estate (in place of the blocks of garages). These would be Council houses rather than 'local needs' homes, although local applicants would be favoured for the first two years. The Parish Council (supported by some residents) questioned the need for such houses, and expressed concerns about access and parking. We also emphasised that the open space on the Estate should be maintained, both for recreation and for its views. ABC is now reflecting on all this. All residents of the Thorne Estate will be given a chance to express their views if this suggestion proceeds to actual plans.



VILLAGE SIGN

It transpires that the village sign (see our header!), which has long been missing from its location near the entrance to the village at the top of Forge Hill, needs some extensive renovation. We do have this in hand and aim to have it repainted and re-installed as soon as possible.

VILLAGE HALL *(Martin Newman)*

Following the major refurbishment of the hall two years ago, the interim refurbishment of the kitchen earlier this year, and the work of the Management Committee (particularly the Quilting Exhibition), there has been an increase in bookings, meaning that the Parish Council has not had to subsidise the hall this year. However, it is clear that updating the toilets is now a priority, as they do not match the quality of the rest of the facility, and provide no disabled access.

We are therefore proposing an extension on the southern end of the building comprising a new entrance foyer and toilets, including full disabled facilities. Initial drawings have now been considered by local builders and outline quotes received. Regrettably, the cost is coming in at a higher level than anticipated. The builders have helpfully suggested where savings could be made, so the architects have revised the drawings and the construction notes to arrive at a more cost-effective solution.

Even if we can trim costs to arrive at a less expensive development, we shall still be some way short of the finance required. We will therefore be aiming to secure grants, but we have been advised previously that these are more likely if we could at least 'match' the amount applied for. Currently, the Parish Council's available funds are less than half of the envisaged project cost, and we have a shortfall in the order of £7,000. The PC's only sources of income are from the precept or from taking a loan (which would have to be repaid through the precept anyway). Reluctantly we are therefore seeking an increase in the precept for 2015-6.

QE11 RECREATION GROUND *(Chris Warricker)*

The area around the new swing has now been turfed and the swing and its protective matting have now been installed.

We also have plans to refurbish the surface of the Tennis Court when funds are available.

TRAFFIC & ROADS *(Martin Newman)*

KCC have confirmed that the budget has been agreed for the completion of the drainage work on Forge Hill. We have asked them to carry out this work as soon as possible before the winter weather renders the hill dangerous again. Ample supplies of salt are available in the bins around the village to spread at those points where problems are experienced.

The issue of parking in the Station Road/Chambers Green Road area continues to cause problems, such as damage to verges and inconsiderate parking. We'll be meeting with KCC Highways to discuss possible further measures to alleviate the impact on local residents.

The Parish Council is continuing to press KCC for a speed reduction to 30mph in our current 40mph limit area. In the meantime, we are considering acquiring a speed warning sign for the village to help slow traffic.



CRIME AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

(Tim O'Connor)

**CALL KENT POLICE ON '101' IF YOU SEE SOMETHING SUSPICIOUS
OR DIAL '999' IF A CRIME IS IN PROGRESS.**

Pluckley's Neighbourhood Watch scheme has been re-launched thanks to the efforts of our new co-ordinator, Martin Chambers. Martin is very aware of the amount of petty crime and antisocial behaviour taking place in and around the village over the past few months, and is in regular contact with Kent Police. To be able to minimise this crime everyone needs to be more aware of what is going on in the village, particularly in the houses and streets near to us, and fortnightly bulletin emails have therefore been restarted. If you do not get these, please contact Martin on NHW@pluckley.net. There is also a Facebook page and a Twitter feed for more urgent bulletins and information. If you already have a Facebook account, search for 'Pluckley NHW (New)' or for the Twitter feed follow @PluckleyNHW.

Martin would like to get as many people as possible involved in Neighbourhood Watch so that it becomes something we all take part in for the good of the village and its residents. We could also run advice sessions on how best to secure your home and outbuildings, rural crime, or computer security/phishing. Please let Martin or Tim have your views and ideas.

We have agreed to purchase a 'Public Access Defibrillator' for the village. These machines save lives when someone has a heart attack, and are straightforward to use by anyone without special training. The intention is to site the equipment in the centre of the village and we are currently exploring siting options.



And finally – don't forget the Pluckley Panto - Robin Hood: February 6th & 7th in the Village Hall. Tickets from the Butcher's Shop or phone 840280

YOUR PARISH COUNCIL

If you have any comments or issues about anything in this newsletter, please don't hesitate to contact one of your Councillors:

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The Council meets in Pluckley Village Hall at 7.30pm, normally on the third Monday of each month, except August. However, please note that the next two meetings will be on **Monday 9th February** and **Monday 9th March**. All residents are welcome to attend.

Published by Pluckley Parish Council, 15 Orchard Glade, Headcorn, TN27 9SS.

Printed on recycled paper by Headley Brothers Digital, 01233 623131 www.headley-digital.co.uk

