

## Chairman's Report, Cuxton Parish Council 2016/17

### Cuxton Parish Council

Parish Councils are the lowest level of local government and, whilst having no executive power and minimum spending authority, Cuxton Parish Council plays a vital role in representing local issues and helping to improve the quality of life for parishioners. The Parish Council provides the opportunity for people to influence decisions that touch their lives by ensuring the concerns of residents reach the ears of Medway Council.

Cuxton Parish Councillors are all unpaid volunteers, but have an overall responsibility for the well-being of Cuxton residents. Their work falls into three main categories:

- Representing their local community
- Delivering services to meet local needs
- Striving to improve the quality of life in the Parish

Cuxton Parish Council meets monthly 11 times a year (no meeting in August) to consider the important issues that require full council decisions for example, setting the budget and responding to consultations such as the Lower Thames Crossing and Medway Local Plan Consultation. In addition, Cuxton Parish Council have a number committees that have limited delegated responsibilities. For example, the Finance and Audit Committee produce a budget proposal for main council to discuss and the Land Management Committee manage events such as the Big Lunch on behalf of the Council within an agreed budget. This allows more time for discussion of more strategic issues at main council level. The work of Cuxton Parish Council committees are described under sections 3-7 of this report.

### 1. Membership of the Parish Council and its Committees

Parish Council members are volunteers elected or co-opted to serve a period of up to four years. The Parish Council elected from May 2015 is listed below.

Councillor	Elected/co-opted	Planning & Environment Committee	Audit & Finance Committee	Land Management Committee	Personnel Committee
Kay Hutchfield Chairman	May 2015	✓	✓	✓	✓ Chairman
Gordon Chitty Vice Chairman	May 2015	✓ Chairman	✓ Chairman	✓	✓
Matt Fearn Ward Councillor	May 2015	✓			
Sheila Chamberlain	May 2015				
Ged Chalker	May 2015				
Elizabeth Maisey	May 2015			✓ Chairman	
Julie Porter	March 2016	✓		✓	✓
Matthew Porter	November 2016			✓	✓
Colin Sacre	March 2016	✓	✓	✓	
Tracy Thorley	October 2015		✓	✓	
Paul Turner	November 2016	✓	✓		✓

## 2. Main Council Activities

This section will use the main responsibilities of Parish Councils as a template.

### *a) Representing their local community*

After consultation with residents, Cuxton Parish Council responded to two major consultations in 2016/17. The first was the Lower Thames Crossing Consultation where the Parish Council expressed opposition to Option C and reflected the views of the organisation Campaign for the Protection of Rural England. They suggested Kent should not be used as a conduit for heavy goods traffic entering UK from Europe, and that making sea routes to ports north of Dover (e.g. Felixstowe) more attractive to haulage companies was a more acceptable solution. The lack of any planned improvement to highways once the proposed crossing meets the A2/M2 and the potential impact on the traffic using the A228 was emphasised as a great concern of Cuxton Residents.

Now Option C of the Lower Thames Crossing has been confirmed it becomes more important that Cuxton Parish Council continues to press Medway Council to ensure the A228/Bush Road traffic lights are installed. As Medway Council supported Option C it is important that they press Highways England, on our behalf, to create a road infra-structure that prevents traffic using the A228 and the minor roads around and through Cuxton, as a short cut to and from the crossing and M2/M20.

The response to the Medway Local Plan was also developed through consultation with residents and during a March Extraordinary Meeting of Cuxton Parish Council. The response stressed the need for a comprehensive review and development of infrastructure (highways, schools, health facilities and public transport) **BEFORE** any more housing developments are approved along the A228. If this were the case Cuxton would have had its traffic lights before the houses at St Andrew's Park were built. Concern was also expressed regarding the lack of Cuxton community benefitting from Developers Contributions (106 agreements) from Medway Gate and Temple Marsh.

(Copies of these responses can be found on Cuxton Parish website).

Issues that the Parish Council are currently campaigning on include:

- The installation of traffic lights at the A228/ Bush Road junction.  
Cuxton Parish Council are continuing to press Medway Council for an early completion/resolution of this project.
- Improvement to access to Recycling Centre on Sundridge Hill.  
Traffic queues at the top of Sundridge Hill caused by traffic trying to access the recycling centre has been the focus of complaints by Cuxton residents. Cuxton Parish Council have been working with Medway Council to try and improve the situation, and have provided photographic evidence to illustrate the residents' concern.  
Recent improvements undertaken within the site have failed to resolve the issues of vehicles queuing in the road on this section of the A228.
- Traffic issues in Bush Road at 'school run times'  
Cuxton Parish Council have been leading the Bush Road Partnership to try and improve the situation at school run times. A report of the activities of this group can be seen on pages 8-9 of this report.
- Developer Contributions  
The Council are working with the Ward Councillor to ensure that the Council is actively involved in any discussions with any future developers proposing to build in or near Cuxton. Council hopes to ensure that future 106 agreements reflect the likely impact on Cuxton and its residents.

- Tapping in to other sources of revenue  
Councillors are mindful of the finite resources available through the precept and continue to seek funds that will allow development to take place without burdening the residents with additional costs. This year the Parish Council have been awarded £2000 from Tesco's to refurbish the teenage village, a well-used seating area in the recreation.  
The Parish Council have applied for a £20,000 grant to pay for a feasibility study on energy generation to make the Pavilion a more economic building to maintain, and explore the potential for exporting energy that could make the building self-sustaining.  
The Parish Council have successfully obtained a £2000 grant from Tesco's to refurbish Seating in the recreation ground, £600 from SGN and the gasworks contractor to finance the Christmas Tree event and £350 in donations from the aviation pipeline company for use of our car park and disruption to use of Tar Tank Lane.

b) *Delivering services to meet local needs*

The Parish Council are obliged to provide allotments for residents and have opted to take on responsibility for street cleaning.

- Street Cleaning  
We have one employee who works hard for 28 hours to keep Cuxton streets neat and tidy. The money received from Medway for street cleaning more than covers the costs of his wages, equipment and consumables.  
Medway have replaced half of the waste bins in Cuxton this year and the Parish Council have paid for the remaining bins to be replaced because of their poor condition.
- Allotments  
The day to day management of the Allotments is now undertaken by the Cuxton Allotment Association. This year a great deal of work was done by the Association and the Assistant Clerk to revise the Allotment Agreements and simplify the annual payment process. The Council appreciate the work done on this activity.  
Cuxton Allotment Association is represented on the Land Management Committee of the Parish Council so that there is an opportunity to bring any issues to the Council's attention. During early spring members of the Cuxton Allotment Association undertook to relay the water pipes to a deeper level to avoid accidental damage. This was challenging work undertaken by volunteers and much appreciated by the Parish Council.

c) *Striving to improve the quality of life in the Parish*

Cuxton is blessed with many community groups that add to the quality of village life. At no cost to residents they support our community events, keep our footpaths clear and keep our children and young people engaged in purposeful activity. In recognition of this contribution the Parish Council provide a sum of money each year that can be awarded as grants to local voluntary groups.

- Community Grants  
The Parish Council provide an annual grant to the Parochial Church Council for £600/year towards the cost of maintaining the Churchyard (primarily grass cutting), and £350/year to Cuxton Countryside Group to support the work of their volunteers who go out twice a month keeping our footpaths clear.

- Community Events

Working closely with Fresh Expressions of Church, the Parish Council re-instated the lighting of a 'Village Christmas Tree and Carols' event. Through the efforts of one Councillor the event was sponsored by the Companies undertaking the gas pipe replacement, and another Councillor provided the equipment to install and remove the Christmas tree. Residents provided electricity, organ, pianist and a PA system for free, which completed a truly team effort on the part of Councillors working with Free Expressions of Church, residents and Medway Library Services.

Despite the a damp start to the day the 2016 Cuxton Big Lunch still attracted a good crowd and is an event set to continue to a 6<sup>th</sup> consecutive year in 2017.

- Protecting the Environment

Cuxton Parish Council have been active in ensuring that access to footpaths is not impeded by rubbish (RS 206) or livestock (RS207) by working closely with Medway Footpath Officer and Cuxton Countryside Group.

The Council is also working with Medway Planning Department ensuring that our Areas of Outstanding Beauty (AOB) are not spoilt.

- Community Centre

Previous Cuxton Parish Councils and other organisations have tried to have the Pavilion in the Recreation Ground transformed in to a Community Centre or Village Halls. In 2013 a Big Lottery Grant of £53,000 paid for the most of the cost of the new children's playground in the Recreation Ground. From that time money, which had previously been put aside for replacing the playground equipment, was put in to a Pavilion development fund. The fund currently stands at £50,000.

During 2016/17 previous plans for re-development of the Pavilion have been revised and will be out for consultation with Cuxton residents. If the outcome of the consultation is support for the development and the proposed plan then the next stage will include seeking funding sources and preparing planning applications.

- Staffing

Cuxton Parish Council has three members of staff; a Clerk and RFO (8 hours), an Assistant Clerk (16 hours) and a street cleaner for 28 hours. The cost of the street cleaner are covered by Medway Council.

Cuxton Parish Councillors are unpaid and over the year provide a total of over 600 hours of volunteering time just attending Main Council meetings. This does not take in to account time spent attending committee meetings, preparing for meetings and organising and running events.

If Cuxton Parish Council is to maintain their level of work and be effective in representing the residents of Cuxton it is likely that there will need to be an increase in the staffing hours of the Clerk and her Assistant. In a neighbouring parish council the total paid hours for the Clerk and Assistant is approximately 48 hours. At the moment Parish Councillors are taking up the shortfall in the workload which is not sustainable.

- Keeping in Touch

The Cuxton Parish Council website should be an up to date source of local information for Cuxton residents. The shortage of staff time has meant that the Cuxton Parish Council Website has become seriously out of date. Recently individual councillors have been working on updating the site which is now almost complete. It is not acceptable for the Council to rely on volunteers working many hours a week to do this essential work and this task needs to be included in staff working time.

*Cllr. Mrs Hutchfield, Chairman Cuxton Parish Council*

## Reports from Chairman of Council Committees and Bush Road Partnership

### 3. Audit and Finance Committee

The Finance Committee has 5 members of the Council, with its own elected Chair, and Vice Chair. The purpose of this Committee is to ensure compliance with the Parish Council's Financial Regulations and relevant Statutory Regulations and to report to Council any issues or areas of concern for corrective action. Generally the Finance Committee meets once a year, in order to make recommendations to Full Council on the annual budgets and the Precept.

Each year the Parish Council has to set its budgets in order to apply for the Precept from Medway Council, which for the year 2017/18 has been set at £60,200, this being an increase of £1,200.00 (2.03%) over the year 2016/2017.

Whilst setting this year's budgets there were known increases in costs such as an increase in the minimum wage and the introduction of the new Government 'work based pension' scheme that had to be factored in to calculations. There has also been a reduction in funds that can be applied for from Medway Council, for example previously there has been an additional Rural Liaison fund which could be applied for annually. In the past the Parish Council have accessed up to £10,000 a year from this fund.

The Parish Council has tried to mitigate against known increases by looking at money saving options such as taking a deal for on our annual insurance over 3 years, so that for the remaining term of this current council the costs are known and fixed. In addition the Parish Council has made efforts over the last year to source income from sources other than the precept. They have been successful in obtaining:

- £2000 from Tesco Carrier Bag Fund for refurbishment of teenage village.
- £600 from Gas Company and their contractors spent on Christmas lighting of tree and carols community event.
- £350 from the aviation pipeline company for closure of Tar Tank Lane and use of recreation ground car park put in to general council reserves.
- £500 in donations received from Big Lunch towards 2017 Big Lunch. Likely to be used for improved sound system and cost of portable loos for the event.
- £200 from ward councillor fund to pay for Christmas tree

Total of grants donations secured £3650.00

All of your Parish Councillors are volunteers, and therefore receive no payment, and are residents of Cuxton and its surrounding areas. They strive to keep our village the pleasant place it is, however, being local residents ourselves, the precept directly affects us as well, but we need to have sufficient funds to be able to maintain and improve the village's assets.

In general through keeping a close eye in last year's spending against the budgets set, we have been able to reduce the budget figures, albeit by only a few pounds here and there, but in some cases there needs to be additional investment in order that we are better able to serve the village.

Additionally the PC needs to have reserves to deal with unforeseen expenses, one particular example has been maintenance of the trees within Six Acre Wood, which have had to have some professional works undertaken last year, and there is still more to do, on top of the excellent efforts of Cuxton Countryside Group, and the group of volunteers who helped deal with another unforeseen incident towards the latter part of last year.

*Cllr. Chitty, Chairman Finance Committee*

#### **4. Planning and Environment Committee**

The remit of the Planning Committee is to review planning applications with a view to how they affect the Village and its residents. The advantage is that the Committee members have local knowledge, and can pick up things which may be missed by Medway Council Planning.

The Planning Committee consists of 5 members of the Council, with its own elected chairman and vice chairman. It meets monthly depending on whether Medway Council have received any Planning Applications within our area, i.e. Cuxton and Upper and Lower Bush, to be considered.

There have been regular meetings of the Planning Committee this year with a range of applications from driveway alterations through to applications for complete new builds. Within the existing boundaries of our Village there is very little space available for new buildings, and worryingly there have been some applications for 'backland' developments, which is something the Parish Council resist because we do not want the village to become similar to a modern housing estate with properties crammed 'higgledy pickledy' into any available space.

Another concern is over development of individual properties, especially where this may lead to potential further inconveniences to other residents such as being overlooked, parking and access problems.

The Parish Council cannot stop a planning application, this is solely down to Medway Council. However, if the Planning Committee objects to an application on behalf of the Parish Council, then, because it is deemed that more than 3 people have objected (by virtue of the Planning Committee being made up of 5 members of the Parish Council), then the application is automatically referred to Medway Councils Planning Committee, rather than being dealt with solely by a Planning Officer.

Another issue which the Parish Council are keeping a close eye on is developments to Medway Councils Local Plan. This has to fit in with the Governments directive to build the number of additional houses they required in the near future. The long and the short of it is Medway are looking at potential development areas, and this could affect us, which may not necessarily be with physical buildings, but traffic increases and demands on already stretched infrastructures. This has happened elsewhere where Maidstone Borough Council, due to not having space available within Maidstone for additional properties, have openly pushed new developments to outlying villages.

*Cllr. Chitty, Chairman Planning & Environment Committee*

#### **5. Land Management Committee**

##### *Committee Membership*

During the year Cllr Paul Monck and Jill Sayer resigned from the Council owing to new work commitments. We are grateful to both of them for their work on the committee. Matthew Porter joined the committee during the year bringing with him both youth and relevant experience. Cllr Mrs Porter was elected as vice-chairman of the committee in May.

Ian Gray was co-opted on to the Land Management Committee (LMC) as a liaison officer between the LMC and the Cuxton Allotment Association giving monthly reports, but with no

voting rights. Robin Bourner has also been co-opted to attend meetings, when the Big Lunch has been discussed, again with no voting rights. He organises the bands that play at the event.

#### *Major Events in Recreation Ground*

The annual Cuxton Big Lunch which took place in June 2016 took £435 at the gate and other donations made the total income £500. This was followed by Bligh Children's Centre event, Cuxton 91 football fun day and, of course the annual bonfire night celebrations. The other major event was carol singing. This year we received a considerable amount of sponsorship for the event, which was held in the library/infant school entrance area. The library stayed open for the event. All of these events show a great deal of social cohesion and community spirit between the various groups in the village.

Discussions have taken place with the Wheel of Cuxton about the clearance of the bonfire site after the event. It was agreed that the PC would allocate a budget of £1, 200 to be reviewed annually, to pay for a professional clearance of dangerous waste material and the Wheel would deal with the removal of the chestnut fencing before the event, conduct a removal of rubbish and rake-over of the site afterwards and return the fencing after the professional clearance.

#### *Maintenance and Repairs*

Regular maintenance of the field and equipment has been undertaken, taking note of the results of weekly inspections by the Assistant Clerk and annual inspections by Maria Cook, a qualified, health and safety playground safety inspector.

- The teenage village seating has been repaired and redecorated using a grant obtained from Tesco supermarket.
- Swing barriers will be installed soon as recommended by 2016 annual safety report.
- The entrance to the playground has been repaired with a concrete base to address a trip hazard.
- New large waste bins have been installed at the entrance to the Recreation Ground to house black sacks collected by the street cleaner until they are collected. This change now keeps the rubbish out of sight and prevents damage to black sacks by foxes and other vermin.
- Roof works were carried out on both the pavilion and the roundel caused by vandalism.

#### *Woodland Management*

Management plans are now in place for both the Six-Acre and the Millennium Woods. The woodlands continue to be managed by Cuxton Countryside Group on behalf of the Council. Professional services were employed to remove a large dangerous tree.

#### *Allotments*

Cuxton Allotment Association have done a great deal of work to improve our allotments site, the most time-consuming task being the renewal and relaying of the water pipes. They have worked hard with the Assistant Clerk to review and simplify the annual Allotment Agreement with plot holders.

#### *Cuxton Countryside Group*



CCG continue to manage and maintain Cuxton footpaths on behalf of the Council. They received an accolade this year from the organisers of the North Downs run. They commented that the Cuxton section of the run was the best maintained part.

#### *Agreements with Local Organisations*

This year the LMC decided to bite the bullet and review all the agreements with associated organisations in the village. Revised agreements with Cuxton 91, Cuxton Countryside Group and the Allotment Association were agreed and signed by both parties. They were also standardised to a collective legal format. Cuxton Sports and Recreation Association has decided to withdraw from its arrangement with Cuxton PC as it is no longer responsible for collecting booking fees, but will still be available to fundraise on behalf of Council if needed.

#### *Pavilion Development*

The LMC took the decision to propose that the Council use some of its funds to employ an architect to re-design the Pavilion to make it in to a building that could be used by a wider section of the community. This decision was ratified by full Council. The architect has now submitted the plan and the LMC has started a wide consultation. The committee itself first studied the plan and made comments. The plan was then presented at a meeting of interested parties, who already use the pavilion as it stands, or would make use of it if development took place. A version incorporating comments from these 2 meetings was then presented to a meeting of full Council. The architect has made the amendments recommended and the amended version will be on display at the Annual Parish Meeting and at the 2017 Cuxton Big Lunch as part of a wider consultation. Further consultation opportunities will be undertaken before any planning or grant applications are started.

*Cllr. Mrs. Maisey, Chairman Land Management Committee*

## **6. Personnel Committee**

The Personnel Committee meets twice a year. It ensures that the performance of employees is monitored and it makes recommendations to Council regarding staffing issues and salaries. This year work based pensions has been a focus of discussion and a pension provider has now been appointed within the time frame required.

In 2015 our current clerk agreed to work with us for at least 2 years to see the Council through a difficult time in its history. Those 2 years are almost over and so the Personnel Committee have been preparing recruitment documentation on behalf of the Main Council so that everything is in place when our current Clerk leaves us.

*Cllr. Mrs Hutchfield, Chairman Personnel Committee*

## 7. Bush Road Partnership

Cuxton Parish Council has joined together with Cuxton School and local organisations and businesses to try and identify ways in which road safety and parking can be improved in Bush Road. We have met seven times during the last year and the following areas have been discussed:

Discussion point	Outcome via Bush Road Partnership
School Travel Plan	School is now working actively with Medway Council on developing a travel plan. Additional parking for parents agreed at the White Hart (AM only). School are piloting the 'Walk on Wednesday' initiative to encourage parents to walk to school when possible.
Travel questionnaire (via school)	Data collected indicates that more than half of the children who attend the school come from outside of the village with 96 children travelling from Medway Gate/Earl Estate, Strood. Ongoing discussions on the implications of this number of cars travelling to the village twice a day.
Bush Road Traffic Light consultation	Updated information is shared via the Ward Councillor Matt Fearn and Medway Council representatives. This information is shared at the full Council monthly meetings.
Parking on Bush Road	Medway Council have been asked to consider if any additional space could be used for parking in James Road. Parking outside the shops is an issue and discussions with Medway Council on new signage and lines, are ongoing. Close links established with the Social Club to help alleviate and highlight misuse of their car park.
Gas Pipe replacement project - SGN	Links made with the SGN Project lead, to gain information on when/how the project could affect Bush Road and shared information via the 'Cuxton Noticeboard' with all residents.
Weekend parking – football	Cuxton 91 FC has been running training sessions outside of the village at Strood Academy and this has reduced the number of cars parking in Bush Road as a result. The school offered the use of the playground for parking on Sunday and this has greatly reduced the number of cars parked on the road/pavement on match days.
Speed of traffic – Bush Road	Mobile Speed Indicator Device (SID) requested and placed in Bush Road for a two week period. Medway Council analysed data which indicated average speeds of 25mph northbound and 18.7 mph southbound.
Possible zebra crossing/Crossing Patrol person	A potential zebra crossing has been rejected by Medway Council but a crossing patrol person has been approved and will be recruited very soon. It is currently being considered by Medway Council where the crossing point will be in Bush Road.

*Cllr. Mrs Thorley, Chairman, Bush Road Partnership*