

## **Chairman's Annual Report 2020/21**

This year has been dominated by the Corona Virus epidemic which has changed our lives immeasurably. The tragic loss of life and the devastating effect on our economy will be something that will be in our minds for many years to come.

Lockdown restrictions have hampered our ability to hold public meetings and events as well as being able to carry out improvements to the village. However a wonderful example of true community spirit came with the creation of the Offham Community Network spearheaded by Councillor Caroline Dyer and Rev David Green and supported by so many other residents. The success of the scheme was outstanding and helped bring much needed support and assistance to those in need.

### **Blaise Farm - In Vessel Composting (IVC) Plant**

Following significant investment in maintenance and improvements to the plant there have been almost no reported issues in relation to flies and malodours. Councillors were only able to make one visit to the plant and it is pleasing to report that everything appeared to be in good order with very few flies seen.

### **Blaise Farm – Quarry (Gallaghers)**

The ever increasing demand for ragstone particularly for the lorry parks linked to the Channel Tunnel and Port saw a huge increase in quarrying towards the end of last year. Plans have been drawn up to extend the quarry into the adjacent field and to accommodate this, the route of the footpath is being altered. The Parish Council have been liaising closely with Gallaghers in relation to the impact of all matters relating to quarrying operations including the route and landscaping of the temporary footpath. The concerns of residents about the effects on their properties caused by vibration from the blasting continue. With the assistance of Sarah Hohler our Kent County Councillor arrangements were made to undertake some independent monitoring and the results should be available soon. If anyone wishes to have a vibration assessment carried out at their property, when Covid restrictions permit, this can be arranged by contacting Gallaghers using the email address [bill.bowley@gallagher-group.co.uk](mailto:bill.bowley@gallagher-group.co.uk). The Parish Council are also co-ordinating a log of the blasts and effects throughout the village: please email our clerk Lynne Mackie, at [clerk@offham-pc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@offham-pc.gov.uk) with your comments.

### **Blaise Farm – Anaerobic Digestion Plant**

This relatively new facility has now been commissioned and the Environment Agency has granted a licence for the plant to operate. The digestors were initially seeded with organic material to get them up and running and to check that all the systems were fully operational. However this resulted in significant malodours being emitted and following representations from the Parish Council, our County Councillor and others the Environment Agency took action. The plant operators have managed to reduce these emissions although malodours still do cause intermittent issues to immediate residents. Now that the plant has its licence to handle animal waste, which it is designed to do, the malodour problem should subside. Councillors have made site visits and will keep in close contact with the plant operators to monitor developments.

### **The old Landfill Site**

The Parish Council continues to have regular email contact with the site manager including an online meeting to discuss various issues. Whilst we are pleased to hear that there has been very little gas migration from the site and gas recovery is close to 100% we are disappointed that there has been little progress with fencing repairs and the demolition of White Ladies has still to take place. We are assured that the latter two issues should be undertaken soon.

### **Planning**

A planning application to build an additional 15 houses at Barfield House, predominantly on Green Belt land outside the village envelope, met with huge resistance from residents and nearly 100 objections were made to the Borough Council. The application was subsequently refused.

The pressure to build housing is ever increasing and it is important to protect our green spaces as best we can. However the opening hearings by the Inspector of our Local Plan, held last year, raised concerns about Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council's failure in their Duty to Cooperate with Sevenoaks Council about their inability to meet their planning requirements. The Inspector has suggested that the Plan be withdrawn or they will recommend its non-adoption. This is a potential disaster as it would take a considerable amount of time to re-submit another Plan and during this time the planning decisions of the Borough Council could easily be overturned. The Leader of the Borough Council has written to the Secretary of State and a decision is awaited.

A planning application has just been received to construct a Solar Park on the old Landfill site which is huge – about the size of Offham village. The Parish Council are looking into all of the implications and will consult residents to obtain their views.

### **The Recreation Ground**

Despite Covid restrictions we have been able to keep the recreation ground open, apart from the play area for a short period of time, which has been much appreciated by adults and children alike. Councillors continue to carry out essential maintenance but some of the equipment is getting to the stage when it will soon need to be replaced. New equipment is extremely expensive and so a sinking fund has been set up to put aside funds for this purpose.

### **Village Projects and Fund Raising**

The sale of the village calendar raised over £1,000 and our huge thanks go to former Councillor Wendy Williams for her outstanding work.

The village Green has suffered considerable damage from lorries driving over the edges. Following contact with Gallaghers the Parish Council obtained 6 large rocks which will be placed in the areas affected in the hope that this will overcome this problem.

Ongoing maintenance work continues at the village pond in order to keep it looking good and we are keeping our fingers crossed that our annual brood of ducklings will appear this year.

The Parish Council is concerned about the tremendous amount of litter seen on our roads and felt that a concerted effort was needed to deal with it and to form a litter picking group to undertake regular litter picks to keep on top of the problem. It was recognised that a number of residents are already picking litter up and following a discussion with Simon

Mahoney he has agreed to head up a litter picking team. Already the village is looking much better so our thanks go to him and all the helpers.

### **Donations**

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

Offham Lunch Club

St Michael's Church

West Malling Scout Group

### **Offham Community Awards**

In recognition of outstanding work and contribution to the village it was decided to make awards to:

David Frankling - Kent Association of Local Councils award

Wendy Williams - Offham Parish Council award

As soon as Corona Virus restrictions permit we will arrange for the presentations to be made.

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

We are pleased to advise you that the Parish Council Tax for this coming year has not been increased. The precept for the Parish Council amounts to £21,885 for the year and equates to £54.41 for a band D household.

### **Newsletters**

We hope that you find our monthly newsletter giving important information, forthcoming events etc helpful and our thanks go to Lynne Mackie, our Parish Clerk, for preparing it.

### **Parish Council Meetings and Helpers**

In normal circumstances the Parish Council meets on the first Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm in the village hall committee room and villagers are welcome to come along and have the opportunity to contribute. However due to Corona Virus restrictions we are currently having to hold virtual meetings using Zoom but we are hoping that all will return to normal very soon.

The Parish Councillors are all unpaid volunteers and, as you may have noticed, do an increasing amount of maintenance jobs around the village. We are always very appreciative of any additional assistance from residents and if you feel that you would like to help out on occasions then please let us know by contacting the Parish Clerk – [clerk@offham-pc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@offham-pc.gov.uk). I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Parish Councillors and volunteer helpers for all their hard work throughout the year and for the time they have given up to support our lovely village.

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

Steve Rickett

Chairman

Offham Parish Council

