

## **Chairman's Annual Report 2022/2023**

A full year of activities of the parish council and within the village returned in 2022/2023 following the Covid restrictions. We were able to organise and undertake some community events and renew some fundraising for village projects. HM The Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebration in June and the period of mourning following her death in September were the events which dominated the year nationally.

### **Parish councillors**

There has been a number of changes to the parish council over the last year. Robin Taylor retired in September having given over three years of valuable service. John Adams and James Barnes were appointed at the beginning of the 2022/23 year. Their contributions were much appreciated, but work commitments meant they both stepped down, John in August and James this February. We thank Robin, John and James for their service as members of the council.

Two new councillors, Sue Williams and Chris Stephens were appointed in November 2022. For a short while we had a full complement of councillors but since February there has been one vacancy.

Other than current councillors there were no further nominations for the local elections, so no election took place for Offham Parish Council. We hope to co-opt further residents to the parish council, both to fill the current vacancy and in due course to replace vacancies which will naturally occur over time.

### **Events and fundraising**

A village Platinum Jubilee event was held on Sunday 5th June, organised by the parish council. A wonderful Children's Street Party arranged by the Offham Village Hall (OVH) committee and preceded by games on Cosgrave Field, was very well received by children and their families. Our very grateful thanks to everyone at OVH.

In the evening, a well-attended gathering on the village green with live music and picnics was generously supported by The Kings Arms.

Our much overdue Race Night was further delayed by the period of national mourning in September, but finally occurred in January. A full house at OVH enjoyed an exciting evening, the racing organised by Malling Lions, to whom we are much indebted.

### **Highways**

Councillors and residents continue to express concern about the speeding of vehicles through the village. Regrettably, Kent Highways support for moving our Highways Improvement Plan forwards was impeded by internal KCC changes during 2022, such that the contact for Offham changed several times. However, in recent months a formal speed survey has been completed and we are now analysing and discussing the results with the Highways team and setting up a working party to move this issue forward. There is an opportunity to develop a 20mph restriction throughout the village but the approach used and the cost needs careful consideration. Commitment from residents by volunteering time and interest to set up and participate regularly in an Offham Speedwatch group, would provide valuable information and be of positive assistance to negotiations.

### **Landfill site - Solar Farm**

The planning proposal to install a ground mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) array and associated infrastructure on the old landfill site adjacent to the village was debated at the KCC Planning Applications Committee in June. The parish council attended and

expressed a number of concerns. The planning proposal was accepted by the Committee subject to a number of conditions. However, the formal determination is yet to be made as legal matters have not yet been signed off.

### **Other planning**

The parish council took part in the Section 18 responses to TMBC's draft local plan, which included a 'call for sites'. Four sites were 'offered' in Offham including: the Barfield site which already has a planning agreement for seven dwellings; the rear Barfield site within the green belt for which planning has twice been refused; a small section of land by the entrance to the landfill site, and White Ladies. The process of the local plan has been delayed and the outcome of site not yet determined.

The parish council continues to review and respond to TMBC about all planning applications made in the parish area.

### **Blaise Farm (Composting Plant/Anaerobic Digester/Quarry)**

The six monthly online joint meeting with all three companies and interested parties, including councils and the environment agency, continue.

There have been no significant problems reported, apart from a fly infestation which affected the village during very hot periods last summer. This was investigated and found not to be from the quarry but from a nearby piece of land; it was dealt with by the environment agency and it is expected that the issue is resolved.

Gallagher has continued to extend its quarrying work into the adjacent field following the diversion of public right of way MR288 and creation of a permissive path to Lords Walk (MR260). Councillors continue to monitor the works and preservation of rights of way. A trial assessment of increased charges is due to commence shortly.

### **Recreation Ground**

Councillors have continued to carry out maintenance work on equipment, especially within the children's playground. Replacement of the playground equipment is essential and is the parish council's main fundraising objective.

### **Men's Shed**

A weekly men's support group has met every Thursday morning throughout the last year for coffee and biscuits and conversation. It has been very successful indeed, regularly achieving 10-15 people weekly and several more from time to time. Some new people with little previous contact with others, those with disability, bereavement and other needs have enjoyed sharing with others, making friendships and overall everyone has found the weekly meetings to provide a very supportive environment. My huge thanks to The Kings Arms for hosting and making this happen.

### **Council tax**

After two years during which the Parish Council Tax had not risen, last year an increase in line with inflation of 5% was necessary. It has been further raised by 7.5% this year to keep abreast of inflation and the cost of necessary expenditure. The precept for the Parish Council amounts to £25,440 for the year which equates to £62.54 for a Band D household.

### **KCC Bus Funding Reductions**

KCC withdrew funding for many bus routes in the county which it had supported, but which did not reach a sufficient level of use compared with other routes. This decision was a result of the authority's budgetary cuts. A proposal to maintain bus routes 58 and 70 locally was led by Borough Green PC and supported by Nu Venture. Offham

and may other PCs gave support to the plan, which attracted a grant from KCC. The outcome is that the 70 route through Offham will be maintained as a shoppers' service but only one bus per week on a Monday morning...and only for an assessment period until this summer. The number of passengers will be key to the viability of even one bus per week on this route from Wrotham, through Borough Green and Offham to West Malling and Lunsford Park (Chaucer Way for Tesco) and return.

### **Offham Community Awards**

In recognition of outstanding work and contribution to the village the parish council has made the following awards:

Pam Begbey - Kent Association of Local Councils award  
Brian Jones - Offham Parish Council award  
Robin Taylor - Offham Parish Council award

### **Communication**

Offham Parish Council continues to communicate with residents as much as possible: daily as necessary and by monthly newsletter to those on our email list, on the several notice boards in the village and via our Facebook page. We urge everyone to sign up to our mailing list but for those who cannot, we encourage neighbours to spread important and relevant information and news.

### **Help**

Councillors are all unpaid volunteers but cannot manage all the maintenance work that is needed around Offham. We really appreciate any additional assistance that residents can offer. If you feel you can help out on occasions please let us know via our parish clerk at [clerk@offham-pc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@offham-pc.gov.uk)

To all those who have helped during this year and to my fellow councillors, my grateful thanks for keeping our beautiful village so well cared for. Huge thanks also to our parish clerk Lynne Mackie for her enormous support to the council and for ensuring that our communication with residents is informative and responsive. I am also very appreciative of the support we have from our county councillor and borough councillors.

### **Finally...**

Your Council Needs You!

Parish councils and the help and support that councillors provide for their communities, only survive if sufficient people put their names forward for election or co-option to a parish council. From time to time we have vacancies for co-option and encourage and welcome interest from Offham residents.

Charles Unter  
Chairman  
Offham Parish Council

16th May 2023