

Offham Parish Council

MINUTES OFFHAM ANNUAL PARISH MEETING FRIDAY 12TH MAY 2023 AT 7.30PM OFFHAM VILLAGE HALL

In attendance:

Cllrs Charles Unter (Chairman), Phil Bailey, Adrian Marchant, Matt Scullion and Sue Williams, Chris Stephens, Clerk, Borough Councillors Trudy Dean and Michelle Tatton, Neil Willis (Chairman Offham Cricket Club), Gill Speed (Head of Care and Training Spadework), Katherine Salter (Community Development Worker East Malling Centre) Mike Rowe and approx. 25 members of Public.

INTRODUCTION TO MEETING AND PARISH COUNCILLORS

Cllr Charles Unter (Parish Chairman) addressed the meeting.

Parish Council – Council members are Charles Unter, Phil Bailey, Adrian Marchant, Matt Scullion, Sue Williams and Chris Stephens.

PARISH COUNCIL UPDATE – Cllr Charles Unter

- Councillors who have also served this year are Robin Taylor, James Barnes and John Adams.
- Cllrs were thanked for their help during the year, for example checking play area equipment and organising and setting up the Jubilee.
- Our previous Borough Councillors are no longer in place, Ann Kemp and Piers Montague. Our new Ward is with West Malling and East Malling, and we welcome our three new Borough Councillors - Trudy Dean, Michelle Tatton and Roger Roud
- A selection of photos available in the Offham 2024 Calendar were shown.
- Thanks were given to Steve Rickett, David Frankling, Robin Taylor and others who set up the Remembrance display on the Village Green. Cllr Sue Williams was thanked for looking after the Pound. Damage to the Village Green, for example from vehicles turning around, is repaired by Cllrs Adrian Marchant and Phil Bailey.
- The biggest event last year was The Queens Platinum Jubilee Celebration. The Village Hall Committee organised a children's party that was enjoyed by all. There was great fun with sports in Cosgrave Field organised by Sue Williams. In the evening there was a band on the Village Green.
- The Offham Sign was taken down, the post repaired and top repainted. Unfortunately, it wasn't ready for the Jubilee, but Maidstone Signs put it up later, and thanks were given to Robin Taylor who organised this.
- We are lucky to have a great pub, The Kings Arms. We had the switching on of Christmas lights by the May Queen and mulled wine and mince pies in the pub, with a lot of support from Saffi and Matt. The following week, carol singing in the pub was organised by Jane Jordan. The Parish Council provided a donation towards the mulled wine and mince pies
- We had a race night, organised by Malling Lions. It was meant to be in Autumn 2021 but was delayed by Covid and then the period of official mourning following the Queen's death. It finally took place in mid-January this year and we had a great time. Mike Rowe was the banker for that evening, as he has done before.
- We hold events to bring people in the village together. After not being able to fund-raise for 3 years, we raised about £4,000 last year for village projects and a substantial chunk will go towards the renewal of playground equipment. It will take a 6-figure sum to update the equipment and we would like to make it better for our children and young families
- The men's support group – The Men's Shed – started last year. It brings together men for friendship and to chat. It has been buzzing every Thursday morning for 14 or 15 months. Regularly a group of 10-15 attend who come along for a coffee and a chat. It is helpful and supportive. The Parish Council needs to find a grant to help with the running costs.
- We have a wonderful school in our community. There has been little links in recent years with the Parish Council so we have made some contact with the new Head Teacher. We are working particularly on the road outside the school, with parking and speeding.

Signed.....

C. Unter

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Dated

4/2/23

- In June last year KCC agreed the Landfill Site would become a solar farm, leased to a company for about 40 years. The process has been held up with s106 legal discussions. When finished we can get in touch with the developers to see how they can work with the village.
- Last year the path at the quarry diverted to the West so Gallagher could mineral work in the next field. We have regularly 6 monthly meetings with all those in quarry site – the Anaerobic Digestion Plant, In-Vessel Composting Site and the Quarry. People may notice the blasts from the Quarry.
- Four sites in Offham were put forward in the Local Plan. We don't know what is happening with the Local Plan at the moment. We supported the wish for the Green Belt to be extended to the East.
- Many residents have seen certain lorries going through the Village in recent weeks. We found a development site in St Leonards Street has Planning Permission, but with a condition for a transport plan. The company haven't submitted a plan but started work. We are working on this.
- This time last year we had buses most days, then KCC stopped funding for many buses around the county following a survey. Locally there was a lot of pressure for 2 buses – the 58 through the BART villages and the 70 through Offham. We gathered together with Borough Green Parish Council to get some funding and now we have a bus once a week. That will be for another two or three months, then a review depending on numbers

KCC and TMBC REPORTS

These will be available on the Parish Council Website

OFFHAM CRICKET CLUB - Neil Willis, Chairman

- Want to grow the club but in a way in harmony with the community and an increasing part of this valuable community. It is our club but it is your club. We welcome you to come along and watch and frequent the bar and chat.
- Founded in 1944. Matches started at current ground in 1945 which was originally owned by Edith Cosgrave who donated it to the Parish Council for the cricket club to play there in perpetuity.
- We are an ambitious, family friendly club. Everybody works and plays together for the benefit of everybody else.
- Junior cricket – an important thing we've been building over last 4 or 5 years. We have a thriving section for male and female players. Have U11, U11 U 15 two sides and U 18. 40 or 50 players. Hopefully they move onto our senior cricket a First XI and a second XI team, and now we also have a full set of Third XI.
- Sunday Kent Village League Team lapsed a few years ago and has been brought back. We won the first game last week. We also run a development team, playing friendly matches.
- About 45 adult members, grown over last few years. People come and stay so a stable group. A growing and thriving club. At the heart of the club is a community.
- Our ambitions – where we want to go:
 - maintain our Clubmark status (with ECB), with excellent safeguarding
 - Secure a thriving and sustainable junior section
 - Successful adult teams both in the leagues and as a development platform for young players
 - Enhance key aspects our existing grounds and facilities
 - Explore options for an additional ground
 - Ensure the club continues to make a positive contribution to the life of the village
- Arranged for an additional defibrillator - the club are leading that with the village hall and tennis club for the whole village. One of their members is going to be monitoring the defib to check it works.

Cllr Williams mentioned defibrillator training on 17th June and 22nd July in the Committee Room.

SPADEWORK – Gill Speed, Head of Care and Training

The Charity is about what we can do for individuals. Spadework started in 1984 but it came to the site in 1994. The focus is still supporting adults with learning difficulties and disabilities of other sorts. Many stay with us after retirement age. It is about helping people to develop the skills of becoming more independent and having a voice of their own and living a happier healthier life. We help our trainees learn to manage change and give them vocational skills. We could have up to 49 trainees on site each day. They arrive at 10am and work in different groups. That changes after 8 weeks.

Signed.....

Dated 4/7/23

Creative Spadework – there is a craft group and a woodwork group. Trainees are achieving things with a meaning – goods they make are sold. We are starting to give them the opportunity to take part in performing arts, to try something new but in a safe environment. Another new option is life skills, eg cooking and healthy eating.

We try and promote skills and behaviours acceptable in the wider community. There is a Trainee Council and they have elections. At the last election, 25 put their name forward for 8 places, so learning to deal with disappointment is an important skill as well. There was an activities week to celebrate the coronation, decided by the Trainee Council.

Since lockdown started last year, Dementia services have grown. Parents and carers of adults with a learning disability have a carers group.

Cllr Unter said we were lucky to have Spadework in our community and congratulated them on their Impact Report.

PRESENTATION OF AWARDS

The KALC award was presented to Pam Begbey by Cllr Unter "Pam's longstanding contribution to the community of Offham has been exceptional. Her leadership and support for the Church, Open House, May Day and Table Tennis exemplify her dedicated commitment".

Offham Village Awards were presented to Brian Jones and Robin Taylor. Cllr Unter said it was a pleasure to serve on the Parish Council with them. They looked after the Village Green and Recreation Ground wonderfully. Both have lived in the village for many years and done so many things – too numerous to mention.

Cllr Unter said that the Offham Community Network was involved with the East Malling Centre and Community Larder. There is a food bin outside the pub to collect food every fortnight. Thanks were given to Janette Burnard and Angela Unter for organising that on a regular basis.

EAST MALLING CENTRE - Katherine Salter, Community Development Officer

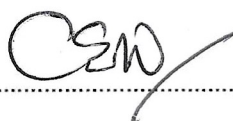
Set up in 2015 in the old St James the Great school. That part of East Malling is a very deprived area with physical and mental health problems, low-income families and poor transport links. It is a unique Community Centre where you can book hall or space, but we also provide and run our own services.

Why are we here? There is a history of benefit dependency, poor education attainment, low paid work and poor health outcomes including anxiety and depression. On the estate large areas of social housing are under Clarion housing. We work closely with Clarion Futures Team, a charity helping youngsters find work, training etc. They provide funding for us as well. Many residents struggling with the cost of living crisis.

What do we do?

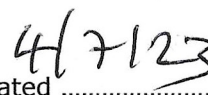
- Community Supermarket – built up since the pandemic, and you are very helpful with delivery of parcels during pandemic. The Café now transforms into a proper supermarket and we pay FairShare to deliver food which can be sold at low cos, helping local families. We are very dependent on donations as well. We want more funding to buy in frozen produce. It is challenging but really successful. 48% of shoppers are clarion tenants, 50% are from working families (January data), 20% are not working families, 40% are over 55 and 15% retired.
- SOS Parcels for people in urgent need of help. This often leads on to other services in our centre.
- We got TMBC funding to provide our own Fuel Voucher Scheme.
- We give support for a virtual face to face with a Citizens Advisor online.
- Lunch Clubs for over 55s – our Chef does lovely 3 course meals on a Thursday with bookings in advance for £8.50. We often have entertainment as well and it is very well attended.
- Memory Café – supporting people with dementia and their carers. This has been difficult to get off the ground as it is hard to reach people with dementia.
- Keep East Malling Warm – thank you to those who helped with this project. We delivered over 170 Warm Packs just before Christmas to encourage the elderly to keep warm. We were running a Warm Space on a Friday morning, but that has ended now. Providing warm soup and drink and a warm place to come along and warm up. Hopefully it will start again next Winter.

Signed.....



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Dated



- Holiday Activities for Children – I organise what we do and get the funding. Unfortunately, a lot of the funding has been cut for sports and activities. It will be tough this year but we hope to get funding. Staff are volunteers so we think of what we can do rather than getting people in.
- Community Events – last year there was a big event for Ukraine in the summer. There was a Christmas Event, a Drum Workshop and a Coronation Day event.
- Live Well Community Wellbeing – there are a lot of mental health issues in East Malling. I regularly deal with people in a bad state with difficult problems, and domestic violence problems through DAVS. We want to focus on men's mental health as there is a lot less aimed at men.
- Grow 19 – a special needs college for young adults based at the Centre. They run the café on a Wednesday. Anyone can go for lunch there. Like at Spadework, they are preparing for the real world. Some are doing horticulture and some catering. They can experience what the real world is like.
- Volunteering – our woodland area day – it was overgrown and hadn't been touched for years and there is a lovely children's play area. We teamed up with volunteers from United Living. Workers gave a day to come and volunteer and we cleared a great area.

There is an Increase in Need:

- There were 20 SOS Parcels in January 2022 and 53 in January 2023
- There were 116 supermarket shoppers in January 2022 and 225 in January 2023
- There were 149 families helped in January 2022, 89 being Clarion Tenants, and 290 families helped in January 2023, with 141 being Clarion tenants

Fund raising is continuous and core funding is an issue. We are working on approaching local companies and businesses to help us more with the bigger amounts. It is a worry that KCC funding is being cut and we need that core funding each year to keep going.

What we want to do:

- Credit union to support local community with managing their finances and encouraging saving
- Provide holiday events and play schemes for families who are struggling and receiving free school meals, as KCC funding has been cut significantly in this area
- Improve links with local businesses in the hopes that they may be able to provide support with ongoing funding
- Improve the actual centre, as the building which was once a primary school is dated and needs repairs in certain areas

THANK YOU OFFHAM. It is because of the generosity and kindness of communities like you that we are able to continue to help people in need

HIGHWAYS AND TRAFFIC

Cllr Unter explained that OPC have been in discussion with KCC for a number of years. We fill in a Highways Improvement Plan (HIP) every year with KCC and it acts as our priority list for what we are able to try and do with highways and roadways in our community. We meet once a year with HIP officers but they have a huge number of parishes and larger councils. We now have four main priorities.

Highways agreed to undertake speed tests in village and the results came through last week. Most people would like a 20mph zone but it is quite complex to organise and there was resistance if it cannot be monitored by police until recently. We are looking for it to cover from the West near the Recreation Ground, through the middle of the village, to the East near the end of Church Road.

The results of the speed tests show numbers from 8900 to 11200 during the week. The average speed was 23.2 – 26.2mph. It seems slow, but what we notice is the ones that go fast. The 85% centile, that is the speed up to which 85% of cars go, is slightly higher at around 28-30mph. On the face of it, compliance with the 30mph is pretty good – 80% comply towards the West on the long stretch but it is around 90% compliance overall. 0.9% - 3.3% of vehicles would face enforcement at over 35mph. So, around 1,114 of vehicle measurements a week are people doing over 35mph which is an average of 149 per day. Those are the ones we notice. Even if we had restrictions and 20mph zones they are the least likely to comply.

OPC need to look at the results in detail and talk to KCC. We could do physical traffic calming measures but many of these require lighting, so the Village decided "no" to these about 12 years ago. There are

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softer forms such as roundels in the road and repeating limit signs. The estimated Cost of a 20mph scheme is not small eg a traffic regulation order would cost over £3000, and audits are required – much falls to the Parish Council to pay for. So we are looking for softer measures. There is more movement from KCC to say parishes can move towards 20mph limits with more soft measures and less expense.


A lot of people complain about speed but when we ask for volunteers for Speedwatch there is silence. KCC will look more favourably if they see clear evidence the community is doing something about it. 8 years ago Martyn Begbey tried to get people involved for Speedwatch training but there were not enough. Now we can carry out Speedwatch with less people.

Cllr Trudy Dean was introduced and she addressed the meeting.

She said support for 20mph schemes has changed in last 20 years and even more in last 5. Casualty reduction is still important and the UN General Assembly endorsed the setting of 20mph speed limits where pedestrians and motor vehicles are in frequent conflict. In the last 5-6 years people have also realised that lower speeds contribute hugely to quality of life. Casualties are pretty low in Offham and West Malling, but the first or second issue that most concerns residents is the speed of traffic. She has found that 84% of people have said the thing most concern about in their environment was speed – they don't like the noise, pollution, vibration and general fear of being passed by high-speed traffic when you are walking

- It doesn't matter what you do, about 15% of the population will consistently oppose speed limits, but they are in the minority. 85% want better standards of life and air quality and less casualties.
- Traffic management and speed is not an exact science. What works in one area does not work somewhere else, it is not obvious why and it is impossible to predict. eg the Boxley scheme was put in and almost all of it taken out because it doesn't work. Speed platforms were put in at a cost of £5-10,000, and then paid to be taken down again because they cause vibrations in nearby properties. But this doesn't happen everywhere, and sometimes you don't know why.
- You need to look at a 20mph scheme in terms of a phased reduction. You don't want to create a counterproductive system in your village, for example with a forest of signs, lots of heavy engineering or a lot of signage destroying the look of your village if you have a conservation status. It's a balance. Heavy engineering traffic calming is not generally favoured – you don't know it will work, it will cost a lot of money, you get associated problems of more vibrations and noise. What is much more effective is managing on street car parking. In West Malling they have blocked the High Street with car parking on the left and right so drivers can't see all the way through and drive faster. Changing where cars are parked is not costly. If you are looking at a scheme and deciding where it will start and end, put in the minimum distance required. Only then if you are still facing a problem do you start interfering in any serious way. Cllr Dean has implemented 20mph schemes for 50 yards or couple of hundred yards – now the feeling is the bigger the area the scheme covers the better. You don't want a lot of different speed limits which commonly happens around here. In Larkfield, East Malling and West Malling people drive between the communities. The scheme began with Larkfield and this completed in 2022 and it cost 30,000. They are now consulting on an East Malling scheme for one small section and consulting on an extension from the central part of West Malling and extending it out. There will never be a police force large enough to enforce all traffic requirements. The biggest objection to 20mph schemes is that they are unenforceable. On the news tonight, the Archbishop of Canterbury has had a speeding fine for driving at over 20mph towards Lambeth Palace – so they are enforced. But you must be pragmatic. There are never going to be many police available for this and you must establish there is a problem if you want to get the police in, which is where Speedwatch comes in. It shows if there is a problem and you can then get the police involved. Speedwatch has changed from a scheme which relied on large and hefty screens that flash, to now using small speed guns from sitting in a chair. It is less demanding to participate in but is important to get police in for enforcement.
- Where West Malling ends and Offham begins the scheme needs to be coordinated. A 20mph scheme should start at Spadework and end at the chicane at other end of village. From West Malling to Offham needs to be continuous, so it should be 30mph into the village. We need to coordinate the two. We are consulting in West Malling so the time is right for Offham to pursue its demands to achieve a better quality of life.

Question and Answer – In Larkfield from start to finish the scheme does involve a lot of consultation and a traffic regulation order took about 3 ½ years

Signed.....

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Dated

Question and Answer – the £30,000 cost of the Larkfield Scheme was financed by Cllr Dean from her KCC Members Fund. At that time the fund was about £20,000 for each County Councillor per year. The allocation has now been reduced to £3,000 so the money from the County Council has largely dried up. If you are looking at getting KCC agreement to a scheme, then your source of money probably has to be s106 from developers. It is the right time to be achieving that as we are going to be looking at several large applications for development in the area. Then you can ask for money to install a scheme.

Question and Answer - a lorry did 50mph past spadework so why are the police not there with speed cameras? Cllr Dean explained that the police have very few speed cameras and staff to do it. We are now at a level of policing higher than we've ever had, but the demands on those police are exceeding levels of manning. If you want to engage the police you need to prove there is a problem here. Get the proof and evidence of your Speedwatch group.

It must be in the realms of what is achievable. At the bottom of all of this is a lack of funding

CLOSING

Cllr Unter thanked the County and Borough Councillors for their support at the meeting and their help all year, to Cllrs Taylor and Scullion who were at the meeting, for Cllr Jones for arranging refreshments, to Mike Rowe and to the Clerk.

He thanked everyone at the meeting for their attendance, interest and involvement.

Before closing, a request was made for anyone interested in taking over the role of Bookings Secretary for the Village Hall Committee.

The meeting closed at 10.15pm

Signed.....

C. E M. Unter⁶

Dated

4/7/23