

# **CRANBROOK AND SISSINGHURST PARISH COUNCIL**



## **ANNUAL REPORT**

**2015-2016**

## **Cranbrook & Sissinghurst Parish Council**

### **Councillor's Contact Numbers**

Councillor Alison Bunyan		Tel: 01580 713831
Councillor Brian Clifford		Tel: 01580 713668
Councillor David Cook		Tel: 01580 713310
Councillor Andy Fairweather		Tel: 01580 712146
Councillor Trisha Fermor		Tel: 01580 713577
Councillor Peter Goodchild		Tel: 01580 712505
Councillor Linda Hall		Tel: 01580 213468
Councillor Matt Hartley		Tel: 01580 720511
Councillor Graham Holmes		Tel: 01580 712653
Councillor Tim Kemp		Tel: 01580 852558
Councillor Francis Rook	Vice Chairman	Tel: 01580 713169
Councillor John Smith		Tel: 01580 712898
Councillor Brian Swann		Tel: 01580 712732
Councillor Bridget Veitch	Chairman	Tel: 01580 715247
Councillor Nancy Warne		Tel: 01580 720765

### **Tunbridge Wells Borough Council:**

Councillor Linda Hall	(Benenden & Cranbrook)	Tel: 01580 213468
Councillor James Hannam	(Frittenden & Sissinghurst)	Tel: 01580 852606
Councillor Sean Holden	(Benenden & Cranbrook)	Tel: 01580 714880
Councillor Tom Dawlings	(Benenden & Cranbrook)	Tel: 01580 241750

### **Kent County Council:**

Councillor Sean Holden	Tel: 01580 714880
------------------------	-------------------

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The list of activities that the Parish Council has been involved in, and the amount that we have achieved over the last twelve months is very impressive, and I wish to record my thanks to my fellow councillors and the all-important Clerks who have helped with these and supported me as a novice parish council chairman. It has been a very steep learning curve. I will briefly describe the highlights.

1. The first must be the achievement of the quality status for the Parish Council. We remain the only parish council in the Tunbridge Wells Borough that has this award, which recognises the quality of the work and processes of the Parish Council. The judges particularly like the quality of the website, so if you have not explored this recently, I recommend it to you.
2. Cranbrook in Bloom's success in being awarded the Silver Gilt certificate in the Britain in Bloom competition is very impressive. We are very grateful to their team of volunteers for their efforts in making Cranbrook such a good place to be and the Parish Council supports their efforts with a grant.
3. I and Cllr Holmes visited both Horsley Place and Evernden House, and our scheduled visit to Major Clarke's House had to be postponed. We went to talk to the residents about the work of the Parish Council, and to welcome the new residents of Horsley Place and Major Clarke's House to Cranbrook and their new homes. The visits were well received.
4. Other newcomers to the Parish were the children in the Swattenden Centre. They have been welcomed by ourselves and by many volunteers, and the managers of the Appledore House have been very grateful for all of this.
5. Our other newcomer has been the Rev Ann Pollington, and the Parish Council were present at the service to welcome her.
6. I would also like to extend a big welcome to Cllr Warne, our newest Parish Councillor, who has joined the council after a By Election in March. Our grateful thanks to Cllr Bradley for all that he did in the short time that he was a Councillor. We wish him all the best for the future.
7. Other incomers were the travellers who parked in the Regal Car park in August, and then moved to land at the bottom of Turner's Avenue. Although they did not stay long, I regret the distress and disruption it caused our residents. We had significant help from the team at Tunbridge Wells in dealing with this.
8. The Parish Council also participated in The Art Show, Apple Fair (and its boats), the Cranbrook Fun Day, the Sissinghurst Fete, and the Garden Safari.

Much discussion has been taking place over the civic amenity vehicle service provided by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. This is the refuse lorry that visits various locations in Cranbrook and Sissinghurst on a Saturday. In spite of every effort by our borough councillors and myself, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council decided to offer us the option of a reduced service for which we would pay, or no service at all.

Knowing how much our residents rely on the refuse lorry we have reluctantly agreed to pay to have it continued at the proposed reduced level. This is probably going to take effect from June. I, as chairman, and our borough councillors will continue to press Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to restore the full service as before.

Last, but not least, I need to comment on the Cranbrook Engineering and Wilkes Field plans, and those for the Community Centre. In the last year one building on the Cranbrook Engineering site became Grade 2 listed, other buildings on the site were added to the new Local Heritage Asset Register (held by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council). In the autumn permission for demolition of the buildings on the site (apart from the Grade 2 listed one) was granted, with the provisos that the planning permission for the replacement development was granted, and the contracts for the construction awarded.

The TWBC planners' guidance was that we should withdraw the planning application for Wilkes Field (submitted in January 2015), and that a new planning application for the Cranbrook Engineering and Wilkes Field should be submitted. Much work has now gone into preparing this application, with many changes made after guidance from TWBC planners. The application is expected to be submitted this month.

As part of the changes after guidance from TWBC, the size of the planned Community Centre was reduced, after approval at a Parish Council meeting. The revised plans and drawings were on display at the Vestry Hall on Friday and Saturday last week.

As planned we conducted a postal survey to learn resident's opinion on whether to pay for the construction of the Community Centre solely by fund raising, or with a loan to partially cover the costs. There was an active campaign against the concept of a loan, and the result of the survey reflected this.

The chairmen of the other committees will give you their updates, and they and my Vice-Chairman will be able to answer questions on this report.

Thank you to everyone who contributes to the community.

**Cllr. Bridget Veitch - Chairman**

## **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

The purpose of the Policy & Resources Committee basically does what it says on the tin: we oversee the activities + expenditure of the P.C.; including all finances, staffing, and admin. This committee includes the chairpersons of the permanent sub-committees.

Discussions take place around ideas aired and their development. Also problems we face and plans for the future; ideas are then taken to the various committees to develop and hopefully turn vision into realities.

I would like to express thanks to this committee, and others, who quietly, faithfully and often sacrificially continue on with unseen helpful responsibilities 'in the background' contributing to the smooth running of a community in many different ways. We have the ability to forget or even be unaware of the many necessary functions of an organisation all the while it works... but if a breakdown occurs, consequences can begin... Councillors give of their time sacrificially and voluntarily, and that is probably no more true than in this committee group. So sincere thanks to those who do the work, and surely help to keep the town 'on course'. Not least of course to those to whom you may turn if ever you need advice, an answer, or just someone to talk to about something that needs to be mentioned! Thanks to our great clerks for being there...

We are thoroughly strengthened and enhanced by our amazing parish clerks Coral Kirkaldie and Lori Ham who give their expertise efficiently and very pleasantly to make our roles easier. They are absolutely invaluable and we all owe them a very big thank you!

The PC aims to improve and maintain the good quality of life for everyone in our community. We work best when we have the support and involvement of you the residents here in Sissinghurst, and in Cranbrook.

I have been a chairperson for less than a year but have come to value every other member of the team, not least Brian Swann, our remarkable finance man. Brian is the former committee chairman and performs his great work with continuing dedication. He deserves genuine praise and thanks for his ongoing work particularly overseeing the financial aspect within this committee and over the Parish Council at large. My role is greatly aided by his continuing experience and wisdom. Thank you Brian!

I am here because I have a heart for the town, and a heart to see it prosper. Although the economy is very important, I believe the key issues are best tackled, not just with cash, but with caring, serving and community-minded hearts working together. Cranbrook+Sissinghurst have sustained some fairly big challenges in the recent times, and sometimes tough decisions have had to be made, particularly by individuals and by some businesses in town. But here we stand at a point of teasing possibilities and massive challenges. One person on their own can achieve certain goals, but a community united in heart and resolve can turn a 'town vision' to "reality"... and that really will be impressive. A new Community Centre is just one of these visions. May I say, we're here to serve you, each of us are just one of you! WE are the people of this place we call home.

Please feel free to contact us, make suggestions, ask questions, or just simply let us know you are part of the “us” stepping into the next chapter together! And thank you for your support!

Cranbrook is becoming known as “Cranbrook in Bloom”! BIG congratulations to everyone involved! Last year we gained ‘Gold’ & ‘Silver’ trophies in a strong competition, so sincere and heartfelt thanks are due to the wonderful organisers and the splendid team of workers, as well as all those secret litter clearers and anonymous citizens who believe that ‘every little helps’. Thank you all!

Since this time last year the new Horsley Place is beginning to look like a natural piece of the landscape, as if it’s always been there. A great achievement in controversial circumstances! And one must also mention the new flats at Major Clarkes - which are also well appreciated.

For the highways, we wait patiently and hopefully to see the planned changes to the Wilsley Green junction. We hear the changes are coming... so we hold on to our anticipation... until the work is done and the town centre is just a little bit freer for local traffic.

We do still employ a part-time **traffic enforcement officer**... and perhaps the advantage of having this irregularly is that no-one knows the days they will appear with penalty notices in the ready! You have been warned! ☺ That’s now secured for the next 5 years. Do keep a lookout, and please help to make our streets safe for all to use, whether walking or driving.

It is always a privilege, as a committee of decision, to help various charities, organisations and clubs; in some specific ways to encourage them and help with local causes. Each month we can **allocate funds** to help with good local and worthy causes. Whether special days of community activity, or for more private charities such as Hospice in The Weald.

You have probably heard that the parish has been awarded “**Quality Award Status**” by the regional Accreditation panel! This is quite an accolade, when you realise that ‘we’ are the only parish to acquire this in the whole of The Royal Borough! Thanks and congrats to our two clerks who have worked well to obtain this prestigious award. So besides the small print of detail, we end up with a status unequalled in the borough.

May I mention ‘**litter**’. Probably most residents of the parish spend more time picking litter up than they do spreading it around. Thank you and Keep it up! We *are* winning. With the Queen’s 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday celebrations taking place this year, the “Clean for the Queen” campaign is sweeping through the county. In June there’s a Tea Party here in Sissinghurst, there’s a special 2016 Garden Safari in June, & a beacon to be lit on St’ Dunstan’s Tower.

Whilst on the ‘rubbish’ subject you may have heard there are on-going discussions about the civic amenity refuse vehicles’ visits to Cranbrook and Sissinghurst? We’re fighting to keep them rolling, but cutbacks are happening at so many levels. Meanwhile, you can be sure that your Parish Councillors are doing all they can to retain this service locally.

Before I conclude may I mention one little snippet for any historians among us? Our connection with Ilkley Moor in Yorkshire! On the 13<sup>th</sup> May 2016 there will be an unveiling of a brass plaque on White Wells Bath House, on Ilkley Moor in Yorkshire, joining our two towns in perpetuity! The lyrics of the famous anthem “On Ilkley Moor Baht’tat”, were put to music composed by Cranbrook resident Thomas Clarke, who wrote (1805) the tune “Cranbrook” used for several hymns (including ‘O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer’s praise’ and Christmas carol ‘While shepherds watched’) So now we celebrate our Yorkshire-joining by this thread and we agreed to send a contribution towards the cost of this plaque, affirming a friendship link into the future.

Let me conclude my report with a theme close to my heart!

You and I are what makes this town what it is!

If I am pleasant and approachable – that is what, in a measure, this town is!

If I am miserable, criticising and fault finding – there goes our community!

Let’s take the words of a famous 18<sup>th</sup> Century preacher:

*“Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. At all the times you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can.” J. Wesley*

And finally-finally, may I express, on behalf of this committee, the very good and often unseen work done by so many of you as parishioners, residents, families and individuals who all contribute to make Cranbrook+ Sissinghurst what it is today! We face the future; aware of setbacks and difficulties, but governed by our desire to see good days, good people and good outcomes down the road.

With a spring in our step, look for goodness, new life and harmony of spirit in our diversity.

Thanks to all who care, give + live for our communities in this much loved parish!

**Cllr. Peter Goodchild**

**Chairman – Policy and Resources Committee**

## Finance Report for the Year 2015/2016

This report looks at what your Parish Council has done from the perspective of its finances for the year to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016.

The accounts show the precept and expenditure for each committee as follows:

	<u>Precept</u> £	<u>Expenditure</u> £
Policy and Resources	199,500	171,428
Burials and Properties	8,600	43,659
Economic and Community Development	7,000	10,279
Environmental Management	66,000	47,735
Planning/Preservation/Housing	2,000	3,281
General, including Contingency Fund	5,000	-
	<hr/> 288,100	<hr/> 276,382

Earmarked Funds not spent from 2015/16

Budget (put aside for future projects)

including Car Parks (£25,800):

£75,650

Total earmarked funds for future repairs etc. to the car parks now stand at £96,800.

Our staff – the Clerk and Deputy Clerk, Vestry Hall Caretakers and Parish Warden (self-employed) – are our most essential resource and we could not run the Council without them. Our staffing costs, including National Insurance and pensions amounted to £96,039.

Other significant items of expenditure were as follows:

	£
Insurances	9,269
General Administration	12,019
Street Lighting	14,754
Vestry Hall - Rates & Utilities	8,194
- Repairs, Maintenance & Cleaning	7,655
Bus Shelters, Benches & Noticeboards	4,760
Community Centre	6,216
Website update & maintenance	1,560
Burial Grounds – Business Rates	1,996
Golford Cemetery – New Fence	3,840
St. Dunstan’s Churchyard – Work to trees	1,200

Information Centre – Repairs & maintenance	1,299
General Maintenance of Cemeteries & Churchyard	2,707
Contracts for maintenance of Grounds, Cemeteries, & War Memorial	34,190
Playground Equipment – maintenance	1,243
Recreation Grounds – Repairs & Maintenance	1,928
Crane Valley – Upkeep of Nature Reserve	3,500
Car Parks	24,202
Grants to Voluntary Organisations	6,522
Election Costs	2,033
Crane Valley Drainage & brook clearance	12,575
Vestry Hall Roof repairs	3,005
New Tourism Leaflets	3,757
Planning Appeal	3,281

These and all our other payments were funded by the precept, various grants, monies earmarked in previous years and the following income:

	£
Bank Interest	824
Rents Received	3,961
Hire of Vestry Hall and Council Chamber	23,208
Burial Fees	9,165
Tomlin Murton Playing Field Trust	6,000
Grant towards New Bus Shelter	4,300

At the end of the year there was £282,490 held as a reserve earmarked for future specified expenditure, and £122,914 held as a general reserve.

The accounts are examined twice a year by our Auditor from Kent County Council and then sent as part of our Annual Return to the Accountants appointed by the Audit Commission for approval. Once approval has been received the accounts are available for inspection at the Parish Council Office.

**Cllr. Brian Swann**

**Vice Chairman – Policy and Resources Committee**

## **BURIAL GROUNDS AND PROPERTIES COMMITTEE**

Your Burials and Properties committee members, Cllrs. Bunyan, Cook, Goodchild and Fairweather all have individual responsibilities keeping an eye on cemeteries properties and other items which are the responsibility of the Parish Council. Cllr Cook looks after St. Dunstan's Cemetery, Cllr. Goodchild has a mixed bag of responsibilities including Bus Shelters and War Memorial, Benches, Notice Boards and the Pound at Wilsley.

Cllr Bunyan looks after Parish owned properties including the Vestry Hall and cottage, Information Centre. Cllr. Fairweather has Sissinghurst Cemetery and apart from being Chairman I keep an eye on Golford Cemetery and Chapel. And I do want to say thank-you to our Parish Warden Ivor Hatcher who is most vigilant and works closely with our grass cutting contractor.

#### Some History

Just for information - the Vestry Hall passed into the care of the Parish Council in 1894. In 1991 the Council Chamber was converted for use as the Parish Council office.

The St. Dunstan's Churchyard became a closed burial ground in 1935 and the Parish Council became responsible.

The cemetery, Cranbrook Cemetery at Golford - land was acquired by the Parish Council and opened in 1905. Sissinghurst Cemetery was bought by the Parish Council from Lord Cornwallis in 1902.

#### Reports

Inspections of our three cemeteries all indicate that they are in good order, apart from some work needing on the tarmac at Golford, the new fence between the housing development behind the church and the cemetery, was paid for by the building developers.

Some work in the interior of the Vestry Hall cottage has taken place and finally some work on noticeboard's and a bus shelter. At St. Dunstan's Churchyard two new benches - one in memory of John Hooper and the other in memory of Monica Camburn – both being paid for by their families.

Having acquired two former BT telephone kiosks, one has been offered to Cranbrook in Bloom and we are yet to decide on the other.

**Cllr. Brian Clifford**  
**Chairman – Burials and Properties Committee**

#### **ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY COMMITTEE**

This Committee was reintroduced by the Council in May 2015 with a brief to facilitate commercial activity which contributes to economic sustainability. To include, employment, training, trading and tourism activities. Promote social cohesion and encourage community involvement. The first task of the Committee therefore, was to produce an action plan and identify key projects that might help deliver some core elements of its brief.

As an essential preliminary, the Committee felt that it was important for it to understand, first hand, what in fact were the key issues facing the business community. To achieve this, it was decided that each member would approach at least three local businesses to procure feedback and enable the Committee to identify and be clear on those areas in which it could influence or assist. To compliment this, it was also agreed to undertake market research at timely intervals engaging the help of sixth formers from our local schools.

The Committee were aware that stocks of the “Cranbrook Heritage & Shopping” leaflet were almost exhausted, so the opportunity would be taken to review its contents and agree the basis for a reprint. Similarly, a review would be undertaken of the Welcome Packs which, with the help of local estate agents, have been distributed to all newcomers to the Parish. The review would involve an update of its contents and images.

It was impossible to predict that the potential to deliver these projects would be seriously hampered by the loss of two valuable members of the Committee. Cllr. Clifford was forced to temporarily withdraw due to ill health and Cllr. Franks decided to resign from the Council due to work and family commitments. I am delighted to welcome back Cllr. Clifford to the team. All this has resulted in a delay in delivery of these projects but there is no reason why they should not now be completed.

Partnerships with other local organisations have enabled the Committee to discharge its responsibilities in other ways. It is important that businesses are properly represented and the Council recently agreed to assist the Business Association in hosting a community meeting to consider how best to “promote Cranbrook and help our Town thrive”. The meeting held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March was well attended and the feedback positive. A number of people came forward to offer their help and become actively involved in defining what can be done and a further, more strategic, meeting is to be arranged.

In July last year, the Council agreed to support the creation of a new Cranbrook Tourism Group which had been formed by the core members of the former Cranbrook Weald Tourism & Economic Forum. As the name suggests, the new Group will focus on promoting tourism in Cranbrook and Sissinghurst. As a first step, a new leaflet is about to be launched entitled “Discover Cranbrook” which will provide visitors with guidance on how to spend a day or two in the area. The Group are also lobbying to ensure better coverage in the Borough “Local” magazine and to seek improvements to the Borough’s tourism page on its website.

The Council is also represented at meetings of the Transport Accessibility Group, whose brief is to seek improvements to local bus services. Parishioners should be aware that Kent County Council is currently undertaking a consultation affecting its subsidised bus services.

In this area the No.5 service is part subsidised whereas the No.297 is entirely subsidised. KCC are proposing to divert evening journeys of the No.5 to run via Coxheath and enable the No.89 service to be withdrawn. There are no plans to amend the 297. Should any Parishioners wish to comment about the subsidised services mentioned, they are invited to drop written comments into the Parish Office for onward transmission. There is also an e-mail address available and details can be found on our website. The consultation ends on the 15<sup>th</sup> May.

The Council is an active partner of the Hop Pickers Line Heritage Group. This Group was formed some years ago to consider how the route of the old railway might be used as a walking or cycling trail. Much progress has been made and recently a Historic Environment Assessment Report was published and is available for inspection at both the Parish Office and the Public Library.

The Council, through the work of the Committee will continue to lend its support to local events that help bring the community together and can range from the Apple and History Fayre to the Sissinghurst Village Fete and from Cranbrook in Bloom to the new Literary Festival.

In concluding this report I would like to place on record my thanks to the members of the Committee for their contributions and last, but by no means least, the invaluable help and guidance given by both the Clerk and Deputy Clerk.

**Cllr. Graham Holmes**  
**Chairman – Economic & Community Committee**

## **ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

Much of the work done by this committee happens outside committee

Allotments Inspected

Playing fields inspected

Decision to replace a lamp standard that a car has demolished

Ask for new bulb replacement and covers to be repaired on lamp columns etc etc.

We have four meetings a year with the first visiting all the land this committee is responsible for, and in Sissinghurst that is the Jubilee Field. Over the months there has been much discussion on new play equipment and the Chairman Cllr. Veitch has had meetings with Jane Nettle and Mrs Lane as to the type of equipment which would be suitable for the children's area but unfortunately the cost of the chosen items and their installation has proved in excess of money available and the promised donation of £5k was only on the proviso that it is for fencing and the cost of that would be prohibitive. So it is back to the drawing board and yet more fund raising. We have received a donation of £5K from another source which was for play equipment.

The Clean for the Queen Litter pick proved very successful with about 40 turning up to help Cllrs Smith and Fairweather collect 28 bags of rubbish. Cranbrook had 12 turn up and we only managed about 14 black sacks full but I make no comment who has the most litter.

I understand that when Sissinghurst Speed watch operates it has been quite successful. With regard to highway issues we had a very informative meeting about the new layout with a presentation from Cllr. Holden who is using his County Councillors allowance to get this dangerous junction changed and the residents left the meeting feeling they had been listened to and that their suggestions had been taken on board and that the work that is due to start about July is to their satisfaction.

We will wait and see and hope that it works to everyone's satisfaction. The results of the speed survey have been collated and there has been a decision to reduce the limit to 30 MPH to past the staggered Junction in Common Road. This I understand will be happening shortly.

The new time table for the amenity vehicle will be implemented in June and your Parish Council has set aside £1,800 for its continued use. A victory of sorts as it was proposed to do away with it altogether and on investigation with refuse collectors to do the job for us rather than TWBC we found the cost prohibitive.

We have suffered in Cranbrook from a spate of vandalism recently with columns in the Regal and Crane Valley being targeted with a catapult plus the unusual incident of the ladies loo door being ripped off, whether it was from the inside or outside I am not privy to that information but one has to ask WHY?

The Car Parks are in good order and I hope you will have noticed how much cleaner and tidier they are since your Parish Council took them over. We are actively looking for more car parking spaces whether in a new location or by more judicious use of the existing areas. Cllr. Veitch has done some very comprehensive surveys of the car parks between May and November last year at 2 hourly intervals and her findings were that of the 440 free spaces there were always spaces available.

Of course I cannot finish this report without giving my heartfelt thanks to our Clerks, Coral and Lori for without them this Council would not run in the efficient way that it does and that we wouldn't obtain the status of the only Parish Council in the Borough to obtain Quality Status.

**Cllr. Francis Rook**  
**Chairman – Environmental Management Committee**

## **PLANNING & PRESERVATION MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

I must, as always, thank my committee and the clerks for all their work and the time involved in helping us to be an effective planning committee.

We were hugely disappointed at losing the planning appeal against the application to build 60 new houses on the hop garden in Common Road. I would like to thank Jane Lynch and her team for coming to this meeting to help us understand the decision. If as it appears, we are going to have to live with this decision – then we should work towards making this development as acceptable in every way as possible. We need to work with whoever the final developer is, to make sure that Sissinghurst gets the best deal. This application was outline and the only fixed elements are the number of homes and the point of access – everything else is up for discussion.

Apart from that it has been a more or less standard year – I don't think we have cancelled any meetings because of lack of applications – so the standard two meetings each month.

Our next major application is already sitting waiting for our comments and for the comments of anyone else who wishes to make them. That is the application for 180 homes on Brick Kiln Farm on the land to the south of the Cranbrook War Memorial. This site and the one between Brick Kiln and the Co-op were identified in the SHLAA – Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment – which is yet to receive the all clear from the inspector – but it is due any day.

Under the existing housing requirement, the Borough has to build 300 homes per annum. There has, however, been a new assessment of the requirement and this number has now increased to 648 homes each and every year until 2033. Although, I would add this may be reduced when AONB, Green Belt and Flood plains are taken into consideration – it will still be a huge increase.

The new housing assessment, the Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) is out for consultation until August this year. The Borough Council is asking landowners or anyone else to submit sites for consideration. Whilst a positive assessment in the SHELAA does not guarantee planning consent, it can feed into the neighbourhood plan which this parish is undertaking. We are extremely pleased to see employment sites included. If we are to take so many new homes, we also need to provide space for businesses to hopefully employ some of the new residents. If you want to include your land or any that you know of, the information is on the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's website or ask one of the 'dear girls' in the Weald Information Centre to direct you to the site.

**Cllr. Alison Bunyan**  
**Chairman – Planning & Preservation Management Committee.**

## **NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN COMMITTEE**

### **Terms of Reference:**

*Aim: To facilitate delivery of a sustainable Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) and all supporting policy, design and ancillary documentation, recognising the distinct local character and aspirations of the communities of Cranbrook and Sissinghurst.*

*To meet as necessary at the general convenience of the committee members.*

*Following approval of the Neighbourhood Area Designation, one parishioner is to be appointed to the NDPC for each Parish Councillor. Working interest groups will need to be formed as necessary to develop a particular aspect of, or contingent project to, the NDP as a direction emerges.*

### **NDPC membership at inception:**

Alison Bunyan

David Cook

Patricia Fermor

Bradley Franks (since retired)

Linda Hall (VC)

Matt Hartley

Tim Kemp (Chairperson)

John Smith (VC)

### **Key diary dates:**

**July 9<sup>th</sup> 2015:** NDPC inception by nomination of committee members and election of Chairman, John Smith, who regrettably had to step down in October following an exceptionally tough harvest.

**November 12<sup>th</sup> 2015:** election of Tim Kemp to chair NDPC.

**December 16<sup>th</sup> 2015:** Tim Kemp attended the Kent Design NDP Seminar at Ashford Borough Council.

**December 21<sup>st</sup> 2015:** first NDPC convened.

**February 1<sup>st</sup> 2016:** second NDPC convened.

**February 15<sup>th</sup> 2016:** Neighbourhood Area Application Designation

**March 7<sup>th</sup> 2016:** third NDPC convened.

**April 30<sup>th</sup>** first public forum scheduled for the Vestry Hall and St George's Institute.

## **A Neighbourhood Development Plan for Cranbrook and Sissinghurst.**

### **Current context.**

We take on this essential task willingly as the Parish Council, but not without trepidation. The planning policy landscape is utterly transformed since the NPPF was published in 2012 and areas of landscape once protected by AONB classification, seem now to be ripe for development.

We are witnessing a generational shift and must move quickly and effectively if we are not to regret it. We are years behind neighbouring parishes in the production of our NDP and there is a great deal of catching up to be done. If the mantra of NPPF at inception is to presume in favour of sustainability, the reality on the ground seems to only extend a chapter of post war ubiquity. If the aspiration of Greg Clarke's Ministerial foreword aspires to remedy the erosion of the built environment by the all too *frequent experience of mediocrity* in design, then I would argue we have yet to witness any significant progression in his home borough.

### **Presumption in favour of sustainability.**

The three unequivocal components of sustainable development, highlighted in NPPF para 7 as economic, social and environmental, are intended to be delivered with finesse, as reinforced by paras 62-64, promoting outstanding or innovative design over the banal. As incumbent Chairman of the NDPC, I consider the delivery of outstanding sustainable design (both urban and landscape) as vital to the wellbeing of the parishioners, constituting the ethical foundation of any cogent NDP. We have an opportunity to promote locally what central government has been shy of undertaking nationally; that is viable policies that actually deliver a truly sustainable and desirable built environment, whilst repairing and enhancing its central and vital natural asset, the Crane Valley.

### **Brownfield first.**

The burgeoning population of the UK is putting the natural landscape under incredible pressure. Britain is running out of land for food and faces a potential shortfall of two million hectares by 2030 according to new research (BBC June 2014); whatever some may think, there is no such thing as a redundant field. Simply put, we can neither afford to build on greenfield, nor can we afford not to deliver on housing targets either. Pernicious analysis of housing form and densities, not just in the formulation of new settlements, but through the deft consolidation of existing brownfield plots, is the only alternative to urban sprawl.

### **Streets not cul-de-sacs. A place for people. A place for business.**

If Mary Portas has cemented the High Street as the quintessential ingredient at the heart of any neighbourhood, its community and its economy, then developers don't seem to be listening. If they are to thrive, places need streets, not roads and cul-de-sacs. Streets are the infrastructure of place and commerce and street markets are their natural hub. Streets are about people, walking and user experience; sustainable regeneration is about putting business, homes and retail within a 10minute walking distance of the centre. We need to be careful to consolidate the centre of Cranbrook as a creative business nucleus and a place to live, if the benefits of regeneration are not to be short-lived.

### **Housing is energy infrastructure.**

In March we were visited by guest speaker Paul Mallion, from Conker Conservation, to make a case for Passivhaus. Passivhaus is a landmark construction standard for energy conservation. With energy savings (when compared to standard modern construction as commonly delivered) of up to 90%, buildings certified to the Passivhaus standard *en masse*, constitute a simple but highly effective strategy for boosting energy infrastructures. Paul made a pertinent case for Passivhaus as a universal standard for homes, businesses and schools; in fact almost any building typology would benefit from this approach. Building to this standard will increase build costs by 5-10% in the UK, but this is a very small price to pay in the context of vastly reduced fuel bills. No new building skills are needed; only half a day's tuition is required to deliver the air tightness training necessary for a standard construction team to deliver this standard. In order to overcome dogma in the infamously low risk volume housing sector, we need to help developers to maintain profit forecasts, whilst delivering on Passivhaus; the two are not mutually exclusive. I firmly believe that we should promote Passivhaus for all new build in Cranbrook and Sissinghurst; it is simply not in the public interest not to.

### **Working in partnership. A public engagement.**

Central to the success of this project is a full and inclusive public engagement; great ideas may come from the young or the old and we will embrace creative thinking from everyone in the parish. We are committed to partnering the production of the NDP with all knowledgeable bodies of local and national influence. From the outset, we will be working closely with TWBC and all local stakeholders, including schools and businesses. We will open a dialogue with CCAAC as their CAMP will form a vital part of the design analysis, informing the urban design manual which will need to produce. The High Weald AONB Unit at Flimwell and CPRE at Charing have both stepped forward to help since the Neighbourhood Area Designation Application was submitted. Design South-East will provide the impartial insight we need to deliver a robust NDP of real quality and enduring relevance. We are also hoping that the National Trust will advance their national mandate to protect AONB land from exploitative development and take their place at the table.

### **Learning from within our parish.**

The duality of the Cranbrook and Sissinghurst settlements has great potential for economic and environmental enrichment. The Sissinghurst Castle Estate maintains a pristine stretch of the Crane Valley, whilst Cranbrook has yet to realise the value of its share. It could be argued that this correlates with footfall; Sissinghurst Castle Garden attracts between 170,000 and 200,000 tourists each year, of which may be less than 5% make it into Cranbrook town centre. This cannot be allowed to continue. How many of those tourists crossing the National Trust campus from Sissinghurst to Scotney make it to our windmill. Our much coveted Parish Council insignia, depicting an iconic Eurasian Crane looking over its shoulder towards Sissinghurst, is perhaps trying to tell us something... "value nature, value your landscape, value design".

I see the preservation, conservation and enhancement of the Crane Valley as a natural habitat, right into the heart of the town, as being at the core of Cranbrook's commercial viability; as essential as enhancing its Conservation Area. Cranbrook's fortunes have been bound to the management of its landscape for centuries and we would be foolish to turn our backs now.

### **Learning from neighbouring parishes.**

Thanks to Coral and Lori, I was fortunate to attend an NDP seminar in Ashford in mid-December last year. This was time well spent, listening to the lessons of NDP production from all sides, including local parish councils, urban design practitioners, developers and planners alike. Councillor Julia Newman, Chairperson of the Hawkhurst NDP, gave an invaluable insight into their experience and I have been in regular contact with their Clerk, Nicole Malem, since the seminar. I am very grateful to Nicole, who has offered very practical start-up advice, not least that we should give very serious consideration to appointing a professional consultant to lead us through the process; to that end she has provided a list of potential candidates on which to build. Thanks to Linda Hall as well for building bridges with Headcorn and to Alison Bunyan for her deft provision of designation applications from adjacent neighbourhood areas.

### **The value of good design to our economy.**

The fact that good design underpins regeneration is long established and unequivocal. Those many thousands of tourists drawn to Sissinghurst for its world renowned garden design, in a beautiful natural setting, need to be suitably rewarded by a diversion to Cranbrook; the difficulty we currently face is that our part of the Crane Valley has been turned in recent years into something of a back yard for a large supermarket, an electrical substation and ill-conceived car parking. Moreover, Persimmon's proposed development of Brick Kiln Farm is so far woefully uninspired and we need to strengthen TWBC's arm if the potentially positive development of the Crane Valley is not squandered by the short term interests of a remote investor. If developers like Persimmon cannot see the value of good design, we as a Parish Council need to and we must help them to deliver on the highest aspirations embodied in NPPF. If we learn from the historical settlement patterns of the locality and get the density and organisation right, the Crane Valley may accommodate housing and nature, side by side, on a zero carbon footprint, without destroying either the quality of life for parishioners or a vibrant and sustainable future economy.

### **Joining the dots.**

We are busy promoting a much anticipated community centre at the very real risk of leaving existing landmarks, within a nationally remarkable conservation area, *redundant*; if we get the balance wrong, we will soon lose our much loved museum building and the Providence Chapel will be assigned to a role for which it is ill suited.

Cranbrook is signposted as an ‘historic market town’ and yet it has neither a street market nor a livestock market. Is the medieval field system on Brick Kiln Farm to be lost to mediocre and cynical design by greedy and indifferent development? How do we counter aggressive profiteering from developers such as Gladman? Volume house builders need positive encouragement to deliver housing that is relevant to the modern world, not stuck 30 years in the past. Is the life expired High Weald Academy to be rebuilt solely for education or will its new campus accommodate the general public after school and paying tourists at the weekends and during holidays?

### **A Crane Colony for the Crane Valley?**

It would seem that the Eurasian Crane is everywhere in Cranbrook; it appears on the town sign, at the local rugby club and even on the CSPC insignia. This idiosyncratic and iconic bird was hunted to extinction locally many generations ago, but successful re-colonisation in Norfolk and Somerset proves the viability of returning Cranes to our landscape. Re-introduction of Cranes to Cranbrook and Sissinghurst must surely be a priority legacy project for our communities and an invaluable boost to the tourist economy.

### **Our chance to reset the balance.**

The production of an NDP invites us to draw on the unique creativity within our communities and connect the dots. Joined up *local* thinking, which is beyond the scope of central government and which is vital to the health and wealth of Cranbrook and Sissinghurst, is what localism was conceived to facilitate. On April 30<sup>th</sup> we will invite the parishioners to the first of a series of public meetings designed to fully engage them in formulating an inspired vision for their neighbourhood.

### **NDP Consultation:**

Delivering a robust and genuinely useful NDP for a Neighbourhood Area as large and complex as ours will need professional leadership. We may facilitate and promote the process, but a full, thorough, inclusive and worthwhile public engagement will need deft handling. We don’t have time to get it wrong.

I have drawn up a long list of candidates; I will report back on these to the NDPC shortly:

1. HAT Architects, Colchester
2. Feria Urbanism, Bournemouth
3. Imagine Places, London
4. Tony Burton (Free Range Consultant), London
5. Designscape, Maidstone

We should plan to interview candidates in May and finalise in June this year.

### **NDP Policy Building Blocks:**

Early discussion has identified four key components of documentation which will combine to deliver robust policy and design documentation:

- (i) NDP policy document (policy compliant mainstay).
- (ii) Conservation Area Management Plan CAMP (effectively a conservation design manual).
- (iii) Urban design manual (for architecture, street and public space).
- (iv) A master plan to map out (i) to (iii).

Two long discussions with HAT and Feria Urbanism have wholeheartedly supported this approach; initial advice has strongly indicated the greater the design content the better. We will need to look well into the future, if this project is to be worth the sweat and, notionally at least, set our sights on master planning at least 50 years ahead. CAMPs will need to be produced separately and by the relevant bodies, but the knowledge gleaned from this process will underpin the design and policy documentation embodied in the NDP; these documents should be commissioned without delay.

**Cllr. Tim Kemp**

**Chairman - Neighbourhood Development Committee**