

CRANBROOK AND SISSINGHURST PARISH COUNCIL



ANNUAL REPORT

2016-2017

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 Kim Fletcher Vice - Chairman	Tel: 01580 712348
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 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
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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Firstly the goodbyes and the welcomes. As you have heard, Francis Rook has stood down from the Parish Council after many years of service, but we can welcome Kim Fletcher in his stead, and hope that he will enjoy returning to the Parish Council. We thank all those who expressed interest in becoming a councillor, and hope that they will stay interested and involved in the Council activities.

We also said goodbye to Coral Kirkaldie at Christmas. Coral had been the valued Clerk for over 14 years, and a public servant for all her working life. Her knowledge of the Parish and expertise was huge, and of course, is missed. The good news is that we get to welcome Laura Larkin as our new deputy clerk, who lived in Cranbrook for many years. Lori Ham is now our Clerk after several years of experience with us. Lori is now a fully qualified Clerk, which enables us to retain our Quality certification. Welcome and congratulations.

There has been a lot of useful contact between the Parish Council and the councillors and officers at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. Cllrs. Jukes and McDermott came to August PC meeting and several officers have attended various meetings throughout the year.

Last summer Tunbridge Wells Borough Council changed the schedule and process for the civic amenity vehicle (refuse lorry). To our relief the reduction in frequency and change to items collected has been implemented smoothly. To our surprise, the amount of fly-tipping has not increased. We are monitoring these figures carefully.

The Community Centre was given planning permission at the end of August. This is an achievement, and resolves several planning details. However the re-estimated cost of the whole project increased to a level that meant that the current design is unaffordable. This was confirmed by a professional fundraiser who did a Feasibility Study on our behalf.

Thus we will have to look at a modified design that results in a more modest and realistic project cost. I am seeking volunteers from the community to participate in the on-going project. Anyone interested should provide their contact details to the Clerk. The Parish Council has not started on the redesign yet, as there are a couple of major difficulties to be overcome first.

The first is obtaining permission from the Co-operative Group for the right to access Wilkes Field from the Regal Car Park. This is an anomaly resulting from a legal agreement between TWBC and the Co-operative Group. The access does not require the crossing of any part of Co-operative Group owned land.

This could not be resolved earlier, in spite of several meetings, as the Co-operative Group would not give approval prior to the granting of planning permission. I remain optimistic that this difficulty will be resolved, but can do very little to expedite it. Negotiations are on-going between Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and the Co-operative Group.

The second is the draft contract that transfers the land for the Community Centre to the Parish Council. At present the concept is that the land will be given freehold for a community centre, but that if the Parish Council decides that it will not, or cannot, build a community centre, then the land will revert to the current owner. There are differing views to whether a hand back clause will cause the Co-operative Group not to grant rights of access, and whether such a clause will hamper fund raising.

Again, I remain optimistic that a solution will be found.

I would like to thank all my fellow councillors who have been working very hard on various major initiatives that will benefit the whole community, in particular the Neighbourhood Development Plan and the new look parish magazine, Parish Cake.

Finally, my thanks to our Clerks, without whom the Parish Council could not function. Their hard work and dedication is enormous.

Cllr. Bridget Veitch – Chairman

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

The purpose of this Committee is simply to oversee the activities and expenditure of the Parish Council; including finances, staffing and administration. This committee is comprised of the chairpersons of the other committees.

I sincerely thank the members of this committee, who faithfully and sacrificially continue on with their responsibilities contributing to the smooth running of a community in many different ways.

We can forget the necessary functions of an organisation whilst it works well, but if breakdown occurs, then consequences begin.

Each councillor gives of their time voluntarily and sacrificially. I would like to express sincere thanks to those who do the work, and surely help to keep us all on course.

Special thanks to our great clerks for being there. We are thoroughly equipped and informed by our new parish clerk Lori Ham ably assisted by Laura Larkin who both give their expertise very pleasantly to make our roles easier. They are truly invaluable and we all owe them a very big thank you!

The PC works to improve and maintain the good quality of life for everyone in our community. Life works well when we have the supporting involvement of you the residents here in Cranbrook and Sissinghurst.

Key words and attributes for me are co-operation, community and connecting. Finding the place where hearts can connect is better than pushing personal agendas. Often we meet obstacles and challenges but resolve to hold steady, making room for each other on the field.

To all those who take an interest in the financial workings of the Parish Council, I confirm and assure you, that all is well. Bills are paid, debts are nil, and after rigorous checks, all continues on a track that is healthy, wise, and all 'in order'. As chair of policy and resources, I would like to record continuing thanks to Councillor Brian Swann who faithfully executes these matters with dedication, professionalism and skill. The **Finance** Report has been printed separately & is available. Please direct any questions to Cllr. Swann.

Each councillor exerts good effort, but one must note the extraordinary workload undertaken by our very good chairperson Cllr Bridget Veitch. She manages to attend a great variety of committee and inter-personal appointments connected with her role, and not least the hectic pathway in pursuit of projects and issues like the longed-for Community Centre. I for one have held this dream, this vision, for many years! It will become a reality!

This is not a back-slapping essay, but I'd like to underline qualities that I see demonstrated by councillors carrying certain responsibilities well. They are: (listed in the standard Parish Council Standing Orders booklet):

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE - As councillors we are committed to behaving in a manner consistent with the following principles:

SELFLESSNESS – always acting in ways for the good of all both financially and materially.

INTEGRITY – the quality of being completely honest on the inside and on the outside!

OBJECTIVITY – championing the needs of the whole, with the whole community in mind.

ACCOUNTABILITY – being always accountable to the public for decisions and actions.

OPENNESS –transparency in all decisions and actions, giving reasons for your decisions.

HONESTY – We have a duty to declare interests, always protecting the public interests.

LEADERSHIP – with a serving heart always demonstrating the above qualities!

You will be hearing more about the planned Parish magazine that is due to soon be delivered to your home. This is a great new and exciting venture to help us stay in touch. More on that from others I believe.

There is a lot of responsibility and detail to attend to, to maintain smooth efficiency to keep us happy; street lights that work, cemeteries well-tended; footpaths kept clean and clear.

Street signage; rubbish clearance; property maintenance; and people management are recurring challenges. The recent big increase in costs of rubbish clearance through the borough has been considerable, but it's a cost beyond our control.

As a parish council we want to support town-wide events, both with promotions and with pounds. Some are new formed like the Community First Responders, assisting paramedics on location, whilst others are perennial and heritage focus points, like our excellent museum, the windmill association and Cranbrook in Bloom.

Each month we allocate funds to help with good local causes: some are special days of community activity, and many are for more private charities that benefit many of us and our children.

I close with a simple plea: We all have great hopes for the place we love – for Sissinghurst and for Cranbrook – places where we live and care about. Please take this to heart:

“Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way and is not irritable. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. Love is the greatest - get it and give it.”

Cllr. Peter Goodchild
Chairman – Policy and Resources Committee

Finance report for the year 2016/2017

This report looks at what your Parish Council has done from the perspective of its finances for the year to 31st March 2017.

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

	Precept	Expenditure
	£	£
Policy and Resources	209,800	194,343
Burials and Properties	10,400	35,877
Economic and Community Development	8,000	11,312
Environmental Management	71,000	100,579
Planning/Preservation/Housing	2,000	-
General, including contingency fund	3,000	1,243
	304,200	343,354
Earmarked funds not spent 2016/17 budget (put aside for future projects) including car parks (£1,700)		45,595

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 £97,461.

Other significant items of expenditure were as follows:

Insurances	£9,186
General Administration	£15,377
Street Lighting	£23,214
Parish By - Election	£5,130
Vestry Hall – Rates & Utilities	£8,981
Repairs, Maintenance & Cleaning	£8,637
Roof Repairs	£3,860
Upkeep of Notice Boards	£1,055
Community Centre Preparatory work	£19,968
Updating I.T equipment	£1,197
Burial Grounds Business Rates	£2,013
Maintenance of Cemeteries & Churchyard (excluding grass cutting and hedges)	£5,351
Contracts for upkeep of Recreation Grounds, Cemeteries & War Memorials	£36,899
Recreation Grounds Repairs & Maintenance	£1,205
Play Equipment Repairs & Maintenance	£3,371
New Play Equipment	£8,866
Crane Valley & Nature Reserve	£22,578
Car Parks	£48,270
Amenity Refuse Vehicle	£1,221
Vandalism	£864
Grants to Voluntary Organisations	£11,114

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

Bank Interest	£642
Rents Received	£3,987
Hire of Vestry Hall & Council Chamber	£24,133
Burial Fees	£17,250

Tomlin Murton Playing Field Trust	£6,000
Grants for work in the Crane Valley carried out by Kent High Weald Project Team	£19,052

At the end of the year there was £307,945 held as a reserve earmarked for future specified expenditure (including £98,500 for the Car Parks). There is also a general cash fund of £134,589.

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 & Resources Committee

BURIAL GROUNDS AND PROPERTIES COMMITTEE

I would like to say that no committee are any good unless its members are committed and I would like to give thanks to all the members of this Committee. The members all have a responsibility and a role to play. I would like to also pay particular thanks to our Parish Warden Ivor Hatcher, who is the unsung hero we see around the Town. We have various assets that the Parish Council own, including Angley Cottage which is well looked after by the current tenants.

I would like to update that the tree surgery has been undertaken in St. Dunstan's Churchyard and that it will be completed at the end of the bird nesting season. A further Tree Safety Report has been commissioned for Sissinghurst Cemetery which the Committee are due to discuss at their next meeting.

I would like to draw attention to the recent spate of vandalism that we have suffered and was saddened by it. Some necessary repairs have been put on hold for the time being.

I would like to report on the work done to the paths in Golford Cemetery and encourage people to visit the Chapel to see the beautiful stained glass windows that have been designed by local artist Michael 'Louis' Woodford who had sadly died recently.

I would like to finish off by saying that the Burials & Properties Committee work hard together but enjoy what it does.

Cllr. Brian Clifford

Chairman – Burial Grounds and Properties Committee

ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

Since my last report, the Committee have been working collectively on a number of small scale projects that we hope will contribute to our local economy. The Brexit vote and the triggering of Article 50 by the Government will be taking us on an uncertain journey and there is little doubt that its impact will be felt across the country with Cranbrook and Sissinghurst being no exception.

Encouraging tourism by promoting the Town and the Parish is at the forefront of our efforts and this financial year we have updated and reprinted the Heritage Trail leaflets. They are also available online. In addition, we are working on a larger project to update and reissue the “Visit Cranbrook & Beyond” leaflets which encourage visitors to explore the wider area. When completed, these will also be available online.

The Committee decided to completely revise the Welcome Packs that are given to all newcomers to the Parish via our local estate agencies. The new version will contain all the necessary information that might be needed to help new Parishioners settle in.

We have completed our survey of local businesses and the results of this survey will now be passed to the Neighbourhood Plan Development Committee for them to use in the preparation of the Plan itself.

The Committee were also given responsibility for the placing of two new defibrillators in the Parish. With the help of Cllr. Fairweather, the first unit is now in place on the outside wall of the St. George’s Institute in Sissinghurst. We are awaiting some professional advice on the location of the second unit which will be placed in the Town.

The Council continues with its partnership working with the Cranbrook Tourism Group, the Cranbrook Experience and the Transport Accessibility Group. The latter have assisted others in the successful introduction of a new Sunday bus service between Cranbrook and Hastings.

On behalf of my Committee members may I express our grateful thanks to our two Clerks, Lori and Laura for all the hard work they have done in ensuring that our meetings are efficiently managed.

Cllr. Graham Holmes
Chairman – Economic & Community Committee

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

It is important that Parishioners understand what responsibilities and powers are carried by the Environmental Management Committee. In terms of diversity, it is the largest committee within the Parish Council.

It is responsible for the maintenance of the recreation grounds within the Parish which are situated at the Ball Field and Crane Valley in Cranbrook together with the Jubilee Field in Sissinghurst. In addition it provides and maintains playground equipment in all these locations.

The Council undertakes management and maintenance of the allotment gardens situated in Cranbrook.

The Council manages and maintains the public car parks situated at The Regal, Jockey Lane and The Tanyard, all of which are within the Town centre. This was undertaken in order to ensure that our car parks remained free of charge at the point of use.

We also keep a watching brief on, but are not responsible for Public Highways and Public Rights of Way within the Parish. A proportion of the street lighting is our responsibility.

It is equally important that Parishioners are also clear about what aspects of daily life we are not actually responsible for.

We are not responsible for maintenance of the Public Highways and footpaths nor do we maintain road signs, enforce speed limits, deal with illegally parked vehicles or repair pot holes. These matters are dealt with either by Kent County Council or Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. The Borough also provides the refuse collection service together with the recycling point in the Regal Car Park. In addition, they have a duty to remove waste that has been fly tipped on public land. Unfortunately, waste that is dumped on private land becomes the responsibility of the land owner. The Borough also provide street cleansing services. Whilst this extends to include litter, all too frequently it is local volunteers who undertake this work, often organised by the Parish Council.

In pursuance of its obligations during the last financial year, the Environmental Management Committee has carried out the following tasks :

We have replaced, or are replacing, playground equipment on the Jubilee Field

With the valuable assistance of the High Weald Partnership, considerable improvements have been made to the Crane Valley Nature Reserve

As part of an overall review we have had the trees surrounding The Tanyard Car Park professionally inspected and it is our intention to undertake the remedial work that has been highlighted.

We are continuing to provide equipment support to Speedwatch in Sissinghurst.

We are now reviewing the placement of litter bins around the Parish to ensure that they are sited effectively.

Lastly, we are supporting an initiative by Mr. Jeremy Boxall to secure improvements to Public Rights of Way and Bridleways within the Parish to ensure that everyone can benefit from a healthier lifestyle and at the same time appreciate our local landscape.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Committee, may I express our grateful thanks to both our Clerks, Lori and Laura for the considerable support they have given us over the last twelve months.

Cllr. Graham Holmes

Vice – Chairman – Environmental Management Committee

PLANNING & PRESERVATION MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

It has yet again been a busy year. I would like to thank our clerks and the committee for all the work they have put in. I was a little concerned when our planning expert, Coral, retired at Christmas but Lori has worked hard and learned the planning regulations and terminology and hopefully the changeover is seen as seem-less.

The areas that have exercised our minds are still the same as last year. The Gladman – now Countryside – site in Common Road, Sissinghurst; the Brick Kiln site in Cranbrook and as has been the case for several years, the Cranbrook/Wilkes Field site.

The Brick Kiln site application was discussed – heatedly in May last year and has not yet been determined. The developers have had lengthy discussions with the Borough Planning Department and I understand will be submitting a completely revised application shortly. We will be encouraging them to hold a public drop in consultation. This is a very large and important site in Cranbrook for 180 homes and we must all help them to get it right for the sake of Cranbrook. At the moment KCC Highways would like to see a new roundabout near the War Memorial which would not only slow the traffic along the Angley Road, but would also give safer junctions for Orchard Way and the High Street. As soon as we have more definite information, we will do our best to keep everyone

informed – via the website, Be in the Know and our new Parish Council quarterly magazine – Parish Cake.

A reserved matters application for the now Countryside site in Common Road has been received and we, the Parish Council, organised a public consultation event in Sissinghurst. It was very well attended by parishioners and of course by the developers – who were pleasantly surprised how nice everyone was. I think, because the site had been so strongly objected to, they were expecting an extremely hard time. Those 60 homes are going to be built and we have to make sure that Sissinghurst benefits. We collected comments and forwarded them along with our recommendation to both the Borough and to the Countryside team.

There is not much to be said about the Cranbrook Engineering/Wilkes Field site. Planning permission has been granted and the old buildings with permission for demolition have gone. The listed building on the site is presumably being preserved, but it's difficult to tell – the fence is very effective.

I don't know if you are aware – the Borough Council will no longer be sending letters to neighbours about planning applications. The officers will visit the sites and put a yellow notice on a nearby lamppost or telegraph pole. You can also go the Tunbridge Wells website and register to be electronically informed of planning applications in areas of your choice.

You might be interested to know that we have seen about 150 applications and of those only 16 have been recommended for refusal and we have only been neutral on 3. Of course, all listed building and tree works applications are referred to the relevant officers.

Cllr. Alison Bunyan

Chairman – Planning & Preservation Management Committee

NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN COMMITTEE

1. First public meetings held by Cllrs Tim Kemp, John Smith & Matt Hartley in Cranbrook and Sissinghurst on 30th April, to raise awareness and ask for volunteers to help run the project and to get involved.
2. The neighbourhood area for the plan was formally designated by TWBC on 8th June, and equates to the boundary of the parish.
3. Tim and I started researching NDP consultants and we all followed up the contacts we knew might be interested, with a view to forming a Steering Group of councillors and residents.
4. I took the helm as Chair of the NDP & formed the Steering Group in September:

Steering Group:

Cllr. Nancy Warne Chair

Cllr. Tim Kemp Co Vice-Chair (Cranbrook)

Cllr. John Smith Co Vice-Chair (Sissinghurst)

Annie Hatcher (Secretary)

Matt Warne (Treasurer)

Cllr. David Cook

Cllr. Matt Hartley

Lee Hatcher

Liz Daley

Tally Wade

Jeremy Boxall

Nem Goodman (joined January 2017)

5. Took advice from Claire Tester, ex-Head of Planning at Mid-Sussex and with a wealth of experience in NPs, who advised us to formally agree a Terms of Reference, so that all the members are to abide by the code of conduct similar to that of the councillors.
6. Worked out a budget with the Responsible Financial Officer, Cllr Swann and got this agreed by the council.
7. Went through the process of shortlisting, interviewing and selecting a consultant. This led to us to the recommendation of Richard Eastham of Feria Urbanism, which was agreed by the council in December. Feria Urbanism appointed.
8. During the Autumn John Smith & myself also met with TWBC planning dept Kelvin Hinton (Planning Policy), David Scully (Landscape & Biodiversity), Mark Stephenson (Conservation Architect), & Debbie Maltby (Conservation & Urban Design)

Talked about their evidence gathering for the new Local Plan and how we can use that to inform our plan. Also, how our policies in the NP can be complimentary yet specific and distinctive for our parish.

9. Agreed dates with Feria for first set of meetings and public engagements events.

10. Inception meeting & site visits:

January 19th/20th Richard and his colleague Anna Freiesleben visited Cranbrook & Sissinghurst and were toured around by members of the Steering Group.

Inception meeting with them to be briefed on methodology and to form a plan of action. It is our responsibility to draw up participation lists and invite people to the events.

We invited leaders from already active community groups, schools, churches, business groups as well as trying to encourage young people & interested individuals to participate.

11. I attended workshops and design forums in Neighbourhood Planning run by Kent Association of Local Council and by Kent Design. Extremely useful for hearing others stories, getting invaluable advice from experts in planning but also networking.

12. Set up a website;

<http://cranbrookandsissinghurstndp.co.uk/>

13. Visioning Events – 22nd/23rd March

Designed to get a broad qualitative overview of the main values and issues of our places, through a series of written and map-based tasks.

14. Ferial currently collating the results from these events.

15. Recognised what missing and have contacted those still missing – schools, churches, Rugby Club and keep trying to get them involved.

16. Further I am now writing to all the landowners who have put their land in the “Call for sites” and developers who are interested in developing in the parish to encourage them into dialogue with us, and to participate with the process.

17. Meeting with Richard Eastham and Kelvin Hinton, TWBC Planning Policy Officer at the end of the April.

18. 3-Day Design Forum – 9th-10th-11th May Coach House Cranbrook School Waterloo Road.

The first morning is made up of 10-minute presentation from anyone who wants to share what is important to them, a “position statement”, be it from community groups, stakeholders (schools, churches, businesses, developers), interest groups (High Weald AONB, Cranbrook Conservation Area Advisory Committee), doctors etc.

We want as many people as possible to get involved. This will take the results of the earlier Visioning Events and start to turn them into a spatial plan for the future of the Parish. At this design forum, drop-in attendance is welcome, as well as longer participation from those who can spare the time.

We will particularly welcome input from teenagers and other young people so they can shape the way the parish looks, works and feels over the next decade or more. Please confirm your attendance at: info@cranbrookandsissinghurstndp.co.uk

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council will be presenting its Issues and Options consultation on the Local Plan for the borough in Cranbrook on Friday 12th May from 4-7pm in the Vestry Hall. This is the day after the conclusion of our Design Forum.

Please come along and help inform the Local Plan – a document that sets out local planning policies and identifies how land is used, determining what will be built where. Adopted local plans provide the framework for development across England. Local peoples' views are vital in shaping a local plan, helping determine how their community develops. The TWBC plan will guide future development in the borough up to 2033.

Cllr. Nancy Warne
Chairman – Neighbourhood Development Plan Committee