

Annual Parish Meeting - 2025

7.00 pm, Monday 12th May in Grafty Green Village Hall.

- 1.** Welcome from Cllr Nick Eastwood, Chairman of the Parish council
- 2.** Public Forum (Residents invited to speak about parish matters)
- 3.** Report from Boughton Malherbe Parish Council Chairman
- 4.** Report from KCC Councillor
- 5.** Report from MBC Councillors
- 6** Report on Village Hall
- 7.** Report on Honywood and Douglas Almshouses
- 8.** Report on Malherbe Magazine
- 9.** Report from St Nicholas Church
- 10.** Report from Gardening & Yoga Club
- 11.** Any Other Reports (submitted post agenda at the discretion of Chairman & Clerk)
- 12.** Further information

Boughton Malherbe Parish Council Chairman

The unusual event of a contested election which started this year resulted in a largely novice council to accompany a new clerk. My thanks are due to all for making my role as councillor and chairman a pleasurable one. Over the year the council has reviewed incoming planning applications: taking a particular interest in a couple, one inside the parish which we supported; one over the border in Ulcombe which we opposed. The unfortunate failure of the defibrillator led to its replacement with the generous promise of support from AW Court, we hope reduced by a grant. We are expected to have some defibrillator training coming shortly provided by Kent Fire & Rescue. Another litter pick is also planned as was done last year to assist the lengthsman in his efforts against the tide of discarded waste. I've also recently become involved in the Heathlands development proposal which is covered in the KCC report.

Contributions to the village hall, the running of the bus and a major review of emergency planning are underway but are reported separately. Our section of council tax will only have increased by an inflationary amount for the coming year. We continue to run a deficit but that was felt appropriate given the overall financial position.

Parishioners are very welcome to attend our meetings which are now usually under the hour.

***Shellina Prendergast – Member Maidstone Rural East,
Kent County Council (as of writing)***

As many of you will know, local government across England has faced a financial storm over the last few years - reflecting inflation, more pressures on services after Covid and under-funding and structural failings in national policy that affect our main services – particularly in the areas of adults and children’s social care where demand and costs have risen significantly not just in Kent but nationally.

In the last five years, eight councils have issued Section 114 notices – in simple terms they have gone bust. And thirty councils are currently being bailed out by central government through ‘Exceptional Financial Support’. I’m pleased to report that KCC is not one of these; KCC is considered financially sustainable, and our financial management is strong. It is not us saying this but the council’s external auditors Grant Thornton.

Over the last ten years, we have delivered approaching £1 billion in savings and demand management reduction. In recent years we have reduced debt from 15% of the revenue budget to its current level of 8%, delivered savings and brought some of our areas of biggest spending pressure under control. There is no doubt that we will have to continue the critical role of financial leadership and tight management in the coming years. As the largest council in the Southeast and with the largest pressures, Kent cannot expect good financial settlements from a government – which by its own

admission is cash strapped – and whose priorities may well rest elsewhere.

There has been much talk in the media about the long-term shape of local government in Kent because of the government's plans for Local Government Reorganisation - replacing KCC, Medway Council and the county's 12 District and Borough councils with unitary councils. This was supposed to go alongside devolution of funding and powers from Whitehall, but the government's inexplicable and unjustifiable decision to exclude Kent has left us in a devolution desert while other counties from Norfolk to Hampshire were taken forward.

Whatever the political leadership in Kent looks like in the future, it will need to take the necessary decisions to keep the council financially secure and transform services to ensure we protect vulnerable people in a sustainable way. As long as KCC exists, we need to work to keep it secure and hand on a good legacy to any successor organisations. In the meantime, work continues to both challenge and work with government to end Kent's devolution limbo and to set a timeline for devolution that goes alongside – or ahead of – local government reorganisation – that is the right thing to do to secure essential services and provide value for council taxpayers.

Moving on to local matters, my focus, as many of you will know, has always been on local issues and being your voice at County Hall. I'm pleased to say that I rarely get casework on items such as adult or children's social care in this area – which is a real reflection of what

a resilient community we have in Boughton Malherbe and I thank you for that.

The single biggest item in my postbag – right across the Division – is highways and almost always in relation to the volume, type and speed of traffic. Having lived locally for more than 20 years – this is something that has my full sympathy. I have – and will continue – to work with the Parish Council and Officers from Kent Highways to secure the improvements already identified by the Parish Council and residents.

Road closures is another big area of concern for many – especially the disruption to day-to-day journeys caused by what seems to be a never-ending series of roadworks and the overuse of emergency permits by utility companies. Last year, 29% of all permits for works on Kent's Road network were for emergency – ie immediate works which very often are not – and consequently KCC have no opportunity to carry out our coordination functions or ensure the proper planning of these works. Any change to the powers the utility companies hold over access to highways would require some major changes to primary legislation and I'm pleased to say that KCC Members and Officers were recently invited to present to the Transport Select Committee – which includes the local MP Katie Lam - and the proposed changes were very well received. We await the outcome of the Select Committee's recommendations, and I will update you on progress.

Whilst I'm not a member of the planning authority – that is down to colleagues at Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) – the continued onslaught of development which threatens our valued rural life is a big concern for many residents. It is the lack of key infrastructure – roads, schools, broadband, transport and medical facilities – for both new and existing residents which worries us all. As your representative at KCC – a major infrastructure provider – I am often called to assist with planning matters and am currently working on the Supplementary Planning Document for the proposed 5000 homes at Lenham Heath to address what the Planning Inspector described as “deficiencies” when the Local Plan Review was adopted last year. These deficiencies, if not properly mitigated will undoubtedly have an impact on Boughton Malherbe and the local road network and I am working to ensure that the infrastructure is provided – and funded – in line with development or preferably before development. Some of you will know that I have never been afraid to challenge decision makers and I have no intention of stopping this on your behalf.

Finally, my thanks to all of you – residents, the Parish Council and the Clerks – for all your support and collaborative working over the years. It has been a privilege to have you put your faith in me and I feel truly honoured. Thank you.

Headcorn and Sutton Valence, including Ulcombe, East Sutton & Boughton Malherbe, Ward Report: Ziggy Trzebinski and Martin Round.

2024 was significant. It was the LAST Maidstone Borough Election for the existing Borough Council and was an “all-out” election. It was followed shortly after by a General Election. Thus 2025 may be the last County Election for a distinct County Council. The new Parliamentary leadership has decided to merge the two levels of Council authorities into larger merged districts/boroughs with the County into “unitary” authorities.

Whilst this was not a shock to some it was in terms of a surprise to the many new political members and the leaders that emerged after the Local Elections both in Maidstone Borough and throughout the County and nationally. The possibility of Unitary status Councils is not new. Many large Cities and indeed places like Medway provide a unified set of services. But this was a whole County of Kent proposal!

Ziggy and Martin initially reported a totally new make-up of Council and leadership at the last Annual Report in 2024, but a year later this report can only state that the new leadership took a long time to build any momentum and indicate their direction. Yet “things” still happened and needed to be addressed. Barely a week goes by in this Ward without something significant demanding our time and attention plus Committees and major agendas need to be worked upon. We also attend special training and briefing sessions

pertinent to legal oversight such as Planning, Licensing and Audit, often just to conform to the law and good practice measures. Martin and Ziggy continue to keep up to date on these matters as both serve on Audit, Ziggy sits on Planning whilst Martin Subs and Ziggy serves on regular Licensing Committees, sessions and hearings plus other Committees.

It was also a Coalition where manifesto claims needed to materialise into a reality. Not easy for the Greens: one group of people totally new to any form of democracy, let alone leadership and administration, working with some very insightful shrewd Lib Dems. Few claims did bear fruit. Some are being worked up, some abandoned, some previous directions cancelled and some remain.

Obviously, it took a while for the two groups to merge directions and set up some common aims and objectives in the Leadership Cabinet. Whilst service operations continued, the policies were unclear and lacked definition and direction. Issues that affect this ward were adversely affected such as Planning and enforcement. Leadership appeared to be in limbo for far too long. No sooner had the leadership personalities agreed a coalition they then went out on the Election trail to contest against each other in the 3 of the General Election seats for Maidstone and others beyond. And in the last 3 months the same ambitions for County Divisions puts most of them in competition!

It has actually been a year of many cancelled meetings and just specific briefings on matters like Equality, Diversity or

Sustainability, which few attend. Planning Training is continual and poorly attended. This means that Planning Committee, possibly the most sensitive committee, has both the least able and/or the most experienced. In this respect it is currently made up of a number of Cabinet members.

What became clear in current leadership direction is the Leeds Langley to M20 Link and other road proposals will be scrapped. The Housing and Local Plan proposals of both the Maidstone Local Plan and the Councils own programme will be re-evaluated and re-prioritised. Schemes such as Lidsing and Lenham Heathlands that are needed to deliver numbers will be given further consultation and further Policy development. So some immediate numbers will need to be found in “windfall” sites and locations to provide a housing delivery that pleases the government trajectory. This means any Appeals will be subjected to the whole Local Plan delivery test. It also affects immediate financial prospects of the Council in its own borrowings and outcomes for its own housing provision, plus there will be longer term loss of dividends regarding the Local Plan and its delivery. So this is a major re-adjustment of the priorities of the Local Plan that re-aligns where the numbers come from. This means budget changes.

The role of Enforcement will hence be devalued with staffing reduced. Resources will be focussed to net zero priorities such as clean air in the Town Centre and energy schemes on Council buildings. Meanwhile Planning and enforcement problems continue

to dictate in this Ward. Furthermore there are anti-social and reckless behaviours that require greater activity by community protection, Social Services, Environment and Waste & the Police. These relate to Planning or existing Housing.

Thankfully the Bin service has settled down to pre new contract collection standards, but there are still periodic failures of service, and it is always rural areas that suffer.

When it comes to Local government Reorganisation and future Unitary decisions the government have now decided some areas can be in the “first tranche” of moving towards new authorities BUT Kent: not immediately! Temporary interim processes will apply.

Housing, residents problems, local ASB & the community housing stock itself continues to provide plenty of emails & calls. This admittedly is predominant in Headcorn itself but the Sutton Valence levels of concern have been a surprise upon taking on the bigger Ward. Discussions with Goldings proved to be a problem and over time they have now realised some issues did need attention and they have now set up a new team.

It has also been Martin’s Deputy Mayor year before his Mayoral year-and NO Civic PA! But Jo stepped in and through the chaos a response and plan took order.

Thank you to all the Parishes, members and clerks of the Ward and all residents; you are invited to the inauguration procession and church service on 17th May starting at 11am.

Grafty Green Village Hall - Jon Thompson, Chairman

I would like to thank you all as trustees for your help over the last year which has been invaluable in ensuring the success and smooth running of the village hall as a hub in our village community. Specifically I would like to thank Robert for his hard work over the years as treasurer and trustee. After many years of valuable service Robert is now retiring and on behalf of us all I would like to wish Robert all the very best for the future.

I should like to thank our hirers who run the various clubs and societies which provide a wide range of activities for the enjoyment of the village community as well as providing the revenue we need to maintain the hall in good condition their support is both invaluable and generous.

This is not an exhaustive list but I should also like to thank the Parish Council, the National Lottery, the Co-op Community Grant Scheme, Shellina Prendergast our KCC Councillor under the Combined Member Grant Scheme and the Malherbe Monthly Magazine for their generosity in providing grants to fund the electrical rewire of the hall, the village volunteers who throughout the year gave freely of their time and resources to help run events, the Church for their support of the coffee morning, Platts Heath School for their support of the scarecrow event, the joint quiz night and along with the church choir and Carol & Beverley Hulm for their excellent carol singing, melodion and guitar playing at the Christmas event, Mike Hitchens for publishing our monthly newsletter in the

Malherbe Monthly, John Collins for auditing the accounts, Neil Denbow for keeping our website up to date and for the local community collectively for supporting events at the hall.

It is encouraging to note that since last year activity at the hall has again increased with the addition of a new Friday afternoon farmer's market, a second art class on a Thursday evening and a second pop up Post Office service on a Thursday. The coffee morning and Post Office service is becoming increasingly popular together with the monthly digital hub to coincide with the coffee morning to help members of the community with a drop in service to assist with access to the internet and all things related to Information technology.

We have hosted a range of activities throughout the year and along with our regular events we have been able to continue to collaborate with the Church, Parish Council and Platts Heath School. Further collaborations are being organised with our neighbours in Ulcombe for the 80th anniversary of VE Day celebrations and with local nursing homes to use the hall as a community space whilst the hall is open for the Thursday Post Office service.

Having undertaken a trial we have installed a Wi-Fi connection permanently at the hall which appears to be well received by hall users, works well and has led to increased bookings revenue for the hall.

I will leave the detailed financial reporting to Matt our Treasurer but the hall has seen a significant increase in both grant funding

which will be utilised to meet the cost of the electrical rewire and internal redecoration and hiring income which has helped us achieve a healthy surplus of income over expenditure which will help us meet the future increases in costs for utility expenses, insurance and cleaning.

We are well advanced with our preparations for the rewire of the village hall which hopefully will be undertaken during the summer, followed by the internal redecoration of the hall once the works have been completed.

Priorities for next year are to continue to expand where possible the range of activities offered at the hall for the benefit of the local community and to establish a robust reserves policy to safeguard the future of the hall for the benefit of our local community so that we can in time pass the hall into the care of the next generation of trustees both financially strong and in good condition.

To conclude I feel that we can be pleased with the excellent progress we have made, the fabric of the hall is continually being improved, the range of activities at the hall has increased, the charity is in an improved financial position and that is all down to your hard work and endeavour and the loyal support of the local community. So thank you all again well done and keep up the good work.

Finally I think this will be my seventh year as chairman and tenth year as a trustee and whilst I will if needed stand again I am happy to

step aside and let someone else take over the chairmanship and take the charity forward.

Honywood & Douglas Almshouses, David Chantler

2024-2025 has been another busy year for the Honyard & Douglas Charity with ongoing work to maintain high standards for the properties and gardens. At the start of 2025 new residents were appointed for four of our properties. We would welcome more applicants from Boughton Malherbe and Grafty Green over the coming years. The highlight of the year was back in October when the charity took all residents to the Square Fish Cafe in Lenham for a very enjoyable fish & chip lunch.

The Charity wishes to thank the Parish Council for their continued support.

Malherbe Magazine

In November 2024, Mike Hitchin handed over the editing and print of the Magazine to myself and Nick Eastwood as he made plans to move away from the Village. I would like to take this opportunity to wish him all the very best with his new ventures and thank him for the many years he managed this on his own.

During the transition with support from Mike the normal distribution of the magazine to the residents of Boughton Malherbe was uninterrupted. The magazines will also continue to be left in magazine holders on the Village Green and in the porch of St

Nicholas Church at Boughton Malherbe. Additionally the magazine will be uploaded to the Parish Council website each month enabling anyone with internet access the ability to view and read the magazine.

I've made a few adjustments to the layout of the magazine after receiving feedback from some of our readers, and would welcome any further feedback from anyone who has suggestions. I would also be happy to receive any photos that can be used on the front cover. Additionally, I would be interested to hear from anyone who would like to advertise in the magazine or send updates to the existing adverts we already have. You can find my contact details in the magazine.

Finally, I wish to take this opportunity to thank all the distributors who drop magazines though letterboxes and Treasurer support from John Collins, without their valued efforts the magazine would not be viable.

Churchwardens' Report, Kenneth Alexander

“To be a meaningful part in the life of the village”

Instead of ending this report this year with my thanks, I am going to begin with them: Firstly, to the Rev John Huggins, our Priest-in-charge and all the other priests and preachers who have led the services for the past year.

Secondly, to those who have played the organ, or the piano, and the choir who bring music to our services. Especially to the choir when there has been no one to play either. However, there was someone who has stepped up to play one introductory note.

Thirdly, to our other churchwarden, Vanessa Goodwin, and other PCC members. We all have our tasks within the PCC, but I would just highlight our treasurer, John Collins, who keeps us on the straight and narrow in these difficult times.

Fourthly, to our main contact with the village and the hall, Sally Alexander. She was asked if she would arrange a coffee morning on Tuesdays when the Post Office visited the hall, and this has gone from strength to strength. This year Lent soup luncheons have added another dimension. More recently the hall has started hosting a weekly farm fair and Sally was asked if she would host a scone stall; with the help of Janet Collins and Jackie, they are selling hundreds which include various varieties of scones.

We celebrated Laura Hooker's wedding with a tea party, and we must thank those from the community who helped make that so successful. This was followed by VE Day celebrations, when we were asked to host a tea party with the help of the village hall committee; this culminated with the lighting of the Goodwins' beacon at the Old Rectory. This was followed by the "team's" Cream Teas in July/August which were again well supported. In October the village hall, decorated with flower arrangements, put together by the gardening Club, hosted our Harvest Supper, and cooked by various

people; the Harvest Festival and auction followed on the Sunday. Then came the build up to Christmas with the Carol Service and the Crib Service which were again well supported and enjoyed by all.

Having said all that, I had better mention the Church fabric. Work to cover the Wotton tomb and to paint the North Wall has still to be undertaken but this now is in hand. Other than that, the fabric is in good order. Our architect is due to undertake the quinquennial inspection in May.

Yoga classes

Monday and Thursday mornings and Wednesday evenings have been running since the early 2000's and are still regularly attended by villagers and from the surrounding area. Yoga is known for its healing effect whether from the stress of day to day life to recovering from any other issues keeping the mind and the body healthy.

Gardening Club

Membership remains healthy growing with new members from the village and the wider area of the Borough. Our aims are to enable members to gain knowledge, share experiences and plants in a friendly, welcoming way.

Date	Speaker/Event	Topic
January 14	AGM and Philip Oosterbrink, head gardener at Walmer Castle	The Jungle Garden

February 4	Robin Smith and David Walker RSPB	Birds of the Medway Estuary
March 4	Jacqueline Aviolet	At the Nursery, cuttings and plants for sale
April 1	Spring Show and Steve Edney	The Kitchen Garden – plants for sale
April 26	Plant Sale 10 – 12 Village Hall	
May 6	Outing to Frittenden, Brickwall Cottages, TN27 2DH 6pm - £6, £3 for refreshments	
May 9 - 11	Weekend in Suffolk – The Mill Hotel Sudbury, £380pp dinner bed and breakfast. Visits to Myddleton House (EA Bowles Garden), Melford Hall, Flatford Mill, Markshall Arboretum.	
June 3	Outing to Woodchurch, Boldshaves TN26 3RA 6pm £10 entry, refreshments extra.	
July 1	Outing to Benenden, Copper House TN17 4LE £7, refreshments £5	
August 5	Outing to East Malling ME20 6PE - guided tour of Communigrow, educational wellbeing gardening charity £8.75 entry – vegetables available to purchase.	
Sept. 2	Autumn show and Rachael Castle from Swallowfields Nursery	Shine a light on bulbs
October 7	Kevin Tooher	The Edwardian Gardens of Sussex

Nov. 4	Ed Flint head garden at Tidewell Manor	Roses and friends
Dec.	Lightshow at Leeds Castle (date and timings to be advised)	

Survey of plants on the verges from the triangle at the junction of Headcorn Road and Eastwood Road towards Yew Tree Farm carried out on 17th April 2024 by Sue Burch

This is a community parish asset that should be safeguarded from the gradual reduction the width of the verge by the increasing traffic using the road. Is it possible to have the verge designated as a wild flower rich verge? Other verges in our parish could also be identified as being habitat rich or unique or even SSSI. I believe we need to promote our asset to encourage people to appreciate what we have and to look after the environment.

The triangle at the junction of Headcorn Road and Eastwood Road is also a small plot of ‘green space’ that has a variety of flowering plants but this is also being damaged by vehicles driving over/through it. The management of these areas seems to be to trim to the ground level which means many flowers are lost with the knock on effect of losing the seed heads or even some of the later flowering plants never getting a chance to bloom. Can there be some negotiation with the KCC that a more sympathetic approach be applied? I have heard that there are other parishes that manage the green areas with due concern for the habitats bordering the highway.

Wild flower / plant found

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| 1. Blue bell | 21. Ivy |
| 2. Bramble | 22. Knapweed |
| 3. bugle | 23. Ladies bedstraw |
| 4. Bush vetch | 24. Ladies smock |
| 5. Buttercup – 2 types | 25. Lesser celandine |
| 6. Bryony | 26. Meadow sweet |
| 7. Cleavers | 27. Nettle |
| 8. Comfrey | 28. Ox eye daisy |
| 9. Cow parsley | 29. Plantain |
| 10. Cranesbill -herb Robert and
hedgerow | 30. Primrose, cowslip |
| 11. Creeping and milk thistle | 31. Ragwort |
| 12. Cuckoo Pint | 32. Silverweed, Potentillia |
| 13. Dandelion | 33. Snowdrop |
| 14. Dead nettle - white, cut leaf
purple | 34. Sorrel |
| 15. Garlic mustard | 35. Thistle, creeping and milk |
| 16. Greater stitchwort | 36. Veronica – ivy leaf |
| 17. Ground ivy | 37. Water mint |
| 18. Hawkbit | 38. Wild strawberry |
| 19. Herb bennet | 39. Willow herb |
| 20. Hog weed | 40. Wood anemone |
| | 41. Wormwood |
| | 42. Yarrow |