

Chairman's report Rolvenden Annual Parish Meeting April 2026

Good evening to you all and welcome to the 2026 Annual Parish meeting.

The last year has been a great success for the parish, in that with the excellent efforts of the clerk we are up to date and fully compliant with all the necessary documentation and procedures that meet the current required obligations. The budget was set with a significant increase in the parish precept of just under 20%. This was necessary to meet the financial obligations and commitments of the parish. It has still meant that we have a shortfall in our reserves and have insufficient funds to take on much in the way of additional works, but we hope that with time any such additional projects can be budgeted. This might include speed indicators at the entrances on the A28 north and south, along with other suggestions. Future increases will be more limited to inflation and to cover additional costs.

There were very few unexpected challenges, and planning issues have been relatively simple, limited largely to alterations, extensions, tree work and listed buildings consent the only significant development was the old Cornex garage, which has now achieved planning consent, though not without some comment.

Money Penny was a significant cause for concern over its future, and possible redevelopment plans. The council arranged for an open meeting with residents and invited Ashford Borough Council representatives to give a presentation. This was followed by vigorous question and answer session. Lobbying by our Council representative and Katy Lam~~m~~ (our MP) to ABC led to a substantial rethink by ABC who had grossly misunderstood the feelings of the residents and their needs and wishes.

The neighbourhood local plan has been completed by the steering group, for which I thank those involved for their efforts, especially Denise Curtain and Alison **Eardley**. This has now been submitted and we await ABC comment before it is returned to council for comment and Parish approval.

Attendance at parish council meetings has been relatively quiet, averaging around a dozen parishioners. This I believe is a reflection of the low level of controversy affecting council matters. Attendance by councillors has occasionally been limited, largely due to a number of unforeseen personal matters or unavoidable conflicts on time.

Thoburn Trust.

The council as the trustee has established a plan for the management of the pasture land to the South of the church. This primarily of maintenance and regeneration to facilitate better pasture management and to restore hedging for the benefit of wildlife. This should meet the wishes of the community for environmentally sensitive care as well as maintaining its value as a greenspace for the community. We hope that work will commence this summer, funded through a combination of S106 monies, grants and charitable funds. The allotments have continued to be self managed, and we are pleased to see the establishment of the community fruit trees.

Village Hall

The village Hall has a modest number of Trustees who have greatly assisted with the overseeing of the hall management. The Hall manager has taken a more pro active role which has improved the running of the hall. The engagement of a professional bookkeeper has also greatly improved the fiscal management. We have also involved a local cleaner at a greatly reduced cost to the hall. The overall use of the hall is very good, with a number of social and sporting groups regularly booking the hall. The downside of the regular usage and booking is the apparent lack of availability for private functions. I would like to stress that a condition of the hall is that these may be overruled for private functions and anyone interested in the hall should contact the hall manager directly.

The Preschool continues to be an important user of their area and we have actively engaged with them to assist wherever necessary in ensuring its continued role in the community. The hall has not made any increase to the rent charged for a number of years, which includes the utilities which have been a significant cost increase to the hall.

To reduce the heating costs a zoned digital programming system has been installed and we expect significant reduction in costs.

The outside area is managed by a local landscape gardener and there will be some replanting this autumn. This follows some crown lifting in carpark area to improve light.