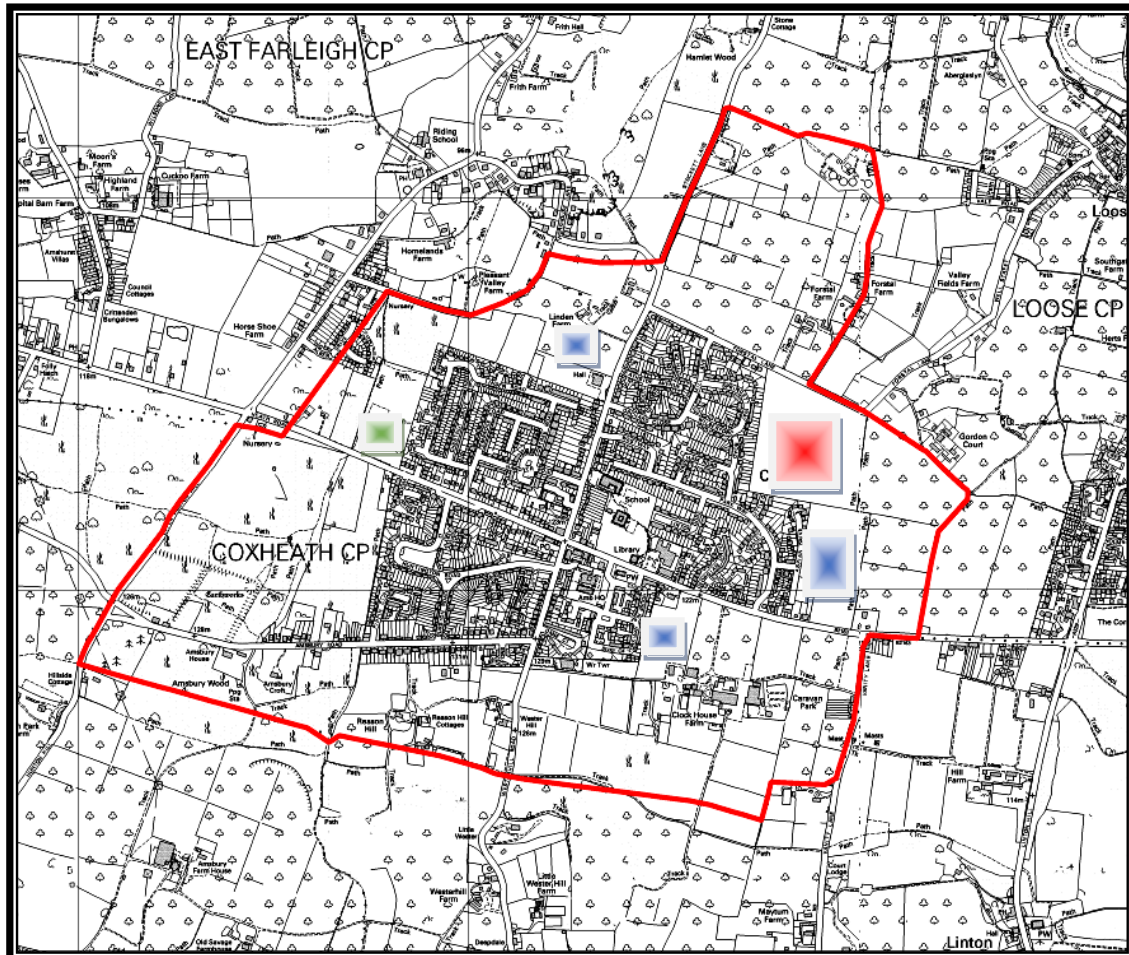




COXHEATH PARISH COUNCIL



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

2017 – 2018

Clive Parker
Chairman – Coxheath Parish Council

Summary Report

First, I thank all the members of the Parish Council for their support, hard work and dedication to the residents of Coxheath Village in the last year. For myself, to continue to represent our Village as Parish Chairman, after 9 years now remains a great honour. As always, I leave the council members open to judge my future in this role at the next Annual General Meeting. This year, please note that the meeting is on Thursday 31st May not the Tuesday as previously advised.

It has been a year of disappointing news on the Planning front with further consents granted for an increase to 210 housing units, with access off Forstall Lane. I thank 'Hands off Coxheath', 'SMART' and Loose Parish Council for their objections raised at the Town Hall last November against this application which has wholly inadequate access. Sadly, Maidstone's planners in their wisdom saw fit to grant consent despite having given assurances to the Planning Inspector that any developer would have to provide proper access to the Site.

The start of the year saw the Parish Council with a full complement of 13 members. However, we do now have two vacancies following the retirement of both Denise Taghdissian and more recently Marilyn Hansford. I would welcome interest from Willow Grange now accepted as part of our village and others. If you are interested, please see myself or the Parish Clerk - Terry Ketley after the meeting. Rodney Divall, our Vice Chairman, has continued in the role of Planning Chairman this last year. Val Page is continuing to lead the Traffic and Community Safety Group, recently bringing forwards work to brighten up and refurbish elements around the Village Centre. The old bus shelter has been refurbished and the new one has a better seat following the collapse of the previous riveted 'perch'. Around the village our thanks go to David Mann who continues to maintain Huntington Green, as well as providing us with floral displays in the baskets and planters throughout the summer. After our brief appearance, on Channel 4 with Penelope Keith, I am pressing Cllr Richard Webb to urge the Post Office to refurbish our tired looking George VI post box, which is indeed older than Coxheath Parish Council.

The Parish Council continues to engage and to work with all local organisations including the Church, Pre-School, Primary School and Village Hall, as well as our Community Warden and the Kent Police. Jasmine Pay remains as our PCSO in addition to our long serving Community Warden Adam McKinley. Adam, with a facilitator Salus – Maidstone District Youth Work, is also now running a Youth Club at the Village Hall for 11 to 19-year olds on Wednesday evenings.

Our relationship with the Holy Trinity Church remains strong. The initiative for Coxheath to dedicate a War Memorial, in remembrance of those lost in conflicts around the globe, will take place in November to mark the 100 years since the end of World War 1. Christmas saw a continuation of the festive lighting around the Village led by Councillor Richard Webb and Cheryl Skinner. Carol singing led by the Rector, Peter Callway, along with mince pies and mulled wine provided by Michael Webb saw in the Christmas break.

Although not part of the Parish Council I feel I should give a mention the activities of the Coxheath Speed Watch Group. Following the departure of Nigel Flint, the group is continuing to contribute to the safety of our community. After engaging with the Kent and Medway Safety Camera Partnership, the group has been significant in helping slow down traffic passing through Coxheath. Further high-tech equipment has recently been provided through Parish funding streams and consideration is being given to

further enhancements in the future. A lot of children walk to and from school during the day, their safety and that of others must remain paramount.

The unwanted play areas at Whitebeam and Fairhurst Drive are still on our 'radar'. It would be good if MBC could finally decide on this item, since the idea has been on and off the table since 2011. Meantime, each year further deterioration of the play equipment and surfacing is occurring. In addition to this the Recreation Group led by Elizabeth Potts is following through with the long-awaited plans to create a hard-surfaced multi-use games area adjacent to the Village Hall Car Park. Funding for these works was set aside several years ago and the public open space provision for this facility has now been agreed.

A new litter picking group has been formed in the last year. My thanks go to Gordon Down for leading this initiative and working through the risk assessments and other papers required by MBC. The group is continuing to grow, and I would urge all to look after and care for our village as best we can.

Moving on to financial matters the accounts from last year are checked and closed for audit. Income was up on the previous year at £84,372, albeit that £5,816 was earlier overdue VAT refunds brought forwards. Spending was lower last year at £60,009 with the balance going to future working group set asides and maintaining the Parish Reserves balance. Reserves equal to the current Parish Precept are retained and the Parish Working Advisory Groups maintain their own budgets, with funds carried forwards each year to pay for both current and future Projects. A further breakdown of expenditure on items around the Village this year is given at the end of the report. As a final reminder Coxheath, along with Boughton Monchelsea, still levy the lowest Parish precept out of the six Rural Service Centres and four Larger Villages.

Grants will continue to be made in the future to the Village Hall Management Committee, in line with any precept increase, as agreed some time back. Small Section 137 Donations at a total sum of £900, to three local charitable organisations, will also continue. Autumn / Winter 2018 will see the appointment of a new Parish Clerk, as Terry has indicated a wish to retire at the end of the current financial year. Advertisements will be placed over the summer to allow for a new Clerk to shadow Terry's work over the Winter / Spring period.

The Village News magazine absent in the last year but previously circulated to the whole Village needs to be reintroduced. This publication for distribution quarterly, supported by local advertising revenue, depends upon input from local people as well as the Parish Councillors. The magazine, along with the Village Website and Notice Boards around the Village, continues as the primary means of communication to all residents.

In drawing towards a close my thanks, in addition to all those mentioned above, go to our Kent County Councillor – Paulina Stockell, as well our Borough Councillors for the year – Brian Mortimer, Richard Webb and Emily Fermor. My final thanks go to our Parish Clerk - Terry Ketley, most importantly to my wife Carol who has prepared tonight's refreshments and to my two daughters Charlotte and Natasha. Their understanding, support and patience is as always very welcome.

Clive Parker
Chairman - Coxheath Parish Council

Council Structure

The Parish Council for 2017/18 comprised at the start of the year the following Councillors:

Clive Parker – Chairman	plus	<u>Co-opted Members</u>
Rodney Divall – Vice Chairman		Cllr Richard Webb – May 2016
Keith Woollven		Jan Webb – May 2016
Val Page		Marilyn Hansford – July 2016
Denise Taghdissian		Ernie Small – October 2016
Cheryl Skinner		Chris Bird – February 2017
Elizabeth Potts		Gordon Down – March 2017

From the previous Parish Council 7 members had been re-elected uncontested in May 2016. With 6 new members co-opted in the year 2016/17, as above, the Parish Council started with a full complement of 13 members. Sadly, owing to increasing commitments elsewhere the year saw the resignation of both Denise Taghdissian and Marilyn Hansford leaving at present 2 vacancies to be filled by co-option.

The full council has continued to meet in the Small Hall at the Village Hall on the last Tuesday of every month at 19:30hrs, except for December. The public are welcome to attend these meetings and are encouraged to do so to bring to our attention any concerns. Public representations will be heard for a period of up to 30 minutes before the start of the meeting, at the Chairman's discretion, depending upon the fullness of the Agenda for the meeting to follow. Outline Agendas are posted on the Notice Boards and the minutes are posted on the Council Website once approved at the next meeting. Copies are also available for inspection in the Coxheath Library. A bullet point summary sheet, introduced in 2009/10, is forwarded to the Local Press for inclusion in the Kent Messenger and Downsmail.

Each year at the May Annual General Meeting, following the election of the Parish Council Chairman and Vice Chairman, Councillors are appointed to the following Committees and Working Advisory Groups. Each Group then has responsibility for its own budget for the year, including funds set aside from previous years. For the year 2017/18 these were as follows:

Planning Committee	Rodney Divall – Chairman
Finance Committee	Clive Parker – Chairman
Recreation & Youth Group	Elizabeth Potts - Lead
Seasonal Events Group	Cllr Richard Webb & Cheryl Skinner – Joint Lead
Traffic & Safety Group	Val Page – Lead

The Coxheath Neighbourhood Plan remains under the remit of the Planning Committee. Various other co-ordinating responsibilities are allocated to Parish Councillors, again on an annual basis and for 2017/18 these included:

KALC / ACRK Representatives	Keith Woollven / Vacancy
Police Liaison / NH Watch	Cheryl Skinner

Footpath / PROW Co-ordinator	Clive Parker
Play Area Inspections	Rodney Divall
Business Liaison	Keith Woollven
Village Hall Liaison	Clive Parker & Elizabeth Potts
Village Centre / Street Scene	Val Page
Village Environment / Litter	Gordon Down
Speedwatch	Cllr Richard Webb / Chris Bird / Cheryl Skinner
Clockhouse / Linden Farm Liaison	Richard Webb
Church Liaison	Jan Webb
Village News Editor	Vacancy
Web Site Editor	Vacancy

Planning Committee

The Planning Committee has continued to meet every three weeks throughout the year, with notice given via the Village Notice boards and Web-site. A summary report on the work of the Planning Committee for the year is provided separately.

The significant applications emanating from the Draft Neighbourhood Plan dated January 2014 are:

- Linden Farm – detailed consent now granted for 74 houses accessed off Stockett Lane, with 1½ acres of public open space and provision of a multi-use games area adjacent to the Village Hall and Recreation Centre agreed, work is now progressing;
- Clock House Farm – marketed as Orchard Grove, a reduced application with detailed consent for 70 houses, along with land provision with outline consent for a new medical centre agreed, work is now progressing;
- Older’s Field – outline consent granted for 55 houses off Heath Road but with the natural open space land to the north originally agreed and adjoining the Beacon Field now withdrawn, no further progress.

Other significant sites promoted by Maidstone Borough Council and now included in the only recently approved Local Plan, despite many earlier objections from the whole Village and Coxheath Parish Council are:

- Heathfield – marketed as Willow Grange, 110 houses now completed off Heath Road and largely occupied with final work to the public open space and the entrance crossing island being undertaken;
- Forstal Lane – despite many objections from ‘Hands off Coxheath’ and ‘SMART’, along with Loose and Coxheath Parish Councils the Draft Inspector’s Report had retained this Site in the MBC Local Plan with provision for 185 houses. Charterhouse have now gained outline consent for an increase to 210 houses with 1.85ha of public open space on 09 November 2017.

Other applications being approved by MBC have seen the further increase in back garden developments along the Heath Road, although the application for 14 and then 10 houses backing onto Aspian Drive remains not approved. All are outside the current settlement boundary defined under the Spatial Policy SP13, as set out in the MBC Local Plan.

The change in use of the old Coxheath 4 x 4 Centre is complete with the site taken over by Apollo Windows. Sainsbury's Local had withdrawn their earlier application following what was considered to be onerous conditions placed on the proposal.

The replacement bar for the old Bird in Hand Public House has still to be opened but works are continuing to complete this and the adjacent flats.

More recently plans have been put to Linton Parish Council to develop a large doctor's surgery and pharmacy between Vanity Lane and Park Avenue, adjacent to Linton Cross Roads. Coxheath Parish Council, despite not being formally consulted, have responded highlighting that a Site is already available in Coxheath which is well related to the centre of an ageing population. It remains that this solution is preferred against the increasing dependence on transport needs, along the already over capacity Heath Road, in keeping with the transport policies being promoted by Maidstone Borough Council.

Finance Committee

The Finance Committee has also continued to meet regularly throughout the year on a three-monthly basis, in February, May, August and November. Once again, no services provided locally by the Parish Council have been reduced. With the Parish Precept increases continuing over a ten-year period based on a target 2.5% growth each year in terms of Council Tax income it has been necessary to raise the Band D rate by £1.81 in April 2017 to £44.28 per annum and a further £2.96 to £47.24 in 2018. Whilst the tax base had grown to 1547 dwellings 2017/18 did see the removal of the transitional grants previously funded by Central Government after the earlier removal of the MBC concurrent functions grants. Coxheath, along with Boughton Monchelsea continue to set a precept giving the lowest Band D rates for any Rural Service Centre or Larger Village in the MBC area. Income streams for 2017-18 against a budgeted income of £82,350 are shown below.

<u>Income</u>	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16
Parish Precept	£68,500	£64,050	£60,350
DCLG Transitional Grant	Nil	£3,887	£4,823
MBC Rural Funding – PSS	£5,266	£5,459	£5,459
VAT refunds to 2015/16	£5,816	Outstanding	£4,961
VAT refunds to 2016/17	£4,319	-	-
Other income – Field / VN	£400	£1,234	£1,668
Other income	£71	£536	Nil
from Parish Reserves	Nil	Nil	Nil
Total Income:	£84,372	£75,166	£77,261

<u>Expenditure</u>	2017/18
A.) General & Admin Costs – Precept {Target: £32,850 inc. 1,800 VN}}	£31,161
B.) Grants & Contract Works – PSS {Target: £23,177}	£17,753
C.) Working Groups – Set Asides {Increased by: £23,000}	£11,095
Total Expenditure:	£60,009
To Parish Reserves	£4,450

Sums of £65,000 from Avanté and £10,180 from the S106 Linton remain ring-fenced for the recreational and amenity facilities planned for the Linden Farm multi-use games area.

MBC Rural Funding, via the Parish Services Scheme, has again been challenged since neither the Administration Costs nor Index linking is included in line with the revised Parish Charter published in October 2015. This future funding is also considered as under threat of being removed completely in the near future. The previous transitional funding has also ceased from April 2017.

An end of year summary report on the Parish Council accounts is provided at the Annual Parish Meeting subject internal and final audits. The draft report and the summaries above show an opening balance of £236,768.74 {£242,125} {£224,641} at the start of year closing at £261,132.17 {£236,768} {£242,125}.

During the year 2017/18, the Parish Council has specifically made funds totalling £32,820 available for the following:

- £1,870 on landscape works to the Beacon Field;
- £4,545 on general grounds maintenance;
- £2,430 on flower baskets and planters;
- £3,228 on the bus shelter repairs and memorial bench installation;
- £ 505 on upgrading & maintenance to CCTV cameras;
- £1,545 on emptying dog bins;
- £5,266 on improvements to the Village centre;
- £5,306 on Seasonal Events including the Christmas Lights;
- £6,500 contribution to the Village Hall;
- £1,200 total in S137 grants to Kent Air Ambulance, Heart of Kent Hospice, Dandelion Time, Involve Kent and Five Acre Wood;
- £ 425 support to the Coxheath Youth Club.

Moving forwards the monthly account summary will show future reserves of £74,500, a new working budget for 2018/19 of £62,000, ring-fenced / committed funds of £75,180 along with working group set asides carried forwards. Future projects will include further refurbishments in the Village Centre, a specific project to complete the multi-use games area at the Village Hall and Recreation Centre, ongoing landscape improvements, consideration of support to the Primary School expansion and support to the Holy Trinity Church in the provision of a Coxheath War Memorial.