

Chairman's Annual Report 2024

In May of last year, I was again honoured to be voted in as Chairman by my peers, and as I have said on many occasions, it is indeed an honour to represent you all in this capacity.

One of my first tasks in this new tenure was to meet with our member of parliament Rosie Duffield about our continued ongoing concerns in regards to the proposed new housing developments on the Bodkin and Brooklands Farm sites. Our discussion was very forthright and cordial where I emphasised that whilst we did not want to be seen as NIMBY's, our concerns revolved (and continue to revolve) around the state of existing infrastructure to adequately support the introduction of almost 2,000 new houses and support hubs. With regards to these two specific proposed developments, we have continued to maintain dialogue with both proposed developers which have mostly been very intuitive. It is through such working collaborations that we have been able to convince them to exhibit to the local community and which many residents attended – I would point out that is something that they were not legally bound to do.

As you know, the Canterbury & District Local Plan has been very much on the backburner for a while now, and in May we submitted a very considered response to the City Council on behalf of the village. It remains to be seen whether this Local District Plan will now ever see the light of day – time will tell.

I would like to thank every member (and of course our clerk) for the professionalism and hard work on putting this together.

In June, I was elected as Chairman of the Canterbury Area of the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC), which as a member of the executive committee affords every parish council throughout Kent to be represented by their respective area committee chairman – this also gives us the opportunity to work in closer working harmony with the City and County Councils alike – a position that has become even more relevant in the months to come (but more of that later!..). This appointment in no way detracts from my Parish Council responsibilities. From a personal viewpoint it has brought me closer to the City Council executive team – which can only be good for us all.

In July last year, our clerk Amanda spoke with me about her wanting to cut back on her working hours, and therefore in August we held interviews with two experienced clerks to work alongside Amanda. I am pleased to say that Chenice was the successful applicant, and we very much welcome her into her new deputy clerk role.

On August Bank Holiday, we again held another Community Fun Day which was free for all to attend – we estimate that we had over 500 people attend – 182 of those were children who enjoyed the inflatables and general fun and games. It goes without saying then that we are already in the throes of organising another for the August Bank Holiday. Like I said this was free to all to attend, although I will be writing to local businesses for them to possibly help with sponsorship or donations so as to reduce our outgoings and therefore enable us to help local causes.

Following some unsavoury incidents suffered by our Speedwatch team, we purchased a police-approved body camera to assist with their safety and security. I am sure that you will all agree that the safety of our roads should remain paramount – as should the safety of our Speedwatch team.

Sadly, in September our dear friend David Fitzpatrick passed away after many years as a Parish Councillor. David was a highly respected member of the Parish Council and a great friend to us all and will be greatly missed by us all.

At our September meeting, Richard Spencer-Tanner was co-opted onto the Parish Council. Richard has a wealth of experience working with planning, and is a former Parish council chairman himself.

In October, we organised a village litter pick which produced the usual amount of strewn and discarded rubbish, and which always seems to also produce a surprise ... biggest thing this time around was a car dashboard!

This year, we have also replaced the two benches in the playpark and also installed a brand new noticeboard up at Broomfield Gate following requests from residents. We have also carried out extensive repairs to a stretch of the public footpath which runs through the golf course. This footpath is part of our popular (and well used) circular walk. During these works we identified a further stretch requiring repair, so we will be looking into carrying this out in due course (no pun intended!!).

Going back to the proposed Brooklands development, in October we held an all-day traffic survey on the junction at South Street as part of any future objection to any future planning application being tabled by the developer. This produced some very graphic and interesting information, and served to emphasise the potential impact on our roads once any newly-introduced traffic flow is introduced to our one main village throughfare.

In January we held a consultation event regarding the Parish Council producing our own Neighbourhood Plan. I am pleased to advise that five residents have joined us on our Steering Committee, which is ably chaired by parish councillor Bob Todd, as we feel that it is important for residents to be involved in its creation with our guidance and advice. Although we are able to refer to several approved plans from other areas, this is not a simplistic case of 'copy and paste', but ensuring that we have the right fit for our own needs. I would like to record my personal thanks to those residents who have expressed their interest for the sake of our village.

You will all by now have received a housing needs survey which will greatly assist the production of our plan – we would greatly appreciate you all taking part in this very important survey – and who knows ... you might even win £100 for your 10 minutes of time!

Also, in January we held two volunteer buffets as our way of thanking those unsung heroes that give up their time in various ways, and who help to make us such a successful Parish Council.

We currently have two vacancies on the Parish Council, so if you are community-minded and wish to join us, please let either myself or Amanda know.

Steve
Steve Bailey, Chairman, Chestfield Parish Council