



## Annual Parish Assembly

18<sup>th</sup> April 2023

Present

Cllr Mike Booth, Chair, Cllr Steve Dyer, Cllr Rosemary Dymond,

Cllr Margaret Haig, Cllr Robert Pryor, Cllr Matt Mason.

Cllr Tony Rice, Charles Amis (Clerk) & Seven Parishioners.

The Chairman opened the meeting by reminding us the Annual Parish Assembly is not a Parish Council Meeting but it is a meeting for residents of the village organised by the parish council and it is an opportunity for parishioners to give their views and air their grievances.

Community organisations are invited to report on their activities over the previous 12 months and their plans for the future.

1. Apologies for absence – Cllr Mat Peterson-Pearce, Cllr Gabriella Gabbitas, Cllr Ben Smith

2. **Chairman's Report** –

Cobham Parish Council are an active group of 9 parishioner volunteers (5 Sole Street & 4 Cobham) supported by an employed Clerk paid for 15 hours per week. There are many different issues that come up during the year which we get involved with.

Here is a short summary which you are welcome to comment on at the end of the meeting

- **The Street – Traffic Calming Bollards.**

A KCC Highways project to provide a permanent solution for the safety of residents and all pedestrian users of the footway along The Street. The culmination of 4 years of lobbying Kent Highways.

This has now had time to bed in and judging by the number of complaints or lack of I believe this has been a success.

- **Fly Tipping** – A nationwide problem which we lobby GBC to help manage. GBC have now employed an Environmental Manager and 3 Street Scene Officers – ongoing.

- **War Memorials** - The CPC are responsible for Cobham & Ifield. Thanks go to the volunteers that keep them tidy.

- **Planning Approvals** – as well as the many small planning applications we are required to comment on we have been involved in lobbying the GBC planning department with various more important problem sites including the Norbond site in Sole Street sidings, White Post Farm, Bluebell Farm, and land for sale in Round Street. **Tony Rice to update us this evening**

- **Public Parking.** In last year's report I commented on the affect Covid had on parking problems in Cobham, which are still a big issue particularly at Cobham Playing Fields. This is still an issue which we have been discussing with GBC during the last 12 months
- **Public Toilets at Cobham Playing Fields.** These were reopened by the Parish Council following Covid 19 without any financial support from GBC and are now fully funded by Cobham & Sole Street residents through the precept, much to the consternation of some of your councillors. We have agreed and included in our budget to continue to fund them for another 12 months and I'm sure the discussion over the future of providing this facility will continue
- **Cobham Youth Club** had to close through Covid 19 and has now restarted thanks to the support of The Grand who are supplying the qualified youth workers and the Parish Council have taken on an admin support role thanks to Charles Amis our Parish Clerk. The CPC finally managed to get the Youth Club funds released which were held in a frozen account by Barclays. These funds now sit in the CPC current account. £2777.99
- **Sole Street Traffic Calming** – the parish council persuaded Kent Highways to do a traffic study for Sole Street to try and resolve a number of traffic issues, including reducing speed, the need for a safer footway from Scrattons Fields to Round Street, and the safety of pedestrians in the area outside the Little Shop.  
We have since been told by KCC in no uncertain terms that there is no money for them to help finance this project.  
To continue this process we have recently opened discussion with LTC in the hope that we can secure funding from LTC Designated Funds as part of the development of the Lower Thames Crossing.
- Other areas involving the parish council include, funding a Maintenance Man collecting litter, repositioning Bus Stops in Cobham & Sole Street, Village Gateways, provision of Village Signs, maintaining Defibrillators for various sites in the parish, and the Bonham Hays Trust.

We have also been lucky enough to have had a very close working relationship with our GBC Borough Councillor Tony Rice who is unfortunately retiring at the end of this term and will be replaced after the local council elections in May,

Other Outstanding Issues:

- **Halfpence Lane** Weight restriction limiting access to Lodge Lane
- **Playing Fields** Maintenance of the Public Toilets  
Outstanding account with Scottish Water
- **Coronation Celebrations** – Rosemary and Bella to update this evening

### Finance

<b>Bank Balance</b>	<b>Balance @ 1st April 2022 including the Precept</b>	<b>£85568</b>
<b>Bank Balance</b>	<b>Balance @ 1st April 2023 before receipt of Precept</b>	<b>£55693</b>
<b>Bank Balance</b>	<b>Balance @ 1st April 2023 including £45k Precept</b>	<b>£100693</b>

### **Planned Capital Expenditure in 2023-24**

Childrens Corner at Cobham Playing Fields	£70,000
Village & Gateway Signs	£10,000

### **3. Report from PC Joanne Hammond – New Rural Beat Officer**

PC Joanne Hammond is the new rural beat officer for the rural area of Gravesham and another rural beat officer will be recruited soon. A new Neighbourhood Policing Department has been set up and 13 officers will be recruited by the end of June who will cover all of Gravesham. Parishioners are encouraged to sign up to My Community Voice and to report non urgent crime to 101.

There is an issue with off road bikes. A parishioner had said they had taken on the custody of Cozendon Wood and the off road bikes is less of an issue since some trees were cut down and it is currently more difficult to ride through the woods. Previously there had been several fires at Cozendon Wood and the neighbouring fields by Church Road. Cars and vans with trailers had parked on Church Road and accessed Cozendon Wood with off road bikes from the byway. Kent Police are not allowed to give chase.

### **4. Kirsty Gaunt, GBC – Local Election and Voter ID plus Community Engagement Work**

**Local Elections:** GBC had circulated leaflets about parishioners bringing Photo ID when attending the polling station. The name and address need to match with the electoral register and the photo needs to be update. Out of date passports are acceptable if the photos are up to date. Photo IDs are not needed for postal votes.

**Community Engagement Work:** The team is involved with sourcing voluntary funding, helping with community events and giving out community awards. The team works with organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau, Churches, Foodbanks and Community Safety Team. The team makes sure that the help from the government is going to the right people including writing to affected residents who need help. The Community Engagement Officer employed by Rochester Diocese works closely with the Community Engagement Work. The Parish Councils are doing a lot of good work

The parish council puts forward individuals who have previously helped in the community or who require financial help from the Bonham Hayes Trust that is administered by GBC. It was difficult to identify those members of the community who needed helping the most. A parishioner said they had found a homeless individual at their gate and had offered them a barn to sleep in for the night. It was asked where the help was for those in immediate need as there appeared to be no immediate help on offer. PC Joanne Hammond said the police were aware of the homeless individual.

### **5. Cllr Rice to provide an update on Planning**

**GBC Local Plan** – The local plan needs to be updated every few years and is used to inform GBC how many houses can be built, where they can be built and how they should be built. The previous local plan was produced 15 years ago. GBC carried out a Regulation 18 Stage 2 consultation 18 months ago. Site allocations for new housing will be set aside in Gravesham once the local plan has been adopted and approved by the Planning Inspectorate. The government has pulled back on their housing target for local authorities.

GBC are waiting for KCC to produce their traffic modelling data for proposed areas of new housing. The next consultation will run from the end of 2023 to the beginning of 2024. Nothing will be happening until the Regulation 19 agreement has been issued.

**Norbond** – The planning appeal is with the Planning Inspectorate and it was uncertain how long they will take to decide the appeal.

**White Post Farm** – The planning appeal has been dismissed by the Planning Inspectorate. The owner is not allowed to use the site as a family residence. GBC Planning Enforcement are in discussion with the owner for a mutually agreed date for compliance. The landowner is not able to put in a similar planning application.

**Cranbourne Farm** – The plots of land were put on the market for sale. The estate agent responsible for selling the plots of land had said there were likely to be good development opportunities. The land is part of the green belt and is also prime agricultural land. The removal of the hedgerows for the installing of the site entrance were found to be legal. GBC Planning Enforcement had asked the owner to remove the caravan.

**Bluebell Barn** – The owner has been asked by GBC Planning Enforcement to remove some of the buildings. The weather conditions have prevented the owner from carrying out this action. The open days over the Easter Holidays had attracted 3,000 visitors.

## **6. Reports from village groups and organisations**

### **(a) Local Funding Group, St Mary's church Rooms**

The community has now raised a miraculous £53,765. 76. with the promise of £37,500 in grants and a grant-cheque of £4,500 making a total of £95,765. 76 towards the £200,767 + VAT quotation for the project to restore St. Mary's Church Room. This year we have applied for grants from Cobham Parish Council, ACRE Platinum Jubilee Village Halls, Thames Crossing, Bernard Sunley, and Laing Family Trust with applications planned to The Heritage Lottery and Veolia in May/June. When we have half the required funds, we will meet the criteria to apply to Garfield Weston.

We reapplied for Planning Permission, and this was granted on the 13<sup>th</sup> February. We hope to have raised sufficient funds for the work to be completed from June – December 2024.

The monthly Community Coffee Mornings started in March which contributed £116.00 and created a friendly and informative event. These will continue to be held in St. Mary's Church Room on the second Thursday of each month from 10.30 – 12.00.

The Coronation Garden Safari is planned for Sunday, 7<sup>th</sup> May. 12 gardens will be open from 11.00 am – 5 pm and there will be a Garden Party at Sole Street House from 4.00 – 7.00 pm. with traditional fete-type stalls and pre-booked supper.

Our AGM is planned for 2.00 pm on Saturday, 24<sup>th</sup> June at St. Mary's Church Room.

We will organise another Garage/Sale Trail on the 20<sup>th</sup> August. This time we believe it would be beneficial to encourage stallholders to be grouped together. We charge £10.00 for a stall unless donating the proceeds to the LFG fund.

We are hoping that Rosemary Dymond will once again take part in the Friends of Kent Churches Ride and Stride and we hope to organise a Film Evening and A Talk in the autumn with the Christmas Wreath Workshop and the WI Christmas Carol event too.

So very many thanks to all those who help us in the background – none of this would have been possible without you. We especially mention the Meadow Room Management Committee, Cobham Parish Council and the Women's Institute.

Susan Rowe, on behalf of the Local Funding group

### **(b) Friends of Cobham Church**

#### **Events**

The highlight of our fund-raising in 2022 was undoubtedly the exhibition "The view where I am" held in October. Master-minded by Kate Hyde it brought together aerial photos of the village and surrounding areas taken 40 years apart, by Nigel Haig in the 1980s and by Martha and Mike Hyde in 2020, together with postcard sketches of local landmarks by the children of the primary school. It raised £875 but almost as important was the pleasure it gave to so many, young and old alike, who thronged the church, exchanging memories and seeing their village through other eyes. After two years of lockdown, we resumed teas on August Bank Holiday, (£317) and continued sales of Hilary Savage's Christmas card, which has now raised nearly £1000. 2023 will start with another of our popular quiz-nights on 22 April.

#### **Expenditure**

Anyone who has attended services, the choir concerts or Two Women Events in recent months cannot have failed to notice the greatly improved lighting in the church and the Friends were more than happy to contribute £4975 to the cost of the required electrical inspection, and the installation of surge protection and LED lights in the body of the church.

The long-awaited refurbishment of the church kitchen should be completed in the next few weeks, and will also be funded in part by £5000 from the Friends.

The Friends are anxious to recruit more younger supporters. Members do not have to be church-goers. We just need people who value the church as a building of great historical significance both nationally and locally and who want to see it maintained both as a village landmark – and a place of peace and sanctuary for future generations. If you want to see how much visitors (including Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber!) appreciate having the church kept open and well-maintained. Please take a look at the Visitors' book.

Geraldine Cracknell,

Chairman

### **(c) Cobham Bell Ringers**

Our band of bell ringers continue to ring for services in Cobham Church, now only held every other Sunday, and we rang a Quarter Peal to wish Angela Walker well in her retirement. We hold our weekly Wednesday evening ringing practices.

Quarter peals are special occasions when we attempt to ring 1260 changes of a method, a pattern of changes, in about 45 minutes. It takes effort and concentration.

For the late Queen we rang Quarters on Her Majesty's 70<sup>th</sup> Accession Day, on her 96<sup>th</sup> Birthday and for the Platinum Jubilee.

Then on the Death of Queen Elizabeth II we tolled and rang muffled in accordance with all the protocols of a State Funeral. We also rang a Quarter Peal for The Queen and still the bells were fully muffled with the Tenor bell open at backstroke which is only done on the Death of the Sovereign.

We rang for two weddings, welcomed two visiting bands of ringers, and Quarters for the Cobham Fete and the new King's 74<sup>th</sup> Birthday.

The exciting thing is that some teenagers are learning to ring. So for the Coronation, and as part of the 'Ring for The King' recruitment campaign, we plan to have general ringing on Coronation Day at 9.00am for half an hour so that all of all abilities can say they rang on Coronation Day. Then on the Sunday we plan to ring a Quarter Peal at 10.00am in celebration of the Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla. Fortunately we keep our bells ringing.

Peter Hartley

#### **(d) Luddesdown & District Rights of Way Group**

First may we thank you for the grant of £50 for the year 2022/23. The grant was spent on advertising and the invoice showing the expenditure is attached. We handed out the smaller cards to individuals and have posted flyers in libraries, doctors surgeries and notice boards in the parishes of Cobham and Luddesdown particularly and other villages around as far afield as Gravesend.

Some of our older membership did not return after COVID but with the help of our promotion campaign we have managed to attract a few new members.

We have also purchased high viz jackets and a small medical kit to do all we can to maintain the safety of the walking group. We now have three walk leaders who have attended a First Aid course.

The Wednesday walks continued throughout winter averaging about 10-15 walkers on the more pleasant winter days, covering the Luddesdown and Cobham areas and we have re-established a slightly longer weekend walk once a month at different locations. Hopefully we have turned the corner to keep the group going and encourage more weekend walking.

As you are aware we are no longer able to do any clearance of footpaths but our Chair reports to the KCC any obstructions, fly tipping or damaged steps etc. found on the Wednesday walks.

One of our members has made an excellent short film, showing the members walking through the beautiful countryside, sometimes with dramatic skies set to a background of classical music. This also attracted a small cost. She presented it at our Spring walk and Social to much applause.

We have made a small increase in the subscription from £5 to £7 per annum.

Anne Whybrow

Secretary

#### **(e) Cobham & Luddesdown WI**

Our WI continues to flourish and we are slowly but surely increasing our membership, which now stands at 36. Our meetings have all been well-attended, only a few of our members do not feel that it is safe yet to attend, mainly because they are or have relatives who are vulnerable to coronavirus. Those who have managed to come along though have enjoyed a full range of meetings, which have included: our annual Strawberry Tea in July; in September, we met "The Woolly Felters" (who make life-like felted animal and human figures from sheeps' wool); in November we held a Ploughman's Lunch, followed by a "make", which this time was a Christmas card. In January this year, Ron Chamberlain came to talk to us about his life in Amateur

Dramatics, and in February, Stuart Robinson gave part 1 of an illustrated talk entitled "Curiosities of the City of London". We are looking forward to his return in June for part 2.

Su Rowe has visited us on two occasions to demonstrate the art of floral arrangement; once in December, to inspire us to make some of our own displays for Christmas; and again, in March this year to give us some guidance for entries to our annual Spring Show earlier this month; and our members did not disappoint. There were some beautiful displays. This was the first time for a number of years that we had entries in all 21 of the classes for spring flowers, flower arrangements, produce and baking, and the day turned out to be a really enjoyable one, with the smell of flowers and baking wafting through the hall and some very proud prize winners. Our judges, Michelle and Geraldine commented on the excellent effort that everyone had made.

Our Autumn Show in October 2022, was equally well supported. This is where members display their skills in art and craft, with entries including embroidery, knitting and crochet, quilting and patchwork, dressmaking and other crafts. Our members also have a chance to vote for their favourite painting, greeting card and photograph. Everyone is busily working on their entries for the next Autumn Show, which will be in November.

We have some very active "groups", which meet in various locations. They include Craft, Art, "Knit and Natter" (who, amongst other things, are actively involved in knitting and crocheting items for Darent Valley hospital); "Read and Rabbit" book group, who meet once a month to discuss their favourite (or in some cases, not so favourite) books; and some newer groups; Needlework, Crochet, Lunch Club, Mindfulness, and Gardening.

We are all sorry that our President, Janet Cherrison, has decided to stand down in May and are grateful to Janet for her valued input during that time.

We are confident that our WI will continue to grow, and will remain a pro-active and valued part of the parish community.

Jill Beatty

#### **(f) Cobham Amateur Dramatic Society**

Last May we performed two one act plays "Sherlock Holmes' Last Case" by Charlie Cook and "Plan B" by Robert Scott. Attendance on all three nights was excellent and the cast were pleased to receive good reviews.

The Autumn Production in 2022 was an evening of murder and mystery. This very successful production of "Who Killed the Hotel The Manager" by Chris Martin ran for four nights and was accompanied by a popular cold platter and desert supper. Despite the additional performance, the run was a sell out and we apologise to those of our regular supporters who were unable to get a seat.

Rehearsals are now well under way for our May 2022 Spring Production. Once again two one act plays will be performed for three nights. The first play "Café Fear" by Paul John Matthews is about two reporters searching for an escaped patient from a local secure hospital, who stop at a café to ask for directions. The waitress is less than polite and they are soon joined by a number of unusual and strange customers. What happens next brings fear to the cast.

The second play "Heavens Waiting Room" by Gary Dimond, concerns Martin Dexter who is confused to find himself in a waiting room. He remembers breaking up with his girlfriend and....oh yes, falling to his death. But where does he go from here?

Performances take place on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup>, Friday 19<sup>th</sup> and Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2023 at the Meadow Room.

Tickets go on sale from 17<sup>th</sup> April. Box Office 07552 665588

We look forward to entertaining you once again.

Ron Chamberlain

Hon Secretary

### **(g) Cobham Gardeners Society**

Cobham Gardeners had a very successful 2022, providing a full program of talks and staging three Shows. We had a very good response from Members and the general public who visited the Shows. The Plant Sellers, refreshments - especially the home made cakes were very popular with everyone.

The Society would like to thank Members of Jeskyns' Young Farmers who have helped set up the tables and chairs for our Shows and have helped clear away afterwards.

Coming into 2023 we have had two very successful talks and look forward to the rest of the programme. The Society have an outing in June to Chis and Di Spree's garden in Stockbury which will comprise a tour around and a BBQ.

We now have over 60 Members and are very encouraged with the number of new members who have joined.

At our AGM in December last year Mike Pickersgill was appointed as our new President and Michael Wood and Pam Hodge were elected as our new Treasurer and Secretary, respectively.

The Society have given a £50 donation to the Cobham Pre-school Group who are setting up a garden for the little ones. It's always good to encourage the gardeners of the future.

Finally, the Royal Horticulture Society has issued all Affiliated Societies, such as ourselves, a Recognition Award Certificate to present to a society member or someone in the local community who has gone the extra mile in the last year. Our Committee have voted to award this Recognition Certificate to Rosemary Dymond for all her efforts in obtaining a Gold Award for Cobham in the Britain in Bloom Competition last year and being responsible for all the beautiful planters which are situated around the village. This Certificate will be presented to Rosemary at the Spring Show on 15 April.

Happy gardening

Liz Jardine  
Chairman

## **5. Parishioner's Comments**

A parishioner said they regularly wrote an article for the parish magazine and did not understand why other groups had not also written articles.



Cobham Primary School is doing well and has 218 pupils. The children are happy and the parent's surveys are positive.

The Sports Association is thriving and the car park is busy with parents dropping of their children for Colts Cricket. The Bowls Club is going from strength to strength. The Tennis Club does not play competitive tennis and some players travel to Meopham or Gravesend for competitive matches. The Sports Association is currently looking to improve their club house and are applying for several funding sources.

All of the flats at Cobham College are full and residents are allowed to use the refectory. The residents are hoping to hold a coronation party on the meadow. The Town Twinning Team from Cambrai are due to visit Cobham College and Cobham Church.

The Young Farmer's Club have been asked to leave Jeskyns Country Park. The club had been asked by Forestry England to look after the cattle which are to be introduced to the grassed areas of the park. The Young Farmers Club do not have the skills to manage the cattle. **Action:** Cllr Dymond to speak to the landowners.

There was a hearing for the Kentish Wine Vault that was at Medway Council. Cllr Rice did not hear anything at the recent Luddesdown Parish Council meeting. It was not certain if Medway Council had asked for the hearing.

A parishioner passed on his thanks for all of the work that the parish council carries out.

Cllr Booth thanked Cllr Rice for all of this help over the past four years.

## **6. AOB**

**King's Coronation events:** On the Saturday from 7pm to 12pm there will be a Charity Ball in the Gilt Hall at Cobham Hall which has been organised by the Friends of Cobham Hall.

On the Sunday there will be some street parties. There is a children's coronation party in the Meadow Rooms from 2pm to 4pm. There will be a garden safari organised by the Local Funding Group and Sole Street House is hosting an event in the evening.

The Monday will be a volunteering day from 10am to 4pm and the meeting point is Cobham Church. Local organisations have been invited and will have an opportunity to recruit volunteers.

**Playground** – Concerns were expressed regarding the quality of the new playground equipment. Istead Rise have used the same supplier for their playground and parish councillors were encouraged to visit their playground. The second phase of the playground improvements will involve installing a new all-weather path from the car park and removal of the existing fencing. The parish council would have enough to contribute £45,000 towards the new playground. Five were in favour in going ahead with the new playground and there was one abstention.

**Finance** – The cheque report was proposed by Cllr Dyer and seconded by Cllr Dymond.

Meeting closed at 9.30pm