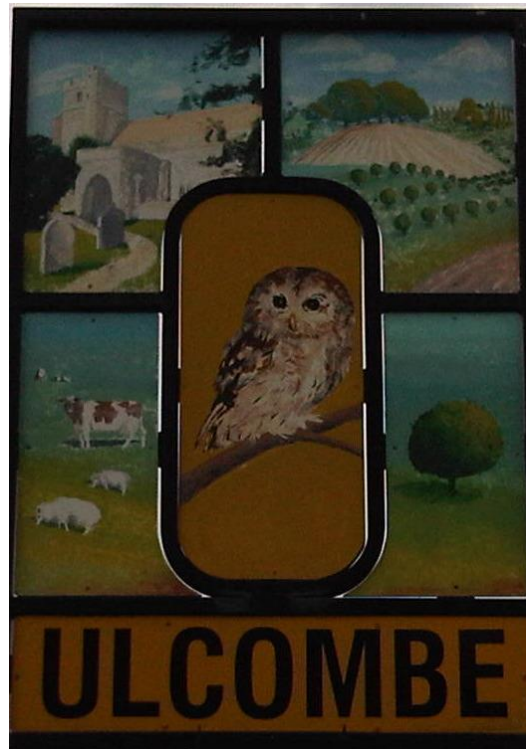


ULCOMBE

Annual Parish Report

2013/2014

www.ulcombepc.kentparishes.gov.uk



Produced by Ulcombe Parish Council
June 2014
(Reports from the Annual Parish Meeting held in April 2014)

ULCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL – Chairman’s Report – Mr Peter Titchener

In the past year, April 2013 – March 2014, there have been 12 regular parish council meetings and 7 extra parish council meetings - a total of 19 meetings which is 2 more than last year.

The main issues affecting your parish council in the last 12 months were:

- A Neighbourhood Plan – does Ulcombe need one and, if so, when?
- Maidstone Council’s call for development sites
- The replacement of parish councillors who resigned
- The appointment of a new parish clerk following Bridget’s retirement
- Highway problems – potholes and flooding
- The proliferation of solar farms
- A proposed minibus service from Kingswood and Ulcombe to Headcorn
- The monitoring of traffic speed and HGVs

Other issues include :- new bus timetables, dog fouling , fire hydrant inspections, the renewed use of the football pitch by Headcorn Juniors, and the addition of more names to the war memorial.

Parish Council

First of all I want to thank Bridget for 18 years of outstanding service to this parish as our Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer, and I want to welcome Mrs Liz McLaren who has taken over. I hope she may also stay with us for 18 years! We also have 5 new parish councillors. Iain Moir and Carole Brookes (The Street), Mary Ann Lovegrove (Crumps Lane), Tony Allen (Eastwood Road) and Shellina Prendergast (Ulcombe Road, near Headcorn). We are at full strength once again and I hope you will give them your support.

Neighbourhood Development Plan

Concerning the Neighbourhood Development Plan, let me be clear that there was always agreement that a Neighbourhood Development Plan was in principle a worthy idea. The question was whether this was the right time to propose new housing on greenfield sites when Maidstone had advised parishes to wait until the housing allocations were announced and the local plan was published. Maidstone Council’s housing target increased from 10,080 houses in 2011 (up to 2026) to 19,600 in 2014 (up to 2031). As 4,200 houses have been built since 2011, and depending on the Consultation results, this figure is down to 17,100 houses in the draft Local Plan and could go even lower if an acceptable evidence base to the Inspectorate can be provided. Ulcombe, East Sutton and Boughton Malherbe and other small villages are not included in Maidstone’s housing plans because they do not have the amenities to support significant growth. In other words, major development would not be sustainable in these villages.

You may recall that in 2013 Maidstone Council wrote to landowners asking them to submit potential development sites for inclusion in the Local Plan. Many Ulcombe residents were concerned when sites to the west of The Street and Ulcombe Hill were put forward. Some were subsequently withdrawn and the others were rejected by Maidstone. This does not prevent small schemes of local needs housing, for example, from being developed in the smaller villages if there is a proven need.

We had two public meetings in April 2013 when the parish council debated the pros and cons. Some residents voiced their concerns about embarking on a Neighbourhood Development Plan, and the overwhelming consensus was negative. Your parish council therefore agreed that before any decision was made about embarking on a Neighbourhood Development Plan, that all residents would be given the pros and cons and asked for their views. That is still our position. This is important because ultimately residents have to vote in a referendum before a Neighbourhood Development Plan is adopted, and unless there is a clear consensus at the outset then the whole exercise could fail. Those villages like Harrietsham and Headcorn with a housing target do have a need to plan and design for this. Ulcombe does not. Ad hoc housing can continue, as at present, via the normal planning process, and it does not mean Ulcombe is closed to new houses.

One of the arguments put forward by those in favour of Neighbourhood Development Plans was that they would influence Maidstone in the preparation of the Local Plan. This is clearly not the case, because the 12 Neighbourhood Plans submitted to Maidstone for approval are languishing in MBC’s “Pending Box”. Maidstone has only just published

its draft Local Plan without reference to those parishes' Neighbourhood Plans. It is clearly difficult to judge if a Neighbourhood Development Plan is in "general conformity with the Local Plan" when there is no adopted Local Plan and there is no clear definition of "general conformity". For those villages who have embarked on the costly exercise of a Neighbourhood Development Plan, the current situation is an expensive mess. It is to be hoped that the situation will be resolved satisfactorily. At 17,100 houses, Maidstone would increase its population by approximately one third, the cars by approx. 35,000. The existing infrastructure needs to expand enormously to cope with the extra population. In Ulcombe, we are in the eye of a storm. A few thousand new houses in total are planned for Harrietsham, Headcorn, Lenham, Marden and Staplehurst, as well as hundreds of houses on the Sutton road at Langley/Boughton Monchelsea. Your parish council will be discussing its response to the Local Plan before the consultation period ends on 7th May. You can see it online on the MBC website. Maidstone needs a 5 year land supply (which it hopes to have by April 2015) and a Local Plan which will allow MBC to oppose unwanted development, which can be upheld on appeal to the Inspectorate if the Local Planning Authority has no Local Plan.

If you have views you want your parish council to consider, then please email our clerk, Mrs Liz McLaren preferably by 25th April. Her contact details are at the back of the Newsletter and on the Ulcombe Parish Council website.

Other issues

- The Saturday 59 Bus service is subsidised but, given the KCC cuts, it remains vulnerable. It is a question of "use it or lose it". New timetables for this service and the Cornwallis school bus are on the Noticeboard
- Ulcombe has agreed Lorry Watch signs for Chegworth road to monitor inappropriate use of rural roads by vehicles over 7.5 tonnes, particularly HGVs. Please phone the number on the signs if you see large lorries on this road. We are experiencing even worse traffic than usual because the Leeds road will remain closed for at least another 3 months. It is also mooted that the current 17 tonne restriction through Leeds might be reduced to 7.5 tonnes like Broomfield and Ulcombe. Boughton Malherbe is also trying to get a 7.5 tonne weight restriction through Liverton Hill. This is partly single track and all our roads locally will be under even greater pressure when the new housing goes ahead in the rural service centres of Headcorn, Harrietsham and Lenham (1500 houses between them rising to possibly 3000 if Lenham gets a further 1500 houses in 2026)
- Grants have been made to the Village Hall and for the purchase of the British Legion wreath for Remembrance Sunday.
- Speedwatch recruitment for volunteers has been advertised again but no volunteers have come forward yet. The recent results of the speed test in Ulcombe showed that the average speed was within the 30mph legal limits. Of course this was an average and makes no allowance for cars at the upper end of the spectrum.
- New anti-dog -fouling signs were agreed for the recreation ground last year, and Maidstone has put up new signs in The Street advising residents that a fine of £75 can be imposed for allowing their dogs to foul in public places under the new Dog Control Orders.
- We have cleaned the War Memorial in the Churchyard so that the names and inscriptions are now visible. We will be adding two further names this year and cleaning the base of the memorial again. Your Parish Council laid a wreath on behalf of everyone in the parish at the Remembrance Sunday service. Your parish council would like to suggest that there is some form of commemoration on Monday 4th August which is the date the British Empire worldwide entered the war. Any suggestions would be welcome - perhaps a church service?
- We now have a Village Diary on the Ulcombe Parish Council website. Please contact Liz to get your events posted. This helps others to avoid clashing dates.
- We now have fire hydrant inspections in Ulcombe and you will have seen that they are now more visible.

Other Matters

External Meetings

Parish Councillors have attended many external meetings. They include The Parish Police Forum, The Joint Parishes Group (JPG), The Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC), Junction 8 -Waterside Park Development, KCC Parish and Town Council Seminar, East of Maidstone Bus Group, Kent Highways Traffic Calming Meeting, KALC Chairmen's meeting, KALC Planning Conference .

Consultations

We have responded to many consultation documents including

- the KALC /DCLG consultation on Greater Flexibility of Use which proposed Permitted Development Rights for Agricultural buildings – this was opposed by Ulcombe and other parish councils and the Local Government Association replied accordingly to DCLG advising that in their view these decisions should be taken locally, case by case, and not decided at national level.
- There was a Consultation on the Harrietsham Neighbourhood plan on which your parish council expressed reservations about the desirability of turning the A20 trunk road into a High Street with shops and traffic lights, and consequential delays and traffic congestion when, with the large housing developments planned in Lenham and Harrietsham, there will be much more traffic going to and from Junction 8.
- There was also a Consultation by KCC to turn off unnecessary street lamps between 12 midnight and 5am. KCC is now implementing this policy across Kent.

Crime

There were 31 reported crimes in the year April 2013 –March 2014. This is a 70% increase compared with the total of 18 crimes in 2012/2013, but still below the 48 crimes in 2011/2012 and the 45 crimes in the year 2010/2011.

- It is important that people always get a crime report reference number when reporting a crime so that they are all properly logged.
- The police want all non – emergency calls to be made by dialling 101, and not 999 unless it is a genuine emergency.

We have been having regular police surgeries in Ulcombe, at the school lay-by throughout the year so parishioners can meet the police and discuss issues of concern. It is a pity that so few residents are taking advantage of this service because a lack of use usually means the service could be withdrawn. However, on the bright side, one can only assume that people do not have many pressing issues to discuss with the police.

We are disappointed that we have had no Police presence at our monthly parish councils since June 2013. We have made the point that this conveys the wrong message about the police commitment to tackling rural crime which only has a 10% detection rate compared with the Kent average of 37%.

Planning

Ulcombe Parish Council is a consultee on planning issues, and Maidstone Borough Council consulted us on 36 planning applications. Of these, Ulcombe agreed 29 and refused 7. Maidstone disagreed with us on 6 and 2 remain undetermined.

We are pleased to see that Ulcombe is having orchards rather than housing west of the Street, and also at Pye Corner. We do have polytunnels for raspberries west of the Street which are not pretty, but screening will be provided shortly. Agriculture is an industry and it has to make money. Some developments are more industrial than others and we have to strike a balance. I hope residents can appreciate that there are worse alternatives. Two reservoirs have been built recently to irrigate the orchards etc and I would ask everyone to spread the word that swimming is forbidden.

Many gypsy and traveller applications are approved on appeal because Maidstone's Gypsy & Traveller policy and locations for new pitches has still not been finalised. Maidstone needs to find sites in the Borough for 187 pitches up to 2031. Because Ulcombe and Headcorn already have a large proportion of the existing pitches, and the Water Lane site is one of two official sites in the Borough, Richard Thick, our Borough Councillor, has worked hard on our behalf to get a commitment that the extra pitches will not be sited in Headcorn Ward and spread more equitably around the Borough. Ulcombe currently has permission for 27 mobile homes, and Headcorn 35. In the Local Plan, although Ulcombe has no planned housing, there is a provision for 3 more Mobile homes at Hawthorn Farm which is subject to Consultation by 7th May.

Finance

The biggest single financial issue has been the cut in our Concurrent Functions grant by Maidstone Borough Council. It used to be about 45% of our income and now it is only about 10%. In order to maintain parish facilities and services like

the upkeep of the recreation ground, the pavilion and insurance premiums, we have had to increase the parish precept to compensate.

Our reserves are not large, and we are going to have to conserve as much as we can, given the probable further threats to our future income. It is very easy to spend other people's money (ie: yours), and we have a duty not to embark on schemes which will result in wasting your money and then increasing the precept to compensate.

Highways

Your Parish Council has been fighting to reduce the volume and speed of traffic in and around Ulcombe.

We now have our village gates, funded through our County Councillor Jenny Whittle's budget. In the near future we will be considering whether to install speed screens which light up when the speed limit is exceeded.

Jenny also paid for the speed wire trial referred to above, and is involved too in the cost of erecting a large multi-lingual sign at the A20 end of Chegworth road to discourage HGVs. I want to thank Jenny for her great help in funding these projects. It means a lot to a small parish like ours.

Better drainage, signage, filling potholes and the re-surfacing of our roads are other priorities for us. The Street, Ulcombe Hill, Chegworth Road, Knowle Hill, and Windmill Hill have recently had major repairs. The increased traffic due to the Leeds road closure has resulted in many craters/potholes from the A20 to Headcorn. Kent Highways has been advised many times but as a result of Jenny Whittle's intervention, we now have a schedule of repairs. Phase 1 and Phase 2 will cover every pothole between Ulcombe Village Hall and Crumps Lane. They are categorised as urgent but unlikely to be actioned until 28th April onwards. It will mean full road closure of the Headcorn road between these points and notices will be on the Noticeboard and KM. Phases 3 and 4 cover the Headcorn road from Jubilee Corner to Headcorn (King's road). More information will follow.

Immediate plans

We intend to paint the football posts and the pavilion, to replace broken bollards on the recreation ground, to fix the pavilion cess pit to avoid an overflow, and have the decorative village sign re-erected.

We will be replying to the Local Plan consultation by 7th May and we have arranged a fact finding Solar Information evening on 1st July 2014 in Headcorn Village Hall at 7.30pm. Adjacent parishes are invited as well as all Ulcombe residents. It will not focus on any single planning application but will explore the facts and we hope to get a view from MBC on its renewable energy policy. Please put this in your diary because this is an issue which could impinge on all of us locally in the near future. More details will be published nearer the time.

Finally, I want to thank Liz for managing to get on top of all our parish council issues since February. It has been a very stressful two months but I also want to thank Bridget too, for being magnificent in assisting with the handover.

PARISH COUNCIL USEFUL INFORMATION

Members:

Peter Titchener (Chairman)

Shellina Prendergast (Vice Chairman)

Tony Allen

Carole Brookes

Mary Ann Lovegrove

Iain Moir

John Watton

Clerk: Liz McLaren (Tel: 07941 139962 or Email: lizmclarenupc@uwclub.net)

Meetings

Our scheduled meetings are held on the second Tuesday of every month, starting at 7.15pm. The public and press are welcome to attend but the meeting will be closed for the duration of any confidential items.

Additional (extraordinary) meetings to discuss planning, finance or other urgent matters are held where a deadline needs to be met. Notice of all the meetings along with agendas, minutes, financial information and more, is published on the noticeboard and also on the parish website, www.ulcombepc.kentparishes.gov.uk.

ULCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL FINANCE REPORT 2013/2014

Summary of receipts	£ (figures rounded)
opening reserves brought forward from previous year	14,006.00
precept	16,393.00
council tax base support grant	792.00
interest	3.00
concurrent functions/PSS basic grant	2,281.00
football fees	150.00
VAT recovered for 2013/14	1,550.00
Provision of rounding of figures	- 1.00
Total income	35,174.00
Summary of payments	
office and staff costs	6,321.00
insurance	860.00
audit	150.00
hire of hall for meetings	695.00
association membership fees	429.00
training courses	240.00
Annual Report	120.00
Information Commissioner notification	35.00
advertising of notices	279.00
upkeep of recreation ground/car park pavilion	4,236.00
	2,639.00
grants awarded to other organisations	890.00
noticeboard repairs	85.00
VAT paid out in 2013/14	1,543.00
Provision for rounding of figures	- 4.00
Total expenses	18,518.00
Closing balance	16,656.00

Included in the above expenditure headings:

OFFICE/STAFF COSTS: wages, office supplies/equipment, publications

AUDIT: internal, external,

ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIPS: Kent Association of Local Councils. Action with Communities in Rural Kent, Society of Local Council Clerks, Kent County Playing Fields Assn

RECREATION GROUND/CAR PARK: bin emptying, strimming, mowing, tree works, TPO site visit, play equipment inspection/repairs, village sign repairs, car park lighting, pothole repair

PAVILION: alarm service, electrical works, fire extinguishers inspection, electrics inspection, electricity, cesspit repairs, cesspit clearance, smoke alarms, pest repellent, materials survey, valuation, materials removal, intrusive survey

GRANTS: village hall (loft insulation), Remembrance Day wreath

For further information please contact the Clerk.

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL – Headcorn Ward - Cllr Richard Thick

Cllr Thick talked about the draft Local Plan and in particular the following items:

- Lack of infrastructure in Headcorn for 400 extra houses
- Barrier at Stilebridge to protect Marden and Yalding from flooding
- 200 houses at the top of Milbank will put extra pressure on the sewage system at Headcorn
- Planned housing in Rural service centres

He confirmed that he will be taking over as Mayor of Maidstone later this year.

Regarding crime he outlined that he receives daily reports from Kent Police and confirmed that reported crimes generally were lower this year than last year.

He said that he was active in trying to get gypsy/traveller sites spread more equitably around the Borough as Headcorn Ward had a disproportionate number overall. MBC's lack of official sites made it much more difficult to manage.

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – Ward Member - Cllr Jenny Whittle

Cllr Whittle advised that cuts in finance were being made in adult assessment services. Certain bus routes were still being subsidised and she would continue to do this for 2014/15. However, this will be decided year on year. Regarding complaints with HGVs using the country lanes, she outlined that often this is through using sat navs. This is a real problems for the Leeds area. She urged that anyone seeing overweight lorries using these road should report them to lorry watch.

She had intervened regarding the number of outstanding and dangerous potholes lining the roads in and around Ulcombe and these roadworks had been rescheduled and would start shortly. She pointed out, however, that many of these essential works had been delayed due to the extensive flooding around the area.

Solar Farms in the area was briefly discussed and the Chairman was asked to send a copy of the Ulcombe Parish Council policy guidelines on solar farms to Cllr Whittle.

Cllr Whittle talked about children's services and the desperate need for additional foster carers. She was asked to send the clerk an article to place in the Village newsletter and this is below for you to read:

FOSTERING AND ADOPTION

I was delighted at the recent Parish Council Annual Meeting to hear a real interest in fostering and adoption. There are 1800 children in care in Kent and we always need people who are considering fostering to come forward, either on a full time basis or to provide respite care for children with disabilities. KCC holds regular information sessions across the county and there is a particular need for more foster carers in Maidstone. If you would like to find out more, please contact 0845 330 2968 or visit our website, www.kentfostering.co.uk. We also need more adoptive families from all backgrounds to come forward, particularly for older children, sibling groups and those with disabilities. Again we host information days across Kent where you can meet those who have adopted through KCC and hear first-hand what it is like to adopt in Kent and about the ongoing support that is on offer. Over the last year, we have approved 167 adoptive families, compared to just 67 two years previously – clear evidence that we are working day and night to recruit as many families as possible to adopt children who would otherwise be in care. Our website contains lots of useful information including details on information days – www.kentadoption.co.uk – or you can ring up our dedicated Adoption Team on 0845 330 2968. Please note these numbers are due to change shortly, but a message will be left on the answer machine with the revised numbers when the switchover occurs.

Please do contact me if you need my help or advice.

Jenny Whittle

01622 734897 or jenny.whittle@kent.gov.uk

KENT POLICE – PCSO Jim Stevens, Bearsted

PCSO Stevens confirmed that a new PCSO, John Boyd, would be joining Ulcombe following Alan Beech's departure. John Boyd who was new to the service and currently being mentored by Dave Rowley, PCSO at Lenham.

PCSO Stevens said that most crimes tend to be opportunist and urged Parishioners to be vigilant, ensuring that houses and sheds were securely locked.

He urged the public to use the 101 Police Contact number for all non-urgent crimes though do ring 999 for any crimes in progress.

The Ulcombe Parish Council Chairman asked if the new PCSO would be able to attend Parish Council meetings. He also enquired as to whether it would be possible for the Police Contact Point service to continue but with a later scheduled time.

ULCOMBE PRIMARY SCHOOL– Emma Hickling, Executive Head Teacher (Kingswood, Ulcombe, Leeds & Broomfield Primary schools)

Emma was already headteacher of Kingswood primary school when in November 2013 she was invited to take over as executive headteacher of Ulcombe Primary school in November 2013 too. At the time, Ulcombe was vulnerable with falling standards and a falling roll, however the staff were very supportive and everyone worked well as a team to rapidly improve the school. In December 2013 Ofsted issued a “requires improvement” judgement, which was a huge improvement on the previous grade issued a month before in November 2013. Emma reported that it was now on course to become “Good” very soon.

In January 2014 Leeds & Broomfield school was included in the collaboration. Emma reported that it was a big step forward that both KCC and the Diocese had allowed her to head a community school (Kingswood) and two church schools (Ulcombe and Leeds & Broomfield) as they were usually kept separate. Emma has now been granted a 3 year term of office to see the changes take root and recruitment of staff will be taking place soon.

In November there were 45 children attending Ulcombe school and already it has risen to 60 and this number continues to rise. The school has the capacity to take approximately 90 children. Emma felt that leadership and teacher excellence was the key to a good school and Ulcombe has excellent teachers. The children are making rapid and sustained progress and attendance rates are improving. They are supported by the local authorities and have links to other schools. There is a developing level of middle and senior leaders and further strengthening of governance. The new Chairman of the Governors is Mr. John Hoadley of Kingswood.

The school had a visit from HMI – Her Majesty’s Inspector, on Thursday 3rd April to check on progress since the last OFSTED report. A letter will be published following this visit.

Emma was asked if the parish council's idea of commemorating the start of the Great War was something she would like the school to be involved with, possibly in September (school time) rather than in the holidays on August 4th and she thought this was a very good idea. This could be explored further between the school, parish council and History society. The possibility of working with Headcorn Juniors’ football club was also discussed. The club intends to use Ulcombe recreation ground again for the 2014/15 season and the collaboration between the club and the school would be a good way of introducing the children to football and encouraging exercise.

ULCOMBE PRE-SCHOOL – Helen Leat

Ulcombe Pre-school has continued to operate for four mornings a week in Ulcombe village hall, and is open from 9.15am- 1.00pm Monday to Thursday, which accounts for the KCC funding for three and four year olds of 15 hours per week. We are part of the KCC ‘Free for Two’ scheme, which allows funding for two year olds (conditions apply).

The management committee has completely changed in the past year, with the previous chairperson, treasurer and secretary all resigning as they no longer had children at the pre-school. We currently have five committee members, including the aforementioned officer positions, which satisfies our requirement of a quorum of five members. All of the work done by committee members and parent helpers is carried out voluntarily, and I thank them all for the huge amount of time and effort they put into our pre-school.

We have fundraised very successfully over the past 6 months, with a Halloween themed coffee morning, a Christmas coffee morning and 2 car washes. The car wash and bacon roll mornings have been particularly successful, and I would like to thank the parish council for allowing us use of the car park at Ulcombe village hall for this. We have raised over £1200 in the past 6 months, and we thank everyone who has come to our fundraising events to support us- it is much appreciated.

We began term 1 in September 2013 with 5 children, 3 of whom attended the full 15 hour of operation. Our child numbers have increased to 10, with children attending a variety of hours. We will lose 6 children at the end of this academic year due to movement to primary education, and so would commence September 2014 with 4 children. The past year has been very challenging financially due to the lack of children attending the pre-school. We have been running with substantial losses over the past three years, and this has depleted our funds. We have tried to increase our child numbers through various means- we have advertisement banners outside Ulcombe Primary School and at Went’s Service Station. We have also had advertisement magnets on our cars, and have placed garden signs within Ulcombe and also outside Platt’s Heath Primary School. We write an article for the Ulcombe newsletter and also for the Malherbe Monthly which covers Grafty Green and Platts Heath. We have also advertised the pre-school with posters in

local shops, children's centres etc. We ran a Halloween Open morning for which we leaflet dropped houses in Ulcombe, Grafty Green, Platt's Heath, Kingswood and some of Headcorn. Despite this we did not have any new children attend the open morning. We have applied for a grant from KCC, but because our figures show the pre-school is currently unsustainable we were unsuccessful with our application. We are now in the unfortunate position of having to consider closing the pre-school at the end of this academic year due to lack of children and hence funds.

ULCOMBE PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL – Rita Strutt and John Goode, Church Wardens

Following the replacement of the stolen lead with zinc in the Lady Chapel, the work to re-plaster and decorate the interior has been completed. This will enable those visiting the church to use this beautiful quiet space.

We applied to English Heritage (EH) for a grant towards the repairs to the roofs and stonework. We were fortunate in securing a grant towards the cost of the investigative year and the promise of a further grant of £32,000 towards the cost of the subsequent repairs that were estimated to be in the region of £68,000. Investigations revealed additional problems with the substructure of the roof, some asbestos in the roof lining and the presence of bats in the ceiling of the St Ledger chapel. Subsequently, when the work went out to tender, the cost of repairs had escalated to triple the original estimate. We have been informed by EH that their offer cannot be increased. After considerable consultation with the architect and EH a decision has been taken to go for a 2 phase approach. The first phase being repairs to the south aisle, the more urgent of the two. The PCC decided to approach other funding bodies for help. Molly Poulter took on this task and has managed to secure sufficient funding to undertake the first phase, for which we are extremely grateful. We hope to start this work in July this year.

We explored the possibility this year of wiring the lighting in the car park to the church electrical supply. In the event this proved to be too costly and difficult. A portable L.E.D light was suggested and we were delighted to receive this as a gift from Leila & John Ware. This will be of particular value for evening church activities.

The church remains open on a daily basis thanks to the band of volunteers who make a valuable contribution to the work of the church.

Activities

In April and October, we held local produce and craft fairs which proved very popular with the community, we plan to hold other such events this year. A harvest supper was also held in October. This was well attended and enjoyed by all present. We are very grateful to those who organised the event, did the catering, manned the bar and contributed to the raffle. We have held 2 concerts, one in February and another in March. The concert in March was by Innominata, a very talented, lively and entertaining group who gave their services for free. We were sorry that there were not more people there to enjoy the experience. The second hand book service is attracting considerable interest. We have a wide range of books that are now displayed in bookcases and we receive donations to the stock on a regular basis.

The church, as part of the benefice, is involved in the connected churches project, which is raising money for bore holes in Zambia which will deliver a clean water supply, ensuring better health for the community.

We are always grateful for any support we receive from the community in all of our endeavours.

FRIENDS OF ALL SAINTS', ULCOMBE – Molly Poulter

It is now eleven months since The Friends of All Saints', Ulcombe was launched in May 2013 following the churches quinquennial report revealing that over £200,000 will be needed to restore and repair Ulcombe's beautiful mediaeval church. Thanks to the generosity of people in the village and former residents, membership donations have already brought in £4,175. To this will be added Gift Aid @ 20%.

The Friends' first fund raising event was an Auction of Promises in November which, again thanks to the villagers' generosity, raised £2,600.10. With some of the funds, we have purchased eight tables for the church at a cost £1,129.58. These will be very useful - not only for The Friends' fund raising activities, but also for all the activities run by the church such as the Harvest Supper, Farmers' Market, and Concerts. In the long run, it will save both the cost of hiring tables, and the cost of transporting them.

Our next fund raising event takes place on **Saturday the 26th of April** in the church – a day of **Mystery and History for all the family**. We are hoping it will be a very special day and will appeal to everyone in the community. Starting at 10 am with bell ringing, there will be an opportunity throughout the day to do brass rubbing, have an introduction to bell ringing, take part in a treasure hunt which will tax the brains and imagination, and watch an artist and stone mason at

work. There will be a talk on the History of Church Music, a concert by Ulcombe's Church Choir, and a presentation by Ulcombe's drama group of some Mystery Plays. Tours of the tower will be available during the day, as will a variety of children's activities. Background music will include Gregorian chant and plain song. There will be refreshments available all day, as well as draft cider and real ale. We hope many in the village and further afield will come along and share this very special day. We have also fixed a date for an **Art Show – Friday to Sunday the 4th to the 6th of July**. It will be held in Ulcombe church, and will open on the Friday evening with a Private View to which invitations will be sent out. Then it will be open from 10 am to 6 pm on the Saturday and 1 pm to 6 pm on the Sunday.

We will welcome Exhibitors. It will cost £3 to enter a picture, and the Friends will take 20% of any sales.

At the time of reporting it was advised that Chris Parkinson, the current Treasurer, was leaving and the society was looking for a new Treasurer to replace him.

VILLAGE HALL COMMITTEE – Frances Crawford

Current Committee Members: Frances Crawford - Chair, Paul McCreery – Treasurer, Debbie Bell – Secretary, Mimi Humphrey, Christina Cox, Jack Webb, John Ware. Being on the village hall committee is a bit like being on a roller coaster with many ups and downs!

On the up side the hall is used on a regular basis by many clubs and societies providing a range of interesting activities. These include Pre-School, Badminton, Stitching Club, Ballroom Dancing, Friendship Club, History Society and two recent additions of Art Classes and Dog Training Classes. All of these events take place from Monday to Friday, but on Saturday the hall is frequently booked out for children's parties, celebration parties and yoga workshops. The Drama Group has been having a rest this year but we hope to welcome them back for another entertaining production at some time in the future. Contact details for all these clubs and activities are available from the Bookings Secretary Nikki Sharp on 842848 or from myself on 843862.

Fortunately we have also had a very good year with our fund raising efforts, which have included two clairvoyant evenings, which we hope to repeat in the winter as they were so successful and two quiz nights, one in November with 91 contestants and one in March with 64 contestants. These four events raised a total of £2,109 and in addition to this Sally and Steve Crump ran a very successful wine tasting evening in October and donated the profits of £521.00 to the village hall. Feeling very pleased with ourselves we felt optimistic that a new kitchen was within our reach within the next eighteen months or so; we had previously purchased a second-hand kitchen which proved unsatisfactory and we were refunded our money on this. However, this is where the roller coaster comes in!

We had already committed ourselves to installing loft insulation to try and reduce our heating bill and this was carried out in August at a cost of £1,003.00. We have achieved the desired result of reducing our heating bill a little but we don't really know whether this is due to the insulation or the mild winter. Fortunately we do seem to have got through a winter without an oil theft, the first time for many years so it does seem that the increased security around the oil tank has been worthwhile.

Unfortunately we then had two unexpected financial headaches! We had been advised that we should keep an asbestos register and in order for this to happen we organised a management survey of the hall, which unfortunately reported that we had asbestos which had been damaged and which therefore needed removal. The cost of the report and the removal of the asbestos came to just under £3,000.00. We were lucky to obtain a KCC Members' Grant from Jenny Whittle of £1,500.00, which left us to pay the other £1,500.00 from the kitchen fund.

The second blow was when we received a bill from Southern Water for £2,690.57. It transpired that the village hall had never been billed for waste water as they did not know we existed until an incident in 2012 when an anti-flood device failed and sewage flooded the hall toilets! Statute dictates that service companies are allowed to backdate bills up to six years, so that is what they did. Following considerable negotiation, based on the fact that figures supplied to Southern Water by South East Water were incorrect, we managed to reduce this bill to £1,159.84, which we have agreed to settle in staged payments.

We were, of course, very grateful when the Club 2000 Committee donated funds of £1,200.00 from the now defunct 2000 club to the village hall as this has effectively paid the water bill. We are also grateful to the Parish Council for the continued annual grant of £850.00.

Looking to the future, we will continue to fund raise in the hope of installing a new kitchen, which will more or less complete the refurbishment of the hall that has been going on over the last five years or so. To that end our next event

will be a Barn Dance at the end of September which we hope will be well attended and we will also be running a Quiz Night in November and, at some point in the winter, a clairvoyant evening.

We are really grateful to the group of people who continue to support us in our fundraising efforts, both in their attendance at events and for their help with cooking, clearing up, etc at these events. We are a very small committee and it would be difficult to continue without the assistance of non-committee members. We have seen some new faces at events this year, which is always nice to see, but as always, if what we are organising doesn't appeal to you and you have some ideas for fundraising, please let us know – we are happy to have a go at virtually anything!

As I've said before, apart from the school, our village hall is the only venue where friends and neighbours can come together as a community to socialise and it is very important to maintain this facility in the best way we can, which is what the Village Hall Committee strives to do.

HISTORY SOCIETY – Molly Poulter

The Ulcombe History Society has had a very successful year with membership growing, a number of interesting talks, and two very enjoyable outings. We started the year with a look at the Roman Settlement at Ickham in Kent, in a talk given by the archaeologist, Christopher Sparey-Green. In complete contrast, our next lecture was by Lt. Colonel Bolton on Sir Edward Lutyens who, we learnt, was an interesting character as well as a great architect. Then we came closer to home with a talk by Helen Allison on Kentish Village Life in Victorian times. It was quite an architectural year because one of our members, Colin Davis, gave a most interesting presentation on Cities Old and New – pointing out that the footprints of many very old cities can still be traced in our cities and towns today. Finally, we moved to Italy to hear from Hubert Pragnell about the architecture of the Italian Renaissance.

Our first outing this year was in April was to Ely Cathedral and Audley End. We went first to the beautiful house at Audley End, and then on to Ely Cathedral where a number of our members climbed the Lantern tower and marvelled at the intricacies of its construction. Our annual weekend visit in September was to York. On the Friday afternoon we visited Castle Howard – used by the BBC for its *Brideshead* saga and stayed overnight in a hotel in York. The next morning we visited York Minster and then some went to the Railway Museum and others explored York city. Early on Sunday we set off for Rievaulx Abbey – a fantastic Cistercian abbey with much of the abbey remaining. Our excellent guide – dressed as a monk – told us much about the life of the abbey and the monks. Not a life many of us would relish today! We then left for Beningborough, a small stately home – where we had lunch before exploring the house. The Society is run by a small committee who all work hard to make the programme as interesting and varied as possible. We charge for membership and welcome both new members and visitors. We help to keep the costs down by a raffle at each meeting together with refreshments for which we ask for a donation. In 2014 we are planning a trip to Greenwich to visit the Observatory, Cutty Sark, Maritime Museum and Queen's House in May and a First World War weekend outing in September.

FRIENDSHIP CLUB – Molly Poulter

The Ulcombe Friendship Club continues to live up to its name as a very friendly, happy club, and membership is growing with people from outside the village as well as local inhabitants. The Club is run by quite a large committee and each person has a special responsibility. Meg Cannings, month by month, brings in and takes away all the crockery and table cloths and washes and irons them ready for the next meeting. Joyce Braggs organises a raffle month by month which helps to keep our costs down. Pat Davis who looks after all our funds, helped by Rosemary Davis. Irene Ayling keeps in touch with our sick members, and Pat Smith and Ann Underdown organised our Cream Tea afternoon in the summer. Last year we had six meetings with visiting speakers, two outings, a Garden Party, a Christmas party when we were entertained by Doreen Hulme and her daughter, and a New Year Lunch at The Hawkenbury. To raise some funds for the Club, we also had a Cream Tea afternoon in the village hall, and one coffee morning.

We have had some interesting speakers over the year. Robert Hitch talked about the Buttercup Goat Sanctuary, I spoke about my pilgrimage to the Holy Land – though had considerable difficulty with the desk top presentation – and thank you all for being so patient. Julia Page spoke about the village of Loose, and Mrs Jan Carsons from Crime Prevention alerted us all as to how easy it was for burglars to get hold of our possessions. Paul Beard gave a moving account of Dr Barnardos and his own experience with an adopted child, and Helen Tobias talked about pearls and the possessors of these beautiful objects. We all enjoyed the production of *Save the last dance for me* at the Marlowe Theatre in Canterbury – but were somewhat unhappy about the distance we had to walk from the car park to the theatre!

Our garden party was at my home, The Old Dairy, and we were blessed again with the weather. And then, in September, we had a most enjoyable outing to Herstonceux Castle where we had really interesting and amusing guide. It was much enjoyed by all.

The Club is open to all. We have a very small membership fee. And at each meeting we have a splendid afternoon tea provided by members. As I say, the Club lives up to its name.

ULCOMBE VILLAGE NEWSLETTER – Leon Holmes/Ellen Richter

Thank you to all the volunteers who help produce and distribute the newsletter; we currently deliver to over half the homes in the parish and this involves a lot of people giving up their time. Leila Ware has now taken over the photocopying. This takes place in the school and therefore access to the school may affect delivery dates. Again, many thanks to Leila. There has still been no volunteer found to take over as treasurer which is causing some concern in terms of future planning. We are trying to develop a few new regular columns – the astronomy one is the first of these, and so far feedback has been positive. One suggestion to be explored is that each local group or society could send a quarterly update on activity, so people are aware of the different opportunities to join in with community activity. This is something we will be looking into over the next few months.

The Wayside Writers – Ulcombe's writing group – has offered to post short poems or pieces of prose in the future.

Lastly, we would like to thank all those who contribute articles and information, and to encourage people to provide feedback on what else they would like to see. The newsletter is a community resource and he would like to make sure it is fulfilling the needs of Ulcombe.

DRAMA CLUB – Mimi Humphrey

UDAS, better known as Ulcombe's Dramatically Amateur Society is made of up of people in and around the local area. It is open to all ages and abilities and being able to act is not a requirement – which is fortunate as most of us can't!

Most of the plays that we have performed have a comedy feel to them. Some would say this is easier to do but I'm not so sure that this is true. We have many sleepless nights learning lines but that said, the group has had some very successful performances from mystery plays to 'Allo 'Allo and Fawley Towers, to name a few.

This year we have had a break from our normal plays. The group was asked by John Moore, one of its members, to perform for The Friends of Ulcombe Church in their effort to raise money for the church restoration fund. We are performing a set of plays known in mediaeval times as "Mystery" plays. They were performed by 'Craft Guilds', ordinary folk from all walks of life, who took their plays around the country usually to tell stories from the bible. They would park up their wagons and go straight into the performance and then when finished, pack up and move on to the next town. We won't be taking our "show" on the road but we do hope that people will enjoy them.

We are hoping to continue with the drama group in the future but have lost quite a few members in the last few months due to either moving from the area or down to other commitments. There will be a recruitment drive in the near future, so WATCH THIS SPACE all you drama queens!

BALLROOM DANCING CLUB – Rod Davis

All is well with the ballroom dancing classes which are held in Ulcombe Village Hall on Wednesdays and Thursdays. New members are always welcome, however numbers will be held to 12 couples.

HEADCORN FOOTBALL CLUB – Keith Crisp

Keith thanked Ulcombe Parish Council for letting the team use the pitch and facilities and commented that it was a great pitch and surroundings.

Headcorn U13s are currently being sponsored by Four Wents garage. The team play in the Ashford & District league and will finish 8th or 9th this season. This is the first season that they have had an U11 team. They have players from Headcorn and the surrounding villages and have played 11-13 matches on the pitch this season.

Keith thanked Trevor, Bridget and Peter for their help with getting the club up and running with marking out the pitch etc, and said he hoped to continue using the pitch in 2014 subject to the go-ahead from Ulcombe Parish Council.