

ST MARY HOO PARISH COUNCIL – CHAIRMAN’S REPORT 2016/17

The 2017 Annual Parish Assembly will be held at 7.30pm on Tuesday 30th May in the High Halstow Memorial Hall. Any group wishing to give a short report on their achievements during the past year may attend. All residents are welcome. A Parish Council meeting will follow.

Probably the most significant issue this year was the publication of Medway Council’s Local Plan Issues and Options document and the opportunity for public consultation which commenced on January 16th. Medway Council is obliged by Central Government to prepare a new plan for future growth by identifying what infrastructure, commercial and retail development, employment, community services and housing requirements are needed to meet demand from now until 2035 and their first task is to find suitable sites for up to 30,000 homes (government assessment figure). Inevitably the Hoo Peninsula will be affected to some degree whilst development of land at Lodge Hill is included but still subject to the outcome of a Public Inquiry scheduled for Spring 2018.

Another issue was a proposal by Highways England for a Lower Thames Crossing which was rolled out for Public consultation. Following this and other considerations the preferred route has recently been announced which involves a link from the end of the M2 at Shorne, passing Chalk and entering a bored tunnel under the Thames. This route will probably be registered now with local planning authorities to protect specific zones from conflicting development.

St Mary Hoo Councillors have taken part in meetings and committee membership of other relevant consultation groups such as Medway Council Rural Liaison Committee, Kent Association of Parish Councils Medway area and the Police Liaison Committee. These meetings provide an opportunity to discuss or raise issues affecting our communities such as policing, highways, transport, social services, planning, local business groups and recreation.

We were pleased to announce that the St Mary Hoo Council Tax precept for 2017 will not increase as, despite the completion and planning of several projects, we have managed this year to keep expenditure within the umbrella of existing budgets, grants and funds.

Our campaign against speeding traffic and for road safety improvements throughout the village has continued. Following another accident at Fenn Corner and several near misses along Ratcliffe Highway we met in October with Medway Highways, Safety Dept, and Peninsula Ward Councillor Filmer who holds the portfolio for Front line Services. Some

positives came from this such as the fitting of verge markers and a planned design assessment for additional barrier at Fenn Corner, repair of the Vehicle Activated Light at Sharnal Street, and further provision of on road 'SLOW' markings, but it is clear that camera provision through the Safety Camera Partnership has been ruled out as no demonstrable casualty reduction rate can be shown. Unfortunately such action is retrospective and applied only where existing casualty figures are of concern. It was also reported that the clearance of weed and shrub growth between the block paving in the hard landscaped roundabout at Fenn corner is not covered by the Council's contractor. Some small trees are already taking root and growing tall.

The Council's Amenity areas have been further maintained and improved this year and Wayne of 'Grassroots' has been employed to keep things tidy. Project work at the Nature Reserve has seen the provision of new safety fencing at the entrance and to the south side, successful growth of spring flowers (and the daffodils at Fenn corner), and the attraction of many more species of birds to our trees and nest boxes. A planning consent has been lodged with Medway Environment to remove a cracked branch from one of the Village Pond willows and to reduce the canopy to 6.5 metres. It is hoped to complete this soon as this will allow more light onto the pond surface and hopefully encourage ducks and moorhens to nest. The Rowan tree planted by Douglas Packman has now established at the Pond Green and the pond overflow has proven successful.

We regret that Martin Botley, our footpaths officer, resigned recently due to additional work pressures and his experience of poor response to safety issues in his reports by Medway Council. We are trying to resolve the issues raised before re advertising the position. Meanwhile a big Thank You goes to Martin for his work

Our communications have been professionally handled by Clive Stanley our webmaster and Michael Pearce, editor of Village Voices magazine. My sincere thanks to both for their invaluable help and guidance.

We wish all local business ventures success and encourage residents to try them and thereby keep their services alive in the community. Our particular best wishes are for Andy and Kelly at the Fenn Bell Inn who have struggled with planning and licensing procedures to provide a unique experience train ride and small animal zoo for the enjoyment of customers, and for Cliff of Cliff Auto Repairs who is trying to complete his new approved facility but has been hindered by restrictions and lately by the close proximity of an electricity supply transformer which will need to be repositioned before work can resume. Good luck to both projects.

Thanks are also due for excellent service, either to the Council or personally, to the following:-

Wayne of Grassroots, Simon of Halstow Fencing and Gates, Gerry Smith - Digger Hire, The Laverock brothers of Laverock Tree Care, Richard of Peninsular Plumbing and Steve of SRS Windows.

Also to Martin and Lynne and to Darren and Julie for help with magazine distribution.

Finally I must thank my team of Councillors and Clerk for their support and who have made all these good things happen over the past year. We are a small Parish with limited resources but we hope that our work makes a difference.

Thank you Paul (Vice Chairman), Terry, Carol and Pat (Councillors) and Roxana (Clerk).

Bill Budd

Chairman, St Mary Hoo PC

[May 2017]