

St Mary Hoo Parish Council – Chairman’s Report 2015/16

My duty is to thank all of those persons who have assisted in making this another successful and productive year. Not all projects and issues have been fully completed but we have steadily ticked off items from the list of must haves and nice to haves. My thanks go therefore to my fellow Councillors, the Clerk, the Webmaster, our footpaths officer, our pond and tree wardens, Ward Councillors, the editors and deliverers of the informative ‘Village Voices’ magazine, our hosts at the Fenn Bell meeting place and to all who have contributed in whatever way to making the Parish a good and safer place to live.

Probably the most memorable occasion this year was when 90 year old guest of honour and WW2 veteran airman Douglas Packman came and planted a Rowan tree at the village green near where he used to live. This was to help us to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Britain and honour all those who made the ultimate sacrifice. Later he returned on Remembrance Day to place a wreath at the tree. We were enthralled and humbled by his tales of daring do and bravery that such young men, many from the commonwealth, carried out to serve this country.

A major achievement was to provide overspill drainage for the Village pond which has been flooding adjacent property in recent winters. A large diameter pipe which discharges excess water from the pond into a new trench was laid under the road. It has been reported that this conditions have significantly improved. The large willows at the pond were also professionally trimmed and tidied as part of an ongoing maintenance programme.

Our nature reserve has attracted large numbers and species of birds during this nesting season and the dawn chorus is testament to it’s success. Nesting boxes have been provided and wild flower bulbs planted. Our problem now is how to keep on top of the growth of the trees, bramble and undergrowth without unduly disturbing the habitat. To this end we are seeking help from the tree surgeons and amenity grounds person to assist our volunteer councillors with control and management in line with the agreed plan.

Road safety throughout the Parish is still of concern as the adjacent villages and holiday resorts expand and annual growth of verge plants limit visibility. Our campaign to set a sensible speed limit was successful but some form of control is still considered necessary to enforce the rules. I can understand the urgency for some people to get to their work and get home to their families but pedestrians, cyclists, horses and local motorists who are turning into and out of their property are at risk from speeding road users and several ‘near miss’ situations have been reported. It is disappointing that recent communications by the Parish Council to Medway’s Road Safety Team have not been answered and we are fearful that it will take fatalities or serious injuries to bring about change.

Our footpaths officer has done an excellent job in walking the routes and reporting on excessive undergrowth and dangerous conditions. Once again, probably due to limited resources, we have not always experienced a satisfactory response to all problems but what is clear is that such public rights of way are precious and must not be lost. I hope that this will not deter walkers from enjoying the countryside in our area or the officer from giving up time to check the paths and prepare reports.

Other issues that have an impact on local conditions have been monitored and presentations attended. The Medway Local Plan Issues and Options document was released for consultation with the second phase of the process due soon. It is expected that specific sites identified for possible development will be published then for comment before any planning decisions are made. Without a Local Plan the area is vulnerable to appeals by land owners and developers being passed. Similarly a consultation period has been set up by Highways England with regard to a Lower Thames Crossing and route with options being forwarded along with probable impacts on land and communities.

Although change and progress are sometimes inevitable, the Parish Council will continue to campaign for the well being of residents and to provide a conduit for concerns. This is a precious rural community with areas of special scientific interest, heritage sites and prime agricultural land. All of these should be preserved for us and future generations to enjoy and not unnecessarily industrialised or used for urban overspill. It is the Parish Council's remit to voice opinion, to ensure that infrastructure and services are commensurate with growth and consideration is given so that development is sympathetic to the landscape and nature of the area.

Thank You.

Cllr. Bill Budd

Chairman, St Mary Hoo Parish Council

May 2016