



Cuxton Parish Council
Annual Report
2020—2021

Cuxton Parish Council

Cuxton Parish Council consists of 11 elected and two co-opted councillors. The 4 year term of office for the current parish council ends on 8th May 2023.

All Parish Councillors are unpaid.

| Councillor | Elected/co-opted | Committees |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| *Kay Hutchfield (Chair) | Elected May 2019 (ACT) | Land Management, Planning, Finance & Staffing Sub-Committee |
| Tracy Thorley (Vice-Chair) | Elected May 2019 (ACT) | Land Management, Planning, Finance (Chair), & Staffing Sub-Committee |
| Martin Burley | Elected May 2019 (ACT) | Planning (Chair) & Finance (Vice-Chair) |
| *Natalie Jackson | Elected May 2019 (ACT) | Land Management & Staffing Sub- Committee (Chair), Website advisor |
| *Elizabeth (Buffy) Maisey | Elected May 2019 (ACT) | Land Management (Vice-Chair) |
| Julie Porter | Elected May 2019 (ACT) | Land Management (Chair). Planning |
| *Pat Reynolds | Elected May 2019 (ACT) | Land Management, |
| Hilary Savage | Elected May 2019 (ACT) | Land Management Planning |
| *Jakob Seger | Co-opted September 2019 | Finance |
| Simon White | Elected May 2019 (ACT) | Finance |
| Sarah Wilson | Co-opted September 2020 | Finance |

* Also members of the Pavilion Re-Development Steering Group.

Parish Council Employees

Parish Clerk: (22 hours per week)

The Clerk joined the Parish Council in August 2019 and has completed the CiLCA training and is now a fully qualified Parish Clerk.

She is also the **Responsible Financial Officer** and is responsible for the financial management of Parish Council resources.

Normal working days are Wednesday, Thursday and Friday

Contact details: 01634 730951, or clerk@cuxtonpc.org.uk

Assistant Parish Clerk: Vacancy

Josie Griffiths retires from her role as assistant clerk on April 30th 2021. The Parish Council extend sincere thanks to Josie for all her hard work in support of the council, and wish her well for the future.

Recruitment of a new assistant will take place during April/May 2021.

Contact details: newsletter@cuxtonpc.org.uk, 01634 730951.

Road Sweeper: Mr Bill Drake (20 hours)

The Parish Council have opted to employ a village road sweeper and receive an annual sum of money from Medway Council to cover his salary, equipment and sundries.

Bill is a 'treasure' and the Parish Council are appreciative of his hard work in keeping our streets clean in all weathers.

Chairman's Report

2020-21 has been an extraordinary year with 2 lockdowns and a tier system that has meant isolation from friends and family, and for many, bereavement and loss of income because of furlough or unemployment. Hopefully, this year will see restrictions slowly being lifted and everyone protected by vaccination by the end of the summer.

Cuxton Parish Council was unable to hold the Annual Parish Meeting in 2020 as public meetings were banned and virtual meetings unlawful. This year it is hope many residents will join us via a virtual Annual Parish Meeting on Friday 23rd April using ZOOM.

When the law was changed in May 2020 it allowed Councils to meet virtually, and so the Council have managed to hold monthly virtual, full council and committee meetings (35 meetings in total), in order to continue working as normally as possible. This does not include meetings held with Medway Planning, MDVC UK (Vineyards and Wineries of England) and Kent Association of Local Councils.

Our clerk and her assistant have been working primarily from home, and have risen to the challenge of remote working imaginatively and with commitment.

One of the challenges faced by the Council over the past year, was the Boundary Commission Consultation. The fact that Cuxton and Halling electorate have been under-represented for many years prompted the consultation and offered the opportunity to have 2 Ward Councillors by 2023. However, the outcome of the first consultation saw the Commission supporting the Medway Conservative Party proposal to join Cuxton and Halling with a large section of Strood South. Although there was some benefit from being part of a large ward with 3 Ward Councillors, the majority of

prompted the consultation and offered the opportunity to have 2 Ward Councillors by 2023. However, the outcome of the first consultation saw the Commission supporting the Medway Conservative Party proposal to join Cuxton and Halling with a large section of Strood South. Although there was some benefit from being part of a large ward with 3 Ward Councillors, the majority of the electorate would be from urban Strood and the parish council feared that the rural voice of Cuxton and Halling would be lost. As a consequence the parish council submitted an alternative plan. They believed that Cuxton and Halling would be better served by joining with Medway Gate and Temple Marsh to form a smaller two councillor ward that would be primarily rural in nature. The parish council proposal was accepted by the Boundary Commission, and so in the May 2023 elections there will be 2 Ward Councillors serving the new Cuxton, Halling and Riverside Ward.

In February the parish council formed a steering group with a number of residents to continue their ambition to create a café and community hub in the Pavilion. This group have been meeting fortnightly, and as a result of their efforts a village survey will be distributed in May that will allow residents the opportunity to comment on the plans to move this project forward. Currently there is a shortfall between the estimated cost of the project and money available from a Football Foundation grant and parish council reserves. The survey will ask you how you may wish to use the new facility and whether you would support the parish council borrowing money from the government, at very low interest rates, in order to complete the project. Please complete and submit the survey (paper copy or online)

when made available as your views are important to us and key to us progressing this development.

Hopefully deliveries of the Cuxton Noticeboard will recommence in April, but copies of the online 2021 newsletters are accessible from the Cuxton Parish Council website.

The 10th Cuxton Big Lunch has been re-scheduled to Sunday, 22nd August. This will hopefully be an occasion for celebration and reunion. In May the parish council anticipate that the WW2 memorial and information board will be installed adjacent to the WW1 memorial bench in Six Acre Woods. Many thanks to Tony Dobbs for his design and research work and to Joy Ireland and Colin Allen for providing the initial family history information.

Plans are progressing to purchase and plant a live Christmas tree that will, in future years, remove the need to purchase a cut tree every year. There is also a plan to improve the appearance of the library gardens by planting wild flowers and generally improving the appearance of this area adjacent to the library.

The Bush Road/A228 junction remains an unresolved issue but it is hoped that the next traffic light trial at the end of April will prove to be a success, The parish council are working with Medway Council to ensure that any unspent section 106 monies comes to the village for use on other highways issues such as traffic calming and Speedwatch.

Cllr Kay Hutchfield, Chair, Cuxton Parish Council

Finance Committee Report

Parish councils raise revenue to meet their spending requirements by issuing a precept. The precept is collected annually via Medway Council Tax. It is collected from all households in the village and can be seen as a separate amount on your total council tax bill. Last year the precept for Cuxton was set as £60,800 which equated to £61 per annum on a Band D property.

Every year in October the Finance committee come together to review the budget for the following year to cover costs including staff salaries, the recreation ground maintenance and assets of the council including the pavilion, playpark equipment, CCTV, bike track and the production of the Cuxton Noticeboard newsletter.

The council have purchased specialist accounting software which allows the clerk to produce monthly reports on each of our budget areas so that we can closely monitor our budget spend. At the meeting in October, we reviewed the budgets set last year against our actual spend to consider what would be needed for the forthcoming financial year. We then proposed the precept, and it was ratified at a full council meeting in December. Medway Council require this figure by January to include in the mail out to residents in March for the forthcoming financial year Council Tax bill.

The pandemic has impacted the parish council budgets both positively (savings by sadly not being able to hold our annual events of Big Lunch and Christmas tree lighting, and reduced production of printed Cuxton Noticeboard newsletters which we were unable to deliver safely because of restrictions), and negatively (purchasing of new software and laptops to allow our staff to work from home and several playgroup equipment repairs).

For 2021-22 the precept has been set at £62,016 which is an increase of £1,216 or 2% from last year. This has resulted in the precept increasing by cost of approximately £1.20 per household per month.

The parish council are supported by several voluntary organisations who offer their help in various ways and this allows us to keep some costs to a minimum. The Cuxton Countryside Group help maintain the woodlands we own and keep Cuxton looking beautiful. Cuxton Recreation and Sport Association (CSRA) maintain the bike track and this year funded and managed a major redevelopment of the bike track, which will provide a safe environment where young people can cycle. Cuxton 91 Football Club maintain the recreation ground and Cuxton Academy of School's football pitches without charge. This year they have been awarded a pitch maintenance grant from the Football Foundation worth £17,000 over 5 years to improve the quality of the pitches at no cost to the Parish Council or the Academy.

The Allotment Association help with upkeep and maintenance of the allotment site. Rent increases and the addition of a water usage fee have reduced the degree to which the allotments are subsidised. The Wheel of Cuxton continue to manage the Annual Cuxton Firework Event and also support the setting up of the Cuxton Big Lunch and the erecting and lighting of the Christmas Tree ahead of the annual Christmas Tree event. Without the tireless work of all these volunteers our costs would be higher, and we thank them all for continuing to help with all our projects. As a community it is fantastic that there are such enthusiastic volunteers who want to offer their help in this way to benefit everyone in the village.

We recognise that the pandemic has affected so many families in lots of ways, but Cuxton Parish Council continue to strive to be focused on reducing ongoing costs where possible and accessing grants and funding to supplement the precept, and to work hard to ensure that Cuxton continues to be a fantastic place to live by spending wisely and making improvements to benefit all.

Cllr Tracy Thorley, Chair Finance Committee.

Please note: Access the Cuxton Parish Council website to view the End of Year Accounts and audit reports for 2019-20 and 21.

Land Management Committee Report

Despite the pandemic the Land Management committee continued to meet virtually as per the schedule with representatives from the Parish Council, Cuxton Allotment Association (CAA), Cuxton Sports and Recreation Association (CSRA), Cuxton Countryside Group (CCG) and Cuxton 91 Football Club attending meetings. There was a change of chair and vice-chair in January 2021 with Julie Porter now Chair and Buffy Maisey duly elected Vice-Chair.

The Allotments continued to be a popular past-time for local residents during the year and even more so during the pandemic. All plots were occupied during 2020 and continue to be so with a small waiting list.

The Countryside Group continued their excellent work throughout the year and have been instrumental in obtaining several hundred trees for the area as part of the Plant Britain incentive. They have also been responsible for installing two memorial benches that have been made by a local resident and placed at the top of Mays Wood. The Parish Council has also commissioned a WW2 Memorial and information board which will be placed opposite the WW1 memorial bench in the woods by the Church wall. This memorial will commemorate those from the village who were killed in WW2. We are grateful to the group of volunteers who continue to maintain the area around the WW1 bench, they are also preparing the site for the WW2 memorial.

Cuxton 91 Football Club, despite the pandemic, continues to evolve as a football club and are looking forward to a bright future. During 2020 the CSRA completed the new bike track in the park which has proved very popular and is a great asset to the village.

Sadly there was no Big Lunch or Fire Works Display in 2020 due to the pandemic but it is hoped that both of these events will return to the village as soon as practically possible. We did manage to place a smaller than usual Christmas Tree in the library garden but again due to the pandemic were not able to hold our usual carol singing.

The pavilion development plans are coming along and a steering group has been formed for this purpose. They are a mixture of Parish Councillors and local residents and are doing a great job in formulating the road ahead for this exciting addition to the village.

Cllr Julie Porter . Chair, Land Management Committee

Planning Committee Report

Cuxton Parish Council has a planning committee of five councillors. The committee considers all planning application submitted that appertain to the area covered by the parish council and decides whether the application is appropriate for the property and surrounding area and does not cause any reasonable objections. Most applications for extensions, driveways etc do not give rise to any objections but some do, such being too large or causing loss of light, etc for neighbours and the locality.

The council does not have any powers to reject or approve applications but makes recommendations to the Medway planning authority, which they must consider by Medway Council not a planning officer.

Due to Covid restrictions the planning committee chairman, vice- chairman and clerk of the council have been considering all planning applications and calling a meeting of full planning committee if thought appropriate.

We as a committee completed many hours of work considering the planning application from Homestead for a plant training school. Resulting in a comprehensive and extensive objection to the application which was approved by the full council and then forwarded to the Medway planning authority.

This resulted in the application being rejected by the planning authority. However, at the moment the rejection of the application is subject to an appeal to the Secretary of State. This will be resolved in the coming months. Cuxton Parish Council has sent their objections to the application to the Secretary of State with a number of additional points against the application.

Staffing Sub-Committee Report

The staffing subcommittee is a new addition to the Finance & Staffing Committee, that was formed in September 2020 to process our increasing workload relating to our employees. As with any employer, Cuxton Parish Council have both a requirement to meet our statutory obligations to our employees, as well as desire to be an excellent employer and a great place to work.

Cuxton Parish Council presently employ staff in three salaried roles, and this committee oversees the Human Resources processes including job design, recruitment, training, appraisal, salary and well-being matters. The sub committee consists of 3 members of the Parish Council who meet as necessary, and make recommendations to main council for approval.

So far, the staffing sub-committee have created:

- a new Performance Management policy and process,
- completed the Clerk's annual appraisal,
- made recommendations for 'cost of living' salary increases for our 3 staff, and
- rewritten all job documentation for our Assistant Clerk role.

In the coming months the staffing sub-committee will be:

- recruiting a new Assistant Clerk,
- assisting in the induction process for this role and
- reviewing our employee remuneration package.

Cllr Natalie Jackson, Chair Staffing Sub-Committee