



Cuxton Parish Council

Annual Report 2023/2024

Cuxton Parish Councillors

Councillor	Elected/Co-opted	Committee Membership
Ged Chalker (Chair)	Elected April 2023	Planning Committee
Matt Nightingale (Vice-Chair)	Co-opted June 2023	Traffic Management working group
Julie Porter	Elected April 2023	Land Management, Planning & Staffing Committees
Tracy Thorley	Elected April 2023	Land Management, Planning, Finance & Staffing Committees
Martin Burley	Elected April 2023	Finance and Planning Committees
Simon White	Elected April 2023	Land Management and Finance Committees
Sarah Wilson	Elected April 2023	Finance and Staffing Committees
John Vye	Elected April 2023	Land Management and Planning Committees
John Manning	Elected April 2023	Land Management and Staffing Committees
Sheila Chamberlain	Elected April 2023	Land Management Committee
Julie Jensen	Elected April 2023	Finance Committee

Council Representatives on Other Organisations/ Groups

Kent Association of Local Councils: Cllr Chalker
Rural Liaison (Medway): Cllr Chalker
Police Liaison: Cllr Wilson
School Liaison: Clerk

Meetings Attendance

Councillors attend 11 Monthly Council meetings per year, held in the library, on the third Thursday of each month, excluding August.

Extraordinary / Committee meetings

In addition to the monthly council meetings, in 2023/2024, there have been:

- Six Land Management committee meetings
- Two Finance committee meetings
- Two Staffing committee meetings
- Two Extraordinary meetings of the full council
- Two Traffic Management Working Group meetings
- Three Recreation Ground Working Group meetings

Cuxton Parish Council Staff

The Clerk

In November 2023, Natalie Jackson was appointed as Clerk and RFO to Cuxton Parish Council, following the resignation of our previous clerk, Carl Jensen in October 2023.

Natalie has lived in the village for most of her life, has a background in HR and web-design and is also a school governor. She works 35 hours a week, including 9am-3pm, Monday-Friday, in the pavilion office, and since joining has completed the first part of her clerk's training.

The Street Cleaners

Bill Drake and Paul Startup continue to be our valued street cleaners, working daily to keep the village beautiful. Bill works 13 hours per week and Paul works 20 hours per week.

Out in all weathers, and always happy to help, Bill and Paul do a marvellous job for the community, keeping pathways and public spaces clean, tidy and safe.

Cuxton Noticeboard

Cuxton Parish Council continues to create 10 editions of the Cuxton Noticeboard newsletter per year, using both content created by the clerk and material submitted by local organisations and individuals, promoting their own services or events.

These are printed by a local company and distributed to all homes in Cuxton thanks to a network of wonderful volunteers.

CuxtonPC.org.uk

The Parish Council publish all documents required by the Transparency guidelines, all minutes, agendas, accounts, newsletters, news bulletins etc to our website, which is updated weekly. All councillors, along with the clerk, have a dedicated email address allowing residents to get in touch with them easily between meetings.

Parish Offices / Recreation Ground

The Parish Council Offices are open Monday – Friday, 9am -3pm.

The office address is: The Pavilion, Cuxton Recreation Ground, Bush Road, Cuxton. ME2 1EZ

The Recreation Ground continues to be checked daily and inspected weekly, with a full annual inspection completed every year in the autumn. Repairs to the piece of vandalised equipment, along with repainting the fence, are due to be completed as soon as the weather clears.

An up-to-date CCTV system has been installed to deter vandalism and improve user safety.

The working party group is making progress towards the reconsideration / repurposing of the recreation ground buildings and plans are underway for a new grant request to help update the courts area.

Chair's Report

This year we have seen the result of the planning application for the Vinery, which despite the officer's recommendation to approve the application, was refused by the councillor members. This went to appeal and the conclusion of the appeal headed by a Government Inspector, which supported the members refusal. He concluded that the application is within an AONB and was not proven to be in the local or national interest. Despite the grounds for refusal, we now have a pre application proposal by the vineyard in the same area for a reduced scale but still within the constraints of the AONB.

We are currently looking at the steps from Woodhurst Close leading up to 6-acre wood which have been in decline for several years and are now in urgent need of repair. At the same time, tree planting and maintenance in order is needed to bring the area up to a reasonable standard, also having regard to the problem we have with Ash Die Back.

Following consultation within the village it showed that the Parish Council should not go ahead with the plans for the Pavilion. However, we are in mind to bring up to date the Parish Office and the clearance of the Roundel to see what better use can be made of both buildings.

We have updated all the CCTV systems within the recreation ground and surrounding buildings. We also look forward to upgrading the hard stand area with a view to encouraging other sporting activities, such as netball, low level ball games etc.

We will continue to support the open gardens and the big lunch and other celebrations taking place within the village.

Councillor Ged Chalker, Chair of Cuxton Parish Council



Finance and Staffing Committee Report

The Precept

The Parish Council receives funding through a part of the local Council Tax which is referred to as the Parish Precept. Each year in November the Parish Council consider their budget for the forthcoming year and whether the precept will need to be increased to cover costs. This decision is submitted to Medway Council in January, and villagers receive their Council Tax breakdown from Medway Council in March for the forthcoming year which includes the precept element.

At a meeting in December 2023 the council agreed not to increase the precept for 2024-25 recognising how the cost-of-living crisis was impacting villagers. You will note that other parts of your Medway Council tax bill have been increased, but the precept element has decreased by 0.3%. Medway Council set Council tax for a Band D property in Medway as £2163.62 for 2024-25 (which includes the precept element of £62.87 per household for Cuxton residents).

Risk Management

The Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) protects 100% of the first £85,000 saved, per financial institution (not per account). Cuxton Parish Council hold monies in several accounts to adhere to the FSCS guidance and have put in place checks and balances to ensure that bank account balances, income received, and payments made are reviewed at each monthly full council meeting and included in the meeting minutes.

The Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer uses an accounting software package called Rialtas to monitor all incomings and outgoings against defined cost codes, producing reports which are shared with councillors at meetings.

Reserves

The council manage funds by holding reserve accounts to mitigate both planned and unplanned costs. There are specific reserve accounts covering areas such as woodland costs, election costs, Legal and professional fees, playground costs and refurbishment of the courts. Planned costs allow for project work in the village to move ahead and unplanned costs (for example trees which might need felling due to storm damage or due to ash dieback), to be scheduled and paid for.

This year the Woodland Reserve will be used to cover the cost of the removal of trees affected by Ash dieback. A focus has been on removing those infected trees that are close to the footpaths, houses in Woodhurst Close and adjacent to school playing fields. This tree management will continue to be a cost to the village over the next few years.

Professional Services

During 2023-24 Cuxton Parish Council continued to employ the services of a Project Manager to help develop the Pavilion project. This project has now been shelved following results of the survey of the village.

The Parish Council would like to thank all staff for their hard work over the last year and for being such a great team.

Councillor Martin Burley, Chair of the Finance Committee

Land Management Committee Report

The Land Management Committee continued to meet during 2023 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 also in attendance.

All allotment plots were occupied during this time and a small waiting list remains in place with preference being given to village residents. The Allotment Association continues to do a great job in the day-to-day running of the site carrying out small repairs as and when necessary.

The CSRA continued with their good work within the village. Their most recent project of the overhaul of the library gardens came to life in 2023 and we are able to now see the fruits of their labour. The group have put a lot of time and effort into this area for which we are very grateful. We look forward to watching the ongoing progress of this area. We also thank the group for their ongoing work in the recreation ground and remembrance garden.

The CCG continued with their brilliant work in 2023. With the changing climate we are now sadly experiencing, we are even more grateful to this group of volunteers who go out in all weathers making safe areas that have been damaged by storms. A lot of work has been carried out by the group in the last year in Six Acre Wood alongside our approved contractor Qualitrees. The group has expanded with extra volunteers now on board and we are truly grateful to them all for their tireless efforts in keeping our footpaths and woodland areas safe and maintained for us all to enjoy.

Cuxton 91 continue to go from strength to strength with many teams in their portfolio. They held an annual trophy presentation at the end of the season and also hold other fundraising events throughout the year which raises thousands of pounds for charity. Their New Year's Day Charity Match raised an impressive £4,900 for Demelza Hospice. Once again thanks to all the volunteers who run the club, again another great asset for our village.

The Big Lunch was held in June 2023 and was another great success. Even the late afternoon rain didn't dampen proceedings too much! This has grown into a much-loved village event with stall holders asking to come back year after year. Thank you to all the residents who support us (come rain or shine). A great deal of work is involved in co-ordinating this event and we thank all the volunteers who help us before, during and after the event. The charity donations taken at the gate totalled £601.62 and was donated to Age UK Medway.

The Wheel of Cuxton held their fireworks display in November. We are very grateful to all the volunteers of this organisation for the hard work involved in co-ordinating this much-loved village event.

Our annual Christmas Tree lighting and Carol Concert was held in December 2023 and was once again well attended and proved to be another popular event for our village. Collection buckets on the night raised £256.67 for the Kent, Surrey and Sussex Air Ambulance. We thank everyone who came along to enjoy the carols, mulled wine and mince pies and to all those who volunteered their time to make this event happen.

So, thank once again on behalf of Cuxton Parish Council to all of the volunteers who make all of the above events in our village such a great success. We honestly couldn't do it without you!

The Land Management Committee also oversees the day to day running and maintenance of the recreation ground and we thank the volunteers who come weekly to check the play equipment in the children's playground is safe.

Finally, my thanks go to all the team on the Land Management Committee for their hard work and commitment over the last year. The Committee over the last year has comprised of mostly new faces so thank you everyone for your input.

Councillor Julie Porter, Chair of the Land Management Committee



Some of the councillors hosting the Christmas Tree lighting ceremony event

Planning Committee Report

The Parish Council continues to monitor all planning applications in Cuxton and when required publishes those that have a big impact on the village in order that residents can have the opportunity to make representation to the Planning Department at Medway Council. The Parish Council if it objects can only ask Medway Council to have applications referred to the Planning Committee.

During the year, we have submitted the Parish Councils view on the Draft Local plan and will continue to submit our view when any new proposals are published, which is scheduled to be published in June/ July of this year. We will continue to look closely at all applications that are notified to us by Medway Council.

With the updating of Permitted Development Rights, the planning process looks to become more difficult in the future for the Parish Council to raise any objection to applications. But we will continue to look at all applications as they arise.

Councillor Ged Chalker, Chair of the Planning Committee

Staffing Committee Report

In November 2023 the Parish Council employed a new Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer (RFO), as our previous clerk, Mr Carl Jensen, resigned from the role in October 2023 to move onto pastures new. The Cuxton Parish Council Clerk/RFO, Natalie Jackson, works 35 hours per week and uses the parish office as her main work base. She supports and advises the parish councillors in their role and oversees the accounts of the Parish Council. Natalie also writes and produces the Cuxton Parish Council Newsletter and oversees the Parish Council's web site pages. If you need to contact Natalie, please email clerk@cuxtonpc.org.uk

Several years ago, the Parish Council opted out of using Medway Council contractors to clean the village and requested that the funding be paid directly to the Parish Council from Medway Council. This allows us to employ two part time street cleaners who ensure the village remains clean and tidy. It is also worth mentioning that this funding also provides the village with the dog waste bags you will see situated at key points around the village to try and remind individuals to assist our cleaners in keeping our streets clean and safe for all who walk our paths. Bill and Paul do a wonderful job so please say hello if you see them around the village.

The Parish Council would like to thank all staff for their hard work over the last year and for being such a great team.

Councillor Sarah Wilson, Chair of the Staffing Committee