

Dear ACT Supporters,

It has been almost 3 months since, with your support, 11 ACT candidates were elected unopposed to Cuxton Parish Council. With your help over several months and a number of working meetings we developed a clear view of how we, as independent parish councillors, should behave and what you, as our supporters, expect of us.

SO, what has happened since the 2nd May?

Firstly, the Clerk, Dani, and her assistant, Josie, led an induction for the 7 new Parish Councillors and provided them with copies of the documents that govern the role of Parish Councillors. The next step was the first Cuxton Parish Council meeting dominated by legal process requirements. All Councillors completed their Acceptance of Office and Declaration of Pecuniary Interests forms, Committee membership was agreed and representatives for a range of outside organisations nominated.

All fine so far.

During the time of the previous Parish Council, Tracy Thorley and Gordon Chitty had been working hard to get together a group of residents to get a PACT (Partnership and Community Together) group up and running to improve communication between Medway Council, the police, social services and Cuxton residents to reduce criminal and anti-social behaviour in our village. The problem was that it needed residents not Parish Councillors as members and only 2 residents had put themselves forward. At a meeting of ACT supporters Robin Bourner, Peter and Rachel Burren and Martin Bridgland volunteered to join the PACT group and so it was possible to move the project forward to a public meeting. Thank you ACT volunteers. We could not have got a Cuxton PACT group established without you.

Then came the bombshell.

Our Clerk, Dani, submitted her resignation to take up a full time post with Boxley Parish Council. That put an end to a gentle introduction to life as a Parish Councillor for new councillors. An Extraordinary Parish Council Meeting was called, and a Recruitment Working Party appointed to manage the recruitment of a new Clerk. Interim measures were also agreed where specific Councillors volunteered to support the Assistant Clerk with council and committee agendas and minutes, finance and general administration. The hours of the Assistant Clerk were increased to 18 hours /week until a new clerk is appointed.

This change has resulted in an additional unplanned 22 hours work for ACT parish councillors and another 10 hours for those on the recruitment working party preparing the job advert and revising the job description, shortlisting etc. One good point was that Natalie

Jackson, one of our new councillors, has a background in human resources management and so could guide us through the process of recruiting a new clerk.

At the end of May I attended a meeting at Gunn Wharf with Michael Edwards (Highways Officer) and Matt Fearn. We reviewed the feedback from residents on issues that had arisen over the first trial of traffic lights and emphasised the need for any second trial to be one that will more closely replicate the design for the proposed permanent traffic lights. The 'fault' that occurred prior to the first trial was explored as many residents felt this was a good solution as it allowed time for traffic to exit Bush Road, it reduced the speed of traffic and did not produce any traffic queues on the A228. Further investigation is needed to see if this fault could be used again even if only as a temporary measure while other options such as a roundabout were considered and costed.

Now its June!

In June three ACT supporters (Robin Bourner, Marin and Brenda Bridgland) responded to an appeal for help from Medway Valley Line to participate in an all day audit event of facilities at stations on the Medway Valley Line that included Cuxton Station. In addition, I attended a Medway Valley Line meeting as Martin Burley was away and unable to attend on behalf of Cuxton Parish Council. Brenda Bridgland, another ACT supporter, also attended and will support Martin at future meetings so we keep up to date with changes on the line and plans for RS206 footpath that runs from Cuxton Station to Strood.

At the meeting we raised our concerns over the poor state of the signal box that is a listed building.

Then there are all the other things going on in the background to manage. The first was the Big Lunch event where ACT councillors and supporters stepped up to the mark ensuring this community event went ahead successfully, raising over £1300 towards renovating the bike track in the recreation ground. A number of councillors and ACT supporters worked from 8am-7pm to make sure the event was a success. What a team! Thank you.

Members of the Finance Committee met ahead of the June Parish Meeting to prepare recommendations for the salary range and hours for the new clerk. These recommendations were made to the full Council on June 13th so that the recruiting process for the new Clerk could commence. This meeting also involved receiving the Internal Auditors report which approved Council accounts and allowed us to complete the annual Audit Return Governance Statement for 2018/19.

It was noted that there were still so some outstanding highways matters that had not yet been addressed by Medway Council e.g. a traffic mirror opposite the end of Mays Street and 'perch' seating on James road. It was proposed a letter be drafted to Cllr Matt Fearn to request him to chase the progress on these issues. Another 20+ hours notched up for councillors.

July: Hitting the ground running

Well if new councillors had hoped for a quiet introduction to becoming a Parish Councillor then I'm afraid they were disappointed. The flip side is that everyone now has a good

understanding of Parish Council processes and the amount of time Councillors have to commit to their role.

Kay, Ian Gray and Brenda and Martin Bridgland attended a Medway Council Blue Green Local Plan consultation meeting during which Medway Council officers explained the plan to keep corridors of green space through out Medway. We await a copy of the outcomes of the meeting which we will share with you.

The July Parish Council meeting was preceded by a presentation from a Planning Consultant on a proposed development of the Homestead site at the top of Sundridge Hill as a training site for construction workers. The training would be on the use of heavy plant e.g. excavators and dumper trucks. Detailed questioning of the presenting team allowed Councillors to gain insight into this planning proposals and some of the problems it might raise for the village. It will be brought back to full Council when the amended planning application is submitted to Medway Council.

The July Parish Council meeting was hard going as unfortunately there were more procedural issues to sign off in order to get everything in order before the August break. Cllr Matt Fearn was in attendance and provided some information about the trial of traffic lights and responded to questions relating to development of a 3 storey sheltered housing complex on the St Andrew's Park site and the proposed leisure development around the 'blue lake' adjacent to St Andrew's Park. John Manning is in touch with a group of Halling residents who are opposed to the developments and will keep Council informed of their campaign. (Another 36 hours for Councillors).

On Saturday 13th July candidates were interviewed for the post of Clerk and Responsible Officer for Cuxton Parish Council. The quality of the candidates was high and all the lived in Cuxton within walking distance of the Parish Office. When satisfactory references have been obtained details of the new clerk will be announced.

On the 18th July four Councillors (Kay, Tracy, Pat and Edwina) attended a Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) 'Councillors Conference', which also provided an opportunity for Pat and Edwina to attend an 'Introduction to becoming a Parish Councillor' seminar in the morning. The conference also provided the opportunity to network with other Parish Councillors and hear updates from experienced Councillors and Professionals. Topics included insurance, employment issues, projects management and borrowing money. There were also interesting presentations by the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England on their work in Kent and Medway, and from Southern Water on how to help them keep our sewers clear!

Martin Burley will attend a KALC Introduction to Planning Conference later this month and I will be representing the Cuxton Parish Council on Medway Council's Rural Liaison Committee.

The Land Management Committee also met on July 18th (so a very long day for Tracy and Kay). The main topics for discussion were water usage on the allotment site, agreeing the design format for the WW1 information boards, forming a Pavilion Development Steering Group and setting up a Big Lunch team to manage the 2010 Big Lunch. It was noted that there was a need to access legal advice on subleases and land registration if the Pavilion

development is to be progressed. If you know of anyone with the skills who might give us some advice for free to get us on the right track, then please let us know. So far councillors have given over 170 hours of their time to support the work of Cuxton Parish Council and related activities.

So, what have we learnt so far?

We have:

- gained a better understanding of how parish councils work and the role of the parish councillor;
- developed a better understanding of local issues and concerns;
- begun the process of becoming a team and gaining confidence in asking questions and voicing opinions;
- learned about opportunities that we might take advantage of to improve village life;
- realised just how much unpaid time this work takes!

What have we achieved so far?

We have

- established a Cuxton PACT group;
- delivered a successful community event (Cuxton Big Lunch);
- raised over £1200 towards the renovation of the bike track and formed a Bike Track Working Party to progress the work needed;
- represented residents at Medway Local Plan Consultations, Medway Council Rural Liaison and Medway Valley Line meetings;
- attended KALC (Kent Association of Local Councils) conferences and seminars;
- progressed the development of an information board for the WW1 bench;
- formed a Steering Group to progress the Redevelopment of the Pavilion;
- improved our online presence.

So! What next

In August there will hopefully be no formal Parish Council meetings, however, the PACT group, Bike Track Working Party and Pavilion Re-development Steering Group will be meeting and to get up and running with their projects by September. It is hoped our new clerk will start in August and so will be with us for the September Cuxton Parish meeting.

ACT also need to organise an AGM for September/October. It gives us an opportunity to catch up with you all face-to-face, to hear your feedback and for you to help us develop our plans for the next year.

Kay