

Annual Parish Meeting of Newenden 2025

Tuesday 6th May 2025

Present: Newenden Parish Councillors Gillian Dalton, Viv Robertson (Chair), and John Turnbull, Ashford Borough Councillor Kate Walder, Lauren Dobson (clerk) and 12 members of the public.

{draft} MINUTES

1. **Welcome and apologies for absence** – Vice Chairman Cllr Robertson welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Cllr David Holman and Chairman David Wheeler. It was announced that Mr Wheeler had just resigned and would not be a councillor going forward. Apologies had also been received from Katie Lam MP and Jonathan Bourne. Cllr Robertson expressed her condolences to Jonathan and the wider Bourne family for the sudden loss of Mr Peter Bourne. The thoughts of the whole village are with the family at this sad time.
2. **To agree the minutes of the annual parish meeting held on 7th May 2024** – there being no comments on the draft minutes they were duly signed.
3. **Annual report from Newenden Parish Council** – Cllr Gillian Dalton expressed the thanks of the Parish Council to Dave Wheeler for his time and commitment as Councillor and Chair before proceeding to read out Mr Wheeler's annual report (see annex for full report).
4. **Reports from local elected Representatives (district, county and parliamentary).**
 - a) **MP Katie Lam.** Ms Lam was unable to attend the meeting due to parliamentary business so Cllr Robertson read her update – see annex.
 - b) **Kent County Councillor report-** as the new Kent County Councillor Wayne Chapman had not yet been sworn in he was unable to attend the meeting but had sent his good wishes and intent to attend a Newenden Parish Council meeting in the near future. Included in the meeting papers was a report from outgoing KCC Mike Hill. VR thanked Mr Hill on behalf of Newenden for his many years of service as a county councillor and wished him a happy retirement.
 - c) **Ashford Borough Councillor Kate Walder**

Cllr Walder expressed her personal thanks to Dave Wheeler who not only worked extremely hard, but always generously forgave any clashes and always put the interests of the village first. His resignation is a sad loss to the village but totally

understandable given how exhausting it can be. Cllr Walder also sent her condolences to the Bourne family.

Her own recent poor health has helped Cllr Walder understand the difficulties being faced by those with poor health in the current NHS crisis. William Harvey is not offering great patient care and it is an area that she intends to work hard to address.

The Government white paper on English devolution gives Ashford Borough and Kent County Councils three years before there is just residents and a PAN Kent offer. Many district councils appear delusional, with no one wanting to take responsibility for the areas of higher deprivation.

Sadly, more and more road deaths are being seen on rural roads, largely due to the poor road conditions not driver error. Cllr Wayne Chapman's manifesto included a focus on roads so Cllr Walder is hoping to work with him on that. Need to focus on what can deliver now under existing structures. Newenden bridge suggestions from KCC have been startling and very concerning. The village has made significant strides with regards highways improvement, far more than surrounding villages and all down to Cllr Robertson.

Planning is still in local council control at the moment and Cllr Walder is trying to build in the highest possible protections for biodiversity while she can. Government is prioritising house building and Newenden needs to be clear what it is to expect. Cllr Walder is on the board of High Weald development so hoping can take that as an opportunity. She is also a Member of the planning committee at Ashford Borough Council and is always available to discuss any planning issues privately along with any other concerns.

Numbers of requests for Cllr help from residents has increased year on year, and complexity of requests has also increased exponentially. Cllr Walder can help residents with housing issues and is very happy to do that. Charitable sector has been severely impacted by the cost-of-living crisis as fundraising is very hard. Recently, Cllr Walder has been working with the Mildred's Trust – focus on food and hygiene poverty, Domestic Violence and victim support. Very happy to come and speak to Newenden about what support the Trust can offer.

5. Reports / presentations from village groups:

- a) **Selmes Trust** – Judy Vinson, Trustee, read out a report from the Trustees of the Selmes Trust (below).

The Trust's main sources of income continue to come from

- The mooring fees
- The agreement with Rother Fishery Association
- Donations from weekend visitors parking in the east field through the summer months.

2024 saw the launch of the Friends of Newenden Meadow, giving the work started by Jillian Eldridge in 2019 a formal structure and a bank account. This means it is now possible for the Selmes Trust to give a lease to the Friends of Newenden Meadow. It is an important step in the life of this project which began with Jillian's vision. That vision was in turn incorporated into the Selmes Trust policy document, setting out the Trustees understanding of their responsibilities to the environment and the potential contribution the field could make to the mental well-being Of the parish.

2024 also saw the building of a new children's playground by the Parish council which was accompanied by the giving of a new lease by the Trust, the original lease having expired while the playground was closed. Alongside that new lease, the Trust will permit the council to construct a path from the gateway opposite Copthall, leading to the field entrance into the playground. This will give parents with buggies an easier and safer route into the playground.

Meanwhile sterling work has been undertaken on the construction of the village hall, as Alan will report to this meeting. The Selmes Trust continues to be the body accepted by the Charities Commission as facilitating this work until the status of the Newenden Village Hall charity is regularised and new Trustees have been appointed. Our backroom function has included two important elements:

- Preparing an application for the Newenden Village Hall charity to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).
- And being the nominal recipient of grant monies awarded to the Village Hall project. Those monies have been lodged in a separate account and care taken to ensure the expenditure complies with the specifics of each grant.

We all know the real progress has been down to Peter Bourne's drive and determination, assisted by Nicola, in getting the project funded and the job done. Peter's drive, in turn, fed the enthusiasm and hard work of Alan, Richard, Derek and their team and the hall is finally being revealed for the interesting building it was designed to be. The hall will be a fitting memorial to a man who loved this village.

b) **Friends of St Peters** – Alan Seal presented his report on behalf of the Friends of St Peters (see annex). He also advertised there will be another tea event hosted by Caroline Anderson-Jones on Sunday June 22nd.

c) **Village hall** – Alan Seal spoke on behalf of the village hall project team. When Peter Bourne got involved with the project it all took off. Outside ramps and steps have

been done, railings will be added at a later date. The West wall facing Rye Road had to be made into a 2hr fire defence wall so had to be re-done, £60k additional costs due to updated fire regulations have been incurred. Inside the toilets have been completed and the hall kitchen. Inside fire proof paint is needed, second fix electrics, plaster board to the ceiling, fire alarm system needed which is quite involved. Fire doors have been installed between the two halls so they can be kept separate safely. Alan expressed the project team's thanks to the whole Bourne family for all their work, Nicola for her fundraising, Sue and Peter for personal donations and John Bourne for an interest free loan. Hugh Edmonds added thanks to Alan Seal for his contribution too.

- d) **Meadow Restoration project** – Jillian Eldridge gave an update on the Meadow Restoration Project. The Friends of Newenden Meadow is now up and running as a Company Limited by Guarantee with Jacky Lamb, Mike Jones and Jillian running the project.

Snakes head fritillaries planted in 2023 are doing well with more than fifty seen this spring. Field scabious, Meadow Cranesbill, Common Birdsfoot Trefoil and Wild daffodil, and various other plants have been introduced to encourage more bees and butterflies and provide important food for when they first awake from hibernation. Green Winged orchids have been seen for the second time this year which is encouraging. The team will survey the field throughout the summer months and record the wider variety of plants that have appeared since the mowing and baling started. Grass vetchling has been seen and various others. Thousands of tadpoles of the common frog were seen alongside the scrape this year but now disappeared, probably eaten by a duck or heron. Like many fauna, frogs are decreasing in numbers. The project is trying to encourage turtle doves to nest too.

The Friends of Newenden meadow Annual meeting will be held 20th June in the church – there will be a slide show and refreshments and everyone is welcome. Open field event had very poor weather so on 12th July there will be a second open field event – Morgan and Peter Greenhalf who are bee experts have been to visit and will hopefully come again on the 12th. The seat funded by Cllr Walder is being well used. Thanks to everyone who volunteered last year on maintenance, its very rewarding and more volunteers are encouraged.

- e) **Samuel Bishop Trust** – Jillian Eldridge also spoke on behalf of the Samuel Bishop Trust. The Trust was started in 1837, originally for the education of boys but then included girls and the village school. It has now evolved into a grant giving charity for children in state secondary schools living in Newenden. The funds are invested and managed by Charifund of MG investments and BLK Charities UK Fund of Black Rock.

For the school year 24-25, eligible children got a basic amount in their first year of £90 and higher years got £110. Only 3 children will be eligible in 25-26. The current bank balance is £1683.

- f) **Cricket club** – Cllr Dalton read out Jonathan Bourne’s report sent on behalf of the cricket club (see annex). The meeting was also informed that the initial draft of the new lease between the club and the Selmes Trust had just been received.

6. Future development in Newenden – resident discussion. Cllr Robertson opened the item asking for residents to suggest how they want the village to move forward. Jillian Eldrige asked about sensors in the 20mph zone proposed for Lossenham Lane. Cllr Dalton explained that KCC have agreed recording won’t be needed to change the lane into 20mph. Jillian suggested more signs warning drivers that people are likely to be in the road would be helpful – Cllr Walder commented that signs are very expensive. Children signage will go in for the play area but could add more for other pedestrians. Entrance to and from the play area is still being considered and part of this is the Selmes Trust offer of allowing a path.

Another suggestion was that “narrow road” and “no through road” signs might be helpful at the start of Lossenham lane. Cllr Robertson stated that there had been a clear lack of investment in highways from KCC in Newenden.

Cllr Walder agreed to send the details of the Public Rights of Way officer at KCC.

Other issues raised:

- Water coming off battery bank by Upway. Can the landowner be contacted again? PC has raised with ABC. Understood drains are being cleared annually now (improved from 3 years).
- Lossenham lane flooding is also an issue, ABC have promised to come back. Cllr Dalton again urged residents to report issues to KCC or ABC direct as well as the PC writing. Cllr Walder suggested the PC produce a ‘how to complain effectively guide’. Cllr Turnbull asked Cllr Walder how the poor state of the road by Cherry Garden farm was sorted when other sections haven’t been – it is likely to have been repaired following an accident or emergency.

7. Any other Parish business and questions.

- i. There was one question about the accounts - Is there really £36k to spend in the parish council account? No, the balance includes the second payment for the new play equipment that is due and will reduce the amount by £22k.
- ii. Judy Vinson announced that on **Sunday 27th July** there will be a day of fun and more fun on the sports field and on the river. Friends of St Peters will sell ducks. Helpers are encouraged. Cakes are needed, there will be a plant stall, games will need running, hobby horse dressage, possibly a dog show, drummers booked,

tug of war. Watch out for information on Facebook or speak to Jillian E, Tavia, Judy, Hugh, Dave Holman.

- iii. Cllr Robertson invited new councillors to come forward and gave the date of the next PC meeting as 23rd May.

The meeting closed at 9.35pm

DRAFT

ANNEX – Meeting Papers



NEWENDEN ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2025

6th May, 8pm St Peters Church



AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence
2. To agree the minutes of the annual parish meeting held on 7th May 2024.
3. Annual report from Newenden Parish Council
4. Reports from District and County Representatives
 - Katie Lam – MP (written report to be read by PC)
 - Cllr Kate Walder – Ashford Borough Council
 - Kent County Council
 - For completeness a report from just retired Kent County Councillor Michael Hill is included in this pack. The new Kent County Councillor, Wayne Chapman, has agreed to attend a PC meeting in the near future once he is officially sworn in.
5. Reports / presentations from village groups
 - Friend's of St Peters Church – Alan Seal
 - Village hall project – Alan Seal
 - Selmes Trust – Judy Vinson
 - Meadow Restoration Project – Jillian Eldridge
 - Samuel Bishop Foundation – Jillian Eldridge
 - Newenden Cricket Club
 - A written report is included in this pack.
6. Future development in Newenden – resident discussion.
7. Any other Parish business and questions.

Please note that this is not a meeting of the Parish Council but it is a statutory duty to give electors of the Parish an opportunity to raise matters of interest or concern in the Parish. Although the meeting may pass motions for the attention of the Parish Council, there is no statutory obligation on the Parish Council to implement them.

Item 2:

NEWENDEN PARISH ANNUAL MEETING

Tuesday 7th May 2024 8.00pm St Peters Church

{Draft} MINUTES

Present: 27 members of the public, Kent County Councillor Michael Hill OBE, Parish Councillors Dave Wheeler, Alex Garman and Nicola Holland.

Lauren Dobson – Clerk, Newenden Parish Council, took the minutes.

Councillor Garman presided.

1. **Apologies for Absence** were received from Hugh Edmonds and Ashford Borough Councillor Kate Walder.

2. The **minutes** of the annual parish meeting held on 4th April 2023 were signed as an accurate record.

3. **Annual report** from Newenden Parish Council – the report was included in the evening's papers (see annex).

4. **Report from County representative** – Cllr Hill expanded on the content of his written report (see annex). He concluded with the news that while he will continue to work hard for parishes this year, when his current term finishes in May 2025 he will be retiring after 24 years as a councillor. Newenden wishes him all the very best for a long and healthy retirement.

5. Reports / presentations from village groups

5.1. Judy Vinson presented the report for the **Selmes Trust** – see annex.

5.2. Alan Seal outlined the report for the **Friends of St Peters** (see annex). Lots of maintenance work has taken place and fundraising remains a high priority. The new LED lights, though expensive, use 15% of the power of the old ones. More work is planned for this year and villagers are encouraged to support the events that are planned, a DUCK RACE, First Thursday talks will be back, a summer event and the AGM and boat trip.

5.3. Jillian Elridge spoke on behalf of the **Meadow restoration project** – the meadow project was restarted in earnest in 2019 and has been given lots of advice from bee and other experts. Since 1930, the UK has lost over 90% of its wild meadows. In summer 2020 the project created what is known as the “scrape” – lots of wildlife is returning, little egrets have been seen, and since 2020 have made hay. Flooding has restricted the time can have sheep on the land. Lots of flowers are now present, several

long horned solitary bees have been found along with native green winged orchids which had been absent for a long time. In 2022, the project took part in the green canopy for the Queen's Jubilee to create an area of small trees, planting 7 crab apples. The project has also received a grant for a seat. The 31st May will see the launch of the Friends of Newenden Meadow which will help the project with funding and enable them to open a bank account. This year the project wants to improve the hedging along the road. On June 11th there will be a talk on identifying bees. Any money the project raises helps to pay for moving off the hay to allow the wildflowers to spread.

5.4 Jillian Eldridge spoke on behalf of the **Samuel Bishop Foundation**. A small charity that provides grants for children in secondary education in Newenden. Formed in 1837. Children receive a basic amount in year 7 and further help later on if needed – six village children have been given money this year.

5.5 Jonathan Bourne spoke on behalf of **Newenden Cricket Club**. There are currently two teams that play on a Sunday. Last season the first team was in the first division, second team in fourth division. Shorter format games are played on weekdays. Recently the club put in nets to try and reinvigorate younger players but need more volunteers to help with this.

The club understands concerns about balls leaving cricket ground – but happens rarely, perception is that it happens more often than it used to. Newenden is the smallest ground in the county. The club did a report in 2020 to gauge feeling in the village for safety nets, but the result was half and half those that wanted and those that didn't. A recently commissioned ball strike report has now recommended 18m high nets all the way around. An application for permitted development to install nets has been made – expected cost will be about £100k. The club is aware that there is an issue and that there are residents that want nets. Until the permitted development has been assessed, the club will be putting up notices during matches. With regards removal of the jetty, this was a mistake on NCC part as to what had been agreed with the Selmes Trust. The plan is to move it a bit further down the river, more accessible to the Selmes Trust car park. The club will rope off the area. After a very hard winter that has taken its toll on the ground, maintenance has been high. Groundsman is very fastidious, amount of noisy work will reduce going forward.

Mr Bourne then invited questions and comments from the public.

Q1. Why weren't the village consulted on removal of jetty? Peter Bourne stepped in to say it was his fault and responsibility, cross wires and shouldn't have happened. A new location will be found – Alan Seal explained the new location – if want to have a jetty on different levels need different permission. Concerns were then raised about the scrape and meadow project being damaged by families and children.

Q2. Why wasn't the ball strike report done on the river side – ball strike report was an engineering report.

Q3. No one particularly wants cricket to not be played, but it's about the safety of players, people visiting, passing cars. Once ball goes beyond ground and requires advised netting, is there a possibility that the quality of play has outgrown the ground? Is the insurance company aware that a ball strike assessment has recommended nets? If not, then the club is not fulfilling its duty of care. Only a matter of time before someone is seriously hurt. If the ball strike assessment was done in September why has it taken so long to make so little progress? Could some nets be put in but lower – starting to have a dialogue with planners. H&S should trump everything. No one wants anyone to get hurt.

Q4. Taking the jetty away was very odd if only 4 or 5 ball strikes a year – now as a boat owner disabled relatives won't be able to get on boat as have in the past. Selmes Trust will rope off the area on match days. Can't stop people swimming in the river. The nets will help with that.

Q5. Doesn't only go out 4 or 5 times, that's what the records say but that's not the actual situation.

Q6. If going to rope off where the jetty was then may as well put the jetty back. Removing the jetty has caused a lack of trust. Temporary nets would have been better than nothing. It only takes one person to get hit. Last season was exceptionally bad, short game is more dangerous. Someone asked if the ground is let out to other teams – yes. Mr Bourne apologised that nets haven't been done quicker. Planning phase now.

Cricket clubs across the UK have similar problems, it is not just a Newenden problem. Will try to communicate better and the club would welcome email addresses of interested parties to keep more people updated.

5.6 Peter Bourne spoke on behalf of the **village hall** project which he has recently got involved with. A good team have restarted the initiative and Alan, Derek and Richard have done a wonderful job on the inside, heaters have arrived and will be installed in next few months. Funding is difficult – a couple of disappointing applications. Funding needed for materials and specialist work, plumbers and electricians. People have generously given their time. No significant deterioration in the building. There is hope for the building but will need to make it a purposeful venue for parties and weddings etc. Plan is to get finished by the end of the year or next year due to funding. Will need to start promoting for events after that. Positive about the future.

6. Newenden day of action. Brian Livesey explained he was organising a day of action on Saturday 8th June 9.45-noon. Refreshments will be available at the end kindly provided by Nibbles. Email or phone Brian or Dave W if you are available to help. PC kindly supplying hi-vis jackets and litter pickers.

7. Any other parish business and questions. There was a discussion about parking on the corner of Lossenham lane and how dangerous it is – suggestion for double yellow lines and have a corner of the field for motorbikes. Nibbles café has moved its shepherd's hut to make space for motorbikes. PC will consider requesting a traffic warden. Unknown how many accidents have occurred at the junction but could do an FOI request.

A question was asked about the new Weald of Kent constituency and how this would affect Newenden. The constituency will be in place from the general election, Newenden will now be part of this constituency for Westminster elections but will stay part of Ashford Borough Council at district level.

The meeting closed at 9.30pm.

Item 3.

Newenden Parish Council Annual Newsletter – May 2025

It has been a successful year in the village this last year. The Parish Council is running at full capacity with new Councillors John, Gill and David joining us.

Playground

The playground has been one of the main projects in the village this year. Dennis and his team did an excellent job procuring an excellent deal for the replacement equipment. Nicola also did an amazing job organizing the fundraising along with generous local groups and individuals. The whole project design, raising all the funds, arranging the lease then construction was all completed in an amazing 18 months. Not bad eh!

Roads, Drain and Bridge

The council have been working extremely hard trying to find out when the bridge work will take place and how long they will take. Unfortunately, Kent County Council, even though they said they will consult us, have given us very little information after many requests and we are still no closer to knowing what they are going to do.

A big section of the road has been resurfaced up towards the junction, however, there have still been several accidents at the junction this year.

Lossenham Lane is in a terrible state of repair, and we are still trying to get this resolved.

The white wooden village entry gates that were agreed over a year ago still have not been installed and there is still no fixed date but we are hopeful for installation in the coming year.

The drains have been emptied and so far, this year, we have avoided many of the problems that were encountered the year before.

Highways have agreed in principle for a 20 mile per hour limit on most of Lossenham Lane after village consultation. We have also put forward a proposal for double yellow lines at the entrance of Lossenham Lane and paving and curb in from of the postbox. This is currently under consultation with KCC.

The Parish Council will continue to push for information from KCC and get the promised projects implemented.

Village Hall

Work on the village Hall has been ongoing, and it now looks much better. I believe good news is coming from the Village Hall Trustees later in this meeting.

Christmas Party

We had a great Christmas party this year with fireworks and complimentary food for parishioners. All the under 16-year-old children in the village received a Christmas mug full of confectionary from the Parish Council. This was mainly funded by generous donations from local businesses, parishioners and a small grant from the Parish Council. A special Thanks goes out to Alex Garman for organizing the firework display.

Village Grant

The Parish Council has earmarked £1,000 a year that residents can apply for when organizing village events that the whole parish is invited to. Details of the grant and the criteria needed to apply can be obtained from Lauren, the Parish Clerk.

Village Sign

The village sign was found to be in a very poor state of repair. The post was replaced with a new oak post, Jillian repainted the artwork, Lewis and I removed and reinstalled the new post and sign and repainted all the iron work.

Peter Bourne

It was very sad to hear of the sudden passing of Peter Bourne. He was one of the longest standing residents and business owners in the village. He was also the Chairman of Newenden Cricket Club. Recently, he had been heading up the completion of the Village Hall, which, after a long period of inactivity, has seen great progress with his guidance.

I'm sure I speak for many residents in saying he will be sorely missed, and we extend our condolences to Sue, Jonathan, Nicola and all his family.

Dave Wheeler, Chairman

30th April 2025

April 24-25 - Summary of Newenden Parish Council accounts

Opening balance 1/4/24	£ 38,350.26
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Income / Expenditure Type	RECEIPTS	PAYMENTS
Bank Compensation	£400.00	
Bank Fees		£50.60
Communtty events	£2,701.63	£368.87
Employee NI contribuion	£14.24	
Employee NI Costs		£76.83
General admin and subscription		£1,462.63
Grant	£14,500.00	
Grass Cutting	£2,000.00	£2,906.00
Interest	£698.40	
IT		£337.75
Maintenance costs		£484.81
miscellaneous		£141.54
playarea		£25,674.21
precept	£10,000.00	
staff costs		£5,011.11
Training		£156.00
VAT repayment	£4,470.66	
Total	£34,784.93	£36,670.35

Closing balance 31/03/25	£ 36,464.84
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Item 4

a. Update from Katie Lam MP

I'm so sorry that Parliamentary business prevents me from being with you tonight. I want to start by thanking the Parish Council for the work they do in Newenden. It isn't always an easy job, and I'm so grateful to those who volunteer their time and energy to improve the village they live in.

I've been the Member of Parliament here in the Weald of Kent for 10 months now. It is a privilege to represent our area in the House of Commons, acting and advocating on behalf of all my constituents.

It's been a really busy time in Westminster, and my team and I have been working away responding to constituents who have written in about everything from access to fibre broadband to securing secondary school places, from local flooding to the Assisted Dying Bill and, of course, continued support for our farmers in light of the Government's family farm tax, and businesses as they face increased taxes and red tape. I am working hard with my Shadow Home Office colleagues on the Borders Bill and the call for a national inquiry into grooming gangs. Also, the Transport Select Committee, of which I am member, is deep into two inquiries, one on rural buses and the other on roadworks.

Right now, I'm very focused on the transport side of things! As you'll know, getting around our beautiful rural home isn't always easy. All too often our roads and pavements are closed for works, or there are big lorries on inappropriate country lanes, or there's no longer a bus route where we need it. We rely on the roads to get to work, school, the shops, GP appointments, to see friends and family — everything! The state of our roads and our bus services is fundamental to how well we can live our lives.

I am really grateful to all of those who have returned my transport survey, which went to every home in the constituency. The answers will really help to inform my work in Parliament and beyond. Thank you!

Outside of Parliament, I've loved getting out and about across the Weald of Kent, especially now that the sun is shining. I've visited primary schools, businesses, farms, hospitals, GPs and charities; it's so helpful to hear first-hand about their achievements but also the challenges that people and businesses across our area are facing.

Newenden is such a beautiful village and it always feels like a treat to come here, whether it be for a drink in the White Hart or a stroll along the river with Bailey.

I hope to continue to meet lots of you when I am out and about. I wish the Parish Council the very best as you make your plans for the next 12 months. If I can help with anything at all, please get in touch with me on katie.lam.mp@parliament.uk

b) Report from Kent County Councillor Hill (retired 01/05/25)

- When I spoke to you a year ago I forecast a turbulent year ahead. Well that certainly proved true. The international scene has been particularly chaotic with escalating violence in Ukraine and the Middle East and a seismic shift in American politics following the Presidential election. At home we had a general election which saw the first change in the governing party for 14 years. Little progress has been made in stemming the flood of small boat crossings landing on the Kent coast and our economy seems to be stubbornly flatlining despite all the efforts to stimulate growth.
- For the County Council our financial position continues to cause concern. We set our budget for the next financial year on 13 February, and it proved to be a challenging exercise. We have had great difficulty containing costs this year and will have an overspend at the end of the financial year. Next year we will still be facing the ever-increasing demand pressures of Adult Social Care now exacerbated by the rises in minimum wage and Employers National Insurance contributions. In order to balance the books, we have had to make significant savings which will inevitably have an effect on service delivery and our discretionary activity. We have also had to raise Council Tax by the maximum allowed of 5%. It is a pretty bleak picture, and we are not alone. 7 Councils have effectively become bankrupt, and it has been reported that at least half of all Councils will be in financial difficulty in the next few years. We expect to see the issue of funding for local government rise up the political agenda as the effects of under investment in this sector become ever more apparent.
- The other major issues which have come to the fore in the last few months are devolution and the reform of local government. These are closely linked topics which together represent the biggest change in local government for 50 years. For devolution, the government wishes to establish new strategic authorities in every area of England to be led by elected executive Mayors. These strategic authorities will be given additional funds to carry out a range of devolved powers and strategic responsibilities. A number of these Mayoral authorities are already in place.
- Alongside devolution the government wishes to reform local government to end the two-tier system and replace it with unitary councils each with a population greater than 500k. These unitaries will deliver the full range of public services currently provided by County and District Councils. So we will end up with an executive Mayor for the whole of Kent and Medway and the County Council would go, the District Councils would go and Medway Council would go – all replaced by a small number of Unitary Councils, perhaps 3 or possibly 4.
- This is a flagship government policy, and they are determined to make it happen. The first tranche of Mayoral elections is scheduled for May next year. Kent is not in that first cohort though all our neighbours are. This is a big disappointment for all of us and we have yet to hear a rational explanation of why Kent has been excluded. The best guess on the Kent process is for elections in May 28. The hope is that new arrangements will be more efficient and will receive better support from Central government. In the short term it is going to be very disruptive and require a great deal of work.

- Roads - Coming closer to home I am well aware of the poor condition of our road network, This is a result of years of underinvestment by successive governments in the road network. It is a national issue needing significant funding to get rid of the backlog. However, we will shortly be starting a pothole blitz to which we have committed £14m so I hope you will soon be seeing some significant improvement.
- UASC - We have established 7 reception centres for UASC in order to meet our legal obligations. These are coping well with the current arrivals, but we await the summer weather with some trepidation. Alongside this work we continue to press government for an equitable dispersal scheme to reduce the burden on Kent.
- Election - There will be elections for the County Council on 1st May. My position is that I will have completed 24 years on the Council including 18 years on the Cabinet. I think enough is enough and I am not standing again. I have found my time on the Council very rewarding. I really enjoyed my portfolio responsibilities for the Community Services which do so much to improve the quality of life of our residents but also the interaction with residents in my constituency helping them navigate the complexities of KCC bureaucracy.
- And finally, it has been an enormous privilege to represent this beautiful part of the country on the County Council. Thank you for all your support and my very best wishes for the future.

Michael Hill

Former Local Member for Tenterden, Kent County Council

NB: The newly elected KCC councillor for Newenden is Wayne Chapman

c) Ashford Borough Councillor Walder will present her report in person.

Item 5a. Friends of St Peter's - report at the PC Meeting 6th May 2025

The Friends is a charity set up by residents who, although not regular members of the church, were keen to preserve the building that was an integral part of the village's heritage. Our financial contribution to the upkeep of the building is significant and the Parochial Church Council of St Peter's, we know, is most grateful for this support.

How have we raised funds.

Financial year April 1st 2024 to March 31st 2025

First Thursdays Talks £440.

Arty Crafty Event at Caroline Anderson-Jones's £389.

Duck Race £556.

Regular Donations £600

Refund from HMRC Gift Aid £1029.

Gift Aid. We receive 25% of all monies donated. This was for the last four year's donations.

Total income without membership subscriptions £2458.

What have we spent on the church

New Chancel Door £2100. Total £4800. Shared with PCC

New Clock Tower Door. £1650.

New Lantern including fitting and electrical work. £600.

Electrical testing. £400.

New Fire Extinguishers £700.

Total spent £5450.

We have spent from our reserves £2992.

Works to be done this year

Repairs to the path from the road to the South Door.

Replace handrails from Rye Road to the South Door.

Ongoing protection to all the external wooden doors.

Explore the idea of a water supply to the church.

Repairs to the bench in the porch.

Events for 2025

Duck race.

First Thursday Talks start in October.

Hopefully an event in mid summer.

AGM and Boat Trip.

Membership Subscriptions can now be taken Electronically.

Item 5f.

Statement on Behalf of Newenden Cricket Club – May 2025

The cricket club has met with paid for preplanning advice from Ashford Borough Council in regards to the installation of netting around the ground to mitigate the chance of ball strikes. As expected they came back to say that due to it being an AONB and the type and height of net requirement that it would be extremely unlikely that planning would be allowed in this scenario. Following this we arranged another meeting with James Moss from Kent Cricket and Ian Moore from the ECB in March in which we discussed the various measures that we had put in place in the 2024 season, including signage around the ground, the relocation of the jetty and the playing of T20 matches from one end. There were in fact a very small amount of ball strikes in the 2024 season, amounting to one that dislodged a roof tile and was promptly repaired. Although it might be a preferable solution to install 12 foot high nets to add to our current measures, this will never get planning and we are satisfied that the provision that the club has taken to inform bystanders and spectators of the potential for balls leaving the playing area is enough at this time. We are as always available and open to comment and discussion with the village and look forward to another successful season. As always, villagers are welcome to join the players for tea on each and every home fixture

Jonathan Bourne