



# The Otford Society Newsletter

Registered with the Civic Trust

Affiliated to the Council for the Protection of Rural England and the Kent Federation of Amenity Societies

APRIL 2005

## **NOTICE OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE OTFORD SOCIETY**

**Thursday 21st April 2005 – 8 pm – in the Memorial Hall**

All members are invited to attend the Annual General Meeting. This is your opportunity to voice your opinion on village matters and to influence the policies of the Otford Society.

The present Executive Committee is:

Ken Gunderson:	Chairman
Carol Griffiths	Secretary (co-opted 2005)
Alf Cook:	Treasurer and Vice Chairman
Vincent Tilley:	Membership Secretary
Andrew Barber:	Walks leaflets & Newsletter distribution
Tony Wiltshire	
Derek Buck	
Jeff Lee	(co-opted 2005)

Nominations for new Committee members can be made on the night or in advance, provided they have a seconder and the permission of the nominee.

The Annual Report of the Society is contained in this edition of the Newsletter. It is not intended to read it out again, in order to keep business down to a minimum. The detailed financial accounts will be distributed at the meeting.

An Open Forum will follow refreshments where local issues can be discussed and the Committee questioned.

## **PUBLIC MEETING – 20th APRIL 7pm IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL HALL**

Members of the SDC Planning Authority will meet local residents to respond to criticisms of planning decisions in the village, and the SDC interpretation of the Local Plan.

It is unfortunate that this meeting falls on the evening before our own AGM, but it is to be hoped that members will turn up in numbers to hear what the Planning Officers have to say. The meeting is scheduled to finish at 9pm.

**The Society's Annual subscription is now due and should be given to your Liaison Officer, preferably when the Newsletter is delivered. Thank you for your support.**

# **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OTFORD SOCIETY 2004–2005**

## **Summary of the Minutes of the AGM of the Otford Society held on 6th May 2004**

There was a good attendance. On view were the plans for the proposed diversion/closure of Footpath 49, and Laing's development scheme for Elidai, Station Approach. After the Chairman's welcome and apologies for absence, matters arising from the 2003 AGM minutes were the Orange Mobile phone mast extension and ground works, adjacent to the football pitch; an update on Licensing Law changes, and security difficulties on the Society's proposed video on Listed Buildings in the village. Treasurer Alf Cook presented the financial report, Membership Secretary Vincent Tilley re-assured the meeting on the strength of membership but again urged recruiting, especially of new residents, and Andrew Barber said the sale of walk leaflets was again highly successful.

On planning, the Chairman said the Society had made representations regarding FP49, had discussed Station Road plans with Laing's and would continue its involvement. Awaited were plans for St Bartholomew's extension, and the Methodist building proposals in the High Street Conservation Area.

Activities would include a Garden Party (cancelled in 2003), St George's Day/Shakespeare's birthday commemorative dinner, and a nautical evening to remember the bi-centenary of Trafalgar.

The Executive Committee was re-elected, with the addition of the co-option of Carol Griffiths as Secretary. After refreshments, members joined in friendly discussion in an Open Forum, closing at around 10pm.

### **THE CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

2004-5 has seen the Society maintain its strength and follow its course of trying to preserve our village environment and encourage local identity. It is natural that our Committee consists of mainly retired residents, but time moves on, and the impetus of new and younger people is needed.

Activities have included the sponsorship of St George's Day and Shakespeare's birthday commemoration. This year it will be in the form of a dinner – roast beef is on the menu – on Saturday 23rd April, limited to 50. In this 'Sea Britain' year we shall be holding an evening to mark the bi-centenary of Trafalgar on 22nd October in the village hall, which I hope will be a memorable occasion. Watch out for further details, and please support if you can. Sorry to say but we have to charge for both events. Hall hire and catering have to be paid for.

Our successful Garden Party was held in the spacious grounds of Colets Well, thanks to the hospitality of our hosts, Sir Michael and Lady Bett. The Autumn meeting had a spectacular attendance of around 120, due to the residents of the Well Road area turning out in force to hear what Laing's had to say about their development plans. (More about that in the Planning Report.) We also heard of the St Bartholomew's annex proposals from the architect Jim Lidbetter. It is sad to record that Jim has died recently. He will be remembered when the new addition to the ancient Parish Church is built.

K.L.G.

### **FINANCIAL REPORT, Summary**

Treasurer Alf Cook writes:

The detailed audited accounts will be available and will be presented at the AGM. (See separate sheet.)

On 31st December 2004 the Society's bank balance stood at £17,899.

In 2004, expenditure was £1,490.02 including cost of Newsletters and excess of income over expenditure was £1,824.92.

## THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT

I am pleased to report that, due to the hard work of our Liaison Officers, the collection of membership subscriptions for 2004 was completed before the end of the year. There was also a small increase in the sum raised by subscriptions over and above 2003, which the Treasurer received before year-end.

According to the records for 2004, the membership for the year stands at 1,086, which is very close to the figure for the previous year and only four less than in 2000. The records also show that there are members present in 634 dwellings, approximately half the residences of the village, which is a high level of membership for a village amenity society.

However, I do not believe that we should rest on our laurels and would urge all of you to encourage your neighbours to join the Society, especially new residents moving into the area. As the committee has often pointed out, it is important to maintain the high level of support we have in the village which adds weight to any arguments we wish to put to local authorities on developments affecting our amenities or environment. Let us all still try to increase that support.

Once again, I would like to thank all our Liaison Officers past and present for their valuable efforts during the year and being the communication link with existing and prospective members.

Vincent Tilley, Membership Secretary. Tel: 01959 522491

## PLANNING

It has been a busy and disappointing year on the planning front. The Society has objected to proposals to demolish the Old Vicarage in Shoreham Road, the development at No. 12 Coombe Road, the original applications by Laing's for the Coal Yard in Station Road, the demolition of the Methodist chapel in the High Street with a 200-seat replacement church, and Laing's development at 64 Well Road for 17 houses. Laing's Station Road project was approved; a scaled-down version of the first application.

Apart from modifications made, the only complete rejection has been that at Well Road, where the Society's traffic survey conducted over two days by our members, put the record straight on parking and the flow of vehicles past the Post Office and through Bubblestone Road. A new application for nine houses on the same site is now going through the planning process; the Society and the Parish Council again objecting.

Our criticism regarding the interpretation of the Local Plan, supported by the Parish Council and our District Council representatives, has resulted in a public meeting arranged for 20th April in the School Hall. The effect this will have on decisions already made is likely to be nil, but no doubt the SDC will feel that they have fulfilled an obligation for local consultation to which they are committed under the new Statement of Community Involvement which will replace the Local Plan.

What a pity they didn't consult local opinion *before* their upsetting and autocratic decisions on the Conservation Area!

K.L.G.

## WALKS LEAFLETS – Andrew Barber reports

These are a major source of income, and the compilers are to be congratulated on the long-term financial benefit they have provided. Many of the leaflets sell at Lullingstone Visitors Centre, so the closure of this outlet would have been a major blow. Its survival from threatened termination is good news indeed. Last year 'Ten Walks Around Otford' sold 398 copies, 200 of these at Lullingstone. 'Walk Around the Village' sold 192, and our other two leaflets 200.

The new Post Master has agreed to stock our literature, for which we are very grateful, but the Sevenoaks Tourist Centre will not take anything from Otford, which is disappointing. Are we not part of Sevenoaks District? After all, the Sevenoaks Society walk guides cover quite a lot of Otford ground.

# otford matters

THOSE WHO READ the ‘Sevenoaks Chronicle’ may have seen my (edited) letter expressing dissatisfaction with the interpretation of the agreed Local Plan by the SDC Planning Department and the Development Control Committee. The Local Plan states that it is the duty of the Authority to abide by its rules – but decisions have gone through where it is debatable whether the rules have been observed. If one takes the approval for the demolition of the existing Methodist church in the High Street and permission to erect a larger building, one must ask if a steel and glass structure with twin-peaked roof will be in harmony with its neighbours, compatible or even desirable in the Conservation Area? Obviously the Planning Officer and the Conservation Officer who recommend it believe it will be. The Development Committee members approved the application without debate, within less than 10 minutes, refusing a deferment for further consideration, without a formal site meeting, without local community consultation and apparently without having the full views of the Otford Society, the Otford & District Historical Society and the CPRE and letters of objection from residents available before them. Available was a condensed summary by the Planning Officer of the ‘ticked box’ variety, approximately 70 words. The fact that further letters to the ‘Chronicle’ from our two District Councillors, Otford Parish Chairman John Allen and residents expressing concern speaks for itself.

A new style of architecture for a major building in the Conservation Area may or may not be a good thing. An argument could be made in its favour, of course. The point is that both

sides *should* have been heard, *should* have been discussed in the forum of the SDC and locally. It was surely the duty of the Development Control Committee entrusted with the extra responsibility of a Conservation Area, to ensure that a major planning decision was fairly considered with all possible care. Has this honestly been the case?

The Conservation Officer, writing since that meeting, on 26th January, on Conservation Guidelines, sets down one of the factors as ‘a need for appropriate standards of design for development or redevelopment in the area’. Surely this applied last October!

Unfortunately, protestors, unlike planning applicants, have no appeal, and decision makers are not obliged to give explanations or reply to their critics.

The Otford Society’s objections are for planning, architectural and visual impact reasons. There is no quarrel with the desire of the Methodists to spread the Christian message with the help of up-to-date and more attractive premises which would be an asset to the community at large. Plans for a new hall are supported in principle. Unfortunately the hall and church plans were submitted together as a two-phase scheme. Is there a need for the demolition of the 70-year-old chapel, and the expenditure on a 200 seat new building of the design proposed?

It is ironic that the SDC has now issued a new document called ‘Planning for People’, the first ‘Statement of Community Involvement’. It tells us the intention is to decide how the public is to be involved in the

new 'Local Development Framework'. We received the questionnaire and document only on request. The Society was not on the SDC's mailing list; so much for their anxiety to involve community groups! **(SDC Please Note: The Otford Society is one of the largest amenity societies in your area with a membership of around 1,100.)** Our Executive Committee has given a negative response to this document, the main purpose of which seems to be to identify 'areas for development'. We cannot foretell what the future holds for our village, but of one thing we are certain. Our members wish to preserve and protect the identity of Otford as a village. Developments may be good, may be wanted, or they may not. We ask to be consulted on local matters, but we do not intend to invite planners to put words into our mouths before we know what their intentions are – especially with regard to identifying 'areas for development'. Will

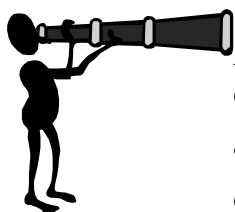
there be any guarantee that a 'Statement of Community Involvement' will be observed any more rigorously than the present carefully prepared Local Plan? Or will it, too, be treated as just an optional guideline?

In view of residents' disquiet at the SDC's planning decisions during the past year – the Coombe Road development seemed another blatant disregard of the Local Plan – we enquired of the OPC whether they thought there was a case we could take to the Local Government Ombudsman. The OPC response, supported by District Councillors, was to ask SDC to call a public meeting in Otford where they could explain their actions, and how they were consistent with the Local Plan. The SDC has agreed to the meeting on 20th April (see front page).

*Ken Gunderson*

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## NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH



A KENT SEMINAR on Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) was attended by our village co-ordinator and Otford Society Liaison Officer, Syd Shaw.

These Orders, which are issued by the police and community support officers, offer speedy action against those misbehaving in public areas. For instance, misusing public space, disregarding community and personal well-being, causing litter and dog-fouling or graffiti, drunk & disorderly conduct.

Syd writes: 'Anti Social Behaviour Orders are civil orders that exist to protect the public from behaviour causing harassment, alarm, or distress. The orders contain conditions, prohibiting the offender from specific anti-social acts or entering defined areas and are effective for a minimum of two years. Orders are made by the Courts. Breach of an order is an arrestable offence. Since their introduction they have been very successful – 85% of offenders comply and do not reoffend.'

The community at large has a role and a responsibility to tackle unacceptable public behaviour, which costs the country £40 million a year.

If you use a mobile phone to ring the police, tell the operator at once where you are phoning from.

*Local Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator Sydney Shaw 01959 522736*  
*Police Liaison Officer Leila Hughes 01892 582159*

# Should we darken our lightness?

OTFORD IS AN unlit village, a policy emanating from the KCC and supported by the Parish Council. Newcomers to Otford may not realise how many times the question of street lights has been raised at Council meetings. Regularly since before the First World War, that is for sure. A moratorium on the subject was declared at an Annual Meeting in the 1980s, as years of fruitless debate had raised nothing but blood pressure. It was agreed to give it a rest for a while. However, worried by an unpleasant incident or two in the rail station area, the Parish Council set up a study on the feasibility of lighting central Otford. The expense, positioning and style of lanterns was investigated. The scheme was turned down. Most people were against it. It was not only the cost, which would fall on residents, but there were design and siting difficulties.

Conceded, however, to those who thought lit areas gave better security, were lights in the car parks and around the station approach paths. At the same time it was said at an Annual Meeting that there was nothing to stop people putting lights on their own homes. And there's the rub. Have some householders gone too far?

Recently we received a grumble from someone who moved to Otford because it was unlit. He enjoyed being able to see the dark skies, and felt it gave a unique feeling to the village. Now, he believes, there is an unnecessary level of lighting to individual houses throughout Otford. There are even lamp posts in some front gardens; some lighting is hazardous to drivers, dazzling because of incorrect positioning and strength. Some seem to have installed inappropriate commercial fittings giving off up to 500 watts. Our concerned correspondent thinks that if the style of lighting is left unregulated, Otford will lose its identity, become more suburban, and there will be a detrimental effect on wild life.

***Should*** something be done? ***Can*** anything be done?

The Otford Society naturally hopes that one of the commitments of membership is to be a responsible citizen and good neighbour. Although every householder has a right to light his property, perhaps the Parish Council would consider issuing some advice and guidelines in its Newsletter? Committee member Andrew Barber suggests considering the following:

- Porch and garden lights should be of low wattage.
- Security lights should only be activated when a visitor approaches the house, and not by passers by on the footway or vehicles on the road.
- On estates, tungsten halogen floodlights should not be used to the annoyance of neighbours.
- A 100 watt lamp will give adequate security lighting. Higher wattages should only be used if the property is set back from the road, or is surrounded by trees.
- Outside lights should be extinguished by 11.30pm.

These guidelines would seem to be adequate and reasonable for home areas. Whether the Parish Council wants to get involved in another lighting debate is another matter!

## FOOTNOTE:

W.S. Freeman proposed an electric street lighting system for Otford at the Parish meeting of March 1906. It was rejected. Dunton Green's lighting was installed in the winter of 1901-2. ('Otford in Kent – A History', ODHS, D. Clarke & A. Stoyel)

The Home Office report on street lighting and the personal safety factor suggested that lighting, although perceived by the public to give greater security, could in fact be more dangerous where pools of light gave way to areas of sudden darkness.

Saxon Close and Twitton Meadow street lights were installed by the Housing Association builders. The original Saxon Close standards have been dimmed at the request of the OPC.

*K.L.G.*

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*Letters or articles on any local topic are welcomed by the Editor.*

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

One hazard of living in Otford in 2005 is the ever-increasing traffic flow and speeding through the village. To try to control the situation various remedies have been proposed and abandoned, the latest being a 40mph light-up sign almost opposite Beadles, where I have witnessed cars speeding so fast that the sign only lights up after they have gone passed it. In conjunction with this display the use of 30mph roundels placed strategically?? on the road seems also to be in vogue.

The main area of concern by the authorities seems to be coming into the village from Bat and Ball which brings to mind the old, and much discussed question, of why such a wide road was created in the first place.

My own concerns relate to the other end of the village, notably the junction of Telston Lane and Pilgrims Way West.

Exiting Telston Lane, in particular when going to the village, is extremely hazardous due to speeding motorists and to the fact that the view is severely restricted both ways. The only thing to do is to increase the car's revs and go for it - and breathe a sigh of relief - having survived another day.

The other problem is the speed at which motorists approach the junction, most of them well over 30mph, due possibly to being relieved, in their view, of the tedium of having to traverse the village high street at a relatively slow speed.

The poor condition of the slow signs on the road means that motorists have to rely on a single upright sign stationed almost immediately before the junction (check the stopping distances of a car travelling at 50-60mph) before meeting cars exiting Telston Lane.

I have been informed that the approach to the junction from the village is due to be resurfaced, when is not known, and will then be re-signed, obviously not enough of a priority with the powers that be to getting it done quickly.

Whilst not being overly convinced of its benefits, if anywhere should have the red road surfacing that seems popular at the moment, then Pilgrims Way at this spot would seem to qualify. If

necessary to prove the point a precedent exists at the junction of Childsbridge Lane and the main road in Kemsing which is much less of a hazard than the site in question.

One can only hope that whichever Authority is responsible will recognise the problem and get something done quickly.

D. Osborne

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## *Dates for your Diary*

### **Otford Society**

Summer Garden Party. Date to be announced

- 23rd April St George's Day/Shakespeare's Birthday celebration dinner, Village Hall. (Ticket admission only, limited numbers)
- 6th October Autumn meeting, Village Memorial Hall, 8pm
- 22nd October Trafalgar bi-centenary commemoration evening in the Village Hall. This is a community event, please watch for further notices.

### **Village Fete**

30th May Recreation Ground. Theme is 'Sea Britain'

### **St Bartholomew's Parish Church**

17th April Otford Celebration Service for 2005, 9.30am

### **Gardeners' Society**

- 5th April Ken Turner – 'Water Gardens'. Village Hall, 8pm
- 7th June Tom Hart Dyke – 'Travels of an Orchid Hunter'. OVMH, 8pm

*Next Otford Society Newsletter - June 2005*

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**Latest news on the duck. He has recovered from his injuries, and is now hoping for success with a dating agency that is arranging for him to meet some attractive partners to join him on Otford pond, together with the restored duck house.**

