Parish of Otford

Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Parish Meeting held on Monday 20th May 2013 at 7.30 pm in the Club Room of the Otford Village Memorial Hall

Present: Chairman Cllr J. Edwards-Winser, Cllrs. D.G. Cracknell, Mrs M Evans, Mrs J Howe, R. Knight, Mrs. J. Lawrey, Mrs. C. Marsh, Mrs. E. Ward

In attendance: Clerk, Assistant Clerk, PCSO Jane Wright, KCC. Cllr N Chard, D. Cllr Mrs M Lowe and approximately 40 members of the public.

1. WELCOME
Cllr J Edwards-Winser, Chairman of the Parish Council, welcomed everyone to the meeting

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were received from Cllr. Jon Verrall, Cllr M Whitehead, KCC Warden Paul Robertson, Kay Drake (Sec of Otford Sports Association).

3. MINUTES The acceptance of the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 21st May, 2012 as proposed by Carol Griffiths and seconded by Cllr. H Leicester. They were then signed.

4. PRESENTATION OF KIRSCH CUP
The Kirsch cup was awarded to Robert Andrews. Robert was nominated by Otford United Junior Football Club. Robert is the older brother of Ellis Andrews, who died last year from leukaemia. Robert had been a member of OUJFC since he was 7 and at age 14 was still playing despite the huge family loss and continued to train and play when giving up could have easily been an option after his terrible news. Robert was a down to earth lad who was proposed as a special young person in Otford who has fought the hardest of battles to continue to enjoy sport.

5. REPORT ON OTFORD PRIMARY SCHOOL
Headteacher Natasha Caisley reported that the school was very busy and it achieved very good results in July and it was currently the top school in Kent for highest achieving children. The current role was 339 children. The main focus was on raising standards with new initiatives including a writing project with Greenwich University. The site was being developed with extra classrooms being built and with the access to the site being from Warham Road the school would make sure the contractors maintained the good relationship it had with the residents. The school hoped to meet with OPC to consider a travel plan and pick up and drop off issues and staff parking to make parking as easy as possible. The school had a broad curriculum and recent trips included visits to Coolings, Bore Place, The Globe Theatre and the Golden Hind. Rev’s Richard Worssam and Kath Pawlett visited the school weekly. Reg Byron, a former headmaster now aged 101 met the children to tell them about school life in earlier years. Otford.net had also funded a talk. The governors and staff are committed to high quality education and Mrs Mayhill had won West Kent Teaching Assistant of the year. Mrs Caisley thanked the village for their support.
6. REPORT FROM COMMUNITY WARDEN
Paul Robertson reported that his role was to be a visible presence and to engage with all members of the community. He could be seen outside the schools, shop areas, recreation areas and railway station. He attends and supports clubs and groups for the young and elderly and supports events around the village. He attends the Thursday Lunch Club and gives advice to club members on safety and the type of services available to them. He makes reassurance visits to the sick and vulnerable and helps residents with a variety of problems. Last summer he was on Olympic and Paralympic duties including the Torch relay which was very enjoyable. He had continued to support members of the village with his 'Jobs for local people' scheme. The highlight of the year was the Christmas 'Strictly Come Tea Dance' in the Village Hall with a great turn out and he thanked the Parish Council, local businesses, residents and warden colleagues for their assistance. Other issues he had dealt with included dog fouling, neighbour disputes, graffiti and litter picking in conjunction with the Parish Council and work parties. He also worked with other agencies promoting their services and getting them to network with each other. He thanked Brenda and Sue and all the Parish Councillors for their support and PCSO Jane Wright.

REPORT FROM PCSO JANE WRIGHT
PCSO Jane Wright reported that she now also covered Riverhead and Dunton Green as well as Otford and Shoreham. Otford had a low crime rate compared to other areas of Kent but there had been some opportunist burglaries on homes, sheds and garages. Patrols had increased in these areas to deter further crime. Letter drops took place to remind residents of the need to secure their properties and outbuildings and to look after car and house keys. Metal thefts were on the increase from both domestic and industrial premises. Local patrols were boosted by the MOD Police from Fort Halstead who also patrol the area. They provided an extra visible deterrent, and joint operations with the British Transport Police help disrupt persons using the rail network to commit crime. The non emergency line to the Police is 101 and this should be called if anything suspicious is seen. For an emergency the 999 system should still be used.

7. KENT COUNTY COUNCILLORS REPORT
Nick Chard reported that he was County Councillor for another 4 years which he looked forward to and enjoyed the role. The KCC was at the start of a new 4 yr cycle and in the last 3 yrs there had been no council tax increases. It was being recommended that Cllrs remuneration would not increase for the next four years. He could access funding from Highways and his Members Grant and residents could approach him direct for this or via the Parish Council. He congratulated the head teacher at Otford Primary School as the school was now a high achieving primary school. He was a governor at Knole Academy which recently received £18 million in investment. He was pleased that the Trinity School and Grammar School satellite projects were continuing and that there was now a grammar school stream at Knole. Kent Highways acknowledged the difficult position re potholes in the roads. They would be toughening up on frequent road works by utility companies. As the local KCC member he was keen to improve quality of life in the area and was receptive to workable, deliverable ideas such as the gateways. He is also chair of the Kent and Medway fire and rescue service.
Cllr. Michelle Lowe reported that planning was fairly quiet at the moment in Otford with few contentious applications. But as ever, she worked closely with the Parish Council to monitor applications as they came in, and oppose them where it was felt that they were inappropriate. Since the recent restructure and her promotion to the Cabinet responsible for Housing, Welfare and Community Safety, she was no longer on the Development Control Committee; and didn’t have to remain impartial about planning applications in the early stages so she would be able to work a lot more closely with Cllr. Martin Whitehead. Cllr. John Edwards-Winser, however, was now on Development Control so he would have to distance himself instead.

The Community Safety part of her new portfolio was quite exciting and sure to give her plenty of opportunities to help Otford. The District Council had a co-ordinating role with community safety and met every morning as part of the community safety unit with the Police and other partners that included housing associations, fire, probation and health services plus KCC and others to sort out specific problems from the root so they are hopefully eradicated and don’t reoccur. The aim was to: Reduce and detect crime, reduce anti-social behaviour & fear of crime and reassure people across the District and strengthen community involvement.

If you want to report various community safety issues such as anti-social behaviour, graffiti, fly-tipping, drug problems, intimidation, hate crime, noise nuisance, rowdy behaviour, issues about licensed premises, abandoned vehicles and environmental nuisance by calling SDC or e-mailing community.safety@sevenoaks.gov.uk. You can of course still contact the Police in the usual way. Her new role also covered licensing and environmental health but as they are mainly statutory services every council in the country ran them in the same way so she had little influence over them. The big part of her new role included housing and this was the area where she would have the most to learn, but a lot of it would involve some of the ambitions in the Village Design Statement and Plan and if she could help realise your dreams on some of this she will. For your information it includes: Housing Strategy and Policy; Housing needs as well as empty homes and under occupation, housing benefit and fraud. Some of this would have huge overlap with welfare benefits and the new Universal Credit and changes in welfare entitlement will impact on people in social housing. The biggest controversial area will be the SDC Gypsy/Traveller Site Management and Unauthorised Gypsy/Traveller encampments. So, as well as representing Otford as best as she can, she also has this new District-wide role. As you know Otford Pond falls dead bang in the centre of the District which runs from Swanley in the North to Edenbridge in the South. Do check out Michelle’s website or contact her if there was anything that she could do for you.

Ron Dullage reported that the hall had had a challenging year with less social events and cancellations due to bad weather and parking issues but had made a reasonable profit due to tight controls on costs. More profit is needed to make improvements and ongoing maintenance. £4,000 would be spent in August on sanding and resealing floors. The top 20 hirers accounted for 60% of hall income and the loss of any of them would be disastrous. The trustees were looking to recruit a Vice-Chairman and Treasurer and the Hall AGM would be held later in the week.
10. ROD SHELTON - ‘THE WIDER PICTURE’

Rod Shelton gave a presentation on the Darent Valley and ‘The Wider Picture’. The Darent Valley Consortium held the principle that 6 heads are generally better than one. It was an unofficial, quarterly meeting between representatives of the six parishes in the Darent Valley, Otford, Shoreham, Eynsford, Farningham, Horton Kirby and West Kingsdown. The councils learn from one another and they discuss a wide range of matters of common interest including on the last agenda Local policing problems: Neighbourhood plans: Getting Potholes sorted: Twinning: Lorrywatch scheme: SDC and tree felling and improving communication for the partially sighted and hard of hearing.

The Darent Catchment Improvement group is part of an EU River Catchment Improvement Plan. Taking part is the North West Kent Countyside Partnership, Environment Agency (Fisheries and Rivers Departments), DRiPS, Kent Wildlife Trust, Kent Downs AONB, Darent Valley Trout Fishers and the National Farmers Union. It is to help create a full-flowing energetic (shallow) river which would be beneficial to fish, the riverside environment, and to walkers, from Westerham to the Dartford marshes. This is achievable by increasing the flow and the volume of water in the river. With Government support, they had already succeeded in massively reducing abstraction by Thames Water. The Darent is at risk from spillage and seepage of nitrates, solvents and other pesticides into the groundwater. This is monitored and effective correcting action is being taken. The habitat is being improved by introducing fish passes at weirs and reducing un-necessary obstructions. It is hoped to engage communities in the river as it is our heritage and the cause of us being here. There were also opportunities for education by engaging land-owners (watering cows but not destroying the banks) and Parishes being able to get closer to the river and footpaths.

The Valley of Visions project is an AONB landscape improvement project. Taking part are Otford, The AONB (who protect the whole North Downs region from Dover to Westerham), each of the eleven parish councils along the Darent, Kent Wildlife Trust, Kent Country parks, Natural England and Sustrans. Its for valuing and sharing the special landscape qualities of the Darent Valley, helping to protect, conserve and reveal the wonderful concentration of heritage that exists all along the course of the Darent - from Westerham to Dartford. It is identifying both community and heritage projects in each parish and raising Lottery Funding to help them to be achieved. Each parish has been asked for its own suggestions. The AONB will act as co-ordinator and will then apply for a sizable Lottery Grant. As a parish we would participate in providing match funding for local projects. So the Parish Council will be saving for this. The local benefits to us should be significant. We form a crucial part of the Community of the Valley (and the Vale of Holmesdale). The valley and its river are our heritage. Through organisations like these, Otford can continue to play a key role in the protection and enhancement of the valley, its communities and its river.

11. HIGH STREET SHOPS

Gill Skinner on behalf of the High Street shops reported that for the majority of shops it had been a difficult trading year but they appreciate all the local support they receive. A big issue is the car park’s lack of spaces for visitors / shoppers and it was hoped that the proposed pay and display scheme will alleviate the problems. Shop owners had been involved in the car park stakeholders group.

GUIDES AND BROWNIES REPORT
Jane Woodrow-Clark reported that Guiding in Otford continued to thrive with the Rainbows, Brownies and Guides all enjoying busy programmes. All three units remained full with long waiting lists and it was good news when two mums had come forward to take over the Rainbow unit in January which would have otherwise closed. However a lack of adult volunteers willing to undertake training meant that despite appeals in local publications they had not had anybody come forward to open a desperately needed second Brownie unit. Weekly activities had seen the Rainbows, amongst other things, enjoying Irish Dancing, learning about road safety and activities to celebrate 25 years of Rainbows. Brownies had tried Scottish dancing and enjoyed a jazz session paid for with the Sainsbury’s vouchers as well as games and badge work evenings. Jointly the two units had learnt about the Millennium Development Goal ‘Together We Can Create Peace through Partnerships’ which culminated in them holding a ‘Fairtrade Café’ to raise awareness of the scheme. They raffled a hamper filled with Fairtrade products and collected donations for refreshments and were able to send £170 to the Fairtrade Foundation charity. In addition to the weekly activities, both the Brownie and Guide units had been on residential trips this year, which was always a highlight for the girls. Numerous trips had been organised to places far and wide including London Zoo, Port Lympne Safari park and theatres to see pantomimes and shows. The Brownies and Guides had attended two Church Parades in the last year for the Remembrance Service and Civic Services at St Bart’s. They had always been very well supported by the people of Otford, for which they are very grateful. The Brownies and Guides ran their annual Christmas Post Service delivering cards in Otford village and raised £439.40 from the sale of stamps which was divided between the Hospice in the Weald and The Bridge Trust, a local homeless charity. The Otford service is apparently the longest running Scout or Guide Christmas Post Service in the UK at 29 consecutive years and they hoped that this year - the 30th - would be a bumper one! They had also been taking part in the Tesco and Sainsbury’s voucher schemes and would like to thank everybody who has saved vouchers for them as this allows them to provide experiences and equipment for the girls that they would not otherwise be able to afford.

**15TH OTFORD SCOUT GROUP**

Lesley Grant reported that the 15th Otford Scout Group had been very busy over the past year providing a wide variety of activities to all the young people within the group. The Beaver section had steadily grown from the 13 they started with in September 2011 to the 22 they had now. They had been working on several challenge awards to enable the majority of the beavers that started with them 18 months ago to gain the highest award - Chief Scout Bronze Award, and 6 were presented with this at a ceremony by the Mayor Richard Parry. They were taking part in a District sleepover and also a group trip to Port Lympe. The Cub sections had been tackling the required six challenge badges for the award of the Chief Scouts Silver award. Along the way the cubs had picked up several activity badges, with four more requirements to go and the last two badges will be collected and it is hoped some 9 cubs would achieve the top award. There had been no summer camp because of the Olympics, but they had a very successful winter camp in December. They had taken part in some District events, six-a-side, cross country and St Georges Day Parade, plus Remembrance Sunday. They had also put together four shoe boxes of various items which were sent out to service personnel in Afghanistan. The Scout section had 22 on their books. The highlight of the year so far had been their selection to take part in the District St George’s Day Service. They would be going
away with the Monday night Cubs for Summer Club in August. The scout section had also undergone some leadership restructuring.

Fundraising for the group saw another very successful Firework Display and they thanked the residents of Otford for their continued support and they would be providing refreshments again at the Village Fete. The Group had a Twitter and Facebook account to try and engage the group in general with parents and interested parties in the village. As the Group continues to grow, the inevitable requirement to increase the leadership becomes more paramount. Anyone interested in helping should contact Lesley.

**OTFORD FETE COMMITTEE**

Patty Chatterjee reported that the Fete would take place as normal on Bank Holiday Monday and the poster had been designed by a pupil at Otford Primary School. The theme was Kent - Garden of England. The fete raises a lot of money for the village and gets sometimes in excess of 6,000 visitors. There will be lots of variety of stalls and attractions. Any help on the day will be gratefully received. It is now too expensive at £4,500 to close the road for a procession so a small procession takes place around the field before the start.

**HERITAGE CENTRE**

A major refurbishment took place in 2012, including the removal of the well head and its replacement by a toughened glass panel in the floor allowing inspection of the well and (children enjoy 'walking on the water') and the area around it has been re-carpeted. The whole interior had been redecorated and a new sales area created before the new displays were installed and thanks was given to everyone who helped with the work especially Carol Griffiths and Ed Thompson. At the same time the patio in the garden was re-laid and extended and the garden renovated with new plants added. There was a special exhibition celebrating the 60th Anniversary of the Queen’s Accession. The Heritage Centre participated in the Otford Shopping Day in November and 45 visitors came to see the displays, which was very successful. It also opened on Saturday mornings in December and had 25 visitors. It was closed in January and February and reopened on 2nd March. There was a visit by 48 pupils from Otford Primary School on 8th March and Walthamstow Junior School also visited. There were two new exhibitions - 'Audio and Visual' with LP records, a television, early tape recording equipment and other memorabilia and 'Toys and games from year's gone by' which included board games, jigsaw puzzles, card games and a small train track. A new Time Line was being made and was hoped to be in place in a month’s time.

**ALLOCMENTS**

Roger Beasley reported that he took over the post of Parish Council agent in October 2012 and thanked Barbara Hine for her efficient system which he had adopted. The Otford Allotments Association had 77 members and only one half plot in Mill Meadow was without a tenant. This was an awkward plot to let because of the shade afforded by neighbouring trees. He checked regularly on plots that were not being cultivated in accordance with the tenancy agreement. Since October only residents of Otford had become allotmenteers and he had three more potential gardeners on the waiting list from the village. He thanked the OAA with their new committee and enthusiastic membership for the hard work keeping the site tidy with their Saturday work parties and the Parish Council for their continued support. There would be an
Open Morning on the site on Saturday 3rd August when you could tour the site and see the plots on display.

**OTFORD SOCIETY**
The Otford Society had a membership of over 1000 and produces a newsletter 3 times a year. They hold an AGM in March each year with a guest speaker and open forum. They currently have a healthy bank balance and have made donations to various village projects including Hale lane Playground, Village Benevolent Fund, Pond works and new trees and the village gateways. They keep a close eye on all new developments and building in the conservation area. If villagers are interested in joining then they should contact the membership secretary Vincent Tilley. The current Chairman Tony Wiltshire would be standing down next year.

**OTFORD SPORTS ASSOCIATION**
The Otford Sports Association has been in existence for the last 35 years with the existing OSA being operational since August 19, 2010.
The following Clubs and companies are affiliated:
- Otford United Football Club
- Otford United Junior Football Club
- Otford Cricket Club
- Otford Lawn Tennis Club
- Otford Table Tennis Club
- Otford Indoor (Short Mat) Bowls Club
- Otford Petanque Club
- The Sevenoaks Personal Trainer

During the past year the OSA have mainly been involved in the overseeing of care and maintenance of the High Street Recreation Ground and various applications for use of the grounds facilities.
The OSA, on behalf of the village thanked David Gunderson for his many years of dedication and hard work with Otford Colts Football Team which had to be disbanded this year. David had worked tirelessly not only on the organisation and management of the team but by turning out at every match and running the line.

Every year the OSA award the Kirsch Cup to a promising young local sportsperson, or a person who has made a valuable contribution to any recreational activity in Otford. This year it was particularly difficult to decide on the recipient.

Finally an extract from a letter from the chairman of the Kent County League about Otford United Football Club was highlighted: “Their neat ground is well maintained and a warm welcome is ensured for all visiting teams and spectators alike. In recent years ground improvements have continued through a dedicated band of volunteer Club Officials and followers. The Club allow the use of their ground for local cup finals together with an annual police game, representative football, and welcome the local community to use their well appointed pavilion. “ Otford’s recreation ground has a wonderful reputation and is often cited as an example to be followed mainly due to many, many, hours of voluntary work by club officials. However, one of the major problems on the Recreation Ground, that of dog fouling, had yet to be overcome. Despite notices, and threats of prosecution, irresponsible dog owners continued to allow their dogs to defecate without picking up after them.
Otford was extremely lucky to have such a vibrant sports community with dedicated individuals giving so generously of their time to ensure that a wide variety of sports regularly take place and the secretary thanked them for their dedication and all the Committee for their help and support over the past year.

**OTFORD UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB**

Dave Hobson reported that all 3 teams were in mid table positions with quite a few matches still to be played. He was pleased to report that they have a considerable membership of young players which they hoped would continue in the future if they could keep them interested. On a slightly worrying note because of rising costs of running the football club, and lack of sponsorship, they have very little monies left for pitch refurbishment/maintenance at the end of the season. As a club they are very proud that the Kent County League selected 2 of their players (Callum Hill and Jamie Knight) to play in the rep team v/s Sussex County in the FA regional cup which they won 3-2 after extra time. Both acquitted themselves well and, having played in the reps side last season, it was hoped that they would become regular members of the squad. Players were selected from all divisions of the KCL prem/div 2. They play in div 1 and it must be a feather in their caps that these 2 players represented Otford at this high level. This was a regional cup and the next tie could be played anywhere in the British Isles.

**OTFORD YOUTH FOOTBALL CLUB**

Stuart Cunningham reported Otford United Juniors FC have had a fantastic 2012/2013 season, with 8 teams being entered into the Tandridge Youth Football League, ranging from Under 9s through to Under 15s (with two Under 10 teams). The club had successfully grown from approximately 80 playing members to over 100 playing members, with the introduction of two committees (doing the work of one committee from last season). The new leadership committee concentrated on day to day issues, the finances of the club and the general decision making for the club whilst the management committee specialised in suggestions for improvement and coaching methods. As the season finishes at the end of May, they couldn’t quite give final league placings for any teams but currently all teams were in the top half of their respective leagues with the Under 10 Bulls in the Tandridge Shield Final, the Under 11’s in top spot in their league, the Under 12s in the Tandridge Shield Final, the Under 13s and Under 14s in second place in their leagues and the Under 9s, Under 10 Titans and Under 15s all competing for top 3 finishes. To sum up, the best season on record so far. Next season looks positive from a team perspective but OUJFC is struggling to find adequate pitch space within the village. Unlike other local clubs, OUJFC doesn’t want to find pitches outside of the village but this is looking far more likely as the season’s progress. All in all the future for OUJFC looked very bright.

**OTFORD CRICKET CLUB**

Jonny Pyman reported that rain and cricket don’t go very well together, but OCC still managed to fulfill most of it’s fixtures. The seniors did ok whilst the Colts excelled. The first team may well have been promoted from their division but for the loss of several very close games. They introduced a number of Colts to first team cricket and they acquitted themselves well. The second team was largely based on the youth programme, and in most cases they played opposition many years more experienced than themselves. Despite this they led the League for most of the season, staying in the promotion spots until the very last game. The Sunday side
had a lot of fun too in their series of friendlies. The Colts system is a socially vibrant part of Otford village life. Many parents stay and watch, or help out the 20+ strong coaching staff on Sunday mornings in early Summer. They often see up to 200 locals enjoying the Recreation Ground for what it is, a sports and recreation field. They are an inclusive Club, everyone getting a go. In 2012 they ran 6 Colt teams; provided cricket and coaching for 150 youngsters, competed in the Mid Kent League, the Mini Super 8s, the Holmesdale Cup and the ECB National Cup. The U11s won their League, the U13s and U15s came very close. The U9s lost a close final at County level, having already beaten the Vine, Dartford and Tunbridge Wells. They may only be a village club, but they can beat the townies.

OTFORD TENNIS CLUB
The Club’s website has been re-developed and more improvements were to come. The coaching programme had been extended, including the re-starting of adult coaching and introduction of cardio tennis. The Club was allocated 22 pairs of tickets for Wimbledon in 2012; all of these were taken up by members. The Club had been allocated 25 pairs for 2013. The project to install floodlights to the bottom court is pending renewal of the Club’s lease, which has been held up by negotiations with the Parish Council. It was a pre-condition for LTA funding for projects such as this that the lease was of long duration. An extension to the lease to 50 years was being sought; an increase in the rent payable was expected but the amount proposed by the Parish Council was not feasible. Resolution to this issue was expected shortly. Junior membership numbers had remained level and there were currently four junior teams competing in county wide inter club competition. Adult membership numbers had reduced slightly. The Club hoped to hold more social events during the year, starting with a fun tennis competition day for both adults and children and with the draw for Wimbledon ticket allocation.

OTFORD GARDENERS’ SOCIETY
Janet Finney reported that the last year had been very much like any other with a mixture of shows, lectures and visits but the economic and geographic climate had begun to show some changes. The Spring Show came at the end of a long, cold winter and the number of exhibits and visitors reflected the drab season and early Easter. It looked as if there would be no show but amazingly the members came good and produced a host of daffodils so it could go ahead. The lectures had been on a variety of subjects including what the Kent Adult Education had to offer, hop picking, improving the standard of show exhibits, commercial rose growing and they had also hosted a Gardeners Question panel. In the summer they travelled to Sandwich to explore the renovated gardens at the Sanctuary. They finished the year with their fun and quiz night and neighbouring horticultural societies were invited with 9 attending. The stall at the village fete took some planning but was the major fundraiser for the society helping keep down subscription rates. In partnership with the Parish Council they continued to judge and host the presentation for the Otford Village Front Garden Competition. They continue their partnership with the Otford Allotments Association and a cup is awarded at the Autumn Show in conjunction with the Otford Allotments Association for a trug or basket of undressed vegetables for kitchen use. The membership showed a very small decline and there were no young people wanting to take part in the junior classes at the last show. The society remained active and the finances were healthy.
OTFORD EVENING W.I.
The Evening WI celebrated the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee with a tea party in 1950’s style and invited the other WI’s in Otford to join them. It was not for profit but the Boot fair held in October added £500 for their funds. A village community choir was formed and many WI members participate culminating with Christmas carol singing in a local 17th Century manor house. Members supported craft, bridge, lunch and evening discussion groups, outings and the weekly senior citizens lunch club. Their talks included a mounted policeman minus his horse, cheese makers and bead making.

OTFORD OAST W.I
The Oast WI had a varied year including cookery classes, a relaxation morning, cake and bread making, beauty therapist, bulb planting and sewing and knitting. They would hold a joint WI cake stall at the village fete. The Oast and Afternoon WI’s had voted to merge and now had 52 members. District events were also attended. Thanks were given to the ladies that ran the crèche.

OTFORD & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Cliff Ward reported the society was formed in 1950 and had a membership of around a hundred. In the earliest days some talks were illustrated using a magic lantern with glass slides. Since its foundation the society had maintained both a comprehensive photographic and documentary archive. The society is hoping at some time in the future to revise and update the first definitive history of the village ‘Otford in Kent’ by Dennis Clarke and Anthony Stoyel. The society comments on local planning applications which have heritage or environmental implications. As part of the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee celebrations a free exhibition by the society was held in the village hall including both photographs and artefacts covering various decades. There had been many excellent speakers over the years and in October 2012 Dr David Starkey was welcomed to Otford. He had a tour of the village and lunch before giving a talk in St Bartholomew’s Church on Archbishop William Warham who rebuilt and enlarged Otford Palace in 1520. Lord Sackville-West also gave a fascinating talk about his ancestors. Later this year John Suchet would be coming to talk about Beethoven and there would also be a return visit of Alison Weir.

OTFORD PLAYERS
It was reported that the Otford Players ended 2012 on a high having stretched themselves to the limit putting on ‘Stepping Out’ by Richard Harris. It had been a challenge for all the cast and crew, because most of the cast had to learn tap dancing as well as their lines. The show was an absolute triumph. This year they had the usual plan for two shows, one in March and one in November. However, the March performance was cancelled due to a mix up of booking dates so they held a quiz night instead which was well very well attended. In November they would be performing ‘An Otford Christmas Carol’ described as a Christmas extravaganza. Rehearsals would start in September and auditions before that. Pictures of previous performances could be found on the otford.info website and they have a Facebook page and Twitter feed that helps to keep people up to date with news.
ANN BARNES - POLICE CRIME COMMISSIONER

A report from Ann Barnes the Kent Crime Commissioner was received. She was pleased that her first Police and Crime Plan had been widely accepted and the final copy would be published on her website before the end of March. The plan encapsulated the key promises she had made during her election campaign. They included cutting crime and catching criminals, ensuring local visible community policing, appointing a youth police and crime commissioner, boosting police accessibility in rural areas by better use of mobile police stations and being the most viable, accessible and transparent Commissioner in the Country. One of her main responsibilities was to set the level of the Police precept. This year she concluded that the only way to boost police visibility was to increase this precept by 2%. This equated to less than a penny a day for a Band D property. This modest increase would enable the force to recruit 60 more Police Community Support Officers and 20 more Police Officers. This would be the biggest boost to police numbers and visibility for several years. She had put in place an itinerary to visit all parts of Kent and her first public meeting in Maidstone had been a success with over 170 people attending. Partnership working would continue to be a crucial part of the vision to keep Kent safe. She had met a number of partner agencies to discuss their priorities, the services they offer and needs for the future. She was embarking on a comprehensive review of partnership working across the County to maximise efficiency and consistency of service levels. She would be holding surgeries every six weeks. Her office was working with the Police to develop the role of mobile Police Stations to visit rural areas. Her main statutory responsibility is to hold the Chief Constable to account and she would hold formal governance meetings where she would scrutinise and challenge him on force performance.

12. OPC CHAIRMAN’S REPORT.

Cllr Edwards - Winser reported that it had been another very busy year for councillors, and yet again particularly so for the clerks. He thanked both Brenda and Sue for all the invaluable assistance they had given him during the past year. The Council Agendas, Minutes and Newsletters were all placed on the local Otford web-site “Otford.net” by Brenda and ably managed by John Hubbard who was demonstrating the system at the meeting.

Otford had long been well-served by volunteers and a wide selection of them had reported on their activities and he thanked them all of them for all their sterling efforts and hard work in helping the community. He gave a short précis of what the council did and what it had achieved and what it hoped to achieve in the future. The Parish Plan had been the driving force behind the majority of the major projects. He mentioned that all the meetings were open meetings and within the rules of council governance try to involve public participation. Those that do attend would stand witness to that. All are welcome to attend, the meetings are not a closed-shop, but as space in the meeting room was limited please notify the clerk if you intend to come along to meetings that are held in the office.

Planning The council had reviewed 83 applications, 65 of which had been decided by SDC. There are therefore 18 still pending. SDC had agreed with 75% of OPC recommendations. There had been 7 appeals, 1 withdrawn, 1 part dismissed and 5 dismissed. All applications taken to appeal were objected to by OPC planning. The main causes for variance between OPC and SDC, were SDC putting less weight on the Otford Village Design Statement than OPC, SDC interpretation of both the Greenbelt rules and the Otford Conservation Area regulations.

Highways The regular matters of interest included recording accidents/near misses, general road safety, bus stops, speeding, road signs - removal of incorrect signs and replacement of
damaged or worn out signs. Gateways - the result due to the exceptional work of a dedicated group meant that they were now in place. They were one of the aims of the parish plan. Resurfacing of the car park was a major undertaking requiring meticulous planning in preparation for obtaining a contractor and for organising and administering the project; which would take place in August. It was anticipated that the car park would be closed for 7-10 days and notices would be circulated. The primary aim to improve short-term parking availability in the car park had resulted in the proposition to implement a pay and display scheme. This had involved wide and thorough consultation over a four month period with a group of stakeholders representing “Otfordians” interests and it was anticipated that the scheme will be implemented in October. He thanked all of the stakeholders that participated on the Working Group.

Services There had been articles in both the March Parish newsletter and the Otford Society newsletter regarding the quantity of litter strewn over the village. and residents were asked to not drop litter and pick up any that they see. Arriva would be putting down a hardstanding by the bus stop in Pilgrims Way West near Rye Lane. They had agreed the action in January and had been awaiting placement by their contractors ever since. The bulbs that were planted near the telephone box on Kent Highways Land by the Pond had at last flowered, as had many other Spring bulbs round the village. The Helplines Directory had been updated on the Website and Risk Assessments, H&S reviews, of the office, sports pavilions and other assets, including the car park and other areas for which your Council was responsible had been completed. The Parish Council Noticeboards were being refurbished or renewed by Mr Catt and the Solar System was being well maintained by Tremaine Clinton. The Twinning relationship had started a trend in the Darenth Valley with Eynsford looking into forming a relationship with a village near Lille in Northern France. The pattern of a day trip by coach which was started last year had continued this year and there was recently a very happy and successful trip to Hardelot and Montreuil. The "Twins" would be arriving in Otford for lunch on Saturday 8th June. The next Social Gathering was at the Woodman on Monday 3rd June at 7.45pm and if anyone had any suggestions or requests for future visits and activities please contact Cllr Jane Lawrey.

Other mundane although essential activities had included organising and carrying out redecoration of the offices by the Councillors, carrying out repairs to several fences and Brian Thomas and Norman Catt were thanked for their varied help around the village and finally maintenance of the public toilets by the Chairman and Sue.

Environment The Environment Committee met bi- monthly over the last year to discuss and implement management of the green areas of the village. They met twice a year with SDC’s Woodland Ranger, Woodland Consultant, and two Kemsing Parish Councillors to review work in Oxenhill Woods. A Nature event was held there in June last year and it was hoped to hold a similar event this year at the end of June or beginning of July. They attended meetings of the Darent Valley Consortium, Cory (landfill site) and Tarmac (quarrying site). The latter donated £500 towards the new planters. The Historical Society had also made a donation. It was intended to purchase two further planters for the grass verge at the Parade. Thanks were due to Russell House School, the Brownies and Denise Thompson for planting and caring for the planters. Thanks also to the Oast WI for their continued care of the long border on the village green, which backed onto the wall of Bubblestone Farm. Otford was winner of the Kent Men of the Trees Competition last year and received two trees plus a cheque for £35. Due to the dreadful weather community working parties had been difficult to arrange. The continued aim was to protect and enhance the environment both now and for future generations. Amongst the duties the Committee oversaw the care of the following areas - Footpaths across the fields,
the Chalkpit, Oxenhill Woods, Main Recreation Ground and its trees, the Pond, the Village Green and Palace Approach, Palace Field – where continuing negotiations were ongoing with SDC over the upkeep of the tower, Palace Park Wood (Managed by the Woodland Trust), The Cemetery, Telston Park and Hale Lane Recreation Area where hedging, trees, a small orchard and bulbs had been planted.

**Recreation** The Recreation Committee had adopted the motto 'Civitas Vegeta et Strenua', taken from the Parish Plan and meaning a 'Fit & Active Community'. They look after the maintenance of leisure activities in The High Street Recreation Ground, the play area and Hale Lane and they will be taking advantage of the car park closure to close the play area at the same time in order to carry out essential maintenance. The committee also worked with the Otford Sports Association, to help, support and encourage its Members. The Parish Council had given Otford United Youth Football Club exclusive use of Hale Lane Pavilion, and the club is paying all the running costs.

The most notable achievement was the children's playground at the Hale Lane Recreation Ground for which Cllrs Richard Knight and Charmian Marsh must take all of the credit. It should be noted that this was also one of the long term aims of the parish plan. However on the down side there are still recurring complaints about Dog fouling on all of the sports grounds which is on the increase yet again and may lead OPC taking more drastic action than just reports in the newsletter.

**Finance** The precept for the year to 31st March 2013 increased by 8% the equivalent of approx 50p per month for a band D property. The increase was mainly due to: accrual of £11,500 for car park resurfacing, 5% increase in some costs to cover inflationary increases and an increase in reserves to bring them to the sort of level recommended for a Council of OPC's size and activity. During the year savings were made on Litter picking, grass cutting and insurance.

There were a number of capital projects in the year: Speedwatch equipment, Planters, Gateways, Hearing Loops, Hale Lane Children’s Playground. The Parish Council thanked the following for their contributions to the capital projects: SITA Trust, Tarmac, ODHS, Otford Society, SDC Big Community Fund, Otford.net, Nick Chard, KCC and the Fete Committee.

**Current year to 31st March 2014**

The precept for the year to 31st March 2014 increased in actual terms by 1.9%. The band D calculation was amended by SDC to take account of the changes in benefits resulting in an increase in what Parishioners paid of 7.5% (an increase of £5.82 over a year for a band D property). As a one off SDC provided a grant of £6629 which enabled OPC to keep the actual increase in the precept level to 1.9%. If the OPC precept were to be effectively capped at 1.9% (as SDC had been) then the Council would only have a further £2614 of income to cope with inflationary rises and unexpected costs. In the case of capping any increase above the level set by the government would had to be taken to a referendum. The costs of a referendum would require a precept rise of approx 2.9% immediately exceeding the potential limit. In these circumstances it is virtually impossible to plan for any capital improvements because the costs of finance and repayments are financed by the precept. Brian Thomas was OPC’s Grounds Maintenance Supervisor and Cemetery Supervisor. He met frequently with bereaved families at the cemetery, a task he handled with great sensitivity. He also inspected the playgrounds on a weekly basis and advised on the care of all the natural sites. It was down to Brian that the pond looked so beautiful and of course he also looked after the ducks. He thanked the clerks for all their hard work and dedication often under demanding conditions and constant interruptions and mentioned that Sue Stephenson had now been Assistant Clerk for 15 years. She was presented
with flowers as a token of appreciation. He also thanked all the councillors for their support and their continuous work on behalf of Otford, most of which went on in the background and was largely unheard, unseen and un-noticed, but which if it was not carried out with the dedication they applied then the adverse effects would soon manifest themselves.

Questions were asked about the removal of the tree in the car park, progress on the pay and display proposals and the new one way system, and a planning application at Otford Primary School

Signed..........................

Dated..........................

The meeting closed at 22.00hrs