

Coxheath Parish Council

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – April 14th 2026

Chairman's Report

Good evening everyone,

Big thanks to Claire Ayres and to Katie Lam MP for their report, to our local police officers for their report (and for being in the village on Saturday lunchtime to meet the public) and to Councillor Claire Kehily and Councillor Rob Ford for being here in person and giving their reports. It makes me very proud that Coxheath is held in such high regard and importance.

For those of you I haven't yet had the pleasure of meeting, I'm your Chairman—still relatively new to the role, and still occasionally checking which drawer the teaspoons live in. I stepped into this post last September, following the retirement of my predecessor, who left rather large shoes to fill—indeed, the legacy of our previous Chairs and councillors is quite awe-inspiring.

It's a real privilege to stand before you this evening at our Annual Parish Meeting, reflecting on what has been a busy, sometimes challenging, but ultimately very positive period for Coxheath.

When I took on this role, I did so with a mixture of enthusiasm and, if I'm honest, a healthy respect for just how much goes on behind the scenes in a parish like ours. What has struck me most over these past months is the sheer dedication of the people involved—our councillors, our clerk, and the many volunteers who quietly keep things running. Parish councils don't often make headlines, and frankly that's usually a good thing—but they do make a difference, day in and day out.

On a personal note, I'd like to thank my fellow councillors for their support over the past months. It's been something of a baptism of fire, but I've been made to feel very welcome and those who have held the post previously have offered support and much-needed knowledge. And to our clerk, Louise, who also joined the council back in September—she has kept us all organised, informed, and occasionally in line—and her years of expertise as a clerk has helped steer us as we modernise the parish council slowly but surely.

Before I continue with my report, I'd like to take a moment to read out a lovely reminiscence written by Councillor Clive Parker, remembering our sadly departed former Chair and long-term councillor Elizabeth Potts:

In memory of Elizabeth who we sadly lost on 19 November 2025 I have prepared the following note for the Annual Parish meeting to be held 14th April 2026.

Elizabeth had worked as a teacher at what was Senacre School in Maidstone up to retirement. She was a well-respected traditional teacher, continued to work as a supply teacher and helped at Coxheath Primary with reading sessions, which both my daughters can recall. Always very well dressed she set a high standard for the Parish Council which she led for many years up to 2009, with Val Page and then Anne Brindle as Vice Chair.

Elizabeth was Chair when I joined in 2004 and followed Micheal Webb (Richard Webb's Father). She led the Recreation & Youth Group and with myself and Brain Mortimer was instrumental in seeing that the Play Area, Sports Wall and Youth Shelter were built at the Village Hall Recreation Ground. Around this time the Huntington Road Open Space also achieved protection as a Village Green. Elizabeth also sat on the Finance Committee, promoted Youth Activity Sessions with Natlie Penfold of KCC and met regularly with our Kent Police Constable Gary Shaw and KCC Community Wardens Adam McKinley & Jo Jewiss that we had at that time.

Having stood down as Chair in 2009 Elizabeth took a few years away from the Parish Council but re-joined in 2013 and continued to give her time for the community up to retiring again in December 2024. To my knowledge Elizabeth had served on the Parish Council for well over 18 years.

To end with a happy memory, I can recall that she had been told she should wear flat shoes to help her ankles and tendons. This was not something she was going to accept lightly as her dress code was always smart jacket, brooch and high heels.

Clive Parker

Parish Chairman 2009-2024

This past year has been a time of change for the parish council. In September our former Chair Gavin Crickett, and long-serving Councillor Chris Bird both retired from the council. They spent many years leading the council and helping the village in so many ways. I'd like to offer my deepest thanks to both of them. Our previous Clerk Irene Bowie also left us to work for a larger council, making an exciting career step...we wish her well. Councillor Sean Thomas sadly had to step down earlier this year due to family matters...I thank him for his incredible help with all matters digital, and for always aiding with the Christmas Tree and Lights! Councillor Darren Carpenter kindly stepped up as Vice-Chairman, offering me his support and years of experience. And we welcome two new members of the council...well, one is a returning veteran, Councillor Richard Webb...and we are very excited to have Councillor Jade Sheppard joining us. But don't be fooled, all these incredible people still need your help...we are looking for a few more brave souls to join us as Councillors...so if you feel you have a little bit of spare time, and would like an enriching and fascinating experience whilst making the village stronger, please come have a chat with myself or Louise at any time this evening.

Over the past year, we've continued to focus on the things that matter most to residents: maintaining our open spaces, supporting local amenities and groups, and doing our best to ensure Coxheath remains a place we're all proud to call home. Whether it's keeping the village tidy, working with partners on local issues, or simply responding to the steady stream of emails—yes, we do read them all—it's been a year of steady, meaningful work.

I am proud that we continue to work closely with the amazing team who run the village hall and offer so much to our community...without them the village would be so much less. Do please thank them and help support what they do. Since I became Chair, my main emphasis has been on improving communications and ensuring we are aware of the village needs and your concerns. We've improved the Facebook page and how we communicate, sharing key information with individuals and groups. It has been my pleasure to be a part of the regular Community Group meetings, as well as attending a coffee morning, and meeting with our close friends at the Church. Our events and communications committee are expanding the activities we intend to organise over the coming year, so watch out for those. We are in the process of updating and redesigning our website to make it easier for everyone to make use of. If you have any lovely photos of the village in all seasons, do please share them with us and we will feature as many as we can.

We have been pushing hard on road and highway issues this year, working with KCC's Highways team. Numerous small issues have been resolved, including a new safety barrier outside the Village Hall, road signage and line renewal. The biggest successes include new and extended double yellow lines and flashing lights outside the school on Stockett Lane, which we hope will be installed during the summer holidays; and new double yellow lines on Heath Road outside of Tesco. As always, I encourage everyone to park carefully and with respect for other drivers, pedestrians and those whose access

you might be impeding. Do please continue to contact us about any road and pavement issues and we will keep working hard to sort them.

One of the things I've particularly valued is the spirit of this community. There's a strong sense that people here care—not just about their own patch, but about Coxheath as a whole. That shows itself in small ways as much as large ones: neighbours helping neighbours, community events bringing people together, and residents taking the time to engage with the council, even when it's to tell us we've got something wrong—which, occasionally, we do. One member of our community I would like to thank in particular is Dave Mann, who for many years cared for our open spaces and planted the beautiful flowers around the village. He retired from this role earlier this year (finally, I believe I heard his family say!) but has continued to share his wealth of knowledge to the council, including aiding with the process of finding and appointing his replacement.

At the end of last year we held our annual Remembrance and Christmas Lights events, both in close partnership with our friends at the Holy Trinity Church. Both were very well attended and village bon-homie was at a high level. I quickly discovered how many things I don't know how to organise, but everyone mucked in and made them both events we can be proud of. Sadly one of our Tommy silhouettes was vandalised earlier in the year, but I am happy to say we are replacing it as well as adding a second Women at War silhouette to match our others at the church.

Of course, we haven't been operating in a vacuum. The wider world has felt, at times, a little uncertain. Costs have risen, pressures on services remain, and local government continues to navigate change. Against that backdrop, I think it's fair to say that what we've achieved as a parish is something to be quietly proud of.

Our VE Day event in May last year was a tremendous success. Led by our indomitable Councillor Karen Laponder and supported by the village hall and so many amazing volunteers, it was a day to remember and did us all proud. We have had so much positive feedback that we are organising an End Of Summer Picnic this year, on Saturday 5th September...details to follow, but I hope you will all come along (and volunteer to help if you can!)

Looking ahead to the coming year, we do so with optimism, but also with realism. There will be challenges—there always are—but there are also opportunities. Opportunities to improve our facilities, to strengthen our sense of community, and to continue working collaboratively with residents and partner organisations.

We are in the process of replacing our old storage units, and working to improving the recreation facilities. Improved security measures for the MUGA and more engagement with residents on what facilities they would most like. Our Open Spaces group, led by Councillor Heather Weaver have begun the process of surveying all the trees under our care, and creating a tree management and coppicing plan that will help care for and develop the wooded areas for years to come.

And on the financial side of things, first I'd like to thank Councillor Clive Parker for his tireless work as Chair of the Finance Committee, and for his graciousness in welcoming and supporting our new incoming Chair of Finance, Councillor Ian Laponder. Ian brings with him a wealth of experience in the finance world. We have appointed a new Internal Auditor. The Internal Auditor reviewed the accounts in November 2025 and again last week. I am pleased to report that we were given a clean bill of health. The Clerk will now submit the Annual Governance and Accountability Return and supporting documents to the external auditor Mazars.

The Parish Clerk has placed a document on your seats which gives an overview of the year.

- Expenditure: The total expenditure for the year was £120,797.22 compared to £94,829.87 the previous year. The increase is due to the fact that we had to employ a Locum Clerk for 4 months and we have also purchased tablets and IT support for all Councillors.

- Income: The total income for the year was £132,056.13 compared to £119,329.11 the previous year. The increase in income is due to the fact that two years of VAT, a total of £17,089, was reclaimed

Our reserves remain quite high and we are in the process of reinvesting these to ensure we obtain the best return we can.

General Reserves have again been retained untouched. Each Committee/working group has been allocated earmarked reserves which will be carried forwards each year to pay for both ongoing and future Projects.

The Parish Council maintained its share of the precept at just £52.00 per annum for a Band D property for the financial year 2025-2026. We have not increased our share/precept this year either which, as a result of a change in the tax base, has resulted in small decrease meaning that a Band D property will now be paying £50.42.per annum. Our precept remains one of the lowest in the Borough.

We are also intending to progress projects to utilise section 106 funding available to us.

As always, we will strive to make improvements to achieve best value for money for our residents

As a council, we'll be focusing on building on the foundations already in place—making sure we listen carefully, act responsibly, and keep Coxheath moving in the right direction. We won't promise the earth—parish councils rarely have that luxury—but we will promise to work hard, to be approachable, and to keep the best interests of the village at heart.

The Full Council has continued to meet in the Small Hall at the Village Hall on the last Tuesday of every month at 7.30pm. The public are very welcome to attend all Full Council and Committee meetings and are encouraged to do so to bring to our attention any concerns. Agendas are posted on the Parish Website, Facebook page & Notice

Boards and the minutes are posted on the Parish Website once approved at the next meeting.

Each year at the May Annual Meeting of the Parish Council, following the election of the Parish Council Chairman and Vice Chairman, Councillors are appointed to the various Committees and Working Advisory Groups. Each Group then has responsibility for its own Terms of Reference and budget for the year, including funds set aside from previous years.

Finally, thank you to all of you for being here this evening, and for being part of what makes Coxheath such a special place. A parish council is only as strong as the community it serves, and on that front, we are in very good shape indeed.

So, here's to the year ahead.

Up next we will hear a report from our clerk, Louise Goldsmith, followed by reports from some of our incredible village organisations and friends. After that we will have plenty of time for your questions and comments, and then we can all mingle, chat and grab some nibbles and drinkies together!