

## Annual Report from the Parish Council

The past twelve months seem to have been particularly busy for the Parish Council and the normal workload has been further enlarged by some major projects and also by the arrival of CIL funding. CIL money, (the **Community Infrastructure Levy**), is paid by a developer whenever a new house is built. The amount depends on the size of the house; most of the money goes to the local authority but a proportion passes on to the relevant parish council. The Acorns development has produced slightly over £ 100,000 for Walsham. This is a very large sum of money when compared with the annual precept which this year is £ 22,250 .

Last summer we sought suggestions as to how some CIL money might be used with bids closing at the end of August. We had a wide range of interesting ideas, but it is important to remember that the money is for “Infrastructure” projects, so funding a celebration won't count. Unfortunately building a swimming pool or running a cafe are somewhat beyond our resources and extending the school is outside our control. In what follows any item wholly (\*\*) or partly (\*) financed by CIL will be indicated. The CIL money needs to be spent during a five-year period so ***there will be other opportunities*** for village organisations or individuals to put forward bids.

Much of what we do is concerned with maintaining and enhancing the fabric of the village. During the past year we have:

- finished upgrading the village **streetlights** (CIL\*). Many of our lights had been in a dreadful state and over the past few years all lights have been brought up to modern standards. The total cost has been about £30k and the final batch has taken £13k of CIL. We now have lights which are more controllable, easier to maintain and cheaper to run.
- arranged a comprehensive survey of the **churchyard** wall and had all the recommended work completed – this has cost £8,973 of CIL\*\*, but should see the wall in a good state for years to come. In addition to the normal grass-cutting the tombstones in the northern section of the graveyard have been cleared of ivy, and money was provided for the purchase of daffodil bulbs which produced an avenue of blooms in the spring.
- paid for the materials needed to refurbish the village sign \*\*.
- replaced, with the help of volunteers, the perspex panels on the Palmer Street bus shelter.
- hired a machine known as a Billy Goat, which is used to clear up all the fallen leaves and rubbish which cover the pavements in the autumn and winter.
- provided £1,000 of CIL to the allotments group to help with repairs to their sheds.
- used £5,628 of CIL\*\* to purchase a new demountable stage for use in the Memorial Village Hall.
- paid for the cutting back of encroaching material covering the pavement running along the Causeway so that the full width of the pavement can be used.

We have also used our resources to support other aspects of village life:

- it is felt to be very important for Walsham to have a good quality **Neighbourhood Plan**, but producing one has proved to be particularly arduous, especially in the time of a pandemic. The Parish Council has sought to support the NP Group by helping to appoint a team of consultants who started work in September and are now driving the project forward. The final cost of the appointment will be in the region of £10k but the Parish Council is able to reclaim this from central

government.

- maintaining the open space alongside **the stream** between Rolfes and Millers Bridge has proved a problem for many years, and although some volunteers and riparian owners have made herculean efforts to keep the area tidy the results have been patchy. The Parish Council has now appointed the company that maintains the play park to do an annual clean-up of the whole area including the banks and the stream bed, and also to cut the verges when they cut the play area. This will hopefully provide support and encouragement for a group of volunteers to make the best of what could be a very attractive part of the village. At present this is something of an experiment and it would be useful to hear the views and opinions of parishioners.
- over the past ten years the **Wild Wood** has become an important part of Walsham life. It is well used and much loved by people of all ages. In recognition of this the Parish Council has decided to make an annual grant of £500 to the Wild Wood Steering Group, which is enough to cover the costs of their rent, annual insurance and the hire of machinery for grass cutting at the end of summer. This arrangement will be reviewed after three years. We have also bought\*\* wood for the construction of a Jubilee bench, which will eventually be moved into the new Jubilee Wood. We wish the group well with this wonderful new venture.

The biggest project in hand at the moment is the refurbishing and re-equipping of the **Play Area** on Townhouse Road. People have been wanting to develop this important facility, particularly for the benefit of toddlers, for many years. The difficulties and obstacles and frustrations have been legion, but eventually it was decided to work with trustees to dissolve the Play Council charity to enable the Parish Council to directly take on the lease of the Play Area and its management. After months of work we are at last in a position where a contractor has been identified, new equipment selected and funds (including CIL monies) raised. The award of the contract is imminent and work should start sometime in the next few weeks and hopefully we will have an amazing upgraded play facility available later this summer.

Some CIL money has been earmarked for upgrading the Speed Indicator Device on Summer Road, and for improving kitchen facilities in the Memorial Hall. We have also reserved some CIL money to act as “pump-priming” for the possible development of gym facilities at the Sports Club; this project will involve large sums of money, but if the local community is seen to be contributing it becomes easier to raise funds from other sources.

Finally I would like to thank my fellow councillors: Paul Arbon, Ian Bartholomew, Brian Kinnair, Nick Mecrow, Trevor Roberts and Janette Winch. They attend many, often lengthy meetings, respond to hundreds of emails, read loads of documents, study lots of planning applications and give many hours of their time. Without them none of the tasks in the paragraphs above would have been completed - without people like them Walsham le Willows would not be the village and the community it is.

But lastly I would like to give our sincere thanks to Kevin Boardley, The Parish Clerk. His is a very difficult and demanding job; it is amazing how much he is expected to know and how many balls he is expected to keep in the air at any one time. And it can be an extremely frustrating job – in fact there are few things more frustrating than the Enforcement Officer at MSDC or almost anybody at SCC Highways. Well done Kevin - your work is much appreciated.

Richard Belson  
Chair of Walsham Parish Council