

**SMEETH PARISH COUNCIL
BRABOURNE PARISH COUNCIL**

Joint Annual Parish Meeting

Wednesday 7th March 2018 at 7.00pm at Brabourne Baptist Church

1. Welcome

Cllr Herrick welcomed all present, noting that the meeting had arisen from comments at the 2017 Smeeth Annual Parish meeting.

2. Present

Cllr Herrick (Chairman Smeeth Parish Council), Cllr Hickmott (Chairman Brabourne Parish Council), Cllr Mrs Alford, Cllr Mrs Morey, Cllr Mrs Pereboom, Cllrs Thorpe and Macphee (Smeeth Parish Council); Cllr Mrs Bewick, Cllr Mrs Young, Cllr Mrs Tanner, Cllrs Joules and Mayland (Brabourne Parish Council), and Mrs S Wood (Clerk). Cllr Mrs Bell (county councillor) and Cllr Howard (borough councillor) were also present. Sixteen members of the public attended.

3. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Mrs Nyssens (Smeeth Parish Council), Cllr Spokes (Brabourne Parish Council), Cllr Miss Martin (borough councillor) and Peter Clayton.

4. Minutes of the 2017 Annual Parish Meetings

The Minutes of the 2017 Annual Parish Meetings were agreed and signed.

5. Smeeth Parish Council Chairman's Report

As in previous years I should like to thank all the Councillors who have served on this Parish Council over the past 12 months.

Special thanks must go to our Parish Clerk, Mrs Sue Wood, in what has again been a very busy 12 months. Sue continues to work tirelessly ensuring that Councillors are informed and up to date with all the current developments and also manages the Parish Council website and responds to various day to day enquiries on our behalf.

Regrettably Graham Kingston, our Community Warden, has recently left us for pastures new and we await a replacement. Our thanks to him for the hard work he has put in over a number of years.

Thanks must also go to our Police Community Support Officer, together with our Ashford Borough Council Ward Members, Councillor Miss Jane Martin and Councillor William Howard, and Councillor Mrs Clair Bell, our new Kent County Council Councillor, who has taken over from Andrew Wickham.

A number of key issues for the Parish as a whole have received attention during the course of the year –

- Ashford Borough Council's draft Local Plan to 2030, which has now been submitted to the Secretary of State for approval, although there is still some way to go before formal ratification and implementation.
- The Village Caretaker Scheme, which has been in place now for 2 years, and continues to be a great success.
- The Community Led Plan, which is being implemented under the seemingly tireless enthusiasm and guidance of Mr. Michael Hinchliffe.
- SpeedWatch, which has continued to monitor and record speeding vehicles in the village.
- The proposed refurbishment of the War Memorial.

Other areas that have received attention during the year include –

- Highways and footpath problems
- Horse and Rider Safety
- Parking issues
- Individual planning and development proposals
- Junction 10A proposals
- Various consultations

It has been encouraging to see an increase in interest in the workings of the Parish Council this past year as exemplified by a much improved attendance by residents at meetings and thanks must go to them for their support and enthusiasm.

Everything the Parish Council does is intended for the benefit of local residents. For those who have not yet made it to any Parish Council meetings, they are held bi-monthly at Brabourne Baptist Church, on Wednesday evenings (usually the first or second of the month) at 7.00pm – dates are detailed on the Parish Council notice-board on The Warren and on the Parish Council web-site.

6. Brabourne Parish Council Chairman's Report

I said last year that the biggest single issue affecting the parish this year would be Gladman Developments Ltd proposal for up to 125 dwellings on about 23 acres of Hospital Field between Lees Road and Canterbury Road.

BPC put strategies into place, created defences and continued to explore every avenue to prevent the development on this area of land. We also lodged a Village Green application on Hospital Field which will be considered by KCC later this year or next year and may also result in a further inquiry into the use of the land. This is also very relevant to the Gladman planning application because it means that the land will not be immediately available if planning consent is granted. The planning application went to appeal and the inquiry eventually took place in January this year.

We engaged the services of a barrister, Katherine Barnes, and a traffic consultant to act on our behalf. We also enlisted the services of 5 local residents – our Fab 5 – in no particular order, ladies first – Allison Nyssens, Kay Bellwood, Sylvia Tanner, Pat Thornby and Tony Dolding. They presented their own local views on the main considerations affecting the village and the site.

Our Fab 5 all drafted their own proofs of evidence which were analysed and edited by our barrister, Katherine; and then submitted to the Inspector before the hearing. All our witnesses were questioned on their proofs by Katherine, Gladman's barrister and the Inspector. Sue Wood, our clerk, also gave evidence on affordable housing and the village green application. All did splendidly well and deserve all the praise they received after their presentations.

ABC also presented a very strong, well argued case with a team of experts led by their own barrister, Richard Honey. In fact ABC put a tremendous amount of effort, time and money into this inquiry because it will set a precedent for housing development in the rural areas of the Borough over the next few years.

A good number of parishioners attended the inquiry throughout the days of the hearing – some every day. Indeed the Inspector remarked on the good attendance several times. We thank them as well for their support.

Breaking news: Following a new and accepted method of calculating the 5-year land supply in another recent planning inquiry, ABC can now be considered as having a 5-year housing land supply. BPC going it alone on advice from Katherine, have made very strong representations to the Inspector over the last week or so about this and he has now agreed that the inquiry needs to be re-opened for a further 2 days because the renewed evidence needs to be tested through cross-examination. The dates for re-opening the inquiry have not yet been fixed but the decision will now not be on or before the 16th April. We fight on!

The examination into ABC's draft Local Plan to 2030 starts on 11th April and this will also consider the 5 year housing land supply. BPC is not against development in the village. We need development in the parish but not on such a scale as envisaged by Gladman. We will support small development sites of up to about 10 properties in the appropriate location. Small sites are now starting to come forward in the parish for development, for example the site behind the Plough Inn, which has recently been granted consent for four bungalows and has already been sold. This will also mean that those sites that are NOT considered suitable for development under the new local Plan may become available for Local Needs housing.

Briefly, on other matters, we will continue to make representations to ABC Planning Dept on all applications received in the parish to try and protect out village and rural areas from unwanted development.

The Village Caretaker Scheme continues to operate successfully, carrying out some of the local tasks in the villages at a cheaper cost than previously provided by ABC or KCC.

The Brabourne website continues to remain a popular source of information and events in the village; and also a means of communicating with the PC. The closed Hospital Field Facebook page was a fantastic medium of communication for the planning application, the appeal and the enquiry.

The allotments continue to be popular and there are still a few plots available. Some further news on the allotments – Shepherd Neame is proposing to gift the allotment field to the PC later this year. We also understand the Plough Inn itself will also be sold by SN as it is not considered to be viable as a tenanted pub. We will do all we can to retain the property as a pub for the village.

Finally, my immense thanks once again to our Clerk, Sue Wood, without whom we would all be wandering around, lost! Sue has put in a huge amount of time because of the Gladman planning application, appeal, enquiry and the Village Green application, Thank you Sue for your knowledge, advice, hard work and humour – as I have said before, you are a credit to the profession of a Parish Clerk and to our Parish Council. You are worth your weight in gold!

Last year I said "...this year will be hard graft and vigour to assimilate all the objections we can raise against the Gladman application." It was and we are still fighting today. Developers will learn that we will not give in lightly and will fight to the bitter end!

7. Financial Report

The draft accounts for the period April 2017-February 2018 were presented and are attached to the Minutes.

Smeeth Parish Council: This is the lead council in the village caretaker scheme, therefore the caretaker's salary, pension contributions and running costs are shown. The other 3 parishes in the cluster (Brabourne, Brook and Mersham) contribute to the scheme, pro rata by population size, and ABC and KCC pay £5000 and £8000 respectively into the scheme. Smeeth field is located on the Romney Marsh and is let for grazing, a recent review confirmed that the rent paid is at a fair rate.

Brabourne Parish Council: Significant expenditure has been incurred on the Hospital Field appeal, because the Parish Council was represented by its own barrister at the appeal hearing. This has been funded by a loan from ABC, to be repaid over a 3-year period from the Precept. Once this has been repaid the Precept will be reduced. A loan of up to £40,000 was agreed, to date £15,000 has been drawn down.

8. Reports from local organisations

8.1 Community Led Plan group (Michael Hinchliffe)

There have been four meetings of the Coordinators Group in the previous 12 months. These have primarily been concerned with fund raising, setting priorities and, where applicable, choosing suppliers.

When the CLP was originally launched there were some 9 projects identified. Of these two have effectively been concluded; they are Mending the Roads and Merging the Two Parish Councils. The first of these has seen a high-quality flyer distributed to all households and business in the community explaining how road and signage defects can be reported to the appropriate authorities. The second of these two, merging the parish councils, requires the agreement of both parties and until that is achieved there is no further action possible.

Of the remaining seven, five require, by our standards, substantial resources to deliver. This has meant that a priority list has had to be agreed, not least because we only have a relatively small number of volunteers working on the CLP at any one time. Currently projects that we have funding for, in full or in part, include Smartening up the Village and Improved Sporting Facilities. Other costly projects that are listed, which we propose to address once those already in hand have been delivered, include Better Facilities for the Young, a new footpath across the village green running parallel to Bridge Road and the painting of the 70 street lights to be found in Brabourne and Smeeth. The other projects underway include Improved Public Transport, addressing speeding through the village and local needs housing.

The salient points of those projects in hand are:

Smartening up the village

Hoskin's Pond has been refurbished, overhanging foliage cut back and the work on repairing the railings that about the pond completed. It has been necessary to clear the gully that joins the two ponds on one occasion to prevent flooding. Some rubbish has accumulated in the pond which will require removing in the near future and we plan to freshen up and repaint the railings where necessary. Ladies from the WI have been out planting bulbs at about 20 locations and we should all be able to enjoy the fruits of their labour shortly. Thanks should be given to Lucie Edmed who not only collected large numbers of free bulbs from various local businesses but also coordinated the planting sessions. Those who donated bulbs include Wilco, Harding's Plants, Asda, Tesco's, B&Q, Evegate Nursery, Wyevale, B&M, Thompsons Nursery and a large bag of bulbs donated by a resident of our community. There is also a project underway by the WI, hopefully in conjunction with the Gardening Society, to see if our villages could or should enter Parishes in Bloom

Local Needs Housing

A survey of the demand for local needs housing has been undertaken, the details of which have been passed onto Rural Kent and both Parish Councils. Some 46 local residents stated they were looking for affordable rural housing in the community. Work is now under way to identify sites that could accommodate 6 houses or more and making contact with land owners.

Better Sporting Facilities

Funding is now in place for the basketball hoop to be put up at the playing field and for an outdoor gym on the village green. The cost for both these projects has been kept down by us deciding to do some of the hard graft ourselves. Indeed there was a meeting yesterday evening to put the bones on work schedules for the two projects. One of the stumbling blocks for the basketball hoop has been the cost of having a properly constructed tarmac playing surface laid down. We had several quotes including one from a firm, Swift Surfacing, which has a strong public service ethos. Swift Surfacing has submitted a quote, at cost, that allows the project to be delivered within our budget.

In a similar vein we had quotes for providing an outdoor gym that would provide facilities for all level of fitness and ages including people with disabilities and children under eleven. The Great Outdoor Gym

Company has provided a quote with a substantial discount being offered which the group unanimously agreed to take up. Once again the preparatory work will be undertaken by community volunteers.

Speeding

The main part of the project to reduce speeding within the village has involved data gathering. This is separate to Speedwatch, and there has been an exchange of information between the two groups.

Better Public Transport

Contact has been made with Stagecoach who have responded with a request for further detail of what is required. It has been suggested that an approach be made to surrounding villages to ascertain how strong the demand for later buses is, particularly on a Friday and Saturday evening. This is currently in hand.

Pavements and Footpaths

In the early stages of the CLP's work the need for a footpath in Woolpack hill was identified. It was quickly established, through KCC, that this was a nonstarter in the present economic climate as there hasn't been sufficient accidents on the hill to justify the investment needed. The proposal to create a hard surface footpath across the village green to take pedestrian traffic away from Bridge Road is still firmly part of the CLP's future plans, however, this should be seen as a longer term project as the funding needed is substantial and it is anticipated that it will take some while to raise. Brabourne PC has approached the CLP requesting a detailed plan of the green be produced showing where the proposed footpath will be as well as the outdoor gym. This is in hand.

Better Facilities for the Young

It is our intention to provide a youth shelter for the village. Once again this project can't be started until work that is currently underway is nearing completion.

Finances

Since the CLP started some £18,260 has been raised including £2,900 pledged but not yet received. There is currently £4,869 allocated to the basketball hoop project and £11,400 for the outdoor gym. Of the remaining funds expenditure includes safety equipment, liability insurance, professional services and the purchase of materials used to refurbish the pond and railings.

Conclusion

It may seem to some that progress has been rather slow, indeed those of us involved, hands-on, in the various projects wish progress were quicker. Unfortunately the work is being undertaken by a small group of dedicated volunteers which rarely exceeds a dozen people all of whom are providing their time and effort FOC.

The single biggest block to progress is raising the necessary funds and on that subject we would like to express thanks, on behalf of the community, to those villagers who have worked to help boost the funds, including those behind the village fete, the Christmas carol singers and anonymous benefactors.

8.2 Gardeners' Society (Brian Sanders)

It has proved rather difficult to determine when the Society was first established but it is believed to be in the 1930s, when it was known as the Village Produce Association. It has undergone various name changes since then [including the Brabourne & Smeeth Horticultural Society]; the title was changed to the Brabourne & Smeeth Gardeners' Society in 2012 with the aim of giving it a broader appeal – we are gardeners, not horticulturalists!

The Society meets on the last Friday of each month [except December] in the village hall at 7:15 for a 7:30 pm start and all are welcome! Any enquiries for further information should be directed to our secretary Wendy Sanders on 01303 813 451 or email brabournewendy@gmail.com.

2017 was a very successful year for the Society with 91 members and a full programme of events and activities including five shows, several interesting, informative and entertaining presentations by guest speakers and a very popular plant sale. There were visits to Hothfield Common, Wakehurst Place and the Royal Horticultural Society's gardens at Hyde Hall; our year ended in November with a pre-Christmas dinner in the village hall attended by over fifty members.

To date we have sixty seven members and our programme for 2018 includes a guided tour of Hothfield Heathlands in May, with visits to Great Comp garden in June and the RHS gardens at Wisley in September. Again, we will be staging five shows and a plant sale plus seven presentations on various garden-related subjects and, this month, a light-hearted quiz. A copy of the Society's Year Book & Show Schedule, giving more details of the visits, shows and presentations is attached to this report.

The committee, in consultation with the Society members and other local organisations, is considering how we might actively participate in the proposed "Parishes in Bloom" project. Other items for consideration include the use of the parish website, the possible establishment of our own website and the use of social media [e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.] for promoting the Society.

8.3 Brabourne Baptist Church (Geoff Thorpe)

Although we have been without a minister/leader for 2 years the premises have remained very active throughout the year. The church steering group regard the whole site as a community facility for all our villagers and their activities.

During school term time, The Ark, a vibrant parent, baby and toddler club, meet every Friday morning. This is not a church venture.

For the next age group (i.e. young families, mums, dads and children) we have Messy Church on the first Saturday of the month. The formula for this is a fun time, with craft and games, plus a Christian message and light meal.

A Youth Group (teenagers) met in the cabin on a weekly basis on Wednesday evenings, but unfortunately this has stopped due to a lack of funding

A Ladies Coffee Morning meets in the cabin on the first and third Tuesday of the month

The older community are catered for: We have Café Wednesday, with free coffee tea and biscuits every Wednesday morning and on the first Wednesday of the month, a clinic is held on behalf of Hi-Kent, to service and provide batteries for hearing aids. This is free of charge

Then on the last Thursday of the month, at lunchtime, a simple meal is prepared for the elderly. This is called Meeting Point.

Other catering occasions are; Ladies and Men's Breakfasts, which are held on a Saturday morning about six times a year.

The church is a collection point for donations of non-perishable food for the Ashford Food Bank.

The CLP group meet monthly, if possible, in the cabin to the rear of the main church building to discuss physical improvements they would like to make within the parishes. Also the community ladies sewing group usually meet every week in the cabin.

There is much talent in the area with the Art club meeting on the 1st Tuesday morning of the month. There are some very gifted artists in Brabourne and Smeeth. I'm amazed at their talent. The Royal British Legion meet the same day in the evening.

The advisory body of Smeeth Parish Council meet in our side hall every two months and when the need arises other meetings as well. Not to forget our MP Damian Collins who uses the building monthly for his clinics on the 3rd Friday pm.

Ashford Borough Council also have first call on the main hall for election purposes.

In conclusion, of course, we have normal Christian worship every Sunday morning. At the moment with a visiting speaker. From this extensive programme you can see that this building is a community amenity for all and an active centre for Christianity.

8.4 1st Brabourne and Smeeth Scout Group (read by Colin MacPhee on behalf of Jon Rose)

In 2017 our Scout Group celebrated it's 50th anniversary. Although there have been previous versions of Scouting in Brabourne and Smeeth, in our current format, we were formed by Ted Pile (a current resident of Brook) and Roy Collins on 10th May 1967. Sadly Roy is no longer with us but we were delighted that Ted was able to attend both our AGM and Group Camp at Hayton Manor Farm last May. All members were able to enjoy a great weekend of camping, pioneering, building walkways, rafting and more.

We have 3 sections as part of the group – Beavers (6 to 8), Cubs (8 to 10 ½) Scouts (10 to 14) plus the Mountbatten Explorer Scout Unit (14 to 17). Each section is reliant on volunteer leaders and this is our ongoing challenge. Although we have leader teams in place, we are very dependent on leaders many of whom joined when their own children were members and have remained long afterwards.

Beavers are full with 18 members (the maximum allowed by our Adult: Young Person Ratios. Cubs are similarly full with 25 members and Scouts have 2 spaces at the moment with 22 members.

An area of concern is that of waiting lists. Beavers have a very long list that is in double figures and we face a reality that may of those on the list will not get a chance to enjoy being a Beaver. However, with Cubs full and having a waiting list of 8 of their own, I foresee that unless we can recruit more adults to expand Beavers and Cubs, some young people will not have the chance to experience the fun, friendship and activities that we would like to provide for them.

In terms of activities, we have been very busy with a wide range of adventurous challenges undertaken by our young people. As well as camping, members of the group have been out hiking, cooking, cycling, climbing and on the water.

During the year we have been able to award some members with the top Chief Scouts Awards in each section – Beavers, Cubs and Scouts – Bronze, Silver and Gold respectively. In addition some of our Explorers have been working on and achieving their Bronze, Silver and Gold Duke of Edinburgh's Awards. All of these awards require the young people to undertake a wide range of activities from physically challenging to helping others, creative work, understanding their environment plus developing independence and self-reliance.

The biggest Scouting highlight in 2017 was the Kent International Jamboree at Detling in late July / early August. This camp was massive with about 6000 Scouts from all parts of the world taking part. The Scouts and explorers that attended experienced a fantastic range of activities from sailing to climbing, driving cars, target shooting, a day trip to London and a lot of fun and friendship. We led a party of 90 to this event which included Scouts from Wye, our Explorer Unit, our own Scouts and a group of Scouts, Explorers and Leaders from Switzerland. The Swiss Scouts stayed in our homes for a couple of days before and after the Jamboree.

This Summer we are travelling to Switzerland to camp with the Swiss Scouts and renew our friendships. This is a great experience for our Scouts and Explorers to not only travel abroad but also to get to know young people from other countries and understand that ultimately, everyone is the same!

As you will know, we continue to lead the monthly village newspaper and cardboard recycling effort which helps to pay some of our bills. We really appreciate the support the community gives us in our efforts on this front.

As councillors will realise from the above, we are very dependent on the support of our volunteer leaders and members of the management committee without whom we would be unable to function. I am always grateful to them for their ongoing support and generosity in committing themselves to Scouting.

We are always keen to have and welcome more help.

8.5 Playing Field Association (read by Geoff Thorpe on behalf of Paul Dawson)

The Playing Field continues to be a successful focus for village life.

The steering group established to oversee the improvements to the playing surface of the field has now been wound up as its work is completed. Its final acts were to effect improvements to the entrance of the car park, eliminating a large pothole, to pave the muddy entrances to the small play park and to replace the damaged fence and posts protecting the playing surface from the car park and rabbits. Maintaining the field at its present standard is an expensive process and the Association is grateful to the two Parish Councils for their increased annual financial support which makes this possible.

Smeeth and Brabourne Football Club regularly use the facility for matches and training and there is now a formal agreement between the Playing Field Association and the Club to protect the interests of both as this use continues. This is working well, as is the good relationship the Association has with the Scouts and Guides. They use the car park regularly, place a skip there for the monthly village paper collection and contribute to its upkeep.

The play equipment in the small fenced off area is inspected annually and any necessary repairs are effected following the receipt of the written report. Some of the older equipment, although quite safe for current use, is showing signs that it will need replacing before too long.

In November Smeeth School decided that it would no longer hold its annual firework night, and so after much discussion and form-filling, the well-known local volunteer group of Channer, Channer and Tanner set about organising a replacement firework night on the playing field. This proved to be a great success socially, visually and financially and drew many compliments from happy villagers. It looks in danger of becoming an annual event. However, as November is a little way off, the same skilled trio of organisers are planning a village fête at the same venue for the afternoon of Sunday June 24th, just to ensure that they do not lose their touch.

I would like to record my thanks to the Playing Field committee members who help to keep an eye on the facility and especially to those who do the necessary work to maintain a much valued village amenity.

8.6 Village Hall (Jacqui Fortescue)

I know this is supposed to be a report covering the last 12 months but as background, I would like to say that the Village Hall I was first introduced to 20+ years ago (when my children were little) was nothing like the excellent facility we have now!

Nowadays, the windows are double glazed, the car park has tarmac and there are toilets off the entrance hall to save having to use the freezing cold toilets & changing rooms at the back; these have been converted into a meeting room with its own toilets. And more recently the kitchen has been completely refurbished.

This year, we turned our attention to the decoration of the hall. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of a small number of volunteers, we managed to paint all the walls and woodwork throughout the main hall, meeting room, entrance hall and toilets (including an awful lot of filling and sanding). Most of the work was done over the August bank holiday and we finished it on a Saturday in January. Having managed to purchase the paint and materials very reasonably and having merely offered doughnuts to our trusty band of helpers in lieu of payment, we were able to save around £3000 in comparison to the quote we had obtained from professional decorators.

Since finishing the decoration, we have been updating the tables and chairs and our next project is to look at re-sanding and varnishing the wooden floor in the main hall.

The improvements mentioned above have led to an increase in our hire income over recent years. We now have three Pilates groups, a beginners Yoga, Tai Chi and circuit training using the hall weekly as well as the more established weekly and monthly meetings such as Yoga, Karate, Dog Training, Gardeners and WI. Our most prolific user is Corinne Willson Stage Academy, which provides all sorts of singing and dancing lessons to local children, using our hall four days a week.

Comparisons with hire fees in other village halls in the area led us to discover that our fees were among the most reasonable. This is largely due to the financial support we receive from both Brabourne and Smeeth Parish Councils, which allows us to keep the fees low and for which we are very grateful. However, along with increased usage comes increased electricity use and increased cleaning and maintenance bills. This is not helped by the constantly increasing costs of electricity by the suppliers. We therefore decided to increase our hire charges this year to £5 per hour for the main hall and £3 per hour for the meeting room on weekdays and we are now charging £15 per hour for one-off bookings at the weekends. We feel that this still offers very good value for money and we are keen to attract hirers locally for family events and parties. With this in mind, we are hoping to increase our presence on social media via the community websites and social media platforms going forward as well as the traditional advertising in the Parish Magazine.

I would like to finish by thanking the local community for their continued support of the Village Hall and by repeating the Committee's thanks to both Parish Councils and the Village Lottery for their generous financial support.

8.7 St Mary's Church, Smeeth (read by Hilary Alford, on behalf of Di Dawson)

2017 was a year of great change for St Mary's Smeeth and for our 6 sister churches. There were open meetings and numerous discussions about the future of the management of the Church as we look to modernising some of our methods and approaches. Whilst this would mean almost no change to anything within the service structure or pastoral care of the church, it should ensure more efficient organisation allowing our next Vicar/Rector to have more time to work in the Parish.

Of much greater interest to the community of Smeeth and Brabourne were the Smeeth Church activities which took place throughout the year. In Lent we held The Big Knit in which we took on the challenge of creating 40 patchwork knitted blankets in 40 days. This was to comprise 28 single blankets for use in the winter shelters for the homeless and 12 cot blankets for mums facing particular challenges. We actually produced 43 blankets in the 40 days and the activity continues (though more slowly) as part of a Knit and Natter group which meets on the 2nd Friday of each month – a direct result of the Big Knit.

Our coffee concerts in June were as popular as ever – musical concerts of just 30 minutes followed by refreshments. These proved very popular Saturday morning events and more coffee concerts are planned in 2018. Lees Court Music and The Bourne Consort also gave us enjoyable musical events.

Our regular Fridays @ 3 – the last Friday in each month when a speaker or activity is followed by home made tea - continue to be popular and offer an afternoon of socialising to some members of our community who may find life somewhat lonely at times.

Pastoral care, visiting those in the hospital, Hospice, Nursing Homes or in our community, has increased and many members of our congregation are involved. We are very pleased to see this area of our outreach growing.

Our monthly coffee mornings held in homes around the parish – principally for a pleasant morning and outreach but which also raise much valued funds – have continued and grow in popularity.

Very significantly this year we had to say goodbye to Revd Ian Campbell and his wife Margaret and Revd Richard Le Rossignol and his wife Alex. Ian had been our assistant priest and Richard our priest and to lose them both to retirement within three months of each other was a bit of a blow. However, we continue with the same service pattern as before, to plan and hold weddings, wedding blessings, Baptisms, Funerals, memorial services and special services (like Crib Service), using lay leaders and visiting priests.

The costs of maintaining a mediaeval building are challenging. However, Smeeth Parochial Church Council has refused to let this limit the need to make improvements. Our Hobbies Exhibition and Gift Day (with a superb model railway layout and many other hobbies) helped to raise the needed monies to enable work on the churchyard to begin. Most of the churchyard maintenance is undertaken by church members but where expert work is needed to ensure the future and safety of some of our very large trees we have used the services of Indica Forestry – who have been superb. Kent County Council cut back the tree just outside the church and this has been replaced by a new Oak Tree. We are also hoping to start work on repairing the church wall during the coming year

Every month a "View from a Bench" written by Sian Hall is produced. This article – with drawings and/or photographs to illustrate the text, writes of the flora and fauna which can be found in the churchyard. Smeeth church remains open during daylight hours so anybody is welcome to pop in and enjoy a few moments of its peace. The Oak Room is busy most days providing a useful smaller space within our villages. Smeeth St Mary's remains a very active, friendly rural church in which services within the church, and Outreach beyond it, are both developing and growing.

8.8 Brabourne and Smeeth Guides and Brownies (read by Sue Wood, on behalf of Julia Adams)

We would like to welcome Emma Chapman back to the unit. Emma was a Guide at our unit from 2008-2011 and is returning as a leader with us. This term we are also welcoming a number of Guides from the Sellindge unit which unfortunately closed at Christmas.

Guides: A busy timetable included activities such as 'Build a Shelter', work towards badges, pancake night, quiz night, outdoor activity and biscuit bonnets.

We are thrilled to run this thriving unit, which is running at capacity. There is always opportunities for Mums, Dads, Grandparents, Aunties, Uncles, Cousins and elder siblings to help. Not just at our unit, but within Scouting or on the Management Committee. The next Management Committee meeting is held at the HQ on Monday, 15th January at 7.30pm, parents are welcome to attend. Alternatively, if you feel you have a skill that can help, for example, IT, Stores Management, sharing your work skills or your hobby with us at a meeting we would love to hear from you.

We will be taking the Guides to Wellies and Wristbands at Foxlease over the August bank holiday.

To all those parents who may not be aware, we have a Facebook page - Brabourne & Smeeth Guides. We use this regularly to post messages and updates, along with pictures. Please send a friend request to be added to our closed site.

Brownies: Newspaper collection is something we do on the second Saturday of every month in the village. We meet at the HQ at 9.00am and are usually finished by 10.30am so please do come along and help. In fact it is great fun and the Brownies will love helping. If you are not able to help with the collection please do put out your papers/ magazines/catalogues for collection and encourage your neighbours to do the same.

8.9 St Mary's Church, Brabourne (read by Villy Pereboom, on behalf of Kathy Embleton-Smith)

Essentially, the business of Brabourne Church falls into three linked areas: services, church maintenance and improvement, and fundraising.

First, services: since our Vicar retired we have been fortunate to retain our usual pattern of services. This has been achieved by the work of our churchwarden, Mr Charles Sinden, together with Mrs Di Dawson, churchwarden of Smeeth Church – to whom we are very grateful. We currently have two services on the 1st and 3rd Sundays of each month, which are lay-led, and two Holy Communion services on 2nd and 4th Sundays led by visiting priests. These priests who are helping us during the interregnum have provided strong support and we are very grateful to them.

Second, maintenance of the church: This year the heating and lighting have all been upgraded to make the church a more comfortable and usable space. This has made a great difference and with the altar and many other features of the church lit, the effect is stunning. The war memorial, which names local people who died in both wars has also been restored, having suffered damage from bat excrement. The cost of all this work – over £21K - has been funded in part by the Friends of St Mary, Brabourne (£10K), and the rest is to be found by the PCC, much of it from fundraising. Our grateful thanks go to the Friends and to those members of the community who have supported us with their generous donations.

On the subject of maintenance, we must not ignore the work carried out by numerous people who open and close the church every day, wash the linen, polish the brass, make coffee after services, clean the church, keep it beautiful with flowers, help with fundraising, host fundraising events, and work regularly to keep the churchyard tidy. Our thanks go to all who help to maintain Brabourne Church, including the PCC, and don't let us forget the bell ringers who make such a difference to the village environment on Sundays. Third, we work hard at fundraising as we have a substantial Parish Share to pay and also additional costs of maintaining a Grade I listed building. In the last year we have held several fund raising events including a Spring Supper at Penstock Barn, a Ploughman's Lunch, a Harvest Lunch in the church and we've been involved in a Benefice Walk. In addition to several other smaller fund raising events we also have a regular event where we meet together for a drink and a chat – nothing religious - on the First Friday of every month from 6-7pm. Everyone is welcome and our aim is to bring the community together. Our thanks go to those volunteers who host this event each month. We are grateful for the support of local people and delighted that they have embraced First Friday so positively.

There is much more that could be said but in an era when most publicity about the church points to decline, our aim has been to demonstrate that Brabourne Church works hard at trying to engage with the

local community, while at the same time playing a full role in the life of the Benefice and Parish of Stour Downs (formerly the A20 Benefice).

8.10 Allotment Society (Colin MacPhee)

The Society was formed in late 2010 – the Parish Council leased the land at the rear of The Plough Public House from Shepherd Neame. The land was leased for an initial period of five years with the option of a further five and a further 10 years after that. Water was laid on to the site and a new access track laid. A 'green' lavatory was installed early in 2011, as were security fencing and gates. Sheds were purchased by the Parish Council and erected by Society Members.

The suggestion to create an allotment site came from residents of the Parish and the initial public meeting attracted about 40 people. Subsequently 22 people signed up for an allotment. The Brownies and guides also signed up for a plot. Of the original 22, 12 still have plots on the site. The Society currently has 31 members working 38 plots (some members have two plots). This year for the first time all of the available plots are occupied. There is possibly space on the perimeter for one more. The turnover in members since the start of the project indicates that the commitment required in terms of time is not obvious until you actually start work on your plot. Also people's circumstances change over the years.

The management and maintenance of the site falls to the Society's committee and to members who volunteer to mow the public areas and access paths and help with the bigger maintenance tasks. This year with the support of Brabourne Parish Council we plan to re-roof the communal shed and set up a central composting site accessible by all members. The council have also agreed to provide an additional water point on the west side of the site and to investigate the possibilities of modifications to the car park so that it is safe to park cars on it. We have purchased a new mower in December and we will retain the old one as a shredder for compostable material.

The soil on site is very light and does not retain water so copious amounts of compost and composted manure are required every year on every plot. The Society is grateful for the deliveries to the site of donkey manure and bedding from the Donkey sanctuary on Canterbury Road and for the chipped wood and bark delivered by Indica forestry in Sellindge.

Unlike most village organisations we do not have a regular monthly meeting. We all get together twice a year, for a barbecue on site in September and for a pre-Christmas dinner in one of the village pubs. The news that Shepherd Neame are to give the allotment site to Brabourne Parish Council is very welcome and eliminates uncertainty resulting from the sale of The Plough.

8.11 Smeeth WI (Joy Taylor)

On the 24th June, this year, it will be Smeeth W.I.'s 100th birthday which is a remarkable achievement for a local branch of a National organisation which itself was only founded three years prior to our own formation. The W.I is made up of many branches all over the country but Federations cover various districts and we are part of the East Kent Federation which funnily enough did not come into existence until a year after Smeeth W.I. formation.

As an individual W.I we plan a programme each year of speakers on a variety of subjects and include what we call our "homemade" speakers - that is Members or Member's husbands who may have an interesting topic to tell us about. We always try to support a fellow charity and we can call on W.I approved speakers and entertainers. At our Programme Meeting to which all Members are invited to attend or send in suggestions, we discuss what they feel would make a good topic for our regular monthly meetings. Over the past year we have learnt about the Highlights of a Holiday to Tasmania, Life with a Guide Dog, Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend, and the Music and Turbulent Times of Gilbert and Sullivan. Members have also spoken about their special treasures and we have heard The Story of Pantomime from a great raconteur and Pantomime artist, Paul Harris. We try to have at least two Open Meetings a year where we select a topic that will be of interest to all - male and female alike and which are always well supported. We had the Natural History of Kent last summer and the St. Clements Clog Dancers last month, who encouraged audience participation and which was great fun.

We usually have a fairly local outing in August and we very much enjoyed a great demonstration at Sellindge Pottery last year with retail therapy and this year we are making a trip to St. Augustine's Priory with a tour and Afternoon Tea. We also look forward very much to our Centenary Lunch in June when we shall be entertained in the afternoon by the Canterbury Brass Band.

Our extra activities include a Luncheon Club every month when we try various local places to eat and enjoy a social time and lunch together. We have theatre trips and last year saw Shirley Valentine and War Horse and later this year we shall be off to see Calendar Girls the Musical.

We have various fundraising activities, an excellent raffle every other month organised by Kathleen MacPhee and always enjoy the Christmas Craft Fair which supports Brabourne Church and also like to have a stand at Smeeth Church on Hobbies Day in September.

We are able to meet up with fellow members at Group Meetings and the East Kent Federation offers a range of events and activities for all members to participate in, if they so wish. It is good news that our own membership has been steadily increasing in recent times.

During the Autumn and early New Year you may already know that Smeeth W.I. have been out and about planting daffodil bulbs. Our idea originally was to plant the road island at the junction of The Ridgeway, Church Road and Lees Road to mark our Centenary. We were then invited by Michael Hinchliffe of the C.L. Plan to do further planting. We are indebted to the Parish Councils and the assistance of the C.L.P. and others, that our stalwart band of Planters led by Lucie Edmed have planted many verges all around the villages of Smeeth and Brabourne. Our special plaque was sited on the road island recently and we feel that this heralded a great Centenary Year for Smeeth W.I.

8.12 Royal British Legion (George Taylor)

2017 for the Brabourne and Smeeth Branch of the BL was one tinged with tragedy and sadness for whilst we enjoyed our usual mix of Comradeship, Remembrance and Community activity, we also lost some of our much missed members.

Our President Countess Mountbatten, or Lady B as she was known to us, died in the early part of the year and our Poppy Appeal Organiser Paul Hardisty was tragically killed in a car crash almost a year ago this week. Both have been sadly missed in their different ways. Lady B for her good advice and presence at our various meetings including the Remembrance Day service and Paul for his enthusiasm to all he did and his dedication to our Poppy Appeal. We miss them both.

The Branch AGM of October 2016 saw wholesale changes to our Committee and in 2017, not only did we need to appoint a new President, Lady Joanna Knatchbull, but we faced a time of reconstruction and development. The general consensus was that it was a year which although in many ways followed the pattern of previous years - a three month cycle in which we enjoyed a Branch meal, a speaker and a Business and Social evening each were filled with laughter, fun and much lively discussion.

Although we were unable to have our regular organised coach trip during the year we were able to enjoy an additional branch lunch and also a Branch Dinner to which other guests were invited. Both proved to be very successful and are likely to be repeated over the next year.

The principles on which the RBL works are based on three main elements, as I have already said, and our regular meetings satisfy the Comradeship part of our mission. Remembrance is stimulated by the support we give to the national Poppy Appeal which raises funds for our main recipients, members or former members of the Armed Forces and their families. This year our Branch raised the magnificent sum of over £22,000.

Our third element is Community and the branch has continued to support several of our Members, particularly our older Members with visits and hampers at Christmas.

We have spent some time this year trying to recruit new Members with some success, and I would like to remind everyone that the Royal British Legion is an open organisation, which although supporting members and former members of the armed forces now has more non ex-servicemen and women than those who have served.

Do come along for a meeting or two and see if we offer you a pleasant way to spend a Second Tuesday evening in the month.

9. County Councillor's report

Cllr Mrs Bell introduced herself, having been elected as county councillor for Ashford Rural East in May 2017. Cllr Mrs Bell stated that she is also an Ashford Borough councillor. At ABC her responsibility is for the environment and land management, including grounds maintenance. At KCC she sits on the Environment/Transport/Highways Committee. Cllr Mrs Bell advised that at ABC her role oversees waste collection, and at KCC waste disposal, so she is aware of both sides. The Cobbs Wood recycling centre is being reviewed, with regard to what is being recycled and possible expansion.

Cllr Mrs Bell advised that she is involved in departmental budgets, noting the difficulty in balancing budgets following the reduction in funding from central government. In the current year KCC has had to make savings of £53,000,000, leading to an increase in county council tax of ~5%, this includes 2% ring-fenced for social care.

Bus services: One of the proposals in the November draft budget was a reduction in subsidy to the bus companies of £2,000,000. This was not popular in rural areas but has now been reviewed, and (after discussion with bus companies) the cuts will now total £500,000. Cllr Mrs Bell stated that Ashford would not be affected by the cuts. A 'conversation' will be held with interested parties, which may include public meetings and focus groups, on bus services and what is wanted and needed. There is the possibility that community transport may be integrated with bus services, including school and social care transport. Use of booking apps (cf Uber) is being considered so that provision would be demand-led.

Cllr Mrs Bell was asked if she has responsibility for Highways, and replied that although on the Transport Committee she is not involved with Highways. She agreed that the state of the roads is poor, noting that the volume of HGV traffic passing through contributes to this – roads are very heavily used. Repairs are being prioritised but it is hoped that more money will be made available for roads maintenance.

Cllr Mrs Bell encouraged the use of the KCC Portal to report problems.

A complaint was forthcoming from the floor regarding a lack of maintenance on the A20, including unlit bollards and a lack of cats eyes. It was noted that the A20 is of significance when Operation Stack is in place. The Chairman offered to follow-up.

10. Borough councillor's report

Cllr Howard thanked the Parish Councils for their support over the last year.

The biggest challenge has been Gladman and ensuring ABC's involvement; ABC has indicated that Brabourne is a 'red line' that developers should not cross and has invested heavily financially and in time in fighting the Hospital Field application. Cllr Howard noted how the community had come together and shown solidarity in numbers and local expertise to ensure its voice was heard at the Hospital Field appeal.

Planning: Cllr Howard stated that it had been a busy year with the drafting of the new Local Plan. The playing field proposal had not been included in the Plan, reflecting residents' views. He noted that the Caldecott site had been put forward, which would have delivered more houses than the playing field site, but this had later been withdrawn.

Cllr Howard advised that the Local Plan has now been submitted and therefore has weight in the Gladman appeal.

Andrew Wickham stepped down from KCC at the May 2017 elections, and Clair Bell was elected for Ashford Rural East; Cllr Howard welcomed working with Cllr Mrs Bell as a county councillor, after their previous work together as borough councillors.

Cllr Howard reported on new developments in Ashford: Ashford College; the new office building near the station (which has almost full occupancy) and which is opening soon; the Designer Outlet expansion; Victoria Way redevelopment (including residential, a microbrewery and Aldi); the new cinema in Elwick Road; A28 dualling. Cllr Howard noted that with the J10A works having started, residents should expect delays as the works proceed. He noted that Mecca Bingo did not renew its licence, the building has been sold to ABC and will be part of the initiative to rejuvenate the town centre. The signalling upgrade on HS1 has been completed, enabling the new rolling stock to stop at Ashford. Cllr Howard advised that he has been working with the leader to ensure that ABC is included in the consultation and impact assessments for Otterpool Park.

The Armed Forces Covenant has been renewed and strengthened, the councillor who has taken over as 'champion' is a former officer in the Services.

The ward member grant is used to benefit local projects; Cllr Howard reported that he supported the proposal that any money left in the scheme at the end of the financial year would go to the borough's Army Cadet forces. The scheme will continue in 2018-19, part will be ring-fenced for commemorations for the centenary of the end of WW1.

Budget: Services are being maintained and investments are generating income.

ABC continues to levy the lowest council tax in Kent.

It was suggested from the floor that the Bingo Hall be converted to a theatre; Cllr Howard noted that a residents'-led campaign for this is already underway. He noted that the Marlowe Theatre attracts countywide funding, leaving little for others, and also needs subsidies to keep going. The Arts Council also looks at footfall, this can be supplied by the Marlowe. However if private enterprise came forward then ABC would look favourably on it.

11. Any Other Business

No other business was raised.

The meeting closed at 9.00pm.

Smeeth Parish Council Statement of Accounts 07 March 2018

Income to 28_Feb_18

Precept	22376.00	
Concurrent Functions Grant	370.00	
Council Tax Support Grant	520.00	
VAT refund	745.25	
Smeeth Field rent	350.00	
Bank interest	9.10	
Grants & PCs' payments (caretaker)	21580.30	
Charity	175.00	
Sundry	0.00	
Subtotal	46125.65	
B/f	32373.81	
Total	78499.46	78499.46

Expenditure to 28_Feb_18

Clerk's salary	3365.17	
Litter picker's salary	652.50	
Caretaker's salary	15528.15	
Caretaker employer NI & pension	4094.09	
Caretaker capital expenditure	57.99	
Caretaker running costs	4040.72	
Office expenses	164.67	
Subscriptions	444.26	
Insurance premium	605.19	
Audit fee	360.00	
Training	72.00	
Hall hire	150.00	
Donations	278.80	
Charity	175.00	
Dog waste bags	435.60	
Total	30424.14	30424.14
C/f to 2018-2019		48075.32

Brabourne Parish Council Statement of Accounts 07 March 2018

Income to 28_Feb_2018

Precept	34000.00	
Concurrent Functions Grant	530.00	
Council Tax Support Grant	410.00	
VAT refund	1271.76	
Fordred's Charity	175.00	
Bank interest	5.41	
Allotment rentals	1195.00	
Wayleave agreement	40.54	
Loan drawdown from ABC	15000.00	
Sundry	400.06	
Subtotal	53027.77	
B/f	13467.01	

Total	66494.78	66494.78
Expenditure to 28_Feb_2108		
Clerk's salary	5613.63	
Litter collector's salary	1128.75	
Fordred's Charity	175.00	
Audit fee	240.00	
Allotments (charges)	1499.78	
Insurance premium	417.06	
Office expenses	479.37	
Subscriptions	626.99	
Grounds maintenance	1632.00	
Tree surgery	240.00	
Village caretaker scheme	4168.46	
Community Led Plan group	334.00	
Village green application	1030.00	
Hospital field	35871.84	
Citizenship Award	0.00	
Memorial Prize	50.00	
Donations	807.60	
Total	54314.48	54314.48
Projected balance C/f		12180.30