WICKHAMBREAUX ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
TUESDAY 16 APRIL 2013

THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

The Chairman Cllr Le Jeune read the following summarised report:

During the year much time has been spent in preparing for the Public Inquiry into the possible registration of Seaton Meadow as a village green. The Inquiry began in November, had to be adjourned, and was completed in February. The Inspector now has to write her report for KCC. She will recommend registration of all or part of the land or take the view that there is insufficient evidence of village green use. Her report is not expected for about another two months. The Council is particularly indebted to Mrs Volkman and Mr Hayward, who represented Seaton Community Action on our Village Green Advisory Committee, for all their work in compiling the evidence for the Inquiry, the staff and students of the Kent Law Clinic at the university for all their advice and their work with the witness statements and all the villagers who gave evidence.

Much Council time has also been spent in responding to requests from Mr and Mrs Perkins under the Freedom of Information Act. They asked for all material we held going back to 2009 relating to the sale of the Ickham Grazing Marsh and Seaton Meadow generally. We complied conscientiously with the requests and with further correspondence from the Information Commissioner.

Planning is always an important part of Parish Council work, although we are not, of course, not the decision-making authority, which is CCC. The new government National Planning Policy is causing us concern as it removes many planning constraints. The Canterbury District is due to provide another 15,000 houses over the next 20 years and the population is due to rise by 30,000. It was due to be published last October, may appear in the next month, after the local elections, but won't have passed through all its consultation stages and been adopted for another year. It is now called The Local Development Framework.

We have considerable expenditure on tree work this year. Our insurance is subject to a tree inspection clause. We have had to fell two chestnuts on the Green because of disease and more work is needed on the big lime in the centre. A dead tree was also taken down at the playing field. We shall replant on the Green, as required when felling trees in a Conservation Area. We plan for another lime on the large green and an oak on the small green. The tree stump near the post box is the responsibility of KCC as it's on a roadside verge. They have promised to plant a new tree as soon as they have the money. They should do so within two years.

We monitor the river. The flood relief channel was opened in early February and has worked successfully, carrying water round the village. Rainfall in 2012 was over 40% up on the annual average. Water levels take some time to have an effect lower down the valley, once the Nailbourne starts running. High ground water levels seeped into the sewage pipes and so some pumping had to take place. Oxygen levels are at over 80% and pollution at only half a percent, so despite the cautious warning notices, there has been no serious risk to health of wild life, dogs or people. Water levels are dropping and emergency action is expected to end soon. Southern Water is busy producing its strategic plan for the next 25 years. The repairs to the river bank also appear to have been successful. We are grateful to Mr Twyman who represents us at meetings about flooding and the health of the river, and organises the annual clearance of the Black Hole Dyke.

Every meeting we advise the County Council of pot holes. They are not responsible for the bad weather and do their best to keep up with emergency repairs, but the roads generally are in a bad state. Thanks to KCC Cllr Michael Northey's efforts, Nargate Street is at last seeing some improvement.

In Wickhambreaux we rejoiced when there was re-surfacing at the junction of The Street and The List where there had been big puddles for years and it looked like a good repair, evening out the whole area. Sadly, the next time it rained we realised that the levels were wrong and what had been a

series of puddles had been converted into one very large one. KCC have promised to try to sort this out in the new financial year.

Parking remains an ever present problem, without solution. People without off-street parking cannot be told to limit the number of cars they own and every taxed car has a right to be on the highway. We can only ask neighbours to park considerately. Highways issues are the responsibility of the County Council, not the Parish. Fortunately, our planters on the bridge seem to have been a continuing success in preventing the most dangerous parking, on the bend by the mill. We are grateful to Cllr Hamilton who continues to look after them.

The happiest events in the year were the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in June. The children's party outside the Rose Inn, the Garden Party in Mr and Mrs Hayward's garden, the film evening put on by Mr Maxted and the original Coronation decorations, preserved for so long by the Montgomery family, were the highlights in Wickhambreaux, and the barbeque and lighting of the beacon in Stodmarsh were all very well attended. The financial support received from the City and County Councils meant that we were able to offer these entertainments free of charge. Cllrs Wright and Joice drew the whole successful programme together.

Two residents, Mr Bodimede and Mr Roberts have worked on restoring the old cast iron signpost at the junction of Grove Road and Wickham Court Lane and Cllr O'Sullivan has made running repairs to the nice wooden signpost at the top of Wickham Court Lane.

The Village Hall is well maintained and remains in good order thanks to Cllr Joice who spends so much time checking and seeing that all is well.

Both our County and City Councillors have been conscientious in keeping in touch with the parishes and offering their help and support. Michael Northey is standing again for the County Council in the May elections. Brian Staley, who has been our Little Stour Ward Councillor at the City Council for six years, plans to retire at the next election in two years' time. We thank them both for their help with local issues.

I should also like to thank all the people who volunteer in ways which help the villages, Liz Jones and the Birt family who mow the greens in Wickhambreaux and Stodmarsh, Sheila Hickling who is our Tree Warden, and Liz Jones and Jenny Wood for the picking up of litter around the village. Most of all I'd like to thank the Vice-Chairman, Martin Twyman and all my fellow councillors and clerk who all work together in the best interests of the village

FINANCIAL REPORTS

Cllr Le Jeune summarised the expenditure and income of the preceding year.
Main expenditure included the Clerk's salary, legal fees in conjunction with the Village Green Inquiry and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations (although the majority was covered by grants from Canterbury City Council and Kent County Council).

The Precept figure has been cut by 10% and the method of calculating band D property tax has changed. This results in residents paying the same but for less money being awarded to the Parish Council. There is also a very probable possibility of Parish Councils' Precepts being capped in two years time. The Concurrent Grant funding has also been cut this year. To make up the expected shortfall to cover essential maintenance including tree works, grass cutting and insurance, the Parish Council has had to make a number of savings. To allow for any future cuts in the Concurrent Grant funding and incase any projects arise in the future, the Parish Council have raised the Precept by a further 10% to a new figure of £9773.00 following advice from Canterbury City Council.

REPORTS FROM THE COUNTY COUNCILLOR AND CITY COUNCILLOR

County Councillor Michael Northey

How time flies, and it is the Annual Meeting again. It's always nice to be here, with its active and skilled council and friendly local people! It is such a beautiful village – the sort which symbolises Kent. It was impressive to see how the school came second in the train modelling competition for schools all over Kent – let's aim for first prize this year!

Kent County Council -- as usual the Budget predominates, because KCC wants to do so much and we need the means to do it. We have had seven years of reduced income, and in the last three years we have had to remove £340 million from the budget, and this year it is again about £97million. It would be lovely to do all we want on roads, education, services for children, young people adults and elderly, etc, etc, but we have to prioritise severely now. In spite of all, we have not increased council tax for the last three years, and there is no loss of front-line services, though we do have to do things a different way at times.

We are rolling superfast Broadband all over Kent. KCC has put in £10m, the government has provided just under £10m, and BT is spending £20m, working together – total, £40m. This means that by 2015, 91% of Kent will get superfast speeds of at least 24mb, another 4% will get fast speed and the remaining 5% , in really remote areas, will still do better, at 2mb. So we are encouraging local business, education and all the good things that superfast broadband gives.

Locally I keep an eye on what is happening. I would not normally take sides on planning matters – but you have my full support on the quest for village green status for Seaton Meadows. On roads there is always the problem of parking, but here again it is more a matter of neighbourly relations, as Kent Highways are most reluctant to despoil the village with parking restrictions and yellow paint. I am always available to do help all I can. Thanks again – and incidentally, you do one of the best after meeting spreads of all my ten parishes.

City Councillor Brian Staley

First of all I wish to congratulation the chair in particular and the whole of the parish council for the splendid work that they undertake on behalf of this beautiful and most liveable of villages. I wish them well with striving to campaign for village green status on Seaton Meadows.

As an opposition Lib Dem Councillor, I would like to explain our alternative budget which we presented to the Full Council which was rejected by the ruling Conservative Group. If we had been the ruling group we would not have raised the Council Tax. Our proposal was to accept the Coalition offer of £96,000 which we would have received from national government if we had frozen the tax and the rest would have been withdrawn from our Vat recovered reserve of £1,700,000 which draws little interest at this time.

We would have insisted on maintaining the grants to the voluntary sector organisations which do so much for the most vulnerable at this difficult time.
We would have reduced our own councillor allowances by 10 % setting some sort of example in these difficult times. We also recommended one more market day which would have brought in an extra £150,000. We would have postponed the extension to the Park and Ride in New Dover Road and spent more on sustainable transport in the district.

In the last year I am pleased to recall the reduction of the speed limit on the A257 and the opening of Ellen Court. Such issues have had to be vigorously fought for. I have long campaigned for appropriate public transport for those living in small villages and though I am pleased that Ickham and Wickhambreaux now has a service I would have preferred smaller buses or even a mini-bus service which could have included Stodmarsh and Grove. A shared taxi service is now operating in New House Lane and if funding allows I would love to see it operate in Stodmarsh.

I have expressed some concern at the expansion of housing repairs which could discriminate against small and self employed businesses such as carpenters, plumbers, decorators, etc. and may prove to be costly to tax payers.

VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS REPORTS

Wickhambreaux Church – read by Cllr O'Sullivan on behalf of Peter Terrill
St Andrew's Church is now working under the direction and guidance of our Parish Priest, the Rev. Chris Wilkinson (now in her second year) to bring about changes and initiatives for growth.

Worship has moved forward significantly during the year and 2013 will see the introduction of a more "family-friendly" service with a small play area for young children proving useful.Significant services during the year include Mothering Sunday, Station of the Cross on Good Friday, Easter Day Family Communion, Harvest Festival and Remembrance Day. All well attended, especially the latter with 130 adults and young people attending.

The Queen's Diamond Jubilee was celebrated with an outdoor service on the Village green alongside the Rose Inn which drew a good audience and made a distinctive contribution to the celebrations.

There have been two notable areas of development; there have been improved links with Wickhambreaux CE school with several well attended family services with the participation of school pupils. Two successful initiatives were a welcome service for parents of new children and a special service for pupils leaving the school. A Church inspection of the school found it again Outstanding. The bell tower is also now functioning again with a very keen team of bell ringers under Rev. Chris.

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) spends a considerable amount of time and effort fundraising. This year's events include a Barn Dance and Village Bake, which together raising £6,000 contributing to the Church's financial security and viability.

The Fabric of the Grade 1 Listed medieval building is in good shape. Concerns regarding lead theft have been addressed by a roof alarm system based on passive infra-red sensors. The Churchyard continues to be well maintained.

Finally, the various activities of the Church could not continue without the support of a large number of volunteer helpers, notably amongst whom are Maggie and Martin Twyman, and of course the wholehearted support of the village community, for which the Church is most grateful.

Stodmarsh Church – read by Cllr O'Sullivan on behalf of John Hickling
We hold an evensong service on most Sunday's including the Harvest Festival and Remembrance Say. The Wednesday Carol Service is always well attended with a very good and reliable organist.

The Fabric of the Church is kept in good working order. This year the tower roof has to be removed because the Cedar tiles are blowing off. The last time this was last done was probably over 50 years ago.

Being a small village there are very few weddings or funerals, but this year we had one funeral and one wedding.

The annual quota we pay to the Diocesan Board of Finance is our largest annual expense but we have paid this in full now for many years.

The Church is open every day and the entries in the visitor book show appreciation for this and the fact the Church is clean, tidy and has fresh flowers.

Wickhambreaux School – read by Cllr Lodge
The school was judged Outstanding by a Ofsted style Church inspection this year. In addition since Ofsted judged the school Outstanding in 2008 they have not been subjected to an inspection; however Ofsted regularly scrutinise our date and performance. Last years SAT results showed us 5th in the country for improvement.

Our sporting achievements culminated in us being awarded a Gold Kite Mark for excellence. There were only 50 awarded in the country and no others in the Canterbury District. Music has excelled under the leadership of Mrs Grove with a brass band having formed tutored by Mrs Rosie Cullen and Mr Grove. The brass band was selected to perform on the balcony in Canterbury for Archbishop Rowan William's last St Nicolas Day Parade. The school choir also sang at the Gulbenkian Theatre at Christmas and in an impressive 8,000 strong choir at the O2 in January.

The School now has its own VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) which is up and running, adding to the capacity for teaching ICT, allowing pupils to design their own interface page and upload homework.

Friends of Wickhambreaux School (FOWs) have been trying very hard to raise money for the school and we are extremely fortunate to have a small dedicated team of parents and teachers on the committee who work tirelessly on our behalf, having raising £5,000 so far from various events including £1,000 from the 4 Villages Post Office and Shop. We desperately need a roof extension, for which we have plans and drawings, but have been unable to secure funding.

Neighbourhood Watch – read by Cllr Lodge
Thankfully, Wickhambreaux continues to be relatively crime free. The Police assure us that liaison between Neighbourhood Watch and PCSO's (Police Community Support Officer') is very important. Continuity of personnel however has been difficult with this blamed on new organisational changes within the police service locally.

At the Neighbourhood Watch AGM (Annual General Meeting) last month, Kent's new Police and Crime Commissioner Ann Barnes was the keynote speaker. One of her many visions is to increase 'visible policing' (not new Police Officers) – an additional 60 PCSO's. Well we only want one and preferably one who can remain with us for longer than a few months! Our current PCSO has been deployed to Ashford but should return this month.

One other initiative which has been reinstated is the mobile police station. Please go along and register an interest even if you don't have a problem to discuss. The next one in Stodmarsh is Tuesday 18 June from 2:45 to 3:50pm.

Sloyden Charity Christine Le Jeune
This is an ancient charity for the relief of hardship in the village. No payments have been made this year. Anyone knowing of a case of need should contact the Chairman or Dr Hamilton. All matters are dealt with in strict confidence.

Conservation Society – read by Cllr Hamilton on behalf of Megan Taylor
The Conservation Society had a successful year in 2012 with several well attended talks, a fungus foray and walks around Stodmarsh Nature Reserve and Samphire Hoe. We contributed to the cost of new trees for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in Littlebourne and Wickhambreaux; monitored and commented on planning applications; kept an eye on the state of our trees and footpaths and supported local groups and the Parish Council's.

Unfortunately though, after 44 years, the Society's committee has now reached a tipping point. We lost our treasurer when Val Garrett moved away and were unable to elect a new treasurer at our AGM (Annual General Meeting). Our Chairman will be resigning soon as she is also moving away.

Our Secretary will also be resigning, despite her long-standing wish to retire Sheila Hickling has nobly carried on as secretary for some years.

This will leave the committee without a Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer – a position from which the society cannot operate. The Committee has looked at various options and has called an Extra-Ordinary meeting on Friday 19 April 2013 to discuss the future of the Society. All concerned for the future of the Conservation Society are welcome to attend.

Conservation Walks – read by Cllr Hamilton on behalf of Jane Rice
We have run walks during most months over the past year, however bad weather has caused the cancellation of some walks. The formula for the outings consists of starting from a pub and returning after a walk of about two hours.

We have had walks from Woodnesborough, Chilham, Ore, Chartham Hatch, Littlebourne and Bridge. In more recent months I have had hip problem resulting in a hip replacement and I have been grateful to Tony White for continuing to lead the walks in my absence.

In October, we entertained walkers from Wimilee, Littlebourne's French associates. We explored many of the paths in Littlebourne, Ickham ad Wickhambreaux and dined at the Duke William in Ickham.
The continuation of the Conservation Society is in some jeopardy, but we hope to continue with the walks – so keep your eyes open for our events which will be advertised in Church and Village.

Villages Post Office and Shop – read by the Clerk on behalf of Peter Terrill
During 2012, the Association again accumulated significant surplus funds from the rental income from the shop, and in addition to the payment to LPC (Littlebourne Parish Council), we have been able to make awards to a record number local good causes. Towards the end of the year we selected 13 organisations to receive grants amounting to £5,570, which is the largest annual distribution we have made to date.

An awards ceremony attended by about 40 shareholders and visitors was held in Littlebourne Village Hall on Saturday 3 November, when Julian Brazier MP made presentations to the following organisations:
Littlebourne Cricket Club Youth Section, Littlebourne Cricket Club, Ickham Village Hall, Turner's Orchard, WI Fitness Group, Littlebourne Afternoon Club, Littlebourne Nature Reserves, Wickhambreaux CE School, Littlebourne Parish Council, Friends of Ickham, Littlebourne Scout Group, Littlebourne Guides and Littlebourne Explorers.

The funds distributed over the past six years when we first generated a surplus are now approaching a total of almost £30,000 and in future this will be increased by the amount of our annual payment to Littlebourne Parish Council. I am sure that all shareholders share our satisfaction in seeing these funds in the shop used to such good effect in our local community.

Finally I would like to express our sincere thanks to Mrs Patel and her staff for their excellent work in running a very successful post office and shop. Also I would like to thank my committee for their efforts and on-going support during the course of this year.

Gardening Society – read by the Clerk on behalf of Isabelle Stevens
The Society continues to thrive, attracting members from all four villages as well as some from further afield.

We have continued with the same format; a programme of four lectures on a variety of gardening or garden related subjects, two garden visits to local gardens followed by refreshments (always well attended). Also an outing to a larger garden, though last year we visited Quex Park and House. The last meeting of the year is the AGM followed by a social evening with a hot pot supper and quiz.

The bring-and-buy plant stalls held at the April and October meetings, as well as being popular, helped boost the Society's funds. The subscription is still £5 per person per year.

Cricket Club - read by Geordie Hayward
The Cricket Club played its 15th season last year, playing 22 matches – won 10, lost 7 and drew 5. The Club won on their tour in Suffolk and are planning on going again this year.

The charity match held each year managed to raise an amazing £1,000 this year, £500 more than last year, in aid of the Pilgrims Hospice.

The Club welcome all new members but have strict criteria before anyone can join; 85% of players have to live/ have lived or work/have worked in the parish before they can become a member.

THE VILLAGE HALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
Cllr Joice gave a brief report of the actions and finances of the Village Hall. This year the Village Hall has lost its Monday Keep Fit Class and Saturday Zumba Class, struggling to maintain regular numbers in a small village, although the Friday Ballroom Dancing continues to thrive.

The Hall is well supported by most groups and societies, acting as a venue for their meetings and social events e.g. the Church, Gardening Society and the Conservation Society as well as holding private birthday parties, dances and discos. In March yet another Bill Barnacle Jazz Band concert was held for the 11th year in succession, raising around £500.

Over the past year the way in which the Village Hall is funded has changed. Previously the Parish Council would apply for funding from Canterbury City Council to cover the costs of essential including insurance, repairs and annual safety checks for gas installations, fire safety equipment and electrical systems. Now Village Halls have been excluded from Concurrent Funding and will now have to apply through the Single Grants Gateway – a funding source to cover all groups in the voluntary and community sector. For the next two years money is ring-fenced for village halls but after that there is no guarantee. However out current financial situation remains healthy, with an end of year balance of £5383.65.

Thanks were expressed to Diane Moore who acted as the cleaner and caretaker for the past 25 years who has now retired.

THE FRANK MONTGOMERY PLAYING FIELD COMMITTEE
Cllr Lodge gave a brief report on litter, dog fouling, new stretch of fencing and the possibility of funding options in the future to complete the fencing. The school fair will be held on the Playing Field on Saturday 18 May 2013. Thanks were expressed to Lisa Crosbie and Mrs Tina Burton for all their help and support.