WICKHAMBREAUX ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
TUESDAY 24 APRIL 2014

THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

The Chairman, Cllr O'Sullivan, read the following summarised report:

The Canterbury District Local Plan: this dominated the headlines when it was launched in the Spring of 2013. The plan envisages the building by 2031 of 15,000 houses on six strategic sites in the Canterbury district. The Parish Council noted with satisfaction that development would be focused in delineated areas and included due respect for the unique nature of the rural environment and the protection of its character, including villages. However, the Council expressed concern at the sheer scale of the project and its inevitable negative impact on the area. In particular, the need for vastly upgraded infrastructure will impinge on the natural environment (and is not clearly costed in the Plan). The Council urged the City Council to balance the need for growth with conservation.

The Richborough Connection: In June, 2013, the Council, together with all local residents, was asked to respond to National Grid's plan for a new high-voltage electricity link coming from Belgium to Richborough and thence by power cable to Canterbury. Two routes were proposed – the South Corridor, which would have cut a swathe through the local countryside, passing between Wickhambreaux and Stodmarsh; and the North Corridor, which would largely follow the route of existing power lines along the Stour Valley. In expressing its vehement objection to the South Corridor, the Council found itself bowing to the inevitable adoption of the North Corridor. In an attempt to mitigate the effects of the scheme, the Council pressed for the routing of as much as possible of the cable underground and for the use of a new type of pylon – the T-pylon – whose environmental impact would be less.

Southern Water Resources Management Plan 2015-2040: Key points of the Council's response to this important consultation were: endorsements of Southern Water's setting targets for water-saving in individual properties, exploration of the role of desalination and planning for a more resilient water network.

Canterbury City Council Electoral Review: Carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission, the review addressed two questions: first, that the number of City Councillors be reduced from the present 51 to 38. The Parish Council objected to this, on the grounds that (i) it would concentrate power in fewer hands and (ii) at a time when the same City Council was proposing increasing the local population considerably, it was not logical to decrease the electoral representation. Regrettably, the Boundary Commission accepted the City Council's proposal. Arising from that outcome, the second question concerned the number and size of City Council electoral wards. Having studied the options carefully, the Parish Council, in consultation with Littlebourne and Ickham Parish Councils, proposed that the current Little Stour ward be amalgamated with part of the North Nailbourne ward, with a southern boundary of the A2 trunk road. The results of the consultation were published recently and the local plan is for a two-member ward covering Barham, Bridge, Littlebourne, Adisham, Bekesbourne with Patrixbourne, Ickham, Kingston, Wickhambreaux and Womenswold. The Council intends to submit a further comment to the effect that such a large geographical area needs to be divided into North and South zones, with one member covering each (which would essentially correspond with our proposal).

The Parish Charter: this is an initiative from the City Council, which effectively constitutes a service level agreement with parish councils. The Chairman attended a workshop and made submissions on behalf of the Parish Council. Among the provisions of the recently-published charter are improved communication and information-sharing, improved consultation, better facilitation of a working partnership between City and Parish councils and better consultation about budgets and local planning issues. The Parish Council voted to adopt the Charter.

Barton Court Grammar School: The Parish Council, in common, we gather, with many other interested parties, opposed the school's proposed move to a new site on the north Kent coast, on the grounds that it would seriously disadvantage local children by reducing their choice of secondary education.

Kent County Council's Road Casualty Reduction Strategy: this 45-page document outlined the County's proposals to reduce road casualties. Whilst agreeing with the majority of the proposals, the Parish Council responded that (i) more ambitious targets for casualty reduction could be set; (ii) driver education programmes should be expanded and (iii), more attention should be paid to the impact of HGVs, especially those from Europe.

In the past year, the Parish Council has looked at some 15 planning applications and 17 matters relating to trees; has carried out a survey of fire hydrants; has commissioned a purpose-made new sign for the village (nearing completion); has drawn up and ratified a Data Protection Plan and has routinely pursued issues relating to highways, rivers, road signs, footpaths, the maintenance of verges and hedgerows, Neighbourhood Watch and Police liaison.

In response to requests from residents, the Parish Council looked at the possibility of installing a bus shelter in Wickhambreaux. As no suitable site could be found, the Council was unable to proceed. Responding to another request on the perennial issue of parking, three Parish Councillors recently met with a senior official from the City Council, with the aim of exploring any possible options to alleviate the parking problems in Wickhambreaux. Following a detailed inspection of the whole village area, any attempt at restricting parking by the use of marked bays or double yellow lines was ruled out because, in the first instance, regulations on the size and location of bays would effectively reduce the number in the Street to nine (with no guaranteed space for any particular property); in the second instance, yellow lines on corners and at junctions would impart an excessively urban feel to the village and would bring problems of enforcement – which is not within the Parish Council's remit, as you have already heard. The Council is left merely to reiterate the message from last year's Annual Report that we can only ask neighbours to park considerately and exploit all parking places, even if that means a short walk to the vehicle.

Last year's report was dominated by the Parish Council and Seaton Community Action's application for the registration of Seaton Meadow as a Village Green. As you will doubtless know, following a protracted Public Inquiry, the application was refused on the main grounds that (i) none of the claimed neighbourhoods as defined (Wickhambreaux and Seaton) is a neighbourhood within the meaning of the relevant statute; (this, in the Parish Council's view, is a technicality); (ii), that the predominant recreational use of the Application Land was on public footpaths and (iii) insufficient use of the land for lawful sports and pastimes was demonstrated. The Council expressed its disappointment to the Registration Authority (KCC), but feels unable to pursue the matter further. However, the Parish Council is still subject to a seemingly ongoing series of requests from the principal objector under the Freedom of Information Act. These are absorbing a disproportionate amount of Councillors' and the Clerk's time. The Council is extremely grateful for the help and support of the University of Kent Law Clinic. Whilst on the subject of external goodwill and support, the Council has begun working with the University IT Clinic in an effort to make its IT systems more secure and robust, consistent with the Council's Data Protection Policy.

The Pear Orchard, Wickhambreaux: in July, 2013, the Parish Council was approached by the owner, who wished to advance his plans to develop the site. Following discussions and a meeting with a senior planner from the City Council, the owner was persuaded that the sort of development that would stand any chance of consent was not viable and subsequently announced that he was no longer intending to develop the site himself.

Finally, the recent severe weather: from late November on, the country was battered by what has been described as a "conveyor belt of Atlantic storms", causing power cuts (parts of Stodmarsh were without electricity for five days, including the Christmas period) and extensive flooding, which will be

reported on as a separate item by Councillor Twyman. The Parish was spared some of the worst excesses of flooding, thanks in no small measure to the Environment Agency's overpumping of the Wickham Lane flood relief channel and to the community spirit shown when parts of Seaton were threatened. The Parish Council has no official role as a responder to emergencies, but proposes to convene a Parish Conference (provisional date, Tuesday, June 24th) to hear residents' experiences and explore possible future strategies which could be formalised in a Parish Emergency Plan.

It remains only for me to thank the many people who contribute time and energy to keeping our villages looking as attractive as they do and our City and County Councillors for their frequent attendance at Council meetings and for their help and support with various local issues. Through them, the Council is able both to receive relevant information from higher tiers of local government and to make representations on matters of importance. Another key source of advice and support is the Kent Association of Local Councils, of which the Council is a member. In particular, at the end of my first year as Chairman, I wish to express my personal thanks to my enthusiastic and hard-working colleagues on the Parish Council, together with the Parish Clerk, Chenice Sparkes, and in particular to the Vice-Chairman, Councillor Martin Twyman, and former Chairman Christine Le Jeune for guiding me through some of the intricacies of Chairmanship.

At the end of the report, Cllr Le Jeune was presented with the Kent Association of Local Councils Community Award, in recognition of her long and dedicated service to the community, in particular as Chairman of the Parish Council for ten yearsl. Cllr Le Jeune remarked that her fellow Councillors had kept the award secret from her and thanked everyone for the award, saying it was very much appreciated.

FINANCIAL REPORTS

Cllr Le Jeune summarised the expenditure and income of the preceding year. Main expenditure included the Clerk's salary and legal fees in conjunction with the Village Green Inquiry.

Cllr Le Jeune explained to residents the difference between the Concurrent Function Funding and the Precept. The Precept is a local tax on all households' Council Tax and is collected and paid in full to the Parish Council by the City Council. The Concurrent Function is a rebate to Parish Councils for taking on roles like grass cutting and tree surgery, on behalf of the City Council, and which are contracts that work out a lot cheaper for parishes to pay for individually than in bulk. However, Canterbury City Council keeps cutting the amount awarded to Parish Councils for undertaking these services, with this being the second consecutive year. The Parish Council applied for £3,700 for the financial year 2014-2015, but was only awarded £1585.67, a loss of £2114.33. The grass still needs to be cut, so to make up for this shortfall, the Parish Council made the difficult decision to increase the Precept to make sure the funds were available. Although it looks like a huge percentage increase on the Precept, the amount paid extra is only small.

Lastly, she thanked all the volunteers who have helped to keep costs low for the Parish Council. Without their outstanding community spirit, expenditure would have been considerably higher.

REPORTS FROM THE COUNTY COUNCILLOR AND CITY COUNCILLOR

County Councillor Michael Northey

Time again to say hello to everyone at your warm, friendly and efficient APM.

What has been going on at Kent County Council, and how does it affect you? Yet again, for about the seventh year running, KCC has to make savings, this time of around £81 million. Efficiency savings have long ago been made, so now we have to transform the way KCC does things. You will not notice much difference in the services, but in the way they are brought to you. For example in the care of the elderly – there will still be the same level of care and home visits, but the number of agencies is being reduced from over 120 to 23. This will result in savings, and will help KCC to monitor the level of care more effectively, with fewer agencies to partner, and fewer staff needed to do the monitoring.

Sadly, for the first time in four years KCC has had to raise Council Tax, by just under 2%. This will raise ten million pounds.

One thing you may notice is that from this April, each local County Councillor will have a reduction of about £20,000 in available grants. There will still be some, but it will be harder to share them out fairly and widely. So if you need a cash injection for a worthy cause, make a good case!

The days are long gone when 'The Council' did everything. These days there is huge partnership working – which was seen well during the recent floods. No wonder they hit us so hard – the weather people say the winter rains were the worst for 248 years. This is a huge time in history – 248 years ago, Jane Austen had not yet been born, and we still owned much of America. The parish and neighbouring area, as we know, were badly hit. The City Council did an excellent job in helping and co-ordinating, and the community response was terrific. On my travels, I also saw huge involvement from many groups, including KCC Highways, the Environment Agency, Southern Water, the Ambulance Service, Red Cross, the Army, Police, Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Service, the MP, community wardens, many local councillors and parish chairmen, and many prominent individuals - even TV crews. Particular tribute of course should be paid to Martin Twyman, Ted Edwards of the City, and others. The River Management Group does invaluable work.

The KCC Cabinet is discussing in its meeting in May ways to bring in money for enhanced flood protection measures for the future.

The roads were badly hit. The government has given KCC an extra £8.6 million to repair Kent roads. KCC is also applying for further funding, especially under the Bellwin Scheme, which is a national government scheme to help councils with emergencies. There are now over 40 crews on Kent roads in the Find and Fix scheme. The average turn-round to mend a pot-hole is 13 days. Please continue to report road damage in the usual way via the KCC website – www.kent.gov.uk/highways I am glad to see work being done locally.

Foreign lorries are now being charged £10 each to enter the country, towards road repairs. KCC has been pressing for this for years. The bad news is that the Treasury is keeping the money – again KCC are lobbying hard for some of the money to come back to Kent, as we bear the brunt of the damage and wear and tear from these heavy vehicles.

So it is a continuing story of great co-operation and understanding of what can and cannot be done. This is a beautiful area and you have such a strong Parish Council and vigorous local life. The churches and pubs are superb. The local school is terrific and it no surprise it is so popular. It is a privilege to be your representative on Kent County Council.

City Councillor Brian Staley

This evening the Full Council meeting in Canterbury will deal with three issues which directly affect our district. The first is the Local Plan, the second deals with boundary changes for the District Council and the third will be the planning on the Howe Barracks site.

I have profound concerns at the plans for our side of Canterbury, which involve massive house building on grade one agricultural land and I fear that much of development is house building which is profitable for developers with a lack of infrastructure that is essential for communities. I accept that there is a need for house building generally, but Canterbury will treble its population within a lifetime. (1960 to 2030) I believe more consultation should have been made with regional neighbours and a longer detailed period of public discussion on the many implications.

It does not make sense to me that we could lose two senior schools on this side of Canterbury whilst we are planning to build many thousands of new houses. I am also concerned that three four-year-old children should be allocated a school almost three miles away in Wingham.

The Howe Barracks plan will only be released in camera before the Full Council meeting. I believe that a new road will be planned between Sturry Road and the A 257. If it does not continue to the A2, will it bring more traffic on to the A 257? I would like other people's opinion on this.

You will have received the joint submission to the Boundary Commissioners by Councillor Mike Sole and myself. I believe less councillors and multi-member wards will inevitably lead to even less power and influence for parish councils than they have today.

Cllr O'Sullivan also reported that the Community Shuttle Service, a scheme spearheaded and highly supported by City Cllr Staley, has now been extended to Stodmarsh. From Thursday, 1st May, 2014, there will be a pick up from the Red Lion at 10:00am, with further stops down Stodmarsh Road.

VILLAGE ORGANISATIONS REPORTS

Wickhambreaux Church – read by Peter Terrill

St Andrew's Church attendance has grown slightly since last year under the guidance of the Parish Priest, the Rev. Chris Wilkinson. There has been a large push in trying to get more children to attend services, an initiative in conjunction with Wickhambreaux Primary School. There are now a number of regular families attending the special children's services.

In terms of fundraising, the Church is extremely grateful to everyone in the local community, which has helped to support and fundraise in the past year. Connections with Wickhambreaux Primary School are also still going strong and the ongoing liaison between the two organisations is very important.

This coming year will see the centenary of the First World War, a massive milestone. The Church is planning on having a display of all the local heroes in the Church and a memorial in the Churchyard. If anyone has any photographs, letters or anything to do with local heroes, please get in contact with Mr Terrill.

There has also been a resurgence of support for bell ringing in the village as well. It is fantastic to see its promising continuation. Lastly, Mr Terrill wanted to thank everyone for their support over the past year, whether it be for cleaning, maintenance, flowers or just general support, it has been greatly appreciated.

Wickhambreaux School – read by Cllr Lodge

Wickhambreaux recently has a "Mocsted!" Carried out by the LA (Local Authority) and the following was said about the quality of education at the school:

- "This is a school that deserves its Outstanding Ofsted grade"
- "Children are at the heart of this school and all the decisions made"
- "Staff and children are welcoming and the atmosphere in all classes is one of pride and teamwork"

It goes on to confirm in the report what we hope you already know, particularly our parents who have been with us a long time, trusting us with all your children:

- "The curriculum is engaging and innovative"
- "The learning environment is outstanding"
- "Children in all classes were engaged, very well behaved and keen to learn"
- "Questioning by adults was of a high standard"
- "Gifted and talented pupils are very well catered for"

After a lesson observation:

- "This was outstanding, due to the preparation and resourcing of this lesson, the accelerated progress made by each child and the engagement of every child"

Regarding our data:

- "Gap analysis and the resulting provision are exemplary and a strength of the school"
- Special Education Needs (SEN) screening and on-going provision are excellent

Innovations offered to pupils this year include:

- **Maths** – Our gifted and talented children went to Saturday morning sessions at Kings School in Canterbury, to link with maths with science. Parents were invited to observe.
- **Japanese Day** – This was organised by Mr Beard and all classes were visited by Japanese adults dressed in Kimonos. The children sampled the Japanese language and culture and tried their hand at origami.
- **Hever Castle** – To enhance their learning experience of studying the Tudors, class three visited Hever Castle
- **Book Week** – Book week was exceptionally well run this year and all the children enjoyed many reading events, including a live link up through SKYPE to classrooms in Abu Dhabi and Florida
- **Music** – Music goes from strength to strength. The children's brass band performed at The Gulbenkian Theatre at Christmas and Archbishop Welby's St Nicholas Day Parade. The parade was featured on the South East News, much to the delight of all.
- **Science** – We are now teamed up with an innovative science provider to deliver first class resources and hands-on experimental approaches to improve standards in science even further.

We have also been instrumental in gaining a £75,000 sum for improving 11 local schools through a Canterbury collaboration bid in conjunction with Simon Langton Girls School.

We are very grateful for the support of the Four Villages Post Office and Shop Fund, which enables our disadvantaged families to fully participate in school life.

We now have new toilets under the LA's modernisation programme but desperately need more as our popularity grows!

A roof extension project has been commissioned by the Governing Body and we are still hopeful this can be achieved.

FOWS (Friends of Wickhambreaux School)

Events to raise money have included:

- Summer Fair
- Christmas Fair
- Quiz Nights
- Cake Stalls
- Easter Extravaganza
- BBQ

A recent Auction of Promises, organised by Ickham villagers with help from FOWS, raised £12,000. This fantastic amount will be divided between Ickham Village Hall, Ickham Church and Wickhambreaux School. We are very grateful to everyone who organised this event. It was a huge undertaking and very successful.

FOWS would like to thank everyone in the local community for their continued support.

Neighbourhood Watch – read by Cllr Lodge
The Neighbourhood Watch movement is the largest voluntary organisation in the United Kingdom. It aims to improve the quality of life in a neighbourhood by helping to reduce crime and the fear of crime.
Thankfully, we continue to be relatively crime-free. The statistics for February 2014 in the Little Stour Ward shows five crimes – four in Littlebourne and one in Bramling.

The information we receive alerting us to crime is now restricted to emails. The telephone service has been discontinued.

However, liaison between Neighbourhood Watch and the Police – usually a PCSO (Police Community Support Officer) - is an important factor. Our PCSO, Elaine Cannadine, was keen to provide some input into our scheme, but we have not had any recent contact.

Both Mobile Police Stations and Police Contact Points were initiatives as a way of bringing Police Officers to rural locations. We are still waiting.

On a positive note, the newly appointed Chief Inspector, Mark Arnold, appears keen to reinstate the Police Forums, where Parish Councillors held regular meetings with the Police to exchange information.

A meeting next month in Littlebourne Village Hall will be with the Community Safety Unity Inspector and should be useful to us.

Sloyden Charity – read by Cllr 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 Cllr Le Jeune or Dr Hamilton. All matters are dealt with in strict confidence.

Conservation Society – read by Alan Holmes
The Conservation Society welcomes closer ties with the Parish Council this year and hopefully for many years to come. Thanks were given to Cllr Le Jeune for attending the Conservation Society meetings.

The Conservation Society has been monitoring planning applications very closely, not just in Wickhambreaux, but in all four villages under its remit. Regular walks and talks were held throughout the year as in previous years. It has also repainted the telephone box in the village and is currently campaigning to move the proposed site for the new fibre optic box to a more suitable location.

In the near future in August, the Conservation Society is planning on holding a film show on Wickhambreaux Village Green. The film cannot be shown until the evening for lighting reasons, so the possibility of having a local fair, showing off local artists and produce, during the day is being considered. If anyone has any suggestions, then please contact Mr Holmes.

There is a need for more volunteers to join the organisation and everyone is welcome to become a member. There are currently no residents from Stodmarsh in the Society, which it would like to change to try and ensure they have the widest possible view of all the four villages.

Four Villages Post Office and Shop – read by Peter Terrill
The Four Villages Post Office and Shop fund is a community project, initially from stakeholders back in 2001, to run the shop. It is a not-for-profit organisation, in essence a company, put into place to run the business. Income from the lease, once all bills have been paid, goes towards funding local causes to put back into the community. More than £30,000 has been awarded since the start.

Since HMRC have changed its rules slightly, the Four Villages Post Office and Shop now do not have to pay corporation tax. This means that approximately £6,500 will now be available to award each year compared to the previous £5,000.
It is that time of year again when applications are being considered: any local community projects which need some extra funding are very welcome to apply. Any organisation can apply, as long as it has a bank account. Successful applicants will have to show how the money has been used.

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 its efforts and on-going support during the course of this year.

Gardening Society – read by Ailsa Williams
The Society continues to thrive, attracting members from all four villages as well as some from further afield. The only issue is parking!

The Gardening Society met a total of eight times last year, with around 50 members paying the yearly subscription fee of £5.00. Being affiliated with the Royal Horticultural Society means that costs can be kept to a minimum.

One of the most notable visits of the year was when the Gardening Society joined with the Bridge Horticultural Society to visit Wisley Gardens in Surrey. It was a very successful trip and they are looking to liaise further with the Bridge Horticultural Society for more trips in the future.

THE VILLAGE HALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE – read by Cllr Joice
Much of the activity going on in the Village Hall over the past year has been “business as usual”. We continue to benefit from our arrangement with Wickhambreaux School, whereby the Village Hall effectively becomes a school hall during term times, and in return provides us with around half our annual income.

The hall has also been well supported throughout the year by various local groups and societies as a venue for meetings and social events – in particular the Church, the Gardening Society and the Conservation Society. Thanks were also given to Mr David Burton for auditing the accounts.

At the present moment we are only running one regular evening class during the week – our long-running ballroom dance group on Fridays. For a few months of last year we held yoga and Pilates classes on Monday evenings, but these came to a stop when the teacher left to have a baby. Hopefully they may start up again in the near future. In addition, the hall has hosted the usual range of private functions throughout the course of the year.

The Bill Barnacle Jazz Evening which we held at the beginning of March has become something of a village tradition, this being our 12th year in succession, and has a regular audience of local devotees. This year was as successful as usual and raised almost £700.00 for Village Hall funds.

As far as Village Hall finances are concerned, our expenses totalled £7147.00 compared to an income of £6242.00, a shortfall of £905.00. This was mainly due to the expense of having the exterior of the hall repainted, as well as paying for the installation of the PA system. However, this does highlight the costs involved in keeping the Village Hall up and running. The Village Hall is also looking to refurbish the toilet blocks and install a disabled toilet as well. This year we received £1054 from the Single Grants Gateway, a funding source operated by Canterbury City Council, in support of voluntary and community organisations. This replaced the previous Concurrent Function Funding we used to receive from the Parish Council. This pays for items such as Village Hall insurance and for various safety checks – gas, electrical and fire equipment.

THE FRANK MONTGOMERY PLAYING FIELD COMMITTEE – read by Cllr Lodge

The winter rainfall may not have been welcomed by everyone but it has benefitted the grass on the playing field. Once again the daffodils, donated and planted by resident Mr John Paul, have provided a lovely splash of spring colour. Added to that there are wild cuckoo flowers blooming in the damp, shady areas for the first time.

I would like to thank my fellow Councillors who helped to remove saplings and encroaching vegetation. If allowed to develop into trees these would have eventually damaged the new fencing alongside the footpath. We are also very grateful to Mr Tim Butler who, along with his family, carted away the huge piles of prunings and green waste. We have obtained permission to remove large saplings from this area and will replant native trees in more suitable places. We would also like to thank resident Mrs Ellie Goddard, for donating and planting, with our Tree Warden Cllr Wright, a three-year-old oak sapling.

The Parish Council employs ROSPA to carry out an annual inspection of the Playing Field and we make our own weekly checks. In February I attended a ROSPA training day, paid for by the Council. It was an excellent course and provided invaluable advice and practical tips to help with our own inspections

We are still looking for funding to refurbish and add to the play equipment, as well as upgrade the fencing.

FLOODING – read by Cllr Twyman
During the last year we gave gone from a very nice summer to a very mild, wet and windy late autumn. This built up the water aquifer and then, from January through to February, it did not stop raining. This built up the greatest flow ever recorded of the Nailbourne and its aquifer springs. After the 2000 and 2001 flooding years, and subsequent years, improvements have helped and with the bypass channel and greater stocks of sandbags, the area just managed to cope. Two more days of rain and Wickhambreaux would have had serious problems.

The Environment Agency river department stepped up and dealt with a very difficult situation and Canterbury City Council, with local residents, played an equally important part. From Lyminge to Littlebourne, serious flooding occurred with the infiltration of water into the sewage system, which has again caused major overtopping of the sewage system.

Lessons have to be learned by the Environment Agency and Southern Water. Already discussions have taken place and will continue to look into the improvements required for the future. The aquifer is still very high and I have great concerns about the Environment Agency and its lack of maintenance of the Little Stour and especially the Great Stour, which is in a terrible state. Every pressure is being put on the necessary agencies and departments.

Over 2000 acres of farm land has been affected by flooding, as well as four major roads closed for several weeks, causing major disruptions. It was a difficult time for the four mill sluice owners and a disaster for Natural England and the wildlife in the SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), Stodmarsh Nature Reserve. Luckily we are now into an early spring, but, with the Nailbourne flowing more often, we have to expect that the flooding issues will still happen and hopefully we will be more prepared for them.

I would just like to say a huge thank you to Jill Thomas, the secretary of our parish river group, for steering the group through such a difficult time, attending numerous meetings and writing many letters to high levels

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