

## **Penshurst Parish Assembly 2026**

### **Report from Chairman of Penshurst Parish Council 7<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2026**

I begin my report with the sad news of the deaths of two former Parish Councillors. Mrs Teri Scott left the Parish Council in 2008, leading to my co-option in February 2009. Cllr Roy Horsford was a councillor for twenty years, stepping down in 2011. My condolences go to their family and friends.

Last year also saw the retirement of our previous clerk, Evelyn Divall who was our clerk for decades and whose support and guidance I found invaluable. My best wishes for a long and happy retirement go to Evelyn.

As I write my 10<sup>th</sup> annual Chairman's Report, I note that much of what I have to say has changed very little over the years.

Highways issues continue at a high number, the vast majority of problems being caused by water damage from blocked drains and ditches. This is definitely getting worse as Kent Highways policy of dealing with drainage on a cyclical basis means that they are only prioritising drainage issues where there is damage to property or a risk to highway safety. Some drains which were cleared towards the end of 2025 are already blocked again and some ditches are blocked due to traffic driving onto verges. It is unlikely that KCC will maintain ditches as they now claim that their responsibility ends at the edge of the tarmac and that verges and ditches do not form part of the highway. I consider this claim to be extremely dubious. The Parish Council are investigating the possibility of taking over the drain clearing work from KCC, but this would depend on costs and also on how obstructive Kent Highways decide to be.

The issue with the incorrect connection of the sewage drain to the surface water drain in the middle of Fordcombe has at last been corrected, with a new pipe being installed from the Village Hall across the Green to connect with the drainage system by the school. Fingers crossed, it all seems to be working OK. Also in Fordcombe, the collapsed wall and bank in Chafford Lane has been partly dealt with, but only in as much as the debris has been cleared. Nothing has been done to prevent another collapse. Although I claimed last year that ownership of the wall had been established, this may not actually be the case. Hopefully we will get to the bottom of this.

As I stated in my reports for the last three years, the Local Affordable Housing project continues to move very slowly forward. Legal agreements between Penshurst Place and English Rural Housing have been dealt with. The latest setback is an objection from Kent Highways regarding the proposed access. My understanding is that this has been addressed which will allow English Rural Housing to go to Sevenoaks District Council for pre-application advice. Once this has been done, we might actually get to a stage where we have some proposals and plans to present to the Parish.

Parishioners receiving their Council Tax notices for the coming year may have noticed a substantial increase in the Parish Council precept. In recent years we had been able to keep the increase to a minimum (and even reduce the precept). The past year has seen a considerable outlay by the parish Council, notably the donation for improvements to Penshurst Village Hall. In addition to one-off contributions to other organisations within the parish, we continue to maintain, amongst other things, the two churchyards, Fordcombe village green, Fordcombe play area, the bus shelters and the highway verges. With the situation in the Middle East, costs for everything, not just fuel, will undoubtedly increase substantially over the coming year and we may also see shortages of some things. This will have an impact on everyone, including the Parish Council.

As always, I close with my thanks to all the councillors and particularly to Rachael, our new clerk, who has taken over seamlessly from Evelyn and kept us organised.

Andy Campbell

7<sup>th</sup> April 2026