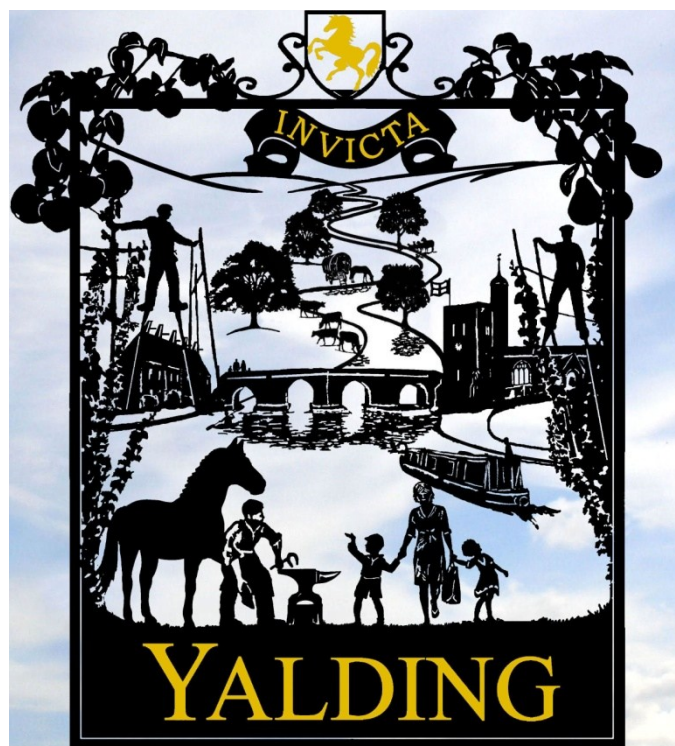




**ANNUAL PARISH MEETING &
ANNUAL PARISH COUNCIL MEETING
AGENDAS**

**ANNUAL REPORTS INCLUDING
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2023/24
BUDGET 2024/25**



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

2023/24

Maidstone Borough Council have had a Ward boundary review undertaken by the Boundary Commission. Members were originally elected in thirds with the KCC elections being on the fourth year. However, the Boundary Commission were insistent that all Wards in Maidstone Borough should be three-member Wards, which neither the borough nor the parishes wanted. The only way around this was for the whole Council to be up for election every four years in one go. This was agreed commencing in May 2024 and it means all parish councils will be up for election at the same time. Therefore, although YPC was up for election in May 2023, it went with all others again in May 2024.

David Law stood down as a Councillor at the 2023 election and, as the election was uncontested with only eight candidates, all were duly elected. Councillors agreed not to co-opt and we ran with only eight councillors until May 2024 when we had a full election again.

In early May, King Charles 111 was crowned and the residents of Yalding Parish took to the High Street for one of the best street parties we have ever held. Although it had rained on previous and subsequent days, party day was hot and sunny and people ate, drank and danced well into the night. The WI gave us a rendering of Abba's Mama Mia, there was music from the Bad Pandas, Lew Lewis, Devil's Cut, Maria and Liam Hannigan and lots of noise from the Old School Samba Band. All of it kept under control by our DJ, Martin Revell.

A huge thank you to everyone who came out to help set-up and then pack up when we had finished. The loan of trucks, furniture and use of electricity were all much appreciated and the Christmas lights team were there to put up and took down again lights, bunting and gazeboes before, on and after the day. Another thank you to Andy and his team who ran the bar, the proceeds of which paid for a lot of the entertainment, and to Amy who organised the children's teas.

June saw the grand opening of the new playground at The Kintons by the Mayor of Maidstone following months of hard work by Dee Ann Stead in talking to the children and parents for ideas and dealing with suppliers and agreeing layouts whilst our Clerk was busy finding the money to pay for it all. A grant of some £53,000 was awarded to the Council by FCC Communities as well as grants from Maidstone Borough Council and Asda together with local fundraising and S106 monies in respect of The Glebe development. As we could not find any coronation souvenirs as gifts for the children, we purchased two coronation benches, one for each of the playgrounds in Yalding and Laddingford, and a "Froggo" waste bin for each area.

September saw the return of our Annual Parish Picnic when, again, the weather was superb as too were the beer, cider, wine and BBQ. Many thanks to Councillors and both Clerks for their help in making it all happen.

The Congelow Organic Educational Charitable Trust has offered the use of a piece of land for amenity use in exchange for a peppercorn rent of £1 per year and naming it The Coopers. Discussions are still ongoing with the Trustees.

The new neighbourhood policing model saw the loss of PCSO Nicola Morris, who has joined one of the neighbourhood task teams so we will still see her around. We welcomed in her place two warranted officers, PCs Charlotte Bingham and Chad Maskell.

And Speedwatch returned thanks to June Chapman who offered to be the Co-ordinator. She has recruited several volunteers for Yalding but is still looking for others from Laddingford.

There is provision within the Maidstone Local Plan Review for a further 100 homes on Kenward Road and, following the examination by an Inspector from the Secretary of State, the plan was adopted on 20th March 2024. We attended and spoke at the hearing and we were successful in at least persuading the Inspector to keep all development to the north site and that the land to the south should be for amenity use only.

During last winter, we were fortunate not to have too much adverse weather which resulted in no flooding of properties in the Parish. Work is continuing with regard to the Leigh Flood Storage Area and Hildenborough Embankments Scheme. This will increase the capacity at Leigh by about one third and the revised operating procedures must take into account any impact on downstream communities. It is hoped for completion Autumn 2025.

Redevelopment of the former Syngenta site is progressing well the first phase of built development is underway and a lot of the ground works with this phase complete. YEP are hoping to have the first buildings ready for Summer 2024.

Thanks to Ken, Symon Wilson, Martin Gent and all the lads who make our villages look so beautiful at Christmas time. Our entire lighting stock is now LED and this has considerably reduced the cost of electricity. Thank you to those residents who have allowed us to install connection boxes in their gardens.

It is good to see once again so many clubs and organisations submitting a report for this publication; we are very fortunate to have so many activities to take part in on our doorstep. It is especially pleasing to know that our youth activities are thriving.

A big thank you to our Parish Clerk, Angela Gent, who is a major source of support to the Council. Her work has increased dramatically not only from Parish activities but also changes in legislation; to that Assistant Clerk, Abi Stern, who was back following maternity leave in September. Last but not least, a big thank you to all of our residents and to all of you who continue to support and maintain the vibrant community that we are.

YALDING PARISH CHARITIES

YALDING ALMSHOUSE CHARITIES

Over the last year we were pleased to welcome Sheena Field as a new trustee as we said goodbye to Barbara Grandi as chairman. Sara Mahoney was voted in as the new chairman. David Gerrish is now looking after the gardens for us and keeps them looking beautiful. There was a change of occupancy in one house who has settled in well. All six houses had the back doors replaced this year. Trustees agreed to a small increase to the Weekly Maintenance Contributions required from residents to £78 from April 2024. Finally, we would like to thank Yalding Taxis for their generous monthly donation.

YALDING EDUCATION FOUNDATION (YEF)

During the past year the YEF organised and financially supported the following:

- Each of the three local Primary schools £1200 to provide a 'cultural or educational experience' of the school's choice.
- Higher education scholarships were awarded to twenty-two students who had attended local primary schools to support them with their courses. Each award was for £200.
- Spoken English competitions, judged by the Trustees were, held in the local primary schools. Prize money of £150 per school was donated from YEF funds.
- £1000 was set aside to financially support where appropriate local primary schools to hold educational or cultural events.

It is expected to run a similar programme next year. The current Trustees of the YEF are Kim Keeler (Chair), Mari Mason, Barbara Reader, Sue Gerrish, Paul Kish, David Goff and Nick Arthur. The Clerk is Gary Atkins. The YEF is financially stable, has a full complement of Trustees and does not presently require any support from the Parish council.

OTHER CHARITABLE GROUPS BASED WITHIN THE PARISH

FRIENDS OF YALDING SURGERY (FYS)

The year end 2023/24 has been the first return to a pre-covid fund raising year but has of course been difficult due to the general difficulties of the cost-of-living crisis and the lack of disposable income. We changed the Christmas main prize this year to a gift card from the traditional hamper to give the winner a choice this seemed to be a success. We would like to thank Sharon Wilford again for her long-standing support with her sewed items that are still available with Tim and June in the post office. We would also like to thank them for all their support they give us throughout the year with anything we ask of them. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the rest of the village and for their help in selling raffle tickets for us this year The Tea Rooms and Maria at Hop pickers rest. Again, taking this opportunity to thank Yalding taxis for their long and loyal support of the friends. With the refurbishment of the surgery the reselling of the books and cd's has been restarted and we have just taken collection of £169 from this, in aid of the patients. With the funds collected and raised in the last year we have been able to help fund £2000 toward replacing the new booking in system, which we believe will be up and running by the time this meeting takes place. We are waiting for the surgery to indicate the next item they want us to fund for above and beyond the day-to-day things we already help to support. The committee was able to help with both the flu/covid clinics at the surgery this year and will do so again if invited to do so. The plans for this year going forward are; a tabletop sale 21/04/24, a quiz 27/04/24, Something mid-summer date TBC. AGM date TBC. Christmas Raffle TBC

KENWARD TRUST

The Kenward Trust is an award-winning charity that provides primary and secondary stage residential rehabilitation and recovery services for those experiencing drug and alcohol addiction, also working in school with education and early intervention programmes. We continue to expand our services to meet the needs of so many people struggling with addiction and now offer an online weekly counselling session. Additionally, those suffering with addiction can find themselves homeless and so we continue to expand our portfolio of Move On properties to give those in recovery a safe place to live. Looking forwards, the cost of electricity at such a large facility as Kenward and with sustainability in mind we are working on a solar solution. The plan is to install a 100kw solar panel array to save on our high-cost energy for the charity in the 2nd half of 2024. In

addition to this work for Kenward, we have had initial discussions with the Community Energy South (CES) group and Clockhouse Farm to develop a local Community Energy Hub scheme, adding further sustainable local energy creation, capacity and storage to serve Yalding residents and businesses and possibly Watlington over the next 2-5 years, aiming to offer lower cost surplus energy to contribute to village energy needs. Fundraising is always very difficult for us as a charity but we have seen an increase in the last year of businesses adopting us as their charity for the year. Alongside this our Café is now open which is a resource for the local community along with archery, disc golf and alpaca walking activities on offer. Our Classic Car show was popular in September and we now hold smaller events, open to all, called Classics and Coffee on the third Sunday in every month where you can see a small selection of classic cars and bikes and enjoy a bacon sandwich in the café. We are looking to hold Mother & Baby Groups from April and more community-based events to bring people to Kenward. If you wish to support Kenward or fundraise for us or volunteer please email Hetty Palmer at Hetty.Palmer@kenwardtrust.org.uk or visit our website kenwardtrust.org.uk or give us a ring on 01622 814187.

YALDING CHURCH PRESERVATION SOCIETY (YCPS)

The YCPS is a registered charity that was formed over 20 years ago by a group of non-churchgoers to help care for and maintain the fabric of our beautiful church. The Trustees consist of Tim Chapman, Louise Inward, Henry Tennant, Jo & Mike Davis and Caron Jansz. We would like to thank all those who have supported and contributed to this very worthy local charity. We have raised over £125,000 over the last 20 years or so and intend to continue to do our utmost to help keep our beautiful historic church at its best for many years to come. We would love to welcome new people to become Trustees so we can continue the great work. Please contact us on our new Facebook page or talk to any of us in person. This year we will be welcoming the fantastic London Welsh Male Voice Choir to do a concert for us in the church on Saturday October 26th. We will also be holding a prize draw at the Yuletide Market in December.

PARISH ORGANISATIONS – LADDINGFORD

LEARNING

ST MARY'S CEP SCHOOL

HEAD TEACHER'S REPORT

Laddingford St Mary's has a new Headteacher, Lucy Clark, who joined the school in January. The school lowered its age range and opened its nursery the beginning of February. In the coming months, the school is looking towards increasing its nursery numbers and further promoting the school. With the new nursery, ideally we are looking to have a separate entrance to the school, especially for nursery parents. The ideal place for this would be into the side of the school grounds, through the church yard. This would mean ideally we would hope for some extra signage and markings on the road to alert road users to the school and nursery. Any support for getting this through KCC would be greatly appreciated.

GOVERNORS' REPORT

Part of the Head teachers report.

FRIENDS OF LADDINGFORD SCHOOL (FLS) REPORT

The FLS had another great year supported by our parents and the wonderful Chequers Inn pub who held our extremely successful Christmas Fair as well as our Father's Day breakfast. This year we added new events to the calendar with a break the rules day and a Wonky Bar sale with prizes hidden on golden tickets. We have funded online learning platforms, school computers and have subsidised trips to the Panto and to Mrs Doubtfire. We are planning on providing food and refreshments at the school sports day, as well as taking over the organisation of the school summer fair, which in recent years has been organised solely by the school itself. We are always amazed how much we raise with a school of such a size and with the help of the local community. Thank you for your support.

OTHER GROUPS AND SOCIETIES

CHEQUERS CHASERS

The Chequers Chasers - The Chasers are not currently active. However, several locals enjoy running and take part in the local Paddock Wood Half Marathon this year. The Chequers have for

many years provided a water station in Laddingford for the event to encourage the runners with support and music and always gets very good feedback from the organisers and participants.

CHEQUERS OTTERS

The Chequers Otters - are a group of people in the Parish who like to swim, particularly in open water but mainly just enjoy swimming and the company with other Otters and of course the obligatory cake or burgers after swimming. The group mainly swims at St Andrew's Lake at Halling which is an approved centre and whilst swimming mainly takes place in the summer months a few of the Otters have embarked on the popular cold-water swimming/dipping over the winter months.

CHEQUERS RACERS

The Chequers Racers are amateurs - some very fit, who cycle a few times a week and others more sporadic and slightly more rounded. They are not only from Laddingford but also the outlying villages & hamlets. The Racers are a friendly bunch and has a recurring theme, they socialise, often, at The Chequers pub. There are no membership fees and you can ride with them whenever you can or want to. Each year they organise a tour where they go away for 5 days to cycle somewhere different. For further information, please check our website www.chequersracers.com or better still, ask at the pub!

LADDINGFORD CHURCH HALL

As the U.K. has emerged from the chaos of lock down due to COVID-19 the Ukraine crisis and its after-shocks the hall has been a casualty. We had a comprehensive review of our charges due to the shocking increase in gas prices, and this made us realise that we were severely undercharging and so had to dramatically increase our hire prices by over 80%. Rates are now £15.00/ph without heating and £20.00/ph with heating for Parish residents. There was some considerable resistance to this from regular hirers who felt that this was too expensive, but we have to charge these prices to cover our costs. The net result of all this is that we have only one regular client, a Pilates class, two hours a week. I have had a very few inquiries for children's birthday parties, however none of them have converted to hires. Going forward, I hope that we are not over charging compared to other spaces in the market, (very difficult to judge), but I fear that our facilities are not as competitive, or that people are not having as many parties/gatherings as they did pre COVID/cost of living squeeze. Enquiries to Digby Danvers 01622 873450.

POP-UP CAFE AND INFORMATION HUB

Since the original Rural Kent Coffee & Information Project ceased in September 2022 Charles & Tracey Leaver from The Chequers have kindly taken on the pop-up Cafe project with the cafe being held monthly in the garden room at The Chequers. The aim and ethos of the mornings continues to be to provide an environment for anyone to come along and meet other people and provide a support and social environment for those that may be affected by rural isolation or loneliness or just as a social couple of hours to meet other people from the village and Parish. With the help and support of several local people the group has continued to thrive with numbers attending averaging around 20 each month. Volunteers provide delicious cakes and if transport is needed for people to get there this is arranged. Representatives from the Parish council and church periodically attend in case anyone has anything they wish to discuss. It is believed that this remains a very beneficial event for several members of the village.

PARISH ORGANISATIONS – YALDING

LEARNING

ST PETER & ST PAUL'S CEP SCHOOL

GOVERNORS' AND HEAD TEACHER'S REPORT

Governors continue to visit the school regularly and we are grateful that Mrs Friend and her team are so welcoming, positive and open to our visits. There have been many enjoyable and educational events and visits organised for the children this year and we remain indebted to our PTA for providing the finances for some of these activities. Without the extra funding we would be unable to do so much in the way of extracurricular events. Our challenges remain the same, increasing costs and a diminishing budget. With staff salaries accounting for around 85% of our total spend, this leaves little for the basics such as facilities, utilities, teaching resources, ICT and so on. However, we consider the experience and consistency of our staff to be the best way to support the children's learning and their academic and emotional development. Thank you to all

the staff for doing an amazing job and helping create a friendly yet challenging environment for the children to learn in. Visitors continue to comment on the warmth and friendliness of the school and we are very proud of that fact. Thank you also to the Parish Council, Vicar and governors for the time and support they have given to the school over the past year and ask that support is continued into 2024 and beyond. If anybody is interested in becoming a governor, we currently have spaces and would welcome talking to anyone who would like to understand what this might involve. If you would like to discuss this, please do get in touch via the school. You do not need any experience and full training will be given.

PARENT TEACHER ASSOCIATION (PTA)

Yalding School PTA had a very successful and productive 2022/2023 academic year and we continue to enjoy hosting great family fundraising activities in this 2023/2024 year. Over the last 12 months the children and their families have had great fun at very well attended events such as the Spring Trail around the village, a movie night, Mother's and Father's Day pop up shops, a Quiz for the grown-ups, a (very hot!) Summer Fair, bake sale, a stall at the Yuletide Market and to finish the 2023 in style a brand-new Christmas event at the school & Baptist Church including a Christmas party & Fair with music, movies, crafting, games, delicious food/drink and a visit from Santa himself. We thank all those other networks across Yalding who have supported our events such as the Parish Council, Baptist & village hall, Scouts & Football Club. In financially tricky times we are heartened to see so much support from the community, which means monies can be channelled in to great resources for Yalding Primary School. Last year new outside tables and graphic maps were purchased, and this year we are subsidising the school's purchases of new SEN (Special Educational Needs) equipment. For a small school the Yalding PTA is very active, and we are grateful to the families who help make it all come together, either by being on the committee, helping at or attending events.

SUMMER PLAYScheme

Summer Play Scheme was a great success again last year, we were fully booked nearly every day and had parents booking extra sessions because the children enjoyed it so much. We received amazing feedback from the children and have taken into account the activities they enjoyed. We have had enquires about this year's summer scheme already, we will 100% be running the scheme in July and are working with the Parish Council to get all the details out as soon as possible. We will let you know once booking is available. We have some great ideas for this year and are looking forward to working with you all again. Bring on the sunshine.

YALDING (RIVERSIDE) PRE-SCHOOL

Riverside Pre-school located in Yaling Village Hall has been open for nearly 2 academic years now and after an exciting first year we have an increasing number of children attending Pre-School, this has allowed us the opportunity to open full time Monday- Friday 8.30-3pm. The Team has worked very hard to establish themselves in the Village and have had great support from locals in the area who have donated toys and books they no longer needed. We have recently been working on 'People who help us' and had the local Police and a Dental Nurse come in to visit us at the Pre-School. The children loved it. We have also introduced a new Dance Class into our curriculum, we have Dance, Movement and Grace come in every other Friday. Riverside Pre-School are accepting the new 2-year funding that has recently come into place alongside the Free for 2 Funding, Universal and Extended 15/30-hour funding. If you are looking for a relaxed, friendly Pre-school for your little please get in touch. Yalding@playplace.org 07442275785

YALDING TODDLER, PARENT AND BABY GROUP

Yalding Toddler, Parent, and Baby Group has made significant strides over the past year, with an increased number of attendees and enhancements to our facilities. We're thrilled to see parents enjoying a vibrant and comfortable atmosphere at our weekly sessions. Our primary goal remains to support parents of young children and provide a welcoming environment for new parents. We're delighted to welcome many new mums, dads, and residents to our sessions regularly, fostering a sense of community and providing a platform for advice, support, and camaraderie. Thanks to the generous grant from Simon Webb of Kent County Council, we've been able to upgrade our furniture, purchase new toys, and acquire additional resources for the benefit of the children. While we still rely on voluntary donations from parents to cover our expenses, we're proud of the achievements we've made. Last year's annual Christmas party was a highlight, bringing joy and

festivities to our community with the support of donated food, games, and even a visit from Father Christmas himself. As the group continues to evolve, we're committed to enhancing our facilities and resources to better serve parents and children. We're optimistic about the future and are actively seeking ways to finance our projects to accommodate our growing popularity. Donations are gratefully accepted through our website. We extend an invitation to those in the village who are able to contribute 'hands-on' to join us in our efforts. And of course, tea, coffee, and homemade cake are always on offer! Polly Humphries | Hannah Selden | Katie Organ.

CHURCH AND ASSOCIATED ACTIVITIES

BAPTIST CHURCH

The church has continued to grow in size and sense of community. We have seen a number of new people join us who have recently moved into the area. Services have covered topics that are relevant to current issues whilst remaining faithful to the context of the scripture they are preached from. They seek to better equip church attenders in their personal lives. Sung worship continues to cross the divide of traditional hymns and modern contemporary songs which helps cater for the age range in the congregation. We recently lost a dearly loved member of the church who passed away late last year. They held the position of church treasurer, a position that is now vacant although the finances are being ably managed by church members and friends. The church has a YouTube channel with a humble but consistent number of subscribers. This enables people to watch sermons that have been preached each Sunday if they missed them but also provides others with an opportunity to gain understanding of the church's theology and biblical emphasis. James, our pastor continues to lead most Sunday services with the occasional visiting speaker. Since the last report, James has become recognised by the Baptist Union as a registered pastor. He also continues to serve with the Kenward Trust as a group therapist and Trust chaplain. YBC now sees consistent attendance by some residents from Kenward on a Sunday. They report that they find the services helpful, accessible and calming. They also appreciate being able to take holy communion with us as alcohol is not used. Our Wednesday evening home groups and Monday morning "Praise and Prayer" times have continued through the year, and we have run a number of coffees mornings in support of various charities, which have been well attended by local people as well as church regulars. We really appreciate the new front doors which make the building appear more welcoming to everyone.

ST PETER AND ST PAUL'S CHURCH YALDING AND ST MARY'S CHURCH LADDINGFORD MINISTRY & WORSHIP

The Church is here to make known the creative love of God the Father through the teaching and example of his Son, Jesus Christ, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in our own time and place. St Peter and St Paul's church in Yalding and St Mary's church in Laddingford form our benefice together with St Margaret's church in Collier Street. We've been at the heart of the community for hundreds of years in many different generations to be both a challenge and a support to the people of our villages and to let them know that they are loved and cherished by God, to be a focus for their prayers, and to be a place to celebrate and commemorate important milestones in their lives, as did their parents and grandparents before them. Our worship and our mission is both modern and traditional, weekend and weekday, as we seek to interpret the Bible message in our own time and place. We were pleased to celebrate the ordination to the priesthood last September of our curate the Rev'd Ollie Phipps, and we invite you to join us from time to time to lend your voice and your presence to the worship that we offer.

CHURCHWARDEN

Part of the ministry report above.

BELLRINGERS

I am still Captain after 50 years. We gained 3 new recruits last year but still need more! We rang for the Coronation of King Charles III on 6th May.

LITTLE FISHES

Sadly, due to lack of numbers it was decided last year to stop running Little Fishes. It is hoped that this may only be a temporary situation and that we might get it up and running again in the future.

CHOIR

The choir continues to lead the singing at Sunday morning services as well as singing for other services such as Evensong and, when requested, at weddings and funerals. Christmas and Easter bring additional services too, which can mean a busy but enjoyable time, with new music to be practiced. It's not all hard work, and last summer we were able to share once again in our annual BBQ, in addition to our occasional post choir practice visits to The Walnut Tree, and the "Sausage and Beer" and "Pints, Pies and Puddings" events at The Chequers in Laddingford. Our numbers remain reasonably consistent, and we are always happy to welcome new members. You don't need to be able to read music, just an ability to hold a tune.

JUNIOR CHOIR

Our enthusiastic and committed group of youngsters which now has eight members, continue to enjoy meeting regularly for a Friday practice. The eldest member of our group, started to sing with the main choir in addition to the Youth choir back in September and hopefully more will follow in his footsteps in due course. He has adapted brilliantly! If numbers permit, we now sing at all monthly All Age Services. Christmas heard us singing at the Family Nativity, the Carol Service (in a joint piece with the main choir) and the Christingle Service and we are very much looking forward to Good Friday when we are joining with the Church Choir to perform Jerusalem Joy. Which is a short musical telling the events from Palm Sunday to Easter Day. Both choirs really welcome the opportunity to sing together. New members (Year 3 and above) are always welcome to come along and join us!

JUNIOR CHURCH

The Junior Church in Yalding runs for the first three Sundays of the month in the meeting room upstairs. On the fourth Sunday the children remain in church for the All-Age Service. We have a strong core of regular families that attend and the occasional visiting family. Numbers each week can range from two to twelve children. The sessions are run by a team of volunteers but quite often the parents come up and help with the activities. The sessions usually include a welcome, some singing, a story, a craft activity and prayers, and follow a theme for the month which then leads into the All-Age Service. During this service photos of what the children have been up to in Junior Church are shared with the congregation, the children may sing a song that they have learnt, and they are encouraged to help lead the prayers. This year we held a Christmas Tree workshop during which the children designed decorations on the theme of 'The Nativity' for entry into the Christmas Tree Festival. Many of the children also attended the Easter and Christmas craft workshops and were integral to the 'Scratch Nativity' play.

CHURCHYARD WORKING PARTY

The Churchyard Working Party are volunteers responsible for mowing the new churchyard along with the general maintenance of both churchyards. We have an excellent group of volunteers but as always, more volunteers to spread the load would be very welcome. We have equipment although the mowers are aging hence, I expect the level of repairs/costs to continue to increase over the next few years.

FLOWER ARRANGERS' GROUP

The flower arrangements for the church throughout the year are provided by a group of willing and hard-working volunteers, not all of whom are regular members of the church congregation. (Sadly, at the moment our numbers are decreasing due to ill-health of family commitments) Our group takes pleasure and pride in making the church look beautiful throughout the year, and we feel rewarded by words of appreciation from visitors and the congregation. Flowers and greenery are donated by the arrangers; though there are funds for reimbursement, this is not often requested. New members to the group are always very welcome and no experience is necessary, simply an enjoyment of working with flowers. There have been fewer requests for special wedding arrangements over the last couple of years as most couples now seem content with the flowers regularly in the church, though if we know there is to be an event, efforts are made to provide a few extra touches. Any fees for these arrangements go directly into church funds. In addition, we are very grateful to members of the congregation who make personal donations to the cost of church flowers, and we are always happy if requested to do additional arrangements to mark a special anniversary or memorial. For the major festivals of Christmas and Easter the regular team is usually joined by several other volunteers over the two or three days of preparation. For these

two special festivals the flowers are ordered from a wholesaler in Ashford, and the costs covered by the money raised by our group in the summer at the church fete, and from our stall at the Christmas market. This year again we made over £500 at Christmas. The items sold on our stall are produced at informal workshop sessions by a varied group of flower-arrangers and crafters and we have been delighted to welcome a couple of new skilled and enthusiastic members during the year.

PARISH GIVING

The giving to the Church is being updated. We no longer use weekly envelopes. Regular donors who give by standing order or gift aid envelopes are being encouraged to make a direct debit to Parish Giving Scheme. This is run by the diocese, saving us a lot of hassle, but all the money and gift aid tax refund comes back to our parish. For occasional donations, we have a QR code which links directly to the scheme, allowing donations to be made, with or without gift aid. This is on display in the Church and in the parish magazine. Gift aid envelopes are still available in the Church, or cash can be put in the alms box. We are looking into the possible ways to improve mobile connectivity in the Church.

PLANT AND FABRIC

No report received.

PRAYER GROUP

Prayer group was suspended during Covid and subsequently, members became ill and it still remains dormant due to the result of Covid.

OUTREACH

Throughout the year, Yalding Church holds a variety of outreach functions in the community. The fête in September, children's craft workshops at Christmas and Easter are such examples. The church also welcomes visiting choirs and bands to use the church for concerts, and bellringers occasionally come to ring the bells. In November last year we hosted the School Gambia Art Exhibition over a weekend. The church is also an integral part of the Yuletide market, organising the carol sing-along and providing stalls and hot chocolate. The church is open to the public during the day, providing a quiet place for private prayer and reflection, with pamphlets available on a range of subjects.

SPORTS CLUBS

YALDING AND LADDINGFORD SPORTS ASSOCIATION (YALSA)

YALSA this year has continued in the same vein, with great cooperation between the Cricket and Football clubs. The football club managed to find a new training venue at the car park on the Lees, although this was short lived due to the excessive rain. Fortunately, the mobile floodlights purchased have been invaluable and they were able to utilise pitches further afield. Due to careful planning between the clubs has meant that the Kintons has managed to cope with the wear and tear and is in good shape for the cricket season. Fortunately, the stars are aligning and both clubs now have options and decisions to make, regarding facilities in the future. Thanks must go to some incredibly selfless individuals who give so much for no reward, to ensure that sport is enjoyed by all. Dan who is always on hand to help and Roy and his band of merry men who undertake all the maintenance now across both clubs. Tim does an amazing job guiding the football club and the Cricket Club are lucky to have such a proactive committee to improve their facilities. Very much looking forward to enjoying a drink at the new kiosk within the next few weeks. Hope to see you there. PS Thanks to Sue for always finding some cash when we need it.

CRICKET CLUB

On the field: The 1st XI played in a higher division in 2023 and performed very creditably, winning 7 matches and finishing in 5th place. This would have been higher but for bad weather at the end of the season. The Sunday XI enjoyed its first league season and provided increased opportunities for younger players to experience league cricket. The 2 junior teams, U11 and U13 finished in the middle of their respective league tables. Girls and women who want to play cricket are already included in the Club's teams, and we're looking to increase our playing membership and improve facilities so that more females are encouraged to join the club to play cricket. Finances: YCC is in a sound financial position thanks to effective financial management, increased sponsorship and other fundraising activity. Projects: Last summer visitors to the Kintons will have noticed the white

boundary boards and wicket covers. Visiting teams are now very positive about the quality of the playing surface at the Kintons and our grounds team continues to work to improve the grounds as well as the cricketing experience and opportunity for players. The club is currently working on a project to provide an irrigation system using water from the River Beult to further improve grounds maintenance and the preparation of wickets. This year visitors will have seen the arrival of the kiosk which we intend to have open for business. It will primarily be a facility for club members, playing and non-playing, to purchase refreshments during evening practice sessions, matches and at weekends during the summer. We hope that as well as encouraging more visitors to the Kintons and improving club membership the kiosk will also help to improve the match-day experience for players and spectators. The club is in early discussions with the football club about the kiosk's potential use during the football season. As always, we are very grateful for the support of Yalding Parish Council for all that we do.

FISHING CLUB (CALPAC)

We don't currently have a regular bailiff for our fishery. This is because we have not been able to replace William Bird since we relieved him of his bailiffing duties. The fishery is still being maintained by myself (Dean Hawkins), and other members. Since the passing of our Treasurer and Trustee, John Bygrave and fellow Trustee Malcolm Corner, we have been in the process of updating our Trustees, and Committee A list of these are below. We have also resigned Ray Wilkinson as a Trustee. President: Jim Hamilton. Vice President: Denise Wheeler. Chairman: Dave Blake. Vice Chairman: Jim Hamilton. General Secretary: Carmel Jones. Membership Secretary: Denise Wheeler Fisheries Manager: Dean Hawkins. Trustee: Carmel Jones. Trustee: Denise Wheeler. Trustee: Dean Hawkins. There are no events planned for 2024 on our field, at this current time. Should that change, we will notify the PC.

FOOTBALL CLUB - Yalding & Laddingford Football Club

This has been a season of continuing renewal for our community football club. We have made further investments in safeguarding training, first aid training & kit and additional DBS checks to ensure there are always sufficient qualified adults present as the club grows. We have continued to participate positively in Kent FA Safeguarding initiatives. We have ten league-registered teams, playing in four leagues and consisting of eight mixed junior teams (U7 Kestrels, U8 Ospreys, U9 Kites, U11 Buzzards, U11 Hawks, U12 Condors, U14 Eagles, U15 Falcons) and two Men's teams. We also launched the U6 Harriers, a Development squad and the Weetabix Wildcats, a fun football introduction for 5 – 11-year-old girls. We welcomed new coaches, adding to the number generously gifting their time & expertise and we supported referee training to add to our growing number of match officials. We played home games at the Kintons and Jubilee Field, Laddingford and held weekday Winter Training at Yalding Lees and at East Peckham using our new portable floodlights. Thanks to excellent support from Roy Farrier, we have further improved pitch quality. We again achieved England FA Accreditation, confirming us to be run effectively and we continue to implement our Club Development Plan. We have continued with a player fee approach which emphasises affordability, access and tailored support for those unable to pay. We continued to benefit from generous sponsorship support. We continued our active presence on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok and LinkedIn. We held a Bingo Night, a Quiz Night, an end of season presentation event and our second stall at the Yuletide Market. It rained a lot during the Winter! A massive thank you to the long list of volunteers, players and parents who have supported the club this season. We're looking forward to building on our momentum in the year ahead!

RIFLE RANGE

It's been a good year for the range with a new member's waiting list. Membership at present is up to its max with 30 members. Repairs and upgrade work still in progress.

TABLE TENNIS CLUB

We usually have between 6 and 11 at our Monday sessions. Fridays are closed sessions, not open to the general public. We have one member in his late 20s who also represents Kent at county level and the rest are MUCH older! Despite the increasing age profile, most are playing at a good level, it is inspiring to see people in their 60s, 70s and 80s still 'running around' and playing competitively. There are still no junior sessions as none of the parents have been able to make the

commitment to running these. Our one licenced instructor is giving up his authorisation but the club will remain affiliated to Table Tennis England (formerly the ETTA).

COMMERCIAL SPORTING ACTIVITIES

CIRCLE DANCING

For the last year we have really enjoyed being able to use the space at The Community Centre which feels so much more than an empty hall, and also a perfect size for our circle dancing which is joyful, friendly and lively as well as meditative. Going forward we will enjoy the continued calm and welcomeness of the space.

LUCY ROBINS SCHOOL OF DANCE

Lucy Robins School of Dance classes are continuing to flourish and grow in Yalding. We have now been running classes at the Youth and Community Centre for 11 years! We have added Musical Theatre and Cheer classes to our offerings at our Yalding branch in the last couple of years, with lots more classes planned. Our school has now grown to over 450 students dancing with us each week from ages 1 years to adult. We recently staged our showcase held at the Khan Theatre, Mascalls School with an audience of 600 and over 350 performers from the local community. We look forward to taking to the stage next year at The Stag Theatre, Sevenoaks. We are looking forward to our summer term!

JLP PERFORMING ARTS

We're a friendly & professional Performing Arts School in Yalding. We offer dance and performance classes for children in Baby&Me Dance, ISTD Ballet, ISTD Modern, ISTD Tap, Street Dance, Stage & Screen Performance, Acro and we also run Adult Dance Fitness classes. We entered some of our students for their ISTD Dance Exams and achieved 100% pass rate with Distinctions and Merits awarded. We have 5 highly qualified and experienced dance teachers employed at JLP and they will be running a dance Summer School this Summer, and we will also have our first full production show next year for the students.

KARATE

Over the last year I have been very happy with the hall and since my last report have extended my hours to include holiday times too. I don't use the front door as its safer for the children to exit the side as there's no road to suddenly run onto if they're very young.

MODEL CAR RACING

In 2023 Kent Mini-Z welcomed a number of new members and continued to be one of the largest UK indoor Mini-Z circuits with racers coming from as far as Bristol just to race on the Friday evening! With ages ranging from 3 to 75 it's fun for everyone! We were also given the go ahead to host the UK Kyosho Mini-Z Cup, which is an honour, this will likely be held in the midlands due to the geographic nature of all of the UK drivers but will be a fantastic opportunity for our club. The format for 2024 will be much the same as the previous year and we are looking forward to another year of fun racing!

PILATES - BODY CONTROL

Numbers have remained constant during the year and classes have been greatly enjoyed.

Participants all comment on how much they feel the benefits of the movements and everyone wants to keep fully mobile and active in day-to-day life. There is a wonderful community cohesion and strong friendships have been formed over the years, very inclusive and caring. We enjoyed many garden classes in Oast Court between May early September followed by cakes and coffee. Incredibly popular and wonderful for well-being connecting with nature. I continue to train with some of the top professionals in the industry and attend regular courses.

PILATES – HARRIET STEVENS

I run a mixed ability and gender Pilates class in St Mary's church hall Laddingford on a Wednesday and Thursday evening at 7:30pm. They run throughout the year with pay as you go or block payment options.

YOGA NUT

Move with Ease (aka Yoga Nut!) is a chronic pain clinic based in Laddingford. Caroline, the owner, is a highly trained, experienced and empathetic practitioner trained in clinical & sports massage therapy BTEC 6, yoga and fascial movement, structural integration, Pain Reprocessing Therapy, Buteyko functional breathing and meditation. All of these modalities help you to move with ease

and live a pain-free life. <https://www.movewiththeease.org.uk/> Caroline runs a donation-based meditation group in Laddingford <https://www.facebook.com/groups/meditationmovewiththeease>

YOGA – HAPPY NAT

Yoga classes in Yalding run every Thursday, they are going really well. Regulars attend every week, people in the village and from Benover & East Peckham. It's a lovely group with a lovely sense of community.

ZUMBA

Tanya's Total Fitness runs local Zumba classes. Including, 7pm every Wednesday at Yalding Village Hall. I have a wonderful group of varied ages, and everyone has the same goal...To keep fit and have fun. There is always room for new members. Please do come along and try a class. You won't regret it!!

YOUTH GROUPS

LEGO CLUB

After starting up in 2022, Lego Club meets at Yalding Library after school 3.30-4.30pm and it's always a joy to put Lego creations in the window for children (and adults!) to look at as they pass by. We had Lego Club during the school holidays in 2023 which was very popular so I suspect we will do the same again in 2024. There is also a Duplo box now for younger children which comes out during story time. It is just a little club, but we are always pleased to see children making Lego and learning to interact with each other. We unfortunately, cannot have children who are unaccompanied as the venue is the library and is a public place, but as long as there is a 'go to' adult present, all children are welcome. For the latest Lego made, take a look at www.facebook.co.uk/YaldingLegoClub.

SCOUT GROUP

Yalding Scout Group continues to thrive because of the leaders who give up their time on a weekly basis. They offer the children of our community an enormous range of activities which aim to help young people grow into well-rounded independent adults. From crafts to litter picking, cooking, fire building, camping, kayaking, raft building, hiking, den building - you name it and they do it. Scouting in Yalding is currently available to children from age 6 up to the age of 14. We would really like some new leaders to join us; anyone is suitable as everyone has some sort of skill they could offer. If it is an issue to commit to a weekly session then we would really welcome someone who could do some fund-raising for us or come along and run a skills session - the opportunities are endless. At the moment, everything is down to the leaders! Our Explorer leader stepped down last summer so we would really welcome someone to take this over as we could then offer scouting up to the age of 18. Giving young people these opportunities between the ages of 14 - 18 is invaluable and serves to encourage them away from gaming and phones! If you feel you can help in any way please contact Sandra on 07928 676106. Yalding Scouts are grateful to the Parish Council for their continued support.

STORY TIME

Calling all pre-schoolers! Storytime is back every Tuesday afternoon in the library in Yalding. Hurrah! Every week either Anna or June will have a selection of stories and then we'll have a sing song of popular nursery rhymes assisted by either Sheelagh or Marion, our lovely librarians plus any mums, or grandparents or carers. We'll have a lovely interactive time with your little one. Storytime is term time only from 2.15-2.45 – so older brothers or sisters can be picked up from school after. We'll do our best to have a storyteller each week, so look out for Joanna from time to time, by popular request! Follow story time posts on www.facebook.com/storytime@yaldinglibrary or post your own requests from you little one – we would love to hear from you and we'll do our best to find a story your little one would really like.

BOOK AND LITERARY CLUBS

HOLIDAY READING BOOK CLUB

HRBC started in 2010 with 12 members. 14 years and over 150 books later we still have over half of our original members actively involved with the group-some have moved away but still read and report remotely. Book reviews have been quite mixed this year but our best and worst reads of the year scored 4.2/5 or 2.9/5 as we usually have a good mix of opinions that average out. Thank you to our local librarians for keeping the book supplies flowing.

LITERARY GROUP

Our reading this year has covered a wide range, including a 19th century classic (*The Warden*, by Anthony Trollope), and several biographies (*The Magician*, by Colm Tobin, about the German writer Thomas Mann; *The Escape Artist*, by Jonathan Freedland, about the man who escaped from Auschwitz and alerted the world to the Holocaust); and *Briefly a Delicious Life*, by Nell Stephens - an imaginative account of Chopin and George Sand's winter in Majorca, as told by a ghost from the 15th century!). As always, we are extremely grateful for the help provided by Yalding Library.

YALDING BOOK GROUP

As a relative newcomer to our book club, started some 20 years ago by Daphne Gear, this year we have enjoyed a diverse mix of books from *Lessons in Chemistry* to *Hitler Stalin Mum and Dad*. Our meetings are occasions for lively debate, social interaction and a chance to forge friendships. Opening us up to reading styles and genres that we might otherwise overlook and learning new things about the world, its history, politics and society. Our club goes beyond just reading. We have celebratory dinners and at Xmas enjoyed a trip to Hamnett in the West End.

YALDING YAFFLES BOOK GROUP

Jenny Gundry, the Founder of the Book Group some 20 years ago, has not been involved for a while due to family health problems, but maintains a keen interest in the group. In order to keep the continuity Annie Lee-Davey agreed to step in. Numbers are a little lower as members have moved out of the area. The selection and range of books continue to be varied, which are chosen at the January meeting each year and submitted to the library where Sheelagh and Marion continue to provide the group with the books requested each month, a service which is greatly appreciated. The group meet each month, excepting August and December, with lively discussion and debate and a mark out of five given for each monthly read, five being exceptional.

OTHER GROUPS AND SOCIETIES

ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

We welcomed many new people to our allotment community during 2023 and they have brought enthusiasm and energy with them. We hope they have many successful years of growing ahead of them. Again, dry weather proved to be a challenge for our growers but with some determination and the careful use of water supplies captured during the previous winter, it's always possible to make some crops succeed. Each year is different and there will never be a season where everything is bountiful. Part of the appeal is working with the unpredictability of our climate and making the most of what you get. Working parties continue to be sociable occasions where much work is done to keep the site tidy and attractive throughout the year. At Christmas 2023, a Christmas dinner was held at the Yalding Club, for plot-holders and their partners. This was the first time we have done this and intend to arrange again in the future due to it being a very successful event. We plan to repeat the success and sociability of 2023 and continue to see the site thrive with enthusiastic growers into 2024 and beyond. Ongoing support to ensure the site is recognised as an essential village amenity. The significant demand from residents for plots proves this to be the case.

ART GROUP

Yalding Art Group has been going from strength to strength over the past couple of years. We are a long-established group as it was originally started by Anne Telfer in 2001. We are now established at Riverside (behind the Post Office) and at times we are a little crowded, but we always seem to fit! Artists come when they can, which gives the group a great dynamic as you never know who will turn up and we work to a new subject every two weeks. We have been taking requests and then we are all out of our comfort zone! We always look forward to our annual Arts & Crafts Show in May which will be on the 19th this year. This subsidises our Summer trip which we now go by train as the cost of a coach is just too much. Last year we finally got to Bexhill-on-Sea after many planned strikes and our ultimate goal each year is to swim in the sea! This most of us did. In 2024 our trip is to Folkestone with the same goal in mind. We are not a fund-raising group which enables our subs to be used either by subsidising our annual trip or the occasional

demonstration and our Christmas meal which is at The Village Club. Sessions are mostly on Thursday mornings 10-12 with a refreshment break (and cake!). £3 per person – all welcome. We have www.facebook.com/yaldingartgroup and a WhatsApp - both of which showcases all the work we do during the year.

BINGO

Due to COVID I am pleased to report after 3 years, Bingo was resurrected in May 2023. It is a great Social Night out and we look forward to seeing new members on Wednesday evenings 7pm at Yalding Working Mens Club.

7 REASONS TO PLAY BINGO:

Improves Mental Agility, Better hand-eye coordination, Stronger short-term memory, Enhanced Concentration, Natural stress relief, Socialisation opportunities, Healthy competition. For further details please contact Sue Gerrish on 01622 814163 / suegerrish@gmail.com

BEE KEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

Laddingford Beekeepers had a very good beekeeping year in 2023. Membership numbers had declined slightly for various reasons and on top of this, we had to deal with the invasion of the Asian Hornet! This coming year is going to be even more difficult as the Asian Hornet becomes an even greater threat with their numbers growing in Kent and the South Coast. They are not just a threat to the honeybee but to ALL pollinating insects. We have had to invest heavily in advertising material and traps to try and stay off the invasion. There is no doubt that this year is going to be very challenging!

DRAMA

Yalding's Drama Group ran very successfully for 20 years offering a variety of productions, indoors and outdoors, until the pandemic halted the momentum and key players retired or moved from the village. Hopes for a revival remain undimmed. Might YOU or someone you know be interested in becoming involved, onstage or backstage, or in bringing fresh ideas for future shows? Don't hold back!

GARDEN SOCIETY

2023-4 has been a busy year for the Garden Society. We held our usual Spring and Autumn shows, and a members' picnic with pop-up show in the summer, along with visits to Great Comp Garden and Hyde Hall RHS garden. For the first time, we had a winter visit to view snowdrops at Knowle Hill Farm. We enjoyed 3 fascinating talks on Monday evenings in the winter, as well as our Christmas party and AGM. We are eager to welcome new members, with or without gardening experience. We are a sociable group. Anybody with the tiniest garden or collection of indoor plants could enjoy exhibiting at our shows.

Yalding Historical Society

An inaugural meeting was held on 27th September 2023. It was decided to have a number of events in the summer of 2024, to include if possible a historical exhibition, talk and walk in the village. Our aim is to collect archives from various local residents and to present them to villagers in this way. There would need to be appropriate historical research to put the documents into context, to have a number of documents that could be consulted and eventually to lead to new publications of interest to local people.

KNIT AND NATTER

The Knit and Natter Group at Yalding Library is new. We meet on a Tuesday morning 10.30am until mid-day. There are no tea making facilities, so feel free to bring a drink with you. The group is for all kinds of crafts and if you have a project you are stuck with Sheelagh is our Librarian expert! She made a beautiful crochet dog to raise funds for Friends of Yalding Surgery, so you are in safe hands should you need help. There is a new Facebook - page www.facebook.com/knit&natter@yaldinglibrary where inspiration for knitting, crocheting and crafts are posted. Please feel free to post any craft or knitting projects – we'd love to see them. Yalding Library is also allocated a 'warm haven' so even if you are not keen on knitting, crochet or craft, just natter with friends and keep warm!

RELATIVE MINORS (RM) ORCHESTRA

Since Andrew Thurston left to live in Canterbury in 2020, we have been lucky to work under the leadership of Rachael Hannigan. Being a professional musician and teacher, she gave us a great deal of insight into our playing and helped us to work in a detailed and challenging way. We were

proud to put on a concert in Hunton in July 2023 and to perform at two primary schools. But sadly, for us and Rachael too, she has a new job in Surrey and can no longer give us her skill and inspiration. We continue to meet on the 2nd and 4th Sunday evening of each month and work together to produce a good sound. We are looking for a leader who can help us at least once a month, so if there is anyone out there who would like to work with us, please contact Heather Haddesley on 07790125791. We are preparing for an evening of musical memories to mark the 100th birthday of Trevor Telfer who played the clarinet with us for years and to remember two of our members who died last year: Andrew Thurston and Tim Oyler. We expect this to be a joyful occasion on 7th July at Yalding Church from 7.30pm. Do please join us. We will play the favourite music of each of these members. The church choir will join by singing music that Andrew and Tim particularly enjoyed. We are always looking for new players and anyone who plays a musical instrument is very welcome. Do contact Heather.

VILLAGE VOICES

The numbers of voices joining Village Voices this past year has increased again and stands at 24 regular singers. We sing a variety of songs for our own pleasure and well-being and we are a very social group, welcoming to new members. A small group of us sang at the Yalding School fete and a full choir took part in the summer concert at Hunton Village Hall together with the village orchestra, Relative Minors. For the first time we were invited to sing at the Laddingford Carol Service where there was a very good turnout. The plans for the coming year include a workshop on folksongs from around the world in Dartford run by the nationally recognised choir leader, Chris Rowbury. Onwards and upwards! All ages, stages and levels of experience are welcome to join the group and you do not need to be able to read music. If you would like to find out more about us, we meet in the church from 7.30 – 9.00 pm, usually on the 1st and 3rd Thursday of the month and the cost works out at £2.50 per session to cover costs. Contact Karen Di Marco 01622 745298 and/or karendimack@gmail.com. After deductions for venue hire, printing and purchasing new music, any residual income is donated to SchoolGambia.

WI

This year Yalding & Laddingford's Women's Institute Group celebrates its 79th year. The group has played such a vital part in women's lives throughout the years. It was first established during WWII to produce and send knitted items to soldiers from the parish serving overseas, as well as help with evacuees and of course making jam and cakes. Since then, the group has done much more and gone from strength to strength. This year we had quite an exciting and eventful year. Our member numbers have doubled, we still aim to keep our membership price down and to do that we have been fundraising. Our first event of the year was the Craft Fair which was a great success. Everyone had a great time and even managed to start their Christmas shopping- Thanks to Sarah for being amazing in the kitchen. We also had the Chocolate Tombola at the Yuletide Market-Thank you to Sheree and Glenda for manning the stall. And for the first time the WI organised a Grotto at the Yuletide Market. It looked amazing!!!! It was a very cold night especially to be dressed as elves and Mrs Claus. Thank you to Father Christmas, Mrs Claus, and the elves. It really wouldn't have been possible without you and thank you to the members who helped to set up and to pack away. In addition to the fundraising, we have been socialising quite a bit and embracing member bonding. Once a month members have a lunch out to catch up, we attend the Chequers Ladies Night monthly, we have been to the Assembly Halls for an Abba Musical evening, and we had a fabulous Fawlty Towers Christmas Party at the Mercure (it will be hard to top that next year) and in case you weren't at the Coronation Street Party we performed an Abba song and dance routine (we were definitely the best act by far!!!!) We have however been doing some serious things too....Helen Palmer taught us how to decorate biscuits, we had a pizza making and prosecco drinking evening - Thank you to Martin!, we had a flower arranging workshop and a wreath making workshop- a huge thank you to Sue for both of those events, David Jenner came to visit and gave us a great photography talk, Catherine taught us to needle felt and we had Heather from Surge Self-defence come along to give us a talk and demonstration on female self-defence. Roll on next year and another fun packed year. The WI is every second Tuesday of the month and is held in the village hall from 7:30 pm. New members and guests are always welcome. Please pop along for a visit or contact Dee-Ann Stead on deeanstead@aol.co.uk or 07920402052.

MARKETS

YULETIDE MARKET

2023 saw another highly successful Yuletide market despite the freezing temperatures and possibly lower footfall than normal. Despite bringing the market back in 2021 following the pandemic, the market grew again and ran seamlessly. We had around 40 stalls, a dazzling array of entertainment (most of it local), and a great number of locals and visitors. We also initiated a brand-new Santa. Our visitor numbers were in line with our deliberate strategy of not marketing the event too much and focusing on “keeping it local”. We were very well organised with traffic management and off-road parking, and thanks again to local business LupoFresh for use of their large area of hardstanding in 2023. We’re also very privileged to enjoy free parking spaces donated by the GP surgery, Yalding school and the Baptist church – thank you all very much for your continued kind support. Residents cooperated seamlessly and for the second year running, we had a car-free High Street in plenty of time, thank you all so much. We did have to implement our contingency plans in 2023, owing to two “lost” children and a falling man. The walkie talkies and barrier marshals sprung into action, and St Johns’ Ambulance proved their value when attending to the (thankfully non-serious) fall. As a result of this we need to tweak the communications a little and look at investing in a public address (PA) solution for 2024. If anyone has any ideas on the PA side of things I’d like to hear from you. Particular thanks must go to the Yalding residents, my superb Yuletide team, the Parish Council, most local businesses and of course our visitors from near and far. Thanks to our loyal stalls who continue to support us each year. Thanks also to H W Martin Traffic Management who professionally managed the road closures alongside our own volunteer marshals, this was also a great local effort! A particular thank you to Jason and Darcey who offered us warm sanctuary and cold beverages after a 12-hour stint in the cold – you are nothing short of lifesavers! 2024 sees us needing to recruit as some of our longest standing volunteers understandably need to move on. We always have more things to do than we have people for, especially in the traffic management and parking domains. This event depends on volunteers, and we need more now! What about some of our newer residents? Reach out to me at jason.bryant1968@btinternet.com.

HALLS AND FACILITIES

YALDING VILLAGE HALL

The Village Hall is a charitable community facility and has been an integral part of the village for 70 years. It can be used for meetings, events, receptions, parties, clubs, associations, fund raising events...you name it! We will do our best to accommodate everyone at reasonable rates. Playplace Preschool being our main user still has vacancies. To register your interest email yalding@playplace.org or telephone 01622 814024 during term time. Playplace also operate a Playscheme in the summer school holidays funded by Yalding Parish Council. To hire the hall, please contact the booking secretary, suegerrish@gmail.com

YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CENTRE (YYCC)

It is probably worth mentioning that YYCC is also known as the Baptist Chapel- this sometimes causes confusion! The building belongs to the Baptist Church but is run by a separate YYCC committee who have a volunteer to manage bookings. Godfrey Featherstone, who has served as Chair of this committee for many years has now stood down from the role and we thank him wholeheartedly for his many years of service and all the improvements he has made possible to the building for the community. James Bushnell (Baptist Church pastor) is now Chair. Many different groups use the building on different days- it is rarely empty! We now have a completely new floor in the main hall which was a major undertaking in Summer 2023. Our next project is the Main Hall windows, including looking into repairing the small stained glass one at the front of the building at the top. Storage space for use by different groups remains a challenge- we are looking into ways to screen off what has become a storage area in the small hall. James and Rachel Bushnell (Chair and Communications, YYCC committee)

FRIENDS OF YALDING YOUTH & COMMUNITY CENTRE

It's still just the two of us! Linda and June. We do one fundraising event a year, which is the Themed Christmas Tree Festival which is held the second week of December after the weekend of the Yuletide Market. Put the 14th & 15th December 2024 in your diary! Local groups and businesses pay £10 to put a themed Christmas Tree in the large hall and each one is voted on throughout the weekend by the public. We did not have a festival in 2022, so our 2023 festival did not have as many trees, but we moved all our tables and chairs for voters to sit in the main hall and the atmosphere was fantastic. We are hoping for more entries this year, especially from the various groups who use the hall. Our first-year winner was Yalding Cricket Club with a six-foot tree made from cricket bats and balls and the second winner was Amy from the Village Tea Rooms with her teapot pouring ribbon tea throughout the tree. The winning tree for 2023 was from the Circle Dancers who use the hall regularly. They made a Christmas Tree dress which was really imaginative and won the winning vote. We are always entranced by the imagination of our entries and it is such a lovely event. Volunteers offer refreshments, cake and mince pies to visitors and all donations go to the upkeep and hopefully renovation of the Baptist Church. We are hoping to raise money towards the replacement of the windows at the front of the church. If you are interested in holding a fundraising event in our name or would like to help with this annual event, contact June on chapman.june59@gmail.com

HELPING HANDS

Yalding Helping Hands has been operating for some considerable years, but we now desperately need volunteer drivers. As reported last year we have lost a number of volunteers who have either moved away, are no longer in good health or are just getting older. It is very difficult for Jenny Scott and I to keep calling on the same people and on occasions we have to refuse requests for help with transport. Transport is provided for local residents to Maidstone Hospital, Tunbridge Wells Hospital or Yalding Doctors' Surgery. Some of our local residents do not have the support of family or friends during the day as they are at work or live further away. This is when Helping Hands is needed most, especially for our older people. If you feel you could help, please get in touch with Jenny or myself our contact numbers are listed in the parish magazine.

NU-VENTURE BUSES

Yalding's daytime buses to/from Maidstone continue to be provided by Nu-Venture on Mondays to Saturdays, with ongoing financial support from Kent County Council. The assistance of Yalding Parish Council on a number of issues is again gratefully acknowledged, especially the prompt notification of flooding and roadworks on local roads used by buses requiring services to be diverted or curtailed. Recently, our significant concerns about a planned residential development in Kenward Road were expressed directly to the developer's transport consultant, who seemed to be much less familiar with the local area (and its traffic constraints, especially the narrowness of Yalding Bridge and the poor roads between the village and larger local towns such as Maidstone) than those of us who provide the parish with its services. As last year, there have been numerous unplanned changes to bus times and routes due to works in the highway, often un-notified to us by Streetworks at KCC whose role is to co-ordinate requests from utilities and others to close roads. Whilst we continue to be grateful that Kent Highways is arranging for more works/closures to take place in evenings and at weekends, the utility companies remain less co-operative.

YALDING LIBRARY

This Year we celebrated 30 Years of Yalding Library. Members of the Parish Council and regular library users came to help us celebrate with a beautiful cake made by one of the villagers. As part of the Summer Reading Challenge events, we had an author visit and the children were able to take part in craft events throughout the summer. The Yuletide Market was another success with over 100 people popping in to make cards, listen to Storytime with Joanna or just have a warmup, we even had a visit from Father Christmas. Our Lego club continues to be popular, and the children's creations can be seen in the library windows. We said a sad farewell to Joanna who has been running Storytime for the last 5 years, we have now found a replacement and are looking forward to a bi-monthly session run by Anna from March. Our Craft and Chatter Group has a core of regular members and has been lovely to see their creations in a lovely window display. We continue to enjoy our visits from Yalding Primary School when they come to choose books. It's been lovely getting to know them and pleased to see so many taking part in the Summer Reading

Challenge. We are looking forward to another Author visit in the Easter holidays and are starting to plan for activities in the school holidays. With the village planning to celebrate the 80th D-Day Anniversary, we shall be sure to get the bunting out again. We have seen a steady rise in visitor figures overall across the year, with a dip briefly during the summer. It has picked up in recent months, and we have welcomed over 50 new borrowers already this year. Our issues dipped some months of this year, we are unsure of why this would be as we promote and offer as much as we can. Any support to increase visitors and library use always very welcome! We also had 60 children take part in the summer reading challenge, which was a fantastic result! Lots of happy families being part of a brilliant reading initiative.

PATIENTS' PARTICIPATION GROUP

No report received.

INFORMATION

PARISH MAGAZINE

I have been Editor since 2020 and the magazine gives me a great sense of pride in getting all the many events and news to the 1200 residents who read it and hopefully our digital magazine will be up and running again soon on the church website www.yaldingchurches.co.uk. The magazine is funded by St.Peter & St.Paul's Church and although it does have Church news etc., we put as many events and community news in as we can and the community diary just gets bigger and bigger! We publish 11 copies a year with the December and January issue being combined. We start with asking for a donation for the following year for £5 to cover publishing costs and we put an envelope in the February issue. Although we now have a QR code in the magazine to assist and details of the bank account is on page 2. If you would prefer to pay digitally, please email us for the bank details. The costs of publishing are large so the magazine is printed in black & white with the occasional colour insert which is always sponsored. We really do appreciate the support Yalding & Laddingford give us. The magazine team consists of Editor - June Chapman, Advertising - Lara Franklin, Treasurer – Graham Spillman and Distribution – Paul & Anna Kish who have a large band of volunteers who deliver house to house. We would appreciate any articles to be with us by the 10th or as near as possible as we have to consider the printing and the distribution and it is very disappointing for readers if they miss an event at the beginning of the month due to delays. If you would like to be a volunteer delivering the magazine, please contact mag@yaldingchurches.co.uk

PARISH NEWS

To receive useful information on flooding issues, road closures, lost and found etc., please email chairman@yaldingparishcouncil.gov.uk to be included on the Parish Database. We have reunited many cats and dogs with their owners along with horses, sheep and even a hamster.

PARTNERSHIPS

MEDWAY VALLEY COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP

This year we celebrated 20 years as a community rail partnership. From small beginnings on Swale Rail, through expansion on the Medway Valley Line and latterly the Kent Downs Line. We are accredited annually by the Department for Transport. Highlights for the Medway Valley Line are listed below.

- Delivering train travel training sessions and rail safety messages to students from Five Acre Wood (Snodland) and Catch 22 Maidstone. These involved rail trips to the dedicated Travel Safe Travel Smart centre in Margate, and classroom sessions sharing anti-trespass messages and outlining how to plan your journey and seek assistance from Southeastern staff or British Transport Police.
- Pop-up events took place at Maidstone CycleFest and the Snodland Over 55s Information and Advice Fair. These events allowed us to promote leisure trips for rail, explain assisted travel options available from Southeastern and travel discounts available through Railcards, "Kids for a Quid" and other schemes.
- We continued to support our station adopters at Cuxton, Snodland, Maidstone West and Watlington, who keep their local stations attractive and welcoming to visitors and regular users.

- Pop-up events took place at Maidstone West and Tonbridge stations, promoting the 61016 non-emergency incident and reporting service from British Transport Police.
- Social media posts have promoted our Rail Trail walks from Medway Valley Line stations and Medway Valley Countryside partnerships wellbeing walks at Yalding Fen.
- A number of local publications, including Yalding parish magazine agreed to run an article around keeping cycles secure when leaving them at stations.
- We arranged a led walk between stations on the Medway Valley Line supported by Visit Maidstone. Walks bring tourists into the Medway Valley by train, promoting sustainable tourism.
- At Paddock Wood we have joined the local community in creating new information boards, celebrating the former "Hop Pickers Line". We have initiated the waymarking of a walking route inspired by this historic railway line.

Kent CRP is grateful to Yalding Parish Council for its funding and support for our work.

MEDWAY VALLEY COUNTRYSIDE PARTNERSHIP (MVCP)

Whilst MVCP work across the boroughs of Maidstone and Tonbridge and Malling, this brief report details the work and projects locally specific to Yalding.

Invasive Non-Native Species:

MVCP continue to control Giant hogweed across the catchment. Some areas around Yalding are still quite dense with the plant but multiple treatment visits are undertaken each spring and we are confident that numbers will continue to fall. MVCP have also continued to control Floating pennywort from around the local marinas and main river and, with funding from the Environment Agency, we released the biocontrol agent for Floating pennywort in the summer of 2023. Initial data indicates the weevils are doing well so hopefully, in time, they will control the Floating pennywort for us. Himalayan balsam continues to be abundant. We have undertaken several task days to pull the balsam in various areas and will repeat this in 2024. Many thanks to everyone, including Yalding Parish Council, who continue to support the invasive non-native species control project.

Ponds at Yalding Fen:

As part of the Natural England scheme to create and restore ponds for Great Crested Newts and as part of the planning conditions for Yalding Enterprise Park, MVCP have created two new ponds at Yalding Fen. These ponds will be surveyed and monitored into the future. Initial observations indicate the ponds are doing well and we are confident they'll support a wealth of wildlife.

Yalding Enterprise Park:

MVCP have assisted YEP by offering advice on their conveyance channel. This has been partly seeded with seeds from Yalding Fen in a hope to extend that habitat. More seed sowing will take place later in 2024.

Yalding/Nettlestead Community Woodland:

With funding from MBC, MVCP have worked with Medway Victory Angling Society and planted approx. 1500 trees near the river just downstream of Yalding. MVCP will continue to monitor the site and undertake aftercare of the trees and remove invasive Himalayan balsam from the site as it becomes established.

Woodland Wellbeing:

With funding from the NHS, MVCP's Woodland Wellbeing programme continues at Yalding Fen. We are running approx. 1 session per month at the moment for a select signposted audience. Based on Forest School principles, the project is to help improve the mental health of participants.

Barn Owls:

A new Barn Owl box has been installed at the Fen and MVCP will be monitoring the box as part of our ongoing Barn Owl project.

SPEEDWATCH

Speedwatch in Yalding had not been operating for several years, so we had to look at all the equipment and liaised with Kent Police to get volunteers and to upgrade certain parts. Also, online training via www.communityspeedwatch.org We have a WhatsApp Group to help get the team together to plan a session, they are various allocated points in the village. We have now started! There is a monthly report in the Parish magazine to show residents our progress. We are gradually getting there trying to find the best places to work from. We can always have more volunteers! If you are interested please email chapman.june59@gmail.com To be a volunteer, it

involves doing an online test and to join our group, look on the website and request to join. It seems that vehicles either speed in or speed out of the village from various places and we just register those vehicles and send the information off to Kent Police. We have no powers to restrain or arrest – we are just information gatherers. We have had a lot of encouragement from local residents as it seems that speeding has been a problem for a while, so we hope we are a little help with trying to reduce it.

OTHER ORGAISATIONS THAT SUPPORT THE COMMUNITY

INVOLVE KENT

No report received.

LOCAL COMMERCIAL SERVICES

CHEQUERS INN

The Chequers combines being the focal point of Laddingford as well as attracting customers from within the Parish and surrounding areas. It is the meeting place for several local groups and is keen to support the organisations within Yalding Parish. With a large garden it is ideal for families and hosts several events in the summer in the garden and warm cosy events in the winter beside the roaring log fire. The Chequers continues to be in the Good Pub Guide and strives to maintain a welcoming environment for everyone. Charles and Tracey the current landlords celebrate 30 years at The Chequers in 2024.

CLOCKHOUSE FARM

2023 marked the 120th anniversary of our fourth-generation family business. Our focus is on always delivering the highest quality, most efficiently and sustainably grown fruit. Following it's opening in spring 2022 Gooselands has fast become a flagship site for the industry, showcasing the very best in sustainable and environmentally friendly farming. This year saw the Gooselands site in full production with 6.5 hectares of blackberries, yielding 450 tonnes of this exceptional fruit. The heated production has extended the growing season using our innovative renewable heat systems and reducing the need for imported fruit. We also grow raspberries, strawberries, blackberries, apples, and plums across a further eight sites in Kent, which has always been at the heart of the fruit growing industry. Clock House Farm has greater than a 2% share of the UK market for strawberries, 9% for raspberries and 20% for blackberries (by volume) and you might be interested to know that almost 1 in every 10 raspberries and 2 in any 10 blackberries are produced by Clock House Farm. Whilst we are proud of these volumes and continue to drive forward and innovate, we are only too aware that the British agriculture is in a challenging place. The industry has seen a 25% reduction in growers in our marketing group in the last twelve months. Food security is compromised meaning that unless the industry is supported by government policy, the British public will see ever more imported fruit. We are passionate about being custodians of the land we farm, and environment, conservation and biodiversity is embedded into the Clock House Farm culture – whether we are planting hedges and trees or reserving 6.5 hectares, which is 40% of the land at Gooselands for nature – Our land sharing and land sparing initiatives are at the forefront of our plans. The support of the local community is very much appreciated and will be vital in the coming years. We are trying to give back as much as possible in the form of sponsorship, donations, and educational trips. Not all our fruit goes to the supermarkets. We supply local organisations such as Maidstone, KIMS and Benenden hospitals, Shepherd Neame and Biddenden Vineyards. We are looking forward to the 2024 season. Our aim is to grow the best quality fruit, continuing with our investment in green energy and improving local biodiversity.

HAMPSTEAD MARINA

No report received

LADDINGFORD GARAGE

No report received.

LITTLE VENICE

We all look forward to all events going on in the village, we have the parish magazine which is full of Yalding activities etc. The phone numbers are very useful and so are the businesses locally as we like to use local tradesmen etc. The WI was a good way of meeting people in the village as well. We also used the George public house as a meeting place and love the Christmas fair too.

I also appreciate Geraldine Browns information during floods.

ORCHARD VIEW GARAGE

Orchard View Garage continues to thrive seeing a continued expansion to the customer base. We have a new technician under training. We have seen quite a number of rodent damaged vehicles this year that may be due to the mild winter we had and of course large numbers of suspension and tyre failures due to pothole and road conditions. We look forward to another busy year. 2024 will be our 21st year in Hampstead.

ORCHARD VIEW STORE

Thanks for giving us the opportunity to be a part of the village community as we have been for 20 years. As you all know, Orchard View Stores has always strived for the best of Yalding villagers' needs for the essential products for 20 years. Our building has itself been supplying the village for the essentials needs for over 100 years.

YALDING POST OFFICE

A lot has happened in the last year. "Alan Bates vs the Post Office" burst onto our TV screens in January and alerted Britain to the corruption that is Post Office Ltd. The Horizon scandal rumbles on and we await, with much interest, the final justice given to the several thousand victims involved. Thankfully we had only a few problems here. Our Emporium has settled in gently. Quite a few artists and crafters show and sell their wares with us. Come and have a look. Our new bread supplier Cranbrook Bakery is doing well. Sadly, Coxheath Bakery could no longer deliver so we had to make the change. Royal Mail, despite its many problems around delivery times, loss of mail and industrial relations has put up postage prices again...Will there be any improvement in performance? The jury is out. Thank you for supporting our little Post Office branch.

TEAPOT ISLAND

As many of you know we decided last year to sell Teapot Island but as of now we still have not got a buyer. This may be good news for the public who have over the years visited to enjoy our food, drink, ice cream and lovely countryside. It really isn't as good news for us because we still haven't found time for ourselves to relax. We would like to take this chance to thank everyone for their friendship and support. We have really enjoyed our time here and really hope that they have too.

THE BOAT HOUSE

We held a few small events last year such as band nights as well as a breakfast with Santa which were incredibly popular. We have a festival planned for the 15th of June this year which we are currently advertising if there is any places you could help us with advertising the events that would be appreciated. And we plan to do another breakfast with Santa this year as well as weekly bands.

THE FORGE

This year I will be trying push my sculptural work, I'll have a selection of sculptures at Pashley Manor available for the public to buy, also exploring other route in which to sell my sculptures. I will also be kept busy with my general workload of railings, handrail, gates and other various jobs.

THE GEORGE (Yalding Store and George Eatery)

The Yalding store opened on April 6th to provide the local community with a wide range of food products and bestselling locally sourced produce. It will allow the elderly people of the village and local people without a car an alternative place to do local shopping while reducing emission. Opening until 10pm, 365 days of the year means it's an essential store that helps local residents have convenient access to fresh produce and other essential food items. George eatery which will be opening soon will be a café style restaurant, which will use high quality ingredients to produce tasteful food that would consist of sourdough pizza, in house secret flavours to enhance the flavour of our burgers and meat. Yalding store and George eatery aims to become a place where local residents can enjoy a great meal and shop at convenience.

THE HOP PICKERS REST

No report received.

THE WALNUT TREE

At the time of print not operating.

THE WOOLPACK

Sales were good last year! It was our first full year with new glamping pods, and they started well, being popular with people from London having a break for the weekend or people visiting The Gardens wedding venue. Costs have risen significantly particularly electric and gas, so that has

been a challenge and continues to be (same for everyone) Food and drink prices from the suppliers continue to rise which needs constant attention. But the pub is being well supported by the local people for which we are always grateful.

TWO BREWERS CLOCKS AND ANTIQUES

No report received.

TWYFORD BRIDGE MARINA

No report received.

YALDING CLUB

Yalding Village Club is situated just off the High Street, alongside Red House or can be reached from Vicarage Road following the signs behind Tea Rooms. The Club holds regular live music events and Bingo every Wednesday evening, The club hosts pool tables, dartboard and large TV screen to watch all the latest Sport events. Sunday Roasts are very popular and evening meals every Thursday, Friday and Saturday are not to be missed. Chair exercises are held at the club on alternative Tuesday mornings and Peter subsidises a lunch at the special price of £5 for all Senior Citizens every Tuesday lunchtime. An active Craft Group also meet at the Club every Thursday afternoon. For further details on any of the above and membership details visit Yalding Village Club Facebook page or contact Peter on 01622 814123 or just pop in during the day or any evening.

YALDING GARDENS

The Gardens enjoyed a successful wedding season in 2023 and is looking forward to the upcoming 2024 season. A new tipi has been installed which is used to host indoor wedding ceremonies, private dining, and corporate events. The Gardens has also renovated its on-site dressing room for couples to use on the morning of their wedding day. The Gardens and its wedding & events operator, Glow Events, employ approximately 13 individuals from Yalding, and over 120 employees live within a 20-mile radius of the venue. The Gardens continues to proudly host Laddingford District & Beekeepers Association within the grounds. The honey is being used in the venue's kitchen and gifted to couples who visit the venue for a wedding show round. Tipis Restaurant returned to The Gardens in November 2023 to March 2024 for its fourth season and will return again in November 2024. For updates on The Gardens, you can follow the venue on Instagram or Facebook.

YALDING TAXIS

We have had another busy year at Yalding Taxis. We have taken on additional drivers, however, there are still some days that we, unfortunately just cannot meet demand. We are hoping to take on yet more additional drivers in the future however the red tape in the licensing process doesn't make this an easy task as well as a labour shortage in the industry as a whole. Yalding Taxis is based in the village. We have male and female drivers and have 8, 6 and 4 passenger seat vehicles specialising in local journeys for Yalding, East Peckham, Paddock Wood, Maidstone, Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells and the surrounding areas as well as providing Airport Transfers and other medium/long distance journeys. We offer a 24/7 service, 365 days a year (when booked in advance). We also offer a courier service as required. Many Thanks for your ongoing custom and we hope to see you in the future. Mike and Dee

YALDING TEA ROOMS

A successful year in the Tearooms. We continue to welcome both village customers and those from further afield. We really feel it has become a great community hub for people to meet and chat, particularly some of the more vulnerable residents in the village. As the weather brightens, we look forward to people using the outside area more.

ZARDA COTTAGE

No report received.

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

YALDING ENTERPRISE PARK (YEP)

Happy to report that the first phase of built development is underway now with Steels going up on site and a lot of the ground works with this phase complete. We are hoping to have the first buildings ready for Summer '24 with good interest to date. The following phases of the

development are being worked up currently following our initial marketing and we are hoping to have these submitted late summer '24 with construction following thereafter.

GOVERNMENT AND AGENCIES

HELEN GRANT MP

Since my last report I was pleased to see that the outline housing planning application for Vicarage Road was rejected (on multiple fronts), and that the development of the Enterprise Park is progressing, seemingly without significant negative impact on the village. Your excellent Borough Councillor, Claudine Russell, keeps me abreast of developments in planning and many other issues in this important ward, and I commend her for all she does. In Hampstead Lane I know that the ongoing problems with flooding are not subsiding and if the Parish Council feels I can do anything to assist in securing better mitigation measures from Kent County Council, or other sources, I will be pleased to hear from you. On the broader flood management front, as the Hildenborough Embankment progresses to completion, I know there is strong desire to see that the related Leigh Expansion Scheme is created as quickly as possible - to counter the potentially negative effects of the Embankment on Yalding. I remain in touch with the EA and other stakeholders on this and other flood management issues in the Middle Medway Valley. Those who receive my monthly newsletter will know that my other campaigns continue unabated. On trains, we have just managed to secure further fast commuter return services from London, with more improvements promised; the cost-of-living help hub on my website remains updated with new advice and guidance as circumstances continually change; the campaign to rid our rural roads of unnecessary HGVs continues, and our 6th Maidstone Apprenticeship Fair took place in March, with more students and companies in attendance than ever before, from right across West Kent. If you would like to keep abreast of my work locally, please sign up for my newsletter at www.helengrant.org and join my Facebook page at HelenGrantMP. You can also follow me on X (formerly Twitter) and LinkedIn. The boundary changes I reported last year have now come to pass and this means, regrettably, that I will no longer be your MP after the next General Election. At the time of writing, it seems most likely that this will take place sometime in the Autumn, but let's see. Meanwhile I can report that the Weald of Kent Conservative Association selected their candidate for this new seat a few weeks ago. Her name is Katie Lam, I like her enormously, and we are working together, wherever appropriate, to ensure a smooth transition if she is elected as my successor. Until that time, I remain as your Member of Parliament and I am here if you need me, as always.

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL (KCC)

It has been my privilege to represent you at County Hall for the last three years. The third year has been even more challenging than the first two, as you all are aware, the impact of the war in Ukraine, the high level in inflation, the cost-of-living crisis and the resultant rises in service, delivery and unit costs have required KCC to undertake some radical financial cuts. The 2023/24 budget was the most challenging yet, as can be read in the KCC Auditors report. The continuing refusal of Central Government to equitably fund Adult and Children's Social Care has been the most frustrating part of seeking to bring back a budget deficit and also ensure that the services both vulnerable adults and young people receive meets their immediate needs. Within Education here are equal challenges from the increase in Home to School transport and the rising cost of SEN (D) EHCPs; and given a grant from the government to cut our costs, they seem to be growing higher than ever. I am fortunate to have been on both the Governance and Audit and Scrutiny Cabinet Committees this last year and both committees have been able to significantly challenge the Cabinet Members on the decision they have made. For the financial year 2023/24 I was allocated a Members grant of £3,600 and I have been very careful to allocate some funds to support a wide range of projects, for vulnerable groups. In the coming year 2024/25, quite rightly the grant continues to be £3600.

At the current time, I am working closely with: -

- Nettlestead Parish to try to reduce the speed limit through the village
- Coxheath Primary School to reduce the speed limit to 20 mph term time, outside of the school

- Lose Parish Council and Loose Amenities Association to develop a 20-mph speed limit through the village.

I sit on two cabinet committees, (a change from last year) which gives me a broad section of work to complete, these: -

- Scrutiny Committee
- Audit and Governance Committee

I would like to pay tribute to the Leader of KCC, Mr Roger Gough, who leads by example and continues to fight for our residents at both a local, regional and national level. As a Member of the County Council, I welcome contact with residents, support groups and local business. The Member Grant will always be available to assist vulnerable groups, be they of any age and if I can be of further assistance to you, please do not hesitate to be in contact with me. Simon Webb, Member for Maidstone Rural West

KCC HIGHWAYS

2023 was a particularly challenging year for highway operations. External pressures for Maidstone included national highways construction of the flyover on the A249 at the M2 junction 5. This added pressure in terms of congestion and closures in the surrounding area. In addition, there has been extensive works on the strategic network at the A20 Coldharbour Roundabout, the Wheatsheaf Junction of the A229, the widening scheme at the Notcutts Garden Centre, the introduction of a turbo roundabout at the Running Horse A229 and extensive works to upgrade the drainage systems on the A274 Sutton Road. Combined to this, there have been several large housing developments in the Maidstone area which has affected the free flowing of traffic to the surrounding roads. Yalding High Street will be given a micro asphalt surfacing treatment in the next budget year from 1st April 2024, and our road and footway asset team will be in touch with you shortly regarding the programme date. Although a mild winter, it has been very wet, and this has impacted locally on us having to close roads to deal with drainage issues. This is well-known to you as this has impacted Yalding and adjoining villages. With regards to potholes, these were identified will be put in for repair. However, we rely on local reporting as our eyes and ears and would appreciate any defects being recorded online at: <https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/report-a-problem>

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

It has once again been a busy year, both in terms of the ward and Maidstone Borough as I continued to be in the Cabinet, adding Communities to my portfolio of Leisure and Arts. During the year I have tried my best to help residents with various queries, from planning issues, waste collection issues, and housing problems. I have spoken at planning committee on behalf of residents and have this year sat on Planning Committee to further assist in the correct determination of planning applications. I have furthered my campaign on rural crime by attending a meeting at the Ministry of Justice, campaigning to have catapults (apart from when used for fishing) to be classified as a dangerous weapon and to have the punishment for their use to reflect this. I was really pleased to see the return of rural crime to the police control strategy and this, combined with the return to "bobbies on the beat" will help enhance safety in our villages. In my cabinet role work on the new archaeology gallery at the Museum has continued at pace, it opens in June, and we have secured funds to continue to improve the offering with a revamp of the Modern History Gallery. The new leisure contract has been let and the capital budget now has an allocation for a new centre built to a sustainable concept. The café is going so well at Mote Park that the plans for the second smaller café at the other side of the lake continue at pace. Maidstone Town Centre has never had more events on offer, and I have strived to use the UK Share Prosperity money to make as many of them free to attend and family focussed as possible. As recently as last week I was pleased to be able to bring to committee a plan to create an Arts and Maker Space in the town centre. Finally, our community grants have helped lots of different groups and organisations and I would encourage anyone to watch this 2-minute video of how we have distributed some of the funds; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8CwqsuVl1A>. Within the wider council you may have seen that we have awarded a new waste collection contract and that is shortly to commence, the local plan is reaching its adoption vote and we continue to purchase

both land and houses for our affordable housing stock for local people. As you may already know, we stood for the first “all-out” Maidstone Borough Council elections. This was something that we wanted, to save voter fatigue and lots of taxpayer’s money. This means that those elected in May will have a 4-year term to run the council. I’ve really enjoyed my term since 2021 and I am proud to represent you to the best of my ability once again at Maidstone Borough Council. As always, if you need my help, please do not hesitate to email me at claudinerussell@maidstone.gov.uk

COMMUNITY PAYPACK

Having used their services for some ten years, we had to release them to a long-term project elsewhere. This is now complete and we are once again engaging with them to prepare a work schedule.

COMMUNITY WARDENS

Diane Wakeling, KCC Community Support Warden for Maidstone, Tonbridge & Malling districts. Wardens work in many areas including Yalding, it has been a challenging year, we have lost many of our partner agencies due to funding cuts. The cost-of-living crisis is still ongoing, and many vulnerable people rely on food banks for the basics for living. We currently continue to work closely with all existing agencies to offer the best possible service we can to our residents. We work closely with Yalding surgery supporting them with welfare visits to residents offering onward referrals where appropriate. We also work with other support groups within the area to achieve the best possible outcome for our residents. The Village Club continues to hold the chair-based exercise group every other Tuesday and is well attended and enjoyed by many. Working collaboratively with Kent Police and the Parish Council we attend the information days alongside many other agencies. Community Payback have supported our residents with positive outcomes, with the clearance on some garden projects. The public consultation ended on 18th March 2024, many of the wardens had found alternative employment before the end of the consultation, the wardens remaining now know where they will be working in the new areas.

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

We’ve had a very wet winter but thankfully the Medway catchment hasn’t experienced any major flooding to date (11 March 24) this winter, however, there have been at least 2 occasions in 2024 when had the track of a storm just been a few miles further east, the catchment would have received a lot more rainfall and it is likely Yalding would have experienced flooding at least of a similar magnitude to that in 2019/20. It is therefore important residents regularly check and maintain their PFR measures. For any replacement parts, residents should contact Watertight. Their contact details are on the attached flyers. Our work on the Leigh expansion and Hildenborough embankment scheme is progressing well. We will replace one of the three gates at the control structure this year and begin works on the new embankment in Hildenborough. In 2025 we plan to replace the remaining 2 gates at the control structure and complete the Hildenborough works. We expect to complete the scheme by the end of 2025.

GOLDING HOMES

We held a neighbourhood action day on 4th October 2023 at Kenward Place. We were joined by KCC and the Dogs Trust. It was lovely to see nine residents come along to meet us, receive help and support. We completed an estate inspection as part of the day and the actions we recorded. The dates for this year’s Neighbourhood Action Day is 02/10/2024. We also held a tenancy surgery on 18/04/2024 with a further one on 24/10/2024 at Yalding Library. The tenancy advisor for the area is Eniola Awoyemi. Our tenancy team can be contacted by residents through our customer services team by emailing help@goldinghomes.org.uk. We also have a dedicated MP and Councillor mailbox for any specific enquiries’ members may have mpandcllr@goldinghomes.org.uk. Our telephone number is 0300 777 2600.

MOAT HOUSING

The only concern we have is related to parking and visitors’ bays being used as second parking bays, this of course prevents others being able to use them. A couple of our residents are a little unhappy with the ground’s maintenance, mainly that the shrubs are twiggy and quite sparse. This I believe is due to the time of year however I have noted this and made the managing agent aware.

KENT FIRE AND RESCUE

For the period April 2023 to March 2024 (year to date), Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS) attended 24 operational incidents in the Yalding Parish area. Of these there were 10 fires and 1

false alarm. The remaining 13 incidents were non-fire emergencies, which comprised road-related accidents and collisions, water-related incidents, and medical response in support of South East Coast Ambulance Service. In terms of proactive prevention work, KFRS completed 11 safe and well visits with local residents. Safe and Well is a free service we offer to anyone who:

- is aged over 70
- is living with dementia
- has a long-term health condition
- has young children or is pregnant
- is a smoker

This service can be requested via our freephone number: 0800 923 7000. Further information can be found on our website <https://www.kent.fire-uk.org/home-fire-safety-visits> In addition, KFRS continues to support the prevention work with partners in and around Teapot Island. We work in collaboration with local authorities, the police, and wider partners to support the overall community safety agenda. As such we are embedded within the Community Safety Partnerships, local Community Safety Units and vulnerability groups. Our focus remains the same and water incidents and flooding remain the highest risk in the area, which is reflected in the Kent Resilience Forum risk profile. KFRS works closely with the Kent Resilience Forum via our Operational Planning Team, to ensure that preparations for flooding incidents are robust. One key element of this is local support for flood wardens. More information about the Kent Resilience Forum may be found on their website <https://www.kentprepared.org.uk>

KENT POLICE

Kent Police have recently invested in several local 'Beat Officers' to serve the surrounding parishes of Maidstone. Yalding is one of a cluster of Wards that PC Bingham and PC Maskell have assumed responsibility for. Although PCSO Nic Morris remains part of the Community Safety Unit, she now forms part of the team for our Task Force. So far, your local officers have completed road/speed checks, held meetings with the Clerks and Councillors, assisted your Community Protection officer with vulnerable residents, local parking issues and attended your preschool to talk about safety matters and the police. We want to be available to you and more importantly contactable and visible. Most of our activity is posted on My Community Voice so please download the app and feel to contact us on there. Please visit our website for further updates in your Community. In an emergency always call 999 or 101 for any other enquiries or report your concern online at www.kent.police.uk

KENT RESILIENCE

The past year saw several incidents, notably storm Ciaran in November 2023 where community emergency planning teams worked hard to limit disruption within their communities. Underscoring the significance of community resilience and the necessity for a comprehensive societal approach. Storm conditions affected multiple areas in the borough, leading to disruptions in water and power supply for some residents. To understand how prepared communities are in the event of an incident or disruption, we have been working with the KRF Community Resilience team to audit all parish councils within Maidstone. Kent has also seen a significant increase in traffic build up heading to the ports due to the change in how non-EU citizens enter and exit EU countries. Where most of the congestion is going to be seen at the ports, school holidays are likely to see greater disruption and Maidstone Borough Council is working with its KRF partners to ensure people stuck on the M20 for several hours are receiving food parcels. To support communities the Kent Prepared Website (www.kentprepared.org.uk) has been growing its resources to include incident management and volunteer training. Should you need any additional support, the Emergency Planning team is always happy to provide advice and support and we can be reached via email - emergencyplanning@maidstone.gov.uk

YALDING PARISH COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

THE LEES PICNIC AREA AND CAR PARK

Yalding Parish Council owns 95.6% of the common land in Maidstone Borough and The Lees, which forms a greater part of it, was given to us by the then Maidstone Rural District Council. First and foremost, the car park is designed as a tourist area attracting visitors to come and enjoy the riverside location and the pubs and cafes that Yalding and Laddingford have to offer. It is not

intended that it should be a mundane, municipal type car park. Requests have been made from local businesses that it should remain open all year round for their benefit but this is a Flood Zone 3b and it would be immoral of us to attract people into this area during the major flood season. Even without severe flooding, the area remains very wet and boggy through the winter and, again due to its flood zone status, we would not be permitted, or even want, to put down any surface other than grass. We have from the 2024 season appointed a manager for the area to take full responsibility for the day to day running of the car park and picnic area. Cllr Ken Gough is still involved in an admin position and we would like to thank him for the time he has dedicated to the project over the past 6 years. We have had some teething problems with the new entry system and this is mainly due to the poor mobile signal to the SIM card. We are still unsure how to upgrade the signal as the card is a roamer so should be picking up the best there is. We will persevere but payment by card and phone far exceeds that of cash now so visitors do not seem to be put off by the sometimes slow operation. We manage the toilet blocks on behalf of Maidstone Borough Council, and these are now cleaned to a high standard by a local person.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

We now have a draft plan that has been circulated to Councillors but it is not yet in a form that can be circulated to residents. We are hoping this may happen in the autumn.

We would like to thank all of those who have contributed to our Annual Report; there are only a very few who didn't reply or declined to participate.

CONTACT DETAILS

PARISH COUNCIL

Geraldine Brown

Contact details: Tel: 01622 814222
Mob: 07815 926313
Email: chairman@yaldingparishcouncil.gov.uk

Leila Bates

Contact Details: Tel:
Email: leilabates@sky.com

Tim Chapman

Contact details: Tel: 07947 529380
Email: chapman.tim56@gmail.com

Ken Gough

Contact details: Tel: 07971 869087
Email: clsken@hotmail.co.uk

Pip Jamieson

Contact Details: Tel: 07570 183030
Email: pip.jamieson@the-dots.com

Andy Sanders

Contact details: Tel: 07905 269113
Email: ypcandy@hotmail.co.uk

Deeann Stead

Contact details: Tel: 07920 402052
Email: deeannstead@aol.co.uk

Joe Westgate

Contact details: Tel: 07866 438331
Email: joewestgate85@gmail.com

Kelly Woods

Contact details: Tel:
Email: kellywoods500@outlook.com

Parish Clerk

Contact details: Angela Gent
Tel: 01622 814134
Email: clerk@yaldingparishcouncil.gov.uk

KENT COUNTY COUNCILLOR

Simon Webb Tel: 07878 018997 Simon.webb@kent.gov.uk

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCILLORS:

Grace Couch

GraceCouch@Maidstone.gov.uk

Claudine Russell

ClaudineRussell@Maidstone.gov.uk

Michael Summersgill

Tel: 07779 367412

MichaelSummersgill@Maidstone.gov.uk

USEFUL NUMBERS

Yalding & Laddingford Street Lighting 01622 814134

Potholes or other highway damage 03000 418181

Out of Hours 03000 419191

Fly Tipping/bins – Environmental Services 01622 602000

Community Warden 07773 397125.

PARISH BUDGET 2024/25

EXPENDITURE

Post Office Rent	6,000
Public Toilets	9,000
Bank Charges	-
Yalding Village Hall	1,000
Parish Magazine	500
MV Railway	500
Grant Pot	1,500
Hire of Halls	600
Insurance	1,900
Legal & Accountancy	1,000
Office Equipment	2,500
Printing/Stationery/Postage	850
Repairs & Maintenance	500
Salary & Clerks' Expenses	35,409

Signs & Noticeboards	500
Subscriptions	1,500
Telephone	2,000
Training	1,000
Website	750
Yalding Church Clock	500
Garage Rent	
Churchyards	500
Play Equipment	2,500
Miscellaneous	6,000
Verges	1,540
Village Green	675
Fowle Hall Green	320
Jubilee Field	605
Kintons	5,095
Lees	1,300
Lees Fencing	1,000
The Tatt	3,000
Litter Collection	2,000
Fen	1,500
Playscheme	1,500

Street Lighting Electricity	3,500
Street Lighting Repairs	2,000
Street Lighting Replacement	3,000
Christmas Lights	2,000
Floodlighting	250
War Memorial	500
Miscellaneous	19,000
Fingerposts	2,750

Parish Activities	4,000
Flood Contingency **	10,000
CCTV Service + Upgrade	6,000
Tree Inspection	5,000
Neighbourhood Plan	2,000
Lees Car Park	41,500
Defibrillator	1,500

197,544

INCOME

Precept	80,000
Parish Services Scheme	12,74
Income Lees Car Park	45,000
Rent Post Office	4,000
Miscellaneous	8,575
Bank Interest	750

142,066

B/fwd 01/04/24	59,650
Income	142,066
Expenditure	(197,544)
C/fwd 31/03/25	4,172

** Chairman's Flood Re
prize money
ringfenced to be expended
on flood issues only

YALDING PARISH COUNCIL

**THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL WILL BE HELD ON
TUESDAY 14 MAY 2024 AT 7.30 PM IN YALDING VILLAGE HALL
YOUR TRESENCE IS REQUIRED**

THE AGENDA WILL BE

Declaration of intension to record proceedings

1. Election of The Chairman
2. Declaration of Acceptance of Office by The Chairman
3. Election of The Vice Chairman
4. Apologies for Absence
5. Declaration of Interest in any agenda item
6. Re-adopt The Council's Code of Conduct
7. Motion to Approve Regulations
 - 7.1. Standing Orders
 - 7.2. Risk Management Scheme
 - 7.3. Financial Regulations
 - 7.4. The Council's Statement of Internal Control
8. Motion to Re-adopt the existing Council Policies, Procedures and Risk Assessments – deferred
9. Motion to Approve new policies, Procedures and Risk Assessments – none
10. Motion to Approve The Council's Fixed Assets Register
11. Motion to Approve The Council's direct debits and standing orders
12. To confirm the Insurance policy renewal – 3-year contract until 2025
13. Motion to pay The Clerk and Assistant Clerk's salary monthly under The Scheme of Delegation
14. Confirmation of programme of meetings for the 2024/25
15. Confirmation of members of Working Parties
 - 15.1. Yuletide Market
 - Parish Councillors
 - Resident Volunteers
 - 15.2. Parish Wide Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group
 - Parish Councillors
 - Resident Volunteers
16. Appointments to Outside bodies
 - Medway Valley Railway Partnership
 - Yalding Enterprise Park - Development Delivery Group
 - Village Hall Committee
 - Kent Association of Local Councils (2)
 - Police Ward Cluster Group (1)
 - Yalding and Laddingford Sports Association
 - Yalding Charities
 - Medway Catchment Partnership
17. Motion to approve spend on the CiLCA portfolio course for The Assistant Clerk of £300

**Note: Minutes of previous meeting were signed at a Parish Council Meeting held on
06 June 2023.**

There are no Matters Arising

**THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING WILL BE HELD ON
TUESDAY 14 MAY 2023 AT 7.30 PM IN YALDING VILLAGE HALL**

THE AGENDA WILL BE

Declaration of intension to record proceedings

Chairman's Welcome and Introductions

1. Apologies for absence
2. Approval of the minutes of the previous Annual Parish Meeting held on 16 May 2023
3. Matters Arising from the previous meeting
4. Chairman's report for 2023/24
5. To note the Annual Reports and thank the contributors
6. Finance Review 2023/24
7. Presentation of Budget 2024/25
8. Presentation with regard to the work of Kenward Trust
9. Presentation with regard to a potential Community Energy Project
10. Presentation from Yalding Sea Scout Group
11. Presentation form The Yuletide Working Party
12. Any Other Parish Business

Followed by the Annual Meeting of The Parish Council

THE AGENDA CAN BE FOUND INSIDE BACK COVER