

BREDGAR PARISH COUNCIL



CHAIR'S REPORT 2024-2025

I have pleasure in setting out some of the achievements and activities of the Parish Council over the past year.

Appointments

The following appointments were in place through the year:

Brian Clarke Chair:
KALC, GDPR & IT.

Nigel Osmer Vice Chair:
Post Office Liaison, KCC Highways.

Penny Twaites Councillor:
Responses to Residential and Local Planning.

David Priestley Councillor: Pond Warden. Pest Control. Heritage.

Hilary Whitnell Councillor:
Footpaths. Thatcher and Eleemosyary Charities Representative.
Liaison with Bredgar School.

Michael Day Councillor:
KCC Highways. Parks & Gardens. Pest Control.

Stephen Parfitt Councillor:
Parks & Gardens.

Teresa Hudson Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer: Website

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Planning

Over the past year, the Highsted Park planning applications have been a major focus for the council. We have worked closely with our neighbouring Parish Councils, Rodmersham, Milstead, and Bapchild, to submit a strong, unified objection to the proposals.

These applications would have a significant impact on Bredgar, involving the construction of 8,400 houses (down from an initial 9,250) to the south and east of Sittingbourne, a large-scale expansion of commercial land stretching to the M2 for the Kent Science Park, and the development of a new M2 junction within our parish. The plans generated hundreds of objections from residents of both Swale and Bredgar via the planning portal.

Swale Borough Council planning officers recommended that the planning committee refuse the applications at their meeting scheduled for 7th November 2024. Representing Bredgar, Cllr Clarke and Cllr Twaites attended the meeting and spoke in opposition. However, just three hours before the meeting began, Secretary of State Angela Rayner called in the applications, triggering a formal Inquiry by the Planning Inspectorate.

Since then, the council has continued to work in close partnership with neighbouring parishes as part of the Five Parishes Group. Together, we secured status as a Rule 6 participant in the Inquiry, which began on 11th March and is expected to continue into July. A final decision will be made by the Secretary of State following the Inspector's report.

Through the Five Parishes Group, the community's concerns are being actively voiced and considered during the Inquiry. The group has worked tirelessly to prepare the necessary documentation and to raise the funds required for legal representation and expert witnesses.

Our complaint last year to SBC Planning Enforcement about the lack of enforcement with the clearing of the sites in Blind Mary's Lane did not achieve any progress. In fact, one of the sites has now submitted a new application for a Lawful Development Certificate, at the recommendation of the SBC planning officer, due to the applicant claiming continuous use and immunity from enforcement action.

More generally councillors have reviewed planning applications and submitted comments diligently during the year, working hard to give balanced and relevant views.

Finance

In order to maintain our income in line with rising prices the Parish Council levied a 3% inflation linked increase in the parish precept for the following year.

Income from the cemetery returned to nearer normal levels this year, although higher than the past averages at £4,149. Some income from the cemetery or reserves is now needed each year for the council to balance the budget, as the income from the precept is less than our usual expenditure on base services.

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Our switch to Unity Trust Bank last year has been very successful, with more efficient payment processing and better management of our accounts leading to higher interest income over the year.

The representation against Highsted Park required unexpected funding in this year of £1516 for consultants and support of Five Parishes Group. There will likely be a further impact of £4000 as part of the 'backstop' funding for legal representation in the next financial year too.

Projects

During the year the council delivered some discretionary projects as part of our ongoing efforts to maintain the village. These included humanely reducing the number of fish in Gore Pond, repairing the King Charles III Coronation flowerbed brickwork, repairing the cemetery store roof, replanting of the recreation ground hedge and cleaning of the War Memorial.

Village Matters

Grass cutting (soft landscaping) and maintenance of border areas continue to be one of our main costs and core services.

A gardener provides regular weeding and maintenance in border areas and Jubilee Garden. The war memorial flower tubs have been looking splendid and well maintained for us voluntarily by one of our parishioners.

A new gardening contractor was engaged to maintain the pond several times over the year.

The council's new system of spoil disposal has now operated successfully for a year. Unwanted spoil from graves is placed into Hippo Megabags for removal within a few days. The new system uses part of the income received from burials to fund the removal of grave spoil. This prevents a build up of spoil in the cemetery, keeping the cemetery much tidier, and avoiding the need to pay other contractors for dispose of the spoil at a later date.

In September, the Parish Council organised another village litter pick.

Fly tipping continued to be a problem in the parish over the last year. Councillor Parfitt, has been very active with the support of many residents in reporting and having fly tipping removed.

Once again the Christmas Tree on Gore Pond was kindly donated by Bredgar and Wormshill Light Railway and lit for parishioners to enjoy.

Finally, I would like to close this report by thanking everyone who has helped the Parish Council look after our village over the last year and all of our Councillors for their commitment and time given to the Parish Council.

Brian Clarke

Chair

Bredgar Parish Council

7th May 2025