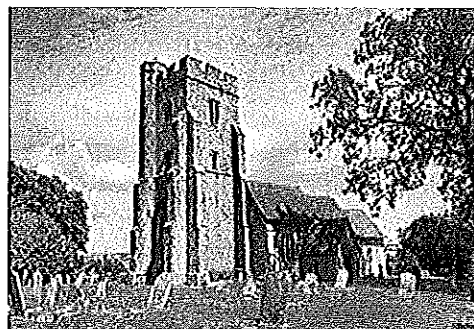


# *Wittersham Cluster*

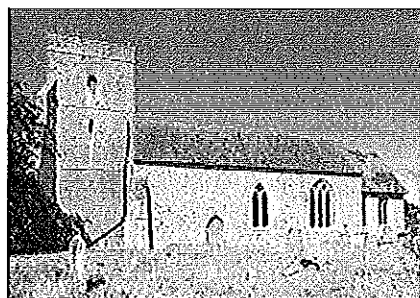
## *Village Caretaker Project*



*Kenardington*



*Stone-cum-Ebony*



*Warehorne*



*Wittersham*

## Report for 2013-14

'Year 2'

## **Background**

The Pilot started on the 1st May 2012 and concentrated on particular works that were previously carried out by Ashford Borough and Kent County Councils: specifically some limited, but significant, Highways operations and management around Housing land.

The Pilot was designed to test the feasibility and efficiency of smaller parishes working together, pooling both financial resources and expertise to create a full-time post, in order to enable them to carry out the type of work (*see above*) which larger Parishes, or a Town Council, could expect to manage with financial support.

Prior to the Pilot starting, Kenardington, Stone-cum-Ebony (covering the settlements of Stone-in- Oxney and Ebony), Warehorne and Wittersham Parishes had decided to work together and financial support had been discussed<sup>1</sup> and agreed with KCC Highways and Ashford Borough Council. The Wittersham Village Caretaker Committee (WVCC), with delegated powers but reporting to the full Parish Council each meeting, and liaising with the other Parishes on a regular basis, also had to produce an advert, an application form, person specification, a generic job description, a contract, and other documents including Health & Safety ~ as there were none available for a post of Village Caretaker with responsibilities covering the role as above ~ handle the interviews and select a candidate. They also worked on an innovative salary based on flexible hours between 'summer' & 'winter' seasons.

It was decided early on that the role would be known as the **Village Caretaker**<sup>2</sup>, as opposed to a Parish Handyman, as, amongst other reasons, the word 'Caretaker' was not sexist, KCC already ran a 'Handyman' scheme in conjunction with District Councils, and the nature of the work that was carried out in the initial pilot did not suit the term '*Handyman*'.

The advert was placed in the Wealden Advertiser: 56 interested people contacted the Wittersham Clerk, who sent each an application pack through the post, and this resulted in 32 completed applications. After the WVCC went through each application, 6 were chosen for interview and a successful candidate was selected and appointed, after taking up references. Equipment, including a van and a trailer, was purchased and Ashford Borough Council additionally provided two Wittersham Housing garages to the pilot. Wittersham Parish Council paid for the services of a locksmith to make the garages professionally secure.

The Village Caretaker chosen was, however, not able to reach the desired standard for the role and, within the probationary period of 2 months, was asked to leave. This meant the pilot had not begun on the high note that all the individual Parishes involved expected. Landscape services were tasked with filling the grass-cutting role during the expected 1-month interregnum. Unfortunately, as they were also suffering from unusual torrential bad weather that year, they were unable to support us in their usual professional manner ~ so everything was suddenly looking bleak.

The four Parishes understood the unusual situation they found themselves in and resolved to start again with a new Village Caretaker as soon as possible. After looking again at the candidates from the last application round, with an additional candidate who applied for the post, interviews were held at the end of June 2012. The resulting new caretaker was appointed towards the end of July after the correct notice had been given to a previous employer.

Within 2 weeks it was noted that there had been a seismic shift in the efficiency and effectiveness of the role and work of the Village Caretaker. With the weather changing in favour of the Pilot, and a Caretaker who had pride in the work being carried out, and who was also keen to make a difference, it was clear within 6 weeks that this Village Caretaker would pass the probationary period of 2 months ~ which is what occurred in September 2012.

---

1 Finance was broadly in line with what Ashford Borough Council believed they spent on the type of work carried out by the Village Caretaker and KCC Highways gave a nominal figure to support the Pilot.

2 Ashford Borough had earlier piloted the idea of a 'Handyman' scheme in another Parish.

## **Cluster Parishes**

### **The First Pilot Year**

The Village Caretaker role proved to be successful. As a result, and by way of example, some of the grass cutting that was placed in the hands of Landscape Services was taken back again and opportunities for 'extras', including work that fell between that of Ashford Borough and Kent County Council, had been actioned: such as overgrown vegetation and the cleaning of street signs.

The social advantages of having a Village Caretaker also become apparent. It was always envisaged that the role would encompass more than 'grass cutting': it would be, in part, a familiar supportive face, 'eyes & ears' on the ground, liaison with the KCC Community Warden and the local PCSO, and someone who would be able to build-up a working rapport with the Highways Steward for the area covered by Kenardington, Stone-cum-Ebony, Warehorne and Wittersham Parishes.

There were many examples, during the pilot year, where the social side of the scheme proved advantageous and popular. Doubters within the parishes, as the pilot was relaunched, became the greatest advocates of the scheme and usually the only feedback given to the Wittersham Clerk, as Line Manager, was excellent!

One example of that social gain was when the Village Caretaker was able to support an elderly infirmed resident by cutting her small plot of grass to the front of her house, just beyond the Housing Land that was being cut in any case. A consequence of that was that the lady in question was able to strike-up a rapport with the Village Caretaker and had someone to alert when in need.

The Village Caretaker also dealt with other small jobs that had been neglected in the past: cutting grass between Housing and private land ~ a 'no-man's' area ~ clearing away a large area of brambles close to where children played alongside Housing land ~ and enhancing areas like the flower box and grass in the middle of Kenardington. The flexibility and effectiveness of this work had been noticeable and commented upon by many residents across all the parishes.

Another example was clearing a severely overgrown raised pavement alongside a narrow road in Stone-cum-Ebony. The KCC Warden who, in liaison with the Village Caretaker, gathered a small working party together that ensured it was cleared. It illustrated "joined-up thinking" and a close working relationship between the Warden & Village Caretaker. As a bonus, this was extended to the Village Caretaker working alongside the PCSO across the village cluster. In one example, the Village Caretaker found used needles close to the churchyard and, passing this information on to the Warden & PCSO, a targeted response was made which was both efficient and effective and where a similar incident has not been repeated.

The Village Caretaker also took remedial action regarding highways issues: keeping grips clear; keeping the Highways Steward informed of blocked drains and gullies; using the on-line Highways recording system for potholes (and then keeping track of them & chasing-up where necessary); and keeping drains clear of mud, leaves, etc. All of this made a big improvement across the cluster villages and, amongst other things, alleviated local flooding ~ which caused upset & insurance claims for those residents involved in the past.

Of course, the Pilot had only been running effectively since the current Village Caretaker was appointed in late July 2012, but the entire cluster of Parish Councils agreed to continue with the successful scheme. The pilot assured ABC funding until at least April 30th 2014 and KCC Highways funding until March 31<sup>st</sup> 2014, so that there would be no interregnum between the Pilot phase and successive years of operation. Indeed, KCC Highways were so impressed with the success of the service, during the pilot year, that they agreed to an increase of £1000 towards their portion of the scheme, making a total of £8000 per annum for all four Parishes.

Both KCC Highways and ABC produced contracts that all parties were rightfully proud of. This was important as the resulting contracts were likely to be the basis for all future 'Caretaker' positions across

Kent ~ when such an opportunity would be offered to Parishes and Town Councils throughout the County.

This Pilot was the only one of its kind in Kent. Professor Tony Bovaird<sup>3</sup>, Birmingham University, said that the Pilot had been, to his knowledge, the first such in the UK and, he believed, was a leading example of what Localism means at the 'grass roots' level.

## The Second Year

The Cluster Parishes confirmed, throughout the second year, that the work carried out by the Village Caretaker was both effective and good value for money ~ with the added advantage that the tasks were completed within a short time-frame, often before they became worse or caused additional problems for the residents and, eventually, cost more to fix!

The social advantages continued to be far-reaching and, in many ways, immeasurable ~ linking with another KCC Service (Community Warden) and also Kent Police (PCSO). This has been achieved without additional expense to the normal 'Caretaker' service. This is a "win-win" situation!

The work undertaken on behalf of Ashford Borough Council continued, as per the first pilot year, but was enhanced by the fact that the Village Caretaker was able to take on additional work that otherwise would have been carried out by Landscape Services, and further areas that did not come under either ABC or KCC. All this has had a major impact on the quality and flexibility of the work and its effect on the four villages. There were no complaints during this year, but there were dozens of positive and encouraging comments from residents and members of all 4 Parish Councils.

Additional equipment was bought in order to facilitate the extra work being carried out, with the lion's share of the additional funding coming from Wittersham Parish Council, but with additional funds from both Kenardington & Warehorne Parish Councils.

KCC Highways work, on the whole, is carried out during the autumn and winter months. After the pilot year concluded, Highways were very impressed with the outcomes and gave an additional £1000 for the second year ~ making their support equal £2000 per parish in the scheme (total of £8000). This was deemed to have been money well spent, equating to just over 6% per Parish towards the salary of the Village Caretaker. This means KCC Highways money is proving to be huge value to the Council Tax payers and has continued to see much work done that otherwise Highways is just unable to get around to doing.

This work, like the previous year, has also included flood prevention work (clearing ditches, drains, etc.) and keeping the Highways database up to date with potholes, land slippages, and other highways issues.

The Village Caretaker, himself, has commented:

*"Much of the work that's been done hasn't been done in years. I'm still finding drains that have been lost in undergrowth years ago, once these have been uncovered they are then regularly maintained, so it's forever evolving. Potholes also play a part in what I do, I frequently report them on line."*

*"I really think that this project gets better each year. People seem to be taking a pride in their environments and they like the changes. I'm forever being spoken to about how nice it's all looking...."*

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/staff/profiles/policy-commissions/public-services/tony-bovaid.aspx>

Some of the drainage (culvert) work has stopped regular flooding from taking place. Here is one example of the work the Village Caretaker has carried out:



Further, after farmers have cut the roadside hedges, road signs are re-aligned and tightened & trimmed around. Sight lines at road junctions have been kept clear, including various 'triangles' being maintained for road safety.

### **The Future**

The Village Caretaker Project goes from strength to strength and, as such, the four parish Councils concerned are extremely happy with the scheme and intend it to carry on. It will continue to evolve as time passes but there is no doubt that this shows effective use of taxpayer money giving excellent value.

It is our intention to continue to work closely with both KCC Highways, looking at the ways we work and other opportunities to support their role in our locality, and also ABC ~ who have shown great support and who, like us, wish to see value for money, efficiency, and gains for our villages without spending additional funds on top of what they previously paid for work carried out by their contractors.

## **Appendix 1: Specific Highways Work Carried Out In Year Two**

20th May 2013	Clean Road signs in Wittersham
22nd May	Cut Warehorne Triangle and road verges by bus shelter
22nd May	Cut road verge by Kenardington bridge
31st May	Cut Warehorne Triangle and road verges by bus shelter
31st May	Cut road verge by Kenardington bridge
19th June	Strim and mow around The Bridge
21st June	Strim weeds from culvert along by the Church Warehorne
2nd July	Met with Ron Swan
19th July	Clear weeds along Church Hill, Stone. Sweep & blow road onto Appledore Rd/Rye Rd to canal. Remove plant growth to improve visibility
25th July	Mow verges along Warehorne bus shelter & opposite. Cut back hedge by bus shelter & near Triangle
26th July	Cut grass by Kenardington dog bin and bridge
7th August	Clean road signs
7th August	Strim blind spots along Stocks Road, Wittersham, through to Stone & Kenardington.
19th August	Clear drains & strim back verges on Church Hill, Stone
21st August	Remove & cutback brambles & bushes restricting drivers view on Malthouse Lane, Warehorne
21st August	Cut grass on Warehorne Triangle & bus shelter verges
23rd August	Mow & strim Kenardington bridge area
3rd Sept	Clean road signs from Underhill to county border
5th Sept	Cut back brambles on path on Stone Hill and strim bend
6th Sept	Cut & strim Kenardington bridge area
6th Sept	Clear drains in Kenardington
2nd Oct	Dig out drains Church Hill
11th Oct	Walk with Ron Swan in Wittersham
18th Dec	Cut grass on Warehorne Triangle & bus shelter verges & cut back brambles/hedges
19th/20th Dec	Clear drains & gullies at throughout Kenardington
6th January 2014	Clear drains & gullies in Stone, Church Hill, Top Road & Knock Hill
7th January	Clear drains & gullies School Hill & B2070 Warehorne to Ham Street
10th January	Clear gullies from Wittersham School to River Rother
20th January	Remove leaves from road in Warehorne
29th January	Clean all road signs in Kenardington & street names from Worlds Wonder to Ellis Barn Farm, tighten & re-align
29th January	Clear drains, gullies & grips in Kenardington
30th January	All village signs cleaned, tightened & re-aligned from bus stop to Woodchurch Road Stone.
30th January	Clear drains & gullies Knock Hill to Military Road Stone & new grips
31st January	Clear drains & debris Swan Street to Wittersham Road.
5th February	Clear grips & drains Knock Hill & Church Hill Stone

6th February 2014	Re-cut grips & clear drains in Church Road, Kenardington & dig out culvert
7th February	Dig out old drains and clear knows ones, grips & culverts from Swan Inn to Potmans Heath Wittersham
10th February	Check drain tops & Pathways Swan Street, Wittersham
11th February	Clear drains & grips in Kenardington village & Church Lane
11th February	Unblock drain/gully in Church Lane & Snargate Road Kenardington
12th February	Clear drains Church Road, School Hill to grit bin Warehorne
12th February	Clear drains on B2070 from Malthouse Lane to Kenardington
14th February	Clear drains & gullies on Church Hill & Rose Hill, Stone
18th February	Clear drains by bus shelter, Wittersham & Church Hill Stone

Kent Messenger: Tenterden Edition 08-09-12

## Helpers clear away overgrown vegetation

CLEAR-up by volunteers means parishioners have an easier walk to church at Stone in Oxney.

The footpath leading to St Mary the Virgin has been cleared of vegetation. Volunteers who took shears and garden tools to the job also cut back the hedge in Church Hill which was bowing over the road.

Kent County Council community warden Lee Kidd and village caretaker Alf Mather rallied the troops to get the job done.

Mr Kidd said: "The footpath was overgrown with shrubs and vegetation and the hedge was hanging into the road.

"I was getting to a dangerous condition and nothing had been done."

Mr Kidd put a volunteers wanted poster in the church and village shop, asking people to bring along garden shears and other tools.

Mr Kidd and Mr Mather were joined by five adults and a 12-year-old boy and they completed the task last Wednesday.

"There was a road safety issue in Church Hill and the footpath is the only one leading to the church," added Mr Kidd.

"I all needed cutting back and I am glad we have got it done."



CLEAN TEAM: Villagers George Beckingham and mum Sue Cowrie with Chris Bonsall, KCC community warden Lee Kidd and village caretaker Alf Mather

Picture: Wayne McCabe 03/09/2012 142218245



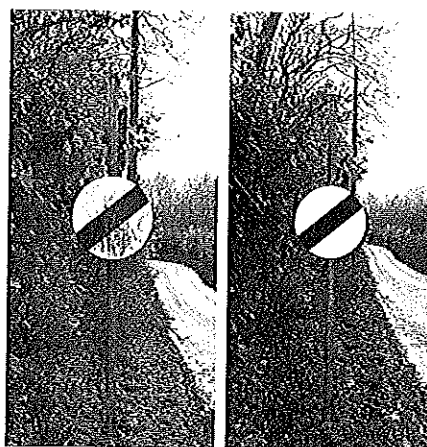
## Appendix 2: Illustrations

Here are just some examples of work carried out, to date, on behalf of Kent Highways:



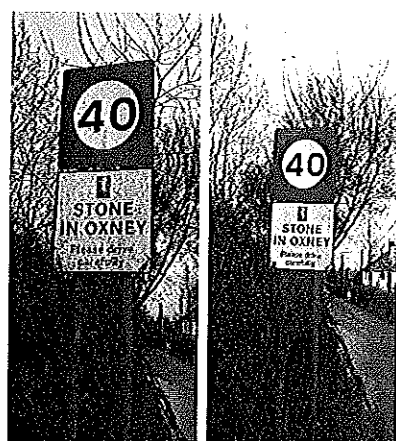
Before

After



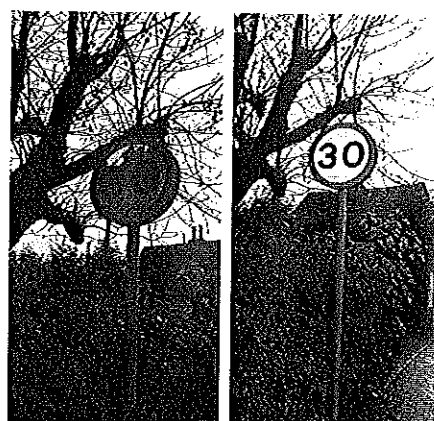
Before

After



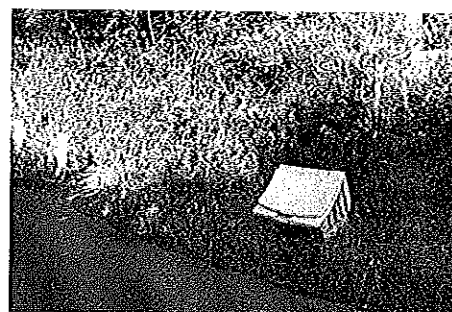
Before

After



Before

After

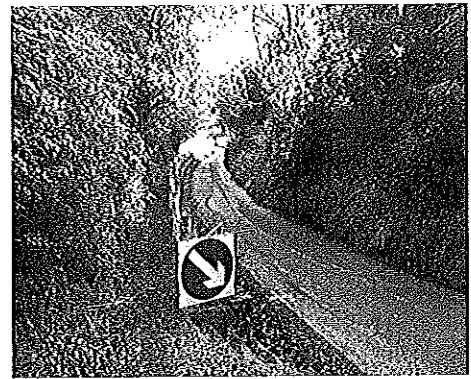


Overgrown vegetation on raised footpath and alongside the road ~ including around County salt bin.

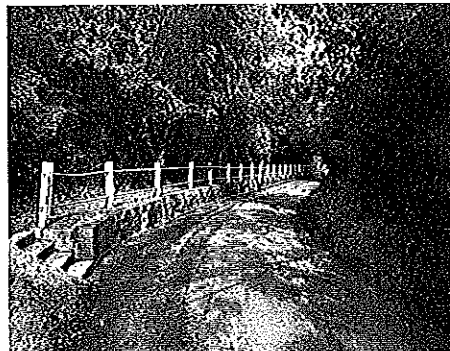




Signage placed  
before the  
bends in  
accordance with  
Highways  
training.



Vegetation removed from raised footpath and alongside the road's edge.  
Residents no longer have to walk in the road.



The view from the other end of the raised footpath.

This job had been left for some years, so the resulting Village Caretaker's work has been well received by the residents of Stone-cum-Ebony.



Top left & right-hand photos show cleaned highway signs.

Bottom left photo shows hedge cut back to improve the sight-line on the bend ~  
especially for those motorists emerging from Malthouse Lane.

The Malthouse Lane sign has also been cleaned.

### Appendix 3: Finance for Year Two

#### Witt. Cluster Caretaker Scheme Receipts & Payments 2013-14

##### Receipts

	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Actual</u>
Balance brought forward		633.17
Wittersham (ABC's allocation for the year)	13,414.00	13,415.00
Warehorne (ABC's allocation for the year)	433.00	433.00
Kenardington (ABC's allocation for the year)	2,085.00	2,085.00
Stone (ABC's allocation for the year)	3,381.00	3,381.00
KCC's contribution	7,000.00	8,000.00
Wittersham Parish Council contribution	4,000.00	4,000.00
Warehorne Parish Council contribution	100.00	100.00
Kenardington Parish Council contri. Towards ride on mower		300.00
NFU Insurance Claim		500.00
VAT Refund for 2012-13		2,437.77
From Wittersham PC to balance account		1,462.15 Note 1
	<b>30,413.00</b>	<b>36,747.09</b>

##### Payments

	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Actual</u>
Caretaker's Salary & NI	17,604.48	16,847.00
Clerk's Salary	2,082.00	1,917.30
Overtime	500.00	0
Mobile Phone	215.88	202.55
Road Tax	215.00	220.00
Van Servicing	500.00	0
Van Tyres, Bulbs etc	350.00	1,075.00
Van Insurance	525.00	483.41
PPE	100.00	0
Sundry items & equipment	1,400.00	445.96
Fuel	2,100.00	1,212.30
Gang Mowing/Robert Pudan	1,800.00	2,875.56
Equipment servicing	500.00	623.96
Equipment Replacement Reserve	1,500.00	1,143.84
Bal. Ride on Mower		5,810.00
Contingency Fund	1,000.00	1,000.00
VAT content		2,890.21
	<b>30,392.36</b>	<b>36,747.09</b>

Note 1 – Vat Refund of £2,890.21 due

To note – 10/05/14 received £300 from Warehorne PC towards cost of ride on mower

