

Hoath Parish Council: who we are and what motivates us

The Parish Council's festive high-spirited Coronation Big Lunch in May, a traditional street party, demonstrated what wonderful things can be achieved when we come together as a community. While celebrating the start of a new period in our history, marked by the coronation of King Charles, we shared food and good cheer, welcomed newcomers to the Parish, rekindled old friendships, raised funds for the Parish defibrillator, danced and sang. In short, together we created a joyous memory for the generations.

Hoath Parish Council can have up to five councillors. Four of us were elected (uncontested) a few days before the Coronation for a term of four years.

Reflecting on the community spirit Hoath displayed on Coronation Day, we have distilled three core values which will underpin our time as Parish Councillors:

Community: All parishioners, from children to our older residents, must be heard, respected, and engaged with; **Unity:** Caring for and collaborating with each other builds unity; **Prosperity:** A united community fosters social, environmental, and economic prosperity.

Together we share, and are inspired by, more than a century's experience of life in the parish and our enthusiasm for this "rural oasis between the sea and the City of Canterbury", a resident's recent summing up of the parish's value to Canterbury District. (Hoath Parish Council is not political.).

Our professional experience covers journalism, social enterprise, education, local business, charities, finance, and social care. We are fortunate that we can tap into even broader expertise in our community, residents who are generous with their time and knowledge.

We draw on these resources in our role as representatives of the first tier of local government, the Parish Council. As councillors, we are tasked with taking decisions on behalf of parishioners, as well as having overall responsibility for the well-being of the local community, including improving quality of life and services to meet local needs. Canterbury City Council is our district authority, and we work closely with Cllr Rachel Carnac, our ward councillor, in addressing local concerns and initiatives. Kent County Councillor Alan Marsh supports us with KCC related matters. Training offered by the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), in areas such as planning, charity law, or about how to be a councillor, expands our understanding and perspective of our role. (The Parish clerk advises us.)

Two of us are also ex-officio members (trustees) of the Hoath Parish Hall charity. We are looking forward to working with the other members of the Committee of Management in supporting the Hall's charitable purpose to serve Hoath Parish residents.

There is much to do in the next four years. We are all aware of the changes taking place around us and wondering how best to adapt. Climate change and biodiversity loss, with the need to adapt socially and economically, affects us all. Will the policies of the 2045 draft Local Plan support our ambition to protect our parish's assets for the benefit of future generations?

Hoath's assets include East Blean ancient woodland, our open fields and hedgerows reaching towards the Wantsum Channel, the Nethergong-Sarre Penn wetland (part of the Stour Valley catchment area), our Public Rights of Way and bridleways. Covid, with its restrictions, sharpened focus on these significant natural resources which, if cared for, can contribute to improving district biodiversity, residents' health and wellbeing and our local economy.

However, we are no longer an isolated rural community defined by traditional family farms such as Shelvingford and Old Tree. A 21st century renewable energy agribusiness, stretching from Whitstable to Sandwich, now defines the character of our traditional open fields. Hoath's green space and open

landscapes are also gradually being squeezed by developments in Hersden and Sturry on one side, and Herne, Broomfield and Beltinge on the other.

There are other issues. The parish's degraded roads evidence that today's larger and heavier vehicles designed to carry lithium batteries are out of scale with local infrastructure. Likewise, the impact of farming equipment which towers above hedgerows and reaches first floor windows. Losing Bus 7, a reliable service since 1943, has reinforced the isolation of Covid and loss of independence for residents dependent on it for going to work, health visits, shopping or meeting friends. The cost-of-living crisis is affecting residents too. Connection, community and secure warm spaces are key ingredients in ensuring quality of life for all residents, especially our older parishioners.

The on-going discussion around the retrospective planning application related to the digestate pit off Marley Lane, at its core, touches on planning, highways and the environment. How do we ensure scrutiny of a permitted development project includes assessing its impact on local communities, for example, by project-related traffic? How do we ensure that permitted developments do not morph into retrospective planning applications? The criteria for assessing a permitted development project and a planning application are different.

To address these issues and give our residents a voice in shaping their parish's future, we have launched Hoath's Neighbourhood Plan, now registered with Canterbury City Council. In doing so we have joined more than 2,400 communities across England that want to have a say in the future of the places where they live and work. As the government website states, it gives communities "the power to produce a plan with real legal weight that directs development in your local area." Chapters being developed include history and heritage, environment, infrastructure, and development. Consultations will include parish-wide questionnaires, face-to-face as well as paper and online. Residents who are not online will be remembered – you live here and pay council tax!

As noted at the start, our Parish is a community affair and conversations about how it might develop in the years to come are just beginning. Please share your ideas via our Clerk at clerk@hoath.org or join us at Parish Council meetings and engage with us.

With best wishes,

Imogen Morizet
Karen Johncock
Sandy Sinclair
Adele Wright

Hoath, June 2023