



December 2013

Issue No. 66



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# Winter Newsletter

## Fabulous Fireworks—the best yet!!!

Last year NAG Social promised that 2013 was going to have the best fireworks display New Ash Green had ever seen. The record crowd who braved the cold and mud this November 5th were all in agreement that that promise had well and truly been kept.



Element Entertainment got the evening going with a superb fire show and this was closely followed by a fireworks display that, for the first time in New Ash Green's history, was fired by a computer that kept all the bangs and flashes in time with the James Bond themed music.

This year's extra investment really paid off and as well as enjoying a fantastic show, close to 3,000 attendees saw this year's unexpected extra twist and were privileged to be part of a "marriage proposal by fire-

works". Fortunately, the answer to the big question was a resounding "yes"!

We would like to thank all the volunteers that assisted through the preparation and during the night, with a special thanks going to Andy at Ash Tyres who stepped in at the last minute to assist with transportation of heavy equipment on and off the field.

If you feel that you can help NAG Social's small team of volunteers in any way with Fireworks Night or Village Day, please contact [chrisi@nagsocial.co.uk](mailto:chrisi@nagsocial.co.uk).

*Photos courtesy of Julia Saxton*

## Wassail! Saturday January 4th

What better way to start the year than with a torch-lit procession and a cup of good cheer. Meet at the Village Hall from 4.00pm, and join the Woodlands Group for this old Kentish Tradition. Bring torches or lanterns with which to make a noise. Before and after the procession to the orchard, there will be music and dancing in the hall, featuring West Hill Morris and St Clement's Clogs. There's also a 2-hour drum/percussion session (hosted by Erith Drum Club) from 2-4pm, for anyone interested... absolutely no experience necessary, just turn up and have some fun!

### The wassail custom - what's it all about?

Wassailing [old English 'wæs hæ!', literally 'be you healthy!'] is the ancient tradition of bestowing health on an orchard at the start of the farming year, while

the trees are still dormant. Dating back to around 1540, it involved the local farm-workers visiting their orchards after dark, around the time of Old Twelfth Night (which used to be between the 5th and 17th January). The best tree would be selected to represent the whole orchard. Cider would be poured over its roots and pieces of cider-soaked toast or cakes would be placed in the forks of branches and hung from twigs. The wassail and other songs would be sung as a blessing, to bring a good crop in the coming year and the tree would be toasted loudly and merrily. Eventually horns were sounded and a great deal of noise would be made to scare off bad spirits and diseases and awaken the tree from its winter slumber.

The New Ash Green Wassail is a simple celebration of the old

traditional orchard that sits between the Minnis and Nine Horse Wood, and is about toasting the good health of the trees to encourage a bumper apple crop next year. Having spent ten years rescuing it from former neglect (the Woodlands Group celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in February 2014), this is a great way to celebrate the revival of our community orchard in keeping with the old traditions.

For more information and some photos of past Wassails, visit [www.nagwoodlands.btck.co.uk](http://www.nagwoodlands.btck.co.uk)



### Breaking News

The new fire station is now up and running.

For more information and to find out about job opportunities please see pages 4-5.

# Chairman's Report 2013

I have found this the most difficult annual report to write, not because of the issues that have been addressed by the VA for the last year but because of the future.

The last year has been a quiet and uneventful year, following the decision not to seek an increase in contribution rate, effectively a reduction in real terms. This approach can only be sustained for a limited period before there is an inevitable impact upon quality of service delivery. As anticipated in last year's report, expenditure for the past year has been focussed on issues that residents can see immediately, notably landscaping. A number of areas have received particular attention, with obvious benefits.

The Village Hall has benefited from a number of improvements, partly funded from our KCC member's grant. It is far improved in general appearance and has more user appeal.

Whilst recognising that many residents are feeling financial pressures, in order to be able to discharge the VA's duty of maintaining the village, it has been considered necessary to seek a modest increase in contribution, an increase that is likely to be more than absorbed in anticipated increases in energy costs.

As ever, I express my thanks for the hard work and support of my colleagues on Council of Management over the last year, and to those who have served on the sub-committees. I would like to pay particular tribute to retiring Treasurer Mike Rose for his notable contribution to achieving value for money. I also wish to thank the VA's paid employees, both those in the office and the greenlands

workforce, who continue to do so much to maintain our beautiful environment, often in the most disagreeable of conditions.

I turn now to the future. Superficially, everything is fine. The village is well maintained, expenditure is focused and under control, and there are no disasters. Recent visitors to the village – a party from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Society; the Head Gardener at Eltham Palace – have expressed delight at what they saw. This doesn't just happen; someone is providing the direction, identifying what needs to be done.

However, the vast majority of Residents' Societies and the VA itself are finding it difficult to find enough people to fill all of the roles required. Many have to resort to paying for one or more committee posts to be filled, sometimes with 'hired guns' from outside the RS. The VA struggles to find anyone to fill vacancies on Council of Management. Its sub-committees (Amenity, Village Hall, Greenlands, Hardlands, Finance & Strategy) urgently need more people. Of these, only the Amenity committee has any 'entrance requirements'. The others only require common sense and interest, though relevant knowledge and experience would clearly be of benefit.

Why is this? Does the average villager have any inter-

est in the original concept of local control of the village? Is there really so much more pressure on younger residents due to their work than was the case 20, 30 or more years ago?

It may be that the problem is symptom of a wider malaise relating to politics in general, whether at local or national level, where the public are becoming increasingly detached, as reflected in abysmal turn outs at elections. Apathy has no place in a vibrant democracy.

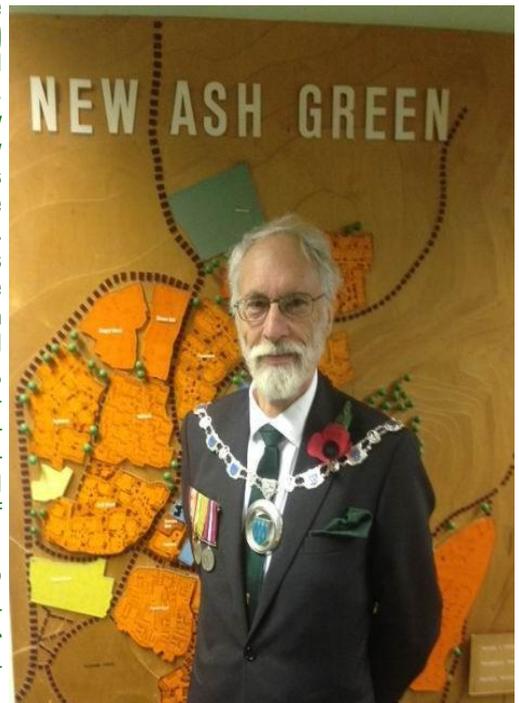
I believe that it is crucial that 'fresh blood' be brought into the village management system if the village is to retain its special character and be relevant to the people that live in it. The alternative would seem to be to pay for others to do what has been done historically by committed villagers for free. This would inevitably reflected in higher fees.

*Where do we go from here?*



"...The VA struggles to find anyone to fill vacancies on Council of Management. It's sub-committees urgently need more people."

*Alan W L Pett*



*Alan W L Pett Chairman*

# Council of Management

- Alan Pett (Consultant Member) .....Chairman
- Brian Hardcastle (Over Minnis and Consultant).....Amenity Committee
- Colin Garratt (Consultant Member).....Greenland Committee
- Terry Vivian (Consultant Member).....Hardland Committee
- Keith Wale (Consultant Member).....Village Hall Committee
- Cameron Clark (Chapel Wood).....Communications

Three vacancies exist

# Budget 2014

Village Association subscriptions will increase by 4.5% from 26 December 2013. In this note we explain why the increase is necessary and how your subscription is spent.

The VA froze subscriptions from 2009 to 2012 in recognition of the very difficult economic circumstances. This year they were increased by 2.5%. Over that time, inflation has raised prices by 16%. That means this year's subscription income will buy about £65,000 less than it did in 2008.

Inflation is not the only consideration. The cost of keeping the Village a pleasant and attractive place to live is rising. Like any house, it has to have money

spent on it as it gets older to keep it in good condition. An example is the woodlands that we all enjoy. Perhaps you have noticed the work being done in some areas at present to keep them healthy and attractive. Carrying out work such as this keeps the Village attractive and supports the value of our biggest asset - our houses.

The VA spends money on day to day expenses; paying the staff we employ to run and maintain the Village, paying the bills for fuel, electricity, rates and insurance and so on. These are termed operating expenses. In 2014 they are expected to total £416,000.

It also has a three year capital

programme of major projects such as woodland renewal and equipment replacement. For example, you may see from time the Greenland work force working with their tractor. That is scheduled to be replaced in the next three years at a cost of £45,000. The overall capital programme for the 2014-2016 totals £175,000.

The split of operating costs between different areas is shown in Chart One below. In 2014 Greenland maintenance will account for £174K, just over 40% of the total. The bulk of the remainder is made up by the cost of managing the Village (Administration - £115K) and path, play areas and lighting maintenance (Hardland - £92K).



Village Association subscriptions to increase by 4.5% from 26th December 2013.

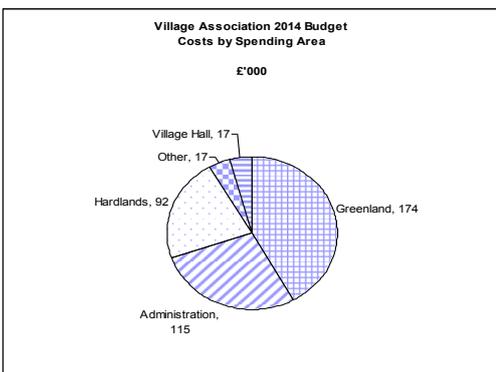


Chart One

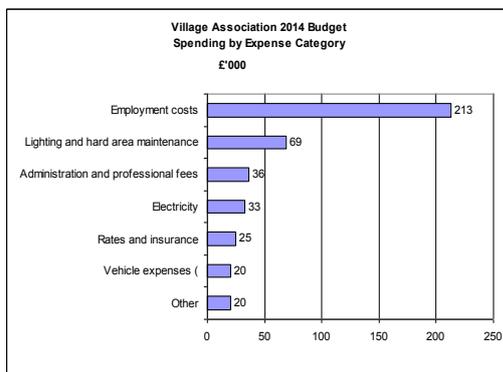


Chart Two

Chart Two shows the amounts that will be spent on specific types of expenses. The cost of the VA staff who manage and maintain the Village is the largest at £213K (including employers statutory responsibilities). The other main areas are day to

day hardland maintenance (£69K), administration costs and professional fees (£36K) and electricity (£33K).

The VA aims to work as effectively as possible and give residents the best value for money

it can. Spending has been tightly controlled in recent years but it believes that the planned operating and capital spending is necessary to protect the environment that residents enjoy and support house values.







# You Told Us What You Want!



Earlier this year the Village Association and Parish Council used a Community Questionnaire to gather some of the evidence we need to write our Neighbourhood Plan. We received 632 replies from 2,710 households throughout the parish—504 were from New Ash Green households, accounting for 1,189 residents of whom 747, just over 60%, were aged between 16 and 64. However when comparing our results with the latest Government estimates, the under-45 age ranges are under-represented and the 45-84 ranges are over-represented so this must be borne in mind when looking at the other results.

We started with a question about some of the issues people had told us were important to them. The answers were interesting. By far the most significant issue was New Ash Green shopping centre and the need to modernise and improve it. Protection of our countryside is also high on the list.

We asked about housing needs and nearly half said they, or someone in their household, would want to move in the next few years. Of those people who want to move, nearly half want to stay in the parish and their favoured option was for smaller homes to buy. Around 70% saw a need for more residential care homes. The need to look at smaller homes was even more obvious when thinking about what should be in any regeneration of New Ash Green shopping centre: apartments or small houses suitable for first-time buyers or older people to buy were definitely favoured.

So if there is a need for more housing in our immediate area, where could it go?

There is already a long-term plan for some in New Ash Green centre (but only if it is part of a full regeneration scheme). Some housing is likely to be necessary there to pay for the much-needed regeneration and the survey has given a strong pointer towards

the type of housing that is needed. The Manor House site in North Ash Road could be a possibility if Bovis move their offices elsewhere, as they have suggested, but the first priority of the majority of people is to retain that as an employment site; alternatively it could be used for the care home that people want. With those exceptions, very few people want to see more housing in or adjacent to New Ash Green. Moving

ble. That is our biggest challenge as we decide what must go into our Neighbourhood Plan.

Other questions in the survey gave an insight into some of the other issues that may not directly affect what goes into the Neighbourhood Plan but which must be taken into account when planning any new development. The local road network is important. Only a few people

wanted major road widening projects but some limited widening and repairs, especially on South Ash Road, had a lot more support; so did improvements to footpaths throughout the parish, both in the villages and out in the countryside. There was great concern about the number of lorries using the roads from New Ash Green towards the A20

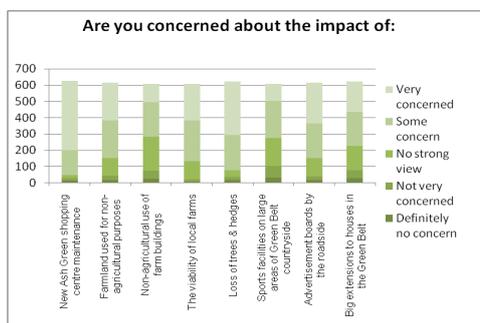
and speeding is an issue on many local roads. Car parking problems in many areas of New Ash Green were raised by a lot of people. If improvements are to be made to any of these, the Village Association and Parish Council must work with the highway authority, Kent County Council.

Another major area of concern is poor internet speed. That is something where we may soon see significant improvements through the joint Government and Kent County Council Broadband Delivery UK programme but continuing pressure must be maintained to ensure we benefit from that as soon as possible.

The neighbourhood Plan Working Party will now be working with officers from Sevenoaks District Council to turn these aspirations into policies, guidance and proposals. These will then be presented to the community as a draft Plan so that everyone can give us their views.

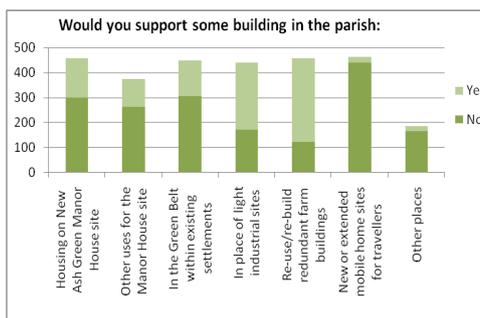
Meanwhile any comments on the conclusions so far can be passed to the Parish Clerk, Alison de Jaeger, at the Ash Green Sports Centre in Milestone School or emailed to:

[acrparish.council@virgin.net](mailto:acrparish.council@virgin.net)



further afield, although most people want to protect the Green Belt from new building, even within existing villages, around two thirds support redevelopment of some brownfield sites, such as light industrial sites in the parish or redundant farm buildings.

Despite the number of people who commute out of New Ash Green, local employment is important with nearly one fifth of households reporting at least one



person employed in the parish. In most cases that is only one person, but this still accounts for 102 jobs in our sample which suggests around 500 people in total are likely to rely on local employment.

We therefore have to strike a balance between three important objectives: protecting the Green Belt, providing housing for those who need it (including the elderly in need of care) and keeping as much local employment as possi-

Comments on the conclusions so far can be forwarded to the Parish Clerk at the Ash Green Sports Centre .  
*See article for details.*



## 'Reel' Movie Magic in the Village Hall

NAGFILMSOC is an entirely non-profit organisation run by local volunteers with all income from ticket sales being ploughed back into the Society. We are pleased to announce that 2013/14 is our fourth season.

As well as showing films, the Society is intended to function as a social meeting place.

We screen a wide range of films including many that are on current release at major cinemas.

Our equipment includes a 5m wide x 4m high screen, digital and reel to reel projection and a 5.1 surround sound system.

Unless the main feature is unusually long, there will always be a supporting film or event. This is a local community cinema.

Comments and offers of help can be handed into box office/ kiosk on the evening or emailed to [fonagvc@hotmail.com](mailto:fonagvc@hotmail.com). You can really help by mentioning the Film Society and this season's

programme to your friends. Further information and details of individual shows and future programmes can be sent to anyone who requests it by email to [fonagvc@hotmail.com](mailto:fonagvc@hotmail.com).

Since we are a non-profit organisation, the more people who come, the cheaper the tickets will be, so it's in your interest to help publicise the films and bring as many friends and neighbours as you can. A good time will be had by all!



Date	Film	Starring
7th December 2013	Inception (2010)	Leonardo DiCaprio, Ellen Page
1st February 2014	Jean de Florette (1986)	Yves Montand, Gerard Depardieu
1st March 2014	Django Unchained (2012)	Jamie Foxx, Christoph Waltz, Samuel L Jackson, Leonardo DiCaprio
5th April 2014	The Man in the White Suit (1951)	Alec Guinness, Joan Greenwood, Cecil Parker
3rd May 2014	The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey (2012)	Ian McKellen, Martin Freeman
7th June 2014	Cape Fear (1962)	Gregory Peck, Robert Mitchum
5th July 2014	Argo (2012)	Ben Affleck, Bryan Cranston, Alan

NAG Film Society  
 Why not come along, bring your friends and join in this community social event!

## New Arts Group for NAG

Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> October saw the launch of a new visual arts group in New Ash Green. The group composed a lively mix of people involved in painting, ceramics, sculpture, theatre design, graphic design, print-making, illustration and art history and appreciation, together with some who just enjoyed visiting exhibitions, looking at and collecting art.

Among the topics under discussion were:

- talks on 20<sup>th</sup> century art;

- workshops and master-classes;
- group exhibitions, locally and further afield;
- the provision of studio space for artists in New Ash Green;
- the application for local and national grants;
- exhibitions and events to visit;
- the involvement of the younger artists within our community.

Two more planning meetings will take place before Christmas by which time a programme of monthly meetings for 2014 will be available.

This is an exciting new venture, the success of which depends not just on the support of all local practising artists, but anyone with an interest in the arts in general.

For more information, or to be added to the mailing list for the 2014 programme, please telephone 01474 874273 or email [fonagvc@hotmail.com](mailto:fonagvc@hotmail.com)



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 New Ash Green  
 Longfield  
 Kent DA3 8HH  
 Tel: 01474 872691 / Fax: 01474 872409  
 E-mail: admin@nagval.com / Website: www.nagval.com

### VA OFFICE OPENING HOURS

The VA Office is open to residents  
 9.00am-4.00pm Monday to Thursdays –  
 Closed to residents on Fridays  
 The office is closed for all statutory holidays



If you would like to write an article for our next Newsletter, either as a member of a Club or Society or to write an article of local interest, please provide it to VA Office no later than **30th June 2014**

## New Ash Green Town Team

Following the unsuccessful bid last year to make New Ash Green a Portas Pilot, we were awarded a small consolation grant by the Government. A Town Team has been established to try to get the most benefit from this money without using it on projects that are really the responsibility of the owners of the shopping centre. (We know New Ash Green is not a town but 'Town Team' is the accepted term for such a group.) The Team consists of councillors and officers from Sevenoaks Council and representatives from the shops, Village Association, Parish Council and other interested people.

The Community Questionnaire has helped the Team to focus on areas for development and has provided some useful background. In particular it is encouraging to know that people from over three quarters of New Ash Green households visit the shopping centre at least weekly, many of them more frequently.

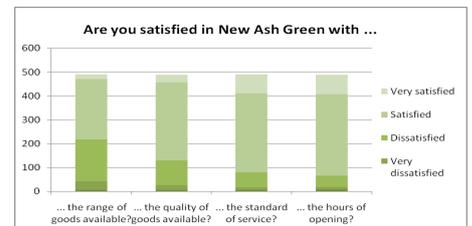
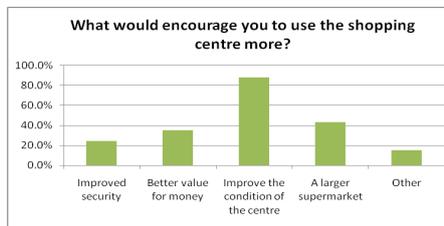
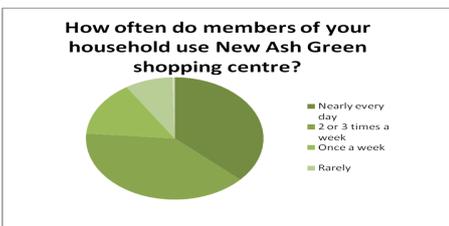
We have a good base of potential customers if we can make some real improvements. It is also heartening that opening hours, service and quality generally achieve good scores. The areas to concentrate on are the range of goods available, value for money and, most importantly, improving the condition of the centre.

It is the last of these that the Town Team will be concentrating on. Initial ideas include improving the planting within the centre (but also thinning some of the overgrown wooded areas immediately outside it), replacing or renovating some of the worn-out street furniture and renewing the outdated and tired signs to encourage more people to stop off in the centre. We would also like to introduce some more events in the centre, like the successful fun days that were held last summer, to encourage people to visit and support the traders.

We need to secure the long-term future of the shopping centre as a vital resource for New Ash Green and the surrounding area. The shopkeepers themselves have a key role to play and so do the landowners within and around the centre. The Town Team hopes to be a catalyst to bring them together and ensure that all are working towards achieving a centre that will be a real asset to the area. In the long term we still hope for a full regeneration of the centre but meanwhile we cannot let it degenerate further and we must ensure we have a vibrant centre to form the core of any regeneration project.

That depends on people supporting our present traders and being willing to work with us and them to build up that solid base of support. If you help us to do that, the Town Team will work with the landlords and traders to achieve some real improvements.

*by Cameron Clark, Town Team Chairman*



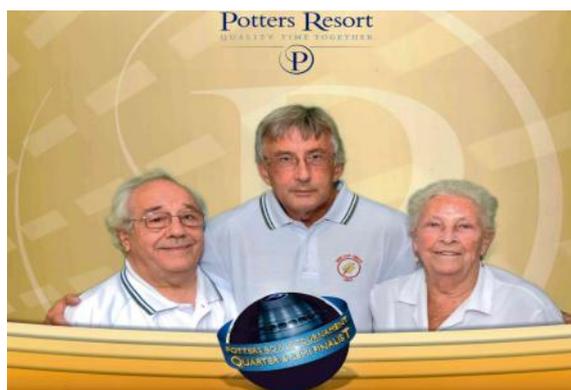
## VILLAGE WALKS 2014

Your 'cut out and keep' guide

- Our seasonal walks in and around New Ash Green will take place quarterly, as follows:
- Sunday 2nd Feb - 'Beating the Bounds of New Ash Green'**, meet 10.30am at the Royal Oak Pub on Chapel Wood Road.
- Sunday 4th May - 'Spring Bluebell Walk'**, meet 10.30am in the Orchard.
- Sunday 3rd August - 'Summer Walk'**, featuring meadows, hedgerows, Northfield and Chapel Wood, meet 10.30am in the Orchard, finishes at the Royal Oak Pub.
- Sunday 2nd November - 'Autumn Walk'**, featuring valley vistas and Village views, meet 10.30am in the Orchard.
- For more information visit [www.nagwoodlands.ik.com](http://www.nagwoodlands.ik.com) or phone Carole on 874976 or Jerry on 879897.

## Bowled Over!

John Martin, Lee Scotting and Joyce Hart, members of New Ash Green Bowls Club who reached the dizzy heights of the Semi Finals of the Triples Bowls Tournament held from 21st to 25th October at Potters Leisure Resort in Norfolk. Congratulations!!!



From left;  
 John Martin,  
 Lee Scotting,  
 Joyce Hart.