



# **ASH-CUM-RIDLEY PARISH COUNCIL**

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

### **2025-2026**



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## Parish Councillors and Staff

Below are your serving councillors and the respective wards that they represent

### New Ash Green South East ward

<b>Cllr Roxana Brammer</b>	<b>Cllr Jill Clucas</b>	<b>Cllr Chris Gorton</b>	<b>Cllr Anna Jauch</b>	<b>Cllr Isabel MacLeod</b>	<b>Cllr Mark Manley</b>
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### New Ash Green North West ward

<b>Cllr Matt Aspinall</b>	<b>Cllr Carol Clark</b>	<b>Cllr Shaun Fishenden</b>	<b>Cllr Sarah Hobbs</b>	<b>Cllr Pat Kirtley</b>	<b>Cllr Vusi Ngwenya</b>
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### Ash ward

<b>Cllr George Pender</b>	<b>Cllr Jake Scott</b>
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### Hodsoll Street and Ridley ward

<b>Cllr Frank Cottee</b>	<b>Cllr Steven Glover</b>
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### Parish Council Staff

<b>Alison de Jager</b>	<b>Karen Law</b>	<b>Megan Johnson- Hodges</b>	<b>Jacquie Hall</b>
<i>Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer</i>	<i>Deputy Clerk and Finance Officer</i>	<i>Assistant Clerk</i>	<i>Lunch Club Cook</i>

# **Report from the Chairman of Ash-cum-Ridley Parish Council**

## **Cllr Shaun Fishenden**

It is a huge pleasure to be writing this report in our first-ever written Annual Report. A new publication that we have introduced to provide greater levels of transparency about the work the Parish Council does on your behalf throughout the year.

This year has been an exciting year for the Parish Council and we have certainly been kept busy!

The Parish Council has continued to deliver it's day to day responsibilities which include:

- Managing Ash Green Sports Centre
- Administering and maintaining Ash Burial Ground
- Managing Northfield open space jointly with Hartley Parish Council
- Acting as a consultee on planning applications received
- Provision of a Lunch Club for the over 60's
- Hosting the Community Safety Focus Group
- Maintaining Ash War Memorial; Bowdler's Well, Ridley and Hodsoll Street play area
- Operating a Community Grants Scheme
- Provision of community events
- Acting as a representative voice

The Council in addition to this, has also worked throughout the year on local issues and on a number of projects to deliver benefits for the community. They are covered in greater detail further on in this report so I won't expand too much here.

I did however want to highlight, this year has seen a particular focus on strengthening the partnership working we do. When organisations work together, a lot more can be achieved for the benefit of our residents. We've seen great progress as a result of this, particularly with the improvements to Policing from working closely with our Beat Officers. Likewise maintaining a strong and healthy working relationship with our District and County Councillors, has meant we have continued to be kept informed of the changes taking place at principal council level and also provided us with opportunities such as the grant funding provided by our County Cllr in order to deliver the Christmas Family Fun Day.

I've taken a lot of personal enjoyment from working with individuals such as PCs Joey Weatherall, Ellie Collins, Caleb Guest and Claire Harrison, alongside our Warden; Jackie West and Community Safety Unit officers; Kelly Webb and Maxine

Quinton. It is always interesting to learn more about the roles they fulfil and to meet people with different backgrounds and experiences to your own.

The Children's Centre project has been an ambitious project that we've been working on and I am so pleased that we have been able to secure this building in the heart of New Ash Green, in perpetuity for the benefit of the community. I am extremely grateful to the small group of volunteers – David Carter, Laura Hunter, Ben Ryder and Graham Price who supported the Council in preparing the proposal and consultation for this process.

In setting the 2026-27 budget and our precept (the amount we levy on Council Tax), we do recognise we had to make a fairly significant increase. We absolutely appreciate household finances are tight and we always seek to ensure we achieve value for money in all our spending. But having identified the opportunity to purchase the Children's Centre and repurpose it into a community hub, we believe we can deliver a whole range of benefits for the parish that will justify every single penny that we have budgeted for. We're not raising precept for the sake of it, we're doing it, to continue to deliver strong benefits for the community at a time when County and District Councils cut back on services.

Serving as Chairman of Council is a huge honour and following in the footsteps of Mike Brown was daunting, but also a privilege. I continue to love working with my fellow councillors to try and make a positive difference to the parish. I also enjoy being able to meet so many residents, hearing your concerns and trying to take those forwards. That is what drives me to continue, we're here to serve you and I've never forgotten that.

In closing, it is important to pay thanks to a whole host of people who have been part of the Parish Council's achievements over the last council year and so it is hard to specify each and every individual without the risk of missing anyone out. But I do want to pay a special personal thanks to three people; Lewis Dowse, and David & Rachelle Jenkin. None of whom live in the parish but are three of my closest friends, who every single day are supporting me in everything I do as Chairman. Very often they are on the receiving end of 2am messages from me fizzing with ideas in advance of a Parish Council meeting! I am so grateful to them for their continued support.

## **Tackling Local Issues**

We wanted to provide a summary of actions we have taken throughout the year to address some of the concerns that matter to residents most.

### **Community Safety and Policing**

#### ***Issue***

Residents raised the issue that they felt policing presence in the parish was not sufficient.

#### ***What we did?***

- We established strong working relationships with our Beat Officers; PC's Caleb Guest (since replaced by PC Joey Weatherall) and Ellie Collins, providing them with local information and intelligence to support them in their roles. We provided them with an Events Guide so they knew community events they could attend in order to engage with residents.
- We took part in a ASB Task & Finish Group established in Summer 2025 which developed an action plan to address the ASB concerns at the time including catapults and arson incidents
- We launched the Coffee with a Cop events alongside PC Guest, which continues to this day. We also held a 'Let's Talk' event in Oct 2025 with PC Collins and our Community Warden
- We are arranging a Community Safety Day combined with a Police vs Youth football match in June 2026, as a fun and informal opportunity to make people aware of the different Police teams that exists, access advice and guidance on crime prevention, and support the building of positive relationships with Police
- We work with the Beat Officers to raise awareness of My Community Voice and the ways in which residents can report to Police, in order to boost reporting levels
- We promoted the Kent Police CCTV registry to residents
- We continue to host the Community Safety Focus Group consisting of various agencies and representatives, and also meet regularly with our Beat Officers and Community Warden

### **Highways and Speeding**

#### ***Issue***

Residents want to see improvements to local highways and address safety concerns

#### ***What we did?***

- We regularly reviewed and updated our Highways Improvement Plan, a document that is submitted to the County Council, showing them the local needs and concerns and identifying potential solutions

- We adopted the Community Speedwatch initiative, a volunteer-led initiative designed to reduce speeding. We plan to 'go live' in the coming weeks!
- We funded a pedestrian count survey at the Olivers Mill-Penenden Crossing to provide data on the number of pedestrian crossings on that stretch of Ash Road
- We continued to share the speed indicator device with Hartley Parish Council, with the SID rotating between each parish every two months. We've just agreed to invest in a small solar panel to extend the SID's battery life on the New Ash Green pole.

### **Planning Applications and Local Plan**

#### ***Issue***

Residents wanted to see a strong representative voice for planning applications that are received, particularly the ones which will have a major impact on residents.

#### ***What we did?***

- We produced an objection response to the New Ash Green Solar Farm application, taking on board the concerns raised by residents. We attended the Development Management Committee at Sevenoaks Council to present our views. And we were delighted the Committee voted to reject the application, safeguarding the much-needed agricultural land .
- We produced a comprehensive response to the Local Plan consultation, highlighting significant concerns with the lack of suitable infrastructure and referring to non-compliance with national planning policies.
- We've published our responses to the Local Plan and NAG Solar Farm on our website so that residents can see how we've represented them

### **New Ash Green Shopping Centre Improvements**

#### ***Issue***

Residents want to see improvements to the Shopping Centre and had concerns about it's future

#### ***What we did?***

- We meet regularly with the managing agents for the Shopping Centre to raise issues and highlight opportunities for improvement
- We've secured reassurances the owners intend to keep the ground floor of the Shopping Centre as retail units and that they intend to create some additional retail units from former garages in The Link.

# Key Projects

## **Purchase of New Ash Green Children's Centre**

Since the Children Centre closed, the building has sat empty and unused, with the services previously offered being delivered elsewhere. The Parish Council decided in Autumn 2025 it would seek to purchase the centre in order to repurpose the building into a community hub and parish council office. By taking ownership, the Council is also securing ownership of the building for the benefit of the community in perpetuity.

Our initial plans for the building include:

- Parish Council office
- Office space for the Community Warden and Beat Officers
- A safe space for residents in need
- Space for community groups, volunteers and partner organisations
- Youth provision
- Skills workshops (digital skills, CV writing, job search support)
- Food bank parcel collection point

We put our plans out to consultation in January 2026 and we had a 304 responses from residents, with strong support for purchasing the building to retain it for community purposes and also a majority of residents indicated support for the increase to the precept that would arise from delivering this project.

We were delighted that our offer to purchase the centre was accepted in April 2026, and we are currently undergoing the legal and survey process for the transfer of the building to us.

We will review all the other exciting suggestions put to us by residents and if we can incorporate them into the building, we will make every effort to do so.

## **Reinstating New Ash Green Youth Provision**

It has long been the ambition of the Parish Council to improve and enhance the youth offer available in New Ash Green.

Despite several attempts to reintroduce it, due to barriers around venue availability and the lack of a suitable youth work provider, it stalled for a number of years until Summer 2025.

Following discussions with Beat Officers about the need to find a safe space for young people; the conversation was reignited. And this time momentum built.

We were lucky to be able to commission The Young Lives Foundation, a well-established Kent-based charity who have years of experience in providing youth work and delivering a range of other services including mentoring, appropriate adults and advocacy services for young people.

We convened a meeting with PCs Guest and Harrison, along with Warden; Jackie West and Stephen Gray from the Young Lives Foundation where we set out the case

to the chair of trustees at New Ash Green Youth Centre about why permission should be granted to use the venue. And I am delighted we were successful in achieving this.

The new youth provision will therefore be commencing at the beginning of May 2026, and will run every Thursday evening. There will be two groups operating:

- 8-12's
- 13-18's

The group will be free to attend and will work on a referral basis but self-referrals can also be accepted. A number of agencies will be able to refer young people to the groups including:

- Local Schools
- Neighbourhood Policing Team
- Child-Centred Policing Team
- Early Help Services and Social Workers
- Community Warden

Sessions will incorporate a range of activities and will be driven by the young people's wishes. Some initial activities planned will include sports, cooking, arts and crafts and VR headsets.

The Neighbourhood Policing Team and their Child-Centred Policing colleagues will also be attending the group in the summer in order to build positive relationships between the Police and young people. And perhaps even by telling them more about the roles they do, inspiring some future police officers!

We have included the poster overleaf which contains a QR code in order to access the self-referral form.

**NEW!!**

# YOUTH GROUPS



**Starting May 2026!!**



## EXCITING NEWS!

The Young Lives Foundation have partnered with Ash-Cum-Ridley Parish Council to offer a **BRAND NEW** Youth Service for young people living in the local community.

**Location:** New Ash Green Youth and Community Centre, Ash Road, New Ash Green, Longfield, Kent DA3 8JY

### Thursdays

Junior Group 8-12 years : 5.00-6.30 PM

Senior Group 13-18 years : 6.45-8.15 PM

**Young People must be referred before attending - this is not an open access youth provision**

Sessions will be led by the interests, hobbies of young people who attend the groups eg sport sessions, arts & crafts, VR headsets, cooking & more...

**Scan here to register your interest and find out more:**



**> LISTEN  
> SUPPORT  
> EMPOWER!**



For more info or to speak to the YLF team:  
**01622 693459 or [youthprogrammes@ylf.org.uk](mailto:youthprogrammes@ylf.org.uk)**

Young Lives Foundation  
Charity no: 1119528

# Remembering Mike Brown

1937 – 2026



Sadly on the 6<sup>th</sup> March 2026, our former Chairman of Council; Mike Brown passed away and we wanted to ensure that his legacy was not forgotten. Therefore we are reproducing the article we published when Mike stepped down from the Council in 2023 in order for residents to remember the dedicated years of service he gave to this parish.

*Back in 1968, Mike and Pat Brown, with their young family, arrived in New Ash Green, bringing with them a passion for community involvement. Mike fully embraced the concept of New Ash Green wholeheartedly from that point onwards. One of the first glimpses of Mike's community spirit was through the babysitting circle, where neighbours came together by taking turns to babysit for one another, earning points in return.*

*His involvement with New Ash Green Primary School began when he joined the Parent-Teacher Association, which was a vital link between parents and school staff. Eventually he became Chair of the Governors in the early 80s and remained as a Governor until December 2020. In this capacity, Mike oversaw and contributed to many pivotal changes within the school. Mike also sat on the Governing bodies of Longfield Comprehensive School and Milestone Academy.*

*In 1975 Mike was elected as a member of Ash cum Ridley Parish Council. By 1977 he had become Chair of the Council, which is a role he held until his retirement in May 2023. His legacy from all those years of service can be seen as a tireless commitment to enhancing the lives of local residents.*

*Amongst the most important and significant of his many achievements are:*

- *His crucial role in collaborating with various agencies, including the residents of Swan Farm, to establish Barnfield Park, a formal site for the Gypsy and Traveller Community.*
- *Securing Northfield, a 65-acre public open space on lease from NAG Village Association, and jointly managed by Ash cum Ridley and Hartley Parish Councils.*
- *Supporting the addition of a gym at Ash Green Sports Centre, which was completed in 1996.*

*Mike had a profound knowledge of the Parish, and this has always provided invaluable guidance to the Planning Committee. He also chaired the Focus Group which addresses issues such as anti-social behaviour, crime, and concerns from residents in liaison with the Police, Community Safety Unit, Community Wardens and other agencies.*

*When he took early retirement from his position as an Engineer with the Electricity Board it gave him more time to be involved in various other community affairs. He gained a law degree, followed by a master's degree from the University of Kent, and served as a Magistrate until his retirement from that at the age of 70. He participated on appeals panels for school admissions, ensuring that the principles of fairness and equity were upheld. Mike served on the Capelands Residents' Society Committee, of which he was Chair for almost 20 years. Early meetings were enjoyable and convivial and served with Mike's homemade Elderberry wine. He enjoyed frequent bike rides throughout the village and the wider parish which enabled him to connect with residents whilst enjoying the natural beauty of the local countryside.*

The Parish Council would not be where it is today without the years of service gave to us and we sincerely hope we continue to do him proud in everything we do for the community.

Mike will never be forgotten, and that is why the Parish Council is permanently recognising him, by renaming the hall in the Children's Centre when it is repurposed, as the 'Mike Brown hall', providing a practical but everlasting memorial to a man who gave so much to the community.

# **Report from the Community Warden**

## **Jackie West**

I have had a very active year in my areas of work.

Time has been spent adhering to Community Warden objectives.

The overarching objective has been to create safer and stronger communities by providing a visible, uniformed presence that focuses on prevention, early intervention and community engagement.

The four key areas are Strengthening Community Resilience, Supporting the Elderly and Vulnerable, Fostering Community Cohesion and Wellbeing and Assisting with Navigating Community Services.

I have continued to work independently supporting individual residents with their challenges as well as referring to the most appropriate agencies for those needing more bespoke interventions.

This past year I have facilitated two multi agency information events to ensure that all agencies who support residents in our local areas are aware of what each individual agency are able to offer our communities.

This strengthens agency working and ensures we have a stronger working network.

My role continues to see me supporting those who are experiencing challenges including Mental Health, Dementia, Addiction, Loneliness and Social Isolation.

The groups I facilitate in New Ash Green and in West Kingsdown bring together the community to share in a love of singing, friendship and an opportunity for me to share local activities and Scam Alerts with those in attendance.

The Community Hub In New Ash Green continues to grow and is increasing in the number of attendees.

This past year we have welcomed agencies including Citizens Advice, SDC Hero Service, Compaid, Imago, Hi Kent, SDC and Kent Fire and Rescue Service.

All services have been attending to offer residents face to face support and guidance.

Myself and volunteers have also hosted two community parties for those who attend the hubs.

Included in those attending have been two local residential homes who I have also twice last year invited them to join students at Longfield Academy for a morning of intergenerational activities in their Autism provision.

I continue to work with the Community Cupboard and each month facilitate a resident drop in service at their Hub at West Kingsdown where residents are able to visit and have face to face advice.

I am also able to sign post residents to the Community Cupboard where they are supported with food parcels if needed and also to an array of other services who hold drop ins monthly at the facility.

In July last year I hosted another Information Event for residents to attend which saw a good attendance from both residents and agencies to gain information on numerous subjects and information leaflets shared with those attending.

My time in area and working with support agencies has allowed me to be flexible in my working and to assist residents in a timely manner.

In February I had the pleasure to have been invited to Sessions House to the first GET Award ceremony. I had been nominated and shortlisted for a Community Award for outstanding contribution in going above and beyond to support the local community, fostering positive relationships and delivering meaningful outcomes. I was delighted to have won the category and was presented with an award.

I am looking forward to an upcoming initiative I hope to facilitate in Hartley bringing community members together once monthly to enjoy a meal and games.

I would like to thank the Community for their support to my role and for the amazing volunteers and local stakeholders for their continued support too.

I look forward to the coming year to enhance community wellbeing and bring about positive changes for those who need bespoke support.

