



**DECEMBER
2025**

Good News Parish Magazine
for Eastling, Otterden, Stalisfield and Throwley
www.goodnews.rf.gd

- 4th Christmas Lights Switch On
Stalisfield Green 6 pm
- 5th & 6th Panto - Emperor's New Clothes
Stalisfield Village Hall 7.30pm
- 6th Bell Ringing open practice
Throwley Church 10 am - 12
- 7th S and O Children's Christmas Party
Stalisfield Village Hall 2pm
- 8th & 22nd Faversham Foodbank at
Eastling Village Hall 1.30 - 3.30pm
- 10th Egerton Arts Society
Egerton Millennium Hall 2.30pm
- 10th Otterden & Stalisfield W.I.
Stalisfield Village Hall 7.30pm
- 11th History Society Christmas meeting
Charing Parish Hall 7.30pm
- 14th Carol Service
Stalisfield Church 5.30pm
- 17th Youth Group Christmas Party
Stalisfield Village Hall 7 - 8.30pm
- 19th Stalisfield Village Carol Singing
Stalisfield Green 6pm
- 19th Throwley Village Carol Singing
Throwley Forstal 6pm
- 19th Cantiana Christmas Concert
Newnham Church 7.30pm
- 20th S and O Seniors' Christmas Dinner
Stalisfield Village Hall 4 - 6pm
- 20th Deadline for January Good News:
goodnewsmagazine@me.com
- 21st Carol Service
Throwley Church 5pm
- 21st Carols in the Carps
Carpenters Arms 6pm
- 24th Carol Service
Eastling Church 4pm
- 24th Midnight Mass
Stalisfield Church 11.30pm
- 25th Christmas Communion
Eastling Church 10am

JANUARY 2026

- 7th Otterden & Stalisfield W.I.
Stalisfield Village Hall 7.30pm
- 15th Warm Welcome
Stalisfield Village Hall 12 - 2.30pm



*Celebrate
The Birth of our Saviour, Jesus*

Carols by Candlelight

- 14th December Stalisfield Church 5.30pm
- 21st December Throwley Church 5pm
- 24th December Eastling Church 4pm

Christmas Eve

Midnight Mass 11.30pm Stalisfield Church

Christmas Day

Christmas Communion 10am Eastling Church



**Stalisfield Village
Carol Singing**
Friday 19th December
Meeting on the Village Green
outside the Hall at 6pm.
First venue will be the Vicarage,
Stalisfield.

Carols on the Forstal at Throwley Forstal

Friday 19th December,
6:00pm

Traditional Carols in the marquee by
the Christmas tree, bring your family
and join your friends and
neighbours in Christmas cheer!



Christmas message

It is nearly the end of 2025. This year has flown past, everyone I speak to, across all age ranges, comments on the speed with which this year has gone by and maybe we notice it the most when Christmas starts to get close. Just last weekend we started choir practice in St Mary's Church Eastling in preparation for the much-enjoyed Christmas Eve Carol Service.

As I write Advent begins in a week, on the fourth Sunday before Christmas, the start of the Christian calendar year, a season of preparation and waiting, a time to consider the significance of the birth of Jesus.

It is also a time associated with Advent calendars and when we are opening the windows imagine that we are seeing not chocolates, or animals, or the Christmas story, rather the things that the world greatly needs Hope, Peace, Love and Joy.

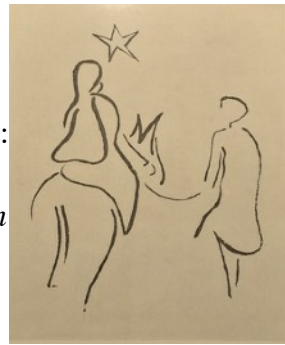
John Pritchard who was the Bishop of Oxford until 2014 and a former Archdeacon of Canterbury, has written several books on intercessions, which I often refer to. He has a special way of capturing the essence of something in the prayers he has written. For

example, a run of prayers under the title 'December' has this one:

In December we count our blessings and mourn our losses. We love the Christmas season, and dread it. It comes as forecast, a huge tide of consumer spending and exhausting pleasure that recedes as quickly as does any tide. Yet we pray that the tide may leave behind in many lives signs of renewed joy and restored hope, flowing irrepressibly from Bethlehem's cave. (The Intercessions Resource Book, SPCK 2018)

The run up to Christmas is a hectic time of year, one indeed dreaded by many and yet also anticipated with joy by many others. It may seem to be all about the build up to Christmas Day, to giving and receiving presents. It is a time of giving and God gave us the greatest gift of all, as foretold in Isaiah: *Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call him Emmanuel*, which means God is with us.

A few weeks' ago, I heard the Bishop of Chelmsford, Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani, preaching on the Radio 4 Sunday morning service from St Aphrahat, the Persian Church in Stockport. She spoke



about the freedom to worship, and the faithful Anglican Church in Iran still surviving despite enduring considerable hardships. We often pray in our services for those who do not have the freedom to practice their faith openly.

The train of thought led me to think of the three Wise Men, and the carol *Three Kings from Persian Lands afar*, who travelled many miles following the star to see the baby Jesus, and who avoided going back to tell Herod where they had found the baby. Persecution was there right at the beginning.

How lucky we are in our Benefice, in our Diocese, in this country that we can enjoy and celebrate this gift of Jesus and remind ourselves in Christingle services, carol services, church and cathedral services far and wide during the lead up to Christmas of how this story of the birth of Jesus, in a stable in Bethlehem, unfolds every year, and we have the freedom to do this openly.

In December we are on a journey towards Christmas, the journey will have its ups and downs, its difficult times, inappropriate presents, over-indulgence, but it is also a journey of anticipation, a time of love, a time of giving and receiving. The quick consumer interlude will pass, but the gift of love and peace is always with us.

In John Pritchard's words: *In December the trees are bare, the ground cold and hard. Random weather events disturb our best-laid plans, and we relish the warm welcome of our homes. Be present, we pray, in these darker days as we hunker down and wait for the light that shines from Bethlehem's cave.*

Wishing you all a peaceful Christmas and happy new year ahead.

Pim Baxter

Advent Prayer Pointers

Heavenly Father, creator of this universe of light;
forgive us when we return to darkness

Lord Jesus, you declared the forgiveness of God;
teach us to forgive one another.

Holy Spirit, you give us light in our hearts; renew us in faith and love

Heavenly Father, you call us to prepare for the coming of your Son;
forgive us our unreadiness to receive him.

Lord Jesus, you exalted the humble and meek; give us humble and contrite hearts.

Holy Spirit, you overshadowed Mary, that she might become a God-bearer;
fill us with your heavenly gifts.

Gracious God, We praise you for the birth of your Son, Jesus, born in a stable yet crowned King of kings.





Stalisfield and Otterden Children's Christmas Party

Sunday, 7th December, 2pm
Stalisfield Village Hall

Festive fun and games start at
2pm - PROMPT!

All children are invited for Prizes,
Presents and Party Food plus a
visit from Father Christmas!

Pre-booking required contact Julie:

julie.beames@hotmail.co.uk

Text - 07584 798415 (evenings)

**BOOK EARLY TO AVOID
DISAPPOINTMENT**



Everyone will be welcome to our Christingle Celebration

In Doddington Church
on Sunday 21st December at 10.30am
Come and make your Christingle, hear
it's story and support the work of the
Children's Society



Youth Group in Stalisfield for 11-17yr olds.

We meet on Wednesdays, usually
twice a month, 7 - 8.30pm in the
village hall AND it is free to come.
We have music, gaming, craft, table
tennis, table football, outside
games, craft table,
tuck shop (everything 10 - 50p), free
cake and drink.

Wednesday 17th December Christmas Party



Contact Catherine 07929 928 046 or
clnorwood@doctors.org.uk or see
our Facebook page.

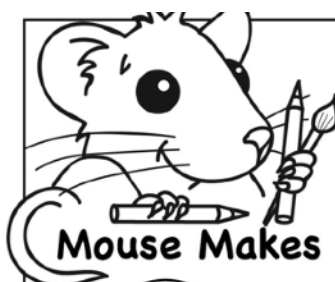
The Stalisfield Pantomime: The Emperor's New Clothes

Performances: Friday 5th & Saturday 6th December

7 pm in Stalisfield Village Hall

Tickets: £7 (£4 children) from Sharon 01795 890415 or
tickets@stalisfieldvillagehall.co.uk

More information inside on centre pages



LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Advent Sunday this year falls
on 30th November.
ADVENT is a time to celebrate
the ARRIVAL of Jesus,
God's Son, our Saviour.
We look forward with HOPE,
we give thanks for God's
LOVE and the PEACE and JOY
we have in Jesus.



Read:
LUKE 2:10-11
Who is 'God's news
of great joy' for?



Read:
John 3:16
How did God show He loves us?



Read:
Isaiah 40:5
What shall
be revealed?



Read:
Romans 5:1-2
Through who do we
have peace with God?

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MESSAGE • PROMISE • PROPHECY • FORETOLD • JESUS • SAVIOUR
CHRIST • GIFT • GOOD NEWS • RETURN • CANDLE • LIGHT



Archbishop Designate, Sarah Mullally, sets out her hopes for the Church

Shortly after the announcement of her nomination as the next Archbishop of Canterbury, Bishop Sarah Mullally delivered an address at Canterbury Cathedral, reflecting on her calling, the challenges facing the Church, and her hopes for its future.

Rooted in her early vocation as a nurse and shaped by her ministry in London, she spoke of “washing feet” as a guiding image of Christian service, and

of finding hope in the quiet faithfulness of churches, chaplaincies, and communities across the Anglican Communion.

She addressed the Church’s responsibility in safeguarding, the need to confront power dynamics, and the importance of standing against hatred and antisemitism.

She said she would seek to be “a shepherd who enables everyone’s ministry and



vocation to flourish,” and expressed her desire to nurture confidence in the Gospel. “Held fast by the Lord’s hand,” she concluded, “please pray for me as I will pray for you.”



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Christmas At Faversham Golf Club

To Start

*Chalk Stream Trout Gravlox, Pickled Cucumber & Soda Bread
Chorizo Scotch Egg & Piccalilli
Pumpkin & Sage Soup
Prawn Cocktail*

Main Course

*Roast Turkey & All The Trimmings
Beef Bourguignon & Mustard Mash
Salmon En Croute & Dill Caper Sauce
Potato Pithivier & Mushroom Truffle Sauce
(All mains are served with seasonal vegetables)*

To Finish

*Christmas Pudding & Custard
Chocolate Marquise, Cherry & Almonds
Clementine Sorbet & Lime Shortbread
Cheese, Membrillo & Crackers (£3 Supplement)*

2 courses 27.50 / 3 courses 32.50






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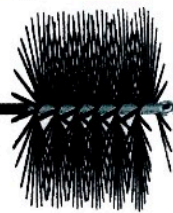

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Come and sing Carols at the Carpenters Arms

Sunday 21st December from 6pm
Mulled wine and Mince pies



Christmas Party

The Seniors' Christmas Dinner
for Stalisfield & Otterden Residents

Saturday, 20th December
4:00 pm - 6:00 pm
at Stalisfield Village Hall

Pre-book only contact Bridget

bawithell@yahoo.com or on

01795 892125

**BOOK EARLY TO AVOID
DISAPPOINTMENT**



CHRISTMAS SOCIAL EVENING

Bring and share buffet, wine, quiz and entertainment.



Thursday, 11th December 2025

Where: Church Barn, Market Place

Time: 7.30pm doors open

Festivities start there!!!



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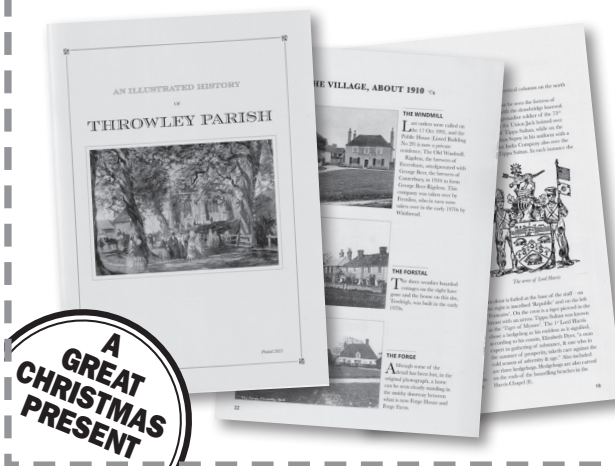
See our availability here: [https://
www.eastlingvillagehall.co.uk/calendar](https://www.eastlingvillagehall.co.uk/calendar)



A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS

to all our Readers
*Thank you to all our volunteer
deliverers and our advertisers*

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The Stalisfield Pantomime: The Emperor's New Clothes

Politics, power, and pantomime collide in
this year's riotous Village's Production of
The Emperor's New Clothes — an irreverent
romp through village life, where egos are
big, promises are empty, and clothes are... optional!

When a blustering would-be leader storms the parish council
election with big talk and even bigger trousers, the village soon
discovers that vanity and vision aren't the same thing. But can the
locals expose the emperor's, ahem, shortcomings before it's too
late? Packed with laughter and mischief this year's panto guarantees
a night of irreverence and pure Stalisfield fun.

Performances: Friday 5th & Saturday 6th December 7pm, Stalisfield
Village Hall. Tickets: £7 (£4 children) from Sharon 01795 890415 or
tickets@stalisfieldvillagehall.co.uk

It's the show everyone will be talking about — because in Stalisfield,
even an Emperor can't hide behind his robes forever!



Otterden & Stalisfield W.I.

Otterden & Stalisfield W.I. was represented by several of our Members at the Annual Lifestyle Day at Ditton Community Centre in October. We had three excellent Speakers on very different subjects.

Our first Speakers were Stephen and Lucy, Physiotherapists from Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone Hospitals, explaining the benefits of exercise to improve bone health. They were both very knowledgeable on their subject and their skills were suddenly required when one of the audience collapsed. Thankfully she had only passed out due to heat. That caused a bit of excitement!

Bob Ogley was a newspaperman for 32 years and editor of the Sevenoaks Chronicle for 18 years. During this time the 1987 Hurricane badly hit the area in which he lives. Bob's account of the devastation was incredibly descriptive and at times, hilarious, despite the resulting state of emergency. He had managed to hire a plane to photograph the areas most badly hit

by the hurricane and then went on to produce a pictorial book, which many of us purchased. (He was particularly upset by the damage of his most beloved haunt - the local pub at Toys Hill!)

The final Speaker was Chris Murphy who runs the Repair Cafe at Tunbridge Wells. He spoke passionately about how he set up this free monthly service. It was an idea driven by consumerism in society today as so much is thrown away when items could be repaired. Two thirds of the items that are brought along are fixed by volunteers who give their time and expertise freely. There are approximately 4,000 Cafes now registered with Repair International around the World. It is also social support for those who attend as well.

The November monthly Meeting at Stalisfield Village Hall had a change to the advertised Speaker, due to ill health. Malcolm Jones stepped in at the last minute to talk to us about the Story of Pantomime.

Very apt, as our own Village Pantomime was being rehearsed. Malcolm is an actor who has played Pantomime Dames in the past. He told us the history of Pantomimes and how they evolved over 300 years, developing from Italian Commedia dell'arte in the 18th century which then gradually evolved from opportunities for political satire into the fairy tale story plots we are familiar with today. As you would expect from an actor, Malcolm's delivery on his subject was excellent.

Our final Meeting for 2025 will be on Wednesday 10th December at 7.30 at Stalisfield Village Hall. This will be a social evening, making decorations, a few games for those who wish to, and finger foods to accompany the beverages.

If you wish to join our Group in the New Year, please contact either Helen Brooks on 07477580727 or Ellie Cameron on 07775649337.

Happy Christmas to you all!!!



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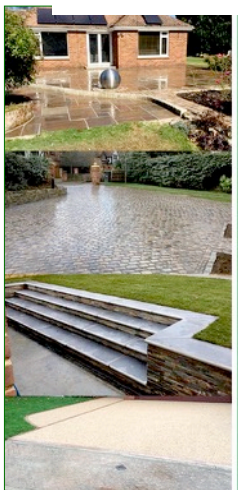
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Services in our Benefice

7th December Advent 2

Romans 15. 4 - 13, Matthew 3. 1 - 12

Eastling 10.30am Holy Communion

Norton 10.30am Morning Worship

14th December Advent 3

James 5. 7 - 10, Matthew 11. 2 - 11

Throwley 10.30am Morning Prayer

Stalisfield 5.30pm Carol Service

Saturday 20th December

Wychling 5pm Carol Service

21st December Advent 4

Romans 1. 1 - 7, Matthew 1. 18 - 25

Eastling 10.30am Morning Worship

Doddington 10.30am Christingle Celebration

Throwley 5pm Carol Service

24th December Christmas Eve

Hebrews 1. 1 - 4 [5 - 12], John 1. 1 - 14

Eastling 4pm Carol Service

Stalisfield 11.30pm Midnight Mass

25th December Christmas Day

Hebrews 1. 1 - 4 [5 - 12], John 1. 1 - 14

Eastling 10am Christmas Communion

28th December Christmas 1

Hebrews 2. 10 - 18, Matthew 2. 13 - 23

Lynsted 10.30am Morning Worship

4th January 2026 Epiphany

Ephesians 3. 1 - 12, Matthew 2. 1 - 12

Eastling 10.30am Holy Communion

Norton 10.30am Morning Worship

Anna Chaplaincy

Please contact our Anna Chaplain, Caroline Ramshaw, if you know of someone who is isolated, alone or unable to attend church.

An Anna Chaplain can offer a listening ear and company. Communion can be brought to you in your own home.

Contact your local Anna Chaplain on:

ramshawcaroline@gmail.com 07799 538 809

High Downs Parish

Rector Revd Paula Jardine-Rose

07516 411269 paula.jardine.rose@kc-hd.org.uk

Parish Administrator Joyce Warren

01795 521831 joyce.warren@kc-hd.org.uk

Associate Priest Reverend James (Jim) Pye

01795 890726 jim.pye@kc-hd.org.uk

Reader Caroline Ramshaw (07799 538809)

Anna Chaplain Caroline Ramshaw

ramshawcaroline@gmail.com

Reader Pim Baxter (07710 116269)

Church Contacts

Eastling Andrew Baxter, Warden (07749 403727)

Administrator E mail: stmaryeastling@gmail.com

Stalisfield with Otterden

Jenny King, Warden (01795 890366)

Chrissie Webster, Administrator
(07590 351977)

Throwley David Elvin, Warden (07973 837122)

E mail: david.j.elvin@gmail.com

High Downs Parish Safeguarding Officer

Mark Harlow (07979 864000)

E mail: mark.harlow@kc-hd.org.uk

CONTACT THE *GOOD NEWS* EDITOR

Hilary Harlow 01795 890338

If you would like to submit articles, or to advertise in the January 2026 magazine, send your submission by 20th December to: goodnewsmagazine@me.com.

Past and current issues of the Good News may be viewed on www.goodnews.rf.gd

Online Daily Worship Continues

9am Morning Prayer every day on the Benefice Facebook Page via <https://kc-hd.org.uk> .

More information is updated weekly on St Mary's Eastling 'A Church Near You': <https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/11982/>

Cantiana Christmas Concert

Friday 19th December - 7.30pm

A candlelit evening of music and congregational carols

Newnham Church

Tickets: £10 (includes festive refreshment)

Available from Doddington Service Station

email cantianachoir@gmail.com





Warm Welcome Village Social 12 - 2.30pm Thursday 15th January Stalisfield Village hall

Join us for social drop-in and stay for coffee, tea and delicious lunch for everyone in the village. Come to the hall and join an activity, use the wi-fi to work or just have a chat with your friends and neighbours. Free to all residents of Stalisfield and Otterden.



Christmas Trees 2025

Christmas trees are available again this year. The arrangement, unchanged over the last 35 years, is for you to contact us by email, phone or text to book a time for a visit here to inspect and select your tree. - then to return and collect it from late November or nearer Christmas.

Trees vary in size between 5ft and 16 ft in different shapes, colours and aroma with the larger sizes suitable for schools, churches, village halls and outside spaces.

The arrangement is for you to make a donation for your tree. This year 70% will be returned to your nominated Parish Church or charity of your choice, with the balance being divided between the listed 25 charities.

Last year, a total of £14,035 was donated to 50 local Parish Churches and all the charities.

Please contact us:

- By email on nashsfarmhouse@btinternet.com
- By phone on 01795 532596 or 07910 248 308

Many thanks.

Peter and Alison Howard, Nashs Farmhouse, Luddenham, Faversham ME13 0TQ

THROWLEY BELLRINGING TEAM IS LOOKING FOR MORE RINGERS

If you would like to try ringing a church bell we're holding a ringing practice session on **Saturday 6th December 10 - 12** at **Throwley Church**. It's great fun, come along and give it a go!
Tea, coffee and cake



The Arts
Society
Egerton

The Arts Society Egerton

We meet at 2.30 pm (doors open from 2.00) at Egerton Millennium Hall, Elm Close TN27 9DS

Wednesday 10th December:

THE ART OF CELEBRATING: Carols, Consuming and Shopping during the Christmas Season 1820 - 1930

Mark Connelly: Professor of Modern British History at the University of Kent until 2024

**WEDNESDAY 14th January
THE PAINTED HALL AT
GREENWICH**

Nick Salmond is a Blue Badge Guide who has worked for the BBC for over 30 years



Visitors are always very welcome at £8 (just turn up and pay on the door), refunded if you join. For further information please contact Christine Willis, our Membership Secretary via cmwillis75@gmail.com or 01233 756377.

See also our website

www.theartsocietyegerton.org.uk



Together in Boots

Join us for a monthly mindful walk through woodland

**Leaving Doddington Church at 2pm
and returning for tea & cake at 2.45pm**

Humans and well-behaved dogs all welcome

On Fridays 23rd January,
27th February, 27th March,

Enquiries to Lissie on 07790 287878
lissie1710@gmail.com



Updates from Citizens Advice Swale

Christmas is usually a time for excitement and joy, but we know that for some the financial pressure can be overwhelming. We've got some tips if you're worrying about how to get through the festive period.

List everything you need to buy; presents, decorations, activities and food. How much can you realistically afford? Stick to your budget as closely as possible. There are many ways to make Christmas special without breaking the bank. Homemade gifts, thoughtful gestures, and family traditions can be more memorable and meaningful than expensive presents.

Prioritise your spending. Remember that household bills often increase during the winter months due to higher energy usage and more time spent indoors. If you have existing debts, it's important not to ignore them, especially priority debts like Council Tax arrears.

Using credit cards and loans can lead to further financial strain if you're unable to keep up with repayments. If you do need to borrow, make sure you understand the terms and have a clear plan for repayment.

If you need help with debt, our specialist Money Advisers are here to help. Request a call back from our team at citizensadviceSwale.uk/debt or see below for alternative contact information.

Our services will be open as follows over the Christmas period:

Monday 22 December: 10am-12pm, Swale House, Sittingbourne

Tuesday 23 December: 10am-12pm, Sheppey Gateway and 11.30am-1.30pm, Murston Family Hub

Wednesday 24 December: 10am-12pm, 43 Stone Street, Faversham

Friday 2 January: 10am-12pm, 43 Stone Street, Faversham

On these dates you can also call **Adviceline** on freephone 0808 278 7979 (10am-3.30pm). For more information please visit citizensadviceSwale.uk or follow us on Facebook.

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- X Hedge trimming
- X General garden maintenance
- X Power wash for Patios & Decks

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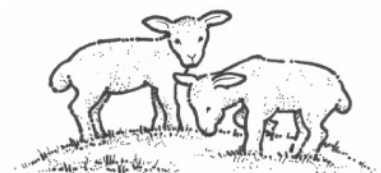
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Remembering

A walk in Otterden

by Audrey Keen

Sheep with mottled faces collect and stare at me; heads turn, ears tweak, noses raise to catch my scent. They decide I am harmless for they come closer and graze beside me. Each has prominent eyes but it is he with the horns I watch especially. The sun draws all things to its warmth, though the wind is chill and the former has much to do to hold its strength today. Clouds come also and dull the gratin bed which rustles as the sheep tread upon it. And I have been totally accepted by the sheep, for they lay on the straw folds of the meadow, not worried by my hooded form.

The outer skirt of the lime tree pales and I remember the heavy scent of its July flowers and, like the pink lillies on the wood pond that have faded also, renders this now all as a summer memory.

The Plough Inn

Family run, independent pub & restaurant, with an extensive menu boasting pub classics and 2 AA rosette specials.

We also offer a Take Away Menu

Wednesday - Friday from 5 - 7pm - preorder required; please call 01795 890256

Christmas Tree Lights Switch On

Thursday 4th December at 6pm.

We will be closed

21st December until 7th January

Keep up to date by following us on Facebook, Instagram or X (twitter)

Stalisfield Road, Faversham, Kent, ME13 0HY

Tel: 01795 890 256 Email: info@theploughinnstalisfield.co.uk

Christmas Events:

Sustainable Festive Wreath making at The Plough with Suzannasflowers. Contact Suzanna, suzannasflowers25@gmail.com for more details. Join a session 10th/11th December or even create your own. Option then to make a Christmas party of it with lunch or dinner at the Pub.



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15 SEPTEMBER**

Every two weeks

1.30pm to 3.30pm

Monday, 15 and 29 September; 13 and 27 October;
10 and 24 November; 8 and 22 December.

If you are struggling financially, we're here to help.

If you have any questions, please call our
answerphone: 0793 872 0604

Our main Foodbank centre continues every
Wednesday and Friday, 1.30-4pm, Gospel Mission,
Tanners Street, Faversham ME13 7JL



Charity registration number 1185413



**Faversham Foodbank will also
accept donations of food at the hall
during the above open hours,
OR they can be left on the back pews
in Eastling Church, open every day
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ME13 0BA

Stalisfield sited at
Stalisfield Village Hall,
ME13 0HY

Throwley sited in the old
Telephone Box outside the
Old Post Office, ME13 0PJ

Eastling Neighbourhood Watch



Village Warden 07794 010 394
or 01795 890848

Police 101 Emergency 999

For any cyber attacks or scam calls please
report it on: 0330 123 2040

Here we are for the festive season and the
usual reminder about drink/drug driving. Please
do not attempt to disregard the rules as the
police are on extra alert at this time and the
dangers of death or injury are quite apparent.
There are no excuses because we live in a
rural community; unmarked police vehicles will
be in the area.

The curse of hare coursing is still about so
please if seen ring 999 and quote operation
Galileo.

The dark evenings and nights are now with us
so please have consideration for other drivers;
as we all know some headlights are very
dazzling and especially driving in smaller
vehicles they are quite blinding.

There are idiots driving around local area using
catapults and ball bearings to attack our
wildlife, if seen please ring 999 to report it .

Have a great Christmas and take care
Alan

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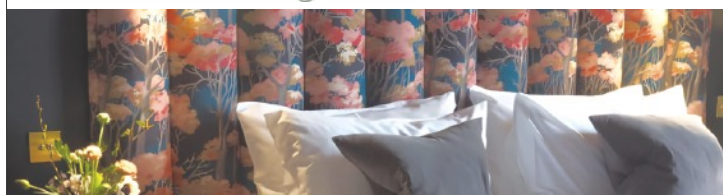
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Councillor's Report

Local Plan beginning to move forward again

"But the plans were on display..."
"On display? I eventually had to go down to the cellar to find them."
"That's the display department."
"With a flashlight."
"Ah, well, the lights had probably gone."
"So had the stairs."
"But look, you found the notice, didn't you?"
"Yes," said Arthur, "yes I did. It was on display in the bottom of a locked filing cabinet stuck in a disused lavatory with a sign on the door saying 'Beware of the Leopard.'"

— **Douglas Adams, The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy**

Writing this report did bring to mind the quote above from The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, but as Arthur Dent found, it is worth paying some attention to plans!

The Swale Local Plan will cover where housebuilding and employment sites will be allocated, and also the policies that will govern that development. Once a site is allocated in the local plan, it will almost certainly get planning permission. However, progress on allocations has been stalled for many months due to the Highstead Valley application south-east of Sittingbourne being called in by the Secretary of State when it was likely to be refused by the council, leading to an inquiry by the Planning inspectorate, who then report back to the Secretary of State for them to make the final decision.

The proposed housing here was of such a scale (8000+ homes) that it was felt to be impossible to make any meaningful progress towards allocating sites, when the decision on

so many houses had been taken out of the council's hands.

We were facing an impossible choice: either allocate elsewhere, and risk overrunning Swale with even more houses if the Secretary of State went on to approve Highstead, or assume that the Secretary of State would approve it and adapt the plan around that development, despite its many flaws and the problems it would create, (which is why it was recommended for refusal by the Swale's planning department), and effectively give up on any democratic input into the plan. The alternative to making that choice was to wait until the Secretary of State made their decision. That is what we decided to do, but it has created a long delay as the inquiry has only just finished after over-running by 4 months, and the inspector has still to prepare her report.

As mentioned above though, the plan also covers the policies that govern development: these cover a very large range of topics about the type of houses that should be built, and all the different factors that a developer must take into account when preparing their plans. Work has been continuing on these, and we now have a draft document which will be coming out for a "Regulation 18" consultation, assuming it is approved by the committees it has to go through. The consultation has not started yet, but if you want to have a look at the draft it can be found using this link : [\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group, 04/11/2025 19:00](#) .The document starts on page 667 of the agenda. It

was a long meeting and it is a long document!

(If you are reading this in a paper version, but have access to the Swale Council website, the links to follow are:

Your council > Council Meetings > View information about Council meetings online > Calendar of meetings, and then click on Extraordinary Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group meeting for the 4th of November, and the Agenda and reports pack link will take you to the full agenda, (no need to beware of Leopards though!)

The agenda also contains a very good report about low carbon buildings: it is more than a bit technical in places, but essentially sets out what really needs to be done to make homes which are zero carbon, and how the current (and proposed) building regulations fail to do this. There have also been some limits placed on what councils can require builders to do, but the validity of these limits is questionable and is being tested by councils around the country. The report has been used to inform the climate change policies in the Regulation 18 document.

As I mentioned, there is a consultation coming up, but given the size of these reports I thought it was worth pointing people in their direction to give them a bit of a head start.

More to follow on this in the months to come

Cllr Alastair Gould
AlastairGould@swale.gov.uk



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