



Report of the Chairmen of the Otford Society for 2025

It is with great pleasure that we present the Chairman's Report for the Otford Society for the year 2025. This has been a year where the Society's growth and success with local events when combined with the release of Sevenoaks District Council's Emerging Local Plan has required the full dedication and focus of our complete extended team.

Defending Your Village – SDC Plans for Thousands of Houses near Otford

When the District Council's Emerging Local Plan was released, we moved quickly to understand what the local community felt about the prospect of thousands of new houses being built in and around the village, delivering a neutral and unbiased survey to every house in the village. The results were overwhelming, with 92% of survey respondents being against the largest developments. Our firm commitment to our members and all village residents is that we will be there to stand up for you where you feel that development is harmful and inappropriate. Understanding that objecting to the proposals would be a massive undertaking, we quickly established the Otford Protection Committee, a completely separate team, ensuring that the Society's regular activities would not be affected. Importantly, advice received assured us that this clear separation would ensure that Trustees and Members of the Management Team who also sit on Otford Parish Council could continue to represent you on the Council. We are hugely grateful to the Otford Protection Committee for their tireless efforts which included engaging legal and specialist domain experts, ensuring that a robust response could be submitted to Sevenoaks District Council. A full programme of appeals, publicity and co-ordination of opposition followed. Our local and district communication groups were key to the co-ordination of demonstrations and protest marches from Sevenoaks Station to the District Council Offices. Focus then spread to wider activities, attracting the attention of an independent documentary film maker, who chose Otford from dozens of locations to film their documentary on the reclassification of Green Belt as Grey Belt. Our local MP, Laura Trott took part in this documentary and we are grateful for her strong support. As we approach the next (Regulation 19) phase of the Local Plan process the Otford Protection Committee is appealing for financial donations to engage further specialists and legal representation, enabling the fight to continue.

The Solar System is Reborn!

The Otford Solar System was 25 years old in 2025 and our team worked to relaunch our famous Millennium Marvel, bringing it up to date by creating fascinating short videos of each planet linked from QR codes on the pillars. A wonderful colourful new interpretation board was installed and the planetary pillars received a much needed coat of paint. The grand relaunch was on Saturday 26th July and the President of the British Astronomical Society, Janice MacLean cut the ribbon, whilst Society members enjoyed a free glass of bubbly to mark the occasion. We are indebted to David Thomas for his inspiration in creating this imaginative, educational and special part of our village and his family were presented with archive materials including letters from Sir Patrick Moore.

Events and Activities

What a fantastic successful year of community events we had – we hope you enjoyed them and are always interested to hear from you about ideas for future events.

As usual, our volunteers supported the annual **Village Litter Pick** in conjunction with McDonalds – what a difference this made!

April saw our **AGM** where we were treated to a fascinating talk by Rod Shelton, tracing the very beginnings of life in our historic valley. The **Village Superstar Award** for 2025 went to Margaret Nicholson who has tirelessly organised the Village Luncheon Club, much loved by elderly residents.

Our **Easter Event for Children** went wild, with youngsters saving Easter Eggs from The Dinosaur who ate Easter. Our wonderful village shops handed out prizes to eagle eyed children who spotted the eggs hidden around the village.

In May, the **Village Fete** celebrated 200 years of the modern railway and building on the success of Jenny Kelly's Craft Village also gave Young Entrepreneurs the opportunity to take part and run their own stalls. As our main fund raising event of the year and approaching its 80th anniversary, the fete provides a wonderful day out for families. In a time when many village fetes are dwindling and dying we must give special thanks to Patty Chatterjee's organising committee and our tireless volunteers who continue to create so many wonderful memories for the village residents, children and dogs!

August Bank Holiday saw the return of **The Great Village BBQ** on the Village Green. On top of the usual partnerships with our friends at the village churches, we had the Bull's wonderful inflatable pub serving drinks as people relaxed in the sunshine enjoying live music.

The **Annual Christmas Fayre** just keeps getting bigger! Despite some light rain, many stallholders reported record takings and Otford Scouts kept people well fed with their delicious Hot Dogs, often washed down with a warming cup of mulled wine from the Otford Society stand. We're delighted to be able to support our village shops with this event that brings people from far and wide to pick up unique Christmas gifts from local craft stalls.

In December, the Society once again co-ordinated the **Village Christmas Lights**, creating a beautiful traditional atmosphere in the High St which was enhanced by the beautifully lit **Christmas Tree** on the Village Green.

Santa returned to his **Christmas Grotto** in the Archbishops Palace Tower to the delight of local children. Society members received a discount on their tickets and Claire Croft earned our heartfelt thanks for managing Santa, his Elves and the volunteer team who made Santa's Grotto such a success. The smiles on the faces of so many children almost melted our hearts!

Towards the end of the year Otford Parish Council finally agreed that The Otford Society could take on the iconic village phone box which will be restored and repurposed for the community in 2026. Watch this space.

The **Friends of Otford Station** worked incredibly hard last year, we set up a separate and dedicated watering team to keep the flowers at the station alive through the extended dry period. In December, Handyman Hicks Services donated expertise to carry out Phase 2 of the development of the garden at the front of the station. OBM donated materials to pave the area in front of the Darent Valley Map and to properly edge the flower beds. The team's work has been so outstanding in 2025 that they were awarded a Gold Certificate at the National Community Rail Awards. Fantastic to see Otford go for gold!

Support for Local Good Causes

The Otford Society Fete Fund supported a number of worthy causes throughout 2025, notably a beautiful new bench to sit outside the library, paying for watering of the new trees in the Palace Community Orchard through the dry summer and the purchase of a new PA System for the use of Village Clubs and Societies. As usual, families in the village struggling to afford a decent Christmas Dinner were supported with supplies to help make their festive day special.

Acknowledgements & Thanks

As the Society grows and moves from strength to strength our core and extended team have worked exceptionally hard. We must extend heartfelt thanks to our Management Team, Trustees, and growing team of Volunteers including the Friends of Otford Station and the new Watering Team. Their commitment and enthusiasm are the driving forces behind our successful events and initiatives. Their efforts have not only preserved the charm of Otford but have also fostered a strong sense of community. Once again special thanks must go to Patty Chatterjee who continues to be the backbone of our key events, skilfully managing large scale complex projects – she makes it look so easy! Many village organisations and institutions have also contributed to our work this year. All the village Churches, Otford Scouts, The Bull Inn and so many others have stepped forward and worked with us hand in hand in a perfect model of community collaboration and goodwill. As ever, we undoubtedly couldn't do what we do without the support of our volunteers and fantastic village businesses. Finally huge thanks to everyone who has donated to the Village Protection Fund – every penny will go on defending the village from the impact of massive developments nearby. Thank you everyone, we should all be incredibly proud of the unique and rather special place that is Otford.

Looking Ahead

As we move into the next year, the Otford Society faces a huge financial challenge as we prepare to take on the might of large developers with deep pockets and expert legal teams. We must appeal to each and every one of you to consider whether you are able to make a financial contribution to help us gain the best possible legal and domain expert representation to fight these proposed developments that could do so much harm to our village.

In 2026 we look forward to our AGM in April, the Village Fete in May, the Village Garden Party in June and of course the Christmas Fayre in November. As we grow, our focus on extending partnerships with other village organisations deepens as we strive to enhance community spirit within our beautiful village.

Simon Featherstone and Chris Sutton

Co-Chairmen, The Otford Society

April 2026