

# The Badlesmere Lees and Hall Committee



Badlesmere....on the way to Ashford 1927

## **Chairman's Report given at the AGM of The Badlesmere Lees and Hall Committee, 27<sup>th</sup> May 2025.**

Good evening everyone,

It gives me great pleasure to reflect on what has been a dynamic, productive, and, at times, challenging year for the Badlesmere Lees and Hall Committee. Throughout 2024 and into 2025, the commitment and energy of our committee members, volunteers, and community have been evident in every decision made and action taken.

The year began with the re-election of our committee officers with no changes, affirming continuity and shared confidence in leadership. Governance has remained a priority, with all core policies updated and a revised Reserves Policy ratified to provide clarity and financial prudence. Perhaps most significantly, we have made real strides toward formalising our structure, with work on the application for Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) status well underway. The formal application went to the Charities Commission this month. This step will unlock new funding opportunities and improve the transparency and resilience of our operations.

Turning to the heart of our village—the Parish Hall—it has been a year of real, tangible progress. We began with essential upgrades: the full replacement of the south wall timbers and cladding, and a new gutter system fitted with a leaf guard. This was swiftly followed by a new concrete path along the north wall and from the track to the entrance, including ramp access and a designated bin area. Turf was laid and landscaping begun, transforming the entrance into a safer and more welcoming space for all ability levels.

The renovation work did not stop there. The cladding was professionally painted, turf maintained through one of the driest summers on record, and a shingle trench installed around the hall perimeter to manage water splashback and protect the building fabric. Internally, the main hall floor and joists were replaced, addressing a longstanding slope. Discussions about the future of the stage and toilet area culminated in a more affordable and sympathetic toilet redesign—one that preserves the hall's space and heritage while delivering improved accessibility. This new design, adopted in March, includes four cubicles (including one disabled), reintroduces separate facilities for ladies and gents, and minimises costly structural changes.

Funding these improvements has required diligent financial management and successful grant applications. A notable milestone was securing support from Swale Borough Council for accessibility upgrades. The accounts for 2023 and 2024 have been compiled, reconciled, and submitted for independent review, and despite rising costs—including an unexpected water bill for turf irrigation—our financial position remains healthy. Adjustments to hall hire rates and a renewed marketing push for the 100 Club were introduced to close the gap between income and operating costs. We are grateful for the continued support of our community, and we would like to particularly acknowledge the contributions of long-time supporters, such as the late Mary Moore.

In parallel with hall improvements, we have continued to address the pressing need for expanded parking. Following severe winter conditions that made the Lees unusable for parking, discussions with Lees Court Estate led to agreement on a 10-space car park extension. Quotes have been received and a modest, temporary solution—levelling and laying type 1 stone—has been approved in principle, although funding will be contingent upon completing the hall's interior works first. We hope to complete this proposal in the next calendar year.

Outside the hall, stewardship of the Lees remains central to our work. The first and second cuts of the year were completed, and the Spring Clean-Up in March has expanded to include substantial bramble clearance, rubbish removal, and tree safety assessments. Volunteer engagement has been tremendous. Environmental enhancement has also been a focus. We welcomed the recovery of the oak and hornbeam saplings and are now exploring new biodiversity initiatives such as dew ponds and bat boxes under the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) scheme.

In terms of track maintenance, 2024 marked a turning point. Responsibility for the North and South Tracks was formally divided among local residents, coordinated by Gareth Fulton. The hall, as a 'resident,' will now contribute a percentage share annually towards materials. Following further repairs in February, discussions continue with Southern Housing and the Lees Court Estate about their share of responsibility for access routes, especially concerning Leavemere Bungalows and the adjacent 'pond'.

Our community events programme has been nothing short of exceptional throughout the year. The D-Day 80 commemoration drew villagers and visitors alike for a stirring beacon lighting and film screening of 'The Canterbury Tale'. Our annual Halloween celebration was a roaring success, with over 200 children and families visiting homes

around the Lees before returning for a show-stopping spooky projection party. Fred Gregory's Wine and Wisdom quiz night raised funds and spirits alike, and is again planned for later in the year. Likewise, just a few weeks ago, we welcomed the Deputy Lieutenant of Kent, Lady Melville, for our VE Day remembrance event. Other events are planned for the rest of 2025, including a lecture by TV historian Dr James Wright in June, an open-air cinema evening in August, and returning favourites in the autumn. The 10k Run, previously scheduled for 2025, was postponed due to logistical challenges but will return in 2026, with planning resuming this September. Other proposed events include Race Nights, a village cricket match, and treasure hunts, all aimed at fostering fellowship and raising funds for the upkeep of our shared spaces.

Looking forward, we have ambitious but achievable goals. Completion of the hall refurbishment, including toilet upgrades, floor repairs and lighting, remains our top priority. Alongside this, we hope to realise the car park extension, pursue further environmental enhancements, and broaden participation in the 100 Club and volunteer activities. Strengthening our working relationships with Southern Housing and the Estate will be key to ensuring that all who use the Lees and its facilities contribute to their upkeep.

In conclusion, the committee has faced this past year with optimism, resourcefulness, and a deep sense of civic duty. We've maintained and improved our infrastructure, hosted memorable events, engaged constructively with partners, and remained fiscally responsible. I would like to thank all members, volunteers, grant providers, and residents for their time, energy, and faith in what this committee can achieve.

Let's continue building on that foundation in the year ahead.

Thank you.