

WOODCHURCH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

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MINUTES

Minutes of the Woodchurch Annual Parish Meeting, held on Friday, 13 April 2012 at the Memorial Hall, Woodchurch at 7.30 pm

ATTENDANCE: Fifteen Members of the Public were in attendance.

The Parish Council Chairman, Julian West, was in the chair.

The Chairman opened the meeting by emphasizing the fact that the Annual Parish Meeting is for Villagers, not the Parish Council and that everyone is entitled to speak, but requested that the normal rules of debate be observed.

The Chairman then introduced the ABC Ward Member, Mrs Aline Hicks, PC Justin Farrow and PCSO John Gorham.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor M Angell, Councillor R Dewar, Mr C Banyard, Councillor P Davison, Councillor P Spice

MINUTES OF 2011 MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 April 2011 were accepted and it was unanimously agreed that Mr West should sign them.

REPORT BY PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN

The members of the Parish Council have discharged their responsibility regarding the village precept to maintain The Green and assets owned by the Parish Council to the best of their ability.

PARISH COUNCIL

We now have a full council thanks to Mrs Davies, Mr Faiers, Mr Sheridan, Mr Steer and Mr Woods who have joined since the May 2011 election.

PLANNING

We continue to liaise with the Planning Department to register our views on development within the village and the lack of low cost housing for young people who have been brought up in the village but cannot afford to move back owing to property prices.

We are lucky to have Aline Hicks and Peter Davison as our Borough Councillors as they know the pressures on the villages and fight on our behalf.

HIGHWAYS

I hope you have seen an improvement in the number of potholes on our roads. Highways are now dealing with them relatively quickly once they have been reported.

PLAY AREA

A member of the Parish Council carries out a weekly inspection of our play area. We also carry out a twice yearly risk assessment and have the area professionally inspected once a year.

FOOTBALL CLUB

During the year we saw our adult Football Club close through lack of support, but we are lucky that Jeremy Hobday has taken up coaching the junior side with the hope that in time we may again see an adult team.

The Parish Council has purchased new goal posts for The Green which will replace the old ones which were very heavy and represented a safety hazard as they were only put away at the end of the season,

WOODCHURCH CLEAN-UP DAY

We are very lucky that John Brymer organises this event every year, which always makes the outer part of the village look better. On behalf of the residents of the Village I would like to thank him.

LITTER PICKER

We have taken on a new Litter Picker, David Fogden, who I am sure you will agree, has brought the standard of cleaning around the village.

NEWSLETTER

The Parish Council is in the process of producing a newsletter which will be distributed to every house in the parish.

DIAMOND JUBILEE

A celebration is to be held on Saturday 2 June and Sunday 3 June. We have been holding meetings since November and hope that all residents of the village will have a good time. The main focus will be the Children's party on The Green on the Saturday and the beacon that will also be on The Green in the evening, followed by a dance in the Village Hall. We are still in need of volunteers to help. If you are interested please contact me.

PARISH COUNCIL FINANCIAL STATEMENT

The receipts and payments summary for the year ended 31 March 2012 was circulated.

The accounts book and the minute book are available for public inspection on request. The balance at bank as at 31 March 2012 was £40,489.01.

The Precept for the year 2012/13 has been set at £20,000. We are also to receive a Concurrent Functions grant of £ 2530.00 making a total of £22530.00.

A VAT claim for the year ended 31 March 2012 has been submitted for £ 449.23.

REPORT BY CLLR MIKE ANGELL – KCC

I am really sorry not to be here this evening, but this is the only time to fit in with KCC programme that I can take off for a holiday.

The record level of debt nationally has meant that the local government grant has fallen by £21 million pounds although it is partly offset by a council tax freeze grant of £14.4 million. This reduction in grant will continue to at least 2013/14 and it is unlikely that our income will increase in the foreseeable future.

It is most unfortunate that KCC has had to lay off over 700 staff so far and restructure the whole council. However it has not affected the important frontline services such as Social Services, Highways, Education and Community Services. There will be no cuts in Libraries although we may find that they will be run in a different way, consultation is underway on this.

The Iceland issue is close to coming to an end as the courts have ordered that KCC is top of the list for refund. In fact well over £30 million has already been returned. The remainder over the course of 2012. See KCC website for up to date figures.

You may well ask that if you can take £97 million out of the budget in one year, why you haven't you done this before! The answer is we have taken £224 million in savings out of the budget in the last 5 years.

I am looking forward to the Jubilee celebrations followed by the arrival of the Olympic Torch and my congratulations and admiration go to the Parish Council and other members of the community here for the work they are doing to make these events enjoyable by all. If they require my help in any way possible they only have to ask.

REPORT BY COUNCILLOR ALINE HICKS – ABC

Councillor Hicks thanked the electorate of Woodchurch for returning her in the 2011 election.

She is on the Cabinet and is responsible for Housing and Customer Services. Ashford has 5000 council houses and a waiting list of almost 2000. ABC has just had to buy all the council house stock from the government at a cost of £124 million. This means that it can keep all of the tenants rents, but if someone wishes to purchase their own home under the Right to Buy Scheme, they will receive a discount of £75,000 and it will take the sale of 8 homes to generate enough capital to build a new council house.

Soon after formation, the members of the Cabinet held a series of "Away Days" which allowed them to informally about their priorities. This resulted in a document called "Ashford 2030 – A Framework" being produced, from which all the councils actions are driven. All Parish Councils received a copy.

The main initiatives include:-

The rebirth of a full-scale market town – think Mary Portas

The establishment of several major retail businesses in addition to the recently announced John Lewis store – think Primark

A major expansion of higher and further opportunities available in Ashford Borough – think K College and Wye School

The creation of sports hubs – think Conningbrook Lakes

Increased support to rural businesses – a rural councillor to investigate

A significant expansion of the Council's own house building activities – ABC is already building on smaller plots that it owns and plan to redesign and update most of the sheltered housing scheme.

We now have the Locality Act and last week the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Policy for Traveller Sites was issued by Central Government. These measures are designed to enable people to take more control of their own affairs if they so wish.

Mrs Hicks said that the best moment for her laws when she went onto the roof of the Civic Centre to look at the photo voltaic cells which have just been installed. These show how seriously ABC takes its green agenda, as well as generating income, thus helping to keep the council tax down.

In Woodchurch there have been several interesting developments:-

The major planning application is the proposed site for homes along Front Road. The submitted plans do not conform to the Tenterden and District Rural Plan as the number exceeds the recommended number of dwellings. Other concerns were raised by residents which were not strictly planning issues. Martin Vink attended a meeting to help residents gain a better understanding of the situation. Mrs Hicks said she is not happy with the proposal.

Concerns were raised about the pheasant rearing pens along Brook Street. After a lengthy consultation period the application was granted by ABC.

Should the decision on a planning application not represent the local view, there is the opportunity to take the case to the Ombudsman who will review it to ensure that the correct procedures were followed. Currently the only person who can appeal against a decision is the applicant.

The Select Committee at the House of Lords recently asked for views on the regulation governing residential home sites. Mrs Hicks directed her Housing Department to respond to this consultation, as it highlighted all of the problems occurring at Shirkoak Park and other sites within the Borough. She also suggested to Damian Green MP that all authorities who responded to the consultation should be invited to a conference at which views could be freely expressed, and to her great satisfaction received notification that such a meeting is to be arranged.

The National Planning Policy Framework to which Mrs Hicks has already referred will be very influential and some of the main points which refer to Woodchurch are:-

Economic growth which is at the heart of the framework

Mixed use of housing to support a more sustainable place.

A housing supply for 5 years is required + 5% and thereafter the land supply for 6-10 years and if possible 10-15 years.

A reasonable allowance for windfall sites can now be made but only for the first 5 years.

A more relaxed attitude to isolated homes in the countryside to extend to a wider range of building conversions other than those of historic or architectural merit.

Confirmation that Neighbourhood Plans can only be produced if they are in conformity with the adopted strategy,

The Core Strategy Review will be out for consultation after the Full Council meeting on 19 April. Mrs Hicks asked everyone to consider this document and make their view known to the Parish Council.

Mr West thanked Mrs Hick for attending and for her report.

REPORT BY COUNCILLOR PETER DAVISION – ABC

Mr Davison sent his apologies as he was unable to attend the meeting.

REPORT BY PC JUSTIN FARROW

PC Farrow reported that he is now responsible for 7 villages.

There have been 19 crimes in Woodchurch in the past 6 months:-

- 1 Fraud
- 1 Assault
- 2 Criminal Damage
- 1 Harassment
- 6 Burglary – 4 dwelling, 2 non dwelling
- 8 Theft – 7 fuel

A lot of changes are taking place within the Police in Kent. PC Farrow said he believed the changes to be for the better.

Ashford is part of East Kent and is now the only area in Kent to have a Rural Policing Team.

The Neighbourhood Police area has reduced significantly.

The Rural Beat Officers are now currently working alongside 8 PCSO's out of Tenterden.

PCSO John Gorham has replaced PCSO Oliver Welch in Woodchurch. PCSO Gorham will provide a visible daytime presence and PC Farrow works nights to provide a presence when the majority of crime is taking place.

PC Farrow once again urged residents to report all incidents, no matter how trivial they may seem to the police. One phone call could provide the final piece of intelligence needed to complete an investigation.

The police are still dealing with poaching, hare coursing and theft of fuel, particularly red diesel.

PC Farrow said officers are hoping to move into the old police house in Woodchurch fairly soon.

The possibility of reforming a local neighbourhood watch will be looked into.

A speed check is to be undertaken along Lower Road in the near future

Mr West thanked PC Farrow and PCSO Gorham for attending the meeting.

REPORT BY COMMUNITY WARDEN, CHRIS BANYARD

I'm sorry I cannot attend this evening as I am on annual leave so please do feel free to read my report for this year.

I have been working closely with many agencies including: Police, Environment, Education, Social Services and many more in dealing with issues in the village. The issues within the village that I have been involved with have ranged from anti-social behaviour to returning lost pets. As community wardens, our duties and remits seem to be limitless, but a lot of this is achieved through the help and support of other agencies and the people within the community. I've done many talks with groups and organisations, regarding everything from road safety, stranger danger, home security etc.

I have a monthly slot at the community/scout hall to hold a surgery, allowing me to offer advice and information. This is the first Wednesday at 2pm each month. Also, the Police will occasionally be on hand to offer advice on policing issues.

The Youth Club is up and running, with much hard work and thanks to members of the community who have made this possible. Unfortunately, due to other work commitments I cannot get involved as much as I would like to so anyone who may have a couple of hours to spare a month would be greatly appreciated.

If I could use this opportunity just to mention that overall, Woodchurch is a safe and happy place to live in, but we should always be on the lookout for anything suspicious or unusual. Please do report anything that concerns you to the police or myself. I am in the village most days and some evenings, as a visible presence and while on my rounds I am more than happy to pop in and say hello to any resident for whatever reason, whether it's for them to report something, ask advice or just to have a chat over a cup of tea.

Lastly I would just like to thank everybody on the parish council, who have always been supportive and make me feel welcome. It is hard to believe this is my fifth year in the village and I look forward to another year serving the community of Woodchurch

FUTURE OF PUBLIC TOILETS

Mr Woods explained that ABC had contacted the Parish Council, to ask whether they would be prepared to take over total responsibility for the upkeep and running of the public toilets, as a cabinet decision had been made to either hand over or close rural public toilets, following the results of a recent survey undertaken in the Borough.

Following a discussion, it was agreed that the Parish Council should challenge this proposal.

Further discussion on this subject will take place at future Parish Council meetings.

OPEN FORUM

Mr Thorp reported that the request for donations towards the refurbishment of the War Memorial had been very successful.

A ceremony of re-dedication is to take place on 26 May 2012 at 12.00 noon.

Mr West thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.55 pm

Signed Dated