

WOODCHURCH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Page 1

MINUTES

Minutes of the Woodchurch Annual Parish Meeting, held on Friday, 10 April 2015 at the Memorial Hall, Woodchurch at 7.30 pm

ATTENDANCE: 9 Members of the Public were in attendance and one Parish Councillor.

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 ABC Ward Members and Mrs Aline Hicks and Mr Peter Davison, County Councillor, Mr Mike Angell and Mrs Judith Batt, Parish Clerk.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An Apology for Absence was received from Parish Councillors, Mrs G Davies Miss R Dewar, Mrs J Haynes, Mr A Faiers, Mr A Hukins and Mr P Spice and PCSO Carr.

MINUTES OF 2014 MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 April 2014 were accepted and it was unanimously agreed that Mr West should sign them.

REPORT BY PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN

The Parish Council has discharged its responsibility regarding the village precept to maintain The Green and assets owed by the Parish Council to the best of their ability.

We continue to liaise with the Planning Department to register our views on development within the village, we are currently working with the Borough Council and Housing Association exploring the possibly of low cost houses.

The Parish Council is setting up a sub-committee of the Parish Council chaired by Rob Woods, to look at the 7 areas that have been put forward by the land owners for possible development. He will then report back to the Council.

The Council are grateful to Mr Tim Bourne for donating over an acre of his field to The Green, at the moment we are waiting for the solicitors to look over the legal documents.

We would like to thank Mike Angell, our County Councillor for keeping us informed of County news. Aline Hicks and Peter Davison our Borough Councillors for supporting the Parish Council and also for putting our views forward to the Borough.

The Council carries out a weekly inspection of our play area. Also twice a year we carry out a full risk assessment on all our assets as required by law.

We continue to pay for the maintenance of the Church Clock.

The Council is grateful to Mr and Mrs Brymer for picking up the litter and bagging it in Place Lane and the top of The Park.

We would also like to thank Robert Harris for all his hard work picking up the rubbish over the past year, as well as Dave Grabham for keeping The Green looking so good.

This year we are going to lose one of the council's most respected members, she has done over 30 years of service on the council and is an asset with all her knowledge of the village. We will miss her.

We would like Joyce to accept these small gifts in thanks for all her hard work for our village during her time on the council.

I would also like to thank members of the council who are not standing for re-election this time.

I would also like to thank the Councillors for their support over the past year, not forgetting Judith who is a mine of information and a great support for any chairman.

Thank you

PARISH COUNCIL FINANCIAL STATEMENT

The receipts and payments summary for the year ended 31 March 2015 was circulated.

The accounts book and the minute book are available for public inspection on request.

The balance at bank as at 31 March 2015 was £45790.17.

The Precept for the year 2015/16 has been set at £20,000. We are also to receive a Concurrent Functions grant of £ 1530.00 and a Council Tax Support Grant of £680.00 making a total of £22210.00

A VAT claim for the year ended 31 March 2013 has been submitted for £ 1211.02.

REPORT BY CLLR MIKE ANGELL – KCC

Since the final report on my Select Committee on Commissioning of Services, I have been involved with the Commissioning Advisory Board which oversees commissioning proposals prior to their being presented to the Cabinet Committee for approval. This is the first time in the history of the County Council that there is significant member involvement in the procurement and commissioning process. This is being developed further with intensive member training in being able to recognise and monitor outcomes.

I also sit as Vice Chairman of Health Overview and Scrutiny. Topics that are currently being addressed are Patient Transport (a chaotic service that was – now being improved), Children and Adolescent Mental Health, once again not at all satisfactory and has been recommissioned and

beginning to show improvement. In addition I have been attending the reports of the Care Quality Commission's inspection of the Medway Maritime Hospital, William Harvey Hospital and Kent and Canterbury. Currently the Committee is receiving regular updates on their improvement plans and shortly the same treatment for the Maidstone and Pembury Hospitals.

My other jobs at County Hall are:-

Planning Committee which mainly deals with Schools, Waste and Highway applications.

Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Service, where I sit on the General Purpose Committee which oversees the External and Internal Audits, Statistics concerning road traffic accidents, fires and also the Channel Tunnel.

The Joint Transport Committee with Ashford Borough Council, I attend once a term.

Also this last winter, I have had a busy time due to flooding issues on my patch as well as keeping a watchful eye on developments.

I am very grateful to the Parish Councils for their support and must congratulate them for their efforts as energetic volunteers. I try and get round to their meetings, but sometimes it is difficult to attend them all.

My best wishes to all those who will be up for election on 7 May.

REPORT BY COUNCILLOR ALINE – ABC

The following report was submitted by Councillor Aline Hicks

Since being elected 8 years ago, I have done my best to serve the village. With the advent of Ward Member Grants I have been able to support various charity/community organisations in all of this area known as Weald South.

Recently I was able to assist the Parish Council in securing the extension to the Village Green.

I have always been available to assist residents with their planning applications but there are clear guidelines from Central Government that have to be adhered to.

The protection of the open countryside and woodland remains from inappropriate development remains high on my agenda.

In addition to the usual council business, I am a trustee of Ashford Leisure Trust, the Borough Council's representative on the River Stour Internal Drainage Board, a governor of Kingsnorth Primary School, a trustee of Kingsnorth Village Hall, a director of Woodchurch Information Centre and I attend the Marshlink Railway meetings and am a member of my local WI.

Since being elected I have been appointed onto the Cabinet where I hold the portfolio for Social Housing. This gives me an ideal platform to promote the building of Local Needs Housing in villages throughout the Borough. The impact of the so called 'Bedroom Tax' failed to have any impact on council house tenants as we introduced Intervention Officers who are able to assist tenants with any problems. Overall the Borough Council is working with the DWP, Citizens

Advice Bureau and other agencies to provide support to residents who may be affected by the Universal Credit System which the government is rolling out across the country starting on 19 April in Ashford.

A big problem we have nationally is an ageing population, and in Ashford we are addressing this subject by improving our facilities for older residents. We have redesigned Farrow Court in South Ashford to ultimately provide 104 homes, of which 20 should be ready for occupation in late June and worked closely with Age Concern to improve their Day Care.

Throughout the Borough we are looking at updating all our Sheltered Homes and this will include Danemore in Tenterden and Cotton Hill House in Hamstreet. Not all older care provision is provided by the Council and we work in partnership with various Housing Association to meet the demand. Recently I was shown the show flat at Chamberlain Court, opposite John Lewis' where sheltered accommodation is available for rent and outright purchase.

With regard to general housing for families and our younger generation, officers from the Planning Department are working closely with parish councils, Woodchurch included, to identify building sites that would be acceptable for development under the Local Plan which is currently being revised. The Planning Officer, Simon Cole, recently paid several visits to Woodchurch Parish Council. As I see the situation, no decisions will be made until the autumn and even then this could slip. A new Local Plan will also include the town centre and retail expectations.

The Conservative administration is seeking to improve the economic offers within the town centre. Many residents feel that the main thrust of general housing should be concentrated in the town and this is now happening with the conversion of Charter House, the Old Tax Office and Trafalgar House from offices into dwellings, as well as the land south of the railway line. There are also plans for the development of the area between Elwick Road and the railway line. We are also putting pressure on Network Rail to address the station access and improve the Eurostar service.

We must acknowledge that Central Government is keen to reduce grants to local councils and so this administration agreed with the HCA to purchase International House which will generate a considerable amount of income for the borough and enable us to keep the rates in Ashford as low as possible. There is currently a proposition to purchase the Park Mall Shopping Centre so that there can be a long term development of Ashford Town Centre.

Woodchurch is the centre of one of the areas in Kent where the skies are at their darkest and in order to protect this, the Borough Council has produced planning guidance to developers to preserve this darkness which is an essential character of rural areas.

The decision to shift the responsibility of maintaining rural toilets from Ashford Borough Council has resulted in Woodchurch forming a successful Information Point, as well as maintaining the toilet facilities. This Information Centre has become a hub for residents to form some new groups and take bookings for events as well as promoting local businesses and I am pleased to support this enterprising project. Funding of this nature will always remain a challenge and I would urge residents to think about adding the cost of funding the monthly newsletter to the village precept as happens in some villages near here.

Development of part of Front Road remains an issue yet to be decided as this site was identified for development years ago, but so far a sympathetic scheme has yet to come forward. I have spoken against previous planning applications as they were not suitable for the village but I remain ever hopeful that a good scheme could emerge.

I was recently able to assist the Parish Council in securing an extension to the Village Green.

Also in Brattle the Housing Dept has submitted a plan for 4 new homes. One of the problems with older style council housing was the lack of parking for residents in this day and age and I am pleased that I have been able to get extra parking included in this application.

Also once again ABC has managed to keep the rates at one of the lowest in Kent. With the general election, borough and parish elections being held on 7 May, I urge everyone to exercise their democratic right.

Finally, I am sure you would like me to thank all of the Parish Councillors and the Clerk for all the hard work they carry out on behalf of the residents of Woodchurch and I also thank Peter Davison who is not standing again.

REPORT BY COUNCILLOR PETER DAVISON – ABC

Councillor Davison thanked Councillor Hicks for her help and support over the last year.

He also congratulated the Parish Council for the work they do and thanked them for their support during the year.

Over the year Councillor Davison helped and supported the Parish Council wherever with the planning applications that have come in during the year and had been involved with the extension of the Village Green and the proposed development on Front Road.

The byways continue to concern members of the public at moment.

There is a lot of concern surrounding the site submissions in all rural areas as a lot of the sites are not considered suitable by the local residents. Councillors Davison supports the view that residents should have a say in planning matters.

There is still the possibility of an Astronomy Centre in Woodchurch, as the village has dark skies.

The new rules brought in by the Government mean there is a much better basis for agreement between the site owners and the home owners on Shirkoak Park and other mobile home parks.

Councillor Davison reported that he is on the Overview and Scrutiny committee of which he is Vice Chairman. He said he is concerned at the restrictions currently being brought in.

A new college is planned for Ashford with the possibility of 1000 students, which could eventually build up to 3000. This will hopefully mean that whereas at the moment 800 students currently leave Ashford each day to travel to Maidstone and Canterbury, future students will no longer have to travel outside of the town to study. Councillor Davison fully supports this project

because we need to build a skills base in Ashford to attract big companies to the town. He said he was disappointed with the site as it will swamp the Memorial Gardens, which should be a place for quiet contemplation.

A large extension is planned for the Stour Centre, part of which will be a theatre for 200 people.

Conningbrook, the exciting leisure park and water sports centre is to open soon. It has been funded by a section 106 from the development of 300 houses.

Mr Davison also sits on the Gateway Grants Committee which has successfully administered grants which make a difference to the grantee's future.

Councillor Davison expressed concern at the lack of transparency with regard to major developments such as Park Mall and International House and he is fighting for greater transparency within the Borough Council.

Ashford Borough Council is under pressure from Central Government to be more entrepreneurial.

Councillor Davison reported that there is a lot going on in the Borough, but some areas need looking at.

REPORT BY SIMON GODFREY, CHAIRMAN OF WOODCHURCH SCHOOL GOVERNORS

Mr Godfrey reported that the Head Teacher and Deputy Head teacher have been in place since September and are very enthusiastic and doing a fantastic job.

There are now 150 pupils on the roll and each pupil attracts funding. There is now a class for each year group. Year 6 currently has 23 pupils.

The school worked with KCC to allow it to increase the maximum size of input at the lower end of the school. The school now has permission to take 26 children into Reception.

Following a question from the floor asking why the classes could not be increased to 30, Mr Godfrey explained that the school can only take 210 children.

A second question asked whether the school had considered moving to larger premises and Mr Godfrey said it had not as a smaller village school is an attraction.

The school is still working closely with members of the community who listen to the children read and the scheme has generated a definite improvement in reading standards.

New members have joined the Governing Body and all are committed to improving the school. If the Governing Body is outstanding then the members can help the school to be outstanding.

Parking continues to be a problem for which there is no foreseeable solution, as one of the realities of modern education is that children go to the school chosen for them by their parents and this means that many of the children are driven in to school from outside of the village. The PCSO has tried to help by attending, but although the parking improves when he attends it reverts to being a problem when he does not.

Mr Godfrey reported that a core of parents listen and help the school while others do not and these parents represent a challenge to the school in many areas.

OPEN FORUM

There being no other question the meeting closed at 8.39 pm.

Signed Dated