

Birling Parish Council

Draft Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting held on Tuesday 8th May 2018 in Birling Village Hall at 8pm

Present: Councillors Mrs J Westwood (Chair)
Mr N Hewett
Mr S Hirst
Mr G Nevill
Mrs S Spooner

Clerk Ms Pilbeam

Also in attendance: Kent County Councillor Sarah Hohler, Tonbridge and Malling Cllr Matthew Balfour 3 members of the public

1 Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

There were apologies received and accepted from Cllr Helen Walker.

2 Annual Reports (a) Chairman

The Parish Council **welcomed** Julie Pilbeam as Parish Clerk in September 2017.

Mrs Jenny Grimmett was thanked for kindly resuming the Clerk position in May 2017 following the resignation of her replacement for personal reasons.

In July 2017 Mr Stuart Hirst was co-opted as new councillor following the vacancy that arose in 2016.

The topic of the **Annual Parish Assembly** in May was BROADBAND resulting in a good community attendance. KCC provided a presentation that providing information about the installation of the new Cabinet to upgrade the access speed to the majority of the Parish.

Financial challenges continue to impact on KCC, TMBC and BPC. However

TMBC withdrew the Financial Allocation to Parish Councils (FAPC) reducing income to BPC by £4232 that resulted in the Parish precept being slightly raised by £490 against the proposed expenditure. The removal of the grant resulted in the withdrawal of Church funding of £1727 that was allocated to upkeep the open churchyard. The Parish Council was advised it was not liable to replace this allocation and awaits a report from the TMBC following a capacity study of burial spaces in the borough.

BPC provided a number of **donations** including support to the Church Harvest Flower Festival and 'Friends of All Saints a Birling'; a local group that arrange community events to raise money for improvements to the church public facilities. The council were able to make an annual cost **saving** of over £320 by challenging the Insurance Company who had in error overcharged the council over past years. A **refund** of £1181.12 was obtained back dated to inception of the error.

The use of the **financial reserve** was previously held against calls on matched funding agreements and is now released. These funds can now be used to improve the access and appearance of the War Memorial and to replace the street lighting with LEDs enabling timed lighting periods. Both of these projects are planned for implementation in 2018.

Communication to the residents were improved by the setting up of a new website, and the use of social media including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

The council thanks the Clerk for taking these matters in hand. I am most grateful to Cllr Helen Walker for the information published about Parish matters in the well-read local PILGRIMS church magazine.

Road matters continue to be of concern to our residents. Key issues are 'rat running, speeding and parking on pavements'. The repeat Traffic Survey funded by Cllr Sarah Hohler KCC took place after much chancing at an inappropriate date when road closures and half term affected the count. Although no results have been received the survey will be repeated. I am grateful to the Vice Chair – Cllr

Colin Grimmett – for leading on these matters and attending the JPTCG on behalf of the council.

Planning matters have been pursued by the working party with the majority of applications resulting in 'no objection'. Particular issues concerning Ham Hill

Quarry and the proposed Sandpit at Ryarsh have been challenging and objections raised due to impact on local residents. The Local Plan consultation has been delayed due to awaiting the outcome of the Ministers consultation on revised housing targets. The council is grateful to all the working party members and Cllr Hewitt for his expert opinion on the complex issues that require response. Cllr Nevill is vigilant in noting any 'Conflicts of Interest' were appropriate.

The council continues to access expert **independent advice** from KALC and

CPRE. The **environmental** issues were fly tipping and Litter that is thrown from passing cars.

Local residents report incidents directly on the web site and also independently undertake litter picking. BPC facilitated a litter-picking event last year that was arranged by Cllr Helen Walker. The Old Chalk New Downs project was supported with three council members attending the briefing and the council input to the consultation to help secure lottery funding for the initiative.

My thanks are expressed to all the councillors for their hard work over the year and the interest shown by the community.

(b) Borough Councillor

Due to the continuing reduction in funding from central government, we have had yet another year when considerable savings have had to be found. Tonbridge & Malling continues to receive one of the lowest payments per head of population in Kent so we are very fortunate that for many years we have had a robust Medium Term Financial Strategy in place, making our huge savings gradually over the years without impacting too greatly on our frontline services.

As we go forward, with yet more pressure on our finances, the council have been looking, not only at savings, but also at opportunities to increase our revenue.

Work on our new Local Plan continues apace, with a new timeline now in place for the final draft to be approved for consultation late summer and ready to be deposited with The Secretary of State by the end of the year.

A lot of work has been done this year on the renewal of our Waste Collection contract in the hope of improving our roadside recycling collections to include plastics and glass.

Our Leisure Services continue to be well used as well as being rated among the best in the country. Recent works at Larkfield will make sure that facilities keep up to date.

The works to make the M20 a Smart Motorway and the concerns regarding a proposal to include a new sandpit at Ryarsh in the KCC Minerals plan will both cause concerns amongst our residents in the coming year, as will the ever present pressure for more houses and the effect that has on our infrastructure. We both hope to be able to continue to protect and support our communities.

(c) Kent County Councillor

Thank you all for your support during the year and for electing me, with an increased majority, to represent you as your County Councillor for an eighth four year term.

The year leading up to the recent budget has been even more of a challenge: it has been calculated that funding for local government has fallen by 47% over the past 7 years whilst demand for services, particularly in social care, has been increasing. Our aim is to deliver the budget whilst minimising reductions in services. At KCC we have planned for these budget pressures and have not run budget deficits whilst maintaining reserves. KCC remains financially sound.

A further challenge which we are aware of is the deficit in provision of infrastructure to accommodate the housing growth that Kent faces. This is the product of demographic change - or growth - and the practical inability of London to provide enough housing. KCC is working to achieve better infrastructure provision and there is some good news with investment planned by Network Rail, the Lower Thames Crossing, the Major Roads Network proposals and more, such as the M20 widening by use of the safety lanes.

Before Christmas we were concerned that we would need to reduce our expenditure on subsidised bus services by £2.25 million. There has been some misunderstanding in that 97% of buses in Kent are operated by commercial companies. KCC subsidises some routes, mainly in the east of the county, and mainly in rural areas when no service would otherwise be available. By talking with bus companies they have managed to link some of these routes to other services, to cause minimum inconvenience. Some services were being subsidised by tax payers by almost £20 per journey. Our savings target for this year has now reduced to £455,000. We have also put funds aside to help communities apply for help to set up taxi/bus type services that meet the needs of their community. To discuss this we are launching, through KALC, the Big Conversation, which will lead to a Rural Bus Summit in the summer.

Speeding traffic through villages, HGVs (including parking) and congestion remain a problem for us all. Junctions 3 to 5 of the M20 will be widened by a lane in each direction which will mean a lot of disruption and inconvenience during construction. I anticipate the Addington footbridge will be replaced during this period. I hope that the Offham enhancement scheme will help deter through traffic and that speed detector equipment will also help all villages which endure this problem. The A228 Snodland bypass is a particular area for concern about speed and a signalised pedestrian crossing is needed to help access schools, the renovated station and open spaces. I will continue to work hard to get this funded.

Still on highways, we have added £2m to the £8.1m already in the budget for pothole repairs, following the recent snow emergencies. KCC deploy 60 full size gritters, 5 mini gritters and 117 farmers with snow ploughs fitted to tractors to help keep the roads clear. Treatment of main routes was carried out twice a day at times, instead of once. Problems on minor roads were sometimes caused by drivers abandoning their vehicles in the middle of the road making it impossible for farmers to clear the drifting snow. Many messages of appreciation to highways during the bad weather were gratefully received. To help repair the roads we are also using smaller Kent based companies.

KCC dispose of household waste collected by districts. We are proud of the fact that only 1% of that waste now goes to landfill. Most of the rest is either recycled to electricity at Allington or to compost at the Blaise site in Offham. Litter on roads and pavements remains a problem, despite heroic efforts by the districts to collect it regularly. As does fly tipping. KCC are now cleaning road signs which does make things look better.

KCC have won national acclaim for their apprenticeship scheme, placing 236 young people in jobs in the year. Pressure on school places remains, mainly due to a population bulge which we have addressed at primary level but is a budget challenge as pupils move to secondary schools.

I am still Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities and Regulatory Services. This means that I represent the Cabinet Member at meetings he cannot attend and am briefed on the portfolio and discuss policy matters with him. The portfolio has a wide remit which includes libraries, community wardens and safety, coroners, country parks and culture. For example, I was asked to chair a cross-party working group on ambitions for our 99 libraries. We visited libraries and were fully briefed during a series of meetings in our libraries looking at the services they deliver, which include registration of births, marriages and deaths. I was really pleased that colleagues share my enthusiasm for libraries and the very important role we think they will play in the future. We need to move with the times and promote even greater use of this very popular service.

I am the appointed trustee of Kent Music, now successfully promoting music in our schools, running music centres and County groups, and providing music tuition. I am also the nominated trustee on the board of Turner Contemporary (built and owned by KCC) in Margate whose national success has been rewarded with its selection as the venue, in 2019, for the prestigious Turner Prize. I am on the fund raising committee - it is expensive to run an art gallery with an internationally recognised education programme and fantastic exhibitions, all contributing to the regeneration of the area.

I also represent the County Council as an Assistant to the Rochester Bridge Trust, a very old charity which was endowed to maintain the crossings of the River Medway. The charity has land holdings, mainly farms, as well as invested capital which provide revenue funding. I am on the education and grants committee. We need more engineers and run great programmes about engineering for young people. We also award grants to eligible causes.

I am a trustee of the Kent Community Foundation which researches and supports many smaller charities in Kent, according to policy criteria, with charitable money endowed by generous individuals.

I am appointed to the Kent and Medway Fire Authority which now works closely with the other emergency services and KCC to provide co-ordinated action and support in emergency situations. A local example was the response to the devastating fire at Holborough Lakes.

Most recently the big issue concerning all of you is the refresh of the Kent Minerals and Waste Plan with the submission of the West Malling Sandpit at Ryarsh as a possible site for inclusion in the plan. As local member I have done my best to make sure all residents are fully aware of the consultation (now closed) and briefed on the issues involved. And, of course, that their views are listened to and taken in to consideration.

My KCC member grant has been spent on trying to improve road safety with speed counts, speed indicator devices, signage and lining (some still outstanding). Examples are the hatching replacing the mini roundabout at the entrance to Holborough Lakes and the Addington village gateway improvement. I have supported with grants: Leybourne Grange Riding Centre for the Disabled, Santa's Grotto, Spadework, Townsend Hook Bowls Club and Dynamic Communities, Ryarsh.

3 Questions from the public

Cllrs Nevill and Hewett gave a presentation on the proposed war memorial refurbishment.

A residents asked if further quotes were being obtained. It was explained that other quotes had previously been sought but Burlsem had worked on the memorial previously and the council were of the opinion that they were the right choice for the required improvements.

A resident asked whether locked gates were necessary, it was confirmed that the gates will not be locked.

A resident commented that the trip hazard of the slope up to the war memorial was always a concern and the refurbishment will add dignity to the Remembrance service.

A resident asked where the paving will finish and it was confirmed that the exact details will be worked out with the contractor.

A resident asked if the box tree could be reduced further. It was explained that the parish council took advice from the Borough Council for which they agreed a 30% reduction. The parish council had originally requested a 50% reduction.

The church water meter was discussed and it was confirmed that this will be checked before any works commence.

Security of the memorial was discussed and Cllr Hohler said that the planting of yew trees had been successful in other areas.

Timescales were discussed and it was noted that the work will start in July.

It was discussed that the road will be closed outside the war memorial during the wreath laying service this year to enhance the experience.

Cllr Nevill explained that at 7pm on remembrance Sunday Birling could walk up to the hill, past the memorial to Squadron Leader Tommy Pinkham, and light a small beacon on Holly Hill. This would be a temporary structure to mark the occasion. Cllr Nevill reported that he had contacted Natural England to seek the relevant permissions.

The publishing of the event and/or a leaflet drop was discussed to raise interest in the event.

It was suggested that the school are informed to generate interest from the children.

The meeting closed at **20.01pm**.