

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL HELD IN
ST. DUNSTAN'S CHURCH, CRANBROOK
ON THURSDAY 14TH APRIL 2016**

The Chairman read out the following statement:

Members are required to declare any interests, dispensations, predetermination or lobbying on items on this agenda. Members are reminded that changes to the Register of Interests should be notified to the Clerk.

No interests were registered.

PRESENT: Cllrs. Bunyan, Clifford, Cook, Fairweather, Fermor, Goodchild, Hall, Hartley, Holmes, Kemp, Swann, Veitch & Warne. Borough Cllr. Hannam (part), KCC & Borough Cllr. Holden

APOLOGIES: Cllrs. Rook and Smith.

MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING:

268: The Chairman, Cllr. B. Veitch proposed that the Minutes of the Meeting held on the 10th March be adopted as a true record. Cllr. Hall challenged when the meeting was actually closed. She claimed that the gavel went down after all members of the public had spoken. The Chairman confirmed that she had closed the meeting to allow visitors to speak and then again to signify order. The proposal was then seconded by Cllr. Cook and agreed. Cllrs. Hall & Hartley abstained.

269: WELCOME TO NEW COUNCILLOR:

The Chairman welcomed Cllr. Nancy Warne to the Parish Council and she was invited to sign the Declaration of Acceptance book. She received a round of applause.

PROVIDENCE CHAPEL – VISIT BY MARK STEPHENSON, PRINCIPAL CONSERVATION ARCHITECT, TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL:

270: Cllr. Veitch welcomed Mr. Stephenson to the meeting. He informed Members that he had been working for TWBC for five years and on the Providence Chapel issue for three. A comprehensive report had been undertaken which identified the condition of the building, historic merit, its character and potential uses. The building is land locked and one of the most difficult buildings at risk that he had ever dealt with. Planning applications had been refused on the basis of potential harm to the character of the building. When potential uses had been looked at, one idea was to treat it as a heritage attraction the same as The Windmill and sources of funding had been looked at. Cranbrook could not support two heritage attractions, the Windmill is in excellent repair and it was deemed that the case for the Providence Chapel was weak. Another idea was for an enabling development to support conversion with Heritage Lottery funding, but this had to be match funded and there was no match funding. Commercial use had shown border line economic value but planning consent would not be given because of the impact on the building, again the report came up with a very poor rating. Conversion to residential was another border line possibility but only if everything was stripped out and this was unacceptable from the heritage view.

Community or Charity was the next category identified in the report. Arts Centre or Museum/Arts Centre was in this category as was a community hub. A community hub was discounted as the building was not big enough on its own. Meetings would be difficult to hold and it was impractical in terms of using the building in its current form. Any changes would not be acceptable in planning terms. With regard to an Arts Centre, this would be uneconomic. Another point was that the building could not be used for certain functions such as weddings as it is a redundant religious building. Also the Chapel floor does not lend itself to functions, it would be very limited. The category of Museum/Arts Centre was given consideration. We already have a museum and it would fit in nicely into the Providence Chapel. The History Society would have to be persuaded to move but they are happy where they are. With regard to funding consideration had been given to the proceeds from the sale of the former Council Offices in Cranbrook but he had been told that this had already been allocated. The sale of the current museum building could be a consideration, the building is owned by TWBC. There was also Hedgelifield Funding. There is a lot more feasibility work to be undertaken. He is not sure that the building could be successfully converted to a museum. If it was, TWBC would have to purchase the Chapel and the maintenance bill would be greater than the existing museum. TWBC Property are not convinced that it is a good idea and he has to convince the Treasury Department. He also has to talk to the Museum Team as they would have to be involved in the relocation. Mr. Stephenson stated he was exploring all avenues including budget holders, architects, valuers, surrounding spaces etc. He had spoken to the Trustees and Committee of Museum; they were happy where they are but they do not have enough archive space. He had not found the ideal solution yet. He is pushing forward but it will take time and TWBC will have to provide funding. There is potential. In twenty years of being a Conservation Officer this is the nastiest building at risk that he has had to deal with. It is a Grade 2* building of great importance and so that means that there are many constraints to overcome. The Chairman invited questions from Members.

Cllr. Bunyan stated that there had been several planning applications which had been refused, if the applicant had appealed could an Inspector have overturned the decision. Mr. Stephenson confirmed that no appeals had been made and TWBC would have defended the decision using the policies and criteria current at the time. Cllr. Hall stated that the major constraint was that English Heritage will not allow the removal of the pews. Mr. Stephenson agreed that the major sticking point was the pews. He had obtained an independent definitive view on the pews. The pews are an intrinsic part of the building but a more sacrosanct opinion was that there should be enough pews left for a feel of the history but not all the pews needed to remain. A sketch proposal had been put to English Heritage to remove some of the pews and this had not been discounted. The pews identified for removal would be on the left hand side and some on the balcony. This area could be used for an art gallery and small meeting rooms. In response to a question from Cllr. Hall, he confirmed that there could be seven removed on the left hand side and five in the balcony. Cllr. Warne asked why it was not suitable as an arts centre yet is suitable for a museum. Mr. Stephenson explained that an arts centre needed open space and the only space suitable would be on ground floor. A museum can be adapted around the pews. Cllr. Swann stated that the Chapel does not have access or any outside land; there is only parking for one car on a Sunday. He also asked who was responsible for the upkeep of the building whilst exploration of suitable uses are being considered. In response, Mr. Stephenson stated that he was aware of the difficulties with various rights of way, he was not aware of the issue of the parking of one car on a Sunday. He confirmed that the owners of the building have the responsibility currently of upkeep.

KCC & Borough Cllr. Holden stated that it was an interesting likely solution of relocating the museum. The Chapel was the third most important building in Cranbrook and had been scandalously neglected by the owners. If we do nothing the building will fall down. There is a financial solution with the sale of the existing museum building which is owned by TWBC. It seems a good solution and he asked the timescale. Mr. Stephenson confirmed that further feasibility studies would take place over the next few months and then it would go to the Management Board to see if there is support. The next step would be to negotiate with the History Society. They have a long lease and do not have to move. It would then go to Cabinet and Full Council. If funding such as Hedgelifa was applied for this could take two to three years. In response to Cllr. Holden, he confirmed that the building is secure and weather tight. It could be that if TWBC decide to go forward they would take on the building beforehand. They would negotiate with the owners.

The Chairman closed the meeting to invite questions from parishioners which included:-

- Compulsory purchase if a price cannot be negotiated. MS confirmed it could be an option but would incur costs to both parties – better to negotiate.
- William Eddy was a past vicar of St. Dunstons and lived in the Museum building. American family come to visit regularly, could they still have access if the building was sold. MS could not guarantee this.
- Confirmation of the economics asked for. MS confirmed that the sale of the museum would fund the purchase and conversion of the Providence Chapel. Costs would be approximately £1.5m for conversion and restoration.
- Where has funds gone from sale of Council Offices site and would this conversion be a burden on the ratepayers. MS had no knowledge other than being told the funding has already been allocated. He stated that there would be no cost to the ratepayers.
- Was English Heritage fit for purpose; the building has been allowed to deteriorate. MS explained the process of buildings at risk. The building is in poor condition but unlikely to fall down within the next three years. If the museum cannot be fitted into the building other ideas will have to be considered even taking out all the pews. The building is a Grade 2* and deserves our greatest attention. If the pews are taken out, the building could be downgraded or even de-listed completely. Other ideas could be considered such as relocating the building elsewhere but this would be a last resort.
- Why take on a building which is impractical for elderly or disabled. Chapel should be sold and restored. Current museum building is fantastic. Pews should have been taken out years ago. MS suggested that the Museum could be stronger by moving into the Chapel, but they would not be forced to relocate. A lift could be put into the Chapel for better accessibility.
- Family connection of 100 years, he was concerned as a life member of the History Society that there was not enough exhibition space in the Providence Chapel. The History Society has not yet taken a view. There was two sets of stairs within the current museum which was an advantage. MS agreed, there was a lot of work to do, extensions to the building could be considered as well as options of acquiring extra land.
- Seen very little input from TWBC into Cranbrook. They have asset stripped the town and not given anything back.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Stephenson for attending.

LOAN POLL/PARISH POLL:

271: With regard to the Loan Poll, the Chairman stated that in accordance with the resolution passed at the February Parish Council meeting the Loan Poll (postal survey) was issued over the Easter weekend. The responses were counted yesterday morning in the Council Chamber, with members of the public in attendance, and the results published on the Parish Council website the same day. The figures were as follows:

2,643 envelopes issued, of which 491 were Sissinghurst addresses
1038 envelopes returned, representing 39% response rate

Yes vote was 454

No vote was 574

Spoilt voting slips were 10

Sissinghurst Yes votes were 53, No votes were 138.

The Cranbrook votes were 52% No, 48% Yes, whereas the Sissinghurst votes were 72% No, 28% Yes

The Chairman thanked Cllr Rook for all his hard work, not least of which was sticking labels onto the envelopes, and stamping the numbers onto the voting slips/poll cards. Grateful thanks too to all the councillors who stuffed envelopes and delivered them. Thanks too to the clerks for producing all the address labels.

William Mayston of Kingsford and Graham Edwards and Rowenna Lawrence of Buss Murton monitored and participated in the count. The Rev Ann Pollington was in attendance. Our grateful thanks to all of them, and the staff in Buss Murton who daily monitored the receipt of envelopes. There had been some suggestions that our process was open to abuse, and as a Parish Council we have done everything we possibly could to prevent abuse.

The outcome of the vote will be that the raising of capital to build the Community Centre will be primarily via fund raising. She hoped that those people who did not want the Parish Council to take on a loan will instead actively support a fund raising campaign.

The whole exercise was a useful communication with our community, and the fact of only having one vote per household certainly meant that the topic was discussed within the household, which she perceived to have been a benefit.

Costs of Loan Poll/postal survey were:

- printing £1,000 approximately
- return postage – unknown – less than 1,000 as many were hand delivered – say £600
- delivery postage - minimal

Cost was less than £2,000 - a lot less than a Parish Poll – Approximately £5,000

Parish Poll – The Chairman reminded Members that at our March Parish Council meeting there was an unexpected request for a Parish Poll in respect of the Loan. Subsequent to the meeting, on checking the appropriate legislation and with the appropriate authorities, it transpired that the request was invalid. We therefore wrote to those requesting the Parish Poll informing them of that fact, and that we would put the topic on the agenda for this meeting.

There has been correspondence from a firm of solicitors, based in Cambridge, suggesting that the Parish Council was in error, and that the Parish Poll should be scheduled immediately. The Parish Council's Solicitor responded. Members of the Policy & Resources Committee were furnished with copies of all the correspondence. Copies are available should any other Member wish to have a copy. We also received a request from a parishioner under the Freedom of Information Act and we responded accordingly.

To summarise the legal position, a Parish Poll can only be called at our Annual Parish meeting, or a specially convened meeting. It cannot be called at our monthly Parish Council meetings. Our agenda for the Annual Parish meeting has already been issued, but our solicitor has advised that we could take a request for a Parish Poll at that meeting (next Wednesday, 20 April) under the Chairman's Report or at any other part of the proceedings prior to the closing of the meeting. The wording of the Parish Poll question must be agreed at that meeting.

CHAIRMANS REPORT:

272: The Chairman welcomed new Councillor, Nancy Warne. She hoped that she would enjoy being a member of our team, and we look forward to working with her to benefit our community. She welcomed members of the public and apologised for the delay in the start of the proceedings and apologised to the Choir Master for disrupting his choir practice. She also thanked Mark Stephenson for his interesting talk on the Providence Chapel.

Cllr. Veitch thanked everyone who had helped with the display of plans in the Vestry Hall last Friday and Saturday, and were available to answer questions. There was a steady stream of visitors on the Saturday when she had been there. Visitors were pleased to have the opportunity to look at the plans, and ask questions. There were 20 sheets of comments/questions placed in the box, but we have not yet had the opportunity to review these.

She stated that she needed to set the record straight on a rumour that the Parish Council are buying the one acre field behind the Co-op store for use as a car park. It is true that she had a meeting with one of the owners, when she was investigating all possibilities of extra car parking spaces. That owner is now looking to obtain a value for the field. This value is likely to reflect possible use as housing. This would be a high value, probably a six figure sum and therefore it is extremely unlikely that the Parish Council would choose to buy the field.

The Chairman congratulated and thanked those organising the Clean for the Queen litter pick in Sissinghurst. She understood that some 50 people turned up. Good news is that we have been awarded money from the Big Lottery to improve the steps between the Regal car park and the Crane Valley. Thanks to the Clerks for achieving this. With regard to the Gladman appeal, she regretted that appeal was lost.

The Chairman informed Members that Cllr. Holmes and herself went to Evernden House to talk to the residents about the work of the Parish Council. This followed on from a successful visit to the McCarthy Stone residents. A future visit to Major Clarkes is planned.

Cllr. Hartley clarified some statistics with regard to the Loan Poll – 55% No vote and 43% Yes vote.

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE:

273: Cllr. Goodchild referred to the report of the meeting held on the 12th April and stated that a clear signal had been sent to Cranbrook in Bloom of our appreciation with a grant of £2,400. Cllr. Clifford had prepared a strategy document relating to the promotion of the Parish Council. He proposed adoption of the Report, this was seconded by Cllr. Bunyan and agreed.

PLANNING & PRESERVATION COMMITTEE:

274: Cllr. Bunyan stated that two meetings had been held and the Minutes circulated. At the meeting held on the 5th April, the Committee had made a neutral recommendation and asked the Conservation Architect to look at the building. The application was also for a change of use and the Committee felt that the conversion would tidy up the eyesore. There is a current consultation on site availability called SHELA – strategic housing and employment land assessment where if anyone has any sites they think suitable they should put these forward and TWBC will assess them. Cllr. Cook suggested that it would be useful if the information could be fed into the Neighbourhood Plan. With regard to the Gladman Appeal Cllr. Bunyan handed over to Cllr. Fairweather to give an update. He stated that he and Cllr. Smith had attended several meetings including a meeting with Greg Clark MP and Jane Lynch – Head of Planning TWBC who is due to attend the Annual Parish Meeting next Wednesday. TWBC is considering Judicial Review but Counsel advice is not supportive. TWBC has been a victim of Gladman alongside many other authorities. Cllr. Fairweather stated that he had taken advice and wanted the Planning Committee to revisit the application for Cobnut Close and it should be refused. Cllr. Bunyan suggested it was not fair to beat up one developer just because another had been successful.

Cllr. Hall had spoken with Jane Lynch and the problem with the 5 year land supply is that Central Government keeps moving the goal posts. Numbers have more than doubled and could even treble. We have Green Belt, AONB and Flood Plains but Jane Lynch does not even know if we can still use the constraints against the numbers.

Cllr. Holmes stated that he was also disappointed about the decision on the former Windmill Pub. At the recent open Business Association meeting it was identified that there were insufficient places to eat and drink and socialise. We should have refused the application but he could see the other view that if it was refused it could continue to be an eyesore.

BURIAL GROUNDS & PROPERTIES COMMITTEE:

275: Cllr. Clifford thanked Cllr. Bunyan for standing in for him and informed Members that the next meeting is scheduled for the 19th April. He thanked the Parish Warden, Ivor Hatcher for overseeing the grounds and contractors. Cllr. Bunyan informed Members that scaffolding will soon be up around the Sissinghurst Village Sign.

ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY COMMITTEE:

276: Cllr. Holmes stated that the scheduled meeting on the 22nd March coincided with the CBA open meeting in the Vestry Hall where he had been invited to Chair the meeting. It had been well attended and a number of key issues identified. However, they were now struggling to find a venue for a follow up meeting, the Vestry Hall being fully booked for April. He thanked Cllrs. Clifford, Fairweather, Kemp and Swann for attending. Cllr. Kemp had explained the Neighbourhood Plan process. Cllr. Swann stated that one overwhelming issue was the lack/difficulty of coach parking and he suggested that this should be looked at urgently between the Parish and Borough Councils.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT:

277: Cllr. Holmes, in the absence of Cllr. Rook, informed Members that the Minutes of the Meeting held on the 15th March had been circulated and he invited questions. Cllr. Veitch advised that she had spoken to companies who have modern coaches and the problem of coaches grounding in the Regal will go away, modern coaches can exit the car park. This has been an ongoing issue for a long time and we had spoken to engineers but there are major issues to alter the exit. Cllr. Warne stated that it was an urgent matter, coaches do not come to Cranbrook, we are not on the map. Cllr. Clifford referred to his promotion document mentioned under Policy & Resources – Cranbrook is the best kept secret, we need to promote both Cranbrook and Sissinghurst. Cllr. Holmes then proposed adoption of the Report. This was seconded by Cllr. Fermor and agreed.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN:

278: Cllr. Kemp informed everyone that we were at the first stage of the process, the application had been made to TWBC and they now have to consult with the public. There will be meetings on the 30th April, both in Cranbrook and Sissinghurst and this will be advertised nearer the time.

CRANBROOK CONSERVATION AREA ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

279: Cllrs. Bunyan referred to the Minutes of the recent meeting which had been circulated. Matt Hartley and Tim Kemp had spoken on community spaces. She invited questions, no questions were raised.

KENT ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS:

280: Cllr. Veitch referred to the Minutes of the recent meeting held in the Council Chamber and invited questions, no questions were raised.

ACTION WITH RURAL COMMUNITIES IN KENT:

281: There was nothing to report.

CLERKS REPORT:

282: The Clerk read out an invite to councillors to attend the St. Georges Day Service at Trinity Church.

CORRESPONDENCE:

283: The Clerk read out a letter from William Benson – TWBC Chief Executive, congratulating the Clerks and the Council on the achievement of the Foundation & Quality status.

Cllr. Clifford referred to the correspondence from a solicitor with regard to the Parish Poll and he was disappointed that Cllr. Hall had gone to a solicitor instead of discussing the issues with the Council Members. Cllr. Hall stated that there was a correction, she was not the client, and there were inaccuracies. Cllr. Clifford suggested to Cllr. Hall that she had a very good case of mis-representation and could take this up with the Law Society. In response Cllr. Hall stated that Cllr. Clifford was a troublemaker. The Clerk confirmed that copies of all the correspondence from both solicitors had been given to the councillors and she had copies if anyone wanted to see them.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION:

284: The Chairman stated that she had noticed in the Times newspaper of 29 March some facts and figures about libraries which she had found interesting: 343 libraries closed in Britain in the last six years. A further 174 libraries were transferred to community groups and then run by volunteers. 111 closures planned for this year.

285: Cllr. Holmes stated that he was an active member of the Hop Pickers Line Heritage Group, the project is to re-open the old railway line which runs to Hawkhurst to Paddock Wood. The Report is on public deposit in the Parish Office and Cranbrook Library and he encouraged people to read the report which was very interesting.

286: Cllr. Kemp had no items for information but he would be asking Jane Lynch questions on planning policy at the Annual Parish Meeting.

287: Cllr. Fairweather thanked the residents of Sissinghurst, in excess of 40, who turned out for Clean for the Queen.

288: Cllr. Cook informed everyone that the service for Armed Forces Day was the last Sunday in June in St. Dunstons.

289: Cllr. Holden stated that the results of the speed survey on the A229 have been collated and the speeds limits are about to be reduced. The limit from the triangle at the top of Common Road to the staggered junction will be reduced to 30mph. He reported that he had been out with Sissinghurst Speed Watch volunteers. With regard to the junction alterations at Wilsley Green, the contractors are due to start work at the beginning of the summer holidays. He was pleased to report that Cranbrook will be holding a Literature Festival and he had put in £1,500 of funding. Giles Brandreth is appearing. He noted the information given by Cllr. Veitch on libraries and stated that Kent has not closed any permanent libraries to date only the mobile libraries, which in some areas were not being used. Recycling initiatives are being looked at with regard to the civic amenity refuse vehicle which is always under threat. He had been asked to the mayor making event which was surprising with regard to the comments he had made about taking monies out of the mayor's budget for the refuse vehicle.

290: Cllr. Hannam reported that TWBC have decided not to take the Gladman Appeal to judicial review. They had a 14% chance of winning but it would have to go back to another planning Inspector and would cost £80,000 even if they won. Gladman would then appeal and the costs could go up to £200,000. If this could protect other rural communities then it might be a good investment, but the advice is that it would not helpfully combat other decisions. The Borough cannot take this any further. Instead they are looking at S106 grants and fighting to ensure the housing bonus should get some money for Sissinghurst. The other thing being discussed is extending the AONB further north to extend to Sissinghurst Castle but this process will take several years. Central Government are pushing for more housing. Gladman will not develop the site themselves, it will be sold on. He advised that Jane Lynch would not be attending the Annual Parish Meeting, the Portfolio Holder Alan McDermott is in Purdah and Jane Lynch cannot attend without the Portfolio Holder present. She was however prepared to come and talk to the Parish Council.

The Clerk stated that this was unacceptable. The Annual Parish Meeting was for the electorate and it was the residents of Sissinghurst who have questions for the Planning Team. The agenda has been issued and the Meeting advertised in the Wealden Ad.

There must be another politician who could accompany not only Jane Lynch but the other two members of her team who had agreed to attend.

Cllr. Veitch then closed the meeting to allow questions from parishioners.

- What action will now be taken on the loan poll? Chairman –no further action. It was to gauge opinion. The recommendation now is to fundraise. No intention to ask for a loan at this stage.
- What stage for a loan. Chairman – Fundraise as hard as possible and as long as it takes but if in a couple of years we are still short we may ask again for a survey.
- Business Plan would not stand scrutiny in private enterprise. Put project on hold until the Neighbourhood Plan is in place. You have no mandate. Not all councillors are behind the project. Take note of their concerns. Chairman – thanked him for his comments.
- Must be disappointed in the results of the survey. Smarden built their Hall for £2m and this was fund raised within 2 years except for say £20,000 which was borrowed and paid back in a further two years.