

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL HELD IN THE
COUNCIL CHAMBER, VESTRY HALL, ON THURSDAY
14TH JANUARY 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, Cook, Fairweather, Fermor, Goodchild, Hartley (Part), Holmes, Kemp, Smith, Swann and Veitch. Borough Cllrs. Dawlings and Holden.

APOLOGIES: Cllrs. Clifford, Hall and Rook. Borough Cllr. Hannam

RESIGNATION:

200: The Chairman informed Members that Bradley Franks had resigned as a parish councillor. The vacancy will be advertised as per the requirements of the legislation. A letter of thanks will be sent recognising his contribution and to wish him well in the future.

MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING:

201: The Chairman, Cllr. B. Veitch proposed that the Minutes of the Meeting held on the 10th December 2015 be adopted as a true record. This was seconded by Cllr. Fermor and agreed.

PRECEPT:

202: Cllr. Swann reminded Members that all the Committees set their own budgets which then come before Policy & Resources and they are collated and set out on the sheets as circulated prior to the meeting. There is an overall increase of £16,100 which equates to 5.59%. The good news is that there is an increase in the number of households in the Parish and therefore this means that the increase in real terms is 2.75%. On a band D property this will mean an increase of £3.27 per year – less than 1pence per day. Responding to a question from Cllr. Holmes, he explained that the contingency fund was a sum of money set aside for unexpected items of expenditure. Cllr. Cook stated that the new Neighbourhood Plan project will have a cost attached to it. Cllr. Swann identified items which contributed to the increase of £16,100 – salaries had gone up, the Clerks on are on a set scale and this increases annually, there had been an increase in National Insurance and pension payments. He had set aside £5,000 to the NP Project as an initial amount, there was also the traveller incursion fund so that in the future if the Borough Council cannot cover the cost of expenses incurred we have set aside £1,000. Also if the threat of the removal of the Civic Amenity Refuse Vehicle comes to fruition, we have set aside £1,800 to ensure its continuation. Cllr. Swann reiterated to Cllr. Smith that although the increase is stated to be 5.59% because of the increase in households this actually equates to 2.75%. Cllr. Veitch clarified to Cllr. Fairweather that the Borough and County precepts are entirely separate from the Parish precept; our figures will be incorporated into the overall charge for council tax.

Cllr. Swann then proposed that the precept as set out in the document filed with these Minutes be agreed – the amount being £304,200 for year 2016/2017. This was seconded by Cllr. Bunyan and agreed. Cllr. Bunyan thanked Cllr. Swann for all his hard work on the preparation of the budgets and precept.

CHAIRMANS REPORT:

203: The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Meeting and wished everyone all success, health and happiness in 2016.

She reported that she had received an email from Peter Oakford in relation to the Swattenden Centre. There are currently 35 young people in residence. Mr. Oakford wished her to pass on his sincere thanks for all that the councillors and the local community have done, and continue to do in support of these vulnerable young people. Support has been provided in many ways, and includes everything from football matches against local schools to volunteers providing English classes and baking cakes. She had asked him to let us know if there was anything else that we could do in support.

The Chairman reported that we had today received an email from Mike McGeary (Democratic Services Officer) stating that the matter of the civic amenity vehicle should be finalised by Friday 15th January, ready for implementation in April. We have spoken to Mike, and explained that at our meeting in December we were advised by our Borough Councillors that the matter was far from resolved, and therefore we had postponed our decision until things were clarified. We cannot make any decision this evening as it is not on the agenda. She understood that Goudhurst and Benenden had also not given their final decision to the Borough. Cllr. Cook asked whether if the Civic Amenity Refuse Vehicle needed urgent consideration whether this could be put on the agenda for the Extraordinary Meeting to be held on the 21st January.

Cllr. Veitch advised Members that the date for the Extraordinary Meeting to consider issues regarding the Community Centre had now been moved to the 28th January. Some essential information will not be available in time for the 21st so this was why the date had been changed. She apologised for the diary uncertainties. The prime information she is waiting for is the revised construction cost estimates.

With regard to the Civic Amenity Refuse Vehicle, Cllr. Swann asked whether the Borough were open to further discussions. Cllr. Fairweather reminded Members that it appeared that the figures had already been decided on and the position is that those councils who had responded positively were in and the three that didn't respond positively would be out and not get the revised service. Cllr. Veitch also reminded Members that we had been told that it was all in or all out. There was utter confusion. She suggested that the notes of the Chairman's meeting should be read with care – although it said it was resolved, in fact no votes were taken. Cllr. Holmes stated that he was very uneasy about the direction that these meetings were taking; it seems that the Officers are determined to push things through – it is not democratic. He thought they were meant to be informative, an information sharing exercise. Cllr. Veitch stated that at the latest KALC meeting held in Goudhurst, concerns were raised about the Notes of the Meeting which imply that resolutions were made when in fact there weren't.

She invited Borough Councillor Dawlings to comment. He agreed that the whole issue was as clear as mud. The Officers were ready to implement the revised schedule and it was true that three parishes had not yet agreed i.e. Cranbrook, Benenden and Goudhurst and it was also true that all parishes had to be signed up for it. Paddock Wood had accepted but with a caveat that a review should take place after six months. TWBC had not yet agreed their budget. He suggested that the Parish Council should accept with a caveat similar to Paddock Wood and continue to oppose the double taxation for the service which is fundamentally wrong. It had been discussed at a recent Conservative Group Meeting but it was felt that the rural Members may well be outnumbered on a vote.

Cllr. Cook referred to the Notes of the Parish Chairman's Meeting and asked Cllr. Veitch whether the two proposals were put down in those terms mentioned. Cllr. Veitch confirmed that there was no formal resolution. Cllr. Bunyan stated that Chairman cannot make a decision on behalf of the Council in these type of forums. Cllr. Swann stated that it was not just a case of the cost but the service would also be cut – we would get just a quarter of what we had before. We do not want a vastly reduced service.

The Chairman referring back to the Community Centre asked whether she could have the outstanding Facility Audits as soon as possible preferably in the next few days. She stated that we were also short of three biopics for the website. Please will those Members who had not done theirs complete them very soon and forward to the Clerks.

She invited Borough Cllr. Holden to give his report at this stage as he had another engagement. Cllr. Holden referred to the Chairman's meetings and agreed that the Chairs could not make decisions. The Borough is saying that because the Chairs agree that a decision has been made. This is not democratic. He is minded not to vote for the Budget.

He had recently attended a Board Meeting when devolution was discussed i.e. a deal between TWBC and KCC and the cultural hub and shared space in Tunbridge Wells was considered. He made the point that Tunbridge Wells Borough is not Tunbridge Wells Town. When North Farm road issues are discussed they should add in Hawkhurst Cross Roads, when schools are discussed, add in Benenden. When community hubs are discussed add in Cranbrook and moving the Library into it. He would like to see more of the £2m from the sale of the former Council Offices. He had seen the letter from Cllr. Veitch to Cllr. Jukes formally requesting the £400,000 and it had a Yes written next to it. The Budget is being discussed on the 11th February and KCC are likely to be having an increase of 4%. 1.99% is allowed by Central Government with an additional 2% for social care – the living wage has had significant implications to the social care costs. The process continues to be painful – there have been cuts of 34% by Central Government. Dorset had a cut of 47% and Surrey a cut of 42%.

With regard to the Wilsley Green junction changes, Cllr. Holden stated that hopefully these will commence from May onwards. The speed review carried out on the A229 north of the roundabout records that we can reduce the speed limit down to 50mph up to the Murco Garage. He then wants a further survey to be carried out from the Murco Garage which should record that the speed limit could be reduced to 40 mph and then back up to 50mph further along. He will continue to work with Helen Grant MP on the speeding campaign. Frittenden and Sandhurst are now sharing speed watch equipment and the Police are being more supportive and carrying out speed checks.

Referring to the recent discussion on yellow lines, he felt that there could be some more parking allowed in the wider part of Stone Street. He was aware of the desire for the thinner paler yellow lines within the Conservation Area but apparently there was a cost implication of removing the existing lines. Cllr. Fermor thanked Cllr. Holden for his work on the Wilsley Green junction and also the reduction to the speed limits.

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE:

204: Cllr. Goodchild referred to the report of the meeting held on the 12th January and pointed out a typographical error in 70/15. He mentioned 73/15 where we had received compliments on our updated website. Under 75/15 He underlined the thanks to the Clerks on their hard work with the Foundation and Quality Status applications. He invited questions. Cllr. Bunyan enquired what had been decided about promotion of the Parish Council in the absence of Cllr. Clifford. Cllr. Goodchild confirmed that Members were going to bring forward ideas to the next meeting. Cllr. Swann suggested that significant items should be forward to the local press. If we were successful with our Quality Status we should shout this from the rooftops – we would be a premiere parish council within Kent. Cllr. Fermor offered her assistance with press releases. Cllr. Veitch thanked Cllr. Fermor for her offer. Cllr. Goodchild then proposed adoption of the report; this was seconded by Cllr. Holmes and agreed.

PLANNING & PRESERVATION COMMITTEE:

205: Cllr. Bunyan stated that two meetings had been held and the Minutes circulated. She informed Members that a meeting had been held with Dan McEwan from Fluid Planning who is acting on our behalf on the Gladman Appeal. He will be drafting a letter on our behalf tomorrow and in his view we do not need to spend money on his sitting in on the Inquiry for five days, a letter to the Inspectorate will suffice. In his view the Borough cannot prove their housing numbers, they are out of date. However, being in the third tier in the settlements will hopefully protect the site. She invited questions, no questions were raised. Cllr. Cook informed Members that at the last meeting the Committee had also looked at the consultation of the proposed changes to the national planning policies. They had composed answers to the questionnaire which related mainly to starter homes. Cllr. Bunyan gave an example where the age given was 40 which the committee felt was age discrimination.

BURIAL GROUNDS & PROPERTIES COMMITTEE:

206: In the absence of Cllr. Clifford, Cllr. Bunyan informed Members that the next meeting is scheduled for the 19th January at 5.15 pm in the Addison VC Room.

ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY COMMITTEE:

207: Cllr. Holmes stated that the next meeting was on the 22nd March. He reported that he had visited Horsley Place together with Cllr. Veitch and they had given a presentation on the workings of the Parish Council. It had been a useful discussion and they had made residents aware of volunteering opportunities which had been of interest. He thanked Cllr. Veitch for attending a meeting on the future direction of the Business Association which unfortunately he had been unavailable to attend.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT:

208: In the absence of Cllr. Rook, Cllr. Holmes reported that the next meeting is scheduled for the 15th March.

Cllr. Smith brought forward the issue of litter picks in the early spring. Cllr. Veitch informed Members that the agreed amount of litter equipment to be purchased had been costed out and came out at more than we had thought so we will await the return of Cllr. Rook before progressing. Cllr. Swann suggested that the agency that deal with persons on Community Service could be contacted to enquire whether litter picking is something they could help with. Cllr. Holmes suggested that when discussing this in the past there were difficulties raised but we could ask again.

Cllr. Kemp raised the issue of grubby road signs and whether the Committee could look at a sponsored event to scrub some of them clean. Cllr. Veitch although sympathetic, reminded Members that road signage was the responsibility of Kent County Council and there was likely to be health and safety issues with volunteers cleaning road signs. Cllr. Fairweather referred to the Queen's 90th Birthday Celebrations and the initiative of Clean for the Queen during the weekend of the 4th – 6th March where local residents can take the opportunity to clean up their community. He was going to get a group together to clean up in Sissinghurst and ask people to clean up outside their homes, clean up hedgerows and signage. He asked for this to be on the next agenda. Cllr. Veitch confirmed it could be on the February agenda. Cllr. Fermor made the comment that the Queen's Official Birthday is in June so why is the event in March? Cllr. Bunyan reminded Members that last year the litter pick was in April and it needs to be earlier as it is easier to extract litter out of the hedgerows before there is a lot of new growth.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN:

209: Cllr. Kemp reported that he had attended a Seminar in Ashford on the 16th December where experiences were shared and lessons learnt. Julia Newman from Hawkhurst spoke at the Seminar and he had spoken with the Hawkhurst Clerk and gleaned some information. There were various ways to undertake the Plan, with DIY which was low cost but a lot of hard work and a lot of risk attached. The general advice was to employ someone, get a professional in early in the process and get on with it. The difficulty is the cost – Hawkhurst spent £36,000. We are right at the beginning of the process. We need further discussion, there has to be thorough groundwork with delivery of the stages effectively. If we are going to undertake a Plan, the policies must be truly robust. Hawkhurst although advanced in the process with the support of TWBC found themselves over-ruled at the recent Highgate appeal. There is a lot of research to be undertaken.

A first meeting took place on the 21st December for informal discussion. We appointed two vice chairmen – John Smith for Sissinghurst and Linda Hall for Cranbrook. Linda Hall had concerns about not dividing the Plan into two distinct areas. Cllr. Kemp felt that there were potential risks in making the split into two as there would be increased costs with two teams and in his view it is more likely there will be one Plan with one overall boundary.

Cllr. Veitch reminded Cllr. Kemp that any decisions have to be made at Full Council and Members need proper Minutes of any meetings held. If any decisions need to be made they need to be notified to the Clerk to enable them to be included on the Full Council Agenda. Cllr. Bunyan stated that the two vice chairmen were one from Cranbrook and one from Sissinghurst not one for Cranbrook and one for Sissinghurst as suggested by Cllr. Kemp. Cllr. Kemp agreed with this statement. He suggested that the next meeting would be scheduled for the end of this month or beginning of next month. There was something which he would like included on the agenda for the Extraordinary Meeting and the Chairman agreed, if time permitted.

CRANBROOK CONSERVATION AREA ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

210: Cllr. Bunyan stated that there had been no recent meeting.

KENT ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS:

211: Cllr. Veitch referred to the Minutes of the last meeting which had been circulated. Members will note the confusion regarding the Civic Amenity Refuse Vehicle. The next meeting is scheduled for the 23rd February which will be hosted by Cranbrook & Sissinghurst Parish Council and will be held in the Council Chamber and Members are all invited. No agenda has yet been issued. Cllr. Julia Newman will be giving a presentation on the Hawkhurst Neighbourhood Plan experience. Cllr. Veitch referred to the item regarding the Country Eye as discussed at the Goudhurst meeting. She had problems accessing this which she had now resolved, so if anyone else is experiencing difficulties she may be able to help.

In the latest edition of the Parish News the Conference Days were mentioned, she is attending the Chairmanship event in February.

ACTION WITH RURAL COMMUNITIES IN KENT:

212: There was nothing to report. The Annual Summary had been circulated to Members.

CLERKS REPORT:

213: The Clerk reported that she had written to the believed owners of the former Windmill Inn enquiring on the future plans for the building, but had not yet received a response.

CORRESPONDENCE:

214: An email had been received from Jeremy Cross, Chief Officer of Tunbridge Wells & District CAB, thanking the Parish Council for the grant of £1,750 to be ring-fenced for the Cranbrook Bureau. He would like to come to a future Parish Council meeting to update Members on their work. It was agreed to invite him to the March meeting which is held in Sissinghurst. The Clerk informed Members that the CAB will visit The Parish Room in Sissinghurst by appointment for the benefit of Sissinghurst residents.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION:

215: Cllr. Fermor asked whether people were able to sell logs from outside of their properties. The Clerk suggested that this was something that either Kent Highways, if it was on the verge, or TWBC Enforcement might be able to investigate.

216: Cllr. Fairweather suggested that the Parish Council should also consider whether Cranbrook will be spearheading anything for the Queen's 90th Birthday Celebrations. TWBC have funding to help with this event. Cllr. Swann commented that the Fun Day is held in June and might be able to lead on this.

217: Cllr. Bunyan reported that she had taken a call from Mr. Newsom from the Cranbrook Town Band, they are urgently looking for somewhere to store two kettle drums.

218: Borough Cllr. Dawlings informed Members that the Gladman Appeal starts next Tuesday. TWBC barristers are as well prepared as they can be. The Borough is wholly confident in their housing targets.

He reported that the Borough budget will increase by 1.99%, KCC has the largest increase as identified earlier by Cllr. Holden.

With regard to the Chairman's Meetings, this appears to be bypassing the electorate. He thought this rather sinister and very unsettling if this is becoming a decision making process rather than an advisory process.

The Chairman then closed the meeting and invited comments or questions from parishioners.

A parishioner stated that she was pleased about the Clean for the Queen. She had written to the Prime Minister and KCC about the road signs and general filth in Kent. She supported all efforts and initiatives which help to clean up the area. We are currently living in a filthy County.

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