

Meopham Parish Council

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A Civility & Respect
Pledge Council

Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on Thursday 6th August 2026 at 7:00pm at Cricket Pavilion, Meopham Green, DA13 0PZ

Members Present: Cllr S Buchanan
Cllr D Fisher
Cllr S Johnson
Cllr J McNamara (Chairman)
Cllr D Sims (Vice Chairman)
Cllr B Wade
Cllr P Watson

In Attendance: L Winter – Clerk
7 Members of Public

Meeting commenced 19:01

Item 1: Apologies for Absence: To receive and accept apologies

F.C. 91 Apologies were received from Cllr Bramer (away), Cllr Collings, Cllr Gofton and Cllr D Johnson (family commitment).

19:01 Cllr Sims arrived.

Item 2: Declarations of Members' Interests: To receive declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests for this meeting

F.C. 92 None declared.

Item 3: Public Session & External Reports

3.1 Public Session

Disclaimer: The statements made during the Public Session reflect the opinion of the speaker(s) and are not necessarily accurate or factual information.

F.C. 93 A member of the public referred to comments made during the public session at the previous meeting regarding the use of confidential sessions. It was noted that there appeared to be some misunderstanding of the requirements relating to GDPR and the need for certain items to be considered in confidential session, and that such sessions are not intended to be secret meetings.

The Clerk advised that they had identified similar concerns and intended to address these matters in the September Officer's Report.

The report would also include information on the Council's notice boards and the requirements for publishing meeting agendas.

3.2 Borough Councillor and County Councillor

F.C. 94 There were no Borough Councillors or County Councillor present

3.3 Police

F.C. 95 There were no Police present.

Item 4: Planning Applications: To consider and make recommendations on the following planning applications

F.C. 96 20260724 – Millers Farm, Gravesend Road, Fairseat, Sevenoaks, Kent, TN15 7JR – Extension of existing traveller site to provide 6 self-build additional plots with mobile home units for occupation by immediate family

There were three member of the public who spoke to this item at length.

We recommend refusal on the following grounds:

- It is the same application – Gravesham (GBC) refused application 20251267 on 27 February this year for three reasons: harm to the Meopham Downs Landscape Character Area, inadequate evidence about who would occupy the pitches, and substandard visibility splays onto the A227. The drawings submitted with the current application are the same drawings. Drawing 003 Revision A, the proposed block plan, is dated 4 November 2025 and appears in both. Same number of plots, same layout, same footprint, same fencing. What is new is a seven page supplementary statement dated 15 June. It deals properly with the second refusal reason by naming each of the six intended occupants and setting out their circumstances. It puts an argument on the third. It says nothing at all about the first. When a refused scheme comes back unaltered, the question is whether the reasons for refusal have been overcome, and on the main one nothing has been done.
- The site keeps growing - Two pitches were permitted in November 2009. Two again in February 2013. Three in July 2020. This application would take it to nine. In area, it goes from 0.16 hectares to 0.42 hectares. In units, it's a 150% increase in one step. Paragraph 14 of the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites says that in rural settings the scale of a site should not dominate the nearest settled community. Each application here has been judged against whatever the last one left off, so a permission originally granted for two caravans has become the springboard for nine. We ask for the cumulative position to be assessed rather than the increment.
- GBC's Green Belt reasoning does not hold up - The February report concluded that the proposal was acceptable in principle in the Green Belt. It got there by two routes, paragraph 154(g) of the NPPF and the grey belt provisions at paragraph 155. Both of them depend entirely on the land being previously developed land. If it isn't, both routes close and the application

falls to be assessed as inappropriate development needing very special circumstances. This finding is not made. The report itself is equivocal about it. It describes the eastern part of the site as having been used for parking and grazing with storage buildings and shelters, then says only that this would lend itself to being previously developed land. That isn't a conclusion, it's a guess. The NPPF definition also excludes a good deal of what's being relied on. Land last occupied by agricultural buildings is expressly excluded. Grazing land isn't previously developed land. Agricultural shelters and stores don't make it so. Most significantly, where the definition covers large areas of hardstanding, it requires that they were lawfully developed. Objectors to the last application said the parking and turning area extends beyond the approved footprint onto open land and that hardstanding and fencing were already in place. A resident told this Council the same thing in the public session on 20 January, recorded at minute F.C. 185: that the applicants have been on the site since 1998, that they have repeatedly breached what they were permitted, and that the application had by then become retrospective because preparation work for the hardstandings had already started. The applicants' own supplementary statement now confirms that one household is living in an unauthorised mobile home on the application site. If the hardstanding being relied on was laid without permission, it can't be used to establish previously developed land status. What evidence establishes that the hardstanding was lawfully created? GBC should redo the Green Belt assessment if there is no evidence. The report also reasons that because mobile units are temporary in nature they don't cause substantial harm to openness. These are permanent residential pitches. Openness has a visual dimension as well as a spatial one, and static units permanently occupying open grassland affect it.

- How much can GBC rely on what it is being told - The record from the last application includes conditions from the 2017 permission not complied with, landscaping never implemented, unauthorised permanent lighting, fencing not covered by the permission, more statics on site than allowed, parking extending beyond the approved footprint, an application form declaring that no works or change had occurred, and a form stating the site was not visible from the public footpath when it is. To that we can now add the applicants' own confirmation that a household occupies an unauthorised mobile home on the application land. That makes this partly retrospective, which the description doesn't say. Our January objection is therefore corroborated by the applicants' own submission. How do GBC propose to secure compliance with any landscaping or screening condition here, given the existing one hasn't been delivered in six years.
- Landscape - The February refusal found harm to the local rural landscape character of the Meopham Downs area by reason of the location, nature, scale and spread of the development in an open and locally prominent position, contrary to policies CS12, CS17 and CS19. Nothing has changed. The layout is identical, the planting strip is still obscured by 1.8m close boarded fencing, and the pitches still run along the northern boundary in the view from Gravesend Road coming from the north. GBC need to apply its own conclusion consistently.
- Effect on neighbours - The February report concluded there would be no detrimental effect on neighbouring dwellings. That conclusion is not safe. The point isn't that harm has been shown. It's that GBC isn't in a position to

say it hasn't. Objectors raised specifically that the caravans would sit close to the boundary and on higher ground, causing overlooking. The report answers by reference to horizontal distances and to the units being 3m high. It doesn't deal with ground levels anywhere. No sections, no existing and proposed levels, nothing through the boundary, in either application. A 3m unit on rising ground doesn't sit in the same relationship to a neighbouring house as a 3m unit on the level, and at the moment nobody knows which this is. The report also records the site visit date as "Desktop Assessment". You can't judge overlooking or perceived activity from aerial photographs. Eight properties were consulted, but the amenity reasoning runs almost entirely off measured distances from The Grange, which is itself two dwellings following permission 20040186. The assessment should cover each property consulted. On activity, the figure of around 24 extra vehicle movements a day is a car calculation from 12 parking spaces. The applicants' own statement says the occupants are horse traders who travel regularly to horse fairs, that there are dog kennels and a pen on site, and that the wider holding has nine stables, a pole barn and a container. Horseboxes and trailers, in other words, not hatchbacks. There's also an inconsistency in the report worth pointing out. The officer says at least one touring caravan per pitch should be expected even though none is shown on the plans, and uses that assumption to increase the landscape harm. If the assumption is good enough to support a refusal on landscape grounds, it's good enough to assess activity and disturbance. It can't be applied to one and ignored for the other. Finally, lighting. Objectors say permanent external lighting has been installed in breach of the 2017 permission, which prohibited it without consent. In a dark rural spot light spill matters, both for neighbours and for landscape character, and the existing breach tells you it won't be controlled voluntarily. KCC Biodiversity recommended a sensitive lighting condition last time.

- Access - Kent Highways asked for visibility splays of 2.4m by 104m in both directions. None have been provided this time either. The gate is still set back 13.95m, which isn't enough for a car and touring caravan to stand clear of the A227. The applicants' answer is that the occupants already live on the site so there's no intensification. That doesn't answer a substandard splay, which is a question of geometry rather than of how many trips are generated. It's also, if true, a further admission of unauthorised occupation. Without a splay drawing and evidence of control over the land the splays cross, the third refusal reason stands.

In Conclusion - our objection is about the scale of what's proposed, the harm to landscape character, the access, the evidence underpinning GBC's Green Belt assessment, and the gaps in the assessment of effects on neighbours. It is not about the applicants being Gypsies or Travellers. That's a protected characteristic under the Equality Act and it isn't a planning consideration against this application.

GBC can't demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable pitches. That unmet need is a real consideration and carries significant weight. And the applicants have now provided proper evidence about the intended occupants, which they hadn't before, so the second refusal reason looks to me to have been answered.

The answer to a shortage of pitches is to allocate sites through the emerging Local Plan, not to keep extending one site in the countryside whose owners haven't complied with the permissions they already have.

20260624 – Land West of Steeles Wood, Wrotham Road, South Street, Meopham Kent – Conversion of existing barn into 5 x 4-bed residential units, together with provision of associated parking

We do not object to the conversion of this barn. Permission for residential conversion of this building was granted in September 2024 under 20240604 and is extant until September 2027. The Council accepted then that the barn is of permanent and substantial construction, that its re-use falls within paragraph 155(d) of the Framework, and that the location is sustainable.

The applicants making fuller use of the roof void is acceptable. If they can get more floorspace out of the building without changing its envelope, that is a sensible use of an existing structure.

Our objection is to what they are doing with that gain. Rather than better houses, the extra roof space is being used to take the scheme from three units to five. Everything that follows from those two extra units happens outside the barn, on open Green Belt land, and it breaches the Council's own published standards in at least two places.

- What has actually changed - The permission granted in 2024 was for three dwellings of 183.14 sqm each, made up of 132 sqm on the ground floor and 49 sqm in a partial roof conversion. About 549 sqm of dwelling in total. This application is for five units of 145.0, 142.7, 142.7, 142.7 and 145.0 sqm. About 718 sqm in total. The ground floor is essentially unchanged at 384 sqm. The first floor goes from 147 sqm to 334 sqm. So the roof void is being converted much more fully, which is fine, and the number of households on the site rises by two thirds, which is not the same thing at all. The supporting statement describes this as a revised internal arrangement wholly contained within the established building envelope. The floorspace is. The consequences are not.
- GBC's own standards on amenity space - When GBC assessed the three-unit scheme in 2024 its officer recorded that each plot would have 103.8 sqm of garden, that this exceeded the 100 sqm minimum in the Gravesham Residential Layout Guidelines, and that the depths met the 10m minimum. Three units cleared the Council's own threshold by under four square metres. This application puts five gardens into the same rear strip. The supporting statement sets out a room by room internal schedule down to the 3.1 sqm ground floor WC, and says nothing at all about external amenity space. No garden areas are given on the drawings either. That omission is the single most important thing in this application. On the Council's own 2024 figures, five gardens in that space cannot meet the guideline. GBC should require the garden area and depth for each unit to be stated on the plans, and to assess them against the Residential Layout Guidelines before determining the application.
- Parking and hardstanding - The 2024 permission provided two spaces per dwelling, six in total, which met the minimum in the adopted parking

standards. This application shows three spaces per unit, fifteen in total, together with five EV charging points and five cycle stores. That is nine additional car spaces, all of them outside the building, all of them on open land within the Green Belt. The applicants' case on openness rests on the removal of ancillary structures amounting to 108.65 sqm of built form. On any reasonable calculation, nine new parking spaces will lay down a similar area of new hard surface. The benefit they are asking the Council to weigh is cancelled out by development they have not weighed at all. GBC should quantify the total area of new hardstanding and to re-run the openness assessment with it included, rather than accepting the 108.65 sqm figure in isolation. We note that Kent Highways raised no objection in 2024 on the basis that the traffic generated by three dwellings would not be significant. Five dwellings with fifteen spaces is a different proposition and Highways should be consulted again on the scheme as it now stands.

- **Character** - The 2024 officer accepted the appearance of the scheme partly because the boundary treatment was kept light. The report records 1.2m post and rail fencing with 1.8m timber fencing next to the patio areas only, leaving what the officer described as an open visual aspect. Five plots require four internal divisions rather than two, and the submitted site plan labels 1.8m timber garden fencing between each pair of dwellings. That is a greater extent of close boarded fencing than was approved, and it moves the site further towards a suburban terrace and away from the agricultural character the Council relied on in accepting the earlier scheme. The site sits in the Meopham Downs Landscape Character Area, where the guideline is to conserve and reinforce. The proposed boundary treatments need to be compared directly with those approved in 2024, and for the extent of 1.8m fencing to be reduced to what was previously found acceptable.
- **Nature** - The site adjoins Steeles Wood and the Happy Valley Local Wildlife Site, with ancient woodland in the surrounding landscape. Gravesham took that seriously in 2024. It imposed a pre-commencement Construction Environmental Management Plan requiring protection of the Local Wildlife Site and ancient woodland from light, noise and dust, and a lighting condition requiring any external lighting to comply with the Bat Conservation Trust and Institute of Lighting Professionals guidance, including a light spill plan. Five households with fifteen cars will generate more vehicle movement, more lighting and more disturbance next to that boundary than three households with six. The biodiversity net gain documents were only added to the file on 23 July and have had no scrutiny. We ask that the ecological and lighting conditions from 20240604 are carried forward in full, and that KCC Biodiversity is re-consulted on the scheme as amended rather than relying on the 2024 appraisal.
- **GBC's own conditions** - Two of the conditions Gravesham attached in 2024 are worth putting back in front of it. Condition 7 removed permitted development rights for any new window, door or opening, expressly to protect the amenity and privacy of neighbouring occupants. A first floor of 334 sqm rather than 147 sqm will need considerably more light than the approved scheme. Condition 8 removed permitted development rights for extensions and outbuildings, expressly to ensure adequate private amenity space is maintained. Smaller gardens make that condition more necessary and harder to live with, and it should be imposed again if permission is granted.

In Conclusion – we object to the scheme as submitted, because the increase from three units to five cannot be accommodated on this plot without falling below the Council's own minimum standards for private amenity space, and without a significant increase in hard surfacing and parking on open Green Belt land which has not been quantified or weighed.

We request for four things before determination: garden areas and depths stated on the plans and assessed against the Residential Layout Guidelines; the total new hardstanding quantified and included in the openness balance; Kent Highways and KCC Biodiversity re-consulted on five units rather than three; and the boundary treatments brought back into line with what was approved in 2024.

20260769 – 27 Willow Walk, Meopham, Gravesend, Kent, DA13 0QS - Demolition of existing side and rear extensions, including front bay window, garage and car port, and construction of a two storey side extension, a part two/part single storey rear extension and a two storey front extension incorporating an entrance porch

We recommend refusal on grounds of excessive bulk for the plot and being out of keeping with the street scene.

20260750 – 1 St Francis Road, Harvel, Gravesend, Kent, DA13 0DD - Demolition of existing garage and construction of single storey side extension and new roof terrace

We raise no objection to the application.

Item 5: Act of Remembrance: To consider and agree the arrangements, including, but not limited to, the budget, speaker, wreaths, road closure and signage, risk assessments, PA system and brass band

- F.C. 97** Following discussion the following was agreed:
- All paperwork regarding road closures, signage, risk assessments would be carried out by the office;
 - Cllr Buchanan was to engage a speaker;
 - The Brass Band were booked, the office to follow this up with confirmation;
 - The PA System was arranged, the office to follow this up with confirmation;
 - Wreath to be purchased including a donation to the Royal British Legion up to the value of £100, Cllr Buchanan to contact Sandy Price regarding arrangements;
 - Residents of Oast House were happy to provide the electricity;
 - The Church Parish Office will be approached to print the Order of Service and invoice MPC for the cost.

RESOLVED: that £350 be allocated from the events budget. Agreed.

Item 6: Carols on the Green: To consider and agree the arrangements, including, but not limited to, the budget, purchase of Christmas tree, refreshments, PA System, and brass band

F.C. 98 Following discussion the following was agreed:

- The office to source a 20ft Christmas tree, including installation, if possible;
- Cllr Wade had asked Vigo Singers. Cllr Wade to confirm availability;
- The Brass Band were booked, the office to follow this up with confirmation;
- Primary Schools to be contacted by liaison councillors: Cllr S Johnson Culverstone Primary School and Helen Allison; Cllr McNamara Meopham Community Academy;
- Cllr Wade advised that we may need to purchase a new set of lights;
- Mulled Wine: Meopham Wine were in attendance and offered this at cost, which was accepted. The Office to liaise with Meopham Wine regarding requirements and payment.

RESOLVED: that £650 be allocated from the events budget. Agreed with 1 abstention.

Item 7: Standing Agenda Item: To consider any need for professional advice or reports on planning or related issues

F.C. 99 Councillor Collings was not in attendance and therefore no update was received.

Councillor Watson noted that the Council had allocated a significant budget for planning and specialist advice. In light of Gravesham Borough Council's decision regarding the Norwood Lane application, he questioned whether it remained appropriate to continue pursuing this course of action, whether it represented a good use of public funds, and whether the Council was receiving value for money.

Councillor McNamara responded that he considered the expenditure justified, stating that the Council was engaging the best available specialist advisers.

F.C. 100 Councillor McNamara advised those present that the Council would now move into closed session to consider the confidential element of Item 8. He explained that the meeting would subsequently return to open session to consider the remainder of the item and invited members of the public and press to wait outside if they wished to rejoin the meeting once the confidential business had concluded, which was expected to be brief.

20:10 – The meeting entered closed session – all public and press were asked to leave the meeting.

PROPOSED Cllr S Johnson SECONDED Cllr Buchanan. All in Favour

CLOSED SESSION

Pursuant to Section 1 (2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, that due to the confidential nature of the next item, the public and press will be asked to leave the meeting

Item 8: Standing Agenda Item: To receive an update on Southdown Shaw Allotments

F.C. 101 Members received an update on the latest developments relating to Southdown Shaw Allotments.

20:25 – The meeting returned to open session - all public and press were readmitted to the meeting.

PROPOSED Cllr McNamara SECONDED Cllr Fisher. All in Favour

F.C. 102 Members considered the report and the recommendations contained within it.

Councillor McNamara proposed that the recommendations set out in the report be approved.

Councillor Watson proposed an additional recommendation, a copy of which had been circulated to Members. Councillor McNamara read the additional recommendation aloud.

Councillor Fisher seconded the motion, comprising the five recommendations contained within the report together with the additional recommendation proposed by Councillor Watson.

Resolved that the following recommendations be approved

1. That the existing Meopham and District Allotment Association tenancy agreements continue to apply to existing plot holders following the transfer of management responsibility to Meopham Parish Council from 1 April 2026, until such time as they are reviewed, amended or replaced by the Council.
2. That responsibility for the day-to-day management, administration, maintenance oversight, compliance monitoring and enforcement of Southdown Shaw Allotments is delegated to the Clerk and officers acting under the authority of the Council.
3. That the delegated authority includes the issuing of notices, management of tenancy breaches, health and safety actions and

termination of tenancies where permitted under the tenancy agreement.

4. That officers are authorised to undertake urgent works required to address health and safety or maintenance matters, in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations
5. That a tenant appeal process is established whereby any tenant whose tenancy is terminated under delegated authority may appeal in writing within 14 days of the termination notice to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council, whose decision shall be final on behalf of the Council
6. The Council should require tenants to provide sufficient evidence to verify their identity and that they are currently residing at their tenancy address within Gravesham Borough. This will normally comprise one document confirming identity and one document confirming their current residential address. Where a current photocard driving licence showing the tenancy address is provided, no additional proof of address will normally be required. Evidence should demonstrate current residence at the tenancy address rather than simply the ability to receive correspondence there. Identity documents should be used only for verification purposes and should not be copied or retained unless there is a clear legal or business need to do so, in line with the Council's data protection obligations.

The meeting concluded 20:29