

**Minutes of the 127th MEOPHAM Annual Parish Meeting**  
**held on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2022, at 7.30 pm**  
**held at St Johns Centre**

**In the Chair:**

Cllr S Buchanan, Chairman, Meopham Parish Council.

**Also Present:**

From Meopham Parish Council: - Cllrs D Bramer, M Bramer, G Green, J McTavish, A Rose, B Wade, C Price and D Sims. S Fishenden (Clerk - taking the minutes) and C Collings (Assistant Clerk)

County Councillor Bryan Sweetland and Community Warden Mandy Cason plus 58 members of the public

**Invited speakers:**

Cllr Lyn Milner, Mayor of Gravesham and Cllr David Brazier, Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport at KCC

**1. Chairman's Welcome**

The Chairman welcomed the Deputy Mayor of Gravesham along with other distinguished guests and parishioners of Meopham

**2. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from the following:

Cllr John Ogden – Vice-Chairman of MPC, Cllr Roger Gough – Leader of Kent County Council, Cllr Sue Gofton – MPC Councillor and Cllr Bob Lane – Shorne Parish Council

**3. Minutes of the previous (126th) Annual Parish Meeting**

The minutes of the 126th Annual Parish Meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2021 were confirmed as a true record.

**4. To receive presentations from the following:**

**4.1 Cllr Lyn Milner – Gravesham Borough Council**

The Mayor of Gravesham introduced the role she does to represent the borough. She emphasised the duty she felt to make sure she did not let the borough down as its representative.

**4.2 Chief Inspector Junior Dann and Inspector James Beautridge - Kent Police**

Neither of the officers had arrived to the meeting and so this item did not take place.

**4.3 Cllr David Brazier – Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, Kent County Council**

A copy of the verbal report provided by Cllr Brazier is below.

*Kent County Council is the largest county administration in England. It has 5,400 miles of highway, excluding motorways, 4,000 miles of footways, 275,000 roadside gullies, 8,500 soakaways, 2,200 bridges and even two tunnels. All that is managed by our Highways Asset Management team through our principal contractor AMEY. We also look after 3.2m square metres of urban grass, 3,300 miles of rural verges that need to be cut, and over half a million trees. We have a transportation team that looks after the design and operation of 330 signalled crossings, 170 CCTV cameras and over 500 interactive signs, and we provide education, training and advice to 150,000 road users per annum.*

*We also carry out the functions of a statutory Local Transport Authority, providing bus service infrastructure, supporting unprofitable buses, getting statutorily entitled children to school, negotiating not only with the bus operators but also the rail companies within the county of Kent for better services. You might be familiar with our Kent Travel Saver for children going to school and the ENCTS concessionary bus scheme for people over 60.*

*We also maintain an interest in aviation as one of the flight paths into Gatwick ranges over Tunbridge Wells and other areas of West Kent.*

*We provide a winter service to keep the roads clear of snow and ice with 66 gritter lorries, up to 23,000 tonnes of grit and teams of farmers with our snow ploughs. It's winter weather that damages our roads and every year there is a programme to rectify this.*

*We design and build new roads and infrastructure to meet the needs of development. Ideally the greater part of this is paid for by the developer. Overall our revenue budgets amount to about £70m per annum and our capital programme is about £170m. So, my annual budget is about £240m and I have about 500 full time staff.*

*I mentioned the roadside verges. Increasingly these are cut with a conservation regime that encourages biodiversity and pollinators.*

*Increasingly our work is focussed on highway drainage. Much of our drainage infrastructure is outdated and, in the older parts of the county's towns we have what we called combined drains. These put highways drainage in with sewage and when there is very heavy and prolonged rainfall, they can overflow. Generally our weather is becoming wetter with longer periods of rainfall and this has necessitated investment in improved infrastructure underground.*

*The £30m I have to maintain the roads may seem like a lot of money, but it isn't; it is actually about 50 % of what we need to provide a "steady state" condition and therefore we are in a state of managed decline.*

*We rely to a substantial extent on government grant and I am just beginning to spend £11m on resurfacing 111 miles of highway and we have this year £7m to spend on our annual "pothole blitz", which gives work to Kentish companies.*

*Just now we are applying to the DfT for what are known as Part 6 Powers that will enable us to enforce certain moving traffic offences. There are 26 offences for which the DfT are prepared to delegate powers, including stopping in yellow boxes, making prohibited right turns and contravening weight limits. The enforcement will use ANPR cameras and we hope to have the powers by the end of this year.*

*What are the problems I have to deal with? Most, if not all are related to money, or shortage thereof. Our rural network is not in great condition and if you live in a residential road, you are likely to be resurfaced every 70 years. Patched roads don't always look very nice but they are serviceable and safe.*

*Where a road seems to have been poorly repaired, this is often due to a bad reinstatement by a utility company. Gas, electricity, water and sewerage providers all have statutory rights to enter the highway. Obviously we hope that they will work with us to minimise closures but they don't always do so, and in the case of an emergency they can enter the road without notice. We used to inspect about 20% of utility reinstatements; now it's generally about 80%. We invented a Lane Rental Scheme that encourages utilities not to leave road works unattended for days on end to the detriment of road users.*

*Buses have been a big problem this year. Buses in Kent are run by private companies for profit. The Covid-19 pandemic caused an enormous reduction in patronage, so that many services became unprofitable and have been handed back to the licencing authorities. In normal circumstances the County Council would make a judgement about whether the service was "socially necessary" and sometimes we would support all or part of the route. At this time our own financial situation is such that we are consulting to withdraw support for 48 services we are currently subsidising and have no money to take on more.*

*What of myself? I've been a member of the County Council for 25 years and represent Sevenoaks Rural North East, the patch next door to this one. Being the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport takes all my time. It can be stressful but gives me the opportunity to work with some marvellous people in serving the residents of Kent.*

## **5. To note the Annual Report for 2021-22**

The report was noted and it is available on the parish council website for members of the public to view.

## **6. KALC Community Awards**

The KALC Community Awards are about celebrating the work of individuals or groups who do good work within the parish. This year, we are presenting two awards due to our inability to present the 2021 award at our APM last year as it was held virtually.

The 2021 winner is the Supporting Meopham: Superneighbours scheme and this award is being collected on behalf of all the volunteers by Martine Morris. The volunteers provided a massive support to members of the community during the Covid-19 pandemic and we are extremely grateful to them.

The 2022 winner is Meopham and District Footpaths Group and this award is being collected on behalf of the group by Ken Dare and John McNish. They have received this award for all their work over the years in maintaining rights-of-way and footpaths within the parish

## **7 Public Question Time**

**Q:** A resident enquired about the dilapidated condition of the BT telephone boxes and whether BT could remove them.

**A:** The Chairman highlighted the Parish Council had previously written to BT but would follow-up with them to try and secure an improvement to their condition.

**Q:** Another resident enquired whether the salary budget could be split to show the individual salaries for the Clerk and Assistant Clerk.

**A:** The Chairman responded that this was not possible, and that the professional officers are the 'engine room' of the Council and therefore worth the remuneration they were receiving.

**Q:** A resident enquired about improving signage on footpaths to distinguish whether they are a byway or bridleway.

**A:** The Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport answered the question, confirming KCC are responsible for rights-of-way and asked the resident to report on the online portal so the County Council could investigate.

Keith Walters, from Meopham Colts asked for a formal note of thanks to be recorded for the Parish Council's support in the Judsons Pavilion extension project.

***The meeting closed at 8.20 pm.***