

Meopham Parish Council

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A Civility & Respect
Pledge Council

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Tuesday 18th February 2025 at 7:00pm at Harvel Village Hall, Harvel, DA13 0DS

Members Present:

Cllr D Bramer
Cllr S Buchanan
Cllr P Crow - Vice-Chairman (arrived 7.05pm)
Cllr A Evans (arrived 7.03pm)
Cllr D Fisher
Cllr P Haslam
Cllr G Smith
Cllr B Wade
Cllr P Watson (arrived 7.03pm)

In Attendance:

L Winter – Clerk
33 members of the public

F.C. 194 In the absence of the Chair and the Vice-Chair of the Council, a Chairman for the meeting needed to be elected. Councillor Buchanan was proposed by Cllr Wade and seconded by Cllr Haslam. All in favour

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

F.C. 195 Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr Sims (away). Cllr Price had sent her apologies and requested a pre-approval of apologies for all Council meetings for an initial three month period, on the grounds of personal reasons, which was accepted.

Cllr Evans and Cllr Watson arrived at 7.03pm

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

F.C. 196 There were no declarations of interest received.

Item 3: **Minutes of Previous Meetings: To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 21.01.25**

F.C. 197 Cllr Haslam PROPOSED an amendment to F.C. 182 to include the following two specific comments:

The Chair's autocratic style was not conducive to ensuring the Parish had a properly functioning Parish Council and that she should consider her position as Chair. The Chair acknowledged the comment and said she would respond.

A member of the public stated that the footfall numbers used in the consideration as to whether Pitfield Green toilets should remain open were incorrect and that some members of the council knew them to be incorrect and failed to disclose such.

Cllr Crow arrived at 7.05pm during Item 3

SECONDED: Cllr Wade. There were six votes in favour and 3 against. The amendment was carried and the minutes of the meeting held on 21.01.25 were approved subject to this amendment.

Cllr Crow was Chair for the remainder of the meeting

Item 4: Officers Report

F.C. 198 The officer's report was noted. A copy will be attached as an appendix to the minutes.

Item 5: Public Session & External Reports

5.1 Public Session

F.C. 199 Members of the public were invited to speak on matters of interest.

A number of questions were raised around the Employment Tribunal: Do the legal representatives have any connection to the parish council; Have the legal representatives advised against socialising with the former employee that has brought the employment tribunal claim; Have the professional development fees been recovered from the ex-employee; and Is it appropriate for them to be present at this meeting?

A trustee from Meopham Cricket Club thanked the parish council for covering the costs to repair the green. They also enquired if we had a date for the basal work and the trimming of the trees, which they hoped would be before the start of the cricket season. The Clerk advised that the basal work had been passed to a contractor and should be done as a matter of urgency. The trees are in a conservation area and we are awaiting a response from GBC regarding how much we can remove. Cllr Bramer also stated that it was bird nesting season from 1st March.

A member of the public raised the issues arising from a wet winter and the refusal from KCC to empty the drainage. They enquired whether the parish council would have any influence.

The following question was asked 'Will the Parish Council agree not to demolish the Pitfield Green toilets until the necessary grant funding and planning permission for the new toilets is approved? Surely, this is commonsense, otherwise, we could be left with no toilets at all.'

A number of points were made questioning the decisions and statements made by the parish council regarding the Pitfield Green toilets and the validity of them.

A resident made a number of complaints about the Carols on the Green event.

Another member of the public ask questions relating to the draft budget 25/26 specifically the allocation of £25K for the library service, which is not the parish councils responsibility, the £6K allocated for a new website from the 24/25 budget and the £250K in reserves. A copy of the agreed budget for 25/26 was given to them and Cllr Watson explained that the council had provisioned for the library service as KCC need to save money and the 99 libraries are potential areas to achieve this. Cllr Haslam stated that the new website proposals would be an agenda item on the next full council meeting and assured them that the figure was around £1500.

A statement was made that we have just been told that just for the postage of polling cards to Culverstone and Harvel ward comes to over £4000. Given the cost of a first class stamp is £1.35 not £1.65 and that this is the smallest ward in the parish the figure of £4000 is clearly incorrect. We were previously told that the parish poll would cost £30K. This therefore calls into question all 'facts and figures' that the council releases.

5.2 Borough Councillors and County Councillor

F.C. 200 There were no Borough Councillors or County Councillor present.

5.3 Police

F.C. 201 There were no Police present.

Item 6: Planning Applications: To consider and make recommendations on the following planning applications:

F.C. 202 20241164 – Land South of White Post Lane, Cobham, Gravesend
Change of Use of Land to form a Gypsy/Traveller site comprising the siting of 1 Mobile Home, 1 Touring Caravan, and 1 Dayroom

Cllr Buchanan PROPOSED that the council object to this planning application as it would constitute inappropriate development in the green belt. SECONDED: Cllr Wade. There were 8 votes in favour and 1 abstention. The motion was carried.

In addition a member of the public advised the Councillors that the damage to the trees was £16K. The comments received from residents would be included with the submission to Gravesham Borough Council.

F.C. 203 20240910 – Land at Stoney Wood, Wrotham Road, South Street
Application for the change of use of land from agricultural to C3 dwellinghouse, proposal to convert the existing hard and soft landscaping

Cllr Wade PROPOSED that the council object to this planning application as it would constitute inappropriate development in the green belt and Meopham Downs. SECONDED: Cllr Fisher. There were 8 votes in favour and 1 abstention. The motion was carried.

- F.C. 204 20250081 – Distarti, Rhododendron Avenue, Meopham, Gravesend, DA13 0TT**
Application for variation of condition 2 attached to planning permission reference number 20240001 for Demolition of existing dwelling and erection of a new replacement dwelling; to allow change to new dwelling position

Cllr Bramer PROPOSED that the council should not raise any objection to the planning application and that the comments received from Cllr Price be submitted to Gravesham Borough Council. SECONDED: Cllr Evans. All in favour.

- Item 7: Planning Appeals: To note the following appeals have been received**

- F.C. 205 2025/006/REF – Purvil Wood Cottage, Leywood Road, Meopham**
Application for a Proposed Lawful Development Certificate in respect of erection of single storey side extension

Noted.

- Item 8: Harvel Green: To agree to the requests to use the green**

- F.C. 206** It was agreed to authorise the use of Harvel Green by Harvel Hash House Harriers for this years' annual Harvel 5 mile race on Saturday 7th June 2025 subject to the receipt of the all appropriate documentation including a risk assessment and insurance certificate.

PROPOSED: Cllr Wade. SECONDED: Cllr Buchanan. All in favour.

- F.C. 207** It was agreed to authorise the use of Harvel Green by the Gravesend and Meopham Rotary Club for an Easter Eggstravaganza (Easter Egg Hunt) on Saturday 12th April 2025 subject to the receipt of the all appropriate documentation including a risk assessment and insurance certificate.

PROPOSED: Cllr Buchanan. SECONDED: Cllr Wade. All in favour.

- Item 9: Financial Matters**

9.1 Approval of Payments: To approve the payments made since the last meeting up to 11.02.25

- F.C. 208** Following queries on Vouchers 190, 196 and 204, members approved the payments up to 11.02.25 as per the report.

PROPOSED: Cllr Haslam. SECONDED: Cllr Evans. All in favour.

9.2 Receipts & Payments Report: To note the receipts and payments report up to 11.02.25

F.C. 209 The receipts and payments report up 11.02.25 was noted.

9.3 Bank Statements: To note the Unity, Lloyds and Cambridge bank statements and the supporting bank reconciliation as of 11.02.25

F.C. 210 The bank statements and the supporting bank reconciliation as of 11.02.25 were noted and signed by the Chairman.

9.4 Council Reserves: To note the reserves balance as of 11.02.25

F.C. 211 The council reserves were noted as at 11.02.25

Item 10: Liaison Councillor Reports: To receive liaison councillor reports for information only

F.C. 212 Cllr Watson reported on rural crime and asked for people to display a poster that raised awareness to people out walking dogs to try and prevent unnecessary attacks on sheep.

Cllr Bramer requested some work be carried out on the overgrown holly/ivy at Culverstone Green.

Cllr Buchanan reported that a wall was being built to insulate the sound in Meopham Village Hall. When this work was complete the Hall would be available for future meetings of the council.

The meeting closed at 8:14pm

Agenda Item: 4

Title: **Officer's Report**

Prepared By: **Lisa Winter – Clerk and RFO**

Pitfield Green Toilets Update

I issued a press release inviting expressions of interest. These actions can be taken by the Clerk under delegated authority as they are administrative only and have no capital expenditure/procurement attached. I am simply carrying out due diligence on a motion that has already been resolved. Any expressions of interest received to take over the running of the toilets will be forwarded to Cllr Haslam and Cllr Smith for their initial considerations.

Following the comments relating to the survey of the toilets, the RICS registered Chartered Surveyor and Barrister has offered to revisit the toilet block now that the shutters have been removed and provide an addendum to the report. There will be no fee for this revisit.

Two more companies have been approached for quotes for the demolition of the toilet block and the Section 80 Demolition Notice has been submitted. We have also applied for the lottery matched fund grant towards the single-unit accessible toilet and the planning application is in the process of being completed and submitted.

Land at Blackthorn Farm, Culverstone Green

We have been advised by Esquire Developments that a planning application will be submitted shortly for Land at Blackthorn Farm, Culverstone Green. The developers will be holding a public meeting in March at Vigo Rugby Club. All parish councillors will be invited.

By-Election

Nominations need to be in by 4pm on Friday 14th March. If the election is contested the poll will take place on Thursday 10 April between the hours of 7am and 10pm. The requirement to send poll cards does not apply to parish council elections, but we can request to issue them.

Given that it is not unusual for a parish council election to be uncontested, issuing cards would come with a risk, should this be the case. Another consideration is the costs of printing, officer time preparing and Royal Mail postage. The electorate is around 2,500 with first class postage cost being £1.65 for each card. That excludes the cost of the cards themselves and the printing.

In the Returning Officers experience most nomination papers are handed in during the last few days before the deadline, so basing a decision on it being contested, whilst giving them enough time to print and send them is simply not possible.

Devolution

Following the announcement that the Kent and Medway region has not been selected for the Devolution Priority Programme, we have been advised by Gravesham Borough Council that any expenditure that they can pass on to the Parish Councils will be coming soon. We believe this to be initially the costs for the grass cutting and the electricity bill for the streetlights.

Kent missing out on this Priority Programme also means that the Kent County Council elections will be going ahead this year.

Harvel Pond

Following a traffic accident in the ice on Saturday 1st February involving two vans, the pond fence was struck by one of the vehicles and was damaged. The fence panel was wobbly and detached from the upright post. This needed immediate repair on grounds of safety and under delegated authority and in consultation with the Chairman I arranged the repair.

Judsons Recreational Grounds

I reported at the last meeting that I had written to the trustees of The Colts. Two of the trustees subsequently requested a meeting. From this meeting it was not clear if the trustees themselves were on the same page, so I await to hear in writing what their wishes are in terms of the lease. If it remains status quo, then it simply needs registering by The Colts. However, if changes are requested, then in due course this will be an item for consideration by full council.

Employee Assistance Programme

This has now been put in place and I am just finalising the paperwork. I will then provide each officer and councillor a login to access the programme.

Camer Parade Parking

At a previous meeting Mr Leggett, representing the Costcutter from Camer Parade raised concerns around the time limits that were in place, currently you can park all day on one side and 3 hours on the other side, with people who work in the parade leaving their cars parked all day, which holds no value to the local businesses. He also reported a 10% decline in sales following the new road layout.

We contacted Gravesham Borough Council who advised that the time limit was 2 hours no return for 1 hour Monday - Saturday, on the highway side and is patrolled/enforced by their Civil Enforcement team. This can be amended and asked what time limit would the businesses like to see implemented? They would have to conduct a formal consultation and follow the legal processes for amending their current Traffic Regulation Order, so it isn't a quick process, but they can certainly have discussions regarding any changes. The bays on the shop side are private land and as such they cannot implement a restriction or take enforcement action.

I relayed this information back to Mr Leggett expressing that discussions were necessary with the other businesses, to establish some common ground if any, as any new time limit was unlikely to suit every business within the parade.

Mr Leggett has recently advised that he has spoken with 50% of the parade who would like the time limit of the highway side to be 30 minutes no return within 1 hour.

With regards to the shop side, this will be more of a challenge as it is owned by the leaseholder. They need to find a middle ground to suit all businesses, but at present with the current time limits, people are parking for long durations and not allowing access for people on the move.

Mr Leggett has requested a meeting to hear the voice of all parties, as from speaking with some of the businesses, they are at huge risk of potential closure if the time limits continue in the current form.

I will go back to Gravesham Borough Council as they stated that they would have to have a formal consultation on any changes to establish what format this would take and if it would involve all parties input and opinions. However, this will only provide a solution for the highway side and it is not a quick process, so the sooner it is started the better.

As Mr Leggett says the shop side is more of a challenge as it is private land, so even if the businesses could agree a time limit, who would enforce it.

Community Warden

Mandy has received her Bluewater gift voucher and wishes me to pass on her massive thanks to the Councillors, she was truly overwhelmed. She will buy something to keep to remind her of the fond memories that she has of working with the Councillors and the community.