

Meopham Parish Council

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A Civility & Respect
Pledge Council

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Tuesday 19th November 2024 at 7:30pm at Harvel Village Hall, Harvel, DA13 0DS

Members Present:

Cllr M Adam
Cllr D Bramer
Cllr S Buchanan
Cllr P Crow - Vice-Chairman (arrived at 7.32pm)
Cllr A Evans
Cllr D Fisher
Cllr P Haslam
Cllr C Price - Chairman
Cllr D Sims (arrived at 7.33pm)
Cllr G Smith
Cllr B Wade
Cllr P Watson

In Attendance:

L Winter – Clerk
Councillor J Meade – County Councillor, KCC
Councillor S Fishenden – Parish Chair, Ash-Cum-Ridley
7 members of the public

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

F.C. 122 There were no apologies for absence.

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

F.C. 123 There were no declarations of interest received. However, a number should have been, and this was noted.

Cllr P Crow arrived at 7.32pm

Item 3: Minutes of Previous Meetings: To approve the minutes of the meetings held on 17.09.24

F.C. 124 The minutes of the meeting held on 15.10.2024 were approved subject to a typographical amendment to remove the words 'wreck at' in F.C. 121.

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

Cllr D Sims arrived at 7.33pm

Item 4: Public Session & External Reports

4.1 Public Session

F.C. 125 Duncan Holland asked for an update on the toilets at Pitfield Green and was advised that this was covered in the Officers Report.

He then reported that the bus services in Meopham, particularly the Red Route services were unreliable. There was a lack of a current timetable outside of No.4 Oddfellows. He appreciates that this is a KCC matter and would escalate this issue to KCC and the Red Route Company. Mr Holland was asked to keep the Parish Council up to date on this matter.

Ian Cleary stated that the parking at Camer Parade was now much safer and wished to thank the Parish Council for their involvement to achieve this. However, he did feel that the lighting was not adequate in the area. Councillor Price advised that this was something that had been flagged with KCC along with a number of other things which she would address in her report later in the meeting.

He then asked why was Harvel Village Hall the venue for Full Council Meetings and added that the schedule of dates on the noticeboards states TBC for the venues. The Clerk advised that there were currently issues around booking Judsons Pavilion and the lack of suitable venues that can accommodate the meetings, meant we were using Harvel Village Hall, which is still Meopham. The Clerk appreciates that the schedule of meetings says TBC and this needs updating, however, when the agenda is posted to the website and the noticeboards this contains the place of the meeting.

Ian went on to mention the noticeboards and the high cost of repairs quoted to the Council. He noted that a couple just required new thumb turns and another a little refurbishment. Councillor Price advised that the issue was down to insurance and public liability, but asked Ian to liaise with the Clerk to see if it was possible.

Ian asked about Mandy the Community Warden and Councillor Price stated that this was covered in her report.

Lastly, Ian asked if the flagpole was owned by Meopham Parish Council and stated that there was a cherry-picker currently on the Windmill site and whether this could be used to fix the flagpole and reduce the repair costs. Councillor Price stated that the flagpole was owned by the Parish Council, but the cherry-picker was a contractors through KCC and again this would have insurance and public liability implications, but we could ask the question.

Ben Ryder from Swale Leisure was in attendance to give Councillors an update on the Family Fun Days which had been funded by Meopham Parish Council. Five had been hosted so far with 350 attendees from the Parish. These were tracked through the system to establish that they were from the Parish when they checked in. The sessions were mainly 4-11 year olds, but they were also offering structured sessions for 12-16 year olds in the gym. They received an induction and then a routine to follow and with this they then got 7 days access to the gym.

Michael Bennoson was in attendance to ask for volunteers for the Community Speedwatch Scheme which had been reactivated in September 2024. He advised that there were 14 locations, 10 of which were on the Wrotham Road. More volunteers were needed as they could only do 1, sometimes 2 sessions per week at present with the number of volunteers they currently have. Full training would be given and Councillor Watson was already a volunteer having been trained early this year. Councillor Price and Councillor Smith volunteered along with the Clerk, Lisa Winter.

Mr Fishenden, Chairman of Ash-Cum-Ridley Parish Council was in attendance to thank Meopham Parish Council for his invitation to the Act of Remembrance and reception afterwards.

He also wished to touch on the question of KCC Community Wardens and the discussions that were ongoing with KALC and numerous parishes to see if it was possible to fund a community warden. He advised that there were issues with the data being used which Sevenoaks District Council were challenging. It had also been confirmed that there was no reason why neighbouring parishes in differing districts cannot pool together to fund resource and his Parish Council were happy to join forces.

4.2 Borough Councillors and County Councillor

F.C. 126 Councillor Jordan Meade spoke at length about the KCC initiative with homes for displaced Ukrainians, which was around 4000 in Kent.

Councillor Meade was thanked for his very thought provoking and at times harrowing account of his work with Ukraine and the various regions he had so far visited. He spoke at length of the reciprocal benefits and opportunities that a collaboration between Meopham Parish Council and a district in Chernihiv would offer.

4.3 Police and Community Warden

F.C. 127 There were no Police and Community Warden present.

Item 5: Memorandum of Understanding with Chernihiv Region, Ukraine

F.C. 128 Councillors agreed to formalize the collaboration between Meopham Parish and Chernihiv.

Councillors added a vote of thanks to Tom and Iris Smith who were in attendance, for everything that they were doing to support the efforts being made in Gravesham to aid Ukraine.

PROPOSED: Cllr Price. SECONDED: Cllr Watson. All in favour.

Item 6: Officer's Report: To receive a report of items for information from the Clerk and RFO

F.C. 129 The officer's report was noted. A copy will be attached as an appendix to the minutes.

Item 7 Community Events:

7.1 Village Fete: Minute reference F.C.327 confirming £1500 event budget

7.3 Act of Remembrance: Additional event expenditure incurred under delegated authority for the safe delivery of the event

F.C. 130 Councillors agreed to transfer 50% of the Community Engagement budget (£4750) to the Community Events budget to cover the agreed £1500 for the Village Fete and the additional event expenditure incurred under delegated authority for the safe delivery of the Act of Remembrance event totalling £759.03. £2375 would be transferred.

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

7.2: Act of Remembrance: Vote of thanks to the Proprietor of Minel in hosting the Civic Reception following the service with no charge to the Parish Council.

F.C. 131 All Councillors agreed to send a vote of thanks.

7.4 Carols on the Green: To confirm the date and arrangements for the event.

F.C. 132 Councillors were advised that the event was on Wednesday 18th December 2024 at 4.30pm.

Cllr Evans gave an update on the arrangements so far. The schools have been asked to meet at the Secondary School car park for 4pm, for a torchlight procession up to the green. The tree will be positioned outside Minel Restaurant, who are sponsoring the tree. The schools are making the decorations for the tree and food donations were being collected for the foodbank. In addition to the tree being lit by solar lights, the Windmill would be lit. This was being organised by the Windmill Trustees, who were keen to collaborate with the Parish Council.

Cllr Wade queried the health and safety aspect of keeping the tree upright and that permission to dig the hole was needed from the leaseholders of the green. In response, Cllr Evans confirmed that arrangements were in hand.

Cllr Adam suggested that we could link this event with the community engagement and support for Ukraine

Item 8: **Community Grants:** To consider a late application received for the Community Grant Scheme for the 2024-2025 financial year. The Clerk recommends, if Councillors are mindful to grant this application, a transfer from the Community Engagement budget to the Community Grants budget.

F.C. 133 It was agreed to make the community grant of £500 to Meopham Marquetry with the provision that they promote themselves to the community and the local schools. The Parish would also encourage them to join our list of community organisations in Meopham that were interested in creating new opportunities for mutual learning, support and growth with the Chernihiv Region, Ukraine. It was also requested that the Marquetry Group be asked to provide a piece of work that could be given to our partners in Chernihiv as a mark of friendship.

Councillors agreed to transfer £500 from the Community Engagement budget to the Community Grants budget.

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

Item 9: **Financial Matters**

9.1 Approval of Payments: To approve the payments made since the last meeting up to 14.11.24

F.C. 134 Councillors approved the payments up to 14.11.24 as per the report.

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

9.2 Receipts & Payments Report: To note the receipts and payments report up to 14.11.24

F.C. 135 The receipts and payments report up 14.11.24 was noted.

9.3 Bank Statements: To note the bank statement for Unity

F.C. 136 The bank statement from Unity for 30.09.24 up to 31.10.24 was noted.

9.4 Statement of Internal Control: Councillors are asked to consider the attached Statement of Internal Control in support of the Annual Governance Statement.

F.C. 137 Councillors agreed the Statement of Internal Control and approved the Chairman and RFO to sign the document.

9.5 Expenses Claim Form: To authorise the expenses claimed by Cllr Evans.

F.C. 138 Councillors were advised that the expense claim form was for expenses incurred for the Act of Remembrance and due to officers not having a multi-pay card. Councillors approved the payment of £475.87 to Cllr Evans.

PROPOSED: Cllr Smith. SECONDED: Cllr Price. All in favour.

Item 10: Youth and Community: Family Fun Days: Retrospective agreement for the August and October/November 2024 family fun days run by Swale Leisure and confirmation of funding for future dates confirmed with the Clerk within the budget.

F.C. 139 Councillors agreed retrospective approval of £2142.87 for the August and £1428.58 for the October/November family fun days and agreed for a further 2 days up to a final total of £5000 in line with the agreed budget for 2023/2024, delivering 7 sessions in total.

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

Item 11: Solar Farm: To consider the request received from the Parish Clerk of Ash-Cum-Ridley

F.C. 140 Councillors agreed:

That any correspondence Meopham Parish Council has relating to New Ash Green Solar Farm, is copied to Ash-cum-Ridley Parish Council; and

That Meopham Parish Council (as a corporate body) will refrain from involvement in the New Ash Green Solar Farm planning application that does not sit within Meopham Parish and that has no impact on Meopham.

PROPOSED: Cllr Price. SECONDED: Cllr Smith. All in favour.

Item 12: Government Consultation – Remote Attendance at Local Authority Meetings: To agree a corporate response

F.C. 141 Councillor Bramer asked all Councillors to express their view as to whether they wanted a corporate response to the two specific questions – the proposal for remote attendance and proxy voting. Councillors agreed to vote.

Remote Meetings vote:

6 For and 6 Against. Chair used casting vote Against: 6 For and 7 Against.

Proxy Voting vote:

7 For, 4 Against and 1 Abstention.

The Clerk to submit a corporate response for proxy voting.

Item 13: Liaison Councillor Reports: To receive liaison councillor reports for information only

F.C. 142 The following liaison councillor reports were noted:

Councillor Adam advised that she had successfully got a place on the health and well-being forum at the Meopham Medical Centre and would be representing Meopham Parish Council as well as a being a patient participant.

Councillor Wade advised that quad bikes and motorbikes had been on Meopham Green. She had informed PC Hammond. She asked if a boulder could be moved and for costings to be sort for boulders to be put between each post particularly the area outside the Kings Arms (Minel). Councillor Watson added that anti-social behaviour was more prevalent when the schools were out.

Councillor Wade also reported that Mandy, the Community Warden had served Meopham with 20 years of service and it was agreed that the Chairmans Allowance be used to buy a card and flowers. The card to be circulated. All in agreement.

Councillor Haslam reported the response from BT following his contact for cleaning and varying degrees of repairs for the following phone boxes:

- Harvel Village Hall DA13 ODS - on next year's removal programme.
- Wrotham Road/Huntingfield Road DA13 0EY - this one is to remain.
- Wrotham Road/Cheyne Walk DA13 0JW - removed 08/01/24.
- Wrotham Road/Steels Lane DA13 0QA - on next year's removal programme.
- Wrotham Road/Whitepost Lane DA13 0TN - on next year's removal programme.

BT stated "We will be looking to remove the kiosk and working mechanism all together, for now I have raised cleaning jobs for the four that currently remain. Cleaning happens on a reactive basis, so if you need any of them re done then please drop us an ask and we can again rearrange if need be. Please allow up to 5 working days for the cleans to take place".

Councillor Haslam also advised that he had approached four companies for quotes for the new website.

Councillor Sims gave an update on the windmill following a meeting with the Trustees of the Windmill Trust. The Trustees have sought preplanning

advice from GBC, but were still awaiting the report. They are keen to work closely with MPC to ensure the future of the windmill, and they believed they had sufficient funds currently to get through the next fiscal year. The condition of the Mill gardens was raised with the Trustees, in particular the siting of the portaloo and the overgrown hedge encroaching the footpath. The Trustees acknowledged the issues raised. Councillors added that they would like the 'Chairmans Board' in the windmill to be updated.

Councillor Price reported on the following:

Libraries – whilst no decision has been made by KCC about cuts to services, it is likely that some divesting of the library portfolio will take place at some stage and she and The Clerk had attended a with KCC which has opened the dialogue in ensuring that Meopham has the option to retaining its library whatever happens.

Meopham Community Academy – at a meeting with the new headteacher and a representative from the PTA predominantly regarding the parking issues (and safety) on Longfield Road it was agreed that the School Close car park was not fit for purpose. It was explained that MPC had discussed the ownership of this site with GBC previously but that the offer of a peppercorn lease had been withdrawn. The situation at the moment is that 2 abandoned vehicles cannot be removed as the height restriction bar is welded on and a tow truck cannot access the site. The issue has been raised with GBC and a meeting requested with the deputy CEO GBC to see whether the School Close car park can be brought back into play.

Meopham Secondary School – at a meeting with the new headteacher it was confirmed that he wishes to strengthen the links between the school and the wider community. The publication of a newsletter, mentioned last month by Councillor Evans, is something that we hope to work together to achieve.

Helen Allison School – following a meeting with the headteacher they are keen to improve relationships within the community following on the school's attendance at the Summer Fete and are keen to be involved with Carols on the Green. The headteacher was keen to open up the school to training for staff from other schools within the parish to help support SEN provision and Councillor Price has agreed to facilitate a meeting between the three Meopham head teachers.

As a follow on to this, the head teacher at Meopham Community Academy wants assistance with arranging a strategy meeting about Martyn's Law. The provisional dates are 22nd or 23rd January 2025. There is no cost or officer resource implication for this as the meeting will be held at the school and Councillor Price has agreed to use her contacts with GBC and KCC to facilitate this event.

Community Wardens – as councillors will have seen from Councillor Bramer's notes following the KALC meeting, the question of parishes funding the community warden service has now been moved forward. This initiative actually stemmed from a meeting that Shaun Fishenden and Cllr Price had with KCC in April to scope out whether this would actually be possible. At that meeting it was agreed that consideration would be given and a response would be provided after discussion with KALC, as roll out at a county level would be preferable.

As the Chairman of Ash-cum-Ridley Parish Council has confirmed, there are issues with the data being used which Sevenoaks DC are challenging. It has also been confirmed that there is no reason why neighbouring parishes in differing districts cannot pool together to fund resource. When Cllr Price and the ex-Clerk met with KCC it was agreed that the fairest way of allocating cost and resource was on a per capita basis. There will also be a budgetary impact on officer resource to oversee any contract and an issue of service resilience to be overcome.

The matter is to be discussed at a special KALC meeting on the 26th November. In the meantime Cllr Price has requested the service utilisation data for the parish from KCC.

The internal audit is taking place next week.

Camer Parade – The office has had a number of visits from parishioners giving positive feedback on the works that have taken place. We have had one request for the extension of the double yellow lines from the end of the parade to opposite the junction with Green Lane. The resident has now written in formally and the matter will be added to the HIP. The cost however was excessive and we have pushed back on this to KCC to challenge as the problem is a direct result of the engineered solution.

The new signage has gone in and the bollards will be painted green to match the existing street furniture. We have also raised the issue of the lighting around the new island, as it does not seem very visible especially at night.

Act of Remembrance – We have received positive feedback from a number of attendees at the Civic Reception held after the service. From this Cllr Price has been invited to attend meetings of the brownies, guides, scouts and air cadets to see the work that these organisations do. The Rotary Club are engaging in conversations with the scouts about forthcoming events to celebrate their 75th anniversary and the DL was very impressed at the turn out for the service and the links that are being built by the Parish Council with youth groups within the community. There was also a suggestion that Parish Councillors might like to go along for some team building events at Hope Hill which could include paddle boarding and axe throwing.

The Clerk will be initiating the process to recruit staff for the office.

F.C. 143 Suspension of Standing Order 3(x) – a meeting shall not exceed a period of two hours

PROPOSED: Cllr Price. SECONDED: Cllr Adam. All in favour.

F.C. 144 Closed Session – all public, press and parish councillors with an interest in item 14 were asked to leave the meeting.

PROPOSED: Cllr Price. SECONDED: Cllr Evans. 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 were asked to leave the meeting

Item 14: **Subject Access Request (SAR):** Due to the legal requirement to comply with a SAR request within set timescales, Councillors are asked for retrospective agreement to instruct a solicitor and to agree the costs for their involvement.

F.C. 145 PROPOSED: Cllr Price. SECONDED: Cllr Haslam. All in favour.

The meeting closed at 10:02pm