

WEST FARLEIGH PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 24th MARCH 2014 AT THE GOOD INTENT, WEST FARLEIGH

PRESENT: Cllrs B Scott (Chairman), Cllrs B Merritt, G Martin, L Johnson, J King, H Swan, C Stockwell, Borough Cllr D Collins, Borough Cllr B Mortimer, PCSO Alan Hunter and Mrs A Broadhurst, Clerk

IN ATTENDANCE: Eleven parishioners and the Chairman of Coxheath Parish Council, Cllr Clive Parker were present.

PUBLIC DISCUSSION:

There was no public discussion, although Cllr Scott stated that, on this occasion, he would allow questions from residents during the meeting regarding a number of items on the agenda due to their importance and impact on the village.

1. APOLOGIES

Kent County Cllr P Stockell

2. COUNCILLOR DECLARATIONS

Cllr Swan declared an interest in agenda item 8.4 (Donations for 2013/14) as she is the leader of The Evergreens.

3. MINUTES of the Meeting held on 20th January 2014

The Minutes of the meeting had been previously distributed and Cllr Martin proposed that the minutes were a true record. This was seconded by Cllr Merritt, with all in favour. The Chairman signed off the official copy.

4. POLICE MATTERS

Cllr Scott welcomed PCSO Alan Hunter to the meeting. PCSO Hunter informed all present that, in the last two months, there had only be one crime which was a shed being broken into, although nothing had been stolen. He also reported that Coxheath had had 11 crimes in the past month and this included a large amount of sheds being broken into, where the hinges or padlocks have been removed. PCSO Hunter suggested that residents who own a shed should change the screws on the hinges to anti tamper ones which will result in thieves being unable to remove the hinges. There has also been an increase in the number of burglaries in surrounding areas and these have included the front door being kicked in. It is thought that this could be a result of people not locking their front door properly in a rush to go out to work in the morning.

5. HIGHWAYS AND FOOTPATH MATTERS

5.1 Highways Issues in West Farleigh

The Clerk reported on the outstanding highways issues that have been reported to Kent Highways and added that she had copied in Kent County Cllr Stockell, as requested. To date there had been no response although an email has been received from Tara O'Shea to say that she is investigating. It was noted that there has been no response to the request for a meeting with the Parish Council. A resident stated that nothing seems to be moving forward and it is extremely frustrating that the same issues are being discussed every meeting. Cllr Scott asked the Clerk to chase Cllr Stockell to see whether she could get these issues looked into before the next meeting. **ACTION: Clerk**

5.2 Parking in Charlton Lane

The clerk reported that the Sports Club has now submitted an application to Maidstone Borough Council for parking, adding that the PCSO had visited the area and had not found parking to be a problem, on that occasion. It was noted that, on the day he attended, it was a children's practice session. Cllr Merritt stated that, on the Sunday before last he had counted 38 cars and on the Saturday there had been 42. The Clerk stated that the Sports Club had requested support with funding towards the parking. Cllr Martin stated that the Parish Council does not have much money and, when the application is approved and is moving forward, financial support could then be discussed. It was noted that to date there has been no information on the likely costs of the project and so it was impossible at this time to offer them a donation towards the cost. Borough Cllr Collins stated that Hunton Parish Council had managed to get funding for their pavilion and that there may be funding opportunities available to the Sports Club. A resident stated that it did not appear that the Parish Council were prepared to support the Sports Club and Cllr Martin responded that he has been fencing the area around the Sports Club free of charge and Councillors have always try to support them where possible. It was noted that, when the original application was to be submitted by the Parish Council for the community hall, the Sports Club were informed that there would have been space directly opposite the sports ground for parking but they were unhappy with walking, what equated to, the length of the field, as it was deemed to be too far.

The Parish Council had asked the Sports Club to support the application as the building would have contained changing rooms, showers and parking for the club to use; this had been turned down. Cllr Martin stated that the Parish Council had arranged a meeting with the Sports Club, approximately 18 months ago, which had not been productive. Councillors agreed that, whilst they wish to support the club, they also have to take in to account the interest of other residents living in the village. Cllr Merritt stated that the Parish Council had been informed that the police could be involved, as visitors to the club are parking on the pavement causing an obstruction, although the Parish Council had chosen not to take this action. The Clerk stated that, hopefully, the planning application will be received by the Parish Council soon for discussion and then the cost of the project can be looked into further.

The Clerk read out part of the email received from the Sports Club to the Editor of Life-line *"As stated previously in my last email please could you contact the Sports Club before publishing goes ahead in Lifeline (or KM etc) if you have not heard from us in future."* The Clerk added that she had already stated in a previous letter that the Parish Council does not have any control over the content of the publication.

6. RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT MATTERS

6.1 Centenary of WW1 Commemorations

Cllr Stockwell informed all present that he would like the Parish Council to commemorate World War 1. He circulated some sample envelopes to all present which contained a small number of poppy seeds to be given to every household in the parish to place in their gardens. Cllr Martin raised concerns, as a farmer, as poppies spread easily and are hard to get out of crops. Strong chemicals are required to be used to get rid of them, although he added he was broadly in support of the idea but only if they were placed in resident's gardens. After brief discussion all Councillors were in agreement with the idea but asked that all residents are informed that the seeds can only be used in their gardens. Tim Hill then stated that Lifeline would distribute the envelopes on behalf of the Parish Council. Cllr Scott thanked him for the kind offer of help.

6.2 Gate for KM21

The Clerk reported that the Public Rights of Way Officer has stated that they would replace the gate on KM21 but require the landowner to sign a form. On further investigation the form states that the landowner would take on the maintenance of the gate, once it has been supplied. Subsequently, the landowner has asked whether the Parish Council will take on future maintenance as they have requested that the gate be changed on behalf of residents. Cllr Merritt stated that this would only be a problem if the new gate was stolen, as the Parish Council would not be able to fund a replacement one. However, Cllr Merritt offered to weld the tops of the gate so that it could not be removed and so this should stop the issue arising. After brief discussion, all Councillors were in agreement that the Parish Council should take on any future maintenance, although it was noted that, as the gate is galvanised, the need for maintenance should be minimal.

The Clerk then reported on the progress of the replacement gate for KM16. Following the last meeting, the Clerk had received an email from the Public Rights of Way Officer, stating that the gate had been replaced. Having spoken with Cllr Martin, this was found to be incorrect. The Clerk reported that she had managed to download a map of the gates in the area and Cllr Martin had marked the one which requires replacing. This had then been forwarded to the PROW Officer, who has not responded since. Several emails have been sent asking for her to contact the Clerk and also Cllr Martin directly to discuss the progress of reinstating the gate, but no contact has been made.

The Clerk reported that she will continue to chase this.

ACTION: Clerk

7. MATTERS OF REPORT

7.1 County Councillor's Report

Not present at meeting.

7.2 Borough Councillor's Report

Borough Cllr Mortimer informed all present that a meeting is to be arranged with the agent for Tutsham Farm, Phil Norris (Enforcement Officer) and himself to discuss the current issues. Unfortunately this has been delayed as Mr Norris is currently on sick leave. The Borough Council are not classing this as a priority and so it is hoped that the meeting will take place in the next couple of weeks, when Phil Norris returns to work. Cllr Scott offered to be present, if required. Cllr Martin commented that the traffic must come along Hunt Street and Borough Cllr Mortimer stated that the Parish Council could erect a 'No Access' sign. Cllr Scott responded that residents may be looking into arranging this.

Borough Cllr Collins stated that there is a change of law rubber stamping farm building being converted to residential dwellings. Cllr Merritt added that this had already happened to all of the buildings at Tutsham Farm. Borough Cllr Mortimer added that, in the draft plan, live/work units would only be approved in Rural Service Centres in the future.

7.3 Individual Councillor's Reports

Cllr Stockwell reported on a recent Resilience and Reassurance for Local Councils training course which he had attended and circulated information to all Councillors. The idea is for communities to provide self help when an incident occurs.

Cllr Swan stated that the village looks fantastic this spring, with more people planting bulbs on the road side for everyone to enjoy. She added that residents should be congratulated for their work. Cllr Swan asked for additional bulb planting to be added to the next agenda for discussion. **ACTION: Clerk**

Cllr Swan asked for a letter of thanks to be sent to Peter Bissenden and this was agreed by all present. **ACTION: Cllr Swan**

Cllr King reported that litter along the grass verges on Lower Road was becoming a constant problem and needs litter picking. The Clerk stated that she could arrange this and added that if the problem is constantly reported, the Borough Council may look to add the area to their litter picking schedule more frequently. **ACTION: Clerk**

Cllr Merritt reported that a resident had stated that he had a conflict of interest, whilst parked on the grass verge on Lower Road, where the 'Keep of the grass' signs keep being removed. Cllr Merritt stated that he had been trying to carry an extremely heavy generator at the time and had needed to park very close to the property. He added that he will be concreting the signs back in on Monday.

Cllr Merritt informed all present that he has arranged the sign for the new play area.

Cllr Martin reported that he had recently received several calls to his home from a resident who had complaints relating to the Borough Council. During one of the conversations, the resident had been extremely rude to his wife, which was unacceptable. Cllr Merritt reported that, shortly afterwards, he had also received a call from this resident. During discussion, it was noted that Councillors are volunteers within the village and, with members of their family, should not have to put up with being spoken to in such a manner. The caller had stated that Councillors are paid for the work that they complete and should be available to speak with her, when required. It was noted that Councillors do not receive any payment and complete additional work around the village in order to keep the precept for all residents as low as possible. Cllr Martin requested that a letter be sent to the resident informing them that, in future, any complaints be put in writing or alternatively they can attend the Parish Council meeting to raise their concerns in the 15 minutes public discussion at the beginning of the meeting. All Councillors were in agreement with this course of action. **ACTION: Clerk**

It was noted that a suggestion had been made to remove Councillors phone numbers from the Parish contact list and replace them with an email address instead. However, on reflection, it was felt that other residents should not be penalised for the actions of one person.

7.4 Clerk's Reports

The Clerk reported that the end of year audit has been arranged for the last week of April.

8. FINANCE

8.1 Budget Monitoring

The Budget Monitoring Report to 28th February 2014 was **Noted**.

8.2 Income received since the last meeting

Actual payments received since the last meeting were:

Co-operative Interest – Direct Plus Account (January)	£ 2.36
Co-operative Interest – Direct Plus Account (February)	£ 2.62
MBC – Second payment of Parish Service Scheme funding	£749.50

8.3 Cheques for signature

It was proposed by Cllr Martin, seconded by Cllr Johnson "that the Council approve the following payments".

101030 – Mrs A Broadhurst – Nett Salary March	£491.16
101031 – Post Office Ltd – PAYE	£330.80
101032 – Iden Signs – Sign for the play equipment	£ 86.40
101033 – CPRE – Annual Subscription	£ 29.00

8.4 Donations for 2013/14

The Clerk reported that a letter had been received from the Church asking for a donation towards the grounds maintenance of the churchyard. A request has also been received from The Evergreens. It was noted that, last year, the Parish Council had given them £350 and £500 respectively. It was noted that Cllr Swan had declared an interest at the beginning of the meeting and would not be taking part in any discussion or vote. After brief discussion it was proposed by Cllr Martin to make a donation of £400 to All Saints Church and £600 to West Farleigh Evergreens. This was seconded by Cllr Merritt, with all in favour (who could vote). Cheque Nos: 101034 and 101035 were issued.

8.5 Campaign to Protect Rural England Annual Subscription

It was proposed by Cllr Scott to renew the annual subscription at a cost of £29.00. This was seconded by Cllr Stockwell, with all in favour.

9. PLANNING MATTERS

9.1 MA/14/0310 – Marshalls, Hunt Street

Alterations to roof and re-building of three external walls to existing outbuilding.

Parish Council Recommendation: West Farleigh Parish Council wish to see the above planning applications **approved** and do not request that it is reported to the Planning Committee.

9.2 MA/14/0293 – 3 Mill Cottages, Tutsham Farm

An application for listed building consent for the erection of a rear extension.

Parish Council Recommendation: West Farleigh Parish Council wish to see the above planning applications **approved** and do not request that it is reported to the Planning Committee.

9.3 Paperless Planning E-Consultation

The Clerk reported that MBC have circulated information to inform Parish Councils that they intend to commence a trial of paperless planning consultations, although large scale applications will still come out to Parishes in paper form. To begin with this will only be for Parishes that have the capability to manage without paper copies and will commence in June. The Clerk has responded to the recent survey explaining that the Parish Council does not have any access to computers or internet connection at meetings, which would make it extremely difficult to discuss applications, especially if residents attend to discuss particular issues with an application. The results of the survey were noted and it highlighted a number of concerns which had been reported by Parish Councils, including access to laptops and projectors at meetings, the lack of internet connection, the inability to show residents a paper copy if requested and the potential additional administration costs to Parish Councils. Borough Cllr Collins stated that members of MBC had already moved over to paperless planning; although all Borough Councillors had been issued with an I-pad for viewing the documents on-line. Borough Cllr Mortimer stated that the Borough Council had tried this system some years ago, but it had been thrown out. He added that there would be cost implications for Parishes if the Clerks had to print off documents to bring to meetings when no internet and computer access was possible. Councillors agreed that this would be a problem for the Parish Council and the Clerk reported that she would update the Parish Council when further information becomes available.

9.4 MBC's Draft Local Plan

The clerk reported that Maidstone Borough Council's draft Local Plan has now gone out to an informal public consultation, which will end on the 7th May. The document sets the framework to guide the future development of the Borough until 2031, including the need for 19,600 dwellings. It sets out:

- The scale and distribution of development
- Identifies, by site, where development will be located
- Identifies where development will be restrained
- Explains how the Council and its partners will deliver the plan.

Whilst West Farleigh has not been earmarked for any development, Coxheath could have approximately 500 dwellings and additional industrial units. This will impact on the amount of traffic through West Farleigh on roads that have already been highlighted with highways issues. Cllr Martin commented that the crossings over the River Medway including Teston and East Farleigh bridges won't be able to cope with any additional volume of traffic. Cllr Merritt added that the B2101 and the B2163 are already used as rat runs and Cllr Martin stated that Teston Lane has still not been repaired. Borough Cllr Mortimer stated that, whilst Bow Hill has currently been rejected for development, this does not mean that this decision could not be revisited in the future. The Clerk queried why, in the draft Local Plan, MBC had preferred developing 17,100 homes between 2011 and 2031 but had continued to use the figure of 19,600 dwellings. Borough Cllr Collins responded that the council had to use the figure of 19,600 homes as that was the number required for the Borough and Kent County Council had agreed with this. Borough Cllr Mortimer stated that KCC had not agreed the figure, only the methodology used to work out the housing figures, he added that not having a Local Plan in place left the Borough open to developers going to the Inspector stating that Maidstone did not have a five-year land supply. Borough Cllr Mortimer went on to say that Maidstone Borough Council should have spoken to Parishes before consulting on the draft Local Plan and there were a lot of assumptions in the figures. Borough Cllr Collins stated that the housing numbers for Rural Service Centres will increase as the figures originally given were based on a housing need of around 12,000 and this figure has now increased to 19,600. The Clerk responded that Rural Service Centres are still working with the figures that had originally been given, as the Council has not indicated that these would need to increase. Cllr Scott stated that no discussion has taken place with Parish Councils, the Borough does not want to listen or meet with Parishes and clearly do not have any regard for the comments made by Councillors working on behalf of residents. He added that, in the Local Plan, there are implications to the residents of West Farleigh. Cllr Martin added that councillors are volunteers and there had been a 2 hour meeting with the Chief Executive of MBC before Christmas and no action had been taken to resolve the issues raised and he felt that the way the Parish Council had been treated was disgusting.

Cllr Mortimer stated that the Liberal Democrats had boycotted a scrutiny meeting held to discuss the Local Plan as only Borough Councillors were allowed to speak, but surely a scrutiny meeting should hear both sides of the discussion. A request had subsequently been made requesting for the consultation to last for eight weeks and the Leader of the Borough Council had said he would 'think about it', then continued with the six-week consultation. The clerk stated that details of the Local Plan can be found on the Maidstone Borough Council website and residents must send in comments, which can be done on-line. Exhibitions are to be held around the Borough during the consultation period, with the closest ones being:

Thursday 17 April	Coxheath Village Hall, Stockett Lane	1.30pm-7.30pm
Tuesday 29 April	Yalding Village Hall, Lyngs Close	2pm-8pm

It was noted that copies of the plan are in all libraries in the Borough for residents to view.

A resident queried whether the Parish Council would like copies of the comments sent and the Clerk confirmed that they could send copies to her either by email or post. A resident commented that the MP should also be involved and receive copies of documents to get their support as Central Government is dictating the housing required in the Maidstone area. Borough Cllr Mortimer stated that Coxheath had been highlighted as a Rural Service Centre, which will receive a higher number of housing, but this had now been downgraded to a 'larger village' which means that the village can take limited development. Unfortunately, in the Plan, up to 500 homes could still be built and he stated that the question should be asked as to why this is. The Chairman of Coxheath the Parish Council, Cllr Parker, stated that they had been working on a Parish Plan and this had now progressed to a Neighbourhood Plan which has highlighted three sites for development which would include up to 150 homes. They felt that this was an acceptable amount of housing for the village and would include local needs housing, elderly care and some industrial units. Cllr Merritt stated that the Parish Council has seven councillors looking after the well-being of 351 residents; it is impossible to speak to all residents and asked the public present to inform their friends and neighbours of the current situation, asking them to respond to the consultation.

The Clerk informed all Councillors that the Parish Council response would need to be submitted before the next meeting and so the content would need to be agreed over email discussion. **ACTION: All Cllrs / Clerk**

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next full Council meeting will be held on **Monday 19th May 2014** from **7.00pm – 7.45pm** at The Good Intent, followed by the **Annual Parish Meeting commencing at 8.00pm**

With no further matters to discuss, the meeting was closed at 9.35pm