

SMEETH PARISH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
Wednesday 14th March 2012 at 7.00pm
Brabourne Baptist Church

1. Present

Cllr Austen (Chairman), Cllr Herrick (Vice-Chairman), Cllrs Hinchliffe, Plowright, Thorpe, Turner and Mrs S Wood (Clerk).

Cllr Wickham (county councillor), and Cllrs Wood and Howard (ward members) were also present.

Five members of the public attended.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Lilley and Mr Kingston (Community Warden).

3. Minutes of the 2011 Meeting

The Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 9th March 2011 had been agreed and signed as a true record at the Parish Council meeting on 11th May 2011.

4. Chairman's report

I would like to briefly review the year before we take the Matters Arising from last year's minutes.

I want to thank the councillors who have served on the Parish Council. They have all given of their time freely (and might I say quietly and joyfully) as they have sought to give priority to community needs. Working with them and trusting them has meant that meetings have proven to be both amicable and rewarding. Thanks must also go to our parish clerk (Mrs Susan Wood) who works tirelessly in the background ensuring that councillors are informed and up to date as well as ably managing our website and answering queries on our behalf.

We try to look for ways that will benefit the community life of Smeeth (closely linked with Brabourne) and for it to be sustainable as we look to the future, whilst recognising its rural nature and historical status. We hope it will continue to be a safe place for families to grow up in and thanks here must go to the efforts and involvement of our Community Warden and Neighbourhood Officer. For willingness to listen to us and for offering advice and assistance on various issues we are grateful to William Howard our Ward member and Andrew Wickham our KCC councillor.

Regular meetings with the Kent Highways team give us opportunity to voice our concerns and also to understand some of the constraints they operate under.

We are encouraging the communities to be aware of and to support local businesses and this also includes the farms with their increasing pressures to maintain viability.

A Community Led Plan (that means by the people of the parishes and not the parish councils) is being looked into with Brabourne and I hope many will become involved in recognising the strengths and needs, as well as setting out some of the design criteria for the future.

In the event of any major emergency in the area we are developing an emergency plan in conjunction with ABC and KCC.

A visible sign of a very long term safety campaign is the speed indicator sign as you approach Smeeth School; thankfully there have been no major incidents in the past and our hope is that it will continue to act as a reminder for safety.

Other issues are still ongoing and regrettably unresolved, notably concerns for parking and access at Sandy Place.

The need for more affordable housing in the area has been identified, and with Brabourne PC and the English Rural Housing Association we are looking at the possibility of identifying sites where a small development can take place so adding to the successful Fortescue Place in allowing local individuals and families to remain or return to the community.

As we go into the Diamond Jubilee celebrations and the Olympics I hope that the community spirit will continue to develop and thrive amongst us.

5. Matters Arising

- 5.1** Cllr Plowright thanked Cllr Wickham for funding the interactive speed sign near Smeeth School. Cllr Wickham stated that he had used money from his Member Highway Fund, as the situation did not meet criteria based on accident statistics.
- 5.2** Cllr Turner asked if there had been progress towards resolving the parking problems in Sandy Place. Cllr Howard replied that he had been liaising with the Cabinet member for Housing, and officers from Housing Services: a site meeting would be held in the Spring with residents, the Parish Council and officers from ABC. He was confident that agreement could be reached. The Chairman advised that the Community Warden had been monitoring the situation, and had highlighted the lack of disabled parking spaces and that there were fewer spaces than properties. Cllr Howard noted that no provision had been made for visitors, eg care workers, and that this was a lesson for future developments.
- 5.3** Cllr Wood advised that 80 affordable housing units have been built in the borough over the last 4 years but this will increase to 80 per year. The borough council will buy suitable sites, to be subsidised by building 1 or 2 market-priced homes on each site, and is to launch a building housing company. Although there had previously been insistence on a survey by ACRK to assess need, this is not a statutory requirement and ABC will accept PCs' evidence of need.
- 5.4** Cllrs Wickham and Howard advised that grants may be available from KCC and ABC for Jubilee celebrations. Cllr Howard proposed allocating £250 to each parish from the new Member Community Grant Scheme, Cllr Wickham will make grants to parish events provided that they are free and open to all in the parish. The Chairman advised that the Scouts and Guides are organising a family picnic/fun day on the playing field for residents in both parishes. Cllr Plowright stated that it was planned to light a Bonfire Beacon, provide entertainment and fireworks, and confirmed that the event would be free.
- 5.5** Cllr Wood referred to the recent Cabinet announcement about devolving powers to Parish Councils; a 1 year pilot scheme is to be carried out in the town centre and on Romney Marsh, beginning in summer 2012. He confirmed that training would be provided, and that powers would be devolved only to willing PCs. Cllr Wickham stated that money would have to accompany the shift in responsibility. Cllr Hinchliffe asked if minor road repairs could be undertaken but was advised that only off-road repairs could be, furthermore, some areas would be excluded (eg along the A20). The Chairman and Cllr Wickham welcomed the scheme, which may minimise delays, but economies of scale would need to be addressed. Cllr Wood added that the visible presence of the Handyman had increased vulnerable residents' sense of security.

6. Financial Report

The draft Statement of Accounts (attached) was circulated by the Clerk.

Donations had been given to the Football Association, the Village Hall Association, the Playing Fields' Association and the Footpaths' Association. £2000 had been loaned to Brabourne Parish Council for the allotments' project, this was because of a potential funding shortfall due to delayed payment of a grant. The loan was repaid within a week. The reserves have been built up in order that funding is available for projects such as Sandy Place parking. Cllrs Wickham and Turner noted that money had to be held in the reserves to pay for possible referenda, and bye-elections.

7. Any Other Business

The Chairman invited comments from members of the public.

- 7.1** Residents welcomed the progress towards a resolution of the parking problems in Sandy Place. Mr Shorter offered to pass on any information from the PC to all residents, and advised that Mr Robinson (4 Sandy Place) had offered to take down the sycamore tree at no cost, if he could keep the timber. This was welcomed.
- 7.2** Cllr Hinchliffe advised that he had been contacted regarding deterioration of the verge on Plain Hill, exacerbated by parking for the Nursery School. The Chairman noted that the issue of unsafe parking had been raised with the school on a previous occasion, which led to a temporary improvement. He further stated that he thought the planning permission for the school included

a condition that vehicles should drive on to the site for drop-off and pick-up. Cllr Howard asked if there was a turning space for vehicles at the school, but was advised that staff parking rendered this impossible, and also blocked the in and out driveway. There had been no requirement to increase parking provision when the number of children at the school rose from 10 to 20. Cllr Wood reported a similar situation in Aldington, and said that the involvement of the Community Warden had led to a temporary cessation. He suggested that other parishes be contacted to see if it is a problem elsewhere, in which case it could be raised at borough level and then taken to KCC.

Possible courses of action would be discussed at the Parish Council meeting (immediately following the Annual Parish Meeting).

- 7.3** Cllr Wickham advised that Plain Road will be closed for up to 4 weeks from 30th March, to allow for cabling works. The Chairman stated that although a diversion will be in place, there are 5 bus stops on the affected stretch of Plain Road.

The Chairman thanked all those who had attended the meeting, which closed at 8.10pm.