

Smeeth Parish Council
Minutes of the Meeting
Held on Wednesday 21st July 2021 at 7.45pm at the Village Hall.

	Action:
<p>1. Present Cllr Herrick (Chairman) (DH), Cllr Mrs Morey (JM), Cllr Mrs Moo (YM), Cllr Mrs Pereboom (VP) Cllr Roger Baker (RB), 4 members of the public, Borough Cllr Howard and Mrs Block (Clerk) (TB).</p> <p>2. To receive and approve apologies for absence. Apologies for absence had been received from Cllr Alford, who had a prior engagement.</p> <p>3. To receive declarations of interest (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Significant Interests). The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared. There were no declarations of interest to be made.</p> <p>4. To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 4th May 2021. The Parish Council approved the minutes as a true record and the Chairman signed these. A thank you had been received from the Village Hall Association for the monies provided for the Village Hall refurbishment which is now complete. The seed library is now complete and installed, it looks lovely, and thanks are extended to Pat Thornby for making it. Following the discussions regarding War Memorial ownership and the insuring of same, the PCC have agreed ownership and will insure the War Memorial from next year - the Parish Council continue to insure the War Memorial for the current year. There followed a discussion regarding the ownership of the War Memorial as a member of the public considered that the Parish Council should be responsible for this as has been the case across the country since 1921. JM explained that the ownership rests with the PCC as they have a vested interest - the PCC owns the land and the War Memorial. The Village Caretaker will continue to maintain the area within the War Memorial. It was questioned by a member of the public whether this has been undertaken and it was confirmed that it has. The KALC Community Award had not been presented to the nominated couple yet as a representative from Brabourne PC is required. The Clerk will discuss, and contact DH once agreed.</p> <p>5. Update on the situation regarding co-option of a Councillor to the Parish Council There are 2 interested parties, both of whom attended the meeting. The Clerk is to forward detail on becoming a Councillor to both parties and it is intended that the co-option should take place at the next meeting.</p> <p>6. Public session: To receive questions and comments from the public on any agenda item The public had nothing to add at this stage.</p> <p>7. To receive report from the Borough Councillor Cllr Howard explained that there is one particular message he would like to convey to parishioners: The planning applications that cause issues are mainly due to a lack of neighbourly communication and consultation. This could be easily remedied by discussing the plans with those nearby and affected and also with the Parish Council. Cllr Howard went on to report that Ashford Borough Council (ABC) have been dealing with staff</p>	<p>TB</p>

returning to work following lockdown and a return to face-to-face meetings. Several planning meetings have already been held.

The Borough remains heavily affected by the Stodmarsh issue and so far no resolution has been found to this situation. This affects 80% of the Borough and has put a stop to all new residential builds – an update is expected on 9/9/2021. Natural England are not allowing any applications to be passed.

The Stour Centre is now open again with a soft play centre and some parts of the pool are now open. Tenterden Leisure Centre is also fully open.

The Draft Carbon Neutral Plan is out for consultation and ABC would like to receive feedback. ABC is reaching out for community interaction; the consultation closes at the end of the Summer.

6,666 trees have been planted in Discovery Park. ABC are also involved with the Queen's Green Canopy Plans and will be planting a further 30,000 trees on Borough Council land and looking to parishes, communities, and private landowners to be able to plant the remaining 100,000 trees next year.

Cllr Howard noted that with the expansion of Ashford, J10a, and the forthcoming Otterpool Park, the area along the A20 corridor is highly appealing to developers. Cllr Howard is looking to Cllr Bartlett, who covers Mersham, for full support and to jointly defend the green corridor. Cllr Clarkson also recognises the issue and supports the Councillors in this.

ABC is afforded a consultation on a discussion basis with Folkestone and Hythe District Council (formerly Shepway) and ABC uses this to ask that ABC developments be considered when discussing use of the A20 and J10a. J10a was built to meet the infrastructure demands of ABC's housing developments and therefore cannot be used to meet the housing development infrastructure in the neighbouring District.

A member of the public commented that the area is rapidly becoming a giant suburb from Ashford to Hythe. We need farming in order to support the country, but the Government puts too much emphasis on housebuilding. Cllr Howard explained that all he can do to help is to oppose developments in the green corridor. Smeeth and Brabourne will not require any large developments before 2030. Developers have used the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in the past to try and get permission because ABC has fallen below their obligation on their housing supply. This has dropped now because of the Stodmarsh issue and ABC fear the Government could make a decision for ABC as ABC have not fulfilled their obligation, despite that being no fault of their own.

Cllr Howard noted that he had not received representation from residents near Smeeth Hill House as yet. Nor has he received any representations regarding the proposed Solar Farm.

8. To receive an update on the Highways Improvement Plan (HIP)

The HIP sub-committee has met and looked at the possible improvements as suggested by the residents of Smeeth and Brabourne. The list was then prioritised and sent to Kent Highways for comment. Smeeth crossroads safety improvements was top of the list, however, Kent Highways said that now that the cross-roads had been resurfaced and white lined, no further changes could be made until the impact of this was known.

Highways, therefore, went on to looking at the second priority, Plain Road, and the opportunities to slow the traffic. KCC has provided details of a number of different companies who could undertake a traffic survey (a pre-requisite) with costs. They also provided a map of where the traffic counters would be placed. The Parish Council agreed that the Clerk should contact Kent Highways to confirm that the Parish Council requests a survey to be undertaken for 2 weeks beginning the 13th and 20th of September as term time is preferable. The monitoring sites are also requested to be placed within the 30mph confines.

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9. To note the new PCSO's name

A new PCSO has been assigned to the area, this is Luke Jones.

The Clerk is to update the website with the new contact details.

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10. To discuss the future of the Newsletter

VP had circulated the figures for the number of people the newsletter reached.

With Mike Hickmott no longer available to write articles, VP is finding it impossible to come up with the required input. VP would like a volunteer from Brabourne Parish Council. VP considered it important to include planning applications, a report from Cllr Howard, hopefully a report from Cllr Clair Bell, and then a summary of the PC meetings. The Clerk suggested that VP discuss this with Brabourne Parish Council directly. It was suggested that the newsletter should become bi-monthly.

11. KALC Representative Report

The meeting of the Ashford Area of KALC was held via zoom on 7th July.

The plan is for Parish Forums to restart again in September and then to be held every two months with a suggested agenda of:

September- Community Climate Action

November- Community Place Making

February- Caring Communities

Chief Inspector Sparkes gave a short report on behalf of Ashford Police.

Among other topics discussed were

- a. The Parliamentary Constituency draft boundary review which, if adopted, would mean that the area of Ashford Borough would be represented by 3 shared MPs representing the three parliamentary constituencies of Ashford, Faversham and Mid Kent, and Weald of Kent. The proposals at present could affect the wards of Charing, Downs North and Downs West.
- b. Pilot project at ABC to revise the IT platform functionality. Notification of this was circulated by Tracey in the June Local Government Bulletin. It is to be hoped that any new Planning Portal would retain all documentation relating to an application in the site history and not just the last document that shows the Planning Officer's decision.

Amenity Lighting

ABC have been working with KCC to review street lighting and where KCC have accepted there was a case for such lighting for either a Highway or safety reasons such lights have been transferred over to KCC from ABC. All remaining lights are deemed amenity lighting and not essential. These are to be either transferred to parishes for them to take over ownership and pay ongoing costs - or they would be removed. Any to be transferred would first be checked over and converted to LED.

It's now time for parishes to consult/review streetlights within their boundaries and establish if they wish to take on ownership or they are in agreement with removal of each individual streetlight.

Costs involved: -

Electrical testing every 5 to 6 years - £6.96 per column

Structural testing every 5 to 6 years - £10.45 per column

CMS maintenance charge per year if linked to KCC CMS system - £0.66 per column.

Energy yearly - £7.55 per column

Average annual cost – c.£12 per column

<p>In Smeeth there are 11 streetlights that have been identified as amenity lights: - 8 in Calland, 2 in Caroland Close and one in Church Road adjacent to Church House. The costs per lamp will no doubt increase over time. Some costs fall in 5 yearly lump sums and the cost of a lamp standard that fails at some time in the future would be much higher (£1000 or more).</p> <p>Next meeting of KALC is Wednesday 1st September at 7.00pm via zoom or in Civic Centre.</p> <p>Following a discussion regarding the streetlights, it was agreed that a walk of the area would be undertaken, and a letter drafted to the affected residents.</p>	All TB
<p>12. Footpaths and Highways</p> <p>There had been no further news regarding the reported flooded footpath at Calland . David Green at ABC was looking at dealing with this as it had been reported directly to him.</p> <p>There has been some road resurfacing in some areas, particularly near Washington Farm.</p> <p>Cllr Herrick is yet to visit Sandy Place (fencing) but will do so as soon as is practicable.</p> <p>The A20 is currently closed again between J10a and Tesco - the works should be completed this week.</p>	DH
<p>13. Planning matters: to authorise a response to any application(s) and to note any recent planning decisions by Ashford Borough Council or any correspondence on planning matters.</p> <p>13.1 To receive the report of the Planning committee.</p> <p>The Planning report had been circulated to all, and the responses had been agreed.</p> <p>13.2 To discuss the new planning applications for Smeeth Hill House</p> <p>All Councillors had viewed the “glamping” application and all comments made regarding this application. Cllr Howard noted that the local residents have a strength of conviction against this application, which will likely be taken to the Planning Committee if the Planning Officer is minded to support the application.</p> <p>There is also concern about the validity of the “mobile home” application given the reason for requiring this i.e. in order that a gardener can live on site. Concern over the fundamental facts has been questioned.</p> <p>The Parish Council is to respond to both these planning applications endorsing the neighbours’ comments regarding the considerable impact on the area, not enhancing the location, highway safety concerns, conservation concerns, and the lack of complementing the historical environs.</p> <p>The Clerk will also contact the PROW Officer regarding the closure of the footpath.</p> <p>13.3 To discuss the consultation regarding the proposed solar farm</p> <p>It was noted that the consultation is well underway.</p> <p>A member of the public expressed concerns regarding the effect of flooding that occurs in the valley and the use of lithium batteries for storage. Concern was also expressed that the batteries could become a fire risk.</p> <p>The applicant has requested a meeting with Smeeth PC. It was suggested that the Clerk should contact Aldington PC to see if they too are having a meeting, and with Brabourne</p>	<p>TB</p> <p>TB</p> <p>TB</p>

PC, to see whether a joint meeting would be appropriate.

The Clerk is also to ask the developer about the lithium battery concerns raised regarding flooding and fire.

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14. Financial matters:

a) To note the Parish Council's financial position as at 30/06/2021

The current financial position of the Parish Council was noted. The Parish Council has a balance of £84,023.91 as of 30th June 2021.

b) To authorise any payments

The following payments were authorised:

T Denne and Sons	£108.00
HMRC	£420.46
Paul Rodway	£1534.18
KCC Pension	£623.43
Lister Wilder	£173.30
Hastingleigh Garage (van MOT)	£727.02

B Podd	£187.11
HMRC	£135.40
Tracey Block (June salary)	£270.73
Tracey Block (July salary)	£270.53

15. Correspondence

There was no correspondence outstanding.

16. Playing Field Association

No update had been received from the Playing Fields Association but there is an on-going survey to ascertain the appetite for activities in the parishes. This ended on 24/7. A list of issues regarding the play area has been circulated to Committee Members and these are being addressed. The play area has deteriorated markedly in recent years and some items have been taken out of service pending repair/replacement while others need less extensive work. So far there have been no recent minutes or accounts made available.

17. Village Caretaker Scheme

The Village Caretaker scheme continues well and if there are any matters in the Parish that require the attention of the Caretaker, please let the Parish Clerk know. At the moment it is the height of the growing season and Paul is doing his best to stay on top of all that needs to be done.

On 24th May 2021 the Caretaker Committee of all the Parish Councils in the Cluster (Brabourne, Brook, Mersham, and Smeeth) held its yearly Financial Meeting to review the current 3-year plan.

Prudent planning in previous years had built up a balance which had served well but unfortunately this year there was a deficit in the running costs of the scheme due to (i) a significant increase in salary costs due to an increase in mandated pension contributions which were £2203 over what had been previously budgeted and (ii) purchase of equipment (a new ride on mower and a brush cutter) which cost £7684.

Together these account for an end of year deficit of £5577.65 from the Opening Balance

(£8884.26) and Closing balance (£3306.61). In order to keep the finances healthy and to offset the increase in salary costs, which will be ongoing due to the increase in pension contributions, and in order to continue to make provision for future replacement of equipment, including the van, and with a view to returning by 2023/2024 to the previous healthy position, it is proposed that there should be an increase in the contributions from each parish.

Accordingly it is proposed that the contribution from Smeeth in the coming year should be increased to £3260, which will be due in two instalments: £1525 on 31/5/21 and £1735 on 3/10/21.

The Parish Council unanimously agreed to the extra expenditure.

18. Speed Watch

The issue of signage being obliterated by hedging was discussed. There is an ash tree in front of one 30mph speed limit sign on The Ridgeway causing concern. Also, although one 30mph sign on Plain Road was dealt with by the Caretaker, another is still a problem.

Enforcing the speed limit is an uphill struggle. SpeedWatch send their data to Kent Police who keep the information on a database and 2 offences mean the driver receives a letter. Further offences may result in a visit from the Police. The Police collate data from different SpeedWatch groups. A breakdown of recent Smeeth/Brabourne SpeedWatch results with numbers of cars v speeding cars was circulated to the Council.

There are only 4 volunteers in the parish so more would be useful.

19. Community Led Plan/Emergency Plan

The fencing at the basketball area has been repaired and the extended fencing is to be erected imminently. COVID 19 has hampered the CLP activities.

Having a formal local Emergency Plan has essentially become outmoded as social media has meant that local emergencies are dealt with quickly and efficiently by those available.

20. Any Other Business (for information purposes only):

Cllr Herrick had received complaints regarding nuisance from ragwort, quad bikes, and bonfires. He had directed the complainants to Natural England (ragwort) and ABC.

The recent lack of water supply for more than 24 hours as the result of a burst main means that residents are entitled to a refund. Eligible residents are encouraged to sign up to South East Water's vulnerable persons register.

There is a KCC initiative for young people in Kent this summer called "Reconnect," details of which are to be published in the next eNewsletter.

There are some boulders very near the edge of the road outside a property on Woolpack Hill which are causing concern. The Clerk is to report this to Kent Highways.

21. Determining the time and place of ordinary meetings of the Council up to and including the next annual meeting of the Council.

Wednesday 8th September 2021 – possibly in the Baptist Church - DH to confirm.
Wednesday 10th November 2021
Wednesday 12th January 2022
Wednesday 9th March 2022
Wednesday 11th May 2022

The meeting closed at 10.10pm.

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