

Smeeth Parish Council

Minutes of the Meeting

Held on Wednesday 13th September 2023 at 7.00pm at Brabourne Baptist Church.

Cllr Herrick welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. To note those present.

Cllr Herrick (DH), Cllr Baker (RB), Cllr Graham (RG), Cllr Grant (SG), and Cllr Mrs Morey (JM).
Cllr Betty (Borough Councillor), 3 members of the public and Mrs Block (Clerk) (TB).

2. To receive and approve apologies for absence.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Denyer and Y Bramwell, a new soon to be Councillor.

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 made.

4. To approve the minutes of the meetings held on 12th July 2023.

The Parish Council approved the minutes as a true record and the Chairman signed these.

5. To discuss matters arising from previous minutes that are not covered by the agenda.

There had been no contact from Quinn Estates regarding a site meeting for the land behind Ramstone Close.

A response regarding the EV points consultation had been submitted, there had been no further update.

The bus shelter request had not been responded to.

6. To receive report from the Borough Councillor

STODMARSH UPDATE

In July, the Leader of the Council, Cllr Noel Ovenden, joined a number of other local authority leaders across the country in signing a letter asking the Prime Minister to act immediately on nutrient neutrality and demanding Government intervention. Possible strategic solutions, such as the creation of wetlands, have also stalled because key Government organisations are not working constructively with councils and constantly change their advice or stance on the matter.

Upon receipt of the letter the Leader, together with other local authority leaders, was invited to 10 Downing Street to meet with the Prime Minister's special advisors to discuss government support in finding a national solution to nutrient neutrality. The Leader specifically raised the issue of the need to unblock the delivery of affordable homes in Ashford and argued that not building new homes does very little to slow the increase in water pollution and that Government organisations need to own this national problem.

The Government has now responded by announcing a range of new measures to help address the impact of nutrient neutrality. The Government intends to legislate in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill to make Natural England's rules on nutrient pollution advisory rather than mandatory and that funding will be available to help tackle the underlying problem of pollution in England's waterways.

Although the detail is awaited, it is hoped that this quick reaction by the Government will help the Council get the Local Plan back on track to deliver much needed homes in the right places.

MYASHFORD PORTAL

MyAshford is an online customer portal that gives residents access to the various accounts held with Ashford Borough Council in one place. Once residents set up an account they can view council tax bills, find out their rent balance, see who their local councillor is, apply for parking permits and

more. Once signed up, residents can link all their accounts under one single sign-on, making it easier to access all their information in one place.

The old MyAshford system will be shut down on Friday 29 September 2023. Existing users will still be able to access the system until that date, but it is recommended that residents sign up for a new MyAshford account. Existing users are being contacted giving them guidance on how to register to the new portal.

For more information, visit www.ashford.gov.uk/your-council/my-ashford.

INCREASE IN TARRIFFS IN COUNCIL OPERATED CAR PARKS

Over the last few years, the Council has experienced a significant increase in its costs relating to car parking, mainly driven by increased utility costs. The Council policy is to review parking charges every three years; however, the last review had been postponed and so it had been four years since the charges were reviewed.

Tariffs have therefore been increased by approximately 10% (rounded to the nearest 10p) whereas the Consumer Price Index has increased by 20.18% since the last increase. The charges are still lower than those in nearby centres.

LAUNCH OF CITIZENS' PANEL

Ashford Borough Council is launching a Citizens' Panel to encourage residents to engage with the Council give their views and opinions on services and issues that affect the borough.

Citizens who sign up will be able to share opinions and take part in consultations through online surveys and polls to provide their views on various topics of interest to residents. The aim is to consult the panel up to six times a year and provide regular updates on what changes to services have been made because of the feedback received. (For example, having a 'You said, we did' style campaign).

More information on the Citizen's Panel can be found at: www.ashford.gov.uk/citizens-panel

UPDATE ON KCC HIGHWAYS POTHoles AND SAFETY CRITICAL DEFECTS

KCC Highways report that it has received additional government funding to ensure that potholes and safety critical defects can be repaired as soon as possible before the onset of winter. Six additional contractors have been appointed by KCC to ensure the required resources are on hand to deliver the level of repair needed. Highways stewards will prioritise reports of damage received from residents as well as those picked up from routine inspections.

7. Public session: To receive questions and comments from the public on any agenda item.

There were no comments from the members of the public.

8. Co-option of Councillors

CLlr Graham completed the relevant paperwork and was co-opted to the Council.

9. Financial report

9.1 To approve the Financial Statement

To note the Parish Council's financial position for the beginning of the new Financial Year.

The current financial position of the Parish Council was noted. The Parish Council has a balance of £90,561.96 as of 31st August 2023.

9.2 To agree payments in accordance with the Budget

Paul Rodway	1821.26
HMRC	£ 589.30
T Denne and Son	£ 118.80
Kent Pension Fund	£ 790.86
P Rodway – pull cord for the mower	£ 7.57
HMRC	£ 145.20

Caretaker Scheme	£1595.00
T Block	£ 290.10
T Block	£ 290.10
BWP Creative	£ 240.00
Scouts and Guides – grant payment	£ 500.00
Brabourne and Smeeth Village Hall – grant payment	£1000.00
Brabourne and Smeeth Playing Field – grant payment	£2333.00

10. KALC representative report

Cllr Morey reported: I attended the meeting of Ashford Area KALC meeting held at Civic Centre on Wednesday 6th September.

An update was given by Inspector Johnson on behalf of the Ashford Police. The local beat officer for the Rural North Ward (which includes Smeeth) PC Faires has left the force and PC James Murrell took over the Rural North area from September. The e-newsletter from the Police was sent out to all Parish clerks in August and September and the Police continue to encourage everyone to sign up for “My Community Voice “to keep updated with what is happening in their area.

There was no progress to report on Action with Communities in Rural Kent - the position regarding the village halls and housing staff remains the same.

There was no update on when the CCTV Team or Enforcement Team from Ashford BC would be able to give a presentation to the Ashford Area KALC committee. The impact of the amendments to the Levelling Up Bill regarding the nutrient neutrality on local planning issues was discussed. It is not known whether the large reed bed previously considered by Ashford Borough will now proceed and if so on what basis, as it appears that control of planning decisions now moves from Natural England to local authorities.

The post of Secretary to Ashford Area Committee KALC remains to be filled after November when the current secretary leaves the post.

Next meeting will be Wednesday 1st November at Ashford Civic Centre.

11. Planning

11.1 To receive a Planning Report

There have been 4 planning applications since the last meeting. None of these have caused the Parish to be concerned so no objection responses have been submitted.

It was noted that when the Clerk emails the Planning Officer, the comments are not always acknowledged.

Ashford Borough Council have been formulating their Local Plan 2041. There has been a call for sites that are capable of holding 5 or more homes.

JM and RB attended the planning training.

11.2 To agree any outstanding planning responses.

There were no outstanding planning responses.

12. Litterpicker

The Clerk is to meet with a potential litterpicker. Any available Councillors will join this meeting on Monday morning at 9.30.

13. Village Caretaker Scheme

The Village Caretaker scheme continues well.

The Village Caretaker Cluster committee met on July 20th at Brabourne Village Hall to carry out the financial review for the year ending March 2023 and consider the budget and financial plan for next 3 years. Ashford BC are not willing to increase their contribution against inflation and Kent CC increased their contribution by 1.7%. Salary costs were over budget due to mandated step increase in pay scale and mandated pension increase which will carry through to future year budgets. The intention is that the scheme will continue to rebuild a surplus pot over the next three years as provision for equipment replacement. This year there was an unexpected purchase required of a new trailer after it was stolen. The salary costs were over budget due to

mandated step increase in pay scale and mandated pension increase. The contributions from each of the Parishes in the Cluster are to continue as previously planned.

The Village Caretaker Cluster Committee also met on 26 July at Brook Village Hall to carry out Paul's annual staff appraisal.

If there are any matters within the Parish requiring the attention of the Caretaker, please notify the Parish clerk.

14. Local Organisations – Updates

Community Led Plan – The group have been fairly active at the pond in Church Road. To deal with it properly would be extraordinarily expensive. The connecting pipe between the 2 chambers is to be cleared by Kent Highways. CLP are also looking at the benches on The Warren - this is Brabourne Parish Council's responsibility. The footpath between Mountbatten Way and Canterbury Road has areas that are overgrown - CLP are discussing the issue with Jon Rose as the Scouts might be able to help with the clearing of the path. The CLP have taken on the comment regarding the planting on the verge at the Playing Field. There is currently an issue with people parking on the verge.

Playing Field Association – A report had been circulated. There has been some damage to the goal posts and motorbike damage over the summer.

Royal British Legion – There has been a fallow period over the summer. The RBL are stepping towards the poppy appeal and Remembrance Sunday. This year the RBL is able to take payments by card. The RBL meetings are on the 1st Tuesday of the month and people will be welcome to attend any meetings and events. The RBL poppy collection will be held between 28/10 and 12/11. The Caretaker is requested to clear the leaves in the run up to the Memorial services.

Scouts and Guides – Jon Rose reports - Since the last PC meeting, we took 19 Young People to Foxlease in the New Forest where we had a good week's camping.

The Scouts & Explorers experienced a wide range of activities including Climbing, Zip Wires, Crate Stacking, Raft Building, Cycling in the New Forest as well as hiking.

We even found time to visit Highcliffe Beach for a day's relaxation on the final day of camp. A great week and the weather wasn't too bad in what was a rather damp summer!

We are urgently seeking new leaders and supporters for the group as several of our long term key leaders are leaving – Katrina from Cubs now and 2 of us from Scouts at the end of this year. We will be delivering recruitment flyers through the villages and via local schools in the next couple of weeks.

Fingers crossed for success.

Smeeth Sandpit Company – There was no update.

Smeeth Women's Institute – The start of the autumn session was well supported with an open meeting. There were some new faces attending the meeting. The programme is interesting to the end of year in March 2024. The WI meets on the 2nd Monday of the month.

Speedwatch – Graham Snazelle sent the following:

Date/Time	Site	Offenders	Vehicles Passing	Letters Sent
22 July 8.00 to 9.30	Church Road	20	78	1
24 July 8.00 to 9.30	Ridgeway	4	30	1
26 July 7.30 to 9.00	Warren Heights	6	59	0
27 July	Church Road Rained off			

30 August 8.00 to 9.30	Church Road	14	111	1
31 August 10.30 to 12.00	Ridgeway (rained off at 11.15)	4	15	0
6 September 16.30 to 18.00	Church Road	19	222	0
7 September 7.30 to 9.00	Warren Heights	10	67	0
Totals		77	582	3

We have been informed by the Police that letters are only sent to offenders where there is more than one observation, unless they are going exceptionally fast. The majority of the above are 1st time offenders, hence the low number of letters sent.

Yet again we are hampered in our efforts as we only have 4 volunteers, including myself. It makes it very difficult to organise sessions at regular intervals.

I would like to add that Plain Road, particularly Plain Hill and The Plain, is suffering from excessive speeding by trades people in vans and alarmingly by an increasing number of motorists, who are mostly local. There have been several accidents recently, thankfully no injuries being sustained. As much as I detest speed bumps, I feel this is probably the only solution to curb this dangerous behaviour. Would the Parish Council please consider putting such a request forward to the powers that be. Despite the recent additional increase in size of the 30mph signs plus the new 30mph road markings, there has not been any noticeable improvement.

Village Hall – Now holidays are over bookings are getting to exceed pre-covid levels with a new set of Yoga classes twice a week. The table tennis teams are using the hall for 9 hours per week as last year. A new sewing group meets monthly, so we now have a digital sewing group, a quilting group and a general sewing group meeting monthly for all day bookings.

Party bookings at weekends have also increased notably this year- especially children's parties. Income is exceeding outgoings, but maintenance, electricity and insurance are costly.

Activities supported by the hall (and hence by the parish councils) include Pilates, Yoga, gardening, WI, Table tennis, sewing, keep fit, Karate for juniors, dog training.

15. **Information Sharing – update from Working group.**

RB and SG provided an update on the Working Group discussions.

The Parish Council ratified that it would continue to use the database as it is in order to email residents of both parties.

The Parish Council ratified that all communication should be sent to a member of each Council before it is sent out.

The Parish Council agreed to consider the use of social media as a means of communicating with parishioners. To do this, the Parish Council will need to create a Social Media Policy.

The Working Group will consider the possible creation of some sort of replacement for the Parish Magazine - to include an events calendar, or a similar means of sharing information about events, for residents without internet access.

16. **Update re: Highways Improvement Plan**

The Clerk had attended a meeting with Jennie and Kieran and they had agreed to progress the requests the Council had. The Clerk will follow up with this with East Kent Highway Improvements.

17. **Footpaths and Highways (including parking issues and bridleways)**

The streetlights response had been submitted.

The footpath on Church Road has been elevated for Cllr Bell to negotiate with Kent Highways to

achieve some response/action.

18. Correspondence

The Clerk had been asked about a salt bag, the Clerk is to ask the Baptist Church about having a tonne of salt delivered, the Clerk will communicate with Rev. Jerry Newson about this.

The Clerk had received a letter from Fordred's Charity asking whether Smeeth PC could send a representative to their annual meeting on 25th October.

19. Any other business – Fordred's nominations and Wreath laying (November)

The Councillors are asked to consider some nominations for the Fordred's Charity funds.

Cllr Herrick is to attend the wreath laying at the War Memorial and Smeeth Church. The Parish Council wreath has gone missing since last year. If the wreath is not located, a new one will be purchased.

Rev. Jerry Newson had been in contact - it is hoped that there will be another Community Day in May 2024.

SG explained that there are issues with the No 10 bus service. Cllr Betty is communicating with Stagecoach and hopes to be able to have a meeting with Stagecoach. The Clerk recommended communicating with Cllr Bell.

It was noted with sadness of the passing of Bob Dryland and Peter Clayton. The Parish Council send sympathies to the families of these gentlemen.

20. Date and time of next meetings:

Wednesday 8th November 2023

Wednesday 10th January 2024

Wednesday 13th March 2024

Wednesday 8th May 2024