

BIDDENDEN PARISH COUNCIL

APPROVED Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Tuesday 26 May 2015 at 7.00 pm in the Village Hall, Biddenden

Present: Cllr C Friend (Chair) Cllr A Lidgett
 Cllr D Boulding Cllr S Parks
 Cllr E Cansdale Cllr E Stevenson-Rouse
 Cllr P Harris J Tydeman

Cllr M Hill, KCC
Cllr N Bell, ABC

Mrs A Swannick (Clerk)

12 parishioners attended

1. Apologies for absence

None.

2. Approval of the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of 22 April 2014

There being no comments or amendments put forward by councillors or parishioners, the minutes were deemed a true and proper record of the meeting. Proposed by: Cllr A Lidgett
Seconded by: Cllr S Parks. **Unanimous.**

3. Chairman's Report by Cllr Chris Friend

The Chairman announced the sad death of Lt Col John Rymer-Jones. He served as a councillor and Chairman of the parish council for a number of years and will be sorely missed.

The Chairman read out his report (copy attached).

4. KCC report by Cllr M Hill

At this time of year, money is a top priority and the Council Tax has had to be increased by 2% this year. Savings have to be made over the next three years. Over the last six years of the recession half a billion pounds has been removed from the Council's budget. KCC has a responsibility to try and keep all services going at an acceptable level and this has to be done by transformation of the way services are delivered. Some services such as back office services, HR, IT and Finance are being looked at in terms of outsourcing.

With regard to devolution of power, conflicting messages are being received from the government. Big counties such as Kent as well as cities should take part.

Councillors are given £25,000 to give to small projects.

KCC is not up for election this year, but the general election result does give more stability. The next elections will be in 2017. Cllr Hill stated that he is enjoying his work, and enjoys working with villages and parishes.

Questions:

- a) Central government says that services should be shared with another authority. *KCC is putting effort into outsourcing rather than sharing. The benefits of outsourcing and getting services run by the private sector are enormous if it is got right. Authorities do try sharing and it is not always successful.*
- b) The state of High Halden Road was brought up in terms of haunching and potholes. *Cllr Hill will take it up again.*
- c) The cross roads at Castleton Oak is dangerous. *The road requires realignment.*

The Chairman thanked Cllr Hill for attending the meeting and answering questions.

5. Ashford Borough Council Report by Cllr Neil Bell

Cllr Bell thanked everyone who voted. The Council increased the number of conservative seats from 30-34.

- a) Over the last 5 years, Ashford Borough Council has frozen the Council Tax and has the lowest Council Tax across Kent and it has done this in part by sharing recycling services with other councils.
- b) Money to local government is being reduced, but despite this surveys show local government is getting more popular.
- c) The Council aims to keep the frequency of recycling service.
- d) A number of charities, shops and post offices received discretionary rate relief granted by ABC. Normally these organisations have to apply for the relief every year, but ABC is saying that anyone who receives it will continue to receive it for the next four years, ie until the next election.
- e) ABC wishes to encourage home ownership. This ties in with central government proposals in the Queen's Speech and the existing government commitment to people renting from housing associations to have the right to buy their homes. The government is also going to require councils to sell 5% of their most valuable properties when they become vacant, and once sold, councils will be required to build a more affordable, cheaper property on a one-for-one basis.
- f) Cllr Bell will continue to pick up on planning applications and work with parish councils .

6. Police Liaison

PCSO Burden sent the following report:

"Crime statistics 86 recorded crimes from April 2014 – March 2015"

Anti-Social behaviour has been minimal in the village , apart from a number of occasions whereupon unknown persons have been climbing on the roof of the Porta cabin pre-school and damaging equipment.

A dedicated Anti-social behaviour patrol were sent to the location at key times to provide a visible presence, which seems to have deterred the offenders.

Blockages to the toilets in the Post Office Car Park had been reported a few times this year, which seems to have stopped.

Anti-social behaviour regarding cars has started to become a problem again this year, with a number of drivers from the village causing annoyance to other local residents with their manner of driving and loud modifications to their vehicles.

Statistics from POLICE.UK show from only April 2014 – March 2015 which show 19 calls recorded were Violence and sexual offences, this could range from a minor domestic altercation to a serious assault , Police . Gov choose to categorise this together.

Second highest recorded crime is Theft at 17 calls, (sheds, outhouses, farms) this does not include Burglary dwelling which was recorded at 13.

Criminal damage and antisocial behaviour was also recorded as 12 and 14 respectively and there are a small number of other recorded offences such as drugs and vehicle crime.

Being a rural community I have seen the impact theft from farms have had on businesses such as loss of business to raises in insurance premiums.

Farms working possibly day and night, during harvesting for example are very easily accessible to thieves, crime statistics show there has been a number or recorded crimes on farm land and out houses, resulting in unrecoverable items and high insurance premiums.

There is a close network of farmers in Biddenden who work closely monitoring any suspicious activity.

Hareplain Road , Frittenden Road and High Halden Road have suffered particularly badly this year.

PCSO Burden covers both St Michael's Ward near Tenterden and Biddenden, holding a bi weekly surgery at the post offices on a Friday for any residents who wish to attend to speak to me.

Speed Watch is a regular initiative run by local parishioners who have links with Kent Police Safer Roads team for advice and guidance.

PCSO Burden works closely with Ashford Borough council and the Community Safety Unit at Ashford Police Station to attend joint visits on Neighbourhood issues.”

Cllrs thanked PC Burden for her report but were concerned that there were no details of what the police were doing about these issues or proposals for reducing such crime. The Clerk to follow up.

7. Parishioners questions

a) Concern was expressed regarding the difficulty of getting round the village green when turning right. It was suggested that each side should be one-way. *Cllr Bell stated that he would keep pressing for a change.*

b) Concern was expressed regarding the two site submissions for Biddenden relating to house-building. *Nothing further has been heard from ABC on this matter. Cllr Bell stated that he will continue to oppose these sites. The local plan is updated every five years by ABC. With the housing in Sandeman Way, the possible development of the Tapley Field and potentially at the weavers, Cllr Bell was not sure there was a need for general needs housing. There is also the large development at Chilmington Green which will come within a mile of Bethersden. This alone will increase traffic and people coming into Biddenden.*

c) A question was asked about the problems with parking in The Weavers and concern expressed regarding this increasing once the new houses are built. *Concerns were noted.*

There being no further business, the Chairman thanked everyone for attending the meeting and thanked everyone for their hard work over the past year.

The meeting closed at 20.15.

Refreshments were provided for all attending.

Alison Swannick
Parish Clerk

Biddenden Annual Parish Meeting

26th May 2015

Parish Council chairman's report

Welcome

I would firstly like to welcome Councillor Mike Hill who is the Cabinet member for Community Services for KCC and the member for Tenterden and Councillor Neil Bell who is Biddenden council member on ABC (Congratulations to Neil for his election victory)

Following the recent General and Local Council Elections the Parish Council is made up of the following councillors:

Chris Friend (Chairman)

John Tydeman (Vice Chairman)

Adrian Lidgett

Eileen Cansdale

Philippa Harris

Scott Parkes

Edward Stevenson Rouse

David Boulding

And not forgetting our Clerk Alison Swanick.

I would like at this stage to thank Tom Lupton who stood down as chairman shortly after the last annual meeting and (retired) as a councillor before the last election. He has been a councillor for around 8 years and was chairman for 3. He has contributed enormously to the working of the council and he will be sorely missed. Thank you Tom for all your hard work.

Report.

Last summer was generally good and although the summer of 2013 will go down as the year when the first and spectacular Biddenden Tractor Fest, it will be remembered when day 1 as a washout, day 2 was very successful. Sadly because the main returns were for only one day the event made a loss.

However to their credit BEST decided to put on a similar spectacular in the summer of 2014 and this time the weather was kind and the 2 days were an incredible success and a large share of the profits have been distributed to village groups and organisations

Again BEST will be putting on another Tractor Fest this summer and I urge you to all visit the show and tell all your friends and workmates to come and enjoy themselves and ultimately contribute to the assistance of the village organisations.

Community Led Plan

The community Led Plan has been passed onto KCC and ABC and we keep pressing for action where action is required.

Speeding

One of the important finding of the CLP was the problem with speeding through the village. And as noted in the minutes of the last APM the village is operating a speedwatch group. Since February 2014 we have carried out 8 5/7 day periods and in those periods we have :

- a) Registered 591 cars exceeding the 30mph limit
- b) The average speed of the vehicles exceeding the 30mph is 40.78mph
- c) Of the speeding vehicles the police have written warning letters to 51 drivers
- d) We have 19 volunteers who are willing to carry out the speedwatch duties in all weather conditions and thanks go to all of them. Special thanks should go to Adrian Liggett who organises the rota for each speedwatch period and then collates all the information and sends that to the police. Please, if you or anyone you know wishes to be a volunteer please let Adrian know, you will be most welcome.

We have also requested a permanent variable speed sign in North street and a similar sign to replace the 30mph sign on the Sissinghurst Rd.

ABC Development plan

ABC has selected 2 possible sites from the original list and these are BD4 and BD8 as possible future development sites. This of course doesn't mean that these 2 are in anyway definite, and nothing can be ruled in or ruled out. However no further action will be taken by the PC until such time as ABC commences further action which could be any time up to the year 2030.

As most of you are aware the development of 12 houses in Sandeman Way are well on the way to completion and I believe will be on the Market in the Summer. The PC were asked to put forward a couple of names for the road and I believe the accepted name will be Maydes Close.

Local Needs Housing

The land known as Tapley Field which is currently owned by the Biddenden Consolidated Trust is currently being discussed as a possible site for the building of affordable housing. A figure for the land has been agreed and the dealings have now been put in the hands of the surveyors. Any homes that are built will only available for rent rather than to buy and renters will, where possible, have local connections.

Southside Pavement

You cannot help but have noticed that the works to what has been previously referred to as the Southside Pavement have now been completed and we now have a walkable pavement linking the village to the sports field. The PC contributed £10,000.00 to the final phase of the works and I trust you will agree that this was money well spent.

Post office , Toilets and Car Park

Since September last year the PC has been deep in discussions with the Post Office, the current Post Mistress and a third party over the future of the Post Office.

The Post Office policy has changed in as much as from April 2015 they will be making no further annual payment to those who run any smaller post offices and in future they would have to rely on any commission for selling PO items and profits from other items for sale within the post office. The current Postmistress understandably decided that with the goods, other than those of the PO and with rent a, insurance etc the current situation was unsustainable. The pc then had a series of meetings with the PO and the owner of Headcorn PO and the outcome was that he would take over the running of the post office albeit with a slightly reduced overall hours. The PC agreed to a reduction in rent and a new lease was drawn up. Since then the PO has seemingly put in various obstacles and to date no agreement has been made and whilst they agree that Biddenden should have proper post office facilities rather than an outreach site they are still procrastinating over certain issues. However Rona has agreed, for the time being, to continue running the post office and the PC has made certain adjustment to assist on the financial side. The PC and I`m sure the village as a whole would thank Rona for what she is doing when she could easily have said enough is enough and walked away.

Toilets

Apart from minor vandalism which we always seem to get, we have had a reasonably untroubled year with the exception of a couple of problems. We have had 2 occasions where members of the public have been locked in the

toilets. On the first occasion the fire brigade were called and the second occasion I managed to release the lady myself. Our apologies go to the 2 individuals involved and hope it doesn't happen again.

Car Park

No problems apart from some vehicles overstaying the 4 hour time period laid down. I would like to remind people that it is a public car park rather than a permanent parking area. It does get busy at times and cars that are parked longer than they should are stopping others from parking legitimately.

Gordon Jones fields, Millennium Fields and Jubilee Meadow.

GJ Field. We are still having trouble with the drainage on the football pitches and a quote for drainage has been obtained and passed to the PC for over £100000.00 We will be looking into ways of improving the drainage and seeing if there are grants available especially as the BFC are now affiliated to the FA .

The numbers of teams playing have increased to 9, ranging from U6`s to U15`s along with 5 asides and 7 asides, The Biddenden U15`s were winners of the ADFY cup in 2014 . Well done to them and well done to the dedication and hard work put in to the volunteers who run the football groups.

Millennium Field. We are about to undertake some tree works following a tree survey. This will mainly consist of trimming back dead and damaged branches.

Play Area We have received the results of the survey that was sent to the school and playgroups and have now collated all the results and worked out what equipment is required. The next step is to obtain 3 quotes and then seek grants for the amount over and above the £35000.00 promised by the PC. We are probably looking a total figure of between 50 – 60 thousand pounds for the complete works but will provide the most up to date equipment and be fit for the next 25 years which what some of the existing equipment has lasted.

Re-cycling

We have now received the last of the recycling funds from ABC and following the last pay-outs we have a balance of approximately £5000.00 in the fund for future pay-outs.

Policing

We receive a monthly statement on the crimes in Biddenden and whilst the figures are reasonably low it could of course be better. There are still problems with rural crimes and thefts from farms etc. and would ask for everybody to be vigilant and report any suspicious activities to the police. Thanks once again to our police and especially PCSO Angie Burden who is, as always available to answer your questions or problems relating to crime.

Finances.

The Council's accounts for 2014/15 have now been audited and are being prepared for the external auditor. The following is a brief overview.

During the year the Council spent £67,469.66(2013/14 £59,855.24), and operated at a surplus of £1269 during the year. ending the year with a cash balance of £106,469.66).The savings represent reduced maintenance costs for the Councils property, and are likely to be picked up in the next year (e.g. Play Area on the Gordon Jones Playing Field).

The Council has changed the level of precept payable by parishioners for 2015/16 due to the reduction in grants from Ashford Borough Council and the Millennium field single payment scheme. It is anticipated the cash position will reduce significantly due to the £35,000 allocated to the Gordon Jones Field play area

John Mayne School

The PC receives a monthly report from the school and we cannot but be impressed how the school is progressing. It has been reported that the school is oversubscribed for next year which goes to show how confident the parents are with the standards of the teaching. Congratulations must go to the Head teacher Melanie Williams, her staff and of course the children for the school achieving a "Good" rating from Ofsted.

Communications

I know a lot of Parishioners are frustrated with the speed of Broadband and in this day and age of electronic communications they have every right to be. However we have had assurances from BT that the final link up with the fibre optic cables should be completed shortly. However we have had assurances with BT before and to this end we are also in talks with various providers looking at wireless broadband so hopefully one way or another we should have a faster connection sooner rather than later.

Allotments

There have been a few changes to the allotment owners this year with new members taking over from those who have given up for one reason or another. However we have no names on the waiting list so all of you with green fingers and want to grow your own veg. please let the Clerk or Richard Harris know and you can be put on the waiting list.

Finally

As always thanks must go out to all in our community, being the Pubs, Restaurants, Tea rooms, shops Post office and all businesses, and all other volunteers who go out and make Biddenden a wonderful and worthwhile village to live in.

Thanks to you one and all.

