

**Minutes of the 118<sup>th</sup> MEOPHAM Annual Parish Meeting**  
**held on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2012, at 8.00 p.m.**  
**at the St Johns Centre, Wrotham Road, Meopham.**

**In the Chair:**

Cllr D Powell, Chairman, Meopham Parish Council.

**Also Present:**

Cllr Mrs Lynn Milner, Deputy Mayor of Gravesham, Cllr Mrs L Boycott (Borough Councillor), Cllr M Snelling, (Borough and County Councillor), Canon G Oliver (St John's the Baptist Church), Mr J Ogden DL, Mrs M Jones (Chairman, Luddesdown Parish Council), PC D Smith, PCSO J Hartley and 17 representatives of local organisations, other invited guests and electors.

**Parish Council Members:**

Cllrs A Aitken, M Bramer, S Buchanan, C Courtney, M Everson, P Hasler, H Marshall, J McTavish, D Powell and B Wade

**In Attendance:**

Ms S Steven (Deputy Clerk).

**1. Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Mr A Holloway, MP, Cllr J Cubitt (Borough and County Councillor) Cllr Ken Kemsley (Meopham Parish Council), Air Commodore J Walliker, Mr D Freere, Mrs C Barnes (ex-Chairmen of Meopham Parish Council), Cllr Roland Graves (Vigo Parish Council), Mrs J Baker (past Meopham Parish Councillor) and five representatives of local organisations, other invited guests and electors.

**2. Chairman's Welcome to guests, electors, members of the public and the Press**

The Chairman welcomed the Deputy Mayor of Gravesham, Cllr Mrs Lynn Milner along with other distinguished guests, Members of Council and Parishioners of Meopham. The Chairman then invited the Deputy Mayor to address the meeting.

Cllr Mrs Milner thanked the Parish Council for their kind invitation to this meeting and said that it gave her great pleasure to attend Parish Council meetings in the Borough. She gave apologies on behalf of the Mayor, Cllr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi. Cllr Mrs Milner then congratulated the Parish Council on the excellent programme of planned Jubilee events and hoped that the celebrations would prove enjoyable for all residents of Meopham.

### **3. Minutes of the previous (117<sup>th</sup>) Annual Parish Meeting**

The minutes of the 117<sup>th</sup> Annual Parish Meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2011 were confirmed.

### **4. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

### **5. Chairman's Address and Annual Report**

The Chairman reported that the major issue that the Parish Council dealt with this year had been responding to a consultation by Gravesham Borough Council (GBC) regarding local planning. A public meeting in November 2011 had sought views of residents and this was so well attended that people were turned away. The Chairman took this opportunity to thank "Campaign to Protect Rural England" (CPRE) for their support at the public meeting, the residents who attended and all those who provided written comments.

The Chairman further reported that from the feedback it was very clear that there was an overwhelming rejection of the plans presented and that the proposal to build on any greenbelt land or change the greenbelt boundaries should be opposed. Therefore, the Parish Council on behalf of the residents requested GBC to submit a document based on the Long Term Migration figure for Gravesham of 4,600 dwellings to be provided over the next 20 years together with a credible supporting plan to redevelop Brownfield sites that create more employment with the housing, with no building on greenbelt and no changes to the greenbelt boundaries.

GBC had yet to issue their final proposed Local Development Framework for submission to the Secretary of State's Planning Inspectorate, but it was understood that they had revised their plans and it is expected that they would be submitting a case based upon 4,600 houses to be provided over a 18 year period with no development on the greenbelt as currently defined. However, the Local Development Plan was likely to contain an "Exceptions Policy" allowing for the provision of accommodation within the Green Belt where identified needs could be demonstrated for affordable housing/sheltered accommodation.

Cllr Powell stated that the Parish Council were conscious that there may be a need for more affordable housing in Meopham but the Parish Council's policy was still to support building on Brownfield sites in preference to development in the greenbelt. He further noted that the application to build 50 sheltered homes with extra care facilities on the land north of Longfield Hill and west of Evenden Road had been withdrawn by the applicant in September 2011.

The Chairman then moved on to issues affecting the A227 and highways. The A227 was closed again for four days in June 2011 due to a burst water main. Southern Water had advised the Parish Council that their leak

reduction programme had led to a smaller number of mains bursts across their network. However, the Parish Council had responded to Southern Water requesting that they consider a study into whether the damage to the pipes on the Wrotham Road had been exacerbated by vibration from heavy vehicles. The Parish Council would continue to monitor this issue.

The Chairman congratulated Kent Highway Services and the local farmers for providing an excellent service in keeping Meopham moving during the snow period.

The Chairman then reported that as part of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations, the Parish Council had planted six native trees (one for each decade of the Queen's reign). The trees were a Copper Beech, Hornbeam, Rowan, Weeping Silver Birch, Whitebeam and an English Oak. The Meopham Historical Society sponsored the English Oak that had been planted on Hook Green in memory of the late Mr Jim Carley, who lived opposite the Green. The remaining five trees were planted at Judson's Recreation Ground. Four of them replaced trees in very poor condition that had been removed. Some of these trees had already been sponsored but other sponsors were sought.

Cllr Powell stated that four Parish Councillors had been working with a number of local organisations and residents to organise events over the Jubilee weekend. About 50 people were involved and the Chairman thanked them for their time, effort and hard work that would make the Jubilee a special occasion. The Chairman encouraged residents to attend as many events as they could. The draft programme was available along with other Parish information including the Annual Report.

Cllr Powell advised that the Parish Council had commissioned a survey to be carried out on all trees on Parish Council owned land to enable a tree maintenance plan to be established; some urgent work had already been carried out. The Parish Council also continued to monitor the village greens.

The Chairman noted that a planning application to extend the pavilion at Judsons Recreation Ground had been submitted to GBC and a decision was awaited.

Cllr Powell reported that there had been changes to the Neighbourhood Policing Team during the past few months. Meopham had been well served for the last five years by PC Helen Lamb. She had left Kent Police in December 2011 and the Chairman extended a warm welcome to PC Dave Smith as her replacement. He is supported by PCSO Jo Hartley, and until March 2012, by PCSO Dave Brooker. Cllr Powell thanked PC Lamb and PCSO Brooker on behalf of the community for their dedication to the parishioners of Meopham. The team together with the Community Wardens Jacqueline Fuller and Mandy Cason maintained a watchful eye on the parish.

The Chairman was pleased to note that the Parish Council had good working relationships with various organisations within the parish, including

the village halls and community centre, footpaths group, allotments association and Meopham Welfare Committee.

The Chairman expressed his gratitude to his fellow councillors for all the work they had carried out during the past year and for the support they have given him, especially the Vice Chairman, Cllr Barbara Wade and the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the Standing Committees. The Chairman further thanked the Clerks who support all the Councillors and Cllr Gillian Bateman who had resigned from the Council. He noted that the process of replacing Cllr Bateman was underway.

Finally, the Chairman thanked Borough Councillors r Derek Shelbrooke, Mrs Lesley Boycott and Mike Snelling for their support over the last year. Miss Laura Hryniewicz resigned as Borough Councillor for Meopham North in May 2011 and Cllr John Cubitt was elected as her replacement. The Chairman wished Laura well for the future and extended a warm welcome to Cllr Cubitt in his absence. Cllr Cubitt was also a County Councillor for Gravesham East and Cllr Snelling was also a County Councillor for Gravesham Rural.

The Chairman then invited the Cllr Snelling to address the meeting with regard to KCC and GBC issues.

Cllr Snelling gave the following report:

#### Kent County Council issues

*Finance* - The national financial situation had again dominated KCC in that local government had been hit harder than other departments in budget cuts. 10% had to be taken out of this year's Budget, another 10% next year, and a further 10% for the following two years saving around £320 million in total. In spite of this KCC had frozen Council Tax for the second year running and were preserving front line services as far as possible. It was believed more could be delivered for less. The cash deposited with Icelandic Banks was all expected to be returned.

*Highways* - Although still continuing to dominate the postbag, issues had abated and the management arrangements in KHS including a complete restructuring and new contractors, were seen by the public as a vast improvement.

The refurbishment of four of Gravesham's secondary schools was still a matter of doubt following the cancellation of the "Building Schools for the Future" (BSF) programme. Cllr Snelling would be pursuing this.

The contribution by KCC to Gravesham capital projects was now paying dividends. The new town centre library has been completed at a cost of £2m. Cyclopark would open in Spring 2012 at a cost of £10m and the Town Pier Pontoon, designed to bring visitors and funds to Gravesham, was now in place and would be operational in time for the arrival of Olympics visitors at a cost of £2m.

The Lower Thames Crossing issue remained and would become increasingly emotive as the KCC "election season" approached. Cllr Snelling's view was that it must not go through East Gravesend and he remained convinced the government would opt for more capacity at Dartford (after introducing cashless tolls).

KCC were reviewing the provision of Youth and Library Services to decide what could be needed for the future (in both urban and rural areas). Cllr Snelling was leading this debate in Gravesham and would report on this throughout the year.

The Government's Health Reform Agenda had been in the news and KCC had a role to play here. Cllr Snelling believed that unnecessary hospitalisation for patients with long term illnesses could be reduced by 50/60%. Cllr Snelling was now Chairman of the KCC Health Overview Scrutiny Committee which held local health providers to account and would be a challenging task.

Other issues were:

- KCC would put £10 million into the provision of superfast broadband for Kent businesses and residents.
- KCC had launched a £3m Big Society Fund to encourage new social enterprise and mutual to help expand the voluntary/community sector.
- KCC would be launching a big campaign to encourage employers to take on more young people, aged 16-24 years .

#### GBC issues

With political control In Gravesham changing hands since the last Annual parish meeting Cllr Snelling said that his role had been somewhat different. However, the big issues for the residents of Meopham and Culverstone on which GBC had an influence remained the same.

*The Greenbelt* - The furore over the GBC's proposals to move the greenbelt boundaries in the rural areas (including Meopham and Culverstone) to allow residential development had provoked an angry response. The various Action Groups and Parish Councils were to be congratulated in organising such an effective campaign. GBC had, for now, taken a huge u-turn. However, the devil was always in the detail and because the lower housing numbers required in the LDF had only been achieved by reducing the term of the plan by three years (from 2031 to 2028), Cllr Snelling was left wondering why this could not have been done at the outset.

*Affordable Housing* - The debate continued as to the need and location of rural affordable housing. There was still confusion to many as to the difference between the specific Rural Affordable Housing Scheme (where applicants for houses need a defined "village" connection) and the 30% social housing generally available to all in Gravesham, which forms part of any housing development in the Borough over a certain number of units. The latter would have been the case if the greenbelt development had been agreed.

*Finance* – Cllr Snelling stated that contrary to press reports, GBC was not “broke” but savings needed to be made by all Councils. This would be a question of hard choices being made over cuts. The controversial issue of the stopping of the free Saturday parking was, Cllr Snelling believed, a mistake at this difficult time for retailers. GBC was one of the few Councils to reject the government “freeze” grant and raised council tax for the coming year by 3.48% (just below the 3.5% figure which would have triggered a public referendum). Cllr Snelling disagreed with this decision and noted that KCC, the Police and the Fire Authority all took the decision to freeze their precept which would help Meopham and Culverstone residents.

*The Olympics* - GBC had continued to capitalise on the close proximity of the Olympics. The Olympic Torch would pass through Gravesend on 20<sup>th</sup> July and Cllr Snelling urged all residents to attend the celebrations. There would be a caravan/camp site at Culverstone and Cllr Snelling was pleased that GBC had pledged funding to the community to provide a facility for youngsters.

Cllr Snelling concluded his address by congratulating Meopham Parish Council on the great job it does on behalf of the residents- “Localism” at its very best.”

The Chairman thanked Cllr Snelling for his address and then invited Canon Gordon Oliver, Rector of Meopham to speak. Mr Oliver thanked County, Borough and Parish Councillors for their very welcome support for the refurbishment project of the church. He stated he was glad to have created a whole new venue in the centre of the community but not to the detriment of the other village halls and community centre. One issue of concern was that there would be no burial spaces left within 10 years. It was hoped that adjacent land could be used. Mr Oliver concluded by congratulating the Parish Council on its active role within the community.

## **7 Questions from the Public**

The Chairman invited questions from parishioners and asked that they declare their names and which wards they reside in. He reminded parishioners that they were not permitted to make statements and that some questions may require a written response if the information was not readily available.

Cllr Snelling was asked for an update on the proposals for an airport on the Hoo Peninsula. Cllr Snelling confirmed that KCC had launched a consultation to ascertain views but he believed the debate would subside following the London Mayoral elections.

Cllr Snelling was further asked regarding parking problems at Camer Parade, Wrotham Road by vehicles advertising to purchase cars. Cllr Snelling stated that this issue had now dealt with in conjunction with Kent Police.

The Chairman thanked the members of the public for their questions.

**8 Any Other Business**

The Chairman thanked the Deputy Mayor Cllr Mrs Lynn Milner, Distinguished Guests, Members of Council and Parishioners, for attending the 118th Annual Parish Meeting.

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm.