

Minutes of the 125th MEOPHAM Annual Parish Meeting
held on Tuesday 30th April 2019, at 7.30 pm
at the St Johns Centre, Wrotham Road, Meopham.

In the Chair:

Cllr S Buchanan, Chairman, Meopham Parish Council.

Also Present:

B Cllr Lesley Boycott (Deputy Mayor of Gravesham), B Councillors Derek Shelbrooke and J Burgoyne, 10 members of Meopham Parish Council, M Cason and S Taylor, Community Wardens and representatives of local organisations, other invited guests, electors and members of the public.

Invited speakers: Cl Loudon, Doug Robertson, Rural Crime Co-Ordinator and Luke Bonwick, KCC Conservation Officer

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from the following:- , A Holloway MP, PCSO Rebecca King, County Cllr Bryan Sweetland, The Mayor of Gravesham, David Hurley, Anne Nicholson - Meopham Ladies Luncheon Club, Rev Alyson Davie - St John's, Mrs Doughty - Headteacher Culverstone Primary School, Mrs Nicholson – Headteacher, Meopham Community Academy.

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

The Chairman welcomed the Deputy Mayor of Gravesham along with other distinguished guests and parishioners of Meopham.

3. Minutes of the previous (124th) Annual Parish Meeting

The minutes of the 124th Annual Parish Meeting held on 15th May 2018 were confirmed as a true record.

4. To invite the following to address the meeting:

The Deputy Mayor of Gravesham on the role of Deputy Mayor

Cllr Buchanan introduced Deputy Mayor Cllr Lesley Boycott who was now coming to the end of her term as Deputy Mayor and addressed the meeting regarding the role over the last year.

County Councillor

Cllr Sweetland had been unable to attend the meeting but had provided a written report which was available at the meeting.

Borough Councillors

Cllr Harding thanked Meopham Parish Council for setting up the hearing loop system in the cricket pavilion and the windmill chamber. Borough Councillor elections are being held on the 2nd May and Cllr Harding was happy to answer questions on local issues. A government report had suggested that by 2030 the majority of the adult population would be over 50 plus and that we must prepare ourselves for the issues that this brings with it. Speeding traffic has been a constant issue here.

Cllr Burgoyne, having been with the council for 7 years, is not standing again as she is moving. Many residents have addressed their concerns over the Local Plan. Cllr Burgoyne reiterated that nothing has been decided as yet.

Cllr Shellbrooke addressed the meeting to advise that he is not standing again for borough council. He thanked members of the meeting for their support, having been in post for just over 9 years.

5. Presentation by Chief Inspector Loudon and Doug Roberston from the Rural Task Force.

Doug Robertson, who is the Rural Crime Co-ordinator provided the meeting with a brief overview of the Rural Task Force, including details of local contacts covering Meopham. They have a wealth of knowledge on wildlife and rural matters. A quarterly magazine is produced called Rural Matters. The team cover issues that are rural, including wildlife, environmental and heritage. They have developed partnerships to help within these areas. There is an app available to download on your phone called Country Eye for reporting of crimes such as fly-tipping.

A question was raised regarding the introduction of charging for taking hardcore to the tip by KCC and the impact on this on fly tipping. Did KCC consult with the Rural Task Force on this? CI Loudon advised that KCC would consult at a strategic level, not a force level. CI Loudon was asked to come back to MPC on whether the police were consulted on this.

Farm watch is being piloted in the east division. Farmers can become part of this and it can help to make them aware of any suspicious activities in the area. This will be extended to the north division.

CI Loudon, who is the District Commander for the Gravesend and Dartford District addressed the meeting giving details on his 19 years back ground with Kent Police where he started as a beat officer in Meopham. Back then there were 12 Police officers in Meopham but policing style has changed over the years. Cuts have come in and taken away a lot of services. He spoke on the types of crime that the police are now having to deal with which stretch resources. Residents were encouraged to continue to report the types of crime such as speeding, nuisance youths and petty theft as this is still taken seriously and reporting it helps to build a pattern so that further resources can then attend. Three months ago, Gravesend and Dartford area had 8/9 officers and now it has teams of up to 19/20 officers.

CI Loudon gave a presentation on recent crime figures for the area, explaining the types of crimes. The recent violent robbery at a shop in Meopham was mentioned.

The police did make a number of arrests and this is currently going through the courts.

Questions from the public:

Q. How valid are the reports made from dashcams?

A. Depending on the seriousness of the incident, they can be valid.

Q. Are any brands of dashcams recommended by the police

A. No

Q. The increase in police, for example attending Camer Parade in Meopham, might improve relationships

A. Yes, extra front-line officers may help with this and neighbourhood policing may come back to what it was.

It was highlighted that Meopham remains a safe place to live and work compared to other areas. There is currently a massive recruitment drive in Kent Police with funding for 180 front line officers. Crime Commissioner Matthew Scott has also just secured funding for a further 200 officers.

The Chairman thanked CI Loudon and Doug Robertson for their reports.

The Chairman then introduced Luke Bonwick who is the new Conservation Officer at KCC to give a brief update on Meopham Windmill.

Luke's role is over 8 windmills in Kent including Meopham. For the last 15 years he has worked as an independent consultant on Windmills all over the country. KCC have a budget to get its mills into a better condition which he is trying to sort out. One issue is the lack on suitable contractors. KCC are currently using Millwrights from Holland. The intention is to start work on the Meopham Windmill within a few months, working in phases, from the ground up. By the end of his role, the mill will be restored.

Questions were raised about the safety of the mill. Luke confirmed that the first job is to ensure the mill is safe and water tight. The fantail was removed a couple of years ago in order to ensure safety in the area.

The Chairman thanked Luke Bonwick for his report.

6. Questions from the Public

The Chairman reported on recent water leak issues with the public toilets at Pitfield Green and the forthcoming Judson's Pavilion project. She also mentioned that due to an uncontested election, going forward there would be 8 parish councillors on the council with 4 vacancies as 4 councillors were standing down. She thanked 2 long serving councillors for service given; Peter Hasler who has been on the council since 2003 and Doug Powell, since 2007.

Deputy Mayor Lesley Boycott was then asked to present the KALC Community Award, backed by KALC, the High Sheriff of Kent and Kent County Council to former Meopham resident Trixie Leyshon for fund-raising and organising regular leisure activities, particularly for older people, at Meopham Village Hall and in the community and promoting participation in tennis for all ages, for thirty years.

Questions were then invited from the public.

Q. What is being done about a mirror at Camer Parade?

A. KCC will not allow a Trixie mirror here, but the Parish Council is still pursuing this

Q. Recent roadworks have been carried out on Wrotham Road. Why are the manhole covers 2 inches too low?

A. MPC will pursue this with KCC Highways.

Q. Why were only 2 names of the councillors leaving Meopham mentioned?

A. There are 4 councillors leaving but these 2 were particular long serving councillors.

Q. Why was the work on making poppies for remembrance not mentioned in the report?

A. The Chairman thanked those involved for making the poppies

Q. Is the leak at the toilets covered by insurance?

A. Yes

Q. Does the parish council have a contingency plan for if they have to move out of the office at the windmill site.?

A. Not yet.

Q. What are the arrangements for cutting the verges and litter picking for this year?

A. KCC are responsible for cutting the verges. The Parish Council has organised quarterly community litter picks for this year. The Parish Council employs a contractor to litter pick Judson's recreation ground and the village greens.

Q. Regarding the balance sheet in the annual report could the previous year's figures be included?

A. The council could look into this.

The Chairman encouraged residents present to look the Neighbourhood Watch table at the meeting tonight and then thanked the Mayor of Gravesham, guests and parishioners, for attending the 126th Annual Parish Meeting.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm.