

Aylesford Parish Council

Meeting of the Council

Minutes of the Virtual Meeting held via Zoom Link on 12 January 2021

Present: Councillors Balcombe (in the Chair) and Councillors Base, Beadle, Ms Dorrington, Mrs Gadd, Gledhill, Homewood, Ms Oyewusi, Rillie, Shelley, Smith, Walker, Winnett and Wright

In Attendance: Mr Harris (Clerk) and Mrs Randall (Assistant Clerk and Finance Officer)

Apologies: Councillors Hammond, Ludlow, Ms Papagno, Sullivan and Williams,

1. **Declarations of Interest additional to those contained in the Register of Members' Interests**

There were no declarations of interest additional to those contained in the Register of Members Interests.

2. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies of Absence from Councillors Hammond (unwell), Ludlow (work commitment), Ms Papagno (unwell), Sullivan (TMBC Meeting) and Williams (personal commitment) were received, and the reasons for absence agreed.

3. **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman informed everybody that progress was being made in respect of the joint working between the Parishes of Aylesford, Ditton, and East Malling and Larkfield particularly in respect of planning. West Malling were also a potential further Parish that could join. He also indicated that it was good to see everyone and asked that everybody keep themselves safe.

4. **Adjournment of the Meeting to allow for Public Participation**

There were no members of the public wishing to ask questions of the Council.

5. Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 17 November 2020

It was proposed by Councillor Balcombe and seconded by Councillor Rillie that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 17 November 2020 be **approved** as a correct record and signed.

6. Matters Arising from the previous minutes

There were no Matters Arising.

7. Policy and Resources Committee Minutes – 1 December 2020

There were no Matters Arising.

8. Policy and Resources Committee Minutes – 5 January 2021

Minute 13 – 2021/22 Budget – Precept Setting

It was **Agreed** that there be no increase in the Council Tax (Band D) and that it remain at £58.81 and that the precept be set at £253155, a reduction of £4645 as a result of the decrease in Council Tax base, and that this decrease be funded from an appropriate head within the earmarked reserves.

9. Environmental Services Committee Minutes – 24 November 2020

There were no Matters Arising.

10. Environmental Services Committee Minutes – 15 December 2020

There were no Matters Arising.

11. To Receive the Report of the County Councillor

County Councillor Homewood stated that he had nothing to report.

12. To Receive the Report of the Borough Councillors

Borough Councillor Base indicated that there were 4 applications that the Council would be interested in and which would be going for determination at the Area 3 Planning Committee. These were the Bunyards Farm application which was being considered on 28 January, the Oakapple Lane application which was being considered possibly in March, the Panattoni Aylesford Newsprint application possibly in March and the Croudace Homes Hermitage Lane application for 330 dwellings which could also be considered in March but probably later.

He also reported that the TMBC Finance, Innovation and Property Advisory Board that he chairs had considered the budget and the good news was that the TMBC position was not as bad as originally thought but the bad news being that it would need to take £3.5m from Reserves over the next 2 years. Additionally, the Council would have to find £975k savings each year as well. These figures were based on a £5 increase in Council Tax this year. In response to a question about whether TMBC had considered whether to not increase the Council Tax in these difficult times, similar to the Parish Council, he responded that by targeting resources to their services many of which benefitted the low paid that the Council was giving help to those most in need.

Borough Councillor Kennedy indicated that he would like to wish everybody a Happy New Year. Since his last report the main issues have (as usual) been Highway related. As you will know, this is mainly the responsibility of KCC and it irritates him greatly when he raises an issue on behalf of residents, KCC and TMBC pass it back from one to the other, neither authority considering he needs of the those who are affected (and whose Council Tax pays the bills).

BLUE BELL HILL PICNIC SITE

There is understandable concern from residents about plans from Kent Wildlife Trust to introduce pay and display parking at the picnic site / view point car park. He had discussions with KWT last year about this, and he received assurances that such charges would not be introduced until TMBC had undertaken a general review of traffic and parking in the village. It appears that KWT have either forgotten this understanding or have unilaterally changed their mind. The fear, which he fully shares, is charges will simply relocate parked cars from the picnic site car park onto Common Road, resulting in noise and inconvenience for residents and the loss of much needed revenue for the KWT. Some residents on Common Road would like double yellow lines, but this is not supported by all, especially those who have limited off street parking or need additional space for visitors. He is also concerned that traffic restrictions on Common Road will simply result in cars parking on Maidstone Road, Mill Lane and The Downs instead. He understands and supports KWT's need to raise funding for the maintenance of the AONB, but this should not be done at the expense of residents. He would be grateful if the Parish Council could perhaps consider formally writing to KWT (FAO Simon Bateman Brown) adding your support to my concerns.

HGV PARKING

On NY Eve an HGV laden with cardboard caught fire on the A229 and pulled into the Maidstone Road south of the gated section that runs from the old Upper Bell onto the dual carriageway. The fire services jettisoned its cargo onto the roadside (several tonnes of cardboard) where it stayed for a week before Kent Highway's had it removed. There was absolutely no communication with residents, and his own enquiries to TMBC were met with "why don't you look on Kent online as there is something about it there". I thought such an off-hand response to an elected representative to be discourteous and unhelpful and left both KCC and TMBC know that he was unimpressed with the lack of consideration for the community, who deserved an explanation of what had happened and the likely timescale for it to be removed.

This issue highlighted the problems of HGV roadside parking (or fly parking as it is called) across our Parish, in particular at the old Maidstone Road (as above) and also northbound on Old Chatham Road (on the roadside opposite the Lower Bell, from Cobtree to its junction with Pilgrims Way). While he accepts the HGVs must park somewhere, he did not accept that they should leave behind food debris, litter and (sorry to be blunt) many bags of human excrement and plastic bottles of urine, as is the case at these sites, to be cleaned up by local residents.

He wrote to KCC and TMBC asking them to address this issue, and as too often happens KCC said parking was a matter for TMBC, and TMBC said they are unable to impose parking restrictions on a trunk road due to safety issues, and said it is for KCC to make this road a clearway. This municipal “buck passing” is tiresome and unhelpful for residents whose concerns are seldom addressed. He has requested and secured a review at TMBCs Overview & Scrutiny Committee of TMBCs traffic enforcement policies, particular in the north of the borough and with regard to HGVs. This will take place later this year. County Councillor Homewood indicated that he would take this matter up at KCC and that he would liaise with Borough Councillor Kennedy.

CHRISTMAS DAY LUNCHESES

A week before Christmas when the Prime Minister announced a further lockdown, Cllr Des Keers contacted me to see if we could do anything for the many older residents who were going to be left alone as they would be unable to travel to spend time with their families. He agreed to see if I could pull together a Christmas lunch service, and thanks to the generosity of many friends and colleagues (including the Co-op in Snodland who donated turkeys) I cooked 40 traditional Christmas lunches which were delivered to isolated residents in Aylesford, Dutton, Blue Bell Hill, Walderslade, Eccles, Burham and Wouldham. I would like to thank Tracey Crouch MP, and my TMBC colleagues Des Keers, David Cooper and Colin Williams for their help and support with this project.

PLANNING

Finally planning. Before Christmas he voted against the proposed development at Ditton Edge, though this application was passed by the closest of margins. He was concerned to see another application at Hermitage Lane for a further 300 houses and he has suggested that APC might wish to secure the services of an independent traffic consultant to examine KCCs view that Hermitage Lane and the A20 can absorb yet further traffic movements. He remains committed to the provision of extra homes but believes more should be done to allow residents (empty nesters) to downsize locally, thus releasing thousands of large family homes on the market. He would also like to see more designated new towns built close to motorways and rail links rather than these ongoing greenfield development within the strategic gap, without the suitable investment in local infrastructure.

The Council **Agreed** that it would write to the Kent Wildlife Trust responding to their proposal to put parking charges on the car park at the Blue Bell Hill Picnic Site on the basis detailed in Borough Councillor Kennedy’s report.

13. Accounts for Payment

The Council considered the Payment Schedule attached to the Agenda and Councillor Shelley proposed and Councillor Mrs Gadd seconded and it was **Agreed** that 22 payments totalling £26919.63 be made.

14. Podkin Meadow

Councillor Shelley reported that he had met with a colleague, Nick Green, at Podkin Meadow to discuss what could be done to improve its condition and enhance the start of the wild flower meadow. His colleague had indicated the need to remove the remaining brambles and having identified that there were wild flowers there what wild flower mix had been used previously. He indicated that his colleague would then produce a proposal.

15. Any Other Correspondence

There was no other correspondence

16. Duration of Meeting

7.30pm to 8.05pm