

HILDENBOROUGH PARISH COUNCIL

Pavilion and Recreation Ground, Riding Lane, Hildenborough, Kent TN11 9HY

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Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of Hildenborough Parish Council held in the Jim England Room of the Village Hall, Riding Lane, TN11 9HY on Thursday 14 March 2024 at 7.30pm

In attendance were seven members of the Parish Council, one Borough Councillor, one County Councillor and of the order of 40 local residents.

Apologies were received from four Parish Councillors and one Borough Councillor.

24/1 To agree the Minutes of the previous Annual Parish Meeting held on 8 March 2023 as a true record and any matters arising.

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 March 2023 were approved and signed by the Vice-Chair, Cllr K Dobson. There were no matters arising.

24/2 Annual Parish Council Report followed by questions relating to the Report from the floor.

The Vice-Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for their support during the year. She asked the councillors who volunteer to represent the village to show themselves to the meeting and thanked them for their time and efforts. Thanks were also expressed for the support of County Councillor Harry Rayner and Borough Councillors Mark Rhodes and Kath Barton. It was reported that since last year's election the Council now has two extra councillors bringing the total number to eleven so there are currently no vacancies that need to be filled.

Last year saw the retirement of Pam Gow after 17 years as Parish Clerk and Pam has been replaced by Julia Church, an enthusiastic addition to the Parish Council.

2.1 Projects completed

The Vice-Chair reported that a number of projects have been completed during the year including the installation of the bollards outside The Flying Dutchman at no cost to the Hildenborough residents and we would like to say "thank you" to Kent County Council. Thank you also to KCC for the installation of the "wigwags" (flashing warning lights) in Riding Lane which are in situ now. The Council anticipates getting S106 funds from Berkeley Homes once the sales of the properties at the Oakhill/Fidelity development have completed.

The funds will enable a path around the Recreation Ground in Riding Lane and the Council is also looking at providing play equipment for disabled children.

The Council continues to attend the Farmers' Market on the second Tuesday of the month, where residents can ask questions of the parish councillor or give feedback.

2.2 Planning Committee

This year the Planning Committee has considered 138 planning applications, 10 of which were refused by the Borough Council. Following delays due to the consultation about parking charges in and around Tonbridge, the TMBC Parking Review formal consultation should take place this summer. Updates will be posted on the Hildenborough Parish Council website and Facebook page. We continue to monitor the ongoing stages of the Berkeley Homes Oakhill Development. The Gardening Society and Parish Council have been seeking assurances that the award-winning Tom Stuart-Smith garden located on the old Fidelity site will be preserved. Berkeley Homes have confirmed they are mindful of preserving the site and the we are awaiting a date for visiting the site..

2.3 Open Spaces

The Chair of the Open Spaces Committee, Cllr Ioannis Sklavenitis, thanked everyone for coming to the meeting before reporting on projects completed during the year. The largest item of expenditure was for ash die back. Nearly £11,000 was spent on the removal of the diseased trees and the Council are very grateful to Hildenborough Conservation Group for planting nearly 100 new trees.

The climbing frame in the West Wood playground had been burnt down so it was replaced and S106 money used to renovate the pump cycle track following the repair of the longstanding water leak in West Wood.

The pond in West Wood has been renovated by a team from Medway Countryside Partnership working with Natural England as part of a project to create habitats where the endangered Great Crested Newt can breed. Following feedback from the Conservation Group the Parish Council is looking into carrying out a Risk Assessment on the pond. The Council has also been approached regarding flooding on the Village Green. Research is being undertaken into the actions taken by the Council in 2011 regarding the problem and the reasons for the issue not being resolved.

Councillor Sklavenitis expressed thanks on behalf of the Parish Council to the Hildenborough Conservation Society for all the work they do in West Wood. He also thanked the Community Payback Team for painting the fence around the playground in the Recreation Ground last summer, the Council's Maintenance Contractor, Andy Baker, for cleaning and

fixing things in Hildenborough's Open Spaces and also to the residents of Mount Pleasant who have been assisting with watering the willow trees on the Village Green.

2.4 Finance Report

On behalf of the Chair of the Finance Committee, Cllr Andrew McNeil, Cllr Sklavenitis said he was pleased to report that the Council has received £4.5k more income than expected due to grants and higher interest rates - £139k versus a budget of £134.5k, and we are projecting a net underspend of around £29k, £105k versus a budget of £134k. Overall we are expecting a net surplus of £33,500.

Salaries were overspent by £4.5k, as we had an overlap in clerks in order for our retiring clerk, Pam Gow, to give a full handover to the new clerk, Julia Church. This overspend is after netting off an ear-marked reserve for the retiring clerk's gratuity.

Administration costs were on target, while the main areas of underspend were in tree management, £12k, as less work was needed on ash die back this year; contracts, £4k and in the projects budget, £14k. This latter underspend is mainly due to the timing of large projects and will be utilised in the future. One of these projects is a new picnic area in West Wood which is budgeted at £6.3k and has been moved into next year.

We have reserves set aside for further ash die back work (£30,000) in addition to general reserves of (£100,000) totalling £130,000. These general reserves amount to around 13 months working capital (excluding any project work) or 8.5 months with projects.

The precept for 2024/25 will be £136,265, which is an increase of 3%. This is an increase of just £0.56 per annum for band D properties. The Council Tax for the Parish Council continues to be one of the lowest per band D property in Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council.

2.5 Questions from the floor

2.5.1 The willow trees planted to help with reducing the flood water on the Villager Green will not be effective in the short term so what can the Parish Council will do to deal with the flooding?

Reply: An explanation was given about the problems faced when ground works had been explored in 2011, including the possibility of installing a French Drain, but at that time it would not be possible to connect the drain to the KCC main drainage system. Cllr Rayner explained the funding available at KCC to put towards such projects was seriously limited and they were not obliged to offer drainage but he would look to see if anything can be done. Cllr Rayner said he would be willing to make a small contribution from his Members' Fund towards any scheme the Parish Council may wish to take forward. Cllr Ioannis

acknowledged the problem of flooding on the Village Green is a frustration and said the Council are looking into it.

2.5.2 Can the Parish Council do anything to ensure the vegetation growing over the pavement on the B245 from land owned by Berkeley Homes be kept cut back because it presented a danger to pedestrians last summer?

Reply: The Council will be keeping an eye on the situation this summer along with other “hot spots” that had been reported last year.

2.5.3 Does the Parish Council have plans to place fencing around the newly-renovated pond in West Wood?

Reply: Cllr Sklavenitis replied to say that the Council are looking to have a Risk Assessment carried out and will see what safety recommendations are made in the report.

2.5.4 How soon will S106 funding be available to make a pathway around the Recreation Ground?

Reply: The monies should start being available once the properties on the new Oakhill development are sold and in the meantime the Council will investigate the Schedule of Phasing for the S106 monies that should give more details.

24/3 Presentation by Ian Nunn, Area Operations Manager for the Environment Agency and also Project Sponsor for the Leigh Embankment and Hildenborough Expansion Scheme who will give an update on the defences being built to protect Hildenborough from flooding.

The Vice-Chair introduced Ian Nunn who gave a clear and interesting presentation to explain how the flood alleviation works scheduled for this summer will affect the community, emphasising that they will work hard to ensure there is a minimum impact on the residents of Hildenborough. The EA will publicise any upcoming traffic management schemes which the Parish Council will share via our Facebook page and Centre Piece articles.

Ian explained how overall the expansion of the reservoir affects around 1,400 properties and businesses in Tonbridge, Hildenborough and downstream communities. Raising the reservoir by half a meter will give a huge increase in volume from 5.8million to 7.3million cubic meters of water in order to prepare for the heavier flows of water anticipated over the next 50-100 years due to climate change. Flooding will be prevented by the bund which will be raised to 1.5 meters high. The complex scheme has taken years of planning with everything planned to the finest detail and this summer will have the most significant impact. The traffic management scheme will allow access to the site by the construction vehicles and the project should be completed in 2025. The Environment Agency want to

engage with the community throughout the process and any queries can be raised with the project team at LEHES@environment-agency.gov.uk.

3.1 Questions from the floor

3.1.1 Has the Environment Agency communicated with residents in Stacey Road/Hawden Lane, where there will be disruption, where the construction vehicles will be coming off the site?

Reply: There has been communication with residents who will be directly affected by site traffic. Cllr Rhodes advised his leaflet drop around Hildenborough included information on this

3.1.2 Where does the clay for the expansion of the bund come from?

Reply: A lot of it comes from a site near Canterbury. It has to meet a certain specification as a lot of detail goes into the specification for a clay embankment.

3.1.3 How is the project taking climate change into account?

Reply: We ensure the schemes we do match the specifications that will be required in 50-100 years' time, taking into account the calculations for the increased flow of water as a result of climate change.

3.1.4 How much communication do you have with Southern Water regarding whether or not the scheme will have any impact on sewage output?

Reply: The Environment Agency are working closely with Southern Water to ensure the project has no impact on the sewage system. SW are a consultee and have to be happy with what the Environment Agency are doing, but our projects do not normally impact on the sewage system.

At the end of the meeting Cllr Dobson thanked the team from the Environment Agency – Project Manager, Ian Nunn; Kathy Aucott, Environment Agency Engagement Advisor and Project Manager for contractors Volker Stein, Josh Hawkins.

Cllr Dobson also thanked the Parish Councillors who give their time, Andy Baker who maintains our open spaces, the voluntary groups in Hildenborough including the flood wardens, SpeedWatch Team, Hildenborough Gardening Society, Hildenborough Conservation Group, Hildenborough litter pickers and other local groups who work with us to protect the facilities and services of Hildenborough. Finally she thanked Pam Gow, who has been working closely with the new clerk Julia Church to ensure a smooth transition into the role.

~~Thanks to the Village Hall Committee? [What are you thinking?](#)~~

The meeting concluded at 8.25pm.