

Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held at The Memorial Hall, The Street, Frittenden on Wednesday 14th May 2025 at 7:30pm.

Present: In the Chair Councillor Garry Lawrence (Chair of the Parish Council), 4 Parish Councillors, Cllr Claudine Russell (County), Councillor Andrew Fairweather (Borough) and 11 members of the public.

In attendance: The Parish Clerk

Councillor Lawrence welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillor Richard Vernon, Councillor Sarah Murray & Councillor Nancy Warne (Borough).

2. GUEST SPEAKER: COUNCILLOR KIM FLETCHER, SUPPORT WEALD SCHOOLING

Councillor Fletcher provided an update on the ongoing campaign to bring non-selective secondary schooling back to Cranbrook. He shared some of the data compiled to support that campaign and the work done to gain cross-party support from local MPs. Mr Fletcher explained the next steps required to get Kent County Council and the Department of Education to accept that there was a need for a non-selective secondary school in the Weald, particularly in light of the number of new homes being built in the area. He appealed for anyone who had taken the decision to home school their children to get in touch, because the Campaign was very interested to understand the reasons behind that decision and ensure that those parents' voices were heard.

Councillor Russell spoke from the floor confirming her support for the Campaign. She was asked how the recent change of control of Kent County Council to Reform and the upcoming move to unitary authorities under the Government's plans for devolution would affect the prospects of success. Councillor Russell noted that it was very early days and so no assessment could yet be made on that.

Councillor Lawrence thanked Councillor Fletcher and reiterated the Parish Council's support for the campaign.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS ASSEMBLY

The minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held on 15th May 2024 were made available to read prior to the meeting. Acceptance of those minutes was proposed by Councillor Gosbee, seconded by Councillor Tuke, and agreed.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THOSE MINUTES

None

5. TO RECEIVE ACCOUNTS OF CHARITIES

This item was postponed to the next meeting of the Parish Council on 3rd June 2025.

6. PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Council

In the 12 months to 30th April, we held 11 monthly Council meetings and 1 additional planning meeting. Attendance by Councillors averaged 77%. Attendance by the public varied from 0 to 5. Councillors Fairweather (Borough), Warne (Borough) and Holden (County) regularly attend our meetings. Meetings are normally held in the Sixty-Four Room in the Memorial Hall, normally on the first Tuesday of the month.

Membership of the Council continues unchanged and I have completed my first full year as chair ably assisted by my vice chair Tony Staples.

I have summarised our activities below, arranged alphabetically. Where appropriate I have noted the names of Councillors who take the lead in particular areas.

Amenities (Lead Councillor Garry Lawrence)

The playing field and children's playground are regularly inspected. Cllr Lawrence is supported by Cllrs Gosbee and Viviers in this work. Reports of these routine inspections are presented to the Council every meeting and minuted. Remedial action is taken whenever appropriate. ROSPA carry out a full annual inspection. Their recommendations are categorised according to risk and severity. Their recommendations are implemented, with prompt attention given to any risks considered serious. Where possible minor works are done voluntarily but contractors are used for all specialist work. Work undertaken this year has included replacing a number of swings and the platform on the small slide as well as a repair of one of the picnic tables.

The Grounds Maintenance Contracts have been awarded after a tender process to two new contractors after dissatisfaction with the service provided by the previous contractor. It is worth noting that the size of the contracts is relatively small and there are only a few contractors that we can go out to.

We are occasionally approached by residents who wish to use the field for private functions. As a general rule we do not grant such permission, to ensure that the field is freely available as a resource for all residents. The only exceptions are to allow Larchmere to hold their summer fete in the corner adjacent to their property and the school to hold their summer fete and sports day on our field.

Dog fouling

This remains a source of annoyance to residents. It is also a serious health hazard, especially to young children. At the most recent Council meeting a Dog Owners Charter has been suggested which could include restrictions on times when dogs may be allowed off the lead as well as a limit on the number of dogs that may be walked by one person. Whilst the Council does not want to penalise responsible dog walkers it feels that action is required

Two dispensers of bags for dog's mess – at the entrance to the field and by the War Memorial – are regularly replenished by the council but this facility continues to be abused by some residents.

Finance

Once again, the precept for the coming year remains unchanged at £17,000. Frittenden, although one of the larger parishes by area has the lowest population and continues to have the lowest precept in the Borough.

Our accounts for the year to 31st March 2025 will be available on the Parish Council website once they have been audited.

Fun Run

This year FPC promoted the Easter Monday Fun Run, organised on our behalf by Charlotte Hunter, In each case proceeds are passed to causes nominated by the Fun Run organiser (Frittenden Primary School and the Memorial Hall).

Headcorn Aerodrome (Lead Councillors Lester Gosbee and James Tuke)

Parish councils have no control over issues of noise but Frittenden PC is represented on the Headcorn Aerodrome Advisory Committee. We do pass on residents' concerns through this committee but aside from one off events noise issues have diminished.

Local non-selective education

The lack of a non-selective local secondary school continues to be an issue for local parents with some of our children having to spend close to two hours a day travelling to and from school. The “Support Weald Schooling” campaign led by Kim Fletcher (my fellow Chair in Cranbrook) has raised the profile of the issue significantly and has now gained the support of all of our local MP’s. he will speak at the Annual Assembly to further update on progress.

Parking

Parking in the village continues to be a problem on all main routes into and out of the village. The proposal to apply double yellow lines in the centre of the village was subject to both an informal and a formal consultation process. We await Highways decision on whether or not they will proceed with the scheme. Although not strictly a Highways Improvement Plan issue (see “Roads and Verges” below) inconsiderate parking can create issues for road users with many of our main routes becoming “single lanes” during peak times and so will be considered by the Highways Improvement Plan Working Group.

Planning (Lead Councillor Richard Vernon)

The parish council has no planning powers but it is a statutory consultee. The Borough Council is obliged to take our views into consideration though that does not mean they will always draw the same conclusions as we do regarding the merits of a particular application. We therefore carefully consider all planning applications, taking into account any representations made by residents.

During the year the Council considered 29 planning applications, the vast majority of which were either agricultural building conversions or home extensions.

The majority of applications within the parish were uncontroversial, although some attracted objections from parishioners and/or the Parish Council. Such objections are always considered by TWBC but that is no guarantee that they will agree with our views!

The most significant issue affecting parish residents is the continuing situation in Knoxbridge. Whilst a Planning Enforcement Notice was served last year requiring the owners to return the site to its former state this has been appealed. We await the result of the appeal and the Parish Council continue to support residents where we can.

Work has continued at the Four Acres development and most residents will be aware of the ongoing and still not fully resolved “road narrowing” at The Street on entering the village from the Sissinghurst direction (see “Roads and Verges” below).

Roads and verges (Lead Councillor Lester Gosbee)

Frittenden’s roads, like those throughout Kent, remain in bad shape although there have been a significant number of our roads “patched” in the last few weeks.

To consider the wider issues of our roads and their safety the Council has recently set up a Highways Improvement Plan Working Group including a number of volunteers to consider any and all issues raised. This Group is currently collating and prioritising these issues raised and considering potential solutions and will report back to the Council in the next three months. This Group will also consider parking within the village and aside from looking at the few potential parking sites in the village it will also work with all stakeholders to instil more considerate and safer parking.

We have made significant progress in getting gateway signs replaced with a new gate on the Headcorn Road. We are currently in discussion with Canham Homes regarding the gate on The Street. It was our understanding that the gate would be renewed when it was moved but that has not happened as yet. And as for the road narrowing on The Street created by the installation of a new footpath from Four Acres to the edge of the village we have had some success in getting warning signs erected but remain hopeful that there will eventually be a “chicane set up” installed heading into the village forcing drivers to give way. This will hopefully have the added benefit of reducing speeds on that road.

Other problems include the theft of manhole covers and the continuing water leak on the Biddenden Road.

Fly-tipping continues to be a problem throughout the village. We urge residents to report instances immediately, preferably via the “Report it” facility on the TWBC website. If the waste contains hazardous material (eg asbestos) clearance can take longer but if you have reported waste and action is not taken promptly report it to a councillor and we will take up the issue on your behalf.

We are grateful to Cllr Gosbee for his regular inspection of verges, road surfaces, and salt bins and for following up problems. We also value the support given by Paul Catt (KCC Highway Steward for Tunbridge Wells) when we raise urgent problems.

Speedwatch (Lead Councillor Anthony Staples)

We carry out speed checks in two-week blocks each month. We aim to hold five or six sessions each time but due to weather and availability of team members we have not quite achieved this. We currently have a team of 11 active members. We held 48 sessions over the year to 31st March (a further 3 were cancelled due to bad weather or unscheduled road works). During 2024/5 292 offenders were recorded and as a result 60 police letters were sent out to repeat or serious offenders.

The principal benefit of Speedwatch is to raise awareness of road safety and speeding in particular. We were pleased to welcome three new volunteers this year but more would always be welcome. Typical commitment is two one-hour sessions in each four-week period. Some initial training is needed but this is done online. Do contact Tony Staples if you would like to join our volunteers

The TWBC Local Plan (Lead Councillor Richard Vernon)

The timing of the Local Plan has slipped still further behind its original schedule with further public consultation only closing at the end of last month. This Plan will be out of date by the time it has been approved as it does not yet reflect the substantially increased targets set by the Labour Government for new house building.

Though not directly affecting our parish the effect of this change means that all parts of the Borough are vulnerable to speculative applications for planning as TWBC cannot prove that it has a secure five-year housing supply.

Village Clean-up Days (Lead Councillor Garry Lawrence)

We have held two Village Clean-Up Days, on Saturdays in September 2024 and April 2025. Both events were very well supported as always. As always, a large volume of waste comes from casual disposal of food and drink containers especially along Cranbrook and Headcorn Roads. We are very grateful to the volunteers who help at these sessions.

We would like to thank Sean and Rosie Croucher for providing us with a headquarters, James Highwood for using his truck to collect rubbish, and the many parishioners who pick up litter in their own areas throughout the year. Litter-picking equipment is now available for use by parishioners.

Concluding remarks

I'd like to close by thanking:

- Our Parish Clerk Emma Nightingale, for her hard work and support;
- Our Borough Councillors, Andy Fairweather and Nancy Warne, and County Councillor, Sean Holden, all regular attenders at our council meetings and willing to take forward issues on our behalf whenever this is needed; and
- Bernard Millard, our auditor.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Councillor Staples was pleased to present the KALC Community Award to Mike Cooper in recognition of the many years he worked as editor of the Parish Magazine, transforming what had been a church publication into a resource for the wider community, and his service as head of the Tent Team, whose efforts had raised c.£30,000 for charitable causes over the 20 years he had been at the helm.

The Parish Council was delighted to present the gift of a garden bench to Councillor Staples in recognition of 9 years of tireless work for the community in the role of Chair of the Parish Council, a

role he stepped down from in May 2024. Cllr Staples continues to be a key member of the Parish Council as vice-chairman.

A resident commented that, whilst it was good to see that some of the potholes blighting the Parish were being repaired, it was utterly ridiculous and a waste of time and resources for one pot hole to be repair whilst another within a few feet to be left untouched.

The Chairman thanked everybody for attending, and there being no further business closed the meeting at 8:25pm