

**Brook Annual Parish Meeting**  
**Held at Brook Village Hall on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2024 at 7pm**

In Attendance: Cllrs A Betty, S Betty, J Jessop, F Penberthy and P Penberthy. 8 members of the public and the Parish Clerk.

Apologies were received from County Cllr Clair Bell.

<b>1.</b>	<b>Welcome</b>
	Cllr Simon Betty welcomed everyone to the meeting. Cllr Betty explained the rules of the Parish Meeting and that the meeting will be minuted.
<b>2.</b>	<b>Report from Cllr Clair Bell read by Cllr A Betty</b>
	<p>Once again, the past year has been dominated by efforts to balance the books, as KCC, in common with many councils across the country, has seen rising costs and huge increases in demand. We needed to find over £100m of savings and have achieved this only by making some very difficult and unpopular decisions. Despite that, our budget for 24/25 provides record levels of investment in adults' and children's social care, and in school transport, all of which we have a legal duty to deliver. If the council had failed to reach a balanced budget, the consequence of going "bankrupt" would likely have led to the government sending in commissioners to run the council. Where that has happened elsewhere, many discretionary services, such as arts and culture, support for voluntary groups, libraries and community services, have been severely reduced and council tax raised significantly. We believe it is preferable to manage our own finances, and retain as many services as possible, even if that means scaling back, rather than losing them altogether and at the same time residents facing an even larger council tax bill.</p> <p>This has been a year of change for me personally as I moved from 4years as cabinet member for Adult Social Care and Public Health to take over the portfolio for Community and Regulatory Services. The portfolio is wide -ranging and covers libraries, registration and archives, community wardens, trading standards, public rights of way, the coroners service, arts and creative economy, voluntary sector support, community safety, Kent Police, PREVENT anti-terrorism duty and emergency planning. Emergency planning has a particular focus at the moment as later this year sees the introduction of a new European Union Entry Exit System which brings in new electronic border controls for tourists and freight. Checks will be carried out on all passengers crossing the channel at Dover and Eurotunnel giving rise to significant risk of queues and delays which could severely impact the local road network and local communities. A huge amount of work is going on with our partners and with district councils, as well as the Department for Transport and the Home Office, to plan for the new system, to support the Port of Dover and Eurotunnel, to understand the potential impact, to keep traffic flowing, ensure everyone is safe, and informed, and mitigate the disruption for communities and businesses. My inbox is overflowing with emails from residents concerned about the state of our roads - and understandably so. We would love to have more money to spend on the road network and bring it up to a higher standard. While the council has received some extra government funding, which is helpful, we continue to press government for additional resources, so we can get on top of the potholes, carriageway repairs and drainage issues which plague our roads and cause frustration for residents.</p>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Report from and read by Cllr Simon Betty</b>
	<p>It is almost a year since I became your ward member and I know it is a cliché, but I honestly do not know where the time has gone. On being elected as your ward member, my priority was to create closer links between the parish and borough council. There are four parish councils in the ward, which is one of the highest number in the borough, and it was my intention to ensure that all were well represented and that closer working relationships with parish councillors and residents were established.</p>

I have therefore made it my priority to attend parish council meetings when they do not clash with Borough Council meetings. I always ensure that a ward member's report is available for each parish council which generally takes the form of a briefing note highlighting what is happening at Borough Council level that I consider is of potential interest to residents. A copy of the report is then appended to the parish council minutes. In this way parish councils can feed any issues up through me to the Borough Council and I can feed information back to them. From my perspective this system is working well and I hope the parish councils agree. However, I am always willing to accept feedback to improve communication between us.

### **STODMARSH**

One of the main challenges facing the Borough is the impact of nutrient neutrality on the delivery of new homes, both private and council houses, in the River Stour catchment area. For those not familiar with the issues, in 2020 Natural England found that algae levels in the Stodmarsh area to the east of Canterbury had risen to significant levels which had a major ecological impact on the location.

Natural England identified the cause of the issue as being the increased discharge of nitrates and phosphates into the river. Stodmarsh is a designated sensitive catchment area as well as being a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) together with other high-level designations of environmental protection. Part of Stodmarsh is also a National Nature Reserve (NNR).

As a result, Natural England introduced a moratorium on the building of new dwellings, or any development having an element of overnight accommodation, within the River Stour catchment area. New residential development will only be permitted in the catchment if it can show nutrient neutrality mitigation measures that will prevent an overall increase in nutrient pollution from sewage and be able to maintain these measures 'in perpetuity'.

To overcome these issues, many of the larger residential developments that are coming forward are incorporating their own on-site wastewater treatment works (WwTW) which can offer the highest level of nitrate filtration. Other sites are incorporating their own artificial wetlands with reed beds to provide natural filtration.

A wetland has recently been created near Conningbrook to serve the Big Burton development which is currently under construction. Once established this will support a reedbed to remove nitrates and phosphates from the river water. As a guide, one acre of reedbed should clean up the wastewater from about fifty five new houses. Recent legislation has also placed Southern Water, and other wastewater companies, under a new legal duty to upgrade all their larger wastewater treatment works by 1st April 2030 which will include the Bybrook works in Ashford.

Natural England has just issued a revised nutrient neutrality calculator which enables property developers to work out their nutrient budget for proposed housing in the catchment area.

Significantly, the new calculator includes an allowance for all the required WwTW upgrades anticipated by 2030.

### **LOCAL PLAN**

The Borough Council has a statutory duty to review its Local Plan and identify sufficient developable land to meet the requirements of a growing population and it has just started work in preparing its new plan. The Borough Council's current Local Plan is valid until 2030 and the review will cover the next eleven years to 2041.

The call for sites is a necessary first step in this process. In addition to finding land for housing, the council also needs more Traveller sites, land for employment and leisure facilities. It also needs to identify suitable land for green spaces and energy generation, biodiversity net gain (BNG) sites, and potential wetlands for nutrient neutrality mitigation to address the Stodmarsh issue.

The sites submitted to the borough council will be subjected to an initial assessment before they go forward for public consultation. If any of the sites are included in the Draft Local Plan, they will be subject to an examination by the planning inspector at a public enquiry to assess the soundness of the plan before it is then adopted. The parish and wider consultation is likely to occur in 2025 and the public examination stage in 2026 with a final decision and adoption in 2027.

	<p><b>WASTE CONTRACT</b></p> <p>SUEZ took over the borough council's recycling and waste contract on 25th March with the former Biffa crews transferring to the new company. Some of the changes to the previous Biffa contract have resulted in different collection days and routines. I am aware of a few teething issues which I hope are now resolved.</p> <p>I'd like to thank residents for bringing any collection issues to my attention and please report any missed bins using the Borough Council website.</p> <p><b>ASHFORD CINEMA, ELWICK PLACE</b></p> <p>Many residents will be aware of the changes that are currently taking place at the former Picturehouse cinema in Elwick Place which is owned by the Borough Council. This came about after Picturehouse, who have been the tenant of the cinema since 2019, informed the council it would be closing the cinema in January. This left the Borough Council with two options - either do nothing resulting in a large vacant building in the town centre with responsibility for all the inherent costs; or take a proactive approach. The Borough Council decided to do the latter and therefore stepped in to create a new company to run the cinema together with a firm of industry consultants taking responsibility for the day to running. The company has also taken on the former Picturehouse staff which has saved over 20 jobs.</p> <p>The legal paperwork is due to complete imminently so the intention is to run the cinema as a going concern on an interim basis until a permanent independent operator can be found.</p>
<b>4.</b>	<p><b>Update from Brook Rural Museum, read by Prof John Nightingale</b></p> <p>Prof Nightingale introduced himself as the Chair of the Brook rural Museum. His Father had previously been involved and a brief history of the Museum was provided. Prof Nightingale came forward as part a succession plan as the trustees were ageing. The 2022 Lottery bid had been successful and now the Museum has 2 employees. Philippa Mesiano and Tom Kennett. Fran Penberthy helps out also and there are volunteers involved too.</p> <p>Last year the Museum held a Hop festival, a Beer Festival and a Medieval Fayre. The school have been quite involved and we are working together as well as encouraging other schools to visit. A further Lottery Grant application has been submitted and further funding has been received. Philippa has been reappointed. We have a desire for more volunteers to be found locally and we hope they will join the Museum journey for the next 2 years and beyond.</p> <p>There is a desire for more funding to convert the sheds into studios in order that further income might be achieved. The Museum is keeping an eye on what the Pub does as it might be possible to offer a cafe or similar. The Museum is a fascinating place.</p>
<b>5.</b>	<p><b>Report from Brook with Hinxhill Village Hall Trust read by Nathaniel Collins</b></p> <p>Over the course of 2023, the Village Hall has continued to recement its role as a vital community hub for residents of Brook, providing a wide range of events through the hard work of Committee members and independent users of the facilities.</p> <p>Particular highlights include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A full programme of events organised by hall committee members throughout the year: the Band Concert in June, The village BBQ in July, the jumble sale in October, and the anticipated festive open morning in December;</li> <li>• An event to commemorate the coronation of the King in May 2023;</li> <li>• Hosting a fantastic range of speakers, provided by the Brook Rural Museum, delving into local history and cultural events;</li> <li>• The ever-popular produce fair, hosted by Janet and Barbara; and</li> <li>• the vintage tea party, set up by Carole, to raise funds for the Church Flowers.</li> </ul>

	<p>Committee members have also sought to review and adapt the village hall to ensure it continues to meet the evolving needs of the village. We held a consultation event alongside other community groups across the village: the Brook Rural Museum, the Parish Council and the Save the Honest Miller Group. An encouraging number of residents turned up to provide their opinions around how the village hall could improve its offering.</p> <p>As a result, I am pleased to say that from December, the Village Hall will now offer WiFi connectivity for those using the venue and are further looking at options to provide a more cost-effective form of heating, better wheelchair access to the hall, and the potential use of other hire equipment.</p> <p>Moreover, we look forward to revamping the programme of traditional events with the hopeful introduction of a Christmas market, a bingo night, and a local produce evening. Watch this space!</p> <p>In September this year, I also experienced what it was like to use the Village Hall for the first time, as our family held a party for my son, William. I was so impressed with how easy it was to organise and run an event there, how well equipped and prepared all the amenities were, and how respected and cared for everything was. Brook is lucky to have this asset for the community and I felt an enormous debt of gratitude to all the Committee Members that give up their time to ensure that it can be used by everyone.</p> <p>I especially wanted to thank two outgoing members of the Committee. Christine Finn has been a committee member for a number of years, taking on the role of secretary later. She has worked tirelessly for the benefit of the village hall and dedicated a tremendous amount of time to support the events it holds. We are also sad to lose our Treasurer, Michael Holland, who has also been a stalwart of the Committee, having served for a long time. Michael has kept a firm hand on the tiller, ensuring the viability of the Hall as a going concern and leaving it in a robust financial position. Both Christine and Michael will be welcome to remain with the Committee in any capacity they choose but, at the same time, I hope they enjoy a well-earned break from the stellar service that they have provided. A heartfelt thank you to you both.</p> <p>Michael will be replaced by Juliet Canty and Steph has taken on the role of Secretary.</p>
<b>6.</b>	<b>Report from Brook Drama Group</b>
	There is nothing to report.
<b>7.</b>	<b>Report from and read by Brook Primary School</b>
	<p>My name is Ellen Ranson-McCabe. I'm the Headteacher at Brook and I joined in September 2023, currently in my second year of Headship. Brook really is a 'small school on a very big adventure'. We are passionate about ensuring every child has a happy time at primary school and achieves their very best.</p> <p>Since my arrival, the amazing staff team have worked tirelessly to improve all areas of our school, from teaching and learning, to pupil well-being, communication with parents, safeguarding and the school site.</p> <p>We had an Ofsted inspection in May last year and a report which we were proud of. We are now a 'Good school with Outstanding Leadership and Management'. Prior to this, Brook was in the 'Requires Improvement' category. The inspectors noted the nurturing and inclusive nature of our school and commented that 'pupils are thriving.'</p> <p>The school site has undergone a transformation in many areas to ensure it is appealing and welcoming for all. Areas have been redecorated with the theme of bringing the outside in as learning through our amazing village environment is very important to us. Staff areas have been refurbished to ensure staff have clean and comfortable areas. The front of the school has been improved with painting, tarmac and safety markings and our website was revamped. We are still improving the site and now are looking at improving the field area and gardens.</p>

Teaching and Learning has gone from strength to strength with a focus on professional development for all our staff, high levels of support and a drive to ensure staff well-being needs are met sufficiently. We very much believe that happy staff will teach well. We have welcomed new teachers and teaching assistants to the team and promoted Mr Stanley to Assistant Head last January. This has strengthened leadership across the school.

We continue to be a school that promotes outdoor learning. We are great believers in happy children learn and many of our children like to be outside of the classroom learning through experiences such as Forest School, walks around the area and using our field. We are very lucky to have a dedicated, passionate, and strong team of Teachers and Teaching Assistants who have the children at the heart of all that they do. We also have a great team of Governors who work hard as volunteers and our office School Business Manager is often complimented on his welcoming manner to all who come through the door.

This year we have worked on improving our offer for trips and enrichment for all the children and increased our Forest School provision. We are also working on writing as part of the curriculum and ensuring that all children can achieve their very best in writing through drama and talking. The Assistant Head and I have written a new curriculum for History which is centred around our children. We are now working on other subjects.

We try to make links with the community where we can. We attend St. Mary's Church at the end of most terms for special services. Reverend Linda and Clare Masters visit the school and deliver assemblies and we have built links with Brook Rural Museum too. Last Christmas we came down to the visit village green to sing.

Despite the changes we have made and the improvement we have seen, the drive to continually improve does not cease. We continue to work hard on all areas of the school and still have much we would like to accomplish.

At Brook we have high numbers of children with Special Educational Needs. Parents choose us because our small size and nurturing environment and, we as a team, very much believe that everyone is welcome at Brook. This means inclusion is a high priority for us. We feel it is something we are doing well, but we also know there is room for improvement here.

It can be very challenging as finances are very tight. We continue to be undersubscribed with around 75 children on roll instead of 105 if we were full. This means we have less money coming in to develop the school in the way that we would like to. We also face challenges with time as schools are very demanding places and staff are stretched. As a small school, staff wear many hats and have to juggle various responsibilities.

I am pleased to share that this year we will welcome more children into our new Reception Class than the school has seen for many years. We are hopeful that word of mouth will continue to spread.

We are always happy to welcome visitors if you would like to come and have a look around the school and see what we are up to. We also have a Facebook page and an Instagram page where we post photographs of what the children have been doing. Every week our newsletter goes on to our website too.

We welcome volunteers as well. We are grateful to have volunteers who come in and read with our children and help us out with different jobs or talk to children about their areas of expertise. If this is of interest to you, please don't hesitate to send us an email or drop us a phone call.

	<p>Email: <a href="mailto:office@brook-ashford.kent.sch.uk">office@brook-ashford.kent.sch.uk</a>  Website: <a href="http://www.brook-ashford.kent.sch.uk">www.brook-ashford.kent.sch.uk</a>  Instagram: Brook_Primary_Ashford  Facebook: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064233605891">https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064233605891</a></p>
<b>8.</b>	<p><b>Report from Brook Church read by Teresa Redfern</b></p> <p>St Mary's sits in the heart of the village, with its clock marking the hours of each day. The steady rhythm of worship in 2023 continued in the same pattern established after the pandemic, with Holy Communion at 11am on the second, third and fourth Sundays of the month, led by Revd Ravi Holy and Revd Linda Cross on the second and fourth, with visiting priests presiding on alternate third Sundays. Many members of the congregation volunteer to read and intercede, and there is also a team who organise refreshments after the service: post-worship refreshments and chat are much enjoyed, along with delicious homemade cake and shortbread. This is sadly the last annual report of a whole year of Carole McCarron's hugely appreciated service – we so valued all she did with her team to ensure that the church looked beautiful and was decorated with wonderful flowers. The volunteers who give their time so generously to clean the church and arrange the flowers are also very much appreciated, as their efforts keep the church tended and welcoming for visitors as well as spick and span for worship. The PCC was grateful for the financial support of the Parish Council when the clock needed repairs. There is no central funding for parish churches and our costs each year must be covered by fundraising events, covenants and donations – regular donations make all the difference and the PCC is very thankful for the generosity of our neighbours as well as those who worship regularly. If anyone is inspired to donate please do get in touch.</p> <p>The church welcomes all our neighbours in creating moments of community worship and celebration. On 8 January we held a Plough Sunday service in collaboration with Brook Rural Museum, with a church full of people and then music from Dune Acoustic and refreshments after the service funded by the National Heritage Lottery Fund. Farmers Mike and Ed brought a plough from the museum into the church and the children dressed it with dried flowers before the plough, earth and seed were blessed. In March we held a Lent music weekend with our visiting choir, the Brook Occasionals – a candlelit concert on Saturday evening and a choral Eucharist on Sunday. We held a really joyful Harvest Festival on 8 October, followed by a harvest barbecue at the museum next door. The day before the celebrations Mike West drove his 1966 Massey Fergusson tractor up the Street to collect food offerings for FareShare in Ashford, including lovely fresh produce, for our neighbours who need help from food banks. Our final special service of 2023 was the joyful if chaotic nativity service in the green yard behind the museum, before the village hall mulled wine and mince pies festive morning; and on Christmas day the church was again full, with lovely carols and hymns to enhance the spirit of joyful celebration. It is a pleasure to welcome Brook Primary School for special services to mark moments in the year – Easter, the end of the school year, harvest and Christmas.</p> <p>The fabric of the church is holding up well, and in October our new architect undertook the survey in order to prepare the Quinquennial report. We continue to actively fundraise to look after the church's fabric and make repairs as time and the weather take their toll. The PCC also has responsibility for God's Acre, our beautiful churchyard. As well as tending it for those who mourn and visit to remember their loved ones, half of the land, to the north of the church where the graves are much older, has been encouraged to grow into a wildflower meadow, with orchids as well as festoons of primroses, daisies and other wildflowers. The bats continue protected in the belfry and are busy about their lives around the church (and sometimes, to the chagrin of the cleaning team, inside it). We are registered as an Eco Church, at the bronze level, and are using renewables-sourced electricity and low-energy lightbulbs.</p> <p>The church is open for pilgrims and visitors every day and comments from the visitors' book show how much it is appreciated: 'So interesting. Thank you for keeping it open and looking after it so well'; 'Feels as if God is present in this beautiful church'. The church is here for everyone in the village, especially for those big moments in life – one baptism, one wedding and five funerals/interments took</p>

	place in St Mary's in 2023. All of the team at church is keen to welcome all our neighbours, and we value and are thankful for the support that so many people give. We look forward to continuing to worship and serve in this community.
9	<p><b>Brook Parish Council Chairman's Report given by Cllr S Betty</b></p> <p>At the elections in May 2023, four of the six long standing parish councillors decided not to stand for re-election, with only Janet Jessop and I continuing as councillors. Four new councillors joined to replace those standing down, and I'm sorry to announce that Janet Jessop has recently taken the decision to leave Brook Parish Council after 10 years and I would like to thank her for the contribution she has made to the village. The Parish Council is therefore looking to co-opt a new councillor to replace Janet.</p> <p><b>RECREATION GROUND</b></p> <p>Following the feedback received from the public consultation that took place in 2023 regarding the renewal of the play equipment, the Parish Council has been in discussion with several play equipment supply companies to produce costs and designs for consideration. Local resident, Mark Hanton who is a landscape architect, is kindly assisting the Parish Council with ideas for various layouts of play park and I would like to thank Mark for his assistance which is much appreciated. Further public consultations will take place once more detailed preliminary designs and costings have been received.</p> <p><b>ABORICULTURAL REPORT</b></p> <p>Several years ago, the Parish Council instigated annual arboricultural surveys and reports on the trees surrounding the recreation ground. Initially, several trees were identified as being in a dangerous state or requiring urgent remedial work resulting in very expensive work being undertaken to remove the trees or make them safe. Fortunately, no major problems were highlighted this year and the Parish Council will continue to ensure that the trees in the recreation ground are managed in a responsible way. For the avoidance of doubt, the trees on Stonebridge Green are the responsibility of KCC and those on Brookbank are the responsibility of Ashford Borough Council.</p> <p><b>CALL FOR SITES</b></p> <p>As part of the Borough Council's preliminary work on the new Local Plan, the initial call for sites exercise has just completed and the list of submitted sites has been shared with the Parish Council. This is an initial list and no detailed investigation into the suitability of the sites has been undertaken which is the next phase of the exercise. Those sites that are considered capable of development will then be put forward for a public consultation. The sites in Brook that have been submitted for residential development are the paddock next to the Honest Miller in Troy Town Lane and a site at the top of Nat's Lane. Residents should also be aware that an extension of Hinxhill Park has also been proposed that will run from the end of the existing site up to the dairy in Hinxhill Road. The Parish Council will monitor these sites and advise residents if any will be subject to public consultation.</p> <p><b>VILLAGE CARETAKER</b></p> <p>Brook has been part of the village caretaker scheme that has been running for several years in conjunction with Smeeth, Brabourne and Mersham. The village caretaker, Paul Rodway, is tasked with cutting the grass on the recreation ground, Stonebridge Green and the front of Brookbank. In addition, Paul also undertakes the annual hedge and verge trimming along Spelders Hill and the occasional cleaning of the village road signage. The scheme receives grants from KCC and Ashford Borough Council and the remainder of the costs are funded by the village precepts from the villages in the caretaker cluster. For 2023/2024, the contributions were as follows:</p> <p>Brabourne £8,740.00  Brook £2,690.00  Smeeth £3,360.00</p>

	<p>Mersham £8,520.00 Ashford Borough Council £5,686.00 KCC £9,189.00</p> <p>The scheme is run by a committee of four people comprising one councillor from each parish council and the scheme is administered by the Parish Clerk who acts as secretary to the committee. The scheme continues to work well and I would like to thank Paul for his continued effort.</p>
<b>10.</b>	<b>Questions from the Audience</b>
	<p>Prof Nightingale was asked: <i>What happens to items you don't use?</i> Carts and ploughs are difficult to get rid of, there is a process that we have to go through in order for items to leave the collection. <i>Do you ever have coaches visiting?</i> The curriculum does not allow a school to justify such visits and coaches cost far too much.</p> <p>Ellen Ranson-McCabe and Mr Stanley were asked: <i>Do you link to other schools?</i> We are part of a care trust and we link to 10 other schools including Lady Joanna in Wye, Smeeth and Brabourne. <i>Do you link into Eco-Schools?</i> No but we will look into it. <i>Do you feel under threat of closure from new schools being built under the S106 agreements with local developments?</i> We always feel under threat but we strive to ensure we are niche and different and that people will choose to come to us. We will strive to ensure that <del>to let</del> the School does not close.</p> <p>Teresa Redfern was asked: <i>Can the Priests Room be available for cleaning?</i> Teresa agreed to ask the Church Wardens about this.</p> <p>Cllr Simon Betty was asked: <i>Who put forward the sites for the Call for Sites?</i> The sites were put forward by the land owners. There are 2 sites for Brook, Troy Town Lane and Nats Lane. The Borough Council will encourage all residents to comment when it is time for there to be a consultation. <i>Will the confines map stay?</i> The confines map could be redefined-as could all relevant policies. <i>Can we get involved with the new confines map?</i> We will have to wait to see what approach Ashford Borough Council take.</p> <p>The Parish Council was asked: <i>What level of reserve is required?</i> We need to ensure we can cover any emergency tree/play ground works and also to cover the cost of a bi-election. The PC is in a more comfortable now.</p> <p><i>Can a group be formed to have a pull up of Himalayan Balsam from the brook?</i> Ownership of land and access would need to be approved. The PC will discuss this as an agenda item in May.</p>
	Cllr Simon Betty thanked everyone for attending the meeting.