



Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Tuesday 2 May 2023 in Detling Village Hall

Present: Cllr Geoff Cosgrove (Chairman)

Clerk: Mrs Wendy Licence

Also present were twenty-six members of the public.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Cllr Chris Evernden, Cllr Mark Housden, Cllr Gemma Nauman, Cllr Karl Pay and Cllr Lawrence Rustem.

2. Minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting held on 3 May 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 May 2022 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

3. Report of the Chairman of Detling Parish Council

Cllr Cosgrove reported that although the current administration had only been in post in September 2022, it had achieved a lot.

The lease for the Community Shop has been agreed for another five years. Open spaces: the Council parted company with Medway Valley Countryside Partnership and the Council will need to look into getting a management plan in place for Horish Woods. Volunteers have been re-established for Monk's meadow and are doing an excellent job in maintaining the area. Pennies day Nursey has installed two bug hotels in the area. The Forestry Commission Grant Scheme has been resolved. A new landscaping contractor has been appointed.

The Parish Council was referred to Maidstone Mediation Service with volunteers from Monk's meadow and this was resolved amicably. The Council has installed two new notice boards and has given a notice board to the Church; there are two notice boards left and it is clear that residents do not want to have a notice board near them.

Finance: The budget has been set and Councillors were aware that Detling has one of the highest precepts in the borough, in 2018 there was a 50% increase in the precept. A new Independent Internal Auditor has been appointed; it is good practise to change auditors periodically.

Issues with the Clerk's contract have been resolved and following an appraisal the Clerk has passed her probationary period.

The Council has resolved issues with the website domain name. We have started to sort out policies, which will always need updating with changes in legislation, and which needed to be standardised in their format.

We have met with the Church and have restarted the Council reports in the Parish Magazine as an effective way of communicating with residents. The Council is supporting the Coronation Event in the village.

The Council has enjoyed a good rapport with our external representatives who have been very supportive of us. SBCllr Nick de Wiggondene-Sheppard is stepping down at the election. We have had a number of meetings with KCCllr Shellina Prendergast, including a Teams meeting with KCC Highways looking at the Highways Improvement Plan. I have attended surgeries with Helen Whately MP with parishes inputting issues regarding traffic, speeding and housing.

We have tried to reinvigorate the Tri-Parishes Group with Stockbury and Thurnham Parish Councils so that we can go forward with one voice.

The majority of planning applications have been non-contentious, and our decisions have been supported by Maidstone Borough Council. The Lynch Bank Farm appeal starts tomorrow 3 May. Maidstone Borough Council sought the Parish Council's opinion on a new name for the development at the old school and, following a discussion at a Council meeting a resident suggested Rugg Close, in keeping with the history of the site, and this has been put forward.

There will be a handover file for the new Chairman of the Council and it is suggested that the Council looks at the Village Design Statement and Parish Plan.

An updated Highways Improvement Plan has been produced following a meeting with KCC Highways last week. Our revised Highways Improvement Plan was received well and they made a few comments. KCC Highways only has £10,000 in its budget for four parishes.

4. Villager of the Year Award

Cllr Cosgrove said nominations had been considered and Mr Derek Lawrence was deemed the worthy recipient of the Villager of the Year Award. Mr Lawrence is an active member of the Village Hall Management Committee and has given many hours of practical support dealing with maintenance and improvements at the hall. He has also had major involvement with set construction for the Detling Players for a number of their productions and was featured in the awards list at a One Act Play Festival. Mr Lawrence also had considerable involvement behind the scenes in setting up the Detling Community Store.

Cllr Cosgrove presented Mr Lawrence with the Villager of the Year Award certificate in grateful recognition of his significant contribution to the village.

5. Reports from Parish Organisations

Village Hall

The Village Hall runs under the terms of the lease with the Parish Council. It is registered as a charity and submits an annual report. The Village Hall management Committee is made up of volunteers elected annually. The annual running cost is approx. £40,000 and income is from lettings. The Main Hall is let an average of 40 hours per week, raising 75% of the income, and the Meeting Room an average of 20 hours per week, bringing in 25% of the income.

The pandemic was an issue when lock down meant public spaces could not be used and the hall obtained Government support. The hall bookings have now returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Running costs have increased and it is hoped to increase hall lettings rather than hall fees. A large number of lettings are from outside the parish.

Volunteers are always welcomed.

Detling Players

The Detling Players have staged three productions; Pressure, The Vicar of Dibley, and Talking Heads, all were a great success and audiences are increasing. The company is excited to be invited to perform the Vicar of Dibley at Rochester Cathedral on 23 and 24 June, tickets will be on sale from the cathedral website and it is hoped to sell them from the Community Shop as well.

The Detling Players are always looking for new cast members, directors and backstage helpers. There are a number of social events. Since the Players have lost the ability to use the old school for practise there have been Zoom rehearsals.

The Detling Players continues to build a reputation for the village.

Community Shop

The store is a not-for-profit organisation supported by the Parish Council, the Kent Community Foundation, customers and volunteers. There is a part-time manager. The shop would not exist if the volunteers did not help.

It has been a difficult year for sales due to the cost-of-living crisis. The "buy local" policy has served us well and has helped. Grants have been received from Maidstone Borough Council and the Kent Community Foundation to provide free food parcels for those in need in the parishes of Detling, Thurnham and Boxley.

We try to support village events. There will be a supplier day in June for producers to show their products.

The store is for locals and it will only survive if used. Our store needs you!

Detling Short Mat Bowls

The club has eighteen players and six members play at county level. The club is in the Second Division. We are fortunate to have this hall, which provides an excellent space, and we are grateful to have an affordable rent. Club night is on Monday from 7.30pm- 10pm. We are actively seeking new members.

Detling Cricket Club

The club has been in existence for 136 years and we are proud of our heritage. We have a strategy for 2025 and the Parish Council is an important part of this. We have received grants which helped refurbish the pavilion. A lot of work is carried out by the players and this helps to keep costs down. The club has twenty-two fixtures this year, the season is from April to October. New players are always welcome. The Detling Cricket Club versus Detling Village is an important fixture and we have recruited new players through this. We welcome female and male players.

The club has challenges, such as an old roller, but the future is about having fun and keeping fit.

Monk's Meadow

Regular updates are given to the Parish Council meetings. We met with Pennies who want to install a notice board. The site is very wet in the middle at the moment and this will need to be looked at. Volunteers are keeping the area clean and tidy and since mowing there has been less dogs mess. Pennies have drafted a leaflet for their parents so we will be seeing more children using the area.

St Martin of Tours, Detling

We are grateful for the support and goodwill which our village church and church events receive.

Over the last year, the church has been busy. We have been able to offer a full year of services and events without too much impact from covid. This is obviously great news!

It is an important part of the church's role that we have been able to welcome local families for their weddings and baptisms. We have also been able to support families as they have said goodbye to loved ones who have passed away. The churchyard at Detling is obviously still open and I think this is particularly significant in our village setting. The village means a lot to many people and having their loved ones buried in the village is very meaningful. It is a privilege to be able to offer this.

The church remains very active in offering social events. Detling residents have frequent activities and events in which to get involved.

We are hugely grateful to Polly and Charles for their expertise in editing this super magazine. Great thanks also to those who contribute articles and those who distribute. The magazine is a welcome feature of village life and a helpful means of staying 'in the loop'.

Wednesday coffee mornings run regularly, and they are a great (and inexpensive) way of having a regular social with local people. Dates are published in the magazine. Everyone is welcome!

The Men's Breakfast has just launched and is one example of a new venture which has had a super start (16 attended our first breakfast). The focus is simply bringing together the community, via the church and the pub!

We are looking forward to the coronation celebration and should, again, be encouraged by the example of groups within the village working together to (hopefully!) make an occasion a success.

Challenges and opportunities:

We work hard to be the best church we can be for the village. There is so much positive overlap between people in the community, with organisations and with events. We hope that many people benefit from the church's presence. We would like to develop our pastoral care and support of local people, especially those who don't get out much. We would highlight that this would be available for people of all faiths and those of none.

Key challenges and opportunities we are facing-

Upkeep of the church and churchyard. We would love some more people to get involved in helping keep the church and churchyard in good order. We want both to be very welcoming places for people to spend time. Getting some teams together for work parties (which can always happen alongside tea and cake!) would be really encouraging.

The church is a beacon in our community. This is highlighted by it being lit up in the evenings, almost serving as a welcome to people returning home. However, churches are also very expensive buildings! They are, often, ancient and, as such, need specialist care which comes at a cost. The church receives no external funding or support from the government. It is simply Detling's church. Villagers are encouraged to consider whether they might be willing to support the upkeep of the church, even if it is just a small amount every month.

We are very open to providing what the village wants, including in our services. In the last year we have had an all-age harvest festival, children's nativity service, pet service and more. If you have an idea for something we can offer, our ears are open!

Cllr Cosgrove thanked all the representatives for attending and for their reports.

6. Any Other Business

The litter picking group is to be applauded, it had its second session and approximately twenty-five volunteers helped. They will be litter picking every six weeks or so and are making a huge difference to our village. We are grateful for their sterling work.

Thank you Cllr Cosgrove and Councillors for stepping into the breach to look after the parish.

How does the Parish Council work?

Cllr Cosgrove said Parish Councils are the first tier of Government and are formed of elected representatives. They are not volunteers and can be paid an attendance allowance. The parish Council is the closest thing to local democracy, working directly with residents, and are there to support and do things at a local level more than a Borough Council can do. Parish Councils can provide allotments and can maintain closed church yards. They must be careful not to get involved in things such as highways which is the responsibility of others. A Parish Council can raise a precept which is where most of its income comes from.

Cllr Cosgrove thanked everyone for coming to the meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 7.50pm.