

The Brook Annual Parish Meeting at the Village Hall held on Thursday, 21st May 2026 at 5.00pm

1. Report from Chair of Brook Parish Council

Brook Parish Council meets every 2 months on the third Thursday in January, March, May, July, September and November. There are six members of the parish council, and I am pleased to welcome Cllr Robert Masters as our newest member who was co-opted in November, filling the vacancy left by Fran Penberthy who resigned as a councillor in September 2025. The Parish Clerk continues to be Tracey Block who is the main point of contact for the parish council. Parish Council meetings are open meetings and members of the public are therefore always welcome to attend.

PLAY PARK PROJECT

The existing play equipment is more than 25 years old and has now reached the end of its economic life. The parish council is proposing to replace the equipment and a scheme has been out for public consultation, but the cost of replacement is more than £100,000. It is proposed that the equipment is replaced piece by piece when funds allow.

This project is being run by Cllr Alison Wood and a £10,000 grant from ABC Community Grants Fund has been secured together with further donations from Givaudan, Our Place Wye, Brook Drama Group and private donations raised by cake and plant sales.

These funds have enabled a zip wire to be purchased which is being installed behind the existing play equipment on the recreation ground. The parish council would like to thank everyone who has donated to the project. Further equipment will be purchased when funds allow.

RECREATION GROUND

The village recreation ground is owned and maintained by the parish council and the village hall trust holds a long lease on the village hall from the parish council. As agreed with the village hall committee, private hall hirers are not permitted to use the recreation for any activities associated with the hall.

I would also like to extend the thanks of the parish council once again to David Scarisbrick who at his own cost continues to plant and tend the area to the side of the car park.

OPEN SPACES POLICY

The parish council continues to receive requests for memorials on the recreation ground. In view of the increasing number of requests, the parish council has prepared an Open Spaces Policy confirming that memorials will take the form of commemorative plaques. Please see the Open Spaces Policy for further details which is available on the parish council website.

VILLAGE NOTICEBOARD AND SIGN

The posts supporting the village noticeboard and sign became badly rotted at ground level and have been temporarily removed pending repair. Steel sleeves have been made which will provide support for the posts and once the metalwork to the village sign has been restored, the intention is to replace both the sign and noticeboard as soon as possible. The parish council would like to thank Mike West for procuring the manufacture of the steel sleeves and for his assistance in moving the sign and noticeboard.

VILLAGE CARETAKER SCHEME

Brook is 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. 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.

Simon Betty
Chair Brook Parish Council

2. Report from Borough Councillor

It has been another busy year, and I remain committed to ensuring that that all four parishes in the ward and residents are well represented. I continue to attend parish council meetings around the ward, and I prepare a written ward member's report for each meeting which is then appended to the parish council minutes to ensure that they are available for everyone. This close working partnership with each of the parishes is essential so that any issues are then passed up to the Borough Council and I can also feed information back to the parish councils.

WARD MEMBER COMMUNITY GRANT SCHEME

I'd also like to remind everyone that the ward member's grant is available again this year which provides me with a pot of £3,000 for community projects and organisations around the ward. Last year, I was pleased to assist several worthy local community organisations with grant payments for their various projects and applications for this year's grant will be open until 28th February 2027.

THE NEW LOCAL PLAN

Between August and October 2025, Ashford Borough Council ran a consultation on the draft Ashford Local Plan 2042. The consultation focused on setting out the Council's 'direction of travel' for the emerging Local Plan, including setting out ambitions and intentions for sustainable development in the borough. As part of this consultation, the Council also reopened the Call for Sites, which invited residents, landowners and developers to submit sites for consideration for allocation within the emerging Local Plan.

The Council has now published the responses that have been received from the Local Plan consultation and the sites submitted through the Call for Sites.

It is anticipated that a second draft of the Plan will be available for consultation in the late autumn and I would encourage as many residents as possible to submit their comments.

Notwithstanding the onset of Local Government Reorganisation, Ashford Borough Council has been advised by Government to press ahead with developing a Local Plan and the Council also considers it vital to have a 5-year supply of housing in place to prevent inappropriate speculative development.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION UPDATE

Local government Reorganisation means in a few years' time Ashford Borough Council along with Kent County Council will no longer exist and services will move to a new unitary council.

Several options as to how the new unitary councils should be applied to Kent have been discussed by the leaders of all the Kent councils and various options have been proposed. The option preferred by Ashford Borough Council is a four unitary model known as 4d because this is considered to have the scale needed to deliver efficient, resilient services as well as respecting local identity, community voice, and historical continuity as well as offering an easier transformation across public services and therefore supports financial sustainability.

Residents will have received a leaflet through the post from Ashford Borough Council outlining this option and providing links to the government public consultation which closed on 26th March. We now await the timescale from the government which will ultimately lead to the confirmation of the unity model for Kent.

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

Whilst Local Government Reorganisation will not affect existing Parish or Town Councils, a large part of Ashford town centre is unparished and there are concerns that residents in this area will no longer have a voice when Ashford Borough Council no longer exists.

To that end, Ashford Borough Council has launched a Community Governance Review to gather residents' views on the creation of a town council for the unparished, urban area of Ashford. This will include the town centre, Repton Park, South Ashford, and parts of Willesborough.

TOWN CENTRE PROJECTS

Ashford Borough Council is currently pushing ahead with several major town centre projects.

At the former Park Mall Shopping Centre, a major town centre regeneration project for a mixed use residential led scheme is underway. In the meantime, the site will be used as an interim car park while a procurement exercise is undertaken to seek a suitable development partner to bring forward the larger scheme.

A public consultation exercise has just taken place for the former Kent Wool Grower's site in Tannery Lane where Ashford Borough Council are preparing a scheme to provide 160 social housing units with a further 60 units in the former Civic Centre building itself. The site includes the listed Whist House which will be used as housing department offices. The scheme will also include covering part of the Stour Centre car park with solar panels.

Elwick Place, the site of Ashford Cinema, is set for a major revamp that will include a cinema, family attractions, social gaming and workspace facilities. The Ashford Cinema, Snap Fitness and Travelodge will continue operating throughout the works, with the new facilities expected to open by late summer 2026.

After years of lying empty, proposals have been prepared to bring the front section of the former Odeon building in the Lower High Street into productive cultural use as a small-scale arts, cultural and community venue while protecting the remainder of the building for a future redevelopment. Plans include creating a 150-200 capacity flexible performance space, a gallery and café/bar with workspace, and refurbishing the first-floor ballroom.

Finally, a reminder to all residents that if you need to contact me my details are available on the Ashford Borough Council website.

CLlr Simon Betty
Ward Member for Bircholt

3. Questions from the public

There were no members of the public in attendance.