

2022 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING MINUTES

Page 1

DRAFT Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting
held in the Bluebell Centre, Hothfield,
on Wednesday 4 May 2022, at 6.30 pm

Mr Ian Lloyd, Chairman, Mrs Margaret Merrion, Mr Malcolm Clark, Mrs Penny Sutcliffe, Mrs Marie Norris (Clerk) Mrs C Bell (Borough Councillor)

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. There was 2 Member of the Public present,

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:**

An Apology for Absence was received from Mr R Vernon and Mr M Pollack, Mr C Simkins County Councillor, Mrs C Bell Borough Councillor

2. **TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE LAST PARISH MEETING**

These were unanimously approved and signed by Mr Lloyd.

Proposed Mr Lloyd Seconded Mrs Merrion

3. **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no Matters Arising.

4. **PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

Mr Lloyd outlined the activities of the Parish Council over the past year.

Following the residents meeting in September 2021 to discuss how HPC should spend the solar money, the many suggestions have been investigated, costs confirmed and the practicalities considered.

One of the biggest concerns in the village is speeding. We have arranged for Traffic speed surveys to be completed and undertaken detailed discussions with the various authorities to establish what can be done and cost implications.

There has unfortunately been anti social behaviour incidents in the village which has prompted the suggestion of CCTV being installed in key locations. Costs are in the process of being assessed. HPC have also been in contact with ABC, the Village Warden and the Police to identify the culprits and take further action where required.

We will undertake a further Residents meeting later this year to present our findings on all the Solar Money spending suggestions and make decisions with residents approval.

It was with great sadness that the village lost a wonderful resident this year, Richard Sutcliffe. Among many other things, Richard gave up his time to print and distribute the Hothfield Newsletter. He will be sadly missed by all those who knew him.

Work by HPC is undertaken by volunteer parish councillors who give up their free time for the benefit of others with little or no recognition of the effort they put into their role. I would like to welcome our new Councillor Martyn Pollack on joining HPC.

I would also like to extend my thanks to all our councillors and of course Marie our great Parish Clerk for their excellent work and I am very grateful for their support over this year.

5. PARISH COUNCIL FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Although a formal statement had not been circulated in advance. Mrs Merrion reported that at the end of financial year 20/21 HPC had positive funds of £42,000 although this sounds a large sum the majority of the funds are earmarked for specific items. HPC hold £14k surplus funds which is unallocated and the equivalent to 1 years precept as recommended by. Looking forward to FY 20/21 the budget was set and approved with a similar income from Ashford Borough Council. The year end figures for 20/21 are currently being prepared and will be able to view via the accounting statement produced by the authority and publicised on the village notice board and the HPC website.

6. BOROUGH COUNCILLORS REPORT

Clair Bell, Ashford Borough Councillor for Upper Weald, Annual Report May 2022

Over the last year the way the council works has evolved from staff working from home wherever possible, to a hybrid model, where staff typically spend 2 or 3 days in the office. This seems to be the right balance but we continue to monitor the situation to ensure smooth running of council services and staff wellbeing. Councillors meetings are also held either in person or via MS Teams, as appropriate.

The budget for 22/23 includes an increase in the council tax of £5 for the average Band D property, increasing the ABC element from £172.50 to £177.50. This means Ashford still has the lowest council tax in Kent. Rebates of £150 are administered by ABC.

The council has a Medium Term Financial Plan which demonstrates a balanced position over the 5 years, but there are some key risks. The plan relies on some reserve funding in the early years moving to a balanced income and expenditure position later. Income is generated through investment, including the council's property company and efficiencies are achieved by smarter working through digital transformation. The future of New Homes Bonus is uncertain and we don't know what any replacement scheme will look like. There is also significant capital expenditure on regeneration projects in the town, such as Vicarage Lane redevelopment and plans to regenerate the lower high street.

Ashford continues to attract inward investment - Brompton Bikes, the largest manufacturer of bicycles in the UK, announced a few weeks ago they would be applying to build their new factory and indeed their Global HQ in Ashford. This equates to a £100m investment into the local economy and when fully operational will result in 4000 jobs being supported locally. The factory will be constructed on a floodplain, so the wetland will be restored and will itself promote cycling and walking, with disabled parking spaces only and thus encouraging staff to walk or cycle to work. There will be a nature reserve open to the public with cycle paths and trails. The intention is for it to be a factory of the future, constructed using materials with low carbon footprint, maximising natural light, minimising energy consumption, using solar and ground source energy, and so designed to adapt and be resilient to, the changing climate.

One of the main challenges facing the council is an environmental issue - Stodmarsh. It was found that the quality of Stodmarsh Lakes near Canterbury has deteriorated and as a result new housing development in the Stour catchment area is required to mitigate this and achieve nutrient neutrality. Many planning applications for new housing have been on hold for a year now, including some sites in the Local Plan to 2030. Working with Natural England and the Environment Agency, the council is continuing to pursue the creation of new strategic wetlands as a means of mitigation, as well as lobbying the government to assist, including supporting a significant upgrade in wastewater treatment works in the catchment area. Unfortunately a recent planning appeal in Tenterden overturned an ABC decision to refuse permission, with the Planning Inspector citing Stodmarsh as a key reason for the decision as he wasn't assured that sufficient progress had been made.

As with many local authorities ABC is supporting the Ukrainian refugees. There is information for both hosts and guests on both ABC and KCC websites which is regularly updated. Ashford is working in conjunction with County Council and Kent Resilience Forum to carry out property checks and DBS checks. There is a particular risk to ABC if there is sponsorship breakdown and people become homeless. Work is underway at the former sheltered housing facility Pym House in Charing to offer accommodation to Ukrainian families.

<https://www.ashford.gov.uk/your-community/support-for-ukraine/>

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/support-for-ukrainian-nationals>

7. COUNTY COUNCILLORS REPORT

This was received by the Chairman and circulated to all members of the Parish Council.

8. PUBLIC INTERVAL

A member of the public commented that the annual meeting had not been well publicised and that it was not in the newsletter or the website. This clerk confirmed that the agenda had been placed both on the noticeboard and the Hothfield Parish Website and agreed to investigate further.

9. EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION

No items were discussed.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 6.45 pm.

Signature

Date