

EASTLING PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Parish Meeting for Eastling held in Eastling Village Hall on Monday 4 April 2022

Present: Cllr Jimmy West (Chairman), Cllr Paul Ainsworth, Cllr Paul Adams, Cllr Julia Bailey and Cllr John Payne; and Mrs Wendy Licence (Clerk).

Also present were eight members of the public.

Cllr West welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies had been received from County Councillor Rich Lehman (at another meeting) and Ward Member David Simmons.

1. Minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting held remotely on 22 April 2021

It was **AGREED UNANIMOUSLY** to accept the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 22 April 2021 as a true record, Cllr West duly signed the minutes.

2. Matters Arising from the minutes

There were no matters arising.

3. Report of the Chairman of Eastling Parish Council

Cllr West reported:

The Council has adhered to its established pattern of bi-monthly meetings in the year, with a very satisfactory attendance record for all 5 Councillors. The Council is non-political. Meetings have been held either remotely by Zoom or since May 2021 in person, and this process has worked well, with no change to the smooth running of the Council. Members of the public were also able to join the meetings, and several took advantage of this facility.

Elections to the Council took place in 2019. Full Elections will be held again in 2023, although there maybe vacancies on the Council before then, due to retirements. As a reminder, anyone is welcome to attend Council meetings, who would like to get more involved. There has been no change in the Eastling Councillors tin the year. However, there will be a change in Councillors this year, as sadly Cllr Paul Ainsworth has decided to step back from the Council, following this meeting today. I would like to publicly thank Paul for all the hard work and wise advice he has given to the Council over the many years of his service. He will be very much missed from the Council, but we will still have the benefit of his thoughts through his position on the Village Hall committee, and in addition Paul has agreed to continue to run the Village website. In the next few weeks, the Council will go through the official procedure following a resignation, with the plan that another villager can be co-opted on the Council before too long.

COVID-19. Although all legal restrictions have now been dropped, covid cases are as high as ever. So, the Council has adopted a policy of utmost caution, at its meetings and business. Although most cases of Covid are relatively mild, in many instances the symptoms can severe, so care is needed to protect others.

History of Eastling. The late Hugh Perks wrote a substantial [58 pages] document on the History of our village, including many photographs old and new. This wonderful document was

passed to the Council this year and is now published in full. There is a link to it on the village website.

Eastling Telephone Box. The Council has now “adopted” the phone box from BT. BT have passed the responsibility of maintaining this listed and historic telephone box to Eastling Council. It dates from King George 5th in the middle 1930s. The box has been beautifully restored and repaired by Colin Bell. There is a bit more work to do on the inside now that BT have recently taken out the phone equipment. The Council is very grateful to Colin for all the work he has done on this project.

Parish Council Clerk. We are fortunate to have Wendy Licence as our Clerk. Wendy is Clerk to a number of other councils and attends regular training and update seminars to keep abreast of all that is required by statute for the proper governance of Parish Councils. The Council is obliged to have its own Website <https://www.hugofox.com/community/eastling-parish-council-15993/home> On that is published all the agendas and minutes of Council meetings and all our regulatory and financial information etc. This Website is maintained by Wendy. The Council is a member of the Kent Association of Local Councils [KALC], a body that is particularly useful for training and keeping us all up to date. The financial update will be given by Cllr Payne but all I need to say is that the cash management and budgeting are robust. There will be no change in the Precept this year. It will remain about £5,100, being £35 a year for a band D property in Eastling. Various charitable gifts have been made as usual, including a substantial donation to an Eastling school project, which Cllr Payne will expand upon.

Planning applications. Eastling is in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and thus subject to severe restrictions on development. Eastling Parish Council has viewed and commented on several applications favourably and a few unfavourably, but it is Swale Borough Council who makes the decisions and sadly on occasion the Councils opinions get rejected or upheld by Swale Borough Council.

Alan Willson continues to do an excellent job in looking after **Neighbourhood Watch**, liaising with the police where necessary and helping out villagers in many ways. Thanks to Alan for the excellent work he does in the village on many fronts and helping to keep us all safe.

Speed Limits, and Parish Highways Improvement Plan [PHIP] Residents have been concerned for several years about the highways speed limits in Newnham Lane, the 40mph sign is in the wrong place, and in any event, it should be a maximum of 30mph. To help resolve this, a petition was organised in 2019 and received a massive 144 supporting signatures. This was submitted to the Chairman of the Joint Transport Board at KCC last year. Last year we were asked to prepare a Parish Highways Improvement Plan [PHIP], which has been done and submitted. Kent County Council Highways arranged for speed tests to be done in Newnham Lane and Kent County Council Highways officers are now looking in detail at the result at our request for the Newnham Lane speed limit. Unfortunately, due to staff changes at KCC, Eastling council has still not received the result of their deliberations. On another matter on the PHIP, the railings down Kettle Hill have now been replaced, after many years of neglect, giving added safety to traffic and other road users.

Highways. The Council continues to report potholes and other issues to Kent County Council Highways and batter them with follow up. Anyone can report any Highway problem themselves online, through www.kent.gov.uk I would urge you do this. KCC are usually pretty responsive, and you can track progress. The Council has also been concerned about fly tipping, in particular in Pett Dane Lane and Seed Road. We continue to work with KCC Highways, to try to get these issues resolved.

The Village Website The village website is www.eastlingvillage.co.uk. This is run by Paul Ainsworth. We are pleased with the Website for Eastling Village; feed in any comments, news, or events you may have to the administrator. He can only post information he is told about, so do be in contact with him with information and photos. In addition, the Council has its own website, [see above] which has all the details concerning the work, constitution, and regulations etc of Eastling Parish Council. This is run by our Clerk, Wendy Licence. There are links between the two websites.

Footpaths. The Council strives to work with local farmers, to keep paths in good condition. Ben Binder manager of the Belmont Estate works particularly hard to maintain the paths and bridleways. He provides regular reports to the council, for which we are very grateful. If you spot any problems, fallen trees etc then please let Ben know. The trenches around most of the fields dug by the Belmont Estate are to stop "Hare Coursing". Unfortunately, some is still occasionally taking place. If you see this happening, please report it to the police, rather than approach the offenders yourself.

Swale Borough Council and Kent County Council. Last year I paid tribute to the retiree, KCC Cllr Andrew Bowles who served Eastling excellently for many years. At the May 2021 election his seat was won by KCC Cllr Rich Lehman. Rich has attended several of the Council meetings. We are fortunate to have his helpful support and hard work for the community. The Council was very sorry to hear of the death of retired SBC Cllr Colin Prescott at the end of 2021. He was a very regular attendee at our meetings and served the community that he loved brilliantly. David Simmons is on Swale Borough Council, is our Ward member is. David attends our meetings, and his input and advice is always appreciated.

4. Financial report of the Parish Council

Cllr Payne reported that the accounts are currently being prepared for audit and will be available on the website at the end of May. The precept has been kept the same for the last three years. Swale Borough Council always expresses the precept on a Band D property which is £35 per annum. The Council maintains the church footpath, the notice board and the area around the sign and this is done several times a year. The Council has made several grants during the year, it has given to Swale Citizens Advice which helps residents and also the Kent Sussex Surrey Air Ambulance. Donations were made to UK Sepsis Trust and Diabetes UK in memory of former Ward Councillor Colin Prescott. The main donation was made to Eastling School; in 2018 a young lad called Joey died and the Governors wanted to create a sensory garden in his memory, the Council purchased a Gruffalo for the garden. The phone box was restored by Mr Colin Bell who invoiced for the materials only, the Council is grateful to Mr Bell for generously giving his time for this project.

The Parish Council continues to pay Community Heartbeat for the Village Emergency Telephone System.

The Village Website is funded by the Parish Council.

Cllr West thanked Cllr Payne for his report.

5. To receive reports from local organisations

Mr Ben Binder, Manager of the Belmont Estate, said he had received correspondence regarding the footpath which goes down to the valley and concerns about the barbed wire on top of the fence. The barbed wire has been there for nineteen years and the barbed wire cannot be replaced with plain wire as it would fall apart. The fence will need replacing within the next few years and plain wire will be put along the top.

There are a couple of places near the school where people are walking across the field rather than adhering to the public footpaths, this causes damage to the crops. Signs have been put up but people have just torn them down. People must appreciate that this is not the footpath. A tent had been pitched behind Prospect Place and the people were asked to move.

The fields are being planted with a drill and some people think this looks like stubble and walk on the fields, this is causing damage to the crops.

There are not too many problems with the drains, the drain by Prospect Place has been cleared and a soakaway has been dug into the field, it has been a dry winter so it is unclear as to what difference this has made.

There has been a lot of litter in the village. The fly tipping near Pett Dane was reported three years ago and has only just been removed.

A dog waste bin is needed where the footpath goes across from Newnham Road as there is an issue with dog fouling in the field.

Cllr West thanked Mr Binder for his report and for all he does for the village.

6. To receive questions and comments from parishioners.

A resident asked if details of the Village Emergency Telephone System could be publicised with a leaflet drop. Volunteers could also be encouraged and a training/ refresher session could be arranged.

Cllr Bailey said the Council will look into this.

A resident raised concern about the drain in the dip in Newnham Lane is blocked.

Cllr West said KCC Highways did unblock it but it silted up after rain.

Cllr Adams said there needs to be a proper schedule of maintenance.

A resident said there are a lot of pot holes in Newnham Lane.

Cllr West said the pot holes were reported to KCC Highways and this is put on the maintenance schedule.

Cllr West thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.45pm

Signed as a true record of the meeting:

Chairman

Date: 11 April 2023