



## ACOL PARISH COUNCIL

The Village Hall  
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### **Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2026 at 7.30pm, Acol Village Hall**

**Present:** Parish Councillors Richard Steel (Chairman) [RS], Sarah Corby [SC], Gavin Winpenny [GW], Wendy Winpenny [WW], Kate Ruranski [KR]

**In Attendance:** KCC Cllr Luke Evans, District Cllr Abi Smith, Community Warden Gary Groombridge, Sara Archer – Clerk, plus 1 member of public.

#### **62/25-26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from District Cllr Peter Evans.

#### **63/25-26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No interests declared.

#### **64/25-26 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

**RESOLVED:** To approve the minutes of the last Parish Council Meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2025.

These were proposed by Cllr W Winpenny, seconded by Cllr Corby, all were in agreement and therefore signed by the Chairman of the meeting as a correct record.

#### **65/25-26 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

- Cllr Steel reported he had added a news item to the website and newsletter article, regarding the recent bid by Polly Billington to propose Thanet as a 'Isle of Culture' in 2029, however, the deadline for comments was very short. The bid had been supported by TDC in principle and if shortlisted, would be further backed by the Council.

- A proposal made by Birchington PC to share proportionally per capita, the Pride in Place funding granted by Government, was discussed at the Parish Council Forum. No formal decision had been made with regard to the allocation of the funding.

- A news item on the website advised residents of the position with regard to the Local Government Review. Parish Councils are expected to not be impacted by the proposals, however, the Government were yet to make a decision on the options presented by the Local Authorities.

- At a recent meeting of the Acol Village Hall Management Committee, it had been agreed to publicise the Committee to raise the profile of the Village Hall and try to attract a younger membership to join.

- The honours board was in the process of being updated with the recent addition of Skip and Teresa Ling.

- Suggestions to improve communications, raise awareness of various Village bodies and increase involvement in community events were welcomed. Currently, information is publicised on the website and via social media, however, other methods would also be considered.

- The Parish Council had been notified of the intention by BT to discontinue the landline and decommission the public phone box. It was agreed the kiosk should be adopted by the Parish Council in the first instance, and suggestions going forward for its use would be considered at a later date.

**RESOLVED:** To formally adopt the telephone kiosk from BT. **Proposed: Cllr Steel, Seconded: Cllr Ruranski**

- Notification had been received from PC Andy Howe that he had stepped down from the role as Ward Officer, and PC Owen Crush had been appointed to the role in his place. Sincere thanks were expressed to PC Howe for his support to the Village. Cllr Steel would write to him direct on behalf of the Parish Council.

#### **66/25-26 CLERK'S REPORT**

- The Clerk advised that the handyman from Minster had been contacted and asked to progress with the maintenance of the roundabout and to attend the site and discuss the installation of a safety gate at the entrance of the Recreation Ground. Works would be completed when the weather improves.

- A meeting would be held with representatives from Birchington, to discuss the next steps to progress with a Neighbourhood Plan in March.

- The Clerk had booked onto three sessions of AI training provided by KALC.

- The Clerk had attended online training with regard to Assertion 10 regulations. A number of criteria should be met in order to conform to the regulations. In particular, the requirement for a PC owned domain name, preferably .gov.uk, should be obtained. The Clerk was making enquiries with regard to costings for the generic domain email address for the Clerk, to be purchased.

**RESOLVED:** To approve the purchase of a generic email address - .gov.uk, for the Clerk, in order to meet the Assertion 10 regulation. This was proposed by Cllr Steel, seconded by Cllr W Winpenny.

## 67/25-26 COUNCILLOR'S REPORTS

**Cllr Ruranski** advised she was exploring the suggestion of placing planters at the entrances to the Village. Locations such as the welcome to the Village signs were being considered. The intention to improve the visual appearance of the village would be discussed further at future meetings.

Cllr Ruranski had written to David Whitehead and thanked him on behalf of the Parish, for maintaining the footpath to Quex. It was noted that the path was currently very slippery, due to the weather, however, Cllr Ruranski would approach Mr Whitehead to enquire whether any measures could be put in place to make the pathway safer. Following this suggestion, discussion took place with regard to the recent bid by TDC for Pride of Place funding, and the potential of making an expression of interest for funding towards a hard standing footpath to Quex, or replacement fencing at the play area.

**Cllr G Winpenny** had attended the Thanet Area Committee meeting in which the KALC Community Awards had been mentioned. It was confirmed Skip and Teresa had been nominated for the award.

Parishes were being encouraged to produce a Parish Charter. The Clerk was liaising with local Clerks regarding this and receiving information from Penny Button, TDC as part of the working group.

Parishes were also being encouraged to produce an Emergency Resilience Plan.

The TDC Parking Strategy was also discussed at the meeting. Improvements to signage for local attractions was being considered. Discussion with regard to challenges with local village parking took place and potential areas for allocation for parking could be identified in future.

**Cllr W Winpenny** advised that the waste bins for the Recreation Ground had not been emptied recently. The Clerk would contact the Director and request this was addressed promptly.

Cllr Winpenny suggested a Village Event was organised. Plans for a celebration would be discussed further.

**Cllr Corby** advised that the Community coffee afternoon – 'Bites & Banter', had been arranged for 28<sup>th</sup> March 2026, 3pm-5pm. Any individuals requiring transport to the event were welcome to contact Sarah who would make arrangements.

The drain opposite Nursery Fields was blocked, this would be reported by the Community Warden, along with the potholes on Margate Hill.

It was noted that a delivery van had become stuck on the verge at Crispe Road, due to the mud created by the inclement weather.

Residents are reminded they can report any issues direct online to the relevant official bodies for action.

## 68/25-26 INDIVIDUAL OFFICER REPORTS

a) **Cllr Luke Evans** read the following report:

### Budget

I want to start by giving you some context about Kent County Council's budget proposal for 2026–2027—because it's important you know where we started and where we're heading.

When we took office on 2nd May 2025, we inherited a council with £732 million of debt, and that figure was forecast to hit £1 billion within two years. To put that into perspective, taxpayers were paying £84,000 every single day just in interest to service that debt.

The previous administration had set a target of £121 million in savings and increased income for the current year—but when we took over, the council was already £21 million overspent. And if that wasn't enough, we later discovered a ballooning Adult Social Care budget, which we didn't even find out about until August. In the first quarter alone, Adult Social Care was £20 million over budget.

So, what did we do to fix this mess?

We found £100 million in efficiency savings, and we reprofiled another £39 million. The biggest factor in that reprofiling was receding the Climate Emergency, which meant we didn't have to chase unrealistic net zero targets that would have bankrupted the council.

We went further. We reduced the debt by £67 million, and we have another £17 million of debt reductions baked into our budget by March. For context, this is the first time in nearly 15 years that KCC has reduced its debt.

We've also got a grip on Adult Social Care. For the past two months in a row, we've delivered huge savings, and we're confident we can bring our biggest portfolio spend under control.

On top of that, we've set up a Contract Management Review Group, which now goes through every new contract with a fine-tooth comb to make sure the public gets value for money—because frankly, the contracts we inherited were dire.

And because financial responsibility is at the heart of everything we're doing, we've also budgeted to put an additional £30 million back into reserves in the coming year.

Now, here's the really exciting part: based on the new direction we've taken, it looks likely that our 3.99% council tax rise could be the lowest of any council in the country. If it's not the lowest, it will certainly be in the top three—and that's out of 384 council tax authorities in the UK. That is an astonishing achievement when you consider that the previous administration put council tax up by the maximum legal amount for 12 consecutive years—and we've lowered it after just eight months.

This is what real financial responsibility looks like, and it's only the beginning. Together, we're building a stronger, more sustainable Kent County Council for the future.

### Sea Link

A letter in response to recent action on the Minster Marshes facebook site was read:

Dear George,

Just to clarify the position unequivocally.

Reform U.K. councillors at Kent County Council have had no involvement whatsoever in the planning, development or approval of the Sea Link project. The scheme was signed off under the previous administration, prior to Reform U.K. taking control of the council.

Since taking office, the only work undertaken in relation to Sea Link has been by council officers acting under instruction from the Secretary of State, and this has been strictly limited to the legal and procedural elements of the planning process. No political endorsement, direction or support for the project has been given by Reform U.K. elected members.

To be absolutely clear, Reform U.K. councillors at KCC do not support the Sea Link project in its current form.

A full and formal statement will shortly be issued setting out:

- The outright rejection of the project by Reform U.K. elected members at Kent County Council; and
- My alternative and far more logical proposal for the interconnector route.

That proposal would see the link continue to Dover Harbour, where a transfer station could have been established on the infilled Granville Docks site. This location would have delivered genuine energy security benefits, avoided unnecessary industrialisation of sensitive countryside, and enabled power transfer along the existing railway corridor to the established Sellenge site for connection to the national grid.

This approach would have minimised environmental harm, made use of existing infrastructure, and avoided the significant planning, transport and landscape impacts now associated with the current scheme.

Any suggestion that Reform U.K. councillors are responsible for, or supportive of, the Sea Link project is simply incorrect.

Yours sincerely,

David Wimble Cabinet member for economic development

I would like to add that when this statement was released on the SMM FB page it had over 250 likes within a couple of hours but now the statement has been taken down so it looks like we us Reform UK Clls haven't bothered responding which is untrue. For site admins to act like this it clearly shows that they have a hidden agenda. If we stick to the facts though the guilty parties are easily identified. The Conservatives started the Sea Link project nearly 3 years ago and the Labour Party are carrying on with it. The Secretary of State could stop Sea Link tomorrow if he wanted to but he won't because his party, just like the party before his, is ideologically married to Net Zero. Reform UK will keep fighting for residents, defending our countryside and coastline, and protecting local wildlife from a project that local people do not want.

b) **Cllr Peter Evans** was not in attendance, however, he submitted the following report:

1. Essential repairs are ongoing to Walpole Bay tidal pool, as the cracks were bigger and deeper than was at first thought.
  2. The Theatre Royal design proposals for the refurbishment were shared with the public on february 9th.
  3. TDC is holding a public engagement with the public concerning air quality this month.
  4. There are public engagements this month concerning Jacky Bakers. These will be in the form of online surveys and public events.
  5. The annual TDC budget consultation is now live and open to scrutiny and comments.
  6. The second phase of the formation of Margate Town Council is now underway. The results of the first phase launched last September are now available to the public.
  7. Thanet is being proposed as a 'City of Culture' by Polly Billingham Labour MP for East Thanet.
  8. There is tree planting proposed this month for Nethercourt and Holmes Park Broadstairs.
  9. The public engagement concerning the Winter Gardens was held in Margate earlier this month.
  10. The Labour group held a meeting earlier this week concerning their proposals to make Thanet a 'City of Sanctuary'. This aims to support Local Residents, Refugees and Asylum Seekers who are facing the prospect of homelessness.
  11. Some of the Lido complex has now been closed off to the public as the structure is now unsafe. This includes access to the old bathing pool area and the walkways adjoining it.
- If anyone has any queries they would like to ask or for me to take up, please email me.

**Cllr Abi Smith** reported as follows:

Consultations now open on YourVoice Thanet <https://yourvoice.thanet.gov.uk/en-GB/> include...

1. TDC's proposed budget for 2026/27 – locals are being asked for their views on the approach for the coming financial year. Sorry, but the survey closed: Monday 16 February.
  2. Plans for a Parish (Town) Council for Margate
  3. The proposed 'hub' for Jackey Bakers Recreation Ground in Ramsgate
- Great British Spring Clean 2026

The TDC Beach and Coast team is organising a beach clean for staff and councillors on 26th March, as part of the Great British Spring Clean 2026. Volunteers will begin the litter pick at Margate and work along the coastline toward Westgate-on-Sea.

#### VCSE Forum

The first meeting of the newly formed Thanet Voluntary and Community Sector Forum was at 11am on 17 February, in Broadstairs. There was a good turnout for the event, which provides opportunities for collaboration, information gathering and sharing. Meetings are now planned to be quarterly.

#### Tree planting:

Just one more session in Broadstairs next Friday! Sign up online.

#### SEA Link DCO hearing

It was very disappointing (a) to have registered and written speeches but to find no speaking opportunity and (b) that there was zero participation from KCC and little from TDC. Suffolk CC and East Suffolk DC each had a King's Counsel, plus at least half a dozen expert officers each, to discuss issues including ecology, neighbourhood amenity, traffic management, etc.

Meanwhile...

A beautiful, original film was created by young filmmaker Connor Caruthers. It premiered at the Natural History Museum, then at Salt Broadstairs this week. Thanet Green Party and the Save Minister Marshes campaign are exploring more local screenings. See it (on the small screen) at <https://youtu.be/8tps519SR34?si=0mYfJT4IV7uDEgg0>

#### TDC Planning re BESS application

I spoke against this development because my concerns about fire risk and chemical runoff are not satisfied. I'm afraid they still aren't, but it was approved by the committee.

#### Two Margate theatres public events

Westwood One Theatre, the new leaseholder of the Winter Gardens hosted a public engagement event on 10th February, 4-7pm and a public drop-in session took place at the Theatre Royal, Addington St Margate CT9 1PW on 11th February 2026. Both events were well-attended.

#### Pie Factory

A £535,000 grant from the Pride in Place Programme capital allocation was approved, to be paid to Pie Factory Music. This enabled them to buy the freehold of Ramsgate Youth Centre, and keep it as a vital resource for young people.

#### Woodpiles F/TH/25/0718

I am pleased to say, that after "calling in" the application to the Committee, the eyesore stored on land off A299 layby in order to fuel the incinerator at Discovery Park were refused retrospective planning permission by TDC Planning.

c) **PC Owen Crush** was not in attendance, and no report submitted.

d) **Community Warden Gary Groombridge** read the following report:

- Continue to do Visual Presence around the Villages.
- Neil Butcher from Trading Standards and myself held a scam talk presentation in the evening of 3rd February, to the Horticultural society at Acol village hall. It was well attended and was a great success.
- Check for fly tipping around some of the Roads around the villages that can't be accessed on foot (Using my van)
- I reported a blocked drain that needed looking at to KCC highways in Acol, I received a reference number.
- I reported Potholes holes to KCC Highways in Acol and received reference numbers.
- The Community Warden Team is involved in the Safety in Action Week at Dreamland in Margate, for primary school age children from the schools in the Thanet Area. I have put the information together for the team to use. This included a five-question quiz on Community safety, Phonetic alphabet charts so the children can spell their names through some walkie talkies. We also had stickers to give out at the end.

#### **69/25-26 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW**

As previously discussed under Item 65.

#### **70/25-26 HIGHWAYS**

a) & b) It was noted the first stage towards the implementation of the 20mph traffic scheme had progressed, however, the scheme would not be completed until June/ August due to a change in contractors appointed by KCC.

The Parish Council had received correspondence with regard to the increase in frequency of HGV's driving through the Village. Cllr Steel advised he had contacted the concerned resident and explained the position with reference to the Lorry Watch Scheme. The resident advised they would be pursuing the Scheme personally.

**71/25-16 FINANCE**

a) The Clerk presented the monthly bank reconciliations between the cash book and bank accounts.

**RESOLVED: To approve the monthly bank reconciliation for December & January (Proposed: Cllr Steel, seconded Cllr Corby).**

b) The Clerk presented the monthly payment schedule which included the following payments:

Hugofox - Website hosting fee	£11.99
KCC - 20mph scheme	£6,000.00
KALC - Training fee	£144.00
HMRC - Employee PAYE	£332.57
S. Archer - Clerk's salary & expenses	£381.30
Birchington PCC - Village Hall land lease	£200.00
Hughes & Son - Grass Cutting	£300.00
lonos - Email hosting fee	£7.20
Unity Trust - Service fee	£6.00
Hugofox - Website hosting fee	£11.99
lonos - Email hosting fee	£7.20
Quex Park Estates - Land Hire:Rec	£80.00
S. Archer - Clerk's salary & expenses	£381.10
Unity Trust - Service fee	£6.00

**Receipts:**

Unity Trust - Bank Interest	£95.47
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**RESOLVED: To approve payment of invoices included in the monthly payment schedule for February. (Proposed: Cllr Steel, Seconded: Cllr Corby).**

**72/25-26 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

No concerns raised.

**73/25-26 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> April 2026, 7:30pm, Acol Village Hall.

The meeting was closed by the Chairman at 21:22hrs