

ASH-CUM-RIDLEY PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 19 February 2026 at Ash Village Hall, The Street, Ash, TN15 7HB commencing at 7.45pm.

Present: Cllr S Fishenden
Cllr M Aspinall
Cllr R Brammer (arrived 8.07pm)
Cllr C Clark
Cllr J Clucas
Cllr F Cottee
Cllr C Gorton
Cllr S Hobbs
Cllr A Jauch
Cllr P Kirtley
Cllr I MacLeod
Cllr M Manley
Cllr V Ngwenya

In Attendance: Alison de Jager – Parish Clerk
Karen Law – Deputy Clerk/Finance Officer
Megan Johnson – Assistant Clerk
Cllr M Fothergill – Kent County Council
Cllr M Lindop – Sevenoaks District Council
Cllr Penny Cole – Sevenoaks District Council
Cllr Perry Cole – Sevenoaks District Council
2 Members of the Public

9063/26 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs S Glover and J Scott (prior engagement)
Cllr C Clarks PROPOSED that the apologies and reasons for absence were accepted.
SECONDED: Cllr C Gorton and AGREED.

9064/26 Declarations of Members Interests and Dispensations

None

9065/26 Minutes

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 15 January 2026 and the Extraordinary meeting held on 05 February be signed and approved PROPOSED: Cllr C Gorton SECONDED: Cllr J Clucas and AGREED.

9066/26 Public Session and External Reports

County Councillor – Cllr M Fothergill reported that she had attended the budget process at County Hall where the proposed increase in council tax was 3.99% and not the full, permitted 4.99%, resulting in a £10.1million shortfall. This, together with the existing pressure on underfunded Adult and Child Services led Cllr Fothergill to abstain from the vote. Another concern was that the budget had no provision for the Local Government Reorganisation. Cllr Fothergill has been invited to join Restore Britain, and accepted. There will be no change in the work carried out for residents and she will continue as before. Due to adverse weather, the many potholes have not been repaired and when temperatures improve, large scale improvements should be evident.

District Councillors – Cllr M Lindop advised that he would be attending the Waste Management meeting at Sevenoaks District Council on 04 March 2026 together with representatives from the Parish Council, Village Association and some Resident’s Societies. Cllr Perry Cole confirmed that he would also be attending the Waste meeting and hoped this would resolve the current disconnect between the Village Association and the Council. He updated members on the Local Government Reorganisation consultation and SDC’s preferred option being 3a. Currently, Sevenoaks is represented by 54 district and 6 county councillors. Under the new proposals this will drop to 18 – 22 representatives.

**The meeting was Suspended at 8.52pm to receive a presentation from Hallam Land, Cratus Group and David Lock
The meeting reconvened at 8.30pm**

9067/26 Clerk’s Report

- a. The Clerk’s Report was RECEIVED and NOTED

9068/26 Council Administration

- a. **Annual Parish Meeting** - Cllr S Fishenden advised that a new format will be held for the Annual Parish Meeting to be held on 22 April 2026 at the Youth and Community Centre. The Annual Parish Meeting will start at 8.00pm, and from 7.30pm a Market Place will be held with the Police, Community Warden and Young Lives Foundation being available for members of the public to speak to. In addition to the KALC award, a special award will be presented to PC Caleb Guest.

9069/26 Finance and Governance

- a. **Current Financial Position:** The Finance Officer reported that we are currently holding £207,050, with a surplus of £60,394. General Reserves are currently £77,866 which is roughly 3.7 times monthly running costs. Members were taken through the receipts and payments noting that the audit fee exceeded the budget as the Sports Centre performed better than anticipated, resulting in the Parish Council’s total income exceeding the threshold for the next audit charge band by £1,000. (Cllr R Brammer arrived)
- b. **Approval of Payments:** Cllr M Manley PROPOSED that the payments made since the last meeting up to 12 February 2026 are APPROVED. SECONDED: Cllr V Ngwenya and AGREED.
- c. **Speedwatch:** Cllr S Fishenden PROPOSED that up to £150 is authorised for the purchase of a body camera for use by the Speedwatch group. SECONDED: Cllr M Manley and AGREED.
- d. **Policies**
1. **Staff Appraisal Policy** – The Staff Appraisal Policy was reviewed without amendment. PROPOSED: Cllr S Fishenden SECONDED: Cllr C Clark
 2. **Disciplinary Policy** – The Disciplinary Policy review was carried out with the following additions:
 - Summary Dismissal – to add ‘Suspension is a neutral act and does not constitute disciplinary action or imply guilt, to the end of the first paragraph.
 - Gross misconduct list – to add, ‘Serious data breaches or accessing inappropriate or unlawful online material.
 - In all cases – add, ‘All records will be stored and retained with the Council’s Data Protection Policy and GDPR requirements.’
 - To replace his or her with their in the following sentence, ‘At all stages, the employee will be given the opportunity to state *their* his-or-her-case...’PROPOSED: Cllr S Fishenden SECONDED: Cllr M Aspinall and AGREED.
 3. **Grants Policy** – the Grants Policy review was carried out with the addition of :

- 5.7 The Parish Council may award less than the amount requested. If an organisation is awarded a reduced amount, it must wait until the next financial year before submitting a further application.
- 8 Monitoring and Review – remove the sentence, ‘The Community Grants Scheme will be trialled during the 2025-26 financial year.’

PROPOSED: Cllr S Fishenden SECONDED: Cllr A Jauch and AGREED.

4. Co-option Procedures – the review was carried out with the following amendments:

- Addition of ‘Applicants must confirm that they meet the statutory eligibility requirements for serving as a Parish Councillor and that they are not disqualified under the Local Government Act 1972. This includes confirming age (18+), citizenship status, local connection (residency, employment or land ownership), and that they are not disqualified due to bankruptcy restrictions, criminal convictions or disqualification orders.’
- vii – add, ‘ and must sign the Declaration of Acceptance of Office.’
- viii - All personal information provided by applicants will be handled confidentially and in accordance with the Council’s Data Protection Policy and GDPR requirements.

PROPOSED: Cllr R Brammer SECONDED: Cllr M Manley and AGREED.

9070/26 Local Government Reorganisation Consultation

- a. The report and consultation questions were NOTED. It was NOTED that the full consultation document had been emailed to members in advance of the meeting.
- b. Cllr S Fishenden PROPOSED that the response to the Local Government Reorganisation Consultation is delegated to the Clerk in conjunction with Cllrs R Brammer, C Clark, J Clucas and G Pender. SECONDED: Cllr P Kirtley and AGREED.

9071/26 Children’s Centre

- a. The Parish Council has submitted an increased offer to the NHS in respect of the purchase of the Children’s Centre. The NHS has responded advising that they are awaiting a RCIS valuation of the Children’s Centre and will advise once this is received. *(Cllr M Fothergill left the meeting)*

9072/26 Planning

a. Applications:

25/03080: West Yoke Depot, Michaels Lane, New Ash Green, TN15 7EP. Erection of a single storey rear extension, retention of container and change of use of former stables building and land to general industrial (Use Class B2), plus formation of hard surfacing to create incidental car park in connection with occupation of Units 10 and 11. Cllr M Manley PROPOSED that the Parish Council objects to this application as it is inappropriate development in the greenbelt as the extension to the unit doubles the size of the existing building. The council wishes to note that works have already been started being the extensive area of hard standing, making this a retrospective planning application. We also question whether the existing hard standing used for the car parking area is permeable. If granted the Parish Council requests that all necessary remedial or compliance works are completed on the site. SECONDED: Cllr S Fishenden FOR: 10 AGAINST: 0 ABSTENTIONS: 3

- b. The notes of the Planning Applications Working Group were NOTED.
- c. Sevenoaks District Council Local List – the following were suggested to be submitted for addition to the local list:
 - New Ash Green as a Village
 - The listed buildings in the Parish Clerk
 - The Orchard

- Northfield Open Space.
- Any other suggestions to be emailed to the Clerk.

9073/26 Ash Green Sports Centre

- Current Financial Position** – the current balance of the Sports Centre stands at £18,246 compared to the balance of £16,739 at the same time last year, which also included £7,500 from the Parish Council grant. Revised legislation introduced in 2023 states that VAT is no longer payable on gym memberships, which is expected to increase income by approximately £12,000 per year. Members were taken through the reports.
- Approval of Payments** - Cllr A Jauch PROPOSED that the payments made since the last meeting to 12 February 2026 are APPROVED. SECONDED: Cllr C Gorton and AGREED.
- Management of Ash Green Sports Centre** – this item has been deferred to March 2026.

9074/26 Community and Environment

- Focus Group** – The notes of the Focus Group meeting held on 12 January 2026 were NOTED.
- Easter Tea** - Cllr S Fishenden PROPOSED that an Easter Teas is arranged with Hartley Parish Council or the Co-op to share costs. Cllrs S Fishenden and J Clucas will work with the Clerk to organise the event. SECONDED: Cllr M Manley and AGREED.
- Easter Egg Trail** – Cllr M Manly PROPOSED that an Easter Egg Trail is organised, Cllrs S Fishenden and M Manley will work with the Assistant Clerk to organise the event. SECONDED: Cllr A Jauch and AGREED.

9075/26 Items for Information

- Cllr S Fishenden reported that the youth provision which was due to start in January has been pushed back to April 2026. A trustees meeting was held on 18 February and we will continue to liaise to confirm the start date for both sessions. PC C Harrison has advised that she will attend when on duty from the second week of the clubs starting. Cllr S Fishenden has advised that he will attend all sessions for the first month. Young Lives Foundation has offered to have one of the Trustees of the Youth & Community Centre attend an existing club to see how they operate.
- Cllr F Cottee advised that the Big Breakfast continues.
- Cllr M Manley advised that he had written to Kent Highway Services regarding the roadworks and diversion on Ash Road and thanked County Councillor M Fothergill for her assistance. Mr Payton will be invited to attend the Annual Parish Meeting marketplace or to give a formal talk.
- Cllr R Brammer noted the numerous potholes on North Ash Road. Cllr P Kirtley reported that her family had had to replace three tyres in three weeks due to damage from potholes. An article will be published in the Bulletin advising how to report potholes.

9076/26 Progress Tracker

The Progress Tracker was NOTED.

The meeting closed at 9.30pm

Signed: Date: Chairman

ASH-CUM-RIDLEY PARISH COUNCIL

Agenda Item: **5 – Full Council 19 February 2026**

Report Title: **Clerk's Report**

FOCUS GROUP – The next meeting of the Focus Group will be held on 13 April 2026.

HIGHWAYS IMPROVEMENT PLAN – The next meeting of the Highways Improvement Plan Working Group will be held on 11 March 2026.

NORTHFIELD – The next meeting of the Northfield Management Committee will be held on 05 March 2026 at Hartley Library..

POLICE – The next Coffee with a Cop will be held on 17 February 2026.

SEVENOAKS DISTRICT COUNCIL FUN DAY – A Family Fun Day will be held on 18 August 2026 on The Minnis.

SPORTS CENTRE – Two part-time instructors will be leaving the Sports Centre at the end of February and we will be holding interviews on 06 March 2026.

THURSDAY LUNCH CLUB – The lunch club is reaching capacity and we will be starting a waiting list.

YOUTH PROVISION – negotiations with the Youth Centre and Young Lives Foundation continue, looking at a start date of 01 April 2026.

ASH-CUM-RIDLEY PARISH COUNCIL

Agenda Item: 7 – Parish Council Meeting 19 February 2026

Report Title: Local Government Reorganisation – Kent and Medway Consultation

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has published a consultation entitled “Proposals for Local Government Reorganisation in Kent and Medway”. The consultation seeks views on proposals submitted by councils in Kent regarding the replacement of the current two-tier system of local government with new unitary authorities. Medway Council already operates as a unitary authority. The consultation is not asking respondents to choose a preferred option, but to comment on whether the submitted proposals meet the Government’s criteria for local government reorganisation.

The consultation opened on 5 February 2026 and closes on 26 March 2026.

Different proposals have been submitted:

- A. A single county-wide unitary authority covering the whole of Kent
- B. 3 Unitary Councils
 - North – Dartford, Gravesham, Medway and Swale
 - West – Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling, Tunbridge Wells
 - East – Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Folkstone & Hythe and Thanet
- C. 4 Unitary Councils
 - North – Dartford, Gravesham and Medway
 - West – Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells
 - Mid – Swale, Ashford and Folkstone & Hythe
 - East – Canterbury, Dover and Thanet
- D. 4 Unitary Councils – includes revised boundaries
 - North Kent – Medway (98%), Gravesham (87%), Swale (81%), Dartford (78%), small parts of Tonbridge & Malling (3%) and Maidstone (2%)
 - West Kent – Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge & Malling (61%), Dartford (22%), Gravesham (13%) and Medway (2%)
 - East Kent – Canterbury, Dover, Thanet, Folkstone and Hythe (64%) and Swale (Faversham area 17%)
 - Mid Kent – Ashford, Maidstone (98%), Folkstone and Hythe (36%), Tonbridge and Malling (36%) and Swale (3%)
- E. 5 Unitary Councils
 - North Kent – Dartford, Gravesham, Medway (25%) and Sevenoaks (18%)
 - West Kent – Maidstone, Sevenoaks (82%), Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells.
 - East Kent – Canterbury, Swale (24%) and Thanet
 - Mid Kent – Medway (75%) and Swale (76%)
 - South Kent – Ashford, Dartford, Dover and Folkstone and Hythe

The Government has stated that proposals will be assessed against national objectives, including whether they:

- Simplify local government structures and improve efficiency;
- Strengthen strategic leadership and support economic growth and devolution;
- Improve local accountability and decision-making;
- Deliver high-quality, sustainable public services; and
- Are financially sustainable in the long term.
- As a general guiding principle, the Government has indicated that new unitary authorities should normally serve populations of around 500,000 or more, unless there is a strong justification for a smaller council.

While parish and town councils are not responsible for delivering principal authority services, any reorganisation of local government could have implications for how local services are accessed and delivered.

Questions: The same questions apply to each of the proposals A -E.

RESPONSE OPTIONS: *Strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree or disagree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree, don't know.*

NB: We are not being asked to choose an option, but to respond to each proposal.

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal suggests councils that are based on sensible geographies and economic areas?
2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils will be able to deliver the outcomes they describe in the proposal?
3. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils are the right size to be efficient, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks?
4. To what extent do you agree or disagree that this proposal will put local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing, particularly given that some councils in the area are in receipt of exceptional financial support?
5. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed councils will deliver high quality, sustainable public services?
6. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal has been informed by local views and will meet local needs?
7. To what extent do you agree or disagree that establishing the councils in this proposal will support evolution arrangements?
8. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal enable stronger community engagement and gives the opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment?
9. If you would like to, please use the free text box to explain the answers you have provided to questions 1 – 8. You may also use the box to provide any other comments you have on the proposal.
10. This is a proposal that is accompanied by a request that the Secretary of State considers boundary change or that affects wider public services. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposal sets out a strong public services and financial sustainability justification for boundary change?
11. If you would like to, please use this free text box to explain your answer to question 10?