

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING THAT TOOK PLACE ON 26TH MAY STARTING AT 6.30PM

Those present, Cllr S Parish – Chairman, other Cllrs who attended were S Instance, N Fursdon and G Worthy. Cllr J Hollingsbee – FHDC, and Cllr C Hespe – KCC. Also present were 4 members of the public and the Proper Officer.

Apologies were received from Cllr K Gipson.

The Chairman welcomed every for coming. And highlighted his comments from his report, see below;

'Good evening and welcome to the Annual Parish meeting for the 2025/2026 year. I would like to start with a review of what the Parish Council has been doing over the last year and then an outline of what the Parish Council has planned for this coming year and what outside factors will impact both the Parish Council and the village going forward.

Last year:

- 1. Installation of the Village Beacon on The Lees in December with the first lighting of it done at the Christmas Carols on The Lees event.*
- 2. In addition to the regular grass cutting and maintenance of the Lees and various flower beds and borders the following has also been carried out – ongoing maintenance of the churchyards including rebuilding of the fence in the New Burial Ground which was destroyed by a tree falling on it, the rebuilding of a set of steps by the car park in Meadow Grove as they were a health hazard;*
- 3. More play equipment has been installed in the children's play area on the Leas. Following this we received a number of emails from residents enquiring whether play equipment for older children could be installed and we will consult with the residents as to what type of equipment and what age groups should be considered.*
- 4. Community Speedwatch – supported by the Parish Council the team have received new equipment and have recorded more than five hundred speeding cars passing through the village in the last year so many congratulations to Richard, Barry, David, Cynthia and Deborah.*
- 5. A lot of work has been carried out over the last year identifying and creating a digital record of the graves in the New and Old burial grounds which will be useful going forward.*
- 6. Sadly, a number of wooden benches and some of the playground equipment on The Lees have been vandalised, although they have been repaired, they have quickly been vandalised again, so the PC are looking into more permanent solutions to the problem.*

This year:

In addition to all our usual activities we are planning on carry out the following projects:

- 1. Reinstalling the Parish Village Sign – the refurbishment is nearly complete and will be situated in its original position by the village hall.*
- 2. Fitting out the new parish office next to the Premier store in St. Catherine's Crescent – the office, which is an empty shell, was part of the Section 106 agreement with Taylor Wimpey for the Lees development. The full council has approved an outline plan and an estimate of costs, and we are about to appoint a project manager to manage the fit out with a target completion date of the end of the year. The project, which we hope will become an asset to the village, will be funded entirely from the PC's investment income and will not utilise any council tax payments received by the PC.*
- 3. Although not a project we are sending out a plea for residents to join the council. Over the last 18 months we have lost three councillors reducing the PC to six and there have been a number of occasions when meetings have not been able to be held because the council was not quorate. We have tried to recruit new councillors (which is a voluntary position) without any luck. If you (or anybody you know) would be interested in getting involved with the way the village develops, and changes then please contact the Clerk Linda Hedley whose contact details are on the PC website.'*

Otterpool Park

An update on where the project is and what is happening next and what its impact on the village will be. A couple of months ago it was announced that Folkestone and Hythe District Council had signed a collaboration agreement with Homes England (a government agency within the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) which meant the Otterpool Park project could start. At the same time planning permission was granted for the construction of a new wastewater treatment plant, a primary substation and a series of reed ponds on the farmland south of the M20 and railway tracks between Harringe Lane and Meadow Grove.

Obviously, there is a lot of planning and legal stuff to be put in place before construction can start so it is unlikely that construction will begin until sometime in 2027 at the earliest (but do not hold me to that!). There will be a phased approach to construction as wastewater treatment plants need water to operate properly. On the diagram Phase 1 will consist of the first half of the wastewater plant, the primary substation and ponds 1, 2 and 3. Phase 2 will start when sufficient buildings (estimated to be between 1000 and 1500) have been finished and will be the second half of the plant and ponds 4, 5, 6 and 7. Phase 3 will likely be built after when 5000 houses have been completed and will be ponds 8, 9 and 10 so probably not until 12 to 15 years' time – these are all guesstimates.

Local Government Reorganisation

Since 1972 the way local government bodies were structured has changed. Before 1972 there was a two-tier system consisting of county councils and district council, but this has now changed to a unitary authority system. Since 1972 there has been a gradual switch over to the new system and it is now Kent's turn. Since autumn last year Kent County Council, Medway Council and the twelve district councils have been in discussions about how Kent councils were going to be organised into unitary authorities. At the end of March 5 different options as to how many unitary authorities there would be and what the district council authorities in each unitary council would be were submitted to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. A decision as to which proposal is going to be approved is expected sometime during the summer this year with implementation of that proposal to be completed by 1 April 2028.

As parish and town councils were not involved in these discussions, we shall have to wait until nearer to April 2028 to see what, if any, changes are made to the way we operate. Until then it is business as usual!

The report from other Cllrs are listed and printed were copies available when people arrived and the will be uploaded to the website.

Cllr Instance gave an update regarding the Neighbourhood Plan and we have been advised that the group can now move forward, following a review by Alison Early, who is the PC advisor on our NHP, to adjust certain policies etc, so if you have been involved prior and or wish to get involved now then do contact the PC clerk.

A round robin debate took place on various issues, and the meeting was closed at 7.55pm