

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL HELD IN
COUNCIL CHAMBER, VESTRY HALL
ON THURSDAY 11TH AUGUST 2016**

The Chairman read out the following statement:

Members are required to declare any interests, dispensations, predetermination or lobbying on items on this agenda. Members are reminded that changes to the Register of Interests should be notified to the Clerk.

No interests were registered. Dr. Temple had informed the Clerk that she was going to record the meeting.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Meeting. She reminded members of the public that this is a Meeting to which the public are invited, but it is not a public meeting. She would close the meeting at the end of the main agenda to allow them to speak briefly if they choose. She reserved the right to ask significant questions to be submitted in writing. The Chairman reminded members of the public not to disrupt the meeting and if they continued to do so after request from herself as Chairman to desist, she had the power to ask them to leave. Having said that; she welcomed the interest from the members of public in our proceedings.

PRESENT: Cllrs. Bunyan, Clifford, Cook, Goodchild, Hartley, Holmes, Rook, Swann, Veitch & Warne. Borough Cllr. Hannam.

APOLOGIES: Cllrs. Fairweather, Fermor, Hall, Kemp & Smith.

MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING:

73: The Chairman, Cllr. B. Veitch proposed that the Minutes of the Meeting held on the 14th July be adopted as a true record. Cllr. Warne pointed out a typographical error on page 4 which was corrected. The proposal was seconded by Cllr. Cook and agreed.

VISIT BY BOROUGH COUNCILLORS:

74: The Chairman thanked Cllrs Jukes, McDermott and Weatherly for giving their time and coming to visit us and answer questions.

David Jukes is the Leader of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and his responsibilities include Major Projects, Regeneration, Property and Estates, Facilities, Policy and Performance, Democratic Services, Communications and Publications, Human Resources (including learning and development).

Alan McDermott is the Cabinet Minister responsible for Planning and Transportation and his responsibilities include Development Management, Planning Policy, Heritage and Conservation, Enforcement, Land Charges, Building Control, Landscape, Parking (on and off street) and Transportation. He is also Deputy Leader of the Council.

Lynne Weatherly is the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Wellbeing and her responsibilities are Housing (including Housing Need and Housing Renewal), Health, Community Development, Community Partnerships (including Community Safety), Rural Communities, and Young and Older People.

The Chairman stated that there would be questions from councillors, and then, if there is time, and if the Borough Councillors were willing, there would be questions from audience.

Cllr. Jukes stated that we were living in interesting times. He informed Members that when Greg Clarke MP was Secretary of State for Local Government he carved the Government grant and TWBC were paying back money as were Sevenoaks. They were told that the monies paid were going up north. They were being penalised for being well managed. There will be no Government grant and from 2017 TWBC will have to be self-sufficient. TWBC only gets 11% of council tax collected, 82% goes to KCC with the remainder going to the Police, Ambulance and Fire Service. Parking charges are a way of earning good revenue. TWBC own and manage their car parks and charge reasonable fees.

When he first became Leader he looked at disposing of non-performing assets. They were worth £78m and included small areas of land and public toilets as well as the former Council Offices in Cranbrook. When the Pennington Road public toilets were sold he was criticised as he used a London auctioneer but they were sold for £38,000 and no fees were paid to the auctioneer. There were also savings on maintenance, business rates and insurance. Some sites had been given to parish councils and residents associations together with a small pot of money in the first instance for maintenance. When the former Council Offices were valued under the Leadership of Roy Bullock, the valuation was £389,000. When he met Peter North, former Chairman of the Parish Council, Peter stated it was more like £1.2m, which he agreed was more likely. He then mentioned the Regeneration Company where the Borough was never going to be the leading partner. We were offered a way out of the contract but owed them for their time they had put in. It cost £¼m to get out of the deal and we made £2.2m out of the sale. He had promised Peter North at least £400,000 out of the proceeds of the sale, but he needs to see a cost plan for the community centre before talks can start about the money.

Another current topic is devolution which is also Greg Clarke's idea. KCC have too much control over Boroughs. Cllr. Jukes stated that he wanted to bring back the highways section to the Boroughs. There will be an amalgamation of authorities – Tonbridge & Malling, Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells – called West Kent, not unitary but combined. There will be a lot of savings and an improved service. Refuse collection can go over to KCC. The renewal of the current contract can be put on hold until this is transferred over. Other services will also be transferred including community safety. All this will commence in April 2017. KCC are very much engaged. Councillor numbers will reduce and only one Chief Executive will be required so there will be massive savings and a better service for residents.

A new Five Year Plan is being produced. The current version was achieved in three years. One other thing he introduced when he became Leader was the Parish Chairmans meetings. Having been a parish councillor, he accepted that some feel remote and it is useful to get feedback – it works well.

Cllr. Jukes stated that he had also managed to get community centres up and running and he used Southborough as an example. They were hostile in the first instance but if you drive down the A26 it currently looks like a bomb site.

Cllr. Clifford asked where TWBC were with the disposal of the Assembly Hall and Town Hall. Cllr. Jukes stated that the intention is to build a new civic complex on Mount Pleasant Avenue on a car park which they own and is currently leased to AXA. There will be offices, a civic area and a new theatre on the Great Hall Car Park with an underground car park for 300 cars. The Borough is not selling the current complex. They do not want to dispose of assets. The new complex has to generate income. The expected rental from the offices is £1.25m per year. A loan will be applied for from Government at interest rates of 1.6% over 50 years. Cllr. McDermott stated that the new theatre would have 1,200 seats. Cllr. Warne asked if there was any aspiration for a university. Cllr. Jukes stated that they were open to any prospective tenants, in spite of Brexit, property prices are going up. Cllr. Rook tabled the minutes from the Chairman's meeting which mentioned that the current complex would be sold for £50m. Cllr. Jukes stated that since then, he had changed his mind and the complex would be retained. Cllr. McDermott stated that the current council chamber would be used for weddings and reception with a bar etc. The plans are being worked up. Cllr. Jukes informed Members that the Library and Adult Education complex is being converted to a Cultural Centre with its own heating system. Currently there is only one boiler for the entire complex. Cllr. Holmes stated that he did not share the optimism on property prices – he felt that were going down and not up. Cllr. Jukes stated that there was an opposite view from experts. Cripps Harries Hall had just taken on a new build by Berkeley Homes for £27 per square foot.

Cllr. Clifford referred to a recent presentation by TWBC Principal Conservation Architect Mark Stephenson who informed us about a plan to move the Museum into the Providence Chapel. Where does the Borough sit on this? Residents are concerned that a building which has town heritage might be sold. Cllr. Jukes stated that Cllr. Holden had raised this idea and the owner had come to him two years ago and begged him to take it off his hands. He owned some other land and would offer this to support the refurbishment of the building. The pews are the main problem. The Chapel is an important historical building. One option might be to dismantle the building and move it to another site i.e. take it down and re-erect it somewhere else. It would then at least remove the eyesore from the centre of the town. Cllr. McDermott stated that he had attended a meeting at the Museum and they are not keen to move. They do not have to move if they do not want to. Cllr. Clifford suggested that residents were under the impression that the current building housing the Museum was given to the Town. Cllr. Veitch clarified that it is an asset which belongs to TWBC.

Cllr. Holmes mentioned the refuse collection contract. Cllr. Jukes reiterated the aspiration of the West Kent authorities to transfer all the refuse collection, recycling and disposal over to KCC with a more local tip/transfer site for the rural areas. He confirmed the renewal of the current contract with Cory would be delayed. Cllr. Holmes asked whether Cllr. Jukes would support doorstep collection of all recyclables including glass. Cllr. Jukes totally supported this and would expect KCC to undertake doorstep collection of recyclables. Cllr. Veitch had been asked to bring forward a concern from a resident on the reduction on the Saturday refuse vehicle and could it be confirmed that there would not be any further reductions. Cllr. McDermott stated that Tunbridge Wells is the only Borough which had a civic amenity refuse vehicle.

Cllr. Jukes stated that if the refuse collection goes over to KCC it is likely that the civic amenity refuse vehicle would go, parishes need to support the idea of a more local tip. Cllr. Bunyan stated that it was because our local tip closed that the Saturday lorry was agreed.

Cllr. Swann referred to the Parish Chairmans meetings where it appears that it has been assumed that the Chairmen have the authority to make decisions. Cllr. Jukes stated that it is a working party led by parish chairmen. Cllr. Swann stated that decisions should not be made at the Chairmans meetings. Cllr. Jukes replied that they do not make decisions.

Cllr. Swann stated that it should be appreciated by the Borough Council that parishioners do not want the museum to move.

Cllr. Goodchild referred to the new community centre and the comments made by Cllr. Jukes that monies are going north. From the sale of the former Council Offices i.e. £2.1m where has all the monies gone. Cllr. Dukes stated that some of the money went on a “finders fee” which accounted for £65,000. Cllr. Goodchild worked this out at just under 20% and asked whether he would consider upping the money for our community centre and when these monies could be transferred. Cllr. Jukes reiterated that he needed to see the cost plan before he could talk about the £400,000 promised. Cllr. Warne did not see why it was dependent on seeing the cost plan. Cllr. Veitch confirmed that the costings are on the Business Plan and were done by a qualified QS.

Cllr. Bunyan asked a question on planning and the five year land supply. How was the Borough going to address the issue of the lack of the five year land supply especially in the light of recent appeal decisions. Cllr. McDermott stated that the Borough was in difficulties with this issue. Their housing quota has been raised from 6,000 to 13,000 so the five years supply had now become 2 ½ years and means 645 new homes every year. We took the issue up with Greg Clarke MP. TWBC does have a Core Strategy which has some power and it is planned to get the new Site Allocations Plan completed as soon as possible. A new Core Strategy is programmed for next year 2017 – 2033. Some developers are saying we need 19,000 new homes and not 13,000. There are a lot of other constraints within the Borough including AONB and Flood Plains. Two farms have come forward – 250 acres – which could be built on. Cllr. Bunyan asked whether the Borough is just looking for large sites, she referred to a recent refusal on a small infill site. Cllr. McDermott suggested that developers are trying to break planning rules and the Borough is frantically trying to get sites to put forward. Cllr. Bunyan stated that it appeared that there is only interest in sites over 0.2 hectare. Cllr. Hannam suggested it appeared that there is one rule for big developers and another for small ones. Cllr. McDermott clarified that it is the Government who are dictating that we need to build more homes and he confirmed to Cllr. Rook that if TWBC does not meet the targets they would be taken over by the Government and put into special measures. There may be extra payments for extra houses up and over the targets. He mentioned S106 funding and how a new school is being paid for by a developer and then would be handed to KCC. Cllr. Rook stated that S106 tariffs are set by KCC, some funds are allocated to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council but our parish has not benefited from any of the funds. He used an example of where we had asked for some funds for playgrounds but had been refused. Cllr. Jukes stated that the development must be over 10 homes. Cllr. Rook reiterated that the Borough receives a pot of money but this is not shared out to the parishes. Cllr. Jukes offered to send out a schedule of where the funds have been distributed. Cllr. Swann made the point that the Borough are very generous with their grant funding which we have in the past applied for. He made reference to Brick Kiln which the Parish support as a site and whether we can expect any money from the developers.

Cllr. Veitch stated that the developers had suggested that the levy would be £354 per house. Cllr. McDermott informed Members that the topic of S106 is difficult and there would be meeting with the planners in the near future. Jane Lynch has now left and her replacement Karen Fossett will be joining TWBC in September. There is also the difference between S106 or the Community Infrastructure Levy. TWBC prefer S106. Responding to a question from Cllr. Rook, Cllr. Jukes confirmed that the West Kent authorities will be looking at how the money is spent but the strategic authority KCC will still look after schools.

He also confirmed that business rates will now be collected by the Borough and he confirmed to Cllr. Veitch that some will find its way to the parishes. Cllr. Cook made the point that it looked as though the housing sites would all be in the towns and not the villages. Cllr. McDermott confirmed that at the next Parish Chairmans meeting we will be looking at where we can take development. Tunbridge Wells/Southborough cannot take much more. We are looking towards the A21 corridor but 13,000 is an awful lot to find sites for. Responding to a question from Cllr. Cook on the rail network, he confirmed that they were looking at Paddock Wood and near to Marden.

Cllr. Veitch closed the meeting to enable members of the public to ask questions. Responding to a question on whether residents of the Borough will have a vote on whether the Borough takes the vast loan from the Public Loans Board, Cllr. Jukes could not assure him that this would be the case. The new civic complex is going through the design process and when it has gone through RIBA Stage 3 it will go to Full Council with a full cost plan and show how the money will be raised. Cllr. McDermott clarified that TWBC would not be raising the precept to pay for the complex so TWBC do not need to go to a public vote. Cllr. Veitch then re-opened the meeting.

CHAIRMANS REPORT:

75: The Chairman said that the changes in the visits of the Civic Amenity vehicle (Refuse Lorry) came into force at the end of July. We have had an email advising us that the collection of garden waste last weekend was of such high quality that 100% of it was acceptable as green waste rather than having to be diverted due to contamination. In order to monitor the service she had attended the lorry in Frythe Way last Saturday for a short time, and asked the attending officers about the public comments and their experience. They said that there had been no problems, apart from the complaints of 'nobody told us about this'. They were also surprised about the lack of increase in fly tipping that they, and we, had expected. This may be due to August and the summer holiday period, but is nevertheless, good news. The Chairman reminded everyone that the much enjoyed Sissinghurst Fete is Monday 29 August, Bank Holiday Monday, and the Parish Council will have a stand. Our Sissinghurst councillors all have roles in the fete and are therefore unable to help man our stand. She had a few volunteers to help, but could do with more if any other councillor is able to spend an hour or so with us. Hopefully the weather will be kinder than last year. She informed Members that the planning application for Cranbrook Engineering and Wilkes Field sites is expected to come before the TWBC Planning Committee on Wednesday 31 August. The Planning Committee meets at 5.00pm onwards. If, as is hoped, the planning permission is granted for the Community Centre, she would like to get fund raisers involved as soon as possible to see how much money we can raise. She is collating various pieces of information, and has been speaking to an additional, local, fund raiser and she would like to schedule an Extraordinary Parish Council on Wednesday 14 September, in order for Members to choose the fundraiser. This is obviously just a provisional date at present, and is totally dependent on the outcome of the TWBC Planning Committee meeting.

This meeting had been necessary as the September meeting is being held in Sissinghurst. The Chairman stated that Members had all been circulated the Parish Chairman's meeting notes from June.

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE:

76: Cllr. Goodchild referred to the report of the meeting held on the 9th August and did not feel there as anything significant to highlight, he proposed adoption of the Report; this was seconded by Cllr. Rook and agreed.

PLANNING & PRESERVATION COMMITTEE:

77: Cllr. Bunyan stated that one meeting had been held on the 19th July and the Minutes circulated. She invited questions. No questions were raised. As the meeting had not been quorate, she asked for ratification of the Minutes. Cllrs. Rook and Veitch had gone over the plans and the recommendations after the meeting and were happy with the comments made. All Members were happy to ratify the Minutes.

BURIAL GROUNDS & PROPERTIES COMMITTEE:

78: Cllr. Clifford referred to the report of the site meeting held on the 19th July. The grounds contractors had been invited to attend and walk the grounds with Members. There were a few issues at Galford but Sissinghurst was in very good order. Under 6/16 War Memorials, he thanked Dave Howell of Reflections who cleans the memorials every November free of charge. Cllr. Clifford stated that some works were identified when he had inspected Vestry Hall Cottage and a quote is awaited. With regard to bus shelters, KCC are offering a match funded grant so the Committee agreed to put in a shelter at Wilsley Pound. He proposed adoption of the Report; this was seconded by Cllr. Goodchild and agreed. Cllr. Swann enquired on whether the report on the lime trees was yet available. Cllr. Clifford confirmed that this was a work in progress.

ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY COMMITTEE:

79: Cllr. Holmes stated that the next meeting is scheduled for the 23rd August.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT:

80: Cllr. Rook stated that there had been no recent meeting. The highway works at Wilsley Green had been carried out and he would be interested in comments on how it is working. Cllr. Warne commented that there had not been great feedback so far and it would help if the signage was not obstructed by foliage and could be cleaned. Cllr. Swann stated that in the past we had been promised new signage. Cllr. Clifford informed Members that when he drove through this evening a very large new sign had been erected. Cllr. Rook reported that the football pitch had now been marked out on the Ball Field and was being used on a Sunday with practice on Tuesday evenings. The football club had cut the grass much shorter and there were some piles of grass but he had been reassured that these would be removed this Sunday. He had been made aware by a parishioner that there was a problem with dog fouling on the Ball Field and he asked Members to be vigilante.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN:

81: Cllr. Warne in the absence of Cllr. Kemp informed Members that there is a meeting scheduled for the 17th August and Cllr. Kemp had been progressing things with consultants with a view to a presentation at the September Council Meeting

CRANBROOK CONSERVATION AREA ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

82: Cllrs. Bunyan referred to the Minutes of the meeting held on the 27th July. Mark Stephenson had attended and a discussion took place on the Conservation Area Management Plan – CCAAC are interested in preparing the Plan. She reported that six properties have now been identified for local listing. CCAAC are looking for new members. Cllr. Swann clarified that the Management Plan is needed for the Neighbourhood Plan and this had been recognised by the Committee. A lot of the work has already been undertaken in the Conservation Area Appraisal and just needs some more detail added.

KENT ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS:

83: The Parish News has been circulated. Cllr. Veitch referred to the May minutes which had been circulated. Cllr. Bunyan pointed out on page 4 incorrect information. Cllr. Veitch agreed and would get this corrected.

CLERKS REPORT:

84: The Clerk report that we had this morning received a clean bill of health from our external auditor PKF Littlejohn LLP and the Deputy Clerk had been very efficient and already uploaded this onto the website.

CORRESPONDENCE:

85: No correspondence had been received which needed to be reported.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION:

86: Cllr. Cook made the suggestion that a page should be included on the website giving information about our local charities. Cllr. Clifford mentioned the KCC monthly list of grant funding available from various charities which could be linked. Members all thought this was a good idea and the Chairman offered to explore this with the Clerks.

87: Cllr. Holmes reported that the Bowls Club was in need of some new members and he offered to put something in the next Newsletter on their behalf. Cllr. Cook made the suggestion that the CCAAC request for new members could also go in the newsletter.

88: Cllr. Holmes thanked Cllr. Veitch for forwarding the information regarding the Great British High Street. He has forwarded a copy onto Emma Wood – Chair of Cranbrook Experience. Cllr. Veitch informed Members they could find the information on the website – greatbritishhighstreet.co.uk

89: Cllr. Clifford commended Members to listen to the audio recording of the Tenterden Town Council meetings. It was interesting to see how they carried out their business.

The Chairman closed the meeting to enable members of the public to comment or ask questions. No questions or comments were made.