

WESTBERE PARISH COUNCIL
PARISH COUNCIL MEETING - HELD TUESDAY AT 7.30PM on 17 March 2020

Present: Parish Councillors: Tom Hopkins (Chairman), Stephen Laws, Sylvia Harlow, Karen Williams, Maria Morcom and Kathy Wilson.
Clerk to the Council, Amanda Sparkes.
Canterbury City Councillor Georgina Glover (for most of the meeting)
No residents.

1. The Chairman's opening remarks

Cllr Hopkins welcomed everyone to the meeting especially in light of the Coronavirus epidemic. The set up of the room had been changed to allow social distancing of the councillors and Clerk present.

2. Coronavirus

Cllr Hopkins commented that the coronavirus situation could go on for a long time, possibly six months. One discussion item is the Annual Electors Meeting scheduled to take place on 27 April 2020. Current legislation states that a parish council must hold this annual meeting between 1 March and 30 June. It is probably not going to take place on 27 April.

Councillors also discussed how to set up a communications network in the village with all residents, and in conjunction with the WVPS and Neighbourhood Watch network. The Clerk will draft a flyer to go to all households to both (i) ask for volunteers to help any residents self-isolating who need help with shopping, medicines, post, or just a friendly chat, and (ii) ask if any residents who are self-isolating needing help with anything to get in contact, and the parish council will do their best to help. In the first instance residents in either category should contact Cllr Kathy Wilson on 07969 093715 or email kathrynwilson365@gmail.com, with Cllr Maria Morcom agreeing to be the back-up contact. The Clerk commented that the flyer would have to mention GDPR requirements. It was also recognised that the situation may change and of course that adherence to government guidelines is crucial and these government guidelines may of course change.

The Yew Tree public house is going to provide a service of meals and a delivery service – this has been cleared with CCC under their licence, and arrangements are being finalised.

Cllr Glover commented that CCC held an emergency meeting on the morning of 17 March 2020. They have cancelled the Forum meetings and closed the museums.

3. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Kent County Councillor Cllr Alan Marsh and Canterbury City Councillor Louise Harvey-Quirke.

4. Vacancy on the Council

Following the resignation of Joshua Croucher on 12 January 2020 relevant notices were posted, and CCC electoral services have now confirmed that no election has been called for, and the parish council may co-opt to the vacancy. This has been advertised on the noticeboards and latest newsletter. There is no interest yet formally, although a possible candidate could be approached by email by Cllr Morcom.

3. Declarations of Interests – None.

4. Minutes of the last meeting held 18 February 2020 :

All councillors agreed that these were a true record of the meeting and the Chairman of the meeting duly signed them.

5. Chairman's Report and Councillors' Reports

Cllr Hopkins – Cllr Hopkins had nothing to report not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

Cllr Morcom – Cllr Morcom explained that she attended the last Twinning meeting. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic it is highly unlikely that the French will now be coming to visit in May.

Cllr Morcom's feedback and questions from WVPS from their 4 March 2020 is covered below.

The other councillors also had nothing to report not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

6. Correspondence with the Westbere Village Preservation Society

Westbere Village Preservation Society questions from WVPS Meeting: Wednesday 4th March 2020

The **Council Tax** bills arrived that day:

Can WPC explain why the bill for WPC has risen by 22.8% on this year's council tax bill when all the other changes (rises) are between 2 and 5.2%? One person suggested it was because of the reduction in the number of households in the parish.

The reduction in the tax base was only by 15 households so although this would have impacted it is not overly significant.

Last year's precept (2019-2020) was £11,981.12 and this year's (2020-2021) is £14,423.00, so the difference is £2,441.88, not large in absolute terms.

The main increases may be explained as follows:

1. New provision for traffic related initiatives of £1,200 – this was allocated based on feedback from residents attending parish council meetings and raising issues.
2. New Website hosting requirement of £995 – KCC EiS will not host free of charge from 01 September 2020, and the alternative preferred provider KCC Cantium initially quoted £995 in the first year (2020-2021). Whilst this has now been removed for all parishes with a precept below £30,000 the precept had already had to be ratified and advised to CCC by December 2019, and the announcement of its removal came after the CCC deadline. (So this provision in the budget now becomes an unrestricted reserve and can be allocated to any other project in 2020-2021 or retained as a reserve).
3. Tree stump sculpture - £250 was allocated to this project
4. Capital project – new Cherry tree for the village green - £225 has been allocated, the rest of the project costs to be met through a CCC capital grant to be paid from April 2020.

Following on from that question, have the Clerk's hours been reduced pro-rata?

No. As explained just 15 properties and the Lakesview Industrial Estate have been lost from the parish boundary change. The bulk of the clerk's duties remain unchanged by the boundary changes. The Clerk is the only employee and is part-time. The Parish Cllrs are all volunteers. The parish council tries to keep overheads low, however we have sought to maintain and protect the services we provide and the work we do on your behalf in an effort to preserve and enhance the quality of life in our village.

Proposed **Tree Sculpture** in the churchyard

In relation to the illustrated article in the February WPC Newsletter WVPS ask what the actual price of the proposed carving is. They feel it is difficult to give their thoughts and views when they don't know the exact costs involved.

WPC has no quotes yet. The parish council resolved to go to consultation with WVPS and residents first. Favourable consultation is crucial to the success of any capital grant application made to CCC.

WVPS views have previously been reported to the parish council and this was followed up with the newsletter article for a wider view. Residents' comments from that newsletter consultation were reported to the 17 March 2020 parish council meeting. There is very little support for the idea and most responders are opposed to the suggestion. WPC took the decision therefore not to go ahead with this.

February WPC Newsletter feedback

On Page 2 the article about the Two Fields starts with the following wording: ***We have two applications lodged with KCC...*** One member felt that the wording is misleading as item ii) Village Green Status is not a WPC application and overlooks Lisa Laws' hard work to get this application under way. It was suggested this should read: ***Two applications have been lodged...*** to avoid any confusion.

The next newsletter is in draft format and the text has been adjusted as per this valid comment.

Village Green

Two WVPS Members whose houses overlook the Village Green – and who keep a watchful eye on it – would like to provide and plant some spring bulbs to “prettify” it for next year. They plan to use some of the funds they hope to raise at their 4th April Easter Artisanal Market.

They asked whether it might be possible to have some sort of picnic table/bench too as they would like to be able to eat lunch there? The meeting wondered whether this might be a better way of spending community money, rather than paying for the churchyard carving, which is not favoured by the majority of the WVPS committee.

This could form the basis of a capital grant application to CCC for 2021-2022 assuming CCC offers the scheme again this year. As the tree stump sculpture is not going ahead the budget provision of £250 could be reallocated to this project instead.

Community Library

The meeting asked me to pass on thanks and appreciation, once more, for the library; including thanks to Ian for all his hard work fitting the shelves in the phone box.

Noted.

7. City Cllr reports

Cllr Georgina Glover

Cllr Glover advised that CCC plans to hold no meetings this week in light of coronavirus. COVID-19 will impact on the CCC budget, for example, a reduction in car parking income, the University of Kent has shut from 17 March 2020 until after Easter so students will return home, and tourism will also be badly hit.

8. Highways Improvement Template

NOTED the email from the Highways Stewards:

“I am just checking in with those Parishes who have had an active HIP last year; having just refreshed myself by reading your November revision, it would appear that we are in a state of hold, following the installation of the roundels. We were pleased to use some of our small works budget for you installing these – we hope that they have been of benefit.

This email is just a checking in contact really, obviously from a resource perspective we have to give priority to other parishes coming through with new HIP's that perhaps haven't had any investment. As

you know we only have around £20k small works budget for the whole Canterbury district (which includes Whitstable and Herne bay Canterbury City and rural areas) however I am mindful that we need to keep planning and having aspirations – to this end it would be positive to make another annual review date sometime during the mid to late course of 2020 and for you to update and revisit your Parish HIP if and when appropriate.”

9. Next informal meeting with Cllrs and Clerks of Westbere, Hersden and Sturry Parish Councils

The Clerk has been in dialogue with Sturry and Hersden Clerks who confirmed that both of their councils agree it is a good idea to hold more informal meetings and also to invite Fordwich Town Council to the next one. Sturry has offered to host the next one. A date will be set when the coronavirus allows.

10. Adjournment for residents’ participation

As there were no residents present there was no adjournment.

However, a resident who was self-isolating had emailed the Clerk and Chairman with two questions which were raised at this point:

- i) A question about why the precept had risen by 22% for 2020-2021.
Cllrs felt that lots of residents have probably wondered about this. As detailed in the WVPS correspondence above, the Clerk will run the detail about the precept increase in the next newsletter to all households.
- ii) The resident was interested to see the recent newsletter being used to gauge public opinion on the tree sculpture suggestion and asked if the parish council would conduct a similar survey with respect to the installation of a Vehicle Activated Speed (VAS) sign in Westbere Lane.
Cllrs discussed this. An installation of a speed sign would probably cost circa £7,000 and the parish council cannot expect financial support from KCC towards this. KCC Highways must also approve a site and there might not be one.
The Clerk explained that she has information leaflets on vehicle activated sign options from Kent Highways and will circulate these to councillors for information.
The suggestion will be raised at the Annual Electors Meeting to gauge residents’ opinion.
The Clerk was asked to reply to the resident that the parish council is happy to consult in the next newsletter if the resident feels that with the realistic costs figure this is something that should be pursued at this time.

The meeting continued.

11. Planning Matters

CCC review of the Canterbury District Local Plan (CDLP).

As part of the CCC review of the CDLP, CCC invited all the parish councils in the district to individual sessions to talk about the Local Plan review and any aspirations for the Parish and the District over the next 20 years. A session on 28 February 2020 was attended by the Clerk and Cllrs Harlow and Laws. CCC Cllr Georgina Glover was also in attendance.

The officers explained that the CDLP is having its 5-year review by CCC with a timescale to adopt the revised version by July 2022. There will be a report to the Policy and Resources committee in April 2020 with the revised CDLP then coming out to consultation.

The Clerk’s notes detailed the following points which were discussed:

1. The Sturry Level crossing and barrier down time and possibility of lengthening the platforms using developer contributions to avoid train overhang and enable the barrier down time to be reduced.
 - This would reduce traffic congestion.
 - It links to improved air quality too.
 - The CCC Transport Strategy does prioritise travel by rail rather than car.
 - The idea would need traffic modelling.
 - It could be achieved before the KCC Link Road and Viaduct get built and alleviate the impact of the 1,200 plus homes planned to be built at Sturry and Broad Oak.

2. Infrastructure
It is regretful that there is a lag in the system before the infrastructure provision of all the new homes being built.
There is a key sustainability objective but no mention of the provision of infrastructure to support new houses. The parish council consider that sustainability is clearly unachievable without cast iron guarantees being in place to secure that any new houses are supported by the transport, and other infrastructure they need to prevent damage to the environment and allow the occupation and use of the new housing in a way that reinforces the sustainability objective. The scoping report is relatively unclear about the methodology to be employed in determining housing need and the extent to which it will comprise need generated from outside the district. There should be a determination not to address such needs until all measures to achieve the sustainability of the housing to meet such needs are not only guaranteed but also in place.

Officers explained that they are going to front load the Policy text in the revised CDLP to make the requirements around developers' contributions much clearer rather than leave it to negotiation with separate developers.
3. Could the Chislet Halt be brought back into use as an extra train station?
Hersden Parish Council are supportive of this idea.
4. Air quality along the A28 and the barrier down time contributing to vehicle engine idling time.
Car idling causes pollution. Noted.
5. Fast traffic - The desire for a speed reduction to 30mph all along the A28 from Sturry to the Lakesview roundabout.
Noted. Safety issues stressed as well.
6. Possibility of a new Park and Ride on the Thanet side of Westbere, eg at Lakesview.
This would make a big impact on traffic congestion and air quality.
Noted. Would be considered under the transport strategy review rather than the CDLP.
7. An extension to the Westbere conservation area would be desirable to include the whole of the Two Fields site at Staines Hill.
This is outside the scope of the CDLP review process.
CCC funding currently is allocated to a review of the Canterbury conservation areas (then CCC may move to Whitstable and Herne Bay town centres. There is no plan currently to review the rural areas.)
8. Confirmation sought that CCC will continue to support the 'green gap' designation between Sturry and Westbere.
CCC will revisit the CDLP designations.
WPC made officers aware of the Village Green application now lodged with KCC.
9. Make enquiries about seeking TPOs on the existing remaining trees at the Two Fields site and whether and how the parish council may make an application for this.
This is outside the scope of the CDLP review process.
CCC Cllr Glover is in talks with the Head of Planning, Simon Thomas.
10. Support for the provision of an Eastern link road for Canterbury from Littlebourne Road through to the back of the Military Road CCC offices.
This has been secured through the redevelopment of the Howe Barracks planning permission.
The wider bypass to alleviate the Canterbury ring road congestion will be looked at through the CCC transport review.

11. WPC support for small ribbon development along the A28 from the convent to Church Lane, eg at Russet Orchard.
Officers explained that the current “call for sites” running until 30 June 2020 is for a site with a ¼ ha size as a minimum and a minimum of 5 dwellings.
12. The parish council’s opposition to any backland ‘garden grabbing’ development along Westbere Lane
Drainage in the village is also too poor to support this.
13. The question around CCC’s call out to developers for SHLAAS and housing land supply and the Housing number requirement going forward.
The “call for sites” runs until 30 June 2020. Current targets are for 800 new homes per year. There is a new calculation by central government and this will see CCC’s target rise to 1,120 homes per year.
Crucially, student unit numbers will now apply for inclusion in that yearly target figure.
14. Improvements to the Public Footpaths and Cycle Paths network
Desirable.
15. Westbere has several roads which have no footpaths – so pedestrians have to walk on the roads.
Noted.
16. A question on any update re the Manston/Thanet Parkway station?
KCC would be dealing with this.
17. Any news on the Hoplands Farm development and the rumour that Network Rail has halted development due to run off issues onto the railway line?
The officers were not aware of anything.
18. Environmental issues on the SSSI site in Westbere.
19. The desire for junction improvements if there is more local development – eg. A roundabout at the crossroads of Bushy Hill Road and Bredlands Lane with the A28
Noted.
20. A desire for no more large scale building on the Westbere side of the A28 as there have been recent run off problems especially down Westbere Lane which has affected listed buildings and development would cause further run off issues.
Noted.
21. The character of the village and its listed buildings – many of which have no foundations.
Noted.
22. Can a joint Neighbourhood Plan between 2 or 3 or 4 parish councils be undertaken?
The officers agreed to make enquiries and find out.
23. CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) is being implemented from 1 April 2020. Once collected 15% of CIL collected for applications in the parish will be given to the parish council in future. (Some applications will not have a CIL levy but still have contributions secured through Section 106 Agreements.)
24. The parish council would also welcome the introduction of a Local Connection Criteria to be applied to the social (NOT open market) housing on significant new developments, to ensure that people with a local connection are able to tenant them before they are offered more district or country-wide. Crucially this would give homes at an affordable rent and be for tenants with a Local Connection (for example that they lived in the village but had to move away as they could not afford to stay, or now have elderly relatives needing care but they

cannot afford to return to be on hand to do so. Please contact the parish council Clerk if you would like the full criteria proposed.)
Officers explained The Allocations Policy is outside the scope of the CDLP review.
CCC's Policy does not have a local connection policy – the allocation is based on need. And National Policies govern policies and requirements – and these are constantly changing.
But for larger scale developments planning officers do link the provision / size of unit / tenure of the affordable housing element with the known local need.

Cllr Laws expressed concern that the officers had not taken their own notes at the meeting. The Clerk was asked to change the above text into a letter to be sent to the CCC Planning Policy and Heritage manager as a record of the parish council notes taken of the meeting. The letter will also thank CCC for the opportunity to attend the session as this was welcomed.

Hoplands Farm update

Red Row want to increase the housing numbers on the Hoplands site by a further 75 homes. This will require a new planning application. They have sent a detailed leaflet to nearby residents including some in Bushy Hill Road explaining this. Cllr Hopkins confirmed he had received a leaflet and will try and scan it and circulate to all councillors for information.

Cllr Glover confirmed that the application for the Apprentice Centre and the Nursery is now in (CA/20/00100). And that Quinn Estates are handing over land for a medical centre to the NHS.

Canterbury District Call for Sites 2020

Alongside the work on the next Local Plan, CCC has launched a 'Call for Sites' to gather information about potential sites to see if they could be earmarked in the next Local Plan.

Have you ever seen a piece of land and thought it would be a great place for homes or offices or other uses, such as community facilities or open space? Now is the time to tell CCC about it.

The Call for Sites is open to everyone including parish councils to take part.

CCC will need sites for a wide range of uses and invite people to submit sites for not only housing and employment but for community facilities, open space and wildlife habitats as well.

The Call for Sites runs until 30 June 2020. Find out more at www.canterbury.gov.uk/callforsites

Village Green status application to KCC for the Two Fields site

The Sturry and Westbere Two Fields Action Group submitted an application for the Two Fields to be designated a Village Green to KCC at County Hall on 08 November 2019. 70 residents of Westbere and Sturry submitted Evidence Questionnaires along with their memories of using the fields and photographs.

It was reported at the last (February 2020) meeting that a stile had been put up on the official public right of way, where there wasn't one before and which causes accessibility issues. The entrance used to have a kissing gate which has been broken for some time. Cllr Glover explained that she had had an officer from the KCC PROW team visit and had confirmation from the officer that it has to be removed. Cllr Glover will chase this.

New planning applications:

None this month.

Notifications:

None this month.

Appeal: Application ref: CA/18/01500

Former Westbere Butts Hotel, Island Road, Sturry, CT2 0EZ

Proposed 13 no. dwellings, including 8 no. two-storey dwellings, 5 no. two-and-a-half storey dwellings, with associated access, parking and landscaping.

Appellants name: Rockhold (Westbere) Ltd. Appeal ref: 3221989. Start date: 22 August 2019. The Informal Hearing was scheduled for **14 November 2019**. The appeal documents can be inspected on the Council's website at www.canterbury.gov.uk/planning. An Inspector, R MacLeod BA(Hons), MRTPI, was appointed by the Secretary of State to determine this appeal. The Inspector's decision letter is now published on the CCC website. His decision is that the Appeal is DISMISSED. His conclusion was that: "The appeal site would be a suitable location for the proposed development having regard to relevant local and national planning policies. The high proportion of 4-bed units would not be sufficient reason to reject the proposal in relation to housing mix having regard to site circumstances. However, whilst the form and scale of the dwellings would be acceptable, the layout and plot sizes proposed would result in a cramped development that would be detrimental to the character and appearance of the area. For the reasons given and having regard to all other matters raised, the appeal is dismissed."

12. AUTHORISATION OF ACCOUNTS

The expenditure list circulated to Cllrs as Appendix 3 totalling £1,050.69 was authorised for payment.

13. FINANCIAL MATTERS

RECEIVED the bank statements and bank reconciliation for February 2020, and RESOLVED the signature of a councillor other than the Chairman thereon.

Pension payments – The Clerk has been contacted by the KCC Pension scheme asking that payments be made by BACS as due to the coronavirus that staff might not be able to take a cheque payment to the bank. The parish council has no bank transfer facility and online banking has associated costs. The bank mandate also requires two signatories to authorise a payment and this would still apply to an online facility and could cause some more work for both the Clerk and the Cllrs. The Clerk will research the options and costs and report back. Cllr Williams will take the March pension cheque into the bank and try and process it directly through the banks and report back on how she gets on.

Delegated authority during the coronavirus pandemic

Cllr Laws proposed and Cllr Morcom seconded that a delegated authority be given to the Clerk and Chairman to authorise payments should the parish not hold a meeting due to the coronavirus outbreak. Cheques will still need two signatories.

Capital grant application for 2019-2020

The parish council received a CCC capital grant of £ 577 for a backless bench to be provided on the site of the removed telephone box on Staines Hill. Match-funding is required for the balance from the parish council. Kent Highways require an approved contractor holding their certificate to undertake works on a highway. Kent Highways also require a permit to undertake work on the highway which has to be applied for by the parish council – the Clerk has completed the permit and supplied the required information and the contractor should install the bench by the end of March 2020.

The future of Concurrent Function Funding

Canterbury City Council is considering the future options for the concurrent functions funding budget and held a stakeholder event to explore the options for CFF for 2021/22 onwards on 27 February 2020, which the Clerk and Cllr Harlow attended. RECEIVED and NOTED the Clerk's separate write up of this event which is attached to these Minutes as an information appendix.

For Westbere:

The CFF award in the final year (2020-2021) of the four-year funding agreement will be £4,094.

The grounds maintenance contractor tender alone is £2,840.

The precept this year is £14,423. (which is a 22% increase on last year's).

To add £4,094 if there were no award at all would be a 33% plus increase to Westbere's residents on their precept.

An Options paper was to go to the Rural Forum on 23 March 2020 but this has been cancelled due to the coronavirus. This paper recommends that CCC consult with parish councils on three options:
Option 1 – to reduce the concurrent function funding to zero over a four-year period.
Option 2 – to reduce the concurrent function funding to zero over a two-year period.
Option 3 – to reduce the funding to zero with effect from 1 April 2021.

The parish council will keep a watching brief on developments and new meeting dates, etc.

Website Accessibility Regulations (by 1 September 2020) and current KCC EIS website hosting
KCC Cantium has been appointed as the new parish council's website host. The Clerk has updated the pages on the parish council website ahead of the migration of information – a date for which is awaited but anticipated during June or July 2020.

14. Canterbury City Council Corporate Plan consultation

CCC is consulting on its draft Corporate Plan for the next two years. The Corporate Plan is one of the council's key strategic documents and is developed so councillors can set the agenda and priorities for the council. It is used by council officers to help them focus their energies and increasingly-limited resources, implement agreed priorities and formulate future policy. It also helps them shape the way services are delivered. Read the draft plan at

<https://news.canterbury.gov.uk/downloads/download/2/draft-corporate-plan-2020---2022>

The draft plan for 2020 to 2022 proposes four priorities:

Priority One: We will take a leading role in tackling climate change across the district

Priority Two: We will deliver our services effectively and efficiently ensuring we do all we can to get them right the first time

Priority Three: We will help to increase prosperity throughout the district in as sustainable a way as we can

Priority Four: We will focus our increasingly scarce resources on meeting the needs of our communities

Give views using the questionnaire at <https://www.snapsurveys.com/wh/s.asp?k=157926863336> by 23 March 2020. All the feedback CCC receives will be reported to councillors before the final Corporate Plan is adopted.

15. Tree works at village green and in the churchyards

Village green Cherry tree – tree works: NOTED that the preferred contractor has been appointed to: Remove dead wood, trim all round to neaten and shorten the heavy, low horizontal limb to an upright growth point around 2m from the stem. (Conservation area consent has been given.)

Tree Inspection: T41 Western red Cedar in the Church yard, opposite the church

The result of the tree climbing inspection on the above tree carried out February 2020 says:

“A large historical wound was noted and inspected:- the wound is 30 cm wide and runs the last two thirds to the top of the tree originally assumed to be a tear out from the top, but upon closer inspection scorch marks can be seen in the minor cavity within this wound, therefore could only have been a lightning strike many years ago and there are slight signs of soft rot setting in. This is only the beginning, the tree has many years of life, and I recommend this tree is re-inspected in 24 months as this is located in a public church yard.”

16. Possible tree stump art sculpture for feature tree in the West Churchyard, should tree be felled

The suggestion for a sculpture if and when the feature tree in the churchyard may need to be felled was featured in the February 2020 newsletter and residents' views sought.

The Clerk heard from one resident, who felt very strongly that the tree should be retained until nature takes its course; he felt the parish council should just keep a watching brief on it and he did not feel it was a danger as so few people visit the churchyard. (The Clerk did explain that unlike a tree in a private garden, the parish council does have a duty of care as it is a public area.).

With regard to the sculpture idea he felt that this was wrong – that trees are the feature of Westbere village – and a sculpture would be out of character – and that if and when it is removed that the parish council should plant 2-3 more trees in its place instead.

A further three residents contacted the Clerk with similar views, all opposed to a sculpture.

In light of the feedback received all Cllrs agreed to abandon the sculpture idea.

Cllrs then considered whether to commission a climbing inspection for this feature tree in order to inform the parish council of its condition. Cllr Hopkins proposed and Cllr Laws seconded and all Cllrs agreed that the Clerk should appoint a contractor to do this.

As an aside, Cllr Glover advised that the Hersden Neighbourhood Centre had a problem tree and they have just had a sculpture of a miner carved into the trunk.

- 17. Clerk report** - The Clerk report had been circulated to councillors prior to the meeting. Most items are included elsewhere in these Minutes.

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 - Priority Three: We will help to increase prosperity throughout the district in as sustainable a way as we can
 - Priority Four: We will focus our increasingly scarce resources on meeting the needs of our communities
- Give views using the questionnaire at <https://www.snapsurveys.com/wh/s.asp?k=157926863336> by 23 March 2020. All the feedback CCC receives will be reported to councillors before the final Corporate Plan is adopted.

18. Inspection of the village drains

NOTED that Cllr Williams and the Clerk undertook a daytime walk to inspect the village drains on 01 March 2020 and 11 blocked drains were reported to KCC.

19. Glow in the dark Pick up after your dog poster

CCC has sent a glow in the dark poster and cable ties to encourage people to pick up after their dog. Cllrs felt that the footpath running alongside the railway line at the bottom of Walnut Tree Lane is a bad dog fouling path, and Cllr Hopkins will fix the sign there.

20. Sandwich train station and platform lengthening

The Clerk advised at the February 2020 parish council meeting that the platforms at Sandwich train station are being lengthened because of the Sandwich Golf Open in July 2020. Westbere Parish Council still feels that if the platforms at Sturry train station can be lengthened to avoid train overhang across the level crossing barriers then the barrier down time can be shortened and the traffic would flow better. The Clerk has completed a Freedom Of Information request to Network Rail about the lengthening of the platforms at Sandwich train station, and asked: Why was this done? What was the need? Were feasibility studies undertaken? What was the cost? Who is paying? What is the full scope of the work? Has it involved the moving of signals?

With that information a further request to ask for Sturry station lengthening may then be considered. The FOI deadline is 9 April 2020 but this may be extended due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The meeting closed at 9.25pm

Dates of future meetings: 21 April, Annual Electors Meeting 27 April, 19 May, 16 June, 21 July, no meeting in August, 15 September, 20 October, 17 November, no meeting in December 2020.

Other diary dates: Village Green Party on the green Sunday 5 July 2020.

In light of the coronavirus it is not known if the scheduled meetings will go ahead. NALC are seeking guidance from the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) as a matter of urgency on a range of issues including whether the statutory timeframe to hold the Annual Electors Meeting may be extended, and whether a parish council meeting could be held virtually/not in person. The information is awaited.

As a contingency it was agreed that a conference call for the Clerk and three Councillors could be set up through a facility that the Chairman has in place. Additionally in the absence of meetings decisions could be ratified by the council by email where appropriate.

Signed: Date:
Chairman

Please note these Minutes remain as draft Minutes until they are approved by the parish council at their next parish council meeting

Information Appendix:

Writeup of the stakeholder event held on 27 February 2020 re the future of Concurrent Function Funding post 2021-22 and onwards

Background and budget

CFF was set up to reimburse the delivery of services by parish councils and safeguard the provision of open spaces not owned/managed by CCC. Core items are bus shelters, closed burial grounds, two cemeteries, and open spaces.

Street lighting payments to Barham and Petham (the only two parishes retaining street lights) will remain unchanged.

CCC officers explained that there are no proposals nor decisions yet.

The total funding allocation for the last four years for CFF has been £134,500. CCC has received a reduction in its government funding from 2011 and these reductions are to continue. CCC has still to find £2.5m of savings by 2023-24 (this is the equivalent of 15% of the current CCC budget.)

Other local authorities:

Canterbury – undertake CFF

Ashford – undertake CFF

Maidstone - undertake a Parish Services Scheme

Tonbridge and Malling – operate a Special Expenses Scheme – This was introduced in 2016. Funding for grounds maintenance contracts is taken out of the general revenue account and put in a special expenses account – so that all residents pay less. Parished areas then pay through their precept for the parish's grounds

maintenance and unparished areas get charged from the special expenses account. This method removes 'double taxation'

Dartford - give compensation for loss of income from the council tax support scheme

Dover/Thanet/Folkestone and Hythe/Sevenoaks/Gravesham/Tunbridge Wells – all offer parishes no contribution.

Three breakout tables

The event split attendees into three breakout groups to discuss CFF issues/options.

Key points arising were reported back as follows:

ISSUES:

- A reduction or removal of CFF will result in Double taxation for rural residents.
- If funding is removed there would be some very significant increases required on parish precepts to maintain the same level of service (some would need to increase their precept by 59%).
- The DCLG (Department for Communities and Local Government) have been monitoring parish councils' precept increases for the last few years and whilst they have not set Referendum Principles on large increases they are continuing to monitor and could bring in Referendum Principles in future.
- Parish Councillors would be blamed for precept rises – they are volunteers – and this impacts on their goodwill.
- Not all residents that live in villages are wealthy – and not all residents can absorb the necessary increase in the precept/council tax if funding is abolished altogether.
- Deprivation is already partly taken into account by the Council Tax Banding system.
- Parishes seek a plea for certainty and four year planning - Any cuts in funding should be staged over 4 years. This would make it easier to budget and communicate with residents so they understand the situation.
- Some parishes have started increasing their reserves in anticipation of CFF reduction but building reserves without a clear message is difficult.
- Parish Councils set their budgets in November each year – the timing for any reduction proposal for 2021-2022 is important.
- There are other external pressures on parishes' precepts, such as the requirement to find new website hosts and several of those previously with EIS/KCC who used to host the website for free now face large annual charges for hosting – which is a significant percentage of very small parishes' budgets.
- Impact on levels of service – spaces still need managing but there is the possibility of some scope for a reduction in the level of service.
- Revisit the 'must haves' versus the 'nice to haves'.
- There is already in several areas volunteers' involvement – such as paint/mend, litter picking, fund raising, etc.
- CCC make 'hidden' savings by operating CFF – for example, administration costs dealing with grounds maintenance contractors are dealt with by the parish clerks dealing with contractors/payment of invoices, etc.

SUGGESTIONS:

- CCC should explore the Special Expenses Scheme (operated by Tonbridge and Malling local authority).
- There could be consultation with parishes' residents on the emerging options.
- CCC should not just look at CFF in isolation but also with other increased charges to residents such as the introduction of the green waste collection charges.
- Are their joint procurement opportunities with CCC?
- Can CCC provide services in a more cost effective way on the parish councils' behalf?
- Can some services be absorbed back by CCC cheaper – such as street lighting?
- There should be a value for money exercise repeated – as in the Scrutiny Review before – where CCC ask Serco to quote for grass cutting of certain recreation grounds and then compare with the actual costs incurred by those relevant parish councils using their own local contractors.

- Many if not all of the parish councils do not receive sufficient CFF to cover all of their actual costs and the shortfall is added to their existing precept - Explore all the parish councils' current shortfall versus their CFF award – and see if there is any inequality.
- CCC should not consider the parish councils levels of reserves held in any option.

ALLOCATION DISCUSSION

- How is it funded currently?
- A flat rate per head of resident was not considered by the parish representatives as a fair way to allocate any future funding.
- Some parishes have more services.
- Each parish has different needs.
- What is the funding being spent on by each parish?
- Different services could be divided/allocated funding in a more formulaic way
- An allocation of a £ rate per hectare or type of land could be considered but would need to be more sophisticated – like a 'needs based' approach. For example, items on safety grounds could/should be a priority.
- The parish representatives at the event felt that it would not be fair to only fund the smaller parish councils in the future.
- Should CCC incorporate CCC-owned parcels of land in the parishes back into the CCC contract? The majority of representatives present who would be impacted had no objection in principle but felt more information was required. CCC should do a value for money exercise if this is explored – would there even be a saving? What control would parishes retain?
- More information is required – for example the Serco standards and frequency of cuts etc.
- There are tie-in to contracts with contractors complications in some parishes.
- There are other complications - Barham Parish Council has a leased piece of CCC land which is manages until 2023.

POSSIBLE OPTIONS for the future:

- Remove all funding
- Parish Councils could disband – and the services would then have to move back to CCC.
- The value for money exercise should give information for future options.
- Different services could be divided/allocated funding in a more formulaic way.
- An exercise into the current shortfalls by parish should give information for future options/tweaks to a funding schedule.
- There could be an option to keep the current pro-rata level of awards – this would be less administrative for everyone – and the levels have been the same for the last four years so all parishes are used to the levels they currently receive. This would be useful should the grant be phased out completely to work out how much you would have left each year for the entire period.

NEXT STEPS:

- CCC will pull all the information together with
- A report to the Rural Forum on 23 March 2020.
- There will then be a consultation period running from 26 March to 27 May 2020.
- Returning to the Rural Forum in June 2020. Then to
- CCC committee will make a final decision for CFF funding for 2021-22 onwards in time for parish councils' budget setting.