

Minutes of the “virtual” meeting of the Westbere Parish Council held on TUESDAY 15 SEPTEMBER 2020 at 6pm.

Background to this “virtual” meeting:

Regulations enabling town and parish councils to lawfully conduct virtual meetings by video and telephone conferencing until May 2021 have been published. The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 came into force on 4 April. The legislation allows for virtual meetings if required up to May 2021.

This meeting was held using Zoom as a virtual hosting platform. Agendas were posted on the village noticeboards as usual and also to the parish council’s website. This clearly explained that members of the public are still able “attend” a parish council meeting either online or by telephone and included details of the meeting link or phone number and the PIN code for access to enter.

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

1. Resignation of Cllr Tom Hopkins

The Clerk explained that she was sad to announce that Tom Hopkins previous Chairman had resigned from the parish council on 31 August 2020.

2. Election of Chairman / Chairman for the meeting

Cllr Laws explained that he was the vice chairman and wishes to remain as vice chairman, and although he agreed to chair this meeting, he does not want the role of Chairman. He commented that he was very saddened to hear of Tom Hopkins’ resignation and that Mr Hopkins had done a tremendous job. He asked that thanks be recorded to Mr Hopkins for everything that he has done during his time on the parish council.

3. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from CCC councillor Cllr Louise Harvey-Quirke.

4. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None.

5. Minutes of the last meeting

All councillors agreed that the Minutes of the last meeting held 28 July 2020 were a true record of the meeting. (NOTED that these will be signed by the Chairman of that meeting by post after the meeting.)

6. Chairman’s Report and Councillors’ Reports

Cllr Laws

Cllr Laws advised that he had nothing to report not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

Cllr Wilson

Cllr Wilson explained in her role as Chair of the village hall committee, that the preschool and the yoga sessions are being cleaned by the users after each use.
For neighbourhood watch she is now back in the Police Station each Thursday.
She has sent an email to all those residents putting themselves forward as volunteers to help residents affected by coronavirus to both add them to her neighbourhood watch list, and also to retain their contact details in case of another local lockdown. Thanks are recorded to them.

Cllr Williams - Cllr Williams advised she had nothing to report not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

Cllr Morcom

Cllr Morcom advised that the WVPS now has a new Chairman, Frank Rossi. They have held a couple of socially distanced meetings within allowed numbers on the village green, but she has not attended

one. Cllr Harlow commented that she had attended one. Future meetings may be more problematic with the government bringing in restrictions on holding meetings of no more than six people currently. Cllr Morcom explained that she has not heard anything from the Twinning Association.

Cllr Harlow - Cllr Harlow advised she had nothing to report not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

7. Reports from County and City Councillors

CCC Cllr Georgina Glover report

Cllr Glover explained that the city council annual meeting usually held in May was held last week. Cllr Pat Todd is now the Lord Mayor, and Cllr Anne Dekker the new Sheriff.

CCC is reverting back to holding meetings of the committees, and she agreed to send the Clerk the meeting dates.

Cllr Glover commented that for the first time in her serving as a city councillor, all councillors had worked through August.

(As detailed more below) Concurrent Function Funding decisions have been deferred to allow a special meeting of rural representatives and CCC councillors, and Cllr Glover kindly offered to chase for a date for this. Parishes need to hear before budget setting timetables.

Cllr Glover explained that CCC has revamped its budget, which will just about balance for 2020-2021 although there will be a £15m shortfall in 2021-2022. The subsidised Park and Rides will re-open in September.

8. Adjournment of the meeting

As there were no residents 'present' there was no adjournment of the meeting.

9. Speeding vehicles in Westbere

There has been recent email correspondence from residents about speeding vehicles in the village, which was reported to the July 2020 parish council meeting.

Westbere Parish Council does agree that speeding is an issue, and one possibility is to have a traffic survey. The Clerk advised the cost for a week long survey is £500 for one site or £700 for two sites, and the survey records the date, time of day and speed travelled by all vehicles 24 hours a day for the week. However, as the current traffic volume is still felt to be considerably less than pre-coronavirus Cllrs felt that it is still not the right time to commission one now.

The Clerk advised when considering the draft precept for 2021-2022 she would try and add this is a specific project item.

10. Planning

A28 Link Road - KCC/CA/0091/2019 - Construction of part of a new road (A28 Link Road) including viaduct between A28 Sturry Road and A291 Sturry Hill and associated on-line improvements. A28 Sturry Link Road, Sturry, Canterbury.

There is no update on the link road.

Village Green status application to KCC for the Two Fields site

NOTED that 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. Over 70 residents of Westbere and Sturry submitted Evidence Questionnaires along with their memories of using the fields and photographs.

At the end of the public consultation period the officer forwarded The Two Fields Action Group copies of the objections she has received. The only objections were from Bellway and another landowner. The Two Fields Action Group response to their objections was sent to KCC on 26 May 2020.

KCC then gave the two landowners copies of the Action Group and they have both written further representations which the Action Group has circulated to residents.

The Action Group has therefore drafted a further representation to their further representations and this will be sent to the KCC officer by the 22 September 2020 deadline.

The parish council recorded their thanks to the Action Group members doing the work on this.

Planning correspondence

Information was received on 17 July 2020 and reported to the 28 July 2020 parish council meeting from the owners of Russett Orchard. They anticipated CCC granting permission very soon for the new dwelling to replace the existing house – this has now been granted on:

CA/20/00026 – Russett Orchard, Staines Hill

Outline application for two-storey detached dwelling including access, layout and scale, with attached single-storey garage following demolition of existing dwelling

This original plot has been annexed from the rest of the site, and has been sold, subject to Planning Permission, to a family who wish to move into the area.

The owners of Russett Orchard have retained the rest of the site and wish to apply for Planning Permission for a similar size and type of property, on the "infill" site to the East of the present house, and adjacent to the houses in Church Lane. The owners asked if the parish council would support their second application. A pre-application without prejudice response was sent to them on 24 July 2020. Their validated planning application for final formal comments is awaited.

New applications:

CA/20/01621 - 12 Westbere Lane, Westbere, Canterbury, Kent, CT2 0HH

Ground floor and lower ground floor rear extension.

Cllr Harlow and the Clerk undertook a site visit with the neighbours on both sides of 12 Westbere Lane on 10 August 2020. The following comments were uploaded to the CCC portal on 11 August 2020:

No. 12 Westbere Lane is part of a terrace of five locally listed cottages which, we believe, are subject to an Article 4 direction.

The land to the rear has an upward gradient from east to west from No. 10 to No. 18.

No. 10 has an additional storey to the other four cottages and a single storey flat roof.

The proposal is to excavate additional space for the basement (kitchen) and add a master bedroom above at the rear of the building and effectively doubling the living space.

Westbere Parish Council has scrutinised this application, including undertaking a site visit to fully appreciate the proposal in context, and has the following observations/concerns:

The parish council has concerns about the full width proposal – this is considered overdevelopment, and overbearing on the row of cottages. It also gives rise to a crude connection to the outhouse roof of No. 14's bathroom. The loss of half of this historic fabric outhouse is also regrettable.

The full width proposal also impacts upon the narrow window of No. 10 at first floor level which houses their stairwell – it will lose light and become quite dark through the day because of the aspect and rotation of the sun.

The only rear access is down a shared drive beside No. 10 and through the rear garden of No. 10 – but there is no right of access for vehicles – it is only by foot. This arrangement will require some sensitivity during construction, should CCC be minded to grant this application and, if granted, the parish council suggests that a condition on the timing of deliveries and workers on site should be imposed in order to protect the amenity and privacy of the householders at No. 10 during construction.

Westbere Parish Council feels that a site visit by the planning case officer is essential to understand this proposal – the determination of the application should NOT be done just as a desk top study due to the current limitations of coronavirus, as desktop studies do not fully show the impact on the neighbours neither do they show the contours of the site. A CGI 3D Block Plan should be requested to enable the scale and bulk to be fully understood.

Whilst Westbere Parish Council is not against the principle of an extension this scheme is not respectful to its neighbours and should be more sympathetic to the terrace as a whole.

One nearby resident sent the planning officer a video on how to access the site from the rear without coming into contact with any residents to enable a safe site visit, and the officer has agreed to do this. The planning decision is awaited.

CA/20/01646 - Gate House, 26 Walnut Tree Lane, Westbere, Kent, CT2 0HG

Single-storey rear and side extension.

The parish council has no comments.

Notifications:

None this month.

11. Financial matters

The payments totalling £1,812.84 were authorised.

NOTED that the Appendix 3 Finance Schedule will be signed by the Chairman of the meeting and returned to the Clerk by post.

It was agreed that as there have been no meetings in person, that the bank statements and bank reconciliation for March, April, May, June, July and August 2020, along with the income and expenditure record, will be posted for scrutiny to be signed by Cllr Morcom.

NOTED that there has been a national pay agreement for parish clerks with effect from 01 April 2020 of 2.75%. The increase and the back pay have been incorporated into the September Clerk salary.

KCC Cllr Alan Marsh grant for coronavirus support activities

The parish council has received a grant of £1,250 from KCC Cllr Alan Marsh to mitigate the effects of coronavirus in Westbere. There is £284.89 of the grant remaining as yet unspent.

A further one off cut of CB92 public footpath from Walnut Tree Lane to Fordwich Lakes

The footpath from Walnut Tree Lane along the railway line became very overgrown and is usually the responsibility of Network Rail to maintain. The Clerk reported this to Network Rail, however they replied that they were unable to schedule any staff or contractors due to coronavirus. The parish council felt that the COVID crisis makes the work all the more important because of the extra use the route is getting, and the fenced, narrow path is narrowed further by the vegetation - making it even more difficult for social distances to be maintained by those using it. The parish council therefore in June and July authorised a one off cut of the path for a one-off payment. The cost of this is £50 per occasion – and the expenditure will be allocated against the grant given by KCC Alan Marsh to mitigate the effects of coronavirus.

The parish council asked the Clerk to contact Network Rail again about maintenance of the path in the future, and make an offer to Network Rail that Westbere Parish Council do the maintenance in future at a rate of £50 per occasion and invoice Network Rail accordingly.

Capital grant application for 2020-2021

A grant of £241.58 was awarded from the CCC Parish Council Capital Grant scheme 2020-2021, and has been paid, for the planting of a mature replacement tree on the green to become the feature tree when the Cherry tree finally needs total removal. It is believed to have 2-3 years of life left. The application has total project costs of £550 for the supply of a 10-12 foot mature Cherry tree and protective cage. The Clerk will now progress this project for Autumn planting. The new tree is planned to go to the side of the existing feature tree - between it and the upright village sign on the corner. The Clerk explained that despite the last two newsletters asking for residents to offer to help water the new tree, no-one has yet come forward. Cllr Morcom offered to ask two residents if they would consider watering the new tree when it is planted.

Christmas tree lights on village green tree

NOTED that when John and Alison Grubb removed the lights from the central village green tree, they removed the power box that was attached to the bottom of the trunk and disconnected the power in the cupboard though the cable is still buried in the ground between the box and the tree, and the cable end at the bottom of the tree is still in place.

If and when this tree reaches the end of its life, the cable end will need to be protected if the old tree is removed and a new one installed. It is believed to have 2-3 years of life left in it.

Capital grants 2021-2022

The Clerk was emailed the following on 12 August 2020: CCC would usually invite parish councils to make a capital grant application with applications assessed in the Autumn and grants awarded for the next financial year. Due to the financial pressures currently being experienced by Canterbury City Council, councillors agreed to defer the capital programme for this year in line with the COVID Emergency budget. This does **not** affect the capital grants already allocated for 2020/21 as the funding agreements were signed at the start of the financial year. The £20,000 capital grant budget for 2021/22 will now be considered as part of the Council's budget setting process in the Autumn once the Council's financial position is clearer. If the budget is confirmed following this process, there will be an opportunity for parish councils to apply for funding for 2021/22.

The future of Concurrent Function Funding

Canterbury City Council is considering the future options for the concurrent functions funding from 2021-2022. An Options paper was to go to the Rural Forum on 23 March 2020 but this was cancelled due to the coronavirus. CCC has consulted with parish councils on 3 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.

A written response to the Options Consultation was ratified by email by Cllrs and sent to CCC on 11 April 2020.

The Clerk watched the COVID emergency committee meeting on 06 August 2020 on YouTube where the report on Concurrent Function Funding post 2021 was heard. There were 17 councillors present with voting rights (one more, Cllr Barbara Flack was also present but did not have a voting right as she had an interest as Chairman of Blean Parish Council, but had been given permission by the Chief Executive to attend as the Chair of the Rural Forum).

The parish councils in the district have concerns around increased precept implications, double taxation and a desire to have this consulted at the Rural Forum prior to a decision.

After discussion all 17 councillors voted unanimously that the CCC Committee meeting to be held on 20th August would decide if committees like the Rural Forum and Communications Committee are to meet, in what form this will take (likely virtual):

Notes from the CCC Council Extraordinary meeting held 20 August 2020

The Clerk watched the CCC meeting on YouTube on Thursday 20 August. Key points are:

- From a balance of risk point of view CCC is to continue to hold its formal meetings virtually only
- But they will start to experiment with hybrid meetings for *informal meetings only* at first – in The Guildhall, which has a capacity for 32 people to socially distance. (A hybrid meeting is where some people attend in person and some will 'attend' virtually).
- For governance arrangements – they have been holding just Covid Emergency Committee meetings (and planning) but resolved that they will now restore only those committees which can take decision-making items. i.e. non-decision making meetings and Forums will continue to be kept on hold.
- The COVID Emergency Committee will cease and be replaced by a Recovery Committee of Council with 17 members to carry out the functions of Full Council.
- These arrangements will be reviewed again by the end of October 2020.
- For Concurrent Function Funding and its future post April 2021, it was agreed to convene a special meeting of parish representatives and rural ward councillors, so that feedback can be gathered and included in a report to the Recovery Committee by Autumn 2020.

12. Clerk Report

The Clerk will now try to appoint a contractor to undertake a Climbing inspection for a large Cypress in the West Churchyard – It is a feature tree and its loss would impact visually.

Temporary closure of Public Footpath CB91

The Clerk was advised on 04 August 2020 that Kent County Council intends to make an Order to temporarily close Public Footpath CB91 between Westbere Lane and the junction with Public Footpath CB62A from 01 September 2020. The path will be closed for a maximum of six months, although it is expected that it will reopen before October 2020. The path is closed due to the installation of a new fence adjacent to the railway. The alternative route is via Westbere Lane, the A28 and Public Footpath CB62A and will be signed for the duration of the closure.

The Clerk sought clarification on the closure, as the parish council felt that the part of the footpath between Westbere Lane and the Railway does not need to be closed -and should not be closed because it gives access to the two fields and to the (as yet unregistered) footpath that leads to Island Road avoiding the danger of walking up an un-paved road.

A PROW officer advised that KCC processed a closure for CB91 from Westbere Lane as they can only work with the public rights of way that are legally recorded, the other paths mentioned in the field are not recorded on the Definitive Map at this time so KCC cannot sign them as an alternative route.

However, the officer checked the plan that Network Rail submitted and it looks like they will be keeping the first part of CB91 open from Westbere Lane so access will be available to the field mentioned.

CB91 is scheduled to be closed from 1st – 5th September.

13. Coronavirus risk assessments

NOTED that the Clerk has completed further Risk Assessments around Coronavirus risks for August and September 2020.

The Clerk will do a further coronavirus risk assessment for October, to include the new government rule of meetings of no more than six people indoors or outdoors with effect from 14 September 2020.

14. BT Community Fibre Partnerships

Correspondence has been received from a resident re exploring **BT Community Fibre Partnerships** to get high speed broadband to more households in the village with Fibre to Cabinet service. FTTP can be

supplied to just a small handful of homes or to the entire village but will require a contribution (of £300 to £1,500 per home) from residents interested, although the more people who come on board, the cheaper it will be. Plus, the government's UK Rural Gigabit Broadband Connectivity Programme pays £3,500 to businesses and £1,500 to homes to help cover the costs.

In order to get a better picture of what it would cost per household, for a £250 fee, Open Reach will conduct a survey. In order for the survey to be completed, we need to have an accurate picture of how many homes would be interested in participating. Once we have a number of genuinely interested parties, the survey will be completed and we will have a better idea of the options.

The resident has offered to take the lead in the first instance – and would simply need the name and postal address of interested parties. At this point it is about looking for expressions of interest as we need a fair number of participants to make it worthwhile.

More information on the community-fibre-partnerships can be found here:

<https://www.openreach.com/fibre-broadband/community-fibre-partnerships>

More information on the Rural Gigabit Voucher programme can be found here:

<https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/>

Westbere Parish Council considers that low broadband speeds already diminish property values and that that is an effect that is only likely to be magnified by the growth of home working and likely technological developments, which will be bound to require higher speeds for new services. The council RESOLVED to advertise with a special leaflet drop to all households in the same way that the parish council delivers the newsletter, with the resident to lead and collate the responses (and with a closing date for expressions of interest of 31 October 2020). The parish council will also pay £250 for the BT survey.

Cllr Harlow will speak to the resident with an update from this meeting.

15. Website

NOTED that KCC as existing website host has agreed that due to COVID-19 their hosting service can be extended to Sunday 1 November 2020. The migration date to the new hosting provider Cantium Services is awaited. This was originally anticipated by August. The Clerk explained she has received no reply to an email to Cantium asking them for an update, and will now try and telephone them instead.

16. Possible lengthening of the Sturry train station platforms

Westbere Parish Council has had a long desire to try and get Network Rail to lengthen the platforms at Sturry station to avoid train overhang across the level crossing, thereby enabling the barrier down time to be reduced and keep the traffic flowing.

The Network Rail response to the Freedom of Information request was followed up with a letter to the KCC Cabinet Member for Highways and the KCC Cabinet Member for economic, environment and expansion development to see if they can help further. The KCC Cabinet Member reply was reported to the July 2020 parish council meeting and recorded in full in the Minutes of that meeting.

Network Rail retains the objective of completing the East Kent Resignalling Scheme – phase 3, which includes the section of route between Canterbury West and Ramsgate via Sturry and Minster. At present this scheme is not scheduled for short-term delivery, but if this scheme were to be brought forward to Network Rail's existing Control Period (CP6: 2019-2024), there might be an opportunity to include the required re-positioning of signals in the vicinity of Sturry station. If this could be combined with a change to the SDO arrangements, whereby passengers were enabled to board and alight from the rear 6 coaches only in both directions (as the newly located signals further along the route on the Up side would permit this), then the platform lengths could remain as they are and the level crossing would be clear of the rear of stopping trains at all times.

The KCC Member therefore recommended that Westbere Parish Council sought support of their local MP to speak to the Secretary of State for Transport and request the inclusion of the East Kent Resignalling Scheme - phase 3 in the planned outputs for the current Control Period (CP6: 2019-2024), to include the proposed re-siting of signals in the vicinity of Sturry as described above.

After the July parish council meeting a letter was sent to Westbere's MP Sir Roger Gale on 12 August 2020. NOTED that Sir Roger Gale acknowledged this in August and agreed to raise this with the Secretary for Transport in September when Parliament resumes. Parliament has now resumed so hopefully there will be an update soon.

17. Date and time for the next meeting/virtual meeting

The next virtual meeting was set for Tuesday 20 October 2020 at 6pm.

The meeting closed at 6.56pm.

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Signed: Cllr Stephen Laws, Chairman of the meeting

Date: