

Minutes of the “virtual” meeting of the Westbere Parish Council held on **TUESDAY 23 JUNE 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 but to do so will need to contact the Clerk for details of the meeting link or phone number and the PIN code for access to enter.

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

1. The Chairman’s opening remarks and apologies for absence

Cllr Hopkins welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending. He commented that this was the parish council’s third ‘virtual’ meeting, although there was a normal agenda to work through.

The Clerk confirmed that no members of the public had asked for the PIN to join in.

Apologies for absence were received from KCC Cllr Alan Marsh, although he had provided a verbal report to the Clerk by telephone (recorded below).

2. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

All councillors agreed that the Minutes of the last meeting held **26 May 2020** were a true record of the meeting. (NOTED that these will be signed by the Chairman by post after the meeting.)

4. Chairman’s Report and Councillors’ Reports

Cllr Tom Hopkins

Cllr Hopkins advised he has written his Chairman’s Annual Report to residents – this has been circulated to councillors. It has been written as a letter to residents and will be delivered with the next newsletter to all households, and also uploaded to the parish council’s website.

Cllr Hopkins commented that there is graffiti on the grit bins in the village. These are owned by KCC and he questioned if KCC would clean them, or whether CCC/Serco would do so. There is also graffiti on the bus stop by Pennington Close and on a lamppost between the bus stop and Pennington Close. Cllr Louise Harvey-Quirke kindly offered to report these to CCC if a councillor would confirm all the locations. Cllr Williams offered to send photos of each location to her.

Cllr Morcom

Cllr Morcom advised she has been responsible for cheque signing. She has been checking the book library while on village walks. She confirmed that the water leak at Pennington Close mentioned at the last meeting has now been fixed.

Cllr Wilson

Cllr Wilson said that the village hall is now open to the preschool. There are some concerns about floor cleaning and establishing a booking system to adhere to numbers of people attending and ensuring a 1m-2m social distancing operation.

The hall committee has asked the village contractor to clear all the weeds and shrubs when the preschool is not present.

For Neighbourhood Watch, Cllr Wilson advised that Kent Police are looking at getting the volunteers back into the Police Station but only those under 70 years of age. In the meantime she has been sending the usual email alerts and scams out.

Cllr Laws

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

Cllr Harlow

Cllr Harlow advised that she now tidies and cleans the book library every Monday. She has had problems with software on her new laptop and was not able to access any Word documents and she thanked the Clerk for sending her everything in a PDF format. She is hopeful that the issue is now resolved.

Cllr Williams

Cllr Williams commented that she has walked the village but not noticed anything that needs reporting.

5. Reports from County and City Councillors

KCC Cllr Alan Marsh report

KCC Cllr Alan Marsh had given apologies but provided the following verbal report to the Clerk by telephone:

1. The Sturry Relief Road planning application
This is frozen at present with no update.
2. KCC Planning meetings
Planning meetings have resumed virtually, and three have been held but they take much longer than in-person meetings.
3. Staffing levels at KCC - Lots of KCC staff are either isolating or shielding and County Hall has totally closed down, so workers when able are working from home although the work is disjointed. Staff who are leaving their posts are not being replaced so staffing levels are depleted further.
4. Cllr Marsh has been asking for more KCC Community Wardens since 2017, as he feels they do such a good job for isolated, single, disabled and similar people in the community and he is pleased to announce that KCC has allocated £1m for up to 23 new wardens – possibly three for East Kent (areas such as Sturry, Westbere, Hoath, Chislet, Herne and Broomfield). Their training should start once COVID-19 allows.

Cllr Louise Harvey-Quirke report

Good Evening all, I trust you have been keeping well.

Before I go on with my report, I wanted to inform you that Canterbury City Councillor, Ian Thomas, sadly passed away last weekend. Ian, who was also a Kent County Councillor, had been involved in Local Government for over 20 years and was liked by all - He will be greatly missed.

To update you on my activities - I have been working from home since the start of Lockdown and have been attending regular Councillor briefings, albeit virtually.

I have received many resident enquiries throughout this difficult time, mainly from elderly and vulnerable people, who have needed assistance from our Community Hub.

The Planning Committee resumed in May and I have attended one meeting, sometimes two, per week to work through the backlog of applications.

This week, however, there will be no Planning meetings, as the CEC (Covid 19 Emergency Committee) will be meeting. This meeting will be live-streamed on YouTube at 5pm on Thursday (25th June).

Items on this agenda, which you may be interested in, information on the Local Plan consultation and the future of Housing.

Regarding Housing, I continue to sit on the Housing Working Group, which has been managing the transfer of services from East Kent Housing to in-house.

The proposed date for the transfer of services is October 2020.

Thanks all. I hope to see you all again soon.

Take care, Louise

Louise Harvey-Quirke, Sturry Ward Councillor

Cllr Harvey-Quirke left the meeting at this point.

6. Adjournment of the meeting

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

7. Planning

CCC Planning Committee meetings

The first virtual planning meeting took place on 26 May 2020. The next one was scheduled for 2 June. Agendas can be viewed online at democracy.canterbury.gov.uk which includes the planning officer's report and recommendation and a link to YouTube where people are able to watch the meeting live. Members of the public can submit a pre-recorded speech, up to three minutes long, which will be played to the Committee and those watching online. Democratic Services will arrange the recordings, which will be done remotely by computer, tablet or telephone.

The speaking slots are still limited to three for, and three against the planning proposal. In addition, as always, there are slots reserved for the applicant or agent (but not both), parish council or amenity group, and the ward councillor.

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.

On 13 June 2020 the KCC officer update was: "I have now had the opportunity to read your response to the objections in detail. In light of the alternative submissions regarding locality and also some of the comments regarding the fencing and accessibility of the land, I think that it would be helpful (and in the interests of procedural fairness) to invite the objectors' comments on these. I shall give them a period of four weeks to do this and you will, of course, have the final right of reply in due course."

CCC's Call for Sites

CCC's Call for Sites says "We will need sites for a wide range of uses and so we are inviting people to put forward sites for This includes sites for community uses such as:

Village and Community halls, Education & Nursery facilities, Open spaces & Wildlife habitats"

NOTED that The Two Fields Action Group considers that the Two Fields site qualifies under: open spaces & wildlife habitats – and they have put in a submission to CCC to this effect.

NOTED that on 10 June 2020 the Clerk, on behalf of Westbere Parish Council, endorsed this and did a submission too, which has been acknowledged by the CCC officer.

Correspondence from Sturry Parish Council re CCC's Call for Sites

The CCC call for sites can include land for amenity use and you don't have to be the landowner to offer a submission. Sturry Parish Council is developing a submission to the Call for Sites. Sturry Parish Council has noted that none of the proposed major development in Sturry is being obliged to provide any on-site outdoor sports provision when, according to Local Plan policy, land equivalent to about 3 full-sized pitches should be provided. This against a background of an existing shortage of available sports area.

Sturry Parish Council's main aim of any submission will therefore be to secure land for outdoor sports, plus community buildings. A Sturry Cllr has put together an Options Appraisal of potential sites:

- Site at Popes Lane
- Sturry Recreation Ground
- Sturry Primary School
- Land south of the railway, Sturry
- Land belonging to The Kings School, Sturry
- The Two Fields south of A28 and Westbere Lane, in Westbere

The Sturry parish councillor advised that the Two Fields in Westbere has been put forward as one of the candidates, although not considered a runner.

Sturry Parish Council invited any comments from Westbere Parish Council and The Two Fields Action Group, not just on the Westbere fields but on any of the other sites.

A view from The Two Fields Action Group was sent as follows:

I very much appreciate your informing me of your proposed submission and for asking my views on whether to include the Two Fields as a possible site or not. I think that a local sports field for community use would be a very welcome addition to local facilities but agree with you that the Two Fields would not be a suitable site.

I would prefer to see Sturry PC throw its wholehearted support behind our Village Green application — on the grounds that the latter, if successful, would also benefit a significant number of Sturry residents by providing for their general recreational needs. The other sites seem to be better suited for organised sports and are in the Parish of Sturry whilst the Two Fields is in Westbere.

The land is geographically unsuitable for playing pitches/fields, given the fact that it slopes and has a tendency to flood along the railway line. Access off the A28 would also be problematic as it is such a busy road with traffic regularly queuing beyond the entry point when the level crossing is closed.

It is now — and should remain — a valuable Green Gap for wildlife. The Forestry Commission has also designated the land as woodland and wrote a letter to CCC asking them to bear this in mind should any planning applications be submitted which would include sports facilities. Our Evidence Questionnaires demonstrated that it is the natural state of the area that is most valued by local residents. The development of sports fields would destroy wildlife habitats and limit use by locals to organised sports.

I have discussed your proposal with a few others in the group and there is concern that, if your submission includes the Two Fields as a potential site, it might well undermine our application for Village Green. If CCC starts thinking that local people could live with some sort of ‘useful’ development, waters will be muddied. It might even prompt a local developer (such as Mr Quinn) to propose a nice little rugby/football stadium, complete with club house and car park, which he’s desperate to plant somewhere in the area.

We would prefer the Two Fields not to be included in your appraisal. Since you have other sites with more potential, it seems unnecessary to include it. Our VG application was made on behalf of residents of Westbere and those in Sturry who live within walking distance of the site. Westbere PC has submitted a letter of support for our application but, despite being asked more than once, Sturry PC has not. I am concerned that your submission will indicate to CCC and therefore KCC that Sturry PC does not support the VG application which could influence the outcome.

I hope that you agree that it would be better to remove the Two Fields, as a possible site for development, from your submission.

On receipt of The Two Fields Action Group comments, the Sturry Cllr confirmed these matched those already made and so there is a very good consensus and justification for not submitting the two fields. She explained that the purpose of their appraisal is as much to eliminate inappropriate sites as anything else and so the two fields was included. The appraisal comments on the fields will provide all the reasons needed for them to be excluded from consideration and should answer anyone who, in future, might suggest otherwise. The importance of retaining the Green Gap and Sturry’s support for the Village Green application will be emphasised. Many residents of Sturry are hoping this application succeeds.

Only one site will be needed if it is of sufficient size and in a suitable location, so it is very unlikely that more than one will be submitted to CCC for outdoor sports. A further, and quite suitable site, has been identified north of Sweechgate but, at the moment Sturry Parish Council considers the field north of Pope's Lane to be the most likely option.

Cllrs discussed this. Westbere Parish Council also backs the Two Fields Action Group response above. The Clerk will write to Sturry Parish Council to this effect and that the site is in Westbere, and Westbere Parish Council would also prefer it not be included.

Canterbury District Local Plan review to 2040 – update

A further update from CCC was received on 2 June 2020:

By now most parishes have met with CCC officers to informally discuss issues and aspirations informally for your area. Virtual meetings are being offered to those who have not yet met.

The Head of Planning says "To date we found the sessions to be very useful and hope that you did too. As you would expect the issues raised with us during the briefings varied considerably amongst the Parish Councils. Some of the issues raised so far have included:

- *the need in some areas for sufficient affordable housing, particularly for younger and older people, who wish to live or remain in villages*
- *the need for more housing in certain villages to bring in younger people and families and support important local services*
- *local transport issues in many areas such as the adequacy of bus services, need for improved walking and cycling links*
- *the need to improve some village facilities, such as play areas and community halls."*

CCC is working towards a formal public consultation about the issues facing the District. A report has been prepared for the Covid Emergency Committee (which is currently dealing with the business of the Policy and Resources Committee) due to meet on 25th June and if the Committee agrees, the consultation should begin shortly afterwards. The issues consultation is an opportunity to comment on the issues considered important for the District to 2040 and how these might be addressed.

Following the issues consultation CCC intends to draw up potential Options for the future of the District and to consult upon these in early 2021.

Call for Sites - The Call for Sites ends on 30th June 2020. This is where CCC invite people to identify sites for development which they think should be included within the District Plan. Many of the sites put forward are likely to be from landowners wanting to get their land allocated for housing or employment development, but it can also be used by communities to put forward local sites for housing or employment uses, as well as open space and community facilities etc.

Parish Councils have asked when they will be able to see which sites have been submitted through the Call for Sites. CCC expect this information will be available to share early next year.

In some cases the sites will end up as allocations in the new District Plan but in many cases they will not. More details about the Call for Sites can be found at <https://www.canterbury.gov.uk/callforsites>

Surveys / assessment work

CCC is currently conducting two surveys as part of the preparation work towards the district plan and has asked for the parish councils' help with these:

1. *Local Facilities Audit* - CCC has carried out an initial assessment of the facilities that exist within each of the parishes. On 3 June 2020, the Clerk completed the CCC online survey of the CCC list and provided further information about the parish's hall(s).
2. *Landscape Assessment* – CCC has asked consultants to undertake an assessment, using a standard methodology, to assess the quality and value of the various "landscape character areas" within the District. CCC will be writing to parish councils with more information on this particular assessment in the coming weeks and seek parish councils' input to this assessment early on as evidence for when CCC prepares the district plan.

Hold the date: Our future district to 2040 (virtual conference)

An email from the CCC Head of Planning was received on 23 June 2020 explaining that the first public consultation will begin in July (subject to the approval of the Council's Committee on 25th June). As part of the consultation, CCC is planning to arrange a virtual conference for key stakeholders to debate the issues that the district will face over the next 20 years.

The provisional date for the Conference is Monday 20 July 2020 (between 11am-1pm) and a formal invitation will be sent once the date is confirmed. Cllr Laws and the Clerk will attend.

New applications:

None this month.

Notifications:

None this month.

8. Financial matters

The payments totalling £ 1,480.01 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.

NOTED that when meetings are able to be resumed in person - TO RECEIVE the bank statements and bank reconciliation for March, April and May 2020, and TO RESOLVE the signature of a councillor other than the Chairman thereon;

- i) When meetings are able to be resumed in person - TO RECEIVE the bank statements and bank reconciliation for March, April, May and June 2020, and TO RESOLVE the signature of a councillor other than the Chairman thereon;

S101 – 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 (and provided photos provided by Cllr Wilson) to Network Rail. However their reply on 4 June 2020 said:

"Thank you for getting in touch with us. Like many others around the world, Network Rail has decided we must take measures to minimise the spread of the COVID-19 virus, whilst maintaining an effective railway for key workers travelling to places of work and for essential freight to reach its destination. As we are sure you understand we will only be completing essential work on and around the railway with immediate effect.

At this time we are unable to schedule any staff or contractors to help with your query. Please continue to keep an eye on the news and as soon as social distancing restrictions are beginning to lift, contact us again."

The Clerk therefore proposed on 5 June 2020 the use of S101 to ask the parish council's contractor to undertake a one off cut of the path for a one-off payment. 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. There are no passing places and even if it were practical to wait for someone whose already on it - you cannot see the whole length from either end.

The parish council asked the Clerk to contact Network Rail and advise them that in the circumstances the parish council has arranged for cut(s) as a special case to aid social distancing during coronavirus but will not assume the responsibility for future years, when it is expected that Network Rail should resume their own responsibility for the maintenance of this footpath.

The Clerk will contact the contractor to see if this cut has been undertaken yet. The cost can be claimed under the offer of a grant from KCC Cllr Marsh below:

Offer from KCC Cllr Alan Marsh for a grant for coronavirus support activities

Cllr Marsh has offered a grant of up to £2,000 for costs for anything that might mitigate the effects of coronavirus for Westbere residents. The Clerk will complete an application form for:

- the additional footpath cut(s) required to assist with social distancing;
- the purchase and distribution of facemasks and small hand sanitisers to residents;
- sanitiser, facemasks and cleaning materials for the Church

- a stock of facemasks and sanitiser for the Yew Tree – for both their own business use and to hold as a further stock for residents needing to collect more
- printer inks to print the Chairman's Annual Report as coronavirus prevented the holding of the Annual Electors' meeting
- envelopes to contain everything to all households.
- Signage for social distancing reminders at the footpath entrances in the village.

The future of Concurrent Function Funding

Canterbury City Council is considering the future options for the concurrent functions funding from 2021-2022. There is no update at this time.

9. The Annual Governance and Return For Annual Return 2019-2020

NOTED that following approval of the year end accounts at the May parish council meeting, the Clerk returned the necessary documents to the external auditor PKF Littlejohn on 05 June 2020.

The Clerk also made arrangements for the exercise of public rights publishing the Notice of Public Rights and Publication of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return and other documents on both its parish noticeboards and website.

KE0309: Receipt of documents – notification of exempt status, 2020

An automated message was received by the Clerk on 23 June 2020 from PKF Littlejohn to confirm receipt and logging of the notification of exempt status for the year ended 31 March 2020 submitted to them for Westbere Parish Council. By claiming exemption there is no review to be performed and consequently no auditor certificate and report, or any other closure documentation issued for this reporting year. Unless PKF Littlejohn receive any correspondence from local electors during the period for the exercise for public rights that requires them to contact the parish council, nothing will be heard until the planning for the 2020/21 review year gets underway.

(Cllr Harlow left the meeting at this point due to internet issues but re-joined the meeting for item No. 12)

10. 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.

11. Next newsletter

The Clerk will finalise the next newsletter. The Chairman's Annual Report will accompany this, together with face masks for each household. The newsletter will:

- Mention the separate Chairman's Annual Report written as a letter to all residents and accompanying the newsletter
- Confirmation that the Annual Electors' meeting cannot now be held.
- Encourage public participation / feedback in the meantime.
- Confirm that the Westbere Charities annual report and accounts, and the Village Hall accounts for 2019-2020 may be viewed on the parish council's website.
- An article about KCC Cllr's Member grant and the face masks etc to be provided.
- Include an article / reminder to residents about conservation area tree works and trees with TPOs and the need to notify CCC / seek permission to undertake work in a conservation area (unless exempt) and for a planning application for a tree with a TPO.

As a tree with a TPO needs a planning application the parish council would be made aware of tree works in those instances through the weekly lists from CCC. However, tree works in a conservation area are not notified to parish councils. Cllrs discussed that some years ago CCC always notified parish councils of all tree works, but resolved not to do this when staffing levels were reduced. They felt that it would be useful for notifications to be resumed and the Clerk will email the CCC Cllrs to see if this could be reinstated.

The Clerk will also try and look at the CCC Layers map to see if any of the trees on The Two Fields site have a TPO on them.

12. Bretts Land, Fordwich Lakes

Councillors and residents have heard a rumour that Bretts at Fordwich is closing its site and the land could be used for a housing development? This would impact on the lakes. The Clerk will email the Fordwich Town Clerk to ask if he knows anything more of if there has been a planning application submitted. If so, Cllr Hopkins felt that a footbridge to link the footpaths over the railway line should be sought as a developer contribution.

13. 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 regarding the recent lengthening works to platforms at Sandwich train station was reported to the April 2020 meeting when it was agreed that the Freedom of Information request would be followed up later in the year and ask about the final costing information when hopefully Network Rail will have this information to hand.

After that parish council meeting the Clerk forwarded this information to KCC Cllr Alan Marsh for both his information and to ask questions about the KCC funding mentioned and if he is able to find out any information. Cllr Marsh suggested that the parish council write to the KCC Cabinet Member for Highways and the Cabinet Member for economic, environment and expansion development to see if they can help. At the May 2020 meeting, the parish council agreed to do this. The Clerk's draft letter to the two KCC Cabinet Members was approved and will now be sent to them.

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

The next virtual meeting was set for Tuesday 28 July 2020 at 6pm.

The meeting closed at 7.10pm.

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Signed: Cllr Tom Hopkins, Chairman

Date: