

**BRABOURNE PARISH COUNCIL**  
**MINUTES OF ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**  
**Held on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2016 at 7.00pm**  
**At Brabourne Village Hall**

**1. Present**

Cllr Mrs Young, Cllr Mrs Tanner, Cllrs Joules, Mayland and Spokes, and Mrs S Wood (Clerk). Cllr Howard (ward member), Cllr Wickham (county councillor) and Mr Paul Rodway (village caretaker) were also present. Seven members of the public attended.

**2. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Cllr Hickmott (Chairman), Cllr Mrs Bewick, Cllr Miss Martin (ward member), the Community Warden (Mr Graham Kingston), and PCSO Hobbs.

In the absence of Cllr Hickmott, Cllr Mayland took the Chair.

**3. Presentation of Annual Citizenship Award**

The Chairman said that the Award is given annually in memory of Cllr Chris Goodall, whose contribution to the parish is immeasurable. This Award marks the affection and respect with which he was held and is awarded to someone who has worked for the parish and for the people of Brabourne in a voluntary capacity. The recipient is chosen by the Parish Council from nominations submitted by the community.

The Chairman continued that it was a great pleasure to present the Award on behalf of the community and Parish Council to someone who has been actively involved in the community for many years in a variety of roles.

To loud applause, the Chairman presented the Award and a cheque for £100 to Mr Ron Cooper.

The Chairman also presented Mr Cooper with an engraved glass plaque, donated by Mrs Marion Goodall and her daughters.

Mr Cooper thanked all present for the Award, and in particular was grateful for the support of his wife, Jenny.

**4. Minutes of the 2015 Meeting**

The Minutes of the 2015 Annual Parish Meeting were agreed and signed.

**5. Matters Arising**

There were no Matters Arising.

**6. Chairman's Report**

The Chairman read the report on Cllr Hickmott's behalf (attached).

**7. County Councillor's report**

Cllr Wickham:

I am going to start by reflecting on what Kent County Council has achieved over the last 4-5 years. This County Council budget 4 years ago was in excess of £1.1 billion, which will now shortly reduce to £890 million. This represents over a £200 million reduction (some 20% of our budget) whilst at the same time containing demand pressures on our services, predominately beyond our control, amounting to some £230 million. And incredibly with no substantive service reductions and indeed in many cases, improving the quality of our services with £430 million savings delivered.

Demand for our services has predominantly been in learning disability, adult social care and in children's services, as well as increases in concessionary fares and school transport costs. As demography changes, we are having to support an ageing population growing at 2% per year and similarly, growth in the school rolls and the number of young people entitled to school transport. In addition, we have been able to deliver sensible pay increases for our staff and inflationary related increases to our external providers of services.

Delivering the current year's revenue budget in balance has been a massive challenge, in particular adult social services demand and costs. However, I am pleased to report that the mid-year position indicating an £11 million overspend is now predicted to deliver a modest underspend at year-end following intensive management action across the authority. This will complete 16 years of delivering a balanced budget.

The tough financial challenges imposed by central government on local government over the last 5 years in their endeavour to reduce public expenditure and restore the public finances of this country, particularly for County Councils, who have had to endure the greatest degree of pain having lost out by only receiving a small proportion of the financial benefit of the New Homes Bonus.

In Kent, our salvation has been found through a relentless pursuit of efficiency, innovation and transformation to avoid reducing front line services, whilst at the same time freezing council tax to help residents for 3 out of the last 5 years.

Regrettably we have to propose a 1.998% increase in council tax charges in addition to the 2% social care precept, yielding an increase in council tax receipts of £37.7 million and leaves us again with the challenge of finding £81 million of savings.

So what's the fix, what's the solution?

- Continuing the relentless pursuit of efficiency, innovation and transformation in the way our services are delivered, saving a further £44 million, particularly building on focussed commissioning and procurement, targeted prevention avoiding high cost interventions (reducing demand) including transforming assessment processes and reducing property costs
- £26 million from debt management, financing and intelligent and prudent use of reserves
- £7 million additional income from Kent Commercial Services
- Keeping any service reductions to a minimum. There is a £2 million reduction in the highways maintenance budget (although we are hopeful that the pot hole fund announced in the Autumn Statement may fill this hole). Our fair proportion of the National figure, when announced would amount to some £1.4 million every year
- £0.4 million from a reduction in Member Grants

Cllr Wickham advised that KCC Highways is a consultee on the Hospital Field planning application; he recognised the impact the proposals would have because of the significant increase in traffic movements. He asked for comments from residents – these would help him formulate his response.

Cllr Wickham reported that he has given a grant of >£6500 to the village caretaker scheme, which will be used to fund the purchase of the Kubota ride-on-mower; the grant can only be used for capital expenditure and not running costs. He thought that the caretaker scheme will enable services to be delivered quickly, efficiently and effectively.

The county councillor asked that if residents have identified a reduction in services arising from the cost savings, they should let him know.

The floor was opened for questions.

- The reduced frequency of cutting of verges was welcomed because this had allowed butterflies to breed. Cllr Wickham agreed but stated that cuts are needed where safety is an issue, eg on corners.
- The Chairman noted that a strip of land on Hospital Field is owned by KCC, Cllr Howard replied that failure to serve the required notice on KCC had resulted in the planning application for the stables on the site to be deemed invalid by ABC. However, he noted that this piece of land is not included in the current planning application by Gladman for 125 houses.

## **8. Borough councillor's report**

Cllr Howard reported that he and Cllr Miss Martin were among the volunteers who carried out traffic surveys as part of the Village Protection Policy (VPP). Data generated can be used in comments on the Hospital Field planning application.

He advised that ABC has to reduce costs, with the target of being government grant-free by 2019. ABC will raise revenue by investing in property and collecting rents, eg International House and Park Mall.

It is hoped to attract more shops into the latter; businesses are being encouraged by lower rents and longer leases offered by ABC.

Building of the new college has begun after clearance of the site. The curriculum offered is being reviewed in light of local industries' needs, eg engineering and architecture. The college will have more than 1500 students and staff, which will increase footfall in the town centre.

There will be a consultation on the Victoria Way regeneration project, this may bring a microbrewery (from Chapel Down), Aldi supermarket and 400-600 apartments to the area. ABC will invest £1,600,000 in Victoria Park using money from S106 agreements from the project.

The Designer Outlet will double in size and a Model Railway Exhibition Centre will be built.

Cllr Howard noted that the Community Led Plan (CLP) is being implemented, and has been given a ward member grant of £1900. The ward member grant continues in 2016-2017 and applications are invited.

The Gladman proposals were first advertised in December in the local press, before the Parish Council and ABC had been made aware. Cllr Howard reported that a planning application has also been submitted by Gladman in Smarden. He noted that Cllr Miss Martin had introduced the concept of the VPP, and the Policy is now being drawn up by consultants. However, additional information and photos would be welcomed. If the Gladman application is given planning permission the VPP will have input into the design, specification and character.

Mr Peter Clayton asked if the government grant-free aim by ABC would result in government money being turned down. Cllr Howard replied that it would not, ABC is planning for the possibility of the withdrawal of government grants, likening it to the Parish Council's position with regard to the withdrawal of the Concurrent Functions Grant.

## **9. Financial Report**

The draft accounts were presented.

The Clerk advised that the Concurrent Functions Grant will be paid to the Parish Council by ABC after 2016, contrary to previous expectations.

Expenditure: Increased office expenses arise from the Village Green application – costs of copying evidence questionnaires and delivery of the application to KCC.

Expenditure on tree surgery was necessitated after an inspection of trees on the village green and the need for works identified.

ABC withdrew the provision of free dog waste bags, Smeeth Parish Council (with the agreement of Brabourne Parish Council) decided to continue provision on the grounds of public safety.

Transfer of CLP funds: Brabourne PC acted as banker to the CLP group. This was not Parish Council money but arose from grants given to the CLP, the funds were transferred after the CLP group opened its own bank account.

It was noted that the Council is on a sound financial footing, with the projected balance carried forward to 2016-2017 being approx £18,500.

## **10. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

The meeting closed at 8.00pm.

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## **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2015/2016**

During the last fiscal year Brabourne Parish Council has been continuing to work to maintain and improve the area for our parishioners. The beginning of the fiscal year was relatively quiet but things were happening behind the scenes.

The Village Caretaker Scheme slowly progressed co-ordinating the adjoining parishes of Smeeth, Mersham and Brook under the supervision of Michael Hinchcliffe – a Smeeth councillor. I am pleased to say a Village Caretaker has now been appointed in a full time position to carry out some of the local tasks in the villages at a cheaper cost than currently provided by ABC or KCC and we can now put the

money where we want it spent!

The Brabourne and Smeeth Community Led Plan is now up and running and forms the basis of how our villages view and react to a whole range of different issues affecting our local area. The effects of the CLP are now being seen – most recently Hoskins Pond in Church Road, Smeeth has been the scene of intense weekend activity to clear the rubbish, cut back the weeds and trees and make it an attractive feature once again. Another group is pursuing the design and cost of providing a footpath on the Warren to go from the Notice Board down to Childs Garage. Other projects are in hand and our thanks go to those volunteers involved in the CLP.

The Playing Fields have progressed with their ambitious project to improve the football field so that it can be put to full use once again and the Smeeth & Brabourne Football Club can play on its own ground. The whole area was taken up, levelled, new soil put down and the pitch re-seeded. The football field will be able to be used in the not too distant future. The Parish Council has supported this facility financially for many, many years and will continue to do so.

The Village Hall has recently refitted the kitchen and carried some much needed internal redecoration work. Once again, the Parish Council fully supports this village facility and provide ongoing financial support which helps to keep the hire rates at a low level for our parishioners, as it is a valuable local amenity used by many in the village.

The Brabourne website continues to remain a popular means of a nucleus of information and events in the village; and also a means of communicating with the PC. There have been getting on for 35,000 hits since the site opened.

The allotments continue to be popular and there are still some new plots available. The Allotment Society is now running the site with only a little input from the Parish Council. Anyone who wishes to take a plot should contact Sue Wood, our clerk.

ABC's "Call for Sites" in 2013/2014 requesting land owners to submit possible sites for development in the rural areas of the borough continues to roll on. This effectively put a stop to both parish councils trying to find sites for much needed Local Needs Housing – like Fortescue Place. However, ABC have now made their decisions about whether any of the proposed sites are suitable for residential development and these will be released shortly. This will mean that those sites that are NOT considered suitable for development may become available for Local Needs housing as the planning criteria are different.

Up until 23<sup>rd</sup> February this year there had been no major planning issues in the previous 10 months. Then we were hit with the biggest planning application the rural area of Ashford Borough has ever seen. This is, of course, Gladman Developments Ltd proposal for up to 125 dwellings on about 23 acres of Hospital Field between Lees Road and Canterbury Road.

We now have 2 mandates from the last PC meeting and a meeting at the village hall on 16<sup>th</sup> of this month to object to this application and Smeeth will also be objecting. This proposal would increase the number of dwellings in Brabourne parish by nearly 20% and in the village centre by about 30% - a staggering increase.

Virtually everyone will be affected in the parishes of Brabourne and Smeeth in one way or another. The significant increase in traffic generated by the proposals of over 600 vehicles movements per day, will affect not only those living in Brabourne Lees but also those living on the main routes to the A20. Those who live in East and West Brabourne will also be caught up in the extra traffic. There is also the concept of an urban expansion of the village centre into the countryside which will have serious visual and landscape impacts. There will be pressures on the schools, doctors' surgeries, community facilities, etc.

We are already putting strategies into place and creating defences; we will continue to explore every avenue to prevent the development on this area of land. Both parish councils will be strongly objecting to the application. We have already had countless meetings with our Borough councillors, a local lawyer, our MP and others about our objections. We are enlisting the help of other organisations such as CPRE,

Kent Downs AONB; we are also putting in place the Village Protection Policy and other strategies.

But we still need all parishioners to object or comment on the application. Please, go online to the ABC website, [ashford.gov.uk](http://ashford.gov.uk), Planning & Building Control page - the application number is 16/00303/AS - or write a letter to Planning Dept, Ashford Borough Council at the Civic Centre quoting this reference. Please comment by 9<sup>th</sup> April 2016 if you can or soon afterwards.

We cannot over-emphasise the importance of submitting individual comments to ABC as this will show the weight of public opinion more than anything else.

**If this application is approved it will inevitably alter the characteristics of our village forever.**

We will continue to make representations to ABC Planning Dept on all applications received in the parish to try and protect our village and rural areas.

Finally, my immense thanks once again to our Clerk, Sue Wood, without whom we would all be lost! Sue is now putting in double the hours she has done previously because of the Gladman planning application. Thank you Sue for your knowledge, advice, hard work and humour – you are a credit to the profession of a Parish Clerk and to our Parish Council.

Last year I said “Let us look forward to the next year with hope and vigour!” This year it is not so much hope as hard graft and vigour to assimilate all the objections we can raise against the Gladman application. They will probably appeal so the fight will go on for the rest of this year.

Mike Hickmott  
Chairman, Brabourne Parish Council.

21/03/2016

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