

Bethersden Parish Council

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ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on the 24th June 2021 in Bethersden Village Hall at 1800hrs

Present

Cllrs A Boyd (Chairman), C Simkins (KCC), J Blanford (ABC), 7 members of Bethersden PC and 23 members of the community.

Apologies for Absence

Cllr A Pickering (ABC)

Minutes of the Meeting of the Annual Parish Meeting held on the 10th April 2019.

These were taken as read.

Recreation Ground

Cllr E Allen and S Buckman along with a representative from Komplan gave a presentation on suggestions for the upgrading of the children`s play area at the recreation ground and the costs involved. Previously presentations had been given to other groups in the Parish including the local school.

The idea of all the consultations is to inform the Parish Council of the agreed best way forward. A question and answer session followed.

Twinning with Gruson (France)

A visual presentation was given of the village of Gruson along with the promotional presentation of Bethersden that had been set to Gruson.

The Parish Clerk gave an overview of the progress that had been made to date despite Covid. He reported on the conversations he had had with the French and how it had been discussed that they would come over for the Queen`s Jubilee during the first week of June 2021. He said they were very positive to go ahead especially to establish a link with our local primary school. A budget of £1K had been initially set- a-side by the Parish Council for startup costs. It was hoped that as soon as travel restrictions were lifted a small delegation would visit each other later this year.

The George Public House

Mr Alex Withington gave a presentation, which included a power point presentation on the progress to date on their scheme to re-open The George Public House. He encouraged support from the community and announced that he along with Roger Kelly, Joanne Brannan and Robin Draper were being advised by the Plunkett Foundation.

County Councillors Report

Cllr C Simkins gave an overview of some of the issues that KCC are involved with such as social care, education, help for small businesses, support for low-income families and the problem around financial stability linked to an increase in costs including Covid. An increase in funding was received from central government.

This year KCC increased their share of the Community Charge by 4.9% and are also involved with the infrastructure such as roads and schools, etc. at Chilmington.

Borough Councillors Report

Cllr J Blanford reported that ABC had the lowest Council Tax in Kent. ABC has been working with foodbanks and charities during the pandemic.

There is a plan to plant 135,000 trees in and around Ashford this year, one for every person in the borough of Ashford. They are also recycling 55% of collected refuse at the moment as well as trialing a new digital planning system for the government, one of 10 areas selected.

Chairman`s Annual Report 2019/21

These certainly have been turbulent years, of the like we, as both a Parish and Country, have not seen or suffered before!

I am delighted to report that your Parish Council members elected two years ago Joyce Crannis, Eavanne Allen, Sam Buckman, Gareth Burnett, Keith Brannan, Keith Mitchell, Philip Boyd and Philip Buss are still in post as is our Clerk, I wish to thank them all on your behalf for their efforts supporting the community in such strange and dangerous health situation over this time

I wish to thank on your behalf, Cllr Brannan for his support as Vice Chairman over many years prior to his resignation.

During the year Cllr Burnett was elected Vice Chairman. I thank him for his support over the lockdown periods when we could not hold live meetings.

The Clerk along with the Parish Council, has again had to suffer more stressful, unnecessary, financial, legal disruption and as well as mental stress - relating to matters from before the election, partly from the previous Parish Council, that are now resolved. I thank him for his help, advice and resilience in those tortuous events

On behalf of the community thank Cllr. Simkins, Cllr. Blanford, Cllr. Pickering, for providing support and advice to the Parish Council. PCSO Kyle Farnfield and Kathy Carter, our Community Warden, your law officers and your village contractor for all their hard work. Attempts to find a local person for this work has been unsuccessful

In the last year your Parish Council has not been able to meet in person in the Village Hall due to Covid-19 until this May, when the Government refused to allow Zoom or Teams Parish Council meetings to continue. All future meetings will have to be "in-person". We even held a meeting in the open air of the George Field – in the rain!

The council, for an early part of the lockdown period, was run daily by the Chairman and Vice Chairman Council advised by the Clerk, later full meetings were successfully held on "Zoom".

We thank the public for their participation using zoom links to the meetings.

Thanks go to all the Council Members who have appraised the planning applications in their designated areas during lockdown, despite the logistical difficulties that arose within Covid-19 restrictions.

Our thanks go to Marc Stevenson of Stevenson's Rocking Horses, for the assistance with renovating the Village sign following the sterling efforts of Cllrs. Philip Boyd and Philip Buss dismantling the old post and sign, To Cllrs. Gareth Burnett, Phil Buss and to Marc Stevenson for re-erecting the sign on its new oak post. NB. the time capsule was not disturbed!

During the year the flooding problems at Forge Fields in the Bethersden Stream continued, but, with Environment Agency permits and the kind assistance of Chris Dickens of Chorus Homes Developments, the Bethersden Stream was cleared out from School Road Culvert to below Norton Lane culvert. This has been a great success and helped mitigate the flooding in the Forge Fields. At the School Road end of the stream, the mouths of the two culvert pipes at the culvert - upstream of the

School Road culvert still needs watching to prevent debris blocking them. KCC and the Environment Agency continue to research the replacement culvert under the School Road / Church Hill.

Serious flooding occurred four times since Christmas at Baileys Fields on the Ashford Road requiring continuous attendance of two water tankers, and on one occasion an additional two fire appliances were required to support residents attempts to pump away the water. Despite this the houses were so badly affected internally and an aerial photograph as seen in the Kentish Express showed the houses standing in the middle of a huge lake of water. Houses at Forge corner were also affected.

We thank Joanne Davies with Phillip Chapple of KCC Highways, for arranging the work that has since been carried out by KCC Highways - replacing a road side pipe that had "bellied" and overhauling of the main road drain from Kiln Lane leading to Forge Hill. There has not been such a heavy storm of water since to test the outcome. We certainly hope that it has stopped these distressing events

Work is planned to clear and upgrade the stream flowing through "Newtown" to assist in helping water to clear faster from Forge Hill on route to the Bethersden Stream in Forge Fields.

The Bethersden Stream maintenance, passing through Forge Fields, presents a problem with access to clear out the Stream with miscellaneous of domestic structures within or over its boundaries. Reports that occupiers of adjacent properties throwing waste into the stream is a cause of considerable concern and must stop - as a blockage to downstream culverts could have catastrophic consequences to properties in Forge Fields.

It is exasperating to report that the serious problem regards construction and use of the surface water distribution and the attenuation tank is still going on in the George Field. Again, we have not been able to meet the relevant ABC' staff due to covid-19 but the Parish Council's position is that as was signed off by ABC as "being in compliant order", this despite opposition from the Parish Council, therefore we consider ABC to be liable for rectification of the faults that were in evidence at the time in the ABC Freeflow report . The surface over the "tank" is now sinking! We hope to be able to pursue this vigorously after this pandemic is over. A property over the ditch drain has suffered flooding from uncontrolled flow and the ditch from the field has been covered over.

The legal documentation regards the George Field / George Grove boundary still ponders on The community continues to enjoy the new surfaced paths on the George field.

The ditch has been cleared out on the bottom of The George Field.

Several times the boundary fence between The George Grove and the George Field has been hit and damaged by delivery vans.

One time this winter, as Baileys Field was flooded, so were the properties on the North side of The Street. Thanks go to Cllr Buss who is negotiating for the ditches and pipe work, from these properties to Norton Lane, to be cleared out by the riparian owners to improve the water flow away from the affected properties. This is ongoing

Ashford Borough Council have surveyed the waste and dog waste bins in the village. The ABC policy now is that the dog waste can go into the general waste bin and they will be removing the existing dog bins. If a rubbish bin is not at the site of a dog bin, then a rubbish bin will be put in its place,

A bus shelter has been provided for the users in The Dene and Forge Fields along with users on the A28. We thank the Peter Adams trust for their generous contribution towards the cost.

It is with great regret that following a meeting where Ashford Borough Council considered that at the advanced stage of the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan, we could not lawfully proceed with such a greatly dissimilar requirements between those identified in the evidence already submitted to the inspector and the recent new housing survey and with the changes in the Parish boundary. The evidence submitted earlier was now no longer fit for purpose.

The alterations being made acknowledged the Parish Council's efforts to achieve a Neighbourhood Plan. We wish to thank Cllrs. Brannan, Mitchell and past councillor Muddell for their sterling work in promoting and organising the plan along with the participants on various groups

This work involved up to 50 community members working for over 44 months but had come to an end. This failure was caused by poor advice, interminable internal opposition, delays due to the passage of time, changes in National Planning legislation and the future National planned changes

about to be brought about by the Government's new proposals for the National Neighbourhood Plan all of which contributed to the evidence being out of date,

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Bethersden was one of the initial parishes to prepare for a Neighbourhood Plan started in 2012 to 2030 and there was little practical knowledge available at that time. Only a small number of parishes have succeeded in accomplishing the creation of their Neighbourhood Plan and of those, some are having to update them already.

I appreciate that words of thanks hardly begin to cover the disappointment felt by the participants, but solace can be taken that the information gleaned, during the preparation of our plan is being used by ABC for future planning aspirations in the community. For example, the recent housing survey that indicates the housing types and numbers needed for Bethersden in the future.

Ashford Borough Council lead planning officer, believes that the best future plan is for Bethersden Parish Council to obtain more local needs and affordable housing through the strengthening of the Ashford Borough Council's local plan. This will negate the need for parishes to undertake complex and expensive research operation's - both financial and professional -with willing inexperienced volunteers input, rather than to try and meet the requirements of a revised Bethersden Neighbourhood Planning process when most of the existing participants are exasperated and exhausted.

Attempts were made to progress the prospect of building affordable houses in the area north of the Village Hall. but this was unsuccessful at this time.

At the beginning of the lockdown the Parish Council and the Bethersden Film Club created the Bethersden Community Support Scheme. The community is very indebted to Chris Winch, Jan Guntrip, Sonia Lassnig, Dawn Walker and Marion Draper who during the shutdown, did sterling work for so many months -organising volunteers to distribute food and providing comfort to so many people, including collecting food from Fareshare which was funded from: –The Peter Adams Trust, The Bethersden Trust, The Godinton Trust, Kent Community Funding and the Parish Council. Not only for the food distribution but giving support to those who were vulnerable and living on their own for such a long time. So many people in this Parish owe so much to so few. The Parish Council is very disappointed that the initial report that KCC Highways made regards the safe crossing of the A28. They decided there was insufficient pedestrian traffic, crossing the A28 at Forge Hill junction, and that the crossing did not justify the £70,000.00 to 100,000 build cost. The Parish Council disagreed with this decision and formed a working group, led by Cllr Burnett, to seek evidence and promote the need for a safe crossing. A Parish pedestrian use and traffic survey was made and results analysed, but due to covid-19 we have been unable to proceed until it is safe for KCC operatives to meet us on the ground. The motivation at the moment is to extend the footpath on the South side of the A28 from where it ends opposite Stevenson's factory to opposite Blackpits footpath, where pedestrian vision is reasonable both ways for a safer crossing point which will give access to the school and the village centre via Blackpits footpath, Chester Avenue or the George Field footpath.

Discussions are also being made to extend the footpath from Big Tree Farm to opposite Kiln Lane to provide safe passage for pedestrians wishing to enjoy a safe circular walk of the village.

Attempts to set up fixed speed meters on the A28 continue to be thwarted but once the restrictions regard covid-19 are clear, we will again push for a resolution. The traffic is getting faster and heavier and it is continuing to be an even more dangerous road

The mobile speed meter group is still awaiting the repair of the speed indicator unit

The Tennis Club has received a twenty-one-year lease giving access to various grants and sporting loans. The MUGA court use by the tennis club is regulated and the times the tennis club can use it is advertised on the board. The club is contracted to remove the net on the MUGA court when not in use.

The pitch is showing considerable wear and tear in front of the goals and work is planned in the closed season for ground repairs to be carried out

The playground working group of Cllrs. Sam Buckman and Eavanne Allen, are to be thanked for the time they have spent and have put forward ideas for renewing the equipment and would like to have input from the users, again the covid-19 stopped progress but we hope tonight's meeting will have a positive result and enable the process to go forward.

We had hoped to hold this Annual Parish Assembly in May when we thought the end of lockdown and a normal open meeting with plans and designs for the public to view and comment could be

held to prepare for the work to be done in 2021 this could however could be delayed until next year.

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Mischief abuse and vandalism still occur, involving youths, on the recreation field and in the village. This spoils the quality of life for the community. Law enforcement personnel are aware

The resurfacing of the carpark and the pavement to the pavilion has been a great success. It was considered that the cars parking in the Rec carpark were so badly parked that they used up valuable space. The white lines have allowed a lot more cars to park in the area.

TISS youth football club have taken on the football pitch and are busy running youth teams for both sexes. Bethersden players are welcome to join in.

The legal processes for the donated land transfer, from Mr Tim Stubbs to Bethersden PCC, to extend the St Margaret's churchyard has finally been completed.

Bethersden Parish Council has been approached by a French village of Gruson in Normandy to form a twinning between our countries and communities. It has been resolved to form a twinning association with the two authorities. We are going to give a short presentation tonight and further information will be available on the website. It has the support of the school and other organisations in the village and likely to occur in 2022.

VE Day – from August 2019 a committee of the community worked towards having celebrations for VE Day. A great amount of work had gone into planning the day but the Covid-19 outbreak in February 2020 stopped the process in its tracks. It is hoped to revive the enterprise again in conjunction with the Parish Twinning for the celebration of the H M Queen's Platinum Jubilee June 2022.

The Group would be delighted to have more volunteers – please contact Tracy Laws.

Following Government legislation, the Parish Council had to revise its presence on the internet website to incorporate the needs of disadvantaged community members and other requirements to comply with the Law. The council at the moment fund both the Bethersden Community website and the Bethersden Parish Council website, each can be connected through the links. They continue to provide a useful point of information for the community.

We thank Leo Lyons who maintains the parish council site and Nerys Withington for her loyal work on the community site.

We regret that the owner of The George pub has not come to an agreement regarding the future sale of the Pub. Attempts are being made to research the possibility of retaining the building as a pub and as a community asset or a commercial enterprise. It is a major part of the heritage of The Street, and the Village. The car park is also in the mix of the process

Hedges are becoming overgrown in public highway verges in the village causing pedestrians to have to walk out onto the road to get by, or in the case of Blackpits the footpath. While this is really a KCC problem to enforce, it would be appreciated if adjacent owners took action and cut the hedges back to their boundary.

Your Parish council has considered the provision of a vehicle recharging point for the village but does not support the idea at this time.

The Parish had a donation of 40 odd tree whips from the Woodland Trust, which were distributed by the Gardeners Society

Progress is being made to use the telephone box, situated by the post office and owned by the Parish Council as a community book store as well as a phone facility.

The Courtlands development Sect 106 monies awarded by Ashford Borough Council has been received by Bethersden Parish Council. it covers the Parish legal costs related to the transfer of the land to extend the graveyard.

The Parish Council has acted as fund holder for Ashford Borough Council Sect 106 monies in relation to the Cricket Club grant. The cost of the posts & netting, road way in, power cable to shed, removal of asbestos has been paid

The Sect. 106 money for the Bears Lane development that had been expected by the Bethersden Parish council has been redirected to ABC. The normal terms of Sect 106 is that - as the parish has to provide burials, play areas and community facilities for the extra members of the community from a new development, a portion of the Sect. 106 is directed to the Parish Council. Even if ABC was using the Community infrastructure Levy system, Bethersden should receive 15% of the sum. HGV warning signs appear to have had a moderating effect on heavy vehicles using Parish country lanes.

The parish council's HIP (Highway Improvement Plan) with KCC Highways includes the provision for resurfacing The Street. Dates for the work have not yet been given.

Financial Report

The Parish Clerk gave an overview of the current financial position. The Internal Auditor gave the Parish Council a clean bill of health. With matters now beginning to stabilize it was possible this year to reduce the precept by about 20%. Both receipts and payments were down on the previous year. The later by £47K.