

Bethersden Parish Council

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Minutes of the Council Meeting held on the 14th February 2024 in Bethersden Village Hall at 1900hrs.

Reports

Appendix A: Cllr J Blanford (ABC) and A Pickering (ABC)

01/2024 Present

Cllrs A Boyd (Chairman), E Allan, K Brannan, P Buss, J Crannis, A Jordan, K Mitchell and C Tearle (Parish Clerk) and eight members of the public.

02/2024 Apologies

J Blanford (ABC) and S Buckman

03/2024 Declarations of Interest

None

04/2024 Minutes of the Meeting of the 13th December 2023

It was resolved to approve and sign these.

05/2024 Election by Co-option of a Parish Councillor

Mike Peters was proposed by Cllr A Boyd and seconded by Cllr K Brannan. There being only one candidate Mr Peters was duly declared elected and signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office. He then took his place.

06/2024 Hoads Wood

A number of residents attended the Council Meeting and the Chairman closed the meeting to give these residents an opportunity to express their views. These were formulated by Mark Elliot and are shown below:

“I stand before you to express not just my own concerns, but the collective dismay and frustration of our community over the environmental disaster that has unfolded within Hoads Wood. Since our initial reports of criminal activity on the 13th July 2023 and multiple reports after that some 20-30 trucks (many with no number plates) a day began to dump domestic waste in Hoads Wood, our community has watched in disbelief as no substantive action was taken to secure the site until the 16th January 2024. This delay has allowed the unlawful dumping of waste to reach a staggering volume over a 4 acre area, approximately 15 feet deep in places, within an ancient woodland and a designated SSSI.

The fact that the initial arrival of a single lorry load of waste from July did not trigger an immediate and robust response is a profound disappointment to us all. We understand the

importance of gathering evidence for enforcement actions, but we cannot accept this as a justification for allowing the situation to escalate to the point of an environmental and local community crises. This lack of timely intervention has not only facilitated the degradation of a protected site and the wildlife therein but has also significantly impacted the health and financial well being of the local community.

We feel deeply let down by the failure to prevent this disaster, underscoring a desperate need for accountability and action. As such, we are calling for a community meeting at the earliest convenience, chaired by Damian Green MP as a neutral party. We believe it is imperative for this meeting to include representative from ABC, KCC, the EA and the Kent Police.

Our demand for a community meeting is driven by a desire to understand:

1. How this situation was allowed to develop.
2. To seek assurance that measures will be taken to remediate the damage with – and we emphasise with immediate effect.
3. To establish clear protocols for preventing future incidents like this.

This is an opportunity for all parties involved to demonstrate their commitment to our community and the protection of our natural environment. We trust this call for action with the urgency and seriousness it deserves. After all our natural heritage, community well-being, and trust in local governance and national agencies are at stake”.

The Parish Council resolved to attempt to organise a public meeting in the village hall chaired by Damian Green MP with representatives for all the agencies involved.

07/2024 Planning Applications

- a) To consider the following applications

PA/2023/2218-Luton House, The Street, Bethersden, TN26 3AG
Oak Framed Cart Shed.

The Parish Council supports this application

PA/2023/2270-Bull Lane Fm, Bull Lane, Bethersden, TN26 3HA
Relocation of existing vehicular access to property

The Parish Council supports this application.

PA/2023/2391-East Quarter Cottage, Etchden Rd, Bethersden, TN26 3DS
Erection of a replacement dwelling with associated parking area, following the demolition of the existing garage.

The Parish Council supports this application.

PA/2023/1340-Land North East of Sewerage Works, Norton Lane, Bethersden.
Change of use of land to residential and erection of one detached dwelling with detached garage and associated landscaping and biodiversity enhancements

The Parish Council maintain their strong objection to further development off Norton Lane and completely disagree with the case officers view that it will not be visually intrusive-

This application has not been considered in relation to another large detached house approved by the same officer for the same applicant under reference PA/2022/2679 and again developing what had been previously approved for equestrian use with an original condition preventing it from becoming a residential plot. (This is what this Council considered to be Planning Creep)

This a narrow country lane used as a “rat run” for commercial traffic with no footpaths and directly serving both the primary school and Scout hut with young

pedestrian traffic.

The access is proposed to be shared with the Sewage Works and the Scout Hut and will present unnecessary danger to the existing children using the scout hut. Its proximity to the Sewage works means it will suffer from pungent odor from the south westerly prevailing wind notwithstanding the scant report and assertion of the "odor report" to the contrary submitted with the scheme.

The drainage at this lowest part of Norton Lane is historically bad and suffers from a poorly constructed road culvert which often causes flooding to the house garden directly opposite this site-

We consider this to be further development creep into open countryside, the loss of yet another equestrian field to present an unacceptable form of development because of road safety, drainage and environmental considerations and should be refused.

b) The following application has been refused

22/00571/AS-Land north of Possingham Farmhouse, Ashford Rd, Great Chart, TN26 1JR Outline application for the development of up to 655 residential dwellings (including 30% affordable dwellings) to consider access only (excluding internal circulation routes), with all other matters reserved.

08/2024 Chairmans Report

We wish to record our serious concerns for King Charles III's health and wish him a speedy recovery

May I wish you all a happy and successful New Year from the Bethersden Parish Council. Hopefully a new Parish Councillor will be appointed at the meeting tonight.

Following the illegal incursion to Hoads Wood 24th July 2023, I am delighted to report that, following political press, TV and legal representations both local and National, regarding Hoads Wood resulted, at last, in legal action being to close down this site and has been granted a court order - but only for six months.

How long, or if the perpetrators will abide with this order only time will tell. Meantime the debris and destruction stay! It is unknown what will follow. Our thanks to all the various people who have worked so hard behind the scenes, including our MP, to close this fly-tip down.

We will work on together with representatives of the local community and parish councils of Hoads Wood along with among others, our MP Damian Green.

We are disappointed that the newly elected Ashford Borough Council, being politically green in emphasis, has not taken action to support these local residents

The Possingham development proposals next to Chilmington has been refused by Ashford Borough Council planning.

The flood mitigation work by KCC Highways and the Environment Agency and others, stood up to the test in recent heavy rains, with the exception of flooding of some gardens in Baileys Fields and minor flooding of gardens in Forge Fields. The A28 road storm water at Baileys Fields was unable to get into the road drain gullies due to lack of gully cleaning maintenance work by KCC, caused them to be blocked with water overtopped into the local gardens. One of the local senior pensioners and the Parish Council Vice Chairman, worked through the night into the next morning unblocking and carrying away debris from these gulleys, relieving the risk of more serious damage. We thank them for their diligence. Inspection of the water attenuation systems in the new "Oaks" estate, to the rear of Baileys Fields, is to be made to check they are fit for purpose.

Investigations regarding the residential area north of The Street is now limited to the pipe under the Manse lawn. The local residents reportedly have rectified the other drainage problems.

The major problem of flooding upstream from the culvert under Mill Road, from the Mill Road, Bridle path and Forge Hill by the Thorne Estate is still outstanding. A solution regards the flood mitigation for the area downstream of this culvert is being investigated by the KCC drainage team.

A volunteer has come forward as a flood warden, training will soon take place.

Thanks are due to KCC Highways for the overall flood improvements already made.

A meeting is being arranged to complete the Bethersden Flood and Emergency resilience plan with ABC, EA and the Parish Council.

The repairs to the George Grove fence are in hand but cost is very high as spare parts are not now available. Steps are being taken to stop vehicles reaching the fence with a steel barrier. It would be appreciated if any local constituents could note registration details of offending vehicles damaging Parish Council property, so the perpetrator can be charged for the damage cost that otherwise falls on all of us through the local council tax.

Ashford Borough Council working with Maidstone and Swale Borough and District Councillors have appointed a new waste collection contractor – SUEZ.

The existing BIFFA staff are transferring to Suez so they will still know where everyone is. The transfer details will soon be published, but some collection days will change. The centre of this operation will be Ashford.

The parish is in the process with updating the KCC Parish Highway Improvement Plan.

The parish council is still trying to get ABC to meet to with The Borough Councillors, ABC planners and Drainage expert regards the George Field attenuation tank. It is about 9 years since the development was completed and this problem started.

The Parish Council is still trying to get a conclusion regards the land registry transfer of the George Field Boundary fence and George Grove

The village newsletter has been prepared by Cllr Brannan and being circulated. We thank everyone for their input and the parishioners who have carried out local deliveries to mitigate the postal costs

A vender has made enquiries regards providing a weekly mobile pizza service to the village

The annual ROSPA inspection has been completed for the playground. This will be considered and the minor repairs carried out. Work continues to identify the improvements to the play equipment. The old Wicksteed Wheel, so popular with the users, is showing increased decline, the clerk is seeking replacement parts. The soft surfaces put in recently are raising on the edges in some places. This will be referred back to the contractor.

In the meantime, it would be appreciated if children were refrained from “picking” at it.

The soft surface under the slide and the bolted joints on slide, while it has passed inspection, consideration needs to be made regards its repair or its replacement.

The Clerk continues to seek financial assistance for grants for this and other community works.

The CCTV system on the Recreation Ground is up and running but one camera has developed a fault which is being rectified. A backup recording system is in place should any vandalism of the cameras occur.

Again, one of the two fire extinguishers has gone missing from the pavilion, It has been replaced twice before and I would ask for guidance regards spending of yet another £60 on its replacement.

A metal fabricator has attended to quote for the repairs to the youth shelter

Attempts will continue to try and communicate with the hierarchy of KCC Highways regards the installation of a speed meter, speed watch and a safe crossing of the A28, as they emphasise their control over these matters.

Plans are being made to publicly acknowledge the “D- Day 80” event by holding a public low-key entertainment on the George Field 6th June 2024. Tracey Laws is leading on this event for which we are very grateful. Any members of the community who can help before or on the day please contact Tracey.

A rough draft of the day has been received by the clerk.

St. Margaret’s church on Palm Sunday 24th March 2024 and they are using the George Field to meet and set off to the service with two donkeys.

KCC Winter aid - facts have been circulated on social media or through the clerk.

The book swap is popular but is still suffering from users swamping the telephone box with non-book items and leaving books on the floor that get wet and have to be dumped.

Please try and maintain one book out one book in.

Nothing further has been heard regards to the development on the Stevenson’s site.

The parish council, as tier one of the political representations in England, and with the current international threats, should we be looking at reviewing civil defence for the community?

09/2024 Bethersden Design Statement and Newsletter

Cllr K Brannan reported that subsequent to the December meeting only about a third of the leaflets had been either delivered or posted. There had not been any feedback from those that had.

10/2024 Finance

- a) To approve the schedule of payments and bank balances.

1st February 2024	£
Lloyds Bank – Treasurers Account	43,356.48
Lloyds Bank – George Field Account	14,215.99
Co-op Bank	21,128.01
Income	
Lloyds Bank Int	14.67
ABC – (S106)	400.49
ABC – (S106)	275.00
Tennis Club (Tokens)	686.00
Expenditure	
C Tearle (Salary & Expenses) – (2 months)	2,500.07
Stamps and Envelopes (Bethersden Design Statement)	550.56

HMRC – PAYE	1,085.78
*Countrywide Grounds Maintenance	579.34
*Chris Buckman (Village Handyman)	120.00
*Bethersden Village Hall (Newsletter)	25.00
Bethersden Village Hall (Feb Meeting)	28.00
*Leo Lyons Digital (Website Maintenance)	375.00
*Print Junction	214.23
*Net World Sports (Bethersden CC S106 agreement)	10,750.00
*Bookers (Printing Paper)	25.79
*SSE (Rec Grnd)	717.04

*Information Commissioners Office	40.00
*Business Stream	16.28
The Play Inspection Co. Ltd	199.20
InkXpress (Printing Cartridges)	187.20
T Laws (Hurricane Lamp)	14.99
C Buckman (Village Handyman)	150.00
Countrywide Gnds Maintenance	579.34
Amazon (2 Basketball Nets)	13.58
Parish On-Line	32.40
Bethersden Village Hall (Oct Meeting)	25.00
Baxtech 4G Networks	2,907.96
• Previously paid	

b) On-line Banking

Following an extensive discussion it was decided not to proceed. A motion to go to on-line banking was proposed by Cllr K Brannan, not seconded, so therefore fell.

11/2024 KALC Community Awards

A nomination has been submitted by the Parish Council.

12/2024 Recreation Ground

It was reported that the CCTV system recently installed at the recreation ground was now operational.

A group of councillors have decided to have a site meeting following receipt of the annual inspection report. They will report back to the next meeting.

13/2024 The George Field

It was decided to accept the quote from Mr T Laws to repair the fencing.

14/2024 Highway Improvement Plan

It was resolved to deal with this next month after the Chairman and the Parish Clerk have reviewed the current plan and situation.

15/2024 Dates of the Council Meetings for 2024

These meetings will happen in Bethersden Village Hall at 1900hrs.

To agree the following dates: 14/2; 13/3; 10/4; 8/5; 12/6; 10/7; 11/9; 9/10; 13/11 and the 11/12 respectively

The Annual Parish Meeting will on the 10th April 2024 starting at 1800hrs.

16/2024 Date of the Next Meeting

This will be on the 13th March 2024 in Bethersden Village Hall at 1900hrs.

17/2024 Legal Matters

The Clerk reported that was nothing further to report.

Appendix A

Cllr Jessamy Blanford (ABC)

First my apologies for not being able to attend this meeting. Unfortunately, once again it clashes with the Borough Council's Planning Cttee meeting which, as chair, I have to attend.

Hoad's Wood: I am especially sorry not to be able to take part and listen to the discussion on this issue. The BC tell me that they are not concerned with Hoad's Wood as an environmentally protected site it falls under the Environment Agency. The KCC is also involved as they are responsible for the disposal of rubbish – particularly illegally dumped rubbish. I have emailed the EA and asked them to update me on what action they propose. Telephoning simply produced a stonewall response. I will be in touch with the Chair of the parish council to see what action may have been proposed this evening.

Suez refuse collection: Next month, around 24th March, Biffa will be replaced by a French company called Suez. The collection will be much the same as currently, although they will not be collecting small electrical goods or fabrics. The BC will be updating all Parishes on the changes shortly.

Picturehouse, Ashford: no doubt you have read in the press that the owners of the Picturehouse intend to close the business in Elwick Place. This would be very detrimental to that part of Ashford and so ABC have decided to take over the management of the cinema for six months, including the staff and the equipment, in the hope of putting it on a sound basis and finding another company to take over the running of the business. The site is owned by the BC. There have already been enquiries. The Picturehouse and Cineworld are owned by the same company. When the picture house was opened we were told that it would show a wider range of films and would also show performances of ballets and operas from London and abroad. Unfortunately this never happened. I think one of the biggest mistakes was in showing much the same films as Cineworld at Bybrook and, secondly, not advertising what was being shown. You could drive past the Picturehouse and there was never a poster inviting you in or publicising what was on show that week. Even on the website it was extremely difficult to find out what was on.

Road closures: I have forwarded an email to the clerk and chair of the PC showing road closures in the vicinity of Bethersden over the next few weeks.

Cllr A Pickering (ABC)

ABC is in the process of moving to International House from the current civic centre. The current plan is to have office staff in the office for only 2 days a week which many do not support.

All council house repairs are now to be handled "in-house", whilst a new contractor will take over the waste collection service.

The new customs facility at Sevington operated by ABC now has 125 staff.