

WEST MALLING PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD ON 31ST MAY 2022, 7.30PM
AT VILLAGE HALL, NORMAN ROAD, WEST MALLING

Present: Mrs Trudy Dean (Chair)
Ms Gwyneth Barkham
Mrs Linda Javens
Mr Keith Mann
Ms Sara Margetts
Mrs Lorna Miles
Mrs Yvonne Smyth
Ms Min Stacpoole
Mr Peter Stevens
Mr David Thompson

Also Present: 6 Residents
Mr Matt Christmas (founder of My Street Heritage Project)
Mr Nathan Martin (Secretary to West Malling Chamber of Commerce)

Minute		Action by	Action taken	Response
1.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were received from Ms Medhurst			
2.	MINUTES of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 12 th April 2021 were approved and signed.			
3.	MATTERS ARISING from the minutes not otherwise on the agenda - none			
4.	WELCOME BACK TO THE HIGH STREET			
4.1	<p>WEST MALLING CHAMBER OF COMMERCE</p> <p>Members welcomed Mr Nathan Martin to the meeting who was in attendance as the new Secretary of West Malling Chamber of Commerce.</p> <p>Mr Martin explained to members that himself and the new Chairman, Mr James Gardner (both of Viners & Sons) had recently taken over the running of the chamber and that they were hoping to engage with shops and businesses over the coming weeks and months.</p> <p>It was recognised that this is a very difficult time for shops and businesses and that it was important that the town had a Chamber of Commerce that could be of support.</p>			
	Mr Martin left the meeting at 7.50 pm			
4.2	<p>Members welcomed Matt Christmas to the meeting. Mr Christmas is the founder of My Street History, a history project which focuses on properties in West Malling and in particular those on the High Street.</p> <p>https://mystreethistory.co.uk/</p>			

	<p>Mr Christmas provided an overview of the project and took members through how the site is laid out and information obtained. It is hoped that residents or those interested in the history of the town will want to submit information to the site.</p> <p>Mr Christmas received funding from the Welcome Back Fund to assist with the funding of this project.</p>				
5.	<p><u>COMMITTEE REPORTS</u></p> <p>The following reports were read:</p>				
5.1	<p>REPORT OF THE AMENITIES COMMITTEE</p> <p>AMENITIES COMMITTEE REPORT TO ANNUAL PARISH MEETING</p> <p>The early part of the year was spent reopening the facilities following a prolonged period of lockdown, and it was pleasing to see the equipment being used again. Sadly, the zipwire broke during the year, and there was a delay in being able to finance its replacement, but I can now report that the equipment has been repaired. We are pleased to report that a new contract has been agreed for the rent of the village hall garage and that the tennis courts remain popular. We had the sad news during the year that two of the lime trees in the churchyard were increasingly decayed and that they needed to be cut down. This will be taking place shortly. We have instigated some new plans to improve our hedge maintenance for environmental benefits – and these will be seen over the next two years as we move to a two-year rotation on some hedges. The committee have been pleased to see a steady improvement in the performance with the Borough Council's contractors for household waste collections, however a number of issues still remain, particularly in respect of waste bins and dog waste bins across the town.</p> <p>Peter Stevens 23 April 2022</p>				
5.2	<p>Highways, Transportation & Streetlighting Committee Report</p> <p>Highways Committee – Annual Parish Meeting May 2022</p> <p>In December 2021, Nick Stapleton stood down as Parish Councillor for West Malling and the position of Chair of the Highways Committee became vacant. Nick did some excellent work whilst Chair, particularly many hours spent co-ordinating Speedwatch. I would like to pass on my thanks to him.</p> <p>Speedwatch We have unfortunately been unable to continue with any Speedwatch sessions so far this year. The equipment we have is old, heavy, and cumbersome and malfunctions. The Parish is looking into purchasing new equipment that we believe is presently being trialled by the Police. We would hope to get this up and running again towards the latter half of the year but will need volunteers to help with the monitoring. Speed of traffic in the Parish is still of great concern and we continue to press KCC and the Police to do what they can to alleviate this problem.</p> <p>Buses We expressed our serious concerns about the reduction in the bus service and assisted residents with submitting their comments.</p> <p>Street Lighting Parish owned streetlights were surveyed in 2021 and are due another review later this year. Two columns were replaced and general maintenance has been completed. All our old Mercury lamps have finished being changed over to LED.</p> <p>Working with the Climate and Biodiversity Action Group, we are looking at EV charging points particularly whether we can make use of our lampposts to provide electric charging for resident's cars. This has been successfully achieved in other towns. We need to see if it is</p>				

	<p>feasible here regarding both power supply and accessibility.</p> <p>Road and Pavement Maintenance We are continuing to monitor the roads, pavements and road signage in the main area of West Malling. There has been a long-term issue with the St Mary’s Church end of the High Street, even after a couple of repairs the road is still badly dipped. KCC plan to complete and more extensive repair on Sunday 29th May.</p> <p>St Leonard’s Tower We liaised with KCC over the ownership with the ‘pond’ area by St Leonard’s Tower. English Heritage owns the Tower & KCC the road and drainage but not the pond which is rather overgrown and in need to some attention.</p> <p>Sara Margetts</p>			
<p>5.3</p>	<p>Planning Committee</p> <p>Annual Report 2022</p> <p>With planning one of the most important challenges facing West Malling and surrounding areas at the minute, members of the Planning Committee have worked hard to ensure that the views of local residents are heard.</p> <p>The Planning Inspector’s decision to request the withdrawal of TMBC’s Local Plan and the lack of a five year supply of new housing means that our town continues to be vulnerable to inappropriate development. Unfortunately, the impacts of this are beginning to be seen and felt with exploratory works taking place on Forty Acre field and large numbers of new houses beginning to fill previously green space between St Leonard’s Street, Orwell Spike and Kings Hill despite objections from the Parish Council.</p> <p>In addition, the Committee has continued to scrutinise private residential development, taking particular care to ensure that modifications and extensions to existing dwellings or commercial property does not negatively affect the town’s unique heritage and environs.</p> <p>Looking ahead the Planning Committee will continue to express the discontent of local residents on new and continuing planning applications that will not benefit both old and new West Malling residents alike. In particular, we will continue to monitor progress and engage as necessary with the plans for Broadwater Farm in order to mitigate against the worst aspects of the development, including access roads and the loss of green space and agricultural land. Similarly, we will continue to engage comprehensively with the Local Plan process from the results of the initial call for sites through until final adoption of an agreed plan – a process which is highly likely to continue into 2023.</p> <p>Alongside this, we are now once again able to progress work on a Neighbourhood Plan, in which we hope to make further specifications about the way we want West Malling to continue to develop and prosper in the years ahead, how we will continue to protect our local heritage and how we intend to go about using the levers available to us to respond to the climate emergency.</p> <p>David Thompson</p>			
<p>5.4</p>	<p>Macey’s Meadow</p> <p>Macey’s Meadow Report for APM 2022</p> <p>Continued Covid restrictions prevented the holding of the usual community events during the past year but it is planned to see the return of the Applefest on Saturday 1st October.</p> <p>A new hedge was planted in the Meadow using a generous donation from the Malling Society and it is hoped to extend this in the Autumn. Two morello cherry trees were also planted with donated funds and a number of cider apple trees were gifted to the Meadow. All the donations from local residents were very gratefully received and these will be used for a variety of purposes, e.g. the planting of more fruit trees and the purchase of new equipment to assist with</p>			

	<p>the ongoing maintenance of the Meadow. Unfortunately, a number of cherry trees had to be felled because of their age and condition but some of the wood was used to create log piles around the Meadow, which it is hoped will be of benefit to a range of invertebrates. Work is continuing to develop and expand the wildflower area.</p> <p>As ever, the maintenance of the Meadow is undertaken by a small group of dedicated volunteers and additional help will always be very welcome, particularly when the apple trees and cobnuts need pruning, Volunteering is carried out on alternate Saturday mornings and the dates can be found on the noticeboard in the Meadow or on the Parish Council website</p> <p>Malcolm Doyle Chairman of Macey's Meadow Advisory Committee</p>			
<p>5.5</p>	<p><u>MALLING ACTION PARTNERSHIP</u></p> <p>Mrs Dean explained to those present the role of MAP which is to work alongside Parish Councils to facilitate projects, for example, providing initial set up help for fledgling organisations. As part of their role, Map assists with applying for grant funding for projects, for example Lottery funding, MAP as an independent body will report back to the grant provider on how the grants were spent.</p> <p>An example of a West Malling MAP assisted project is the successful Blue Plaque Scheme.</p>			
<p>6.</p>	<p><u>CHAIRMAN'S REPORT</u></p> <p>Throughout the Covid emergency the PC has used zoom to maintain its regular calendar of meetings.</p> <p>During the year we were pleased to welcome Lorna as a new councillor, and the Parish Council is fortunate to continue to retain a full complement of 11 councillors.</p> <p>Rotary House: The Parish Council's wish to purchase Rotary House, the former Age Concern Centre, Norman Road, from KCC has dominated our work for the last two years. <i>Our aim is</i> A) <i>to consolidate our land ownership of the meadow,</i> B) <i>protect access and parking arrangements to the Old County Ground Cricket Meadow for the existing community activities at West Malling Primary School, Town Malling Cricket Club and Maceys Meadow, including social events held on the Meadow,</i> C) <i>to provide a new Community Hub and commission with Age UK to provide a range of preventative and social activities for older people in the Parish , to improve quality of life and support independent living</i> D) <i>pursue planning permission to provide other community activities, including particularly activities for young people.</i></p> <p>The current position is that KCC has advised WMPC that it intends to sell the land to "the highest unconditional bidder". KCC say they do not know the intended purpose for the land. This means that KCC had no way of testing the community impact or deliverability of the intended project, in comparison with that of WMPC proposals. WMPC requested and has now received a report on how the sale decision was made. It does not however answer the questions put to the County Council.</p> <p>Public Conveniences The TMBC decision to withdraw from funding WM Public toilets has been challenged by WMPC. As the next largest retail centre outside of Tonbridge, we argued for toilets to be retained to support shops, businesses, the High Street Markets, community events and visitors. TMBC has declined to reverse its decision, but has agreed that the current location is no longer suitable for a modern toilet, and is exploring alternative sites with the Parish Council within the High Street car park. WMPC will consider at its June meeting whether to accept ownership of the toilets subject to the conditions of sale. The Parish Council is exploring the optimum design and cost of new provision, whilst the Borough Council is examining its Title deeds to ensure there is no prohibition within them on building new public toilets.</p>			

Local Plan.

The Tonbridge and Malling Borough Local Plan failed to gain the Inspectors' approval, and a new version is being drafted. The new draft plan requires over 800 houses to be built in the Borough each year, compared to the previous allocation of 6xx which was itself well in excess of the highest rate of build ever achieved in the Borough.

The Cabinet Member for Planning at TMBC advised councillors on Thursday that approval was not expected until 2025. This means the Parish Council is likely to be obliged to spend further money in engaging legal and expert planning specialists to present our cases at Appeals, until approval is given to a new Draft Plan. We have so far appeared at two appeals by Bellway, and Gladmans on land between the Abbey and the bypass. Both of these were won. Sadly, the Appeal for Forty Acres, East Malling was lost on the grounds of the overriding need for housing in TMBC as demonstrated by the lack of the Local Plan and five year building supply.

S106 Planning Conditions

All parishes in the Borough are being asked to compile lists of improvements with their parishes which could be paid for by contributions from developers.

UK Share Prosperity Fund

Parishes have also been asked to set out themes of priorities for Government funding of which TMBC has been given £1m over five years to promote various strands of economic activity within the Borough, including measures which would increase footfall in High Streets.

There is a lack of clarity regarding the management of these funds but the Parish Council hopes to work with the Chamber of Commerce to ensure West Malling High Street benefits from such contributions

Other issues the F and GP committee has considered were:

Donations up to a total of £1,500 to other organisations working for the benefit of our Parishioners. All applicants are asked for a copy of their latest accounts, and a statement of how many people in West Malling they have benefitted.

These have included the Kent and Medway Air Ambulance, and the Citizens Advice Bureau who were able to demonstrate their clients in West Malling.

Precept requirement

Despite the need to set aside sums for repaying borrowing for the purchase of Rotary House, the Parish Precept was set at an increase of 2.7%.

This year once again the Council's Clerk and Deputy Clerk achieved a clean bill of health from the external auditors..

Partner Organisations.

WMPC is extraordinarily lucky to have an unusually large list of individuals and partner organisations with whom we work for the benefit of the Parish:

The West Malling Village Hall Management Committee,

WM Volunteers,

WM Chamber of Commerce,

The Malling Society,

Macey's Meadow Advisory Committee,

The Parochial Church Council, and the Ryarsh Lane Allotment Society are all run by volunteers; a total of almost 100 people serving our community.

I want to thank them all for their work in the past year which has brought many challenges

I want to make a special mention of Ann Turner who is retiring from being the Booking Secretary of the Village Hall after 14 years in the role. Ann has been a super reliable, hardworking, unflappable volunteer for all that time, during which the VH has developed into a self-funding facility, much of which has been the result of the income which Ann generates for the Hall.

We are delighted that both she and her husband John are remaining actively in support of the Village Hall.

At the closing of what has been an extremely challenging year, I want again to thank our Clerk Claire Christmas and our Deputy Clerk Sarah Howard for their excellent work. In addition to keeping the normal work of the Council functioning, they have had to cope with virtual meetings, and the considerable additional workload resulting from the pursuit of the purchase of Rotary House, and the closure followed by a lease of the Public Toilets.

Claire has also in recent months begun the additional work of training for a Professional Clerk's

	<p>Qualification (CiLCA) which may result in the Parish Council being able to exercise additional powers. We are exceptionally grateful for the loyalty and hard work Claire and Sarah have given to WMPC over the last year.</p> <p>Trudy Dean</p>				
<p>7.</p>	<p><u>QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS</u> – None</p>				
	<p>There being no further business, the Chairman thanked members for attending and closed the meeting at 8.57pm</p> <p>Signed.....</p> <p>Date.....</p>				