

WEST MALLING PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD ON 15TH MAY 2023, 7.30PM
AT VILLAGE HALL, NORMAN ROAD, WEST MALLING

Present: Mrs Trudy Dean (Chair)
Mrs Camilla Bridgeland
Ms Gwyneth Barkham
Ms Izzy Jones
Mrs Lorna Miles
Mr Peter Stevens

Minute		Action by	Action taken	Response
1.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were received from Mr Mann; Ms Margetts; Mrs Smyth; Ms Stacpoole and Mr Thompson;			
2.	MINUTES of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 31 st May 2022 were approved and signed.			
3.	MATTERS ARISING from the minutes not otherwise on the agenda - none			
4.	COMMITTEE REPORTS The following reports were taken as read:			
4.1	<p>AMENITIES COMMITTEE REPORT TO ANNUAL PARISH MEETING MAY 2023</p> <p>As our four-year cycle comes to a close, I firstly wish to thank all of the members of the Committee for their hard work, help and guidance both to me as chairman of the Committee but also to Sarah Howard, our Committee Clerk.</p> <p>To Sarah, I wish to extend my thanks for all of the work she undertakes on behalf of the Committee – the allotment administration, amongst so many other things, would not run as smoothly without her and the number of times she goes above and beyond her duties. Through Sarah, I am pleased to say that we have obtained the services of Nathan as a litter picker-extraordinaire for the Norman Road playing fields and their spotlessness is as a result of his dedication to the role.</p> <p>Sadly, this May we see Linda Javens step down from the Committee and the Council, although I am pleased to say that Linda has offered to return as a co-opted member and as our representative on the Village Hall Management Committee. I know that her knowledge of the Village Hall is invaluable to both Committees.</p> <p>I'm quite surprised to realise that this report sees me complete 10 years as Chairman of the Committee. To all members of the Committee and the clerks, both past and present, I would like to thank them for making my job relatively stress-free throughout that time.</p> <p>We were delighted last summer to hear that there were opportunities to acquire funding from the developers of the Lancaster Park development on King Hill for works to the Norman Road</p>			

	<p>Playing Field and Tennis Courts. Plans are still developing, but funding has now been secured to demolish and rebuild the Tennis Courts in the autumn, with a plan to then provide adult outdoor gym equipment in the parish for the first time in the 2024-5 financial year.</p> <p>The allotments remain well used, and there is a waiting list for potential new tenants.</p> <p>Sadly, we have had some issues with anti-social behaviour surrounding some of the football players who use the Norman Road Playing Field, and as a result have terminated their agreement to hire the pitch.</p> <p>Finally, the financial situation has remained challenging for the Committee with most contractors' quotes and tenders increasing sharply this year. The lack of competition for the work has also hindered the Committee's ability to obtain best value for money, which remains a disappointment, particularly in respect of sportsground marking and maintenance.</p> <p>Peter Stevens 3 May 2023</p>		
<p>4.2</p>	<p>Highways Committee - Annual Parish Meeting 15th May 2023</p> <p>Buses We were very disappointed with the decision taken by Kent County Council to cancel many bus routes. Led by Borough Green Parish Council, the Parish Alliance was set up incorporating several local parishes, including West Malling Parish Council. This was to support Nu Venture who run the 58 & 70 bus route following their successful application for a grant from the Government Bus Service Improvement fund. The Alliance would also offer limited funding during a trial from February to July as Nu Venture assess the viability of running a one bus one day a week service.</p> <p>Highway Improvement Plan KCC have reorganised the department and we now have a designated person who we can speak with regarding our plan. We have agreed and submitted a revised version and are awaiting implementation of one of our requests. An order has been raised for bollards to be placed along the stretch of pavement from Clays menswear shop to The Chocolate Umbrella; this is to keep pedestrians safe from vehicles, often delivery vans, mounting & travelling along the pavement. We have requested that the bollards are wooden and not plastic. We are awaiting a decision.</p> <p>Road and Pavement Maintenance We are continuing to monitor & log any roads, pavements, and road signage in the main area of West Malling that need KCC's attention.</p> <p>Speedwatch Our Speedwatch program is progressing, all be it, slower than we had hoped. We are exploring two main avenues. One is called a SID 'Speed Indicator Device'. It is a temporary activated illuminated sign that makes drivers aware of their speed. We are waiting for the outcome of the installation of the Larkfield machine, and the costs involved. Secondly there is still an ongoing trial of a new type of speed gun. The equipment we presently have is rather difficult to use and the reliability is questionable. We are in contact with another local parish who are using one belonging to the Police Speedwatch Unit and they will soon decide whether to purchase their own equipment. We would need a co-ordinator and more volunteers. So please do let the Parish Clerk know if you are interested and would like any further information. The Highways Committee has considered the issue of the extension of the 20mph scheme in West Malling, the committee supported this in principle alongside consideration of other speed reduction measures. This is the recommendation to be made to Full Council.</p> <p>St Leonard's Tower Last year we had liaised with KCC over the ownership with the 'pond' area by St Leonard's Tower. English Heritage, who own the Tower, have recently cleared this area but with no acceptance of maintenance responsibility. KCC have also resurfaced the drainage opposite for runoff rainwater to feed into Manor Park Lake.</p> <p>Street Lighting</p>		

	<p>The Climate and Biodiversity Action Group and the Highways Committee invited an expert on using our streetlight columns for EV charging. Unfortunately, this has proved not possible as our power supply charge is too low. A completely new infrastructure would be needed. We are still progressing with the new column for Lucks Hill liaising with KCC and TMBC planning department.</p> <p>I would like to thank Claire Christmas, the Parish Clerk, for all her help with the running of this committee. As the meetings are bi-monthly it can be particularly difficult to keep on top of issues and information.</p> <p>Sara Margetts May 23</p>			
<p>4.3</p>	<p>Planning Committee</p> <p>Annual Report 2023</p> <p>2023 has been yet another year where planning issues have dominated the agenda of the Parish Council and local councillors. While we wait for TMBC to complete its Local Plan, the area remains vulnerable to development, in particular in those areas earmarked for extension of the Green Belt. The Parish Council held a public meeting, designed to help inform TMBC’s Regulation 18 consultation which attracted significant attendance and support. Looking ahead, the Planning Committee will be sure to respond to Local Plan developments and do everything we can to make representations against inappropriate development on behalf of local residents.</p> <p>During the last 12 months we have also had residents join Committee sessions to talk about the revised proposals for the London Road site and made representations objecting to the scale of the changes and the negative impact on the immediate and local surroundings.</p> <p>The Committee has also continued its work to scrutinise private residential development and is pleased that a number of local improvements have had the unique, history character of West Malling at their heart.</p> <p>Looking ahead, it is important that the work of the Planning Committee and other committees remains central to the operations of the Parish Council so that issues and proposals are allowed the necessary time to be properly scrutinised. The Committee also intends to continue its new meeting pattern to ensure that we are able to publicly discuss and debate important planning applications ahead of the recently imposed three-week deadline for TMBC applications.</p> <p>David Thompson May 2023</p>			
<p>4.4</p>	<p>Macey’s Meadow</p> <p>Annual report 2023</p> <p>The main two community events held in Macey`s Meadow over the past year have been the Applefest last October and the Blossom Day/Coronation picnic in early May this year. Both were very well attended and received positive feedback. All monies collected will go towards maintaining the 20 acre site.</p> <p>In the case of the Applefest, people either picked apples from the orchard or brought along their own fruit for juicing. The Blossom event was linked to the Coronation celebrations and apart from the various stalls in Macey`s Meadow, there were games and activities for children organised on the adjacent cricket field.</p> <p>Macey`s Meadow received a number of generous donations during the year and this enabled an extension to be made to the recently planted hedge in the Spring Meadow and the purchase of some much needed new tools. A number of cider apple trees were also gifted. It is hoped to raise money for a new noticeboard in the coming year.</p> <p>As ever, a lot of time was spent on routine maintenance - tasks such as mowing, pruning hedges, apple trees and cobnuts, spreading chippings on paths and in gateways and mending</p>			

	<p>fencing. Tree and cobnut surveys were also carried out during the year. This work is carried out by a small but dedicated group of volunteers. New recruits would be very welcome and anyone interested should contact the Parish Clerk for details.</p> <p>Sadly, Percy Macey`s son passed away earlier this year and his family have requested that a tree be planted in the Meadow in his memory. This will take place once a suitable location has been identified.</p> <p>Malcolm Doyle May 23</p>				
<p>4.5</p>	<p>Malling Action Partnership.</p> <p>Malling Action Partnership is a not for profit company limited by guarantee. Its purpose is to support the business and community life of West Malling and the ten surrounding parishes for which it serves as a retail and community centre.</p> <p>MAP undertakes delivery of some projects directly, but mainly acts as a facilitator for local volunteer groups in the process of setting themselves up, or who want additional funding for a specific project. Members often locate funding sources, and these can require mentors or a body to monitor expenditure, and MAP can find these. We can provide temporary or permanent banking facilities and insurance cover for volunteers.</p> <p>We were pleased to transfer our publicity this year to The Oracle following the closure of Downs Mail. The Malling Mail insert to Oracle is funded by a Lottery grant.</p> <p>Activity has slowed over Covid. But this year we took on a new permanent project called Offham Digital History, which seeks to record and archive all available documents regarding the history of Offham village. There were some GDPR issues to resolve. (The project is funded from proceeds of the Offham May Day.)</p> <p>MAP hopes to replicate this with West Malling's extensive historical documents, which are in many different places.</p> <p>Trudy Dean</p>				
<p>5.</p>	<p><u>CHAIRMAN'S REPORT</u></p> <p>Chairman's report 2022-3</p> <p>The last four years of the Parish Council have seen exceptional national and local events which have put great strain on everyone. I want to place on record my thanks to all members of the Council, particularly Peter Stevens the Vice Chairman, David Thompson, Sara Margetts and Min Stacpoole who have taken on the responsibility of Chairing their respective Committees. The additional workload has fallen very heavily on our Clerk Claire Christmas and Assistant Clerk Sarah Howard. I want to record my thanks to them all for the persistence, flexibility, ingenuity and unflinching good humour they have all achieved to enable the Council's work to continue uninterrupted.</p> <p>BUDGET</p> <p>The Parish Council was pleased to be able to keep its Council Tax for 2023-4 at the same level as last year, reflecting the pressure on everyone to meet rapidly rising prices not matched by increases in income. The council retains a level of reserves matching that recommended for Parish Councils.</p> <p>LOCAL PLAN</p> <p>Public consultation began this year on the Borough Council's second Draft Local Plan to replace the document rejected by Government Inspectors. It contained worrying proposals for both West Malling car parks to be designated for housing, and these were only recently overturned. WMPC joined together with East Malling and Larkfield Parish Council to launch a petition renewing our proposal to extend the Green Belt to cover the majority of green fields between West Malling, East Malling and Kings Hill. This currently stands at 2,888 signatures.</p>				

	<p>Nationally, ministers have suggested that Housing Targets, a Five Year Building Supply, and the duty to cooperate with adjoining authorities may be dropped. However, we still await the necessary new legislation and National Planning Policy Framework to effect these changes. Locally we await clarity on whether any of these changes would affect Councils such as TMBC which lack an approved Local Plan.</p> <p>TMBC itself has discussed the probable need for a second public consultation (the so called Regulation 18 document) which would include details of over 40 additional new sites for development.</p> <p>It is therefore regrettable that proposals for 900 houses on Broadwater Farm, and 1,600 houses at East Malling Trust land at Kiln Barn Road will almost certainly need to be decided without the protection of an approved Local Plan. Both contain highly controversial road construction, and uncertain funding for school places at primary secondary level.</p> <p>ROTARY HOUSE The future of Rotary House, Norman Road remains uncertain. It's sale into private ownership was followed by a planning application for four houses submitted last August. This has still to be determined by TMBC. The Parish Council submitted a strong objection, arguing that the site should retain its Community use status. Meantime, high winds during winter damaged roof coverings contributing even further to the dereliction of the building which has stood empty since May 2019.</p> <p>PUBLIC CONVENIENCES The Parish Council has continued to maintain the King Street toilets following TMBC withdrawal of funding. We have carried out this work under licence which is awaiting renewal from TMBC. WMPC remains committed to finding a safer and more accessible site for new toilets. We await the Borough Council's decision on whether a site can be found within the High Street car park.</p> <p>CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY The Climate Change and Biodiversity Action Group held a successful 'Greener West Malling' meeting at West Malling Primary School. It is currently establishing the carbon emission 'score' for the Parish Council, and exploring ways to achieve net zero by 2030.</p> <p>VOLUNTEER GROUPS West Malling Parish Council has for many years created and worked with volunteer groups who support a wide range of activities which contribute enormously to the community life of the town. These include the following groups to whom we are immensely grateful for their work. VILLAGE HALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE maintain and operate our Village Hall which is has achieved the fantastic result of being almost self-financing as a result. MACEYS MEADOW ADVISORY GROUP is a volunteer group who maintain and improve the 20 acre site for public enjoyment. The meadow has become a firm favourite location of popular local events. St MARY'S CHURCH OF ENGLAND PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL work together with the WMPC to share costs and workload of maintaining the churchyard and keeping it open for burials. TOWN MALLING CRICKET CLUB have a long lease on the historic Cricket Ground which they maintain together with the pavilion. They provide opportunities for children and adult sports which ensure the meadow remains the community facility began in the 1700s.</p> <p>WMPC also has a record of inviting residents interested in any particular aspect of our work to join our committees informally. Please contact Claire Christmas on 01732 870872 for further information.</p> <p>Trudy Dean</p>		
<p>6.</p>	<p><u>QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS</u></p> <p>There was a general discussion regarding asking community groups to attend to speak at future Annual Parish Meetings. It was agreed to consider this further and to potentially set a date in April 2024.</p>		

There being no further business, the Chairman thanked members for attending and closed the meeting at 7.36pm

Signed.....

Date.....

DRAFT