Draft Minutes of the 129th Annual Parish Meeting of Wormshill

**held in the Village Hall on Tuesday April 6th 2022**

**at 7pm**

**--ooOoo--**

**Present: -** Simon Bass (chair), Polly Bass (recording secretary), Susan Smith, R Stokes, Valerie Hemsley-Flint, Val Payne, Patrick Phillips, Joan Lewis, Tom Adams, Sarah Martin, Vicky Pearce, James Pearce, Mike Gee

**In attendance:-** Patrik Garten

**Apologies: -** Shellina Prendergast

The chair welcomed all to the meeting, especially our Borough councillor, Patrik Garten. He had requested a police presence but unfortunately had had no response.mouse controls

**Basis of meeting**

The meeting opened at 19:05. The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and advised the villagers that an Annual Village Meeting (AVM) is held under s72 of the Local Government Act 1972. The National Association of Local Councils is of the view that we can discuss and agree anything which the villagers believe is important and which we can if necessary influence through MBC, KCC or another public body.

The first task is to elect a chairman and vice chairman for the following year. The chair stands down for this and hopefully a villager will recommend someone and that that view is seconded. Strictly speaking the vote is for the meeting itself but a standing contact is helpful for ongoing contact with other bodies.

**1a Election of Chair**

The Chair stood down to allow the election to take place. Valerie Hemsley-Flint (VHF) proposed and James Pearce (JP) seconded the proposal that Simon Bass (SB) be chairman for the year and there being no other proposal, this was supported unanimously by the meeting. VHF offered her thanks for the Chairs work over the last year.

**1b Vice-Chairman**

The chairman asked if anyone was interested as standing as vice-chairman. He explained that

the duties were not onerous but that it may be helpful to have a deputy to assist if the need

arose. In the absence of any volunteers the position was again put in abeyance for the year.

1. **Minutes of 128th meeting held on 6th May 2021**

Draft minutes were available and the chairman asked if any amendments or corrections were requested. Copies of the minutes were also available in the hall. It was proposed that the chairman sign them as a correct record.

1. **Matters arising from previous meeting**
* *School transport* – A number of children seemed to be disadvantaged by the KCC rules which were horrendously complex. KCC appear to have cut back even further from what was previously available. Parents can pay for a place if some available on the bus and there was a moped allowance available previously. Realistically there is not much that the village can do but if necessary one of the village charities could provide some limited support. Anyone interested should speak to the Chair who would discuss with the Trustees.
* *Footpaths – use of kissing gates rather than stiles* - David Munn, the manager has written to the landowner and offered a package of assistance with replacing the current inadequate stiles and gates with new ones and they have a couple of weeks left to respond. If he does not hear anything then it will move to the formal enforcement process which will unfortunately probably mean that the current stiles will be replaced with new ones rather than kissing gates.

Susan Smith (SS) noted that there was one field that one can get in but can’t get out of. Another field has had a gate installed but no stile. Patrick Phillips (PP) noted as well that the route to Bredgar is impassable. VHF noted that new stiles across to Ringlestone have only been partly replaced so the side supports wobble. The route through to Saywell is now between fences so doesn’t need a stile. Vicky Pearce (VP) suggested a lifting style gate might be better but PP said that these can be left open and cattle can get through. We should note that access regulations only cover access for humans not dogs so this is at the landowners discretion.

1. **Update by Police and Neighbourhood Watch**

Despite contacting the police I have had no response, and nor has PP, our Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinator. I have searched the Police website and there are monthly stats for our area but as it stretches from Yelsted the other side of the A249 to The Plough at Stalisfield and from Leeds Castle to not quite the Bredgar and Wormshill Railway, it is questionable how useful these stats are, but for information there were five vehicle crimes, three assaults without injury and two cases of harassment. Crime hotspots were South Green and the corner opposite the Dirty Habit. One can make of that what one will…

As there was no police presence we moved to the next item.

1. **Report from Patrik Garten (PG), our Borough Ward Councillor.**

Patrik commenced by commenting that the Chair is his eyes and ears on the ground for him so thanked him for that. Patrik reminded attendees that he prepares a monthly newsletter which is sometimes on Wormshill website, sometimes not! You can sign up individually if wished.

Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) had no overall control and a committee system but since May 2021 it is now back under Conservative control so will be changing back to an executive system so should run more smoothly. Elections to re-elect one third of councillors every year continue until 2024 when MBC will switch to whole council elections. There will be 48 members rather than the existing 53. As some councillors are not particularly effective, fewer councillors doesn’t necessarily mean less will be done.

A boundary review is underway due to shifts in population. Currently the North Downs will be merged with the adjoining Harrietsham and Lenham ward, so that Wormshill, Frinsted etc will go in with Lenham and Harrietsham whilst the ward south of Lenham ward will probably stay in Headcorn. Patrik has made councillor and personal representations to Commission. The existing North Downs ward is very different to Harrietsham & Lenham - not enough housing in the former versus too much there! Wormshill, Frinsted are very different to the big villages such as Lenham and inevitably the councillor would perhaps concentrate on the big villages and and give their funding there. He is an opponent of the proposed garden villages at Lenham and Boxley. The Maidstone Local plan includes the government prescribed figures for housing targets – the previous policies were for dispersal. Now we must plan for 17,000 more houses which means villages are being joined up but there is not enough infrastructure to support this currently. Therefore there has been a political decision to create the two garden villages as we don’t want to burden the current communities with overwhelming housing numbers. The revised Local Plan has now been sent to the government inspector for review. The existing Local Plan is still in place so provides a good way to fend off unwanted applications eg the scheme at Detling.

Our Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AoNB) should be safe. Patrik confirmed that there is nothing in the local plan for housing in Wormshill.

Overall Maidstone is trying to find the least harmful solution for the housing numbers requested by the government. Patrik advised that you should speak to Helen Whateley if you want to talk more about this.

**6. Report from Shellina Prendergast (SP), County Councillor for Maidstone Rural East**

Unfortunately Shellina had been unable to provide a report as she was currently suffering from covid.

**7. Village Correspondence**

During the year the Chair gets a vast amount of correspondence from the County, Borough and police as well as from other bodies such as the National Association of Local Authorities or the Kent Association, the NHS, local charities and South East Water and UK Power Networks. Most is not very or only marginally relevant to a small village like Wormshill but where it is he may comment or update the notice board. There had been no issue like the Local Plan this year and only the Highsted Valley development was of real note.

One point I would like to comment on is that there is a consultation (closing next week) on landscape review at present with a particular section on green lanes such as Drakes Lane. I am working through this although I am sceptical that it would lead to much change.

PG noted that this covers AoNBs too as well as national parks. AoNBs should be given stronger protection - more like national parks. National parks are very protected but AoNB’s have to allow working landscapes and businesses. VHF asked if Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) were included as well.

**8. Village hall update**

The Village Hall Committee has got back in its stride and held a very successful Spring Lunch on Sunday. Hopefully all those who attended enjoyed the opportunity to meet up in flesh again. The committee are meeting again regularly and are still working towards refurbishing the hall. They suffered some damage to the roof in recent storms but have recently re-felted the roof and are pursuing an insurance claim.

We have again been fortunate in obtaining some Covid support grant income from MBC but are now seeing income from bookings for hall hire, including regular use by the scouts and woodcarvers and hopefully Medway schools following the Duke of Edinburgh scheme. We have considered starting up the coffee mornings again, probably around June but this is dependent on getting volunteers to help in running it.

The committee have also been looking at suitable events for the Platinum Jubilee in June and will come back on that. They are pursuing a Barn Dance on the Friday at present and possibly tea on the Sunday. A beacon is a possibility although the insurance arrangements are prohibitive.

The meeting was reminded that the Parish Meeting was entitled to appoint two members. Currently the Chair is Jane Bass with Mike Gee as the other trustee supported by a management committee of Kate Joy, Karen Tottle, myself (Simon Bass) and Peter and Carolyn Allchin. Peter also cuts the grass for us and has been doing some work on the trees. I’m sure the village will all thank them for all that they do as it is all voluntary and so sometimes difficult to fit in and not as fast as we would like.

The Committee hope to hold an AGM shortly which will be open to the village.

Kate Joy has arranged defibrillator for phone box – thanks to her for organising this.

**9. Parish accounts**

The chairman reminded the meeting that it was decided at the 2003 Meeting to avoid any expenditure as this would entail an audit which in turn would force the Parish into having a Parish Council. As Wormshill is a relatively small village with no obvious reason at present to raise a precept it has previously been agreed to remain in our current position and I see no reason to change this at present. State that I will be returning the short form, as required, for the year ended March 31st 2022 to the Audit Commission; the short form declaring that there had been no income and no expenditure during the year. The balance in the bank (Santander) is unchanged at £504.93.

One reminder is that we agreed to donate these funds to the Village Hall for the refurbishment works.

**10. Village charities**

There are two of these. The first is the Mary and Harriett Shornden charity which is for the benefit of residents of the Parish of Wormshill and the second is the Poors Land Charity.

Circumstances such as the rise of the internet and GDPR legislation mean than we cannot keep complete records as we once could regarding older villagers or young people. It is now the case that you will have to contact the trustees if you need some help in some way or, as a younger person, you are moving to secondary school or to university.

For older residents, we make a small number of Christmas gifts but we might also help out if someone in the village had suffered loss or bereavement, or was felt to be in need in some other way. We can also support purchases of items such as a mobility scooter or similar for residents who might otherwise have difficulty in making a purchase. Please ask or get a friend to ask, even in a village as small as Wormshill we do not always know if people are in need.

The Poor’s Land Charity is 'for the children of persons resident in the Parish of Wormshill’. It meets its objectives through the provision of educational materials or support to children and young people who are residents of the village. Again, you will need to contact us but we are happy to help out on any way, particularly when going from primary to secondary school or to further education or an apprenticeship.

Six trustees were required under the trust deed and I thank Nicola Billing, Kevin Shilling, Ian Phillips, Paul McGuire and Yvette Hammond for their help as trustees.

The meeting needs to confirm the re-election and election of the aforementioned trustees. Joan Lewis proposed these and Jane Bass seconded them.

The 2021 accounts have not been inspected yet but are up at the back of the hall for information. For information we received about £300 a year for each of the two charities or £600 in total and they have investments which have a market value of about £23,000.

**11. Planning**

The main issue has been the Highsted Valley development which although it is in Swale, would affect us greatly both from the effects of an additional almost 10,000 houses and associated development but also the impact on local lanes following the building of a second motorway junction. Swale issued a press release on 24 January which stated that ‘The council has taken expert evidence on the sufficiency of the statement and has issued notices seeking further information. The application is unlawful until the required information on issues such as archaeology and the impact on nationally important habitats is received. The update also includes a summary of legal advice on the application for a new motorway junction for the M2. This advice says that a planning application is not the correct procedure for a new junction and that it should be pursued though a development consent order as it would be a nationally significant infrastructure project.

The applicant is also required to consider alternatives to a new motorway junction and demonstrate the strategic need for one as national policy aims to minimise junctions on safety grounds. This will require a new round of traffic modelling to inform consideration of strategic planning applications and the local plan, as well as meeting the concerns of Natural England.

Natural England has expressed two concerns about the proposals. Firstly, the scale of further recreational pressure from additional population and secondly, they have concerns about the effect of air pollution from additional traffic along the A249 which could affect local bird populations.

All this means that the strategic need for infrastructure, alternative options for the infrastructure, and mitigating impacts on the important wildlife sites must be resolved before any detailed consideration of any specific planning application.

The only planning permission of concern in the parish is the chicken shed. I believe we have until the 11th April to comment – there are no comments in so far so if you wish

 to comment please do so asap!

Tom Adams noted that the options on land underlying this scheme expires in September 2022 at current rate. The chair offered thanks to Tom (and Catherine!) for all the work done on this scheme which was seconded by Jane Bass.

There have been various smaller schemes in the village and I do not usually comment on these as they are small in scale although I did make some comments about access for the old schoolhouse at the top of Bottom Pond Road. The one scheme of note is the Chicken farm planning application in the AoNB at the end of Park Lane. There seem to have been no further comments yet. This is a new application so we need to submit new objections. PG says his comments should be online.

VHF asked regarding retrospective planning applications – surely they shouldn’t ever be needed? Consent has been given for a local building retrospectively which she was concerned about. PG noted that this is the national law and beyond MBC’s control. Planning law is difficult to enforce but the local council is responsible for enforcement. Recruitment and retention of planning officers very difficult. If it has been in existence with no action taken for four years then it has to be accepted. If something annoys the neighbours, he would pursue it but if (for example) a small shed in the middle of a wood he wouldn’t object.

PG will call in any application in an AoNB for lighting conditions to be imposed. People moving in from towns often put up floodlights shortly after moving in. These floodlights shine over neighbours and into the sky. We have to make it a planning condition of an application.

**12. Highways, road sweeping and footpaths**

As usual the roads around the village were suffering from a profusion of potholes! JP noted that the verges around the passing bays are not maintained and might contain holes and dips that could damage car suspension arms. VHF noted Megan at KCC was very good at sorting road issues. It was also noted that the farm has damaged the verges where Park Lane comes off The Street. SCB has spoken with farmer who said that he can’t use the same place for disposing of manure all the time but he has now finished using that field for the moment. SCB to have another word. Mrs Gibbard was also upset at this.

Susan Smith pointed out with regards to road sweeping that Bottom Pond Rd is in an atrocious condition with lots of straw ripped off bales being transported. The straw opposite Mr Stokes’ property was alight. She eventually got an email to say it would be swept at some point – it needs big lorry to do it. The hedgerows have been cut but the cuttings were falling into the road. It is no good talking to Darren about this as nothing gets done. Bedmonton Lane is now full of pull-ins and verges from traffic cutting through from Bredgar. PG asked that he could be emailed the reference number if it has been reported on line and not yet done. With respect to hedge cutting - farmers are responsible “Maidstone report it”! He noted that “ simple rubbish” will be cleared in two days – if hazardous waste, then it is KCC’s responsibility.

**13. Any other business**

* JP – Fibre Broadband is open until this Friday for applications – otherwise it is with Shellina and KCC and DCMS.
* Village cleanup this Saturday
* VHF - if you see a water leak or electricity goes out, PLEASE contact the companies because they don’t always know!
* She had also called police in Nov & Mar because a neighbour had gone berserk. Phone call after first call from PCSO who now comes round and parks in vicinity every so often
* Patrick - neighbourhood watch - voluntary organisation - has heard hardly anything in last year - appears to have fallen apart. Not sure who PCSO is - difficult to find out from website now. PG - new PCSO - Siobhan? Was Kingswood and Leeds. Area now expanded. Dial 101 to contact anyone. The police don’t give out PCSO numbers any more
* JP noted that from 2025, copper phone lines won’t work in a power cut and we will need to use mobiles, but part of the village is in a mobile desert. Does PG have any contacts regarding this? Further the emergency services network is going to 4G which is also a concern. PG – is this a KCC issue and thus one for Shellina?
* PG ended by reminding everyone that all organisations - - government, power companies etc - KCC, MBC work on the basis that if something is reported they will deal with it, if not, it won’t be! You can use the “Country eye” app to report matters.

With that there was no other business and the meeting closed 20:50.

**Awaiting approval at the meeting on**

**18th April 2023**

**Simon Bass - Chairman**