

**Draft Minutes of the 130th Annual Parish Meeting of Wormshill
held in the Village Hall on Tuesday April 18th 2023
at 7pm**

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Present: - Simon Bass (chair), Jane Bass (recording secretary), Mary Cross, Matthew Rowlon, Rebecca Bentley, Valerie Hemsley-Flint, Joan Lewis, Rebecca Homfray, Kevin Shilling, Alan Joy, Tom Adams, Vicky Pearce, Sarah Perry, Philip?

In attendance:- Patrik Garten

Apologies: - Shellina Prendergast, Jeremy and Virginia Leigh-Pemberton, John and Ann Noble, Mike Gee, Lyssa and Patrick Phillips, Beryl Gibbard, Gerry Boyle, John Nightingale

The chair welcomed all to the meeting, especially our Borough councillor, Patrik Garten. He had requested a police presence but unfortunately our local PCSO was on leave at present.

Basis of meeting

The meeting opened at 19:00. 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 Vicky Pearce (VP) 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.

2. Minutes of 129th meeting held on 6th April 2022

The minutes were approved as a true record and would be signed as such.

3. Matters arising from minutes

School transport – there was a discussion on this subject which had come up at the previous meeting. Comments were made on a moped allowance although comment was also made that parents wouldn't want a child going on local roads in the dark. Villagers have often struggled to get transport and it is not a new problem. 'The 'nearest local school' means that if an alternative is selected KCC may not provide transport. RB noted that in the early 2000s, it was a taxi to Maidstone eg Invicta. SCB to take up with Shellina.

4. **Report updates from Kent Police and neighbourhood watch (requested)**

There was no police attendance or report so the Chair asked attendees for any comments that could be taken up with the police. RB said that offroaders were causing damage - burnt out cars; damage and theft from farms. TA said there was a new Neighbourhood Watch sign at Black Post. Mention was made of a KCC closure notice for Drakes Lane – this would be followed up. RB said she had found invoices in flytipping but that Maidstone had not followed it up. VHF said she has called police twice in last year and had a quick response which was good. The Chair noted that there had been no recent updates from the Kent Rural Crime taskforce.

5. **Report update by Patrik Garten, MBC ward councillor**

- a. **North Downs Ward** will become a 3-member ward with Harrietsham and Lenham – the rural population may not see any campaigning as it might be too much effort, given the spread-out nature of the population. It is not good for democracy to add rural areas to large local service centres as they are likely to be under-represented. PG noted that MBC had reverted to the ‘cabinet’ system for decision making and how all decisions need to be scrutinised against ‘net zero’ and environmental principles. Making decisions like this was more effective than having a separate environmental committee. In terms of planning decisions, MBC needed a “Spatial strategy” which had the same weight as the local plan. It involved how to build quality homes, have good living spaces and how to make the town centre more attractive – fewer shops, more entertainment. These matters and things such as water recycling needed to be incorporated into the proposed Lenham Garden village.
- b. **Police matters.** The Police and Crime Commissioner wanted to do away with PCSOs and civilian staff with uniformed officers taking over all roles but PCSOs to stay for now albeit with reduced numbers. A lot locally have moved to jobs in London because the money is better and they can commute from Kent. Have only 4 out of 22 such posts. Shivon is still our local PCSO and she works 3 days a week. Villagers should call 101 for non-urgent matters – don’t use a direct email because she won’t see it for days.
- c. **Flytipping** – This remains an issue but Maidstone take it very seriously and have invested in CCTV, mobile cameras etc and generally respond very quickly. As ever, the really important thing is to notify the council so that action can be taken. If recurring, let PG know so that officers can review local hotspots and any action necessary.
- d. **Roads** – although a KCC responsibility, these are an obvious concern for villagers. Of particular concern is that due to rebuilding the Dirty Habit the road will need to be closed again – it is down to the engineers how long! There will be a road closure to put a crane in place but only for a few days. PG was told “By end of spring” but unlikely now – probably summer.

JMB noted that the road through Leeds will close on July 24th for 6 months, whilst the Junction 5 works on the M2 are ongoing too.

- e. **Planning** – The biggest development is at Woodcut Farm – this is the industrial estate at Junction 8 of the M20. The developer is trying to alleviate negative impacts on AONB through trees, shrubs etc. The buildings are level with the local tree height. There is an application for another warehouse in the triangle between the new estate and the motorway but this is a protected envelope. The developers photomontage shows the buildings overshadow “Block 8” – This is not in the local plan but the authority must carry out due process so “watch this space”. As it is not in the local plan it is likely to be refused. A question was asked in respect of increased traffic for this estate. PG stated that KCC would have to object and they haven’t presented any planning objections. They don’t come to planning meetings so these things get through.

A question came from VHF regarding reports that KCC are likely to go bankrupt. PG explained that there is a two-tier council system in Kent. MBC only get 12% of the council tax and the MBC finances are good. There is a new waste contract from next year. RB pointed out that sometimes there is no collection for 2-3 weeks. MBC tell him to leave it as black sacks at side of road but foxes etc get it. PG advised him to contact him or report it on the website after 5pm on the missed collection day.

6. Report update from Shellina Prendergast, Kent County Council, Maidstone Rural East Division

No report received.

7. Highways and road sweeping

- a. **Traffic calming** – Nigel Field gave an update on discussions with KCC. There had been a request to village via Whatsapp and Neighbourhood Watch for expressions of interest in looking at controlling traffic speed through the village. 91% responded positively of which 30% reported a recent near miss. This was submitted in February with support from the chair. He met the KCC rep with Shellina Prendergast and the chair and it was a very useful meeting. The KCC rep knew a great deal of on the subject and had access to a lot of information in order to get something done. Engineers are coming out to look at the current signage - some of it illegible, some in the wrong place. There are no signs to say “the pavement is coming to an end”. Two recent events have clearly focused minds on road speeds.

According to the statistics there were on average 181 traffic movements through the village daily. The average speed was 28mph – x% >39mph. SP was surprised there was no 30mph limit already but was very supportive in getting something done and will assist with finance. He is meeting KCC again on 4th April, then there is 3-4 weeks for feedback. They will do a traffic survey – 16th May for one week. If average speeds are similar to those already indicated, they should be able to improve signage in the village.

However, constraints are quite challenging in terms of legislation and KCC’s experience so we will need to await the forthcoming meeting to learn more as to what can be done.

- b. **Roads** – as noted these are a KCC matter. There have been major issues with the DH closure, water leaks, potholes etc. SP says that KCC have more money now for this so we should see some improvements over the summer, at least until the cold weather sets in again. AJ said that potholes are not being marked when reported – they used to be marked quickly. There were still issues with “Valerie’s corner” (the sharp bend near Norwood Farm where the drains often blocked) – the chair will take up with SP. TA noted that it is easy to report potholes online but difficult to claim – you need the depth of hole so measure it at the time if you have an issue.

8. Village correspondence

During the year the Chair gets 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 were no major issues of note aside from the forthcoming Local Plan Review and the continuing saga of Highsted valley.

In view of recent power cuts and the frequency with which they had happened over the last year the chair had written to UK Power on behalf of villagers but had yet to receive a reply.

9. Village hall update

The Committee will hold the Village Hall AGM on 25th April which will be open to the village. Otherwise, the village hall had had a successful year with bookings pretty much back to normal. The committee was still pursuing grant applications for refurbishment of the hall which was looking a little tired.

PG advised that Rural Recovery Fund would be open for applications soon but was not yet open. The government had given support for a Covid Recovery Fund which had been used entirely for the town centre but they had received further funding. The grants scheme would open once the rules had been finalised by government. A question was raised on what the committee does and JMB explained. JMB also stated that the committee was looking for an Events co-ordinator and a secretary wanted.

VHF asked that the curtains are put back please! This would be referred to the management committee.

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.

10. Defibrillator

Thanks to Kate Joy for getting this installed. Some modest fundraising would still be needed for the annual maintenance of the equipment. This would be managed by the Village Hall Management Committee and kept in a restricted account.

11. Village charities

As a reminder there are two of these. The first is the Mary and Harriett Shornden charity which is for the benefit of older residents of the Parish of Wormshill and the second is the Poors Land Charity, for children and younger people.

Circumstances such as the rise of the internet and GDPR legislation mean that 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 which was accepted nem con.

Thanks to NF for inspecting the accounts. These are for the year ended 31st December 2022 and copies are available at the back of the hall. The two charities are valued at around £25,000 which is held in the Charities Official Investment Fund (COIF). Dividends are received on these investments which amount collectively to about £600 per annum.

12. 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. I will be returning the short form, as required, for the year ended March 31st 2023 to the Auditors, declaring that there had been no income and no expenditure during the year. The balance in the bank (Santander) is unchanged at £504.93.

We agreed to donate these funds to the Village Hall for the refurbishment works and this is still the plan.

13. Planning matters

- a. A few requests for changes to local properties over the year which I have either not commented on or made no adverse comment. If there was anything of concern to villagers I would bring it to their attention, such as the chicken farm application near Park Farm. This was objected to in the past and rejected by the Planning Inspector with – so far - no new application.
- b. With respect to the Highsted Valley application, TA commented that there were now 1,305 documents on the planning portal regarding it. This included submissions made just before Christmas. We can still make comments as Swale say can comment until the submission goes to committee. It has slightly reduced in numbers from 8,000 to 7,150 housing units with one aspect of the application being a waste recycling plant situated next to a local nursery. There had been a setback with Swales Local Plan as elements of it did not stack up, so currently there is no plan and this will remain until a new plan is put in place. Swale is therefore a developers charter at present, since if Swale object and developer wins, Swale is liable for all costs.
- c. PG commented that the MBC plan is now at Stage 2. This includes Lenham Garden Village – there may be some stumbling blocks but Maidstone has to build 17,000 homes and this is in the “least damaging area”. MBC is currently on track. TA added that central government set the number of houses required but the local authority has say over where they are situated. ONS data in terms of local need and government figures as to where houses are to go don’t necessarily correspond, however. PG noted that MBC are “toeing the national line” not for political reasons but to best manage the situation. The council officers are following guidance but sometimes this depends on who the housing minister is, of whom we have had very many. We have a very big country-wide problem with asylum seekers – as we need housing for successful applicants. Central government seek solutions such as hotels / B&B locally to house such asylum seekers and local councils have to fight back to manage things locally and prevent undue numbers.

14. Any other business

- a. **Internet** – a vote of thanks to James Pearce was proposed for all his work in getting fibre broadband into the village which the meeting wholeheartedly supported. It has made a significant difference to many households in the village.
- b. **Verges** – A concern has been the damage to verges by Openreach vans, UK Power and the sheer volume of traffic and farm traffic. SCB will write to Openreach about this. VHF pointed out that UK Power Networks generator at the end of Bedmonton Lane had damaged a bed of rare violets.
- c. **Dog mess** - VHF pointed out that dog mess was not being picked up. MBC can fine people for dog fouling – they must use the right bins! Perhaps a mention in the Parish news or notices. PG

pointed out that MBC needed evidence to be able to fine people which was not necessarily easily obtainable.

- d. ***Footpaths / stiles*** Many of these are not in good condition and stiles as opposed to kissing gates are inaccessible for dog owners – one can't access the countryside to walk dogs. The chair stated that he had contacted the KCC footpath officer but no reply had yet been received. Regarding dogs, it is believed that there is no requirement on a landowner to allow dogs to pass – this will be confirmed. Some landowners are not keen on kissing gates. Perhaps we need a volunteer footpaths officer? If anyone is interested please come forward!

VHF said some stiles have been partially repaired but some are still leaning and / or too high! JMB said that an audit of local stiles is needed.! PG suggested a volunteer “footpath officer” could call a community meeting and invite farmers along but understandably they don't like footpaths. RB noted that jogging through the middle of a field in fluorescent colours or having dogs off their lead can spook cattle. PG added that we could get our PCSO involved so that rogue elements from outside the community are deterred.

With no further questions, the meeting closed 20:50.

Awaiting approval at the meeting on 18th April 2024

Annual Village Meeting - matters arising

Item	Action	Name	Status
1	School transport	KCC / SP	Nothing received from Shellina / KCC
2	Feedback from comments to Kent Police (should have been KCC re Drakes Lane)	SCB	No changes to Drake Lane identified on KCC public rights of way map
3	Drainage on the bend south of Norwood Farm to be taken up with KCC.	SCB	<p>As above – ‘Enquiry under investigation’. Per the website, KCC use a risk-based approach to maintaining over 250,000 highway drains and have implemented a cyclical maintenance regime for all roads across the network, which allows them to attend more of there assets in a proactive and cost-effective manner each year.</p> <p>The drains on the strategic road network will be cleaned annually. Minor roads will be cleaned every one, two or three years, with their cleaning cycle based on risk factors such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • road hierarchy • speed limit • whether it is a known flood zone.
4	Report from UK Power re power cuts	SCB	They promised a line patrol and to report back on what they found. No response received since 24 May 2023 despite reminders.
5	Village hall curtains to be replaced	Village Hall Management committee	Some of the curtains are beyond repair as are some of the curtain hangers. The committee will consider this after they have undertaken the maintenance work currently planned.
6	Confirmation as to whether landowners are required to allow stiles or similar which can enable dogs to pass through.	SCB	The Highways Act makes provision for landowners to fit stiles and gates on rights of way in the interests of containing livestock. On a public footpath, a landowner has a legal duty to provide access for walkers but the duty does not extend to dogs.