

**Draft Minutes of the 131st Annual Parish Meeting of Wormshill
held in the Village Hall on Tuesday April 9th 2024
at 7pm**

--ooOoo--

Present: - Simon Bass (chair), Jane Bass (recording secretary), Valerie Hemsley-Flint, Patrick Phillips, Nigel Field, Wendy Miller, Ian Brown, Ann Noble, John Noble, Matthew Roulan, Bebecca Bentley, Matt Fearn, Rebecca Homfray, Valerie Payne, Rosemary Gordon-Webb, Samantha Pink, Thomas Adams, Kevin Shilling, Sarah Martin, Kate Joy, Alan Joy, Denise Gee, Mike Gee, Mary Cross, Mark Landale.

In attendance:- Patrik Garten, Kathy Cox, Janetta Sams

Apologies: - John Nightingale, Beryl Gibbard

The chair welcomed all to the meeting. In view of the forthcoming election, all the parties standing had been invited although the Labour and Liberal Democrats had not responded. Our Borough councillor, Patrik Garten was not standing in this ward this time but he would make his usual comments on the past year as well as a few comments on the forthcoming election. Kathy Cox and Janetta Sams, two of the three prospective candidates for the new Harrietsham, Lenham and North Downs Ward were however here and they would speak after the initial matters were dealt with.

As there was also concern about unauthorised development at Bedmorton ongoing, this would be discussed immediately after the election addresses whilst our councillors / prospective councillors were here.

The chair had requested a police presence but unfortunately this had not been possible.

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 Kate Joy (KJ) 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 130th meeting held on 18th April 2023

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

3. Matters arising from minutes

School transport – there was a general discussion on this subject which had come up at previous meetings. The 'nearest schools' are Milstead and Fulston Manor and do not cover the grammar schools. Decisions can be appealed but if not successful payment will be required. The system seems unfair for rural areas and the chair will write to Shellina Prendergast as our KCC councillor on this matter

Feedback from comments to Kent Police (should have been KCC re Drakes Lane)

No changes to Drake Lane had been identified on KCC public rights of way map – **closed**.

Drainage on the bend south of Norwood Farm to be taken up with KCC

An response to an enquiry was still awaited at the time of the meeting. 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 their assets in a proactive and cost-effective manner each year. This states that 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:

- road hierarchy
- speed limit
- whether it is a known flood zone.

Subsequently a response was received from KCC but this did not state more than quoted above, although they did add that if the situation is clearly dangerous they will respond accordingly. We need to keep monitoring the situation but for now this is **closed**.

Report from UK Power re power cuts

UK Power promised a line patrol and to report back on what they found. This was done but no final response received since 24 May 2023 despite reminders. The Chair did note that there seemed to be fewer power cuts this year. Val Payne also believed that the substation had been upgraded which may also have assisted. **Closed**.

Village hall curtains to be replaced - Response from 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. **Closed for now**.

Confirmation as to whether landowners are required to allow stiles or similar which can enable dogs to pass through.

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. KCC prefer landowners to fit kissing gates rather than stiles and will provide a subsidy if this is done. **Closed**.

4. Election addresses for the forthcoming Borough election

- Patrik Garten – Conservative. Patrik was not standing in this ward this time but will be standing in Senacre. The chair added that he had been very supportive of this area over the past few years and wished him well in the forthcoming election.
- Janetta Sams and Kathy Cox – Green Independent Alliance
They explained the boundary changes undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission. Wormshill now sits in a three-member ward which constitutes over 20% of the borough by area although not population. Janetta & Tom Sams are currently Harrietsham & Lenham Borough Councillors and have now teamed up with Kathy to work within the Green Independent Alliance.

Janetta works within the community – older peoples clubs, food banks, with community warden etc etc. She is on various committees on council and has been a councillor for 20 years.

Kathy Cox is from a local family and has had a career in consumer finance. She was a Director of a credit union until recently. She is task focused rather than political focused. She is passionate about the Downs and keeping them safe for all and is a resident in Hollingbourne. She wants to stand for the Borough council rather than the Parish Council as she feels that would have more impact. She has worked with PG to get the team together to run the activities at the café at Hollingbourne Station after PG helped to get the building back into use.

5. Items to be brought up for discussion

Various people including those living nearby had become aware that land near Bedmonton House was being developed in contravention of AoNB / planning legislation.

In terms of history, the site contained the remains of an old dairy building. Planning permission had been requested but not granted in 2021 for a 5 bedroom house. Just before Easter JCBs levelled the land and poured concrete bases. Ian Brown (IB) has been in touch with MBC. Their water pipe comes from Froghall across the land, as does their power. The unauthorised development has already accessed the water pipe on the land – will the power be next? The site is an SSSI and an AONB but the land has been levelled. PG had asked IB&WM to report this as a planning breach and to send him all the documentation so far. The site is meant to have been sold but has not been registered with the Land Registry. PG asked if they were already living there – the answer was no at this stage. PG will take to the Head of Planning ASAP for a Stop order.

Tom Adams advised that you could use ‘What Three Words’ for location finding if council can’t find it – this had been an issue given the isolated nature of the site.

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

Despite contacting the police I have had no response, and nor has Patrick Phillips, our Neighbourhood Watch coordinator. 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 although they do give some information.

Crimes were as follows in Wormshill.

February - other theft – Bottom Pond Rd,

November - other theft – Drays Field and anti-social behaviour – Mattison Place

May - other theft – Drays Field and Violence / sexual offence - Mattison Place

Patrick Phillips there have been occasional emails from Neighbourhood Watch, mostly about scams. The chair said that the PCSO had Shivon contacted him and others on anniversary of death of David Prentice.

7. Report update by Patrik Garten, MBC ward councillor

Patrik started by thanking people for supporting him for last 8 years. He feels boundary changes will be to detriment of small villages but we have to see a “global” picture of the borough – currently slowly building 1,000 affordable homes. MBC are also acquiring temporary accommodation market on the open market which is more suitable for occupants and cheaper for taxpayers than housing in B&Bs. With the local council buying in Maidstone, this stops other boroughs buying there. There is a town centre strategy which reflects the fact that shopping habits have changed. The centre needs to be attractive for all – planters, greening, new leisure facilities, A creative hub is to be established in Gabriels Hill. There have been festivals and music in the parks over last year which will continue.

Brenchley Gardens antisocial behaviour is being clamped down on – there is now a mini police station there. The gates are now closed at night.

Fly tipping – PG is the cabinet member for environmental services. There has been a change in the national legislation and there is now a £1000 fine for fly tipping and £500 for the householder if no waste is disposed of with no waste transfer licence. There is now a new full time team to investigate. Fines will be used to finance the team.

With the recent refuse disposal re-tendering, bins were a major issue for everyone! PG though it might take until two months after the forthcoming election to settle down. We will however have a fantastic new collection service once it is fully working properly. Until now there have been staff disputes, reliability problems, accident issues on narrow roads etc – the new contracts are not a cost cutting exercise but instead MBC are trying to achieve much higher reliability. Fines for non-collection etc will be higher. There will be telematics in the new vehicles so MBC will be able to see on the website when bins have been collected. There are 17,000 collections per day in Maidstone.

In view of the issues MBC are on the case and there was an emergency cabinet meeting yesterday. Suez have added three vehicles and Maidstone one for emergency mop-up work at the moment. The plan is to clear all waste by end of Saturday. The bin run for crews is on a fortnightly pattern so we are just starting the second round of runs. The website is to be updated with the new rounds. There is an inconsistent collection pattern at the moment – eg food waste from one house, the black bin from the next. The drivers are HGV drivers so have restricted hours of driving – we can't just extend the round to complete if it exceeds the legal hours. It is also clear that some complete roads are missing – this is indicated on the telemetry. There will be a video on the website to explain.

Mike Gee commented that he had heard that the bin lorries aren't big enough to do the job. PG said that as access is difficult on small roads, Suez have smaller vehicles – but that doesn't take into account big estates such as mobile homes at Hogbarn.

If concerned, email PG – if no collection by Saturday.

Wendy & Ian said that where they are there was no bin or recycling but that they used to get black bags supplied. Now there is no often collection. PG said they should have been informed if supply stopping but now (eg in town centre) you have to buy bags. Bins should be listed as 'Fixtures & Fittings' when selling house as you otherwise need to buy them. Broken bins are however replaced FOC. The crews should notice and sign off then bin within 3 weeks, if it can't be lifted.

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

I have been in correspondence with Shellina on occasion during the year and happy to feedback any areas of concern to her. These have principally been road related issues in the past, especially potholes or signage although these can be reported by the KCC Pothole reporting tool:

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/report-a-problem>

9. Highways and road sweeping

A 'retired lycra bike rider' commented that fly tipping and potholes were now his thing! He reported a pothole last week to KCC and it was repaired within 48 hours as it was regarded as "dangerous" – otherwise it should be repaired within 28 days. SCB added that all potholes should be reported as there is then a chance they can be sorted. Janetta Sams said that when reporting a potholes, people should use "what three words" to report the location. The names of roads on KCC map and local usage don't necessarily agree. Nigel Field commented that Park Lane has deteriorated significantly – it needs more than patching now. PG commented that roads are a Kent County Council responsibility. Nigel – have had discussions with KCC and this is ongoing before we hear what the proposals are.

SCB noted that White Post and Black Post have both been hit. Both appear to be the responsibility of Hollingbourne. Shellina will respond as she is at the Hollingbourne Annual Village Meeting later this month and this will be discussed. SCB said he would attend this. PG said he thought Hollingbourne Had said it was not theirs – perhaps Harrietsham?

Alan Joy commented that the KCC footpath reporting website doesn't work! SCB said he would find out who the new Public Right of Way officer is.

VHF said that flytipping not just household waste – includes garden rubbish on the verges. Those offending should pay for garden waste bins. She added that vehicles are eroding verges. The Bottom Pond Road which has a footpath often has parked cars and dustbins on pavement. One can't get wheelchairs, pushchairs through.

10. Village correspondence

I keep a weather eye on this and am copied into Kent Association of Local Authorities correspondence. Matters include such as the Lower Thames Crossing, Subsidised bus routes, MBC and Kent CC matters, flooding, and health. They also include various charities and theatre groups for which I sometimes put posters on the notice board. There have again been no material issue this year other than Highsted Valley or emergency planning.

With respect to the latter I contacted MBC to explain that we are fairly self-sufficient here on the North Downs and cited the fact that half the villagers are on WhatsApp and generally look out for those who are not. We are well prepared in terms of equipment etc in case anything did happen. Neither I nor MBC felt there was a great deal of benefit in attending specific training but if anyone is interested I can put you in contact with MBC.

VHF commented that she has no technology and asked that notices be placed on the Barn and in the Parish News please! SCB commented that he does both and would also telephone individually if something was both important and urgent.

11. Village hall update

Jane Bass, the Chair of the Village Hall Management Committee gave an update but started by saying that the Committee will hold the Village Hall AGM on 23rd April, which will be open to the village.

The village hall had had a successful year in respect of bookings The committee was still pursuing grant applications for refurbishment of the hall which was looking a little tired. We had not been successful with the latest Rural England grant funding but it was felt that this was not necessarily as bad an outcome as it could have been, since we were starting to be pushed out of shape in seeking funding in terms of what we actually needed. We were having to chase things which the funding sought but which made little sense for us to pursue given the use of the hall – eg, air-source heat pumps. We were now pursuing a 'Plan B'. This would look at doing the windows, doors and cladding first from existing funds and then look for further fundraising for the toilets, kitchen and a better surface for the area where cars turn.

We had sought pre-application advice from MBC regarding works that could be done in a conservation area. This had just been received with a positive outcome but we now needed to apply for planning permission but this was in hand. We would then start the works.

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, myself (Simon Bass), Karen Tottle and Peter and Carolyn Allchin. However, Karen, Peter and Carolyn wish to retire at the forthcoming AGM so we are looking for new members to join the

committee. We also need a Booking Clerk if anyone is interested. I am also keen to stand down as Treasurer if anyone would like to take on this role. Peter Allchin 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.

If you are interested in helping out, please do come along to the Village Hall AGM on 23rd April here in the hall.

12. 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 Evette 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, Mike Gee proposing and Tom Adams seconding.

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.

13. Parish accounts

The chairman reminded the meeting that it was decided at the 2003 Meeting (and indeed previously, dating back to 1894) to avoid any expenditure, as this would entail a Parish Council and in due course an audit. 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 2024 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 which as per discussions in previous years I am going to donate to the village hall committee as this year hopefully we are going to be able to use it, at long last.

14. Planning matters

The main issue is Highsted Valley – there hasn't been anything of note otherwise which seemed contentious. Tom Adams (TA) set out the latest position. A revised suite of documents was submitted around early February. There have been 1,604 responses / documents and there are currently 7,150 properties for which permission is being sought. There will be a road from a new motorway junction from Bexon Lane through Highsted Valley to link up with Teynham. Objections (or support) need to be made to the planning portal on this submission. TA is still reading through the documents. The Swale local plan has been rejected so the developers are hoping this will help them as well as a possible change in the national government.

Largest single risk to it progressing? Swale won't have the power to stop it if it goes to national review. The Maidstone plan (which Bredhurst Parish council are taking to review) includes 5,000 houses at Lenham Heath with a new station. There is also a plan for 2,000 properties at Lidsing with a junction into an AONB on the M2– similar to Bexon Lane. It is on the Medway border so they may be liable for services with no tax take.

It was commented that planning letters on this are headed Swale. They have shared planning services with Maidstone so that explains the heading – in terms of response, TA commented that you can make a response any time until it goes to committee. With respect to the Swale plan, they consider they have sufficient housing stock going forward. There is a review of the plan but it will probably be accepted.

PG commented that dispersal of housing doesn't work which is why new centres at Lenham and Lidsing have been proposed. The new local plan says that if there is substantial support from local community, a dwelling could be granted permission as opposed to previously when automatically rejected. A Local plan stops unwanted unplanned development.

15. Any other business

- a. ***Defibrillator*** - thanks to Kate Joy for fundraising for the maintenance of this which is an ongoing liability. As we have no Parish Council, this falls to the village hall as we needed a legal owner to acquire the old phone box. We must also thank James for all his work on this box which houses the defibrillator. He has raised a considerable sum of money for its repainting which along with a donation of some of the paint which Kate Joy has received should result in a useful asset to the village.

With no further questions, the meeting closed 20:45.

Awaiting approval at the meeting on 9th April 2025.

Annual Village Meeting - matters arising

Item	Action	Name	Status
1	Development of land The Old Dairy, Bedmonton	SCB	
2	Bin collection	Wormshill residents	All currently seems to be working well, bar the occasional missed collection
3	White Post and Black Post – what is happening?	SCB	Per John Nightingale who has organised this they should be imminent, supposed to be mid-March but all are hand made and subject to the weather.
4	Public Right of Way Officer	SCB	I couldn't find the current officer but the website seems to be working.