**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF EAST MALLING AND LARKFIELD PARISH COUNCIL HELD OON WEDNESDAY, 8TH JANUARY 2025 AT CHURCH FARM AT 7.30P.M.**

**PRESENT:** Cllrs. D. Thornewell (Chairman), Mrs. M. Moore (Vice-Chairman), Mrs. C. Bell, T. Bishop, Mrs. L. Cook, P. Leale, S. Root, R. Roud, Mrs. J. Sharpe, Mrs. C. Shire and Mrs. M. Tatton

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Cllrs. Mrs. R. Belton, R. Haffenden, R. Mitchell and Mrs. C. Woodger

 Cllr. Mrs. Trudy Dean

**APPROVAL AND SIGNING OF MINUTES AND APPENDICES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 5TH DECEMBER 2024**

 After the addition of Cllr. Root having given apologies for thee meeting and the correction of a typing error, it was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes and Appendices of the Meeting held on Thursday, 5th December be **APPROVED AND SIGNED** by the Chairman.

**MATTERS ARISING**

 There were no Matters Arising.

**PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

(i) **Ratification of Planning Comments Submitted Since 5th December 2024**

 The List of Planning Comments submitted to the Borough Council had been **CIRCULATED** and it was **AGREED** that the action taken be **RATIFIED.**

(ii) **List of Decision Notices Received since 5th December 2024**

 The List of Decision Notices had been **CIRCULATED** and was **NOTED.**

(iii) **Any Other Planning Matters**

 The Chairman reported that the Area 2 Planning Committee Meeting next Wednesday, 15th January 2025 includes the Ivy Farm Application and also the access to Forty Acres from the London Road which affects some trees subject of a T.P.O.

**RATIFICATION OF PAYMENTS SINCE LAST MEETING**

 The List of payments made out of Meeting and Direct Debits had been **CIRCULATED** and the action taken was **RATIFIED.**

**REPORTS ON STANDING COMMITTEES HELD DURING DECEMBER**

(i) **Amenities and Open Spaces Committee** – 9th December 2024

 Cllr. Thornewell presented these Minutes which he felt were a true record of the Meeting and they were **ADOPTED** as a true record of the Meeting.

 Cllr. Mrs. Shire commented that MR100 in Ditton now has a tarmacked road and expressed her concern that the footpath will no longer be reinstated. It was agreed to ask Ditton Parish Council what is happening as they would have been consulted.

 Mention was made about the sign for “Joan a Plain Lane” as confirmation is need for the actual spelling before any action is taken.

(ii) **Finance and General Purposes Committee** – 16th December 2024

 Cllr. Mrs. Moore presented these Minutes and asked about the drains at the George Holding Centre. The Clerk reported that Southern Water will not take any action at present but when a blockage occurs the Doctors have been informed that they contact Southern Water direct.

 It was **AGREED** these Minutes be **ADOPTED** as a true record of the Meeting.

**PRECEPT FOR 2025/2026** – Recommendation from the Finance and General Purposes Committee

 The Chairman **PROPOSED** that the Precept for 2025/2026, as **CIRCULATED** be adopted with a total of £511,625.00 creating a Parish Rate of £97.45, representing an increase of 5.03% on the current year’s Precept, **SECONDED** by Cllr. Mrs. Moore and **CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**CHAIRMAN’S REPORT**

 The Chairman’s Report had been **CIRCULATED**  along with a Supplementary Report**,** as follows:-

Christmas is supposed to be a quiet period but there has been a deluge of Government papers just before Christmas by the Government largely in my opinion in pursuit of their wish to see growth in the economy. The three have in mind are:

**Local Government Re-Organisation under the heading of the White Paper**

**”English Devolution”.**

Val has circulated a paper on this by the Leader of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council which I felt sets out an understandable summary.  It does not set out any changes directly to Parish Councils but clearly the Government wish to move to a system across England where like many areas already there would be system of elected Mayors with larger unitary councils under that umbrella with Parish Councils remaining as the lowest tier. In Kent this already exists in Medway where the Council has both the powers previously with the County Council and those of the former districts.

In our area it seems the Kent County Council would no longer exist and there would be a much larger authority covering Maidstone, Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks. The Government have already been sounding out the existing leadership of these councils and it looks like they wish to proceed very quickly.  If Kent were in the first tranch then it is likely the KCC election due in May would be postponed,  KCC are discussing in January and the Govt is looking for an early response.

I assume like back in 1974 there would be a period of two years when the names of such bodies, where the offices would be based; staffing and all the consequential re-organisation would take place. I was around then and recall how this all took priority over other issues.

As my personal view such a change would mean the Parishes would be even more than now the voice of local people.

**New National Planning Policy Framework of Dec. 2024.**

This document, now issued, replaces all previous versions and is now in force. It means it applies to all pending applications including when reported to Planning Committees, and all new applications. It is clearly aimed at promoting growth and increases the number of dwellings many areas are expected to provide including Tonbridge and Malling. It continues the policy of seeking a Plan based system which is of course a problem for this Borough as it does not yet have an up to-date Plan and worse still lacks a 5 year housing supply so the presumption is planning permission should be given for applications for housing unless the tilted balance applies. It brings in the so called “grey belt” which can allow housing in the Green Belt where applications would previously be refused. None of our Parish is in the Green Belt but most of the area to the West is so designated.

It seems that under this new regime Tonbridge and Malling has only around 2 years housing supply.

**Consultation on Planning Procedures**

In my opinion this document from a local point of view is the one that could have really far reaching consequences.  It would seem to imply the Government will introduce a standard model for Planning Committees with compulsory training for members. The implication is that Area Committees would go and for large scale applications there could be a separate small committee to deal with such applications,  and that officers would be given direct powers to determine applications such as when a site is allocated in an approved Local Plan and Councillors excluded from voting.

The Government give examples where approved sites have been refused by councils and then allowed on appeal. I think despite the evidence most planning applications are passed the Government have accepted the argument development and thus meeting national housing targets/growth is being held back by Planning Committees and a “Nimby” culture.

I also think these changes and proposals are already influencing the decision making at the Borough as evidenced at the recent meetings when the sites at Clare Lane and the MOD site at Kings Hill were passed.

Turning to more positive news I can report on some other things…

**Keats Road, Larkfield**

I am pleased to report the plan to build a house in the garden here has been refused by the Planning Inspectorate. TM/23/01998. It was to build a house in the garden to which this Council opposed as well as the Borough.

**Footpath MR 121, Larkfield**

We have reported the small fallen tree across this path which runs at the back of Woodpecker Road following a resident’s complaint

**Tennis Court Re-lining**

I have been stopped by a resident to express his appreciation of the lines in East Malling Tennis Court being re-painted. I said I would pass on to the Council.

**Path Cut off date to be abolished**.

Some potential good news from the Govt. The Open Spaces Society of which we are a member reported on Boxing Day the Govt is to abolish the cut off date for claiming new public paths that was brought in by the previous Govt.

This would mean we have more time to claim as a public path the route through the woodland strip between the East Malling estates and the A20. If we are to do this it might be a good idea to put in a claim before the KCC is abolished.

**The Barracks, Well Street.**

The barn erected in the 1960s(?) has partially collapsed and this has been reported to both Planning at Borough and KCC as it adjoins the public footpath going across to Broadwater. An update will be reported to Planning and Development.

**Footpath MR 109, Sweets lane/Rats Castle.**

KCC have replied that the knocked over public footpath sign is with the team who do work packages and should be dealt with soon

**Footpath MR121, Larkfield**.

I am pleased to say the KCC officer has taken away the small tree that fell across this path that runs at the back of Woodpecker Road. A very quick response.

**Parish Map on East Malling Green**

The latest Kent Ramblers Annual Review records good progress they have made with KCC about replacing the map in the existing frames and indicates those they are doing such as ours should be completed this year. Fingers crossed!

**Old School Cottages, Clare lane.**

I have now traced a reference to the hard to read plaque on this listed building and have spoken to the owner about it. A book I hold called Memories of Malling by the Rec Fielding of 1893 records the wording at that time both here and the other building at Leybourne. I have supplied copies to the owner of the house with the plaque. I need now for someone to translate the Greek/Latin….

              Liberos tam Literis bonis quam platate explore.

Val has now found that it is Latin and translates to “Explore free books as well as good books”

A further report to P and D.

**Flooding**

In recent days part of the layby at the far end of Lunsford Lane has been flooded as well for a short period New Hythe Lane near the Monks Head and the New Road corner of the A20. As to the latter site we await the proposed renovation of the soakaways KCC say is with contractors to undertake.

Considerable discussion took place regard Devolution and the scrapping of the County Council and Borough Councils. If Kent County Council agree to a unitary authority then the KCC Elections will be postponed or indeed cancelled this year. Cllr. Biship reported that the Borough Council have also been discussing this matter.

Cllr. Bishop commented on the cut-off date for claiming public footpaths and he feels we should go ahead now in claiming the path through the A20 woodland strip through to the estates. This was **AGREED.**

**REPORT BY BOROUGH AND COUNTY COUNCILLOR**

The Chairman reported that Cllr. Mrs. Dean has asked that the cycleway and footway up from the entrance to Forty Acres to the brow of the hill be abandoned.

Cllr. Bishop commented that a resident had commended the work carried out to the hedges at Marlowe Road Green.

Cllr. Roud reported that a resident of Carnation Crescent had received an invoice from Clarion for £7.16p towards the repair of a streetlight and he has taken this up with Clarion and the payment has been quashed.

Cllr. Roud reported that there is to be a site meeting regarding development at the London Golf Club.

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

None to Date.

**PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no Members of the Public present.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING:** Wednesday, 5th February 2025

**CLOSURE**

The Chairman declared the Meeting closed at 8.27p.m.

 Chairman

 5th February 2025