**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF EAST MALLING AND LARKFIELD PARISH COUNCIL HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 5TH FEBRUARY 2025 IN THE PARISH COUNCIL OFFICE, CHURCH FARM AT 7.30P.M.**

**PRESENT:** Cllrs. D. Thornewell (Chairman), Mrs. M. Moore (Vice-Chairman), Mrs. C. Bell, Mrs R. Belton, T. Bishop, Mrs L. Cook, R. Haffenden P. Leale, R. Mitchell, Mrs. A. Oakley, R. Roud, Mrs. J. Sharpe and Mrs. C. Woodger

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Cllrs. Mrs C. Shire and Mrs. M. Tatton

**APPROVAL AND SIGNING OF MINUTES AND APPENDICES OF MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 8TH JANUARY 2025**

 It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes and Appendices of the Meeting held on Wednesday, 8th January 2025 be **APPROVED AN SIGNED** by the Chairman.

 The Chairman invited PC David Warner to introduce himself to the Council as the Police Constable responsible for this Parish and others.

 He makes regular contact with the Clerk and commented and a big problem in Larkfield at present is the theft of motorcycles.

 He said that if any Council members had any issues they should report them to the Clerk who could contact him.

 He was thanked for attending.

**MATTERS ARISING**

 There were no Matters Arising.

**PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

(i) **Ratification of Planning Comments Submitted Since 8th January 2025**

 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 8th January 2025**

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

(iii) **Any Other Planning Matters**

 The Chairman reported that there is to be a meeting on Friday regarding the trees subject of a TPO for the access into Forty Acres site.

**RATIFICATION OF PAYMENTS SINCE LAST MEETING**

 The Lists of Payments made out of Meeting and Direct Debits had been **CIRCULATED** and thee action taken was **RATIFIED.**

**REPORTS ON STANDING COMMITTEES HELD DURING JANUARY**

(i) **Planning and Development Committee** – 22Nd January 2025

 Cllr. Thornewell presented these Minutes and made comment that the application for the proposed development of the Larkfield and New Hythe Football Club site has been validated by the Borough Council and the Notice has been received as the Parish Council own some of the land affected.

 Cllr. Thornewell reported that Demi Richards at Kent Highways has responded in respect of the signs on Bellingham Way which is progressing with the exact positioning of the signs to be confirmed.

 Cllr. Trudy Dean is seeking a meeting with KCC in respect of the bus service in New Hythe Lane/Leybourne Park.

 The Barracks, Well Street – the barn has been completely demolished and it is being investigated by Enforcement at the Borough Council. Cllr Mrs. Woodger commented that the barn was demolished along with its contents and now papers, etc are being blown about the vicinity.

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

**CHAIRMAN’S REPORT**

 The Chairman’s Report had been **CIRCULATED,**  as follows:-

**Local Government Re-0rganisation**.

As part of the so called Devolution agenda the Government is proposing to reorganize local government so across England there will be unitary councils replacing counties and districts and elected Mayors above them

In our case this means a single elected mayor for Kent replacing Kent County Council and probably a replacement council covering Maidstone, Tonbridge and Malling, Sevenoaks, and Tunbridge Wells.  Parish Councils are unaffected in what locally would be the biggest change local since 1974 when the Rural District Council of Malling and Tonbridge Urban District were merged as happened to similar councils across Kent.

Labour run Medway and Conservative run KCC have asked the Government to fast track proposals for Kent and if this agreed by Government the KCC elections due on 1st May will be “postponed”.  There will also be no further elections

For a Crime Commissioner for Kent as his role would be taken on by the Kent Mayor.

**Martin Square.**

 Borough officers advise me that the current works in Martin Square relates to installing the new electric charging points.

They say they are still awaiting the delivery of the Parking Machines but when they arrive they will be focusing on West Malling first and in Martin Square work carried out in March/April.  The first hour will be free as previously reported.

**Planning Changes**.

Borough Council members have had a presentation by a barrister about the changes to Green Belt policy which introduce a “grey belt” exemption from overall policies to allow development on some Green Belt sites such as derelict land or similar.  It is all quite complicated but as there is no Green Belt affecting this parish or the Medway Gap generally it is not something the Parish Council has to consider.  However, I do wonder if the Oast Park development by the football club which is in the Green Belt being west of the A228 may be treated as grey belt as it is a derelict golf course with the remains of a burnt out club house and mounds of dumped materials.

Besides Green Belt Tonbridge and Malling has an extensive area falling with the nationally designated North Downs National Landscape Area and I see in Constable Country the Planning Inspectorate in approving a development being a car park extension with high fences did not observe the duty to conserve and enhance national parks and areas such as Dedham Vale National Landscape and “seek to further” the purposes of such designations. Angela Rayner is quoted as saying the Inspectorate “made an error of law”.  It seems the decision was cancelled.

**Bellingham Way Signs**.

Officers tell me that we should be consulted shortly about the additional signing along the adopted part of Bellingham Way.  I wait with baited breath!

**Parish Walk**

Just a reminder the parish walk is on Sunday 16th March at 2.30pm from East Malling Church. Circular and back around 4.30pm.

The Chairman further reported that it has been announced today that KCC Elections will now be going ahead on the 1st May 2025 as their application for priority consideration for the Devolution had been turned down but it will be reviewed in the summer. Nine other Counties have been accepted.

**REPORT BY BOROUGH AND COUNTY COUNCILLORS**

 Cllr. Mrs Oakley reported on the effect the Kent becoming Unitary Authorities could have on the Borough Council which if it happens could be abolished. It is likely that more responsibilities will be passed to the Parish Councils.

 The Waste Contract is being looked into as renewal is due in 2027.

 There is a Governance Review as to a Tonbridge Town Council with a petition being signed by many.

 There are plans to re-position the Angel Centre in Tonbridge which will cost many millions of pounds.

 Cllr. Mrs. Oakley attended a meeting with Southern Water who are constructing a Storm Drainage Tank in Bellingham Way which should be completed in March.

 Meetings are taking place with Members in respect of the Local Plan.

 Cllr. Bishop reported that Borough Council finances are good at present but if the proposals for the Angel Centre go ahead this may change.

 Cllr. Roud reported on the General Purposes Committee where Borough Council staff salaries was discussed, the Union was suggesting 6% increase but the Borough Council wanted to give 3%. Twenty staff are on minimum wage which will be increased to Living Wage and an increase of 2.9% was agreed for other staff.

 Cllr. Mrs Oakley commented that a Labour Councillor in Snodland, Wayne Mallard has passed away and it is likely there will be a by-election.

 Leybourne Parish Council have agreed to buy the area known as the “Bomb Hole” from the Borough Council

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

 The Agenda for the Amenities and Open Spaces Committee Meeting is incorrect and it was **NOTED** that the Meeting will take place on Thursday, 13th February 2025. The Clerk will send out a revised Agenda for the meeting by email.

**PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

 There were no Members of the Public present.

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

**CLOSURE**

 The Chairman declared the Meeting closed at 8.25p.m.

 Chairman

 5th March 2025