

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF GREAT MONGEHAM PARISH
COUNCIL HELD ON THURSDAY 6th APRIL 2023 AT 7.30pm AT GREAT MONGEHAM
PARISH HALL**

Present: Councillors: J Gatland (Chairman) C Saville R Solley I Lawrence T Ridyard
J Jones Clerk to the Parish Council County Cllr S Manion Dist Cllrs Oliver Richardson & Martin Bates

1. APOLOGIES

Cllrs P Swales, D Royston-Lee.

2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

These had been displayed on the Parish notice board, the website and were available at the meeting.

3. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – Cllr John Gatland

Welcome to the Annual Parish Meeting, over the last year 10 planning applications have been considered and the Parish Council have objected to 5 of them on behalf of the Parishioners, 1 no comment and 4 no objections and one licence application was considered which was objected too. When the Parish Council submits an objection it only counts as one objection, so please do send in objections if you are not happy with a planning application.

The Parish Council have been concerned about lack of paving in the village and speeding cars over the last year and included this on the Highways Improvement Plan. Unfortunately KCC Highways concluded that there was no need for traffic calming measures at the current time and the request for additional pavement was rejected due to the required minimum width of pavements. A pedestrian warning sign has been installed on Northbourne Road and a 30mph tool kit provided. Various potholes and overgrown hedges have also been reported to Highways and handrails were requested and installed for the steps on St. Richard's Road.

The Speed Indicator Device (SID) is still being shared with Ripple Parish Council and Speedwatch continues but I would like to appeal for speedwatch volunteers, please contact Cllr Saville or myself if you can help. Speedwatch has worked very well at keeping the speeds down as in the past many cars were being driven at over 50mph through the village, please do help yourself to 30mph toolkit stickers from the display table.

The Parish Council continue to pay to have the Village Green mowed and also paid for the refreshments round the Christmas tree, we are very grateful to Mr Brian Knight for donating the village Christmas Tree, thank you.

The Parish council have given grants of £300 to the Air Ambulance, £1,780 to the Friend's of St. Martin's Church for the Flower Festival, £780 was funded by grants from County Councillor Manion and District Councillors Richardson and Bates. The defibrillator continues to be registered with The Circuit and is available for anyone in the village or for ambulances to use, Cllr Ian Lawrence checks it on a regular basis. Cllr Chris Saville and his wife Gill received long service awards from Kent Police for services to Speedwatch, it would be good to see some other volunteers.

Thank you to all of the councillors for all that they do and all of the work that they put in.

4. REPORTS

a) Finance Report – Joanna Jones Clerk to the Parish Council

The Clerk had prepared the year end accounts which were available in the meeting pack.

Great Mongeham Parish Council - Unaudited 2022/23 Accounts

	Actual to 31-03-22	Budget 2022/23	Actual to 31-03-23	
INCOME				
Carried Forward	14,891.50	14,278.69	14,278.69	
Precept	9,241.86	9,814.75	9,814.75	
VAT	348.25	496.65	496.65	Note 1
Interest	6.07	6.00	103.94	Note 2
Grant	-		780.00	Note 3
Village Design Statement Group	42.49		439.70	Note 4
Total Income	24,530.17	24,596.09	25,913.73	
PAYMENTS				
Essential/Regular Payments	Actual to 31-03-22	Budget 2022/23	Actual to 30-03-23	
Salaries	4,372.20	4,617.00	4,932.60	Note 5
Councils Pension Contribution	1,060.01	1,122.00	1,191.94	
Admin Costs	481.13	500.00	444.00	
Bank Charges	72.00	72.00	72.00	
Postage, Stationery	185.15	200.00	159.58	
Insurance	342.45	420.00	264.00	Note 6
Hall Hire	104.00	230.00	143.00	
Membership	319.80	350.00	323.12	
Audit Fees	32.00	50.00	34.47	
Annual Meeting	-	60.00	67.65	
Training	50.00	200.00	-	
Cllrs Expenses	-	300.00	-	
Window Boxes	21.67	200.00	123.00	Note 7
Mowing Green	802.45	950.00	739.70	Note 8
Village Events	55.20	1,000.00	32.75	Note 9
New Website - set up and running costs	368.77	400.00	360.00	
Office Equipment	-	100.00	-	
VAT	496.65	-	305.37	Note 10
Grants	710.00	2,500.00	2,080.00	Note 11
Defib supplies	214.00	250.00	-	
Election Expenses (saving for 2023)	-	1,500.00	-	
Contingency	-	1,075.09	-	
Running cost & regular payments	9,687.48	16,096.09	11,273.18	
News letter	-		24.00	
Street Furniture	564.00			
Reserves	-	8,500.00		
Total	10,251.48	24,596.09	11,297.18	

Bank Reconciliation 31/03/2023

Unity Trust Bank - Savings Account	10152.03	B/F	14,278.69
Unity Trust Bank - Current Account	4464.52	Receipts	11,635.04
		Payments	-11,297.18
	14,616.55		14,616.55

- Note 1 – VAT refund of 21/22 expenses
 Note 2 – Interest rate increased over the year
 Note 3 – Grants for Flower Festival
 Note 4 – Donation – Village Design Statement Group
 Note 5 - Clerk's 2022 nationally agreed pay rise after budget produced
 Note 6 – New insurer at a better rate
 Note 7 – More spent on window boxes
 Note 8 – One invoice still due
 Note 9 - Carol Singing only Parish Council village event
 Note 10 – VAT due to be claimed in 2022/23
 Note 11 – £300 to Air Ambulance, £1,780 to Jubilee Flower Festival – The Friend's of St. Martin's Church

b) County Councillor – Steve Manion

Here is an annual report to cover some of the more significant issues which KCC has been involved with over the last 12 months.

Budget

Now our big challenge will be to deliver the budget, while the process of building the 2024-25 budget starts now.

Financial monitoring at the nine month (end of December) stage of this financial year, reported to a recent Cabinet meeting shows a projected 2022-23 overspend of £53.7m. This is gradually coming down, and part of it will be met by the £25m we set aside as a risk reserve at the start of the financial year. Nonetheless, it seems almost inevitable that we will, for the first time in more than twenty years, see a significant overspend at the close of the financial year, which will have to be met from our reserves.

The biggest factors in the overspend were: cost pressures in adult social care, notably older people's residential services; growth and increasing costs in school transport, in particular for SEND students; and sharply higher placement costs, reflecting the challenges in foster care recruitment and higher costs for more specialist placements, in children's services. In addition, we expect that nearly £15m of savings (net of over delivery in some areas) projected for the year have not been achieved, the bulk of them to be taken forward into the new financial year. On the capital side, we are seeing the impact of severe inflationary pressures.

Shortly before the Autumn Statement, the Leaders of Hampshire and Kent wrote a well-publicised letter to senior ministers setting out our concerns about the unsustainable financial position confronting councils such as ours. They have recently held a very useful meeting with Lee Rowley, a member of the DLUHC ministerial team, to investigate further the issues raised in our letter and look forward to these discussions continuing.

Help for residents

Back at the October County Council, there was a very high-quality debate on the cost of living crisis and our response to it, and that was followed by work with our District colleagues and our NHS partners to seek to coordinate the response.

We have a strong record in supporting our residents through the crises and pressures of recent years, which began with a commitment, ahead of much of the sector, to delivery of Free School Meals in the half term in October 2020. Since that time, government has brought forward a series of programmes, running from September 2021 as the Household Support Fund. In the first two rounds of funding, over 450,000 awards have been issued to Kent residents. This has covered areas such as food vouchers for Free School Meal eligible families, energy vouchers, support with water bills, funding passed to District and Borough

Councils and more. The third round of the Fund is currently being delivered, while a £22 million fourth round (announced recently) runs for a full year to March 2024.

Alongside this, we have run our own Financial Hardship Programme, which includes and has built on the Helping Hands Scheme, launched in February 2021 with £10 million from the Covid Emergency Grant. The innovative schemes have included the Money Advice Hub strengthening of Referrals and Data Sharing between councils. Much of the focus is on ensuring that services and support are available to the residents already entitled to them, and that we help residents build their financial resilience.

NHS and social care

42 Integrated Care Systems (ICS), aimed at joining up health and care, came into being on 1 July last year. Kent and Medway is an ICS; it is a significant positive that we are not, as some other counties are, spread across several systems. Roger Gough chairs the Integrated Care Partnership (ICP), which is centred on the NHS, Medway Council and ourselves but which brings together a broader group of partners concerned with the health, wellbeing and care of the population.

The ICP was required to develop an Integrated Care Strategy to a deadline of the end of last year (!); this was successfully delivered, but of necessity is being developed further and is a starting point for more detailed and specific plans.

Over a hard winter, we worked closely with the NHS to seek to manage the pressures on both of our services, using technology to reduce the risk of crisis, increasing care and support at home and developing Integrated Hubs to manage transfers of care. Much of this is, however, work in progress and the severe pressures have meant that we still see far greater reliance on short-term beds than we would wish (and which contribute to our budget pressures). Nonetheless, we continue to develop our local work on integration, and at a national level we await the publication of Dame Patricia Hewitt's review of integrated care systems, which we have reason to hope can strengthen the truly local nature of health and care systems.

Children's Services

July saw our Children's Services rated Outstanding by Ofsted

This has been a journey of a little over a decade from being rated Inadequate through two Leaders of the Council (Sir Paul Carter and Roger Gough) and four portfolio holders. Ofsted stated that "Children are at the centre of Kent County Council's culture and practice. ... Outstanding practice is evident for children in care and care experienced young people as they clearly benefit from the support they receive and make good progress."

There have also been important national developments, with the recent publication of the government's response to the case reviews in the shocking cases of Star Hobson and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes, to the Competition and Markets Authority's study on Children's social care and - most wide-ranging - the Independent Review on Children's Services led by Josh McAllister.

The McAllister review set out a comprehensive vision of services led by early help and prevention, and we are already taking many of the approaches that it advocated. The government's response in the strategy Stable Homes, Built on Love builds on this, though it relies extensively on pilot schemes and commits quite modest resources compared with the ask of the McAllister review. We are very open to playing our part in developing these approaches.

In February KCC was designated one of 14 'trailblazer' councils for developing in the government's Family Hubs programme, which is designed to provide integrated support for families and children. This gives access to £183,000 initial funding and to more than £10 million transformation funding for implementation of the model over the next 2 years.

Community services consultation

This consultation, running from January, closed on Monday (27 March). A decision on next steps is due to be taken by Cabinet in July.

Migration, asylum and UASC

2022 saw a large number of small boat crossings and as part of this the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) referred to KCC was a record 1,390. (There have been 266 so far this year). However, because of the agreements that we reached with government in 2020-21:

- Better financial arrangements mean that the Kent council tax payer is not exposed to these costs.

- The National Transfer Scheme was made mandatory, and some 1,640 UASC young people have been transferred under this scheme since June 2020 to other councils.

- We have around 500 UASC in our care, just above the 0.1% level set by the 2016 Immigration Act, and also provide a Reception and Safe Care service for 120 UASC before they go to other councils. The large overall number of asylum seeker arrivals, along with other schemes and the national backlog in processing claims, has meant that we have seen 5 hotels for accommodating asylum seekers, 3 'bridging hotels' for Afghan families and 2 UASC hotels open in the last year. This, coupled with concerns over how plans for increased asylum accommodation in the south east is to be reconciled with other duties such as homelessness, led all 14 Kent council leaders to write to the Home Secretary in November. We have since met the Immigration Minister, Robert Jenrick, and have worked with our District and Borough colleagues to oppose unsuitable proposals for use of hotels, in some cases with success.

Government has this week announced plans to end the reliance on hotels in accommodating both asylum seekers and those on the Afghan resettlement schemes. The Illegal Migration Bill, currently making its way through Parliament, will also raise important challenges, notably in relation to UASC.

Ukraine

Kent has welcomed the biggest number of refugees from Ukraine of any area in England. The initial tasks of carrying out checks, establishing systems and making payments were very challenging. In the year since guests started arriving under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, 3,274 guests have come into the County (and all told 4,271 have been matched with hosts in Kent – not all have yet arrived). 1,506 'programme leavers' have moved on – 46% into rented accommodation, many of the rest returning to Ukraine or neighbouring countries – but at present there are 1,767 guests staying with 854 sponsors. There are 349 Ukrainian children in our primary schools and 234 in our secondary schools.

We have responded to the challenge of potential sponsorship breakdown, especially as many Ukrainian guests reached the six month minimum sponsorship stage. Moving ahead of government and many other councils, we announced in October that, for the rest of the financial year, we would pay a higher rate to hosts and further increase payments linked to the number of guests. The ending of sponsorship arrangements, which was anticipated to be at around 60% of the total, came in at 9%. We have extended these higher payments for another year while working with our District council colleagues on longer-term housing options.

SEND

The Ofsted/CQC revisit in September produced a deeply disappointing outcome, with inspectors concluding that the Kent area had made insufficient progress in all 9 of the areas of weakness identified in the 2019 Written Statement of Action.

With new leadership on both the officer side (Sarah Hammond as Director of Children's Services, Christine McInnes bringing Education and SEND back together) and politically (Rory Love as Cabinet Member for Education with SEND leadership responsibilities), we have produced a comprehensive plan of improvement to address the long-running challenges in this service.

We have also reached agreement with the Department for Education regarding the Safety Valve to address the accumulated deficit on High Needs Funding, estimated to reach around £142m by the end of this financial year. The agreement aims to bring High Needs Funding into balance by 2027-28, with £140m of the cumulative deficit reached by that point (forecast to be £222m) covered by the DfE and £82m by KCC. This accompanies our plans to deliver major service change that can both serve children and families better and put us on a financially sustainable path.

The DfE published the latest round of Safety Valve agreements, including Kent's, on Thursday 16 March. A summary of the Safety Valve agreement is published on KCC's website.

We are undertaking this programme of change, meeting the challenges of both the Safety Valve and the Ofsted/ CQC revisit, at a time when the government has published the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan. There are many features of the Plan that are welcome, though it is doubtful if it goes far enough in helping establish a sustainable system.

Secondary offer day

Secondary school offer day (1 March) saw record numbers; 19,007 families from Kent (up 695 on the previous year), and 22,620 in total (up 731) applied for a place for their child. Although the proportion of those securing their first preference fell slightly (from 79.6% to 78.2%), the absolute number rose, as did the proportion securing a second, third or fourth preference, so the proportion allocated (4.6%) was the lowest since 2018.

This nonetheless affects almost 900 children across the county, and it is important that any affected families are aware that this is not the end of the process. The next stage will be the second round of offers (reallocation) on 25 April.

Buses and BSIP

We had major challenges last summer over bus services; while we were still taking forward the £2.3m reduction in subsidies agreed in the 2022/23 budget, the bus industry was facing a crisis brought on by higher fuel costs, staff (especially driver) shortages and falls in usage. This was a national issue, but had particular salience in Kent because of the high usage of commercial bus services for school travel and the usage of the Kent Travel Saver. Our Transport team did a remarkable job in working with operators to reduce the impact of route cancellations, especially on school journeys.

Members were briefed on 17 March on our Bus Service Improvement Plan funding award. After very long delays (we were first given our indicative allocation of £34 million over 2022-25 a year ago, we now have agreement to deploy just under £19 million (representing the first two years' funding) over the next year, with a roughly two thirds/ one third split between capital and revenue. While this has taken an inordinate amount of time and is not on the scale or in the form that we might have hoped for, it can deliver some real improvements and help protect and sustain the network, in particular school transport, as well as offsetting the proposed increase in the cost of the Kent Travel Saver.

Nationally, the announcement in February of an extra £155 million government funding to extend support (such as Bus Recovery Grant) until 30 June buys time to establish a somewhat longer-term package, but the sector remains under severe pressure. We still have major questions to address about the best way to secure our network, and school transport in particular, and on that basis, we have, as the leader committed to at the October County Council, established a cross-party Member group to review and advise on the way ahead. The group, chaired by Nick Chard, has held its first meeting.

Active Travel

As in previous rounds of Active Travel funding, we submitted our proposals for funding under Tranche 4 to Active Travel England. 7 schemes will be funded, and details of this will be released in May.

Roads and potholes

Winter weather has taken its heavy toll on our roads. In the December/ January period, highway reports were five times the level of the same period a year ago. While constrained by tight funding and inflationary pressures, we have since January been stepping up the pace of repairs; Members of the public will, I think, have observed the increased number of local road closures that reflect highway works. 14,000 potholes have now been repaired and 68,414 square metres of road has been patched. The budget announcement of £200 million for roads funding, meaning some £6 million for Kent, is a welcome addition and we are looking to deploy it as quickly as possible.

Borders, Brock and EES

We experienced two major incidents of disruption at the border last year, with the all too familiar impacts on traffic and travel, affecting our residents, communities and businesses. The first was an after effect of the P&O crisis and had a major effect around Easter; the second (in July) resulted from non-attendance at the port by the French border authorities, the PAF. After a period of greater calm, and with the Easter break being our second consecutive holiday period without the Brock barrier being put into force, we have now seen further disruption as PAF capacity has not matched the number of coaches needing to be processed.

This confirms that the threat of disruption is never far away; the biggest longer-term risk is the potential introduction of the EU's External Entry System. EES has been scheduled for introduction at various points, most recently this spring – but now delayed to at least the back end of this year and it is

widely believed that it will not now be introduced until late 2024. But it remains a serious challenge and was recognised as such in the final communique after the Prime Minister's recent summit with President Macron.

Work continues with the Department for Transport on developing short, medium and long-term responses to the border issue and we expect reports back in the summer. In the meantime, an important first step has been our securing £45 million for improvements to the configuration and fluidity of the Dover port under round 2 of the Levelling Up Fund. (This successful KCC bid came alongside successful District bids; taken together, this brings £123 million in LUF funding into Kent). This is not a solution in itself, but can support greater resilience at the border, raising the threshold for when measures such as the use of Operation Brock are required. Staying with longer-term plans for strategic road investment, the Department for Transport announced shortly before the budget that construction of the Lower Thames Crossing will be delayed for two years until 2026. Transport Secretary Mark Harper nonetheless stated that 'We remain committed to the Lower Thames Crossing.' Reflecting the same pressures on the DfT budget, RIS3 schemes including Dover access and Brenley Corner, have also been pushed back.

London ULEZ

The Mayor of London is pressing ahead with his proposal to expand the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) to the outer London border, with implementation planned for August. During last year's consultation on ULEZ, KCC argued that the scheme would not be acceptable without an extension of the scrappage scheme to areas bordering London, including affected areas of Kent. This has not been accepted, nor has the proposal taken account of our concern about the nature of the evidence base for taking the ULEZ beyond existing Air Quality Management Areas in London.

The Leader has therefore written to the Mayor setting out our concerns and making clear that we will not continue Section 7 works to install warning signage on our road network. Following my letter, we have had the offer of a meeting with TfL, which we will take up. So far we have not joined the legal action undertaken by four London Boroughs along with Surrey County Council, but we are working with London boroughs and counties surrounding London, and no options for future action are off the table.

Environment and waste

On 23 March DEFRA issued the long-awaited regulations and guidance implementing provisions of the Environment Act 2021, covering a range of issues from consistency in waste collection to responsibility for Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Biodiversity. Most districts in Kent already have a separate food waste collection but the Environment Act requires that all councils must do this. KCC will be the lead authority for the Kent and Medway Local Nature Recovery Strategy and were expecting extra funding for this and for our new Biodiversity duties. We will be further assessing the implications of these regulations and delivering them.

KCC has won its bid for £1.83m from the latest round of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme which is to part fund new heating systems, double glazing, LED lights and Building Management Systems at five KCC buildings. The grant is a real saving to KCC's hard pressed building maintenance budget and will also reduce ongoing energy costs.

KCC has launched a third round of the SolarTogether scheme which uses collective buying power to get a good price on solar panels and batteries for Kent households. The first two rounds of the scheme have been very successful. All Kent districts and Medway are joining with us to promote the scheme and registrations are open now.

It is over a year since, following a big response to our public consultation, we confirmed that we would keep the booking system for our Household Waste Recycling Centres. Our surveys of customer satisfaction get a big response. The results are on the KCC website and show 96% are satisfied or very satisfied with their visit and 95% find the booking system easy or very easy to use. Same day bookings are increasingly popular and 65% of customers say they've booked on the day itself. KCC has been shortlisted for an LGC award in the Digital Impact category for the booking system.

Last May we opened our new HWRC at Allington, which is highly energy efficient and environmentally advanced. It is next to our existing Energy from Waste plant, which along with high recycling rates, ensures that only an irreducibly tiny amount of Kent's waste goes to landfill.

Dungeness and nuclear

We have for some time worked with Damian Collins MP and Folkestone & Hythe District Council to promote Dungeness as a site for new Small Modular Reactor (SMR) nuclear power generation. We have engaged with potential industry providers and other key stakeholders. In the budget this month the Chancellor launched Great British Nuclear, which will oversee a programme of expansion of nuclear energy. In contrast to the previous approach of choosing a limited number of sites, GBN will invite new nuclear builds and assess projects on their merits. This will be an opportunity for us to put forward a case based on commercial and technical viability rather than a government list of approved sites. David Robey is chairing a group to take this exciting project forward at pace.

Cty Cllr Manion then answered a question about school transport costs and paid tribute to Cllr Penny Swales who had built up many years of long service on the Parish Council.

c) District Councillor Oliver Richardson

Fortunately, this year in DDC has been spared the travails of previous years with no COVID lockdowns or bin collection fiascos which has enabled the council to return to a normal business pattern. The national events of the preceding years have of course had a financial impact on the council and we have had to tailor our budget to meet the economic circumstances but we have tried to do so in a way that ensures the most vulnerable of us within our community are protected.

In terms of capital projects DDC is continuing to deliver the programme it set itself back in 2020. The Housing Team has so far constructed 91 new affordable homes with a further 38 currently under construction and 32 others have been approved, with building work due to start on site later this year. A further 132 new affordable homes have also been delivered in the district by housing associations. In Dover work was completed on the regeneration of Market Square with an immediate impact on the numbers visiting the town centre consequently. Work was also completed on the renovations in Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens, with the restaurant attracting many new visitors to the town. Further projects remain ongoing on the refurbishment of Maison Dieu and the construction of the Dover Fast Track, electric bus, pedestrian and cycle lanes continues on schedule with the project due to open in October this year. Future development plans also have also been secured with the successful bids for £21,300,000 of government funding. This will include plans for the positive redevelopment of the east side of Bench Street, including a new Creative Centre, a revamp of the underpass with the Future High Streets Fund, and an education campus (creative and digital skills), business centre and leisure park as part of the Levelling Up Fund. Demolition of work on three of the buildings in Bench St will commence soon.

Finally I would like to say that we both have felt an enormous pleasure in being able to work with the parish council over the past four years. Notwithstanding COVID the council has had to face up to some considerable challenges; Chocks Go Away and the proposals for a wedding venue at a nearby location being only two. We both feel it has been a privilege to work with you over this period and hope to continue to do so in the future.

Cllr Gatland thanked everyone for attending and invited them to stay for refreshments.

The meeting closed at 8.20pm