

WROTHAM PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 05th April 2023 AT 8.00pm IN THE WROTHAM PAVILION, HIGH STREET, WROTHAM

Present: Cllr's P Gillin (Chairman), H Rayner, K Denton, C Mills, M Coffin, S Vick & Mrs B Jackson

In Attendance: Lesley Cox (Clerk) & 14 residents

1. **Apologies for absence:** Cllr's Betts & Beach

2. **Minutes**

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 6th April 2022, approved by the Parish Council on the 2nd May 2022

3. **Opening Address from Cllr P Gillin – Read by Cllr Rayner**

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen and welcome to the Annual Parish meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to give the Parish Council, and other local organisations an opportunity to let local residents know what they have been doing over the past year.

I see we have ten reports from various organisation so I shall move straight on to a report from Chris Mills of Friends of Wrotham Recreation Ground.

4. **Reports from various Committees and Organisations:**

1. **Friends of Wrotham Recreations Ground – Cllr Chris Mills**

Most of you will know what has happened to the Steam Rally, because I have written articles in the Parish Magazine, but briefly, after the pandemic we arranged the event last year and the committee agreed that we would hand the running over to others.

We had tried to get new committee members, but we were unsuccessful. We approached Sevenoaks Lions, who had helped us in the past and after several meetings in was agreed that Malling Lions would come on board with a view to taking over the running of the event the following year.

Ironically, our last Rally was our most successful for many years, due to fantastic weather and the covid restrictions being lifted.

We organised the event with a very small committee and helper numbers, so what we did was amazing. The Lions provided some assistance, but thanks must be given to 'the few'.

Malling Lions decided to take over the running of the Rally and by agreement, we donated monies to help them with the upfront costs. The Rally will take place on Sunday 25th June. Details are on the website.

The charity continues for the time being and recently donated monies to the Coronation street party and Wrotham in Bloom

The committee is pleased that the Rally is in safe hands. It would have been a shame if the Rally cease to be after 40 years.

Thankyou

Chris Mills
Chairman

2. **St George's Primary School -Mrs Elizabeth Rye**

Thank you for inviting me to report on the past year's achievements of St. George's CEP School. Apologies for my absence in person.

I am very proud of our school's achievements this year so far. This includes an Ofsted Inspection being conducted in December 2022 despite the snow! The school's previous inspection was in 2009 and we have since been through two changes in inspection frameworks. We have worked hard to develop the school in a drive for change working towards a curriculum offer that stems from the school's strong vision 'Bringing **faith** and **education** together' by 'Letting Our Light Shine' (Matthew 5:16). We had graded ourselves as '**Good**' and we were pleased by the recognition of the hard-work and dedication of the staff that the Ofsted grading also reflected this as they agreed with our judgement. Our aim is to provide a full broad and balanced curriculum that offers children opportunities to support their wellbeing, independence, proficiency in their learning, become effective communicators, develop their individuality and become real world learners. We have worked hard on ensuring our teaching is consistent in its delivery across the school, that the curriculum coherent and develops the children's skills and knowledge as they move up through the seven years of primary education.

We were rightly acknowledged as having pupils who are 'proud to attend this welcoming and friendly school' where they are given 'opportunities to try new things' and 'learn a wide range of practical skills' particularly through our well-established forest school learning with a child commenting that 'it's a way to experience the wilderness'. The observed that 'Right from the start of early years, staff have high expectations of pupils' achievement and behaviour. Pupils also have high expectations of themselves. They feel safe and enjoy their learning'. Parents and carers also greatly value the school. The comment of one parent that 'My child is very fortunate to be part of this wonderful school'. Of course, we have moved on since the inspection and continue to be forward planning, looking to supporting and developing well rounded children that achieve as they move on from us. Our plans are to continue to opportunities to learn from beyond the classrooms and developing links with our local community are vital in this aim.

We currently have a role of 206, our full capacity being 210. We are anticipating a full intake for our new reception class in September 2023 which is fantastic news. Once back after the Easter break we will start the transition process of welcoming the new families into school.

At the end of this academic year 30 pupils will move into secondary education with eight pupils gaining a PESE pass grade to grammar schools in the local area and thirteen pupils moving to their local secondary school, Wrotham. Our focus for them now is to support successful transition for them, providing additional mental health and well-being support around heightened anxiety of moving on. Links with ourselves and Wrotham are being established again, looking at Arts projects to enhance our school grounds and supporting Year 12 and 13 pupils. We support students on work experience who are keen to work in sectors involving education or childcare professions in their future. We have also developed strong links with the Sevenoaks Partnership this year. This has allowed our children some wonderful opportunities to perform on stage in front of a full auditorium at The Stag Theatre, take part in music and arts at Sevenoaks School and a range of sporting activities at Knole Academy.

I am proud we are able to support our children doing this as it builds their confidence and widens their horizons, remove some anxiety of never being in larger, busier environments. During Covid-19 times some of our children had to transition to their secondary schools without ever actually being able to visit before they started. I feel we have a responsibility to learn from this and pleased we have these vital links.

Increasing cultural capital opportunities has been an important part of our curriculum development. As a school we play a vital role in ensuring all children are provided with opportunities beyond experiencing a classroom. Within our school environment we continue to provide forest schools for every child and allow them responsibility to plan and run events that support friendly competition between their designated house teams or raise money for charity. Within the community we have led the way with supporting the planning of the 'Wrotham Festival of Light' – thank you to the support by the Parish Council and the Wrotham Arts Council, alongside Cohesion Plus, this established itself as another fantastic community occasion enjoyed by hundreds on the night (it is pencilled in this year for Friday 13th October 2023). There have also been visits to local residential homes, walks around our village, performances in St George's Church and this summer looking forward to supporting Wrotham In Bloom.

We have also provided opportunities to take children further afield to enhance their learning. They've travelled to many local venues within Kent such as Farningham, Meopham, Rochester, Canterbury, Camber, where they've visited coasts, zoos, museums, orchards, cathedrals amongst others. They have also been to London to the Tower of London, the London Eye and London Aquarium. They have had weekend PGL opportunities experiencing high ropes, climbing, abseiling, water activities and coming up our Farms For City Children residential to Treginnis Farm in Wales.

Careful consideration of their planning is necessary due to the raising cost implications to our parents. Many activities we heavily subsidise with funding that comes into school (thank you to committees such as the Wrotham Firework Committee), applications for grants and support from our hardworking behind the scenes PTA. We are currently looking to fundraise for a mini bus – this would make an enormous impact on attending local sports fixtures and visiting local attractions on which we currently rely on the goodwill and support of our parents.

Whilst we have shared so many great things happening with the school and the local community we have sadly continued to have problems with traffic congestion and speeding along Old London Road. Notably the worst of this is on school drop off and pick up times. We have put in several measures including running a range of before and after school clubs each day to stagger the traffic volume, communicate regularly with parents about parking responsibly and safely, have personal discussions or write to persistent offenders, reminders of a one-way route to avoid unnecessary turning within the road. However, the problems continue. The road markings outside the school are not visible as haven't been repainted in a long time, we rarely see a PCSO who does have an impact but can only rarely attend. The introduction of the wooden markers outside the school haven't made any difference to parking as they do not impact on where cars stop. I would advocate we continue to have a cohesive and united approach to this with local parishioners, the Parish Council and ourselves we hope will strengthen changes to make long term improvements.

St George's School is a village school to be proud of and can only thank so many of the unsung heroes working hard for the benefit of the entire school community and beyond.

Mrs Elizabeth Rye
Headteacher

Questions were asked of WPC on support for speed reduction in the village. This request has been added to our Highways Improvement Plan for consideration by Kent Highways Engagement Team. WPC has also offered financial support should KCC agree to our request.

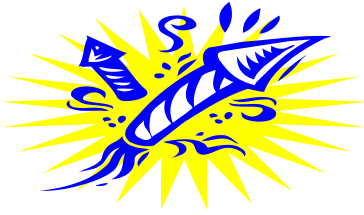
3. Betenson Trust – Malcolm Wiffen

THE BETENSON TRUST ALSMHOUSES

ANNUAL, REPORT FOR THE WROTHAM PARISH COUNCIL

The Trust has twelve small almshouses, four in each of the villages of Wrotham, Platt and Plaxtol. There are 9 Trustees – The Rectors of the three parishes and two co-optative representing each of the three villages. In addition there is the Clerk to the Trust. As a direct result of last years meeting when we said we had problems finding new trustees, I am pleased to say that Joy Bentley has now become a Trustee for Wrotham and after a similar appeal at Plaxtol they too have a new trustee. This is good news. We have continued with general minor maintenance and new kitchen units are currently being fitted in one of the units in Wrotham. Similarly one of the kitchens is being upgraded in Platt. One of the residents at Plaxtol has moved into a care home and this unit will be upgraded whilst empty. Following the completion of a survey of all of the properties it is evident that overall there is a large amount of work needing to be done. This will be prioritised and phased over a number of years. The contribution which each resident pays towards the cost of maintenance has been increased to £65 per week and there will be a percentage increase each year in future. We are very grateful to have received a grant from the Wrotham Fireworks Committee. There is one vacancy at Platt and this will be filled by someone on our waiting list.
Malcolm Wiffen

4. Wrotham Fireworks – Tim Meynen



Wrotham Fireworks Report

Annual Parish Meeting 2023

We are pleased to report that we had another successful event (Saturday October 29th, 2022).

Due to good advertising on social media/website, a streamlined on-line booking system and of course dry weather on the night, the event drew in a large local crowd (up to 3000 people). Huge credit goes to Phoenix Fireworks who put on another amazing display to a Queen soundtrack and we also had a live, local band.

As always our event relies on the wonderful support we have from our loyal, local and committed volunteers. Special thanks go to our fire builders from the allotment society, the children at St George's for the Guys, 40f Maidstone Cadets for their marshalling of the event and our local litter pickers and Borough Green Scouts for the clean up of the cricket field after the event. We would also like to thank the Wrotham Parish Council for their continued support of the event.

The WFC would also like to acknowledge the 'retirement' of Brenda Jackson from the committee. Brenda has volunteered for the committee for many years. We wish her all the best and hope she stays in contact.

Like previous years, we are giving away all proceeds from the event to local organisations and groups (minus a float, insurance etc). To date, we are pleased to say this amount has been £7650.

Organisations that have benefitted from donations so far include:

- Wrotham Parish Magazine
- Borough Green and Wrotham Netball
- Wrotham Music Society
- Wrotham Arts Festival
- 40f Maidstone Squadron ATS
- St Georges Preschool
- St Georges PTA
- Wrotham Allotment Society
- The Church & Friends of St George's
- Flowers in Bloom
- Wrotham Street party
- Borough Green Scouts
- Betenson Trust

Next year's event will be on Saturday 28th October 2023.

Tim Meynen: Chair

Adam Jenner : Treasurer

5. County Councillor – Cllr Harry Rayner

KCC had an overspend in 2022-23 of £55M which overshadows everything. Revenue is capped at 5% way below the current level of inflation which only adds to the problem on going. Adult Social Services and School Transport costs are a major cause of the overspend.

KCC is one of counties hit the hardest by Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) with 1391 arriving in 2022, with numbers for 2023 already at 266.

The Ultra-Low Emission Zones are hitting local tradesmen as most drive non-compliant vehicles which will result in a daily charge of £12.50. KCC is not supporting the Mayor of London's request for cameras on the street furniture on the roads in Kent. Although the consequence of the ULEZ impacts heavily on Kent, the county receives no benefit from the income generated.

As a Tier 1 level of local government KCC also must provide support for Ukrainian Nationals coming to the UK. Currently 370 children have been allocated primary school places and 283 secondary school places.

The Department for Education (DfE) has agreed to indemnify the £50M deficit in KCC's Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND) budget, however KCC will have to make significant savings over the next 4 – 5yrs. Cllr Rayner is on this sub-committee.

Buses continue to see a drop of in use resulting in a significant increase in support costs, the 306 & 308 routes are next in line for daytime reductions.

A parish alliance of parish councils of which Wrotham is a member are subsidising a bus one day a week on routes 58 & 70.

KCC has 19M towards their Bus Improvement Plan although this money can't be spent on existing services. Cllr Rayner is sitting on this committee.

Cllr Rayner remains convinced that Unitary Councils removing the duplicated positions within district/borough councils and county councils are the way forward.

Brian Saunders asked if the Park and Ride services to Maidstone would be reinstated. With income restricted to 5% there is no available funding for this service.

6. Wrotham Arts Festival – Charlotte Atkin

Wrotham Parish Council and Wrotham Fireworks were thanked for their continued support with most of the money received being spent on promoting the event and show casing Wrotham. The event is held over 3 days every 2 years and would not continue without the numerous volunteers who help with the setting up and taking down as well as at the event itself. Our 2022 event attracted 50 independent exhibitors, 15% of which were new to the event. Thankfully the weather was kind resulting in lots of visitors, and as usual the preview event on the Thursday evening was a great success. The event made a profit of £5.5K for the Friends of St George's Church.

7. Wrotham Wombles – Cllr Stuart Vick

Wrotham Wombles is a voluntary litter picking group that aims to get out once a month, currently on the 3rd Sunday of each month.

Unfortunately, as a society, we do seem to be suffering from a litter epidemic. From personal experience, litter picking is a somewhat bitter/sweet activity, but I don't have a dog, so it does at least encourage me to go for a walk around our wonderful village.

Where most reasonably minded people wouldn't dream of dropping or throwing litter, we are unfortunately blighted by some human beings who seem incapable of taking their rubbish home with them.

Having identified a couple of stopping points on Kemsing Road, that had regularly piles of litter from a certain fast food chain with a large yellow M as it's identifying mark, we managed to get TMBC to place a couple of anti-litter signs adjacent to the locations. We will continue to identify particular problem areas and since appropriate action from our governing authority. It may utter coincidence, but the piles of litter do seem to be a litter bit less of late.

It continues to amuse me that drinkers of a certain red bovine energy drink, seem to lack the energy to ever be able to find a bin - I may put in a request to their marketing department and request some sponsorship, as they seem to sponsor everything else..

I find myself cheering for any other Formula 1 driver, instead of Max Verstappen or Sergio Perez as a result of the number of discarded cans I pick up.

Communication for our group is predominantly via a public Facebook page. We've had double figure volunteer turnouts for the last couple of months, and the hope is that as the weather improves, others will be willing to join us and spare an hour or so with black sack and litter picking tool in hand to help keep our little part of the beautiful Kent countryside looking presentable.

The Parish Council were asked to write a letter of thanks to Danny Lucas for litter picking his adopted zone in Wrotham Parish. Cllr Rayner confirmed that he supports this initiative with money from his KCC membership fund

8. Allotment Society – Brian Saunders

At present time there are 42 plot holders

During the past year we have had 4 changes of tenancy and at this time there are 3 people on the waiting list none of whom have been waiting any length of time.

I am pleased to be able to report that we have had no incidents of damage to property of theft of growing items this past year at least non from external intruders. This is tinged with some sadness that we have had a few minor incidents of loss, the culprit of which we suspect is one of our plot holders. However, we have as yet no firm evidence to be able to accuse any particular plot holder. The WAGS committee is keeping this under review.

We have recently enhanced our security arrangements by the installation of 2 CCTV cameras covering the entrance and car park area and thanks to Cllr Denton for organising this.

Again, a very challenging growing year due to the very unsettled weather which seems affected by climate change. We don't seem to be able to rely any more on set, predictable seasonable weather and over the past two years the timing of seed sowing and planting has been quite a challenge. The upside is that we can begin to grow crops that would not normally have thrived outside such as sweet potatoes, melons and more vegetables can be left in the ground until use over the winter.

We again held a very successful summer BBQ and it was good to see that nearly all the new plot holders attended and contributed food (and drinks!)

Again, we had a very strong turnout of volunteers to help in the preparation of the firework's bonfire and were please to be promised a grant from the Wrotham Fireworks profits.

Again, our funds are likely to be used for the purchase of manure and fertilizer and any costs for our summer social event. We organised our own hedge cut for the unmade section of the Pilgrims Way to the allotment entrance but this bridleway at this time has some extensive water filled holes and is very muddy. We assume it is still unlikely that the St Clere Estate will agree to take responsibility for keeping this section of the bridleway in good order.

In closure our thanks to this Council and in particular your Clerk for the time and support given.

Brian Saunders. Asst Secretary (Site Liaison)

The clerk advised the meeting that the up keep of the bridleway MR226 is the responsibility of KCC Public Rights of Way.

WPC has agreed going forward to cover the cost of hedge cutting this section of MR226.

9. Borough Councillor – Cllr Martin Coffin

St George's Court has been a thorn in the side for a long time. A resent questionnaire on the future of the site has received 139 responses, although no analysis has been compiled todate. The results from the questionnaire along with the wishes of the Goring Family will be taken into consideration. T&MBC officers have been continuing to put pressure on Clarion to move the site forward. However, current legislation doesn't provide a legal route to increase the pressure on Clarion.

Cllr Coffin is not in favour of Borough Green Gardens going forward in the T&M Local Plan and will be voting to prioritise brown field sites.

After weekly meetings over the last 2 years the waste service contract is finally running effectively. External bodies have been contracted to enforce littering and fly tipping, with the fines issued covering the contract cost. Under Des Keers Cabinet Member for Community Services T&MBC has invested in high quality cameras to deter and catch fly tippers and as a result incidents across the borough are down by 70%.

Cllr Betts has been working hard on carbon reduction across the borough, with the installation of PV panels on Larkfield Leisure Centre, Electric Vehicle Charging points in several car parks with the installation of another 50 to 60 planned in a joint initiative with KCC. Cllr Betts was also responsible for installation of the water source heat pump in the Leybourne Park Eco Café. Leisure Centres in the borough are rated amongst the top 10 in the country.

T&MBC has planted 2000 trees and is about to launch the 3rd round of the Green Business Grants.

The £3M pounds of revenue lost when Aylesford Newsprint closed has now been returned with the opening of the Panattoni development on the site.

The council is one of only a few in the country that are debt free but continue to support vulnerable households with initiatives such as 'Coats for Kids', Fuel Vouchers and Food Banks.

Cllr Coffin was asked if the green boxes could be fitted with lids. As the current contract with Urbaser has another 4 years to run after which the collection methodology may change, due to the expense involved it is unlikely that the green boxes will be fitted with lids in the interim.

When asked about the revised MOTO application for a 200HGV park, Cllr Coffin was of the opinion that there was no fundamental change from the original application and the proposal still remains inappropriate for the location.

The preference of KCC is that the facility should be located at Junction 8 on the M20 to better serve the New Thames Crossing. With improvements underway to the A249 – A2 roundabout and M2 – M20 connections, junction 8 on the M20 is far more sensible location for a Mid Kent Lorry Park.

In answer to the question of whether the Bulk Freighter Services would be returned, Cllr Coffin reported that this is unlikely although no final cabinet decision has been taken. As an alternative households can book the door collection service for £55.00 with a subsidised rate for families on benefits

Under the current 3 Tier System, Borough Councils are the waste collection authority with County Councils being the waste disposal authority, under a Unitary Government System both collection and disposal would be under the same management team and consequently more efficient.

In response to the question on whether T&MBC were proceeding with reports on and the design of Borough Green Gardens, to Cllr Coffin knowledge no work is on going on the project. Due to the proposed changes to the NPPF it is possible that T&MBC will run Regulation 18 of their Local Plan again, although no final decision has been made. This would of course affect the timescale of the plan, the implications of which would have to be considered against the benefit of the reduction in housing numbers required under the proposed revision of the NPPF. If re-elected Cllr Coffin will be in a position to influence the way forward on the Local Plan.

10. Friends of St George's Church – Malcolm Wiffen

THE FRIENDS OF ST. GEORGE WROTHAM

ANNUAL REPORT FOR WROTHAM PARISH COUNCIL

The Friends of St. George is a registered charity the purpose of which is to raise funds towards the maintenance and improvement of the Fabric of St George's Church Wrotham. The membership numbers vary but is currently 167.

With the ending of the Covid restrictions we were able to organise a number of events starting with a big band concert in April, a quiz night in June, plant sale in July (both of these being

held much later than usual) and lastly a very well received concert by the Kent Police Male Voice Choir in October.

These events raised just under £3,600.

We have continued to support St George's Church by paying some of the smaller maintenance bills. The loss of the church room required the photo copier and other storage to be moved into the church. The Friends helped by paying for new sockets in the vestry and for four new storage cupboards.

We are extremely grateful for the grant of £1000 received from the Fireworks committee. Funds will always be needed for the upkeep of the church. We have agreed to pay for additional leadwork to the Priest's room work which is in process at the moment and also to help towards the cost of upgrading the current CCTV system. Some money has also been ring-fenced for use when the improved disabled access plans go ahead.

Thank you once again for the generous support that we receive it is very much appreciated.

Malcolm Wiffen
April 2023

5. Chairman's Annual Report

WPC has wanted to replace our elderly streetlights with LEDs for ages and especially now as the cost of lighting the village has rocketed by £7,000. The problem has been UKPN who saw us as a cash cow and basically wanted to charge us for repairs to their infrastructure. We employed a specialist consultant to negotiate these miss-placed charges and he reduced the costs significantly. From around £25,000 to less than £5,000. We are currently tendering contracts and should have the 58 new streetlights installed in the coming months. My thanks to David Beach for his patient project management.

This time last year we were appointing a team of experts to fight the Moto Proposals for a 200-vehicle truck stop. That was obviously successful as the application was refused, but here we are again with the same prospect. Groundhog Day!

You may have noticed that we have planted 500 tree whips and two oak trees on a bund in front of the old Nepicar Layby, the point where Moto want an access for their truck-stop. Hopefully they will take the hint this time that we don't expect to lose the fight.

I never thought that the Parish Council would be running busses. Well not literally, but Wrotham and the Parish Alliance are helping to fund two busses for shopping trips each week. One for a run to West Malling and the other to Maidstone. My thanks to Cllr Mike Taylor of Borough Green for all his hard work in pulling it all together.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Cllr Brenda Jackson for her many years of service on the Parish Council and especially all her help with hall and pavilion administration. She has always been a strong advocate for St Georges Church and hopefully approves of all the work we have put into the reclamation of graves and trees in the Church Yard. Thank you so much Brenda.

We have just received confirmation that there is no election for Wrotham Parish Council, , so no way out just yet!

Seems like a good time to invite Public Questions from the floor, so thanks very much for your time and over to you.

6. Public Question Time

Covered under individual reports.

Cllr Gillin declared the meeting closed at 9.40pm

.....Chairman

.....Date