

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF WOODNESBOROUGH PARISH HELD
ON TUESDAY 8th MAY 2012 AT WOODNESBOROUGH VILLAGE HALL AT 7.30pm**

Councillors	D Woodward (Chairman) G. Boorman	K Ellen A Boniface	P Charlesworth G Hall
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26 Members of the Public signed in.

Dist Cllr Pip Russell Sarah Wells Clerk to the Parish Council	Dist Cllr Paul Carter County Cllr Leyland Ridings
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The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for coming. He then introduced the members of the Parish Council to the meeting.

1. APOLOGIES

Cllrs B Baker, D Ford and S Hoskins. Mrs Baldwin & Mrs P Ponting

2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the last Annual Meeting, held on 12th April 2011 were available for all present to read.

3. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising from the previous years meeting.

4. SPEAKERS – KENT MINERS HERITAGE GROUP

The Chairman introduced Mr J Davies, Mr G Cox and Mr C Varrall from the Kent Miners Heritage Group and then handed over to Mr Davies.

There followed a very interesting and informative presentation on the history of the East Kent coal fields and the men that worked in the local collieries. The presentation included old photos, film clips and anecdotes. The presentation lasted about an hour and was followed by a brief question and answer section.

The Chairman thanked Mr Davies and his colleagues for attending the meeting. The meeting closed for a short refreshment break.

5. POLICE REPORT

Unfortunately the local police office had been unable to attend

6. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Council

The year began with the local council elections in May at which 2 parish councillors – Richard Ovenden and Doug Smith retired. Two residents were nominated – Alistair Boniface and Gary Hall – who subsequently filled the two vacancies without the need for an election. However, Doug who was a member of the Parish Council's New Village Hall Working Group requested to continue serving on the group and was co-opted to the Parish Council for that purpose.

In recognition of his service to the community, Richard, having served 47 years on the Council and been Chairman on more than one occasion, was presented with a Magnolia Tree to be planted in his front garden together with a Certificate of Recognition. In my time as a Parish Councillor it was a pleasure serving with him. He had always been able to supply back ground knowledge and expertise on many subjects. It's good to see him here this evening.

Planning

Over the past 12 months the Council has commented on 18 applications ranging from the erection of stables, a terrace of 4 houses, sub-stations, detached garage, extensions and internal alteration to houses, erection of 24 dwellings & new community hall, grain store, temporary change of use of land for the drilling of a bore hole for gas, development of the old Brickworks at Hammill, and stationing of a mobile home for permanent residential use. Some have been contentious and the last one has gone to appeal which was heard last week at Whitfield and a decision is now awaited from the Inspector.

The row of 4 new houses - Bowling Green Cottages, Foxborough Hill - is now nearing completion and are a great improvement to the old Centa eyesore that existed after the closure of the Youth Club.

The Parish Council received concerns from residents about the drilling of an exploratory borehole to test for a form of natural gas – or fracking, in the field adjacent to the Ash by-pas roundabout. I believe we are all interested finding natural supplies of energy within our own country as opposed to importing them, but we had concerns about the disturbance of the strata deep down. However, we did note that this was only a bore hole and that the Environment Agency and Southern Water, major consultees had raised no objections. Permission was subsequently granted by KCC.

At the request of the Developers Quinn Estates, a display of their proposed development of the old Hammill Brickworks was held in the Village Hall. The Parish Council had no fundamental objections to the proposals; just some concerns about the increase of traffic on the surrounding roads, the lack of mains gas and drainage to the site and whether it would be commercially viable.

The Government's new National Planning Policy Framework NPPF is now with us with reduction of planning legislation/controls from a 1,000 pages to 50 we are told. Amongst many features, it allows for the creation of Neighbourhood Plans etc. I personally have reservations of how this is going to work when it appears to revolve around the term "sustainability" without any clear definition. It could develop into a bonanza for the lawyers.

Highways

Representations were made by 3 residents of Melville Lea about the flooding of their gardens following bouts of heavy rain flowing down The Street, a long standing problem since the late eighties. In addition, the Parish Council was advised that there were problems with the sewerage pumping station, again in Melville Lea. In conjunction with our MP Laura Sandys, the Parish Council has pursued both matters. As most residents in the centre of the village will know new drainage was installed by Kent Highways' contractors to remedy the flooding. I'm lead to believe more work is still to be done. In response to our writing to the Chairman of Southern Water arrangements were made for new pumps to be installed to rectify the sewerage problem. The Parish Council is monitoring these improvements.

Needless to say speeding continues to be a problem as it does in every other village or town. The possibility of having 30mph repeater signs placed along The Street was explored but refused by Kent Highways as this would contravene highways regulations. I am pleased to see that the Interactive speed device is still being deployed every so often opposite the Church. We had feared that it would be withdrawn due to financial cuts. With this mind we will pursue the possibility of having the sign occasionally located in The Street. We have also requested the occasional check by PC Woodland but cutbacks appear to have prevented this.

A request for salt bins at the top of Vine Lane and Foxborough Close were declined by Kent Highways. Although the Parish Council could fund them, we are then faced with having to fund and store the salt in one ton bags.

The Parish Council was consulted over the reduction of street lights as part of KCC cutbacks. We advised that we could accept lights turned off at mid-night but not a reduction of lamps in the village.

The saga of the re-location of the Oak Hill bus stop has now been laid to rest, regretfully. When finally the specification for a new stop was received from KCC it became clear that without any funding from them, the project was a non starter for the Parish Council to fund.

Footpaths

We were advised that the KCC Public Rights of Way vegetation clearance contract throughout the County was being reduced by 50%.

As previously they only cut twice a year, they are achieving this reduction by removing some paths off the contract completely. Cllr Ellen discussed this with the PROW Officer and was satisfied that no significant decrease in amenities would result from these cutbacks in our Parish.

Policing

We no longer have Police surgeries in the Village Hall as part of the Police budget cuts. They were not well supported. Our local Police Officer Ian Woodland is now responsible for a much larger area but his colleague PCSO Ian Norton does visit us when possible.

I fear crime is on the increase – with machinery stolen from the building site opposite the Church together with the heating oil being stolen from the Church within a few days of delivery.

I am disappointed that despite advertising in the local magazine nobody came forward to be the Neighbourhood Watch person the village.

Boundary Commission

It was brought to the Council's notice by Cllr Pip Russell that the Boundary Commission was making radical proposals for changes of the constituencies in East Kent by 2013. These included placing Sandwich together with Woodnesborough and other villages right across to Stourmouth in a new constituency stretching to the out skirts of Herne Bay removing us from South Thanet. This was felt to be unacceptable as there are no geographical reason nor historical links between Sandwich and Herne Bay. On behalf of the Parish Council I responded to the consultation expressing our opposition.

New development – Houses and Community Hall

I know that many of you here this evening wish to hear the latest on this matter. I can only tell you that following the public display of the plans over two days in this hall at the end of November, the planning applications were submitted to Dover District Council Planning Dept. We are still waiting for a decision. From a recent conversation with Mr Ellis I understood that addition information had been requested by the Planning Officer dealing with the application, which was supplied. All that I know is that the applications will go before the Planning Committee now hopefully by end of June at the earliest.

Other items of note are

The present Code of Conduct for Councillors is about to be withdrawn following the abolition of the Standards Board for England. The suggestion from Government is that a voluntary scheme be adopted but I know many District Councils are alarmed at this.

This will be the last year that the Audit Commission will oversee and approve the finances of local councils as it is to be abolished. Such duties are being passed to the private sector.

The Parish Council joined the Kent Association of Local Councils having been one of a handful of councils throughout the County not to be members. The Association provides a wealth of information for us and our Clerk, as well training for all Councillors and Clerks.

I believe that by now the new DDC waste and recycling service has resolved any major problems in the village. There were some omissions in Church Street and Marshborough and our District Councillor Pip Russell agreed to pursue these for us.

Following an advert in the parish magazine the Parish Council was delighted to appoint Mrs Su

Atkinson as our Environment Engineer – litter collector. Su, who lives in the village, is very dedicated to the job and we have received numerous comments from residents of how good a job she is doing. She brought to my attention on a couple occasions fly tipping and this has proved very successful in getting such items cleared by the District Council's contractors. Thank you, Su.

Thanks to our District Councillor Pip Russell who provides us with regular reports on district councils affairs, often dashing away from the Whitfield offices to provide us with information hot off the press so to speak.

I will draw my report to close by once again expressing our thanks to Ken & Linda Butcher for looking after the flower bed at the top of Fir Tree Hill. Linda expressed her dismay a few weeks ago when someone had trampled and stolen some of the plants.

I must also add our thanks to Su Atkinson together with Monika Smith who look after a small flower bed beneath the Woodnesborough sign on the Sandwich Road.

A big thanks to Mrs Sarah Wells, the lady behind the scenes who puts in an enormous amount of work for the Parish Council which I'm sure most people are not aware of.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to me fellow councillors and Doug Smith for their support, debate and regular attendance at meetings.

Thank you for your attention

David H-Woodward

7. FINANCE REPORT – 2011/12

The Clerk ran through the year end accounts as detailed below.

RECEIPTS

Carried Forward	8,571.80
Precept	11,000.00
VAT	116.63
Interest	36.61
Other	0.10
	19,725.14

PAYMENTS

Administration	4559.99
Village Hall Running Costs	678.42
Audit Fees	155.45
Village Green	1145.00
Councillors Expenses	0.00
Training	120.00
Church Yard Grant LGA 1972 Sect 214/215	650.00
Highways Cleaning	601.88
Flower Beds	154.98
Membership	642.99
VAT	507.76
Contingency	17.00
Election Costs	119.80
New Printer	194.00
New VH	1400.00
	10947.27

Bank Reconciliation

Current Account	60.00		
Reserve Account	8,942.27		
Bonus Saver	2,880.46	Open Bal	8,571.80
Petty cash	31.18	Receipts	11,153.34
	11,913.91	Payments	-10,947.27
Unpresented Cheques	-3,136.04		
	8,777.87		8,777.87

There were no questions from the floor.

8. REPORTS

i. District Councillors Pip Russell and Paul Carter

In the District Council elections in May 2011, the Conservatives were returned to power. I became a new Councillor and would like to thank those who placed their confidence in me, as one of your three District Councillors. It has been an extremely interesting year for me, learning how the District Council and the Town and Parish Councils work, listening to what people want from their Councils and, most importantly, finding out how to get it for them!

It has obviously been a tough time for the Conservative party, both politically and financially, and for all of us the recession has been not a little frightening, and it has thrown up enormous challenges. How these are tackled makes all the difference to the likely outcome. DDC has taken a leading role as an early implementer in the creation of a Health and Wellbeing Board for our area. This is part of the Government's reforms of the NHS and the Board, currently in shadow form for another year, will see elected members working with health professionals and the newly formed Clinical Commissioning Groups to decide on health priorities for our District so that funding can be directed where local people believe it is most urgently needed. We are one of only three districts in the UK engaged in this early implementation stage. I have been amazed, throughout all the cutbacks that are being imposed on us, at the power of the voluntary services to assist in the unavoidable new approach that has to take place with regard to Government spending. The Health and Wellbeing Boards' sensible use of the existing voluntary groups will be essential to the provision of economical but practical care in the future. No-one wants money to be withdrawn from our essential services, but it is surprising how much can be achieved through reorganisation of money-wasting personnel structures, inefficient supply and purchasing systems, and so on. With an energetic and measured approach to these things we hope some very positive results can be achieved. It will entail some very hard work, focus and dedication.

The new localism agenda has moved forward swiftly in the past year. Whilst the full impact of the Localism Act on planning law needs to be worked through – as ever the devil is in the detail. Towns and villages have been invited to submit their own ideas as to how their areas should be developed within the Local Development Framework. Meanwhile, of course, progress is awaited on plans for the new housing development, incorporating a new village hall for Woodnesborough.

Deep concern has been expressed by our local residents regarding exploration for shale gas from farm land in and around Woodnesborough. We Councillors have attended the various presentations by Coastal Oil and Gas Ltd, who say that they mainly wished to extract methane from coal, but did not rule out shale extraction in the future. This operation has been taking place in parts of America (from in fact the same seam that runs under the ocean and across Wales and through Kent) without known adverse affect, but in Lancashire the operation was stopped after two earthquakes were experienced. There is also the risk that chemicals used could infiltrate the water table. We are concerned that KCC do not press ahead with this admittedly economically very lucrative project until and unless assurances can be given to the community that the technology to be used by Coastal Oil and Gas are non-hazardous.

DDC is actively engaged in two other aspects of the localism subject. A Locality Board has been

formed in partnership with KCC. This will become a decision making forum which will make choices on how funding from KCC in areas such as Youth Services and Libraries will be prioritised and spent. As Lead Member for Community, Housing and Youth and as a member of the Libraries Committee these are special areas of interest to me. This will tie in with the now well-established neighbourhood forums which, as well as providing a means of consultation on current issues, have become the method by which a variety of local clubs, organisations and societies can bid for funding and have their bids decided on by their peers and neighbours.

Turning to DDC finance, for many years, for all kinds of historical reasons, DDC has been by far the lowest council taxing authority in East Kent. In the year that has just ended we were 12% below Canterbury, 32% below Thanet and 46% below Shepway. This meant that we were even more dependent on the Central Government Support Grant than our neighbours. We were also well aware that the coming age of austerity would mean significant reductions in the level of that grant. We were not unprepared for this. In the two previous years we had been through exercises which identified our priorities and targeted our finances and our staff resources on these, and this process continues under the Delivering Effective Services programme. This resulted in the loss of 23 full time equivalent staff positions and an annualised saving of £822K, though happily we were able to transfer and retrain many of the staff affected by these redundancies. In 2011 we reduced our Cabinet from nine to seven, and councillors of all parties voted unanimously for a 10% reduction in their allowances.

Nevertheless, a 14% reduction in our grant represented a big hit when our total budget was only circa £18 million. We have survived this year and, we believe, have protected our core front line services. Our staff are having to work harder and work smarter, and not everything can be done in an ideal time frame, and with a further 12% reduction in the year ahead (and the probability of further, but smaller reductions in 13/14 and 14/15) DDC will have to continue getting leaner and fitter. With a list of budget risks facing us in the near future, especially those relating to the localisation of council tax benefits, changes in business rates administration and the planned universal credits, we have to remain extremely prudent in the management of our finances. This is why we took the decision to raise council tax by 3.45% for 2012/13.

Turning to the regeneration programme, a year ago we were reeling from the decision by Pfizer to close their Sandwich plant with a loss of 4000 jobs and a potentially disastrous effect on our local economy. One year on and the situation, while still very concerning, is more encouraging. The site, now known as the Discovery Park, has been granted Enterprise Zone status and is now being marketed by London & Metropolitan, a big player in Property and Development. There are currently 800 jobs on the site and we have learned of significant interest on the part of another major Pharma company and educational/research institutions. Getting the High Speed train for Sandwich and Deal has been a big boost. However everyone recognises that there is a long way to go and we hope to be able to report a very favourable picture on jobs at the site in a year's time.

An injection of £20m into the flood defence scheme will reduce the risk of tidal flooding to 488 homes and 94 commercial properties in Sandwich. Just last week Laura Sandys announced an injection into East Kent of £35 million for small business from The Regional Growth Fund. Laura is also currently "battling in Brussels" for fairer fishing rules for the survival of the small fishing businesses around our coasts.

We have also made great strides in the redevelopment of Dover Town Centre, and specifically the St James area on the right hand side of the A20 as you head through the town towards Folkestone. The first stage of an attractive scheme incorporating a hotel, shops, bars, restaurants and some housing has been through Planning Meeting and the second stage is due to be considered in May. This will involve the demolition of the two eyesore buildings, the County Hotel and Burlington House, which have disfigured the Dover skyline and given such a bad immediate image of the town. Planning permission has been given for the expansion of Whitfield, a key element within the Local Development Framework, endorsed by the Government Inspector in early 2011, which is effectively our master plan for the

regeneration of the District though to 2026. We also expect the Aylesham development to move forward during the year ahead and there are exciting plans for the regeneration of the Western Heights.

We continue to await a Government decision on the future of the Port of Dover, and whether it is to be privatised or become what is being called a 'People's Port.' While this uncertainty persists we cannot progress our plans for regeneration of the Western Docks and Waterfront Area though some administrative hurdles have been cleared in preparation.

There has been further expansion in the development of shared services with neighbouring authorities. In the Spring of 2011 East Kent Housing was launched and, as Lead Member for Community, Housing and Youth, I am a member of this and also the Dover Area Board. This is an ALMO, an Arms Length Management Organisation, which has now taken over the management of the 17,000 council properties owned by Dover, Thanet, Shepway and Canterbury. While ALMOs are not uncommon in the local government world, bringing together four different sets of policies and working practices was a complex challenge. After some initial teething problems this is now bedding in very well.

For most of us, however, the most obvious example of joint working was the new Waste Service, shared with Shepway, which was launched in the autumn of 2011 and finished its roll-out in the New Year. Certainly there were numerous problems in the early stages, especially in the urban areas, and certainly in Woodnesborough, where quite clearly our contractors didn't do a good enough job in assessing which properties could take the new bins and which could not. Sorting out the fallout from this has taken us months. We also have to acknowledge that the Call Centre handling customer enquiries about the new service was initially insufficiently resourced and was swamped in the early days and weeks. Nevertheless, given that the overall objective of the scheme was to increase recycling rates and reduce the amount of waste going to landfill, we believe the scheme has been a success. From a base of circa 30% we are now seeing recycling rates of over 50% and the scheme was highly praised at the Towns and Parishes Meeting in late autumn. An interesting statistic: in the fourth quarter of 2011, when the scheme was still not fully rolled out, we collected 844 tonnes of food waste and there are signs that seeing the quantity of food going to waste because it is in a separate container has actually changed some people's habits.

In conclusion, your councillors will continue to do their best to work with parish councils and with individual residents where our input can solve some problems, (though we can't solve them all!), or at least tackle blockages and improve communications. We share the frustration felt by parish councils at the slowness of some enforcement actions but can report that a new Principal Enforcement Officer is now in post following a reorganisation of the Planning Department.

The financial stresses are not going to get any easier in the foreseeable future and we will not be able to do everything we would like to do. But it is amazing how often a cloud can reveal a silver lining and, with one hundred percent commitment to achieve what we can, we'll do what we can!

ii. County Councillor Ridings

Finance

At last year's AGM I indicated that KCC were required to make savings in 2011/12 of £95m. This was achieved and prelim figures for March 31st 2012 indicate an underspend of about £8m, which is just as well as Central Government are now requiring savings of £97m in 2012/13 rather than the £65m indicated last year.

Last year I said that KCC would get back a minimum of 92% of the £50m invested in Icelandic Banks a few years ago. I am pleased to say that we now expect to recover more than the £50m in total. £30m has come back already and the remainder is due over the next year. Had that money been invested in the stock market we would have lost more than £4m.

Education

We are very lucky to have excellent secondary education in this area, with one OFSTED rated outstanding school and one with a Good rating.

Of the 9 Primaries schools in the area we have 1 outstanding, 6 good and 2 satisfactory.

Wayfarers

I have been pressing the Cabinet Minister for Adult Social care since he made the decision to sell Wayfarers in January 2011 to reconsider his proposal. I am pleased to say a few weeks ago he did reconsider that decision and has now agreed that “Wayfarers will therefore continue to operate as it currently is, managed by KCC, for the foreseeable future.”

Libraries

All Dover District Libraries will remain open. Ash Library was causing me considerable concern, but joint proposals by Ash Parish Council, Ash WI, the Ash Heritage group and others together with some funding from KCC, means it will remain open for substantially the same number of hours.

Richborough household waste site

I spoke against closure of this facility at the full council debate on 29 March and since then have badgered the Cabinet Member to consider alternative proposals. I don't want to start cheering yet, but a business man has come forward saying he can run the facility at nil cost to KCC. This is very exciting news and I will keep you informed.

The Chairman thanked Cllrs Russell, Carter and Ridings and asked if anyone wished to make any comments or ask any questions from any of the members. There being no questions or comments the Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 9.40pm.