

WROTHAM PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 03rd April 2024 AT 8.00pm IN THE WROTHAM PAVILION, HIGH STREET, WROTHAM

Present: Cllr's P Gillin (Chairman), H Rayner, K Denton, C Mills, R Betts & T Jacob

In Attendance: Lesley Cox (Clerk) & 4 residents

1. **Apologies for absence:** Cllr's Coffin (T&MBC Commitments), Beach & Vick
2. **Minutes**

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 5th April 2024, approved by the Parish Council on the 10th May 2023

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 have apologies from Cllr's Beach, Vick & Coffin
I see that we have 10 reports from various organisations so I shall move straight on to the first report from Elizabeth Rye of St George's Primary School

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

1. **St George's Primary School – Mrs Elizabeth Rye**

St George's (VC) CE Primary School

**Report to Parish Council Annual General Meeting
3rd April 2024 at 8.00pm**



Bringing **faith** and
education together
'Letting our light shine'
(Matthew 5:16)

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

I am very proud to continue in the leadership and development of St George's Church of England Primary School. We have had a successful year in embedding our curriculum that's closely linked to our school vision, 'Bringing Faith & Education Together' in order to allow the children to 'let their light shine' Matthew 5:16.

Our vision ensures that what we offer at St George's broadens children's horizons, allows them to go to places they might otherwise not go, try new activities that test their resilience and allow each child a chance to be celebrated in their achievements. Our overarching school plan explores opportunities to take children out and local visits have included exploring in and around our village of Wrotham, as well as further afield to Rochester Cathedral, Wingham Wildlife Centre, Kent Life, Eagle heights, Horton Kirby to name but a few!

We continue to have excellent links with Farms for City Children providing a residential opportunity. Last year the children travelled to Treginnis in Wales and in June they are off to Nethercott farm in Devon. They become farmers for the week and take part in a range of physical activities, look after and tend for animals.

This academic year we also took over thirty younger children to a PGL centre for the second year for three-night stay. Over that time, they took part in rock climbing, abseiling, archery, tunnel exploring and lots more! I am always so proud of how the children enjoy these opportunities and to the parents for the trust they impart in letting us take their children to these experiences.

We have had some great highlights including world book day, Times Tables Rockstars day, Science Week and looking forward to a summer of sports events – hopefully in sunny weather.

What we also think is important is our local community links. We have been supported by a local nursery in donating a Christmas Tree and plants to help our Eco-Club Gardeners take pride in our school environment by adding flowers and colour. We've been involved in competitions such as MP Tom Tugendhad's Litter Angels competition focusing on litter picking ideas to help the environment and he came to present prizes to own winning children. Once again, we took part in the ROAR Project, supported by the local Malling District Lions Club who have helped pay for our entrance to the competition and come into school to help us determine winners to put forward to the local region finals.

Then there has been the Wrotham Festival of Light. A project that was supported by the Parish Council and the Wrotham Arts Council, alongside Cohesion Plus, this event has established itself as another fantastic community occasion enjoyed by hundreds on the night. I'd like to extend my thanks to the Parish Council who support organising behind the scenes as well as making a donation towards the costs of making the lanterns.

We enjoyed being part of the fantastic Wrotham in Bloom event, the Wrotham Christmas fayre are now planning towards the support of the upcoming Wrotham Arts Festival.

To ensure our vision is lived out careful 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.

Amongst so much great work we have sadly experienced incidents of anti-social behaviour. Youths coming onto our school site and breaking toys, leaving litter and sadly even breaking into our chicken coop which has traumatised the chickens and has ultimately meant we have had to rehome them.

We continue to experience 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.

We have reported incidents and had PCSO in attendance, however, the problems continue. The road markings outside the school are not visible as haven't been repainted in a long time. I would advocate we continue to have a cohesive and united approach to this with local parishioners, the Parish Council and ourselves in the hope we 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 people working hard for the benefit of the entire school community and beyond.

Mrs Elizabeth Rye
Headteacher

Cllr Betts was asked to raise the condition of the line markings outside the school with T&MBC.

The width of Old London Road is an obstacle in respect of speed reduction; however, the parish have purchased speed display equipment which we hope will be installed in the near future.

Mrs Rye informed the meeting that the new electrical installation in the Pre-School building is working well and suggested that Katherine Stanley St George's Pre-School manager is invited to next year's AGM.

In answer to a question from Cllr Denton, Mrs Rye confirmed the current school role to be 197 out of a capacity of 210, the new intact in September is likely to fill 24 of the 30 places available, making the school still viable going forward.

2. Betenson Trust – Report

THE BETENSON TRUST ALSMHOUSES

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE WROTHAM PARISH COUNCIL

The Trust has twelve small alms-houses, 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 trustees representing each of the three villages. In addition, there is the Clerk to the Trust. This year the rector of Wrotham, Edward Wright retired, and his place was taken by Rev Tim Hatwell until he retires next July.

One of the units at Plaxtol has had a major refurbishment and one of the vacancies there has now been filled after being advertised locally. The other vacancy at Plaxtol cannot be offered to an almsperson until a similar refurbishment takes place. There is a further vacancy at Platt but this too cannot be occupied yet as a simple makeover will be insufficient under new government regulations and is now the next unit scheduled to be brought up to a higher standard.

An application for funding for a ground source heat pump at No 1 in Plaxtol is in progress. A short-term programme of works is envisaged for general maintenance over the next two years.

In view of the major costs that will be incurred over the next few years and the high cost involved in providing heating to the residents it has been necessary to increase the weekly maintenance contribution made by each resident to £110 per week. This is causing concern to some residents who receive housing benefit and are still waiting for this to be increased.

Once again we are very grateful to have received a grant from the Wrotham Fireworks Committee.

A number of the current Trustees are looking to retire after many years of service to the Trust and we are giving priority to recruiting others.

Malcolm Wiffen – Trustee
April 2024

3. Friends of Wrotham – Cllr Chris Mills

Chris Mills' Report on behalf of Friends of Wrotham for the Wrotham AGM 3rd April 2024

Good evening,

I am sad to report that this will almost certainly be the last time I will stand here as Chair of FofW. It has been decided to wind the charity up after over 40 years.

I reported last year that the one major event that we put on, The Wrotham Classic Steam and Transport Rally would in future be run by the Malling Lions. Indeed, the Rally did take place last year but unfortunately they have now decided not to run it this year. Another Lions group looked into taking it over, but also pulled out due to the cost of putting the Rally on. It's future is in doubt.

At a Parish Council meeting it was agreed that the charity funds be transferred to a dedicated bank account held by WPC. The rules set out in the charity's constitution will continue, so donations will be for sports, youth and community capital projects.

I am proud of what we have achieved over the time I have been involved, having donated over £150,000 to numerous projects in the village, the largest being £65,000 for the pavilion. We were of great help with match funding for the children's playground and the purchase of the external gym.

Many of the older residents will remember the early donations to build the bowls club and multicourt.

Thankyou

4. Wrotham Fireworks –

Firstly, apologies for our lack of attendance at the Annual Parish Meeting please accept this as way of an update on the Event.

We are pleased to report that we had another successful event (Saturday 28th October 2023). Due to continued good advertising on social media/website and a streamlined on-line booking system, the event drew in a faithful local crowd, despite the very challenging wet weather conditions. Huge credit goes to Phoenix Fireworks who put on another amazing display. 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 Borough Green Scouts and volunteer litter pickers 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 that Tim Meynen is to stand down as Committee Chair who gave 10 years of fun and energy to the role, contributing to the many years of event success. We wish Tim and his family best of luck with their new house move and hope to see them at future events. Steven Finley shall be taking on his new role as Committee Chair. Like previous years, we are giving away all proceeds from the event to local organisations and groups (minus a float, insurance etc). We are pleased to say that despite the drop in sales this year due to poor weather on the night we were still able to distribute a sum £3,050.00 which is full testament to the continued support of the local community. Organisations that have benefitted from donations from the 2023 event include:- • Borough Green and Wrotham Netball • Wrotham Music Society • 40f Maidstone Squadron ATS • St Georges Pre-school • St Georges PTA • Wrotham Allotment Society • The Church & Friends of St George's • Betenson Trust • Wrotham Parish Magazine • Borough Green Scouts We are pleased to confirm that Next year's event will be on Saturday 26th October 2024.

Issued on behalf of Wrotham Fireworks Committee 22/04/24.

Steven Finley, Chairman

Adam Jenner, Treasurer

5. Borough Councillor – Cllr Robin Betts

T&MBC has a balanced budget and is one of very few councils to be debt free.

The Chief Executive Julie Beilby after spending most of her working life at T&MBC retired at the beginning of the year. A suitable candidate has been selected and will take office in July, subject to Full Council approval.

The Planning Department is now nearly at full strength which should assist with the length of time taken to process planning applications.

Grants totalling more than £1.5 million have delivered a major boost to Tonbridge and Malling's ambitions for carbon neutral leisure centres..

Two grants, one from the government and one from Sport England, will be invested in Larkfield Leisure Centre, saving hundreds of tonnes of carbon emissions every year. A grant of £1,164,760 has been awarded by the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme for the installation of air source heat pumps for the fitness pool at Larkfield Leisure Centre, which will allow removal of the current gas fired boilers serving the pool. The council will contribute an additional £158,831 under the funding terms of the scheme which is run by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and delivered by Salix. The council has also been awarded £405,000 by Sport England to fund energy saving measures at the centre in New Hythe Lane, Larkfield. New solar panels and LED lighting will help cut both the running costs and carbon emissions of the centre, which is operated by the council's leisure partner TMActive. The centre already has 190 solar roof panels which were fitted in 2023. The new funding provides a major boost to the council's ambition to make its leisure centres carbon neutral by 2027. At Tonbridge Swimming Pool, solar panels have also recently been installed on the roof and are expected to save around 14 tonnes of emissions every year.

Green Business Grants of £40K have already been awarded for the following:

Supporting business development Section A is intended for businesses in the Low Carbon and Renewable Energy Economy (LCREE) to help build short-term resilience and provide the foundations for future growth.

Helping lower business premises' carbon footprint. Section B is open to all independent businesses based in Tonbridge and Malling borough or Sevenoaks district that operate from commercial premises.

£125K has been awarded under the West Kent Rural Grants scheme which is funded by the Government's Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF). The grant assists rural businesses and communities to support jobs and growth, improve local facilities and to reduce their carbon footprint.

Phase 2 of Electric Vehicle Charging Points is in progress with 30 charging points already installed and an additional 60 to follow.

T&MBC Local Plan will go out to consultation at the Regulation 18B stage next summer.

An enhance enforcement service for fly tipping has been agreed with an increase maximum fine of £1K.

A 6-month trial of an Anti-Social Behaviour Enforcement Team commenced in April, the team will carry out tasks using planned and proactive patrol duties, enforcement, and investigation activities across the borough, addressing issues of crime and disorder, anti-social behaviour, and working in liaison with TMBC internal and external partners. The team will respond as directed or tasked to Members' enquiries, service requests and demands, complaints and taskings. The team's workload will be prioritised by TMBC in liaison with the Team Leader. The team's priority will be to focus on anti-social behaviour hotspots across the borough and to

provide a high visibility presence and reassurance to the public. They will also look to issue Fixed Penalty Notices for breaches of the Public Space Protection Orders and also support initiatives run by TMBC or our partners.

T&MBC migrated to the Agile software platform, with planning being the first to released for public use. The transition has been difficult with numerous problems but will be of great benefit eventually.

6. Wrotham Arts Festival – Claire Fraser

The event is bi-annual the last event in 2022 was very successful with proceeds used to benefit St George's Church. This year's event will follow the same format with a ticket only preview evening on Thursday 9th May and the main event open to the public from Friday 10th to Sunday 12th May 2024. The event is proving popular with most of the display space already sold. The committee remain extremely grateful for the help and financial support received from Wrotham Parish Council, with the donation received used to cover the cost of the hire of St George's Hall and the hall café.

As always help is required especially from younger members of the community to set up the event on Bank Holiday Monday 6th May and take down from 4pm onwards on Sunday 12th May.

Mrs Rye agreed to ask for assistance amongst parents of St George's School children.

7. Wrotham Wombles – No Report

Called away at the last minutes on an urgent litter clearance mission on Wimbledon Common.

8. County Councillor – Cllr Harry Rayner

The position of Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance comes with an office which has provided wall space for my many maritime pictures many of which were purchased from Wrotham Arts Festivals over the years. For many years I have continued to give the Cabinet a hard time over finance, so I believe the decision was made to have me in the tent, rather than out.

The outcome of last year's Borough Election left the Conservative with no overall majority. Entering into a coalition with Independent's Cllr's Mike Taylor and Wendy Palmer and with the Major's casting vote has maintained a Conservative led working majority. This configuration offers more protection against the Borough Green Gardens proposal.

The 2024-25 budget has been difficult with a gap of £84.4M to fill. Libraries, household waste and recycling sites, plus supported buses are all protected this year, but the authority has warned these areas may face cuts in the future in order to balance the books.

Adult and Children's Services now take up 75% of annual revenue as opposed to 40% a few years ago. Spend on Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) has increased by 25% from 60M to 80M. The Council has now option but to look at ways of reducing these costs.

The Borough of Greenwich in their role as trustees of McMillan House, Gravesend Road, Wrotham want to sell the facility, I am currently attempting to persuade KCC to put up new trustees with a view to re-opening the facility.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UAS Children) numbers are enormous and KCC put pressure on the Home Office after Kent reached its capacity under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). KCC has purchased 6 new properties to accommodate increasing numbers and the Home Office following a recent court case has to ensure that transfers out of KCC care take place in line with what is required to prevent Kent's Children's Services becoming overwhelmed again.

The EU Entry & Exit System will be implemented on the 6th October 2024, this will require non-EU citizens to have their finger prints and facial images taken. The system will operate at the Port of Dover and Eurostar and Eurotunnel terminals in the UK. The impact of traffic delays and build up in these areas and on the M20 are of concern. KCC has made strong representations to the Home Office.

Bus routes have experienced a reduction of 75% in pre-covid numbers. The reduced numbers and the significant increase in fuel has resulted in many services being withdrawn by the service operator. The expected annual cost of supporting these services is £3million and this has exhausted the funding available from government whilst KCC's own budgets for the support of bus services are also fully allocated. Unfortunately, this means that KCC are not in a position to intervene when further services are subject to change or cancellation.

Assisted school travel will also end in March 2025.

9. Allotment Society – No Report

10. Borough Councillor – Covered Under Item 5

11. 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

This time last year we went out to tender to replace street lighting and I was predicting installation over a couple of months. Indeed, our contractors, L and K did 90% of their work within 2 weeks. Who would have predicted that UK Power NOWORKS, as I prefer to call them, would still have 2 jobs outstanding a year later.

There have been UKPN crews digging up the road, only to find no electrician on site, and then having to fill in the hole again in the afternoon! It then gets rescheduled a month later. You couldn't write it!

However, we are now nearly there and my thanks to Cllr David Beach for his patient project management and to Mike Mills, our amazing street lighting consultant. Without both of them this would have been impossible.

We have had a successful Groundhog Day opposing MOTO and their 200 HGV Truck Stop has been stopped for a second time. WPC is again Lead Parish of the Alliance, and we appointed a barrister, planner, Highways Expert, and a Landscape Expert to produce reports objecting to the proposal. Tonbridge & Malling Area 2 Planning Committee met last month to refuse planning consent. It is quite likely that MOTO will appeal but we will have the same team to represent the Parish Alliance at the Planning Hearing, in front of a Planning Inspector, in that event.

Borough Green Garden City, the 3000-house development south of the M26, is now highly unlikely in my opinion. The Conservative Administration of Tonbridge & Malling are a minority government who are dependent on Independent Cllrs Mike Taylor and Wendy Palmer to keep overall control. The reality of this arrangement is that Wrotham, Platt and Borough Green have considerable influence. I regularly discuss planning matters with Mike Taylor, the Cabinet Member for Planning and hear that the T&M Local Plan is being brought forward without huge housing developments, as was previously planned.

I note that the Whitehill Roundabout is looking lovey at present with its Canadian Redwood central tree and 4 multi-stemmed Silver Birch satellite trees. The WPC Grounds Team have planted numerous daffodils, all now in flower. Our thanks to Keiron and the Allotment society for the bulbs.

Due to the escalation of Anti-Social Behaviour in the Village WPC resurrected the Crime Diary.

Crime Diary II gives the public a means of providing information on ASB by either:

- Letter using the WPC post-box in Hardens. Go past the counter and it's on the right, above the magazine rack.
- Text or WhatsApp messages to a dedicated Mobile phone number: **07568 056484**
- By email: **wpccrmediary@gmail.com**

Information is only shared with members of T&MBC Community Safety Unit, members include the Police and Clarion Housing .

This 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 9.05pm

.....Chairman

.....Date