

# WROTHAM PARISH COUNCIL

## MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 02<sup>nd</sup> April 2025 AT 8.00pm IN THE WROTHAM PAVILION, HIGH STREET, WROTHAM

**Present:** Cllr's P Gillin (Chairman), H Rayner, K Denton, C Mills, D Beach & A Vick

**In Attendance:** Helen Davison (Clerk), Lesley Cox (RFO) & 9 residents

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

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2024, approved by the Parish Council on the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024

3. **Opening Address from Cllr P Gillin**

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, on their behalf.

I see that we have 11 reports from various organisations so I shall move straight on to the first report from Deputy Head, Mr Jones, of St George's Primary School.

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

1. **St George's Primary School – Mrs Elizabeth Rye, Headteacher,  
Read by Mr Jones, Deputy Head**

*St George's (VC) CE Primary School*

**Report to Parish Council Annual General Meeting  
2<sup>nd</sup> April 2025 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 where our vision is 'Bringing Faith & Education Together' in order to allow the children to 'let their light shine' Matthew 5:16.

Our vision continues to develop in enhancing opportunities for the children who attend St George's. This includes within the teaching of the National Curriculum whilst nurturing their learning in ways which support a 21st century learner. We are very aware of our cohort of children who have been raised in a digital age. In school we support this through our classrooms having interactive whiteboards and i-pads. These have increased in number with thanks to our hardworking PTA who have funded more.

Whilst being computer literate is important, we also want to foster children's life skills by trying new things, visiting new places. We continue to enrich our curriculum with educational visits to local areas and further afield in Kent and London. We had a long weekend PGL residential in Marchants Hill, Surrey-where the children took part in archery, rock climbing, abseiling, giant swing, obstacle courses to name but a few. Our older children continue to enjoy our residential through Farms for City Children, and are soon to visit Nethercott Farm in Devon, where they will tend animals and take part in a range of farm tasks over a 5-night visit.

Our school is lucky to have fantastic grounds where we enjoy sports, outdoor learning, nature, and forest schools. We have been kindly financially supported by Chris Mills and the parish council in the development of a Key Stage 1 Outdoor Learning and Forest School project. This has allowed us to landscape an area of school, buy new equipment, shelter materials, fire pit and waterproofs to allow our younger children to experience forest schools. Now the weather has taken a turn for the better these lessons will be up and running and we would welcome visitors

to see it in use whether through forest school sessions or our Wild with Nature club.

Forest Schools and Outdoor Learning is an important part of the children's lives at St George's. They provide fundamental support by connecting children with nature which is crucial for developing lifelong relationships with the natural world and empowering them to protect their future.

Connecting with nature creates meaningful social connections for mental health and wellbeing, a chance for children to 'take a risk'.

We have observed that more creative learning and environmental awareness has had impact on

- Healthy active play has increased
- Observed improved attitude towards learning
- Improved behaviour
- Reduced bullying
- Reported improved social interaction

There is a changing picture in schools across Kent with funding changes. Schools are required to have a wider, diverse intake of pupils and support inclusion with widening neuro-divergence.

It is important we continue to reflect on how we manage and adapt our school environment to meet the learning needs for all. Constant reflection is a must for pupils who struggle in a traditional classroom environment meaning those with different learning styles such as hands on, real life and experimental learners have **the chance to shine**.

We have also been supported by a monetary donation from the community choir and this has fed into buying resources for a room which some children use for their sensory needs, time to regulate and relax.

Looking forward we are planning on developments in school where we need to ensure our KS1 outside areas has equipment that allows co-operative play, team work and problem solving, which will support communication and language development. We need to upgrade outside areas to support physical development.

Our school building has now been standing for just over 50 years and finally we are getting some KCC upgrades. Over the Easter we are having a new (temporary) school roof, and starting a project which will last through and over the summer holidays to have all the classrooms ceilings replaced as well as checking the drainage system.

Hopefully this will be completed in time for our new September intake. Currently our roll is 194 (we can reach a pan of 210). In our Reception Class we have 25 children. In projections for 2025- 26 intake we had 24 first choices naming St George's so we are hopeful we will be nearer 30 which is better financially for the school.

Widening from the school itself, we have continued to work within the community of Wrotham regular visitors to the beautiful Church of St George's as well as visiting local residential homes' links to foodbanks, the Flexi-School held here in the pavilion. The children love a chance to 'perform and be involved in events such as Wrotham Festival of Light, Wrotham Christmas Fayre and church events such Remembrance Sunday.

We continue to have communication with our nearby neighbours. Despite the excellent addition ~fa speed radar along Old London Road, parking remains an issue at peak drop off and pick-up times. We send information to parents via school communication channels as well as in face to face discussion and the police and/or PCSOs have been outside of school. We have encouraged following a one-way approach but is a difficult issue to solve. I have been in contact with KCC through the Travel Plan option wanting to trial the new School Streets Scheme but have had no success in moving this forward.

We will continue to advocate the great number of benefits that School Streets schemes can bring to school environments, such as:

- greater ease of movement for our school neighbours
- reducing volatile and challenging behaviours near the school entrances (drivers/residents/parents)
- reducing the number of vehicles used on the school run
- creating a calmer environment for staff and families at peak times
- improving relationships with the wider community
- improving children & families' health and wellbeing

The upcoming academic year, 2025-26, has a SIAMS (Church School Inspection) on the horizon for us but I am confident we will do well. We have a strong and supportive Governing Body and already demonstrating the strength of our vision and values. By this time next year, we should know the outcome which I will be happy to share.

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

Comments/Questions raised:

Cllr Denton noticed more parents are using the one way system, Mr Jones agreed this has improved especially Fridays as the swimming coach is returning at collection time.

## **2. St George's Preschool – Katherine Stanley, Charlie Philips**

I am Katherine Stanley, Manager of the preschool. Firstly I would like to thank Cllr Rayner, Cllr Vick and Friends Of St Georges who supported us last year during our power failure as the preschool would not have been able to remain open without your help along with the primary school. Following the completion of all works in late December time and a new power supply running, we received an Outstanding Inspection from Ofsted.

Since then we have been quite busy. We are lucky to have a good relationship with St Georges primary school and support children from the age of 2 up to primary school age, from funded children from underprivileged families who attend for a few sessions a week up to full time. It has been difficult with younger children after Covid needing integration into society so we have worked hard to prepare them and help their transition into primary school.

We work with the local community, joined in with the Festival Of Lights, try to support the Fireworks and fundraising for food banks, We also take children out into the local community handing out care packages made with the children for Chinese New Year and Friendship day. We have invited a range of people from different professions into the school including conductors & musicians, animals workshops and parents to share their skills and talents.

We are trying to spend more time in the outside environment, also have a forest school within the grounds of the primary school and the children go out in all weather in suitable clothing.

We are a full, small charity with only 20 children a day and a full waiting list for September. There is a demand for us. Most children come from Wrotham and Borough Green and priority for available places is given to Wrotham residents or those with siblings enrolled at the primary school to help with pick-ups and drop offs.

We do not have as much going on as the primary school but we like to think that what we do helps them on their step up to school.

Comments/Questions raised:

Cllr Gillin added that WPC helped with the power restoration to which the preschool extended its thanks.

Cllr Rayner asked if the power restoration works had lasted and there have been no further problems, which there have not.

## **3. Betenson Trust – Jon Pearce**

The almshouses in Wrotham are owned and managed by the Betenson Trust which dates from 1788 when Mistress Betenson of Great Comp bequeathed a sum of money for the benefit of the elderly and poor of the Parish of Wrotham. The Wrotham almshouses were built first in 1806, followed by Platt in 1843 and Plaxtol in 1870. The Vicar of each Parish is an ex-officio trustee under the deeds of our Charity.

The almshouses were improved in the 1960's by the addition of kitchens and bathrooms using a mortgage raised with Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, which was paid off over about 20 years from the Weekly Maintenance Contributions (WMC) received from the occupants, most of whom received Housing Benefit. Once the mortgages had been paid off, a proportion of that payment was saved against future maintenance costs.

Periodic maintenance was carried out, including reroofing the Wrotham almshouses because the nails retaining the slates had corroded away. Kitchens and bathrooms have been improved and a communal laundry area created at both Wrotham and Platt as the kitchens are too small to enable a washing machine to be installed.

The trustees are now embarking on a further sequence of improvements to increase the insulation on all the almshouse to comply with modern requirements and reduce the proportion of the WMC that pays for the heating, as heating costs have become much more expensive. Because of Covid restrictions and the need to protect the elderly residents from infection, routine maintenance was paused, and this delay has led to the decay of doors and windows that were not painted in line with the normal 3-year external decoration cycle. This has necessitated the replacement of some doors and windows.

As a result of the large increase in the cost of construction material and labour costs the reserves of the Betenson Trust are now at the lowest level of the last 30 years and it has proved necessary to raise the WMC over the last three years to meet these costs and enable the reserves to be built again for future improvements and cyclical maintenance.

A D Mackay  
Chairman of The Betenson Trust  
26<sup>th</sup> March 2025

Comments/Questions raised:

Cllr Gillin asked about the size of the properties and how they communally heat. The heating is run by gas in Wrotham, on a single boiler to run throughout the entire premises which is a challenge for insulation and costs.

There are no vacancies within Wrotham at present and the process for applicants and waiting lists for Wrotham unknown at present due to significant recent internal changes within the organisation. A new trustee has just been appointed with previous experience of housing application criteria.

#### **4. Friends of St George's Church – Linda Read**

THE FRIENDS OF ST GEORGE WROTHAM  
2024 ANNUAL REPORT FOR WROTHAM PARISH COUNCIL

The Friends of St George Wrotham is a registered charity the purpose of which is to raise funds towards the maintenance and improvement of St George's Church Wrotham.

The membership is currently 150 but it does fluctuate.

As reported last year John Winram took over as treasurer for 2024. At the AGM in September our Chairman Malcom Wiffen was due to stand down but continued in post as no one came forward. He retired from the role as Chair on 31 December 2024 but continues as a committee member. His expertise and service has been invaluable, and we are very grateful for his continuing support.

The Charity's income comes from our membership subscriptions and fundraising events. In 2024 the events held were a Quiz in March, a Garden Safari in April, a concert by the Kent Police Choir in September and a stall in the Church at the Wrotham Fayre in December.

Overall, in the church year end December 2024 the Friends were pleased to be able to make grants totalling £6,661 towards the maintenance of the church on various projects. This included £3,500 towards the cost of improving the access into the Church. The main work was completed in 2024 and has been widely appreciated and hopefully the project will be finalised soon.

There was an outstanding commitment for a grant to fund the boiler repairs made in October 2024 which was concluded early in 2025 for £1,716.

The next major project for the church, is the repair of the South slope of the chancel roof and other urgent quinquennial repairs. The architect has provided a costed plan and so other funding is being sought by the PCC but the Friends will of course, assist in any way that they can.

Again, we must thank everyone for their very generous support in helping to maintain our 13<sup>th</sup> Century Grade I listed church.

Linda Read

Acting Chairperson for the Friends of St George Wrotham. April 2025

Comments/Questions raised:

Cllr Gillin expressed thanks to Malcolm Wiffen for all his work on fundraising and maintenance for the Church over the years.

#### **5. Allotment Society – Brian Saunders**

At the present time we have 38 plot holders and 2 vacant with no waiting list which is unusual.

I am pleased to report that we had no vandalism or criminal damage within the last year. We are pretty tight with our security.

During the summer we had another successful BBQ with our plot holders.

In National Big Green Week we hosted an allotment visit by the St Georges School Eco club. The children were shown the plots, how to plant seedlings and went home with a bughouse they had made, how to make nutritious compost from green garden waste and were encouraged to try at home. We are now exploring future opportunities for collaboration with the school Eco group for further visits.

This year we plan to have a water wise campaign to encourage usage to best effect and for shed holders to fix guttering to their sheds to conserve rain water.

We assisted the fireworks committee by providing a working party to move pallets to the bonfire site and took over the Rose and Crown kitchen area providing lunch for volunteers. We thank the Rose and Crown for allowing us to do this and particularly thanks the Firework committee for their generous donation to our funds.

In conclusion the allotments is a thriving community and gives pleasure and friendships to a very diverse community. It gives space to relax, connect with nature, it's a growing awareness of the importance that allotments are to improving not just physical but also mental health. We have come a long way from the Inclosure Act of 1845 which first created allotments, and intended to give landless poor an area of land they could cultivate.

Comments/Questions raised:

Cllr Gillin was pleased to note the water utility bill issues for the allotments of over £6k were recently resolved after a number of months investigation by the RFO.

Wags hopes this year to set an approach to water usage reasonable with the council and make water consumption as low as possible.

## **6. Wrotham Arts Festival – Tim Martin**

In 2024 following last festival it appeared to be the end.

Older members were struggling to keep up and younger members were losing motivation.

After time to think I decided it was a shame to leave and so the event resurrected with me as the chairman. A few enquiries revealed there were a few people within the village who were interested in helping. They have come forward and hopefully we have a working committee. The date has been booked for the 2026 festival which is the 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> May, opened a new bank account, booked the venue with the clerks help and the screens are reserved so plans are in place.

We have no plans to alter the event so the framework will be the same but we're hoping to expand it slightly to give people something different to look at.

We're looking to improve the admin so for younger people who are quite computer savvy which we are not and one of the reasons that we wanted to step back after starting to run out of ideas to bring it forward, but they have clearly got some good ideas and will hopefully be better.

The money raised will be contributed to the church in its entirety. Thank you to the Fireworks committee for your contributions, I think we have had some money received already, and we are hoping WPC will help out again for when the event goes ahead.

Comments/Questions raised:

RFO advised the festival should send on contribution request prior to WPC setting its precept in December.

Cllr Rayner reiterated the importance to send in requests for financial support early.

St Georges School asked if all the boards were reserved and advised that there were spaces for future works.

## **7. Wrotham Fireworks – Stuart Vicks**

I apologise this is somewhat off the cuff whereas everyone else has written a report.

Firstly, my apologies from my chairman Steve Finley. I think it was an easy out knowing that I was going to be here this evening so he passed it on.

Wrotham Fireworks work on a fairly fixed template of what's going to happen in the evening now. We've had a small but stable community over the years. For about 20 years I have been on the committee and have to confess the joy has somewhat gone over the years of looking up into the sky and seeing my boys that are now men, not quite oohing and aahing as they used to, but last years display I have to confess held my gaze for a good 12-15 minutes.

Phoenix Fireworks I'd like to compliment here tonight actually put on I do believe, yet again, the best display ever.

It is pretty nice when I find myself on the gates and seeing the joyous faces of people walking out and the thank you's of what is another successful event.

Thanks must go to WPC for what input they have. Individual committee members, we pat ourselves on the back when following season.  
Funds raised this year were pretty successful. We managed to give amounts of money, and some have already mentioned, to St Georges Cricket Club, Art festival, Music festival, ATC Cadets who need a special mention because they are one of those groups who we really cannot do without, the Preschool, Betersons trust, the Scouts Association in Borough Green, St Georges PTA & WAGS which was the new one this year with regards to the Rose & Crown. Getting the pallets is probably the biggest thing that happens on a year by year basis, lots of promises that we don't actually know if they will follow through. When more and more offer pallets we are very reluctant to say no and this year was a particularly long shift for the Allotments Society.  
Monies raised are donated directly to the Church.  
Thank you for your time.

Comments/Questions raised:

In answer to how much funds were raised on last years display, the monies distributed so far total £5,100 and funds in reserve for financial commitments on the next year.

## **8. Wrotham Music Festival – Chris Mills**

WROTHAM MUSIC FESTIVAL 2025

This is the first time a report has been shared at the AGM even though it started in 2013. The festival has been led by our musical director, Nick Castell, but due to his promotion to deputy head at his school he has had to retire from the committee. Our thanks goes to Nick for all his hard work over the last ten years or so  
The committee has been enlarged and the new members have brought different ideas which have been incorporated into this year's festival.  
Firstly, we have brought the date forward to 4-6<sup>th</sup> July. Previously, we held the event on August bank holiday, which brought with it the vagaries of the British weather and shorter days. We hope that the new date brings with it sunshine all weekend.  
The original idea of being a not for profit event for the whole community carries on so we continue to involve the pubs and Church and the music is a mixture of genres.  
This year we kick off with a barn dance in the Rose and Crown, with Hot Rats performing. On the Saturday in the Church we have The Daisy Chains an all-girl band who play old and new classics in a Rock and Roll style, who have won numerous awards.  
On Sunday afternoon we have arranged for the ever popular Police band in the park, a free event where the community can bring a picnic and listen to the music.  
All the pubs will be doing their bit as well, with more details to follow.  
Information about how to get tickets will be available soon.  
Other events will be arranged for later in the year including Dan Clews in September.

Comments/Questions raised:

NA

## **9. WI, Wrotham Roses – Lynne Wakeling**

Hello everyone. My name is Lynne Wakeling and I am the President of Wrotham Roses WI. I'd like to tell you all about us.

In April we will be celebrating our 1st Birthday. I can't believe that a group of friends from the Wrotham Church Coffee Morning over coffee and cake of course, talked for months about starting a WI in Wrotham. We eventually decided to test the waters with our inaugural meeting on 12 March 2024 when 52 ladies came to see what we were up to and what the WI would mean for them.

Our aim was to offer a warm, safe inviting space for women aged 18 and over, regardless of background or circumstance. A place to form friendship, learn new skills, to be involved with national and local campaigns. Most importantly to have fun. To bring people together who might otherwise be alone. This we have strived to do and will continue to do so. I hope you will agree a worthwhile community project.

On the 9 April 2024 we held our first meeting in Wrotham Village Hall, 48 members joined, Wrotham Roses WI had begun. We meet every 2nd Tuesday in the month (except for January) 1pm to 3 pm.

We have arranged a variety of activities and speakers including, gardening, beekeeping, keep fit, Air Ambulance, Taxes and toy boys, that was financial advice from the CO-OP finance department and everything in between. We ask our members what they would like and plan accordingly.

We also hold plant sales, bric-a-brac and craft stalls. To try and promote the skills of our members and engage speakers from the local area. Along with supporting local events.

This has been a huge learning curve for us all, both committee and members. We are so pleased that we survived. We have gone from strength to strength and hope we will have a very successful 2nd year. The WI in the UK is 110 years old this year. We are in our infancy and want so much to be able to have a WI in Wrotham for many years to come.

New members are always very welcome.

We are striving at the moment to fund a microphone as many of our members are struggling to hear the various speakers. Also this year we will lose 50% of its member subscriptions which is a significant loss of funds and impact on what the group wishes to accomplish this year so we are fundraising and looking for donations.

Thank you

Comments/Questions raised:

WPC owns one which was offered for use by WI and collection details to be arranged in due course via the Clerk or other contact.

Cllr Vick advised WI to send their details for donation requests in to the Fireworks committee.

Cllr Mills advised that any educational funding for speaker or event a request can be funded for grant from TMBC.

#### **10. County Councillor – Harry Rayner**

Good evening.

Firstly, I'm a member of WPC as you can see and this year 2025, is my 40<sup>th</sup> year since first elected to WPC in 1985. I have served in all 3 tiers of local authority. All the years served at Wrotham Council, 10 years at TMBC and now coming to the end of 8 years as County Councillor.

The usual series of matters at KCC, continue to get significant issues with potholes in the roads because KCC are responsible for highways. One of the items that very rarely makes the headlines is the battery cars that are increasing in significant numbers are about twice as heavy as an internal combustion engine vehicle which is considered less likely to be at least part of the cause of the considerable number of potholes that are appearing across the UK and on Kents highways.

The next up is to give you a quick run through of the recycling situation because I come under increasing pressure from those who do not know how the system works. In short TMBC as the local Council collect the refuse and KCC responsibility as far as refuse is concerned is to dispose of it. There are 2 authorities locally, Sevenoaks and Dartford, who do not do any significant recycling at all with no curb side collection, and they are shortly going to have to come into line as the government has just recently passed legislation accordingly. To give you idea, if you recycle the cost of recycling all the materials recycled is on the order of approx.. £85.00 per metric tonne, compared to anything that is not recycled which goes to Addington or Burling, comes in awaiting at the order of £335 per metric tonne at a rough order of thumb to give you an idea of the value of recycling which obviously TMBC residents do, but is not across all of KCC.

There are still very significant issues with the financing side of KCC. Each year here at KCC we have to save in the order of between £50m-100mpa. This continues as the years have gone by and is coming up closer to £85-90m. This coming year that's the sort of order that KCC is going to have to mind in terms of budget. Expends on revenue budget of the order of roughly £1500mpa so you can see if you're having to save around £100m this is a very significant saving. We are starting to get to the situation now where it will show up in ways which have been withheld from the public so far but I fear are not likely to stay that way much longer. The main issues as far as KCC revenues are adult services. Adult services question how that works and I explain it works like this; less than 5% of the population of Kent who are in receipt of adult social services cost the revenue budget 45-50% of the revenue budget that is £750m

being half of the £1500m budget I told you about, goes on adult social services and if you take it's fast growing, mainly of mine and Keirons age, as the population ages so more fall into the band of needing this. It's a figure which is quite astounding when you look at it.

The other point I was going to make for contact with you locally; Mr Jones made reference to the improvements that are just now starting to the school roof and drainage issues. I have to say that I am really pleased to have being able to get behind the situation. It was apparent to me when I got a call from Cllr Vick from what we already discussed, to raise the money together with the 50% from WPC and half from our members fund, and the electrical works completed by SV Electrical at discounted rate so thank you on behalf of the school. In pursuant to that, two of your staff members actually pointed out to me the drainage issues and so I used the time in-between, and now you'll appreciate the position that getting money out of KCC is not just an art it is also a science as well. As the deputy cabinet member for finance, I am very well placed and got together with my colleague cabinet member for education. Between us we managed to put some funding your way through Mr White, the surveyor into making sure the roofing and drainage issues were addressed. So to give you the background there, funding didn't just turn up as rations, there are a few people there digging away and I hope it was money spent wisely.

A couple of final points to make. Lots in the paper recently commissioning government reform. Just a very brief rundown on that. It's likely over the next 2-3 years that there are definitely moves afoot to close down a number of what are known as Tier 2 authorities such as Sevenoaks District, TMBC, Maidstone Borough Council and so forth, and together with Tunbridge Wells those 4 authorities are likely to form a large Unitary Council which will take over the responsibilities currently exorcised by KCC and also the responsibilities of the current Borough & District Councils. This is not yet set in stone and there is still a lot of concentration work to be undertaken but if you hear about government reform that is the beginning of it. KCC did not get on the Fast Track. It was thought in January that the omens were good and that would occur. We are certainly a second tier arrangement now in terms of speed, and we will see whether or not this comes about given the number of local authorities that the government are putting to the Fast Track scheme.

Finally to mention to you the Parish Council is strictly non political so I am not making any other mention to it other than the election is on the 1<sup>st</sup> May.

Comments/Questions raised:

NA

## **11. Borough Councillor – Martin Coffin & Robin Betts, Read by Cllr Gillin**

Report from Borough Council

As always there has been a tremendous amount of work and development at the Council's Leisure Facilities this year in partnership with the Tonbridge and Malling Leisure Trust. Strongly linked to the Council's aim of a sustainable future and caring for the environment, as well as the priorities of being innovative, cost effective and efficient service delivery, the following large scale projects have taken place:

- The 189 solar panels installed at Larkfield Leisure Centre last year have already generated in excess of 121,000kWh of renewable energy.
- The carbon reduction and energy saving schemes continue, including the installation of an additional 278 additional solar panels on the remaining roof space, due to complete this week, bringing the total to 470 which will reduce carbon emissions by 63 tonnes each year and produce a total of around 330,000kWh of clean energy every year.
- They will complement those on the Eco Café at Leybourne Lakes Country Park, and the 149 solar panels in place at Tonbridge swimming pool, which have generated 53kWh of clean energy, saving 11 tonnes of CO2 since their installation last March.

There has been further expansion of the LED lighting at the Leisure facilities, together with movement sensors and timers in outside areas.

- Work is due to start next month on the installation of air source heat pumps for Larkfield Leisure Centre replacing the existing fossil fuel-based boilers and

- Replacement of the chemical cleaning system at Tonbridge Swimming pool from Chlorine to a salt based system offering additional resilience against supply issues.

These will markedly contribute to the priority of being a carbon neutral council by 2030, together with the proposals for the replacement Angel Leisure Centre in Tonbridge. Detailed work throughout the year has taken place to ensure that the future facility will be fit for purpose and carbon neutral.

TMBC has worked in partnership with local organisations, including Kent County Councils Plan Tree team and Medway Valley Countryside Partnership, to utilise a combination of revenue budgets, external funding and tree whip donations, to plant 2865 young native trees across the Borough in 2024.

This hugely exceeds the Councils commitment of planting 1000 trees per year, through the Corporate Climate Change Action Plan.

Planting has not only taken place at large sites including Tonbridge Racecourse Sportsground, Tonbridge Farm Sportsground, Haysden Country Park and Basted Mill but also in smaller open spaces in Aylesford, East Malling, Kings Hill, Leybourne and Snodland.

Robin is Chairman of the Tonbridge Town Centre Regeneration Project Board. This is a huge initiative which is vital in helping the borough's main town to thrive, and we cannot underestimate the level of effort required by all involved in bringing this together.

The first commitment we have made is to build a new Angel Centre which promises to be at the leading edge of leisure facilities. Robin will of course ensure we deliver as carbon efficient a building as possible with the resource we have.

There is thermal imaging camera that has been loaned to Parish councils or directly to residents helping to identify areas of heat loss in homes enabling works to reduce heat loss.

The council has recently agreed a grant scheme to many different organisations with grants from £750 -£1500 totalling £50,000. These enabling grants are very popular, helping unlock a number of projects in the Borough.

TMBC are supporting the entrepreneurial spirit with the West Kent Rural Grants Scheme creating sustainable growth and prosperity, with that supporting jobs for local people.

The Green Business Grant sits alongside this, and in fact both of these grants contribute towards making our businesses more efficient, sustainable and reducing CO2 emissions, thereby making them more resilient to the ever increasing volatile energy markets.

To date another £40,000 of grant funding has been delivered in this current round, with the new tranche open for applications.

Since the General Election there has been a large change in both planning law and in the future shape of Local Government. Of significance is the increased requirement to build yet more houses coupled with the new definition of 'Grey Belt' land. There will now be greater pressure on our green fields to turn them into building sites. There have been two appeals to the planning inspectorate recently where permission was granted based upon the definition of Grey Belt land vs Green Belt land. We are beginning to see more 'speculative' applications coming forward exploiting the new definitions.

It is intended that by the end of this term of Government local Government in Kent will be re-organised. Essentially the KCC and locally TMBC will be abolished to form a 'unitary' authority with about half a million residents within its boundary. This could be an area that covers Tunbridge Wells, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling and maybe Maidstone Councils. This new authority will combine most of the functions of the former councils. The details are yet to be agreed, and we await more decisions from the Government on this. Tonbridge and Malling is one of the very few authorities to remain debt free during its term, paying no interest charges to anyone. However, it has been confirmed that any debt brought forward from KCC will remain with the new authority meaning the new unitary will be paying interest from day one. Needless to say we are challenging this idea and wish to see the debt paid off before the start of a new entity.

As a result of this re-organisation both Robin and Martin see a more active role for the parishes. The parish councils will need a stronger voice in the face of a less local unitary authority. As more details emerge from the process, we will keep parishes informed of opportunities as they arise.

Robin Betts  
Martin Coffin

Comments/Questions raised:  
NA

## **5. Chairman's Annual Report**

This time last year, I was reporting on a successful battle with Moto, when their second planning application was refused by Tonbridge and Malling. I correctly predicted their appeal but what I didn't expect was a lady Planning Inspector who adores HGVs, Truckstops and Fuel Stations.

She reported that in her opinion a 24-hour illuminated Truckstop beneath the Golden Nob, an English Heritage Viewing Point, would not cause damage to the views from the National Landscape.

**To me that is completely mad.**

However, we cannot question that decision as that was a 'planning judgement' apparently, one that the planning inspector is entitled to make. At this stage all we can question is whether in making her judgement, she has erred in law.

Fortunately, after discussions with our barrister, he is of the opinion that she made three legal errors, and a Judicial Review may be possible. So, Wrotham Parish Council is asking the High Court to consider our case and strike out the Inspectors decision. We have sent in our Statement of Facts and Grounds and await the Planning Inspectorate response. They could concede the case or take it to the High Court.

**The Judge would then apply a further test to each error. In the event that the Inspector had not made that specific error, would the outcome of the judgement have been different?**

So, it's not just making an error, but whether that error changes the outcome that is important?  
**I will let you know next year on that one!**

Currently, in Wrotham we need siege mentality because we are being hit hard on many fronts. Panattoni have truly awful plans for the Marley Tiles site. Fourteen-meter-high warehouses, running 24 hours, 7 days a week, overdevelop the site, immediately next to residential housing on London Road.

Fortunately, TMBC have asked them to rethink their plans and also talk to the National Landscape Unit who protect the AONB.

Wrotham has a lot of problems with ASB, particularly electric bikes rode illegally, and the Parish Council continues with its **Wrotham Crime Diary** initiative that focuses the attention of the police and Clarion on our village.

Clarion wanted to change the Tenure Agreement on St George's Court from a mixture of Affordable Rent and Shared Ownership to 100% affordable rent. We met them with Tonbridge and Malling Members and said **NO**, we need both tenures. We used the Crime Diary to effectively demonstrate that Clarion has a real problem controlling ASB in some of their socially rented areas.

We have been working hard to get KCC to agree to a 20 MPH zone across all of Wrotham Village. David and I had a meeting with a KCC officer this afternoon, trying to impress on her the urgency of this. David charmed her very effectively, but the hoops we have to jump through are immense.

There are now eight additional parish council salt bins across the parish area which we are filling with salt. Street wardens will provide access to them when freezing weather is predicted.

**Lastly, I would like to convey the villages thanks to Lesley Cox, now Lesley Gillin, for the excellent way she has managed Wrotham's Parish Council, and it's finances for the last 20 years.**

**Also, please welcome Helen Davison, who has hit the ground running!**

**Wrotham continues to fight, above our weight, on many fronts.  
Thank you.**

Comments/Questions raised:

It was commented that an increasing number of surrounding villages have restricted speed limits through their centres and Cllr Beach confirmed that this is what WPC is hoping to achieve.

**6. Public Question Time**

Covered under individual reports.

Cllr Gillin declared the meeting closed at 9.40pm

.....Chairman

.....Date