

**MINUTES OF THE PARISH ANNUAL MEETING HELD IN MATFIELD VILLAGE HALL ON
THURSDAY 23rd APRIL 2009 AT 7.30pm.**

Present

The Vice Chairman J. Barsley presided, Cllrs B. Stanley, P. Randall, R Carter, R Dafter, C Treble, and Mrs C Cornford. The Clerk- M Powell.

Mr Alex King OBE, Deputy Leader of Kent County Council and Mrs Sheila Wheeler C.E.O. of TWBC also attended the meeting as well our 2 representatives from Kent Neighbourhood Policing Team, Sgt Ray Masters and PCSO Nick Brown. Jane Frostick Manager of Kent High Weald Project. There were approximately 36 members of the public attending.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received by Chairman M Mackenzie and Cllr I McEwen for family commitments.

Minutes of the previous Annual Parish Meeting.

Cllr J Barsley proposed the acceptance of the minutes of the last meeting on 24th April 2008 as accurate. Cllr B Stanley seconded the proposal and it was duly carried.

Charities Account.

Cllr Stanley presented details of the Charities account. The three Charities all started in the 17th century with the oldest dating back to 1682. He said that this year £330.00 had been raised by generous donations and 8 parcels of food had been purchased and distributed to parishioners. He said that they were all well received by the beneficiaries. The account now stood with a balance of £1253.00. Cllr Barsley proposed the accounts to be adopted, Cllr Randall seconded the proposal and it was carried unanimously.

Chairman's Report

Vice Chairman J Barsley reported on the work of the Council throughout the year. The Council had met some 23 times throughout the year and had discussed many items including finance, affordable homes, rubbish, allotments and the Matfield Pavilion. In addition to the daily running of the Parish the PC also commented on 80 planning applications. It had been necessary to increase the precept by just 2.2% to £46,000. However a grant towards the Christmas lights from TWBC was most welcome. The Playground in Brenchley had benefited with new equipment partially funded by KCC and a much-appreciated donation from Waitrose PLC. After more than twenty years of trying, a parcel of land had been secured for the development of six affordable houses in Matfield. Plans had been displayed at the recent open day and the PC was very hopeful that the planning application, due shortly, would be successful. The Council has been very concerned this year about the increase in fly tipping. Whilst TWBC have been fantastic at clearing up, registration numbers of vehicles or the identity of culprits is vital if this offence is to be curtailed. The parish Allotments continue to be well used with a small waiting list. The Matfield Pavilion is having improvements carried out including new windows and shutters. At last work is underway to remake the cross on Brenchley War Memorial. The future of Matfield Post Office continues to be of concern and the PC has been working hard to find alternatives, but the Post Office is unlikely to reopen in the near future unless a buyer for Cherrytrees can be found. Regarding the 80 planning applications considered the PC did not always agree with TWBC but it had had meetings to see each other's point of view more clearly. Concern existed over the increasing number of retrospective applications and the PC is perplexed at the attitude of TWBC to applications for wind turbines. The parish website is now up and running and has been functioning well with about 1000 hits a month. Thanks were expressed to Cllr Ian McEwen in his absence for the huge amount of effort put in. In May 2008 four Councillors had stood down and Cllr Barsley thanked Ron Berry, David Jolley, Alan Lee and Helen Edmeads for all their years of service to the Parish. The four new Councillors, Richard Carter, Colin Treble, Ian McEwen and Christine Cornford were introduced to the public. At the same time Sally Slade and Marcella Callow joined as our new Borough Councillors. More recently Cllr Fred Playfoot resigned and from a further four volunteers Ray Dafter was the successful candidate. Cllr Barsley explained that Fred was one half of an extraordinary couple whose tireless work has greatly benefited the Parish. He had been on the PC for 13 years but had been working behind the scenes with his wife Pam for longer than that. Cllr Barsley then presented Fred with a token of the PC's appreciation. Cllr Barsley concluded by thanking all the present Councillors and the Clerk for their contribution over the year.

Guest Speakers

The Chairman introduced Mr Alex King.OBE who spoke principally about the difficult economic times we currently face which would impact across all of KCC, TWBC and the Parishes Communities need to help themselves and be aware of sources of funding. KCC has been awarded a rating of excellent in a recent assessment and their test of funding is how it relates to the community. It is here that the PC can make it all happen for their communities. The work at Cinderhill Wood is a good example. Mr King then presented Jane Frostick of KHWP with a cheque for £2200 from the Community fund. Ms Frostick replied with her thanks and that the project that had received the funds was about improving access to the woodland especially horse riders who would no longer have to negotiate Foxhole Lane to enter the site. 292 volunteer days had been logged during the year and apart from rare species becoming native to the site a rare insect thought to be extinct for the last 15 years had reappeared.

Mrs Sarah Fullmann, an environmentalist from Transitional Towns-Sevenoaks, spoke about the needs to improve the Parishes ability to respond to climate change. Her presentation featured examples of increasing energy consumption linked to increasing difficulty in extracting fossil fuels and the likely outcome in terms of costs. The principal message was one of ways to use less energy, to insulate better, to conserve that used and to switch off any consuming appliance whenever possible.

Question Time.

Mr King was asked if our rates were being used to supplement pensions for public workers. He replied that KCC had imposed a 1% salary increase despite opposition from the unions for more and that the pensions were in fact enshrined in law. KCC had made £40mil in savings. He was asked about the money lost in Icelandic Banks and replied that at the time their best advice recommended that they should get the best return on deposits. KCC were not experts on investments and relies on advice on where to deposit money, which usually amounted to between £250 and £400 million on an overnight basis. This was usually distributed between about 38 institutions. The advice was received when the banks in question had an AAA rating and before this rating was downgraded. The Audit Commissions report is expected to remove the wording of negligent especially after it was discovered they also had £10million on deposit. It was expected that up to 80% of the money lost would be returned by the banks receivers. KCC could still demonstrate that they will still be some £30million better off than if they had left the money invested in equities. All current deposits were now in Government securities but the low rates of return will have their impact. A resident asked why there was not a St George's flag flying on Matfield green on St George's day. The Clerk replied that he had thought that that duty had been passed on to another Councillor in the previous year but he had not done it himself.

A resident asked the Police about crime levels in the area. Sgt Ray Masters replied that despite perceptions the area was safe and had falling levels of crime. The only exception to this was theft from insecure sheds of tools and equipment such as mowers. He said that one of the problems was that they often knew the likely culprits but if they were unable to identify the original owner they had to return the equipment to the suspect. If items were identified by the new DNA marking kits property could be returned to the original owner and a conviction was more likely. Kits such as these could be obtained from the local neighbourhood watch co-ordinators.

Public Toilets

Cllr Randall gave a presentation of the issue of the possible closure of the two toilets in the Parish. TWBC were determined to divest themselves of the responsibility and the choice was a stark one of passing the cost to the Parish or closure. He explained the few alternatives such as maintaining just one, which was divisive or maybe closure of both during the winter, which was also considered impractical. The cost for both was at present some £12000 pa and likely to rise. This would add about £8-£9 pa for a band D house and around £14 for a band G. After an open discussion and a question and answer session a show of hands from residents of the Parish the result was overwhelmingly in favour of keeping open both toilets despite the cost.

Vote of Thanks

Cllr Brian Stanley proposed a vote of thanks especially to the guest speakers and visitors for an interesting and varied evening.