

**MINUTES OF THE PARISH ANNUAL MEETING HELD IN MATFIELD VILLAGE HALL ON
THURSDAY 26th APRIL 2007 AT 7.30pm.**

Present

The Chairman M. Mackenzie presided, Vice Chairman J. Barsley, Cllrs F. Playfoot, B. Stanley, P. Randall, R. Berry, D. Jolley and Mrs M. Edmeads. The Clerk- M Powell.

Mrs Sheila Wheeler-Chief Executive of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council together with Mr Robert Cottrill, Director of Planning and Development and Mr Alex King, Deputy Leader of Kent County Council also attended the meeting. There were approximately 50 members of the public attending.

Apologies for Absence

Cllr A. Lee for family commitments.

Minutes of the previous Annual Parish Meeting.

Cllr B Stanley proposed their acceptance and Mrs M Edmeads seconded the proposal and it was duly carried.

Matters Arising

None

Charities Account.

Cllr Playfoot presented details of the Charities account. He said that this year £195.00 had been raised by generous donations and 12 parcels of food had been purchased and distributed to parishioners. He said that they were all well received and the account stood with a healthy balance of £1280.00. Vice Chairman J Barsley proposed and Cllr P Randall seconded the proposal that the report be accepted and it duly was.

Chairman's Report

The Chairman reported on the work of the Council throughout the year. He was pleased to be present at the renaming of Matfield Pavilion to the Jack Wish Pavilion in memory of Mrs Wish's late wife. He thanked Paul Oliver Smith who had retired as Borough Councillor during the year and also Mrs Pam Playfoot who had retired as parish Clerk after many years. The Chairman also introduced the new Clerk, M Powell.

Some other items of interest were spoken of:-

B&M News had been launched as an email news service hosted by Paul Oliver Smith and the public was urged to use it for advertising any social occasions etc.

The Old Palace and the Workhouse had been sold and although not Social Housing it would be providing some affordable housing. The proceeds were being held by High Weald Housing Association some of which will be spent in the area and although no land had as yet been purchased the Council was working on it with several sites under consideration.

Kent High Weald Project was managing the Cinder Hill woods and had received a grant for £8500 to help in surveying and mapping the land. More volunteers were required to assist.

Central Stores had been lost to housing development but housing was certainly needed.

The Chairman also reported on a car accident, which damaged the wall of Matfield Pond and the wall was currently undergoing repair, as was the Brenchley War Memorial, which whilst taking time, was on going.

TWBC had Governmental directives that they should be planning for 5000 new homes in the Borough by 2020 and the Parish Council was working hard to ensure it had an influence on what happened locally.

The Parish was fortunate to have an amenity lorry calling for the disposal of household refuse but commercial users had abused this and the public was urged to report any violations.

Also mentioned was the £20,000 spent on repairing the pavilion after a tree fell on it.

As a final note the Chairman said that a well-known resident, Dick Bailey, had passed away and who had spent a lot of time looking after local peoples gardens and the Jack Verrall garden, Jack being his Uncle. The Council would like to record its thanks for all his hard work and that he would be sadly missed.

The Chairman then introduced the first speaker Mr Alex King.

Mr King spoke about his role as a Deputy Leader. He said that principally the country is about communities and the role of a public servant was to make these communities work properly, making things happen to provide the foundations for the future. £8 Billion was spent in the county each year with welfare accounting for about £2 Billion, all of which needed careful management. Other factors of the job included ensuring the County Council performed efficiently, adhered to policies agreed and deputising for the Leader. Also within his portfolio was to help with international relationships as tourism was of particular value to the local economy, especially with the forthcoming Olympics. Mr King thanked both the Parish and Borough Councils for all their contributions to local government.

Mrs Sheila Wheeler spoke next about the challenges faced by local government and gave a picture of opportunities and constraints in the future. Although public services costs had been increasing results did not mirror this. The Government was now of the opinion that there was too much command and control over local government and some responsibilities were being delegated. The Council was currently engaged on a spending review of their budget over the next three years and their decisions will prioritise what need focusing on. Their budget will be likely to be capped and so the discretionary services are most likely to be targeted, although these services are the most highly valued by residents. Mrs Wheeler mentioned decisions that needed to be made in making the process more efficient with possibly a unitary type of arrangement combining County and Borough Councils. She said that with the expansion of the EU it was part of the Councils job to build cohesive communities and with an ageing population welfare and pensions were a big concern. Climate Change was also mentioned as a priority. She considered that Councils were the champions of the local areas and as extra powers were devolved from Central Government the tasks would get bigger, although with Council Tax capping at 5% likely to be maintained little extra funding was going to be available.

Mr Robert Cottrill spoke next about changes to the planning process. 2004 saw simplification to the planning regime but despite the good intentions frustrations still exist. It is known that the housing supply is inadequate to meet demand and locations of land for development is an issue. The most likely target in the long term is the "green belt", usually because it is situated on the edge of towns where spread can be most easily accommodated. In the short term there is more demand for retail space. Mr Cottrill also mentioned the fact the Parish Council had had its disagreements with TWBC because of apparently inconsistent approaches. In six months there had been about 40 applications in the area with 12 disagreements. There was difficulty with 12 officers, 70000 phone calls to planning and 20000 consultation letters being processed in the year. However pre application advice was now available which would improve the success rate of applications. A review by the Audit Commission in June is coming. TWBC wished to be acknowledged by Parish and Town Councils be good and working together.

Question Time.

Members of the public asked sixteen questions of the speakers all of which received answers. Many concerned planning issues, the main response being the finely balanced nature of the decisions needing to be made. Mr Cottrill offered to provide a planning officer to sit in on a Council meeting on a couple of occasions to provide advice on the recommendation process and the likely views that would be taken by TWBC. Concerns were raised about infringement of the Limits to Built Development and the gradual loss of village shops.

AOB

The Chairman asked members of the public to consider standing next year as Councillors. There were probably going to be vacancies and fresh faces and ideas were actively encouraged.

Vote of Thanks

Cllr B Stanley gave the vote of thanks and said everyone appreciated three experts sharing their knowledge. He also thanked everyone for attending.