

**MINUTES OF THE PARISH ANNUAL MEETING HELD IN BRENCHLEY MEMORIAL HALL ON
THURSDAY 12th MAY 2011 AT 8.00pm.**

Present

The Chairman M Mackenzie presided. Cllrs J. Barsley, B. Stanley, P. Randall, C Carter, C Woodley and Mrs C Cornford. The Clerk- M Powell. Mr Alex King OBE, Deputy Leader of Kent County Council and Mr Robert Atwood, Leader of TWBC also attended the meeting. In addition, Mrs Jane March and Mr Alan McDermott, Borough Councillors. There were approximately 55 members of the public attending.

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 £270.00 had been raised by generous donations but any further contributions would be gratefully received. 14 boxes of groceries had been distributed. The account now stood with a balance of £1500 and the intention was to increase the number of beneficiaries.

Chairman's Report

Chairman M Mackenzie reported on the work of the Council throughout the year. Nine Councillors were working hard to make the Parish a better place to live in. As opposed to last year's still slide presentation a film had been made by Tonbridge Film Makers which would be shown later. The Chairman took the opportunity to thank all the Councillors and the Clerk.

The PC was pleased that the budget had remained the same as the previous year as had the precept. The PC was also pleased it had taken an active position during the cold of the winter and had provided additional salt for roads which were sold by the Inn Store and Brenchley Forge without profit. They were both thanked. The cold also caused the unfortunate death of some 100 fish in Matfield pond and because of environmental concerns some £300 was necessarily spent to have them safely removed.

Work was being planned on what was described as the lost city of Petteridge- the overgrown playing field which would hopefully be started within the year. The PC also considered one of its important jobs was to help local businesses. Brown Tourist signs had been erected but KCC had felt it appropriate to remove them. It was also apparent that the level of broadband speed throughout the parish was inconsistent which was also crucial to any business these days. Working in conjunction with Horsmonden we actively encouraged the "Race to Infinity" campaign by BT to get Brenchley exchange updated. The area was not in the top 10 who would qualify across the country but were close enough to be in the running for the next wave of improvements.

The Brenchley War Memorial cross began crumbling some years ago and eventually, after considerable expenditure, was restored. A rededication service was held on Armistice Day and a booklet was produced to recognise the contribution of everyone mentioned on the memorial.

Matfield entered the Kent Village of the year Competition with an enormous input from Mrs Cornford. She spent 6 months organising entries and 6 prizes were eventually won including Inn Store as best retailer of the year. The prize money was spent on a tree in Matfield Church yard and a new bench by the pond. It was remarked that the Parish had been voted the 11th most popular place people wanted to live in.

Vandalism had been a problem with a certain amount of anti-social behaviour. The PC and the Police had formed a group to focus on the youngsters in the area as to how they could be engaged in local society. The pavilion had been made available as a meeting place and volunteer supervisors were currently undergoing CRB checks.

Parking on the green had been looked at and a new reinforcing mesh installed on the west verge. It was hoped to reopen this stretch in a month or two as soon as the grass had grown back through it.

Litter had increasingly become an issue and in March over 40 volunteers on 2 occasions collected bags of rubbish and other discarded items. This was a commendable effort in looking after our own Parish.

The web site was increasingly being utilised with over 1300 hits a month being achieved which any businesses advertising on it will know its value.

The School was mentioned as being greatly improved with a new highly qualified Head being in place. The signs are it is getting back on its feet.

The Affordable homes site at Wish Court was going to be formally opened on 16th of June with a small ceremony involving representatives of all the involved parties. Locals were cordially invited.

The Chairman called Cllr Mrs Cornford to join him. Mrs Cornford was going to live near her family in Australia. She had been a fantastic Councillor had achieved an enormous amount, witness the

Village of the Year completion, the formation of the youth group etc and she deserved every thanks. Mrs Cornford replied she would be very sad to leave but working with the PC had been a privilege.

Guest Speakers

Mrs Jane March introduced herself as the new Borough Councillor. She promised to work for everyone she represented with 100% commitment.

The Chairman introduced Mr Robert Atwood, a local man who congratulated the PC for being very active. He spoke of the successes the Borough had had, in particular achieving a balanced budget which amongst other things meant no increase in Council Tax without further redundancies, hence improving morale and efficiency. Another success was regarding the amount of rubbish being recycled. Currently the figure stands at 47%, with another 42% returned as energy. Only 11% goes to landfill which is very good. Mr Atwood described himself as a councillor for three years but mainly a business man. He was elected on a ticket of honesty and transparency, consulting not dictating. A good example was the Great Hall Car Park and as part of the parking debate it was thought to be essential and unlikely to be closed. The fact that increasing numbers of people were attending Council meetings was encouraging. Stakeholders agreement documents were about to be published soon. Issues in the press regarding relationships with residents in Cranbrook had been poor over the last 5/6 years especially regarding the council offices. TWBC was working with them in the rebuilding of a new community centre and lines of communication were open again. The Civic Centre in Tunbridge Wells was more controversial but although consultation is in progress it is unlikely to be demolished in the near future. Mr Atwood was keen to ensure local communities take their own decisions and the Localism bill means this can be done although this will need help and money. The Borough is also keen to help local businesses but at present it only keeps 9% of the business rates collected, more from Government would ensure more help was available.

Cllr Woodley gave a short presentation on the aspirations of the Parish Council for the near future. From the Chairman's report it was evident the PC was doing a lot but it was easy to forget plans for the future. The PC was working on several projects. One was the need to tackle the need for more recreational facilities especially since the football club had folded. The PC was also looking at ways to encourage the community to be more interested in the work of the PC by making it more accessible. Consideration was being given to public rights of way which criss-crossed the Parish. Better care and promotion was needed, stiles needed rethinking and more volunteers were needed. Cllr Woodley also spoke on the subject of local finances which are good but we would like to encourage both future legacies and perhaps a community fund to build capacity. The economic well being of local businesses in the area needs the support of the PC and we intend to build on what has been achieved so far.

Question Time.

Several questions were taken from the audience. There were rumours of 500 houses being considered in the Paddock Wood area. Should not the infrastructure be right first? Mr Atwood agreed that the roads were a big issue although not the responsibility of the Borough. Cllr Barsley suggested the Longfield Road interchange was very congested since the arrival of John Lewis etc and perhaps a small measure to help might be to change the lane signs approaching the roundabout. It was discussed that the Longfield Road development was taking business away from the town centre. Concerns were raised on the change of availability of the bus pass from 9am to 9.30am. Alex King replied that although the County Council has taken over responsibility for these from the Borough it has less to spend and the later time does actually cost significantly less. A question was raised about the future of the cinema site adjacent to the Town Hall. Mr Atwood had been informed a contract was due to be exchanged shortly but in light of past experience this was not definite. The Borough would consider compulsorily purchasing this if the contract fails to proceed as it is totally unacceptable for the town to have to live with this "grot spot" This is also true with the Morrison site near the station but this all takes time. The question of speeding in Matfield was raised in that the shop had reduced speed to a degree but the interactive speed sign was set at about 40mph which was too high. The PC agreed to look into this.

A year in the life of Brenchley and Matfield.

A film produced by Tonbridge Film Makers Club was shown which contained numerous occasions worthy of being recorded for posterity over the last year. The copies available at the time were sold at £5 each, half going to a local charity.

Vote of Thanks

The Chairman proposed a vote of thanks especially to the guest speakers and visitors for an interesting and varied evening.