

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF CHIDDINGSTONE PARISH COUNCIL HELD ON  
TUESDAY 23<sup>RD</sup> APRIL 2024 AT 7.30 PM IN CHIDDINGSTONE CAUSEWAY HALL**

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**Present:** Cllr J. Roper, (Chairman), Cllr P. Harris, Cllr T. Nunn, Cllr K. Outlaw, Cllr C. Shamwana and Cllr P. Vicary  
**Apologies:** Cllr P. Myers, Cllr Mrs M. Quirk, Cllr H. Williams, County Cllr Margot McArthur, District Cllr Richard Streatfeild and District Cllr Malcolm Silander  
**In attendance:** Mrs L. Kleinschmidt (Clerk), Grace Wood-Lofthouse and Kristy Poulton from SES Water plus 20 members of the public

Cllr Roper opened the meeting and welcomed everyone along.

1. **The Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2023** were approved and duly signed. Proposed by Cllr Roper, seconded by Cllr Harris, and all were in favour.

2. **To welcome SES Water who will give an update on plans at Bough Beech Reservoir**

Cllr Roper welcomed Grace Wood-Lofthouse and Kristy Poulton from SES Water.

SES Water, which owns Bough Beech Reservoir, have been preparing a plan to make better use of the reservoir for the community, including nature conservation, education and protection of the national heritage. The oast house did have people looking after it, but SES Water has just started a programme to work on the renovation of the oast in order to bring it back into service. Nature conservation is very important, and SES Water is looking at which licenses are required from Natural England to renovate the oast. It is planned that there will be a working kitchen and much of the facility will be available for community use. Nature based learning in conjunction with Bore Place is proposed for the oast area, together with community events. SES Water has initiated biodiversity work aligned with the Kent Wildlife Trust benchmarks over a 25 year period from 2025 and will have to demonstrate biodiversity net gain. A bat survey will be carried out at the oast at the appropriate time next year as part of the programmed plan.

A lot of work has been done with existing tenants and joint users in order to facilitate improvements and mitigate constraints. SES Water prepares a Water Resource Management Plan over a 5 year period to ensure that there is a high quality supply of drinking water over the period of the plan. Consideration is given to improving water resource storage from time to time depending upon birth rates for example.

There are a number of footpaths over the site and access by the public is encouraged, but not in a way that means that there are hordes of people accessing the area around the reservoir at any one time. SES Water is currently in the process of considering how to get the basics right, such as fences, stiles and signposting. There will be information boards around the site and requests will be made to the public to ensure that they stay on the designated footpaths for nature protection reasons. It is important that the public access to the footpath network is sustainable. The path that goes to the water's edge may be diverted for safety reasons, but it will be aligned to another path, which will ensure connectivity.

Cllr Roper asked if there were any questions:

1. Cllr Harris asked whether the monoculture will be changed, it is currently mostly grass at the treatment works with a few trees. The response was that local people are encouraged to get in touch with their ideas for the site.
2. Cllr Nunn asked whether other recreational activities are possible, such as the sailing on the reservoir, will this agreement be renewed? The response was that an approach has been made about open swimming in the reservoir, and SES Water would like to have a detailed discussion with other joint users so that there is full transparency.
3. A resident asked how the plans are progressing for a farm shop on site? The response was that this has not yet been investigated further. SES Water is open to feedback. There are a lot of other businesses in the area and if it is not possible to have a farm shop on site, there could be signs directing people to other local businesses.
4. Cllr Outlaw asked about FlowZone. The response was that this is aimed at key stage 3 school children and there are also open days for adults and children, raising awareness of the reservoir.
5. Cllr Vicary asked about the long term commitment to improve the estate. The response was that the work at Bough Beech and other sites have shown that there is a positive impact on the surrounding area

Cllr Roper thanked Grace and Kristy for coming along and for giving such an interesting and informative talk.

### **3. To hear a report on an initiative to create a cluster Emergency & Resilience Plan**

Cllr Outlaw's report was as follows:

#### **Why create an Emergency and Resilience Plan?**

Over a number of years, there has been a drive from Central Government to embed a series of standards to strengthen national security and resilience. Whilst much of this has been focused on "first line responders" or emergency services, Local Resilience Forums have been established across the country to help with gaining a greater understanding of risks at a local level, improving the understanding of these risks amongst the public, and to understand those communities that are more vulnerable through a detailed examination and mapping of environmental, economic and societal risks. Our local Resilience forum is the Kent Resilience Forum (KRF), who are aiming to implement a "whole of society" approach to resilience to enable, empower and support the communities of Kent and Medway to become more resilient.

I think many people will already be familiar with the types of risks that we tend to face in our rural communities, not least through our experiences with COVID and, over the past few months where many of us have experienced flooding, affecting our roads, transport, and sadly, in some cases, our properties, farmland and utility areas. The very real impact of climate change is one where we can probably agree we need to more prepared to ensure that we reduce the negative impacts on our communities. However, we can identify many other risks to our sustainability; not all of which we can control, but we can mitigate the impacts to some degree or, at a minimum, act as a "voice" for local communities with the appropriate parties. As examples, a failure of broadband, frequent power failures, mobile blackspots while fixed line services are being discontinued, a lack of housing, access to transport, medical facilities and so on.

#### **How Will We Develop a Plan?**

The KRF has typically engaged with Town and Parish Councils to gain access to local information, the public and local community and volunteer groups in order to develop appropriate plans which may be tested and implemented at local levels. Chiddingstone Parish Council felt that given the similar demographics, environments and risks affecting our Parish and those around us, such as Leigh, Penshurst and Hever, we might develop one Emergency/Resilience Plan which might work for all of us; encourage the sharing of information and understanding of risks; and enable us to support each other through the sharing of resources to overcome any emergency or major impact on our communities' ability to bounce back, sustain themselves and thrive.

We had an initial information meeting last month and are now working towards a schedule of meetings over the remainder of the year to build out our plan and engage more deeply with our wider communities.

With another hat on, I am establishing a new charity, Kent ACRE, which will be focused on providing support and advice to village and community halls (many of which have a vital role to play as community hubs), rural charities and volunteer groups and individuals living in rural areas, ensuring that we are not disadvantaged just because of where we live. ACRE stands for Action with Communities in Rural England which is a national umbrella organisation. We intend to offer facilitation and support to rural communities in developing all sorts of community plans – emergency and resilience plans being one of them. As such, this initiative is a pilot receiving support from other ACRE members across the country as well as KRF, Sevenoaks DC, KCC and many others.

We will welcome the input and views of the wider community as we press ahead.

### **4. To hear Chair's Report of Activities in 2023/24**

Cllr Roper reported as follows:

Last year, the Parish Council had 11 open meetings, and a number of meetings of the Planning Committee and the Finance Committee. The Planning Committee is busy with site visits and the Parish Council is a consultee on planning applications and the decision lies with Sevenoaks District Council as the Planning Authority. Last year, the Parish Council welcomed Cllrs Kerry Outlaw, Chris Shamwana and Trevor Nunn as new members, and thank you all for your contributions thus far. The Planning Committee is chaired by Cllr Mitzi Quirk and the Parish Council seeks to retain a rural area in the face of the Government's targets to build more houses. 93% of the Sevenoaks district is within the Green Belt, this is the largest percentage in the country. The good news is that the new Local Plan is focussing development around the existing large settlements and not the smaller villages. The Parish Council is keeping an eye on potential breaches in planning policy and we communicate this through to enforcement officers at Sevenoaks District Council. Action in these cases does take a while.

On aviation matters, please see District Cllr Streatfeild's report for a detailed summary. We are working with the Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign, which does some excellent work on the threat of expansion at Gatwick Airport. There is currently an inquiry taking place.

On highways and transport issues, the Parish Council managed to get the speed limit reduced through Chiddingstone Causeway from 40mph to 30mph.

We have our own community SpeedWatch group, the Parish Council purchased equipment and we report speeding vehicles to Kent Police. The aim is to educate people to drive more slowly. The volunteers will carry out some more sessions in Chiddingstone Causeway and Bough Beech. If anyone would like to volunteer to help, please speak to Louise. The Parish Council has asked for speed reductions in Camp Hill and Bough Beech, and traffic surveys have been carried out. The Parish Council is trying to do something about noisy train horns in Bough Beech but so far we have been unsuccessful. On bus transport, KCC is under huge pressure financially to keep the bus network running. We have been lightly let off in our parish but there will be an impact in future.

Affordable Housing – we have two schemes, one in Bough Beech at Chequers, and one in Chiddingstone Causeway at Bassetts. This latter one is currently under negotiation with the landowner. The Chequers site has achieved planning approval and planning conditions have been dealt with and building commenced. The Parish Council undertook a housing needs survey and it was clear that there is a need for affordable housing for people with a local connection.

Other items:

- we had a street party to celebrate the King's Coronation
- we appointed two trustees to the Margaret Hyde Charity for the almshouses in Wellers Town
- we have replaced the bus shelter in Chiddingstone Causeway
- we are working with the Redleaf Trust on improving the area around the pond in Chiddingstone Causeway
- we have engaged with SES Water regarding the Bough Beech reservoir
- we have worked with Chiddingstone Sports Association to help them restructure and Cllrs Shamwana and Vicary have been involved in this project
- we are creating an Emergency Plan with our neighbouring parishes, Cllr Outlaw has been working on this
- we undertake regular parish litter picks and we arrange for the bulk refuse freighter to visit four times a year
- we are helping residents who are struggling with antisocial behaviour in the parish, working with other agencies such as the police, Sevenoaks District Council and the housing associations
- we are helping residents in Redleaf Close with their flooding issues and pushing WKHA for resolution
- we are making modest grants to parish organisations.

Looking ahead, one of the big issues facing the parish is parking in Chiddingstone village. We talk regularly to the school and we are trying to find a solution.

Cllr Roper thanked our County Cllr, Margot McArthur, and our District Cllrs, Richard Streatfeild and Malcolm Silander, also fellow Parish Councillors including Ben Taylor who has resigned as member. Cllr Roper also thanked Louise, our Clerk.

## **5. To announce the recipient of the 2024 Chiddingstone Community Award**

Cllr Roper announced that the recipient of this year's Community Award is Martin Keeler, for his commitment to parish events, such as the Chiddingstone Fete, as Chair of Chiddingstone Football Club and member of Chiddingstone Sports Association, for many years. In addition, a special award goes to Chris Pounds for his work with the Youth Club in Chiddingstone. And special awards go to Hilary Allen and Letty Sundt for their refurbishment work to the phonebox in Chiddingstone. Thank you all for your huge commitment to the parish.

## **6. To hear report by County Cllr Margot McArthur – circulated as a handout.**

I am sorry to say that I am unable to attend tonight's meeting as it conflicts with a full Sevenoaks District Council meeting. I am happy to answer questions afterwards if anything arises.

**UASC:** Cllr McArthur reported that the action taken against KCC last year in the Courts in relation to its work with unaccompanied asylum children had been successfully appealed and as a result KCC were continuing with their work. There had been a considerable increase in the number of children they were responsible for, this being 2200 in 2023.

**Schools admissions:** 96% of pupils had received an offer from their four preferred schools choices out of just under 22,500 requests.

**EU entry/exit scheme:** Problems are anticipated with effect from October in relation to the revised biometric requirements when going across the border to the EU. Dover would be a particular problem with long delays anticipated.

**Highways and road works:** KCC is responsible for 5500 miles of road in Kent and 4000 miles of pavements; problems are being caused by the utilities who had the right to close roads with no notice to carry out 'emergency works' impacting on residents and on the maintenance work Highways needed to carry out when it clashed. 30% of utilities work was carried out under 'emergency' timing. Representations are being made to Government to change these systems of working.

**7. To hear report by District Cllr Richard Streatfeild and District Cllr Malcolm Silander**

Happy St George's day. Many apologies for not being there in person. There is a full council meeting at the District Council this evening with important votes on the High Weald Management plan and local Safety Partnership.

1. Elections and Governance. The most significant changes at the council was in the May 23 elections. The opposition group now makes up 40% of the Council up from 10%. It is the first time in a generation that there has been significant opposition. This has meant we have seen the first scrutiny committee call in of a decision by Cllr Silander; there have been over ten opposition motions debated at District Council; the most significant of these has resulted in the recording and publicising of meetings which you can access.
2. District Council finance. The budget was particularly challenging this year. In April 2023 the leisure centres required a £1.83m injection which meant that over 10 years the Council has to find £183k in savings each year. That has meant your council tax has gone up by the full 3%; if you travel into Sevenoaks on a Sunday you will now need to pay for parking, and the black sacks and recycling sacks are no longer being given out by the council. All three are symptoms of the financial pressure that the council is under. Inflation has generally been higher than the council tax rise so even though we are paying more we are getting fewer services. One of those to go is the free black bags. The council is trying to balance how it balances the budget between making cuts in staffing and services with the additional funds raised by tax and parking charges. The best example of this balance was with the Citizens Advice Bureau which initially had a £35k in funding decrease, which has been made up by a £40k one-off grant from KCC and central government. There is an on-going debate about the use of a government £165k grant and if/how it could and should be applied to support this service.
3. The Local Plan. The Local Plan is the major piece of work that has been undertaken by the District Council this year. Chiddingstone and Chiddingstone Causeway are below the size of settlement that the Council decided was sufficient for extra housing. Development in the Parish will only be undertaken on brownfield sites or on the 106 sites for affordable housing. There have been protests across the district about the proposed scale of housing development on those sites which have been chosen. There is an internal Housing Policy Allocations Consultation which is ongoing, Cllrs have logged their views that local people should be able to choose local housing.
4. We have arranged visits from the local beat officers to Parish Council meetings to hear concerns. There is an ongoing issue is Chiddingstone Causeway that Councillors have been involved with alongside the Parish Council to try and bring together the Housing Association, the District Council and the Police to be able to resolve.
5. Rural Crime and Flytipping remain a concern for residents. In relation to other parishes in the district both problems are mercifully rare in Chiddingstone and Chiddingstone Causeway but the most important message is to ensure incidents are reported.
6. Gatwick. Below is a precis of recent activity at Gatwick. From a District Councillor perspective the Parish remains far better served in regard to this by its membership of GACC than by the district council. On the district council the Richard has registered and responded to the DCO as a councillor. There is currently an on-going discussion with the Council about the district council response to the Inspectorate's inquiry into the Development Consent Order for the Northern runway, which was not as inclusive of residents views or as comprehensive as it should have been.
  - a. DCO – The use of the emergency runway for routine operations. After the initial flurry of activity in February and March there's been a period of relative calm with the DCO.
  - b. The next stage includes an Issue Specific Hearing on Climate Change (ISH 6 on Tuesday 30 April) and an additional Open Floor Hearing (OFH 3 on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> May at 2:00 pm).
  - c. On the 28<sup>th</sup> March the Examining Authority published updates on a number of Deadline responses. This included a list of questions arising from the first series of hearings (ISH 1 to ISH 5). There are 288 of these and most of these are addressed to Gatwick – the applicant. However there are some addressed to other participants and where pertinent GACC have been submitting responses.
  - d. Also published are Written Representations relating to the hearings so far, and also a series of statements and documents including Local Authority Impact Reports were published. This is the report currently under discussion at the District Council.
  - e. GACC have highlighted that the complexity of noise issues was such that it became obvious that the subject could not be covered in one hearing. This was in part answered in the questions referred to above and this has allowed GACC to submit a detailed response challenging Gatwick's proposed methods of managing noise.

- GACC will publish it as soon as it's been acknowledged by the Examining Authority.
- f. Airspace Modernisation update (FASI-S). There is dissatisfaction with Gatwick and their proposed submission to the CAA (Dec 23) of their desired FASI-S routes. There are too few and they would all affect the Parish.
  - g. Noise Management Board. GACC submitted extensive views on the NMB and on the changes that would be needed for any future board to be effective both to the consultants Gatwick appointed last Autumn and to the airport itself. GACC also wrote to the CEO, Stewart Wingate, asking for a meeting on plans for a new board. That request was refused. GAL subsequently held a "briefing" on its plans for a third term of the NMB on 11 December. The briefing told us virtually nothing new about Gatwick's plans. They did, however, commit to circulating a report on its plans before Christmas but nothing has yet been received. Gatwick has said that any new board will not be in place until Autumn 2024.
  - h. Night Flight Consultation. This was due in the autumn of 2023 together with the results of the DfT consultation on Night Flights in general held earlier in 2023. We understand that the publication of the results of that consultation were due to be signed off by the Minister at the end of January and the consultation for the next allocation of Night Slots will commence shortly afterwards. This does not bode well for agreement to be in place for slots for the next period from October 2025 onwards. The possibility of yet again another roll over of the current limits and slots raises its head.
  - i. Gatwick Operations. It seems that as at the end of December Gatwick's movement numbers were still marginally behind the Pre-pandemic 2019 figures (at around 95%). However the proportion of night movements whilst still within limits is around 20% higher.
7. Rural business support. Businesses in the village have been supported by the new rural support grant scheme which is up and running. Please go to the DC website to find out more.

#### What's on the horizon?

8. The District Council has started a consultation on how to redevelop the centre of Sevenoaks with a new leisure centre, library and adult education centre. You have the ability to respond online or at the events they are running.
9. The regulation 19 consultation on the local plan. This the consultation on the chosen sites.
10. The Council is looking into better recycling and waste management. Food Waste has to be separated by March 2026. Green/recycling - the council's aspiration to reach Net Zero by 2030 has been described as "no longer realistic" and as such has been scrapped. There will be further debate raised about this.
11. Gatwick DCO

#### **8. Questions from members of the public, matters for reporting and diary dates**

1. A resident asked whether it is possible to improve the signage at the railway bridge in Bough Beech. Cllr Roper said that this has been raised with Highways.
2. A resident asked what the view of the Parish Council is to the Real Football event? There is damage to farmland and the roads become gridlocked. Does the event need a rethink? Cllr Roper said that the Parish Council had a presentation by the principal organiser of the event and members felt that the stewarding arrangements were adequate. The organisers consult with KCC, the police and the emergency services and they try and ensure that players and supporters stay on the public footpaths. Unfortunately, this year the weather was exceptionally wet.

The meeting closed at 8.40pm.

# CHIDDINGSTONE PARISH COUNCIL

## FINANCE REPORT FOR YEAR 2023-2024

The Parish Council's financial year runs from 1<sup>st</sup> April until 31<sup>st</sup> March. The precept for the year 2023/24 was £47,000, which was increased from the previous year's precept of £43,000. The precept for 2023/24 will be £48,950, which is a 3.96% increase in the Parish Council's portion of council tax.

Annual memberships were renewed to:

Kent Association of Local Councils	£497.68
Society of Local Council Clerks	£148.00
Information Commissioner's Office	£35.00
CPRE	£60.00
Kent County Playing Fields Association	£20.00
Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign	£10.00
Eden Valley Museum Trust	£90.00
Aviation Environment Federation	£36.00

And grants were made to:

Chiddingstone Fete	£500.00
GACC	£500.00
High Weald Churches	£500.00

The following summary of income and expenditure for the year is taken from the Parish Council's draft accounts for the year ended 31st March 2024, which have not yet been approved by the Parish Council or been audited.

<b>INCOME</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>£</b>
Precept	47,000.00	Salaries	18,440.16
Interest on Investments	1,333.03	Employer National Insurance	1,289.44
Grants: KCC Mobilisation Grant	400.00	Employer Pension	5,251.41
SDC UK Shared Prosperity Fund	4,000.00	Petty Cash / Mileage	1,140.30
Coronation Event income	892.26	Stationery	100.35
Community Infrastructure Levy	1,871.85	Telephone/Email	634.81
Contribution from Leigh PC to office costs	753.08	Office Expenses	1,176.34
Public contribution towards phone box	2,158.05	Bank charges	72.00
		Website	412.00
		Courses	50.00
		Insurance	482.04
		Audit/Accountancy	479.85
		Entertainment	8.30
		Phone box	3,170.00
		Chairman's Expenses	239.49
		Subscriptions	896.68
		Hall Hire	243.38
		Advertising & Publicity	100.00
		Closed Churchyard & other areas	2,270.66
		Repairs & Maintenance	595.00
		PWLB repayments	6,040.00
		Litter / dog bins / bulk freighter	1,388.70
		Grants	1,500.00
		Community Garden	1,008.00
		Speed Reduction	2,160.82
		Sundry	35.00
		Play Scheme	325.02
		Coronation Event	1,693.16
		Causeway Bus Shelter	6,825.00
		Defibrillators	296.50
		Election	163.51
	<b>58,408.27</b>		<b>58,487.92</b>