

Minutes of the ASH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Held Monday 21 April 2008, at 7.30pm

in the Ash Village Hall, Queen's Road, Ash

Chairman: Mr G Foat – Chairman of Ash Parish Council

Present: Forty nine parishioners including seven Parish Councillors, plus District Councillors Mr Bartlett and Mrs Chandler, County Councillor Mr Ridings, P.C. Wright and PCSO White

Apologies: Mr Cooper

08.1 Minutes

The minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting held 24 April 2007 had been made available before the meeting. Proposed by Mr Whitburn, the minutes were agreed as a true record and were signed.

08.2 To receive reports and take questions

i) Parish Council Chairman, Mr G Foat

Mr Foat opened his report by welcoming the new Police Community Support Officer, Lisa White. There had been problems with vandalism of the toilets in The Street and disruption of the Stagecoach service, however the increased police presence had helped resolve the matter.

Towards the end of 2007, Kent County Council had offered land for sale at the east end of the village. One piece was withdrawn and the other, a drainage lagoon, had been sold against the wishes of Ash Parish Council for £22,000. There had been other enforcement issues around the selling of vehicles on the verges of the A257 and sales of food from roadside vehicles.

A housing needs survey has been completed last year. This showed that 22 families with strong Ash connections showed a positive interest, half preferring affordable rental accommodation and half shared ownership. The Parish Council would now look for suitable sites and a housing association to manage the scheme.

There had been a number of highways' issues including the provision of raised kerbs to enable access to the Diamond buses. However they had also caused a trip hazard as there had been no white marking to indicate the change in height and at Guilton a bollard had been placed restricting access for prams and wheelchairs to the raised kerb.

There were on-going issues such as agreeing how private CCTV can be used in a public area, the provision of DDC Toilets at The Street, the state of 26 New Street, speeding and parking problems in the centre of Ash and the six weeks for the consultation on the Local Development Framework.

There had been some very positive initiatives with the monthly visits for local young people to the disco Teen Fusion in Deal. Finally, it is hoped that the Parish Action Plan with an exciting and community based project for parishioners to look into the future and participate through the questionnaire every household will receive.

Questions on the Chairman's Report

- The cost of the new bus shelter had been £5,000 and it was being used.

- A parishioner welcomed the Teen Fusion programme and congratulated the Parish Council on its support for the project.
- The boot fair on the A257 was outside the parish boundary but the PCSO reported that the landowner had asked for advice on how to deal with the parking problems.
- Mr Downes explained that nine years ago the Jack Foat Trust had provided Mill Field for affordable housing and were aware that there was still a need for long term rental for local families. The Trust could be approached again. Mr Whitburn explained that the survey had identified a need for 22 units. Dover District Council Planning Department would look at possible sites and the Parish Council would select preferred sites. There had been a delay at the DDC end on the current proposals but there were a number of sites that could be considered including some rural exception sites outside the village confines.

ii) Recreation Ground Committee Report, Mr G Foat

The Ash Recreation Ground was well maintained by the Environment Assistant, Mr Wilkinson and Saunders House Landscapes. The grass had been renovated on the football pitches and the new roundabout and safety surfacing had been installed. The ground was well used with football, cricket, rugby and tennis clubs being well supported. The Parish Council will be looking at how to manage the long waiting list for the allotments. Additionally, the Parish Council needs to remove three trees along east side allotment boundary on Burford's Alley and to trim back the hedge. Charlton Athletic Community Scheme, part funded by Dover District Council, had carried out some football coaching for young people. There has been maintenance on some of the trees with the black poplar being pollarded and it is planned to plant more trees in November to fill in the gaps from trees that had to be felled. Finally, it is very unfortunate that irresponsible dog owners are spoiling the ground by not clearing up. This has meant that the Parish Council has re-employed the Dog Warden to try and limit the problem.

Nominations for the Recreation Ground Committee Representative

Mr Paul Dunn was proposed by Mr G Foat and seconded by Miss M Bennetts and was duly elected.

Questions on the Recreation Ground Report

- A parishioner noted that the doors on the Pavilion were in a very poor condition and suggested that metal shutters could be used. This comment would be referred to the Pavilion Committee.
- A parishioner noted that the Dog Warden had in the past only made 10 minute stops in the village. It was explained that the Parish Council was now able to request that the Dog Warden vary their visit days and times so that the best possible coverage could be achieved for the money spent.
- A parishioner reported to the meeting that the rugby team had been most successful in winning the East Kent Cup. They asked if the Parish Council would support the formation of a Sports Social Club. This would have to be referred to the full Parish Council.

iii) Footpaths' Committee Report, Mr G Foat

Mr Foat reported that there would be the second of the led walks around Ash footpaths on 11 May. The first one on 12 April had covered four miles in just over two hours. It was noted that the Ash footpaths were not well marked compared to other parishes. Mr Foat had met the

Rights of Way KCC Officer, Mrs Roffey, to inspect paths and to highlight some of the problems.

Local volunteers were being encouraged to come forward to monitor the footpaths and there would be a meeting arranged for late June / early July to allocate footpaths and find out about current problems so that they can be reported.

There were no questions on this report.

iv) Finance Report on the Parish Council Accounts, Mrs C Haggart

The audited statement of the Parish Council accounts for the year ended 31st March 2007 was displayed along with the Auditor's Certificate.

The un-audited summary of the Parish Council accounts for the year ended 31st March 2008 had been distributed to the meeting.

The estimated receipts were £98,368 and payments were £56,788. Receipts included the £2,450 Parish Action Plan Grant. Payments had been lowered than expected as there were three projects that had not been paid for within the current financial year ie the bus shelter, the maintenance grant to Ash Village Hall and the PCSO costs December to March 2008. These amounts had been included in the ring fenced reserves of £22,708, with general reserves of £19,058 giving a total figure for reserves of £41,763.

Projects undertaken by the Parish Council during the year included the directory, the Newsletter being printed in colour, the PCSO, two new dog bins, the new roundabout, and extensive tree surgery.

The budget for 2008 – 2009 had set the precept at £58,800 a 5% increase on the prior year. This included an increase in donations of £1,000 to the Ash Heritage Project and £500 for Parish Action Plan. Allocations to reserves for the safety surfacing was made as this would be an expensive item due to be carried out in the next two years. The remainder would be to match existing expenditure on administration, direct employment costs, the PCSO and on-going maintenance.

Questions on the Finance Report

A parishioner asked about the increase in bank charges from £36 to £215. Mrs Haggart explained that there had been charges for cheques presented on the current account which had been overdrawn. The charges were being queried with the bank.

08.3 Report from County Councillor Mr L Ridings

Current issues:-

- The sale of the drainage lagoon on the A257 continued to be objected to by Kent Highway Services.
- The food van on the A257 had been registered in Thanet but came under DDC Enforcement Department and as it had not obtained the appropriate Food Handling Licence the Environmental Health Department should be able to regulate the situation.
- There had been only a 3.9% increase in the County Council tax and there was still £10 million owed to Kent County Council by Central Government over money that had been spent on statutory obligations regarding asylum seekers.
- There was £10,000 available via the KCC Members' Grant and there was also a Minor Capital Grants fund for which grant applications had to be made before 29 August.

Questions on County Councillor Ridings's Report

- it was explained that grants applied to the Little Stour and Ashstone area and covered the areas from Sandwich to Chillingdon and over to Eastry.
- all County Councillors had members' grants and they had been used for projects such as Pegasus, Enterprise Tudor, Footpath Light at Wingham, Sea Cadets etc.
- it was asked if Orchard View could be re-surfaced as although there had been some repairs the surface was breaking up
- the demise of St Nicholas House was raised and the way in which the provision of housing was provided for senior citizens by Dover District Council.

08.4 Reports from the parochial charities and trusts:

Ash United Charities – Benevolent Fund and Resthaven

Mr D Downes opened his report on the Ash United Charities which had spent £557 in the year, including Christmas hampers for long-standing residents

The trustees of the Benevolent Fund were also trustees of Resthaven Almshouses. The loan for £45,000 from the Frank Kingsland Charity for maintenance had been repaid recently. This means that the fund can accumulate again and is to provide two almshouses for disabled residents. The accounts are healthy.

The Frank Kingsland Bequests

Mr D Downes reported that two properties had been purchased in Chequer Lane and Chilton Fields which would be handed to the Ash United Charities trustees to manage, keeping together the management of all the almshouses. There was a surplus in the fund. This charity is to benefit the parish and has £200,000 available, now that the loan has been repaid by Resthaven.

The Jack Foat Trust

Mrs N Vallack explained that this trust fund includes property, land and investments. Since 1997 there had been a total of £297,000 spent on the parish. Repairs were due to be carried out on 126 The Street to deal with damp and replace a front door and windows. It was hoped that it would be available for short term let again in 2008.

Land held by the trust includes Street Field and Discovery Field which is about 15 acres at the bottom of Pudding Lane. There are two picnic tables and parishioners are permitted to 'wander at will'. When one field was being grazed, it was possible to use the other field.

Ash Educational Charities

Mr I Chandler reported on the year end accounts. Opening balances were £47,411, of which £10,000 is invested and the year ended with a balance of £62,321.

Income during the year was from rent received, re-imburement of an insurance premium and interest on investments. Payments were for insurance, including a contribution for the new school and £900 in various grants to young people.

The Charity is primarily for educational purposes in the broadest sense. For example, it has contributed to the cost of the transport for young parishioners to Teen Fusion in Deal. Applications are welcome for book grants to first year university or further education students from the parish. The Charity is very keen to support young people and welcomes applications from young residents.

08.5 Reports from the trustees of the Village Halls

Ash Village Hall

Mrs Ryan reported that the bookings for the hall had increased over the year after a drop in the first quarter when the Line Dancing finished. At the end of financial year there was £9,443 in

hand. Apart from the regular bookings, a series of KCC Adult Educations classes were expected to start in September 2008.

Disappointingly there had been some repetition of vandalism on the outside of the building. A work detail of local lads with PCSO White had painted over the graffiti. Repairs and maintenance were on-going with the repainting of the internal windows of the main hall due this year as well as the exterior wood work. The Committee will be applying for a Hallmark Award which ensures that village halls meets all the standards for administration and management required to comply with charitable status.

Westmarsh Village Hall

Mr Fitzgeorge reported that bookings had improved and had increased by £400 reversing the previous trend. The Committee was catching up with repairs and maintenance of the building. At the end of the financial year there was £10,287.

08.6 Police & Police Community Support Officer Reports from:

PC Wright opened by explaining about the new Neighbourhood Policing Teams, promoted by the Chief Constable as a way of involving the community. Anti-social behaviour when reported had been dealt with in a robust manner and there had been an improvement at Pound Corner. The new PCSO's had been welcomed by communities and the police. The PCSO's have an opportunity to engage with the community in a different way to the police. Operations during the year had successfully prevented the sale and reduced the consumption of alcohol by under age persons. The use of speed cameras had not been as frequent as hoped but when they were available they had been used to enforce the limits. Operation Freedown had seized motorbikes being ridden illegally and Operation Cubit had continued with the removal of untaxed vehicles from the public highway. The monthly surgeries had provided contact for residents outside of day time hours. Parking issues had been given priority at the schools and there had been support from the headteachers at both local schools. Full bus provision from Stagecoach had been re-instated and the offender was dealt with through the criminal justice system. It is important that residents continue to report any incidents so that the Neighbourhood Police Team can respond to problems.

Police Community Support Officer White addressed her first meeting after having been in post for eight months. Meeting the community (young and old) had been an important first step in encouraging the community to come forward to speak to her. There had been three main concerns raised by the public. Nuisance youths had caused some distress and the approach was to combine robust policing with providing diversionary activities. Speeding and parking were concerns and she will be receiving training on the speed indicator device and has been in contact with DDC Parking Services to attend more regularly to enforce the parking restrictions. Reports on dog fouling had increased and it is hoped that the combined action of the hiring of the Dog Warden and patrolling by the PPCSO will improve this situation. Monthly surgeries take place between 6pm and 7pm in the Ash Village Hall Library on the first Monday of the month (unless it is a bank holiday) and the number to contact PCSO White on is 0777 222 6204.

- A parishioner asked about the vandalism at the DDC Toilets at The Street Car Park. PCSO White explained that the CCTV Domehawks move around East Kent based on priorities.
- The dangers from vehicles parking at the entrance to St Faiths were raised and it was explained that the head teacher had sent letters to all parents.
- A parishioner asked why the police team came under Deal rather than Dover. It was explained that there was a team at both Deal and Dover, each with their own sergeant and the areas were allocated geographically to each team.

- A parishioner asked what could be done about the increase of vehicle exhaust noise around The Street / Chequer Lane junction. The PCSO explained that owners of vehicles could be issued with a Vehicle Defect Rectification Order to reduce this problem.
- Safety concerns about vehicles exiting the Car Park on to The Street where visibility was reduced by the cars parked along the south side of The Street was noted.
- Graffiti was along The Street up to Glebelands. The PCSO will report this to the DDC Community Safety Unit so that it can be removed.

08.7 Parish Action Plan Update

Mr N Whitburn reported that from the first meeting in September 2007 to see if there was public support for a Parish Action Plan, a steering group had met regularly, obtained a grant to cover costs and had arranged open days. The first on 15 March at the Ash Village Hall had been well supported as well as having many groups and the library attending. The second day, on 29 March at Westmarsh Hall, also had been well supported. Over 300 residents had made contributions.

The next stage was to distribute a questionnaire to every household and this was planned for June. There would be other activities to involve as many different groups in the parish before drawing up the Action Plan. The aim was not just to see 'how many houses should be in the parish' but what the parish should be like over the next 10-15 years from all perspectives.

The photograph competition had been judged by Dover District Cllr Bartlett. It is hoped to launch the plan at the 2009 Annual Parish Meeting and also produce a 2009 calendar. All the comments will be considered and if any items can be addressed sooner, this will be done.

08.8 Report for the Cartwright and Kelsey School, Mrs S Chandler

Mrs Chandler was pleased to open with good news that the new deputy head has been appointed. The Fledglings, the pre-school entry group was going from strength to strength and so the Reception Class had higher numbers than for many years. The admission criteria was being re-written. All classes had benefited from extra field trips which it is hoped to continue and there were many exciting projects including the wildlife garden being re-constructed with the help of Saunders House and parents. There is also a school transport plan to promote healthier options and to ease the traffic issues at the start and end of the school day. Bike sheds are being placed around the school so that bikes can be kept secure and protected from the weather.

The use of the security lights around the school was raised and the timing of the lights will be checked.

08.09 There were no resolutions for which written notice has been given.

There had been a letter from Mr Blaxland about the future need for another burial ground within the parish when the graveyard at St Nicholas Church was full. It was agreed to ask for parishioners' opinions on this matter. It was noted that there were no appropriate sites within the village confines.

08.10 Reports from District Councillors, Mrs S Chandler and Mr T Bartlett

District Cllr Chandler reported that the DDC Community Safety Unit was not able to use covert CCTV at The Street toilets, as much of the damage was inside. The problem was not able to be solved by using cameras. Solutions were still being looked at. The successful monthly disco for under 16's, Teen Fusion, continued and transport was arranged for young people in the parish.

Questions for the District Councillors

- A parishioner asked if the Neighbourhood Forums had been successful. The meeting held in Ash had been well supported and a programme is being set for the year.
- On new housing developments for Ash, Cllr Chandler explained that there had been sites put forward in the new Local Development Framework – Cowan's, Bates and the area of the Scout Hut at Molland Lea however because of the recent new developments nothing new could be started for ten years. It is not necessarily the owners who put forward sites as suggestions could be put forward by any party.
- A parishioner spoke about the many years of neglect of St Nicholas Sheltered Housing Scheme and the length of time it had been under threat of closure. There was a growing need for supported / sheltered housing. Could not DDC be asked to spend the money raised from the sale of St Nicholas House in Ash for this type of housing provision? Cllr Chandler agreed that the demand for St Nicholas House had fallen due to the conditions however the funds raised would be used to support existing facilities and to provide additional ones as well as supporting people to stay in their own homes.
- A parishioner spoke about the need for improved local drainage if new houses were built, as the Collarmaker's Green development had used the old drainage system. Infrastructure would need improvements to be able to cope with more new homes.
- There were more contributions about infrastructure, use of Council capital receipts, provision of bungalows and the DDC's local housing waiting lists. Parishioners were encouraged to include their comments in the Parish Action Plan questionnaire.
- A parishioner asked about the collection of plastics for re-cycling. Cllr Chandler explained that the new waste recycling contract should be in place by September and would include plastics.
- A parishioner asked about the caravan sites in Westmarsh. Cllr Bartlett explained that a new DDC Enforcement Officer, Mr S Lower, had been recruited and was prioritizing the outstanding cases for action.
- Parishioners raised the planning conditions attached to the granting of the application for the polytunnels regarding the drainage improvements that should be in place. Cllr Bartlett had asked for regular updates from the Planning Officer.
- The future of the toilets in The Street Car Park was discussed. Cllr Chandler explained that usage and costs were being looked at for the provision across the district. Alternatives were being considered.

08.9 Any other business concerned with parish affairs

The Chairman of the Heritage Group reported on the progress that had been made on the parish archives project. Suitable sites were being considered and funding would be looked for once an agreed site had been found. There is active support for the project continuing. The Parish Council had given their support.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 10.10pm.