



**Minutes of the
ASH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
Held on Monday 19th April 2021 at 7.30pm
via Zoom**

Chairman: Mr A Harris-Rowley, Chairman of Ash Parish Council

Present: 4 Parishioners, 8 Ash Parish Councillors, Dover District Councillor, Mr T Bartlett, Kent County Councillor Mrs S Chandler. Cartwright & Kelsey Primary School Headteacher, Mrs F Crascall.

In attendance: Mrs C Haggart (Minute Taker)

Apologies: Mr I Chandler, Mrs N Vallach (Jack Foat Trust), Mr T Jones (Ash Village Hall).

On behalf of the parish, the Chairman offered sincere condolences to Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, and her family at the passing of HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, on 9th April 2021.

All participants agreed to the recording of the meeting. All reports were on the Ash Parish Council website under Parish Council / Annual Parish Meetings, including those from the Police Community Support Officer, Ms Winter, the KCC Warden, Mr Gill and the Dover District Community Officer, Mr Allen.

21.01 Minutes

It was proposed by Mr J Tanner, seconded by Mr K Ellis, and agreed to accept the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of 15th April 2019 as a correct record. Due to COVID-19 the 2020 annual parish meeting had been cancelled.

21.02 To receive reports and take questions:

- i) Ash Parish Council Chairman's Report – Mr A Harris-Rowley
2021 had been a very difficult year due to the impact COVID-19 had on residents, communities and the country. Thank you to everyone who have kept daily life going. The parish council made a number of pro-active changes: using Zoom for meetings, keeping the web-site updated with COVID information and liaising with residents and local authorities and keeping the Ash Recreation Ground Toilets open throughout the winter for handwashing. All the information in the local directory had been kept upto date on the website. There had been some delay in completing all the projects but significant progress has been made on 2020 key priorities:
Ash Neighbourhood Development Plan is progressing well and went to examination in March. The council is waiting to hear from the examiner and if the Plan is accepted, it will go to referendum in July.
The children's play area was completed and opened in July 2020. This has been very well received.
Highways Improvement Plan (HIP) Phase I was completed in October 2020 at the entrances / exits to Ash village at Guilton, Sandwich Road, New Street and Chequer Lane. Going forward there will be further phases addressing traffic safety issues in the village.
Communication is very important to and from our residents and in October 2020 a fully accessible, new website was launched. Since July 2020, to reach a wider

audience, the Ash Parish Council Facebook page was published on the Ash Village and Westmarsh pages.

New priorities for 2021

Biodiversity Working Group has helped to create the four wildflower swathes on the Ash Recreation Ground. Local schoolchildren have been encouraged to build bug-hotels and one had been installed on the Allotments. On the parish council website there are seasonal tips on how to improve biodiversity in our gardens.

Highways Improvement Plan (HIP) Phase II. This group will monitor Phase I to make sure it delivers road safety improvements and it will gather views on what should be the next priorities. When Covid restrictions are lifted, a Speedwatch group will be set up with volunteer support.

Review of community facilities. This is another of the NDP projects and is to review facilities, from broadband to sports and leisure to find out what will be needed over the coming years and how to deliver these improvements.

DDC proposed to charge for rural car parks. The parish council's strong recommendation was that the car parks should remain free. In May 2020, after a review of parish councils' views, DDC agreed not to introduce charges and the parish council asked residents to be considerate and only use The Street Car Park for short-term parking. In August 2020, the parish council undertook a parking survey to inform the next phase of the HIP.

The parish council decided that because of the financial impact on residents from COVID, it would take an active decision to keep the precept flat for many and reduced for some.

There is a vacancy for a councillor due to the resignation of Mr Loffman and the parish council welcomes applications from residents.

ii) Parish Council Finance Report – Mrs C Haggart (Clerk)

The audited statement of accounts, along with the Annual Governance Audit Return and the Auditor's Certificate for the year ended 31 March 2020 had no issues to report. The accounts and the unaudited Ash Parish Council Receipts & Payments for the year ended 31st March 2021 were presented.

Receipts and Payment 31st March 2021

£174,012 was carried over from the previous year. Receipts for the year ended 31st March 2021 were £110,808 including reclaimed VAT of ££20,309. Payments for the year ended 31 March 2021 were £190,201 including VAT paid of £19,604.

Points to note on Receipts to 31st March 2021

Precept (Parish Council Tax) £83,500 - there was a 3.14% increase in the Ash Parish Council tax, an extra £2.19 per household for the year, giving an annual charge of £71.91 based on a Band D property.

The receipt of £6,358 was the developer's contribution from Mill Field for the new playground

Points to note on Payments to 31st March 2021

The new playground equipment was installed and the total cost was £76,714. Thank you to the Jack Foat Trust who donated £25,000 towards this project in 2020.

The new access path that gives wheelchair accessibility to the play area cost £5,101.

The Highways Improvement Plan (HIP) Phase I to improve traffic safety with the village gateways and the new road markings cost £20,906.

Major tree surgery maintenance of the trees on the Ash Recreation Ground was able to be completed late winter and cost £4,015.

The Recreation Ground Toilets are now kept open seven days a week, throughout the year, and the service charge came to £721, although this was not for a complete year. The improved website cost £963.

Budget 2021-2022. The Parish Council tax (precept) for this year 2021-2022 is £83,500, unchanged from 2020. Due to an increase in the number of houses in Ash, this was a decrease of 1.38%, on the prior year, with the annual amount for each household being £70.92 per Band D property.

The increase in Employment Costs is for a possible change in the Clerk's hours.

There is an increase in Administration to cover the cost of £1,000 for eleven tablets for parish councillors. This was necessary for Data Regulations' compliance and to help with the return to face-to-face meetings. The other increase to note is £1,566 for the publication of the Ash Directory and the restarting of newsletters. This will take place when it is possible to deliver to all households.

Monitoring of the impact of the Highways Improvement Plan Phase I for improving traffic safety will be done in the autumn and £1,500 had been allocated for an automatic traffic count.

Total Reserves are £94,618 as of 31st March 2021.

Ring-fenced reserves are kept for future expenditure such as the HIP Phase II, projects funded by developer contributions, and Green Spaces that would be of benefit to residents. It also includes Contingencies and Election Costs. On the 31st March 2021, these reserves were £31,691. Once the Ash Neighbourhood Development Plan is completed, £10,000 will be transferred to general reserves.

General reserves are held as a safety net. On the 31st March 2021, they were £62,927. The parish council now aims to hold up to one year's precept as a general reserve. The level of general reserves will be re-considered in the 2022 budget.

Questions & Answers

Q: A resident asked in relation to the Chairman's report, about the DDC The Street Car Park, with reference to over-night and long-stay parking by people which limits the use of the car park for residents who are visiting the shops or using the facilities. Could the parish council consider if charging for more than 2 hours parking would help improve this problem?

A: This will be looked at in the HIP Phase II to see how this problem can be addressed, as there is no other available space for a central car park.

Comment: A resident, said that if the parish council had helped to encourage Kent County Council to resurface The Street, thank you, as it had made an appreciable difference to the quality of life for residents living on The Street.

21.03 Reports from and Questions for the local charities and trusts:

i) Ash United Charities – Mrs Mary Smith. Due to problems with the Zoom link Mrs Smith was unable to give the report verbally however the written report was noted.

- the Benevolent Fund is made up of six bequests donated in 1642, 1833, 1846, 1895 and 1934 for specific purposes. The interest from these bequests can be used although it is only a small amount.

- Resthaven Almshouses were built in 1903 by the Gardner family and provide four homes. In 2018, planning permission was achieved for two further homes. Despite the difficulties of the pandemic the construction work continued and new residents moved in summer 2020.

- Frank Kingsland Trust (for the elderly) has two bungalows. As will all the Trust's properties, the trustees are responsible for the day-to-day management as well as ensuring the financial viability for the foreseeable future. Annual accounts are prepared for each charity and the trustees are responsible to the Charity Commission and the Regulator of Social Housing.

Thank you to the other trustees, Carole Palmer, Kevin Ellis and Maureen Bubb for their outstanding support. Thanks are also given to our residents who have come through a difficult year of lockdown and restrictions with stoical humour and good grace.

- ii) Frank Kingsland Trust – Mr P Chandler
There is £33,013 in the bank account. This Trust has a wide remit to benefit the parish of Ash. Last year the Trust helped with a large grant towards the building of the two new Resthaven properties. It also had agreed to help fund a web-site for the Ash Heritage Group.
- iii) Ash Educational Charities – Mr C Pratt
These are made up of the Cartwright, Godfrey & Kelsey Educational Charities. It is specifically for educational purposes for the residents of Ash. It holds £203,370.39 in safe investments and is able to use the income for charitable purposes. The income has reduced in 2020 because the rental from the Old School ended when F H Brown moved out of the premises.
In the past year, it had given £1,581 to five students for book grants and to the Cartwright & Kelsey School for school bibles. In 2020, the Trust decided to sell the site and to apply for planning permission for five dwellings. The Trust will then re-invest the money to provide a regular income. This could possibly be achieved by buying another property that could provide a rental income. The investments are safe but do not provide an income.
- iv) Jack Foat Trust – apologies had been received from the Trust Chairman, Mr I Chandler. The report for the year ending 5th April 2020 was noted.
During the year 2019/20 the Trust was pleased to support various village organisations, including Ash Cartwright School (Mini bus), Ash Cricket Club (Sight Screens), and Ash Parish Council (upgrade of play equipment on Recreation Ground), as well as ongoing maintenance of the Trust’s land (£46,240). 20 – 26 The Street is an ongoing source of expenditure (£22,528) for internal repairs and renewals.
In September 2019, the Trust disposed of 88 The Street (auction sale) and a small area of land adjacent to 57 New Street (£157,500 net of expenses). The Trust received £52,894 during the year, derived from rents, dividends and interest on investments.
Covid will obviously have some effect on the Trust’s investment portfolio, but hopefully this will return to more normal levels as the pandemic recedes.
The value of the Trust Fund at the end of 2020 was a tad shy of £2.5 million. This is a total valuation of land, property, and investments.
In 2020/21 (audited figures not yet available) money had been spent on tree surgery, fencing, further property improvements and grants to School and Heritage Group.

21.04 Ash and Westmarsh Village Halls: Reports and Questions

- i) Westmarsh Village Hall – Mr Harris-Rowley (Chairman)
The Hall was closed during COVID and the time had been used to update and refresh the Hall. A new fence was erected for security and safety and was grant funded. The DDC Community Grant of £530 was used to upgrade the kitchen facilities. Income for the year, including the COVID grant, was £11,655 and expenditure was £7,588, with £4,00 on capital expenditure. Rental income was £598 compared to £2,857 in the prior year.
- i) Ash Village Hall – apologies had been received from the Ash Village Hall Chairman Mr T Jones. The written report was noted.
The Ash Village Hall had a short period of activity after the first lockdown which provided some income. Also, KCC paid a reasonable % of the rental for the Library. The finances are stable and there are good indications that there will be users in April and May, when the COVID restrictions are removed.
The hallway and disabled users’ toilet were re-decorated during the second lockdown. There was a major repair to stop water leaks on the flat roof. The final accounts will be available in the near future. On behalf of the committee, thank you to the Parish Council for their continued financial support.

21.05 Cartwright and Kelsey School: Report and Questions

The Headteacher, Mrs Crascall summarized her written report which is available in full on the parish council web-site.

It had been a very successful two years and the school is now 'good' in all areas (Ofsted September 2019). The school also received a glowing SIAMS (Church Inspection) report in September 2019.

Thank you to all the local charities as the school has benefited greatly from their support with a bird hide, mini bus, play equipment, accelerated reader, laptops, tablets and a fully funded a learning/after school club lodge all paid for from donations.

This is not the end of the journey as everyone is working hard to keep on improving. From the team's point of view, it is essential to have a village school that local parents and children want to use which is the case now, We are looking forward to building on the successes and working with the village.

The school is 300 hundred years old, as the first school in the village was opened in 1721. The school is working with the Little Studio, an Ash mosaic artist and the children to create a mosaic for the entrance to the school.

There are so many things to look forward and lots to celebrate. DDC Councillors Trevor Bartlett and Mike Conolly visited last year which was appreciated and we were delighted to show them around the school.

Comment: Cllr Bartlett said how impressed they both were with what they saw. There was a lovely friendly atmosphere. The children were very happy and there was a real sense of how the school has improved. Cllr Bartlett had asked the After School Club if they wanted to take part in the Christmas card competition and he had used their design for his Leader's Christmas Card this year.

21.06 There were no resolutions for which written notice had been given.

21.07 Kent County Councillor, Mrs S Chandler: Report and Questions

Cllr Chandler explained that as it was the pre-election period, the report had been circulated prior to the meeting and she was not permitted to present it.

Questions and answers:

Q: A resident asked if the A257 was regularly swept, as there was debris in the gutters and an accumulation of small stones in the middle of the road that were thrown up and damaging windscreens when cars were overtaking.

A: There is a schedule for road sweeping and Cllr Chandler will pass on the comments to the KCC Highways Department.

Q The Chairman asked who the parish council would speak to at KCC to express the concerns about the removal of lighting at the A257 junctions at Chequer Lane and Sandwich Road.

A: The parish council can ask for this to be considered again in the context of the Vision Zero policy for reducing the fatalities on Kents Road by 2050. If the removal of the lighting has caused an increase in the incidents at the junctions, it could be looked at as a preventative measure so other factors than crash data could be taken into consideration.

Q: A resident commented that it did not appear logical to have the Guilton junction 'looking like a fair-ground' and no lights at the other two junctions.

A: At the time the decision was taken, it was based on the crash data and the number of serious incidents. Vision Zero allows for a wider consideration other than reported crash data. The parish council could comment on the two unlit junctions in that context.

The written report is on the parish council website and covers:

COVID 19 support to residents, business and the care sector. The actions taken by Kent County Council including sourcing and distributing PPE and the adapting of

working systems to ensure support continued through-out the pandemic. The total amount of Covid grant from Government to KCC was £139.1 million, some of which had been distributed and delivered as support by the Districts.

Kent Resilience forum having to deal with the consequences of the French closing the borders due to COVID.

Highways: There has also been ‘business as usual’ activity to keep our roads repaired and drains cleared. The five year highway maintenance plan is available on the KCC website. The £500,000 refurbishment of the Sandwich Toll Bridge was completed last autumn. Supporting Highways Improvement Plans, which prioritise the improvements that local people would like to see in their parishes.

Vision Zero strategy is the plan to reduce fatalities on Kent roads to zero by 2050 but as importantly to achieve a year on year reduction in serious accidents and to make sure that local communities feel safer using their local roads.

Reconnect programme is for all children and young people in Kent for the next year and beyond.

Net Zero Action Plan commits KCC to reducing greenhouse gas emissions from its estate and wholly owned traded services to net zero by 2030.

Plan Bee pollinator action plan for Kent, which is designed to do what it says on the tin and take the lead to encourage local communities to improve habitats for pollinators.

Member’s Grant was given to the Hills Court nature path received a Member’s Grant.

KCC budget for 21/22 is focused on maintaining frontline services despite the unprecedented financial context and regrettably had to include a rise in Council Tax of just under 2% and an additional 3% which is ringfenced for social care.

21.08 Dover District Councillor Mr T Bartlett and apologies from DDC Cllr Mr M Conolly. Reports and Questions

Councillor Bartlett gave the report and highlighted from the written report the following points:

It had been a very difficult year and DDC councillors and staff have worked throughout to support residents and business. Despite the loss of income, it had been possible to balance the budget.

Dover was hit by the EU transition as well as the closing of the French border when Dover came to a halt. There were the combined problems of road congestion and the resulting increase of rubbish on the roads. The clearance had started but it is time consuming and costly.

Local Plan had completed its first consultation and the feedback is being assessed.

Climate change policies and projects were ongoing and DDC had received a government grant for the installation of 49 Electric Vehicle Charge Points for the district.

Dover Lotto allocated £68,000 to 129 local organisations in its first two years. It continues to grow and £64,000 had already been allocated this year. Community Grants continue to be awarded.

Dover District is joining the great British Spring Clean from 28th May to the 25th June and information can be found on the DDC website.

East Kent Housing is back in house and is now running smoothly.

There has been a problem with the Veolia waste collection that usually runs smoothly.

Due to IT issues, rounds have been missed and it is hoped that all will be back to normal with the collections for the 53,000 properties in the district. DDC apologises for the inconvenience and is working with Veolia to resolve the problems.

Questions and answers

Q&A: Part of the Local Plan includes policies on the provision of traveller sites. A copy of the report will be available when the responses on the consultation have been collated.

Q: The replacement cycle racks in the DDC The Street Car Park are being dealt with by the DDC Officer and the Clerk. Cllr Bartlett is very happy to support the racks re-instatement.

The written report is on the parish council website and covers:

Council activities have been dominated by Covid-19. It is right to offer a huge thank you to DDC officers who have performed outstandingly in rising to the new and unexpected challenges which faced us. They have demonstrated flexibility, determination and resilience, as well as a willingness to work long hours in often unfamiliar activities.

Covid response: DDC established a Community Hub staffed seven days a week with 120 officers, around 40% of the officer establishment, working through the Hub supporting residents and businesses.

Finances: DDC had been able to maintain all front line services and still end the financial year with a small surplus, as well as being able to budget for 21/22 with a manageable deficit and fully fund our three year Capital programme.

EU transition: DDC worked throughout 2020 with a wide range of partners with the aim of keeping Dover and Kent clear of traffic following the end of the transition arrangements. Also as part of the new arrangements the Government has announced it will be setting up an Inland Border Facility near Whitfield, now due to open in early 2022, to monitor inbound HGV traffic.

Local Plan and Regeneration: During the March 2021 consultation, 10,502 people visited the Local Plan website. Facebook posts reached 70,000. This is a hugely important piece of work which is key to underpinning the District's growth and investment agenda while meeting the Government's targets for new home building.

Climate Change: Working to DDC's stated aim to be carbon-neutral by 2030, two projects, both aided by government grants have started. Installing 49 EV charging points across the district and a programme to de-carbonise the DDC offices at Whitfield. In addition KCC had given planning permission for the Dover Fast Track bus service which will be financed by a Government grant of £16 million.

Dover Lottery: This has been running for two years now and in total nearly £68,000 had been given to 129 local organisations. We have also continued with our regular programme of Community Grants.

Social housing: On October 1st took back in-house management of our housing stock from East Kent housing. We have also continued with our plan to build 500 social housing homes over the next few years.

Finances: the year 2018/19 was satisfactory, with a small surplus against budget and reserves of over £2.5 million at year end. Council tax for 2019/20 will rise by 2.95%, maintaining DDC's position as the lowest council tax in East Kent.

21.09 Any other business concerned with parish affairs

A resident asked if the path between the entrance to the Recreation Ground by Resthaven up to the toilet block could be improved as during wet weather it is very muddy.

The Chairman agreed that it does need work and would take the matter to the parish council. He also explained that the entrance gate had been removed for repair and would be re-instated as soon as possible.

There were no further questions and the Chairman thanked everyone for all their hard work and support over the last two years and was looking forward to putting the parish council new plans into place.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.24pm.