

Staple Parish Council

Minutes of an Ordinary Council Meeting, Wednesday 13th May 2020

7.30pm via Zoom (due to Covid 19)

Present: Cllr T Bartlett (in the Chair)
Cllr Mrs Coulson
Cllr N McCollum
Cllr G McCollum
Cllr D Kirk
Cllr J Kirk
Cllr R Loukes
Cllr Sue Chandler
Parish Clerk: Lisa Acarnley

1. To receive and approve apologies for absence.

No apologies.

2. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Significant Interests.

None

3. To approve the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting held on Wednesday 11th March 2020 and to report any matters arising therefrom not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

Cllr Coulson advised that the footpath with the overhanging tree is behind the remembrance garden and not Crixhall Lane as documented in the minutes.

Cllr N McCollum advised that the drains mentioned in the minutes now appear to have been cleared.

- **minutes were approved.**

4. Report from County Councillor

Cllr Sue Chandler explained that KCC are working on a recovery and transition plan. This covers many areas, including the procedures around getting children back to school and finance. KCC are petitioning government for support due to a range of issues. A big expense for them has been funding PPE where needed. This includes their front line staff, staff in care homes, hospitals etc. They will now need to try and recoup some of this expense. The health of the public was prioritised above finances and now some of this needs to be recouped.

Household waste and recycling centres are opening up for as of Friday 15th May and timeslots need to be booked. The website has just opened for booking and was in extremely high demand. The site received 18,000 visitors initially and was unable to cope with the volume. However, many people have booked and this should gradually settle down.

Some of the local libraries and book delivery services will be opening up again.

Cllr G McCollum asked for clarification on how DDC has lost income and suggested it would be helpful for figures to be made available so that the public can see how the funds have been used and where the gaps are.

Cllr Bartlett confirmed that these figures will be made available once they have a report.

Cllr Chandler mentioned that there has of course been a significant drop in business rates payments and also Council Tax from the residents of the district, due to changes in many households' financial circumstances.

Yearly report provided from Cllr M Conolly – representative of Little Stour and Ashstone ward along with Cllr T Bartlett.

This was prepared for the AGM which was unable to go ahead.

This report is being written as the catastrophic effects of the Corona virus have become ever more apparent. The report does not attempt to recount the details of the events of the last few weeks of the financial year to the end of March – that will be a task for the historians – but rather to chronicle the ‘ordinary’ events of the year. The cost to the Council of Covid 19 will be very high, so not all the plans and projects outlined below will necessarily be brought to fruition. What looked like a reasonably solid Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan in February is now fundamentally compromised and only time will tell what the medium and long term effects will be. It is though reasonable to say that in terms of Community Support and adaptation to different ways of working the Council has responded very strongly. Suffice to say that as of late April a huge amount of work is going on to plan how the Council will come out at the end of the crisis and how it will meet its obligations.

For DDC the year began in May with the council elections, the first since the number of councillors was reduced from 45 to 32. The new council consists of 19 Conservatives, 12 Labour and one independent. Mike Conolly became Council Chairman in succession to Sue Chandler, and Steve Manion took over Mike’s role as Finance Portfolio Holder.

There were further changes in October following the abrupt resignation of Keith Morris as Leader and Councillor. Trevor Bartlett was elected Leader and two Cabinet appointments were made: Derek Murphy for Housing and Health and Oliver Richardson for Property and Assets. Following her appointment to the KCC Cabinet – congratulations Sue – Sue Chandler stepped down as Deputy Leader of DDC and was replaced by MJ Holloway. She remains a District Councillor for Sandwich.

A major problem arose in May following the revelation that East Kent Housing had failed to carry out large numbers of gas safety inspections of council-owned homes. Emergency action was taken to bring inspections up to date. There had already been concerns about the performance of EKH in a number of areas and this problem proved to be the catalyst to the decision taken later in the year by the four parent councils – Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone & Hythe and Thanet – to bring housing back in-house. That process has now started and will conclude in early October, but it should be emphasised that it will be neither easy nor cheap.

Work has continued throughout the year on the new Local Plan which will take us through to 2040. This covers not only housing but infrastructure, business and leisure, though inevitably the main focus will be on housing. The Government has set DDC a target of 629 dwellings per annum across the Plan period. This is a very challenging target and means that difficult decisions will have to be made, including probably a higher burden on rural areas than we would like. Your councillors have been active in debating these with the Planners and have succeeded in mitigating some of the more damaging suggestions. Draft proposals were revealed to towns and parishes in March and these will now go out to formal consultation later in the year.

Regeneration remains a major focus for DDC. We have now seen the first full year of the St James retail and leisure development near the Dover waterfront, and this has been successful for the tenants. We’ve also now had a full year of the Dover District Leisure Centre at Whitfield where footfall is more than three times higher than at the old Dover Leisure Centre, now being demolished. The redevelopment of Kearsney Abbey and Russell Gardens is now nearly complete and we are working towards a Lottery Grant to update Dover Town Hall – Maison Dieu – a wonderful old building but desperately outdated and unsuitable for present day use. Tides is also showing its age and we have

reached the point, as we did with Dover Leisure Centre, where continuous repairs no longer make economic sense. A cross-party advisory group has been set up to review a number of options, which do not include a re-build elsewhere, but we are looking at a sizeable funding gap if we are to do what we would ideally like.

Much time and effort went into the preparation of how DDC will handle Brexit when it is fully implemented after the transition period. We worked closely with KCC, the police, the Harbour Board and Highways England but of course our powers of decision in this are limited. Major concerns were that Dover Town would not be clogged up by vehicles seeking to avoid authorised routes and that Sandwich would not be effectively cut off by congestion on the A256 if the Manston option were introduced (despite our oft repeated objection to this idea!).

Climate change and the council's response to it has been another major theme. A cross party working group has been established to recommend action to Full Council in due course. The objective is to make all DDC activities carbon neutral by 2030. Because of its long term importance this group is chaired by the Leader, Trevor Bartlett.

A comprehensive Tourism Strategy has been developed. This highlights the many attractions of White Cliffs Country and will be publicly launched when the time is appropriate. The Open golf championship will now be coming to Sandwich in 2021 and will be a key opportunity to persuade investors of the advantages available to them in Dover District.

Our waste and street cleaning contract with Veolia expires at the end of 2020 and negotiations with potential contractors have been continuing. We had hoped to be able to announce a result in June to allow time for any transition needed but this is now under review.

As ever it has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with our parish councils. We can't always deliver the outcomes that colleagues are hoping for but that isn't for any lack of effort as we live among you and your concerns are ours.

Report from District Councillor Cllr T Bartlett

Within a space of 8 short weeks everything has changed, and for our key public services the challenge has never been greater.

DDC had well rehearsed contingency plans, although a global pandemic was not something most of us had given much thought to at the beginning of the year.

However, thanks to good planning, investment in new technology and a commitment to public service, the Council has quickly moved to a new way of working.

Most DDC staff are now working from home, pretty much as normal. Our frontline key workers are out and about in the district with both careful measure to protect both them and the residents.

We have maintained core public services which we know you are relying on most at this difficult time, including all our household waste and recycling services.

At the same time, the Council have set up a Community Hub to help the most vulnerable residents, and coordinate the volunteer support effort across the district.

The planning department have done very well and are having a virtual meeting on Thursday 21st May – there are only 3 items on the agenda. They plan to carry out two meetings in June to catch up. The local planning agenda has been pushed back due to the current circumstances and this is now looking like the consultation period will be during the Autumn, with decisions being issued in January 2021.

DDC ground maintenance services are now back in full.

KCC have carried out the mechanical sweeping up of litter on the A256 and this has made a big improvement to the landscape (*Note - 23 tonnes of waste and debris has now been collected on the A256 between Dover and Sandwich over 6 days)

DDC have set up a community fund of £50,000 to help local organisations who are helping the community during this crisis. This has kindly been topped up by some local businesses and individuals. There are still funds left if any organisations wish to apply. LED lighting has been put up in the village. Some residents have mentioned that they may be too bright. It's likely that the 'old' ones were just very old. If anyone has a particular issue with them outside their window, then there are options.

* Information provided post meeting.

5. To receive an update from Cllr J Kirk regarding the website.

Cllr J Kirk advised that he has spent some time on the new website, and it was unanimously agreed that a good job has been done. Some lovely photos of David Riddleys have been used for the site and a balance between village activities and history of the village have been included.

It was suggested that Cllr R Loukes provide some of the Speedwatch information to be included on the website.

The new email addresses which have been set up are all now in use (Cllr Coulson to double check) and all councillors have adopted and agreed the email privacy advice.

A Twitter account has now been set up for the Parish Council
Councillors thanked Cllr Kirk for his all of his hard work on this.

6. To receive any updates on the "Sandwich Connect Pilot".

Current usage is almost zero, but not entirely. Britannia have advised the bus cannot just cease service as they are under contract with KCC. A middle ground has been reached that if the bus runs the morning service and there are no outward passengers, then the bus will not return for the evening run.

This period will not be used in the pilot scheme figures.

7. To receive any updates on the Community Speedwatch and Speed Indicating Devices.

Report from Cllr Loukes

Community Speedwatch & SID Report

May 2020

Speedwatch

Since the lock-down due to the pandemic and at the request of Kent Police and Community Speedwatch we have not done any Speedwatch sessions. We had a letter from the Police this week that said "*please don't deploy roadside at the moment, as soon as I am advised that we have the green light to go back out I will let you know.*" We will obviously comply with this but are frustrated that we see a trend for the average speeds to increase along with dangerous driving by motorcycles.

Once we commence sessions again we will very happily accept any new volunteers who would like to see a reduction in speeds through the village.

Please contact me if you want further information:- roger43@gmail.com or 01304 812306

SID report (for April)

The Speed indicator devices are still in operation during the lock-down!

This month I have compared the statistics with those from last November and January

Lower Road east direction.

During April there were 11,200 vehicles

During January there were 20,700 vehicles

The average speed has increased slightly and the max recorded speed was 70 mph on the 3rd April at 23:35 hrs.

The Street west direction

During April there were 7,800 vehicles

During November there were 16,200 vehicles

The Police have issued a "Reporting nuisance motorcycling" sheet which will be in the Escallop and our Parish Council web site. We do urge you to make notes on any motorcycle that is driven recklessly and report it to me or the Police.

8. To discuss any actions carried out or required to support the community and our vulnerable residents during the current pandemic.

Cllr Coulson advised that there is a 'buddy service' in place, where a group of residents are phoning neighbours who are particularly isolated at this time. This is working very well.

Angus and Vanessa Nederman kindly gave flyers to the residents to ask if anyone needed assistance at this time.

Cllr Bartlett thanked the residents of Staple for their ongoing show of support for the NHS and key workers on 'Clap for our Carers' Thursday evenings, and also Matthew Cullen and his tractor. These challenging times are certainly bringing the community together.

9. To discuss Harmer and Sons Maintenance costs for this season

Councillors agreed the costs were fair and are happy to continue to use Harmer and Sons for the coming season.

10. To consider planning applications

(i) 20/00406 | Received: Tue 14 Apr 2020

Land East Of Fairview Lower Road Staple

Outline application for the erection of a dwelling and associated parking (with appearance, landscaping, layout and scale reserved)

This was discussed and agreed that we do not feel able to support this application:

Some of the justifications within the planning application do not stack up in that the proposed mitigation does not stand up to test

Section 4

Talks about clear site lines but doesn't take into account the fact that it's on a bend with a known problem of speeding / accidents on that section of road.

Section 5

5.5 Claims that it won't breach policy DM11 as the occupant will be able to do most of their shopping at the Black Pig shop. In reality this is a very limited facility for top up shopping and the occupant will be driving in and out of the visit as normal, so this argument does not stand up to testing

5.12 This development would not address the needs of groups with specific housing needs in the village which we know from the housing needs survey is affordable housing.

6.2 It refers to other cases where planning consent was granted for developments outside the confines of the village settlement but these were both large scale planned developments and are not really comparable.

6.6 No evidence to support there will be any local employment as a result of the development

Comments have been submitted to DDC planning.

(ii) Receive an update from the clerk on Planning decisions

19/00120 Land east of the Courtyard – Durlock Rd, Staple. 8 Dwellings with parking and access -
Granted

11. To receive an update on any financial matters, including:

(i) Cheques for approval

Harmer & Sons invoice 16684, date 18/3/20 Total £1146 – A query was raised as to when the mowing season ended as there were a couple of areas which have overgrown slightly.

(Cheque has been agreed in principle once response has been received)

Clerk's salary – April & May + £43.20 for online payment to dot com. Total £423.20 -

Approved

12. To receive any footpath updates

A resident has kindly cleared the footpath from the remembrance garden to Lower Rd. There are a few footpaths that need clearing which are the responsibilities of landowners. The footpath off school Lane also needs trimming. KCC will begin the annual clipping rounds of the district this month, hopefully this will be done shortly.

Cllr Coulson has reported unemptied bins to DDC.

Cllr Bartlett thanked residents who have cleared footpaths themselves and would also like to remind people that it is important we stay on the footpaths and do not use unauthorised land to walk across.

13. To receive any highways and transport update

Cllr N McCollum advised that the KCC portal for reporting highways issues appears to work well and thanks were extended to KCC for this.

14. To receive a village hall and recreation ground report.

- 1) **VHC Meetings / VHC AGM:** In line with Government advice, the AGM has been cancelled and no meetings have taken place since 'lockdown'.
- 2) **Maintenance:** Regular, scheduled maintenance inspection visits have still taken place to check for any required day-to-day repairs / incidents of vandalism etc. - Everything found to be o.k.
- 3) **Play Area:** The Recreation Ground is still open to the public; but the play area isn't. Unlike Ash or Wingham; the Staple play area isn't located within its own, lockable, fenced-in area. So 'closing' it wasn't possible. However, the VHC blocked access to the equipment, using heavy industrial cable straps; and also tied the swings to their frames, to prevent use. Access to the junior equipment is still blocked; but all of the ties on the other equipment have been broken off, and the swings have been untied.
- 4) **CCTV:** Decisions are being made regarding the different options available, taking in to account the costs and quality.
- 5) **Regular Mowing of The Recreation Ground:** Query with the round maintenance as the grass is now very long in areas.

15. Any confidential items to be discussed.

None

16. Any additional correspondence as permitted by the chairman

The AGM was of course cancelled last month and it was decided that this will now be put back to next year.

It was reported yesterday that there was a theft at Summerfield Farm, this is very disappointing and is now in the hands of the police.

It was agreed that the Zoom meeting had worked well and all councillors are keen to continue this going forward until the guidelines from government are changed.

Cllr Bartlett closed the meeting at 9.22pm

Mrs L Acarnley
Clerk to the Council