



Offham Parish Council

DRAFT MINUTES OFFHAM ANNUAL PARISH MEETING TUESDAY 4TH APRIL 2017 AT 7.30PM OFFHAM VILLAGE HALL

Present: Cllrs D Frankling (Chair), B Oliver (Vice Chair), W Pierce, P Slate, D Stretton and W Williams, Borough Cllr Balfour, Clerk, approx. 50 members of public
Apologies: Cllr M Begbey and County Cllr Hohler

APPROVE MINUTES 2016

The minutes arising from the Annual Parish Meeting on 24th April 2016 were proposed to be approved by Cllr Pierce, seconded by Cllr Slate and signed as approved by Cllr Frankling.

PARISH COUNCIL UPDATE

Cllr David Frankling (Parish Chair) addressed the meeting.

Planning - There are few planning applications in the village and only one has been contentious, the scoping exercise to increase the blast size at Blaise Farm. Blasting is on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Blaise is occupied by Gallagers (quarry) and New Earth Solutions (composting).

Open Spaces and Recreation Ground - The Recreation Ground is very well used, the Equipment is cleaned and looks good. The wetpour has been upgraded at some expense, an ongoing exercise as it shrinks. Overall the village looks beautiful and the flowers are the best they have ever been. The contract for grass cutting has been renewed with Adrian Marchant and the grass looks very nice this year. Offham has entered the Kent Men of the Trees competition which will be judged in May. Cllr Wendy Williams is the Tree Warden.

St Michael's Church - They have carried out a lot of work on the wall. Rev'd Green will be giving an update after the break.

Lease and Parish Council Owned Property - nothing to report.

Liaison - TMBC, KCC, Highways, Other Villages.

Highways - A lot has happened about the Environmental Enhancement Plan which will hopefully come to fruition this year.

Parish Partnership Panel takes place every 3 months and Cllr Frankling attends. The main topic has been the Local Plan.

Joint Parish Councils Traffic Consultative Group (JPCTCG) - Cllr Stretton attends. This has been predominantly about J5 slips and now the new Thames Crossing.

Blaise Farm is moving gradually closer to the village. If Gallagher's get permission to increase the blasting it will increase the effect on us. It is important if you are concerned that you complain - see the Parish Council website for details about who to contact. Offham Parish Council are complaining but are just one voice. The composting at Blaise is run by New Earth Solutions who were bought out last year by Co-op and then sold to Panda Group. It looks as if they are putting money into the site. They are changing the bio-filters, hence the recent odours. They have shelved plans for the Anaerobic Digester as it is not financially viable. Black bin collections go to the incinerator at Allington and food waste is being shipped out of the area.

Landfill – Cllr Stretton attends these liaison meetings. Some attendee invites were missed from early meetings, but these are now back up and running. The ongoing maintenance of the site is the main focus and on the last inspection this had improved. Last year there was some gas migration problems at the western and southern boundaries - the site is still producing methane and is being monitored. They have decommissioned one of the generators and are running only two, which will be decommissioned as the gas decreases.

Speedwatch – there will be an update later.

Village projects – there will be an update later.

Fund Raising – The Parish Council has raised money from the sale of the calendars and the Quiz Night. Money for projects comes from this fund raising and not from Council Tax.

The Parish Council meets on the first Tuesday of every month, and people are welcome to come along and contribute.

VILLAGE PROJECTS

Recent Projects

- Pond Restoration
- Enhancement of the Village Gateways. Cllr Williams and her husband Peter have been upgrading and tidying these – well done.
- Quintain
- Christmas Lights
- The Book Box is well used, though thankfully the defibrillator hasn't been needed.
- Seating in the Recreation Ground
- £1200 to the Village Hall for the new LED hall lights.

Current Projects

- The well outside Walnut house
- Pond maintenance
- Installing a new power supply for the tree lights on The Green.

Cllr Frankling asked for suggestions for other projects.

DONATIONS

The Parish Council has made donations to: Offham Lunch Club, Offham Primary School, The Methodist Church, St Michael's Church, Age Concern Malling and First West Malling Scouts. Please give the Parish Council feedback if you think there are other projects or organisations to support.

OFFHAM FINANCES

These figures are unaudited.

The Parish Council received £24,000 income and spent £21,000. Extra income comes from fund raising. The biggest cost is the one employee, the Parish Clerk. The rest of the Parish Council are volunteers. The next biggest expense is grass cutting.

There are changes to the Council Tax which came about because Tonbridge wasn't parished and they paid Council Tax only. Everyone else in Tonbridge & Malling paid Council Tax and a Parish Tax. This was unfair so Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council (TMBC) applied a local charge to Tonbridge in line with parishes. TMBC reduced the Council Tax to parished areas so Parish Council money goes down as a result. Also, an additional funding grant to parishes has stopped along with the Council Tax Support Grant. Our income as a parish has gone down significantly.

The overall net change is that TMBC Council Tax for Offham has reduced by 5.7%, but they have introduced an Adult Care Tax from KCC of 2%. Offham Parish Tax (precept) has had to increase as we have lost £4,000 of income. The Parish Council has increased the Parish Precept by 23% simply to maintain the parish income at the same amount.

In summary, Council Tax has reduced, Parish Precept to Offham has increased, but the net effect to residents should be neutral.

To continue to do enhancement projects in the village we must continue to Fund Raise.

UPDATE ON BOROUGH PLANNING AND THE LOCAL PLAN

Steve Humphrey (TMBC Director of housing, Planning and Environmental Health) addressed the meeting. TMBC values its relationship with Parish Councils. As part of the current Local Plan Review we visited 27 Parish Councils, and Offham is one of the most pro-active.

The planning application for Blaise Farm is made to KCC, so TMBC are a consultee who submit their views but do not make the decision.

Planning gets no less complex or controversial. There are more people and more space, and we are more aware of our environ. Things the planners are asked to do increase, and land value and property values are jealously guarded by people. The housing crisis and affordability means society has a responsibility to find a way to meet those needs. Also, we need to consider roads, doctors, hospitals and schools.

Our new Local Plan tries to be about that. We need a Local Plan to find a way to balance these issues, find sensible and sustainable growth opportunity until at least 2031, to provide some clarity and to give confidence that if people accept growth they can retain the things they cherish the most. If we don't do a Local Plan, someone is likely to impose something on us (eg Housing Developers through appeals, Government, the Planning Inspectorate). We try and retain as much control as we can and be in command of our own future however difficult to achieve.

The Local Development Framework, our old Plan, is still a good document and gives us that confidence. TMBC has taken some hard decisions to provide key development sites to provide a pipeline of development (such as Kings Hill and Peter's Village) – where the Council has sought to deliver moving forward.

TMBC has to do a number of things well to provide evidence. We will be challenged as to how we reached our conclusions. We have to review the current boundaries of the Green Belt. It is a challenge to work with other agencies to achieve their services in parallel, such as doctors and dentists.

Housing supply is the focus of the Local Plan. Over the next period TMBC must provide for 14,000 houses to be built - 700 per year. Taking into account the housing in the pipeline and that already approved, that means an extra 6,000 dwellings. We need to keep building for the next couple of decades broadly at the same rate as over the last couple of decades. But the problem is there are no more redundant airfields, chalk pits or redundant hospital sites to build on.

At the end of last year TMBC analysed evidence about the size of the problem and then changed to thinking about strategy to address these problems and produced a document called "The Way Forward". This was to articulate an approach that makes sense and uses development in a positive way. The document puts forward some challenging decisions and controversial sites and is available on the TMBC website. TMBC are considering responses made to that consultation. Some of those sites will lead to considerable difficulties, problems and challenges. Our job in the face of the need we have to address is to see what gives us the best advantage in that context. Nothing stands still and a new Housing White Paper changes the landscape of our thinking again.

Ian Bailey (TMBC Planning Policy Manager) addressed the meeting. The Government's Housing White Paper, 9th February 2017, is now out to consultation. The goal posts are constantly moving and we are steering through. The National Planning Policy Framework is a national set of guidelines and is also due to be reviewed in the Autumn.

Some of the changing landscape to deal with includes:

1. Standardised methodology for dealing with housing need.
2. Statement of common ground.
3. Housing Delivery Test.
4. New definition of affordable housing.
5. Amendments to Green Belt Policy.

These are all built into our strategy "The Way Forward".

Questions:

- *Gallagher Blasting – what will TMBCs representations be?* TMBC have not formulated that yet but it will be publicly available online.
- *Offham Society is interested in whether to have a Parish Plan but was told you don't encourage this, why?* TMBC never discourages if someone wants a Parish Plan. But it is important a neighbourhood plan reflects the plan that TMBC are doing and is in conformity with that. You can still prepare a Parish Plan, but a Neighbourhood Plan is very different and you go through a mini Local Plan Process and a mini referendum and it becomes part of a development plan for the area. TMBC will assist you, but you have to reflect the Borough Plan. It is important to add issues to the Borough Plan, but if you are still unhappy after that then perhaps look at your own plan.
- *This is the second application to increase blasting at Blaise, did KCC support parish objections last time?* Steve was unsure but will check.

Cllr Frankling thanked Steve and Ian. Steve was instrumental in getting funding for the Village Enhancement Project, and without his support, and that of Matthew Balfour, this may not have happened. On behalf of the Village he was thanked.

KALC AND OFFHAM COMMUNITY AWARDS

Cllr Barry Oliver addressed the meeting and thanked everyone for coming. Awards are presented to 3 people every year who have shown outstanding commitment in village service, fund raising and event organisation. Two awards are given by the Parish Council and one is from the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC).

The first Parish Council Award is given to Stewart Malcolm. He lives at the Western end of the village, and produces cherries which we all enjoy. In the past, he has served on the Parish Council and has been the deputy and Chair of the Offham Society. Although having just celebrated his 80th birthday, he still lends a hand in the village with his tractor. He cannot be here tonight as he is returning from Australia but will be presented with his award later.

The second Parish Council Award is given to Valerie Taylor. Valerie and Robin moved to Offham over 10 years ago. She has served on the committee off Offham Open House and the Village Hall, later becoming Chair and being involved in renovations to the kitchen, toilets and Hall floor. Although standing down from the committee, she still works at Village Hall and Village events, supporting the village wherever needed. The award and framed photo were presented to Valerie.

The KALC Award is given to Clare Innes. She moved to Offham over 20 years ago and is involved in most things in the Village. She is a member of Blaise Quarry and Landfill liaison groups, advising the Parish Council, and established the villages' complaint log. She was a member of the Parish Council in charge of planning for 8 years and attended many meetings on behalf of the Parish. She has been active as a school Governor and recently took on May Day, forming a company in charge of the event. The development of the Recreation Ground is one of her many projects. The Church has also benefitted from her involvement. The award and framed photo were presented to Clare.

Cllr Frankling said well done to the award recipients, and said we were lucky to have so many people to do so much for the Village.

REFRESHMENTS, MAY DAY PHOTOS EXHIBITION AND SPADEWORK'S PLANS

Residents had the opportunity to look at photos from May Day over the years and to look at the development plans displayed by Spadework.

ST MICHAEL'S AND ALL ANGELS CHURCH

Rev'd David Green addressed the meeting. The Church is 11th/early 12th century, with some rare features and there is evidence of the church being there since 832AD. Everyone who lives in Offham has a stake in our Church. The 2013 quinquennial inspection revealed

£125,000 of works were needed.

John Bailey, Inspecting Architect with Thomas Ford and Partners, addressed the meeting. The Quinquennial Inspection is required by law, and he gives an honest appraisal of the works required. Fundamentally the Church is sound but there are a number of issues that need to start being looked at, such as the down pipes and drainage. They are putting in a soakaway to allow the water to get away from the building more easily. There will be masonry repairs. These will be kept to a minimum but every building needs some work to ensure it is structurally sound and watertight.

Residents are invited to come and see the works in progress at a date in the summer to meet the stonemason and experience the building. You can see the bands where, between 1080 and 1090, work was carried out by local people until the end of each summer and then stopped until the next year, taking 5 years in total to build.

Rev'd Green explained that the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) initially gave £8,000 to get the project started. The Church have done a lot of fund raising and worked to get quotes, research, investigations and preparations. Last year we (i.e. St Michael's Parochial Church Council) thought we needed £125,000: £12,000 from fund raising, £88,000 from HLF and £25,000 from savings. Since then HLF have confirmed they will support the project and have given £65,000. We have found out we can claim back VAT of £9,500 and £5,000 can be used from our own reserves. But the estimate has also got cheaper and the project should cost about £80,000 not £125,000.

This means there will be about £30,000 left over so we are looking to extend the project further – the Tower needs pointing, internally the altar plasterwork needs attention and the organ may need replacing.

Thanks to everyone who has helped participate in this project and raising funds – the congregation, Offham Society etc. Fund raising has gone well for a relatively small village, but there is always something else around the corner.

Questions:

- *Why have the costs gone down?* The specifications are very detailed, with individual stones marked, so we can control costs. During the tender process prices were dropping for small projects and we went to tender at the right time - now prices are rising. All the tenders were close so we know we are paying the right amount of money for the correct amount of work.
- *Is any water entering the church?* Not at the moment although there is some historical staining. There is green mould from condensation. The Church used to be shut up, now windows and the door are open to get the air flowing. It is hoped the mould can be brushed off when the scaffolding is up.
- *On 18th June the Offham Society are holding another Jazz in the Field event to raise money.* Other events include a stand at May Day, a heritage lecture by John Bailey and a play by Hedgehog productions. You can donate monthly through Friends of Offham Church and DVDs of John's talk 18 months ago are for sale. Residents were thanked for their help.

KENT HIGHWAYS UPDATE

Borough Councillor and KCC Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport, Matthew Balfour, addressed the meeting.

Lower Thames Crossing. An announcement was due to be made the week before last, but due to the tragedy on Westminster Bridge this was delayed. Unfortunately, this was followed immediately by the KCC pre-election "purdah" period, where due to the County Council elections such things as might affect the election are closed down, such as announcements like the Lower Thames Crossing.

They are now discussing the next Lower Thames Crossing for 2050, when the Thames Flood Barrier is coming to the end of its life and needs replacing.

HGV parking is a nightmare, although we suffer relatively little compared to other areas. Parked lorries make a noise at night due to the compressors and refrigerators, leave litter and have thrown debris over garden gates. The Department for Transport has been very

positive about Kent and Chris Grayling MP has been using the county as a project. It is hoped the law will be changed so lorries can be clamped first time (not third), fines will increase considerably, and the Operator will suffer the fine and not just the driver. To do this there must be places where the lorries can go, as they must stop due to tachograph conditions. At the moment drivers come over from Europe for their 48 hours break, as this is cheaper than the fines they would get in France or Belgium. After the KCC elections, the sites which have been identified will be announced. New signage has also been approved by the Department for Transport, designed by KCC, creating new laws.

Questions:

- *A Spanish lorry was recently in the Eastern layby in the village for 48 hours with the refrigerator running. The resident also picks up litter left by lorries along Teston Road.* This cannot be stopped at the moment without a Traffic Regulation Order, needing yellow lines and blue plaques – which is why KCC are doing what they are doing. We want Kent as a zone. This cannot be done until there is somewhere to move the lorries on to. The scheme will start in Ashford and move across Kent, but will take time.
- *Can a weight limit be introduced to stop lorries, except for access only?* Yes, but Offham has too many roads in and out and it would only work with a singular road. It needs enforcement – but the police won't enforce and no-one else can. Leeds village has a weight restriction but no-one pays any attention. What I am suggesting is the best way forward.
- *Why not get rid of the layby?* This would just move the problem elsewhere.
- *Litter on the A239 is terrible.* It is Maidstone Borough Council who have to pick up the litter here, but it is disgusting. KCC officers picked up litter at the Running Horse roundabout in their own time and collected 60 sacks.
- *Is the layby on Teston Road an official one – if unofficial you could prevent lorries parking there?* Without a Traffic Regulation Order you cannot prevent lorries stopping there. It will be Highways land not private land
- *Can you use bollards?* Possibly, but it is hoped the county wide system of stopping lorries being in the wrong place and "fly parking" will work. Need secure lorry parks to go to and stop them parking where it is inappropriate.

Cllr Frankling said we would check the ownership of the layby.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE

Cllr Frankling addressed the meeting. The Kent Highways Engineer said "the measures proposed within the highway intend to reflect a retro, rural road standard commensurate with a village setting". Residents voted overwhelmingly to support the scheme as described at the last APM. That hasn't changed.

There have been delays caused by the Chief Designer of the Scheme leaving, a breakdown in the TMBC/KCC liaison which is now fixed, an issue with the buses needing road closures which has now been dealt with, the contractors not being told, and issues regarding materials to be used which have now been resolved.

Hopefully the scheme will be starting next week. The changes that have been made are largely positive. Visually the road through The Green will be narrowed, although not actually narrowed. Visually the junctions will be chocked with rows of granite setts – not to narrow them in reality but to give the impression of being narrowed.

The junction strips cannot be put down at Pepingstraw as Highways were concerned it would create a rumble strip next to the houses. Instead the junction will be highlighted in a different colour. Also it was a nightmare for buses to close that junction so we have had to concede that.

Materials will be stored in the Recreation Ground.

Question:

- *If noise over the surfaces is a concern, won't vehicles over the granite sets cause a noise?* People don't like driving down gulleys. Visually the road will be narrowed and people traditionally don't drive in them.

Phase 1 of the works should take 4 months. Then other works will begin after the channelling, then the junctions before finally resurfacing the road completely. The junctions will probably be done over the summer as road closures are needed. It will be more difficult to drive through during the work so people may get used to driving elsewhere. Cllr Frankling talked residents through the map of the village and the work to be carried out.

There are no significant changes and KCC has the funds. Steve Humphrey from TMBC was instrumental.

Question:

- *Will the granite setts have an effect on mobility scooters driving over? They are not raised but are level with the road surface. We can't have hard traffic calming without street lights. I think this will have an effect on speed and we will wait to see if affects volume. We will do a speed and traffic count afterwards.*

We are looking at whether we can extend the 30mph limit Eastwards past Spadework. But this is costly and a lengthy exercise.

SPEEDWATCH

The Parish Council have decided not to resurrect the old system of cameras on the Green noting registration numbers. We would need new equipment, as the current equipment is shared and 10 years old. KCC have generously funded a mobile Speed Indicator Device (SID) on a pole. It is battery operated and can be moved through the village. We took the view it was more effective than people in yellow Hi Vis vests. We hope to put 1 at the Eastern side of the village which is bi directional and 2 at the Western side. The current one at the Western end is effective. We hope this will be installed in 3 months' time and need volunteers to help us move them around.

Questions:

- *Thanks to the Parish Council for sorting this out – it's good news. I was a volunteer for training last year and this is the first feedback I've had about what is happening – please give feedback. Will there be a data log of speeding drivers? There is no identification or number plate recognition. Volunteers can still do Speedwatch and take registration numbers.*
- *There are no restrictions proposed for Church Road – drivers might use that as an alternative? Can you identify or monitor traffic down there? Once the scheme is finished we will do traffic counts again and include Church Road. There will be chaos when the scheme is being done, but the pain is worth having. We hope it reduces the volume and speed of traffic. The further expansion of Kings Hill will only make problems worse and we hope this helps.*

OUR VILLAGE HALL

The Hall is owned by the Village. The Committee are the custodians and manage it. It is the biggest asset in the village. The dedicated committee do a fantastic job, but it is an old building and needs work done. The committee are doing a lot of fund raising. The lights alone were £2500, the roof needs repairs and the work is ongoing. The Committee go above and beyond to keep this going.

Cllr Frankling proposed we precept for the Village Hall. Residents pay TMBC Council Tax and Offham Tax (precept). If we put the Offham Tax up slightly (£2.68 for a Band D property or £5.36 for a Band H property per year) this will give the Village Hall £1,000 per year. The Committee are doing general maintenance but need some bigger jobs carried out. We could do more as a village to help and not just rely on the committee.

Question:

- *What about Lottery Funding? Funding has been obtained in the past for projects. But funding is for one off projects not just ongoing maintenance.*
- *I agree – but is £1000 enough? It is a start.*
- *Regular hirers struggle to get people to come. Income has dropped £2500 in*

the last year but costs have gone up. This year they have increased prices by 50p an hour but some groups have asked for a discount. They can't get grants as these are for large projects. They have started refurbishment - £1000 on electrical sockets, refurbishment of the hall. The Hall depends on regular hirers to pay maintenance costs but they are losing income and expenditure has gone up. The committee fund-raise because they need the money, it is a community asset and the spirit in the village is lovely, but it won't cover the running costs.

- *Gift Aid may help.*

Cllr Frankling asked for a show of hands to support the Village Hall by a small extra cost each year to fund it. There was almost unanimous support. This funding will start from 2018 and will go to the Parish Council for approval.

Q&A SESSION

The Parish Council were thanked for all they do throughout the year, Councillors are unpaid and were thanked on behalf of the village.

MAY DAY UPDATE

Clare Innes addressed the meeting. She thanked the Parish Council for her award. Last year the money was spent on: £1000 Village Hall, £250 Lunch Club, £250 Scouts, £250 Church, Ducks signs for the pond and some money to the Parish Council. It is run by volunteers to raise money and spend it in the village. It started again in the 1960s to raise money to re-roof the Village Hall.

They need lots of help – setting up on Friday evening and Saturday morning, running stalls on the day and taking down. There will be Morris Dancers, the May Pole, May Queen, Great Offham Bake Off, BBQ, Fairground, Children's Games, Offham Dash and Offham Dog Show.

The Offham Society are running the bottle stall. They asked for anyone attending their AGM to take a bottle.

Thanks were given to Cllr William Pierce and Orchard Place Farms who sponsor the Bottle Stall, Stewart and Stephen Betts who sponsor the chocolate tombola and Marion and Jon Regan who sponsor the sweet tombola and prizes for the children

Cllr Frankling gave thanks again to Clare for her help.

He also explained that two signs have been ordered "major event in village – severe traffic delays" – to ease congestion.

Residents have a copy of the map from last year's APM showing the village envelope, and 2011 census statistics.

Cllr Frankling thanked everyone for attending and declared the meeting closed at 10.10pm.