

Minutes of the Annual Assembly of the Parish Meeting for Eastling held at Eastling Village Hall on Thursday 27th April 2017

Present: Cllr Jimmy West (Chairman), Cllr Julia Bailey, Cllr Nigel Bickerdike, Cllr Helen Higgs and Cllr John Payne; and Mrs Wendy Licence (Clerk).

Also present were County Councillor Andrew Bowles and twelve members of the public.

Apologies had been received from Ward Member Colin Prescott.

Cllr West welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance.

1. Minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting held on 27 April 2016

Cllr West said the minutes of the previous meeting were not available.

2. Matters Arising from the minutes

There were no matters arising from the previous meeting.

3. Report of the Chairman of Eastling Parish Council

Cllr West gave the following report:

The Council has adhered to its established pattern of bi-monthly meetings in the year, with a very satisfactory attendance record for all five Councillors. The Council is non-political.

Elections to the Council took place in 2015. Julia, Helen, Nigel, JP [our Responsible Finance Officer (RFO)] and myself all agreed to stand again. Elections will be held again in 2019, but meanwhile anyone is welcome to attend Council meetings, who would like to get more involved.

New Parish Council Clerk. We are fortunate now to have Wendy Licence as our new Clerk. Wendy was appointed in December, following an extensive search for an experienced Council Clerk. Wendy is Clerk to a number of other councils, and attends regular training and update seminars to keep abreast of all that is required by statute for the proper governance of Parish Councils. During the latter part of last year it became apparent that the Council was falling behind on number requirements that as a Council we are obliged to comply with. I am happy to report that with Wendy's help [and prior to that David Buckett, our auditor,] we are up to date and compliant. The Council is obliged to have its own Website www.eastlingpc.kentparishes.gov.uk/. On that is published all the agendas and minutes of Council meetings and all our regulatory and financial information etc. This Website is maintained by Wendy. The Council has received some £1,600 from the Government Transparency fund, this money is used to finance the Councils own computer, and other expenses necessary for proper governance. The Council has joined the Kent Association of Local Councils [KALC], a body that is particularly useful for training and keeping us all up to date.

On the financial side I need to report that all Parish Councils are required to employ their Clerk and pay them under PAYE. The Precept has been set at £5,110, being £35 for a band D property in Eastling.

Planning applications have been few, which is not surprising as Eastling is in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and thus subject to severe restrictions on development. Eastling

Parish Council has viewed a number of applications favourably, but it is Swale Borough Council (SBC) who makes the decisions and, sadly, occasionally they get rejected by SBC.

The Village Warden Scheme has established itself as an appropriate means for reporting problems such as anti-social behaviour to the Police, and to seek help. Our Warden Alan Willson has reported that contact with police is effective. Thanks to Alan for the excellent work he does in the village, on many fronts.

Highways. In the spring, Andrew Bowles kindly organised a Site visit with a representative of KCC's Highways department. Several of us walked around the village with them looking at the drainage issues. This was partially successful as some of faults have been dealt with but not all of them. I am afraid it is an ongoing battle, as is potholes. The Council continues to report issues to KCC. Anyone can also do this themselves online, through www.kent.gov.uk I would urge you do this. KCC are pretty responsive, and you can track progress of the problem.

The Village Website This year the Council has changed its website provider to www.eastlingvillage.co.uk. This is run by Paul Ainsworth's brother David. The previous website run by Neville Perkins is no longer operating. We are pleased with the new Website for Eastling Village, it is early days yet, so please feed in any comments news, or events you may have to the administrator. He can only put up information he is told about, so do be in contact with him with information and photos.

Swale Borough Council. We are fortunate to have Colin Prescott as our local representative and Andrew Bowles the leader of SBC and a member of Kent County Council. The Council is grateful that both take an active interest and play a part in the issues concerning Eastling, along with their other wider responsibilities. I have also noted that our MP, Helen Whately is working hard on our behalf in this her constituency.

Footpaths. The Council strives to work with local farmers, to keep paths in good condition. Ben Binder, manager of the Belmont Estate, works particularly hard to maintain the paths and bridleways. He provides regular reports to the council, for which we are very grateful. If you spot any problems, fallen trees or other issues then please let Ben know. The trenches around most of the fields dug by the Belmont Estate are to stop "Hare Coursing". The Estate is gradually putting up new gates, over the entrances.

4. Financial report of the Parish Council

Cllr Payne reported the increase in the precept is to enable the Parish Council to become more transparent and comply with the Transparency Code. The Parish Council now has a website and employs a professional clerk. The Council has obtained a grant from the Transparency Fund and this has paid for a laptop and will also pay for hours worked on the website to become compliant. Other items of expenditure have been budgeted for roughly the same as last year. Cllr West thanked Cllr Payne for his report.

5. Report from the Village Warden

Mr Willson, the Village Warden, reported the village has been quiet over the past year. Before Christmas, there were some undesirable people going around and opening cars in the village but not much was stolen. There was a break in at the village hall and this resulted in some structural damage and the sound system and tea urn were stolen. This week there have been four people going up driveways, vehicle registration numbers have been noted and this has been reported.

Mr Willson said when he took his dogs for a walk through the field behind his house one was caught in a snare. This was reported to the game keeper who has agreed not to put snares in the area. The gamekeeper will also be informed about the forthcoming bluebell walk.

Cllr West thanked Mr Willson for his report and for his sterling work in the village.

6. To receive reports from local organisations

Mr Binder, Farm Manager of Belmont Estate, reported there has been a change of policy on the estate and there are now only two employees and casual staff are employed when needed. The remainder of the footpaths will be sprayed off shortly.

Mr Binder asked that dog owners should ensure they keep their dogs on leads and to walk quietly though the fields so as not to disturb the sheep. People were requested to keep on footpaths even if it looks as if there is only stubble in the field as crops have been planted between the stubble. Gates are being erected where physical barriers have been.

There is a wedding at the Manor on 2nd September and there may be extra cars in the village and also fireworks on the church path. The pub is thriving and this may cause an issue for tractors if the cars park on the road.

Mr Binder asked residents to contact him if they notice a fallen tree or other issue on the estate. Cllr West thanked Mr Binder for his report.

KCCllr Bowles reported he had been a Parish Councillor for thirty-nine years and has been appointed Honorary Vice President of KALC. Government at every level is becoming very bureaucratic so it important for Councillors and Clerks to undertake regular training.

KCCllr Bowles said Eastling has very few problems and this is indicative of a good community with good Parish Councillors and a Village Warden. Thanks go to Mr Binder for maintaining the footpaths in the village.

KCCllr Bowles, as leader of Swale Borough Council, informed the meeting the borough portion of Council Tax had to be raised because the Council received less from central government and also the Lower Medway Internal Drainage Board doubled their charge to the borough.

Cllr West thanked KCCllr Bowles for his report and his hard work on behalf of residents.

7. To receive questions and comments from parishioners.

A resident expressed concern about the increase in the parish precept and whether it was necessary.

Cllr West explained that the Parish Council has to comply with legislation. In 2015 new legislation came into force compelling Parish Councils to be more transparent and the increase in precept will ensure the Council is compliant. The Parish Council has obtained a grant to purchase a laptop and for setting up a website.

A resident raised concern about the state of the pumping station. There was a hedge which covered a portion of the building but this has been removed. How long will it last for?

Cllr Bickerdike said work is scheduled until the end of May.

A resident said there was a problem with the drain in Kettle Hill Road which only operates for three months from 1st May.

Cllr Bailey said there is a tidy up team which goes around the village picking up litter, one of the team is moving and a volunteer is needed for Newnham Lane.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 9.05pm.