

LUDESDOWN PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH COUNCIL ZOOM MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 15th March 2021 AT 7.34 pm

PRESENT: Cllr Noel Clark - Chairman
Cllr Chris Mileson
Cllr Mrs Anne Moorhouse - Vice Chairman
Cllr Matt Newnes
Borough Cllr Tony Rice
Mrs Jo Barker - Clerk
8 Members of the public

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. TO ACCEPT AND AGREE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from, Gerry Minister – Luddesdown Rights Of Way Group, Martin Fielder-White and James Jackson – Cobham Colts

2. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON 25 MARCH 2019

It was agreed that the minutes from the Annual Parish Meeting 2019 will be signed as a true record at the next Parish Council Meeting held in the Village Hall. This was proposed by Cllr Noel Clark, seconded by Cllr Anne Moorhouse and all voted in favour.

3. ACCOUNTS

The Financial Statement of the Parish Council's Audited Accounts for the year ending 31st March 2020 were received. This was on a proposal by Cllr Clark, seconded by Cllr Chris Mileson and all voted in favour.

4. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

- **Our Spring Clean event will take place at the end of this month** (lockdown measures allowing) please see our notice boards or website for details and ***join in!***
- **We are in the process of purchasing enforcement cameras to help control fly tipping** in the area; if you are interested in helping with this
- initiative, you will need to be fit and able (to climb trees) and available to monitor fly tipping hot spots on a regular basis. Please contact Cllr Newnes or our Clerk for details.

- Over the past two years we have with the help of our Borough Councillor been lobbying the Borough to **upgrade the play equipment on the recreation ground**. A number of you have expressed an interest in fund raising to support this. Would any residents who are interested in helping, or who have an interest in using the equipment please make yourselves known to Cllr Newnes or the Clerk, as we would like you to join a group leading this exercise.
- **Don't forget to complete the census on March 21st.**

What does your Parish Council Do (apart from spend your money)?

The PC exists to represent your opinions to the bodies who affect where and how we live. These are Borough Council, County Council and other bodies such as Highways England and others. We provide grants to the Church for the maintenance of the churchyard, war memorial and village green. We make small grants to the Village Hall and the Rights of Way Group. We make responses to local planning applications. We have sought to get better treatment of the area by highlighting drain clearance issues. We produced an illustrated report on the poor signage maintenance for the County Highways department. We regularly raise the issue of fly tipping and anti-social behaviour with the Police representatives and with the Borough. We also highlight any potential uncontrolled planning issues within the Parish to the Local Planning Authority. We are active members of the Kent Association of Local Councils who provide us with training and advice.

On Planning: in the last year we responded to the consultation on the core plan by Gravesham Borough Council which contained the proposal to build 3000 new houses on Greenbelt land in Higham, Meopham/Sole Street and Istead Rise, calling on the Borough to find another solution to the housing problem. We submitted a response to the Government consultation on planning reform. We participated in the Highways England supplementary consultation on the Lower Thames Crossing prior to the Development Consent Order (DCO) submission and also made representation to the Borough regarding the Adequacy of Consultation for this project, we are happy to see the DCO has been withdrawn, but it will return... We objected strongly to the proposals by Highways England because of the lack of consideration for the effects of traffic on the villages, its impact on the environment and the prospect of the local main roads being gridlocked.

We deplore the sheer waste of taxpayers' money in promoting a scheme that is now budgeted at £8bn (7 times the cost of the QEII bridge) purely to increase traffic between Essex and Kent. We participated in the consultation on the London Theme Park, and registered for the DCO review. We opposed the theme park primarily on the lack of competence of LRCH (the holding company) to deliver this project, their poor assessment of environmental impact and on the weakness of their transport plan to deliver the expected 15M visitors per annum to the site. We also objected to the way the existing employees on the site at the Swanscombe peninsula have been treated.

We take seriously the need for housing and economic growth but are against developments which put stress on existing infrastructure and services for those living here. We will not allow the impacts to this area of outstanding natural beauty to be ignored. You can read the responses we have made in detail on our website under Correspondence, but we encourage your input as it is our role to represent you. If you go to our website, the Planning Tracker shows all current applications, you can also subscribe to the website to be notified of any new applications in the parish.

Our thoughts are with those of you who have suffered badly during the pandemic and lockdowns; we hope the coming year will see some return of your fortunes. We would like to thank all of you who have been involved in making the parish such a desirable place to live in. Last Spring we purchased some litter picking equipment and are particularly appreciative of those of you who have spent time cleaning and litter picking in the parish with it. I would like to commend Richard Gagg for his selfless efforts in removing so much of the fly tipping here. We are indebted to the Church and PCC for maintaining the graveyard, war memorial and green to a high standard. As a council we owe thanks also to the Village Hall committee and Vineyard Farms Ltd (Court Farm) for hosting our skips during the clean ups which so many of you participated in. We commend the work of the Luddesdown Society who also placed the Christmas tree on the green and long standing member Rita Hayward, who raised the request to get a defibrillator for the village (now installed on the Village Hall). Thanks are due to the Village Hall Committee for allowing us to site it there, and for providing the power to keep it warm in winter. The defibrillator and new enforcement cameras were obtained with grants from our County Councillor Bryan Sweetland - our special thanks go to him. We must also mention the support in gaining those grants and the outstanding advocacy provided by our Borough Councillor Tony Rice, who has tirelessly attended almost every single Parish Council meeting (on top of the Borough meetings) and who is frequently found working weekends on your behalf.

Your Parish Clerk, Jo Barker, is available and willing to help or pass your enquiries to us. I would like to commend Jo and my fellow councillors for the work they have done on your behalf over the past year; but space here is limited. Please login to our annual meeting to see them, or contact us via email with any issues you feel we can assist you with. Our last year's finance report and next year's budget is available for you to download from the website (www.luddesdown-pc.gov.uk - look for Documents, then Finance).

5. COUNTY AND BOROUGH COUNCILLORS' REPORTS

Cllr Rice met with the new Police District Commander for Dartford and Gravesham, C.I. Junior Dann. The purpose was to press for a less sporadic, but more sustained and integrated response to the crime we experience in our area, notably the pervasive nuisance from track bikers.

He has also been pressing GBC for more routine patrols to enforce against illegal parking in restricted areas.

GBC has fallen under the 75% threshold for housebuilding against the government target. This means that it is now required to presume in favour of sustainable development. In practice this means that new home applications that have no cut and dried rejection criteria i.e. those in the marginal zone of planning discretion, will come under greater likelihood of approval. It also means that GBC will probably have to increase its land supply to enable more development to take place in a less restricted way.

GBC has increased council tax to the maximum allowed without a referendum. For a Band D property, the rise will be £4.95 a year, going up from £208 to £213.

COVID Report - 280 people have sadly died in the borough, within 28 days of contracting COVID. GBC has distributed £20m of government grant funding to 1,200 orgs in the borough.

The GBC Director for Planning and Regeneration, Kevin Burbidge, will be retiring at the end of March after 31 years of service to the borough. Nick Brown will be taking over this directorate, in addition to his existing responsibility for Operations (waste and recycling etc.). A new Assistant Director will be hired to concentrate on Regeneration, while Wendy Lane will continue as Assistant Director for Planning.

Planning Applications - the Telecoms mast at the top of Batts Road - GBC Planning has verbally stated that this will be refused, however this has not yet been made formal with a notice on the planning portal.

Play site - GBC has indicated that improvements to the GBC owned Luddesdown play site may be accelerated in the borough wide plan, however this has yet to be formally confirmed.

New Dog Poo Bins - Cllr Rice reported to Cllr Newnes that GBC will be happy to consider new bins in new locations, and suggested that a request is made.

Broadband and cellular 'not spots' - Cllr Rice was informed that some Luddesdown residents have no coverage. He said that he is doubtful that GBC has any remit, or ability to help, but he would enquire and report back.

On the subject of the proposed mast being erected in Batts Road Cllr Newnes said that the visual impact was not in keeping with the area as it would have been in an Area Of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and no attempt by the applicant had been made to disguise it. It was for emergency services network only not for network coverage which villagers would probably welcome. Other locations should be looked into to site the mast.

Cllr Newnes had talked about obtaining a dog waste bin for the village at a previous Parish Council Meeting. He took this opportunity to ask the members of the public where they felt a bin would be best placed. Residents recommended the following areas:

Near to the post box near the church, we would need to check with the church to see if they own the land. Cllr Clark said he would investigate

Near to the footpath up the side of the Cock Inn

At the entry of the byway next to Reynolds Farm

On Luddesdown Road entry to footpath opposite the farm entrance

All of these sites would benefit from bins. Cllr Newnes to contact GBC.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Rice for his report.

6. REPORTS FROM LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

a Luddesdown Rights Of Way Group

Luddesdown Rights of Way Group thanked the Parish Council for the grant of £75.00 which was received last year. This year we walked when and where we could (covid restrictions allowing). Thanks are due to the Village Hall Committee for allowing us to use the car park which was a life saver for the group. Thanks also are due to the proprietor of the Cock Inn also for the use of the car park. Walks will continue when conditions allow. The LDROWG will follow the guidelines issued by the Ramblers Association when re-starting walks. The group will hopefully attend next years Annual Parish Meeting.

b Luddesdown Village Hall Committee

Colin Dickens reported with sad news that Brian Hayward had passed away. He was a long standing member of Luddesdown Society. The Village Hall has now been closed for a year due to Covid 19. Colin does not expect the hall to re-open until 21st June 2021 and will follow government guidelines for re-opening. He has however, had bookings for weddings for 2022 and several enquiries for bookings for the hall. Most of the enquiries for bookings come in via Facebook and social media. Colin thanked the Parish Council for their donation which was gratefully received. Whilst the Village Hall has been closed maintenance work has been carried out. Radiator valves have been replaced, the lower part of the walls have been repainted, the problem with the boiler has been fixed. The car park was resurfaced in August 2020. Water has been seeping into the kitchen floor and this has rotted the boards underneath. The Trustees of the hall are hopefully going to replace the floor with concrete. There is still an outstanding oil leak but this is being looked into. Colin wanted to remind everyone that residents of Luddesdown receive a 50% discount when booking the Village Hall.

The Chairman thanked Colin for his report.

c Luddesdown Vineyard (Vineyard Farms Ltd)

Holly Dewale introduced Gary Smith their CEO. Gary wanted to reassure everyone that they would be working towards positive land management and work on the ecology and biodiversity of the land. Gary reported that 400,000 vines were planted in 2020 and there is just a small number left to plant.

They are working with a number of ecological consultants so the land is managed in a positive way and keeping it environmentally friendly. They have been working with Old Chalk New Downs charity by planting around 4,000 trees and hedging which will act as a “wind break” for the vineyard and encourage wildlife to the area and will also prevent flooding. They are working on a transect survey to monitor pollenators which will monitor bees, butterflies and other major pollenators; this is alongside Old Chalk New Downs too. They have worked with the Rights Of Way Group and have installed a couple of benches around the area. More land has been bought, Upper Bush which is around 400 acres. They are also working on their Organic status with the Soil Association. The Vineyard are looking forward to the harvest of their first vintage, a brand name is still in discussion, watch this space!!

The Chairman thanked Luddesdown Vineyard for their report.

7. Questions from the public

There were no questions from the public.

8. Other business at the Chairman’s discretion

None.

The Chairman thanked everybody for attending and closed the meeting at 8.25pm

SignedChairman

On theday of2021