MINUTES OF THE 130th ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD AT THE LOOSE PARISH PAVILION, KGVPF, LOOSE
ON MONDAY 24 MARCH 2025 At 7pm

Present
Councillors:
Cllr Vianne Gibbons, Jim Andrew, Sarah Leeson, Neil Lettington, Tony Oliver, Sue Hill, Mick Westwood.
Speakers in attendance:
Councillor Brian Clark – MBC Ward Councillor for Loose & Linton
Councillor Simon Wales – MBC Ward Councillor for Loose & Linton
Police Officer – Harry Greenfield

Also in attendance:
Nicky Bourne – Clerk
Amanda Baker – Assistant Clerk
Janet Burnett – Assistant Clerk (who took the minutes)

There were an additional 46 members of the public present
Meeting started at 7.00pm

I. Apologies for absence
Apologies were previously received from Charlie Hollister (Vice-Chair to Loose Parish Council) and Cllr Velma Bennett. Councillor Simon Webb – KCC Division Councillor for Maidstone Rural West.

II. Chairman's welcome, opening remarks & introductions
The Chairman of Loose Parish Council, Cllr Vianne Gibbons, welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for coming. Cllr Gibbons explained that this was the Parishioner's meeting, and that the Councillors were there to answer any questions. Cllr Gibbons explained the working of the Council. The merger of North Loose and Loose was mentioned. The projects undertaken during the past year include: A new Neighbourhood Plan for the extended area, War Memorial cleaning, defibrillators, finger posts in Cripple Street, the pond and meadow, the fete, highways and play area.
Cllr Gibbons thanked those involved with: litter picking, planters, coffee morning, working groups, the pond, Loose Amenities Association, Sean Carter, Loose Parish Councillors and the Clerks.

III. Minutes of the 129th Annual Parish Meeting held on the 25 March 2024
The Minutes of the 129th Annual Parish Meeting, held on 25 March 2024 were **AGREED** and signed by the Chairman.

IV. Cllr Gibbons invited the local Police Officer Harry Greenfield to speak.
PC Greenfield spoke about the Neighbourhood Policing Model that includes Offices on the Beat, PCSOs and a Childhood Policing Team.

V. Invited speakers:

a. Councillor Brian Clark and Councillor Simon Wales – Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) - Ward Councillors for Loose & Linton
See Appendix A for report

b. Councillor Simon Webb – Kent County Council - Division Councillor Maidstone Rural West
Cllr Webb had sent in a report.
See Appendix A for report.

The following issues were raised by the parishioners for Cllrs Clark and Wales to answer:

- Shernolds change of use - planning certificate of lawfulness approval.
- Housing Land Supply
- Local Government reorganisation
- Potholes
- Double yellow lines on Walnut Tree Avenue
- Temporary roadworks
- Highways Working Group
- Mangravet Woods

V. The LPC Chairman stated that the formal part of the meeting had been concluded.

i. Chairman to Close the Meeting

Chairman closed the meeting at 8.22pm and invited people to stay for refreshments and browse the various displays.

Signed by the Chairman to the Loose Parish Council…….

Dated……

Appendix A

LOOSE & LINTON ANNUAL REPORT 2025 – Cllrs Brian Clark and Simon Wales

Ward Councillors' report to Loose Parish Annual meeting 24 March 2025

Cllr Simon Wales thanked residents for their trust in electing himself and Cllr Brian Clark as the Maidstone Borough Councillors and he and Brian reported on activity and work in progress since May 2024. Simon is Cabinet member for Housing and Homelessness, and Brian is Vice Chair of the Joint Transport Committee involving MBC and KCC.

SW started with an update on local government reform, which will see a directly elected Mayor of Kent, and 3 or 4 unitary councils below. MBC submitted outline plans on 21 March which will see us in an authority with Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and Malling and Sevenoaks and will take responsibility for all matters such as highways, schools and social care. This is the preferred option as it is co-terminous with the NHS boundaries. Final detailed plans have to be submitted in November. SW and BC will keep LPC informed as planning progresses.

Alongside this, MBC Democracy and Governance Committee has been discussing how to manage the currently unparished areas and is considering the proposal to set up a town council. There has been some concern from local Parishes that they might be absorbed as part of this. SW clarified that this was not the case. If Parishes on the urban edges wished to be part of this, they might choose to, but no Parish could be forced to lose its current independence.

Activity across the ward:

- Parking issues at Walnut Tree Avenue – double yellow lines have been agreed by KCC and will be going in shortly, funded via Loose's Highways Improvement Plan (funds collected from developers)
- Speed restrictions on the Linton Road from the viaduct in Loose to the 30mph section in Linton Village – evidence has been gathered by means of informal survey of residents along the route which received 133 responses, 126 in support, 6 objections and 1 neutral. These were submitted to KCC by Cllr Clark at Maidstone's Joint Transport (JTB) Committee. Officers have agreed to consider the results and reply by way of a paper returning to the JTB.
- Parking at the Primary School at pick up and drop off times – Tommy statues will go in soon to protect the cobbled area where parking occurs. The cost of the highways licence has been waived by KCC and installation will be undertaken without cost by local contractor Wrights Fencing and Landscaping.
- Zebra crossing across Loose Road to the Primary School – will be installed in early April. Sadly not a Pelican crossing, which was our preference, as the location does not conform to KCC policy.
- Advance signage on the A229 for weight limits already in place at Cripple Street (working jointly with Tovil Parish Council)
- Yellow lines at the Farrows near the turn into and out of Pearce Gardens (Sainsburys) to remove parked cars at the junction – progressing via Highways Improvement Plan
- Greensands Planning Application was passed but as part of the mitigation, the speed will be reduced to 30 mph. Effectively extending the 30mph in Coxheath village to 300m past the Linton Crossroads (to the east)
- Cornwallis pitch and special events notice – following representation at Licensing Committee the events notice was restricted to two events a year, and the no whistle policy has been lifted at planning committee, and the hours of usage limited to 9pm, with further noise mitigation to be installed.
- Spring water in Church Street – this is ongoing, despite our presence at site meetings, and representations to the various authorities. Finding someone to take responsibility is proving difficult. Progress is being made slowly but this is ongoing with Kent Highways.
- Linton crossroads safety improvements – the new cabinet which includes SW is agreeing its priorities for Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy, and Linton Crossroads will be top of the list.
- Several highways schemes are not progressing at the moment. We had £14m allocated to schemes including approximately £1million for the Swan Junction and £3.8milion for the Wheatsheaf junction, along with Sheals Crescent and Sutton Road at Willington Street. We feel it is a disgrace that KCC's budget indicates that all but £100k has been spent, when so little has been completed (and £6.7m from the programme, which is part of Maidstone's Local Plan for housing, was spent on a junction in Tonbridge and Malling)

◦ SW attended the Beacon Park developer public presentation along with Cllrs from both Loose and Linton parishes. This site was returned to the Local Plan at the last minute when the last administration pushed the local plan through. BC attended LPC planning committee and gave feedback on green spaces at the site and how the scheme related to the allocation.
◦ Increasing protection of the Greensand Ridge – our part of the ridge has no protection and BC had a motion passed at council to pursue improvements, and SW helped pilot this through Cabinet. Our intention is to protect the “missing link” of the Greensand Ridge in Maidstone (the Surrey section is protected).
◦ Overgrown path behind McAlpine Crescent. The path is owned by Golding Homes, but the trees are in the gardens of Herts Crescent properties. BC is pursuing a resolution with Golding Homes.
◦ SW has dealt with various housing issues in the Parish.
◦ At Strategic Planning Committee two management plans came to committee but were not in our area, although there is now an overarching Conservation Area Management Plan that has been adopted and will give protection from planning to conservation areas that do not have management plans and this will also enhance Article 4 Directive protection. A draft of the Loose Conservation Area management plan is expected to go to Strategic Planning shortly (where the committee will make a decision on taking it to public consultation).
◦ BC worked with MBC to support LPC in removing. A children’s camp at the eastern boundary of the King George Playing field
◦ SW attended the meeting regarding the noise issue in Westwood Road – which has been resolved to the satisfaction of residents
◦ Planning applications at Shernolds and subsequently Lancet Lane (for a children's care in the community) – BC met with residents for both schemes and gave feedback to LPC planning committee. The Shernolds plan for a change of designation was passed at planning committee.
◦ BC worked with officers and gave guidance to LPC on retrospective planning application proposal for change of use of residential pool to commercial swimming pool (application refused).
◦ Nuisance bikes on King George V Recreation Ground - BC had been contacted by witnesses to the incident and thanks to footage taken by a resident, one of the culprits had been apprehended and the bike confiscated. BC repeated the importance of always reporting (there have been 10 seized bikes in our wider area since 2024).
◦ BC advised that there is a new development proposal, planning application expected May 2025, for the land at Postley Road (behind Richmond Way bungalows) which the LPC Planning Committee are also following. This has been represented because the earlier scheme timed after Cllrs Clark and Wilby challenged a last minute attempt by the developer to claim the proposal for 62 homes had started. The new plan is for a much smaller number of properties (36) and the scheme includes 15 affordable homes.
◦ BC highlighted a section of Richmond Way green is not within the lease currently being transferred to LPC. He suggested that with devolution there may be an opportunity for the Parish to obtain the freehold.
◦ BC advised that he is continuing to work with a variety of stakeholders at KCC, MBC and Five Acre Wood school on a proposal for alternative access for Five Acre Wood School to reduce congestion in Boughton Lane. Response to date from all parties has been positive.
◦ The work underway to develop a Design and Sustainability DPD (Development Plan Document) for Maidstone has been shifted to deliver numerous “SPD”’s – Supplementary Planning Documents. This is because national policy will be changing and there is a risk that the DPD would need major amendment when the changes come forward. This approach means MBC can strengthen protections through the planning process while being able to deliver policy in smaller parts quickly while having more flexibility to modify only affected documents when national changes come through.

There followed extensive questions on the Shernolds planning application and residents were advised to keep Councillors informed if there were any issues arising from this.

Further questions were on planning issues, potholes and local government reform, particularly in relation to the remoteness of Cllrs in bigger constituencies as part of devolution.

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Maidstone Rural West Residents' Update 2024/25

Dear Resident,

It has been my privilege to represent you at County Hall for the full term of four years. I have been reselected for the forthcoming election (May 1st 2025) – I hope to continue my work with you.

This last year has been dominated by concerns overfunding, both in Children's Social Services and Adult Social Service, however, the improvements made in efficiencies and service reductions have given much hope for the future. Kent has moved from the bottom quartile of financial concerns to midway through the mid-quartile. The 2025/26 budget was agreed by all parties (96% anyway) – there is some cushioning of the County Reserves, which will help in the immediate future.

The continuing refusal of Central Government to equitably fund Adult and Children's Social Care is disappointing, however, no where near as devastating as the removal of the winter fuel allowance. In the next month local businesses will begin to be strangled by the increase in National Insurance costs, as well as the added employment costs due to the minimum wage rising. We wait to see what challenges the Chancellor imposes in her forthcoming budget

Within Education some good news with the Home to School transport budget showing a surplus for the first time in 8 years and reduction in the number of SEN(D) EHCPs being awarded brings some respite to our budgets.

I am fortunate to have been on both the Governance and Audit and Scrutiny Cabinet Committees the last two years and both committees have been able to significantly challenge the Cabinet Members on the decision they have made.

For the financial year 2024/25 I was allocated a Members grant of £3,600 and I have focused on three projects, Nettlestead pedestrian crossing (replacement of lights and a refresh of the white lines; purchasing new tents and equipment for Coxheath Scouts and more furniture for Yalding Parent and Toddler group.

At the current time, I am working closely with:-

a) Nettlestead Parish to try to reduce the speed limit through the village
b) Loose Amenities and Parish Council supporting residents in Church Street to rectify the water run-off – work has been ongoing with senior officers – but not yet to a successful outcome
c) All small primary schools to ensure their admissions for 2025 and beyond match expected birth rates

I would like to pay tribute to the Leader of KCC, Mr Roger Gough, who leads by example and continues to fight for our residents at both a local, regional and national level.

As a Member of the County Council, I welcome contact with residents, support groups and local business. The Member Grant will always be available to assist vulnerable groups, be they of any age and if I can be of further assistance to you, please do not hesitate to be in contact with me.

Simon
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