

**MINUTES OF THE 127TH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD AT THE LOOSE PARISH PAVILION, KGVPF, LOOSE
ON WEDNESDAY THE 23 MARCH 2022**

Present

Councillors:

Vianne Gibbons (Chair to Loose Parish Council), Jim Andrew, Velma Bennett, Darren Carpenter, Susan Luckhurst, Joanna Miles, Tony Oliver, Peter Rigby

Speakers in attendance:

Councillor Susan Grigg – MBC Ward Councillor for Loose

Councillor Simon Webb – KCC Division Councillor

Also in attendance:

Kim Owen - Clerk

Anne Rigby – Communications & Media Clerk (who took the minutes)

There were an additional 32 members of the public present

Meeting started at 7.05pm

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Charlie Hollister, Cllr Andrew Richards & PC Tony Ingram.

2. Chairman's welcome, opening remarks & introductions

The Chairman of Loose Parish Council, Cllr Vianne Gibbons welcomed everyone to the meeting and stated that last year's meeting (having been held virtually) really did not work at all. She explained that the formal structure of the meeting this year, had been kept deliberately short and to the point, so that those attending have the opportunity to speak to the people present, who are showcasing their activities.

3. Minutes of the 126th Annual Parish Meeting held on the 4 May 2021

The Minutes of the 126th Annual Parish Meeting, held virtually on the 4 May 2021, were agreed. No copy was available for signing. The LPC Chairman will sign the minutes at the next available opportunity.

4. Invited speakers:

The Chairman introduced Cllr Sue Grigg

i. Councillor Sue Grigg – Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) - Ward Councillor for Loose

Cllr Sue Grigg (SG) apologised for reading out her report, but from previous experience she has found it is the only method of summarising a year's work. Prior to starting her report, she mentioned that on Monday evening, following the lobbying from both Loose and Coxheath after the Regulation 19 document was published, Beacons Park was withdrawn from the Maidstone Local Plan. This was met with a round of applause.

- The year has continued to be dominated by Planning, with major focus on the Local Plan Review. Core element being the need to cope with the Government's unrealistic housing target. All parties on the Council have tried to persuade the Government to reduce this, with little success.
- Review itself has moved forward, it is intended to be put forward for Examination later this month. Some elements of the Plan were agreed across party, whilst others, such as the 'Beacon Park' allocation at Coxheath, became deeply controversial and were fiercely challenged by residents and Councillors.
- Climate Change another major feature of MBC's work. Council's Climate Change Action Plan has been independently assessed as the best in Kent, and sixth best in UK. Over £1 million of capital has been allocated. An improved biodiversity strategy has been produced, to protect and enhance wildlife and the countryside.
- MBC has allocated new funding for additional planning policies, including a town centre strategy, improved conservation area work, plus additional Planning and Enforcement staff to try and deliver a better quality for the built and natural environment.
- Continued focus on addressing homelessness, with MBC adding additional short-term accommodation, as well as direct provision of new rented housing, with delivery of developments at Brunswick Street and Union Street. MBC is looking at an ambitious plan to deliver over 1000 new affordable homes. To help achieve this, it has agreed to purchase the derelict Springfield Library site.
- Continuing investment in other areas, to promote economic regeneration of the Town Centre.

- East Station Improvement Project has reached the finishing stages; MBC has been pushing on with plans for the former Royal Mail site; the Bus station refurbishment has been completed.
- To expand the Borough's Cultural and Leisure Offer, the Borough is looking at improvements to the Museum and has been working with the Business Improvement District to encourage events in the Town.
- Last year's notably successful events included a very well attended Christmas lights switch-on and a lively celebration of Chinese New Year. Many further events are planned, as the Town can no longer rely on retailing alone to be a success.
- MBC continue to invest in activities that provide a sustained income, enabling the Council to be more self-sufficient. This includes the purchase of the offices at Maidstone House, where the Council will lease out large parts of the premises, through the Business Terrace. Action is crucial, as MBC no longer receives any Revenue Support Grant from the Government. Most of its Business Rates are redistributed to poorer areas of the Country.
- Maidstone will be moving to a new system of Governance with reintroduction of a Cabinet System next year. This has proved controversial, although efforts are being made to develop a different type of Cabinet System, with more rights for Councillors.
- Maidstone will shift to a four-yearly election cycle in 2024, with the number of its Councillors reduced from 55 to 48, with completely new boundaries. SG will endeavour to ensure that Loose gets the best possible arrangement.
- SG made the decision to leave the Liberal Democrat Party. She now sits as an Independent Councillor. A copy of the letter had been sent out explaining SG's reasons. Basically, it was caused by political posturing over 'Beacons Park' and the planning threat this posed to the Loose anti-coalescent belt. SG explained that we are not out of the woods yet, as the Inspector will need to agree the modification. A hostile planning application is likely to follow, but it does mean that we can oppose the development fairly. If it had remained in the LPR, there would have been absolutely no hope of the Planning Department being able to refuse the application.
- SG stated that it has been a privilege to sit as the Ward Member for Loose and gave special thanks for all the support received from the Parish Council, especially from the Clerks, Kim and Nicky.

Any questions? Councillor Jim Andrew queried whether the numbers still added up, now that Beacons park has been taken out of the plan? SG replied Yes, and there is strength in that.

The Chairman thanked SG for her report and introduced Cllr Simon Webb.

4. ii. Councillor Simon Webb – Kent County Council - Division Councillor

Cllr Simon Webb (SW) stated that It may be the 127th Annual Parish Meeting, but this was his first. He explained he is also a parish councillor for Coxheath. SW said as with Sue Grigg, he would read out his report.

- Privilege to represent you at County Hall for the last 12 months.
- High learning curve, but meeting residents and liaising regularly with Parish Councils extremely worthwhile.
- KCC continuing to make Kent a great place to live, despite financial challenges and rising demand for services creating additional pressure.
- COVID pandemic caused many people significant upheaval and sadly many relatives have been lost, due to the virus and its variants.
- Government gave KCC additional monies to support the most vulnerable and also many of its residents.
- KCC Members were given £6,000 to distribute as they saw fit to support people within their division.
- Also allocated a Members grant of £10,000 per year - very careful to allocate some of the funds to support a wider range of projects.
- Received a better-than-expected settlement for forthcoming year, but pressures coming from a combination of factors, has given KCC a shortfall of many million pounds. The resulting cost cutting measures agreed for the budget to discretionary services has caused concerns.
- Many of these service cuts and respective details are currently out for consultation. Please ensure your voice is heard and respond.
- SW sits on four cabinet committees. These are: - Adult Social Care; Public Health; Audit and Governance, Growth and Economic Development.
- Tribute paid to the Leader of KCC, Mr Roger Gough, who continues to fight for residents at local, regional and national levels.
- 2021/22 has seen a variety of projects being supported by the COVID RECOVERY Grant (£6,000) alongside the Combined Members Grants (£10,000) on behalf of the residents of Maidstone Rural West including: Nettlestead

Parish Council additional sport equipment £700; Hunton Bowls Club replacement mower £650; 21Together Supporting vulnerable children for a Dinosaur Fun Day £750; Yalding Pre-School replacement IT Laptop £500; Dandelion Time, East Farleigh Therapeutic Support Time for vulnerable young people £2,000; Linton Cricket Club Replacement nets for Youth Development £1500; East Farleigh Primary School Installing a footpath to front of school £4,320; West Farleigh PC Improve/support replacement of equipment on the sports field £1000.

- Contact welcomed with residents, support groups and local business.
- Member Grant available to assist vulnerable groups. Roll forward of £4,680 into the next financial year.

The LPC Chairman stated that the formal part of the meeting had been concluded and asked whether there were any questions from members of the public.

5. Comments by the Public on matters of concern or of Local interest

There were no questions or comments from members of the public.

6. Chairman to Close the Meeting

Chairman closed the meeting at 7.23pm and invited people to stay for refreshments and browse the various displays.

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

Dated.....

Additional documentation to the meeting

4.1 Report from MBC Independent Councillor for Loose Ward – Susan Grigg

Unsurprisingly, this year has continued to be dominated by Planning, with the major focus on the Local Plan Review. The core element has been the need to cope with the Government's unrealistic housing target. All parties on the Council have tried to persuade the Government to reduce this with little success. However, the Review itself has moved forward and it is intended that it should go forward for Examination later this month. Some elements of this Plan were agreed across party whilst others, such as the 'Beacon Park' allocation at Coxheath, became deeply controversial and were fiercely challenged by residents and Councillors, but more about that later.

Climate Change has been another major feature of the Council's work with the Council's Climate Change Action Plan being independently assessed as the best in Kent and 6th best in the UK. To turn the Plan from a document into reality over £1 million of capital has been allocated and an improved biodiversity strategy to protect and enhance wildlife and the countryside has been produced. The Council has also allocated new funding for additional planning policies, including a town centre strategy, improved conservation area work, plus additional Planning and Enforcement staff to try and deliver a better quality for the built and natural environment.

There has continued to be a focus on addressing homelessness with the Council adding additional short-term accommodation, as well as getting back into the direct provision of new rented housing with the delivery of developments at Brunswick Street and Union Street. The Council is looking at an ambitious plan to deliver over 1000 new affordable homes. To help achieve this, the Council has also agreed to purchase the derelict Springfield Library site. More widely the Council is continuing to invest, not just in housing, but in other areas to promote economic regeneration of the Town Centre. For example, the East Station Improvement Project has finally reached the finishing stages and the Council has been pushing on with the plans for the former Royal Mail site and the Bus station refurbishment has also been completed.

As part of its focus to expand the Borough's Cultural and Leisure Offer, the Borough is looking at improvements to the Museum and has been working with the Business Improvement District to encourage events in the Town. Last year saw some notably successful events including a very well attended Christmas lights switch on and a lively celebration of Chinese New Year. Many further events are planned as it is widely recognised that the Town can no longer rely on retailing alone to be a success.

MBC continue to invest in activities that provide a sustained income enabling the Council to be more self-sufficient. One such investment was the purchase of the offices at Maidstone House. The Council will lease out large parts of the premises through the Business Terrace. This action is crucial as the Council no longer receives any Revenue Support Grant from the Government and has most of its Business Rates redistributed to poorer areas of the Country.

Maidstone will be moving to a new system of Governance with the reintroduction of a Cabinet System next year. This has proved to be controversial although efforts are being made to develop a different type of Cabinet System with more rights for Councillors. It will be interesting to see whether this works in practice. Additionally, Maidstone will shift to a four yearly election cycle in 2024 and will have the number of its Councillors reduced from 55 to 48 with completely new boundaries. This will certainly occupy considerable time and effort over the coming months and I will endeavour to ensure that Loose gets the best possible arrangement.

On a personal note, I made the decision to leave the Liberal Democrat Party and now sit as an Independent Councillor. I hope that everyone has received a copy of the letter that I sent out explaining my reasons. Basically, it was caused by political posturing over 'Beacons Park' and the planning threat this posed to the Loose anti-coalescent belt.

However, tonight I have some very good news. On Monday evening, at the Strategic Planning & Infrastructure Committee Meeting, Beacons Park was removed from the Local Plan Review Document as a main modification. This follows the lobbying from both Loose & Coxheath after the Regulation 19 document was published. We are not out of the woods yet, as the Inspector will need to agree the modification. I am also confident that a hostile planning application will now follow but it does mean that we can oppose the development fairly. If it had remained in the LPR, there would have been absolutely no hope of the Planning Department being able to refuse the application.

I will finish as I always do by saying it has been my privilege to sit as the Ward Member for Loose and I would like to give special thanks for all the support I receive from the Parish Council, especially from our Clerks Kim and Nicky. I honestly could not carry out my duties without them.

Thank you.

4 ii. Report from KCC Division Councillor for Maidstone Rural West - Simon Webb

It has been my privilege to represent you at County Hall for the last 12 months. The learning curve has been high, however, meeting many residents and liaising regularly with Parish Councils has been extremely worthwhile. KCC is continuing to make Kent a great place to live, despite the financial challenges and rising demand for our services creating additional pressure.

The COVID pandemic has caused many people significant upheaval and sadly we have lost many relatives due to the virus and its variants. The government has given KCC additional monies to support the most vulnerable and also many of its residents. To this end KCC Members were given £6,000 to distribute as they saw fit to support people within their division. Below is a list of the projects I have supported. I am also allocated a Members grant of £10,000 per year and I have been very careful to allocate some of the funds to support a wider range of projects.

Although receiving a better-than-expected settlement for the forthcoming year, pressures coming from a combination of factors, including rising prices, the rising demand to support both our elderly residents and the most vulnerable young children has given KCC a shortfall of many million pounds. The resulting cost cutting measures agreed for the budget to discretionary services has caused concerns, many of these service cuts and the respective details are currently out for consultation. Please ensure your voice is heard and respond.

I sit on four cabinet committees, which give me a broad section of work to complete, these:-

1. Adult Social Care (vice-chair of this committee)
2. Public Health
3. Audit and Governance
4. Growth and Economic Development

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.

Examples of support provided in Maidstone Rural West:

2021/22 has seen a variety of projects being supported by the COVID RECOVERY Grant alongside the Combined Members Grants on behalf of the residents of Maidstone Rural West including:

Communities		
Applicant	Project	Amount
Nettlestead Parish Council	Additional sport equipment for use KGV Field, Nettlestead	£700.00
Hunton Bowls Club	Contribution to replacement mower	£650.00
21Together	Supporting vulnerable children for a Dinosaur Fun Day	£750.00
Yalding Pre-School	Replacing IT Laptop	£500.00
Dandelion Time, East Farleigh	Therapeutic Support Time for vulnerable young people	£2000.00
Linton Cricket Club	Replacement Nets for Youth Development	£1500.00
Covid Grant		£6000
East Farleigh Primary School	To install a footpath adjacent to the front of the school to allow for parents, buggies and elderly people access to the school	£4320
West Farleigh Parish Council	Improve/support replacement of equipment on the sports field	£1000
Members Grant	There will be a roll forward of £4680 into the next financial year.	£5320

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.