

**MINUTES OF THE 128th ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD AT THE LOOSE PARISH PAVILION, KGVPF, LOOSE
ON MONDAY 27 MARCH 2023**

Present

Councillors:

Vianne Gibbons (Chair to Loose Parish Council), Charlie Hollister, Velma Bennett, Tony Oliver, and Peter Rigby.

Speakers in attendance:

Councillor Susan Grigg – MBC Ward Councillor for Loose

Councillor Simon Webb – KCC Division Councillor for Loose

Also in attendance:

Kim Owen – Clerk (Who took the minutes)

Nicky Bourne – Deputy Clerk

Anne Rigby – Communications & Media Clerk

There were an additional 18 members of the public present

Meeting started at 7pm

I. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Jim Andrew, Cllr Elaine Lawford, Cllr Susan Luckhurst and Sandra Edmonds (Community Warden Supervisor)

No apologies were received from Andrew Richards and Darren Carpenter

II. Chairman's welcome, opening remarks & introductions

The Chairman of Loose Parish Council, Cllr Vianne Gibbons, welcomed everyone to the meeting. 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. She thanked her Clerks for all their hard work in the Parish.

III. Minutes of the 127th Annual Parish Meeting held on the 23 March 2022

The Minutes of the 127th Annual Parish Meeting, held on 23 March 2022 were **AGREED** and signed by the Chairman.

IV. Invited speakers:

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

Before SG read her report she sadly advised that Councillor Dan Daley had passed away on Friday evening. She then read her report as follows:

After several years of starting my report the same way by stating that it has been dominated by the Local Plan, I can finally report that we have now arrived at the Examination in Public. The Council has managed to successfully navigate through the first stage and avoided the Plan being found unsound. However, there were some significant changes such as the proposed safeguarding policy for the Leeds Langley corridor being removed. The Inspector found that objections to the proposal regarding the delivery of the road risking unplanned housing growth were well founded. Additionally, both the proposed Garden Village allocations at Lidsing and Lenham were potentially unsound as currently presented and need further work. The second stage will commence in May.

Elsewhere in Planning the Council is currently consulting on a Design & Sustainability Development Plan Document, which will hopefully put some much-needed policy detail into place. It is also planning to step up work on Conservation Plans (very important to Loose), and commencing a Town Centre Strategy. We have also just commenced work on a Gypsy and Traveller Strategy.

The Council has been operating a new Constitutional arrangement with a revived Overview & Scrutiny function which is carrying out major reviews into water supply and disposal and public safety. As part of the continued focus on climate change several major natural flood mitigation and biodiversity projects are planned as part of the Water Cycle Review.

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The Town Centre Crime Task Force is meeting with some success and new CCTV cameras have been placed in Brenchley Gardens, Trinity Park, and Brewer Street Cemetery. The new Housing office has opened in the former Trinity Foyer and its presence appears to be reducing anti-social behaviour in the area. Elsewhere, there has continued to be a focus on homelessness with the Council committed to finding 1000 new affordable homes and a continued commitment to identify poor quality landlords. I have been involved with assisting residents who are struggling with mould in their homes. This problem is being exacerbated by the cold weather and lack of heating due to rising costs of gas and electricity. On the economic front, the Council continues to try and make Maidstone more resilient and a worthwhile place to visit, with the Museum refurbishment plans moving forward as an example. The future of the Sorting Office Site is still being negotiated and the future of Archbishop's Palace and the Leisure Centre remain to be determined.

Regarding elections, this year will be the last time that Maidstone has elections by thirds and, going forward, it will then move to all out elections every 4 years with new Ward boundaries. It is very confusing but, as there will be new boundaries, there will need to be another election in 2024. As a result of these changes, the Community Governance Review taking place next municipal year will also be required to consider the timing of Parish elections. To avoid Parishes having to pay their own election costs they will need to have their cycle coincide with the Borough meaning that Councillors elected to Parishes this year may have to go through it again next May as well.

Also, please remember that all residents wishing to vote in the upcoming May election will now have to provide photographic Voter ID.

As you can see, it has been a very busy 12 months, but 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, once again, like to give my special thanks for all the support I receive from the Chairman and the Parish Council. Without Kim & Nicky, I honestly could not carry out my duties so please be grateful for such a hard-working group of people. Thank you.

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

b. Councillor Simon Webb – Kent County Council - Division Councillor

Simon advised that it has been fairly negative for KCC this year with two major collapses in terms of process. Firstly, the SEND transport was changed and the preparation is normally done in the Summer holidays but it was decided to do the preparation in half term instead which resulted in chaos and there were a significant number of very distressed children and very distressed parents without transport or transport going to the wrong place. There has been a major review by internal audit which caused significant challenge to the processes and the officers involved. The second one was with the allocation of the special needs statements, now called Educational Health Care Plans and the collective budget has been going in excess of £140million. I am not saying that these children between the age of 5 and 16 do not need these plans but Kent has 40% of the children with these plans, which is 20% higher than any other Authority. Something has gone wrong somewhere. We have had a CQC inspection and OFSTED inspection and require improvement, the same as last inspection. So, should we be graded as inadequate as no improvement has been made? The key questions are "What did they say they would do to improve?" and "What have not been done?". I have been appointed onto the subcommittee to deal with the issue to investigate further. We had a very feisty first meeting last Thursday and the meeting lasted three and a half hours when normally it would be one and half hours. They gave the officers hell. Why should children suffer because systems are wrong in the Authority?

Budgets are going backwards as you are aware. We have had to make £61million of cuts and they have not started cutting back yet. That will happen next month. One I am anxious about and has caused issue in my party is the Voluntary Services Grant for Adult Social Services. Last year it was £12.4million and it has been reduced by £4.3million. Despite all this I am still enjoying doing the job.

SW advised that last year he did not spend much of his Members grant and he rolled forward £5,500, which meant he had £15,000 to spend this year. I have passported £2000 across to Loose to support the work in Well street and £300 to Love Loose Hate Litter. Details are in my report (Appendix A) and I am happy to

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take any questions you have, I would like to thank the committee and the Clerks for all their work. Thank you all for listening.

SG advised that she would like to raise the issue of potholes. Loose has a unique situation with underground springs. The KCC policy of repairing potholes does not seem to be working. Could you take our concerns back? Recently we had potholes fixed but they needed repairing again within a couple of weeks as they were not repaired properly and have sunk. They were re-reported and KCC have been out and said yes, they need repairing but they are not now critical. The second issue is the drainage work for Loose is not being completed as per our maintenance schedule and we have issued in Church Street, Well Street, High Banks and Old Loose Hill. We have reported it and re-reported it and have been advised by KCC that they do not have the resources to do the work. SW advised the number of potholes has trebled this winter but that is no excuse. They have been given £6million from the government for additional repairs. SW asked that the details of the issues be forwarded to him to take back to KCC.

A resident asked if something could be done about the temporary traffic lights and the lights through the town as they do not flow and traffic journeys are getting longer.

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.

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

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

ii. Chairman to Close the Meeting

Chairman closed the meeting at 7.40pm and invited people to stay for refreshments and browse the various displays.

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

Dated.....

Appendix A

Kent County Councillor

Simon Webb

07878018997

Simon.webb@kent.gov.uk

Autumn Cottage
Grove Lane
Hunton
Maidstone
ME15 0SE

Maidstone Rural West Residents' Update 2022/23

Dear Resident,

It has been my privilege to represent you at County Hall for the last two years.

The second year has been even more challenging than the first, as you all are aware, the war in Ukraine, the sudden rise in inflation, the cost of living crisis and the resultant rises in service, delivery and unit costs have required KCC to undertake some radical financial cuts.

Most recently, KCC is offering to allocate £100 to any household which meets the need criteria. Please access the KCC website to see if any resident you know could qualify.

The aftermath of the COVID pandemic and its variants has seen the pressure on the NHS continue, and it is my earnest wish that a period of fewer medical emergencies is seen in the coming summer months to give our exceptional NHS workers a reprieve.

In addition to this the ongoing number of both legal and illegal migrants continues to impact on our services, specifically, with Adults and Children's services, with their budget service costs increasing by between 10 - 15%. There have also been periods of time where 'Operation Brock' has caused some significant disruption to freight and KCC residents going to and from work. These costs although unseen are real, and add to the costs which businesses are having to cope with.

For the financial year 2022/23 I was allocated a Members grant of £10,000 and I have been very careful to allocate some funds to support a wide range of projects, for vulnerable people. In the coming year 2023/24, quite rightly the grant has been reduced to £3600.

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 five cabinet committees, (a change from last year) which give me a broad section of work to complete, these: -

1. Adult Social Care (vice-chair of this committee)
2. Reform and Public Health
3. Audit and Governance
4. KCC Pension Committee
5. SEN(D) sub committee

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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.

I list below the exact details of the Members Grant to show complete transparency.

Examples of support provided in Maidstone Rural West: (£10,000 + 4680 (u/s))

Communities		
Applicant	Project	Amount
Team Tutsham Charitable Trust	Allocation for child support and equipment/infrastructure costs	£2500
Marden Wildlife – covers EF/WF and Hunton	Volunteer Wildlife surveys for Village Farms	£750
Loose Parish Council	Costs towards alleviating West Street traffic	£2000
Loose parish Council	Love Loose Hate Litter	£300
Holy Trinity Church Pre-school	Fencing for stay and play group	£373.97
Hunton Village hall	Upgrading of Village hall heating	£500
Fusion (Charity)	Assist with Adult Literacy/Numeracy	£1000
Mid-Kent – Motor Neurone Disease Association	Support Group sessions	£1956
Coxheath – Park Road Highways	Assist with cost of resurfacing of road	£2000
West Farleigh Parish Council	Refurbishment of Play Area	£1000
Hunton Primary School	Refurbishment of play area to nurture area	£2500

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
Simon Webb
Member for Maidstone Rural West
Simon.webb@kent.gov.uk 07878018997

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