

HUNTON PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE FULL COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 13TH MAY 2024 AT 7:30PM AT HUNTON VILLAGE HALL

PRESENT: Cllr D Heaton in the Chair, Cllrs A Trought, I Simmons, T Stanbridge and J Goddard, and Mrs S Goodwin, Clerk

IN ATTENDANCE: County Cllr S Webb, Borough Cllr C Russell and one member of the public were in attendance until Item 17.

OPEN SESSION:

A resident raised three issues:

Bins – He thanked Cllr Summersgill, following his recent election to Maidstone Borough Council (MBC), for pursuing the missed bin collections in Hunton since MBC awarded the new contract to SUEZ in March. Previously elected members have failed to adequately manage and oversee the new waste contract, leaving many residents with missed bin collections. Communication via the MBC website has been poor, leaving the incoming councillors to resolve the problems. County Cllr Webb advised that he was previously a Borough Councillor and had worked hard to resolve the situation.

Prior to the election, the resident had not received a response from the Leader of MBC or the borough councillor in charge and had only received a reply from one of the three ward borough councillors. Cllr Webb advised that he had not received the email sent by the resident, but he had worked on the situation with Cllr Summersgill, and Borough Cllr Claudine Russell had worked very hard to ensure the bins were collected in Hunton.

Cllr Simmons noted the work done by the borough councillors, but residents just see the poor delivery of the service. Cllr Webb advised that, within the contract, there is a three-month grace period before SUEZ will be penalised for poor performance; it is a normal clause within waste contracts when there is a change of contractor.

The resident pointed out that he has not had his green bin emptied for six weeks. Cllr Stanbridge is in the same position and has not received a satisfactory response from MBC. At a meeting with the Kent County Council Head of Waste a month before the new contractor took over (in his professional capacity), he was advised that there would be issues. There should be a risk register with mitigations to deal with the issues. Vehicles and drivers have had to be brought in from all over the country.

Cllr Heaton suggested that the newly elected borough councillors are asked to pursue why the new contract has gone wrong as the Parish Council is not likely to receive any more of a response from MBC than residents.

Broadband – The resident asked when Hunton will have fibre optic connectivity, given that Watlingtonbury has access and overhead fibre optic is installed along Vicarage Road. Cllr Stanbridge advised that BT Openreach have no plans to install it in Hunton. Watlingtonbury and Yalding have residential density, which Hunton does not have due to properties in the village being spread out, so it is not viable for BT. CallFlow operate broadband, but this is unlikely to still be an option as they have no interest in extending the network. The other option is Starlink, but it is expensive. Cllr Stanbridge continues to check the options, grants, etc. Cllr Heaton noted that there is infrastructure in the ground, but it is not connected.

Postcode – The resident lives within the Hunton parish boundary but his property has a Yalding ME18 postcode, as opposed to the Hunton ME15 postcode. He has spoken to the Post Office but has been told to contact MBC. The resident would like to know how the postcode can be changed.

Cllr Heaton advised that the ME15 postcode extends into Maidstone and out to Bearsted, Parkwood and Shepway. The end of Lughorse Lane, still in Hunton parish, is ME18. Postcode areas are large and roughly follow parish boundaries but are not exact.

Members agreed to set up an email address (huntonbinspc@gmail.com) which will be publicised in the Hunton Herald, allowing residents to contact the Parish Council with missed bin collections. The collected data will be reported to MBC. Borough Cllr Russell agreed to ask an MBC/SUEZ representative to attend a Parish Council meeting as the service in Hunton does not seem to be improving.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Cllr Trought proposed, and Cllr Stanbridge seconded, that Cllr Heaton be elected as Chairman for the forthcoming year. All councillors were in agreement and Cllr Heaton completed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office, witnessed by the Proper Officer.

2. ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN

Cllr Simmons proposed, and Cllr Goddard seconded, that Cllr Summersgill be elected as Vice Chairman for the forthcoming year. All councillors were in agreement. Cllr Summersgill was unable to attend the meeting but had confirmed prior to the meeting that he is happy to be elected as Vice Chairman for the next year. Cllr Summersgill will complete the Declaration of Acceptance of Office before the next meeting.

ACTION: CLLR SUMMERSGILL / CLERK

3. MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF ACCEPTANCE OF OFFICE

All Members elected in the recent uncontested parish election completed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office, witnessed by the Proper Officer.

4. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Cllr M Summersgill.

5. FILMING, RECORDING AND PHOTOGRAPHING

The members of the public did not wish to film, record or photograph the meeting.

6. DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

Following the election of Members, the MBC Monitoring Officer requires all Members to complete a new Disclosable Pecuniary Interests form. All Members present at the meeting completed the form. Cllr Summersgill has already completed the form.

ACTION: CLERK

7. COUNCILLOR DECLARATIONS

7.1 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

7.2 Dispensations

There were no requests for dispensations.

8. MINUTES OF THE FULL COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 18TH MARCH 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th March 2024 had been previously distributed and were agreed as an accurate record. The Chairman signed the official copy of the minutes.

9. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES NOT INCLUDED IN THE AGENDA

Item 9.6 – Election nomination papers were submitted to Maidstone Borough Council (MBC).

Item 9.7 – The Annual Parish Meeting was publicised, and Marden History Group have agreed to speak at the meeting.

Item 11.9 – The account opening form has been sent to Redwood Bank.

10. PARISH COUNCILLOR VACANCY

An ordinary vacancy has occurred as there were insufficient candidates to fill all the seats at the election.

In line with the Parish Council's Co-option Policy, Members **Agreed** that the vacancy should be publicised on the notice boards, website and in the Hunton Herald.

ACTION: CLERK

11. POLICE

11.1 Police

No crimes have been logged on the e-watch website since the last Parish Council meeting.

11.2 Huntonwatch

Huntonwatch provided the following report:

Having inexplicably been 'lost' on the police and County's Neighbourhood Watch databases we have now re-registered and been formally recognised once more.

We attended the 'Meet the village' event at the Club and signed up some new members. We also distributed a number of free items such as window stickers, UV pens and 'Keep Safe' booklets. We are currently undertaking an audit of our members database to ensure it is accurate and up to date with just over 50% of the data confirmed as of 13th May 2024. After an initial rush of members responding to our email asking for them to confirm the details we are holding, the rate at which we are receiving responses has slowed very considerably. This could be for a number of reasons:

- We are holding incorrect email addresses
- Members have moved away
- Members do not read our emails

We will report back on member numbers once the audit has been completed.

Our dedicated Huntonwatch phone has been re-activated and can now make and receive calls having been off-line for a couple of months.

We have notified Members of:

- Multiple road closures
- Fly tipping in Mill Lane
- Criminal damage to a vehicle in Hunton
- The dangers of Alabama Rot after a case was reported in the Paddock Wood area during the very wet spell in late Winter/early Spring
- Attacks on sheep in the Headcorn area
- Multiple thefts and damage to cars in the Benover / Yalding area
- Various reports of suspicious activity in and around the village
- Dog fouling in the West Street area

We also received reports of an escaped cockerel, but it disappeared before we had time to ask if anybody knew who owned it.

12. LOCAL COMMUNITY

12.1 King George V Playing Field Committee

The Chairman of the Playing Field Committee, Simon Taylor, was unable to attend the meeting. The following is a summary of the last Playing Field Committee meeting on 8th May 2024:

Work to be undertaken includes: replacement of a low post on the adventure trail; remedial work on the multiplay; fixing the Community Orchard gate; installation of a new gate near the cricket pavilion; and filling the potholes in the car park.

A new bench has been ordered for the fenced play area.

Landscape Services have been awarded the contract for the grass cutting.

Another electrical inspection has taken place at the cricket pavilion by a different contractor. While the EICR has not been received yet, apparently only three C3 points (improvement recommended) have been raised compared to 15 C2/C3 points by the previous contractor (which would cost £1,323 plus VAT to rectify).

The Playing Field Committee currently has funds of £1,529.

12.2 Traffic & Road Safety Working Party/Highways

Cllr Goodard reported that, following on from previous meetings with Greg McNicholl from Kent County Council (KCC) Highways, orders have been raised for the two 'Slow' markings on East Street and Hunton Hill. The road has been remeasured for central line painting.

Cllr Heaton noted that a number of potholes have been filled.

Cllr Simmons had a stand at the recent Plant & Produce event at the Village Club for people to ask questions and give views and comments on street improvements in Hunton; 30 people gave their views.

Several people have mentioned the footpaths in Hunton and whether they can be improved or enhanced so bikes and horses can be ridden on them. Another suggestion was a circular walk for Hunton. Cllr Simmons will submit an article for the Hunton Herald, setting out the main points raised and asking for any additional comments. He will also engage with the school and local businesses. Terms of reference for the project will be prepared for discussion at the Parish Council meeting in July.

ACTION: CLLR SIMMONS

The next Traffic & Road Safety Working Party meeting will be held in late June/early July.

12.3 **Tree & Pond Warden**

The Tree Warden, Sam Andrews, was unable to attend the meeting but had reported that the Oak tree branches cut down by the football club have been cleared. Cllr Heaton will organise the purchase of a hedge clipper.

The Pond Warden, Cllr Summersgill, was unable to attend the meeting but had reported that the recent newt survey was successful; there will be an article in the next Hunton Herald. A rapid decline in water levels was noted in ponds in the last month. The balancing/storage pond on Wilson's Yard is showing some signs of vegetation development this Spring, but also some floating weed that could spread.

13. **APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEES**

Members **Agreed** the following Committee and Working Party arrangements for the forthcoming year:

- Planning Committee – a minimum of three Councillors is required for the Committee to be quorate. All Councillors are members of the Planning Committee.
- Traffic & Road Safety Working Party – a minimum of two Councillors and one member of the public is required for the Working Party to be quorate. Cllrs Goddard, Summersgill and Simmons are members of Traffic & Road Safety Working Party.

14. **COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES**

Members **Agreed** to the following appointments for the forthcoming year:

- KCC Highways – Cllr Goddard and Cllr Simmons
- KALC Area Committee – Cllr Summersgill
- Policing matters – Cllr Trought and Cllr Heaton
- Hunton Primary School – Cllr Simmons
- Representative Trustees of the King George V Playing Field Committee - Cllr Heaton and Cllr Stanbridge
- Trustees of the Hunton Village Hall Committee – Cllr Trought and Cllr Heaton

Members **Agreed** to the following Parish Council responsibilities:

- Footpaths and ditches – Cllr Heaton (primary) and Cllr Goddard (secondary)
- Road conditions and speed limits – Cllr Goddard (primary) and Cllr Simmons (secondary)
- Events and communications – Cllr Trought
- Planning issues and consultations – Cllr Summersgill
- Liaison with KALC, MBC and other external bodies – Cllr Summersgill (primary) and Cllr Heaton (secondary)
- Utilities (broadband, water, electricity) – Cllr Stanbridge (primary) and Cllr Summersgill (secondary)
- Speedwatch – Cllr Summersgill.

15. **APPOINTMENT OF INTERNAL AUDITOR**

Members **Agreed** to appoint Lionel Robbins as the Internal Auditor for the forthcoming year.

16. **COUNTY AND BOROUGH COUNCILLORS**

16.1 **County Councillor**

County Cllr Simon Webb reported that Bryan Sweetland, County Councillor for Gravesham, is taking over as Chairman at KCC in the next month.

The auditor's report of two months ago was critical of KCC on the budget and likely deficit. Cllr Webb asked at Scrutiny Committee why the auditors allowed KCC to set a budget with £65 million in unidentified savings. Adult Social Care, Children's Social Services and home to school transport costs are increasing, as well as home tutoring for home-educated children.

Cllr Webb has asked for specific figures on Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) as he would like the data to understand it as a Scrutiny Committee member. He is supporting two parents in Yalding to get their children into Yalding Primary School with EHCPs.

Cllr Simmons noted that highways is a lower priority than education and social care so it is difficult to get things done; the reality is that the Parish Council will probably need to fund improvements. Cllr Webb advised that the new KCC Cabinet member for Highways visited Nettlestead. Cllr Webb was impressed with his knowledge and would be happy to speak to him about any issues; Cllr Simmons agreed it would be useful to take a set of issues to the Cabinet member.

16.2 Borough Councillors

Cllr Heaton congratulated Borough Cllr Claudine Russell on her recent election as borough councillor. Cllr Russell reported that MBC is still running a Cabinet system with a four-year term. Turn out in the recent elections was very low. MBC has its AGM on 18th May. Cllr Russell was previously Cabinet member for Communities, Leisure & Arts and is pleased with how it has been left:

- Improvements to the leisure centre. There will be a new leisure centre in 2028/29.
- New leisure contracts.
- The Hazlitt Youth Theatre goes from strength to strength.
- Many community grants given.
- Improvements at Lockmeadow.
- A new archaeology gallery opens at the Museum soon, which will provide learning opportunities for schools.
- Free events during the summer in the town.

Cllr Russell reported that there is a balanced budget for temporary accommodation. In terms of affordable housing, the administration wanted 1,000 affordable houses. There are sites for 400 of the 1,000 houses - true social housing administered by MBC for people on the housing list with a connection to Maidstone. The Maidstone Local Plan was adopted by full council. There are a couple of judicial reviews. In the Call For Sites exercise, 330 sites were put forward for development of which 100 sites were selected for the Local Plan.

There was only one tender for the new waste contract, the only other alternative was to take the service in-house. The best option was seen to be accepting the tender.

Borough Cllr Mike Summersgill had provided the following report in his absence:

Borough Cllr Summersgill is likely to cover Marden, Hunton and Collier Street and Borough Cllr Grace Couch will cover Yalding & Laddingford and Nettlestead. Cllrs Summersgill and Couch are still in the induction phase until 16th May and no appointments have yet been agreed. It is expected that the Council Leader will be from the Green Party as the Green & Independent Group is (currently) the largest at 14 members. However, the Conservatives (13) and LibDems (12) could form a majority (49 councillors in total) should they wish to coalesce. Cllr Summersgill has been active on bin issues, chasing MBC and taking various comments from residents about their problems for the last week, and communicating on Hunton Facebook page. Prior to that, previous Borough Cllrs Lottie Parfitt-Reid and Simon Webb had been dealing with it since March.

17. PARISH MATTERS

17.1 Parish Councillors

Cllr Simmons reported that the 'Meet the Village' event organised by the church events group had attracted 130 people. The objectives of the event were met, and every club had new members join up. Cllr Trought advised that several people had suggested it should be an annual event, which Members agreed would be a good idea. The organisers, Wendy Simmons and Sue Pinks, were thanked.

17.2 Flooding

Cllr Summersgill had provided the following report in his absence:

There are still culvert blockages (not dealt with yet by KCC) on East Street, Redwall Lane and George Street - evident in heavy rain last month. Cllr Summersgill has raised an issue about soil being stockpiled on the flood plain just over the boundary in Linton but noted that it has mostly now been moved from there as pond construction work has progressed. There is still some incursion of spoil into the Zone 2 edge, alongside the fence by footpath KM129 in Linton Parish.

17.3 Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainability

Cllr Summersgill had provided the following report in his absence:

Cllr Summersgill has recently become certified as Carbon Literate by MBC/KCC, as have about 25 local parish councillors in south Maidstone. They are expected to pass on the training/knowledge to fellow councillors and residents in the near future.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is now in place for planning applications for Small Sites as of 2nd April, after coming into effect on larger sites in February. Maidstone's Local Plan, now adopted, requires 20% BNG for residential developments, but only the (national) 10% for commercial/industrial proposals.

Cllr Summersgill is attending a series of KCC county-wide workshops on the national DEFRA-led scheme called 'Making Space for Nature'; the first one in East Malling in February was attended by 30-40 people (farmers, residents, landowners, councillors), Cllr Summersgill could not attend the second one as it was on

election day but will be attending the third one in Cranbrook on 16th May. Marden also have a Councillor attending/actioning information onto the KCC Making Space for Nature website mapping. On 5th June, Cllr Summersgill is attending an MBC/KCC training/educational event in Bearsted on improving home energy efficiency, organised by the local Climate Action Network. It is expected that retro-fit will be a 'live' topic for Maidstone in the next year or two, as MBC have got some big funding to improve their own office estate and to partly modernise the leisure centre.

17.4 Speedwatch

Cllr Summersgill had provided the following report in his absence:

A few Speedwatch sessions have been held since March, at the Club and Hall. It has been observed that more attention is being paid to slowing down when coming into the village from the north, but some are speeding heading past the Club going up the hill. An article in the next Hunton Herald summarises numbers and will request a couple more volunteers. One of the volunteers is going to become a Co-ordinator, in addition to Cllr Summersgill.

17.5 Clerk's Report

Village Hall Wi-Fi: A Wi-Fi booster did not need to be purchased as the Clerk already has the exact model suggested by Cllr Stanbridge at home and can bring it to meetings.

Defibrillator: The new defibrillator will be fitted in the telephone box near the Village Club within the next few weeks but requires payment before installation (see Item 18.9).

Members suggested the Parish Council should purchase a computer for the Clerk to use on Parish Council business and consider use of the Cloud for back-ups. The Clerk will research these. **ACTION: CLERK**

18. FINANCE

18.1 Statement of Internal Control

The Council needs to review the effectiveness of the system of internal control for the Annual Governance Statement in the Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR). A Statement of Internal Control was prepared by the Clerk to assist in this review. Members reviewed the Statement and **Agreed** that it could be signed and included with the year-end accounts. The Statement was signed by the Chairman and the Clerk.

18.2 Annual Review of Effectiveness of Internal Audit

In carrying out the Council's annual review of Internal Audit, Members **Agreed** that:

- the Internal Auditor is independent of the Council and has no involvement or responsibility in the financial decision making, management or control of the Council;
- the Internal Auditor is competent to carry out an effective audit of the Council's system of internal control;
- the review and scope of the internal audit adequately assesses the Council's internal controls, governance processes and management of risk;
- they understand the importance of the relationship between the Internal Auditor and the Council;
- adequate preparations are made for the audit procedure to facilitate the work of the Internal Auditor, including making available all relevant documents and records and supplying any information or explanations required; and
- reports received from the Internal and External Auditor are actioned when necessary.

18.3 Internal Audit Report

The Internal Auditor, Lionel Robbins, carried out the internal audit on 15th April 2024. He has completed the Annual Internal Audit Report on page 3 of the 2023/24 AGAR and provided a separate internal audit report. Members considered and **Approved** the reports.

18.4 Accounts 2023/24

Members reviewed the Council's Statement of Accounts, year-end Financial Book and Fixed Asset Register. The Accounts were signed by the Chairman and the Clerk, and the Chairman also signed the Financial Book.

Members noted that the valuation of the Village Hall is included 'for information only' on the Fixed Asset Register. The Clerk explained that this is because the Parish Council is the custodian trustee of the Village Hall, not the owner and the hall is insured separately by the charity which manages it, the Hunton Parish

Hall Committee. Members asked the Clerk to check the title deed for the Village Hall to determine the legal owner (and similarly for King George's Field for which the Parish Council is also custodian trustee) so the ownership structure can be clarified, and options can be considered on how to regularise it if necessary.

ACTION: CLERK

18.5 Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2023/24

18.5.1 Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement

Members considered the Annual Governance Statement contained in Section 1 on page 4 of the AGAR, consisting of 9 assertions. To properly consider the assertions, the Clerk provided Members with a table comparing the Parish Council's practices to proper practices according to the 'Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance Practitioners' Guide – March 2023'.

Members **Agreed** that statements 1 to 8 could all be answered "Yes" and statement 9 should be answered "N/A". Members **Resolved** that the Annual Governance Statement be approved, and page 4 of the AGAR was signed by the Chairman and the Clerk.

18.5.2 Section 2 – Accounting Statements

Members considered the Accounting Statements contained in Section 2 on page 5 of the AGAR and **Resolved** that they be approved. The Clerk had already signed page 5 of the AGAR according to the requirements of the external auditor. The Accounting Statements were signed by the Chairman.

18.6 Budget Monitoring Report

The Budget Monitoring Report to 30th April 2024 was **Noted**.

The Clerk suggested the following variations to the 2024/25 budget which Members **Agreed**:

- Village Hall – add £4,425 grant for external renovations (as budgeted for 2023/24 but not done)
- Highways – add £900 for three salt bins (as budgeted for 2023/24 but not purchased)
- Highways – add £2,000 for the Street Improvements Project

ACTION: CLERK

18.7 Income Received

Members **Noted** that the following income has been received since the last meeting:

Hunton Parish Hall Committee – FIT	£181.72
Maidstone Borough Council – Precept for 2024/25	£26,338.00

The bank reconciliation was reviewed and signed by Cllr Trought.

18.8 Payments Made

Members **Approved** the following payments made since the last meeting:

Unity Trust Bank – Service charge	£18.00
SO – Sharon Goodwin – Salary & office allowance – March	£545.81
SO – Sharon Goodwin – Salary & office allowance – April	£545.81

The following payments were authorised at the Planning Committee meeting on 29th March 2024:

Lionel Robbins – Internal audit	£105.00
VCS Websites Ltd – Web hosting	£100.00
KALC – Annual membership subscription	£367.91
Npower – Street light electricity	£36.36
W Simmons – Chairman's Allowance – Reimbursement for food for 'Meet the Village' event	£79.51

18.9 Electronic Payments

Members **Approved** the following payments. Cllrs Stanbridge and Heaton will authorise the payments set up in Unity Trust Bank using online banking:

King George's Field, Hunton – Contribution for 2024/25	£7,000.00
Hunton Parish Hall Committee – Contribution towards running costs (1 st half)	£500.00
Glyn Bell – Plumbing work in the cricket pavilion	£148.00
The Community Heartbeat Trust – Defibrillator for telephone box	£2,226.00

Kent County Council – Second phase of pond surveys	£750.00
SLCC – Annual membership subscription	£144.00
Sharon Goodwin – Travel expenses / Stationery / Mobile phone top-up	£107.19

18.10 CIL Neighbourhood Receipts

Members **Noted** the report from the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership on the second phase of the pond surveys. Members suggested that the Wilsons Yard pond could be included if there were any future surveys.

Members considered other possible uses of the CIL monies: Highways, environmental improvements and EV charging points.

Members **Agreed** that the Clerk should report back on when the CIL monies were paid to the Parish

Council and the deadline committing CIL monies.

ACTION: CLERK

19. PLANNING

19.1 Planning Decisions

19.1.1 Scotts House, West Street - 24/500658/LBC

Listed Building Consent for replacement external doors and windows. Erection of a new boundary fence and entrance gate to driveway.

Parish Council recommendation: Do not wish to comment.

Maidstone Borough Council decision: Permitted.

20. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next full Parish Council meeting will be held at 7:30pm on Monday 15th July 2024 at Hunton Village Hall.

There being no further matters to discuss the meeting closed at 9:41pm.