**GRAVENEY with GOODNESTONE PARISH COUNCIL**

**Minutes of the Extraordinary Parish Council Meeting held at The Village Hall, Graveney,**

**on Monday 11th April 2022 at 7.00pm.**

**Present:** Roger Mitchell, Cllr Catherine Wilkinson, Clare Boggia, Alan Stewart and Teresa Bowles.

 Public: 4

1. **Welcome by the Chair of the Parish Council.**The Chairman welcomed all the Annual Meeting and offered thanks for attendance.

**2. Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Cllr Rich Lehmann (KCC), Cllr Lesley Lound, Cllr Tom King as well as Linda and Paul Winter.

**3. Annual Report of the Chair of the Parish Council.**

I feel a little fraudulent giving the annual report of the council, when only been chair for the past two meetings! Thanks to the previous Chairman, Roger Mitchell who did a sterling job until his move to pastures new.

I’d like to also thank the parish councillors for their work and giving up their time voluntarily to help the village. Regrettably we still have a vacancy, so please do spread the word as many hands make light work!

**Cleve Hill Solar Park**

Alan and Lut Stewart, alongside Tom and Marie King and others have kept the flag flying for GREAT to ensure that the developers adhere to all the restrictions put in place and I know are working hard regarding the battery storage. It is of course, very disappointing for villagers that this is going ahead, and understandable concern not only the issue of battery storage, but road safety during installation and rest assured the council will do all they can to minimise disruption. The council has a report from the GREAT team monthly and I know they are working alongside Swale Borough Council, Graham Thomas.

**Local Plan Consultations**

The massive development in Faversham of course gives rise to concern for residents on many levels, transport, education and medical care. I know our Borough Councillors are supporting our views to try to minimise the impact where at all possible.

**Highway Improvement Plan**

Work is now underway, and I’d like to thank Beth Kendall, Richard Filipcaz, Graham Reynolds and Sally Edge who volunteered to help with this alongside myself and Teresa Bowles from the council. We will talk about the results of the survey later, but the real work will begin with what we can realistically put in place to help our resident’s safety

**End of Lockdown celebration**

Sadly, this never got off the ground due to a resurgence of a new variant but I am pleased that the Church are well under way in bringing together different groups from the village to support the queens jubilee and the parish council is please to support this, with a planned competition for front garden displays

**Training**

This has been a little more restricted due to the pandemic, but there have been some very good online training courses that councillors have attended. In a world of changing legislation and governance it is imperative that we keep up to date and thank the Kent Association of Local Council who put on these days.

**Solar Cycleway**

The Parish Council continues to pledge support to this venture. It is wonderful to have Brian Jeffries from the village who is so motivated to lead this project.

**Faversham Lottery**

The council put forward a nomination for All Saints Church for this. Whilst the council does not hold much money for sponsorship/donations etc, they do know very often where sources of funding can be obtained so always pleased to hear from applicants

**Footpaths**

I cannot tell you all how lucky our parish is to have Richard Filipicx as our footpath warden. It is a credit to him that the paths are well maintained, and this is borne out in the recent survey. Richard also voluntarily does the fire survey for the village for Kent Fire Rescue, so thank you Richard.

Lastly, I’d like to thank our two Borough Councillors Tim Valentine and Alistair Gould, who attend all our meetings to ensure any concerns our villagers have is taken back to Swale. Both are very approachable, as is our KCC councillor who of course has a much wider area to cover. All three respond quickly and helpfully to any emails we send – so thank you.

**4. Presentation by the Chair of the Graveney & Goodnestone Trust.**

Roger Mitchell read his report to the Council as follows.
The work of the trust was affected, like all others, by Covid.

Grants that had been approved during 2020 were held up due to work delays,

New grants were similarly not forthcoming.

However, we now appear to be returning to normal and several old and new grants have now been paid.

The financial figures for 2021 are with the accountants and the next meeting will probably be an AGM to receive and approve the accounts.

In July 2021 the current Chairman notified trustees of his intention to step down by the end of the year, as he is leaving the village. In September, this was announced at the Parish Council Meeting.

This has resulted in a search to replace the roles of Chairman and Secretary which he wishes to relinquish. He is happy to remain as Treasurer for the moment.

No existing trustee wished to be Chairman, so a hunt for new Trustees was started. So far 3 people have expressed interest in being Trustees.

One withdrew, one is considering but would not be Chairman, the other will be invited to the next meeting.

I have also had a discussion with a previous trustee willing to step in as Chairman once they complete current commitments.

Inevitably there have been delays in leaving the Village, So the status-quo remains for the moment.

The Chairman has had a discussion with a previous trustee to potentially step in as Chairman.

**5. Highway Improvement Plan.**The Chair gave a full presentation which indicated a very good return rate of 45.2%. The meeting was opened for questions at the end of the presentation.

**6. Reports from Village Groups.**

a, All Saints Church, Graveney.

Report shared by Cllr Teresa Bowles.

b, Friends of Graveney Church

A report was sent to the Parish Clerk by Linda Winter to relay to the Parish Council.

Following an agreement to share the majority of events with Church PCC there has only been one non routine event. A zoom meeting covering the history of Graveney and Goodnestone, a talk by Wendy Tait Mayfield, it was well attended and very interesting. Wendy has agreed to take a small group of FGC to look at the sight of the old customs post on Monday 16th May 2022. Anyone interested in coming along with us and becoming a member of FGC please phone Linda on 07961 427997 for details. A flower festival is scheduled to be held in September 2022 and details will be confirmed at a later date.

c, Graveney Primary School.

Not present and the Parish Council did not receive a report to share.

d, Village Hall Committee

Two trustees attended the meeting and shared the following report.

Though Covid 19 restrictions were lifted in June 2021 hirers were hesitant to return to hiring the hall for the worry of the Covid virus. Hirings slowly increased during late summer and continued into the Autumn.

The arrival of the Omicron variant of Covid in late Autumn 2021 saw many hiring’s for the Christmas period and January 2022 cancelled due to the uncertainty of how the Government would possibly impose further restrictions and individual health concerns.

As in the previous financial year it was only through Government funding by the provision of COVID grants that the Graveney and Goodnestone Village Hall Charity was able to remain in operation. The Grants have been used to carry out further improvements to the play area, modernization of the Village Hall lighting using modern energy efficient LED’s and a planned revamp of the toilets.

The level of financial income mostly from grant funding will require Charities accounts to be reviewed as required by the Charity Commission and HMRC. Last year’s review was believed to be the first in the history of the Graveney and Goodnestone Charity which were duly approved and accepted.

Trustees’ numbers have now increased with Ms Howard and Ms Smith joining in 2021. The trustees continue to manage the financial activities of the Charity with the utmost care and diligence. In doing so and with careful management the trustees have been able to keep the village hall a viable venue for all the enjoy.

The Village Hall field continues to be blighted by dog waste and the car park with fast food packaging discarded next to where it was consumed. Both the Parish Council and Swale council have been advised and asked for help. SBC report that there is little they can do due to staff shortages. Contributing to this problem is the use of an un-official path to a near by field. Though this was once fenced it is believed to have been torn down by vandals on several occasions.

The Graveney & Goodnestone Village Hall fund stood at £18,660 on 31st March 2022 which has enabled all financial commitments to be met. The Trustees have allocated funds for further improvements along with a planned reserve of £4k to provide financial security for the charity to operate over the next two years with regards to paying energy bills and insurances.

However, there is grave concern that the increasing costs of energy cannot be met by just increasing the cost of hirings. The Trustees will seek to raise awareness with both the Parish Council and Swale Borough Council of this problem which will affect all village halls and therefore we bring this to your attention today.

Work to revamp the old toilets begun in February 2022 and is expected to be completed in late spring. Further works to the building fabric along with better access from the car park with a handrail and a sloped pathway is also planned.

Costs for the toilet revamp are in the region of £12k, and therefore further grant funding has been applied for of which £8,500 of funding from KCC has been approved but subject to a strict criteria.

Monies for an inclusive picnic bench have been pledged along with grant funding from the Graveney Trust. The picnic bench will be located on the new patio area behind the swings and will be inside the new ROSPA fencing.

Hedging gifted by OVO energy and planted in January 2022 will provide a home for wildlife and provide a wind break for this area. Sadly, a number of these were then vandalised. Further improvements to the field boundary are planned in the next few months.

New ROSPA approved fencing funded by The Graveney Trust was installed in March 2022. This should now allow families to play in a safe and clean area.

The Covid Pandemic had a devastating effect on society affecting everyone and everything including the village hall for the second successive year. With the continued support of the Government at both national and local levels, the Trustees, and Hirers of the Village Hall has survived another difficult period.

The Trustees would like to place on record their thanks to KCC, SBC, The Graveney Trust and OVO energy for their Grant funding that has enabled these improvements and kept the Village Hall a viable asset for both the Parishes of Graveney and Goodnestone.

If it had not been for the above support, there is no doubt the Village Hall would have permanently closed.

It was also noted that a bin is required for the Village Hall as there has been an issue with litter on numerous occasions. The Chair informed the Village Hall Committee that they would need to contact Swale Borough Council.

e, Women’s Institute

Cllr Teresa Bowles read the following report to all.

The Graveney WI membership is very healthy with 20 members. The last year through the Covid 19 Pandemic weeding and the planting of the flower bed around the Graveney Village sign at the eastern end of the village has been continued. At Christmas we decorated each village sign with Christmas trees etc. Contact has been maintained via the use of Social Media and telephone calls to members. Most members attended the Christmas meal at the Plough in Lewson Street and was enjoyed by all. Jam was sold on site that was made by Pat Younger and a raffle was also held. A Christmas Card donation was given to The Pancreatic Cancer foundation. Meetings at the Village Hall have now commenced again.

f, Neighbourhood Watch.

Not present and the Parish Council did not receive a report to share.

g, GREAT (Graveney Rural Environment Action Team)

Cllr Alan Stewart shared the following report.

GREAT has given regular updates to the Parish Council since planning permission was granted in May 2020 for the Cleve Hill Solar Park. Since then numerous solar proposals have sprung up all around the UK and numerous articles have appeared in the papers, largely condemning large scale solar and battery storage facilities.

The Sunnica proposal for a solar array extending to some 2,500 acres in Suffolk and Cambridgeshire, prompted the formation of the Solar Alliance Campaign (SAC) and this campaigns against large scale solar parks and battery storage facilities. GREAT is a member of the SAC and provides and receives support from this group.

The collaboration with Sunnica also resulted in Sir David Melville from The Faversham Society collaborating on several scientific papers about Lithium Ion Batteries as these continue to catch fire in various places around the world.

When the scheme was approved by the Secretary of State, several requirements were set out in the Development Consent Order (DCO) and the developer was required to comply with these before the elements of the scheme could start on site. Swale Borough Council has the responsibility for giving final consent when the submissions and Management Plans are presented to them. One of these was the Archaeology Management Plan and this was agreed in 2021 with the original developers – Hive Energy and Wirsol.

In October 2021 Quinbrook Infrastructure Partners acquired Cleve Hill Solar Park Ltd (CHSP) from Hive Energy. Quinbrook is now the sole owner of the project. The company is reported to already operate two large solar farms in Nevada, USA, and prides itself on being “an investment group solely involved in renewable energy schemes”.

Quinbrook promptly renamed the Solar Park – Project Fortress. However, in its latest communication, the precise details of the scheme and website dating back to its inception in 2017 have been adopted without any substantive changes. Basically, they have taken on the identity of the previous developers and it appears that the entire Board of Directors of CHSP now comprises personnel from Quinbrook.

GREAT is following up on the basic legal position that it is the “defined undertaker” in the DCO who has the benefit of the Order so that the transfer of the benefit provisions in Article 5 to the new entity relates to the transfer to someone other than the original undertaker.

The National Planning Inspectorate take the view that as the project is still being developed by CHSP there has not been any such transfer and this is currently the point we are disputing and seeking legal opinion on.

GREAT is concerned about the intentions and transparency surrounding the actions of the “new developers”, particularly in relation to the future submissions that will be required under the DCO, especially the Construction Traffic Management Plan, operational management, and the Battery Storage Safety Management Plan.

The company has now put forward submissions regarding wildlife protection work (in respect of water voles) and fencing and despite challenges being put forward by the Parish Council, The Faversham Society, CPRE, and GREAT, interim approval has been given by SBC. Their timetable is now for construction to be started this Autumn.

GREAT intends to closely follow activities at Cleve Hill.

In accordance with the Governments new energy strategy and the commitment to continued communication, GREAT will approach the developers for a meeting with them – we do regard communication to be a two way process, not just sending a letter every so often.

The website has been revived and this will now be updated on a regular basis.

**7. Report from Borough Council representatives.**

 Not present and the Parish Council did not receive a report to share.

**8. Report from County Council representatives.**

Not present and the Parish Council did not receive a report to share.

**9. Close of meeting.**The meeting was closed by the Chair a 8.18pm.

Signed……………………………………………………..

Date………………………………………………………..