**GRAVENEY with GOODNESTONE PARISH COUNCIL**

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

**on Monday 17th April 2023 at 7.00pm.**

**Present:** Chairman, Cllr Catherine Wilkinson, Cllr Alan Stewart, Cllr Teresa Bowles, Cllr Mike Newman, Cllr Lesley Lound, Cllr Tom King, Alison Blackwell (Graveney School), Elaine Cooper (Village Hall Trustee), Janet from All Saints Church, Cllr Tim Valentine (SBC) and Cllr Rich Lehmann (KCC)

 Public: 2

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

**2. Apologies for absence**

 Apologies were received from Lut Stewart and Marie King from GREAT and Cllr Alistair Gould (SBC).

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

 The Chairman expressed thanks to all the councillors who give up their time freely to come month in, month out to support our villages. At times these meetings can be very dry and the option of a warm fire and good tv drama is certainly a better option than a cold frosty night at the village hall. The councillors are here to represent you the villagers and I can assure you that there is nothing better than having a parishioner contacting one of us, be it with a complaint or ideas how to improve the village – this makes it worth our while sitting here month in month out!

Roger Mitchell stood down as Chairman last year, having moved away from the village. Cllr Clare Boggia stepped in to keep the council going and would like to thank Cllr Catherine Wilkinson who stepped up to vice chair during the past year.

We have had nine regular meetings this year plus various subcommittee meetings including a finance meeting to set the budget and planning meetings if any application falls outside the deadlines of our meetings. There have also been very many meetings with Cleve Hill Solar Park and we are thankful to Richard please insert his surname who acts as a village presentative on the traffic management group. Cllr Alan Stewart attended the finance conference this year, bringing back helpful hints when reviewing our budgets. The precept for the parish this year is £2,133.17 for a band D property. There was a rise, however we needed to cover costs within the budget for any election expenses, as it happens, there will not be an election due to only existing councillors standing for the parish council.

Planning is a major part of our meetings and this past year we have had the following applications to consider.

* Langdon Court
* Four Horseshoes
* Land adjoining Faversham Showground
* 4 Ewell Barn, Ewell Farm
* 1 Bridge Cottages
* Windy Ridge, Seasalter Road
* Cleve Hill Solar Park
* Lorry Park

Swale Borough Council have not finished their Swale plan, and we look forward to any engagement and consultation that goes with this. As everyone is aware there is development all around us and it is up to the parish council to look at any applications we receive with neutrality, follow planning guidance as well as doing what we consider best for our community. Of course, the fact that Graveney and Goodnestone are ribbon development villages emphasises issues such as lack of footpaths, speeding etc and the council are committed to supporting anything we can do to improve this.

Many things take a long time to come to fruition and work this year by the councillors includes:

* Defibrillator – due to be installed this month at the pub. The actual defibrillator needs to be checked weekly, three weeks just needs to be a visual check and one a month a full check – volunteers for a rota for this greatly appreciated.
* Improve the visual impact of the village, including regular mowing and keeping area around the village sign smart. Some flowering cherry trees are due to be planted here next week
* Improving the rough ground adjacent to the school car park – a bench will be installed here in the next month together with planting of fruit trees
* Working with the local housing association to look at ways of improving parking and landscaping at Culmers terrace.
* Looking at options for allotments in the village
* New information boards at the village hall and replacing the one vandalised at Odin’s Path and putting a new board at the Murton Place bus stop
* Working with KCC highways at looking a traffic calming and speed within the village. Whilst we all understand the risks walking the roads in the villages, sadly, KCC highways team do not always agree with us on this. This is why Speed watch is in the process of being set up and any volunteers to this most welcome. Yellow lines will be painted at the top of Homestall lane soon to allow those using the limited footpath access and make visibility on the bend towards the roundabout clearer. We feel the figures given by KCC highways regarding driving speed through the villages does not match our experience and have asked for the old fashioned line on road to measure as opposed to sat nav figures and this will happen soon.

We look at crime figures each month and pleased to say generally this is extremely low within the parishes. The area that is reported on is Boughton and Courtenay and if you go to the Kent Police page you can drill down the figures. The vast majority for this area are outside our parish.

I would like to finish with acknowledging a few others who have worked hard -

Thank you to Richard who voluntarily takes on the role of footpath warden in the village as well as fire warden and works with Kent Fire and Rescue.

Thank you to all the village hall trustees but especially to Colin Relf who has worked tirelessly to get grants to upgrade the facilities for all the villagers.

Thank you to the team at GREAT for all the work they have put into trying to get the best practical options with the Solar farm in order to keep us safe – believe me you cannot underestimate the number of hours that this team have put in.

Thank you to both our county councillor Rich Lehmann and borough councillors Alistair Gould and Tim Valentine – all three have been a super support to our village.

It is with great sadness that we learnt that Tim is stepping down at the local elections next month as he has been a great support to us but pleased to see that Rich is standing in his place. We wish them well in the forthcoming elections.

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

Cllr Alan Stewart informed the Parish Council that there are currently five trustees however, the trust are looking for two more. Grant applications have been received from the Village Hall for development of the playing field. The total trust fund currently stands at 100k, the original figure was 300k. The 100k is made up of investment interest.

**5. Highway Improvement Plan.**It has been agreed that tracks will be placed to complete a speed survey again. It was suggested that Seasalter Road to Monkshill Road be surveyed. For the period of March 2021 to April 2022 statistics showed that on average there was no speeding.

Jennie Watson from Highways has emailed the Chairman and highlighted that the hedges are cut in and around Graveney on their Rural Swathe programme however, this year they will only be carrying out one swathe cut which is due to take place in June due to funding restrictions.

**Action 5: Clerk to write to KCC approved hedge cutters for quotes to cut hedges in the village.**

**6. Reports from Village Groups.**

1. All Saints Church, Graveney.

Report given by Janet Payne.

Thanks was given to Graveney and Goodnestone Trust for their donation. Enough funds have been raised for the porch village gate. Cllr Teresa Bowles has been working with the community payback team on the churchyard. Also very thankful for all public donations received throughout the course of the year. The Church has been open every Sunday which has attracted new people to attend. The Church would like to open on Saturdays also but as there are few volunteers in number this is not as likely. The boiler has stopped working, and this is something that needs to be addressed in the future whilst complying with Church rules on greener energy.

1. Friends of Graveney Church

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

Some of our members enjoyed a zoom meeting given by Wendy Tait Mayfield on the subject of Crime in Goodnestone and Graveney in the 18th/19th C. It was extremely interesting, and it appears that both villages, with several significant exceptions were very quiet and on balance well behaved. We are also making plans for a local visit to add to members understanding of history in the area during the summer months.

We have committed to fund the recent repairs to the Lychgate at All Saints Church. We need new members. Please call Linda Winter directly or contact the Parish Clerk of Graveney and Goodnestone Parish Council.

1. Graveney Primary School.

Alison Blackwell attended and shared a report with the Parish Council.
Over the past two years our pupils and staff have faced the incredible challenge of learning during a pandemic. This has not been an easy task, it is very easy to forget that we have continued this year with Lockdowns and also a few other emergencies (the school emergency planning document has never been used so frequently), these have included power failure, Storm Eunice, phone disruption, internet failure and a Red heat warning. Nothing will not stop us learning here at Graveney Primary!

Graveney Primary School continues to be a thriving village school, with 101 pupils on roll and 19 members of staff. Graveney Primary remains the sole Academy in our Multi Academy Trust and continues to strive to maintain its individuality. The school supports and work with other schools within the local area as part of an informal collaboration.

Here at Graveney we believe that education is not just academic success. We encourage all of our pupils to have the confidence to explore and challenge themselves so that each of them can reach their true potential. Listening to our pupils when they have the opportunity to share their work and also talk about their progress with visitors has been wonderful; our pupils are able to speak with eloquence and honesty about their learning.

This year we have given all our Year 5 and 6 pupils the opportunity to experience our residential trip. Whilst away pupils develop their team work skills. Learning to challenge themselves is a key part of this experience, we may not always be able to reach the top of the climbing wall… It is wonderful to see pupils supporting and challenging each other to achieve just that little bit more.

Sports Day continues to be another of the pupil’s favourite events, is it the excitement and the fun? It is so rewarding to see all our pupils participate in the competition, also watching them working as a team, their encouragement for all pupils to cross that finish line is so infectious (if slightly deafening by the end of the afternoon).

This year we have produced two very different school productions, our Ladybirds and Bumblebees shared the nativity story with their songs and smiles. Whilst our Scorpions produced an exceptional performance of Edith’s Wartime Memories, where they amazed us with their ability to learn so many lines and songs to such a high standard. Every performance this year has given our pupils a new life skill, and a love for the arts which will enhance their lives forever.

With all these incredible events our teachers continue to work tirelessly to help all pupils to make progress and achieve their very best in our curriculum. This year has seen a more stable staffing for which I am very grateful. Our incredible staff have nurtured our pupils who have flourished and my pride in all of them is infinite. Recruitment for new teachers to join the school has been very successful this year with more applications received from teachers looking to join us than any previous round of applications remembered, this is to replace staff who are preparing for their retirement.

In July 2023 the school once again achieved incredible SATs results, across all Key Stages our school is now above the national averages, with Reading in Key Stage 2 continuing to show an improvement despite a pandemic, all our leavers have achieved the expected standard with 38% achieving greater depth of the standard. This has been achieved because of the incredible team we have here at Graveney.

Every member of our community helps us to make Graveney Primary a wonderful place for children to grow and develop their love of learning. I thank the teachers, pupils and parents for all working together. We really are ‘Learning and Achieving Together’

1. Village Hall Committee

Two trustees, Elaine Cooper and Joan attended the meeting and shared the following report.

Firstly, for those who weren’t aware Trish Tims our dear friend and fellow trustee passed away in August 2022. Trish worked very hard for over 20 years fund raising and keeping the village hall running, she will be greatly missed but forever in our thoughts. Thank you, Trish.

The Trustees have continued their work in carrying out improvements to the village hall and playing field during the past year.

Improvements were carried out to both toilets paying particular attention for the less abled person. The work was above that required for an old building and have been well received. These improvements were sponsored by KCC, and approved as per the requirements of the grant.

The play area greatly benefitted from regular maintenance and has received many a good comment as has the building too. The Trustees would like to improve the maintenance of the playing field but this would be a considerable cost and therefore ask the parish council for assistance.

A new £18k footpath sponsored by The National Lottery, The Rochester Bridge Trust, The Kent Foundation Trust, The Bensted Charity and Crest Nicholson Housing paid for an inclusive footpath that opened in January 2023. This provides a safe walking route for all by connecting the car park to the play area, the original picnic tables plus a new picnic bench in memory of Flying Office Wendel that was supported by the local RAFA, Graveney and Goodnestone Trust and Swale Borough Councillor Gould.

After much investment and improvement for the young the Trustees turned their attention to the adults and arranged for a new 3-piece adult gym costing £5,200 to be installed. Though only two months old it has proven popular with the community and visitors alike.

Repairs to subsidence in the car park was carried out and further repairs are planned subject to funding. Owing to the worsening misuse of the car park, bollards have had to be fitted. Though they cause some inconvenience it has for example reduced the amount of drug use.

Dog fouling continues to be a problem as does the use of an un-official footpath through the field boundary that has resulted in many saplings being broken by those who don’t appreciate the work involved improving the are. Vinson’s farm Ltd have been requested to tidy this boundary.

The Trustees would like to ask for volunteers to assist with arrangements for the car park during the summer months along with field maintenance, cleaning away rubbish and pooh picking. A request to the editor of the Parish Newsletter asking for volunteers will be made in the near future.

**Financial Position**

The Charity continues to fund raise through grant appeals and car boot fair’s that allow for the continued improvements to the Village Hall for the communities of both Graveney & Goodnestone with out any cost to them.

The Graveney & Goodnestone Village Hall account stood at £16k on the 31st March 2023 which has enabled all financial commitments to be met this year. A reserve of £6,000 will be held to provide financial security for the charity to operate over the next two/three years with regards to paying energy bills and insurances etc.

Regular hirings increased with the arrival of three new groups, along with private hirings. “The caravan club” annual hiring continued and to which they once again returned this Easter. Swale Borough Council also hire the hall through contract for local government business. It is worth nothing that when many clubs in the area are struggling and closing post covid that we are grateful to all our hirers for their support.

With careful financial management and planning the Graveney & Goodnestone Village Hall continues to be an asset to both communities and is self-financing. However, there is grave concern that the increasing costs of energy cannot just be offset by simply increasing cost to hirers.

The Trustees ask that the Parish Council acknowledge our concern and request that Swale Borough Council are informed of this situation.

**The next 12 months.**

Further improvements are hoped to include park benches, community defibrillator, field boundary maintenance including further sapling planting, fencing and on-going car park repairs. With inflation costs having risen by over 10% some will now have to be re-evaluated.

The trustees have received a lot of complimentary comments, but a number of residents now report that the village hall is not suitable.

The trustees do not believe this to be the case and will continue wit future improvements as deemed necessary.

On behalf of the trustees – thank you.

1. Women’s Institute

Cllr Teresa Bowles shared the following report with the Parish Council.

The Graveney & District W.I Membership has 20 members. We meet at Graveney Village Hall on the 2nd Wednesday of the month. Last year we have continued to weed and plant the flower bed around the Graveney village sign at the Eastern end of the village. We have kept the village sign flower bed, planted and weeded. Members enjoyed a trip to the Ramsgate tunnels in July. At Christmas members went to the Christmas meal at The Plough in Lewson Street, the meal was enjoyed by everyone and we also had a raffle. At Christmas we decorated each village sign with Christmas lights and wreaths. We have had some interesting talks this year. After we have completed W.I business we have lots of fun in members time.

1. Neighbourhood Watch.

Cllr Clare Boggia informed the Parish Council that generic messages are now being received after a long period of inactivity from Maidstone. Hopefully the area specific messages will start coming through again. If anyone wishes to have the email alerts, please contact the Chairman.

1. GREAT (Graveney Rural Environment Action Team)

Cllr Alan Stewart shared the following report.

We continue to report to the Parish Council at each meeting.

GREAT continues to be actively involved with a number of groups, including:

* The Faversham Society
* CPRE
* Solar Campaign Alliance
* Helen Whately MP
* Swale Borough Councillors

The main actions undertaken by GREAT during the year include:

* Detailed responses to the draft Management Plans which were submitted by the developers to Swale Borough Council as required by the Development Consent Order for the project, were shared with the community.
* Attended fortnightly Traffic Management Group meetings and actively highlighted deficiencies in the Construction Traffic Management Plan.
* Continued to update the GREAT website and Facebook pages.
* Provided feedback on the Marshalling Area planning application. It appears that this application will not now be considered by Swale Borough Council until May. In the meantime, an escort vehicle is leading HGVs through the villages at the 20 mph speed limit.
* There is now a log to record perceived HGV breaches of speed limits or safety for Cleve Hill Solar Park to investigate. The GREAT website and Facebook pages have been updated to reflect the information required for these to be recorded and discussed at the Traffic Management Group meetings.

Battery Storage Safety Management Safety Plan Update:

* The draft Battery Storage Safety Management Plan has still not been submitted for review. No expected date has been provided for its publication.
* A 50MW battery storage facility in Lower Penn, Staffordshire was approved with 24 conditions attached, which reinforces the point that much more extensive and stringent conditions will be required for the Cleve Hill facility.
* Maria Miller, MP for Basingstoke, has raised concerns about battery storage facilities which “utilise relatively new technology in a way which has been shown to pose a potential fire hazard.” She tabled a Bill in Parliament in September 2022 which sought to address this problem based on the experience they had in Basingstoke. There have been no updates on when this Bill may be implemented.
* Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire & Rescue Chief, Neil Odin, said “..we remain concerned about the chosen locations that could have such a detrimental effect on the environment should a fire occur. In the event of a fire, our teams would face an impossible choice between protecting the community from a potential toxic or explosive gas plume or applying water that would pollute the watercourse for many years.”
* A meeting with Kent Fire & Rescue has been arranged for late May to raise our concerns on the Health & Safety aspects of having such a large battery storage facility so close to Graveney and Goodnestone and the surrounding areas.

Challenges faced:

* It has been very difficult to communicate with Swale Borough Council following the loss of a number of planning officers who left the Council last year. These were replaced by contracted planning officers who have not been particularly responsive in the Traffic Management Group, DCO condition sign-offs and other matters.
* A large majority of the Management Plans were received over the course of a few days, which made it very difficult to fully review them and get comments back within the 21 day deadlines.
1. Community Voice Group.

Cllr Alan Stewart updated the Parish Council on their behalf as no one able to attend. Following the community drop in session it is currently not known what direction will be taken. A meeting was held on 29th March by Cllr Alan Stewart, Cllr Teresa Bowles and Cllr Lesley Lound. Paths and cycleways have been identified alongside landowners that could be contacted in the hope of some land been offered to be used for footpaths. The Parish Council are already actively looking into the HIP where wishes and requests can be quantified. Biodiversity on site, VH improvements and lastly green energy which could include solar panels on public buildings, electric charge points and looking into the local electric bills are all hoped to be included.

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

 Cllr Tim Valentine (SBC) informed the parish council that the Solar Park Transport Management plan is running. There is a new head of planning, Joanne Johnson at Swale Borough Council meaning that communication should be improved.

The Local Plan has been paused presently as awaiting the National Government Policy before proceeding. The main issue being housing targets, a local plan could become statutory.

The land south of Lady Dane went through planning and has been given permission for 88 houses alongside an outline for another 74 houses and care home.

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

Cllr Rich Lehmann (KCC) informed the Parish Council that a complaint had been received directly relating to speeding.

Chestfield Tunnel on Thanet Way will be undergoing light works which will be put into place until the end of June.

**9. Close of meeting.**The meeting was closed by the Chair at 8.20pm.

Signed……………………………………………………..

Date………………………………………………………..