**GRAVENEY with GOODNESTONE PARISH COUNCIL**

**MINUTES of PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD AT GRAVENEY VILLAGE HALL**

**On Monday 13th January 2025 at 7:00pm.**

**PRESENT**

Cllrs Mike Newman, Alan Stewart, Tom King, Lesley Lound, Catherine Wilkinson, Teresa Bowles, The Parish Clerk and Footpath Warden.

1. **Apologies for Absence –** Cllr Clare Boggia and Cllr Rich Lehmann (KCC & SBC).

Absent: Cllr Alastair Gould (SBC).
2. **Declarations of Interests.**No declarations.
3. **Cleve Hill Solar Park Development Update.**A meeting was held with Reece and Jackie from CHSP. Colin was not present. They announced that Quinbrook were now in the final stages of linking up with an established administration company to oversee the community funds and will provide more detailed information shortly.
Helen Whately was able to present her concerns regarding the impact of the development at a Westminster Hall debate and received a response from the Government representative. Helen is keen to be kept informed of ongoing issues.
It was noted that road sweepers had been observed however, the brushes were not deployed.
CHSP accepted a quote from A&B for bollards, hedge cutting and improvements.
Cleve Hill are due to send another Newsletter out to the community. Colin had emailed Rupert Cotterall requesting an update.
Adrian Oliver kindly gave the parish council the update below:
The Solar Cycle Way is a route from Faversham Creek through the Cleve Hill Solar Farm development to Seasalter. From an active travel perspective, this is an opportunity to create a new piece of infrastructure to realign Sustrans National Cycle Network Route 1 away from Sandbanks Road (busy fruit farming environment) and Seasalter Road (busy alternative through route between Faversham and Whitstable for drivers). This meets Sustrans Paths for Everyone vision, which is to make as much of the NCN, traffic and barrier free.
Continued efforts by the Solar Cycle Way Campaign Group to negotiate with Quinbrook/PEP brought Cllr Lehmann and Kent PROW on board. In 2022, this resulted in KCC and Quinbrook commissioning Sustrans to undertake a Feasibility study. A report was delivered in June 2023. A second stakeholder engagement report was commissioned from Sustrans and delivered a year later.
As a result of these two reports, we are aware of the significant hurdles that need to be negotiated to achieve a route through the solar farm. To minimise these issues, the route selected is mostly using existing public rights of way and existing infrastructure. There is still an aspiration to create the optimum northern route, but this faces significant (and delaying) ecological problems.
KCC PROW and Highways had a meeting with the PEP team in December 2024. This was onsite and was positive.
KCC and Sultrans are now fast tracking the work on route:
\* An ecologist has been commissioned to undertake a survey of the specific route
\* Access and permission agreements are starting to be worked on
\* Site visit planned
4. **Kent Police Beat Officer Update.**A report was shared with the parish council from PC James Tancock noting two new surgeries in Boughton and Courtney Ward. Dunkirk Village Hall Tuesday 28th between 11am and 12pm and Hernhill Village Hall Tuesday 28th between 2pm and 3pm.
There were no crimes or anti-social behaviour reported during December 2024.
5. **Skylark – Update.**Cllr Alan Stewart informed the parish council that Luke Simpson is the Case Officer for the Four Horseshoes site application and noted that there are a couple of issues being worked on. The applicant has indicated that they would likely appeal in the event of a refusal. Luke Simpson is doing everything he can to ensure that all representations are fully considered.
6. **To approve the minutes of the meeting held on Monday 9th December 2024 and the Budget Meeting minutes held on 21st December 2024.**

These were proposed as a true record of the Monthly Parish Meeting by Cllr Alan Stewart and seconded by Cllr Teresa Bowles. Cllr Alan Stewart proposed the approval of the Finance Budget meeting minutes which was seconded by Cllr Catherine Wilkinson. The minutes were signed by Cllr Mike Newman.

1. **Footpath Warden.**The KCC maps are due to be updated in 2031**.**
2. **Website Update.**

Cllr Mike Newman would like to formulate a subgroup and believe Cllr Catherine Wilkinson would be an ideal candidate for this role as we could incorporate the Newsletter on the website and working together would ensure accuracy. Cllr Mike Newman has been looking into how things are loaded on the website. Cllr Mike Newman asked the parish council if anyone else would like to be involved. The parish council unanimously agreed that Cllr Mike Newman and Cllr Catherine Wilkinson would be best suited to this role.

**Action 160: Cllr Mike Newman and Cllr Catherine Wilkinson to create a subgroup and give a website update at the April meeting.**

1. **Asset Register.**Cllr Mike Newman confirmed that he will speak with the insurers regarding a midterm adjustment.
 **Action 161a: Clerk to send insurance details to Cllr Mike Newman.
Action 161b: Cllr Mike Newman to speak to insurers regarding a midterm adjustment.**
2. **Matters Arising (for information only)**Action 139c – Ongoing.
Action 202e – Ongoing.
Action 52a – Ongoing.
Action 64b – Ongoing.
Action 104d – Ongoing.
Action 106 – Complete.
Action 127a – Ongoing.
Action 127b – Ongoing.
Action 139 – Complete.
Action 140 – Complete.
Action 141 – Complete.
Action 142a – Ongoing.
Action 142b – Complete.
Action 145a – Complete.
Action 145b – Complete.
Action 148 – Complete.
3. **Highway Improvement Plan.**No updates at present.
4. **Correspondence.**17 items received.
5. **Finance.**a. Financial statement and bank reconciliation – approved and signed by Cllr Alan Stewart.
b. Parish Council Budget 2025/2026.
The budget spreadsheet formulated at the meeting held on 21st December 2024 between Cllrs Alan Stewart, Catherine Wilkinson, Tom King and the Parish Clerk was shared with the parish council. Full detailed minutes are available in the Finance Working Group Minutes.
The precept figure for 2024/2025 was £13,530. The suggested precept for 2025/2026 was £12,910.
Item 14, it was noted that an insurance premium figure of £1,000 was proposed due to inflation and could be more following the asset register adjustments.
S. 137 Expenditure.
Miscellaneous was removed and a provisional budget of £1,000 was placed in S.137 as there was a high expenditure value in 2024/2025.
It was agreed to increase repairs and renewals to £1,900 as were looking to be spending around £1,000 for the bus shelter maintenance and heritage boards repairs and reduce the S.137 to £100.
The website was agreed to increase to £750.
The new proposed precept was £13,620 divided by the SBC tax base of 188.10 would be £72.41 per Band D Property compared to £70.47 for 2024/2025.
The precept was proposed by Cllr Alan Stewart and Seconded by Cllr Mike Newman. The parish council unanimously agreed in favour of the £13,620 precept for 2025/2026.
C. Precept Application.
Precept of £13,620 was agreed.
d. Payments.
i. SSE Footway Lighting January (for info only – paid by D/D)
ii. Clerk Salary – January Salary - £259.44 – Proposed by Cllr Alan Stewart and seconded by Cllr Tom King.
iii. HMRC – PAYE Payment for January £188.16 – Proposed by Cllr Alan Stewart and seconded by Cllr Tom King.
iv. Cllr Teresa Bowles - £41.49 Expenses for Shrubs, trees and bulbs – Proposed by Cllr Mike Newman and seconded by Cllr Alan Stewart.
v. Footpath Warden - £14.40 Mileage as agreed for Public Rights of Way Training – Proposed by Cllr Mike Newman and seconded by Cllr Teresa Bowles.
vi. S&J Services - £388.94 for concreting the sign into position for the Odin’s path noticeboard – Proposed by Cllr Teresa Bowles and seconded by Cllr Tom King.
vii. Pinnacle Banner - £45 Defibrillator signs x4 – Proposed by Cllr Mike Newman and seconded by Cllr Alan Stewart.

**Action 165a: Clerk to update the Budget spreadsheet.
Action 165b: Clerk to send precept figures to Swale.**
6. **Planning.
24/505066/FULL – Section 73 – Application for variation of condition 2 (to amend wording to: The mixed native hedgerow planting shown upon approved drawing 203/P01A shall be carried out in the first planting season following the date of this consent, and any plants which die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of a similar size and species.)** Pursuant to **24/500589/FULL for – Creation of vehicle access (retrospective). – The Four Horseshoes Head Hill Road Graveney Kent ME13 9DE.**The parish council highlighted the importance of maintaining a maximum hedge height of 90cm and would like to draw attention to the omission of the bat and bird boxes referred to in the original condition 2. The parish council would like to be given further details on plant species proposed.
**24/505186/FULL – Erection of single storey room extension – Graveney and Goodnestone Village Hall, Sandbanks Lane, Graveney Kent ME13 9DQ.**
The parish council unanimously support this application.
7. **Graveney with Goodnestone Trust.**No update at present however, Cllr Alan Stewart informed the parish council that the accountants had advised that as the trust is a registered charity no corporation tax would be applicable in the case of the car park ownership being passed to a third party.
8. **Reports from Parish Councillors.**Cllr Lesley Lound noted that a street lantern at the bottom of Cleve Hill at the junction of Cleve Hill and Seasalter Road is not working.
Cllr Catherine Wilkinson did not have anything to report.
Cllr Teresa Bowles informed that parish council that there was a large hedge at the end of Bridge Cottages which was causing obstruction on the road. It was also noted that the road closure signs placed for the road closure were the incorrect way around and will report this to Gary Gibbs.
Parking on the footpath at All Saints View is still in progress.
Cllr Mike Newman noted that the fly tipping at the top of Homestall Lane in the layby continues. Cllr Rich Lehmann (SBC & KCC) has stated that he will place some signage notifying of intended prosecution. There has not been any progression to date.
Cllr Alan Stewart informed the parish council that he had emailed Gary Gibbs to look into the condition of the road surface in the upper section of Cleve Hill Lane and is awaiting a response.
Sandbanks Lane vehicle movements has generated a vast amount of mud on the roads. Cllr Alan Stewart requested that the clerk contact Camilla Longley at the farm to see if they could extend their road sweeping up to the Railway Bridge.
A meeting was held with Newchurch Parish Council regarding a Solar Park Application. Newchurch parish council were very appreciative and it was confirmed that they were welcome to contact the parish council in future if required.
Cllr Tom King – Nothing to report.

**Action 168a: Clerk to report faulty streetlamp to Streetlights.
Action 168b: Cllr Alan Stewart to inform Kent Highways of the hedge causing obstruction.
Action 168c: Cllr Teresa Bowles to report road closure signs.
Action 168d: Cllr Teresa Bowles to report parking on footpath at All Saints to Gary Gibbs.
Action 168e: Clerk to contact Cllr Rich Lehmann (SBC & KCC) for a progress report relating to the fly tipping at Homestall Lane.
Action 168f: Clerk to contact Camilla Longley at Sandbanks Farm to request the mud is swept up to the Railway Bridge.**

**Reports for Borough and District Councillors (if present).**
Cllr Rich Lehmann (SBC & KCC) reported that in mid December the government published plans to turn all remaining 'two-tier' council areas in England into Unitary Authorities over the coming years, and to install directly elected mayors across the entire country too.

These plans, if they go ahead, will completely change the landscape of local government in Kent and the other remaining areas with county councils over the next few years. And at an extraordinary KCC full council meeting on Thursday 10th January, the administration group voted to sign Kent up to this process, and also to write to government with a request to be on the 'fast-track', and start the process as soon as possible.

Sadly this decision appears to be primarily driven by the poor financial state of both KCC and Medway, and the fact that the government only appear to be willing to offer additional financial support to those areas buying in to their chosen policy direction.

One of the upshots of this request is that being on the fast-track could see the cancellation of this May's KCC elections. A move which many at the meeting on 10th January strongly opposed (sadly my, and other's, attempts to convince the council to express a preference NOT to cancel the elections were voted down).

I strongly believe that the cancellation of elections should not be allowed to happen. The primary argument for cancelling them appears to be that it would enable the mayoral elections to take place as soon as possible, and that council staff would be tied up for the eight week election period if elections were being held.

If those weeks are needed to get a mayoral election set up for May 2026, then the government should have started this process last October, rather than in mid-December. If the amount of work needed is such that the 68 week timeline between now and next May is that tight, it suggests to me that things are being rushed, and are at risk of not being done with the necessary due diligence for a project of this magnitude.

Should Kent's fast-track application be accepted, we will almost certainly be electing the first ever mayor of Kent next year.

A number of concerns were raised at the meeting about this direction, from all sides of the chamber. The directly elected mayor model concentrates a huge amount of power into the hands of one individual, and the way they are elected often means there's very little that can be done (barring a custodial prison sentence) to remove one once they are elected.

There is also the fact that they will be able to charge a council tax precept, so any potential reduction in council tax which might occur as a result of streamlining the county and district councils into unitary authorities may end up being wiped out by the increase.

This wouldn't be quite so much of an issue if it wasn't for the fact that there have been numerous cases of directly elected mayors spending tens of millions of pounds on vanity projects. Most notably Boris Johnson's attempts to build a 'garden bridge' over the Thames, which saw £43m of taxpayers money spent before the project was finally abandoned. One of the key reasons costs can spiral on vanity projects is that mayors do not receive the same level of oversight and scrutiny as council administrations do.

The second part of this huge project will be Local Government Reorganisation, which will likely take place in 2027 or 2028. I will write an update on this next month.

1. **Any other business (for information only).**The footpath warden informed the parish council that the Goodnestone Lane Road sign had been damaged and was reported by Cllr Alan Stewart. Gary Gibbs arranged for the sign to be repaired however, it is believed that the sign will be replaced when funds are available.
**Action 170: Clerk to send email from Footpath Warden to Cllr Lehmann for an update.**
2. **Date of next meeting – Monday 10th March 2025.**
3. **Close of meeting.**The meeting was closed by Cllr Mike Newman at 8.55pm.

**Signed………………………………………………………………….Date …………………………………..**