**GRAVENEY with GOODNESTONE PARISH COUNCIL**

**MINUTES of ANNUAL GENERAL PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD AT**

**GRAVENEY VILLAGE HALL**

**On Monday 14TH April 2025 at 7.00pm**

**PRESENT**

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

Absent: Cllr Rich Lehmann (KCC & SBC) and Cllr Alastair Gould (SBC).

1. **Welcome by the Chair of the Parish Council.**The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting. This meeting gives all the opportunity to reflect on the year gone by, to account for our actions and decisions, and to look ahead to the future of our parish.
2. **Apologies for absence.**None received.
3. **Annual Report of the Chair of the Parish Council.**

This past year continues to have been one perhaps dominated by both the proposed developments by Skylark and the ongoing development of the Cleve Hill Solar Park. As a Parish Council, we’ve sought to represent residents in both these matters. With Skylark, we took a series of actions including funding the engagement of a professional freelance planning consultant to work with us to produce reports submitted to Swale Planning Committee which set out a series of structured objections to the proposals, based on planning policy. At this point, decisions are dragging and still not finalised, but we have strived throughout to preserve the heritage of the village and hopefully prevent this being sacrificed at the altar of developer profit.

With Cleve Hill, we have maintained regular meetings with PEP and tracked and, where possible, negotiated a series of actions to limit the disturbance and disruption that is inevitable with a development on this vast scale on the edge of our community. The Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) designation granted to the development of course has meant that we have had a limited hand to play with, but we have, as a council, become quite familiar with the voluminous content of the various Development Consent Orders and sought to act as a voice to hold the developers to them whilst also trying to maintain a civilised and cordial relationship with our new bedfellows. I record sincere thanks to my fellow councillors and GREAT for the many hours committed to these endeavours which have resulted in better traffic management, the creation of a penalty system for speeding drivers, the creation of golden hours to improve safety at the school and the many occasions where we were able to persuade the developers to remediate damage caused by the thousands of vehicles coming through the village and to improve communication with the community.

We have also maintained dialogue with PEP and Quinbrook on the creation of a Community Benefits Fund to be used to benefit the entire parish. This has been a steel thread throughout our engagement. Supported by Community Voice, the Parish Council became, at the request of the developers, the central communication channel for this topic. Because of the timing of the grant of the NSIP designation, this has meant that the developers were, and are, under no legal obligation to provide Community Funding, a key discriminating difference to the development of the London Array. We have therefore had to rely on tireless lobbying and the instilling of the need to be seen to do the right thing for our community.

I think it is fair to describe the progress as a ‘slow burn’ as we have tried to navigate the right balance between holding the developers to account whilst maintaining the right degree of advocacy in the relationship.

With some sense of auspicious timing, I am therefore truly delighted to be able to share that the developers have now entered into a contract with Grantscape, a Community Fund Management company. I recognise and am grateful for the efforts of key individuals at PEP. We have, earlier this evening, had a meeting with Granscape’s CEO Matt Young and the appointed Grants Officer, Laura.

Grantscape will now appoint an Advisory Panel – this being a small cross-representative group from the Parish Council and the community, who will act, not unlike a board of trustees (though helpfully, Grantscape will shoulder the burden of much of the administration). This panel will review applications and recommend funding decisions based on agreed criteria and thus enable the realisation of a variety of modest projects in and for the community.

This is a great milestone to have achieved together and further details will come out in the next few weeks.

**Financial Report**

Turning to our finances, I am pleased to report that we have continued to manage our budget prudently. Our principal source of income remains the parish precept, which we reduced in real terms in the last year. We have discharged the costs for the services covered by this precept and hold modest reserves, should these be required.

**Audit and Governance**

Our audit (conducted by Per Pro Services Ltd) has been completed for the year with our thanks and with no major issues raised. Our policies are up to date and in order, and collectively support the assurance that we meet our legal and financial obligations. We remain committed to full transparency, good governance, and acting in the best interests of our residents.

**Community Engagement and Partnerships**

We have continued to build positive relationships with our district council, and local service providers, Graveney Primary school, together with local businesses - and village groups such as the Women’s Institute and of course All Saints church, shepherded by the wonderful Revd Cathrine.

**Acknowledgements and Thanks**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank sincerely my fellow councillors for their continued commitment and support. Each member has played a valuable role this year, whether through working groups, planning consultations, or just getting things done. I would particularly like to thank our deputy chair, Alan, whose well-considered opinions and tireless dedication has again been the backbone of this group.

I’d also like to thank our district councillors, particularly Cllr Rich Lehmann who gives us time when he can and has acted inside Swale in support of our activities on numerous occasions during the year.

A thank you must also go to our community volunteers— including GREAT, but also Richard, our footpath warden, who has the distinction of attending every Parish Council meeting and who regularly contributes to our debates.

**Looking Ahead – The Year to Come**

As we look to the year ahead, we will continue to support the community – we will take an active part in the Advisory Panel with Grantscape and of course continue to fight for the heritage of our parish villages in this great, longstanding Kent farming community.

**Closing Remarks**

In closing, I want to reiterate how proud I am, as a Man of Kent, to be a part of this traditional, vibrant, and resilient parish.

While challenges and uncertainty always remain, including the reality of a large energy generator and the seemingly continuous looming threats of large housing developments all around us, the dedication and care shown by our residents make this parish a truly special place to live - and we all have a collective role, as custodians, to support the common aim of preserving it and its heritage.

Thank you all for your ongoing support. I look forward to working with you in the coming year.

1. **Graveney with Goodnestone Trust.**The Trust has been established since 2008 and currently has five Trustees. The remaining funds held by the Trust are in the order of £85,000 with total grants awarded , to date, in excess of £300,000. The principal recipients have been All Saints Church and the Village Hall Committee. Over the last year we have only received grant applications from the Village Hall Committee and we are now reviewing an application for the part funding of the proposed village hall extension and remedial works to the existing play area. The decision was taken last year to review the future of the Trust , having regard to the funds now available and whether it may be appropriate to consider a final distribution of funds followed by the winding up of the Trust itself. As part of this process we have also had to consider the question of the school car park which is owned by the Trust and where the school have the benefit of an occupational lease which includes restrictive covenants governing its use dating back to when the land was originally transferred to the Trust by London Array. The Trustees have been taking legal and accountancy advice so that the proper steps can be taken to progress matters and the Trust will continue to report to the Parish Council each month.
2. **Report from Village Groups.
a. Graveney GREAT (Graveney Rural Environment Action Team)**We are now in our 7th year of active campaigning.

One of the major events this year and also the most disappointing one was the National Planning Inspector overturning the planning decision to refuse the BESS. Our main concern has always been the safety of the unproven lithium ion batteries technology and we were absolutely right in highlighting this. Since January 2025 there have been 4 battery fires in the UK and a large battery fire in a battery recycling plant. The fires happened during installation and there are ongoing investigations into the cause.

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

GREAT is very grateful to the following organisations, experts and individuals who have shared their knowledge and expertise freely with the villagers in Graveney and Goodnestone:

* Professor Sir David Melville
* Professor Peter Edwards
* Professor Peter J Dobson
* UK Solar Alliance
* Last but not least – the Parish Council

The main actions undertaken by GREAT during the year include:

* Attendance and active input at the fortnightly Traffic Management Group meetings
* Providing info to Helen Whately on Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)
* Continued to update the GREAT website and Facebook pages.
* Campaigning against light pollution – which is ongoing.
* Raising concerns about water pollution with relevant statutory bodies and supporting 1 near neighbour whose garden has been totally flooded which may have started to be addressed today.
* Completion of Freedom of Information requests to a variety of public bodies, including Kent Fire and Rescue, Swale Borough Council,…
* Advising and supporting other campaign groups as there is a lot interest in our experience as the first National Significant Infrastructure Project ( NSIP) in the UK

Challenges :

* Difficulties in getting information from CHSP, for instance on the planting of the perimeter hedging and details of the biodiversity contributions
* We have responded to the “Considerate Developers” Quality Mark
* Difficulties in communicating with Swale Borough Council following the loss of a number of senior planners who left the Council last year.
* Lack of knowledge of the CHSP application, the Management Plan by planners
* Lack of specialist knowledge by SBC about the responsibilities in respect of Equality Legislation and resulting non compliance as well as the
* Lack of interest by KFRS of Equality Legislation and resulting non compliance
* Lack of interest by National Planning of Equality Legislation and resulting non compliance
* Lack of detail of emergency planning by all the emergency services – they merely say there is a plan but there are no details

GREAT in collaboration with the PC have also been committed to supporting the village in their objections against the 2 Skylark sites and this has resulted in many objections on many occasions from many residents. We would hope to see the outcome of the Four Horseshoes Application at some stage and are wondering whether the Seasalter Road application, which has been refused, will go to Appeal.

Our Mantra which we re-inforce at every opportunity:

At the 2021 Energy Storage Summit, the Deputy Fire Safety Commissioner of the London Fire Brigade, Charlie Pugsley stated that : "If you've got foreseeable events or got systems with the potential to either harm people or harm the environment, why would you not want to apply a retrospective look to it, to actually see that it's safe, or anything can be done."

He further stated that the London Fire Brigade has spent the past few years "reflecting on what was foreseeable" since the tragic Grenfell Tower fire at a high-rise housing unit in 2017, which was exacerbated by the building's flammable cladding: "If we know some things could fail catastrophically or it could have those effects," he said, "it's going to be a difficult day if one of us is standing there in Court saying we knew about it but we didn't do anything."

**b, All Saints Church.**It has been a difficult year for All Saints and Patricia and Michael have carried a heavy burden throughout the Autumn and New Year. Sadly, Brenda has become unwell and she and Samantha have decided that they must resign from the PCC, In addition Janet, following a fall, fracturing her hip, has suffered a difficult period and has not been able to undertake as much as she previously did.

The reality is that our current PCC is short of members and we need to seek help. It is such a pity that this has come just as we have the wonderful support of the Reverend Cathrine, who has all the youth, energy and spiritual strength that we need. She is fully aware of our problems and has been working hard, reaching out to parish councillors and the village school, seeking to widen our remit in the village.

Much effort has gone into keeping the church open for services as often as possible but we also join with the other churches, on whose support we rely. Financially, All Saints is the weakest link in the Benefice in which all three churches are struggling. We are warmly supported by the other two churches and they subsidise us to some degree. Nevertheless, a financial black hole is opening for All Saints and we are failing to increase our congregation from within the village. Our small congregation is made up of 7, sometimes 8, pensioners and two single mothers

 The reality is that we are unable to meet the full share of the Diocesan costs for ministry, plus £200 for insurance.

Using the word warmly in the previous paragraph brings us closer to the straw that has almost broken the camel’s back in the latest journey for All Saints. With no heating we have been experiencing the conditions that probably existed at the church’s inception in the twelfth century! For the last two years we have shivered and struggled. The demands of the Church of England, in its understandable desire to become green, have led to us labouring in a less than fertile vineyard in the search for new heating. We began boldly along the road to electric heaters only to find that their cost, £40,000 for the heaters but £100,000 for Network Power to upgrade our supply, plus running costs that we could not afford, made them out of the question. Running through the gamut of other possibilities eventually led us to a very helpful company whose advice was that our best and least costly option was to have a new gas boiler (by comparison a little under £20,000.) We then had to justify this choice to the Diocese and only now are we on the cusp of getting permission to go ahead. Quite clearly, exposing parishioners to two freezing winters has not helped our congregation to grow.

As we begin a new phase in the life of All Saints we must concentrate on continuing to reach out to the village. Our small congregation currently only has two members of the village as regular attendees and we consider ourselves lucky to reach double figures, our numbers being generously filled by members of the other churches for monthly Benefice Services.

Our depleted numbers make it difficult for us to hold necessary fund-raising events which in the last year have largely been dependent upon the energy and generosity of the Friends of Graveney Church, whose efforts will be separately represented.

Our current story is not a new one…we are a largely elderly group, who have less energy but who are, nevertheless, determined to try to keep the village church alive and our hope is in the joy and energy of the new incumbent. She deserves all the support we can give her and we are hoping to reach out again to the goodwill of the Parish Council, the WI, the village hall, and other groups to bring to their minds the real threat that a wonderful Grade I church could again be under threat of closure. We want to be there for both the joys and the sadnesses of village life. For that to be sustained we need, frankly, bottoms in the pews.

 **Reasons to be cheerful:**

All Saints has been much blessed by the generosity of The Goodnestone and Graveney Trust who have come to our aid in the last ten years and we are pleased to be able to report that consequently we continue to have reserves which should be sufficient to complete the installation of the gas boiler. We have treated grants from the trust as money to be used only for necessary building works. We have tried hard to find an alternative within our financial reach and we have, of course, considered solar panels and have spoken with the solar farm developers. However, no definite offer has yet been made and to continue for a third year without heating will not only harm the church building but will also inevitably result in lower attendance.

We are currently displaying a notice, for one month, of our intention to install the gas boiler and it is open for villagers to submit their comments.

**The Church Quinquennial**

To comply with the rules of the Diocese, the church is subject, every five years, to a physical inspection by an architect. This is known as a quinquennial. I am happy to report that all the repairs recommended by our quinquennial of 2020 have been successfully completed. It is our hope, that as the cycle is repeated, the building will be considered to be in a good condition. I have not yet begun the process for this year onward but I am still in touch with our excellent architect. Our builders recently returned to put back tiles that had fallen from the Lychgate, to which repairs were made, kindly funded by the Friends of All Saints, as a result of the last inspection.

 **Fund Raising**

We have had little opportunity to fund raise and we did not have a Christmas Fair in 2024 as we were simply unable to undertake it, the stallholders having found the church too cold in the winter of 2023. We will really miss Brenda who had brought us the joy of a connection with Kori, a charity for which we have fund raised for years and which Brenda had visited, in Sierra Leone, to check on the way in which life in a village had been enhanced. Amazing things have been achieved – the building of toilets, a library, a piggery and a sewing room, enabling women to work and students to use a solar-lit library after their days in college. As a result there has been economic development, access to education and a rise in the living standards of villagers. In the early days of our connection dresses were made enabling girls to attend school and now mothers have learned how to sew themselves. We owe a debt of thanks to Brenda for all she has done to involve us in this wonderful project.

**The Friends of Graveney Church:**

Linda and Paul Winter have been towers of strength having been supportive of the church for some 25 years. Perhaps the village is most aware of the Transport Weekend, which brings buses from the town to the church. This event will happen this year on 17th May. Linda has, in addition, amassed wonderful history artefacts related to the church. A fascinating exhibition was displayed where photographs and documents of village families, including field plans of historic planting brought good numbers to the church In addition she has been working with an author, who has a family connection with Graveney. She is researching the history of Graveney and its surrounding area, She has already given a lecture and will be giving another in May this year. Linda has also, with Brenda, undertaken wonderful flower festivals and she and Paul spend many hours working behind the counter selling cakes and teas, serving we estimate some 200 people last year.

 The members of the Friends, some of them former village residents and others from wider afield, have been supportive of the church in many ways, giving generously, and we are extremely grateful Paul and Linda, who long ago recognised that those who do not necessarily want to worship still have interest in maintaining the church. We are greatly indebted to them for their longstanding and loyal support.

**The Community Payback Group:**

Teresa and Ben Bowles have been involved and supportive in bringing in the Community Payback Team. Men and women, under supervision have been involved in working in the churchyard and the church. Significantly they helped to remove the tumble down caravan, oiled and polished the pews and sanctuary screen. They have also cleaned gullies and the church itself. Ben is to be thanked for fortnightly providing his trailer, taking away churchyard cuttings and, indeed, the caravan, which was a considerable task. Its removal was financed by donors who chose not to be named.

**Conclusion:**

A strong and active membership of the Parochial Church Council is essential if the church is to continue. It is our hope that new people will come forward to strengthen our number. We need new people with energy, ideas and commitment to helping the church to remain not just open but a thriving community helping to enliven both worship and village life. I pray and indeed plead that villagers will come forth to take an interest in the new opportunity that is afforded to us by having a young, talented and very special priest. The Reverend Cathrine Ngangira will bring joy and the hope of new life to the village and the church. Please come along for the ride.

**c, Friends of Graveney Church.**Over the weekend of the 8th. & 9th. June 2024 we organised a Flower Festival which used the importance of recycling as the main theme and featured an impressive number of displays. There was also a stall from Swale Borough Council which encouraged young people to take an interest in recycling and the environment.

Over the long weekend of the 17th, 18th, and 19th, August the Friends organised a three day weekend on the History of Graveney and Goodnestone which benefitted by being an element of Open Faversham taking place at the same time. A very wide range of historic information and records were available and several visitors spent significant time undertaking research. There was also an opportunity for visitors to feedback on events they were aware of that were not covered.

The final event of the history weekend was a fascinating talk on the history of All Saints’ Church by John Burke.

The Friends originally organised the Graveney destination of the Transport Weekend Bus Day. The event grew in importance and in 2023 we agreed that the funds raised should be for the benefit of the Church. In 2024 we had a record number of visitors. We still assist with the day and continue to do so. This year the Bus Day is on Saturday the 17th. May and any help will be gratefully received.

**d, Graveney Primary School.**This last year has continued to see change and developments here at Graveney Primary School – it does seem like an eternity ago for me that Ofsted phoned the school and told us they would be paying us a visit way back in October 2023. Their validation that Graveney is a school where our pupils thrive was so wonderful to read in the first line of their report. Since their visit the staff have all continued to work hard at addressing the areas where they felt we could improve further. Upon our return to school in September we have been implementing our new our curriculum, which has already received positive responses from our pupils and staff. Within the school we now have 18 staff (some part time and job sharing) who make the Graveney Primary School team.

The extension of our school day to support our families in line with the governments recommendations has taken place. Our breakfast club now opening at 7:45am and our Activity Club now remains open until 6pm to support our working families with child care.

This year we have plans to continue to improve the garden areas of the school and hope to create a pollen and bee friendly garden at the front of the school for us all to enjoy.

Here at Graveney we believe that education is not just academic success. We encourage all 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.

Last year we have gave 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 encouraging each other to achieve just that little bit more. And yes there is a photo out there of me climbing the A frame to play rock paper scissors to prove it can be done!

Sports Day continues to be another of the pupil’s favourite events, is it the excitement and the fun and also the return of our much-loved strawberries and cream (and ice lollies this year) from our newly formed PTA. Our sporting celebration continued with the highly sought Wimbledon tickets winners heading off for a fantastic day out. I know there were many disappointed children and adults who wanted to join this group and I will be very pleased to announce to them later in the term that we have once again managed to get tickets for our pupils again this year…

Our school trips have added to our fun this year, with theatre visits in school, Quex park – where they loved the tractor ride and also the crazy golf (but mostly the play area) and our final end of term outing to Leeds Castle.

This year we have once again seen two very different school productions, our Ladybirds and Bumblebees joined together for our nativity production – where there was a very sparkly star this year. Whilst our Scorpions produced an exceptional performance of Let the Games Begin, 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.

The results achieved by the pupils continued to improve in 2024 - our Reading results in Key Stage 2 showed incredible progress with 39% once again achieving greater depth of the standard. Every member of our community helps us to make Graveney Primary a wonderful place for children to grow and develop their love of learning, teachers, pupils and parents all working together. As evidenced in our World Book Day celebration where we swapped almost 300 books this year. Our new book swap library has now been placed at the front of the school, so that children are able to access books at any time (even when we are closed)

With all these incredible events our whole team continue to work tirelessly to help all pupils to make progress and achieve their very best in our curriculum. This year we have appointed some new teaching assistants who support in our classes, I am always incredibly grateful for having such an amazing team of staff to support and nurture our pupils here at Graveney Primary School.

**e, Village Hall Trustees.**
The Trustees are pleased to report that they continue to improve the village hall for the communities of both Graveney and Goodnestone.

The solar installation costing £18K was completed in July 2024 and has already seen a revenue being returned. This was funded by the following sponsors: Graveney and Goodnestone trust, Swale Borough Council, ACRE and the Village Hall Charity. In times when obtaining grant funding is getting increasingly difficult if not impossible this is an amazing achievement.

The defibrillator is now fully operational and gives piece of mind that those visiting the Village Hall and near-by area may be able to survive a medical emergency. This was funded by Cllr R.Lehmann, London Hearts Foundation and the Village Hall Charity. The defibrillator is registered on the National data base called “The Circuit” which is updated every month with the Defibrillators’ status.

As in previous years the Trustees request for volunteers from the community failed to raise any interest which was most diss-appointing but not unexpected. The Trustees work tirelessly for the community, yet it is some of these very residents that turn to social media and local government with unfounded criticism and complaints. Dealing with these issues are time consuming, disheartening and detract from the important work of operating the village hall.

Financial Position

The charity continues to fund raise through grant appeals and car bootfair’s, much time is invested in these activities.

Private hirings have remained steady along with Government hirings for use as an electoral station that brings in a welcomed bonus.

With careful financial planning the Graveney & Goodnestone Village Hall continues to be a viable asset for both communities, and one to be proud of? As in previous years the largest financial commitments are that of the annual insurance and energy costs.

SBC are currently reviewing the ratable relief value for the village hall; this is divided between central Government 80% and Swale at 20%. It is hoped that both will remain zero rated but could be as much as £3K. The Charity would struggle to operate if the maximum value was applied.

The next 12 months and beyond.

As reported last year a kitchen and storeroom extension is required. Designs and plans have been submitted to SBC and estimates sought. The cost for both projects is a staggering £100K!

This cost prohibits a single project from being undertaken and will now be attempted as two separate ones. Many grant applications have been submitted and if anyone would like to donate financially, please contact the Charity or Parish Council.

Summary.

It is only through incredible grant funding and support from many Sponsors that improvements have been made. The Trustees would like to put on record their gratitude and thanks once again to all.

On behalf of the Trustees - Thank you

**F, Women’s Institute.**We have 21 members and hopefully this year that will increase. I hope everyone will agree that it has been a great year having some interesting talks and laughter and fun in our members time. The Treasure hunt was an enjoyable evening ending with a meal at the Wagon and Horses at Charing. Thank you Clare for organising it. We had a trip to Scotney Castle. In September the Strawberry Tea was held at Boughton House where we enjoyed lovely scones with fresh strawberries and raspberries from Edward Vinson Ltd. We painted stoned which were hidden at All Saints Church Graveney for a competition. We had lots of fun and laughter at the Quiz night with interesting questions set by Clare. In November we had a craft morning making Christmas door wreaths with refreshments in the Village Hall. We had a lovely Christmas meal at the Red Lion at Badlesmere with all members receiving a Christmas gift.
I would like to thank Clare and Aileen for their hard work in their posts as secretary and treasure, which I know sometimes can be very time consuming. I would like to thank the small work in progress committee for all their commitment in staying on for this year. I would like to thank Jackie for doing the raffle each month and I would also like to thank Kay for doing the competition book each month for everyone who has made caked and served teas this year.

1. **Report from Borough Council representative.**Not present.
2. **Report from County Council representative.**Not present.
3. **Close of meeting.**The meeting was closed by the Chairman at 7.48pm.

Signed……………………………………………………………………….

Date………………………………………………………………………….