

**MINUTES OF DOWNSWOOD'S ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD IN
THE COMMUNITY CENTRE ON 3 MAY 2016 AT 7.45 PM.**

Present: Cllrs Cheesman (Chairman); Greenhead; Roberts; Butler; Weeks; Brooks; Eady; Pearson; Mrs T. Irving (Clerk); John Leaf – MPE; Mr Richard Young (part).

1. Welcome by the Chairman of the Parish Council, Cllr. Roz Cheesman.
2. **Apologies:** Cllr Carmichael – work commitment; PCSO Gurr; David Bicker – Willington Players (written report submitted); Cllr Aplin – Otham Parish Council; Rajen Kantaria.
3. **Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting held on 3 June 2015** were agreed as a true & accurate record of proceedings and were signed by the Chairman.
4. **Reports from invited groups and associations.**
Abridged reports from groups and associations invited to the Annual Parish Meeting (a full copy of reports are available on request)

MPE FOOTBALL CLUB – John Leaf

It's been a good year for the club, over 200 girls and boys currently playing. The finals were last week and all teams did very well.

Unfortunately it's been a very wet year, which meant that Mallards kept flooding.

Finances are stretched as each team has to have a qualified coach. It 'costs a bomb' for courses and to maintain charter standards.

A good time was had in Barcelona when matches were played over an extended weekend.

As previously reported, now that the Orchard Spot is no longer a pub there has been problems with parking.

The club were thanked for their participation during the Olympicnic. Cllr Roberts stated that he would like to invite local sports to take part this year and MPE are very welcome to have a stall.

THE WILLINGTON PLAYERS 2015-2016 - David Bicker, President

Well, for a start, we celebrate our 70th anniversary this year. The group has had a long journey from its first performance in the long since demolished Willington Village Hall in 1946 via various venues for both rehearsals and performances. Today, we are a long established group at the Hazlitt Theatre, having first performed there just after the theatre opened in the early fifty's.

We started the year with a play entitled "The Game's Afoot" at the Hazlitt Theatre. A comedy thriller by a lesser known author proved once again that Maidstone audiences prefer a full blown comedy, but the production was well received.

We followed this with our entry for the Duncan Rand One Act Play Festival at the Medway Little Theatre. We chose a new play written by one of our members entitled "The Pandal Legacy". This was a complex production, with a large cast, including 3 children, various settings and costume changes. Quite a lot to fit into a performance not exceeding 50 minutes! However, all went well on the night and we picked up several awards into the bargain.

Then we were immediately in rehearsal for "Whose Life is It Anyway", a more serious play about the right to die. Although the play has its lighter moments, our audiences were again down which was a pity as the production was highly praised by those who saw it.

And so it was back to comedy in the New Year as we started rehearsals for "Boeing Boeing" in April. It is in performance as I write this and again looks like another successful production.

We seem to have spent almost the whole of the year in rehearsal, but have managed to cram in a few social events. We do strive to be sociable as well as maintaining high production standards. As always, we welcome new members both as actors and non-actors and we are at the Community Centre most Monday and Thursday evenings.

RECTORS REPORT - Reverend Steven Hughes MBE.

The last twelve months have, I believe, borne witness both to a consolidation of previous decisions as well as to signs of new life and growth without which this, or any, parish cannot hope to survive for long. The 'consolidation' refers to the 'new' pattern of services which is now well established and into its third year. It isn't a perfect pattern and it throws up anomalies from time to time, but by and large it works, and its greatest strength is the fact that on two out of the four Sundays each month (or three out of five on a 'five Sunday' month) our service is a united one. This continues, I believe, to strengthen the unity of the parish

The one problem we are still faced with as a parish (it pre-dates me but is still an ongoing issue) is the fact that if we continue as we are then in a few years' time we shall run out of money and the parish, and its churches, will quite simply cease to exist. This, I believe would be a tragedy. It won't affect me personally because I will be retired by then, but what about those with families here who would like the church still to be here in a generation or two's time, let alone a year or two? Quite simply we all NEED to look at what we give and ask ourselves honestly if we can't increase it by a reasonable amount.

One other major uncertainty remains and that is how much more new housing will be built within our parish, and what its effect on church and parish life will be. It seems quite likely, I think (although I am not privy to any inside information), that in the non-too distant future the field between the church and the old rectory will be built on, as will the field between the White Horse pub and Gore Court Road. These developments, along with Langley Park, will present us with both opportunities and challenges (not least in terms of clergy time).

POLICE REPORT- PCSO Timon Gurr

Please find below a summary of the crime figures over the last year for Downswood and also details of the other activities I have been involved in throughout 2015 & 2016:

- Holding Police surgeries on a monthly basis outside the Downswood Community Centre
- Attending community events
- Working in conjunction with the community policing team to tackle local issues
- Engaging with local businesses and local residents to tackle and reduce any anti-social behaviour
- Providing a high visibility presence while on patrol
- Working in partnership with local housing providers where necessary
- Attending Parish Council meetings to provide a police report of local crime issues and listen to any concerns reported to the council
- Providing crime prevention advice and re-assurance to victims of crime

Crime Figures Summary 04/2015 – 04/2016

Crime Type	Number	
Theft Miscellaneous	1	
Burglary Dwelling	1	
Criminal Damage	5	
Theft from motor vehicle	6	
Attempt Burglary Dwelling	2	
Attempt Burglary other than dwelling	1	
Vehicle Interference	2	
Assault	1	

THE SPIRES SHOPS – Rajen Kantaria

I am pleased to submit this report on behalf of The Spires shopping parade. My apologies for not being present in person.

The parade continues to host two take away businesses, a convenience store and a pharmacy and able to satisfy most of the convenience needs of residents of the parish and surrounding areas.

It is pleasing to report that customers as far as Tonbridge Road have been ordering from both the takeaways due to their reputations. Both continue to improve their menus, sometimes varying the choices according to seasons. Customers can order on the internet, as well as call or phone for deliveries and all card payments are now accepted. Both cater for special tastes or requests provided sufficient notice is available. Residents should pop in whilst passing by and have a chat or make suggestions.

The convenience store and the pharmacy continue in their efforts to satisfy most other everyday requirements and offer a range of items at one pound and value prices! The pharmacy offers consultations on many health related matters, whether for everyday needs, travel advice, medicines reviews and bio clinic tests on a confidential basis. Do visit both places to chat, make any suggestions for

improvement or find something you never knew was available on the local doorsteps!

Over the last few years economic conditions and government policies favouring big over small have greatly impacted all small businesses and the shops in the parade are not immune from this. I would urge residents and customers to continue to support local shops to ensure continuity of community setting and spirit by using the available facilities as well as asking local MP's what efforts are being made by their colleagues in government to encourage continued viability of small businesses. The shops themselves are determined to continue to play their role within Downswood community.

We record our thanks to the Community Police Officer Timon Gurr and his colleagues at Maidstone Police station for their continued efforts to keep the parade welcoming to all visitors and shoppers.

We are all grateful for support given to us by residents who shop with us and helping keep the local economy local. Shopping local not only saves cost but also gives an opportunity for some exercise! :)

Finally we are grateful for the active support of The Parish, Borough and County Councillors and the opportunity to present this report.

5. Chairman's Report – Cllr Roz Cheesman

Clerk: Downswood Parish Councillors are ably guided by the 'working beyond the call of duty' Parish Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer, Teresa Irving. She also holds that position with Otham PC with whom we closely liaise.

Councillors: Newly co-opted and welcomed, completing the hard working team of Parish Councillors are Paul Eady and Kate Pearson. The remaining Councillors are Sam Brooks; Anne-Marie Butler, Scott Carmichael, Bill Greenhead, Simon Roberts, Martin Weeks and me Roz Cheesman. All are unpaid holders of public office undertaking an increasing number of tasks and responsibilities, liaising with Church, MP, KCC, MBC, CPRE, KALC, JPG, Pharmacist, Schools, Police, DCA plus other agencies. Although a Parish Council is the ground roots level of local government, it is non-political.

Cleanliness: Jim Noyce continues to ensure the business area of the parish remains litter free. A monetary contribution towards his pay is received from DCA; Caxtons and GP.

Crime: Fortunately Police cover via PCSO Timon Gurr has resulted in few reported crimes.

Active Support: is regularly received from Helen Whately MP; KCCllr Gary Cooke and MBCllr Gordon Newton. I thank all mentioned, plus the many volunteers such as regular litter pickers.

Keeping Busy: many of the seminars, training courses and conferences available on diverse subjects have been attended.

Numerous meetings have been attended; documents read; responses made to consultations. These have included the Local Plan - potentially 1,897 new homes off Sutton Road and Church Road with inadequate infrastructure/services; Development at M20 J8; Thames Crossing; Waste & Minerals; Pharmacy funding. MBCllr Gordon Newton and KCCllr Gary Cooke have assisted.

Kent Highways -Traffic Survey in Downswood/Otham was undertaken, funded by KCCllr Gary Cook and the 2 parishes.

- **Road Surface Survey** in Mallard Way following several incidents of cars leaving the road/breaking through fencing surprisingly resulted in no surface faults found.

- **Road Markings** have been reinstated, including faded yellow lines adjacent to the Community Cntr. Hopefully the latter will discourage dangerous parking.

DCA - Fete & Quiz were supported. DPC will again have a fete stall on Sat 4 June.

- **Defibrillator**, purchased by DPC is to be installed outside the Community Centre;

- **Community Centre Energy Saving** – a joint project. DPC is assisting with funding, initially for change to LED lighting and insulation, the latter with Councillors' volunteer labour for installation.

Olympicnic, in conjunction with MPE's John Leaf & team; Richard Young and Charles Tanswell, was a great family fun day event. Saturday July 16 is the date set for 2016, 11am.

Garden Competition results: 1st -14 Mallard Way; 2nd - 36 Murraine Dr; 3rd - 32 Grampian Way. In addition to winners' prizes supplied by DPC, judges, Rumwood Nurseries kindly donated vouchers for 3 "Highly Commended" – 14 Monkdown, 20 Church Rd and 19 Reinden Grv. 2016 Judging is scheduled for July.

Remembrance Day services were attended and a wreath laid in St Nicholas Church & Otham Green.

Foxden Play area - it is embarrassing to report that despite tenacious 'badgering' by MBCllr Gordon Newton and DPC, the new equipment is not yet in situ. However we have been promised (yet again!) that installation is imminent - prior to summer holiday period....

Christmas Lights & Carols - St Nicholas Church Choir led the carol singing magnificently. Maidstone's Deputy Mayor was in attendance. The lights are for everyone's enjoyment. We are grateful to Richard Young who generously sponsored 2 new Christmas light motifs for Church Rd. Local resident, Deputy Lieutenant of Kent, Trevor Sturgess has kindly agreed to officiate at this year's event on Saturday 3 December, 4.30 pm.

DPC's Task Force - SSSI (Geological) – Huge improvements have been made for access to the site's face and footpath. Permission was gained via Natural England. Preservation instructions were strictly adhered to by volunteer DPCllrs and family members. Task Force for the initial 'attack' was supplemented by x2 funded by KCCllr Gary Cooke.

- **Spring Clean for the Queen:** as well as general litter picking, bat boxes have been installed and further have been ordered. The Jubilee triangle (Church Rd/Spot Ln) has been smartened and replacement plantings are planned.

- **David Nuttall:** we await checking results of survival of the memorial tree planted prior to any ceremony. A plaque is planned.

Len Valley Nature Reserve - application for such status has been made but is still pending. The request is for extension along R Len to at least where Otham/Bearsted/Downswood Parishes boundaries meet. It will not include Mallard Lake.

Mallard Way Park – various plans are in hand for the lake edge and islands.

Mallard Way/MPE Car Parking – the search is on for a solution to lack of parking space.

Spires Medical Centre Closure: much time and effort has been spent by DPC, upon discovering by chance that only very minimal service was available, patients seemingly automatically directed to either Grove Grn or Shepway surgeries. MBCllr

Gordon Newton & DPC met with Dr Singh. Due to extreme difficulties encountered, DPC, with assistance from KCCLlr Gary Cooke, requested assistance from Helen Whately MP. A Public meeting was held, which she chaired. In collaboration with MP and NHS England due to further difficulties, a DPC questionnaire was delivered to all Downswood residents. Results at the time of writing of the approximately 400 responses, is imminent and will be accepted by NHS England.

Currently the surgery is closed, this without public consultation.

When I called at the Spires Medical Centre on 08 April to request a morning appointment, I was told that the surgery was closed; that no doctors or nurses attend Spires Medical Cntr. This seems at odds with the contents of GP's retrospective consultation (questionnaire and accompanying letter) sent to patients (date as postmark – 07 April 2016). I urge all patients to respond to this consultation prior to 10 May.

Communication: is requested to be addressed via the Clerk please. Thanks to the efforts of Cllrs Butler, Greenhead and Weeks, information is available via DPC's Newsletter, Website and Facebook.

I thank everyone for their continued support.

6. Clerk/RFO's Report Year Ended 31 March 2016 – Teresa Irving

As parish matters have been fully detailed by Cllr Cheesman, my report focuses on finance.

The parish received a total income of £34,421.05 mainly comprising of;
Precept - £26,500/ LCTS - £1,324, Litter Picking Contributions - £734.00, Parish Services Scheme - £629.00 and VAT refund of £4,557.68.

Excluding £1,845.29 VAT as this will be reclaimed, the total expenditure for the year amounted to £28,439.69.

As of 31st March 2016 there was £7,252.24 in the current account and £10,259.54 in the National Savings Account. Allowing for unpresented cheques to the value of £1,661.81 and an outstanding VAT refund of £1,845.29, a total sum of £17,695.26 will be carried over to 2016/17.

The Annual Return is due to be signed off at the Parish Council that immediately follows this meeting. The internal audit is due to be carried out Auditing Solutions week commencing 16 May. The return will then be submitted to PKF Littlejohn for external auditing by no later than 13 June 2016

I would like to thank the Chairman and parish councillors – all unpaid volunteers - for giving their time so freely and for their continued commitment and support.

I would also like to thank Cllrs Newton and Cooke for all the assistance they provide throughout the year.

7. Questions from Members of the Public – There were no questions.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.10 p.m.