

**MINUTES OF DOWNSWOOD'S ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD IN
THE COMMUNITY CENTRE ON 4 APRIL 2017 AT 7.45 PM.**

Present: Cllrs Cheesman (Chairman); Greenhead; Weeks; Carmichael; Pearson; Mrs T. Irving (Clerk); Cllr Gary Cooke (KCC); Cllr Gordon Newton (MBC); Diane Thompson & John Everett (DCA); Atul Kantaria – Spires Pharmacist; 2 Downswood residents & 1 Otham resident.

1. Welcome by the Chairman of the Parish Council, Cllr. Roz Cheesman.
2. **Apologies:** Cllrs Butler (family commitment), Fincham (holiday), Brooks (conflicting appointment), David Bicker – Willington Players (written report submitted).
3. **Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting held on 3 May 2016** 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)

The Spires Pharmacy - Atul Kantaria spoke of his concerns with the cuts in NHS funding and the closure of the Spires Medical Centre. The pharmacy is trying to address this by diversifying with other services, including flu/travel vaccinations and expanding the range of goods for sale.

A recent survey found that customers are happy with the service provided and the satisfaction rate for the business was 95%.

It was suggested that a small working group of perhaps 3 or 4 councillors could work with Atul to prepare a questionnaire for circulation to residents. This would help to identify exactly what services are required in the parish. As more information will be required to move this forward, Atul was requested to forward a list of services that are currently being offered and a copy of the previous survey.

Cllr Cooke confirmed his support for the pharmacy

The Willington Players 2016-17

As I write this report, I am struck by the thought that there is little to say that is actually new. Our twice weekly programme of rehearsals throughout the year leads up to two major productions at the Hazlitt Theatre and an entry into the One Act Play Festival at Medway Little Theatre. In the last year, our Hazlitt productions were “Boeing Boeing” by Marc Camoletti and “Habeas Corpus” by Alan Bennett, both of which, judging from the audience reaction, were a success. Our entry to the One Act Festival was again well received and we garnered a few more awards so, all in all, it's been another good year for us.

Currently, we are the only amateur company in the area still presenting plays at the Hazlitt and so our membership is fairly strong, although we can always use a few more. Sadly, we have had to introduce a minimum age limit of 18 years for members so that we are not restricted by the legal requirements relating to young people under that age.

Our one major headache remains finance. The costs involved in staging plays, particularly at the Hazlitt, means that the group has to be run more and more like a business than a hobby and that, in turn, restricts our choice of plays since we must seek to make a “profit” merely to cover our overheads. Maidstone audiences are renowned for preferring comedy and farce and if we are to survive in the longer term we must give them what they seem to want.

David Bicker, President

Downswood Diggers/Open Spaces Committee - Cllr Greenhead

The group is responsible for looking around the parish and ensuring that open spaces are working correctly. Issues are flagged up with MBC, as necessary.

Recent activities include work at the SSSI and installing bat boxes. The group would like to put up more boxes in the future and have ambitions to clear the River Len in the next 5 years.

The group are very proud of what they have managed to achieve.

Mr Everett stated that the DCA may have some saplings available – oak, hazel, crab apple, etc – if they are of interest to the group?

5. Chairman’s Report – Cllr Roz Cheesman

Downswood’s residents are well served and represented by a small hardworking, dedicated team. The **Parish Councillors are Bill Greenhead; Anne-Marie Butler; Martin Weeks; Scott Carmichael; Sam Brooks; Kate Pearson; Pete Fincham and me, Roz Cheesman.** We have a vacancy due to Simon Roberts’ relocation from Downswood. The councillors are unpaid holders of public office in this the **apolitical** ground roots level of Local Government. **Teresa Irving**, Parish Council Clerk to Downswood (also to Otham), leads and advises extraordinarily well, and Litter Picker **Jim Noyce** ensures the centre of Downswood is clean and tidy. DPC has much support from and regularly liaises with **MBCllr Gordon Newton, KCCllr Gary Cook and MP Helen Whately.** The Church, KCC, MBC, CPRE, KAPC, JPG, Pharmacist, Schools, Police, DCA, Natural England, Environment Agency, NHS England are just a few of those with whom we liaise.

Important matters which have taken/are taking a great deal of time include **The Local Plan; Nearby developments** (adj M20/J8; Sutton Rd area, North of Bicknor Woods, field adj St Nicholas Church++), also **infrastructure** - especially **Water Supply and Quality, Sewerage and Roads; Closure of Downswood’s surgery and transport to other surgeries; Potential loss of Spire’s pharmacy, and Cessation of Arriva no 8 bus and unsatisfactory replacement.**

‘**Downswood Diggers**’ comprising Parish Councillors and volunteers have undertaken many tasks, ie clearing vegetation by SSI and pedestrianized Church Road.

DPC's two main annual community events have been successful, happy times for all ages:

Olympicnic - at Mallards (initiated by Simon Roberts) relies on Cllrs and much needed extra voluntary assistance including that of Richard Young, John Leafe & Charles Tanswell to achieve a fun time for all. Competition to win medals was sometimes fierce. It is hoped during **this year's Olympicnic Sat 15 July**, (weather permitting) to unveil a memorial stone to David Nuttall who set much of the landscape for Downswood.

Christmas Carols and Lights - singing led by St Nicholas' Church Choir and brass band of extremely young, competent musicians. **Christmas motifs** were switched on by Downswood resident Deputy Lieutenant Trevor Sturgess. Richard Young generously donated the two Church Road motifs.

Mallards & Foxden Play areas now have new equipment. Young resident, Sophie Lawrie's persistence paid off regarding provision of the latter. Work has commenced on coppicing the islands.

DPC continue assisting the **DCA**, including a stall at DCA's annual fete.

Remembrance Wreath from Downswood Residents was placed in St Nicholas Church and at Otham Green's War Memorial by Cllr Pearson.

Garden Competition, Judge Alex Rennie, former Hadlow College Head Gardener/Lecturer - Results: 1st 11 Grampian Way, 2nd 14 Mallard Way, 3rd 48 Reinden Grove; Highly Commended 19 Reinden Grove and 66 Longham Copse.

Website Upgrade – DPC is very grateful for work currently in progress where soon all relevant DPC information may viewed

I thank everyone, including the several voluntary litter pickers - who assist DPC and the community in any way. That's what makes Downswood so great!

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.

To date, the parish received a total income of £31,732.93 mainly comprising; Precept - £26,500/LCTS - £1,090, Litter Picking Contributions - £1,462.00, Parish Services Scheme - £629.00 and a VAT refund (for the 2015/16 accounting period) of £1,845.29.

As of today - and excluding £2,315.93 VAT as this will be reclaimed - the total expenditure for the year amounts to £31,742.43. An income/expenditure difference of £9.50!

Donations this year included £2,840 for the installation of LED lighting in the Community Centre. Grants to other charitable organisations amounted to £903.

As of 24 March 2017, cash at the bank amounted to 4,893.74 in the current account and £10,321.18 in the National Savings Account.

Auditing Solutions has advised they will be commencing the Internal Audit from 28 April.

This will be followed by the External Audit which will be carried out by PKF Littlejohn. They require the Annual Return & associated paperwork to be complete and submitted to them by 12 June 2017.

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 help and support 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 8.15 p.m.