

**MINUTES OF DOWNSWOOD'S ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD IN
THE COMMUNITY CENTRE ON 4 JUNE 2019 AT 8.00 PM.**

Present: Cllrs Weeks (Chairman); Cheesman; Greenhead; Butler; Alden-Morris; Rajalingam; Fincham; Mrs T. Irving (Clerk); PCSO Zoe Turner; Cllr Gary Cooke (KCC); Diane Thompson & John Everett (DCA); John Leaf (MPE Jnr FC); 1 Downswood resident.

1. Welcome by the Chairman of the Parish Council, Cllr. Martin Weeks.
2. **Apologies:** Cllrs Newton and Fairhurst; Atul Kantaria (Spires Pharmacy)
3. **Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting held on 3 April 2018** were agreed as a true & accurate record of proceedings and were signed by the Chairman.
4. **Reports from invited groups and associations.**

MPE Junior Football Club – John Leaf, Welfare Officer.

We have just come to the end of another exiting and successful season for our club.

In the new FA format of a separate Autumn and Winter Leagues plus three cup competitions most MPE sides have won at least one. We had some 200 boys and girls enjoying their football in the local leagues in a secure and safe environment.

The club faced two big challenges in the season just gone, firstly improving our facilities. Spring 2018 was very wet and we had too many teams playing at Mallards and Madginford School. We noticed a trend of a small trickle of boys moving to clubs with better facilities. Firstly we worked with Madginford School to turn the pitch across the field to avoid the bits that get waterlogged and then diverted our U10s to a great pitch at Boughton Monchelsea. The result that instead four teams having games at the school every Saturday and Sunday this was reduced to just one game a weekend. We then diverted one of our U11 sides to Sutton Valence so after games at Mallards on Saturdays there was only one U11 side playing at Mallards on a Sunday. Helped with the car parking too.

But these changes came at a cost. The club had to buy new metal goals and a white line marker for Boughton Monchelsea. As we plan for next season with extra teams we need to purchase another set of quality goals at a cost of £660. We are fund raising for this and are more than half way there. The second challenge was managing the club's cash flow. Winter training at the Y Centre, Loose and Swadelands, Lenham costs £44 per hour and has to be paid in advance. Maidstone Borough Council introduced a new system where you had to pay in advance when booking a council pitch. Also Boughton Monchelsea and Sutton Valence required a season long payment in

advance. As a result we have had to move away from our homely cash on the day method to introduce a monthly Standing order system for parents to pay directly to the club. We have had to increase the monthly contributions but continue to be 50% cheaper for parents than other local clubs.

The future looks good but challenging. We have some 30 local 4/5 year olds getting ready every Saturday morning with a view to joining the league as U7s when the time comes.

Downswood Under 5's – Diane Thompson

I have been running the Downswood under 5s for just over a year and a half now and we always have a steady stream of regulars and newcomers attend every Thursday with everybody enjoying their time, mainly because of all the equipment & activities we have for the children.

So we are in a good position at the present time, always taking enough entrance money to pay the rent on the hall and to replace any toys if necessary.

However, whilst we do enjoy interacting with the children, the equipment set up & clearing away really does take it out of the three regulars who run the group - Vanessa, John & myself and as none of us are getting any younger, ideally we are looking for someone younger to take over the group. (It was agreed to advertise for volunteers in DPC's newsletter).

Thank you for your support.

Spires Pharmacy – Atul Kantaria

We have had two break ins and one attempted in a six week period. The convenience store had one break in and the take away (Unit 3) had one attempted. All these occurred on a Tuesday early morning. I wanted to notify you of this so that the local community is vigilant and report any suspicious behaviour.

They cover their faces so cannot be picked up on CCTV.

Downswood Community Centre – John Everett

As many of you know, we have the . . . I can't say regular, more like irregular income of hiring fees for the centre & although the loss of the After School Club last year has made quite a difference to our income, the centre management have since been cautious on spending for the centre and it has eased a little with five new smaller hirers in the lounge. These include Yoga, Musical bugs, Musical bumps, Mother & toddler keep fit & a Burlesque dance group.

Over the past year we have received a lot of support from residents for our fundraising events, including the two quiz nights in September 2018 & March 2019, the Children's Halloween party in October 2018, the Children's Egg Hunt on Easter Sunday 2019 & £2109.58 from the annual Summer Fete

which was held last week which made us a total of almost £3500 from fundraising in the last year.

We have also received support in the way of grants for our loft storage project which although finished we are waiting for the final inspection from MBC. The overall cost of the loft project including the plans came to £18480.66 & the grants for this which added up to £16800.00 came from the National lottery, Tesco bags of help, Monkton Whitehead Charitable Trust & Downswood Parish Council of which we send our thanks. Another grant received was from the KCC You Decide scheme in the way of £1500.00 towards new chairs for the centre and again we send our thanks to Gary Cooke for this.

The centre management are always looking to make improvements to the centre and we now have CCTV, Wi-Fi access for our guests & a new intruder alarm, along with some ongoing redecorations.

Our next major projects may include the suggestions of replacing the windows to more efficient ones, or a complete replacement kitchen. This will be discussed at our next meeting in July.

On a personal note Di. & I would like to thank everyone here for their nomination for the KALC award for all the work we do at the centre. It was very unexpected but very much appreciated, thank you.

Kent Police – PCSO Zoe Turner, Maidstone Neighbourhood Team

Downswood has maintained a fairly low level of crime during the past year. Crime levels throughout the year have their peaks but I am pleased to say that we are sustaining the reduced level of crime overall that we have benefited from over the past few years. This thankfully has been possible through the support of the community and the Parish Council.

I have dealt with a number of issues throughout the year, which have included the following:

- Provide a visible presence in my wards and surrounding areas.
- Follow ups on the victims of burglaries to give crime prevention advice and information booklets.
- Helping neighbours to try to sort out their disputes, this on most occasions means linking in with the housing associations where applicable.
- Linking in with the Kent County Council Wardens and other agencies to help out with many problems that arise.
- Speed enforcement checks and speed monitoring checks throughout the area.
- Patrols of outlying areas to deter and stop vehicles known for scrap metal thefts. This has been backed up with pre-arranged Policing Operations County wide involving numerous authorities and scrap yard inspections.

We are always trying to keep on top of any nuisance youth issues in the village. As with the previous years this has not been a major issue, any incidents of this type of behaviour have been swiftly dealt with to good effect. We encourage residents to call in any incidents of this type of nuisance behaviour.

Theft of tools, petrol mowers/strimmers are reported on a non-regular basis. Typically sheds are broken into and the goods removed. I would ask all residence to report any suspicious activity, vehicles driving past slowly or any occupants paying more than the usual amount of attention to the surrounding area.

I have and will continue to provide the visible presence and first class service that the Kent Police is renowned for. As well as Downswood I do cover Bearsted and Otham.

Anyone wishing to contact me about any issues or crime prevention advice can call the non-emergency Police number 101.

Thank you for your continued support in making Downswood safe.

5. Chairman's Report – Cllr Martin Weeks.

My first year as Chairman of Downswood has certainly been an interesting one, and has proven to be a fairly steep learning curve.

Shortly after taking over my Mother became seriously ill and I am grateful for the support shown by the Clerk and my fellow councillors during that difficult time, on many occasions it has been great to see the majority of the councillors pulling together on different projects and supporting both each other and the community in which we all live.

Downswood is not geographically a large parish, nor in comparison with some large in populous, but the Parish Council maintains a central and pivotal role in the community and is generally well respected by parishioners.

During the year I am pleased to see a continued growth in community engagement, our social media output continues to increase in following and although it should not be the only means of communication it continues to grow in its importance of keeping our community aware of all kinds of different incidents, events and activities within Downswood.

Our Olympic picnic last year was very well attended and it's a testament to its success that we are now receiving enquiries from members of the public as to when this year's event will take place. We were blessed with good weather last year so without tempting fate let's cross our fingers and hope for the same again this year.

The Christmas lights that adorn Downswood shone again, not without issues in getting them up and ready in time and it is thanks to the diligence of our clerk Teresa that they were turned on at the annual switching on ceremony, again a well-attended local event.

We have held several public meetings during the year, all of which have been well attended – our first was a speed watch meeting, called after we had listened to residents' concerns regards to the speed at which vehicles travel through Downswood and the obvious increase in traffic numbers. As a result of this a traffic survey has recently been completed and we will shortly be in a position to discuss the possibility of introducing a blanket 20 mph limit across the estate with Kent County Council Highways.

Many of the events that run in Downswood centre around the Community Centre, which is independently managed by the Downswood Community Association. It is pleasing that more so than before the DCA and DPC are able to work closely together on events and meetings. One very successful event was a clearance day in the River Len, and I could not report on the year's events without mention of the DCA Chairman's tumble into the river during this – a great day for many people and pleasing to see several new residents joining us for the day with promises to return on future conservation events. We have increased the number of Bat Boxes in the area and during this year also installed Hedgehog houses around the wilder areas of the estate and have Owl Boxes ready to put up later in the year. All of these activities and ongoing management of areas such as Mallards Way and the Spot Lane/River Len corridor contribute greatly in making Downswood the pleasant place it is to live today.

As a very small and self-contained Parish we do not often face major issues of planning, however the proposal by Bellway Homes for over 400 houses to be built in Church Road has certainly brought the community even closer together. Members of the Parish Council, assisted by a member of the public and our County and Borough Councillors worked very hard to prepare an objection to Maidstone Borough Council – all giving freely a lot of time both attending meetings and on individual research. An initial evening meeting was organised and the feelings of residents was clearing very strong – subsequently a drop in morning was arranged which was attended by in excess of 300 residents and members of the PC planning sub-committee were able to give advice on appropriate objection and reassure residents that the Parish Council would do everything possible to top this development.

The outcome of our objection, both to MBC at planning level and the Secretary of State calling for an Environmental Impact Assessment to be completed are as yet unknown and the team will have much more work to do before the outcome is known, but with such a strong group residents can rest assured that Downswood Parish Council will do all in our power to stop this development.

6. CLERK/RFO'S REPORT 2018/19 – Teresa Irving

As in previous years, my report focuses on financial matters as parish matters have already been fully detailed by Cllr Weeks.

To date, the parish received a total income of £35,839.30 mainly comprising of: Precept - £30,000/Litter Picking Contributions - £1,395.00, Parish Services Scheme - £464.00, £2,500 KCC Traffic Calming Grant and a VAT refund (for the 2017/18 accounting period) of £1,405.10.

The total expenditure for the year amounts to £33,978.25. This excludes VAT of £2,221.32 as this will be reclaimed. (A difference of £1,861.05 in the black).

Donations this year totalled £800 and comprise of: £250 to Miss L Eady towards her World Challenge trip, £50 Royal British Legion wreath, £100 to St Nicholas (choir donation), £200 St Nicholas Churchyard and £200 to Maidstone Citizen Advice.

As of 23 March 2019, cash at the bank amounted to £7,890.87 in the current account and £10,445.02 in the National Savings Account, amounting to a grant total of £18,335.89.

An Internal Audit was carried out by Auditing Solutions during May 2019. The report is very positive with no issues arising throughout and it specifically mentions '....the quality of records maintained.....'

The Annual Return is now complete and is available to be signed off at the DPC meeting which follows.

I would like to thank the Chairman and all parish councillors for their continued commitment and support.

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

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.30 p.m.