

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of East Peckham, held on Thursday 22nd May 2025 at 7pm in the Jubilee Hall, Pippin Road, East Peckham

1) Welcome and Introductions by Chairman of EPPC

Chairman Mark Williams opened the meeting and welcomed everyone in attendance

2) Approval of the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd May 2024

The minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record of the 2024 Annual Parish Meeting.

Proposed: D. Fairless, seconded: M. Joannes, All in favour

3) Reports on the Parish Council activities, events and financial performance from the past year

Assets: Councillor T. Eastwood reported back on several of the works that have been completed over the past 12 months, including conversion of the old referee's changing room into a new public toilet for those using the playing fields, installation of a new fence around the adult exercise area to protect it from dogs and incorrect use by children. The purchase of the old allotment land which is now being turned into the Community Garden, which will be a long-term project. Resident input is welcome as the final plan will continue to evolve over time.

Events: VE Day Celebration was a great success. M. Joannes requested volunteers to help with the upcoming events running later this year, including the Halloween event and The Christmas Lights Switch On.

Finance: M. Williams offered up a copy of the expenditure report for the 2024/25 financial year; should anyone have any questions or wish to have a personal copy to review. Current bank balance is currently c£350,000.

Resident asked a question regarding S106 monies and what the council anticipated being able to access in the coming year. M. Williams responded that there are potential funds from the Brunswick Yard and Coult's Close developments in the centre of the village and Little Rhoden Farm development if that goes ahead. One other prospect may be from Grove Farm in Goose Green, but due to its proximity to Hadlow, it may be allocated to there instead.

4) Reports from Borough and County Councillors

A full report from TMBC Councillor Mat Boughton was read out, a copy of which is included in the appendix at the end of the minutes.

5) Mark Gurnett: The development of the Community Garden so far and the processes involved

Mark explained the process behind permeaculture and his vision for the garden. His focus is on the 'wild area' of the garden. The council will manage the more formal side, to include a seating area, water feature, orchard of fruit trees etc.

Resident questioned how the garden will be managed long-term. A Community Garden Volunteers' WhatsApp group has been set up to help disseminate information to volunteers, which the Assistant Clerk will continue to monitor and manage volunteers.

6) Matt Joannes: Potential plans for the upgrading of the playground

M. Joannes gave a report on the need for upgrading some of the pieces of equipment long term and looking at potential designs and options for the development of both areas.

7) Police - advice on current scams in operation and how to avoid them

Emily, Local Fraud Prevention Officer from Kent Police gave an overview of fraud – 42% of crime in the UK was an incident of fraud, but believes it is often under-reported. 54 different types of fraud, main 3 types: **Smishing** – messages on your phone from well-known retailers and companies – Amazon, Apple, HMRC etc. **Phishing** – scam emails on personal and business emails – 3.4billion emails sent every day. **Vishing** – scam fraud via telephone calls – phone, broadband providers etc. Highlighted that all contain a request for you to click on a link and not to click on the link unless absolutely sure it is safe to do so. Introduced a new number – 159 - a new emergency hotline number to ring if someone suspects they are being a victim of fraud. Will immediately connect you to your bank fraud team who can confirm if the call was genuine. All reports of fraud need to go to Action Fraud, can be done online or over the phone. Or can be done via 101 if needed. Age UK, Victim support and CAB can offer advice if suspect have been a victim of fraud.

8) Open Forum – an opportunity for residents to ask questions or raise concerns or suggestions related to the parish.

Resident asked if it is likely that houses will be built on the small green spots around the village. M. Williams replied that a Call for Sites by TMBC has gone out and report is due in August. Resident raised concern over traffic volumes in the village, number of HGV's on the roads through the village, number of pets being hit by cars – What can we do going forward to help reduce this and protect them? Chair responded that the Parish Council does not have the power to resolve it itself, that it has to work with Kent Highways. Also raised concern over the large vehicles coming along the roads that are causing issues, especially along Snoll Hatch, Addlestead Road, Little Mill. Suggested the council needs to be more proactive in highlighting the issues, need to request more current surveys / investigations. Gave examples of proactive community involvement to help precipitate change.

Resident raised the issue that the grass at the churchyard is still being strimmed and not mowed, despite the rules stating they must be mowed. They reported the issue to the council last year, which was dealt with, but it has reared again. Council will follow up with the contractor and Holy Trinity again.

9) Wrap up and next steps

Mark thanked all for attending this evening, assured residents that the Parish Council will take their comments and issues into consideration, and to please continue to contact the council with any future queries or suggestions.

Meeting closed at 20.25

Appendix: Report from Matt Boughton, TMBC Councillor

I am sorry not to be at the Annual Meeting in person this year, unfortunately a clash with a pre-existing diary commitment means I am sadly unable to join.

The past 12 months have been another busy one as Borough Councillors. Whilst we have seen a General Election happen and Labour form a Government 10 months ago, earlier this month at the Kent County Council elections Reform won and will form an administration at the County Council.

Fortunately things are more stable at Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and both Sarah and I continue to work very hard on your behalf, and indeed for the 3 other villages (Wateringbury, Mereworth and West Peckham) that we represent. In addition I remain as Leader of the Council which allows me strategic influence and the opportunity to have our village views represented at the highest level.

Despite the uncertainty elsewhere I am pleased that the Borough Council has achieved a lot over the past 12 months. Our Key Performance Indicators shows success in many key areas from waste collection to maintenance of public open spaces, and engagement with the community – our last community grants scheme was over 3 times oversubscribed, such is its popularity and the Councils reach.

However the big bombshell came in December when the Government announced its intention to proceed with two linked but separate issues – ‘Devolution’ and ‘Local Government Re-organisation’.

Devolution essentially means passing power from the centre down to local authorities, something I very much welcome. Unfortunately Kent was not included on the first tranche which means we have to proceed on ‘Local Government Re-organisation’ first.

Local Government Re-organisation would see existing County Councils (including Kent County Council) and Borough Councils (including Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council) abolished and replaced by one Council covering a wider area, but taking both Councils existing functions. The new Councils need to cover a population of 500,000 or more. By way of comparison the population of the whole of Tonbridge and Malling is 135,000. Parish Councils are unaffected by this change.

Our likely geography to meet this threshold would be for the existing Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council area to join with the area served by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Maidstone Borough Council and Sevenoaks District Council to form a new ‘West Kent Council’. There is broad cross-party consensus that this is the best outcome for our area across each of the 4 Councils, though the outcome is less certain elsewhere in Kent.

The Government have said that they wish for this process to be conducted by the end of the Parliament, which we expect to be in 2029. They have also said that local areas need to work together to develop proposals, with ours expected to be submitted in November. So while we have broad agreement in our area, we need to bring the rest of the county with us.

Asking 14 Councils to work together to abolish themselves is not easy. Much of the work is done through Kent Council Leaders, where I am the representative for Tonbridge and Malling. We have had lots of difficult discussions and long meetings. It is extremely time consuming but I know I need to devote the time to this so we get the best outcome for our village from the new structure.

While we are engaged in all these discussions, work carries on as normal at Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council. One of those particularly important pieces of work is the forthcoming Local Plan.

This is the document which acts as the guide for future housing and employment development over the next 20 years.

Many of us will have heard Angela Rayner and the new Government say, many times, they would like to 'build, build, build'. We are very much in their firing line. The Government have mandated Tonbridge and Malling to deliver a Local Plan which delivers nearly 1,100 homes per year over the next 20 years. In total this would mean we have to include sites for nearly 23,000 new homes in the Local Plan. At the moment we are currently building around 400 homes a year in Tonbridge and Malling.

To add to our woes, the new Government have also introduced the concept of 'grey-belt' which would make it easier to develop on greenbelt land. Though this is a new concept it essentially will make it easier to secure planning permission on sites which are currently greenbelt and are close to, or adjacent, to existing village settlements. This is particularly relevant to us with Hale Street and Snoll Hatch considered different settlements to the most densely populated part of the village, being Old Road, Pound Road and those roads leading off it.

We need a Local Plan to best defend against inappropriate, speculative planning applications. However it will be extremely difficult to deliver with such a large housing target, way in excess of what I believe the infrastructure can take across the borough, including here in East Peckham.

The current timetable has a consultation on the Local Plan in the Autumn. At the moment the Council is having to update all of its evidence in a large suite of planning documents to see whether we can really deliver this target. No doubt this will form a significant part of future reports I give to the Parish Council.

The final critical issue that Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council will have to determine very soon is the future of our waste collection service. The current contract is with FCC (previously Urbaser) and expires in 2027. We have gone out to tender in the past few days to invite potential bidders and look forward to their responses. Once we have selected a preferred bidder discussions will then start on how the contract will run, and whether there are opportunities for changes in the number of wheeled bins, collection method, and what and how we recycle.

Moving on to matters specific to the village, waste is something we have spent some considerable time on. Our Litter Warden Michael and all the volunteer litter pickers do a tremendous job in keeping the village clean and tidy. However in the lead up to Christmas many litter bins were staying full for too long.

Working with TMBC Waste Services and having had valuable input from the Parish Council, Sarah Hudson and I successfully got some changes made to the frequency of collections. This has made a difference with a drop in the number of bins which have not been emptied on time being reported. Please do let us know using the contact details below of any overflowing bins you see.

We also secured the annual clearance of litter on Seven Mile Lane again this year. Unlike most other roads, Seven Mile Lane is not on a regular cleaning schedule by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council (TMBC). This is because the heavy use of the road, speed vehicles are travelling, and undulating nature means it isn't safe to have crews litter picking while cars are travelling down both sides of the road.

Consequently every year TMBC has to organise a specialist contractor to come in and do a deep clean of the litter along Seven Mile Lane. This year it took place towards the end of March. It is a big job – it takes a team of people four days to do the whole section of Seven Mile Lane between the village and

Mereworth, on both sides. You may have noticed the rolling road closures in place to allow them to do this safely.

This year the crews also used the road closure to dig out the traffic islands and make each of them a little nicer. Unfortunately though there was an area they couldn't litter pick, close to the junction with Old Church Lane. Where two lanes merged into one at the bottom of the hill (as you drive towards Mereworth) they couldn't safely close the road given the speed of traffic as cars look to gain speed before the hill. We are trying to find whether there is a safer way to do this, as it was noticeable when driving up the hill.

If Seven Mile Lane acts as the entrance to the village then A228 Boyle Way lives up to its name as the bypass, keeping through traffic away from the majority of residents in the parish. Unfortunately the issues with nuisance drivers, or 'boy racers' as they are sometimes referred to, continues.

A couple of years ago we successfully put in place a 'Public Spaces Protection Order' which prevents nuisance vehicles gathering and making loud and antisocial noises. This covers the A228, along with a number of other roads in the borough.

However Kent Police also have enforcement powers and we have worked with them to do a number of operations across certain days where those causing the nuisance have gathered, especially late at night on a weekend. These action days have been a success and, by way of example, the latest action on Saturday 10 May resulted in 77 fixed penalty notices being issued, drugs found and confiscated, and a vehicle seized by Kent Police.

Finally, I thought it best to reference a number of individual planning proposals that we are currently working on. Starting in the far north of the parish, we have worked with the developer at Grove Farm to ensure they could resubmit their proposals for this brownfield site, and this is currently under consideration. Likewise we have advised neighbours on the barn conversion at the rear of properties in Snoll Hatch and a decision on the development behind properties on Westwood Road and Drage Road is due imminently. We are also following up closely on planning enforcement concerns, with the major ones currently being the unauthorised fence near the traffic calming on Hale Street, and issues related to the construction of and access to Coult's Close. This is by no means an exhaustive list and there are scores of other planning issues we have dealt with over the past year, and remain happy to help going forward.

It remains a pleasure to represent the village and I hope you find this Borough Council report helpful. I am lucky to work alongside Sarah Hudson as both our other Borough Councillor and our newly re-elected County Councillor and together we always do our very best for the whole village. Sarah is one of the best Councillors I have ever met and her can do attitude helps us all.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions if you would like any help. The best way is by e-mail to matt.boughton@tmhc.gov.uk and I am always happy to come around and meet anyone who needs help. Unfortunately I remain banned from the Village Facebook Group so please don't tag me in anything there, as I won't see it!

Best wishes

Matt Boughton

Leader, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council

Councillor for East Peckham, West Peckham, Mereworth and Watlingtonbury