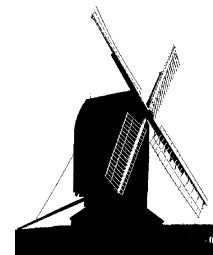


Rolvenden Parish Council



Louise Goldsmith Parish Clerk
5 Artisan Road
Headcorn
Kent
TN27 9AZ

rolvendenclerk@gmail.com

Minutes of a meeting of Rolvenden Parish Council held in Rolvenden Village Hall on Thursday 17 October 2024 at 7.30pm.

Present: Cllr A Hinge (Chairman), Cllr H. Back, Cllr. S. Bryant, Cllr. M. Geerts, Cllr M Gilchrist, and Cllr L Walker.

In attendance: Louise Goldsmith, Parish Clerk

PC Darren Laker, Richard Batten (Acting Inspector CSU)

13 Members of the public were also in attendance

Administration:

Fire Exits, Fire Meeting Point, Mobile Phones.

1121. Intention to record the meeting

There were no intentions to record the meeting.

1122. Apologies for Absence:

An apology for absence was received from Borough Councillor Kate Walder and Cllrs. Balch, Barham and Green and the reasons for absence were accepted

1123. Declarations of interest:

Cllr Bryant noted an interest in the War Memorial Trust.

Cllr. Hinge noted an interest in the War Memorial Trust.

Cllr. Walker declared an interest in the Rolvenden Village Fete Committee

1124. Minutes of the meeting of the 19 September 2024

Resolved: That the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on the 19 September 2024 be approved and confirmed as a true record.

It was agreed to take agenda item 12d next.

Neighbourhood Watch/Kent Police

Standing Orders were lowered to allow Sian Reeves, Rolvenden Neighbourhood Watch, to speak.

Sian Reeve reported that parishioners remain concerned about the recent incidents of criminal damage, arson and anti-social behaviour in the parish. Some residents remain concerned about reporting ASB incidents. Sian Reeves referred to a recent incident at the former Cornex Garage in the High Street and suggested that everyone needs to remain vigilant. Sian Reeves advised that anyone previously receiving Rolvenden Neighbourhood Watch messages via the Rolvenden Update to now register on <https://www.ourwatch.org.uk/> to become a member and to receive important crime prevention information and alerts.

Standing Orders remained lowered to allow Peter New, Police Volunteer with Kent Police to speak

Peter New reported that there has been a nationwide increase in internet shopping parcels being stolen from doorsteps and courier fraud. Peter New discussed his concerns about the number of reports involving e-scooter/electric bike fires. Peter New explained that an essential part of an intelligence lead police model is that every single incident is reported by residents and crime numbers obtained. Do not hesitate to use 999 if there are crimes in progress or about to happen. Peter New urged everyone present to complete the online Police and Crime Commissioner Consultation on the New Priorities for Kent.

Standing Orders remained lowered to allow Richard Batten, Acting Inspector CSU, to speak

Richard Batten thanked the Parish Council for inviting him to the meeting and thanked both Sian Reeves and Peter New for all their work with Neighbourhood Watch. Richard Batten reiterated the importance of reporting all crime explaining that this gives important statistical information on what crimes are happening and where and helps the Police to direct resources. Richard Batten advised that his team understand that some residents are reluctant to report crime but reassured those present that there are number of methods of reporting intelligence anonymously. Richard Batten suggested that residents witnessing ASB complete a survey form which can be obtained from PC Darren Laker or online through the Community Voice App. Richard Batten gave a brief update on the new Kent Police Model which was introduced in December 2023. Beat Officers are now designated to each area, a Neighbourhood Task Force (NTF) are on hand to flood an area if needed and the Child Centred Policing Team, (CCPT) work with vulnerable children that need assistance or are perhaps the cause of ASB. Richard Batten was keen to stress that the overall crime statistics in Rolvenden are low. In response to the number of recent incidents Richard Batten has increased the number of patrols in the village and has allocated two Beat Officers to the parish. Richard Batten encouraged residents

to sign up to Community Voice. Richard Batten was surprised to learn that a recent incident of arson which was reported to the Fire Brigade did not seem to be relayed to Kent Police. Richard Batten advised that this intelligence would normally be shared. Richard Batten offered to provide an update directly to the people concerned on a recent incident of arson at the football club. Sian Reeves asked if residents are able to photograph children who are committing ASB. Richard Batten suggested that they seek advice on this from the Information Commissioner Office. The Chairman thanked both PC Darren Laker and Inspector Richard Batten for attending the meeting.
8.17pm PC Darren Laker and Richard Batten left the meeting

1125. Borough Councillor's Report:

As you are aware, I have been immobile due to a slipped disc and despite an hospital admission, the situation has not radically improved. Despite this, I have continued with my Parish Council and Borough Councillor duties albeit relying heavily on online/telephone methods of communication.

My absence from recent Parish Council meetings stems however from the decision of the Parish Council to hold meetings on the third Thursday of the month. This clashes with Cabinet and Full Council meetings at Ashford. If I do not attend these decision-making meetings, the entire Ward will go unrepresented when decisions are made on a wide range of critical issues and allocation of resources. I am also acutely aware that I am now the only farmer to sit on ABC and believe it is vital that this essential industry has a representative – an awareness that is heightened whenever farming and agricultural issues are raised at ABC. To resolve this state of affairs, I will be scheduling a series of meetings in the village on key themes and give updates directly to residents in person. I will send details to the Rolvenden Community site and Parish magazine. And residents are encouraged to send me details of any issues that they would like to put forward and examine in greater detail. I remain available at all times on my mobile (07389110611) or on kate.walder@ashford.gov.uk.

Turning to matters that have arisen or become highlighted in the recent months and I have been working on, I set out a summary below:-

Mildred Trust

I have been involved in a trial project – the Social Supermarket – launched in Tenterden with the Mildred Trust and Repton Community Centre. A wide range of household goods are available at heavily discounted prices and the Social Supermarket has a refrigerated van that means it can access the villages. The new CEO of the Mildred Trust, Beth Wright, brings her extensive experience of fund-raising, community support and engagement to the Trust and we are currently examining the problems suffered by too many of our residents so we can use funds most effectively. I wish I could report that demand is falling – it is not and we need to proactively prepare for the winter months when our elderly residents will feel the full impact of 10 % increases in electricity and fuel prices coinciding with the removal of the Winter Fuel Allowance. I would like to thank Councillor Walker for all the work she and the Star have done to support our most vulnerable residents.

Disrepair Claims – Social Housing Tenants

The Borough has been aggressively targeted in recent months by 'No Win No Fee' firms of solicitors, largely advertising on social media and I believe, door to door, in Ashford itself. Tenants end up with very little as the firms can be motivated at times only on their own costs which means they are undertaking litigation without the tenants' best interests as their objective. If anyone is considering going down this route, please contact me first so we can accelerate repairs and improve tenants' living conditions. Housing Association tenants are so badly served in this area but I will advocate on their behalf and I can engage directly with the Repairs' Team at ABC.

Biodiversity Net Gain and Risks to Developers

One of the biggest flaws in this new field of potential payments to land owners and developers is the very real risk that trees/hedgerows and other natural/wildlife assets will be razed prior to a Planning Application being put in. A very recent case which I am involved in shows that anyone tempted to take this route will be heavily penalised at the planning stage. Please call me if you see any concerning tree felling/hedgerow removal etc and tell those involved to cease pending my arrival. Emergency enforcement powers can be put in place extremely rapidly.

Anti-social Behaviour

Currently involved in discussions with the Community Safety Unit and police which for obvious reasons remain confidential.

Mayoral Community Champion Awards

I am delighted to be attending the Star tomorrow night for the presentation of two Community Champion Awards by the Mayor of Ashford, Councillor Lyn Suddards to the Star itself and to the Rolvenden Tigers. Two real beacons of hope and achievement in the village and such worthy recipients.

Obviously, the vast majority of my work is individual casework so confidential. Patience is not one of my virtues and at my most recent spine specialist meeting, the doctor said I have to cut my workload by at least 50% until there are real concrete signs of healing. I have had to change the way I work temporarily but my workload remains unchanged and I can be contacted at any time,

1126. Chairman's report:

The Parish council has continued with its program to fulfil its statutory requirements, bringing its financial and procedural processes in line with national guidance. The banking processes are almost complete, and with the correct processes now in place we have been able to ensure all outstanding creditors have been paid. This has also allowed for the purchasing and installation of necessary repairs and maintenance. The swing at Rolvenden Layne playground

has now been replaced, and the chip bark and weed management of the ground surfaces brought up to standard. The ROSPA inspections have been carried out and this will allow a maintenance program to be arranged for any further issues to be corrected. Planning issues have been limited to minor matters particularly with regard to necessary tree work. Rolvenden Club has been granted permission for change of use, unfortunately we were unable to have conditions imposed to improve the appearance and landscaping, though this is awaiting a definitive decision. We have continued to engage with police via the neighbourhood watch.

1127. Clerk's report:

The Clerk reported that the repairs to the gateway on Tenterden Road and to the bench on the Layne Field will be carried out next week.

The Clerk urged residents to complete an ASB survey if they are witnessing or experiencing issues.

Community Orchard: The Clerk is attended Keepers Nursery this week for a guided tour of the fruit trees that ABC has requested and for advice on how to plant and maintain the orchard.

1128. Open Session:

Agenda items other than planning applications:

A member of the public asked if the footpath from the High Street to Sparkeswood could be cleared. The Clerk to report.

The Clerk has been contacted by a member of the public who is concerned about the bin on the Layne Field which was recently installed by ABC but is leaning to one side. The Clerk to follow up on.

A member of the public expressed their concern about the increasing volume of traffic on the A28 and asked whether any pollution studies are carried out. The Clerk to check with KCC.

A member of the public expressed their concern about the sale of vapes in the shop. There appears to be a much bigger range which is now displayed in such a way that they are easily accessible. The Clerk to investigate.

A member of the public gave some background information on proposal PA/2024/1756.

1129. Planning:

a) To consider any planning applications received prior to the meeting.

PA/2024/1756: Lambsland Cottages, Maytham Road, Rolvenden

Erection of dwelling and car parking with associated amenity space, landscaping and access following the demolition of existing 2no. dwellings and ancillary buildings.

Resolved: Support.

OTH/2024/1700: The Water Tower, Hastings Road, Rolvenden

Beech – fell tree close to the ground level, remove and treat stump with Eco plugs to prevent regrowth.

Causing displacement damage to steel work of decking. T2 – Oak - Tidy recent tear-out wound on the Southwestern side at 6 meters and reduce back limb by approximately 2 meters to appropriate branch axil, reducing weight on potential now weaker union. Large limb at approximately 6 meters on Eastern side, with potential weak fork union on overextended limb. Reduce back to appropriate branch axil removing 3-4 meters of growth. T3 – Birch - Dismantle fell, flushing stump close to ground level. Causing damage to the building due to location.

Resolved: Support.

NOT/2024/1672: The Well House, Frensham Road, Rolvenden

T1 Leylandii - To reduce conifer down to previous pruning points and thin the sides

T2 Pyracantha - To fell to ground level and poison (EXEMPT as shrub)

T3 Bay and Beech - To fell to ground level and poison

T4 Poplar - To fell to ground level as it is quite large for its location and it is blocking light.

Resolved: Support.

b) To consider any approvals:

None to consider.

c) To consider any refusals:

None to consider.

d) Neighbourhood Plan:

The Chair advised Members that a resident with a background in this area has tentatively offered their services but that the Parish Council will still need to engage a planning consultant to help with the process. The Clerk is in the process of setting up a virtual meeting with a KALC recommended planning consultant.

1130. Website Domain and Email addresses

The Clerk was pleased to report that HugoFox, the current website provider, is now Nominet .gov.uk certified which allows them to provide .gov.uk domains and emails. The Cabinet Office has secured funding to help Parish Councils set up a .gov.uk domain. This discount of £100.00 is applied at the point of purchase by those Approved Registrars participating in the Parish Council Domains Helper Service. It was noted that the Clerk

applied for the grant in between meetings which has since been granted. The Clerk advised that HugoFox is now in the process of setting up a .gov.uk domain and email addresses for the Parish Council.

1131. Parish Matters

a) **RoSPA Annual Inspection of Playgrounds**

The Clerk reported that the RoSPA inspection of both the playground in Maytham Road and Rolvenden Layne took place on the 28 September 2024. The Clerk has circulated a copy of the reports. It is apparent that no works have taken place since the last inspection in 2023. It was agreed that the Clerk should seek some quotes for the remedial works.

b) **Rolvenden Working Mens Club Localism Act 2011**

The Clerk reported that the Protected Period ended on 24 September 2024 but the Asset of Community Value listing lasts five years which means that unless the premises are disposed of before the end of the Protected Period then the listing will not expire until 26 July 2027. ABC has advised that they have not heard from the owner of the premises. The Clerk reported that ABC has now been advised that the property is under offer. ABC has stated that there are a number of categories of relevant disposal which are classed as exempt which may take place outside of the protected period and without the need to provide notice to them.

Standing Orders were lowered to allow a member of the public speak.

At the suggestion of Cllr. Walker it was agreed to not take this matter any further.

c) **Historic Records:**

Cllr. Back is kindly assisting the Clerk in contacting local residents to try and collate copies of the missing minutes.

Cllr. Hinge explained that there are considerable gaps in the documentation and that the Parish Council would be very grateful if anyone could assist.

1132. HIGHWAYS/PROW

a) **Highways Improvement Plan**

The Clerk has submitted an updated Highways Improvement Plan and has arranged a virtual meeting with the Community Engagement Officer to take place on the 12 November 2024.

b) **Reported Faults**

The Clerk has reported a number of potholes.

c) **New Faults**

Benenden Road the side of the road is breaking away.

1133. Policies

a) To approve a revised Publication Scheme.

Resolved: To adopt the revised Publication Scheme.

b) To approve a revised Complaints Policy

Resolved: To adopt the revised Complaints Policy.

c) To consider the appointment of a Data Processing Officer.

Deferred to the next meeting for the Clerk to find alternative quotes.

1134. Finances

a) **To note the completion of the limited assurance review year ending 31 March 2024**

Members were pleased to note that the External Auditor has completed the review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR) and have concluded that the information is in accordance with Proper Practices and that no other matters have come to their attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met.

b) **Notice of Conclusion of Audit**

The Clerk has arranged for the Notice of Conclusion of the Audit to be displayed on the website and noticeboard along with the relevant sections of the AGAR.

c) **External Auditors Continuation Report 2023**

To receive a report from the Clerk on corrective actions to be taken/already taken:

The Clerk reported that the following matters came to the attention of Forvis Mazars LLP during the review of the Annual Governance and Accountability Report (AGAR) for the year ended 31 March 2024

Matter 1: Failure to provide electors with 30 working days notice to inspect the accounts

In undertaking the review of the 2023/24 Annual Governance and Accountability Return it came to our attention that in 2024 the Council has not met the requirements of the 2015 Accounts and Audit Regulations to provide electors with a period of 30 working days including the first 10 working days of July, to inspect the accounts. This was due to the notice of public rights not being uploaded to the Council's website until 8th July 2024.

Corrective Measure: The Parish Council went through a difficult period from December 2023 to March 2024 with 7 Councillors leaving and the Clerk retiring. The Parish Council now has a qualified Clerk in post who has had many years experience of ensuring that the requirements of the 2015 Accounts and Audit Regulations are met. The Clerk will ensure that the required Notice period is given in future years. The Clerk will advise Full Council of the Notice

period and this will be recorded in the minutes of the next relevant meeting.

Matter 2: Annual Governance Statement: Failure to comply with the requirements of Assertion 2

(We maintained an adequate system of internal control including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness). In undertaking the review of the 2023/24 Annual Return it came to our attention that the Council had not met the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 of maintaining an adequate system of internal control, including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness. The Council correctly answered no to the relevant assertion in the 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement.

Corrective Measure: Assertion 2 was ticked 'no' as the Parish Council had not been able to access the bank accounts in their entirety since February 2024 due to 7 councillors resigning in December 2023 and January 2024. This was compounded by the previous Clerk's retirement. In the intervening time the Parish Council had to rely on Ashford Borough Council to pay the urgent debts. Full Council elected to tick this box as it was agreed that the Parish Council had not properly safeguarded the funds in the bank account given that a number of ex-councillors were able to access the accounts. The Parish Council now has full access to the Bank Accounts. All of the ex-Councillors have been removed from the account and new Councillors have been added. The Parish Council banks with Unity Trust which has a three way authorisation process. The new Clerk can only view and submit payments. Councillors with access to the account can only view and authorise payments. The Clerk submits a payment and two Councillors are required to authorise following approval at a Full Council meeting. The Parish Council has recently adopted revised Financial Regulations based on the new model NALC template. Payment schedules are being presented to Full Council at meeting along with updated accounts and a bank reconciliation which is signed by a Councillor who is able to access and check the balance of the bank account. Full Council has also recently adopted a revised and comprehensive Risk Management Policy. We believe we have now taken full and appropriate steps to mitigate any potential fraud.

Matter 3: Annual Governance Statement: Failure to comply with the requirements of Assertion 3

(We took all reasonable steps to assure ourselves that there are no matters of actual or potential non-compliance with laws, regulations and Proper Practices that could have a significant financial effect on the ability of this authority to conduct its business or manage its finances). In undertaking the review of the 2023/24 Annual Return it came to our attention that the Council had not met the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 to take all reasonable steps to assure themselves that there are no matters of actual or potential non-compliance with laws, regulations and proper practices that could have a significant financial effect on the ability of this smaller authority to conduct its business or on its finances.

Corrective Measure The Parish Council is now a position where it can access funds. With treble authorisation and frequent financial reporting, adequate safeguarding of public funds has recommenced. The Parish Council also has a fidelity guarantee on its insurance, so further protection should misappropriation of public funds occur.

Matter 4: Annual Governance Statement: Failure to comply with the requirements of Assertion 6

(We maintained throughout the year an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems). In undertaking the review of the 2023/24 Annual Return it came to our attention that the Council had not met the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 of maintaining throughout the year an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems. The Council correctly answered no to the relevant assertion in the 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement.

Corrective Measure: Having now regained access to the bank accounts, Councillors are now provided with monthly bank reconciliations, bank statements and copies of invoices for payments. Councillors can check invoices against orders for payment before authorising any payments which have been processed by the Clerk. As mentioned above all payments and contracts are made in line with our recently adopted revised Financial Regulations. A list of approved payments, receipts and a copy of the bank reconciliation is appended to the minutes of each Full Council meeting. These are placed on the noticeboards and website. These procedures provide a transparent and adequate system of internal audit and to the Council and public should they have questions. The Parish Council will also ensure that a competent person, independent of the financial controls and procedures, gives an objective view on whether internal controls meet the needs of this smaller authority.

Matter 5: Annual Governance Statement: Failure to be consistent in reporting

The Accounts and Audit Regulations require the Authority undertakes an effective internal audit to evaluate the effectiveness of its risk management, control and governance processes, taking into account public sector internal auditing standards or guidance. The Council identified several weaknesses in internal control, correctly answering 'No' to the relevant assertions in the 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement. However, the Internal Audit Report contains 'Yes' answered to every control objective, indicating that the Council has experienced no weaknesses in internal control. In future, the Council should ensure that the Internal Audit report is consistent with the Annual Governance Statement.

Corrective Measure: The Parish Council now has a qualified Clerk in post who has had many years experience of ensuring that the requirements of the 2015 Accounts and Audit Regulations are met and will ensure that there are no further reporting inconsistencies.

d) **VAT**

It was noted that the Clerk had submitted a claim for a VAT refund of £11,027.14 which has now been received.

e) To receive the accounts

The accounts dated 17 October 2024 were noted.

f) To receive the bank reconciliation as at 17 October 2024

A bank reconciliation as at 17 October 2024 was noted and signed by Cllr. Hinge.

g) To receive a list of payments for approval

Cllr. Hinge checked the invoices against the payment schedule, (appended to the minutes), and it was **resolved** for Cllrs. Green and Hinge to authorise the payments online. The authorised schedule was initialled immediately below the last item by the Chair in accordance with the financial regulations.

1135. External Meetings

- a) Rolvenden Village Hall: Cllr. Hinge reported that the Management Committee met on the 1 October 2024. The Clerk who is also now the Secretary to the Management Committee has circulated a copy of the minutes. Cllr. Hinge reported that the finances of the village hall are in a reasonable state. The heating system needs updating and the Committee is considering the option of renewable energy. Cllr. Hinge advised that more Committee members are urgently needed.
- b) KALC Area Committee: The minutes of the meeting held on the 25 September 2024 have been circulated

1136. Items for the next meeting

Warm Hub update and funding. Cllr. Walker advised that The Star will continue to host the Warm Hub initiative. Christmas Tree

1137. Correspondence/Consultations

The Police and Crime Commissioner Consultation on the New Priorities for Kent.

1138. Any Confidential Items: None

1139. Date of the next meeting: Thursday 21 November 2024 at 7.30pm

There being no further business the meeting closed at 9.30pm

Signed: Date:

BACS Payments for Approval October 2024

Reference	Payee	Invoice	Description of Transaction	Gross
41/24	Maureen Brooks		Litter Picking	150.00
42/24	Louise Goldsmith		Salary	1117.08
43/24	HMRC		Tax and NI	794.80
44/24	Louise Goldsmith		Expenses	97.79
45/24	Ina Hemsley		Share of cost of bin	120.00
46/24	Tompsett Landscaping	3143	Grounds maintenance	1988.02
DD	Unity Trust		Quarterly Charge	5.40
DD	Hugo Fox		Website	11.99
		Sub total		4285.08

Receipts October 2024

Date		Amount
30/09/2024	Ashford Borough Council Precept	17106.00
04/10/2024	HMRC VAT refund	11027.14

Bank reconciliation as at 17 October 2024

Opening balance	£ 81,535.03
add receipts	£ 58,989.41
	<u>£ 140,524.44</u>
less payments	£ 104,165.41
Balance	<u><u>£ 36,359.03</u></u>

Chairmans signature.....