

# **MINUTES OF HORSMONDEN ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD AT 7PM FOR 7.30PM START ON MONDAY 19 MAY 2025**

## **Present:**

Cllrs Richards (Chair), Boon, Davis, Larkin, Russell, Jenkinson, Sheppard and Baylis

## **In attendance:**

Lucy Noakes (Clerk)

Anna Blyth (Deputy Clerk)

15 members of the public

Cllr Darrah (TWBC)

## **Declarations of Interest:**

Declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests in accordance with the Code of Conduct were invited.

No interests were declared.

### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR**

Cllr Mark Munday (KCC)

Cllr Tom Mobbs (TWBC)

Cllr Baxter-Smith

Cllr Richards welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked fellow councillors for putting themselves forward for re-election to serve on the Parish Council for another term.

### **2. PUBLIC SPEAKER(S)**

This year the Parish Council were pleased to welcome Mr Will Davenport from Davenport Vineyards to speak at the Annual Parish Meeting.

During the presentation, Mr Davenport provided an engaging and informative overview of their operations at Davenport Vineyards. He shared the history of the vineyard's establishment, the inspiration behind it, and how it has developed over the years.

In addition to reflecting on their journey so far, Mr Davenport outlined exciting plans for the future with the potential introduction of wine tastings and tours, offering residents and visitors an opportunity to experience the vineyard up close.

Additionally, he announced the possibility of opening an on-site shop, where visitors could purchase Davenport wines and related products directly.

The Chair thanked Mr Davenport for his time and invited any questions from the audience. This led to a brief discussion with residents showing great interest in the vineyard's operations and upcoming opportunities.

**3. PUBLIC SESSION -The public are entitled to raise any subject matter of relevance to the Parish and have up to three minutes each to speak. The content will be briefly minuted.**

The following questions were raised and answered:

Q. What are the PC's long term plans with the area of land at Fromandez Drive as residents are concerned over the length of time it will take for a wildflower garden to develop and the condition of the area in the meantime.

A. Cllr Larkin explained that the PC have been working hard to develop a wild flower garden at Fromandez Drive however some patience is required as the project will take time to establish. A considerable amount of effort has already been put into the site by a small group of dedicated volunteers, and additional volunteers would be very welcome to support the ongoing project. There has been progress with micro bees recently being spotted using the bug house.

Q. How do the PC plan to manage large events bearing in mind the new laws that have just come into force?

A. The Clerk confirmed that the legislation known as Martyn's Law has recently been passed. This new law requires organisations to implement specific security measures aimed at protecting the public from the threat of terrorism. There is a two year period for compliance and the requirements are based on two tiers: one for events or venues with a capacity of up to 200 people, and another for those accommodating over 800 people.

Although the likelihood of a terrorist incident in the village is considered to be very low, the PC are committed to meeting their legal obligations and will be undertaking the necessary risk assessments and training to ensure full compliance.

Q. Why did the PC not erect the Beacon for the VE Day Celebrations?

A. The PC considered the option of erecting the beacon for the VE Day celebration however, it was agreed that the associated costs were too high, with estimates exceeding £900. These costs included transporting the beacon from storage, erecting it safely and subsequently dismantling and returning it.

The Chair explained that it is not possible to leave the beacon in place on the village green permanently as its presence would obstruct the air ambulance from landing in the centre of the village – something deemed essential for public safety.

As an alternative, the PC arranged for two 'Tommy' statues to be installed at the War Memorial to commemorate the occasion and honour those who served.

A member of the public addressed the Parish Council with a brief comment regarding the current youth facilities within the village. The speaker emphasised the vital role these facilities play in supporting local young people and expressed concern about how the current volunteers will manage with the anticipated growth of the village, particularly in light of the increasing number of houses being built. The speaker urged the Council to consider how they plan to accommodate the needs of a growing youth population and to reflect on the long-term vision for youth provision in the community.

The Chair thanked the speakers for their time and contribution.

#### **4. MINUTES OF 2024 ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**

The 2024 Minutes had been reviewed and it was proposed by Mr Peter Bird and seconded by Mr Andrew Winser that the 2024 Annual Parish Meeting Minutes be accepted as a transcript of what took place at the meeting. Voted unanimously.

#### **5. CHAIR'S REPORT AND OTHER PC UPDATES:**

Cllr Richards updated those present on projects which the Councillors had been working on over the past year:

- Fairly major works have been carried out at the Institute Building and Clock Tower following on from works earlier in 2024. This included surveying of the internal and external clock tower structure, repairs and reinforcement to internal and external cracks in the brickwork, repairs to the woodwork at the top of the tower including a re-paint, retiling the clock tower roof, reinstallation of the clock mechanism and the installation of surge /lightning protection for the tower.
- Aiding the Social club with their internal refurbishment project, both financially and through liaison with professionals.
- Continuing work with the Village Hall committee and professionals to consider the potential for the current Village Hall to be refurbished, as part of the ongoing project to investigate all the options for a future Village Hall in Horsmonden.
- Providing recommendations to the Local Planning Authority on all planning applications in the village and in particular those detailed in application at Bassetts farm and Brenchley Road site, contracting professionals where necessary to help put forward the villages comments.
- Continued up-keep of village assets with the usual maintenance and preventative work (water/ legionella testing, electrical testing, fire safety and risk assessment, gutter clearance/cleaning down of village entry gateways/cleaning/plumbing and repair work in public conveniences.
- Continued maintenance of outside spaces with tree works, and groundworks maintenance of these spaces as well as the 47 street lighting columns owned by the village.
- Provision of new Christmas lights which were well received by parishioners.
- Continued liaison with Voltalia over the solar farm project at Bockingfold as well as negotiating a successful grant application from the scheme which paid for the majority of the cost for the recent solar panel installation at the public toilets.

- Working with Kent Highways to negotiate HIPs – putting forward parishioner's concerns and wishes to try and increase road safety in and around the village.
- Assisting the WI in organising a successful litter pick around the village in March.
- Provision of youth events through close liaison and financial assistance to HOVEC in their various events and activities.

Cllr Richards thanked his fellow Cllrs for their hard work and time given as well as the Clerk and Deputy Clerk .

## **6. PRECEPT 2025-26 AND ACCOUNTS SUMMARY 2024-25 - See Appendix 1 & 2 attached**

The Precept for year 2025-26 had been circulated prior to the meeting. As Chair of the Finance Committee, Cllr Russell gave the following update:

The precept last year was set at £125,510, while this year's precept is £127,330. Despite this slight adjustment, residents in a Band D property will see a 0.6% decrease in their council tax contribution.

### Other Income in 2024-25

- £3,950 grant from TWBC – which was used towards the cost of replacing the clock tower roof at the Institute Building.
- £4,500 from the Bockingfold Solar Farm Community Benefit Fund – which was used towards the cost of installing solar panels at the public conveniences.
- The PC were able to draw down £1,938 from Section 106 funds to carry out essential repairs to play area equipment.
- The PC received £600 from TWBC towards the running of the public conveniences.

Cllr Russell reported that the clock tower project at The Institute Building was completed within the budget of £20,000, after taking into account grant funding, which was considered a significant achievement given the scale and complexity of the work involved.

### Current year 2025-26

Cllr Russell explained that the parish precept for 2025-26 has seen an overall increase of £1,820 and this is mainly due to:

- Increase in employer National Insurance for Parish Council employees.
- The knock on effect of employer NI and minimum wage increases affecting the small contractors who carry out work for the PC- resulting in an increase in charges.

Cllr Russell detailed three major items within the 2025-26 budget:

- £8,000 allocated towards rent for a potential relocation of the parish office.

- £9,000 under “Contribution to General Reserves”. This allocation was used to replenish any reserves spent at the end of the 2024-25 period relating to unforeseen works carried out during the internal refurbishment at the Institute Building.
- £5,000 allocated to the potential replacement street light columns. Cllr Russell explained that the PC own 47 street lights in the village, some of which are aging and may need replacing/repair.

Cllr Russell advised that Section 106 funding has been allocated for the play area but must be spent by 2028. A working party has been formed to develop proposals, including representatives from the local Kindergarten and Primary School to ensure a wide range of views are considered.

#### VAT Reclaim

Allowing for the timing difference for the PCs 2024-25 VAT reclaim, £3,364 has been added to reserves.

The Chair thanked Cllr Russell for his comprehensive update.

**There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8:25 pm.**