

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF CHIDDINGSTONE PARISH COUNCIL HELD ON
MONDAY 13TH APRIL 2026 AT 7.30 PM IN CHIDDINGSTONE VILLAGE HALL**

Present: Cllr J. Roper, (Chairman), Cllr S. Andrews, Cllr I. Henderson, Cllr T. Nunn, Cllr K. Outlaw, Cllr C. Shamwana, Cllr P. Vicary and Cllr H. Williams

Apologies: Cllr P. Myers

In attendance: Mrs L. Kleinschmidt (Clerk), County Cllr R. Mayall, District Cllr M. Silander, District Cllr Richard Streatfeild, Wendy Fallon and Liz Bourne from CPRE plus 10 members of the public

Cllr Roper opened the meeting and welcomed everyone along.

1. **The Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 28th April 2025** were approved and duly signed. Proposed by Cllr Shamwana, seconded by Cllr Williams, and all were in favour.

2. **To welcome Kent Police who will give a report on local policing matters**
Cllr Roper reported that unfortunately the Police were unable to attend the meeting.

3. **To welcome the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) who will give a presentation on its work to protect rural areas from unwanted development**
Cllr Roper welcomed Wendy Fallon, Chair of the Kent Branch of CPRE, and Liz Bourne, Branch Secretary. Wendy said that the Sevenoaks branch is a small group of volunteers who meet every two months, and who monitor planning applications and planning appeals in the area. They liaise with Town and Parish Councils and communities requesting local knowledge about local matters and support for their work. If there is any infringement of Green Belt or National Landscape, they will write a letter of objection. There is a Kent CPRE office which has a director and two professional planning experts. There is also a national CPRE office. Wendy said that the SDC Local Plan has taken a long time to prepare and the Regulation 19 consultation is awaited.

Cllr Roper asked if there are any questions for Wendy or Liz.

1. Q1: Are there any success stories?

A: Liz said that the recent case locally was at Pootings and unfortunately the appeal didn't go the Parish Council's way. The Sevenoaks branch will support Town and Parish Councils in their objections to development on the Green Belt or in National Landscape areas, and the national office will comment on issues like solar panels on roof tops.

2. Q2: How is SDC's Local Plan going to slot into Local Government Reorganisation?

A: District Cllr Streatfeild said that the Sevenoaks District Local Plan is not yet adopted, but Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council have both just adopted their Local Plans. It is hoped that the Sevenoaks Local Plan will be adopted before the unitary councils are in place in May 2028 and therefore the timescale for the Regulation 19 process is important.

3. Q3: Does CPRE have specific policies on local planning matters or do you look at each application on a case by case basis?

A: Liz said that Green Belt, National Landscape and Conservation Areas will be commented on, also sustainability issues, transport and dark skies.

4. Q4: With the concept of Grey Belt, will beautiful farmland now be classified as Grey Belt?

A: Liz said that CPRE would prefer to see development on brownfield sites, or previously developed land. There is a policy discussion taking place at Head Office on whether land is classified as Green Belt or Grey Belt.

5. Q5: Is there a policy to stop the travellers' site in Pootings happening elsewhere?

A: Liz said that CPRE are considering the action that took place.

6. Q6: Why doesn't development go on brownfield sites?

Cllr Streatfeild said that this version of the Local Plan uses every available brownfield site but the housing targets are such that greenfield sites must also be considered. Work on the next Local Plan will start in 5 years time and this next plan will have to include Grey Belt and Green Belt land.

Cllr Roper thanked Wendy and Liz for coming along and discussing these important issues with the Parish Council and local residents.

4. To hear a report on the preparation of the Chiddingstone Neighbourhood Plan

Cllr Nunn introduced himself as the Chair of the Chiddingstone Parish Council Planning Committee and also Chair of the Chiddingstone Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee. He said that the National Planning Policy Framework is at the top of the hierarchy for national planning policy, and policies are then adopted by local District and Borough Councils. The Neighbourhood Plan gives the Parish Council a greater voice but we cannot contradict national or local planning policies. At Neighbourhood Plan level we can state that there is a preference for hedgerows instead of fences, for example, or seek provision for more car parking spaces. It is a plan for the community as a whole and will set out how residents see the parish evolving in the future. The Parish Council has canvassed opinion on what people think is important, and a good response was received, thank you. 88% of the parish would like to see a dark skies policy and 40% of respondents said that parking provision in Chiddingstone village needs consideration, also parking provision in Chiddingstone Causeway. The Steering Committee comprises Parish Councillors and members of the local community, and we would welcome further support. The Steering Committee has drafted policies for approval by the Parish Council and then the Neighbourhood Plan will go to residents for their approval at a referendum. There is an ambitious timescale, a Neighbourhood Plan normally takes 3 to 5 years, we have been working on ours for 3 months now and are half way through.

5. To hear Chair's Report of Activities in 2025/26

Cllr Roper reported as follows:

Last year, the Parish Council had 11 open meetings, and a number of meetings of the Planning Committee and the Finance Committee. There have been 2 changes in the year, sadly Mitzi Quirk died at the end of last year, and Penny Harris has stood down as she had a number of other commitments. The Parish Council has welcomed Cllr Suzanne Andrews and Cllr Iain Harrison to fill these two vacancies.

Planning

Most of our attention has been taken up with planning and development proposals in the parish. SDC have a Government new homes target of 17,460 to be built during the term of the next Local Plan. There are constraints as 93% of the district is Green Belt and therefore encroachment into Green Belt land is being considered. A Call for Sites was undertaken by SDC seeking sites that could be available for development and, because of the change in planning policy with the introduction of Grey Belt, sites are being re-assessed to see if they now satisfy planning policy, such as the airfield site in Chiddingstone Causeway. The Regulation 18 consultation included 3 sites in Chiddingstone Causeway: 300 dwellings on land adjacent to the Little Brown Jug, 41 dwellings on the site at Station Yard, and 8 dwellings on the Highways Dept. There have been a lot of objections locally and this was felt at the two open public meetings that the Parish Council held in order to give residents the opportunity of raising their concerns or support for these proposals. The Parish Council engaged the services of a planning consultant to help prepare a response to the Regulation 18 consultation. Despite the strength of feeling shown at the public meetings it was disappointing to see that there was not a larger number of responses to the consultation. The Parish Council feel that there is a need for small developments of new housing for people with a connection to the parish but we do object to large developments. SDC is currently analysing responses to the Regulation 18 consultation and the Regulation 19 consultation will be published in the summer. This will then go to the Planning Inspectorate, together with everyone's comments, who will then make a decision on the Local Plan.

Aviation

There are more issues with proposals to expand Gatwick Airport by introducing the northern runway. Please see the report by the Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign, who has now sought a Judicial Review.

Transport

We have a very successful Chiddingstone SpeedWatch Scheme, monitoring traffic speeds on our roads in Bough Beech and Chiddingstone Causeway, but we do need more volunteers. Last year we said that we were hoping to get the speed limit reduced on Camp Hill and Bough Beech. The Camp Hill speed reduction has been approved by KCC Highways and we are going through the final stages of this process. Bough Beech proposals have not advanced much and KCC is less than enthusiastic on our proposals to reduce the speed limit but we will do our best.

Affordable Housing

We have two current affordable housing schemes, one in Bough Beech and one in Chiddingstone Causeway. The Bough Beech scheme at Millbrook was opened in October by HRH Princess Royal. The Chiddingstone Causeway scheme is currently in the planning application stage.

Other

- We are supporting residents of Redleaf Close in the struggles with WKHA on drainage issues. Cllr Kerry Outlaw has been working with residents to take the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.
- We carry out regular litter picks and maintain our Parish Council owned land
- We have awarded grants to GACC, Stonewall Park Cricket Club and Edenbridge & Oxted Show to support local farmers

Looking ahead, we continue to try and find a solution to car parking issues in Chiddingstone village.

Cllr Roper thanked our County Cllr, Robert Mayall, and our District Cllrs, Richard Streatfeild and Malcolm Silander, also fellow Parish Councillors for their time and commitment to parish matters. Cllr Roper also thanked Louise, our Clerk, for her hard work.

6. To announce the recipient of the 2026 Chiddingstone Community Award

Cllr Roper announced that the 2026 Chiddingstone Community Award will be awarded posthumously to Mitzi Quirk, we miss her hugely. He presented the award to Mitzi's son.

7. To hear report by County Cllr Robert Mayall

County Cllr Mayall reported as follows:

I was elected as a Reform Party candidate almost a year ago (1 May 2025) as the Kent County Councillor for the division of Sevenoaks Rural South. This was slightly to my surprise although I was delighted with the result. This includes the parish councils of Cowden, Penshurst, Leigh, Sevenoaks Weald, Hever, Chiddingstone and Edenbridge Town Council. I was not the only Reform candidate to be surprised for the same reason. This meant that on the Saturday following the election 57 new Reform councillors met up for the first time at a hotel in Maidstone, we were crammed into a meeting room that had been previously booked that was intended to accommodate around 30 people.

The initial criticism of the new administration was that we wouldn't have a clue how to run a county council being all new boys and girls. Having been in power for nearly 12 months now, we are of the opinion that the previous Conservative administration didn't know how to run the Council either despite being in power for nearly 30 years. We got the impression that it was the Council officers who were basically running it for them.

On taking office, we inherited a debt of £732 million which meant KCC was paying interest of £84,000 a day. In the first 6 months we reduced the debt by £67 million and £100 million of savings and income targets have been implemented with an addition of £40 million of future savings. We were able to ensure a balanced budget for 2026/2027 and no cuts in services. The Council Tax was increased by 3.99% which is less than any time in the last 14 years. Now that Reform has passed its first budget, we can say that Reform is now fully in charge of the finances.

There have been a few bumps in the road where certain individuals in the Reform group attempted to destabilise the leadership of our elected leader, Linden Kemkaren. This included the leaking of the "Suck It Up-gate" video to The Guardian. The rebels were removed from the Party and are now mostly members of the Restore Party although we like to call them "The Inbetweeners". Their behaviour since their expulsion has been a little erratic as they seem to want to oppose anything Reform wants to do regardless of any political principle or ideology. Another former Reform councillor is in prison.

Another big issue on the agenda is LGR (Local Government Reform). The Reform administrations favoured scheme is for what is known as Option 1A which would mean Kent would continue as one unitary authority with the councillors in the authority making up 3 regional assemblies that would deal with certain issues in their locality such as libraries and housing. This is without doubt the cheapest and least disruptive option as it would not require the disaggregation of services such as adult social care and education. This option will save £69 million a year and the transition cost will be £99 million and will pay for itself within 3 years. Reform's view is the whole thing is a waste of time and money and there is still a good chance that it won't happen if the government is overwhelmed with bigger problems which is quite possible.

One final issue is that KCC has signed a contract with a Company called Ringway which is used by Transport For London and National Highways to maintain the Kent's roads. The contract should hold them up to far greater levels of scrutiny than has previously been the case.

8. To hear report by District Cllr Richard Streatfeild and District Cllr Malcolm Silander

District Cllr Streatfeild and District Cllr Silander reported as follows:

Local Government Reorganisation: Sevenoaks District Council is limping towards Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The structure of the new unitary council is expected in July, with elections in May 2027 and vesting day in May 2028. Current indications point to a West Kent unitary authority including Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells, and potentially parts or all of Maidstone, with recent national decisions favouring smaller geographies.

Planning and Development: The Local Plan remains a significant area of work and continues to face opposition across a number of proposed development sites, including Chiddingstone Causeway. While no development is allocated within the Chiddingstone, Penshurst and Fordcombe ward, approximately 350 homes are proposed for Chiddingstone Causeway and around 3,000 for Edenbridge. Affordable housing in Bough Beech and Chiddingstone Causeway represents 2/3 of the affordable housing schemes in the district in the last ten years. Penshurst represents the other 1/3. We are fortunate for these schemes for local people. Alongside this, the recent opening of new affordable homes at Bough Beech provides a local example of delivery against identified housing need.

Service Changes: Waste collection arrangements are being updated. General waste will move to fortnightly collection, and a kerbside glass collection service will be introduced. Further details are available in the latest In Shape magazine. There will be new food waste collections.

Governance and Finance: The Council's accounts have been disclaimed by external auditors for the second consecutive year.

Political Position: Political instability has continued, with a third Leader appointed in three years, Councillor Kevin Maskell. The Council is currently operated by a minority Conservative administration. Conservatives retained seats in recent by-elections in Hextable and Knockholt, although there have been two defections to Reform UK and nine to the West Kent Independents.

9. Questions from members of the public, matters for reporting and diary dates

1. A question was raised about waste. District Cllr Streatfeild said that SDC recycle 35% of its waste. SDC is one of the last councils who provide a weekly waste collection. There are new Government targets on waste and there will be a new waste collection regime including the collection of glass from the kerbside. The separate waste collection service will save SDC a lot of money as food is the heavy part of general waste.
2. A question was asked about what should residents do with rubbish collected as part of a litter pick. District Cllr Streatfeild said that this rubbish will go in general waste.
3. Will SDC reinstate the bulk refuse freighter service? District Cllr Streatfeild said that a bid was made to reinstate this much used service but was rejected unfortunately.
4. Could charges at the household waste centre be scrapped so that people will be encouraged to take their rubbish there. District Cllr Streatfeild said that this is under discussion.
5. Could consideration be given to the provision of a play area? Cllr Roper said that the Parish Council has considered this but the cost is prohibitive for a small Parish Council with a small precept. If there is development in the parish this could possibly be something that could be raised with a developer.

The meeting closed at 8.50pm.

CHIDDINGSTONE PARISH COUNCIL

FINANCE REPORT FOR YEAR 2025-2026

The Parish Council's financial year runs from 1st April until 31st March. The precept for the year 2025/26 was £51,000, which was increased from the previous year's precept of £48,950. The precept for 2026/27 will be £56,000, which is a 9.36% increase in the Parish Council's portion of council tax.

Annual memberships were renewed to:

Kent Association of Local Councils	£563.22
Society of Local Council Clerks	£180.00
Information Commissioner's Office	£47.00
CPRE	£60.00
Kent County Playing Fields Association	£20.00
Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign	£10.00
Eden Valley Museum Trust	£90.00
Aviation Environment Federation	£36.00

And grants were made to:

Edenbridge & Oxted Show sponsorship	£150.00
GACC	£600.00
Stonewall Park Cricket Club	£444.00

The following summary of income and expenditure for the year is taken from the Parish Council's draft accounts for the year ended 31st March 2026, which have not yet been approved by the Parish Council or been audited.

INCOME	£	EXPENDITURE	£
Precept	51,000.00	Salaries	20,582.62
Interest on Investments	1,193.04	Employer National Insurance	2,246.76
Verge cutting contract	6,518.71	Employer Pension	5,755.00
Contribution from Leigh PC to office costs	354.07	Petty Cash / Mileage	1,171.35
Contribution from Leigh PC for Speedwatch	992.50	Stationery	110.55
		Telephone/Email	354.07
		Office Expenses	1,087.15
		Bank charges	73.00
		Website	691.08
		Courses	575.00
		Insurance	446.71
		Audit/Accountancy	750.95
		Verge cutting contract	6,980.00
		Chairman's Expenses	197.25
		Subscriptions	1,006.22
		Speed Reduction	39.76
		Advertising & Publicity	70.00
		Closed Churchyard & other areas	5,340.00
		Repairs & Maintenance	324.41
		PWLB repayments	5,822.40
		Litter / dog bins	1,452.59
		Grants	1,194.00
		Community Garden	50.00
		Sundry	21.49
		Play Scheme	64.29
		Defibrillators	144.00
		Planning consultant	1,702.50
		Local Plan associated costs	643.67
		Neighbourhood Plan	150.00
	60,058.32		59,046.82

Louise Kleinschmidt
Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer