



Parish Council

Minutes of a meeting of Ruckinge Parish Council held on Thursday 9th March 2023 at 7.30pm in Ruckinge Village Hall.

Present: S Hewison (Chairman), D Archer, A Beaney, T Bennett, T Cliffe-Harrison, M Pepper and P Sillibourne.

In attendance: Peter Setterfield PSLCC, Parish Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer.

Also present: Cllr L Harman (ABC), and 2 residents.

249. **Apologies for absence:**
Cllr D Robey (KCC).

250. **Declarations of Interest:**
There were no declarations of interest.

251. **Minutes:**
The minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 9th March 2023 were submitted, approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

252. **Chairman's Report:**
It often feels like a no-win situation just being involved in this Parish Council. As the owners of the Ruckinge Village Hall, I believe we are entitled to say if we are happy or unhappy with how it is being run, how it looks, and whether it is profitable or not.

Councillors put in effort, totally unpaid effort, to attend meetings, review planning applications, attend sites, deal with all manner of residential challenges from potholes to fly tipping to sewage, working with the Police, Neighbourhood Watch, KCC and ABC.

It is a largely thankless task.

Without a Parish Council Ruckinge and Bromley Green would lose its representation, it would lose its voice.

Similarly with the Village Hall – it's where we meet, it's where events are held.

What has occurred over the last two weeks – where I, as a councillor have been verbally threatened by a member of the public, my family and home threatened, because of negative comments being made by individuals on social media relating to the Village Hall is shameful.

Yet another offer from the Parish Council (on a date and time of their choosing) has been declined by the lead representing the former Village Hall Committee.

- Right now, the status is that the Charity Commission will no doubt, in due course, decide where the Covid Grant money must be transitioned.

- Our position has always been, that it was intended for the Village Hall, and is very much needed for its regeneration.

That item aside, and a close of tenancy invoice for items which were not transitioned the Parish Council are already making significant head way in bringing the Hall up to date and officially reopening in April.

We will not be engaging in Facebook commentary, we did not initiate it, it is proving divisive, and is quite literally fuelling criminal behaviour.

We will not be deterred – threats, abuse and intimidation will simply be reported to the police.

I cannot believe that after 2 years of Covid, an energy crisis leaving people freezing cold, inflation going through the roof, and a war raging in the Ukraine – that the Ruckinge Village Hall deserves to be something to get upset about.

We live in a very strange world.

253. Neighbourhood Watch:

Update uploaded to the Parish Council website

254. Public Participation:

It was reported that the pot holes at the entrance to the car park at Bromley Green had reappeared. A quote to be obtained to see if viable to install an area of hardstanding at the entrance.

255. Kent County Councillor's Report:

- The KCC Budget will be very tight this year and next, which will have a lot of difficult implications for services.
- The proposals for the rationalisation of the KCC property portfolio, along with the idea of providing multiple services from the same building, and also looking at the provision of services digitally, is out for consultation now, and I urge anyone with a view on this to respond. The deadline is 26th March and the link to the consultation is www.kent.gov.uk/communityservicesconsultation
- the Highways Budget has been underfunded for years and we are seeing the results now, in the poor condition of our roads. Although this is a national problem, this is no comfort to the residents of Kent and there are no easy answers. I raise the issue whenever I can at County Hall.

256. Ashford Borough Councillor's Report:

Fly tipping continues to be an issue, this will be taken forward with the Borough Council and the deployment of cameras to see if offenders can be caught.

Various questions have been asked about the planning status of Capel Gardens at Ashford Borough Council. Council tax demands have recently been issued to residents.

The Borough Council element of the Council tax will be increased by 2.99% for the forthcoming financial year.

257. Planning:

PA/2022/2338 Land adjacent to Noakes Farm Barn, Ruckinge – Change of use from agricultural land to campsite consisting of 10 small tents and associated toilet, shower and storage facilities. Operational only April – October.

At the specific request of the Monitoring Officer at Ashford Borough Council this application was placed on the agenda

Resolved: as the Parish Council is only a consultee and does not make the final decision the application will not be reconsidered.

258. **Finance:**

Schedule of payments:

Clerk's salary	£546.77
HMRC	£112.60
Clerk's expenses	£17.10
D A Mummery	£120.00

Resolved: To authorise the payment of the items of expenditure in the schedule of payments.

259. **Ruckinge Village Hall:**

To focus on the positives irrespective of the open issues, the Parish Council have not been deterred from making progress.

Already we have:

- Negotiated $\frac{3}{4}$ off the price of standing electricity charges (£2.50 a day down to 60p)
- Negotiated 100% relief from business rates.
- Cheaper (but also better) fire equipment has been obtained on a service contract.
- Bookings are up.
- Broadband will be installed for the first time once we have concluded redecoration.
- The address is now listed with the post office (incredibly it never was).
- A post box is going to be added.
- Increased Security has been added.
- We have received a £500.00 grant which can go towards repainting (interior and exterior) day in March and a clean-up of the exterior grounds weather permitting (20 people have so far volunteered).
- Over the past week, Councillors, giving their own free time, and volunteers have begun work clearing grass, weeds and brambles around the car park.

260. **Bromley Green Hall:**

Nothing to report.

261. **Carters Field:**

The new play equipment item has been ordered with an anticipated delivery date in May. It was agreed to continue with the existing grounds maintenance contractor for the mowing of the field.

262. **Items for future meetings / exchange of information:**

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8:50pm.