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TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PARISH PARTNERSHIP PANEL

MINUTES

Thursday, 30th May, 2024

Present: Cllr R W Dalton (Chair), Cllr Mrs M Tatton (Vice-Chair), Cllr R P Betts, Cllr B Banks, Cllr S Crisp, Cllr P M Hickmott, and Cllr M Taylor.

Together with representatives of Addington, Aylesford, Birling, Borough Green (Vice-Chair - S Butterfill), Burham, Ditton, East Malling and Larkfield, Hildenborough, Ightham, Platt, Plaxtol, Shipbourne, West Malling, Wouldham and Wrotham Parish Councils.

[Minutes corrected on 30 August 2024 to reflect that Wouldham Parish Council were in attendance]

Cllrs A G Bennison, M R Rhodes and K B Tanner* were also present pursuant to Council Procedure Rule No 15.21.

(*participated via MS Teams)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs S Bell*, M D Boughton, P Boxall, M A Coffin*, Hadlow*, Kings Hill*, Offham*, Ryarsh, Snodland, Trottiscliffe* and County Cllr Mrs S Hohler.

(*apologies for in-person attendance were received but participated via MS Teams).

PART 1 - PUBLIC

PPP 24/1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIRS

Appointments of the Chair and Vice-Chair were confirmed to be Cllr R Dalton and Cllr Mrs M Tatton respectively. The appointment of the second Vice-Chair from Parish and Town Councils was confirmed to be Cllr S Butterfill from Borough Green Parish Council.

PPP 24/2 NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute members.

PPP 24/3 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

PPP 24/4 UPDATE ON ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES

There were no matters required to be updated.

PPP 24/5 ELECTION UPDATE

Following the announcement that the General Election would be held on Thursday 4 July 2024, the Head of Elections provided an update on key issues for parish/town councils to consider.

Particular reference was made to the importance of adhering to legislation in parish/town council elections as the same legal procedures and consequences applied as for Borough Council and General Elections.

The most common issues that parish councillors and clerks needed to be aware of related to the submission of expense returns following an election, even if there was a 'nil' return, as newly elected councillors were not able to serve until this had been received and confirmed by the Electoral Officers.

There were also issues around notification of vacancies and there was a set procedure to be followed. The rules around notifying of vacancies had been circulated previously and would be attached to the Notes for convenience (at Annex 1). The Kent Association of Local Councils were also able to assist parish clerks if they required assistance.

All were reminded that assistance was available via the Elections Team.

With regard to the General Election, the Head of Elections encouraged anyone interested in working on a polling station, at the count or in another role to contact the Elections Team as soon as possible. Details would be shared as soon as possible and all were encouraged to share this information wider as the Borough Council would be grateful of any assistance that could be offered.

All parish/town councils would be asked to display the Notice of Election on Tuesday 4 June 2024 which started the timetable for the General Election.

MATTERS RAISED IN ADVANCE OF THE MEETING

PPP 24/6 MAKING SPACE FOR NATURE (MS4N)

In the absence of the Chair of the Kent Association of Local Councils (Tonbridge and Malling) who had submitted apologies, Dr T Shelley of Aylesford Parish Council provided an update on the Making Space for Nature (MS4N) initiative following attendance at the KALC Planning Conference. His summary report would be attached as an Annex to the Notes (attached at Annex 2).

Making Space for Nature in Kent and Medway was working with partners and stakeholders to collaboratively establish shared priorities for the delivery of nature recovery and environmental improvements in order to create a network of wildlife-rich places across the county. This local nature recovery strategy would be one of 48 – together these would cover the whole of England, with no gaps or overlaps, to deliver the Government's commitment to ending the decline of nature and supporting its recovery.

More information was available via the MS4N [website](#)

Members recognised the importance of improving biodiversity, connecting habitats and creating wildlife corridors and also recognised the difficult balance between protecting nature and providing housing.

PPP 24/7 CLIMATE CHANGE

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Regeneration and Property (Cllr R Betts) provided updates on the climate change initiatives being undertaken by the Borough Council.

These included:

- Providing infrastructure for electric vehicles. Phase 1 had seen 36 charging stations installed around Tonbridge and Malling, all in Borough Council owned car parks. A further 60+ charging stations were being installed as part of Phase 2.
- Leybourne Lakes Country Park. The eco-café was an exemplar of renewable energy and used energy created from the lake using ground source heat pumps. The County Park also had a wildflower meadow which had recently been extended.
- The Borough Council had emphasised its commitment to climate change by creating a Cabinet portfolio for Climate Change, Regeneration and Property and engaging a Climate Change Officer.
- There were a number of rewilding projects throughout the Borough including one at River Lawn, in Tonbridge and these required assistance to get established and better signage to educate on the aim of rewilding.
- Undertaking a survey to understand the Borough Councils carbon footprint which illustrated that 70% of CO2 emissions came from the Leisure Centres, 28% from the waste service collection vehicles and the remainder from the organisations own estate, including buildings and staff commuting. The Borough Council planned to migrate staff from the inefficient Gibson East building into the newer Gibson West. This proposal also included plans for

installing photovoltaic panels (PVP) to generate power using green energy sources and would result in the Borough Council 'headquarters' being carbon neutral.

- Successfully bid for grant funding to assist with decarbonisation projects and been awarded approximately £1.5M from Sports England and Public Sector Decarbonisation. This funding will be used over the next 2 years to install more solar PV panels and an air source heat pump at Larkfield Leisure Centre.
- Successful completion of solar PV panel installation at Tonbridge Swimming Pool in March.
- Established a scheme to plant 1000 trees per year.
- Achieved 50% of all waste recycled which made Tonbridge and Malling one of the top achievers in the country. This was thanks to the excellent contribution of residents.
- £40,000 of Green Business Grants had been awarded and a further round of the West Kent Rural Grant was available until September if parish/town councils wished to apply.

Reference was also made to the anaerobic digester plant at Blaise Farm Quarry which produced gas from food waste and could supply 5-6,000 homes in Kings Hill; and the Allington Quarry Waste Management which incinerated waste to produce electricity. The use of both of these facilities meant that less than 1% of waste produced in the Borough went to landfill.

Members welcomed the update on the initiatives being undertaken which demonstrated the good work being taken by the Borough Council in meeting green objectives and of which the wider community were unaware. It was suggested that a regular newsletter be provided to inform parish/town councils. The Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Regeneration and Property offered to provide regular updates at future meetings of the Parish Partnership Panel.

There was general discussion on a range of topics related to climate change including the loaning of infra-red cameras to identify buildings with high energy leakage; the potential of moving to electric vehicles for the waste services contract; the creation of wildlife corridors which parish/town councils could establish on their own land and the Woodland Trust initiative of providing saplings to community groups. The value and importance of gardens in supporting biodiversity was also recognised.

The Cabinet Member indicated that the purchase of infra-red cameras was an action still to be progressed, whilst actions related to the waste service would be reviewed and assessed when the contract

was up for renewable in 2027. The Borough Council could also promote the Woodland Trust initiative when applications were open. The Chair indicated that visits to Leybourne Lakes Country Park and the Allington Quarry Waste Management should be considered as parish/town councillors could find this beneficial.

Finally, it was noted that the West Malling 'Great Big Green Weekend' offering an opportunity to celebrate and educate would be held on 8 June 2024.

PPP 24/8 GREEN FLAG AWARDS - HOW TO APPLY

The Green Flag Award® scheme recognised and rewarded well managed parks and green spaces, setting the benchmark standard for the management of recreational outdoor spaces across the United Kingdom and around the world:

- To ensure that everybody has access to quality green and other open spaces, irrespective of where they live.
- To ensure that these spaces are appropriately managed and meet the needs of the communities that they serve.
- To establish standards of good management.
- To promote and share good practice amongst the green space sector.
- To recognise and reward the hard work of managers, staff and volunteers.

More information on how to apply for Green Flag Awards was available on their website: <https://www.greenflagaward.org/how-it-works/> Although, the application period for 2024/25 was now closed it wasn't too soon to start thinking about applications for the next period.

PPP 24/9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(1) Local Plan

In response to a question from Birling Council about whether the calling of the General Election had implications for the Local Plan timetable, the Cabinet Member for Planning (Cllr M Taylor) advised that the Regulation 18b Consultation had been delayed. However, it was hoped that further updates could be provided in July.

(2) Community Wardens

Aylesford Parish Council asked whether there were any measures that could be taken to reinstate Community Wardens. Members were reminded of the significant budget pressures faced by all local authorities and the costs related to Adult and Childrens Social Care were an additional pressure for the County Council. Unfortunately, these

budgetary pressures had led to reduced funding in other areas, such as community wardens.

The meeting ended at 8.45 pm

Vacancy process for Parish/Town Councils

- When a councillor resigns/is asked to leave/passes away, the Parish clerk should notify us immediately and agree a notice of vacancy with joanne.miller@tmbc.gov.uk, including the statutory dates. Please see attached the new vacancy notices, due to us having a new Proper Officer.
- The clerk should then advertise the vacancy within the parish, on the Parish website and noticeboards. TMBC will do the same.
- At the end of the statutory deadline for the notice of vacancy, Joanne Miller will email you to confirm whether or not an election has been requested and whether you can go ahead and Co-opt to the vacancy. **Please do not co-opt anyone until we have confirmed that you are can.**
- If someone is then co-opted to the vacancy, please send their name and address to Joanne Miller and their completed DPI to Denise Tate, denise.tate@tmbc.gov.uk and it will then be displayed on our website. It should also be displayed on your Parish website.

It cannot be stressed enough that this process has to be followed, it is set down in legislation and the Parish could be challenged legally, if it is not.

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NOTES ON LNRS (LOCAL NATURAL RECOVERY STRATEGY) POTENTIAL MEASURES WORKSHOP AND RELATED MATTERS

Workshop held at Lenham Community Centre, May 23rd 2024.

The program aim is to produce, “A realistic and deliverable plan, linked to supporting mechanisms and finance.”

It was said that “Most potential measures should include reference to relevant habitats or species but the creation or enhancement of habitats may not be enough to deliver some priorities on their own.”

- Example 1:

Connect and enhance existing ancient and native woodland to improve ecological connectivity, increase the abundance of the Duke of Burgundy butterfly and increase carbon sequestration. The potential measure would be to create woodlands and restore semi natural woodland, favouring natural colonisation of woodland boundaries, hedgerows and along watercourses.

- Example 2:

Improve species abundance and biodiversity in urban areas. The potential measure would be to create urban meadows and ponds in newly developed areas and improve awareness and understanding of the need for more natural (“untidy”) space in urban areas.

Other potential measures might be to create more salt marsh and create new woodlands on steep slopes in water catchment areas.

The habitat focused priorities are seen as:

- Grassland and heathland
- Woodland and trees
- Freshwater and wetland
- Coastal and marine
- Farmland and urban.

A new mapping tool has been developed where anyone can put desired actions on a map. This will be running over the Summer.

<https://www.makingspacefornaturekent.org.uk/getinvolved/map-your-priorities-for-nature>

Biodiversity net gain. Plan is to give extra ‘Brownie’ points in some areas. Areas of strategic significance. Need to work with emerging Local plans. There is a map of opportunity areas.

There will be another series of workshops in September.

Discussion

Grasslands table. We agreed on the importance of hedges but who is to maintain them properly? I suggested repeated small cuts. But see Defra notice below:

Woodland table. I pointed out that new, “natural” woodland needs to be inoculated with soil and mud from ancient woodland. Even then it is unlikely to be able to incorporate all necessary species to make it truly natural because natural ecology is so complex.

A local parish councillor brought up the idea of having ditches as a wildlife corridor. But how to manage them so water still flows down them without destroying their ecology with machinery? (I have this dilemma myself on our own land. The only solution I can find involves getting in the ditch in waders and doing a lot of work by hand).

Ponds were deemed essential but the same parish councillor brought up the problem of their potentially being contaminated by pollution from road runoff.

Some parish councillors said they are putting motion sensors on their street lights in order to reduce light pollution at the same time as saving money.

Species are moving Northwards especially birds and bumblebees. There is a need to provide tunnels and remove barriers so species that cannot fly can also migrate

I was told that DEFRA has put out a notice that No Move May is now no mow anything until the end of July because of a crash in pollinator numbers. I thought this sounded unlikely so looked it up and found the notice below, which asks people to avoid mowing except where really necessary up to Mid July.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bees-needs/bees-needs-campaign>

That same evening I received the following notice:

“New hedgerow regulations

“We are writing to let you know that new regulations have been approved for the management of hedgerows on agricultural land.

“What the regulations mean for you

“The new regulations require:

- a 2 metre buffer strip, measured from the centre of a hedgerow, where a green cover must be established and maintained
- no cultivation or application of pesticides or fertilisers within the 2-metre buffer strip
- a hedgerow cutting and trimming ban from 1 March to 31 August (inclusive)

The cutting and trimming ban will start immediately. This is to protect nesting birds up to the end of August 2024”.

Biotechnology Net Gain: At a wedding on Sunday, I found myself sitting in the middle of a group of small-scale developers so brought up the subject of biodiversity net gain.

They said that in order to meet requirements, it was necessary to either engage consultants, or use a piece of software owned by a Member of Parliament, Oliver Lewis CBE. The software is: <https://ukgbc.org/resources/the-joes-blooms-biodiversity-net-gain-tool>

I have not tried it because the minimal cost is £495 and was told by somebody who had used it, that the report it produced was rejected by the local authority it was submitted to. Apparently the software is still being developed.

Tom Shelley May 27th 2024