



DRAFT MINUTES of **OFFHAM PARISH COUNCIL** meeting
Held on **Tuesday 8th October 2024** at **7.30PM** in The Committee Room, Offham Village Hall

Councillors Present:

Cllr S Taylor (Chair)
Cllr S Williams (Vice-Chair)
Cllr P Bailey
Cllr F Steer

Also in attendance:

L Mackie (Clerk), County Councillor Hohler (7.30-7.40), Borough Councillor Dean, 11 members of public (1 resident left at 8.50 after the Open Session, 1 resident left at 9.15 after planning)

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY AND NON-PECUNIARY INTEREST.** To receive apologies for absence and declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interest. Cllr Taylor reported that Jim Altin has resigned. The Parish Council will miss Jim and his liaison with the school.
There were apologies from Cllr Marchant and Borough Councillors Roud and Tatton.
There were no declarations of interest.
2. **MINUTES** To receive and approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 3rd September 2024 for signature It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of meeting held on 3rd September 2024 be approved and signed as an accurate record by Cllr Taylor.
3. **TO CONSIDER PARISH COUNCIL VACANCY AND CO-OPTION**
There are two vacancies.
4. **EXTERNAL REPORTS**
 - a) County Councillor Hohler
 - There is no update about Seven Mile Lane
 - There has been less traffic on the road due to traffic lights on Wrotham Heath. Everyone seems to be obeying the speed limit. The new white lines are clear, they are upgrading the existing and clearing overhanging vegetation
 - There are difficulties as drivers are using Comp Lane which is not a good idea
 - There are people eligible in Kent who are not claiming Pension Credit. There is as much as £68m unclaimed in Kent.
 - Green Libraries Week is coming up. Last year 3,176,000 books were loaned out as well as virtual books
 - In Kent and Medway, GPS offered 826,000 appointments in August. 34,000 people did not attend those appointments
 - b) Borough Councillor Dean
 - There is a petition against the new parking rules in West Malling which make it not possible for market traders to park. There are over 1,500 signatures so it will go to a TMBC meeting. It is being left open so people can sign up to indicate their support. The market has lost 10 stalls already and will lose more when street parking charges go live. The Farmers Market is very precious to us and has been going for 25 years next year
 - There will be 9 ticket machines along West Malling High Street, and each will be in front of a listed building. They will probably be solar powered
 - TMBC have said there is nothing they can do to improve mobile signal, but the machines will take cash as well.
 - There is a 20mph scheme in Larkfield and WMPC are expanding the one in West Malling. East Malling were at first they were told they did not qualify for the scheme, but that has been overcome. They are now getting a design which has cost about £9000 to produce. EMPC will then have a scheme ready if developers come along with money to agree to fund.
 - Speed guns used by Speedwatch are easier to pick up and manoeuvre than the screens and cost about £1,700 each. They can be shared if OPC are interested.
 - Local Transport Plan exhibition. She has asked for a copy of the list of projects.

- Her Member's Grant is shared among her County Division. She will see if she can help Offham Cinema as many residents from West Malling attend.
- The Lower Thames Crossing was cancelled in terms of planning permission. There needs to be an awareness as it is billed to be increasing traffic coming out of east of London by almost double. There are no improvements to A228 that they will pay for, but it is likely traffic would use A228.
- She is organising a Remembrance Day festival at Rochester Cathedral to be held on November 2nd. There are 600 places but only 21 tickets left.

c) Police

Cllr Taylor noted that in Church Road between 18:00 on Saturday 28th September and 06:00 on Monday 30th September, the tyres on a farm trailer and curtain sides on another were slashed and pumpkins in the field were cut and destroyed, just behind Spadework. They belonged to the Farm who had lent them to Spadework. This is awful and pitiful that someone could do this.

d) Village Hall, Primary School, Offham Society

Village Hall – there was no report

Offham Society – there was no report

Primary school – Cllr Taylor has met the Head Teacher, Ruth Powell. The School has met with the Farm and are very happy with the arrangement for Forest School. The School has reduced the number of their attendances at Forest School due to pressures of the curriculum. The Farm and school have had very positive discussions and are talking about an assembly together in the spring.

5. MATTERS ARISING

a) To discuss Public Rights of Way, LJ Betts Farm

Cllr Taylor noted that 8 emails have been received about footpaths. The Parish Council has been in touch with LJ Betts Farm who have listened to the concerns and confirmed that nothing has changed regarding the Public Rights of Way (PROW). No PROW has been closed, the Forest School has not been stopped and there is still school parking allowed in Betts field.

These are early days in our discussions with LJ Betts Farm and early days with the change of ownership. With a change of ownership comes different approaches and those approaches have to be respected as it is a business.

LJ Betts Farm is not public land. PROW are official and are the responsibility of KCC. Other paths have no legal rights to be walked, and walking on them without permission is trespass. Any issues can be taken to the KCC PROW Officer who will investigate.

LJ Betts Farm is a business with planning consent to operate and the legal right to use the public highway. The Parish Council has no right of enforcement. The Parish Council will take on everyone's points and will endeavour to help where we can, trying to work collaboratively.

At the June Parish Council meeting, LJ Betts the Farm provided information which was included in the June Minutes and the June Parish Council Newsletter, which are available on the Parish Council website.

A response has been sent to the 8 residents who have been in contact which Cllr Taylor read out. This is available on request.

If residents believe that a Right of Way has been created and a legal use should be given, this is covered by s31 Highways Act 1980. Residents can obtain a copy of the application form from the Clerk or KCC PROW. KCC have said there is current a waiting time for these applications which is in the region of 5 years.

b) To receive update about Highways Improvement Plan

There were no updates on the HIP. Local road closures have created a problem through the village which has been used as a rat run. Emergency works haven't helped.

c) To consider Green Credentials

This will be considered at the next meeting.

d) To consider Annual Parish Meeting 2025

This was very successful this year and will be run in that format again next year. Cllr Williams will get available dates from the Village Hall.

- e) To consider KALC Community Award and OPC Village Award
Cllrs AGREED they would like to take part again with both award schemes.
- f) To note new street Name – Moorlands View
Moorlands Orchard was not accepted by TMBC, so Moorlands View has been agreed.

6. OPEN FORUM – Public Participation Session

A number of matters were raised by residents:

- Resident - Forest School is not as often, children and parents are upset, and it is not what the school wanted. We were told that the reason Forest School stopped is because this was not a Public Right of Way
Cllr - The Head Teacher confirmed the reduction was at her request as the curriculum is so busy. Any issues about this need to be taken up with the school.
- Resident – it is chaos and dangerous at school drop off and collection times.
Cllr - so many roads are closed and it is impossible to schedule times when there are detours
Resident - It changed with ownership of LJ Betts Farm. Before that, tractors missed time of drop off and collection and it was rare to encounter a lorry. The problem is far worse in the last few months.
Cllr – We will bring this up with LJ Betts Farm
- Resident – Is the engineering workshop on the Farm handling all tractor work, so tractors come up from Hugh Lowe to be serviced?
Cllr - we can ask that question
- Resident – who runs LJ Betts Farm?
Cllr – Marion Regan. The Management Team is the same as before and the Farm Manager is the same.
- Resident – LJ Betts Farm website says they will avoid Offham between 8.15am and 8.55am. Are they enforcing that?
Cllr - it is a business. We cannot dictate to a business and they are entitled to use the public highway. The last few months have been bad because of so many road closures. This is not just farm traffic but all traffic. It is in no-ones interest for the road to be jammed. There are conversations to be had and it is an ongoing process
- Resident – I believe LJ Betts Farm capacity has been upped massively which will increase traffic on road and that crop production has increased.
- Resident – Some footpaths are in an appalling state. I feel a lot of tracks are in the wrong place, are not fit for purpose and are often on swampy ground. Some are already impassable in the rain as they are slippery and dangerous
Cllr – The KCC PROW Officer has provided the following information:
 - Surface vegetation is the responsibility of KCC. They have a clearance contract that cuts certain paths 3 times a year, however not all Public Rights of Way are on that contract. They are able to add to the contract, although they operate on a meterage system where if they wanted to add say 100m of path, 100m has to be removed from elsewhere. They do cut some routes on a reactive basis depending on what sort of budget they have available. These at most get cut once a year, so the timing depends on reports received, weather & contractor availability.
 - Landowners are responsible for side vegetation on things like hedges and overgrown trees, usually because they are the owners. KCC can remind them of their responsibilities if they receive reports to suggest otherwise.
 - Landowners should be addressing ploughed fields to ensure the alignment is obvious and the surface has been flattened. KCC can remind the landowner of their responsibility.
 - There is very little that can be done about muddy and slippery paths. A number of Rights of Way in the country require different footwear at times of year. Most of KCC's surfacing budget focuses on the more urban routes where a tarmac or stone surface already exists.
 - If a PROW is also used by a landowner for vehicular traffic and that's contributing to a path become muddy and slippery beyond 'natural weather' then the landowner should be taking measures to repair damage caused by vehicles. KCC can discuss with the landowner if that is an issue.

- Dogs are considered a natural accompaniment, and accommodations do not have to be made for them on a Public Right of Way.
- Resident – signs spoil the ambience
- Residents - comments were made about questions asked or attitudes of LJ Betts farm workers while residents were walking on footpaths or pavements
- Resident – A meeting with LJ Betts Farm where Marion could share her vision for the Farm and allow villagers to ask her questions directly would be appropriate
- Resident – The village always existed with the farm.
Cllr – Going back, there have been issues, talks of curfews and ups and downs. LJ Betts Farm and village don't always live in harmony but they have lived in dialogue. The Parish Council will open a dialogue again. What has happened in the past does not mean that is how things will carry on going forward. Ideas have been floated and we hope to get to positive solutions. The Parish Council cannot enforce anything but we can help facilitate
- Resident – lorries are encouraged to come in via the bypass but they are coming from the other side of the village
Resident – Marion asked me to report lorries not leaving via the bypass, and I email but get no response
Clerk – not all residents in the village are supportive of lorries using that route
- Resident – there should be an alternative road
Cllr – LJ Betts Farm did investigate this but it was not possible
- Resident - Every Steam Rally a lorry comes through at 1pm and get stuck
- Resident – footpaths are not maintained and have ruts in them. They should have a level surface within 14 days of ploughing
Cllr – it is not impassable. Any problems can be reported to KCC PROW.
- Resident – some paths are not in the right place for the current situation. example given was the PROW across the farmyard, where large vehicles and walkers pass each other
Cllr – KCC PROW have checked and said all footpaths are in the right places
- Resident - If you want to walk across the wheat field you have to go all around the field and it is a long way. There needs to be consideration to move the paths and give residents a shortcut
Cllr – the PROW is there as a public right of way. They cannot just be moved.
- Resident – I've walked the path and didn't know it wasn't a footpath
Cllr – It is still not a PROW. If you believe you have a right of way you can take it up with KCC PROW

Cllr Taylor said the Parish Council will take all this information and liaise with the Farm. We will feedback with those at the meeting if they leave their email addresses to be contacted.

Amelia McLean a Director at Church Farm spoke. She said they had taken on board everything that had been said. There is a lot of misinformation and they are sorry if any of that came from the Farm. They are looking forward to working with the village and hopefully allay some of the concerns. There will be teething issues but not a single policy has changed, not a single cropping rotation – they are just getting to know the new business. There has been the same management team, and Stephen Betts only finished working on the farm last week. They employ 3 mechanics and run separate machinery fleets – they do not bring tractors from other farms to this Farm. The Farm can be contacted at contact@ljbetts.co.uk

7. PARISH COUNCILLOR REPORTS:

- a) Blaise Farm (Liaison Meeting tbc)
 - i. Quarry
There was nothing to report.
 - ii. IVC Waste Management
There was nothing to report.
 - iii. AD Plant
There was nothing to report.
- b) Offham Landfill Site and Solar Park
There was nothing to report.

- c) Speedwatch (FS)
September was a quiet month for Speedwatch so there have been no sessions in the last week. One volunteer is expected to leave and three will be joining.
There was a big event on Saturday morning by the Quintain, prompted by Facebook enquiries about Speedwatch with some misinformation. The Village PC and the Police Community Speedwatch Officer attended and answered questions. Speedwatch is all about education.
The police are assessing another Speedwatch checkpoint Westbound towards the gateway. Bin stickers were handed out with speed limits on.
- d) Maintenance Contract (AM)
There was no update.
- e) Community Emergency Resilience Plan (JA)
This will be taken over by another Cllr.
- f) Fire Hydrant Checks in the Village
Cllrs will allocate which hydrants they should each check.
- g) Dog Mess Signs and the Dog Fouling Campaign (JA)
This will be allocated to another Cllr.
- h) Wellbeing (FS)
Matt at the Kings Arms has said he is not looking to the Parish Council to fund Mens Shed any longer. Matt and Safi were thanked for everything that they have done - they are an asset to the Village.
- i) 2025 Fund Raising Calendar (SW)
£205 sales have been made so far. Cllr Williams will sell calendars at the steam rally, and calendars are available for anyone to purchase.
- j) To discuss Quintain Repairs and Maintenance
Cllr Taylor met with James Miller, a Conservation Accredited Engineer. He has put several bullet points together and will provide a report. Sue Y is going to track down the location of the original Quintain.
- k) To consider Parish Council Projects (ST)
This will be discussed at the next meeting.

8. PLANNING AND LICENSING:

- a) New applications
 - i. **24/01470/PA** - Tree Notification Conservation Area - **Aldon Farmhouse, Aldon Lane** - Acer, which as died from honey fungus, remove and replace with a semi-mature crab apple (14.10.24).
TMBC have stated that the Tree Works are Exempt.
 - ii. **24/01463/PA - Comp Corner, Seven Mile Lane** - Conversion of existing outbuildings into Office/Gym and Entertainment Room (14.10.24)
There were no objections
- b) Approvals
There were no approvals to report.
- c) Refusals
There were no refusals to report.
- d) Any other planning and Licensing matters
 - i. **24/01372/PA - Blaise Farmhouse, Tower Hill** - Demolition of existing bungalow and outbuilding. Replacement dwelling, and associated landscaping (25.09.24)
 - ii. **24/01304/PA - Orchard Place, Teston Road** - s73 application to vary condition 2 of planning permission TM/07/01124/FL to allow 3 further mobile homes with day rooms. (30.09.24)

- iii. **24/01369/PA - Kingscot, Tower Hill** -Details of Condition 3 ((a) Notated elevations and floor plans and detailed specification for removal of modern floors and wall coverings and details of making good exposed surfaces, (b) Method statement for removal of stone fire surround cladding, (c) Specification for timber beam cleaning, (d) Details of roof light, (e) Roof structure and first floor wall plan) Submitted pursuant to planning permission TM/22/02874/LB (Listed Building Application: Demolition of existing single storey side extension and replacement two storey side extension. Internal alterations, refurbishment, conservation and repair works to listed building. Replacement of asbestos garage roof, new driveway gate and associated landscaping. Demolition of existing shed and replacement single storey detached (30.09.24)
- iv. To discuss Planning Policy Statement, Neighbourhood Plan and Neighbourhood Priority Statement
The Parish Council needs to be aware of the new NPPF guidelines to protect the village and we need a Neighbourhood Priority Statement. West Malling PC are going for a Neighbourhood Plan. We will work with WMPC.

9. MONTHLY CHECK-LIST

- a) To note any Highways, Footpaths and Footways problems (www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/report-a-problem)
 - Cllrs Williams has purchased signs for the litter bins from TMBC
 - Cllr Williams will report to TMBC that the bin by North Meadow is too tall inside to put rubbish in.
 - Cllr Taylor reported that Highways renewed the white lines at the top of Aldon Lane, but not the hash lines by the gateway. Residents and Councillors can report this online.
 - The reflector on the new bit of fence needs installing and this can be reported online.
 - If anyone sees something wrong with the highway or signage or white lines, it should be reported on the Kent Highways website. We have a good relationship with our Highway Steward and often get a quick turnaround of work. The Western Gateway was replaced quickly after it was damaged.
 - There was a discussion about vehicles travelling the wrong way along North Meadow. The Clerk was asked to add that to the Highways Improvement Plan.
- b) Reports about Parish Property and Land including The Pond, Village Green, The Pound, Cosgrave Field, Recreation Ground, Play Area, Book Box, Defibrillator, Speed Indicator Devices, Trees
 - Pond maintenance – Steve R is dealing with this. Amelia M agreed that the silt could be deposited on Farm land.
 - The light in the Recreation Ground Car Park is coming on at the wrong times. TMBC are investigating this.
 - Cllr Taylor has a template to repurpose the covid signs in the Park, including a notice that dogs are not permitted in the Recreation Ground or the enclosed Play Park. She will share details. A 3rd “no dog” sign is needed on the gate by the footpath.
 - The Notice Boards will be installed in the next week
- c) To discuss Calendar of Village Maintenance Works by Parish Council
Cllr Williams and Steve R have had a handover of the defibrillator from Dave F. David and Kath F are leaving the village soon and will be sorely missed. They have contributed so much to Offham.

10. EVENTS. To receive reports on past events and to discuss events coming soon

- a) KALC – Advanced Planning Topics for Local Councils – 17.10.24 (ST)
Cllr Taylor is attending.
- b) KALC – Clerks Conference 12.11.24 (Clerk)
The Clerk is attending.
- c) Remembrance Service and Wreath Laying
Cllr Marchant will lay the wreath.
- d) Lighting the Christmas Tree – 1.12.24
New lights may be needed for the bus shelter

- e) Christingle Service at St Michaels – 08.12.24
This was noted.
- f) Carols in the pub – 19.12.24
This was noted.
- g) Shedettes (every Tuesday) and Mens Shed (every Thursday) - 10am, Kings Arms
This continues to run well.

Other Events:

19.10.24 – Matt S has been given permission to put a Bouncy Castle on the Village Green. Cllrs gave permission as an acknowledgement of everything he does for the village. Cllr Marchant will complete a risk assessment of the Village Green

20.10.24 – an unofficial event is the Steam Rally. Cllr Marchant will complete a risk assessment of the Village Green.

Remembrance Poppies and Display on The Green – Robin T said he was liaising with Steve R about this

11. FINANCIAL INFORMATION

- a) To receive bank statements, consider and approve financial statements and to monitor budget
These have been circulated to Cllrs. It was **RESOLVED** to approve the accounts and the statements were signed by Cllr Williams. There were no budget issues to report.

- b) To consider and approve invoice payments

<u>Payee</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Amount £</u>
Payments Approved since the last meeting		
Viking Office	Office Supplies	145.69
AJG Gallagher	Insurance Renewal 01.10.24-30.09.25	2,274.45
Unity Trust	Service Charge Current Account	18.00
September additional payments		£2,438.14
Payments – October 2024		
Clerk	October 2024 Salary	959.47
HMRC	October 2024 PAYE and NI	320.12
Clerk	Travel, Reimbursements	120.55
Netwise	Host, support and maintenance PC website	396.00
Forvis Mazars	Limited Assurance Review AGAR 23-24	378.00
S Williams	Reimbursement Costs- play area opening and APM	78.76
The Kings Arms	Mens Shed June-September 24	32.50
Waring Lawn Care	Late Summer Treatment 08.10.24	280.00
October total external payments		2,565.40
Internal Payments		
Current Account	Instant Access Savings Account	8,000.00

Cllrs Bailey and Marchant will authorise the payments with Unity Trust.

- c) To discuss and approve annual donation towards refreshments for Lighting of the Tree and carols in the pub
The regular Annual Donation of £100 was AGREED.
- d) To approve the purchase of wreath for Remembrance Service
This was approved.
- e) To consider and approve updated Fixed Asset Register and note insurance renewal (01.10.24)
Cllrs noted the renewal.

12. AGENDA ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING

The next monthly meeting will be held on **Tuesday 5th November 2024** at 7.30pm in The Village Hall
The Farm will be added as an Agenda Item.

The meeting closed at 9.25pm

Signed

Dated

DRAFT