

BOUGHTON MALHERBE PARISH COUNCIL

**Minutes of the Annual Meeting
held on Tuesday 8th May 2012
in Grafty Green Village Hall
following on from the Annual Parish Meeting**

Present:

Robert Turner, Chairman
Ron Galton
Mike Hitchins
Tony King
Barbara Pearce

Christine King, Clerk
Councillor Jenny Gibson
10 Members of the Public

1. Chairman's Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everybody to the Annual Meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Keith Anderson; Sue Burch; John Collins, Jenny Whittle.

3. Approval of Previous Minutes

The Minutes of the previous Meeting held on 10th May 2011 were approved and signed as a correct record.

4. Police Report

An introductory Police Report was given by Alan Beech at the Annual Parish Meeting

5. Speed Watch Report by Keith Anderson, read by CK.

The new National Speedwatch Software and Database has been received and installed. The operation of inputting data has been made much easier and is also capable of matching speeding motorists across other counties which it previously couldn't.

To date, Grafty Green Speedwatch has 7 trained parishioners and will carry on now, week after week and, in conjunction with the plans to install a 30mph interactive sign, it is hoped that speeding vehicles will be minimal.

Just for information, a news release had been received thanking everyone for their patience in having to wait for the new Speedwatch Template. In just 2 months many more 'cross border' second and third time speeding detections have been registered than expected.

6. Kent Fire and Rescue Report by Chris Wheal

The fire at the Barn on 1st October 2011 gave rise to many concerns, not least of which was operational changes within KFRS. Subsequent meetings were held with KFRS which resulted in some very positive initiatives which are on-going. The fire brought home to everybody the devastating impact. Fire prevention came prominently to the top of the list and various initiatives rolled out, with awareness and preventative measures being highlighted.

We have investigated a number of things regarding hydrants, ensuring as far as possible, clear identity and operational availability and readiness by way of very regular checks and close liaison with KFRS. Hydrant covers are now painted yellow, signs visible, an 'H' in the road and, where necessary, verge marker posts to 'protect' the hydrants. Lack of water supply for fire fighting purposes (falling short of national guidelines) became very evident and is currently an on-going dialogue between Parish Council and South East Water.

I am honoured and delighted to say our work with KFRS has led to a programme by then to be rolled out to all parishes in the county - and all based on Boughton Malherbe, so at least a positive from a negative. I should shortly be enrolled as an 'Official KFRS Volunteer' which will bring further positive benefits.

6.1 Update on water supply problems by Ron Galton

Since the fire at The Barn the Parish Council has been in constant discussion with South East Water (SEW) concerning the low mains water pressure and inadequate flow rates for fire hydrants. These discussions are likely to go on for some time.

So far we have established that whilst water pressure is low there are no houses where it is below the statutory minimum. However, some householders have said that pressure is so low that their roof storage tanks can run dry after a bath because the flow rate is inadequate. We have now received an assurance from SEW that if we provide a list of the addresses which have suffered this problem they will try to assist and a notice will be placed in the Parish magazine asking anyone affected in this manner to report it to Ron Galton who will then arrange for SEW to investigate.

With regard to Fire Hydrants, SEW have now stated after investigation into the system that it will not be possible to provide the high flow rates required by the Fire Service and because SEW are meeting their statutory obligations there are no immediate plans to improve the situation.

7. Chairman's Report by Robert Turner

Well, whoever says that nothing happens in Boughton Malherbe! Over this last year Parish Council business seems to have taken more and more time but I, personally, have found the greater involvement a rewarding challenge. As the Boughton Malherbe Councillors will have found, the demands placed upon us by the Borough Council have increased significantly. To see this, just look at your in-box. The sad thing is that a goodly quantity that comes through has little or no relevance to our community.

The Localism Act - which received Royal assent in November will give greater empowerment to both Borough and Parish councils and will bring more work for the future which is a double edged sword. But it will bring opportunities for the Parish Council to have a greater say in what happens within our Parish.

Concurrent Functions - following protests from all parishes the grant for 2012/2013 was maintained at the level of the previous year (in itself a 30% cut on the 2010/2011 level) The future of this grant is still being debated by MBC. As a Parish we will have to fight for every penny that we can get in the coming year.

The Parish Precept - after a thorough financial review the Parish Council decided to increase the Parish Precept for the year of 2012/2013 by 9.5 %. This meant an increase from £8.37 to £9.17 per house at Band D level.

Parish Clerk Changes - as you all know, Pat Anderson decided to retire from the post of Parish Clerk. After several interviews, Chris King took up the challenge In April. We all wish her well.

Crime Levels - unfortunately crime levels have risen over the past year, much to the concern of the Parish Council. Discussions are in progress with the police on this matter.

Local Policing - our PCSO, Siobhan de Burca, has been moved to pastures new. Alan Beech has replaced Siobhan. In addition, the police structure for both Maidstone East and West was revamped in November 2011. We hope that this will bring additional resources to the Parish to tackle the rising crime level.

Planning Applications:

Numbers received	11 (Previous year 13)
Accepted	7
Refused	3
Retrospective Approval	1
Awaiting Decision	1

PPS Development at Ivy House Farm - the Planning Application was not rejected by the Borough Council and final approval is to be delegated to Planning Officers. An Implementation Panel is to be set up to ensure that all the conditions are met. The Parish Council will be offered a place on this panel.

Liverton Hill - A Chairman's Report would not be complete without a comment on Liverton Hill. The drainage in the top section was repaired in the summer. The Hill is to be resurfaced and the gullies cleaned in June of this year.

Roads and Gullies - this is a permanent battle for the Clerk with KCC. This, like Liverton Hill, occupies a great deal of clerical time. A big thank you to our Clerk for her persistence.

Outside Meetings Attended - meetings were attended covering:

KALC, Maidstone Planning Committee, Concurrent Functions, Joint Parishes Group, Maidstone Core Strategy presentations, Police Forum .

One or more members of Boughton Malherbe Parish Council attended one or more of these meetings. As we are a small Parish it is important that we maintain a high profile and contribute.

59 Bus - this is an "on /off saga." A big thank you to John Collins for fighting this issue on our behalf. The village does need to realise that there is a use it /or lose it issue at stake here. The new Parish Council need to consider alternatives for the future should we lose this service.

Fire at the Barn - this was a very sobering and thought- provoking event . I am delighted that work has started on the re-building. This incident highlighted a weakness in the fire hydrant system and the issue has been championed by Chris Wheal with the Kent Fire and Rescue Service. As a result major improvements have been made. In addition, a presentation was arranged with KFRS in the Village Hall on fire safety in the home. This resulted in several follow up visits to people's homes by the KFRS .

Also as a result of the fire, water pressure in the village has been questioned. There has been a quantity of correspondence with South Eastern Water about water pressure and this will remain as an on-going issue.

Elections - we have just had Parish Elections. This has resulted in two new Parish Councillors - Barbara Pearce and Tony King. I hope that they will enjoy their appointment to the Parish Council.

Interactive Speed Sign - this was Pat Anderson's baby .This new sign is to be installed virtually opposite Offen Farm gateway. The site was recommended at a meeting with KCC last week.

Finally I do want to thank the following people for their help and support over the past year :

- Michael and Rosemary Smith for keeping the green neat and tidy.
- Michael Tew for arranging the Christmas Tree and keeping us festive.
- Jenny Whittle of KCC who has given us a great deal of her time, not to mention her money, over

the past year . Our grateful thanks for her support.

- Jenny Gibson has attended most of our meetings over the past year and has supported the Parish Council over issues with the MBC. In addition she has kept us abreast of the vagaries of the Borough Council . Thanks for her support .
- Members of the Parish Council, thank you for the help and time that you have freely given to the Parish of Boughton Malherbe .
- The Clerks: Pat Anderson and now the newly appointed Chris King. Without your determination and organisation the Parish of Boughton Malherbe would be much the poorer. A big thank you.

8. County & Borough Councillors' Reports

Report by Jenny Whittle, KCC read by Robert Turner

I am very sorry that I cannot be with you tonight; I hope this short report in my absence is helpful by way of a resume of what I have been up to in relation to the parish over the past year as well as a general summary of recent county council developments.

Reducing the speed limit on Liverton Hill

The proposal to reduce the speed limit on Liverton Hill has been beset by delays for which I can only apologise. A statutory Traffic Regulation Order advising residents and motorists about the proposed speed reduction was recently advertised. The new 30mph speed limit if approved will stretch from the top of Liverton Hill straight through to Grafty Green (but not the part from Platts Heath to Liverton Hill). On the basis that most of the responses are positive, the speed limit will be introduced shortly after the consultation has been undertaken.

A new speed indicator device in Grafty Green

The Parish Council and I are jointly funding a speed indicator device for Grafty Green to encourage motorists to slow down and adhere to the speed limit. I am awaiting a date from Kent Highways as to when this will be installed and will keep the Parish Council advised.

Protecting Kent's roads

With 15 parishes in my electoral Division, I have received numerous complaints about the ongoing problem of HGVs using inappropriate rural routes. KCC views this issue seriously and has been developing a Freight Action Plan that will seek to introduce a number of initiatives to mitigate the impact of lorries on Kent's roads. A few of the actions highlighted in the plan include:

- work nationally to develop a standard method of data sharing with the suppliers of devices and local authorities
- work with the Freight Transport Association to promote best practice
- develop a facility to provide information to businesses on most suitable routes
- investigate the possibility of a Lorry Watch scheme (where Trading Standards officers fine lorry drivers caught flouting weight and width restrictions and other road regulations).

The plan will be issued for consultation shortly and will be adopted as a strategic approach to tackling a problem that has menaced Kent's rural roads for too long.

2012-13 KCC Budget

KCC has frozen its council tax precept for the second year running despite having to make £95 million savings and retaining eligibility criteria for adult social care to "moderate" - one of only a small number of authorities in the country that has not raised the threshold for accessing these services. Staff will also received a 1% pay increase after a two year wage freeze. KCC is also investing an additional £23m to support the most vulnerable children in the county, including the 1500 children in our care system.

Kent Jobs for Kent Young People

A new £2m fund to provide help for employers to offer apprenticeships for young people is currently being formulated by KCC. It is hoped that this funding will help support up to 1000 opportunities for school and college leavers and graduates and provide a vital first step for young people to gain meaningful employment. There are too many young people struggling to find work and this fund is desperately needed to support them find jobs. Details in how to apply for assistance are available on the KCC website (www.kent.gov.uk).

My goal over the next year is to try and improve broadband access for residents and I will write a piece for the Malherbe Monthly about how I propose to do this.

Report by Jenny Gibson, MBC

The achievements of Maidstone Borough Council over the last year have recently been highlighted and include the improvements to the museum and its excellent new extension; the extensive renovations to the High Street; Maidstone's position as 8th best town in the country (according to a survey by the Halifax), and its part to be played in the forthcoming Olympic Torch Relay, in addition to the improvements to Mote Park.

However, in the rural areas there are a number of concerns, including the ongoing need to provide suitable accommodation for gypsies and travellers. 15 new pitches are to be established but this still leaves an immediate, unmet, need for 57 pitches. Landowners have been approached for appropriate sites but it is going to be a difficult task to supply sufficient numbers. There is a preference on the part of gypsies and travellers to settle in the Weald area but the Council is seeking to establish pitches more evenly throughout the Borough.

Local Structure plan - looking towards the future and how to balance economy and growth whilst preserving what is best in an area. This can be hard to achieve with house prices the way they are. MBC is one of only a few councils that do not allow affordable housing to be built outside the 'village envelope.' (Jenny Gibson will try and find out more about this.)

MBC has been concentrating on trying to save money and has set up a system of back office sharing with other councils as one measure. The need to make substantial cut-backs will continue for the foreseeable future.

Litter clearance is an issue in some areas, and the aim is to keep main roads clear with more minor roads being litter picked less frequently, with the hope that the problem can largely be contained by deploying resources in this way.

The Citizens Advice Bureau operate a valuable outreach service at Headcorn every third Friday of the month at Headcorn Library. No appointments are necessary and residents from surrounding areas are encouraged to use this service.

9. Village Hall Committee Report by Richard Pilborough, Chairman

A new Village Hall committee was formed in August last year, following Mike Hitchins' decision to step down from the chairman's role. I was the only candidate for his replacement and so was duly elected.

Robert Turner continues as our Treasurer but, apart from Robert and myself, my wife is now the only member of the former committee still serving and we have 8 new members.

We see our role as maintaining the fabric of the Village Hall, running community events there ourselves and encouraging others to use it.

The regular hirers of the Hall continue to be Headcorn Morris, the Gardening Club, Gail Kelly's "Dazzle" drama group for children, and Sue Burch's Yoga class – plus yourselves, of course. Additionally, free use of the Hall is granted to the Church for a monthly coffee morning and the annual Harvest Supper. But we will soon have a new regular hirer, of which more in a moment.

Last August, the first significant issue for the new committee was a collapsing floor in the Hall kitchen, caused by damp having rotted the supporting joists. Local handyman Gary Brooker subsequently fixed this for us, assisted by Robert - and Robert was also instrumental in getting funding from Cllr. Jenny Whittle to cover the cost – so a serious problem was sorted.

Following this, Gary offered to become our regular on-call handyman, and we have indeed had to call upon him for several, more minor, maintenance jobs since then. His willingness to turn out for us at the drop of a hat is invaluable.

Early on, the Gardening Club organised a clear up of the planted area to the L.H. side of the Hall (and have repeated this exercise recently) so that area, previously overgrown, now looks tidy; Anne Henderson and my wife, Sandra, sewed many metres of material to make new stage curtains (to match the window curtains which had been hung a year or so previously); and I undertook a 'deep clean' of the gents' toilets which were encrusted with dirt and lime scale.

But if we were to improve the Hall further, and if we were to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee as we wished with a major village event, it was clear we needed to raise funds. In 2010, The Hall's income had been barely enough to pay its bills.

The first social event held under the auspices of the new committee was a dance to the band "Chicory Tip" in November, which had already begun to be organised by Margaret Neave and Anne Henderson before they joined the committee. This was well supported, and raised over £600, and a similar dance is to be organised by Margaret and Anne this autumn.

Another Committee member, Jacqui Thompson, together with friends & neighbours, organised a quiz night in December and shared the proceeds between ourselves and the Church – boosting our bank balance by a further £700.

In January we organised a collection of unwanted clothes and similar items for re-sale, in March we ran a 'Frog Race' gambling evening and last month we had a Beetle Drive, all of which further improved our financial position.

With the money raised we have improved the toilet facilities in the Hall, repairing the instantaneous water heaters for hand washing, replacing toilet seats and toilet roll holders, and changing the flushing arrangements for the Gents' urinals - so there is no longer a continual flush of water about 50 times a day, every day of the year, regardless of need. Instead you now push a button to flush as required.

As well as saving water, this will minimise future lime scale build-up, reduce the dampness which has affected the walls, and allow the yoga class to indulge in silent contemplation without the sound of a tsunami interrupting them every 20 minutes.

Temporarily, this work has made the decorative state of the loos worse, but next weekend, committee members and others, will be repainting the toilet areas which should then look and function much better than they have for many years.

Our remaining profits are being put towards our Jubilee celebration in June. On offer is a hog roast meal; a display of classic cars; a bouncy castle; stilt-walking jugglers; stalls of various kinds; music and dancing. We are spending over £2,000 on this event, which we regard as the highlight of our year. (And we are grateful to the custodians of the village Millenium Fund, subsequently renamed the Yvonne Fletcher Fund, for donating the unused balance of that fund to help us finance the celebration.)

Looking further ahead, we aim to continue offering social activities for the village and encouraging others to make use of the Hall, and I am delighted that an indoor bowls club is currently being formed. The Hall Committee has facilitated this by hosting a 'taster' session that attracted over 20 people and by subsequently funding the purchase of mats and bowls. We will hope to recoup this financial outlay in the charges that the club will pay to hire the Hall, initially for 2 sessions a week.

We also aim to improve the Hall further and, in this connection, are currently looking to replace the Hall chairs with something more modern and comfortable. The Gardening Club, who are the most frequent users of the Hall seating, have generously donated £1,000 for this purpose, but we will have to find an additional £2,000 if we are to replace all the chairs with the sort of seating we would like.

So fund raising will continue, and we will continue to seek reductions in our outgoings. We have recently negotiated a cheaper electricity contract and hope to negotiate cheaper insurance, based

on a quote from an alternative insurer. And now our water usage has shrunk hugely we will look at any possible saving to be achieved by installing a water meter.

It has been an extremely busy 9 months for the new committee, getting ourselves established and finding our way around the issues that we've confronted, but we've been enormously cheered by the support we've had from villagers and hope we can keep up the momentum going forward.

10. Short Mat Bowls Club Report by Chris Wheal

Another positive for Grafty Green, spurred on by Richard Pilborough and the Village Hall Committee, and there was sufficient interest from the Villagers to form a club which now has its initial equipment (albeit mainly second-hand) and gets underway, proper, on Wednesday 23rd May. I have no doubts whatsoever for its success and expected continuous growth - it really is an addictive and pleasurable pastime.

11. Garden Club Report by Sue Burch, read by CK

The highlights of 2011 - definitely a WOW factor was the garden in Bearsted that surprised all with its beautiful panoramic view towards the North Downs. There, too, were the amusing speakers; Neil Arnold, Laurie Manser and Dr Simon Charlesworth, not forgetting the fascinating story behind the Saltwood Foxglove that enlightened us on the long and difficult journey it takes to reproduce plants to a particular specification (cloning!) Even the talk on composting, which might have been thought not that interesting, caused quite a bit of animation and discussion from the audience, plus we got a free environmentally friendly bag!

Another successful weekend trip in September visiting Charlecot Manor, The Three Counties Show at Malvern, the national collection of Michaelmas Daisies close to Malvern and Slimbridge Wildfowl Trust.

The club always welcomes visitors and new members – currently we have 36 members and last year we had 47. You can see that we offer a wide range of talks and outings.

The club have made a donation to the Village Hall of £1,000 to go towards some new chairs.

The club manage the border outside the village hall, the planters on the green and on the approach roads from Headcorn and Egerton. Additionally the club is planning on planting some trees in the Parish to commemorate the Jubilee.

Our events over 2011:

Date 2011	Event/Speaker	Subject
Jan 4	AGM - Dr Charlesworth	Down Derry Lavender
Feb 1	Neil Arnold	Weird Animals in Kent
Mar1	Greg Hitchcock	Insects in the garden

April 5	Spring Show / Laurie Manser	Gardening as a boy
May 7	Outing - Pashley Manor	Tulip festival
June 7	Outing - St.Faiths Lane Bearsted	Private garden – donations to diabetes charity
July 5	Coach outing to Salutation Garden in Sandwich	
August 2	Knowle Hill Farm, Elizabeth Cairns	Private garden – donations to charity
Sept 6	Autumn Show - Sue Scrivens	Saltwood Foxglove
Sept 24/25	Weekend to Malvern, Worcestershire	3 Counties Show
Oct 4	Brogdale National Fruit Collection	Tasting Apples and Pears
Nov 1	Alison Sollis	Composting
Dec 6	John Collins	People and Places of Boughton Malherbe

And our events for this year:

Date 2012	Event/Speaker	Subject
Jan 10	AGM – Hilary Newman	Plant Hunters
Feb 7	Jacqueline Aviolet	Hardy Geraniums
March 6	Sue Scrivens	More Wayside Plants
April 3	Spring Show / Laurie Manser	More Gardening Memories
May 1	Sandra Pilborough and Sylvia Galton	Making the best of flower arranging
May 15	Ros Bennett	Ferns and Mosses in Elmstone Lane
June 9 Saturday 2pm	Outing Molesworth, Benenden	Private garden
July 3 6.30 pm	Eaglewood, Warren Street,	Mr and Mrs Darvill's garden

July 27 -29	Weekend in Sussex	
August 7 6.30pm	Bean Place Nursery, Headcorn	Nursery visit
Sept 4	Autumn Show - Neil Coombs	Vintage Trees
Oct 2	Veronica Moore	Horticultural Therapy
Nov 6	Sue Buckingham	Wild flowers of the Mediterranean
Dec 4	Social – Tom La Dell	Weird and Wacky things to eat from the Garden

12. St. Nicolas' Church Report by Joan Davidson

At the end of June our Assistant Priest Rev: Marian Bond left us to take up a post at Bredgar and 4 other small Parishes in that area; we were very sad to say good-bye to Marian. Two weddings were held in St. Nicolas' last year and we had one candidate for Confirmation this service was held at All Saints', Ulcombe

In January this year we stopped holding the Morning Worship Service on the second Sunday in the month, the same day as Evensong, as it became quite clear which service people preferred to attend.

In May the DAC (Diocesan Advisory Council) visited St. Nicolas' to see what works we are proposing to do when we install a toilet and kitchen area in the tower and old boiler house at St. Nicolas' and we also propose to remove 3 Pews to make more room at the front of the Nave and side Aisle and one pew beside the Font. The Faculty form for these alterations is about to be sent off to the Commissary General for approval.

We now have mains water piped to the Church, which arrived just in time for the start of Cream Tea season. The Teas were a great success again last summer the last tea afternoon raised over £400 for the Pilgrims Hospice. We purchased a new table and 8 chairs in August to help cope with the growing numbers attending.

During the summer some tree work was put in hand to raise the crowns of the Yew Trees in the Churchyard and to trim back over hanging branches from the Shrubbery next door. As the front part of the Churchyard is closed, the Borough Council paid for this work.

We had a little trouble with nuisance makers in the Churchyard who thought it would be good fun to knock over the Portaloo, making it necessary to send it to be steam cleaned at a cost of £70. Also, some visitors made off with a Church key which resulted in the need to modify the door lock and a new set of keys having to be cut. These people were subsequently apprehended and sent to Court as ours wasn't the only Church which they had visited.

The Harvest Supper was once again a success bringing in much needed revenue.

The Quiz in December was also very successful, organised by three couples in the Village with help from their friends, and they made a handsome profit. We are very grateful to all the people involved in organizing these events.

At the end of January a field gate was installed in the fence line of the field opposite the Church, Jamie Clark having given permission for us to use the field for parking cars for weddings, funerals etc. We are grateful to the Parish Council for helping to fund this facility.

The Coffee Mornings held in the Village Hall have a small following; it would be good if more people dropped in for Coffee on the 2nd Wednesday of the month between 10.30 and 12.00. There are always freshly made goodies to be had and a warm welcome, at no charge.

13. Yoga Club Report by Sue Burch, read by CK

The weekly yoga classes are running on Wednesday evenings and Thursday mornings. Numbers fluctuate from 4 to 14 and are always enjoyed by those who come and experience the sessions. The range of participants is wide - there is a 12 year old who comes with his Mum, there are the sporty types as well as the less agile, male and female, young and old.

14. Boughton Malherbe History Society Report by Ron Galton

During the past year the sale of books has continued and only a few now remain unsold. The response to the book and the exciting stories and information collected since publication has led the committee to agree to publish a second volume. So far there are eight chapters prepared in rough draft form and information is nearly ready for several more.

The new book may be smaller than the first but we think it will be more interesting.

No date has yet been set for publication.

15. Bus Service by John Collins, read by CK

I have represented Boughton Malherbe Parish Council at both of the meetings of the East of Maidstone Rural Transport Group held in the last twelve months, and in matters arising outside of the meetings.

The 59 service has remained largely unchanged as far as Grafty Green is concerned but there have been changes to the financial arrangements.

Having retained the contract to run the Saturday service for another four years from April 2010, Nu-Venture decided to cancel the contract from April last year, citing as the main factors increases in the price of fuel and confirmation of the actual level of reduction in the rate of reimbursement for carrying passengers using concessionary permits. KCC duly re-tendered the Saturday contract which was awarded to Arriva but at a much higher contract price. This meant that the level of subsidy per

passenger journey also went up considerably, putting the contract high on the list of contracts which no longer met the criteria for financial support. It was therefore identified as one of the contracts to be cancelled from the end of December 2011 as KCC looked to reduce its spending on subsidising public transport as part of the overall budget cuts which KCC and all other local authorities were having to make.

Following discussions with Kent County Council Cabinet Member for Transport, Cllr. Bryan Sweetland and KCC Officers and Kent County Councillor Jenny Whittle, KCC agreed to continue funding for the Saturday Service 59 until the end of March 2013.

The Monday to Friday service had continued to be run by Arriva on a commercial basis, but in February this year, Arriva announced that, in order to try and make the Monday to Friday service profitable and secure its future, certain services would be withdrawn from 1st April. As far as Grafty Green was concerned, this involved the withdrawal of the 07.21 service from Grafty Green and the 16.10 from Maidstone on non-school days, and the 17.25 service from Maidstone on school and non-school days. This would have meant that the service could no longer be used for those travelling to work and if scholars missed the 16.10 from Maidstone or had after school activities, they would not be able to travel home by bus.

However, again with some involvement of Cllr Jenny Whittle, and despite severe pressures on its transport budget, KCC agreed to fund the 07.21 from Grafty Green and the 17.25 from Maidstone, although the 16.10 from Maidstone on non-school days remained withdrawn. The other services remain commercially operated by Arriva.

It is not clear how long the funding is set to last but the next meeting of the group is scheduled for July when there will be much to discuss as to how the 59 service can best be secured for the future. Some options for reducing costs without materially affecting the level of service are already being considered.

Everything depends on the level of usage so the message remains USE IT OR LOSE IT. We nearly did!

16. Honywood and Douglas Charity Report by Mike Davidson.

David Chantler and Mike Davidson were reappointed as Trustees. The Almshouses are going from strength to strength. There is a vacancy at the moment which is being advertised locally, in Malherbe Monthly and in Church. If anybody is interested they need to apply by 30th May. There has only been one other vacancy this year so if anybody knows of anybody, let the Trustees know. RT thanked them both for standing as Trustees.

There being no further items for discussion the meeting closed at 10.22pm