

**STELLING MINNIS PARISH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING ON 21 MAY 2025 HELD AT 7.30PM
IN STELLING MINNIS VILLAGE HALL**

Present: Parish Cllr John Haffenden (Vice Chairman)
Parish Cllr Nick Smith
Parish Cllr Ann Day
FHDC Cllr Elaine Martin

Gail Hubbard, Clerk to the Council
There were four members of the public present.

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Cllr Couch, Cllr Hubble, FHDC Cllr Jenny Hollingsbee and VH Chairman Lee Jones. Cllr Haffenden welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD 22 MAY 2024

The minutes from the meeting in 2024 were proposed by Cllr Smith, seconded by Cllr Day and so it was AGREED that the minutes be accepted. The minutes were duly signed by the Chairman of the meeting.

3. VICE CHAIRMANS ANNUAL REPORT

Cllr Haffenden gave his report that is summarised below:

- **Councillors**
Full complement of seven Cllrs all year
- **Meetings**
All six held as usual, no extra ordinary ones required
- **Planning**
Over the last 12 months – only 10 applications received
3 of these refused by FHDC
5 approved by FHDC
Remainder awaiting consideration from FHDC
- **Village Hall**
SMPC have supporting the hall and have now awarded a grant for roof repairs of £5895.
A report to follow later from the Chairman, Lee Jones
- **Stelling Minnis Windmill**
Following KCC's decision to divest of the windmills we have been receiving regular feedback from the Windmill trustees. A meeting was held on Monday which we will hear more about later from Cara.
- **CIL expenditure**
Two amounts spent in the last 12 months:
£500 grant to the PTA at Stelling Minnis School for playarea works outside
£230 on the Defibrillator awareness session that we arranged in November 2024

This was a successful evening attended by 25 residents, instructor was very engaging and people were able to get hands on with the dummies and AED's.

- **Councillor informal meeting**

We hosted an evening in October and invited the other local parish councillors to attend for a sharing of concerns etc. This was attended by Cllrs from Waltham, Denton with Wootton, Etchinghill, Upper Hardres, Elmsted, Barham, our District Cllr and Leader of FHDC.

- **Bench**

We are in the process of looking to replace the wooden bench that was beyond its useful life outside the shop. Cllr Smith has been investigating replacement options and a budget has been agreed.

- **Defibrillators**

The PC have two defib units situated in the village

Thanks to First Responder Steve Moore's who had been looking after these for us, Steve has now moved away and the parish are appointing a proper company that will look after these on our behalf. To ensure they are always emergency ready.

- **.gov.uk domain**

The PC have taken up the option of a .gov.uk domain for the website. This is not mandatory yet but best practice. We may need to follow on with the clerks email address shortly too.

- **Highways**

Cllr Hubble has continued to report issues and liaise with our highways steward to get highways issues resolved. Roundels that formed part of the HIP (highways improvement plan) have been installed.

4. PARISH COUNCIL STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2024-25

The Clerk read out her report as follows:

This is my report on the Parish Council accounts for the year ending 31st March 2025, which will be presented to the Councillors at our meeting in June, ready to meet the audit and transparency deadline of 30th June. These will be available to the public after this point and will be displayed on our website.

The gross income for the year was £8420.24, this was made up from the precept amount of £8,159 and £261.24 of VAT reclaimed from the previous year. The gross expenditure for the year was £8,020.52. From our CIL monies we awarded Stelling Minnis School PTA £500 for their play equipment project and spent £230 on a defibrillator training session at the hall. The rest of the years expenditure was usual running costs.

The balance at year end stands at £22,188. From this balance, we have monies set aside in our Ear Marked reserves; these are £9,311 of CIL monies, £300 towards replacement

defib pads/battery, £121 towards replacement office equipment and £498 towards election costs.

We set a precept of £8,359 at our January meeting for this year, 2025-26. This is only £200 more than last year's amount but due to a change in the tax base from FHDC this will have shown as approx. a 4.9% increase/£1.29pa on a band D property.

5. OUTGOING KCC COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT

Cllr Susan Carey's report was provided as follows:

2024/25 Annual Report Kent County Council

Your County Council continues to offer hundreds of services ranging from the recycling and disposal of waste collected by the district councils in Kent, care for the elderly, the disabled, child protection, fostering and adoption, lifelong care for those with a Learning Disability, Trading Standards, the Coroners' Service, registration of births and deaths, libraries, streetlights, roads, public rights of way, provision of school transport and more.

The past year has seen continued financial challenges as demand for Social Care continues to outpace our income and from April this year companies that provide care face increased costs from tax rises which will further worsen this situation.. Despite the pressures, several of our services have won recognition for exceptional efforts such as Kent Highways for their work educating young drivers and their passengers. KCC also won the Local Authority Energy Efficiency Award for the Southeast with for its solar farm at Kings Hill near Maidstone, a project I saw through from start to finish.

The very first elections to Kent County council were held in January 1889 with the council formally coming into being on 01 April 1889. Now the Government is planning to reorganise local government in England combining Districts and County Councils so the election held on 01 May this year is likely to be the very last election for Kent County Council. The Government will have the final say on the shape of the new councils but has indicated that the new combined council/s should have a minimum population of 500,000 (there are around 1.6m in Kent as a whole). At some point we also expect there will be a mayor for the whole of Kent with responsibility for strategic planning, transport and other Kent wide issues.

All your services will continue and there may be economies of scale. There will almost certainly be fewer councillors in the new set up and that may leave a bigger role for parish and town councils particularly if they too look to combine (there are at resent no compulsory plans for this but it could be done on a voluntary basis).

In my 20 years as your County Councillor I have seen a number of parish councillors, clerks and chairmen at Stelling Minnis but the challenges are largely the same. I've been able to direct my KCC grant to help with traffic measures and help village organisations and I was particularly pleased to help fund the oak bus shelters and the cinema club. Stelling Minnis is an impressive community in its many village organisations, its splendid newsletter, the glorious Minnis and fun events at the Village Hall and the Rose & Crown. I've met many people contributing to village life and I've made friends over the years. I shall miss you all but particularly my friend and District Council colleague Jenny Hollingsbee who continues to do quite exceptional work for the parish and our area.

Over the years, I have held several roles with countywide responsibilities the most recent being KCC's Cabinet Member for Environment where I introduced the booking system for our Household Waste Recycling Centres as a lockdown measure and which proved

so popular with the public that it has been refined and kept. We won major Government grants to help reduce our energy costs and carbon emissions, launched Plan Tree to establish 1.5 million extra trees and also launched the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. We helped hundreds of Kent households (and Stelling Minnis Village Hall) access Solar Panels through the Solar Together collective buying scheme and introduced EV charging points in District Council car parks.

It's been a great privilege to serve as your County Councillor and I wish you all well for the future.

Susan Carey
Member for Elham Valley

6. FHDC DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORTS

Cllr Elaine Martin read out her report as follows:

District Council Annual Report - Cllr Elaine Martin

This report gives a brief overview of some of the activities of the District Council over the past year and future plans.

Local Government Reorganisation

In December the government published a white paper on local government reorganisation. This is a hugely ambitious project to reshape local government. The District Council and County Council will both be dissolved in the next few years. They will be replaced by a higher-level strategic authority which will eventually be run by a mayor covering Kent and Medway and a lower-level tier of unitary authorities which will be more concerned with operational matters. The relationship with town and parish councils will be 'rewired' as well but there are no details about what this actually means. There are on-going discussions about whether to divide Kent into three or four unitary authorities. The government has asked for final agreed proposal to be submitted in November and we will obviously be doing our best to speak up for the residents of Folkestone-Hythe.

New Corporate Plan

We are in the final stages of revising our Corporate Plan. This builds on and extends the plan which is currently in place. The strap line for the plan is 'Our District, Our World'. This encapsulates how we can be aware of global problems such as climate change, biodiversity loss and inequality, whilst taking local action. The subtitle of the plan is 'Building Prosperity and Well-Being for All'. This highlights both the need for a sound economy and the health and welfare of the people who live in the district. The plan was informed by an extensive and highly successful consultation and included the views of a significant number of young people.

Otterpool Garden Town

Although not visible there has been a lot of progress made this year with the Otterpool Park development. On 1st February the Council finally signed a collaboration agreement with Homes England which runs the next for six months. The purpose of the agreement is to explore the potential for a strategic partnership. There is now a realistic prospect of making progress on Otterpool. The agreement also meant that Homes England paid F&HDC a £1.56M contribution to the historic planning costs for the 10% of land that they own on the site.

Working with Young People

One of the Council's objectives is to work more closely with young people and to involve them in decision making. This spring we held a Youth Forum in the Council Chamber to consult with representatives from all the secondary schools in the district about their ideas for the future. There will be another meeting of the Forum this coming September. We have also been working in different ways with primary schools in Hythe, Cheriton and Hawkinge on environment and sustainability issues.

District Council meetings on tour

For the first time ever, the October meeting of the full District council was successfully held outside of Folkestone. The Marsh Academy, New Romney was a fitting venue for this first meeting. Members of the public were able to meet some of the district council's elected members before the meeting. It is hoped that the full District Council meeting will continue to move around to various locations throughout the District to encourage more members of the public to attend.

The old Debenhams building (FOLCA)

The old Debenhams Building and associated buildings in Bouverie Place have been empty for many years. Plans for refurbishing the area are proceeding steadily with support from the Levelling Up Fund but the plans involve many different players, including KCC and the NHS. The plans have also been impacted by devolution. However, council officers have now secured a grant of £1.44 million for a heating pump system for the Debenhams building which will both help expedite the project overall and greatly help in the Council's long held ambition to become net zero.

Overview and Scrutiny

Southern Water, the Environment Agency, KCC and the Romney Marsh Area of the Internal Drainage Board all sent representatives to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting. The district's potential risk of inland flooding and the quality of the coastal bathing water were all discussed in detail. The aim of the meeting was to publicly shine a light on the problems of inland drainage and flooding risks and the pollution found on our beaches.

Sustainable Futures Forum and Green Grants Scheme

Local people are working with the Council in a variety of ways to reduce carbon emissions, enhance biodiversity and build community resilience. The Sustainable Futures Forum which was launched a few years ago goes from strength to strength, attracting around 90 participants at an event this autumn. The Green Grants scheme which has recently been launched to support sustainability initiatives has attracted 59 applications. These have come from town and parish councils, charities, local groups and organisations and small businesses across the district. Applicants will know if they have been successful by July at the latest.

Recycling and waste

The campaign to raise the district recycling rate to 50% or above continues to achieve results. The 'raise the rate' campaign started in early 2024 with the introduction of an A to Z guide for recycling and waste. There were also several question-and-answer sessions on our social media pages answering questions from the public on what they found difficult to recycle. From September to November last year, we launched a joint project with KCC to sticker refuse bins with 'no food waste' labels. The tonnage of food being recycled has now risen to over 15% in comparison with same period in the previous year and reported in the local press. The next phase of the project will be focused on paper/card recycling. Discounting the price for a black box for residents is one of the options being discussed.

Council House Programme

In May 2023 the Council agreed a target to build 20 new houses a year, or 80 over its full term. This target will not only be achieved but it will certainly be exceeded. There are already plans for 99 affordable council homes to be delivered over the next 24 months and another 77 affordable homes are being built by Orbit on council owned land at Biggins Wood. This is a very significant achievement in the current financial climate and all credit is due to officers and others with responsibilities for this programme.

Age UK in Lyminge

In November a decision was made by Age UK to close their Lyminge hub and on the 31st March the lease for the building was handed back to F&HDC. This is a great loss to Lyminge and the surrounding villages. The decision was made because the cost of running the facility was unsustainable and they had been making a loss on running the services there. Dementia support will still be available in Hythe. To continue to make use of the building as a community facility it would need to keep the fire alarm, lift, boilers, fire extinguishers, etc. compliant, maintained and serviced and the council do not have the resources to do this.

Cllr Martin also added that it had just been announced that Folkestone sports centre had been saved, it had been bought by The Sports Trust and Roger De Haan after they outbid housing developers for the site. It is hoped it will be open again in the very near future.

Cllr Jenny Hollingsbee's report was provided as follows:

Annual District Councillor Report for the year 2024/2025



As one of the North Downs District Councillors, I represent the Communities of Bodsham, Elmsted, Etchinghill, Lyminge, Monks Horton, Postling, part of Rhodes Minnis, Sellindge, Stelling Minnis, Stanford, Stowting and all points in between. I attend as many Parish Council Meetings as possible and many events throughout the year. The following is a brief summary of my monthly reports.

Otterpool Park – After almost two years into the current Administration, the only movement on Otterpool Park is a six month collaboration agreement with Homes England. We await to hear the outcome of this arrangement as The Council continues to search for a Strategic Partner to help fund the project. This means housing targets will not be met and developers are able to push for sites that would otherwise be deemed unsuitable.

Local Plan – The current housing target for our District is 838 units per annum and as part of the process for the new Local Plan, the District Council has made a 'call for sites' on two occasions. The Council are seeking land for several uses, the main one being housing (including plots for Gypsy and Travellers and self-build) but also for employment and community uses. For further information, please see the FHDC website.

Everist Court (Jubilee House) Lyminge – It was very disappointing to learn of the closing of the Age UK Hythe & Lyminge Centre in Lyminge. I put several questions at full Council to the Leader asking for consideration to be given to maintaining, at least a small Community facility.

Government Rural Prosperity Fund –Local Village Halls and Community Centres in the North Downs Ward were encouraged to make an application to this fund and I am pleased to report that Sellindge & District Playing Fields Benevolent Society (£25,000) and Stowting Peace Room (£9,450) have both been successful in receiving funding towards installing Solar Panels. This work has now been completed.

Folkestone Sports Centre – The news that Folkestone Sports Centre had closed was extremely bad news for the Community. I am pleased that a buyer has come forward to keep and maintain the Sports Centre. With Hythe Pool maintenance costs constantly increasing, lets hope that the Folkestone Sport Centre Swimming Pool opens soon.

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation - In view of the Government Reorganisation Programme with Kent County Council, Medway Council and the Districts and Boroughs likely to disappear over the next few years, I put forward a motion to full Council on 29 January to ask the Secretary of State for permission to remain as a Cabinet/Leader style of Governance. This was to allow resources, Officer and staff time and funding to be focused on ensuring our residents get the best deal possible moving forward. The Secretary of State agreed with this decision and at the Annual General Meeting of the Council earlier this month, this decision was ratified by full Council.

Ward Budgets

The new round of Ward Budget funding starts at the end of May - Ward Grant Application forms and guidance can be found at www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/community

See projects I have supported through my Ward Budget this year as below -

Date	£ Spent	Description	£ Balance
06/06/24	£500.00	Playground improvements - Lyminge	£2500.00
07/07/24	£500.00	Monks Horton Community	£2000.00
30/07/24	£500.00	Curtain replacement –Etchinghill VH	£1500.00
02/09/24	£500.00	Noticeboard for community, church and school	£1000.00
10/10/24	£500.00	Village Hall Heating - Stowting	£500.00
27/02/25	£500.00	Renew of sound system – Stanford Church	£0.00

I continue to serve on the Planning & Licensing Committee and the Personnel Committee. I also lead the Conservative Group. Throughout the year I have attended many Parish Council Meetings across the North Downs West Ward and have supported lots of events. I try to attend as many events as possible and I am always happy to meet residents to discuss issues. I receive many emails on planning matters which I am pleased to try and address with the Planning Department as well, as, of course, any other issues residents want to bring to my attention.

Kent County Council - Susan Carey stood down as a Member of Kent County Council as at 1 May 2025. She has been our Kent County Councillor for 20 years and I would like to put on record my personal thanks and also that of residents of the Elham Valley Division. Her kindness, expertise and willingness to help and support residents over the years has been exceptional. Personally, I have worked with Susan for 26 years as previously she was also my District Colleague for North Downs West. I will certainly miss such a wonderful friend and colleague and wish her and her husband John, all best wishes for their retirement.

7. REPORTS FROM LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Reports from local groups were read out as follows:

Cllr Day – Stelling Minnis Village Hall (report prepared by Lee Jones)

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT ON BEHALF OF TRUSTEES 2024/25

1. Introduction

This is my seventh annual report as Chairman of Stelling Minnis Village Hall Management Committee. It has been a privilege to serve our local village hall and I am very proud to have led the committee to this point.

Expenditure continues to be high but we are still in a reasonable position overall. Feedback from residents and councillors suggests our efforts are appreciated by the community, however this year a number of concerns have been raised about the condition of the hall and so it was the right decision to commission the survey on the structure of the hall in May 2024.

I would like to thank everyone on the village hall committee for their valued support, challenge and commitment. Earlier in the year I decided to delegate more responsibility to individual committee members due to a limit on my available time to lead from the front. This has been really successful but has also presented some various challenges. Once again this was the right thing to do and I must thank everyone for their patience and understanding.

2. Achievements over the past year

At the last AGM I wrote and confirmed that our focus would be on hall repairs, strengthening our financial resilience, maximising revenue and improving communication with our local community.

During the year we have made good progress on repairs and maintenance which will continue to be a sharp focus for the committee in the short and medium term and we have taken steps needed to maximise revenue and reduce expenditure. We endured high energy and running costs in 2024, which continues to be a challenge for all village halls and charities. Despite this, the hall continues to be well managed and well looked after. Some of our specific successes during 2024 include: a

- Potentially secured CIL funding up to £8k in principal from the parish council towards external repairs.
- Offering reliable WiFi to hall users.
- The embedding of regular film nights to help offset the cost of high WiFi expenses.
- Taking ongoing measures to strengthen financial resilience where possible.
- Improving the tidiness of the gardens and grounds; and
- Ensuring the hall premises and grounds continues to provide a safe, clean & well-used space where residents and visitors can enjoy the facilities.

3. Future Focus

Increases in costs and the uncertainty surrounding the village hall repairs and funding for those repairs will be the focus for the committee this year and over the coming years. Therefore, there are a number of priorities that will need to be managed carefully over the coming year: -

- Continue utilising the experience of committee members in conjunction with various partners to manage our hall repairs;
- Improving our relationship with the parish council;

- Improving the resilience and capability of the village hall management committee;
- Significantly strengthen the way we communicate with our local community.

4. Financial Position

The village hall management committee is a charitable organisation. Our treasurer Ann does an excellent job looking after the accounts and we have benefited from advice from Baytree Accountancy over the past year. Having Ann as our bookings clerk and our treasurer ensures that finances are in good shape. Having one person acting as both gatekeeper and treasurer is not technically ideal due to fraud risk, but Ann has proven that she is a trusted operator and has high levels of integrity. The Chair also has independent access to the bank account online and so the risk of fraud is reduced to an acceptable level. Our financial position will continue to be impacted by increased costs relating to insurance, fuel, internet and electricity costs and the committee will need to continue looking at ways to increase income and reduce expenditure to meet sure our reserves stay at a prudent level.

5. Hall Bookings

As we all know Ann looks after the hall bookings and the Chairman now looks after the keys. Being the gatekeeper for the hall is one of the most challenging and time-consuming tasks assigned to any member on this committee. Ann has continued to do an excellent job looking after the bookings, organising our hall diary, and collecting money due.

6. Conclusion

The Stelling Minnis Village Hall Management Committee has had a challenging but a really good year. The film club and other fundraiser events has proved to be a success however this next year will throw up some challenges about how we manage our relationship with key stakeholders and our ongoing governance and resilience. We must also not forget to thank our parish council and our district councillors for their support in helping the committee achieve its goals this past year

Rachel Buss - Acting Headteacher at Stelling Minnis CEP

Rachel has been Acting Head since September but has been at the school for a number of years as Deputy Head.

The school are currently working on their vision:

Our school exists to make each child into a shining star, so that they flourish personally, socially and academically; to be the best they can be, reflecting the light and love of Jesus Christ.

Last year they had two classes walk to the windmill and they had a wonderful time. Some of the pupils visited Stelling Minnis Village Hall as part of prayer reflection where they had tea and cake with some of the residents.

A large proportion of this years reception children are from the surrounding villages so there are more children now walking to school.

The school has been working with local farms; they currently have a polytunnel on site to grow various produce.

The school bells were rung to celebrate VE Day.

Some of the children visited the tea rooms at Lord Whiskey.
New outdoor play equipment is now in situ; thanks to the PC for the grant towards this equipment.

Cllr Smith – Hardres and Stelling News report

Firstly, a big thank you to all who have written articles for inclusion in the Villages Community Magazine for without you there would not be a magazine. I know that many readers look forward to the regular contributions and the occasional letters from readers.

Contributions regularly include community news from County, District/City, and Parish Councils together with the two Parish Churches and a message from the Parish Priest; as well as those from SM Primary School Headteacher, History Group, Gardening Society, both Village Hall, Johns Haffenden's Farmers notebook, Minnis Managers, thoughts from Steve Hardman, a brief weather report as well as information on the mobile library dates and Windmill & Museum. With occasional articles from other clubs, societies and individuals these all go to make what I hope is an interesting and informative Community Magazine with something for everybody.

The National Parish Magazine of the Year competition was not held for 2024.

A big thank you to Bruce & Margaret Crawford and their band of delivery agents for getting the magazine to you; to Ann Day for handling the finances and selling all the advertising spaces, not forgetting Xinyang and Sijia at Stelling Minnis Stores for willingly continuing to allow some readers to collect their magazine from the shop. Advertising spaces remain at 23 pages to allow for the increasing demands of the regular contributors and a limitation on magazine size placed by the printer of a total of 64 pages (front cover, 23 for adverts and 40 for the editorial material) because of machinery capacity.

Any images for the front cover should be in Portrait format, please.

Nick Smith - Editor

Cllr Smith – Community website

There was a period of a few weeks early in 2025 when the community web site was not available because of a software conflict when the security on the host site was upgraded again. This was resolved by the web site host provider, Simon Wood, and an intermediate virtual Private Network is used to allow both web sites to communicate.

Pages on the community site have continued to be updated on request or as the information time expires.

The "what's on" page is updated mainly from information on events etc that are included in articles for the Hardres and Stelling News.

I hope that Parishioners and others beyond the community find the web site of some use. I have tried to keep the web site as simple as possible with no unnecessary frills and pop-ups.

The address of the community web site is a little different from the Parish Council web page, although they can be accessed from each other via links within each site.

Nick Smith – web master Stelling-minnis.co.uk community web site.

Cara Cooper – Stelling Minnis Windmill

The windmill has continued with another good year with a healthy pool of volunteers to assist with open days. An EGM was held on 19th May, attended by approx. 85 people, the purpose to discuss with the community the options for going forward.

Three options were explained and discussed at the meeting:

1. To do nothing/walk away and let KCC do as they see fit
2. Right to bid option – due to ACV (Asset of Community Value status)
3. Community asset transfer

These options bring with them further questions, which as yet the answers are not known. The new unitary authority for Kent is looming and the divestment of the Kent Windmills has not yet been ratified by the KCC councillors, and now we have a Reform council, maybe this could yet be overturned.

The Windmill Trustees are leaning towards option 3, as were the community when asked at the EGM, but they are not tied into doing anything as yet. It is clear that community support is needed going forward.

8. RESIDENTS QUESTIONS

A resident asked if there was any update on the Bower farm planning enforcement issue. FHDC Cllr Martin advised that this is now in the hands of the courts, it is going through due process but is likely to take time.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending this evening and for the various reports. The meeting closed at 8.30pm.

Signed..... (Chairman)

Date.....

Please note these minutes will remain unapproved until the next APM.