

Brook Annual Parish Meeting
Held at Brook Village Hall on Tuesday 20th May 2025 at 7pm

In Attendance: Cllrs A Betty, S Betty, J Jessop and the Parish Clerk.

Apologies were received from County Cllr Clair Bell, Nathaniel Collins and John Nightingale.

1.	Welcome
	Cllr Simon Betty welcomed everyone to the meeting. Cllr Betty explained the rules of the Parish Meeting and that the meeting will be minuted.
2.	Minutes from the APM 2024
	The minutes from the APM 2024 were approved.
3.	Report from and read by Cllr Simon Betty
	<p>The annual parish meeting is a good opportunity to look back over the previous 12 months. Since the last parish meeting there have been two national commemorations - D-Day 80 and VE Day 80 – which brought the communities in the ward and the wider Ashford borough together. In addition to these special commemorations, it is always good to see how many ongoing community events there are in the ward throughout the year as I know how important these events are in maintaining the vibrancy of our villages.</p> <p>As a ward resident of some 30 years, I feel incredibly privileged to be your ward member for Bircholt, and my priority this year has been the continuation of maintaining the close links between the parish and borough council by attending as many parish council meetings as I can. With four parish councils in the ward, it remains my intention to ensure that all parishes and their residents are well represented and that the close working relationship that has been established with parish councillors and residents continues. This enables the parish council and residents to feed any issues up through me to the Borough Council and I can feed information back to them.</p> <p>I also continue to ensure that a ward member's report is available for each parish council and a copy of the report is then appended to the parish council minutes to wider circulation. I am pleased to report that the ward member's grant is available again this year which provides me with a pot of £3,000 for community projects and organisations around the ward. Last year, I was pleased to assist several worthy local community organisations around the ward with grant payments for their various projects.</p> <p>Applications for this year's grant are now open.</p> <p>An update on the Borough wide issues that are of importance to the parish is as follows.</p> <p>NUTRIENT NEUTRALITY</p> <p>Last year I reported that one of the main challenges facing Ashford Borough was the impact of nutrient neutrality on the delivery of new homes, both private and council houses, in the River Stour catchment area.</p> <p>During the last year Ashford Borough Council and Canterbury City Council approved the setting up of a Joint Venture company, known as Stour Environmental Credits, to satisfy nutrient neutrality rules in the River Stour catchment area. The aim of this company is to source the mitigation that is required to get the stalled housing market moving in the River Stour catchment area of both authorities by using some of the £9.8m of the Local Nutrient Mitigation Funding awarded to the catchment by Government which will cover the first year's running costs and the balance will buy enough mitigation</p>

	<p>to unlock around 2,000 homes in Ashford and Canterbury, including much needed social housing.</p> <p>This will enable the buying and selling of mitigation credits to developers, enabling them to demonstrate that their housing schemes are nutrient neutral and can proceed, otherwise Ashford is unable to demonstrate a 5 year supply of housing as required by the National Planning Policy Framework leading to an increase in unwanted and inappropriate speculative development.</p> <p>THE NEW LOCAL PLAN</p> <p>Ashford Borough Council held a series of events throughout the summer to enable residents to find out more about the new draft Ashford Local Plan. These events also provided the opportunity to find out where sites have been put forward by landowners, ask questions of the planning team and leave feedback.</p> <p>A total of eight community events across the borough were held plus two virtual sessions. The feedback received during the community events was collated and used to gain a better understanding of key local issues and, where appropriate, inform the content of the draft version of the new Local Plan.</p> <p>The aim is to bring a first draft of the Local Plan to Cabinet in July 2025. The next round of consultation, known as Regulation 18, will then take place and if this coincides with the school summer holiday the consultation will be extended. A number of community events will also be arranged for members of the public to meet and discuss aspects of the draft Local Plan with Officers and a list of the sites to be included in the draft Local Plan will be issued after the consultation.</p> <p>The Council has been advised by Government to press ahead with developing a Local Plan notwithstanding local government reorganisation, and the Council also considers it vital to have a 5 year supply of housing in place to prevent inappropriate speculative development.</p> <p>DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION</p> <p>Looking to the future, this is the main issue that will affecting us all to varying degrees. The government published its English Devolution White Paper in December 2024 which sets out the vision to create simpler local government structures. This will include a strategic authority for every area, with most having an elected mayor and a standardised list of enhanced powers; and the removal of two local government tiers, where these still exist, below strategic authorities. This will involve the abolition of KCC and Ashford Borough Council to create a new unitary authority.</p> <p>KCC and Medway Council applied to be fast tracked onto the devolution programme, but their application was rejected and it is unlikely that the reorganisation of local government will now occur before 2028. The 14 leaders of the various councils will continue to move forward over the coming months with the view of submitting further proposals to central government by 28th November 2025. I will provide further updates when these are available.</p> <p>Finally, a reminder to all residents that if you need to contact me my details are available of the Ashford Borough Council website.</p>
4.	Update from Brook Rural Museum
	No report received.
5.	Report from Brook with Hinxhill Village Hall Trust read by Janet Jessop
	<p>2024-25 has been a year of modernisation for the village hall. Over the course of the year, the Committee has introduced important changes to the service offering of the village hall and improvements to its operating capability. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing WiFi connectivity to the Hall. This service was the most required improvement

	<p>listed by villagers in the 2023 consultation and one we are delighted to have finally got over the line.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing card/contactless payment machines, which have introduced new, quicker ways to collect income for the VH at events; and • Refitted the entrance to the hall to ensure that it is fully accessibility for those that require wheelchair access, allowing all villagers to share in the community asset. <p>We continue to explore other avenues to improve the services offered by the village hall and look forward to further programmes of modernisation and enhancement.</p> <p>The Committee has also hosted a full programme of events organised by the hall committee members throughout the year: Bingo nights, The village BBQ in July, the jumble sale in October and April, the festive open morning in December, and in augural cheese and wine night in February. The events have supported the regular bookings to ensure that the village gall remains in a healthy financial position and can continue to serve the village as a community asset to be enjoyed by all.</p> <p>As ever, none of the achievements would be possible without the fantastic, tireless and unfailingly altruistic endeavours of the committee members. They give up their time for the benefit of the village and they deserve recognition and support for all that they do. However, numbers of committee members have dwindled over the course of the year and one of the priorities will be to undertake a recruitment drive to get the numbers up to 2023 levels of representation. This will be important to spread the workload that current members are taking on.</p> <p>We look forward to 2025 and are busy planning an agenda of new events and programmes.</p>
6.	Report from Brook Drama Group
	No report received.
7.	Report from Brook Primary School
	No report received.
8.	Report from Brook Church
	No report received.
9.	Brook Parish Council Chairman's Report given by Cllr S Betty
	<p>Brook Parish Council meets every 2 months on the third Thursday in January, March, May, July, September and November. There are six members of the parish council, and I am pleased to welcome Cllr Vaughan Redfern as our newest member who was co-opted in January, filling the vacancy left by Janet Jessop. The Parish Clerk continues to be Tracey Block who is the main point of contact for the parish council. Parish Council meetings are open meetings and members of the public are therefore always welcome to attend.</p> <p>PLAY PARK PROJECT</p> <p>The pariah council is pressing ahead with the playground renewal project and a working group has been set up led by Cllr Alison Wood. Following the public consultation that took place during 2023, an outline scheme has been prepared which was on public display during the Festive Open Morning in the village hall in December. Grants and other methods of funding the project are now being investigated to move the project forward.</p> <p>RECREATION GROUND</p> <p>The village recreation ground is owned by the parish council and the village hall trust holds a long lease on the village hall from the parish council.</p>

	<p>There have been several instances in recent years where hirers of the village hall have been using the recreation ground as part of their hiring activity without the consent of the parish council which has led to several complaints from our residents. The parish council and village hall committee has worked together to find a solution which has resulted in the village hall hirers user guide now clearly stating that use of the recreation will not be permitted as part of the hire agreement. The parish council would like to thank the village hall committee for working together to find a solution to this issue.</p> <p>I would also like to extend the thanks of the parish council to David Scarisbrick who at his own cost and time has planted the area to the side of the car park with daffodils, shrubs and trees, totally transforming this piece of land.</p> <p>VILLAGE CARETAKER SCHEME</p> <p>Brook is part of the village caretaker scheme that has been running for several years in conjunction with Smeeth, Brabourne and Mersham. The village caretaker, Paul Rodway, is tasked with cutting the grass on the recreation ground, Stonebridge Green and the front of Brookbank. In addition, Paul also undertakes the annual hedge and verge trimming along Spelders Hill and the occasional cleaning of the village road signage. The scheme receives grants from KCC and Ashford Borough Council and the remainder of the costs are funded by the village precepts from the villages in the caretaker cluster.</p> <p>The scheme is run by a committee of four people comprising one councillor from each parish council and the scheme is administered by the Parish Clerk who acts as secretary to the committee. Apart from a few machinery issues over the past year, the scheme continues to work well and I would like to thank Paul for his continued effort.</p>
10	Questions from the Audience
	There were no questions.
	Cllr Simon Betty thanked everyone for attending the meeting.