**Annual Parish Meeting**

**8 May 2017**

**7pm, Shipbourne Village Hall**

**Present:** Cllr Cohen (Chair), Cllr Tyler (Vice Chair), Cllr Pettengell, Cllr Wallington, The Parish Clerk

Borough Councillors Perry, Shaw and Taylor

10 members of the public

**Apologies:** Cllr Dagger, Cllr Redman, Cllr Sheldrick

1. **Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting – May 2016 –** There were no formal minutes, only notes which will be circulated.
2. **Chairman’s Report:**

**May 2016**

In May 2016 speed restriction signs were installed on the A227 and roads around the Common. Initially there was consternation about some of them but highways did manage to re-site a few and the painted road markings have now lost their rather bright white glare. Without them we could not have the speed limit we needed and wanted, the result of which has been to make drivers aware of their speed and slow down.

The speed indication device on the A227 as one approaches the village from the north is generally felt by residents to have had some effect on speed awareness. When the sign flashes most drivers instantly react and slow down although some say it is mostly locals who do so.

However, it is noted that the speed of the traffic coming south from Tonbridge is still reaching the school at well over 30mph. Although the PC is opposed to a proliferation of signage it was agreed that the only way to alert drivers to their speed was to have another speed indicator device at the start of the 30 mph zone and before cars reached the crossroad by the school.

Our KCC member has kindly offered £2,000 from her member’s Grant to put towards the device and the PC is confident that we can raise the balance for such an important safety

The PC continues to support the J5 Slips Group regarding new slip roads off the M25 at Junction 5 at Chevening. Slip roads should reduce the traffic that has to travel through Borough Green and possibly down the A227. We also support the Parish Alliance.

**June**

The only community event of the year was a supper for residents in the village hall to celebrate Her Majesty the Queen’s 90th birthday. It was a very successful and enjoyable village event with everyone involved in some way and guests kindly donating dishes of food. Over 60 villagers came and approximately £1000 was raised for the Village Hall Fund.

**July**

The vacancy for a new Parish Clerk and responsible Financial Officer was advertised following the resignation of our Parish Clerk, Sarah Codling, to take up a new career in teaching. Fortunately, her husband was able to step in temporarily.

**September**

Since September last year there have been a spate of planning applications many of them to extend properties but also many that have sought change of use or rebuild properties that are materially larger than those they replace. Unfortunately, this often results in the loss of modest three bedroom dwellings suitable for downsizing families that are already in short supply in the parish. The PC always keeps in mind that the purpose of the Green Belt is to maintain ‘open-ness’ and seeks to maintain the distinctive local rural character of Shipbourne and protect it from creeping suburbanisation and pattern-book executive housing.

**October**

The vacancy for a Parish Councillor was advertised and posted in the newsletter and on the village website following the resignation of Councillor Wright in October. Uptake to fill the vacancy has been slow and although it may not be perceived as a very exciting community service it is not onerous and can be satisfying for someone who knows and loves the village and wishes to help preserve all that is good about it.

Our village website was redesigned by our tech savvy councillor with the help of Saul Cullen. It is a much more interesting and visually attractive website than the off the shelf alternatives and it now functions better and faster with the ability for users group to download their own monthly content.

**November**

PC welcomed Sarah Huseyin, our new Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer in November. Sarah lives locally in Ightham and is also clerk to Ightham PC, so we looked forward to having a clerk that knows the area and all its services well.

**December**

In December the Interim Site Assessments produced by TMBC were forwarded to all parishes in the borough. These reports came to the conclusion that not one of the sites in Shipbourne was suitable for development and would not be included in the Local Plan although that is not to say that the sites may not be re-assessed at some future date.

**January**

It has been apparent for a long time that the heating in the village hall is not fit for purpose as the storage heaters are very old, inefficient and difficult to regulate. During the first quarter of this year SPC have been liaising with the Village Hall Trustees to look into refurbishment. Our District Councillor kindly offered to fund it from her member’s grant and it will therefore be possible to pay for new wiring for lighting – at the same time replacing the ceiling in the main hall – fitting a new main board and installing a heating system. Hopefully the hall can also get a lick of paint.

**February**

The parish precept is the money the parish charges as separate item on the resident’s Council Tax bill. It is called S136 and can be used for specific items such as grass cutting and hedge trimming, upkeep of historical assets such as the phone box (which has just been repaired), refurbishment or replacement of benches, signs and so on.

Unfortunately, the grant SPC gets from the BC for these things – called S136 money – is no longer available to Parish Councils. SPC have not increased this precept for several years but now that Borough Councils are tightening their belts we regretfully felt it necessary to increase the precept to plug the funding hole in our budget. In February the PC budget and precept increase was agreed.

The PC has always given their S136 money to the church to pay for the grass cutting and it is unfortunate that the grant has ceased. However, we hope that the BC will find a way to support the upkeep of such open churchyards as St Giles.

**March**

A large conifer at Dunks Green was left unstable after high winds. The PC had it inspected and had to have it felled but an unexpected benefit is that there is now an improved view from the Green and the Kentish Rifleman. Following the incident the PC agreed that there should be a tree survey undertaken to check on the condition of all trees that are the responsibility of the PC which will be mainly at Budds Green and Dunks Green.

We have noticed an increase in litter since take-away restaurants have opened in Tonbridge and the PC has written to the outlets to alert them to it and ask for their co-operation. The rise in cyclists has also, unfortunately, increased litter with bottles and banana skins discarded on the roadside. Next year we intend to arrange a clean-up campaign in March before the verges and hedges grow too much. TMBC have a litter app [www.littergram.co.uk](http://www.littergram.co.uk) so residents can post a photograph and report fly tipping and loads of litter directly to the council.

**April**

In line with SPC wish to be ‘transparent’ it was agreed in February 2017 that the PC Budget should be published on the website and the Parish Councils ‘Complaints Policy’ honed to suit a small parish to be also available online.

The Parish Emergency Plan that the PC has been updated and streamlined during the year thanks to efforts of a Parish Councillor and was finalized this April. The Shipbourne Emergency Handbook contains information that will be necessary to support the Emergency services in the event of a major emergency and will be available on the village website.

In April the new defibrillator was installed in the cabinet on the back wall of the Chaser pub and registered with the Ambulance Service. The Chaser have the code for it which it will be necessary to quote when 999 is called to register any accident that may require the unit.

1. **Finance Report**

At the start of 2016/17 the Parish Council carried forward a cash balance £16,106.

Income during the year was £28,462 (which included £15k towards the Village Hall refurb)

Expenditure was £10,289.40, approx 50% of which was spent on the Clerk Salary and the remaining spend was predominantly grounds maintenance.

For 2017/18 T&MBC have withdrawn certain funding from parish councils. This allowed them to reduce their element of Council Tax but placed an additional financial burden on the parish councils. After a full budget review and careful consideration of its reserves and contingency requirements Shipbourne Parish Council has decided to limit the parish precept to £10,195 for 2017/18, an increase of only £1,600 despite losing £4,200 from District Council funding. This is all reflected in the Parish Budget for 2017/8 that was adopted by the Council in January 2017.

In addition to the precept, half of which has been received already, we have now received £2,000 members funding which must be used for a new speed device. These balances and the £15,000 reserved for the Village Hall heating represent more than 50% of the Councils cash balance £40,872 at the end of April 2017.

For 2017/18 we have developed a new spreadsheet based cash book and financial reporting package which will improve the visibility and control of the council's finances.

1. **Report from Shipbourne School – Stavros Martis**

Mr Martis reported that Shipbourne School had achieved outstanding results and was high up in the league tables, they have recently appointed 2 new governors; himself and Brenda Mullinger. There are a number of repairs that need to be carried out including to the chimneys. Budget against expenditure is good but tight and grants from the government have reduced. In September 2017, there will be an additional 8 pupils bringing the roll to 57. The Head and Chair of Governors have recently met with the new Rector. The school fete will be on 8th July.

1. **Report from Shipbourne Village Hall – Curtis Galbraith**

In April 2016 the Village Hall had funds of £4,963, this included a grant from the Parish Council of £1119 and a legacy of £500. In May 2017 the balance is £7,694. The increase in the balance is down to a more proactive use of the village hall for routine and social hires, various fund raising events and a donation from a local resident. Annual rental income is £3,700 but running costs wipe most of this out at £3,000. Helen and Peter Leach have been instrumental in saving the village hall a lot of money in cleaning and maintenance of the grounds and this is much appreciated. Electricity is the main cost and the village hall committee are about to embark on a project to install a new heating system, works will start soon.

1. **Report from WI – Margaret Peacock**

2016 was a mixed year seeing the WI lose 3 members and gain 3 members, overall membership is 20. They had a deficit at the end of last year but now have a small surplus. They have hosted a number of good speakers and are hosting the carol service in December.

1. **Report from Borough Councillors**

Cllr Taylor reported that the last year had been frustrating in terms of planning with supported applications being refused and vice versa.

Cllr Taylor is on Tonbridge & Malling Area Committee CPRE (Protect Kent) and said that they have an excellent planning department should we need advice.

Cllr Taylor gave thanks for our continued support in the J5 Slips campaign and for the Parish Alliance which is now gaining weight.

Cllr Perry said that when discussing development in a conservation area it would be useful to have a copy of the management plan so that we know what’s acceptable in the area.

Regarding expenditure, he would have liked SPC to have increased the precept further in case it gets capped in the future.

In relation to the Local Plan, the next round of public consultation is in October. Even though there are no proposed developments for Shipbourne, we are likely to be impacted and therefore should comment.

Cllr Perry said that there was a growing problem with cyclists in the area, both in terms of speeding and littering, Plaxtol has a similar problem and there may be some joined up thinking between the local villages in tacking the growing problem.

Cllr Shaw have thanks to the PC and PCC for the invitation to the installation of the new Rector at the Church. His primary concern is the rat run of traffic through the local villages. He gave thanks to Shipbourne’s contribution towards the Economic Feasibility Study for the J5/East Facing Slips and although the response from the consultants was positive, the quality of the report was very disappointing. It is a very big project and he will continue to campaign for the slip roads and would welcome ongoing support.

1. **County Councillor**

The Parish Clerk reported that Cllr Dagger had retired and that Cllr Harry Rayner had recently been elected as our new County Councillor.

1. **Questions from Members of the Public**

A question was asked about speeding along Back Lane and the A227 and how it could be stopped. Cllr Cohen said that the Police aren’t around to monitor speeding. We had Speedwatch for a while but found it to be ineffective. We are hoping to get a new speed device on the entrance to the village from Tonbridge and hope that this will also help to slow traffic on the side roads. Curtis Galbraith reiterated that the police have limited resources. Cllr Perry said that Speedwatch has recently been taken over by Alan Watson and that it is much improved with automated letters now being generated and it would be worth looking into it again and perhaps joining forces with a neighbouring Parish like Plaxtol.

A question was raised about people parking on the double yellow lines by the Chaser? We have already taken it up with the police and Cllr Sheldrick had some notices made up. Unfortunately the offenders usually ignore notices and it is a continuing problem. We had received some advice from Cllr Rayner a while ago and were asked to email him if the problem continued.

Richard McCormick asked about litter and said that the Fairlawne Estate spend about £4000 a year in collecting litter. They have noticed a marked increase in litter on bin collecting day and believe that some of it is coming from the recycling vans that are often open at the back. Cllr Perry said that he would take up with the cabinet member for waste but that the collection services were being reviewed anyway TMBC. The PC gave thanks to all parishioners who litter pick in the village.

Cllr Cohen queried to necessity to road sweep in our village and said resources would be better spent in litter picking.

Viv Packer gave thanks to the PC for all their efforts.

The meeting closed at 7.45pm.