

DYMCHURCH PARISH MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday 15th April 2025

Methodist Chapel, Chapel Road, Dymchurch

The meeting was opened under the chairmanship of Councillor Dougie Young of the Parish Council.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Tony Cooper (District Councillor) and Tony Hills (County Councillor), who were unable to attend due to other commitments.

2. Appointment of Clerk to the Meeting

Mr J Lawrence was appointed as Clerk for the Annual Parish Meeting.

3. Minutes of the Previous Parish Meeting

The minutes of the previous parish meeting were confirmed as a true and accurate record.

4. Chairman's Report

An update was provided on the recent public meeting held with statutory bodies involved in water quality and testing. It was noted that some authorities were more willing to engage than others, but the Parish Council gave assurances that it would continue to scrutinise the activities of these organisations to ensure that water quality improves.

Gratitude was expressed to The Friends of Dymchurch Recreation Ground Charity for their efforts in raising money for a new Pavilion for the recreation ground.

The Chairman noted that the village is being kept very smart, with residents becoming increasingly engaged in maintaining environmental standards. Positive examples were given of residents responding promptly when issues arise, such as litter left after a barbecue on the sea wall.

Volunteer litter pickers were thanked for their continued efforts throughout the year.

The meeting recognised Dave Henley, who has served as groundsman for 17 years. Dave was described as an excellent groundsman who has always been available to help residents, and was warmly thanked for his years of service to the village and presented with a memento for his service to the Parish.

5. Invited Speakers and Guests

Invited guests provided an overview of their work within the Parish, as follows.

KCC Community Warden Service

Carol, the KCC Community Warden covering Folkestone Harbour Ward and Romney Marsh (from Burmarsh and Newchurch to where St Mary's joins New Romney), introduced herself and outlined her work with elderly and vulnerable residents.

Carol announced that a new food bank is being established in Dymchurch, to run once a month at the village hall. It will begin on 8th May, with sessions also in July and August (with no June session), as a three-month trial period to assess need. The food bank will run in partnership with the existing food bank at New Romney Hub, meaning that combined, food bank access will be available every two weeks across the two locations. Donations can be made at local supermarkets and churches, and if the trial is successful the service will become a regular monthly fixture.

District Councillor Report – Tony Cooper (read in absence)

Tony Cooper apologised for his absence due to a district council planning meeting. His report noted it had been a busy year supporting residents with casework, applying pressure on authorities regarding environmental improvements and water quality, and working to promote the message that the village is open for business, including the local tourism industry. He expressed pleasure in working with the Clerk and the Parish Council, and confirmed he would continue to advise on devolution matters and local government reorganisation. He described the next couple of years as crucial for services as new unitary authorities take shape, noting that Dymchurch is seen as a gateway to Romney Marsh and that partnership working will be essential on important upcoming matters.

County Councillor Report – Tony Hills (read in absence)

Tony Hills apologised for his absence and provided an overview of key issues across several areas.

Local Government Reform

This was described as the biggest challenge in local democracy for over 50 years. The government is moving at speed to bring unitary councils to Kent. The leader of Folkestone and Hythe District Council made a submission on 21st March to the Secretary of State, with detailed proposals expected by 28th November. Whatever form it takes, profound changes to local communities are anticipated.

Highway Maintenance

The county has been working to repair potholes on the Marsh following a frosty winter, supported by additional government funding, though more support is still needed. Residents were encouraged to report issues, as the volume of complaints increases the likelihood of repairs being carried out.

Water Management and Climate Change

While grateful that the severe downpour experienced the previous winter was not repeated, it was acknowledged that similar events will occur again and that resilience planning is needed. Work is ongoing with local partners to prepare for future weather events, and pressure is being applied on Southern Water to increase storm drain storage capacity before discharge to sea. Partners have agreed to set up a strategic water group to investigate water quality problems in the southern end of Hythe Bay,

and there is an intention to bid for Regional Committee funds for groundwater management solutions on Romney Marsh.

Dungeness Visitor Centre

Following the shock closure when Kent Wildlife Trust returned the keys last year, work with Folkestone and Hythe District Council and the Romney Marsh Partnership has led to a restructuring of the arrangement. The Visitor Centre is expected to reopen in late spring.

Dungeness Nuclear Site

Progress is being made with government on the future of the site. Consultation is underway on a second tranche of nuclear energy policy, looking at small modular nuclear reactors and micro-reactors at Dungeness. The Secretary of State has offered to visit Dungeness, hoped to be in May.

Solar Farm Development

It was acknowledged that no one wishes to see large-scale solar farms in the middle of the Marsh. The decision will ultimately rest with the Secretary of State for Energy, not with KCC or the district council. The aim is to work to secure the best possible outcome for residents and the Marsh should the development receive government approval.

Romney Marsh Community Hub

The Romney Marsh Community Hub was successful in securing KCC funding to deliver a dial-a-ride and community transport scheme. This initial success has led to a second award from KCC to fund an additional vehicle.

Cllr. Anne Pegler

Commented that residents have expressed disappointment at not receiving a formal pedestrian crossing near to The Fairway. An 'elderly pedestrians' sign is to be installed. This matter has been ongoing for approximately 50 years.

Cllr. Liam Finch

Updated the meeting on flooding issues in the Redoubt Estate and Beverley Gardens in particular. It was noted that improvements have been made to a culvert and also further plans for improvement are being discussed.

Cllr. Chris McCreedy

Provided an update from the Beach Advisory Group meetings this year including issues with dog fouling on the sea wall, the installation of navigational bouys. The meeting was also attended by Kent Police anti Terrorism Community Officers who provided an update about being vigilant.

An updated was provided on the New Pavilion regarding a planning matter with the RHDR but this will be managed soon and a planning decision at the end of the month- Hopefully.

Highway Safety and Traffic – Update from Cllr Vanessa McCreedy

Councillor McCreedy reported on a comprehensive site visit conducted with a KCC Highways officer to review problem areas in Dymchurch.

At the Lower Sands area, the officer walked the route and acknowledged the difficulty of emerging from the junction, noting that vehicles would be accelerating as they came around the bend. The officer expressed the view that it would be beneficial to move the 30mph zone further east, however see below.

At Queensway Bridge, the officer was asked to assess visibility and confirmed that sightlines were poor. Discussion took place regarding vegetation and the positioning of junction posts. New speed signs were suggested but deemed unsuitable.

Regarding the High Street and 20mph zones, 20mph panels were discussed as a measure to assist with the school crossing. KCC is still awaiting the completion of a traffic survey, and the Parish Council has provided maps indicating where surveys should be conducted.

Regarding Fairway traffic issues, a traffic survey has now been completed, though parking surveys cannot be conducted during school holidays. Schemes for the Local Transport Plan are considered in January so a request will be submitted for improvements in signage, however high competition for funding is an issue and will require substantial evidence.

The roundabout at the Highstreet has been repainted.

Regarding the extension of the 30mph speed limit along the A259 . KCC responded that they cannot support extending the zone on the A259, stating that road conditions and average speeds suggest that changing the limit from 40mph to 30mph is unlikely to be effective, could lead to high non-compliance, and might make pedestrian crossings more dangerous, as drivers would find it harder to judge speeds.

The Parish Council challenged this position, arguing that residents already experience non-compliance with existing restrictions, that a lower limit would be more appropriate for areas of poor visibility, and that it would benefit pedestrians, including those using mobility scooters and pushchairs. The Council also noted it is contrary to logic that bends should carry higher speed limits than straight sections; that many residents living on nearby estates need to cross to access the beach; that permanent speed cameras are statistically the most effective method of encouraging compliance; and that this has been an ongoing request for many years, with evidence dating back to 1946 meeting minutes. The Parish Council noted it has the support of the KCC Cabinet Member for Transport Cllr. Peter Osborne and expressed concerns that KCC is blocking what both residents and the Council want.

8. Any Other Matters Raised by Parishioners

Water Quality

Significant discussion took place regarding sea water quality. Southern Water releases sewage during rainfall events, and an alert had been issued on the day of the meeting. A local business owner, running Sundays café, expressed concern about the impact on her business, while also thanking the Parish Council and Folkestone and Hythe District Council for their support in securing extended opening hours, now until 4:00 PM. Questions were raised about whether current 'do not swim' signage is sufficient. The Chairman attends water quality meetings every two to three months and described them as illuminating. Multiple speakers expressed

concern and thanked those involved in engaging with the relevant authorities on this issue.

COMMERCIAL SIGNS ON THE HIGHWAY

A resident raised concerns about shop signs on footpaths and roads leading up to the beach.

This is a matter for the Highways Department however the Parish Clerk will be monitoring this situation.

VE Day Celebrations

Preparations are underway for VE Day on 8th May, with references made to a tea dance event and memorial preparations.

Scout Group

Discussion took place about supporting the local Scout group. It was agreed to include information about the Scouts needing help in the newsletter and on Facebook. It was noted that a recent jumble sale had seen poor attendance because many residents are unaware of the Scout hut's location, and a request was made to replace the directional sign on the main road pointing to it.

Licensing

Concerns were raised about businesses operating beyond their licensed areas, with a coffee shop noted to be placing tables on the sea wall. When windy, this causes difficulties, and the seating area in question falls outside the licensed premises. It was confirmed that this is a District Council licensing matter to be reported accordingly.

Martello Tower

The Martello Tower will be opening on the coming Saturday for the first opening of the 2025 summer season, and will remain open every Saturday throughout the summer, subject to volunteer availability.

Recreation Ground Barrier and Fence

Three quotes have been received for completion of the new barrier at the recreation ground entrance. The scheme will include fences on either side of the gate, a pedestrian gate with hard standing for pushchairs and bikes, and no change to pedestrian access. The barrier is not intended to create a permanently open car park, given concerns about overnight vehicles, but will be removable for events when the Pavilion is operational or for charity functions. Some attendees felt the current barrier was not as attractive or sturdy as anticipated and could have been lower.

DOUBLE YELLOW LINES ST MARY'S ROAD

A resident raised concerns about vehicle parking along St Mary's Road, especially during the summer, by tourists. This causes lots of problems, especially for farm workers moving machinery. He suggested double yellow lines along the length of the road.

It was mentioned that this had been raised with KCC, who were concerned that installing lines would displace the parking issues elsewhere.

9. Closing Remarks

The Chairman thanked the Clerk, Councillor Vanessa McCreedy, for all her hard work on behalf of residents in trying to resolve issues with KCC and other agencies regarding village safety, including the elderly pedestrian crossing signs and ongoing work on speed limits and traffic calming.

Members of the public expressed appreciation for the considerable effort the Council puts into looking after the village, with particular thanks given for the engagement with authorities on sea water quality. Hope was expressed that common sense would prevail on these matters.

The Annual Parish Meeting was adjourned. The Chairman noted that the Parish Council meeting would follow immediately at the Methodist Chapel.

Signed: Date:

Chairman, Dymchurch Parish Meeting