

POSTLING PARISH COUNCIL

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Minutes of Postling Parish Council meeting held at Postling Village Hall on Tuesday 24 January 2023 at 6.30pm

1. Attendance: Chairman Frank Hobbs, Councillors Helen Calderbank, Christine Hobbs, Daniel Shaddick, Yvonne Mumford, Parish Clerk Clare Hamilton, County Councillor Susan Carey, District Councillor Jenny Hollingsbee and one member of the public.
Apologies: Cllrs John Pattrick and Charlie Wilkins
2. **It was resolved** unanimously to accept the Minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2022.
3. Members' declarations of interest on Agenda items: 6b-Chairman Frank Hobbs and Cllr Christine Hobbs.
4. Public Participation session, not required.
5. There were no matters arising from the previous meeting.
6. Planning Applications received since last meeting, circulated to Councillors for comments, outcomes of those deliberations, and to consider any applications received since this agenda was published:
 - a. **22/2118/SCO Pent Farm, Pilgrims Way, Postling CT21 4EY**
Consultation request in respect of EIA Scoping Opinion under regulation 15 of the Town and Country Planning (environmental impact assessment) Regulations 2017
PPC comments in Appendix. Awaiting decision from FHDC.
 - b. **22/2032/FH/TCA Page Farm, Staple Lane, Postling CT21 4EZ**
Works to trees in a Conservation area comprising of 1 x Beech reduction in height by 4 metres and laterally by 2 metres
PPC No objection. FHDC Approved.
 - c. **19/1258/FH Postling Lodge, Farthing Common CT18 8DQ**
Retrospective planning permission for a grounds maintenance building and entrance gate accessed from Loughborough Lane at Postling Lodge
PPC Objection. Awaiting decision from FHDC.
Cllr Jenny Hollingsbee is trying to arrange a meeting with Head of Planning to highlight various planning matters including this long outstanding application.
 - d. Received 19.01.23:
23/0067/FH The Pent, Pilgrims Way, Postling CT21 4EY
Listed Building consent for removal of internal wall to open up office space
PPC Support. Response to FHDC by 21 February 2023.
7. Highways
 - a. Pot holes marked on Cuckoo Lane: awaiting a date for works. A major pothole was reported on 13 January, Cllr Susan Carey to follow up.
 - b. Pot holes on Sandling Road (Cuckoo Lane to Sandling Rd): work complete
 - c. Parking on verges on Cuckoo Lane/The Street: Letter posted to parishioner. There were no recent issues to report. If problems arise in the future wooden bollards on the verges will be considered.
 - d. Temporary Road Closure, Stone Street, Monks Horton: 6 March with estimated completion by 10 March 2023. Stone Street, Monks Horton will be closed between the junctions of Woodland Road and Blindhouse Lane.
 - e. Emergency Road Closure, Pilgrims Way: No notice received re. BT works commenced on 23 January. To contact KCC Highways to ascertain reason for closure, completion date, and why no information was issued. There is no local knowledge of a reason for an Emergency closure.

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Cllr Susan Carey highlighted that KCC maintains over 5000 miles of highways across the county and this year's weather and cuts to budgets have exacerbated problems on the roads. KCC is investigating technical solutions in order to improve road repairs, including the use of graphene.

8. Finance

a. Balance of account at 24 January 2023: £5,484.01.

b. Payments and Receipts since last meeting:

Payments

C Hamilton	Salary Oct Nov	395.89
	Backpay 1Apr-30Sept	96.00
HSBC	Bank charges Nov Dec Jan	24.00

Receipts *none*

c. Expenditure due before next meeting:

123.reg	Annual domain name renewal	14.39	£2.40 vat
C Hamilton	Salary Dec Jan	395.89	
	Travel exp Jan meeting	7.20	
HSBC	Bank charges Feb Mar	16.00	

It was resolved to approve expenditure. Proposed Cllr Helen Calderbank, seconded Cllr Christine Hobbs, all in favour, approved by the Chairman.

d. Precept request 2023/24 of £3,782 applied for to FHDC.

9. Reports from District and County Councillors - see Appendix

10. Elections 2023

There is a new legal requirement for voters at the polling station from 04 May 2023 and voters must present a valid form of photographic ID in order to be issued a Ballot Paper. For more information, a Voter ID Guide from the Electoral Commission is available on the parish council website under the 'Elections 2023' tab.

11. Fire Hydrants

Clerk to contact KF&RS again re. Farthing Common hydrant.

12. Bus shelter at Newbarn corner

As the proposed shelter is within Lyminge parish, this matter is on the agenda for the Lyminge Parish Council meeting to be held on 30 January.

13. For Information

- KALC Community Awards Scheme: no nominations this year
- Coronation events: clerk to email parishioners to enquire if anyone has any plans
- Litter bin by phone kiosk: case no.00118819 reported on 06.01.23 still not emptied, clerk to escalate
- Phone kiosk: light not working, Cllr Dan Shaddick to attend to
- Bike scrambling: a parishioner reported this is taking place near the phone mast, off the by-way. This is MOD land and responsibility and should be reported to them.
- 2023 meeting dates (nb. change to May date):
Tuesdays at 6.30 pm - 24 January; 28 March; 23 May; 25 July; 26 September; 28 November.

Meeting closed at 7.25pm

Signed.....Frank Hobbs, Chairman, 28 March 2023

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Appendix

6a. 22/2118/SCO Pent Farm, Pilgrims Way, Postling CT21 4EY

PPC comments submitted to FHDC, Ward Councillors Jenny Hollingsbee and Susan Carey, Lexington Communications (acting for RNA):

About RNA Energy

According to the RNA Energy website <https://www.rna-energy.com/projects> only one project is built but not yet connected. Is RNA Energy an established company with a proven track record of producing and sustaining developments such as this?

Kent Downs AONB

The Pent Farm Solar website states "A small section of the site sits just inside the Kent Downs AONB" whereas the whole site sits inside the AONB boundary.

The panels will be visible from a large area in this AONB where open views are highly prized. Any planting and green initiatives to disguise the panels will take a long time to establish and offer scant screening. Will the 'green' element of the proposal be planted/installed at the same time as the panels?

The RNA consultation mentions two other solar sites in Kent. Councillors would like to visit completed RNA developments in the Kent AONB for comparison.

***addition:** Planning permission to the site on the corner of Stone Street and Pilgrims way was granted provided the applicants could provide an RIBA certificate of Outstanding Architectural Interest; they did so and planning permission was granted. This development is about a quarter of a mile in a direct line from the proposed Solar farm. It is worth considering if the RIBA would issue a certificate of Outstanding Architectural Interest to the field of Solar panels.*

Farming matters

The UK is a small country and it could be argued that agricultural land should be kept as such for food production, not for energy production. Off-shore wind farms are an alternative.

It is acknowledged that the land in question, being heavy clay, may be difficult to farm, although cereal crops could be grown there. The proposals indicate livestock may graze around the panels.

It is recognised that farming is challenging and farmers need to diversify, but would any profits from solar be re-invested into the farm to boost food production?

Timescale

Although the land is in close proximity to a power station/connection, how long would it take for the supply to be connected to the grid to become live and financially viable? Media reports suggest some developers are waiting many years for connection to the grid due to lack of investment in infrastructure.

Employment

Local employment opportunities appear to be few, as a specialist company will no doubt make and install the panels, and once built minimal maintenance is required so will not provide sustained employment.

Future concerns

If a planning application for the solar farm as outlined in the proposal is successful, Folkestone & Hythe District Council should put planning restrictions in place to restrict any further expansion of this site. A successful planning application should not set a precedent for future similar applications.

The life of solar panels is limited: if a solar farm is no longer viable in future, will the land return to agricultural use or would it be re-classified as brownfield land?

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Local benefits

Would the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) apply in order to financially benefit local amenities? If not, what benefits would there be for the local community, infrastructure and amenities?

Alternative sites

Solar panels on roofs of industrial units/supermarkets would be more acceptable than on agricultural land in an AONB.

9. Report from District and County Councillors

Budget Consultation - The council will consider the proposed £19m spend on services for the new financial year at the full council meeting on 22 February 2023. The services include maintaining parks and gardens, providing social housing, keeping streets clean, emptying bins and dealing with planning applications. Please visit the budget consultation 2023-2024 page for further information - all comments should be received by 4pm Wednesday 1 February 2023.

Use of accommodation in the district to temporarily house those seeking asylum in the UK. The council is organising an online engagement event to answer resident questions around the Home Office's use of local accommodation, health and wellbeing, community safety and what support network is in place for those seeking asylum. Questions can only be submitted ahead of the meeting and need to be submitted before 4pm on Friday 20 January 2023. These can be sent in online via <https://fhdcformassembly.tfaforms.net/f/community-event> or sent by post to Committee Services at the District Council. This event will be streamed live on YouTube and will take place at 3pm on Friday 27 January 2023 - [youtube.com/@folkestoneandhythemeetings](https://www.youtube.com/@folkestoneandhythemeetings)

Cost of Living – Just a reminder that there are many schemes available to support vulnerable people/families – information can be found on the website, Live chat via website, by telephoning customer services 01303 853000 or the Customer Access Point (CAP) at the Civic Centre which is exclusively to enable those without digital access to self-serve online through computer points with help available if needed. Southern Water is just one of the utilities that run a scheme to help customers struggling to pay their water bill – We would urge you to get in touch on payless@southernwater.co.uk or: 0800 027 0363 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

Home essential fund (previously referred to as the UK Prosperity Fund). This is a scheme to support families on low incomes and is over a three year period. Currently, in this financial year, there is funding available for boiler replacement or servicing and particularly relevant to our area oil boilers needing to be replaced or tuned up and checked for efficiency, top-up of oil or gas bottles. Application forms will be on the Council website shortly, however please advise us if you know a family who may benefit from this scheme as we are keen that residents in this ward do not miss out because funding on this particular project is only available until the end of March 2023. Other projects, under this heading will follow in the next financial year – watch this space.

KCC Leader Roger Gough did an excellent New Year message issued on 31 December which you can find on [kccmedia hub.net](https://www.kccmedia.hub.net). He sets out the challenges for Kent and how we are tackling them. I really can't improve on it.

2022 has been a tumultuous year – for the world; for our country, which lost its longest-reigning monarch and saw three Prime Ministers hold office; and also for all of us here in Kent.

In addition to the effects of the invasion of Ukraine, we have seen record arrivals from small boat crossings of the Channel to our shores; a record-breaking heat wave and failures of water supply on the Isle of Sheppey in the summer (and subsequent water supply disruptions in many parts of Kent in the run up to Christmas); massive pressures on our bus network, at their most intense over the summer but which have not gone away; and frequent reminders of how quickly a range of issues at the Channel border can escalate into a crisis which, even when Operation Brock is in place, can spill over into disruption on our county's road network.

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Amid all these pressures and crises, and in the vital day to day delivery of services, our staff at KCC have been there to support residents and communities with dedication and commitment.

The return of war to Europe through Putin's invasion of Ukraine has had a most dramatic effect. People in Kent have responded to this in an extraordinary way; we remain the part of the country which hosts the largest number of Ukrainian guests under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. KCC and our partners have worked to support this, most recently by introducing – ahead of many councils and of any national policy – higher rates of support for hosts. I hope that this move will not only reassure current hosts in these financially challenging times, but also encourage more people in the county to sign up to the scheme. More Ukrainian guests are still arriving every day, and more homes are desperately needed.

The economic havoc unleashed by the invasion of Ukraine has exacerbated already serious pressures on the cost of living. With funding from government, we have sought through our Helping Hands and Financial Hardship programmes to provide help to those most in need, through holiday Free School Meal programmes, support with energy and water bills, financial help and advice and much more. We continue to work with our public sector partners and with the voluntary and community sector to do everything we can to help those most in need – once more building on the spirit and actions of Kent Together that were brought forward during the pandemic. We will maintain this support into 2023.

Economic disruption from the aftermath of the pandemic and from the Ukraine war, the highest inflation in 40 years and severe labour shortages have had a massive impact on the council's services and finances. This will remain a huge challenge for us in 2023.

In the short term, the government's Autumn Statement was a real help. It was particularly welcome to see local government, and social care in particular, being given higher priority. But what we face in local government – and this was the point of the letter that the Leader of Hampshire County Council, Rob Humby, and I wrote to ministers in October – is the lasting crisis of an unsustainable model.

To meet this challenge, and to do more than just struggle to get through the next crisis, we need to do three things.

The first is to put our finances on a sustainable course. That will mean that we still have to take some very difficult decisions, with the focus always on providing our services in the most cost-effective way we can.

The second is to work in ever closer partnership, above all with the NHS. Like areas across the country, we are developing an Integrated Care System for Kent and Medway, working together to make the best use of our resources to tackle the pressures that we face over this winter and beyond and ultimately improve the lives of our residents. What we have done so far – under the phrase "Together, We Can" – is a good start, and I believe it is one of the most hopeful developments of 2022 but we must take it much further in 2023.

Finally, we must ensure that the County Council is the strong organisation that people in Kent need it to be. Not just to manage the unprecedented risks and pressures that we now face, and not just to deliver our core statutory services, above all to vulnerable people – vital though that is. We must also address the really big challenges that we face as a county: organising and providing public services in times of growing need but with limited resources; addressing the pressures we face as a frontline, border county; securing the infrastructure that we desperately need; continuing to support and champion local businesses and the Kent economy; and helping to achieve energy transition, net zero and adaptation to climate change.

To do this, we have already brought about big changes in how the council is run. We must also respond to changing national policies; both government (through the Levelling Up White Paper, published in February 2022) and the opposition (in Gordon Brown's Commission on the UK's Future) have set out plans to change our over-centralised system. We can expect to hear a lot more of devolution and county deals in 2023. I look forward to the opportunity of taking part in and influencing this debate in relation to the future of the county.

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2022 has been a tough year, and its challenges are still very much with us. But people across this county responded in an amazing way to those challenges, and we look to 2023 with realism but also with hope and optimism.

I would like to wish everyone a very Happy New Year.

Susan Carey, Member for Elham Valley, Kent County Council

District Councillor, North Downs West, Folkestone & Hythe District Council

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Since this report was received, Levelling Up funding has been approved to improve traffic in and out of Dover, and for improvements to Folkestone bus station, Folca and town centre.

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