

HEADCORN PARISH COUNCIL

The Parish Office, Headcorn Village Hall, Church Lane, Headcorn, TN27 9N

Tel: 01622 892496 Email: clerk @headcornpc.org.uk



HEADCORN ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2019

Minutes of the Annual Parish meeting held on 24th April 2019 at 7:00p.m in the Village Hall, Longmeadow.

Cllr Lyn Selby presided and there were 25 present, including Parish Councillors and Borough Councillor Martin Round.

Apologies were received from Cllr Davie and Evenden.

1. Introduction

Cllr Selby opened the meeting and warmly welcomed all attending.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of the 23rd May 2018 were approved.

3a Elected Officer Reports

Kent County Councillor Shellina Prendergast was unable to attend the meeting and sent the following report:-

Dear Resident,

It is two years since I came to represent residents of Maidstone Rural East at Kent County Council – and it continues to be an honour and a privilege to represent one of the very best parts of our County.

Kent County Council (KCC) approached the start of yet another financial year facing an immense challenge in setting the budget. After producing savings of some £640 million over the last eight years, the Council has risen to the challenge of finding another £73 million to fund rising spending pressures during 2019/2020. In line with most other Councils across the country, KCC has raised council tax by 2.99%, plus the 2% specifically allocated for social care – Councillors very much regretted that this proved necessary, but budget consultations indicated that residents were mostly accepting of a rise that would be “ring-fenced” for protecting front line services for our increasing aging population. The following are some examples of how the £988 million budget will be used to maintain, improve and enhance the services that will benefit our 1.5 million residents in Kent:

- Biggest ever investment in highways – from £70 million in 2017/2018 to £89 million in the current year and rising next year to £95.7 million. This is in addition to the £28 million recently received from the Department of Transport for highways improvements to mitigate against the impact of Brexit.
- Subsidised bus services – £6.2 million to ensure that many of those living in our most isolated rural communities have access to the services they need.
- Housing related support for the most vulnerable - £7.1 million
- £6.5 million on community services including community wardens, arts and culture, country parks
- Children in need of family support - £9.8 million

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- Young Person's Travel Pass - £8.1 million on this non-statutory service.

Brexit – as part of the Kent Resilience Forum, KCC is committed to preparing for the country's anticipated withdrawal and extensive work has taken place to keep Kent moving and open for business. This includes working with Highways England to keep the M20 open in both directions, minimising disruption for local communities and implementing welfare plans for those who may be affected by delays. Extra Trading Standards Officers have been recruited to address the issue of illegal or unsafe goods entering the County. On resilience, KCC has been overhauling its business continuity plans, providing advice to other businesses and working to minimise disruptions on our schools, hospitals and vulnerable residents. KCC will continue to liaise with central government, fine tune our plans and keep our communities informed over the coming months.

As well as attending meetings of the Council, I am also a member of the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee, the Regulations Committee and the Corporate Parenting Panel – like all of us at KCC, I am very proud to be a corporate parent to Kent's looked after children and care leavers. Appointments to outside bodies include the Red Hill Trust – a registered charity offering support to children and young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The welfare of our children and young people is one of the Council's key priorities and my work as a Deputy Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education includes responsibilities for commissioning of school places, special educational needs and disability assessment and placement, youth and youth justice, Children in Care services, adolescent support and the fostering and adoption service.

During my time at KCC, I have worked with residents, parish councils/meetings and Helen Whately MP to address the pledges I made to you when elected, and these include:

Transport and Highways

- Speeding, rat running, volume of traffic and inconsiderate parking are a problem for all of us. I have worked with Kent Highways, the Police, Cabinet Members and our MP to improve highway safety not only in our rural villages but also the strategic road networks which impact on residents of Maidstone Rural East - most notably the A20, A249 and the A274.
- Lorry Park – I have worked closely with residents and parish councils on the speculated lorry park between J8-9 of the M20. Helen Whately MP and I have worked closely on this and are both in regular contact with Highways England. We both spoke at a recent and very well attended public meeting and hopefully were able to reassure concerned residents that we are doing everything possible to leave the decision makers in no doubt that the proposal in this area is completely unacceptable to our residents and would cause severe damage to the built and natural environment.
- Access for All – Over the last 12 months, I have worked with our MP, Headcorn parish council and the community to secure step free access to Headcorn station for some of

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our most vulnerable users. Although unsuccessful in the first round, we are all committed to launching a further bid for the soon to be announced mid-tier programme where accessibility can be delivered for under £1m – which Headcorn would undoubtedly qualify for.

- Rural Transport – Many of our rural parishes are poorly served by public transport and I have worked with commercial bus operators and KCC public transport officers to ensure that good levels of service are maintained where possible. I was particularly delighted, following some considerable lobbying on my part, when it was revealed earlier this year that the bus pilots launched in Kent would include enhanced services to many of the rural villages I represent. The pilot schemes are due to commence in June 2019 and will run for 12 months. I very much hope that the service will be popular and that increased usage will lead to a more permanent service.
- Many of our children are facing unacceptably long daily journeys to school and back – and I am in constant dialogue with bus operators on how these journeys can be shortened and to ensure our children have access to a high quality and reliable service to enable them to get to school on time.

Education

- The unprecedented population growth in Maidstone has put some significant pressure on early years settings and primary schools. I have worked with my Cabinet colleagues and Education Officers to ensure a sufficiency of places and was delighted that my work on the nursery school provision in Headcorn paid off – Juniors Nursery opened in January this year on a temporary two-year basis on the Headcorn primary school site – and I'm continuing with my efforts to secure a long-term solution. I am also working with other areas facing a similar shortfall – I firmly believe it is important to give our children the best start in life and give their parents/carers the opportunity to fulfil work and other commitments.
- With primary schools, I continue to work with Cabinet colleagues, the Education and Skills Funding Agency, Maidstone Borough Council and our MP to ensure that every child has access to a good or outstanding school within proximity of their local area.

Planning and Infrastructure

- My well-established record in fighting decision makers on inappropriate development within our rural areas has continued at a pace. I am particularly concerned with housing developments where vital infrastructure such as schools, transport links and medical and community facilities have not been properly considered. I have worked very closely with Lenham Parish Council and the Neighbourhood Planning Group in ensuring that highways and education provision are sustainable for both current and future residents.

Communications

- Kent County Council is working with the Government's broadband agency, Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) to improve access to superfast broadband services. To date, this work has already brought superfast broadband to over 134,000 homes and businesses, who would otherwise have been left with no, or slow broadband. This means that 95% of properties across Kent and Medway can now access a superfast broadband service of

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at least 24mbps. I am working with residents in many of our communities – Hucking, Hollingbourne and Ulcombe – to secure a better service and more information can be found on <https://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/broadband/making-kent-quicker>

I attend as many of the local parish council meetings within my Division as I can – sometimes two in one evening – as well as the annual parish meetings. My most important role however is to help and support residents with their individual problems. The case work is varied - ranging from school appeals to care packages for our elderly residents, potholes to hedges etc – and it is always very rewarding to see positive outcomes. I am always happy to listen and help and can be contacted by either email or telephone – Shellina.Prendergast@kent.gov.uk or 07970 461160.

I am always very keen to support local community projects with my KCC Members Grant. Beneficiaries this past year include improvements to Filmer Hall in East Sutton, play equipment in Ulcombe and at Hollingbourne primary school, improved facilities at Headcorn Tennis Club, Five Acre Wood School, various highway schemes, Age UK Maidstone, Involve Kent, a youth project led by the Salvation Army and a memorial stone in Boughton Malherbe. I have several worthy projects in the pipeline for 2019/20 but please do let me know if there is anything within your community that I can help with.

Thank you again and my very best wishes to you all.

4 Maidstone Borough Councillor Martin Round

Councillor Round gave the meeting an update on the past year and this included:-

- As part of the MBC Planning Committee he can ensure that the committee consider the rural perspective, especially as there is a view that MBC are too urban in their approach
- He confirmed that MBC are no longer embroiled in a Judicial Review with KCC. MBC have called a halt to the process and it is expected that will save circa £1m in costs.
- On the subject of planning Enforcement and Conservation continue to be a big challenge
- MR confirmed that a members grant of £500 was awarded to each Parish in his ward
- Austerity measures still continue and a thorough review of costs continues. This includes a review of electoral costs.
- Housing issues are under real scrutiny and the challenge is the balance of what is need against what developers are trying to deliver
- Other matters that need addressing
 - Drainage & flooding issues
 - Fly tipping
 - ASB
 - Highways issue such as speed & parking

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4 Stuart Ellesmere Kent Community Warden

Stuart gave his apologies as he was unable to attend the meeting and he sent the following report:-

Many apologies, I am tied up in Maidstone today attending meetings (serious organised criminal panel meetings - criminal gangs/individuals etc) As a result, I've had to work an early shift. These meetings are monthly and are the only meetings I've had to carry over from my previous time before I left. I am still awaiting a full uniform too!

I haven't been able to submit yearly report this time around, please convey my apologies. I had a planned week off and I have been playing catch up ever since and I also had to carry out welfare visits in Grafty Green on top of the ones required in Headcorn.

It looks like as we go forward into the wardens will become far more welfare based and less ASB/criminal themed.

If there is one thing you could convey to the Parish Council - it would be my overwhelming happiness to be back in the area, I really did miss my time here, albeit 3 weeks away, it has opened my eyes a bit with regards to fresh ideas and perspectives on the role. Residents too have been extremely welcoming on my return as have respective Borough councillors and business owners - it's also been great to rekindle great working relationships with yourself, John Boyd and the lengthsman - Peter and Malcolm. I'm looking forward to the next 7 years (if you are happy to have me!)

5. John Boyd Kent Police PCSO

Headcorn has maintained a fairly low level of crime during the past year. Crime levels throughout the year have their peaks and troughs but I am pleased to say that we are sustaining the reduced level of crime overall that we have benefited from over the past few years. This thankfully has been possible through the support of the community and the Parish Council.

We have dealt with a number of issues throughout the year, which have included the following:

- Provide a visible presence in my wards and surrounding areas.
- Follow ups on the victims of burglaries/breaks to give crime prevention advice and information booklets.
- Helping neighbours to try to sort out their disputes, this on most occasions means linking in with the housing associations where applicable.
- Linking in with the Kent County Council Warden, who I am pleased to say that I have a great working relationship with, and other agencies to help out with many problems that arise.
- Speed enforcement checks and speed monitoring checks throughout the area though we do accept that speed is a nuisance throughout the rural and more needs to be done.

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- Patrols of outlying areas to deter and stop vehicles known for scrap metal thefts. This has been backed up with pre-arranged Policing Operations County wide involving numerous authorities and scrap yard inspections.

We are always trying to keep on top of any nuisance youth issues in the village. This, as all issues has its ups and downs but overall (whilst there have been issues recently) this has also not been a major issue this year and any incidents of this type of behaviour has been dealt with to good effect.

We encourage residents to call in any incidents of this type of nuisance behaviour.

As with most areas in life the police have changing priorities and budgets. I am pleased to say that my area hasn't changed this last year which continues to be the Headcorn ward with Lenham and Harrietsham.

I have and will continue to provide the visible presence and first class service that the Kent Police is renowned for.

Anyone wishing to contact me about any issues or crime prevention advice can call the non-emergency Police number 101.

Thank you for your continued support in making Headcorn safe.

PCSO John Boyd - Maidstone Neighbourhood Team

6. Presentation by Dean Morrison of South East Rivers Trust

Dean Morrison gave us an excellent presentation that centred on the work undertaken by the South East Rivers Trust and natural flood management. He noted that the Trust has received excellent support from local land owners in the work that they are to undertake on the River Sherway and Hoggs Bridge/School stream.

Work is due to commence in the Autumn and he hopes that locals will volunteer. More detail to follow.

7. Annual Report of the Parish Council by the Chairman.

I am sure you will be pleased to hear, given the time, that this will be a relatively short report -for a number of reasons. -the number of items on the agenda, then we are back to a meeting in April instead of May as in 2018 -thus only covering 11mths but most of all, and this is disappointing, many of the issues from last year's Parish Meeting Report seem to have steadily continued on, only in a few cases coming to a resolution, and there have been relatively few new issues.

The Parish Council works as a corporate body in the interests of Headcorn Parish (Local Government, not Church) in a number of ways – as a statutory consultant on planning applications, as guardians of the parish assets, in particular the open spaces, the general appearance of the village so Headcorn is a pleasant place in which to live, and representing Headcorn at numerous meetings with outside bodies who can significantly influence life for parishioners in a variety of ways. To do this we need Cllrs and here in lies a problem -we should have 13 Cllrs (as the village increases in size this number could soon rise to 15).

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Currently we have only 9 Cllrs. Since the last Parish Meeting we have lost 4 Cllrs due to illness and/or change of lifestyle. We are hoping to co-opt some new Cllrs at our May Full Council Meeting – currently we have only 3 candidates. I will come back to this issue at the end of my report when I hope to enlist your help.

As I have explained in previous years, due to the amount of work as the Parish steadily increased in size over the years, the Full Council set up first of all (about 12yrs ago) a Planning Committee, then , later ,an Open Spaces Committee and more recently a Staffing Committee. If these committees did not exist then Full Council Meetings would be more than double their current average 2 ½ hours in length.

Planning Committee

This continues to meet twice a month, chaired by Cllr. Nigel Pyman, to consider any planning applications relating to Headcorn Parish and, as a statutory consultee, to recommend refusal or approval to Maidstone Borough’s Planning Committee. Cllrs use local knowledge combined with acquired knowledge of planning guidelines and various planning documents, aided by the investigative prowess of the Clerk, to reach decisions. Since our last meeting 55 planning applications have been considered, some of them in great detail and 7 planning inquiries have been covered by written “reps” or attendance at the actual inquiry.. The number of planning applications is smaller than in recent years -o, whether this is due to Brexit, austerity or too many houses in the village left unsold who knows?

Maidstone Borough Council Local Plan Review

As they are required to do, MBC are currently undertaking a review of their Local Plan which informs planning decisions. They have put out a “call for sites” – developers and landowners can put forward sites to be considered as acceptable for development. Regrettably, there will be sites put forward and accepted in Headcorn, despite the fact that over the current planning period, there have been 601 new houses approved in the parish, although in the MBC Local Plan the total for Headcorn to 2031 is only 423. The Government formula presented for Local Authorities to assess the demand in their area seems to mean the more houses they approve the more they are required to approve the next time round. So it is almost inevitable that Headcorn will be “awarded” more houses when the revised Local Plan comes out in 2022. HPC however will be fighting this and has already asked The Clerk to investigate the number of empty houses on the new estates, there seem to be a lot, even though the 220 houses between Ulcombe road and the A274 have only just started to be built. In addition, it has been reported that Maidstone has by a long way the highest increase in the number of long term empty houses -42% -than any of the surrounding boroughs. Currently, using the above, we are compiling a letter to MBC asking them to challenge the Government’s formula and this approach is supported by KALC of which we are a member.

Gypsies and Travellers

Whenever planning is considered, then the question of the many G and T sites in the parish arises. I will make my usual statement - there have been Gypsies settled in Headcorn for many, many years, in houses in the village or in discreet, isolated sites in the surrounding countryside. They were accepted as part of the parish. Issues have arisen since new legislation allowed Gypsies and Travellers to buy green field sites and settle on them followed by lack of control from MBC which has resulted in Headcorn having the largest number of such sites in a parish in the county.

Last year I was able to report that a new enforcement officer had been employed principally to sort out the G and T sites and we saw a lot of action. Sadly she has left. However, we have received a number of planning application and there have been appeal inquiries as a result of her work.

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In the meantime, sites in Love Lane which had a variety of planning states are steadily producing planning applications or appealing enforcement and Martins Gardens on the Lenham Road (technically in Ulcombe due to a small bump in the parish boundary but effectively in Headcorn) is coming in to line having over stepped their previous permission. The Meadows, the large site on the Lenham Road is unfortunately a different story – we have been waiting for a Planning Inquiry since 2017 but lack of Inspectors led to delay after delay. And Hammerstream Paddock has a Court Injunction which has been flouted for much of the past year and talk but no action seems to be the order of the day.

We have of course been monitoring and chasing where necessary these developments and have been fully supported by our MP who had set up a meeting with the top two MBC officers plus MBC Cllrs. However, on the day, the MBC Officers had not been properly briefed by their assistants and the meeting was a waste of Helen Whately's time

Neighbourhood Plan

Those of you with good memories will remember some Cllrs with a group of volunteers worked for many, many hours over several years on producing a NP only to be delayed substantially by MBC and then ran into a new version of the NPPF followed by a legal challenge of MBC's Local Plan. It is only since the latter failed that it has seemed reasonable to try and move it forward particularly in time for the revised MBC Local Plan. The Group met our Borough Cllrs and Cllr Karen Chappell -Tay offered to spend time with MBC officers to see their view as to our next move and report back to the Group. Their suggestion is that we go back to Regulation 14 – a lot more work, or involve a planning consultant to advise amendments to enable it to pass the examiner. Currently the HPC has agreed to the Clerk chasing for 3 invoices from consultants. We do not want to just abandon the NP because apart from all the goodwill and involvement over the years from a large number of residents, if we have an adopted NP our CIL (Council infrastructure Levy) adopted by MBC in Autumn 2018 ,increases from 15% to 25% . This is in place of the old S106 monies from developers and is a substantial amount of money for the village, if Headcorn receives more developments.

Open Spaces Committee

Cllr James continues to chair this committee which meets at 2monthly intervals preceded by a Sunday walk around the village. The emphasis is on making the village a pleasant place in which to live. Usually less stressful straightforward than planning, actions decided by the Cllrs are completed by the Clerk who manages our lengthsmen. The latter seemed to be able to turn their hands to anything and are a great asset, saving the need to employ contractors and at the same time saving the parish money.

Some of the Issues covered this year:-

Lighting – programme to replace old street lights to LED nearly completed.

Maintenance of Days Green, Hoggs Bridge Green, Parsonage Meadow, Spires Ash.

Monitoring of Playground equipment, ensuring that annual inspections by ROSPA take place and recommendations are carried out. This is especially important as from time to time a child has an accident and the parent feels it is the fault of our equipment.

Ensuring the annual Tree Audit takes place and arranging any remedial work.

Continually ensuring the current burial ground is kept in an appropriate state and also arranging for an extension next door in the wooded area of Long Meadow. This involves consent for certain trees to be removed (they have a tree preservation order) and consent for the area to be used, layout etc before the area can be consecrated.

The War Memorial cleaning was completed in time for Remembrance Sunday, paid for by a grant from War Memorials Trust -many compliments have been paid regarding it's improved looks!

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Christmas Lights -a rolling programme to maintain the current lights and improve when possible. Again the usual panic as to whether they would be ready for the Headcorn Christmas Fayre

Arranging our hanging baskets and trying to provide a little more impact on the south side of the High Street. Also arranging for the flowers at the war memorial and hopefully a planter by the White Horse, to be paid for by a developer.

Mowing of village greens etc – the mowing contract with MBC is being terminated and a mower purchased (paid for from S106 money) so that our lengthsman can mow our open spaces when it is needed. Our lengthsman have also built secure storage for the mower and given their incredible job after a break-in on our HPC equipment store, I think we can sleep happily at night!

To more general issues

Remembrance Sunday.

Originally the planning for this event was undertaken by Cllrs, but given the absence of the Cllr concerned, over the past 2 years the arrangements have fallen on The Clerk, using the file Cllr Dungey compiled whilst she was the organiser. The event seems to get bigger every year, and this year we had many extra requests for Wreaths to lay, including a request from our MP, Helen Whately. Luckily, given it was a Centenary year, the weather was kind, everything fell into place and the 3 biplanes dropped the poppies in the right place! Well done everyone and thanks to all the volunteers.

Not content with a morning ceremony, the Clerk persuaded the Council to have a “Battles Over” ceremony in the evening, which she proceeded to organise, helped by our lengthsman who made a remarkable beacon. We are currently finalising a permanent place for this item. The surprise of the evening was our PCSO John Boyd stepping forward in a different uniform to play the trumpet. Thank you John and all who made this a special evening.

Law Enforcement

HPC works closely with our PCSO and our Community Warden who are often met visiting our Parish Office. Stuart Ellesmere, our Community Warden sprung his own surprise by leaving us, due to family circumstances, for a new job only to return about a week later!

However we are not complaining -welcome back Stuart.

During the past year there was a perception around the village that we were experiencing a crime wave. In fact the number of reported crimes had been fairly stable but Social Media had expanded two break ins to 22 and more!

However, antisocial behaviour has been increasing – information shared between agencies does help to end certain incidents, but it is important anyone seeing or experiencing anti-social behaviour reports it on 101 – also available on line now. John told us how on returning from leave he saw a number of 101 calls re motor bikes, quad bikes and go-karts on the Lenham Road -he linked them, pressed for Police responses and the behaviour was stopped. Due to the increase in anti-social behaviour including driving through Hoggs Bridge Green Gate twice -without opening it first – HPC are purchasing a CCTV camera for that area which will cover the youth/adult equipment on the Green. This will join the updated camera in the High Street, another facing down North Street and the camera on Day’s Green.

I am sure I do not need to mention the spectacular cash point theft – save to say early morning our Clerk could be seen directing traffic before the Police took over and also accidentally insulting a High Ranking Police Officer who had parked his car in the space needed for reversing lorries!

Kent Highways

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We continue our close contact with Kent Highways and have constructed, as suggested, a Highways Improvement Plan with all our requests in priority order. We hear it was describe by KH as “ambitious”!

Despite years of saying they would do no more re the surface of Dawkes Meadow as the neighbours should be contributing, KH suddenly decided to resurface the centre strip and ended up going right down to Kings Road!

And again, having stood at Shenley Crossroads at least twice being told that they could nothing to improve the bus stop area for pedestrians, we have just received an email saying they would do it soon provided the utilities in the area do not make the cost prohibitive. However, it does not all go our way. Our highly successful anti car parking A-boards around the Forge Lane /High Street junction were seen by the KH Maidstone Area Officer when visiting us for a meeting and we were told they were illegal and we needed to remove them asap!!

Car Parking

Remains a problem – we met with the MBC Enforcement Officer and the Manager of the firm supplying the “Civil Enforcement Officers”. Some adjustments were made following a trial period but essentially it is an education exercise, not a money-making scheme. Our Clerk duly accepted an invitation to spend a day with a CEO on the streets of Headcorn and found it very enlightening! Unfortunately, there are inconsiderate people everywhere and you can never prevent all the infringements.

We have had complaints about the Foreman’s Carpark -this is privately owned and the surface will not be improved until Starnes have built the small “office” unit in the lower car park – this should be built by now but there is an unexplained delay.

We have been in contact with South East Rail re the excessively high charges for car parking in Headcorn, but could not persuade them hold the increase this year -they are still saying the matter will be assessed with the new franchise.

Access For all

HPC has been pressing for lifts at Headcorn Station to enable those with limited mobility or with small children and buggies, to cross to the upside and not have to journey to Ashford or Staplehurst to go to London. Much support was given to our grant application, by parishioners, MBC and KCC Cllrs and our MP. The Clerk filled in a very complicated form and Cllr Evenden became a newspaper and TV star! We had high hopes as we seemed to be shortlisted, but in the end the grants went elsewhere -mainly to larger stations. WE will try again!!

To finish on a positive note, after pressure from the HPC and the NP Group we now have a larger school on the original site, an improved sewerage system (though we still need Phase 2) and South East Water are putting in a new water pipeline.

Finally, I must say thank you to all the Cllrs who have shown their interest in “Helping Headcorn”, in particular the Chairs of Committees and my Vice Chair Bridget Dungey, our lengthsman And of course, our Clerk without whom none of this would be possible.

This is only a flavour of HPC activities – it is impossible to cover them all in the time available BUT what would happen if next year, when the whole Council is up for election, no one stands as a Cllr? Up and down the country, PCs up for election this May do not have enough candidates for the vacant places and those that do stand become Cllrs by default, there being no election. In the worst case where no one stands at all their Borough Council takes over and the PC is defunct. I leave you with the thought -would MBC have the time, the interest or the understanding to process the work HPC does for this village? Please think about it -then go away and help to spread the word -Headcorn needs more new Cllrs. for 2020!

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7. Reports were received from the following Clubs and Societies

- Jack Keeler – Chair of Governors Headcorn Primary School
- Headcorn Football Club
- Headcorn Womens Institute
- Headcorn Handbell Ringers
- Headcorn Cricket & Tennis Club
- Headcorn Village Hall
- Headcorn History Society

Meeting closed at 9:03 pm

Signed By:

Date:

DRAFT