

# VINTERS PARK RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION.

## MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATION HELD AT VINTERS PARK COMMUNITY CENTRE ON 19 APRIL 2000.

The Chairman opened the meeting by extending a welcome to everyone present and especially welcomed the Mayor of Maidstone, Councillor Frances Brown who would be speaking later. Mr. Richard Snaith, Maidstone Borough Council's Director of Client and Support Services was unable to attend due to a bereavement and his place was being taken by Mrs. Anne Hardy, the Registration Manager, and Mr. Neil Harris, the Democratic Services Manager. The presentation by the Police would be given by P.C. Ian Gedge supported by P.C. John Anstell. Mr. Geoff Russell, the Highways Manager was also present to respond to those queries falling within his sphere and, no doubt, many others as well. The Chairman expressed the Association's thanks to them all for coming to participate in the meeting.

The Chairman was pleased to welcome County Councillor Mrs. M. Featherstone, Councillor D. MacGrory and Councillor P. Sellar of Maidstone Borough Council and Councillor J. Munson, Chairman of Boxley Parish Council.

Apologies were received from Ann Widdicombe M.P., Andrew Rowe M.P., Councillor Mrs. M. Shaw, Judy Rider the Head Teacher of the Vinters Park Community School, Mr. D. Abrams the Head Teacher of East Borough Primary School, the President of the W.I. branch and Mr. P. Fever.

### 1. MINUTES.

The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 12 May 1999 were circulated at the meeting, approved and signed by the Chairman.

### 2. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT.

The Chairman's written Report had been circulated with the Notice of Meeting and Agenda in the Spring issue of "The Park Ranger". No questions were raised directly relating to this Report or to the Minutes of the 1999 A.G.M., but arising from Minute 8 Mr. Val Elton reported that the condition of Footpath KB 9 had deteriorated still further since the A.G.M. last year and no marker was provided at its commencement. The Chairman stated that due note would be taken of the position and it would be pursued.

### 3. PRESENTATION OF ACCOUNTS.

On behalf of Avice Harms, the Finance Manager, John Stubbins presented the Income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31 January 2000 and the Balance Sheet as at that date, copies of which were circulated at the meeting and are inserted in the Minute Book. On the Income and Expenditure Account under Income John particularly drew attention to the higher amount of Bank Interest due to the transfer of the Reserve Account to the Standard Life Bank, and the grant of £250 from Boxley Parish Council enabling the purchase of new chairs. Under Expenditure electricity was up on the previous year due a change in the Company's accounting methods and the credit on performing rights was due in part to a change in the timing of the charge and the noticeable decrease in hirings attracting such fees.

The Balance Sheet showed a more healthy balance (£5,439) compared to the previous year. Under 'debtors' the major debt related to the replacement of the door lock and keys which the Executive Committee was seeking to recover from the hirer whose loss of a key gave rise to the expenditure. There being no questions on the accounts, John paid tribute to excellent way in which the Finance Manager had maintained the accounts and kept the arrears of fees to a minimum. A vote of thanks was passed to both the John Stubbins as Auditor and Avice Harms as Finance Manager for their all they had done for the Association over the past year.

The Meeting duly approved the Income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31 January 2000 and the Balance Sheet as at 31 January 2000, copies of which are inserted in the Minute Book.

#### 4. ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS.

The following members were duly elected to the posts indicated:

Chairman Neil Sinclair

Vice Chairman Gerry KIRRAGE

Honorary Secretary Keith Rogers

Executive Committee Peter Fever, Sue Fry, Chris KIRRAGE, Peter Lott and Terry O'Connor.

#### 5. APPOINTMENT OF HONORARY AUDITOR.

It was RESOLVED that John Stubbins be appointed as Honorary Auditor for the coming year, but it was left to the Executive Committee to settle the amount of the honorarium to be paid for his services in this post.

#### 6. ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION.

It was RESOLVED that the Annual Subscription be again waived for the coming year.

#### 7. THE ROLE OF THE MAYOR AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Frances Brown, the Mayor of Maidstone, to speak on the role of the Mayor and its relationship with the community. The Mayor said that she felt a large part of the role of the Mayor is to get into the community and see what is going on, and help people in any way she can with information, guidance and advice. Of course the Mayor has an important job to do as the figurehead for the Council and its representative on many civic functions and public occasions.

Each Mayor has their view of the way they should do their job. Councillor Brown felt that she should get out and about and help people in any way she can and pay visits to Schools, Clubs and Associations. The Press were very good at covering the events she visited and so she was able to help the organisations she visited with some good free publicity to whatever they were doing. She also invited people into the Town Hall, her Official Residence, for coffee mornings and other functions to encourage them in their wide range of activities in the Borough. During her year in office she had learnt an enormous amount about what was going on in the area.

In answer to a question the Mayor said she had not find it difficult to keep out of politics during her Mayoralty. She tries to be impartial in al she does. In one particular way she had declined to show her political leanings. It is the custom to decorate the mayoral chain of office with small bows on the shoulders identifying the holder's party. Councillor Brown had chosen to use a neutral colour which plays down her political allegiance during her year of office. She added that the colour red rather limited what you can wear with it!

In answer to a question as to why the Council does not build some appropriate development on the river frontage she made it quite clear that his sort of thing was no longer in the Council's power primarily because it did not have the money to finance any such large scale project. This is why the new housing at Shepway had to be done through a Housing Association. Such small amounts of money as the Council could make available were used to get projects off the ground. Further the Council's powers as a Planning Authority were strictly limited. If the proposed development came within the prescribed uses and did not give rise to a planning objection the Planning Committee could not refuse simply because the members did not like the proposed development. If they did, the applicant could take it to appeal and would almost certainly succeed and the Council would end up paying large sums in costs and possibly compensation.

The Chairman thanked the Mayor for her very useful and informative talk.

## 8. ELECTIONS.

Anne Hardy had prepared a handout giving visual illustrations of the documents to which she referred. Her responsibilities related to the production of the Register of Electors and Elections. To vote at an election your name had to be on the Register of Electors. To qualify you must be living at an address in the Borough on 10 October for the Register produced in the following February. You had to ensure your name is on the form delivered to your address and return it.

Poll Cards telling you where to vote are sent out prior to elections. These tell you where to vote (now with a small location map) and give details of Postal Votes. The Ballot Paper these days has the name of the candidates party and the party logo. These symbols have been introduced because of candidates choosing descriptions similar to that of a well known party (e.g. 'Limited Democrat' when a Liberal Democrat was standing) and causing confusion and a split in the vote. A register of parties is now maintained locally and each party has to register its name and logo.

Mrs. Hardy pointed out the falling percentage of people voting - in 1999 in East Ward only just over 25%, with the Borough percentage only slightly higher. She also explained that the 55 Borough Councillors, serving 28 wards, serve a term of four years with one third elected in each of three years and KCC elections in the fourth year. There were 18 Parish Council elections this year, but there will only be a poll in four as the number of candidates in the other Parishes did not exceed the number of seats being contested. The Council staff also dealt with Parliamentary and European Elections, each on a five year cycle. In answer to a question Mrs. Hardy said that anyone moving into the Borough after 10 October could not vote here the following year and would have to vote where they lived previously. John Stubbins, picking up on the point Anne Hardy had made on trying not to use Schools for Polling Stations, recalled what had happened when the Polling Station had been moved from Eastborough School to the newly opened Community Centre. The change of location had greatly affected the pattern of those who turned out to vote and there had been a change in the party returned.

The Chairman thanked Anne Hardy for her very interesting presentation.

## 9. CREATING A NEW PARISH.

Neil Harris had also prepared a handout outlining the main points he was making. A Parish should be an area with a distinctive and recognisable community of interest with its own sense of identity. Vinters Park estate could well be such an area. In an unparished area like Vinters the process could be commenced by a petition signed by not less than 250 or 10% of local electors all from the area concerned. This would have to be submitted to the Borough Council to determine its validity, notify KCC and adjoining Parishes, make electors in the proposed Parish aware of the petition and forward it to the Secretary of State with Borough Council's recommendations. The Secretary of State can make a decision, but may refer the matter to the Local Government Commission for England.

A Parish Council is of course a local authority and its members are the official representatives of the electorate. The Council has certain powers of its own like providing a sports field and facilities, village halls and open spaces and with the Borough Council may exercise concurrent functions like employing street sweepers and providing traffic calming measures. This, of course, requires finance for which the Parish Council precepts on the Borough Council and the amount sought is recovered by the Borough Council as part of the Council Tax and paid over to the Parish Council.

Perhaps the most significant power of a Parish Council is the right to comment on planning applications on locations within the Parish and to appear at local enquiries. A Parish Council may also support, encourage and assist local community organisations.

There were drawbacks to acquiring parish status. A Parish Council costs money which is paid by the local electors who may not be enthusiastic. It can create antagonism; there could be conflict with an existing Community Association! If Woodlands were part of the proposed new Parish, then Boxley Parish Council would be greatly involved.

On the recent consultation process regarding the Review of Parish Boundaries being carried out by the Borough Council, which in part was looking at the size of the Parish of Boxley, Neil Harris accepted that the process followed left much to be desired. The Council now proposed to have a further round of consultation after the current elections were completed. It had been noted and accepted that on the original consultation the residents of Woodlands had preferred staying in Boxley to moving into East Ward, but the possible move to a new Parish of 'Vinters' would be another question.

In answer to a question from Chris Meigh, Neil Harris confirmed that when the Parish of Tovil was set up excluding the Coombe estate, residents in that estate were not consulted, but added that he believed that the legislation relating to that exercise had been different.

Councillor John Munson, Chairman of Boxley Parish Council, made a number of points including the following. Although Boxley might seem a large Parish, it was nowhere near as large as parishes elsewhere in the country with a population of 30,000. Also its size enabled it to give financial support to many local organisations which smaller Parishes might not be able to do. He also expressed considerable concern at the Borough's previous consultation process.

The Chairman thanked Neil Harris for his explanation of the process of creating a new Parish and the pros and cons of such action.

## 10. PRESENTATION ON LOCAL POLICING.

P.C. Ian Gedge, supported by P.C. John Ansell with visual illustrations on statistics, gave a presentation on the present arrangements for local policing. Vinters was one of 18 areas for which they were responsible including such diverse areas as Allington, Bredhurst and Waldham. They visited 10 Parish Councils as well as the Executive Committee of the Community Association here on a regular basis to keep people up to date with the present situation and to receive feedback. They showed figures for various types of crime on the estate which indicated a downward trend, with burglaries from dwellings down by some 40%.

There had been an outbreak of petty vandalism recently for which a group of local lads were responsible. Much work had been done to identify the culprits including the use of CCTV and visits to parents with mixed responses. One person had been arrested and charged with two offences of criminal damage.

Ian Gedge offered to deal with any general questions but asked people to raise specific points with him after the meeting. The Chairman then thanked Ian Gedge and John Ansell for their attendance and presentation.

## 11. QUESTION TIME.

The Chairman then invited residents to submit specific or general questions on matters which affected the estate. A number of points were raised including the following:

Joan Butcher asked the Executive Committee to consider the installation of a P.A. system or Loop system in the Hall and the Chairman agreed that the Committee would consider this matter.

Val Elton drew attention to the vandalism of 4 trees recently planted in the grassed area adjacent to the footpath at the bottom end of Woodlands and asked for their replacement.

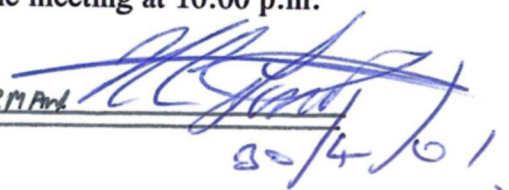
Concern was expressed at the ban on parking between 10.30 and 11.00 a.m. in the Claremont Road/Ardenlee Drive area which prohibited holding coffee mornings and made it difficult if you had a builder coming in to work on the house. Geoff Russell explained the reason for the ban was to prohibit parking all-day by commuters and that a Residents' Parking Scheme was expensive to bring in and enforce. A pass could be obtained for workmen. Another resident was grateful for the ban and reminded everyone of the situation before the ban was introduced when you could not gain access to your own drive because of the commuter parking

The Mayor advised anyone wanting the Council to take action on a specific matter to apply to come and ask a question of the appropriate Chairman prior to a Meeting of the Borough Council. This could ask the Chairman to take the matter to his Committee and ensure its consideration.

Anne Cole referred to the failure to clear weeds on the footpaths and in gutters. Geoff Russell said this had been due to lack of finance; this year funding was more flexible and he would be better able to deal with the weeds. Another project for which money was being provided was the pedestrian crossing in Bearsted Road outside the Crematorium, now in this year's programme.

Other items raised/noted were the state of the underpass under Hampton Road, parking at the top of Hampton Road and a request to replace the passenger shelter opposite the Community Centre.

The Chairman concluded the meeting by thanking everyone present for their attendance and all those who had spoken for their contributions. He then closed the meeting at 10.00 p.m.



Handwritten signature and date: 30/4/01