

**MINUTES OF THE LEIGH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 31ST MARCH 2025
AT 8.00PM IN THE SMALL HALL, HIGH STREET, LEIGH**

PRESENT: Cllr J. Kaye, (Chairman), Cllr R. Britain, Cllr A. Holt, Cllr G. Marchant, Cllr G. Rogers, Cllr S. Smith, Cllr G. Southwell and Cllr B. Williams

APOLOGIES: Cllr A. Backlog, County Cllr Margot McArthur and PSE Alan Watson, Kent Police

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs L. Kleinschmidt (Clerk), District Cllr Malcolm Silander, Charles Lloyd from GACC, PC Donegan and PC Maunsell from Kent Police, Paula Beresford and Jacqui Wordsworth from the Leigh Village Halls Renovation Committee and 35 members of the public.

Cllr Kaye welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. To approve Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 29th April 2024
Cllr Smith proposed that the minutes be approved, this was seconded by Cllr Williams, and all were in favour.

2. Leigh Community SpeedWatch
In the absence of Alan Watson, Cllr Williams agreed to say a few words about the Leigh SpeedWatch group. Cllr Williams said the SpeedWatch group is made up of local volunteers. There are 16 police approved sites in the village and, once or twice a month, the group will be out monitoring vehicle speeds in both the 30mph and 40mph speed limit zones. Any vehicle found to be speeding will have the registration number, make and model of the vehicle together with the time and speed of travel. This information is logged with Kent SpeedWatch, and Kent Police will write to the registered owners of these vehicles, explaining the potential risks and consequences of their dangerous driving. If anyone is logged three times or more within Kent, then they can expect a visit from the police. The Parish Council regularly receive complaints about speeding vehicles in the parish, the aim of the SpeedWatch sessions is to raise awareness and hopefully if residents see the volunteers out and about regularly, they will check their speeds and drive more safely. The group is seeking more volunteers, so please do contact Louise if you would like to know more. The group were recently monitoring speeds by Saxby Wood and nearby residents said that the traffic was slower whilst the group was there. A resident said that traffic calming measures would reduce speeding vehicles, but because Leigh doesn't have street lights, it is not possible to introduce many types of traffic calming measures.

Cllr Kaye thanked Cllr Williams for reporting on this important new initiative.

3. To welcome Charles Lloyd from the Gatwick Area Conservation Area Campaign who will give an update on Gatwick Airport's Northern Runway expansion proposal
Cllr Kaye welcomed Charles Lloyd to the meeting. Charles said that there are two main things happening currently at Gatwick, the first is the proposed expansion and the second is the proposed change in flight paths in 2026/27, this will have an impact on this area. There has been an inquiry by inspectors that has taken six months and, on the 27th February, the Secretary of State announced that she was minded to approve Gatwick's application for expansion, but said that this was subject to certain conditions. The final decision will be made in October.

Charles gave an overhead powerpoint presentation, which included the following information:

- Passenger numbers will increase by 70% to 80m per annum, this will make Gatwick as large as Heathrow.
- Aircraft movements will increase by over 35%, this will increase air noise substantially, as well as road and rail movements, creating local highway congestion.
- Gross CO₂ emissions will increase by over 50%, causing Gatwick to generate 5.5% of all UK CO₂ emissions by 2038, subject to mitigation.
- The conditions required before the Secretary of State will approve the application are:
 - a requirement to increase the area around the airport that would be eligible for compensation on noise. This will not extend as far as Leigh and Peshurst.

- a requirement to increase public transport targets from 44% to 54% prior to commencement of the dual runway operations.

However, there was no requirement to improve the noise envelope, and no requirement to limit CO₂ emissions. Gatwick is required to respond to these conditions by 24th April, and there will be an opportunity to comment on these new proposals.

- The Government has been approving airport expansion at every airport that has requested it, including Stanstead, London City, Southampton and Bristol, and Luton will receive a decision in two days' time. The proposals to expand Heathrow are in the pipeline.
- Airspace modernisation will include Performance Based Navigation (PBN) which is a form of satnav for aircraft, this has the ability to concentrate flight paths. There will be no compensation for people who live under a new flight path, and Gatwick will announce their shortlist of options on new flight paths with a formal consultation in 2026.
- Gatwick's passenger numbers have not recovered from Covid and are not at the same levels as 2019; Gatwick is the only airport that has not fully recovered.

Cllr Kaye asked if there are any questions:

1. A resident asked whether the rail companies are complying with requests to increase rail services. Charles said that there could be longer trains with more carriages, or more buses. Gatwick needs to work out how this increase in public transport provision can be delivered.
2. A resident asked whether night flights will change. Charles said that the number of flights allowed at Gatwick between 11.30pm and 6.00am is limited by a quota, which is currently 11,200 in the summer (seven months) and 3,250 in winter. There have been no changes to night flight operations in the last 15 years or so. GACC requested a ban on night flights if the expansion was approved.
3. Cllr Smith asked whether all airports will be required to use PBN. Charles said that Gatwick switched to PBN in 2015 on departures. It is unclear whether all aircraft will use it safely or whether some flights will have to rely on air traffic control.
4. A resident asked whether PBN will control height of aircraft as well as routes. Charles said that yes it should help.

Cllr Kaye thanked Charles very much for coming along to provide such an informative talk and he encouraged everyone to continue to support GACC.

4. Report by District Cllr Malcolm Silander

Cllr Silander's report is as follows:

Budget & Funding

- SDC approved a £20.3m budget but faced a last-minute £200,000 shortfall due to increased National Insurance contributions, alongside a £337,000 overspend on waste and rising IT and audit costs across the Council. SDC is having to cut costs and sadly this has included redundancies.
- SDC rejected a recommendation to consult the public on future budget proposals.
- SDC is £400,000 over budget on waste, and it may have to go to bi-weekly collections – waste one week and recycling the next – which will increase recycling levels.

Housing & Planning

- The Local Plan has not been completed, and its timelines are being reviewed in light of the new government and its policies.
- The Cabinet has now agreed that a new Regulation 18 consultation will take place in October/November 2025, with the aim of being able to adopt a Plan in December 2027.
- Changes to the NPPF state that Green Belt protection remains a priority, but 'Grey Belt' sites (previously developed land) and poorly performing Green Belt will be considered for development.
- Locally, the application for land south of Greenview Avenue was refused due to Green Belt impact and KCC Highways objections.
- Genuine Green Belt land will continue to be protected.

Environment & Climate Change

- SDC's goal of Net Zero by 2030 has been scrapped due to high costs, particularly related to leisure centre emissions. The government's overall 2050 target remains.
- A motion to introduce an alternative climate policy was rejected by Full Council.

Local Governance & Policy Changes

- A new place-based approach to decision-making will be operational soon.
- Refuse collection changes: 'bags-for-life' have replaced clear recycling bags, with weekly collections continuing for now.
- A major review of waste collection is now underway, as the Council has to meet new legal requirements to collect glass and food waste by March 2026.
- A motion to create a central procurement function was defeated.

Major Development & Infrastructure Issues

- The Local Boundary Review has been paused due to potential unitary authority restructuring, which could end district councils by 2028.
- Land east of High Street (SDC-owned) in Sevenoaks is under public consultation for development. A new leisure centre for Sevenoaks is a major part of these proposals.
- Large planning applications, such as the 'gas works' site in Sevenoaks, were approved despite local and town objections, demonstrating the influence of the revised NPPF and the government's prioritisation of new house-building targets.

Gatwick Airport Expansion

- A challenge has been raised against SDC's acceptance of Gatwick's impact data, arguing that the negative effects outweigh the benefits, with a push for SDC to align with KCC's strong opposition.

Other Key Issues

- A unitary authority (UA) is planned to replace district and county councils within the next two years. The most likely scenario is a merger of Sevenoaks, Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells, and Maidstone. A detailed proposal must be submitted to the Government by November 2025.
- There is no current plan for a Strategic Mayor for Kent, though one is expected at some point in the future.
- The Council unanimously passed a motion committing itself to engage fully with local residents and to strengthen Parish and Town Councils as it prepares its plans.

5. To hear update on the Renovation Project for Leigh Village Halls

Cllr Kaye welcomed to the meeting Paula Beresford, Chair of Leigh Village Halls Management Committee, and Jacqui Wordsworth, Project Manager for the renovation project. Paula said that the project is to renovate both the large village hall and the small village hall, plus the former RBL Club, which is now called the Village Hub. There was a public consultation held in the large village hall and a survey of users of the hall and residents to see what people would like to see included in the proposals. Jacqui said that Leigh Village Halls Management Committee and Leigh Parish Council are embarking on an ambitious project to transform the village halls so they fulfil the needs of the local population in years to come. The current halls have elements that need repair, replacement or updating and this provides an amazing opportunity to develop the halls to create a community space fit for the next 100 years.

Jacqui gave an overhead powerpoint presentation, which included the following information:

The technical phase includes a building condition survey which will identify known issues, this will be one in April, and also planning and building constraints, and there is a meeting this week with SDC planning and conservation officers. An asbestos survey was completed in March.

Funding will be then investigated, the first phase is feasibility funding, and then a plan will be drawn up for the capital funding of the project. Cllr Rogers has kindly offered to help with the fundraising stage.

As part of community engagement, a meeting was held in the large village hall in November and 28 people attended to represent the current users of the halls. A survey was distributed and the response rate was 8.5%. Of those who responded, the following improvements were suggested:

53% of respondents wanted improved heating

47% wanted an improved kitchen

23% would like to see improved lighting

20% would like to see improved acoustics

18% would like improved toilets

17% wanted a sound system and staging

Of those who responded, the following new activities or services were suggested:

53% of respondents would like to see Doctors reinstated (this is being investigated)

50% would like a community café (this is being researched)

32% would like to see improved arts/music facilities

22% would like to see library facilities (this is being investigated)

18% would like to see youth facilities / club

Some urgent maintenance is required, such as an update to the kitchen and temporary flooring to be installed in the small village hall.

Community feedback will be sought in June and July. If anyone would like to get involved, please contact the Village Halls committee.

Cllr Kaye thanked Paula and Jacqui very much for coming along and giving such an interesting update.

6. To hear report by Kent Police on local policing matters

Cllr Kaye welcomed our two community police officers, PC Donegan and PC Maunsell.

PC Donegan said that he and PC Maunsell are the community police officers covering Leigh, Chiddingstone, Edenbridge, Penshurst, Hever and Cowden parishes. He said that My Community Voice is an excellent way of communicating with the police as well as hearing updates on local issues. In Leigh and Penshurst there has been some rural thefts of quad bikes and farm equipment. This is being taken forward and the Neighbourhood Task Force is involved. There have been multiple arrests and cars stopped and searched.

If residents see a crime in the process of being committed, please contact 999. If residents would like to report a crime not being currently committed, or if they see something that just doesn't look right, please contact the police on 101, online at www.kent.police.uk or via my community voice at www.mycommunityvoicekent.co.uk. The police are creating a CCTV map of people's private cameras and ring doorbells. This allows the police to contact residents if they need some footage. If you would be willing to allow your cameras to be included in the map, please let the police know.

PC Donegan and PC Maunsell do carry out foot patrols in Leigh but more often they do a mobile control at night. They said that they are very happy to attend any community events.

Cllr Kaye asked if there are any questions.

A resident asked if there is anything that residents can do to help tackle any drug issues in the community. Cllr Donegan said that reports of drug use in this area is low, but please do report if you see anything suspicious.

7. Chairman's Report of Activities in 2024/25

Your Parish Council meets on the first Monday of every month here in the small village hall. These meetings are open for everyone to attend, and attendees are always welcome. So, please, if you have any concerns please do come to a meeting. This note summarises a few issues that have taken up time or been causes for concern. Minutes are on the Parish Council website or speak to any councillor.

Planning

This remains one of the key areas of activity, the Parish Council of course only has an advisory role but with the help of our District Councillor we are able to influence planning decisions. Our Chairman of the Planning Committee is Bruce Williams. Please remember neighbour comments are taken very seriously by the SDC committee. The Parish Council considered 48 applications, of which they supported 11, opposed 3, had no objection to 13 and submitted a no comment response on 21. We submit a no comment response when members feel that there is no specific comment to submit, or we decide to leave the decision to specialist officers at Sevenoaks District Council – such the tree officer or conservation officer for listed building applications.

We were pleased that after some 2 years SDC refused the outline application by a local developer, Whitehall Homes, for 39 dwellings on the land at the end of Greenview Avenue. It was turned down primarily due to access concerns and impact to the Green Belt. Specifically in paragraph 81 of its Officers' Report with regard to transport it says: "Paragraph 116 of the NPPF states that development should only be refused or prevented on transport grounds if the impacts are severe, KCC Highways have confirmed this is the case, as they remain unconvinced that the submissions are sufficiently robust and detailed to ensure that a safe construction access arrangement can be secured for the development and therefore the development is considered not acceptable in this regard." And with regard to the Green Belt paragraph 104 says: "The principal factor relied on by the applicant is the provision of market and affordable housing, including custom and self-build housing, against a backdrop of 31 an insufficient five-year housing land supply.

“The other matters advanced by the applicant are of lesser weight. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, the site does not constitute as a ‘Grey Belt’ site, whereby if applicable, the development would be appropriate development within the Green Belt.”

It is possible that a revised application will come, though it seems very unlikely that any application can overcome either of the above planning issues. We remain opposed to any development on this site. Although there is much talk of grey belt and so on, guidance still appears to provide strong protection to the Green Belt. Sevenoaks district does have a problem in that 93% of its area is in the Green Belt which clearly makes meeting housing targets more difficult.

We have responded to the proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework. An enormous document and really quite hard for a Parish Council to respond to without specialist advice. We have put forward points regarding the Green Belt, social housing, quality of design and build.

On the subject of planning we are reviewing the Village Design Statement which was produced some 20 years ago and needs an update. This is a document that can be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document and can be most helpful to demonstrate that the village has thought about its housing design and characteristics, and how any future developments can be sympathetic to existing dwellings and enhance the area. Our Village Design Statement must mirror Sevenoaks District Council’s policies, and as SDC is currently reviewing all its policies and producing a new Local Plan, it has been decided to put the review of our Village Design Statement on hold until the Local Plan has been approved.

Also on planning, we have prepared some very useful Planning Protocols which will assist residents when preparing new applications, it explains the procedure and covers reasons for commenting on a planning application and lists material planning considerations under the current legislation. There are two protocols, one for household applications and one for meeting with developers. These can be found on our website under Planning.

Village Halls

The Village Halls Committee has been working hard on options for modernisation work on the village halls. We are grateful to the Committee for its work and their participation this evening.

Affordable Housing

No progress on this in the last year. We still seek sites for affordable housing, though no new suitable sites have been identified.

Roads and footpaths

We all know how bad potholes are around here and we are very glad that Hildenborough Road has been resurfaced. Meanwhile, please do register potholes on the KCC website.

Speed is an issue on roads, and we do get periodic protestations on this subject. Rest assured we are all on the same side.

The Parish Council has been involved recently in ensuring that cars were not left on the High Street so that drainage investigations using a CCTV survey could take place. Drainage is a major concern as the splash back from the permanent puddle of the north side of the road is causing considerable erosion to the wall there. Residents’ co-operation is appreciated to allow this work to progress and more closures are to be expected.

The works on the flood barrier by the Environment Agency are hopefully nearing completion and we look forward to the metal fencing being removed – and also some re-profiling to prevent the large wet area from forming at the bottom of the slope as you enter the water meadows from the Greenview Avenue direction. This has been promised by VolkerStevin.

The temporary closure of the footpath SR435 at the Leigh Barrier will be extended for a further 16 months, until 1st August 2026, or earlier if the works are completed earlier than this.

On drainage the flooding under the railway line on Ensfield Road is an ongoing problem that manages to involve the Environment Agency, Kent Highways and the Network Rail all of whom contribute to the blockages, and are now hopefully being active in solving the problem.

The Parish Council is having work done to repair the path from Kiln Lane to Well Close following a resident’s very unfortunate fall on the roots there. The trees are being removed and a new path laid.

Once again we have carried out two litter picks during the last year and there are also numerous people in the village who regularly put on a high visibility jacket and go and collect litter. Thank you to all of you, it is really appreciated. Both times in the past year Graham Marchant has brought a small lorry to (i) protect litter pickers on the busier roads (Ensfield in particular) and (ii) to collect the sheer volume of rubbish and fly tipping that we suffer.

Leigh Green and Charcott Green

We go to considerable expense to maintain The Green and are grateful to those who put in the effort to keep it that way. In the past year it has been cut 18 times and spiked once. The maintenance contract is now being taken over by Estate and Field, replacing Landscape Services, and Estate and Field have recently harrowed, vertidraind and overseeded The Green. We very much hope for conditions to ensure best possible germination.

The ruts along The Green by the cricket pavilion are very annoying however it is a difficult problem for we cannot install grasscrete on safety grounds as a skidding cricket fielder or football player could be badly injured and likewise we cannot widen the road or install a pavement as it is a registered village green.

People do sometimes drive on The Green – and as we know get stuck. This has included an incident by the school where the driver used blocks of stone to try and get out – leaving others to clear up the mess. Similar has happened by the war memorial, though Ocado is paying for the repair.

We have erected signs reminding people that parking on The Green is only permitted with the approval of the Parish Council. If you have an event, or run a club, and need parking please contact Louise. Other than this parking is not permitted – at this stage we cannot engage in the time and effort to enforce this on a rigorous basis but if needs must, perhaps we will have to. We ask for everyone to help in this.

We have spoken with SDC with regard to the area around the bottle banks and some of the bins (cardboard) have been removed to allow more space for parking. It will not be long before the bottle banks go as we will soon be asked to leave bottles outside our houses in the next couple of years. The green bags that we have all been given have raised considerable comment and it remains to be seen how long they last, either from wear or tear or just being removed.

Aged Persons Dwellings (APDs)

Both are tenanted and now in very fair condition, though we continue to build and hold reserves in order to maintain these two bungalows and to ensure that we keep these dwellings occupied by eligible village residents. They have been redecorated externally along with various repairs. It is fairly clear that at some point we will need to spend some money to upgrade

Trees

The Parish Council owns some 40 trees and has them all surveyed every year – generally they are in good condition.

The veteran oak has continued to be the subject of much discussion, however after receiving consistent advice from 3 specialists we have reduced the weight by trimming of the crown, mulched around the tree to protect the roots and retain water, and installed cobra bracing to support the crown.

More work has gone into the Old Burial Ground which is a vastly improved space. There are some 100 graves on that site and notice board describing the history of this site has been bought and will be erected next to the new path that was laid last year.

Gatwick

It would appear that Gatwick is on our Government's agenda with a renewed vigour. Time spent contacting the local MP with regard to proposals, and responses to consultations are to be strongly encouraged.

The Parish Council continues to be a member of GACC Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign, and I'd encourage everyone to join and to refer to their informative website. We are also members of the Aviation Environment Federation.

Coffee Corner

The Parish Council has taken this over and it has been held in the Scout Hut with some excellent turnouts. Thank you, Louise, for driving this and to the Leigh Ladies Choir for December's event and the Tennis Club for March's event. Any other group that can run this on a Friday morning would be very welcome. The idea really wasn't for Louise to run it pretty much all the time.

Finance

The financial year to 31st March is now complete and a finance report is circulated tonight. The accounts were on the whole to budget. Councillors decided to increase the parish precept for 2025/26 to £55,250 to cover the ongoing needs of the Parish. This amounted to a 3.096% increase over 2024/25. The precept for Leigh Parish remains one of the lowest of all the parishes in the Sevenoaks district. A band D property's council tax in Leigh is £56.85 per annum, up from £55.14 per annum. Our internal auditor notes that "systems and procedures at LPC are well established and followed".

Concluding Remarks

My thanks to all our Councillors, Graham Marchant, Sue Smith, Richard Britain, Glynis Rogers Amy Holt, Bruce Williams, Alice Backlog and our most recent councillor Graham Southwell. Graham replaced Sean Satterly who resigned in August 2024, thank you to Sean.

It does take time and commitment to be a councillor and please do remember that councillors are just volunteers with no particular training or powers, here to help but actually on a fairly narrow remit. Please do get in touch with concerns, but as I say every year, please do keep it mild.

Thank you to Councillor Margot McArthur, our County Council representative, for her representation for our parish. Also thank you to Malcolm Silander for being our district councillor.

Most importantly thank you to Louise, our Parish Clerk. Louise works very hard on behalf of us all and she is so positive and lovely in her dealings with everyone. Louise we are lucky to have you.

8. To announce the recipient of the Leigh Community Award 2025

Cllr Kaye announced that the recipient of this year's Leigh Community Award is Vanessa Pullen for her continuing and tremendous commitment over the past 26 years as Leigh's Brown Owl. This is an outstanding achievement, we are very grateful. Cllr Holt had gathered some very lovely feedback from some of the Brownies which was relayed.

9. Report by County Cllr Margot McArthur

In the absence of County Cllr McArthur, the following report was circulated as a hand-out.

I am sorry I cannot attend the meeting tonight but would like to mention a few headlines from the year gone by.

Children's Services

During 2024, 2600+ Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children were referred to KCC, with 2100 transferring into the care of other local authorities. KCC has six operational reception centres providing temporary homes for newly arriving UAS children in Kent. Four of these centres are new and have been opened since July 2024. Three more centres will open between now and Summer 2025.

As with existing Reception Centres, they will be run by KCC employees and will have stringent security and safeguarding controls in place. They will only provide temporary accommodation and care for UAS Children until they are transferred to another UK local authority.

Secondary school admissions

This year, 96% of pupils received an offer from one of their four preferred schools. A total of 21,767 parents and carers applied for a place for their child in a Kent school for September 2025. The proportion of Kent pupils offered a place at their first-preference school has increased this year to 80.6%

European Exit/Entry System

EES is a new electronic system that will collect and process data on the entry and exit of third country nationals crossing the external borders of the free travel area within the EU.

The new EES checks will require travellers from countries outside the EU to register biometrics such as facial and fingerprint scans at their first point of entry. This information will be used to track the movements of non-EU citizens. There is no date for the introduction of the new system yet.

Gatwick airport

I am pleased to represent KCC on Gatwick's consultative and other committees. A decision on the development of a new runway is still awaited from Government, but is inching nearer.

New security scanning systems have now been installed at the airport which means that electronic devices and fluids no longer have to be separated out, and can be left inside hand luggage. This should speed up the overall process.

10. Questions from members of the public and matters for reporting and diary dates

None.

Cllr Kaye thanked everyone very much for attending.

The meeting closed at 9.21pm