

TESTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Meeting of Teston Parish Council held on 26 November 2024 at 7.30pm in Teston Village Hall

Councillors Present: Peter Couling (Chairman)
Christopher Douglass
Robert Ayling
Ben Merchant
Robin Owens
Nina Wheat
Tina Burgon

Also: Melissa Babington, Parish Clerk
Borough Cllr Fay Gooch
Borough Cllr Allison Sweetman
MBC Leader, Cllr Stuart Jeffery

Members of the Public Present: 0

The meeting was Chaired by Cllr Peter Couling.

The Chairman of the meeting drew attention to the Parish Councils Standing Orders on photographing, recording or broadcasting of Teston Parish Council Meetings.
No intention to record the meeting was declared.

1. **Declarations of Interest**

Declarations as previously noted on the agenda, with no additional declarations made.

2. **Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence received.

3. **Welcome MBC Leader, Cllr Stuart Jeffery, to the meeting**

The Chairman welcomed MBC Leader, Cllr Stuart Jeffery, Leader of Maidstone Borough Council, who thanked the Council and shared his commitment to visiting parishes to engage on rural issues.

4. **Minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2024**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2024 were **approved** as a true record of the meeting and signed and dated by the Chairman.

5. **Ratification of Decisions**

No decisions requiring ratification were reported.

6. **Ordering of the Agenda**

It was agreed that due to the attendance of MBC Leader Cllr Stuart Jeffery, that some items on the agenda would be taken out of order.

7. **Finance Report**

The Council considered the report of the Clerk and received the spreadsheet on which the accounts were being collated and had the opportunity to examine and ask questions.

TESTON PARISH COUNCIL

The Council were informed of the payments scheduled to be made and it was agreed that the following payments be approved; -

Expenditure For Approval and Cheques for signing:

Name	Cheque No	Reason for Invoice	Net	VAT	Gross
Mr B Gilliard	3473	Groundworks and Landscaping – Allotments - Sept - Paid	350.00	0.00	350.00
The Countryside Charity	3474	CPRE Membership Renewal - Paid	36.00	0.00	36.00
Teston Village Stores CIC	3475	Teston Village Stores - Paid	£3000.00	0.00	£3000.00
Gary Gore	3476	Gary Landscapes – Allotments – Paid	£350.00	0.00	£350.00
TMBC	Tap 65	Costs for printing Tapestry – October - Paid	£203.31	0.00	£203.31
Melissa Babington	3477	Working hours in September - Paid	£252.87 Net	0.00	£252.87
Melissa Babington	3477	Home Allowance – September to November - Paid	£175.00	0.00	£175.00
Melissa Babington	3477	Mileage – 24.Sept - Paid	£9.90	0.00	£9.90
Melissa Babington	3477	Mileage – 15.Sept - Paid	£9.90	0.00	£9.90
Melissa Babington	3477	Additional Expenses – Paid	£69.99	0.00	£69.99
Melissa Babington	3478	Working hours in October - Paid	£344.82 Net	0.00	£344.82
Teston Village Hall	3479	Teston Village Hall – Paid	£180.00	0.00	£180.00
BT	DD	Teston VH Broadband October – Direct Debit - Paid	78.92	13.15	
Water Plus	3480	Water – Allotments – October – Paid	£47.72	0.00	£47.72
Water Plus	3481	Water – Allotments – November – Paid	£34.83	0.00	£34.83
Three Counties Contracting	3482	Hedge cutting - Paid	£130.00	£30.00	£180.00

TESTON PARISH COUNCIL

TMBC	Tap 66	Costs for printing Tapestry – November - Paid	£181.04	0.00	£181.04
Commercial Services Trading Limited	3483	Landscapes – Paid	£980.93	0.00	£980.93
Gary's Landscapes	3484	Teston Village Green hedge cutting – Paid	£240.00	0.00	£240.00
BT	DD	Teston VH Broadband November – Direct Debit - Paid	78.92	13.15	
KALC	3485	New Clerks' Finance Training for Melissa	£35.00	£7.00	£42.00
Melissa Babington	3486	Working hours in November & backpay	£386.62	0.00	£386.62
Melissa Babington	3486	Mileage – 26.Nov	£9.90	0.00	£9.90
Melissa Babington	3487	Working hours in December	£360.12	0.00	£360.12
Melissa Babington	3487	Home Allowance – December - February	£175.00	0.00	£175.00

The Chairman noted that the finance report should include HMRC, as it is essential to account for the Clerk's National Insurance and income tax contributions appropriately.
A Bank Reconciliation was presented and approved.

8. **Budget & Precept 2025-26:**

The Council reviewed the provisional budget and precept. Discussions included projected costs, funding allocations, and assumptions on Maidstone Borough Council's contributions.
Final decisions are subject to confirmation in January.

The Chairman highlighted that the budget includes an allowance for a grant to the Church for external works. The Church has received a quotation of £1,700 for tree removal due to concerns that the trees are pressing on the wall, which may lead to its collapse. It was discussed that the current grant of £300 may not be sufficient to support the Church's maintenance needs. The Chairman proposed increasing the grant allocation to £500. This adjustment was approved by all Councillors.

9. **Planning:**

The Council considered the report of the Clerk on Planning, setting out details relating to applications where decisions were pending and new applications.

24/504629/FULL The Orchards North Pole Road Teston Kent - Change Of Use Of Agricultural Store To A Holiday Let Unit.

The Council raised concerns about potential traffic, continuous lighting, and failure to meet Local Plan policies, leading to a recommendation to object. The Clerk was tasked with submitting the objection.

TESTON PARISH COUNCIL

10. Maidstone 2024 Local Plan & G&T DPD Consultation

The Chairman updated the Council on the Local Plan progress, stating that key procedural steps have been completed, and affected parishes are now engaged with Strategic Borough Development (SBD) officers. However, the Gypsy and Traveller component remains under review, with the Maidstone Borough Council Reg 18B consultation closing on 12 December. A paper will be submitted challenging aspects of the consultant's report, and a request has been made for Maidstone Borough Council to ensure that relevant policies are addressed appropriately.

MBC Leader, Cllr Stuart Jeffery commented that this consultation is slightly behind the Local Plan Development Planning Document (DPD), which will likely proceed next year. He noted that the DPD process is progressing, with the first meeting with representatives scheduled for the following day.

The Chairman confirmed that all relevant documents will be shared with the Council.

11. MBC Discretionary Rate Relief

The Council reviewed updates on the discretionary rate relief policy. The Chairman explained that although the Parish Council is Custodian Trustee for the Village Hall, it does not directly manage it. As the Village Hall is a charity, it currently receives an 80% mandatory rate relief, with the remaining 20% being discretionary. Without this relief, the Village Hall would be liable for annual costs of several thousand pounds. Teston Village Stores CIC does not receive any element of mandatory relief, but currently receives 100% discretionary relief.

The Chairman noted that a detailed commentary had been submitted by the Council in response to the consultation, addressing all the questions posed by Maidstone Borough Council. Borough Cllr Fay Gooch confirmed that these responses were quoted in the report and would be presented to the committee on Tuesday 3rd December. The Chairman has secured a speaking slot on behalf of the Council and intends to advocate strongly for maintaining the current rate relief policy.

The Council agreed to support the Chairman in representing their position at the meeting and endorsed the submission made.

12. Teston Bridge Country Park

Updates were provided on Environment Agency activities, including crane operations and site renovations. Concerns were raised about the impact on the park's aesthetics and accessibility.

Cllr Burgon to take photographs and compile comments for further review.

13. Road Safety Matters

The Chairman reported that KCC Highways has approved double-yellow lines at the junction of The Street and Tonbridge Road. Installation is expected within 90 days following contractor approval. Regarding Readers Court, plans to improve pedestrian crossing safety are ongoing. It was agreed to write to the local MP to seek further support.

The Council discussed allocating funds in the budget to contribute if the appeal succeeds.

14. Tree, Hedge Work, and routine maintenance including Tree Survey

The Chairman reviewed the Maintenance Schedule and proposed granting the Clerk delegated authority to proceed with the planned late-February work, provided the costs align with the approximate figures listed in the schedule, plus a 25% allowance for contingencies.

This includes work on the Village Green, Courtlands Verge, Allotments, and Ripton Wood. The Clerk is authorised to commission the work accordingly. The Chairman will review the maintenance schedule and quotes beforehand, and the Clerk will then arrange the necessary bookings.

TESTON PARISH COUNCIL

15. Allotments Report

Cllr Douglass reported that there are currently 29 plots, with 18 re-let so far following a reminder sent to tenants. Rent increases, as previously approved, have been implemented. Issues regarding rent increases for non-Teston residents were also highlighted.

The state of the allotments has been adversely affected by poor weather conditions, leaving the site untidy. However, recent tidying efforts have improved the area somewhat.

Consideration of a skip for site cleanup was discussed but deferred pending further cost evaluation. The Council agreed to review the situation again in the coming months to decide on further measures, including whether to proceed with hiring a skip.

16. Play Area

The Chairman reported that the existing swings and swing seats, though safe, are in poor condition and require replacement. Cllr Ayling updated the Council on funding and contractor options for replacing the existing play area equipment. He explained that evaluating options led to consideration of two contractors known for their strong reputations in installing similar facilities locally. Both provided detailed quotations around six months ago, which were comparable at approximately just under £40,000 excluding VAT. These quotations have since expired and updated quotes will be required to proceed.

Concerns were raised about timing as the project requires three months for completion. To ensure readiness by summer, decisions need to be made promptly. The Council expressed strong support for the play area, while noting the importance of finalising the budget in the new year to confirm feasibility if funding is secured.

17. New Year's Day Event

The Council approved a budget of £225 for drinks and £50 for nibbles. The event is intended as a community gathering, not a fundraiser.

18. Exceptional Delegated Authority

It was **agreed** that EDA should continue until the next meeting.

Adjournment of the Meeting

It was **agreed** that the meeting adjourn to enable consideration to be given to the following: -

- Teston Land Conservation Trust
- Teston Village Stores CIC
- Friends of Teston Church

19. Meeting reconvenes - Confidential Items

To consider the exclusion of the press and public on the basis that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

20. Planning and Enforcement issues

The Chairman reported on an enforcement matter.

There being no further business the meeting ended at 9:12pm.

Date of next meeting: 7.30pm on 28 January 2025 at Teston Village Hall.