

TESTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Meeting of Teston Parish Council held on 24 September 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 and one member of the Public.

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. Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence received.

2. Declarations of Interest

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

3. Appointment of new Clerk

A resolution was passed to formally appoint Melissa Babington as the new Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer.

4. Public Participation Session

Two items were raised during the public participation session:

- A member of the public inquired about the possibility of the Community Payback team returning to assist with clearing fly-tipping, as they had done a few years ago.

The Chairman advised that any sightings of fly-tipping, regardless of size, should be reported to the Borough. He also mentioned that a litter pick would be arranged once the vegetation cutting had been completed.

- A resident raised concerns about road safety due to speeding delivery trucks near the bottom of the The Street, opposite Crown City.

The Chairman confirmed that yellow lines were proposed in this location, with a consultation by KCC Highways to start before the end of September. The consultation would last for three weeks and if there were no major objections, contractors would have 90 days to install the yellow lines. Whilst not guaranteed, these were expected to proceed.

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5. Minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2024 were **approved** as a true record of the meeting and signed and dated by the Chairman.

6. Ratification of Decisions

No decisions requiring ratification were reported.

7. Ordering of the Agenda

The Chairman stated that he would take the items as proposed on the agenda.

8. Dates of Future Meetings

Councillors were asked to confirm their availability for provisional meeting dates in 2025.

The Chairman suggested a presentation about the Teston Village Shop during the APM on 29 April 2025 to raise awareness of the shop's challenges and operations.

9. 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.

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
TMBC	Tap 61	Costs for printing Tapestry – February - Paid	210.49	0.00	210.49
TMBC	Tap 62	Costs for printing Tapestry March -- Paid	178.93	0.00	178.93
TMBC	Tap 63	Costs for printing Tapestry –August - Paid	159.36	0.00	159.36
ROSPA – Playsafety Limited	3465	Play Area Annual Inspection	78.00	15.60	93.60
Water Plus	3466	Water – Allotments – July - Paid	34.51	0.00	34.51
Teston Village Hall	3467	Village Hall Hire - Paid	200.00	0.00	200.00
April Skies Accounting	3468	Audit work for Interim Audit - Paid	225.00	0.00	225.00
April Skies Accounting	3468	Audit work for Final Audit - Paid	370.00	0.00	370.00

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Neil Harris	3470	Working Hours in July Paid	315.46 Net	-	-
BT	DD	Teston VH Broadband August– Direct Debit – Paid	65.77	13.15	78.92
Water Plus	3471	Water – Allotments – August	34.83	0.00	34.83
BT	DD	Teston VH Broadband September – Direct Debit	65.77	13.15	78.92
TMBC	Tap 64	Costs for printing Tapestry – September	203.31	0.00	203.31
Neil Harris	3472	Working hours in August	306.94 Net	-	-
Neil Harris	3472	Working Hours in September	170.90 Net	-	-
Neil Harris	3472	Annual Leave Payment	105.72 Net	-	-
Neil Harris	3472	Mileage	9.45	-	-
Neil Harris	3472	Home Allowance – 1 July to 12 September	120.00	-	-
Neil Harris	3472	Purchase of Stamps	6.80	-	-
Mr B Gilliard	3473	Groundworks and Landscaping – Allotments - Sept	350.00		350.00
The Countryside Charity	3474	CPRE Membership Renewal	36.00		36.00

The Chairman outlined the new bank reconciliation process, addressing a previous internal audit criticism about the lack of proper reconciliation earlier in the year. A spreadsheet has now been created and circulated to all councillors, showing a clear reconciliation of the bank account. The Clerk will update the spreadsheet with payments, and receipts and the Chairman will sign the bank statements and reconciliations. Cllr Wheat and Cllr Owens **agreed** this system.

The Chairman noted Maidstone Borough Council is holding a consultation on discretionary rate relief policy. It was agreed that a submission would be drafted by the Chairman and sent to all councillors for consideration.

10. Banking arrangements

The Chairman discussed the importance of keeping the bank signatory details up to date for banking purposes.

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11. Internal Auditor

The Chairman confirmed that Internal Auditor, Mr Lionel Robbins was now formally appointed.

Members noted the External Auditor's Report and Certificate for the 2023/24 Audit and the Chairman reported that this would be posted on the noticeboard and website by 30 September 2024.

12. Clerk's Training

The Council agreed to the Clerk's training proposals.

13. Teston Village Stores

The Chairman reported on the 10% reduction in turnover at the Village Shop in its latest financial year and strategies to improve the finances, including encouraging more volunteer involvement and applying for additional grant funding.

The Chairman sought a Parish Council grant for the shop and a grant of £3000 was agreed.

The Chairman reported that an Admin Group had been set up to support the Village Shop with management activities.

14. Road Safety at The Street / A26 junction

The Chairman reported that the double yellow lines proposal is progressing, subject to the current consultation. If supported, the lines will be installed within 90 days of approval.

It was reported that the request for a white keep clear box was declined and the Chairman suggested revisiting it after the double yellow lines are installed.

The Chairman noted that safe road crossing at Readers Court and Malling Road was challenging. The Chairman, along with Cllrs Ayling and Douglass, had met with KCC Highways regarding this issue and has received a report which would be circulated to all councillors.

15. Planning

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

It was **agreed** to note this report.

24/503789/FULL Trowfair Church Street Teston Maidstone Kent ME18 5AG

Enlargement of existing loft conversion, including 3no. front and 2no. rear dormers. Erection of a single storey rear extension, extension of existing front porch and changes to fenestration.

The Council considered the above application and raised concerns regarding issues with car parking, usability and the possible impact on privacy of neighbours.

Following a discussion the Council **agreed** that representation should be made to the Borough Council.

Action: Chairman and Clerk to progress.

16. Knole Farm Planning Applications

The Council was updated on developments at Knole Farm.

17. Maidstone Local Plan Review

The Chairman updated the Council on the current position with the Maidstone Local Plan Review, emphasising the need for continued engagement with the consultation process, particularly regarding Gypsy and Traveller sites.

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18. Teston Bridge Country Park

The Chairman reported that the Council continued to monitor the situation at Teston Bridge Country Park following discussions with the Environment Agency and local MP Helen Grant, who is advocating for financial support to complete removal of access road and crane pad after current works have finished.

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

The Council discussed and approved Village Green hedge cutting and, up to a cost of £750 excluding VAT, replacement of dead trees along the roadside of the Village Green.

The Council agreed to commit to the landscape service costs for next year. Additional surveys on damaged trees were discussed and replanting would be considered at a later date.

20. Allotments

Cllr Douglass reported that one plot remained available.

The Council discussed and agreed to increase the rent for allotment holders, raising the fee for village residents to £30 and for non-residents to £45 starting in 2025.

Cllr Douglass received a £350 quote from Gary's Landscape and the work requested had been completed. The Council agreed to pay the cheque once Cllr Douglass confirmed the work was satisfactory.

21. Village Green Charity

The Chairman reported that the Village Green Charity has not been updated and he would work with the Clerk to update the details.

22. Play Area

Cllr Ayling referred to his previous report regarding a meeting with two contractors Playdale and Kompan who had provided estimates. However, those estimates have since expired. Both contractors indicated they would update their quotes with no significant price changes expected.

He reported that the Parish Council was still awaiting information on potential grant funding. Cllr Ayling stated that if the Council wanted the play area completed by next summer, then decisions need to be made soon.

The Chairman provided background on financing, stating that he contacted Mark Green who is the Finance Director of Maidstone Borough Council, who confirmed there should be a capital grant scheme for strategic play areas, though it's not guaranteed. If Maidstone Borough Council does not provide a grant, alternative funding will need to be sourced.

The Council **agreed** that they are commitment to replacing the existing play equipment.

23. Tapestry

The Council reported that a new distribution coordinator has been appointed.

24. Film Club

Cllr Douglass reported that film evenings were planned for the 25th October, 29th November and the 20th December at 7:30/8:00 pm, with tickets priced at £5. Alcohol and soft drinks would be available for purchase.

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The goal is to cover costs with potential profits supporting the Village Hall. If successful, further viewings may continue into the new year. An alcohol licence has been secured and films would be shown via DVD and played through the projector.

The Council noted the the creation of a Film Club in the Village Hall.

25. Beacon Event

Discussions took place regarding possible events. It was proposed that a spring event might be more successful. Cllr Merchant recommended combining daytime and evening activities, potentially on VE Day Celebration in May or during the Village Fête.

Cllr Burgon raised concerns about attendance for evening events following daytime activities. It was suggested to focus on VE Day 2025.

26. Exceptional Delegated Authority

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

27. 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

28. 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.

29. Planning and Enforcement issues

The Council noted that briefings from MBC on outstanding enforcement issues in the Maidstone area had stopped. The Clerk was asked to contact Maidstone Borough Council to reinstate these briefings for review at the next meeting.

Action: Clerk to progress.

There being no further business the meeting ended at 10:07 pm.

Date of next meeting: 7.30pm on 26 November at Teston Village Hall.