

TESTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Meeting of Teston Parish Council held on 28 January 2025 at 7.30pm in Teston Village Hall

Councillors Present: Peter Couling (Chairman)

Robert Ayling

Ben Merchant

Robin Owens

Nina Wheat

Tina Burgon

Also: Melissa Babington, Parish Clerk

County Cllr Simon Webb

Borough Cllr Fay Gooch

Borough Cllr Allison Sweetman

Members of the Public Present: 1

The meeting was Chaired by Cllr Peter Couling.

The Chairman of the meeting drew attention to the Parish Council's 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 were noted as per the agenda.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Christopher Douglass, which were noted and accepted.

Public Participation Session

The meeting was adjourned for public participation. A member of the public raised concerns about road safety, particularly at The Street, and requested that the issue be discussed earlier in the meeting. The Chairman acknowledged the concern and agreed to move the item up the agenda. No further issues were raised. The meeting was then reconvened.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2024 were **approved** as a true record of the meeting and signed and dated by the Chairman.

4. Ratification of Decisions

The Council ratified decisions taken by the Clerk under Exceptional Delegated Authority (EDA) since the last meeting, including maintenance bookings.

5. Ordering of the Agenda

It was agreed that the Road Safety Matters (Item number 12) would be moved forward on the agenda to accommodate the public concern raised.

TESTON PARISH COUNCIL

6. Finance Report

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

The Council was 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
KALC	3485	New Clerks' Finance Training for Melissa - Paid	£35.00	£7.00	£42.00
Melissa Babington	3486	Working hours in November & backpay - Paid			
Melissa Babington	3486	Mileage – 26.Nov - Paid	£9.90	0.00	£9.90
Melissa Babington	3487	Working hours in December - Paid			
Melissa Babington	3487	Home Allowance – December – February – Paid	£175.00	0.00	£175.00
TMBC	Tap 67	Costs for printing Tapestry – December & January – Paid	£181.34	0.00	£181.34
BT	DD	Teston VH Broadband December – Direct Debit – Paid	£78.92	0.00	£78.92
Water Plus	3488	Water – Allotments – December – Paid	£34.48	0.00	£34.48
Teston Village Stores CIC	3489	NYD 2025 event – Drinks - Paid	£138.31	0.00	£138.31
Water Plus	3490	Water – Allotments – January - Paid	£33.79	0.00	£33.79
Gary Landscapes	3491	To refill 5 salt bins around the village - Paid	£70.00	0.00	£70.00

TESTON PARISH COUNCIL

Melissa Babington	3492	Working hours in January & expenses - Paid			
-------------------	------	--	--	--	--

7. **Budget & Precept 2025-26**

The Chairman presented the budget and precept proposal for the financial year 2025-26, a draft of which had been reviewed at the previous meeting. A precept figure of £33,250 was proposed, with £20,000 earmarked for play equipment replacement and £3,000 set aside for works to improve road-crossing at the Readers Court junction with Malling Road. The Council discussed potential contingencies and agreed that reserves would act as a fallback for un-expected costs. The budget and precept were unanimously approved, and the required form for MBC was signed at the end of the meeting.

8. **Bank Mandates**

The Chairman explained the need to update the bank mandates with councillor details. All councillors provided their information to be added as signatories. The Council formally approved the necessary updates to the bank mandates, including required resolutions, for Teston Parish Council and, as Directors, for Teston Village Stores CIC, and, as Trustees, for Teston Land Conservation Trust.

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.

25/500152/FULL 4 Woodlands Close Teston Kent ME18 5AL - Conversion of loft into a habitable room, including front and rear dormer windows and 3no. front roof lights.

Cllr Ben Merchant declared an interest in the latter application and took no part in discussions. The Council reviewed the proposal for a loft conversion at 4 Woodlands Close and expressed concerns regarding the visual impact, particularly on the street-scene, and the impact on neighbours. It was agreed to object to the application, and the Clerk was instructed to formulate and submit the objection.

10. **Telephone Kiosk**

The Chairman reported that BT had submitted applications to remove certain kiosks within Maidstone Borough, including the one in Teston. The Council discussed the potential acquisition of the kiosk for £1. It was agreed that the kiosk should be retained if possible, and the Council delegated authority to sign the contract for its purchase to the Chairman or Clerk, as appropriate.

It was agreed to include information about the telephone box in Tapestry, and everyone was in agreement on this

11. **Teston Bridge Country Park**

The Chairman reported on discussions with the Environment Agency regarding ongoing works at the park. He read an email to all Councillors from their contractor and had already emailing MP Helen Grant to express concerns about potential funding issues for removal of the access road and crane pad at end of the project.

Additionally, concerns were noted about the use of the overflow car park by office workers rather than park visitors, and it was agreed to raise the issue with the relevant authorities.

12. **Road Safety Matters**

A member of the public raised a concern that the approved double yellow lines at the junction of The Street and Tonbridge Road should have been extended further, The Chairman confirmed the approval and suggested the resident follow up with Kent Highways if they hadn't received a response, offering to provide contact details if needed.

The Chairman noted ongoing road safety issues for pedestrians crossing from Readers Court to Malling Road and suggested engaging with our MP to challenge pavement width requirements within the conservation area..

TESTON PARISH COUNCIL

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

The Council reviewed the maintenance schedule and tree survey, noting that the Clerk had booked all required work. It was agreed that an additional cut should be scheduled for the war memorial in the spring. The Clerk was instructed to update the maintenance schedule accordingly.

14. Allotments Report

The Council received an update on the allotments, noting that there were currently vacancies and no waiting list. A discussion took place regarding hiring a skip to assist with site maintenance, with a final decision deferred to the next meeting.

15. Play Area

The Chairman provided an update on funding options for the play area replacement. The possibility of a grant from MBC was noted, but that would probably require match-funds from the Parish Council. A substantial portion of reserves might be applied to the project. As a contingency measure to bridge any gap, it was agreed that an application to the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) would be made. The possibility of additional funding from the National Lottery was discussed, but it was noted that this would delay the project. The urgency of replacing the ageing equipment was highlighted and the Council agreed to hold a meeting once the PWLB application was processed.

16. Risk Assessment

The Council reviewed the risk assessment document. Councillors were invited to submit any amendments by Monday 3rd February. Any comments would be assessed for modification and the assessment would then be approved under Exceptional Delegated Authority.

17. Local Authority possible reorganisation

The Chairman asked the County Councillor and Borough Councillors to provide an update on what is likely to happen with devolution and the potential reorganisation of Kent and Medway authorities.

County Cllr Simon Webb explained that Kent and Medway have opted for devolution, which could lead to the reorganisation of the authorities in Kent into a unitary structure, with a Mayor for Kent. The implications for Teston Parish Council were discussed, and the general consensus was that there would be no immediate impact. The Chairman suggested that Borough Cllr Simon Webb include an update in the next edition of Tapestry

18. Teston Housing Needs – MBC Affordable Homes initiative

The Council discussed correspondence from MBC regarding affordable housing needs assessments. It was agreed that the Parish Council would not identify any specific sites but would continue to engage with MBC on the matter. The Chairman was delegated to draft a response for councillors to review.

19. Tapestry – Advertisement Renewal Rates and liaison with advertisers

The Chairman presented the current Tapestry advertising rates and highlighted the need to increase revenue. He suggested delegating the task of securing new advertisers and sought guidance from councillors on potential rate increases.

A proposal to raise advertising rates by approximately 5% was discussed. The Chairman confirmed there was no capacity limit for advertisers, but attracting more was essential.

To encourage new advertisers, it was agreed to include a call for advertisements, together with advertising rates, in an edition of Tapestry.

20. Confirm dates for 2025-26 meetings

The Council approved the proposed meeting dates for the upcoming year. The Clerk was instructed to confirm venue availability and circulate dates to councillors.

21. Exceptional Delegated Authority

TESTON PARISH COUNCIL

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**
 - o finances are sound
 - o kissing gate to Ripton Wood committed with a view to permissive access
- **Teston Village Stores CIC**
 - o Secretary given authority to submit accounts for 2023-23.
 - o very tight finances reported
- Friends of Teston Church
 - o it is hoped that the Hatchments will be re-installed by Easter
 - o list of potential projects compiled and Trustees are reviewing

Meeting reconvened

22. Consideration of grant to Teston Village Stores CIC

Discussions took place regarding a potential grant to Teston Village Stores CIC.

Confidential Items

Press and public were excluded on the basis that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

23. Planning and Enforcement issues

Confidential planning and enforcement matters were considered.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 10:03 pm.

Date of next meeting: 7.30pm on 25 March 2025 at Teston Village Hall.