

**Minutes of Mersham Annual Parish Meeting**  
**held on Monday, 20<sup>th</sup> March 2026 in St John the Baptist Church**

**Present:**

Gavin Murphy (Chair)	Peter Hawkins
Gill McBarnet	Donna Pearson
Stewart Ross	Kenton Stewart
Melanie Wells	

In attendance: Cllr Bartlett, Emily Mulvaney, 2 members of the public and Tracey Block (Clerk).

**Welcome to the meeting**

Cllr Murphy welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**Report from Emily Mulvaney, English Rural Housing regarding additional houses at Quarry View**

Emily reported that English Rural has exception sites in Kent, with a site in Mersham at Quarry View. About a year ago, the Church Commissioners brought forward a site in Mersham next to Quarry View. English Rural have been working behind the scenes and now have a Memorandum of Understanding with the Church Commissioner. An ecology report has been undertaken and this found a presence of breeding lizards, there is, therefore, further work to be undertaken. An architect has been appointed and have met with ABC; they have given preliminary advice. ABC were positive in principle; a survey highlighted a need for 25 houses. The plan is for the scheme to come through Quarry View; there had been an initial plan for 16 homes with a further 8 to be brought in on a further phase. ABC felt that this 2-stage approach could be awkward. It was, therefore, suggested that a single phase was brought forward. English Rural have also approached Kent Highways for advice as to access to the site.

There is to be some community consultation to come forward and scheme design with additional surveys to come forward. The plan is to submit a detailed planning application in the Autumn of 2026.

What is the mix of housing? We have struggled with viability so we have allowed for an element of open housing in the scheme in order to be viable to build. The scheme contains 20 homes, this is obviously subject to change, but this is where we are at currently: 10 rented, 5 shared ownership and 5 open-market. The plan is for there to be a mix of 1-, 2-, 3-and 4-bedroom homes.

We will be using air-sourced heat pumps and PV panels; we may do air-sourced hot water with electric panel radiators. There will be a high EPC rating on the homes and there will be biodiversity on-site with a green meadow area.

Is there a chance that this won't be viable? Could you walk away? There is always a risk that this could happen but we are grant funded and look at alternative funding. We try to prevent the need to walk-away. The original scheme, the Borough Council allowed the Church Commissioners to use the affordable housing needs housing needed on Finberry. The Church Commissioners, if finding it difficult from their finances, this could be another approach.

This looks very promising; the plan was very positive previously so we hope this will be well received. The outlook with a built-in buffer could sit well and be better considered

The PC felt it was better to have one entrance and agree that the viability is better for the whole build in one phase.

20 homes will be how many buildings? We cannot confirm at present as the plans have not yet been drawn. There will be semi-detached properties or terraced cottages.

Will there be EV charging? Yes, on all properties.

The programme is looking to be completed by summer 2029. There will be a Section 106, this is likely to be about the local needs. This should be simple and for affordable housing. Emily was thanked for attending the meeting.

**Report from County Councillor Brian Collins**

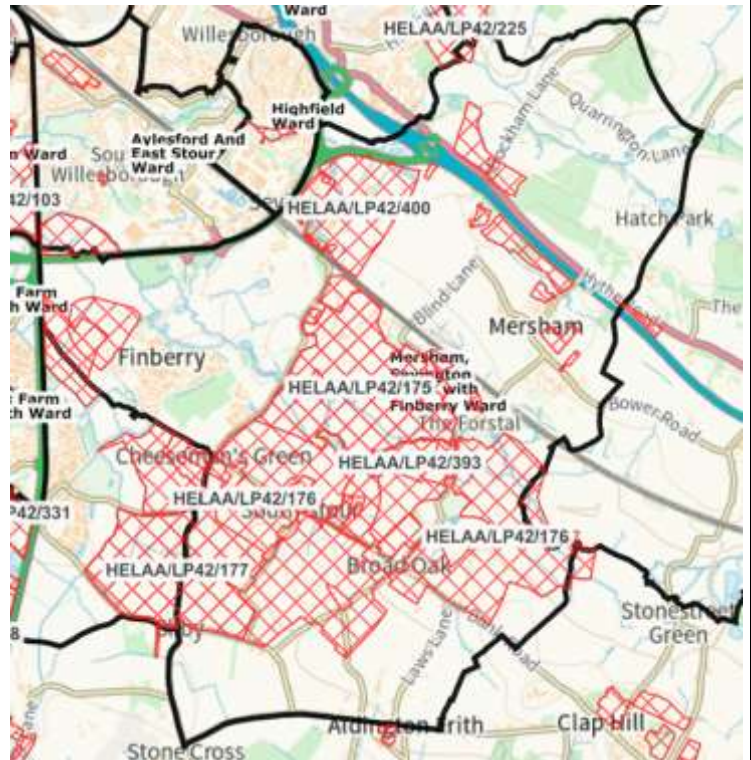
Cllr Collins had sent apologies as he is unwell and unable to attend the meeting.

## Report from Borough Councillor Paul Bartlett

My monthly reports on work can be viewed at <https://www.mershamparishcouncil.gov.uk>

### Ashford Local Plan

The Ashford Local Plan to 2042 went through its “Regulation 18 consultation” in autumn 2025. A Regulation 18 consultation is the initial stage of local plan preparation gathering feedback on early-stage draft plans. The consultation covered the scope, issues, and options for development, helping to shape the strategy. The Council is now considering the impact of the new National Planning Policy Framework and starting the technical assessments of access and capacity of the sites submitted. The next draft of the Plan (Regulation 19) is expected in the autumn but with informal contact with parish councils in the summer. I continue to work with Ashford Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC of which I am vice-chair) including commenting on the new NPPF as it might particularly impact the borough.



### Stonestreet Solar

Both Aldington and Mersham PCs are supporting a legal challenge to the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) planning approval for Stonestreet Green Solar. A CrowdJustice fundraising organised with the Aldington and Mersham support group (which I have supported) and the parish councils have reached the target for this stage and the High Court has set a “first available date after March 13<sup>th</sup> 2026” for an oral permission hearing, at which the judge will determine whether the case is considered to have merit to proceed. This is testing an important principle whether planning appeal and NSIP decisions can be in direct conflict, in this case over heritage matters.

### Inland Border Facility (IBF)

In December, I and the Parish Council participated in the first-ever planning inquiry into a Crown Development application. This involved the Department of Transport, HM Revenue & Customs and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DfT/HMRC/DEFRA) getting permanent permission for the IBF which has been operating under a temporary permission since it opened on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021 (“Brexit Day”). Noise, lighting and signage issues were all discussed at length for improvement which was not outweighed by this being a nationally important facility. The inspector’s report was published on 18<sup>th</sup> December and DfT/HMRC/DEFRA now have permanent permission. We continue to work with the operators on improvements required as defined in the conditions. Good outcomes are that the High Field between the site and Mersham is safeguarded as a 30-year Biodiversity Net gain, Sevington church as money for steeple repair and improvements are expected to J10A to avoid peak time queues from the A20.

### Community Projects

I have supported several community projects in the ward including the new village noticeboard, Stour parishes foodbank, Mersham Sports Club, Mersham School PTA and the Mountbatten Hall. There is a further £3,000 available this year, 2 requests on Finberry have already come forward and been approved.

### Other Projects

I have a role in scrutinising the NHS and would welcome to hear of your issues. I will be leading residents in a planning inquiry to secure village green status at Quantock in September 2026.

## Report from Chair of the Parish Council

It is a pleasure to welcome you to this year’s Annual Parish Meeting and to have the opportunity to reflect on the past year in Mersham — what we as a Parish Council have been dealing with, what we have been trying to achieve on behalf of the village, and where I believe our priorities lie going forward.

As always, the work of the Parish Council is a mixture of the visible and the less visible. Some things are very public —

major planning issues, traffic concerns, village facilities — while much of the rest is the steady background work of keeping on top of local matters, responding to residents' concerns, attending meetings, reviewing applications, dealing with authorities, and doing our best to make sure that Mersham's voice is heard.

Over the last year, we have continued to focus on the issues that matter most to this village: protecting Mersham's identity, responding to development pressures, improving road and pedestrian safety, supporting community facilities, and keeping the council itself well run and financially sound.

One of the biggest areas of work has continued to be planning and development.

We have remained heavily engaged in matters connected to the Inland Border Facility, which continues to cast a long shadow over the parish. We have kept up pressure on the issues that affect residents most directly — matters such as traffic, signage, litter, anti-social behaviour from lorry drivers, CCTV access, and the wider transport effects on our roads and junctions. These are not one-off concerns; they are ongoing matters that require persistence, and we have continued to represent the village's concerns as firmly and consistently as we can.

At the same time, we have continued to monitor the environmental side of these changes as well, including planting, screening, and buffer zones. Protecting the setting of Mersham matters. We all know that once the character of a place is lost, it is very difficult to get it back. So this has not simply been about objecting to things, but about pressing for proper mitigation, proper standards, and a proper long-term view.

Another major issue has been Stone Street Solar, which has remained an important concern over the past year. This has been one of those large-scale developments where decisions are made beyond the parish, but the effects are felt locally. We have followed the process closely, kept ourselves informed, and stayed engaged as matters have continued through the system. This is another reminder that the Parish Council has an important role to play in ensuring that Mersham is not overlooked when major decisions are made.

Closely linked to that is the wider question of the Ashford Local Plan and what future growth around the area may mean for Mersham. We have been very mindful of the risk that further expansion in surrounding areas could affect the separation of settlements, the pressure on local roads, and ultimately the distinct identity of the village. We have consistently taken the view that Mersham should not simply become a place squeezed by development from all sides without proper thought being given to infrastructure, access, traffic, and the protection of the village itself.

At the more local level, one of the important topics this year has been housing need within the parish.

We know that this is a sensitive subject, but it is also a real one. The housing needs work that has been carried out shows that there is genuine local demand for affordable housing for people with a connection to Mersham, as well as some need for homes that would allow older residents to downsize and remain within the community. As a Parish Council, we recognise that this is a matter that needs to be approached carefully and responsibly. We want to protect the nature of the village, but we also understand the importance of enabling local people to remain part of village life where that can be achieved appropriately. That balance will be very important as matters move forward.

Another key area of work for us has been highways and road safety.

This is something residents rightly raise time and again. Over the last year we have continued to pursue a number of local highways concerns, including speed limits, pedestrian safety, crossing points, signage and other safety improvements. We have pushed for practical measures that can make a real difference in day-to-day life, particularly in and around the village where pedestrians, children, school traffic, and through traffic all interact. Progress is often slower than any of us would like, but these matters do not move forward unless somebody keeps pushing, and we have continued to do that.

We have also spent time on the things that make a direct difference to village life and to the community facilities that people rely on.

That includes ongoing matters concerning the Village Hall, the play area, local noticeboards, parish land, and other practical village assets. Some of these are small things in themselves, but together they matter a great deal because they affect how the village functions and how it feels. A parish council should never lose sight of the basics, and I believe we have continued to give proper attention to them.

We have also continued to support the wider life of the village through liaison with local groups and through the work

that sits behind local events, communication, and upkeep. The council has kept in touch with local organisations and tried to play its part in supporting the fabric of village life, because community is about more than formal meetings and official decisions.

On the council side itself, we have continued to make sure that the Parish Council is properly run. That means keeping our governance in order, reviewing our policies, maintaining sound financial oversight, and making sure that public money is handled carefully and responsibly. These things may not be the most exciting part of parish life, but they are essential. A council can only be effective for its residents if it is well managed, transparent, and disciplined in how it conducts itself.

I would also like to say that none of this work happens in isolation.

It depends on the commitment of fellow councillors, on the support of our clerk, on engagement from residents, and on constructive input from borough and county representatives where possible. I would like to thank all my fellow councillors for the time and care they have given over the past year. Parish Council work is rarely glamorous, often frustrating, and sometimes quite demanding, but it is important, and I appreciate the commitment that colleagues continue to show.

I would also like to thank our borough and county councillors for their input over the year, and all those involved with the Village Hall and other local organisations that help hold village life together.

And I would especially like to thank Paul, our Village Caretaker, and Ian, our Litter Picker, for all that they do for Mersham. A great deal of what helps keep the village looking cared for and functioning properly depends on people who quietly get on with the job, and Ian and Paul's work is very much appreciated.

Looking ahead, I believe our priorities are fairly clear.

We need to remain vigilant and active on the major external pressures facing Mersham — especially the Inland Border Facility, wider planning matters, and the implications of future development around us.

We need to continue pressing for sensible highways and pedestrian safety improvements.

We need to approach local housing matters carefully, making sure that the needs of local people are recognised without losing sight of the character of the village.

And we need to continue looking after the practical things that matter to residents: the condition of local facilities, the quality of the local environment, and the overall wellbeing of the village.

Above all, we need to continue standing up for Mersham as a distinct village with its own identity, its own voice, and its own community spirit.

Parish councils do not control everything, and often the biggest decisions affecting us are taken elsewhere. But our role is to make sure that Mersham is heard, that concerns are raised clearly, and that local interests are defended as strongly as possible. That is what we have sought to do over the past year, and that is what we will continue to do in the year ahead.

Thank you all very much.

### **Report from the Village Hall**

Cllr Wells reported that the Mountbatten Hall continues to prove popular with badminton players. 4 badminton clubs play on a regular basis along with other people on an ad hoc basis. Rick now runs a coaching class for children on Saturday and Sunday mornings and also coaches both adults and children on an individual basis.

Short Mat Bowls play on Tuesday mornings from December through to mid-March, Ashford Girls Rugby had the hall on Tuesday evenings for keep fit sessions. The hall is also often hired for badminton on Tuesdays.

From September through to April East Kent Morris hire the hall on Wednesday evenings and Brownies are in the hall on Thursday evenings before the badminton starts. Professional ballroom dancers also now hire the hall for rehearsals and dance classes.

There is a line dancing class on Monday evenings from 7 until 9, a parent and baby dance class on Tuesday mornings

when there is sufficient interest. There are now Pilates classes on Wednesday and Thursday mornings from 9:15 until 10:15 and up until the Easter holidays Ashford Pantomime ran children's musical theatre classes for ages 6 to 16 on Wednesday evenings and Sunday mornings. However, due to exams, they will run three classes on Sunday mornings only until the end of the summer term.

New Groove Creative now run three children's dance classes on Thursday evenings from 4:30 until 7:30. There is a karate class on Friday evenings from 6:00 until 9:00. The Coronation Hall is also regularly booked by Capstone Foster Care UK and Operator Training Services for training days. Southern Cesspool also hired the hall for a training day and, in February, the National Fisheries Services are the hall for two days for a free fisheries management course for local anglers.

We get regular enquiries for both halls for children's birthday parties and family celebrations

Unfortunately, during the last year, there have been a number of water leaks on the property. At the beginning of May a water leak was discovered at the entrance to the car park. I reported this to Southeast Water who, after attending the site, advised the water leak was not their responsibility due to its location. Due to the age of the existing black plastic pipe work and also that it ran underneath the car park, it was recommended that the existing pipe work be disconnected and new water supply pipe be relayed from the water company stop valve to the ladies toilets in the Mountbatten hall where the stopcock is located. CWS Moling carried out the work. At the end of July, the unvented water heater in the Coronation Hall sprung a leak and damaged the wall of the cupboard both internally and externally. Acorn domestic repairs carried out the repair.

On the 8th of January, a water leak was discovered in the Mountbatten Hall which was caused by a burst pipe in the loft. Fortunately, the leak was discovered before any major damage was done, the following afternoon Acorn Domestic Repairs repaired the pipe.

On Friday the 16th of January, I received a phone call from Ashford Badminton to say there was a water leak in the hall. I went to the hall and found that the water had leaked from the loft into the kitchen, storage room and hall which was caused by two burst pipes in the loft and also the new water heater appeared to have leaked. In view of the age and quality of the copper pipes, coupled with the recent burst pipes, Gavin from Acorn Domestic Repairs recommended replacing the copper pipes with plastic pipes. On 27th of January, Gavin carried out the work and also lagged the new pipes and repaired the leak on the mixer valve of the water heater.

John McLean has painted the entrance lobby and put up coat hooks (all the previous coat hooks having been removed and taken by Mersham Little Stars.) To accommodate the coat hooks, one of the large noticeboards has been relocated to the main hall. We have also recently had two windows replaced by mercury windows.

Sam from Hinges and Brackets at Evedgate has fitted new locks to the ladies' toilets. He fitted wide finger plates over the holes where the existing locks were and also replaced the missing broken brackets and screws to the toilet cubicles in both ladies and gents' toilets. John McLean has started decorating the Desmond Draper room as the window frame was rotten and a latch was missing; this window was also replaced by Mercury Windows.

John McLean has removed the fencing panels and gate at the entrance of the side of the Mountbatten Hall. In March, David Smith landscaped the area in front of the kitchen window, he also removed the stones to the right of the bench, which were left by Forest Homes, and concreted this area.

I contacted Paul Bartlett for a grant towards the cost of this project and he very kindly provided a grant of £680. Undertaking remedial and renovation works is very costly and I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the committee to thank Paul for his continued generous support and helping us to meet some of this expense, which is very much appreciated.

Recently the residents of Jemmett Meadow installed a locked gate on the pathway connecting the new development of the village hall car park. The gate was installed without the prior knowledge of both the Parish Council and the Village Hall Management Committee.

There has been a village hall on the current site for over 100 years and it is the committee's aim and sincere wish that the hall continues to thrive and offer affordable classes activities functions and facilities, which can be enjoyed by the whole community and beyond for many years to come. We hope, therefore, you, your friends and family will support our village hall in the facilities it has to offer.

Lastly, the Village Hall Management Committee has its AGM tomorrow evening in the Coronation Hall at 7:15 and all

are welcome. We are currently looking for new members to join our committee to ensure the long-term future of this valuable community facility. So, if anyone is interested in becoming a committee member or know someone who might be interested, either come along to our AGM tomorrow evening or contact me or one of our committee members.

### **Questions from the public**

A member of the public noted how shocking the speed of vehicles travelling in the village is.

It is thought that this issue is a knock-on effect from the traffic congestion at J10a. There is £1.6m funding to improve the junction and KCC have been awarded the contract. It is hoped they will provide a plan for a scheme by Autumn 2026.

Thanks were extended to all for attending.