

**Smeeth Parish Council
Minutes of the Meeting**

Held on Wednesday 14th January 2026 at 7.00pm at Brabourne and Smeeth Village Hall.

Cllr Herrick welcomed everyone to the first meeting of 2026.

1. To note those present

Cllr Herrick (Chair) (DH), Cllr Baker (RB), Cllr Grant (SG) and Cllr Morey (JM)

1 member of the public, Borough Cllr Simon Betty, and the Clerk.

2. To receive and approve apologies for absence.

There were no apologies for absence received.

3. To receive declarations of interest (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Significant Interests). The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared.

RB declared a personal interest in Agenda item 13 b) due to the fact that he is a Trustee for the Brabourne and Smeeth Playing Fields.

4. To approve the minutes of the meetings held on 12th November 2025.

The minutes were signed as a true record.

5. To discuss matters arising from previous minutes that are not covered by the agenda.

DH confirmed that he had delivered the Fordred's Charity money.

DH is yet to contact Geoff Thorpe about the Bedingfield Trust.

JM had attended the Parish Forum - this was an interesting event and will be held annually.

RB had reported that the Manor Leaze bin was not being emptied particularly regularly. It has been emptied now.

6. To receive report from the Borough Councillor

COMMUNITY GRANT SCHEME

The Ashford Borough Council Community Event Grant Scheme will be open for applications from 5 January 2026 to 31 March 2026 to support the delivery of a diverse range of community events and festivals by helping to promote the active participation of residents in community life. Revenue grants are available up to £2,000 for a small project or up to £5,000 for a large project.

Applications are welcome from community groups and charities for events that:

- Are delivered within the borough of Ashford and delivered in the 2026/27 financial year.
- Are open to the whole community
- Are free to attend or include some free activity within the overall event
- Provide opportunities for volunteering and/or community participation
- Promote environmentally responsible and sustainable behaviour

Further information on how to apply and eligibility criteria can be found on this link to the Ashford Borough Council website - Community Event Grant Scheme webpage.

LGR UPDATE

An extraordinary meeting of Ashford Borough Council and Cabinet was held on 27th November 2025 to debate and vote on the preferred unitary option to be submitted to the government by the 28th November deadline.

The preferred option voted for by members was 4d, which is a four unitary option based on the Medway model. It was considered that this option:

- Has the scale needed to deliver efficient, resilient services
- Respects local identity, community voice, and historical continuity
- Enables transformation across public services, supports financial sustainability through coherent economic geographies and tax bases
- Unlocks opportunities for Kent-wide collaboration where it adds value
- Enables a system that is inclusive, place-sensitive, and capable of delivering better outcomes for residents, while positioning the county to secure devolution powers and drive long-term growth.

It is expected that the next steps will involve the government consulting with Kent residents early in 2026, after which an indication of the timescale for devolution will be provided, ultimately leading to the confirmation of the unitary model for Kent.

LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

Between August and October 2025, Ashford Borough Council ran a consultation on the draft Ashford Local Plan 2042. The consultation focused on setting out the Council's 'direction of travel' for the emerging Local Plan, including setting out ambitions and intentions for sustainable development in the borough. As part of this consultation, the Council also reopened the Call for Sites, which invited residents, landowners and developers to submit sites for consideration for allocation within the emerging Local Plan.

The Council has now published the responses that have been received from the Local Plan consultation and the sites submitted through the Call for Sites.

Viewing the responses received on the Local Plan

The responses received on the Local Plan consultation are available to view at:

Draft Local Plan 2042 - Regulation 18 consultation | Have Your Say Ashford

Each response received as part of the consultation has been given a unique

Response ID reference, e.g. REG18.001. A full list of all the responses IDs and who

submitted each response are available to view on the webpage. Individual

responses are available to view and download via the link on the right-hand pane

of the webpage titled 'View and download individual consultation responses.'

Viewing the Call for Sites.

The sites submitted through the Call for Sites submissions is now available to view at: [Call for Sites | Have Your Say Ashford](#)

The Community Governance Review – this has now closed. This was about creating a Town Council for Ashford.

7. Public session: To receive questions and comments from the public on any agenda item.

The member of the public had nothing to add.

8. KALC Report

Report from Cllr Morey.

“Report on the Ashford Area committee meeting of Kent Association of Local Councils held on 26th November 2025 at International House Dover Place Ashford:- Police Sergeant Dan Edge attended on behalf of Kent Police and gave a report about the significant developments in local neighbourhood policing including doubling of rural beat officers to balance those based in the urban wards and town centre. Efforts continue to improve attendance at parish council meetings and the police are grateful to the clerks for providing dates of future parish meetings so that they can plan attendance. Half Term and Halloween did not produce significant antisocial behaviour problems - relatively few reported incidents. Focus on drying district resulted in significant seizures of cannabis class A and weapons from address in Ashford. Arrests made in connection with two rogue trader incidents. The neighbourhood team have worked alongside Rural Task Force and Sussex police tackling rural crime. Together with Ashford Borough Council Enforcement Officers the police conducted a day of action against fly tipping. Focus on tackling retail crime continues through Christmas period.

Kerry Outlaw Interim CEO Kent of ACRE attended to give update about difficulties with funding that have prevented Kent ACRE to get any projects off the ground. DEFRA funding is not guaranteed in the long term and £85,000 is required - the equivalent of £275 per parish. If no funding becomes available Kent ACRE will close in March. Financial assistance from Crowdfunding is being sought but donations would not be returned if target is not reached. It was suggested that a clear statement should be provided by Kent ACRE to show how it could help Parish Clerk and how the service would differ from KALC.

Ashford Borough Council: The recent Parish Forum was informative but perhaps it would have been advisable to have held the planning session in the morning rather than the afternoon as it would have been beneficial to allocate greater time for it.

Mark Chaplin Placemaking Team Leader Ashford Borough Council is working on a project to provide guidance to help deliver better designed places, homes, buildings, streets, and open spaces. In December he will send out a link to all parish councils for a video to explain the aims of the project. This will be followed by an online survey of Parish Councils and the public.

The Local Plan update is being collated and will be considered by the Locality and Planning Task Group.

Local Government Reorganisation update: The Borough Councils and KCC will be submitting their own individual proposals as there was not one option upon which all were agreed.

Next meeting of Ashford area KALC is to be on 28 January 2026.

9. Financial matters:

a) To note the Parish Council's financial position.

The current financial position of the Parish Council was noted. The Parish Council has a balance of £59,770.47 as of 31st December 2025.

b) To authorise any payments.

Fuel Genie	91.98
P Rodway expenses	24.48
P Rodway (December)	1702.12
KCC Pension	704.50
T Denne and Sons	118.80
HMRC	503.21
Bank charge	6.00
P Rodway salary (January)	1676.92
KCC Pension	704.50
T Denne and Sons	118.80
HMRC	503.21
Bank charge	6.00
Green Flag	115.00
BWP Websites	420.00
Bank Charge	6.00
HMRC	177.54
Clerk salary	345.52
Clerk salary	345.72
Litter picker	262.52
Playdale	52,042.20

Bank Charge	6.00
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It was noted that 50% of the playing field costs have been paid and a VAT reclaim has been submitted.

10. KALC Community Award Nomination

The PC has nominated previously. Councillors were asked to consider a nomination. Closing date for nominations is 30th January 2026.

11. Village Caretaker Scheme

Report from Cllr Morey:-

“The Village caretaker continues to be successful. If anyone notices anything that requires the attention of the Village caretaker please contact the Parish Clerk Tracey Block.”

12. Planning matters: to authorise a response to any application(s) and to note any recent planning decisions by Ashford Borough Council or any correspondence on planning matters.

12.1 To receive the report of the most recent Planning Applications

There has not yet been an appeal submitted regarding the BESS application in Brabourne. The applicants have until the end of April to submit an appeal. The grid connection rules have changed recently so this may have affected the developers plans.

Stone Street Green Solar has been approved by the Secretary of State. Aldington and Bonnington PC are pursuing a Judicial Review.

Sevington Inland Border Facility has been approved by the Secretary of State.

Chapel Farm lorry movements – Cllr Betty reported that he had spoken to Environmental Health. The response was circulated to Parish Councillors. The situation is complex in that Environmental Health at Ashford Borough Council only deals with on-site activities. Problems relating to lorry movements on public roads come under the vehicle operator’s license scheme.

An application for Evegat Business Park has been approved by ABC, as has a “change of use” application at Home Farm.

Planning Enforcement are looking into a possible planning contravention at Evegat Business Park.

A footpath diversion (AE415) has been applied for. This was discussed and a formal response will be given.

SG reported that there was a recent land walk and explanation of plans for land management with Doug Wanstall. Included is a track entering the land off Caroland Close to maintain trees - sweet chestnuts and spruce. Also being considered is the installation of reed beds to minimise nitrates. There is a desire to keep cattle on the land and building a cattle shed is a possibility. A pond has also been installed on the land.

13. Local Organisations - Updates

Community Led Plan

There was no update on this occasion.

Playing Field Association

Report from Cllr. Baker.

- **“Ashford Borough Council Grant** - The advice received from ABC in response to an initial enquiry by Tracey was that the Playing Field should apply for this grant, the forms for which were subsequently submitted by William, following discussions with Peter. William has received notification from Ashford BC saying that the Playing Field's application for a capital grant of £10k has been progressed to the next stage, which is to attend a meeting of their grants panel on 10 March 2026.
- **Ashford Leisure Trust Grant** – William has also applied on behalf of the Playing Field to the Kent Community Foundation (which manages the Ashford Leisure Trust) for a grant of £10k. Originally, it was thought that their grants panel wasn't due to meet until April 2026, and William thought we would save that for the potential part 2 (i.e. trail along the side of the field equipment) at a later date. However, he was then advised by KCF that ALT's grants panel was meeting on 18 December 2025. The KCF manager presented our project to the panel at that meeting. William has now heard back from the Kent Community Foundation manager re his meeting with the Ashford Leisure Trust and he says that they would be willing to support an application for £10k. William has already put in the papers, which have been acknowledged.
- **Utilities search** - William has carried out a utilities search for the playground area, which Playdale required the PFA to do before work can begin. As expected, there doesn't appear to be anything in the playground area. However, there appears to be an underground electricity cable directly beneath the area where the CLP have been digging for the re-wilding project by the main entrance. The CLP will need to be informed!
- **Playdale Order** - Tracey (on behalf of Smeeth PC) kindly placed the order for the new play equipment and has now paid the first 50%, with installation scheduled for week commencing 30 March.

As William (Harbottle) says there is still work to be done but we are well on our way to delivering what will be a great community asset. The next PFA Committee meeting will take place later in January – date and venue to be confirmed.”

A huge thank you was expressed to William Harbottle and his team for their work on this. William thanked Smeeth Parish Council for their investment.

Royal British Legion – there was no update on this occasion – an article is in the latest copy of the Village News.

Scouts and Guides

Report from Jon Rose.

“The Group has returned to the New Year and is looking forward to an exciting 2026. There has been loads of planning going on in the sections with a lot already in the pipeline for the coming year.

Changes of leadership

I have now stood down as Group Scout Leader and am pleased to confirm that my successor is Kieran Lee who has been involved in Scouting for some years. Kieran is already our Scout Leader, a Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Assessor and is also on the World Scout Jamboree team as a leader.

I will remain involved as Chair of the Scout group Trustee Board.

Sadly, we have lost a couple of our Cub Assistants whose son has moved on and our Explorer Leader Sarah has also stood down after many years’ service for which we thank her. So, we are actively and urgently seeking replacements to boost our team. If you are interested in helping out either regularly or on an occasional basis do get in touch with us. You are welcome to try it out for a couple of weeks to see if it is for you before you commit!

Just a reminder - Cubs now meet on Tuesdays from 5.30 to 6.45 p.m. and Scouts on Mondays from 7.30 to 9.00 p.m. Beavers (6 to 8 years age range) meet on Mondays from 5.00 to 6.00 p.m. Explorers (14 to 18) meet Fridays from 7.30 to 9.30.

World Scout Jamboree Poland 2027

You may recall that one of our Explorers – Dominic Selwood - has been selected to represent Kent at the next World Scout Jamboree in Poland. We will be helping raise funds to support Dominic’s trip and will let you know when events are arranged.

Plans for 2026

As I have already said, there has been a lot of planning going on across the group. Scouts and Cubs are going Climbing at the Kent Scouts Activity Centre at Grange Farm near Maidstone in the next week or so. This is always a fun evening as well as a chance to try out a new skill.

Cubs have a sleepover and hike planned for February.

Beavers have a full programme which will see them working towards earning a lot of badges over the next term.

Scouts have an Easter Camp planned at Hope Hill Scout Campsite and in the Summer they will be going to the New Forest for a week. The Scouts have also been selecting which badges they are going to work on over the coming months.

We currently have spaces particularly in Cubs (8 to 10) and Scouts (10 to 14) and new members are welcome to come along for a couple of trial weeks without commitment. Just get in touch with me – contact details below.

If you have any questions or ideas for activities that we could try do get in touch.

Next month we will have more news of plans and hopefully, some photos from climbing amongst others.

Jon Rose 07517 566003 brabournesmeethscouts@gmail.com

Website: 1st Brabourne & Smeeth | Ashford District Scouts”

Smeeth Sandpit Company – there was no update on this occasion - an article is in the December Village News.

Smeeth WI – there was no update on this occasion – an article is in the latest edition of the Village News.

Speedwatch – Speedwatch still needs someone to take over from the previous lead person.

Village Hall

Report from Cllr Baker.

“The Village Hall now has 5 new committee members. Jacqui and David are supporting an orderly transition to the new committee and plan to step back at the next AGM. Simon Cavell will be taking over from David as Treasurer later this year and has given me these highlights!

This year, the committee has undertaken repair and improvement works including; a deep clean of the kitchen, replacing the broken main entrance door, replacing blown double glazing units, organising regular/routine cleaning of the exterior facias, window casements, guttering and solar panels and we are currently making improvements to the sanitary facilities (including new bins, sanitary bag dispensers, toilet seats and replacing broken toilet flush mechanisms). As a result of a recent flood, the rear male toilet is currently out of commission pending repairs to the plumbing, boiler and frost-protection device.

The committee decided to increase the hall’s hourly rate to offset increased costs and, following some complaints about cleanliness, to increase the cleaner’s

contracted hours. The hall is sadly showing signs of cosmetic wear and tear - the committee has therefore obtained quotes for redecoration with a view to making the hall more attractive to potential hirers if sufficient funds can be raised.

The committee also commissioned an independent Fire Risk Assessment which identified several areas of concern (8 classified as 'critical', 6 as 'major' and 5 'moderate') including a requirement to replace the fire exit doors and lower their thresholds. The committee is currently evaluating the report's findings, the implications for the hall and the cost of remediation works to ensure that the hall is compliant with current regulations and obligations.

The village hall will show a loss of approximately £2,000 this year and the committee will be looking for ways to fund the significant, but essential, improvement works during 2026.

The committee is grateful for the Council's support and the new committee members look forward to working with us to ensure that the Village Hall continues to be an affordable, accessible and quality resource for the local community."

14. Footpaths and Highways

Kent Highways have agreed to install School Warning Signs in Church Road that light up during school hours suggesting a 20mph speed limit.

There is a road closure on Manor Pound Lane at present. South East Water is undertaking a replacement of the water main. Phased closures will be taking place locally until July.

The Ridgeway is closed and this closure has been extended until 20th January.

Church Road - complaints have been received regarding severe deterioration of the surface - patching work has been promised. The PC will take this forward with the Highways Liaison Officer. Additional pressure is being put on the road because of The Ridgeway closure.

A collapsed drain replacement has been undertaken by the Blue and White Café on the A20. Several local residents suffered punctures.

15. Correspondence

There is a coffee morning at Evegate with Sojan Joseph MP on Saturday. He is hoping to hold another event in Wye.

PC Hopkins is holding a "Coffee with a Copper" at Perry Court Farm.

There was a “hic-cup” in the latest Village News (the SPC article on the speed signs in Church Road was printed twice/the BPC article on the Citizenship Award was omitted) - the Editor has agreed that there will be a correction printed.
PC meeting dates are to be placed in the appropriate edition of the Village News in future.

16. Any Other Business (for information purposes only):

A local Tractor Run at Christmas-time 2026 has been proposed by the landlord of the Royal Oak in Mersham. Support is being sought.

17. Determining the time and place of ordinary meetings of the Council up to and including the next annual meeting of the Council

Wednesday 11th March 2026

Wednesday 13th May 2026

Location and date for the Annual Parish Meeting will need to be agreed.

The meeting closed at 8.10pm