

HEADCORN PARISH COUNCIL

The Parish Office, Headcorn Village Hall, Church Lane, Headcorn, TN27 9N

Tel: 01622 892496 Email: clerk @headcornpc.org.uk



HEADCORN ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2017

Minutes of the Annual Parish meeting held on 20th April 2017 at 7:30p.m in the Village Hall, Longmeadow.

Cllr Lyn Selby presided and there were 62 present, including Parish Councillors and Borough Councillors Prendergast & Round.

Apologies were received from Cllr Davies, Walker and Andrews.

1. Introduction

Cllr Selby opened the meeting and warmly welcomed all attending. Thanks to Sainsbury's Local were given for once again providing refreshments for this evening.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of the 21st April 2016 were approved.

3. Elected Officer Reports

Kent County Councillor Jenny Whittle was unable to attend the meeting and sent the following report:-

- Council Tax for 2017/18 was increased by 4%, half of which is earmarked for Adult Social Care
- An extra £26m has been given to KCC's adult social care services in the Chancellor's Spring Budget
- KCC is seeking to encourage lorry drivers to park in official parks and has been working with the Department for Transport (DfT) to explore what can be done to stop the blight of overnight lorry parking. As well as increase in the number of smaller lorry parks, increased enforcement on the country's roads will be needed. KCC is exploring with the DfT new signing that will tell drivers they cannot park overnight. The level of penalty notices for HGVs is also being reviewed along with clamping of vehicles.
- I have urged Kent Highways to do something about the dangerous junction at A274/Moat Road/Kings Road. The sightlines are dreadful. I feel sure my successor will take up the cudgels as well, as this really must be a priority. Helen Whately is also on the case.
- I've funded some no-HGV signs in the village – the cost was going to be met by the Parish Council, but I funded it in the end as the application had experienced significant delays on the part of Kent Highways.
- My thanks go to the Parish Council for their support and my particular appreciation to Lyn Selby and Caroline Carmichael, who have been tireless in their efforts to protect the quality of life in Headcorn. A resident in the village who is going through a difficult time told me that Caroline dropped off some flowers to her and cheered her up no end. She really does go the extra mile for the parish and I would like to pass on my appreciation for her sterling efforts.

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The Chair expressed her thanks for all the work Cllr Whittle has done in recent years and wished her every success in her new role.

Helen Whatley MP, was unable to attend the meeting and sent the following report:-

It is a pleasure to serve the people of Headcorn in Parliament. It is a beautiful parish and I know that residents feel great affection and loyalty to the village and surrounding countryside. All the same, the village has its problems – and very effective advocates. As your Member of Parliament, I have been working alongside your county, borough and parish councillors to help solve those problems.

As many of you will know, I have continued to work over the last year to address residents' concerns about the expansion of traveller sites. I recently met the Minister for Planning Gavin Barwell MP to explain to him the situation. I invited him to visit the constituency to see the sites for himself. And working with a group of MPs, I raised concerns with the Home Office Minister Sarah Newton about modern slavery at traveller sites.

Having applied pressure on MBC and the Environment Agency to take action on the Hammerstream site, I am pleased that an injunction was sought by MBC last Friday and granted by the High Court. This prevents occupation of the land for residential purposes, use of the land for stationing of caravans, and bringing onto the land of any caravans or portable structures or any further waste materials. A breach would be a serious offence and any contravener may be liable to imprisonment, fines or assets seizure. This is a sign that things are moving in the right direction, and I will be monitoring the progress closely.

Failures in the sewerage system in Headcorn have been raised with me and I have been shocked by what residents have had to put up with. One of my first meetings after my election in 2015 was with Southern Water to press them to sort the sewerage system out. I met Southern Water again last month and heard what sounds like good news: they are planning to increase the size of the sewer pipe connecting the village to the local pumping station, and this combined with some other modifications should bring an end to the problems of overflow and backwash. I have been told work starts this month.

I have also worked to get action on speeding on the A274, asking Kent's Police and Crime Commissioner to undertake more speed enforcement and pressing Kent Highways to do a proper assessment of the Kings Road/Moat Road/A274 junction. I will continue to apply pressure to ensure the safety of residents and road users in this area.

I was contacted about litter problems in Hawkenbury and am pleased that Cllr Round undertook a tour of the village with the MBC Street Cleansing Team to identify the litter hotspots that need clearing.

Finally, I know from constituents' emails and letters that slow broadband is an ongoing frustration locally. I welcome - and lobbied for - the introduction of a universal service obligation, placing broadband on the same legal footing as other essential services like water and electricity. This should mean more investment in rural broadband, and as a result I want to see everyone living in this parish enjoying a high speed connection.

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Can I thank residents for all your letters, emails and phone calls – and though Parliament will soon be dissolved for the election, please do continue to contact me and I will do my best to help.

Shellina Prendergast Maidstone Borough Councillor

Cllr Prendergast gave the meeting a brief overview of the last year and focused specifically on planning issues. She has been instrumental in getting changes in a number of key areas including:-

- Housing policies concerning those made homeless
- Enforcement team man power
- Enforcement action at Hammerstream – an area that has caused issues for Headcorn for many years
- Planning Committee

She will continue to be an active member of the Council and take up matters with those in prominent positions at the Council

4. Stuart Ellesmere Kent Community Warden

Please accept my apologies for my non-attendance tonight as I have a family engagement to attend. I hope that the year that has just passed has been positive for you all. I can't believe that a year has flown past since the last AGM. I do feel as I get older, time has an uncanny knack of speeding up – it's probably one of the world's greatest conspiracy theories!

I am probably in a very lucky position here in Headcorn, time always goes a bit quicker as I always have issues and concerns to deal with, that surround this beautiful Village. I actually do think that some of my colleagues that cover the Maidstone, Tonbridge and Malling areas are quite envious – especially as their day sometimes.... Can take a little longer.

I could write about all that has happened during this past year, or I could look to the positive and the potential of looking forward..... And I'll go with the latter!

There are two chains of thought that embody my report this evening which interlink both Headcorn and me - which do certainly apply to the year that has passed, and for the future years to come. These are Patience and Change.

Headcorn is going through some of the biggest changes it has ever seen. Challenge -wise it is going to need a lot of help both from local Parishioners and Public services to deliver on the needs on the local population; This isn't going to be easy as there will be extra pressure applied due to the growing population and infrastructure needed to support it. It is a daunting time, as many long-term residents are already struggling to come to terms with their anxieties about the situation on how their beautiful village is changing. It is now so important time-wise that we all get together: Parishioner's, Public servants, shop keepers and the Parish Council to help one another to make the most of what is currently a negative situation into a positive one. Having the experience of meeting other Parish Councils over the last five years I can safely say that Headcorn is one of the best, if not the best Parish Council in the Maidstone and Tonbridge area – they really have worked tirelessly in trying to

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protect, and request the best for Headcorn's Parishioners – The Parish Councillors put a huge effort in for what is essentially a volunteer role – for anyone that is passionate about their village I would strongly recommend to get involved with the Parish Council and see what you could bring to the table.

I would like to make a special mention to Caroline the Parish Clerk who has tirelessly supported the rights of all the Headcorn parishioner's she meets, but also forms the special bond between PCSO Boyd and myself – between the three of us we rarely miss out on any updates or issues that the Headcorn area sometimes brings up. Caroline for me is really one of those unsung heroes of the village who wears her heart on her sleeve. For sheer enthusiasm I would also like to mention Cllr Dan Lavender. Having known Dan for nearly five years in my role, it has been a real privilege to see him flourish from a teenager in Headcorn's Youth Forum to one of the Youngest Parish Councillors in Kent – he has done some brilliant work of late in bringing in the Community Payback Scheme (of which you will hear some more about tonight.)

My Role as Community Warden is also changing and evolving at high speed.

The Community Warden Service has stabilised over the last two years – Job cuts appear to be a thing of the past. As a service we are moving in new directions and are more open to commissioning bids from other services within Kent County Council especially as regards to care and vulnerable people. We are also actively recruiting Volunteer Wardens in a number of areas across Kent that may be able to further benefit local Parishes. There are lots of changes ahead – when things become more official I will update the Parish in due course. Most of the planned changes that are coming in our role – happily to say, we do already - so I am really hoping it is more of a case that we manage to get the appropriate support for people in a more efficient manner – if that means working more closely with partnering agencies such as Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue and the NHS then that has to be a good thing for all.

I'm hoping that it doesn't stop there – I'm hoping to liaise further with the Parish Council over other future projects that may help the area – I can't say too much regarding any of the details as these ideas may never leave the design stage, but also I don't want to over burden the Parish as it has quite a lot to deal with at present. With all these Changes both for the Parish and my current role as your Community Warden it is going to take a fair degree of Patience so that things can be worked out correctly for now and the future. All I ask is for local parishioner's to show some Patience and calmness towards the future changes to the village. I have no doubt that by working together, Headcorn will be much stronger for it, and that the Parish Council and the supporting agencies will prevail in bringing together a really strong positive Village ethos.

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I will be undertaking new training soon for an array of future services that I will be applying to the public – I will be asking all parishioners' to be patient with me when I learn all of these new skills!

Thank you so much for continuing to make my Community Warden role a real special one here in Headcorn. I really do pinch myself when I come to work – there is no Job like it, it also makes it a lot easier when I have a very supportive Parish Council and PCSO here with me.

I would also like to pass on my support for Councillors Smith and Mather and wish them a speedy recovery process.

5. PCSO John Boyd

Headcorn has continued to maintain a low level of crime during the past year. We are sustaining the reduced level of crime we have benefited from during the past few years. This has been possible through the support of the community and the Parish Council. We have dealt with a number of issues throughout the year, which have included the following:

- Follow ups on the victims of burglaries/breaks to give crime prevention advice and information booklets.
- Speed enforcement checks and speed monitoring checks throughout the village and surrounding area.
- Continued support throughout the year to various local groups and activities
- Patrols of outlying areas to deter and stop vehicles known for scrap metal thefts. This has been backed up with pre-arranged Policing Operations County wide involving numerous authorities and scrap yard inspections.
- The parish CCTV cameras continue to be put to great effect in detection and prevention of crime. These cameras have had a positive effect on reducing crime and nuisance in the area and are an excellent tool for me to use/ promote and educate with.

We are always trying to keep on top of any nuisance youth issues in the village. As with the previous year this has also not been a major issue this year and any incidents of this type of behaviour have been swiftly dealt with to good effect. We encourage residents to call in any incidents of this type of nuisance behaviour.

6. Community Pay Back – David King

The meeting was given a presentation by David King highlighting the work undertaken by the Community Pay Back teams.

The presentation was very well received and many groups have expressed an interest in signing up with the Payback Service.

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7. Annual Report of the Parish Council by the Chair

Since we met last year, we have had a change of Cllrs. Last May Headcorn Parish Council was up for re-election and several of our experienced Cllrs stood down. As only 13 people put in papers for election, and we have 13 Cllr places, the election was not contested and no one had to vote. Only 2 of the Parish Councils up for election in the borough were contested - an unfortunate fact of modern life. It feels more “democratic” if a vote takes place!

One of the new Cllrs resigned after only a few months, so we have co-opted another Cllr. Your Council now consists of Cllrs Dungey, Andrews, James, Pyman, and Mather with new Cllrs Smith, Padbury, Walker, Davies, Lavender, D’Urso, and last but not least Simon Evenden who was co-opted earlier this year. After a few teething problems, it is fair to say that all new Cllrs are adapting to the “different” world of the Parish Council- where all work voluntarily but are not “volunteers” as they are officially “elected representatives”, even if there has not been a vote!

Looking through last year’s APM Minutes, it is sad or amazing, depending on your viewpoint, to see just how many issues are still rolling along. This is particularly so for anything to do with Planning.

Planning Committee

Headcorn Parish Council continues to perform its statutory role as consultee to Maidstone Borough Council, on all planning Issues relating to Headcorn Parish. Our Planning Committee meets twice a month to get our views back to Maidstone Planning Dept. within the strict time limits. This past year, under the Chairmanship of Cllr Dave Andrews, we have scrutinised 97 planning applications, many complex, reported to MBC and taken further action when felt necessary. It is an arduous task, and thanks must be given to all the Planning Committee but to Cllr Andrews in particular and also to Cllr Pyman who attends the MBC Planning Committee to speak on our behalf when necessary. Many hours are spent on planning issues including meetings with MBC planners.

One of the items still “rolling along” is the MBC Local Plan -this should have been in place some years back but having been through a long examination has had to go back for alterations and has had to go through a new consultation period. HPC has of course made representations at all stages. At all relevant sections of the public examination we were presented by Dr Rebecca Driver, a volunteer from the Headcorn Matters Team, who deserves our special thanks for giving up so much time both at meetings and in preparation at home.

If MBC Local plan had been in place, it could have been easier to defend the village against some of the housing development sites now beginning to plague areas of the village. Our Clerk spends many hours trying to sort issues arising. At least currently, MBC have their “5 year land supply” identified which should make it more difficult for developers to obtain planning permission where they wish, despite local objections.

And then we come to our Neighbourhood Plan – years spent in development, we warned MBC in October **2015** that it would be arriving with them for the examination stage in **Nov 2015 – is is now April 2017** and it is still rolling on. Cllr Dave Andrews has led on the NP but could not be here tonight -he has however given me some words for this report as follows:- “First I would like to thank the Headcorn Matters Team for their continued efforts to negotiate the difficult task of moving the Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan forward in what has been a very tough year.

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We started the year in 2016 waiting for an independent examiner to report on our NP and it has taken until 19th March this year for the examiner's report to arrive, a timescale we find totally unacceptable and also, regrettably, out of our control.

It is unfortunate that the original examiner lost her Neighbourhood Plan Independent Examiners Registration Scheme accreditation for reasons we are not aware of, our second choice examiner was rejected by MBC for conflict of interest reasons, it seems he was acting for someone who was objecting to MBC's local plan (it should be noted that MBC are required to recommend 3 examiners to us for us to choose from). We therefore ended up with Mr Edge, our 3rd choice, who after some considerable time called a hearing which was held in the village hall on 8th November 2016 it had taken a year to get to this point, we handed our completed plan to MBC in November 2015.

For those of you who attended that hearing you will know we entered in to a one sided negotiation session where we gave but received nothing in return, however at the end of the hearing Mr Edge did give us the firm impression that we had given sufficient to get our plan through the examination and on to a referendum.

We were advised to expect the examiner's report within 6 weeks but after much chasing from us the report arrived on 19th March- 4 1/2 months later! We were advised that some of this delay was caused by ill health suffered by Mr Edge.

We are very disappointed to confirm that the examiner's report recommends that our NP cannot progress to referendum for reasons of conflict with the NPPF, MBC emerging local plan and failure to satisfy the basic conditions required of a NP.

On reviewing his report the Headcorn Matters Team sought a meeting with MBC as we felt we could with minor changes to the plan and correction of some legal and factual inaccuracies in the examiner's report be able to work with MBC to overcome the issues raised. To this end MBC agreed to meet with us on 13th April last Thursday. However, after agreeing to meet with us and work through the issues MBC published the agenda for their Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee (SPST) and on that agenda they proposed to reject the Headcorn Neighbourhood Plan and send it back to Regulation 14 consultation, something we completed in the summer of 2014 when we consulted Headcorn Parishioners and interested parties on our plan.

We were very disappointed in this move from MBC and decided at very short notice to seek legal advice from Richard Buxton Environmental & Public Law. In consultation with the Headcorn Matters Team Richard wrote to MBC on the 11th April outlining the deficiencies in the examiner's report and concluded that the recommendation not to allow the HNP to move to referendum was unlawful.

This letter resulted in the item on the agenda to reject the HNP to be removed at the last moment. MBC also wanted to cancel their meeting with the HM Team on 13th April last Thursday however we insisted it went ahead and at the end of that meeting the team felt they had got their position clearly over to MBC and we now wait for their formal response and a better outcome for the HNP at their SPST in June 2017."

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That is 1 year and 8 months after MBC received our Neighbourhood Plan. I will make no further comment.

Other planning issues keep rolling along – you will remember the 220 houses between Hazlepits and Millbank – we finally attended the Judicial Review at the Law Courts in London on April 4th - we now await the judgement. If we win we can continue to defend that area, if we lose we have at least done everything possible to defend the parish against a development 2 ½ times larger than the largest the village has had before.

Then again there is The Meadows, a Gypsy and Traveller site which was refused permanent permission at Public Enquiry some years ago. Maidstone has now issued an enforcement notice, which is a positive. HPC has long held the opinion that the parish has more than its fair share of these sites -which as Headcorn has more sites than in any other parish in the Borough, and possibly in Kent, seems a reasonable statement. We wait to see what happens next.

And on an even more positive note, just immediately before Easter, MBC went to the High Court to get an injunction with reference to working and living on a wide area of what is known to the parish as Hammerstream Paddock. We will ignore the 15 or so years of our complaints about cars, mobile homes and more recently “the bund” – this is a big step for MBC to take.

Two final further points connected to planning:-

MBC have hired an independent company to review the working of their planning department -a small group of us spent ¾ hour or so on a telephone session with one of the consultants answering questions and giving our views.

Following the suggestion of a parishioner, Cllr Angela D’Urso is investigating from all angles the possibility of the parish moving to Ashford Borough Council, who seem to have a much more sympathetic and knowledgeable outlook towards rural communities!

Open Spaces Committee

This committee, under the Chairmanship of Cllr Caroline James, continue to meet every two months with a walk around the village on the day before, as they strive to make sure that our village remains an attractive, clean and welcoming place for all. Cllr James has given me a list of the main items we have been addressing:-

Lighting

There is a rolling programme for the old energy inefficient lights to be replaced by LED ones. This has to be done gradually as the budget only allows for so many replacements a year, and we have replaced the oldest lights first. Most of the oldest lights have now been replaced with new LED lights. This will give us a saving on maintenance of the new lights of about £3000 per year.

Play Area Days Green

As reported last year, our Clerk had identified and managed to obtain from MBC S106 monies deposited with them by developers for use in Headcorn. As a result, and totally paid for by this money, the play area on Days Green has been refurbished by Park Leisure and

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was formally opened by the Learning Council of Headcorn Primary School in November. It was pouring with rain but this did not stop the youngsters who then all flooded onto the new equipment.

The new play area extends to the opposite side of the path and includes a story telling machine.

A young oak tree was planted on Days Green near the Play Area at the same time, donated by Tree Cycle Tree Care.

Not wishing to waste a useful item, the old train that was in the play area is now installed in Locks Yard for the children to use in that area.

Using more S106 money, a project has been started to supply some equipment for older children/ teenagers and even adults on a small area of **Hoggs Bridge Green**

Headcorn Oak Plaque

A new oak plinth (donated and fitted by Crest Nicholson), and new plaque have been placed near the Headcorn Oak, the original plaque having weathered badly. Blooming Headcorn have planted spring bulbs around the area.

Longmeadow

We had to wait a while for planning permission, but all the tree work recommended by our tree warden, on the small wood there, has been carried out, and the footpaths through Longmeadow have been redefined. Bird boxes and a hedgehog deluxe hotel have been installed following ideas from Cllr Smith. We will be planting more indigenous woodland flowers in the autumn. The ditch on the edge of Longmeadow has also been cleared. Thus opening up the whole area.

Burial Ground

Work has been done on the footpath through the HPC run burial ground behind the Methodist Church, and having 2 lengthsman, it has been possible to keep the burial ground tidier than before.

An application is underway with the diocese to extend the burial ground. This is a lengthy process, and is expected to take some time.

Parsonage Meadow

The gate and nearby fencing at the entrance to the meadow has been replaced. We have also recently sited a memorial bench given to the parish, in memory of Norman Hale.

War Memorial

An application has been made to the War Memorials Trust, who have inspected the memorial. Apparently their representative found our memorial particularly interesting. We hope to hear any day now whether we will receive a grant, which would cover up to 80% of restoration costs.

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Parking

Cllrs D'urso and Walker are in the process of undertaking a review of parking in the village - another long term project with particularly difficult problems to solve. Any ideas given to the Clerk would be useful

Spires Ash

This is the pond in Grigg Lane, has recently had a tidy up - all the willows around the pond have been pollarded as is necessary at intervals. A diseased tree has been removed, and a new tree planted.

High Street Hanging Baskets

These were a disaster in 2016 -not due to Hazel Brickles who plants them up for us each year, but entirely due to the failure of our very old, eccentric water bowser which packed up and due to its age and eccentricity proved difficult to revive. However, we believe it is now better and will be in use again this year by David Edwards who has agreed to continue his volunteer role as Headcorn waterer.

Finally, regarding Open Spaces, there is of course all the ongoing tree work and grass cutting and, most important, the everyday work that our two lengthsman, Alan Hodge and Malcolm Hitchcock, undertake throughout the village. Our thanks go out to them, often working in inclement weather, but the sad news is that after some 19years, Alan has decided that it is time to retire. He will be sadly missed around the village after he retires in June, by all of us, and our special thanks go out to him for all his hard work over the years to keep Headcorn tidy. We will be looking for an assistant to Malcolm after Alan leaves.

Thinking about our working Groups

Led by Cllr Bridget Dungey, work is ongoing with the Communications Group producing newsletters and items for the parish (Church) magazine and items around publicity. Cllr Lavender has been working with the Clerk to set up a rota for our new Speedwatch equipment which I understand is much easier to use than the old one with more satisfactory results – training was held up by a personnel change connected to the Police, but new volunteers are now needed asap. The Finance Group apart from working on the precept has been overseeing a change to the Unity Bank which will allow the Clerk to use online banking (not possible with Nat West). The Affordable Housing Group has met with West Kent Housing regarding the sale or rent of some of the affordable housing on 2 of the new developments. Meanwhile, Cllr John Mather continues to inspect Days Green for us every week – needed for insurance reasons.

Unfortunately, the Play Scheme Group had nothing to do – we were unable to use the school in August due to the anticipated start of the building works -this was delayed and it is now realised that we cannot use the school in 2017 either due to works around the school. However, watch this space -we intend to be back in 2018!!

One Group needs a special mention - for years Cllr Dungey led the group organising the Remembrance Day Service - this has become more and more difficult over the years. In 2016, Cllr Chris Walker, with support from Bridget, took over the running of the service and the parade and made a great success of it -we were even on the evening television news! I cannot stop without mentioning defibrillators – after much confusion, having started wanting one of the new variety that can be used by anyone and is accessible 24/7, we have been offered 3 – one on the outside of the Village Hall funded by KALC installed by HPC, one

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on the outside of Sainsburys, funded and installed by them, and one on the fire station -the item funded by Crest Nicholson and installed by the Fire Brigade.

So a busy year again – helped very much by our Clerk Caroline Carmichael who organises us all and has we believe, put a positive, professional, caring, accessible face to the Parish Council. Caroline now works full time for the HPC although the Parish Office is only open to the public on 4 days to allow her to cover the other work. I asked her what items she thought I should mention - I think I have covered many of them - but a quick list of other issues she mentioned and on which I know she has worked tirelessly on our behalf, additional waste bins, new road signs, HGV signage, double white lines at Shenley Crossroads, health and safety audit for lengthsmen working conditions, (Caroline manages the lengthsmen for us), Oak Lane and Grigg Lane issues, fly tipping, potholes, and many more. I extend my personal thanks to Caroline as she has been on a steep learning curve but is always enthusiastic and willing to help when I ask stupid questions!

She has been a source of much support to Cllrs, particularly the new Cllrs and also to parishioners who visit or phone the Parish Office.

And thanks also to the Cllrs, in particular the Chairs of Committees and my Vice Chair Bridget Dungey for their support and hard work. So can I ask you to please join with me and show your thanks to them and the Clerk, for their commitment to Headcorn, in the usual way.

8. Reports were received from the following Clubs and Societies

Ann Caroll – Headcorn Scout Group
Anne Cullen – Headcorn Ukulele Group
Fiona Haskett – St Peter & St Pauls Church
Tim Thomas – Headcorn Local History Society
Jane Stone – Headara
Jenny Gore – Headcorn Flower Arrangers
Barrie Lamb – Headcorn Bowls Club
James Beecher – Headcorn Football Club
Susan Quarendon – Headcorn Handbell Ringers

Meeting closed at 10.25 p.m.

Signed By:

Date: