

The Parish Council of St Margaret's At Cliffe

Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of the above Parish Council held on Monday 12th January 2026 at 7pm at St Margaret's Village Hall

Present: Cllrs Nikki Fulford (in the chair), Peter Blake, Ian Loftus, Tony Fielding, Mick Luckhurst, Brian Pearce, Lisa Smith, Anne Wheeler

Also Present: District Cllr Martin Bates

Apologies: County Cllr Bridget Porter, District Cllr Oliver Richardson,

Parish Clerk: Orla Checksfield

Public Participation:

6 members of the public were in attendance and raised the following concerns

- Parochial Church Council wanted to extend their thanks to the person who cleared the church steps of leaves, assumed to be Team Purchase.
- Resident noted the St Margaret's Social Page has resumed on Facebook
- Resident highlighted there is a closure on Bay Hill. Clerk confirmed this closure hadn't been notified to the council and she was only made aware earlier that afternoon when the South Foreland Residents Association contacted her asking about a diversion through St Margaret's Road. The Clerk having no information beyond the headline details published to One.Network directed the association to Kent Highways.
- Resident updated the council on their application to create a PROW between ER275 and The Avenue which Kent PROW responded to say would need to evidence 20 years of usage, which of course due to previous changes resulting from earlier adverse possession claims in the area is not possible.
- Resident also mentioned the need to use What3Words reference when reporting pot holes via KCC Highways reporting tool.

Action:

- Parish Clerk to thank Team Purchase for clearing church steps of leaves on behalf of PCC

1. The **minutes of the previous Parish Council meeting**, having been circulated to all Councillors, were confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting.
2. Cllr Fulford declared an interest in Item 7 (d).

Parish Council Vacancy

Cllr Fulford asked the Council to formally note the receipt of Cllr Gilham's resignation effective 9th November. The Clerk was asked to record the Council's thanks for their service and contributions during their time in office.

3. It was also noted the District Council have been notified and a Notice of Vacancy has been on display since the 11th December 2025 in line with the statutory vacancy process. The Electoral Services Officer will be in touch to advise on the outcome of the notice, likely in the next few days. In the meantime if anyone would like to express an interest in the vacancy they were encouraged to let the Clerk know.

To consider the co-option of Mr Ian Loftus to fill a casual vacancy on the Parish Council

4. The Parish Council voted to co-opt Ian Loftus to the Council. A Declaration of Acceptance of Office was duly signed - Clerk to advise DDC and DPI form to be sent to Monitoring Office

Actions:

1. Clerk to Advise DDC Elections Team of Ian Loftus co-option as Parish Councillor
2. Cllr Loftus to complete DPI and return to DDC Monitoring Officer.

Report from County Councillor covered the following topics:

5. **Local Government Reorganisation**
It was noted that on 28 November 2025 the Leader of Kent County Council announced a proposal for a Kent and Medway Unitary Council with three Area Assemblies covering North, East and West Kent. The proposal aims to bring decision-making closer to communities, simplify governance, reduce bureaucracy, improve transparency and strengthen local accountability, including clearer budgets, performance reporting and enhanced resident engagement. Public consultation and further details are awaited.
- Kent County Council Supplier Day**
Members noted that KCC announced a Supplier Day on 20 December 2025. The event will take place on Tuesday 27 January at Clive Emson Hall, Maidstone, and will provide an opportunity for local businesses to learn more about working with KCC, its Commercial Strategy, and future procurement opportunities.

Report from the District Councillors covered the following topics;

Local Issues:

- **St Margaret's Bay Car Park**

Members noted that the bid for Dover District Council (DDC) capital programme funding for 2026/27 was unsuccessful. It was reported that limited palliative works may be undertaken using remaining Parking Services budget. A question has been submitted to the DDC Portfolio Holder for Community and Corporate Property for the Full Council meeting on 28 January.

Cllr Smith noted the promenade is covered in shingle post the storm at the weekend and asked if Cllr Bates could advise whom best to contact. The Clerk advised she would contact Keith Watson, DDC Property Services and copy Cllr Bates and Richardson.

- **Townsend Farm Planning Application**

No update was available since the previous meeting, likely due to the seasonal break. It was agreed that Planning Services will be contacted for an update if no further information is received by the end of the month.

- **DDC Parking Strategy**

Members noted the decision of the DDC Cabinet meeting held on 1 December, at which the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were rejected and Cabinet Decision CAB 63 was reaffirmed. It was agreed to consider raising a further question on this matter at the Full Council meeting on 28 January.

Cllr Fulford advised there is a number of community residents ready for the 'call to action' iro the direct impact any Parking Strategy may have on the free car parking in St Margaret's. Cllr Bates advised he would keep the council updated.

District Issues

- **Street Lighting**

It was reported that a number of streetlights in St Margaret's Bay were failing. Following contact with DDC Property Services, it was confirmed that several LED replacements installed in recent years were faulty. The supplier has accepted liability and DDC will replace the units over the coming months. A spreadsheet detailing the affected lights has been shared with parish councils in the ward.

Action:

1. Clerk to email Keith Watson, DDC Property Services to request the shingle on the promenade post the storms at the weekend is cleared back onto the beach in St Margaret's Bay.

Clerk's Report

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Without duplicating actions taken in respect of correspondence which of course were all dealt with.

Communications & Social Media

- Shared a list of known faulty streetlights on social media and provided a link for residents to report additional faults to Dover District Council as a matter of urgency.
- Shared Kent Police St Margaret's Newsletter (December 2025) on social media.
- Shared an advertisement on social media for a three-bedroom property to rent in Ash Grove, having secured two weeks' sole advertising for the parish rather than the usual one week.
- Shared an update on social media regarding the movement of the grazing herd to the central compartment in South Foreland Valley.

Website Updates & Publications

- Published the Minutes of the meetings held on 10 November and 26 November to the Parish Council website.
- Posted the draft Minutes for December to the Parish Council website.
- Uploaded the Community Grants Policy and Data Privacy Policy to the Parish Council website.
- Updated the register of payments in excess of £500 on the Parish Council website.

Planning

- Responded to planning applications: 25/01105, 25/01054 and 25/01275.

Governance & Administration

- Displayed the Notice of Casual Vacancy following the resignation of Cllr Gilham.

Assets & Community Safety

- Updated defibrillator status on *The Circuit*.

Clerk was on leave from 15th to 23rd December 2025

Parish Office was closed in line with District Council Offices from 24th December to 2nd January 2026, inclusive.

- **Gill Turner Tucker merger with Brachers Solicitors**

Gill Turner Tucker Solicitors have advised that they are merging with Brachers Solicitors and have requested confirmation that the Council is content to continue the relationship following the merger. Given the Council is currently engaged in ongoing matters relating to the King George V Recreation Field, it was agreed to proceed with the newly merged firm at this time.

Actions:

1. Clerk to respond positively to Gill Turner Tucker merger with Brachers Solicitors

Planning:

a. New Applications were agreed as follows:

Erection of single storey rear extension with roof terrace and associated window and door alterations

Colton 25 Granville Road St Margarets Bay Dover Kent CT15 6DS [25/01323]

2. The Parish Council objects to the proposed development on the grounds that although some of the issues which led to refusal of planning permission on the previous occasion have been addressed, the current plan still includes removal of the colonnade in front of the long stretch of glazing on the ground floor which causes the glazing to become much more prominent. This would be detrimental to the visual quality and special historic character of the Non-Designated Heritage Asset, and St Margaret's Bay Conservation Area within which it is located.

Actions:

1. Clerk to respond to planning applications

Finance & Accounts:

- a) The Council reviewed and approved all payments and receipts since the previous meeting
 - b) The Council reviewed Quarterly Financials and Budget Forecasts
3. The Council noted the Operating Costs and Village Maintenance Costs remain stressed and beyond the expected spending point for this stage of the year for the reasons noted previously. Overall spending is within budget but the council must continue to be mindful of spending in these stressed areas.

a) **Village Maintenance Items for Approval**

Kingsdown Road Pavilion – Removal of suspected ACM in Social Room at an estimated cost of £790 was approved

Spirit of St Margaret's II – Replacement for Rudolph – estimated cost to 3D print of between £250 and £300 for materials was approved. The council ask Cllr Smith to extend their thanks to her husband Hayden Smith who is donating his time to undertake the design and use of his 3D printer.

b) **Items/Invoices for approval**

DDC SLA for upkeep of Reach Road Car Park Public Conveniences – SLA valued at £10,881.85 was approved for the Clerk to sign and return to DDC

Petanque Piste Construction Spend - Members noted that construction of the Petanque Piste cannot commence until the licence for the land adjacent to the Kiosk in The Bay is issued by Dover District Council (DDC). Planning Permission was granted in October 2025.

However, to enable work to commence promptly once the licence is granted, two contractor quotes were tabled for consideration, with contractor names withheld for fairness.

Members also noted comparative costs obtained by Cllr Fulford for similar installations within Folkestone & Hythe District, which indicated a typical cost range for a single piste.

It was further noted that the White Cliffs Petanque Club intends to fundraise towards the cost of construction, beginning with a Barn Dance on 17 April at the Village Hall.

Contractors have been advised of the site's history, including the potential presence of former foundations, and service maps supplied by DDC have been shared.

The Council discussed the proposals, and agreed to move forward with the fixed quote of £5,465, with a start date subject to the licence being granted.

Cllr Fulford having declared an interest at the start of the meeting, as a member of the Pétanque Club, took no part in the vote.

Donations to St Margaret's Nursery, The Memory Café and St Margaret's Scouts from the Christmas Lights On event.

The total proceeds from the event including raffle ticket sales and donations were £1,099.74 which split evenly would result in a donation of £366.58. The council unanimously agreed to utilise s137 funds to make a payment of £375 to each of the nominated charities.

a) To Review Budget and Approve Precept Demand for 2026 / 2027

For the benefit of members of the public in attendance, the Clerk outlined the process undertaken to prepare the draft budget presented for approval.

Each significant asset owned by the Parish Council is listed within the budget, with forthcoming maintenance works identified and prioritised. Where assets require periodic maintenance, such as the tennis courts, the Council seeks to budget in advance wherever possible in order to avoid sudden or significant increases in the precept.

The Council began creating named reserves in the previous year. The level of reserves held and the approach to budgeting are guided by national best practice issued by the Smaller Authorities Proper Practices Panel. This ensures the Council remains financially resilient while continuing to meet its statutory responsibilities and deliver services.

It was noted the Council also has a number of contractual and known annual costs, including the contract with Dover District Council for cleaning the Reach Road toilets and waste collection, the Parish Clerk, village maintenance and cemetery contractors, and insurance.

The draft budget presented had been developed through a series of working groups.

In focusing on areas with significant year-on-year variance, the following changes in planned expenditure were highlighted:

4.

- **Building Equipment & Maintenance** – Provision for replacement barge boards at the Kingsdown Road Pavilion, with initial estimates of £12k, and budgeting of £3.3k for tennis court maintenance.
- **Professional Fees** – Provision of £15.6k for the preparation of a Village Design Guide. This would provide guidance to ensure all future development, respects the character, heritage and landscape setting of the village. Given St Margaret's location within a designated AONB / National Landscape, this is particularly important in protecting scenic quality, biodiversity and key views while supporting high-quality, sensitive development.
- **Village Maintenance** – The budget reflects a correction of an error where approximately £3k of costs had been excluded from the previous two years' budgets, together with the creation of a named reserve of £3.8k. This area of the budget has historically been subject to overspend due to increasing demands.

Having reviewed the anticipated costs for 2026/2027 and considered the level of general reserves, the Parish Council agreed to submit a Precept Demand to Dover District Council for the same amount as 2025/2026, despite expected cost increases, namely £147,000.

The Clerk then presented the Precept Demand form, which indicated that this would result in an annual increase of 1.82%, or £1.88, for a Band D property. It was noted that this increase is due to a reduction in the tax base, rather than any increase in the precept.

As the precept exceeds £140,000, the Council is required to submit a further detailed breakdown to Dover District Council, which was presented and shows the use of general reserves to meet additional anticipated costs in 2026/2027.

Actions:

1. Clerk to liaise with Bowls Club and Contractor to arrange for removal of suspected ACM
2. Cllr Smith to advise Hayden Smith of approval for costs to proceed with Rudolph design and printing and extend the thanks of the council for his help.
3. Clerk to sign and return DDC SLA for upkeep of Reach Road Car Park Public Conveniences.
4. Clerk to arrange for payment of donations to St Margaret's Nursery, The Memory Café and St Margaret's Scouts from the Christmas Lights On event.
5. Clerk to arrange for submission of Precept Demand form and supporting data prior to 23rd January 2026 deadline.

Correspondence

Thanks & Acknowledgements

- Received a note of thanks from Dover Outreach and Dover Big Local for hot dog buns, mince pies and hot dogs donated after the Christmas Lights On event.
- Cllr Fulford extended thanks to The Coastguard Pub, FirstLight and The Village Shop for their support with hospitality at the Christmas Lights On event.
- Received a note of thanks from the Bowls Club for repairs to the roof.

5. Residents' Enquiries & Local Issues

- A resident reported a fallen tree obstructing a track in South Foreland Valley (SFV); Cllr Wheeler agreed to attempt to locate it.
- A resident reported a further fallen tree in SFV; Cllr Wheeler agreed to correspond with the resident. Despite a previous What3Words reference, a 90-minute search did not result in the tree being located.
- A resident contacted the Council regarding various footpath matters around the village; Cllr Smith arranged to meet on 4 January 2026.
- A resident copied the Parish Council into correspondence with Kent PROW regarding registration of a footpath linking ER275 to The Avenue. Kent PROW advised that 20 years of evidence would be required to support the application.

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- A resident followed up with the Clerk regarding an enquiry relating to St Margaret's Freedown from the 1970s. The Clerk advised they will be in touch again by the end of the week commencing 12 January 2026, barring any emergencies, to arrange a meeting.

Planning & Land Matters

- A non-resident shared planning-related matters concerning Broadlees Car Park, Upper Road, for the Council's attention, as this was post the December meeting and the Parish Council are not statutory consultees on the matter Councillors were invited to respond directly via the DDC portal.
- Cllr Fulford contacted HM Land Registry regarding Title TT184050 to reconsider / clarify the Parish Council's previous objection. The land subject to the adverse possession application has historically formed part of a long-used footpath (ER275) and includes shared infrastructure and an actively used turning circle with a parish memorial bench. The original exclusion was based on the land being treated as part of an unadopted road (The Avenue), which is now challenged by the current application.

Highways, Footpaths & Access

- The Clerk was copied into correspondence from Kent PROW to SMBCA regarding ER37. Kent PROW advised that steps have been cleared and design work is being considered for a new set of steps. Installation was hoped for by the end of March but will be subject to quotes received and financial approvals. Kent PROW will also look to clear The Long Steps and undertake repairs.
- A resident and Speedwatch member advised that 20mph signs on Station Road had been vandalised. They indicated that Kent Police would be informed via the Speedwatch co-ordinator. Cllr Fulford confirmed the vandalism had already been reported to Kent Highways under reference 919876 and this reference had been provided to the Speedwatch co-ordinator.
- Cllr Fulford contacted Kent Highways liaison directly to request escalation of report reference 919876.
- In advance of storms early in January 2026 Cllr Fulford has been in correspondence with local business and Highways to confirm drains at Post Office corner were checked and cleared on the 16th December 2025.
- Post the wet weather Cllr Fulford shared photographs of flooding at PO Corner which confirmed the works undertaken by Highways were not sufficient a virtual meeting has been arranged for Wednesday 14th January 2026 with the business owner in attendance.
- Following multiple incidents of near misses and damage to vehicles due to potholes on the Dover Road / Westcliffe, Cllr Smith contacted KCC

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Highways via the emergency number and also provided the report to County Cllr Bridget Porter to ask for her assistance. Our Local MP Mike Tapp has also contacted KCC Highways regarding this issue and asked for a more sustainable solution to the current patch fix provided.

Finance & Administration

- Lloyds Bank advised that, following a Bank of England interest rate reduction, the savings rate on the notice account has reduced from 2.73% to 2.63%.
- DDC issued the Precept Demand Form and requested an additional breakdown, given precept likely to exceed £140,000, to be returned by 23 January 2026.
- A local charity contacted the Parish Council requesting a link to the Community Grant application form.
- Gill Turner Tucker Solicitors notified the Council of their merger with Brachers Solicitors with effect from 1 January 2026 and provided a consent form for transfer of Parish Council files and active cases.
- Cllr Fulford contacted a resident wishing to meet to discuss finances (as agreed at the December Parish Council meeting) to postpone the meeting due to illness.

Committees, Clubs & External Bodies

- Chair of White Cliffs Petanque Club contacted Cllr Fulford for a written update on the Pétanque Piste following the grant of planning permission in October 2025. Cllr Fulford provided the most recent update as per the December Parish Council meeting, which had also been shared at the Club's most recent committee meeting.
- Cllr Fulford contacted DDC Legal twice between meetings to enquire about progress on the licence for the Pétanque Piste and to ask whether any construction work could commence while the licence is still under negotiation.

Updates & Briefings

- Received Road Safety and Active Travel Newsletter.
- Received KALC Update Bulletin (week ending 19 December 2025).
- Received KALC Agenda for the meeting on 21 January 2026.
- Received East Kent Design Codes – Community Panel update; co-created visions and aspirations will inform the next project stage, with consultation expected in early 2026 and a further engagement workshop anticipated during final design coding.
- Environmental Protection confirmed that the Great British Spring Clean will take place in 2026 and have proposed the 21st March between 1-3pm.

Action:

1. Cllr Luckhurst to confirm KGV Pavilion is available on 21st March between 12.30 and 4pm to host the Great British Spring Clean so Clerk can advise DDC accordingly.

Local Government Reorganisation – Update and Considerations

6. No new updates

Reports from Councillors

1. **Highways Improvement Plan – Cllr Fielding**

Cllr Fielding believes the HIP requires a full review given the complete lack of traction with KCC Highways last year it is clear a number of items need to be clearly discussed and prioritised and a meeting needs to be arranged with the Community Engagement Officer to do so.

2. **KALC Community Award 2026 Nominations – Cllr Smith & Fulford**

A high number of worthy nominations have been received by the Council. One nomination will be put forward to the KALC Community Award 2026, however, all the nominees deserve recognition and this will be undertaken at the Annual Parish Meeting in May this year.

3. **Footpaths – Cllr Smith**

7. Cllr Smith met with a concerned resident and undertook a walkaround of the village to review footpaths under the responsibility of both Highways and Kent Public Rights of Way. Photographs were taken and shared with the Council.

The Clerk advised that a number of the footpaths identified had already been subject to recent clearance works by Highways. However, concerns remain regarding the standard of work carried out. Cllr Smith agreed to re-report the affected footpaths and, using the resulting reference numbers together with the photographs, raise the matter with Cllr Bridget Porter to evidence the Council's view that the works are not being completed to an acceptable standard. This includes instances where manhole covers that should be visible within the pavement are partially covered by silt and obscured by grass due to collapsing or overgrown edges.

Cllr Smith also agreed to share the reporting reference numbers with the resident and to encourage them, and other concerned residents, to submit reports to Highways in order to demonstrate that the issues are not isolated incidents but are of wider concern within the community.

4. **ER275 – Cllr Fulford**

A resident provided this update during the public session.

5. Rural Car Parks – Cllr Fulford

Cllr Bates covered the update in his report.

Action:

- Cllr Fielding to arrange a meeting with Highways Community Engagement Officer to refresh Highways Improvement Plan.
- Clerk to submit KALC Community Award 2026 nomination.
- Cllr Smith to report overgrown footpaths and share reporting numbers with Cllr Porter highlighting standard of work, additionally sharing reporting numbers with local residents to ask them to report to demonstrate that the issues are not isolated incidents but are of wider concern within the community.

Village Maintenance and Matters affecting the Parish

• Playing Field Inspection

Cllr Luckhurst undertook the inspection and noted nothing of concern to action.

• South Foreland Valley

No Update

• Alexander Memorial Field & Pavilion

The hedges behind the Pavilion have now been cut down to approximately 7 feet which will improve light to the footpath behind. The Christmas Tree cuttings have been put on this footpath instead of at The Cemetery as previously planned.

• Kingsdown Road Pavilion

No update.

• King George V Playing Field & Pavilion

There has been some unauthorised use of the Biffa bin but thankfully as yet no fines have been received.

• Updated Risk Assessment

Cllr Smith presented a risk assessment relating to the King George V approach road. The principal risk identified concerns obstructions placed on the grass verges by residents whose properties have gateways onto the road. These obstructions include wheelie bins, concrete blocks and stones, apparently intended to deter vehicles from parking on the verges outside their homes.

The Council discussed the significant risk of an accident arising from these obstructions and noted that, as the verges form part of Parish Council land rather than land owned by the residents, any liability could rest with the Council.

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Members also shared concerns regarding the potential for future adverse possession claims, which could expose the Council to unnecessary legal proceedings.

It was agreed that the Clerk would review the correspondence previously issued by the Parish Council to the residents, taking into account confirmation from the Council's solicitors that the land is owned by the Parish Council and subject to a right of access.

- **The Civic Cemetery**

None

- **Village Ponds**

The hedgerows at the rear of the Chapel Lane pond have now been cleared.

The duck house on Reach Road pond has become stuck on the side. Cllr Fulford will push it back into the middle. It may need to be anchored again, it is unknown if it was previously anchored in the centre.

Actions:

1. Clerk to review the correspondence previously issued by the Parish Council to the residents of the KGV approach road, taking into account confirmation from the Council's solicitors that the land is owned by the Parish Council.

Further information was received since last meeting

9. None

10. There are no additional items for inclusion on next month's agenda

There being no further business the meeting closed at 9.15pm

Confirmed by the Chair:

Date: