

**VIGO PARISH COUNCIL**  
**MINUTES OF THE 25<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**  
**HELD ON 24<sup>th</sup> April 2025 at 7.30pm in Vigo Village Hall**

<b>Present:</b>	Vigo Parish Council: Cllr Pat Banks; Cllr Simon Chaplin; Cllr Sharon Cottam; Cllr Jim Haslem; Cllr Elliott Hulf; Cllr Mandie Jones; Cllr Alan White; Cllr Andy Woolway.
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Dr Lauren Sullivan (MP for Gravesham); Cllr Sheila Buchannan (Meopham Parish Council); Culverstone & Vigo Scouts representatives (x9); Mr Richard Lees (Trosley Country Park); Mr Adam Hemsley & Mr Henry Weedon (Hemsley Conservation Centre); 26 Members of the Public

**1] Chairman's welcome to guests, electors, members of the public and press**

AP01 Cllr Banks thanked everyone for coming and welcomed them to the meeting.

AP02 Dr Lauren Sullivan (MP) introduced herself and gave a brief update on local issues.

**2] Apologies for absence**

AP03 Cllr Dave Hawkins (VPC); Cllr Bryan Sweetland (Kent County Council);

Cllr Bob Lane (Shorne Parish Council);

Mr Ken Hill (Vigo Village Hall); Mr John Milner (Vigo Repair Café);

Community Wardens Mandy Cason & Jacquie Fuller;

PC Jo Hammond & PC Joe Dallara (Kent Police);

**3] Vigo Parish Council celebrates it's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary**

AP04 The first houses in Vigo were built in the mid-1960s, with the first resident moving into Timberbank in 1965. Vigo Parish Council did not exist then – the community land in the village was registered to Vigo Village Trust and was managed by the Vigo Residents Association.

During this time, Vigo was part of Meopham Parish Council. A lot of work went into making Vigo into a Parish in its own right and in April 2000 the inaugural meeting was held, and Vigo became the first new Parish of the Millenium.

This year, Vigo Parish Council celebrates their 25th Anniversary.

**4] Presentation of the Kent Association of Local Councils Community Award 2025**

AP05 The Kent Association of Local Council Community Award 2025 was presented by Dr Lauren Sullivan, to 1<sup>st</sup> Vigo & Culverstone Scout Group.

*With grateful thanks to the scout leaders and other volunteers for their dedication and time. This group (established in 1969) is invaluable to the young people of Vigo (Beavers, Cubs & Scouts).*

**5] Presentation by Hemsley Conservation Centre on their history and their work**

AP06 The Hemsley Conservation Centre, located in Fairseat, is dedicated to the preservation and protection of endangered species and their natural habitats. Their mission is to educate and inspire visitors to appreciate the importance of wildlife conservation and biodiversity.

Mr Adam Hemsley & Mr Henry Weedon gave an informative and entertaining presentation on the work of Hemsley Conservation Centre.

**6] Refreshment break**

AP07 Refreshments were served.

**7] To note the minutes of the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Parish Meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2024**

AP08 The minutes of the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Parish Meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2024 were noted.

**8] Finance Report**

**To note the Financial Statement of the Parish Councils Audited Accounts for the year ended 31.03.24**

AP09 These were noted and received.

**To note the draft actual vs budget spend for the year ended 31 March 2025**

AP10 This was noted and received.

**To note the budget for the year 2025 / 2026**

AP11 This was noted and received.

**9] Cllr Banks presents “A Year in Review”**

AP12 Cllr Banks welcomed everyone to the 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Parish Meeting.

NEW FACES: Cllr Banks introduced the new people who had joined the Parish Council during the past year: Cllr Elliott Hulf, Assistant Clerk Clare Collings, Gardener Daryl Chidgey and Tree Warden Tony Neild.

FINANCE: As was always the case, most of the money spent during the year went on the maintenance of Vigo—grass cutting, tree works, litter picking and much more—to keep the village safe and looking good. The Parish Council also spent some money on administration, to make sure that things that needed doing did get done and to keep things running smoothly.

Cllr Banks then spoke about the larger than normal percentage increase for Vigo, explaining that the main reason was to fund the Community Warden and to increase the tree work budget. However, for a Band D property, the increase was about the same as buying one extra loaf of bread per month.

OFFICE MOVE: A lot of things had happened in the last year, and Cllr Banks spoke about some of the most notable ones.

Firstly, since a part-time assistant clerk had been engaged, the office that had been used since the Council was first formed was no longer large enough for both the Clerk and the Assistant Clerk to work in at the same time. Therefore, in August, the Parish office was moved—lock, stock and barrel—to the two offices on the other side of the Village Hall.

UNDERPASS: Another major event was the repainting of the underpass, which had been in a poor state for some time. Last summer the Parish Council paid to have it pressure washed and then the Parish contractors painted it. It looked better, and it was hoped that the ends would be painted soon. These were not done last year, as the weather had conspired against this.

THE BAY: The seating area in the Bay had been a cause of concern for some time. Residents' working parties had tried hard to make improvements, but as weeds grew so quickly, it was difficult to keep on top of it. Therefore, the Parish Council engaged a gardener, and his hard work, along with pressure washing the brick walls, made a terrific difference.

The post box in The Bay had been looking dreadful for quite a long time. For some years, the Parish Council had been trying to get this repainted. At last, it was repainted—it was not a wonderful job, but at least it was bright red again.

SPEEDING: For some time, there had been concern that vehicles travelled too fast in Vigo. Two Automatic Traffic Count (ATC) surveys were carried out, looking at the speed of vehicles using Waterlow Road, which showed a substantial number of cars travelling over the speed limit. The Parish Council's liaison officer at Kent Highways said this was a situation where action should be taken to encourage people to stick to the speed limit. Kent Highways therefore proposed 30mph signs on the road and some new reminders on posts. The Parish Council paid a contribution towards this, and these were put in place. The Parish Council planned to carry out another speed survey to see if they were having any effect.

GROUNDS MAINTENANCE AND TREE SURGERY: As was clear from the budget, contractors always had a lot of regular tree work to do. They also dealt with issues raised by residents regarding Parish trees and stepped in to deal with emergencies. The Parish Council increased the budget for tree work for 2025/2026.

A project that had been ongoing for a few years was "Vigo Verges – Growing Wild." The majority of people who responded to the survey were in favour of this and of leaving uncut islands of wildflowers. The Parish Council planned to repeat this initiative on Waterlow Road again that year, ensuring that sight lines were kept clear, as they had been the previous year.

STREETLIGHTS: A few years earlier, Gravesham Parish Council had handed over the running of the streetlights. When they were taken over, only 7 of the 69 lights were LED. It was reported with pleasure that all streetlights had now been changed to LEDs—better for tackling Global Warming and better for the electricity bill.

RODENTS & OTHER PESTS: On the downside, rats were still something of a problem in the village. The Parish Council purchased some poison-free traps, which caught some rats—but not as many as expected.

The traps continued to be monitored, but residents were reminded that the best way to deal with rats was to ensure that food was not left on the ground.

Another potential hazard for the future was the encroachment of Asian Hornets into Kent. A talk had been given by the Asian Hornet Watch team, who explained that they needed the help of the public to determine whether numbers were increasing and where they were located.

GOOD NEWS: During the year, good news was received about an issue that had caused a great deal of stress for many people. The illegal development at Fowlers Stone Wood was finally cleared.

THANK YOU: Cllr Banks then said that there were many people she needed to thank and apologised for singling out just a few. Firstly, thanks were given to the Parish Clerk, who was such an asset to the Parish. Thanks were also given to the Parish Councillors and, of course, to the Grounds Maintenance Contractors, who did such amazing work in Vigo.

FAREWELL: Finally, Cllr Banks reminded attendees that this would be her last meeting as Chairman, as she was moving. She said that it had been a great privilege to serve as Chairman for so many years and that she would be leaving VPC in good hands. Jim Haslem, the current Vice Chairman, had agreed to take over the role of Chairman for the following year.

## **10] Reports from other people and local organisations**

### AP13 VIGO REPAIR CAFE

The Vigo Repair Café offers a free meeting place on the second Saturday of every month where volunteers with skills help people repair their broken household items, promoting a culture of repair and reducing waste. At Vigo the repairs include electricals, clothing, bikes, clocks and more. The overall aim of repair cafés is to help achieve a more sustainable future by encouraging people to get stuff repaired rather than sending it to landfill and then buying a brand-new replacement that requires more of the earth's resources for its manufacture.

So far 6 repair cafes have been held in Vigo since September 2024. Out of 124 items brought in for repair, 75 were repaired at the meeting, 16 were taken to a volunteer's home for repair, 23 were referred (e.g. for specialist repair) and 10 were unrepairable.

Since September four local residents have joined the team of Gravesham repairers, leaving vacancies for around half a dozen more to make the Vigo branch self-sustaining. Anyone who can spare one day a month and has a knack for mending things (or can help with reception or refreshments), will be welcome to drop in at one of our events to see what we do.

The "Crisp Packet Project" runs alongside repair cafe, recycling empty, washed crisp packets into thermal blankets and other survival items for the homeless.

In March this year, the Gravesham Repair Café won the Gravesham Friendly competition jointly with Gravesham Sanctuary and this has secured an annual grant of £1500 for 3 years. The plan is to spend it on consumables needed for repairs, frequently needed tools and education & training for repairers.

AP14 VIGO POP UP CAFÉ

The Pop-Up Café is a community group, run by volunteers. We usually meet on the first Friday of the month (10am til 12 noon) in the small village hall. The café is designed to bring people together in a relaxed, friendly environment. The café is free to all, (although donations to cover costs are always very welcome).

Each month, the café welcomes around 25 people, although sometimes there are more than this. We have been known to exceed 30 people in one go, but we have never quite reached our capacity of 36 yet. We provide a variety of hot drinks and cake, as well as sausage rolls fresh from the oven for those who have a savoury tooth. We have special celebrations at Easter and Christmas where we have provided token gifts to those who come along.

The café is a wonderful place to meet old friends and make new ones. The atmosphere is welcoming, with warm, friendly faces to greet you. Disabled access is available.

Over the past year, we've welcomed various visitors from a variety of local organisations, including Driving Miss Daisy (community transport), MP Lauren Sullivan, and PC Joe Dallarda, our local community beat officer.

Although this event is volunteer led, we are grateful to Vigo Parish Council who kindly award a grant which covers our hall rental costs. Their ongoing support ensures that the café remains open to all. Additional costs for refreshments and supplies are covered by donations received from those who attend.

The Pop-Up Café is run entirely by volunteers, and we would not manage without them. Huge thanks to those who assist in setting up, serving, and clearing up every month, and providing a friendly face and warm welcome to everyone.

We are always on the lookout for more volunteers, so if you are interested in joining our merry band (we are a lovely bunch) – please do pop along one Friday to say hello.

AP15 TROSLEY COUNTRY PARK:

Trosley Country Park is a country park situated on the North Downs within the Kent Downs National Landscape (formerly known as the Kent Downs AONB)

With a total of 70 hectares, split between 44 hectares Woodland, and 26 hectares of Chalk Grassland (roughly 60:40) and over 12 kms of Waymarked Trails, our diverse habitats are home to many rare and protected species of fauna and flora - providing an amazing space, open to all, right on your doorstep.

We were proud again to have achieved both a "Green Flag" and a "South and Southeast in Bloom" award this year - important external validation of how we manage the Parks.

Our Visitor Services and Education team hosted events on 26 days across the park with 1465 attendees recorded and our trails proved as popular as ever.

Much of our Summer work was devoted to repairs, maintenance and upkeep, path clearance and when we produced the 42cu metres of logs for our biomass boiler and the 400 bags of firewood and kindling that we sold this year. The logs and firewood are a by-product of our forestry work and part of our sustainable woodland practice, as well as an important contributor to keeping down the cost of running our park.

We were delighted to replace the loose-fill safety surface at our large play area with 'wet-pour' and have the short, connecting section of the Trosley Trail made up with stone, both of which provide improved accessibility.

We also tackled over £20,000 worth of health and safety tree works, removing trees that are a risk to the public. Over the last five years, a significant number of these trees have been Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) affected by Ash Dieback (previously known as Chalara dieback), and this year was no exception. Because of diseased trees and the risk they pose, we have again blocked off some of the informal tracks through the park, as we have done in the past.

We undertook scrub management on  $\frac{3}{4}$  hectare of the Chalk Grassland, working in both Little Pell and Great Pell towards meeting our statutory obligations to restore them. We cut and clear woodier species and ranker grasses, to let the much rarer herbs and wildflowers flourish. This is necessary to supplement the more sympathetic and selective but slower work done by the grazing goats.

In the woodland, we have concentrated our efforts on reinstating the ride and glade network. Rides and glades are spaces within the woodland which provide a marginal habitat with separate zones for trees, shrubby edges, taller herbs and short turf which also provide connectivity between habitats. In a healthy woodland, in a fully functioning ecosystem, these spaces would occur naturally but within the park we need to assist. We have planned it to fit around the existing waymarked trails and other clear areas like the play equipment and viewpoints and this year we cleared around 1ha (less than 2% of the total woodland). This was a mixture of tree-felling, brush cutting and removal of previously felled wood.

Following feedback from residents and users, part of our Summer works this year, we will be to focus on minor improvements to our Shared User route, which we hope will bring benefits to all.

We couldn't do it without the support and commitment of our volunteers - thank you. If you would like to volunteer, please contact Richard. richard.lees@kent.gov.uk

#### AP16 VIGO VILLAGE HALL

All members of the management committee are Trustees. Some are elected to official posts (Alan White, Chairman; Ken Hill, Treasurer; Colin Evans, Vice-Chairman; Jo Spalding, Secretary), whilst others are appointed as representatives of named hall users and the remain are elected "working" committee members.

Our mission is to provide and maintain premises to encourage and facilitate a true community spirit. We operate our village hall, which is used by most of the community groups in the village. These include Little Learners pre-school, Line Dancing, Keep-Fit, Dance-a-cise, Wing Chung, Irish Dance, Fencing and a Pop Up Café. The Hall is also the base for Vigo Parish Council, and the Anglican Church hold a regular service in the hall.

It is the committee's intention to build a cash reserve of £12,000 to be used for emergency repairs such as a replacement boiler.

The income actually paid into the bank account during the period was £32,363 and the amount paid out from our account was £32,793. This means the cash in the bank was increased by £570. Although the surplus was small, it is an improvement on last years loss of £8,816.

£2,005 was spent renovating the Sticky Fingers storeroom and the un-used hall managers office. We also reinstate a doorway between the two rooms. The Parish have now moved their office into the refurbished rooms. The pre-school now have the old Parish office. The £2,005 expenditure will result in around £5,000 extra income. The Hall Manager is now working from home.

Hall usage losses and gains:

- October 2023 the Brownies folded, this was a long term loss to both the village and the hall.
- In May 2024 we gained a Line Dancing group.
- In September we gained the Repair Café.
- The existing Line Dancing group booked extra sessions.
- The Parish Council moved into a larger office increasing the rental income by 50%.
- The Preschool moved into the office vacated by the Parish Council.

THE 800 CLUB: We sold tickets to the value of £1,013 which was £271 down on last year. We paid out £550 in prize money. Remembering that there are around 800 households in the village, it is disappointing that only around 60 households participated in the draw.

INCREASING INCOME: As most of the hall hire prime slots are taken, there is limited opportunity to increase our hall hire. We therefore realise that we need to look at other ways of raising income including a renewed drive to increase 800 club members.

The Committee would like to thank the Hall Manager, Dani Howard, for continually looking for ways of saving money and looking for any grants that might become available.

**11] Any questions**

AP17 None.

**12] Closure of meeting**

AP18 Cllr Banks thanked everyone for attending and officially closed the meeting at 8.56pm.