

## **Folkestone Town Meeting**

**MINUTES of the Annual Assembly of the Town Meeting for the Parish and Town of Folkestone held at the Town Hall, Folkestone on Tuesday, 12 May 2026 at 7 p.m.**

**TOWN COUNCILLORS PRESENT:** Councillors Bridget Chapman, Jane Darling, Laura Davison (7:40pm), Peter Gane, Roger West, Nicola Keen, Kieran Leigh, Adrian Lockwood, Liz McShane, Lucy McGirr, Jackie Meade, Tim Prater, John Renshaw and Belinda Walker.

**REPRESENTATIVES FROM OTHER ORGANISATIONS:** Senet Yohannes (Cheriton Community Network), Ann McGovern (East Folkestone Youth Group), Detective Inspector Carlo Capozzi (Kent Police), Councillor Mary Lawes (Kent County Council – Folkestone East), Council Leader Jim Martin (Folkestone & Hythe District Council).

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Toni Brenchley (Town Clerk), Georgina Wilson (Corporate Support Officer), Jennifer Griffin (Administration Officer), Ian Bishop (Town Sergeant) and Revd. Kate McNeice (Mayor's Chaplain).

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor Christine Dickinson, Abena Akuffo-Kelly, Charles Bain Smith, Roger West and Chief Executive Ann Millington (Kent Fire & Rescue).

**ABSENT:** Councillor Connor McConville.

**MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC:** 14

Prayers were read by Councillor Lucy McGirr.

### **2250. APOLOGIES FOR ABSCENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Christine Dickinson, Abena Akuffo-Kelly, Charles Bain Smith, Roger West and Chief Executive Ann Millington (Kent Fire & Rescue).

Councillor Jackie Meade informed all present that as this was the Meeting of Electors everyone was entitled to vote, not just Councillors. Therefore, the voting would reflect a Majority vote.

**RESOLVED: To accept the Apologies from Councillors Christine Dickinson, Abena Akuffo-Kelly, Charles Bain Smith, Roger West and Chief Executive Ann Millington (Kent Fire & Rescue).**

Proposed: Councillor Peter Gane

Seconded: Councillor Nicola Keen

Voting: F: Majority, Ag: 0, Ab: 0

**2251. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**2252. MINUTES**

The Council was asked to receive and authorise the Minutes of the Town Meeting held on 13 May 2025 and to ask the Town Mayor to sign them as a correct record.

**RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Town Meeting held on 13 May 2025 be received and signed as a correct record.**

Proposed: Councillor Kieran Leigh

Seconded: Councillor Lucy McGirr

Voting: F: Majority, Ag: 0, Ab: 0

**2253. OPENING OF PROCEEDINGS BY THE TOWN MAYOR**

The Town Mayor, Councillor Jackie Meade opened the proceedings of the meeting held in accordance with the requirements of Section 9(1) of the Local Government Act 1972.

**2254. CHEQUE PRESENTATION**

Former Town Mayor, Councillor Lucy McGirr, presented cheques to her nominated charities; Cheriton Community Network, East Folkestone Youth Group for the Mayoral fundraising events during the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

Ann McGovern (East Folkestone Youth Group) thanked Councillors for their continued support.

**2255. QUESTIONS FROM ELECTORS**

There were no questions from electors.

**2256. REPORTS BY KENT POLICE**

Detective Inspector Carlo Capozzi gave a report on behalf of the Kent Police.

The Folkestone Police teams are now up to full strength, and each Ward has a dedicated beat Officer who holds regular Ward surgeries to meet face to face with members of the public, in order to discuss issues and problems that are localised within the Ward. This is alongside using My Community Voice to exchange emails with residents.

The Dedicated Grip Zone in Central Ward has lost funding, alongside the funding for the Taxi Marshals which ended in April. The Police are working closely with Folkestone & Hythe District Council (F&HDC) to try and get the Taxi Marshals back in place over the Summer period.

The Police and F&HDC are looking to work in partnership with Three Hills Sports Centre in order to bring back free spaces in sports sessions across the School holiday periods when a spike in anti-social behaviour is seen in the town centre. Last year 700 places were offered, and anti-social behaviour was significantly reduced. The hope is to secure the funding and for the sports places during the Summer and October Half Term.

The Police Teams continue to engage with, and work alongside the nighttime economy in Folkestone. Taking passive drugs dogs into licensed premises, which is welcomed by both the premises owners and the door staff.

Work continues around vehicle action in the town and surrounding areas to tackle nuisance vehicles and speeding offences. There will soon be a targeted day of action on e-scooters, and the Neighbourhood Taskforce are actively working on problems arising from bicycles in the town centre.

It was reported that although knife crime spiked in November/December 2025 this was down to several individuals known to the Police who were swiftly arrested and charges brought.

A dedicated week for knife crime action is upcoming; this will include working with local businesses and in schools to educate and raise awareness of knife crime. There will also be sweeps in areas that have historically been used to discard weapons.

It was reported that although shoplifting has reduced in the town centre and Folkestone Central Ward, there has been an increase in Cheriton. Resulting in increased focus to attempt to tackle the issue and reduce the amount of offending occurring.

Anti-social behaviour has increased as a whole across the area, except for Harbour Ward. Though it was made clear that these figures also include offences such as vehicle/animal nuisance and neighbour disputes.

Councillor Jackie Meade opened the floor for questions.

A question was asked about tackling homelessness in the area.

It was reported that there is a dedicated Officer within the Taskforce who works closely with the Rainbow Centre and associated partners on the issue, this is alongside discussion on the District Vulnerability Panel for targeted activities around homelessness in Folkestone and the surrounding areas.

Councillor John Renshaw asked a question in respect to CCTV being monitored by Swale Borough Council and if this causes any issue for the Police in Folkestone,

It was reported that there have been occasional instances of cameras being pointed in the wrong direction or a delay in response from radio calls. These issues have been raised.

Councillor John Renshaw asked a question in respect of drink spiking in the area.

It was reported that although drink spiking does occur and is fully investigated when it is reported, it is not a prevalent issue in Folkestone and the surrounding area. The Police hand out drinks covers as a preventative measure across businesses in the nighttime economy. Alongside raising awareness, holding meetings and offering training to nighttime economy partners.

Councillor Mary Lawes asked about how the force is tackling drug dealing, with particular mention to drug dealing in Harbour Ward.

It was reported that the Neighbourhood Task Force has been tackling known problem areas, over the course of the past year there have been a number of successful operations. However, the Police resources are stretched and the team is small.

Councillor Mary Lawes asked about anti-social behaviour centring around speeding cars on Tram Road.

It was advised to report such incidents to Speedwatch and the local Beat Officer.

Councillor Jackie Meade advised that many Councillors have repeatedly reported information on drug dealing and nothing appears to have been done to rectify the issue. It was advised that although the Police Task Forces are small, it is vital to keep reporting in order for targeted efforts to be brought in.

Councillor Meade urged Folkestone & Hythe District Council to work alongside the Police on bringing back the Taxi Marshals as they made such a contribution to public safety.

Councillor Nicola Keen asked a question about what child focused work is being done with older children in the area.

It was advised that the Child Centred Team is at full strength, comprising one Sargent, two PCSO's and two PC's. The majority of child centred work

is done within the local schools and working with individuals who have been identified as requiring additional support. The Team also work closely with Youth Justice.

*Councillor Laura Davison arrived at 7:40pm*

Councillor Peter Gane asked regarding the response to tackling drug dealing in the local area.

The importance of reporting any drug related or anti-social incidents was reiterated.

Councillor Jackie Meade thanked the Police Officers for attending, giving their report and answering the questions put to them.

#### **2257. REPORTS BY KENT FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**

Chief Executive Ann Millington gave Apologies due to a work emergency in Maidstone. Therefore, no report was received from Kent Fire and Rescue.

Councillor Jackie Meade requested a written report for distribution.

#### **2258. REPORTS BY KENT COUNTY COUNCILLORS (FOLKESTONE AREA)**

Councillor Mary Lawes (Folkestone East) gave an overview of the first year in post.

The potholes in the area are being dealt with as swiftly as possible. Although there have been emergency repairs undertaken, it has been necessary to allow the ground to dry out before permanent repairs can be made. A new contractor has been installed who will begin work on the potholes imminently.

The Library will reopen in the old Woolworths building (*Sandgate Road*) This will open on 26 May and also contain Adult Education and a Registry Office. Councillor Lawes has worked closely with Councillor John Baker (KCC - Folkestone West) on a suitable course of action for the former library building at Grace Hill.

The Nepalese Community Centre which was at risk of closure due to an increase in rent has now had its future secured.

The Road of Remembrance is due to be reopened. A retaining wall will be installed at the top of the road, with piping and drainage placed down the road and a mesh system installed to secure the soil and avoid further landslides.

A substantial area of concentration has been the bus service in Folkestone and the local area. Currently there is only the 74 that passes through East Cliffe with limited timings. This causes problems with getting to and from town, people, in particular the elderly, are often isolated for days due to inability to get the public transport required. Councillor Lawes is fighting for more buses in the area.

The 16 has stopped its service to Hythe which has resulted in many students from being able to travel to and from school. After lobbying from Councillor Lawes, Stagecoach is now considering bringing this service back.

Councillor Kieran Leigh asked whether Councillor Lawes would support the library services returning to the Grace Hill building once works have been completed.

Councillor Lawes responded that while not opposed, the current location on Sandgate Road is more accessible.

A question was asked from a member of the public who expressed concern regarding the appearance of the Road of Remembrance after works to install the mesh have been completed. Would the contractors be willing to meet with local history panels to discuss how to tell the story of the Road of Remembrance?

Councillor Lawes explained that as work is to be conducted in the very near future there would probably not be the time to host meetings between community groups and the contractors. Councillor Lawes also explained that safety would be taken into consideration before anything else could be discussed, but that the mesh was designed in such a way that vegetation would grow through and cover it. Councillor assured the member of the public that their request would be passed on to the relevant parties.

Councillor Adrian Lockwood enquired if Councillor Lawes would support a 20mph speed limit on Tram Road. Councillor Lawes responded no, as this would not make a difference.

Councillor Polly Blakemore (F&HDC – Cheriton Ward) discussed the work they have done around buses and asked what hope there is for increased bus services if even a Kent County Councillor is not being listened to. Councillor Lawes stated that the fight to increase the bus service will continue.

Councillor Nicola Keen asked if Councillor Lawes would support Tram Road going back to a one-way road. Councillor Lawes responded this was absolutely something to support. Councillor Keen subsequently asked if there could be some form of speed restrictions/traffic calming measures

along Tram Road, Councillor Jackie Meade asked for these suggestions to be taken to the Cabinet Member for Transport as residents feel unheard over speeding.

A member of the public issued a request for KCC Councillors to respond to correspondence. They have heard back frequently from Councillor Tim Prater but no other KCC Councillors.

Councillor Meade then thanked Councillor Lawes for attending, giving a report and answering questions.

Councillor Tim Prater then gave a report as a member of the opposition at KCC.

The contractors will be on site at the Road of Remembrance in the next couple of weeks. The work will take about a year with a provisional reopening date in Summer 2027.

The entire length of Romney Avenue was resurfaced in March.

Councillor Prater stated that KCC have behaved honourably and professionally during the negotiations for the sale of the Grace Hill building to Folkestone Town Council and noted the good will on both sides. However, Council Prater made it clear that there are years of work ahead to fundraise, refurbish and reopen the building.

Councillor Prater further stated that although KCC understand the wish to have the library back but with Local Government Reorganisation on the horizon it will need to be a negotiation with the Unitary Council.

Councillor Prater discussed highway repairs and that although some temporary repairs had been made, the new contractors would soon be getting to work across the County to make permanent patch repairs to the roads.

Councillor Prater produces monthly reports on KCC activities and directed those present to the reports.

There were no questions for Councillor Prater.

Councillor Meade then thanked Councillor Prater for giving a report.

## **2259. REPORTS BY FOLKESTONE & HYTHE DISTRICT COUNCILLORS (FOLKESTONE AREA)**

Council Leader Jim Martin gave an overview of the District Council's activities over the past year and plans for the next twelve months.

Those present were updated on the status of Otterpool Park.

F&HDC have signed a new collaboration agreement with Homes England which will focus on obtaining outline planning permission. Recently, Homes England bought a piece of land at the Westenhanger end of the development with the aim of progressing infrastructure works and early delivery homes.

KCC have approved plans for the wastewater treatment plant which is a major step forward. Whilst there has been no visible sign of progress on the Otterpool Park development there has been a lot of work going on in the background. Much of this is confidential in nature and cannot be reported on.

A lot of work has been done by the Officers on arrangements for Local Government Reorganisation. It is not yet known what structure the Government will impose for Kent and therefore it is not known which other District Councils Folkestone and Hythe will be grouped with. The Government should communicate in July what the reorganisation of Kent will look like.

F&HDC Green Councillors and the MP for Ashford, Sojan Joeseph, lobbied Network Rail to secure the Barking Goods Yards to be used as an intermodal hub allowing the transfer of freight and goods from both lorries and the National Rail Network on to European gauge wagons.

This will allow freight to move seamlessly into mainland Europe and has the potential to remove 140,000 lorries per year from the M20.

F&HDC approved a £2.4m grant to The Sports Trust for Folkestone Sports Centre enabling it to reopen the swimming facilities, which have been closed since August 2024.

The grant will help to support the objectives of F&HDC's strategic leisure approach, provide local schools with lessons and bring a long-standing community asset back into use. Once it is open again, F&HDC can proceed the planned refurbishment of Hythe Pool.

Work is ongoing on the Folkestone a Brighter Future project which is revitalising the town. Alongside the progression of KCC's work on the new road layouts, the changes to the bus stands and the new play area are progressing well. The aim is for works to be completed by autumn this year.

Folca 1, the Edwardian part of the building, is now in the final stages of being sold and the purchaser is intending to restore that part of the building to its former glory. The money from the sale will be put towards

the development of Folca 2, the Art Deco section of the building. Folca 2 will have a mixed use including a new Medical Centre. Funding for this has been agreed by the Integrated Care Board. F&HDC are indebted to local MP for Folkestone & Hythe, Tony Vaughn for his work on FOLCA.

The Road of Remembrance which has been closed since January 2024 due to a cliff landslide will soon see work done to reopen the road. KCC plan for work to stabilise the cliff and repair the road to make it usable again. F&HDC have contributed £236,000 to this work. The work should take a year to complete.

Councillor Martin encouraged the member of the public who raised concerns about the appearance of the Road of Remembrance to view F&HDC stabilisation works carried out on Madeira Walk, as these show the mess which will be used and how the vegetation has already begun to grow through.

Following the success of last year's Green Grant scheme, the administration allocated £250,000 for this year's scheme. Projects are match funded by the applicant and range from small ones like installing Solar Panels on Village Halls to larger ones such as equipment for a microbrewery.

The Programme helps businesses and organisations to save money by making improving their energy efficiency and has been very successful.

Councillor Meade invited the eight District Councillors present among the Town Councillors to add anything to Councillor Martin's report if they wished.

There were no additions.

Councillor Nicola Keen asked about where Otterpool Park will land under the Local Government Reorganisation, as Folkestone has invested a significant sum of money into the project and risk losing Otterpool Park to another District.

Councillor Martin agreed with Councillor Keen and shared that correspondence on the issue has been sent to two Ministers. It will be necessary to see which preferred geography the Government introduce to Kent before moving further forward with regards to keeping Otterpool Park within the Folkestone & Hythe area.

A question was asked in respect of when the sports centre will be reopened and it was discussed that there had not been adequate feedback to residents regarding the cost of the project.

Councillor Martin responded that currently the aim is to reopen the pool at some point over the summer period but could not be more specific.

It would be necessary to investigate the impact the recent vandalism at the Centre had had on the costs and length of the refurbishment, but Councillor Martin would pass on any updates.

A member of the public asked if it were possible for F&HDC to be more proactive in giving updates to residents on the Folkestone a Brighter Future Project in order to avoid confusion and frustration. The member of the public suggested that F&HDC could pass information to local community groups who would be well placed to pass the updates to residents.

Councillor Martin agreed that communication was key and would look for ways to improve this.

Councillor Kieran Leigh enquired what plans there were to measure the success of the Folkestone a Brighter Future Project.

Councillor Martin responded that surveys would eventually play a part in measuring the success but that overall, the project was about making Folkestone more pleasant and attract investment.

Councillor Jackie Meade then thanked Councillor Martin for attending, giving a report and answering questions.

## **2260. REPORTS BY COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

Alastair Upton gave a report on behalf of the arts charity, Creative Folkestone, giving a brief overview of what Creative Folkestone do.

The 2025 Triennial impact assessment has been concluded and key facts were discussed.

The media labelled it a triumph, and 270,000 people came to Folkestone to view the artworks, which was over the target set.

£13 million worth of impact was brought to Folkestone over the course of the Triennial.

163 jobs were either created or supported, with almost all artworks made within Folkestone.

All schools in the area were visited by the Triennial Team with a total of 11,800 school children told about or involved in the project. 25,000 people took part in the offered activities. These figures exceeded all the targets and Creative Folkestone are very pleased with the Triennial result.

Feedback has been taken on board for the next Triennial scheduled for 2028, which will mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the project.

The organisation was stretched delivering the 2025 project, at a time when funds have not increased but running costs have increased by 40/50%.

Over the next three years Creative Folkestone will be focusing on Folkestone is a Library. Working on the theme that when everyone comes together, things work better. Exploring reading, writing, lending, borrowing and all that a community does around reading.

Working with community partners the world record for the number of books swapped in an hour was achieved on the beach with over 2,000 books being swapped.

Creative Folkestone is one of the community partners working alongside Folkestone Town Council to help save Grace Hill and make it a viable community asset again.

Alaistair then confirmed that he is stepping away from Creative Folkestone after 15 years.

Councillor Jackie Meade wished Alaistair the best for the future and offered thanks for attending and giving a report.

Mark Hourahane (Vice-Chair) gave an update on the activities of The New Folkestone Society.

This year, the New Folkestone Society have focused on furthering community working, supporting various partners and networking. Putting on community talks and launching free coffee afternoons.

They have also focused on supporting reading in schools and putting on outdoor events.

They have funded two online projects. The first in digitalising 18<sup>th</sup> century maps of Folkestone, the second an app named folk.world

The Society took over Heritage Open Days and, co-ordinating with F&HDC, put on around 20 events.

On behalf of the Save Our Library Group, thanks were offered to Folkestone Town Council for purchasing the Grace Hill Building.

Thanks were also offered to F&HDC for saving the FOLCA building and also to the contractor who, despite not being under any obligation to do so, has chosen to retain the heritage of the building.

Councillor Jackie Meade thanked Mark for attending and giving a report.

Jon O'Connor of One Folkestone gave a report discussing the importance of better communication and information sharing between community partners and Folkestone residents. Alongside the importance of working collaboratively.

There was reporting surrounding an initiative by One Folkestone involving giving residents postcards and asking them to write a question on the back. These ranged from "where can I get food?" if in dire circumstances, to mental health & wellbeing, as well as questions on benefits and housing.

One Folkestone have produced small postcards with information on where to go, organisations to speak to, in order to make information more accessible and widely available.

One Folkestone have had enormous success with their food projects and now supply between 350/400 people with food per week, with a ton/2 ton of food. One Folkestone are currently engaged in growing funding and resources for the Folkestone Food Support Project, which looks to create a bank of food that can be accessed by local food banks.

One Folkestone are also building up a bank of people's views and ideas for longer term solutions to the problems facing Folkestone's residents.

Matthew Jones (Chair of The New Folkestone Society) gave a report regarding the challenge faced by Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), particularly as it is not yet clear which direction LGR will go in regard to how the county will be divided or how services will work.

The importance of listening to residents was highlighted, as it was felt there are currently lots of voids between Folkestone Town Council and its residents when it comes to communication.

It was suggested that addressing weeding in the town and improving road markers would be simple boxes to tick in positively affecting how people feel about where they live.

Thanks were offered to Creative Folkestone, Folkestone Town Council and its Councillors for saving the Grace Hill Building. Now the work begins on how to support each other to take this into the future.

There are many positive things happening around heritage in the town.

Thanks were given to Councillors on behalf of many other community groups for all that Councillors do to support them and Folkestone.

No questions were asked.

Councillor Jackie Meade thanked The New Folkestone Society and One Folkestone for all they do behind the scenes and expressed hope for improved communication over the coming 12 months.

**2261. DATES OF THE NEXT MEETINGS OF FOLKESTONE TOWN COUNCIL**

11 June 2026 at 6.00 pm – AGAR (Full Council) Meeting

17 September 2026 at 7.00 pm – Ordinary Full Council Meeting

25 May 2027 – (Provisional) Town Electors Annual Assembly

**The Meeting concluded at 9:05pm.**

.....Town Mayor