

ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF BUCKLAND PARISH MEETING 2026

DRAFT MINUTES of the Annual Assembly of Buckland Parish Meeting held in the Reading Room at 8pm on Monday 23rd March 2026.

1. CHAIR'S WELCOME

Debbie Jones (DJ), as Vice-Chair to Buckland Parish Council, assumed the Chair for this Annual Assembly of Buckland Parish Meeting, introduced herself and formally welcomed everyone to the meeting.

DJ outlined the agenda; explaining that having dealt with the formalities, she would deliver the Chair's address, including the parish council and a report from the village charity.

DJ advised our two topical items are the reorganisation of local government across Surrey and the planned expansion of Gatwick Airport. DJ extended a warm welcome to our two speakers, Surrey County Council (SCC) Cllr Helyn Clack (HC) and Peter Barclay (PB), Chair, Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign (GACC).

DJ, as have been customary, introduced Buckland Parish Councillors Alan Pryor and Julian Steed to the meeting. DJ took the opportunity to thank Rupert Gowrley, who had recently stepped down from the Parish Council, for his valuable contribution and the support he gave during his tenure. DJ introduced Sheena Boyce, our Clerk to the meeting; advising her knowledge, professionalism and determination are invaluable in helping Council navigate what can often be a complex and evolving system of government. DJ concluded by extending a warm welcome to Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) Cllrs Paula Keay and Simon Budd.

It was noted that there were twenty-seven attendees.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Michael Bourke, Alan Brindley, Ianthe Cox, Kim and Nigel Husband, and Dominic Sanders.

3. MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF BUCKLAND PARISH MEETING 2025

The minutes had been displayed on the Parish Council Notice Board and published on the village website. The motion to adopt the Minutes as a true and correct record was proposed by Fiona Brindley, seconded by Liz Lockhart-Mure, and carried by the meeting. DJ, as Chair, signed and dated the minutes.

4. CHAIR'S REPORT

The following updates and messages have been extracted from the Chair's address:

"We have continued our approach of limiting expenditure, which has allowed us to keep any increase in the precept to a minimum, while maintaining ongoing responsibilities and services

Highways

One area where we have been particularly active is in our engagement with Surrey Highways, especially in relation to the A25. Julian and Sheena, with support from Helyn, have worked hard to establish constructive relationships with officers. This has made a real difference. e.g., initial plans for high containment kerbs along the Buckland bends did not consider a long-established "informal" pedestrian crossing point. As a result of our early involvement, this was recognised and accommodated – avoiding what would have been a significant safety issue. This is a good example of how local knowledge, when effectively communicated, and constructively adopted can lead to better outcomes.

Utility company work along the route of the A25 looks set to continue for some time as aged infrastructure continues to fail. Scotia Gas Networks has recently applied for permission to install traffic lights for the whole of the summer school holidays to facilitate further maintenance work between Buckland and Reigate.

We continue to work, with Helyn's support, to press for signage that is easy for all road users to read and positioned to preserve sightlines.

Communication

More broadly, we continue to encounter challenges communicating with some parts of local government. There is an increasing reliance on online systems, which may well appear efficient to the organisations – but do not always allow for the kind of dialogue needed to ensure local issues are fully understood. A balance is needed between digital efficiency and direct communication, especially when an issue or concern needs to be escalated. This is an ongoing concern.

Local Government Reorganisation

A significant amount of time has also been spent considering the proposed reorganisation of local government. While details are still emerging, it is clear that parish and town councils will need to invest time and effort if we are to make sure the needs of our local communities are recognised by East Surrey Council, our new Unitary Authority.

At the same time, there is still uncertainty about how this will work in practice, and how effectively local voices—particularly in smaller parishes — will be represented. We will continue to monitor developments closely and work to ensure that Buckland's interests are fully represented.

Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs)

SCC has been piloting the use NACs, which for us has meant the "Dorking and the Villages NAC," to engage and collaborate with communities.

SCC has suggested the NACs are intended to meet the government requirement need for local engagement and provide a way to feed community views into the new Unitary structure, Their makeup draws representatives from a fairly broad spectrum of local service providers, charities and interest groups such as the fire brigade and police , but with a fairly modest representation of parish councils.

I think the original idea was to only invite 2 parish councillors across the area of the NAC . Even with the best will in the world and a non-partisan view it is almost impossible to expect a couple of individual parish councillors who will be very familiar with their own patch to represent local issues from the other parishes. There is potential for significant differences in expectation of the NAC across the 13 parish councils that currently exist, which following the MVDC led Community Governance Review could rise to 16 and understandable concern about how such large and wide-ranging forums can fully represent the specific needs of individual parishes across Mole Valley.

This is something we will continue to engage with constructively.

Environment and Volunteers

Turning to village matters, I would like to thank everyone who took part in last April's village tidy and hope to see you all for this year's event which is being held on Saturday 11th April 2026.

Pond clearance activity was paused last year, reflecting concern about the difficulty of ensuring actions taken remain consistent with guidance previously received from Natural England and will benefit the habitat, notwithstanding the impact of the extended period of hot weather on the very dry pond. We are very fortunate to have received consistent guidance and leadership from Reigate Area Conservation Volunteers and, currently, the pause continues.

Amenity Improvements

Ten years on from the installation of the defibrillator attached to the outside of this hall, we replaced the defibrillator and added a bleed kit to the cabinet. We are grateful to Helyn who provided matched funding for this project. We welcomed First Responders to the village in November, running a fully subscribed first aid course to help make sure residents have the confidence to use the kit should a need arise.

This is an important community asset, and we are pleased to be able to maintain it.

With the curtailment of support for Microsoft Windows 10, the ten-year-old laptop was replaced, and updates have also been made to the software supporting the village website and village email group to keep up with the latest raft of legislative requirements.

Planning

The Mole Valley Local Plan was adopted in October 2024, and transitional changes continue to be introduced as the Government seeks to update and amend National Planning Policy. The Local Plan has, since its introduction, provided a clearer framework for decision making and has arguably reduced the risk of speculative development.

The one-year review of housing supply showed MVDC still had more than a 5-year supply – which ensures the plan policies continue to be valid. There is some concern that when the next housing delivery test is published MVDC may fall below 75%. A figure of less than 75% allows applicants to submit proposals to develop grey belt land, using “Golden rules” to address this “established housing need”.

We continue to take a keen interest in planning applications and aim to provide consistent responses as part of the consultation process. We recently met with the team of consultants as part of the stakeholder consultation for the proposed redevelopment of Hartsfield Manor. The latest update we have had advised *“The team is currently working hard to finalise the technical reports required for the submission of the planning application to Mole Valley District Council and we are aiming for submission at the beginning of next month, all going well.”*

We will continue to monitor applications and submit representations on behalf of the community as appropriate. Please bear in mind that a response from the parish council does not remove the need for representations to be made from individual residents. If you hold a particular view you need to submit a representation for your view to carry any weight in the determination of the application.

Airports

As we will hear later, Gatwick’s proposed expansion continues to be a significant issue. The plan to bring the emergency runway into use as a regular runway would increase capacity and could have wider impacts on infrastructure and the environment. Ianthe has continued to follow developments and remain engaged with the consultation process. I would like to thank her for her ongoing contribution in this area.

Thanks

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all members of the Parish Council. They give their time voluntarily, attend numerous meetings, and bring a wide range of professional expertise to the role. We are extremely fortunate to have such a capable and committed team.

I would also like to thank Dominic and the Buckland Estate team for their continued support around the village. And once again, my sincere thanks to Sheena, whose contribution goes well beyond what is routinely expected of a Parish Clerk.

With Rupert stepping down from his role there is an opening for a new parish councillor, and we would welcome anybody who feels they would like to contribute . Please don't hesitate to contact one of us to discuss if it's something that might interest you.

While we do not yet know what funding will be available from the new East Surrey Council, it seems reasonable to expect the new authority will be financially constrained and so the role of volunteers remains especially important. I would particularly like to thank Alan Pryor, for his regular checks of council assets, Martin and Sheena Boyce, for the time they invest to keep our village website relevant and up to date, Alan Brindley, for continuing as our volunteer flag officer and everyone else who contributes to our local community.”

5. BUCKLAND PARISH COUNCIL FINANCIALS

Turning to finances, DJ advised there is considerable uncertainty around future funding, particularly considering local government reorganisation. We currently benefit from grants from MVDC and are grateful for that support.

However, as not all District and Borough Councils provide financial support to parish councils, it is not yet clear whether we will receive any grants from East Surrey Council.

For this year, we have limited the increase in the precept to 5%, which equates to approximately £3.60 for a Band D property and hope you agree this remains reasonable.

Full details of the accounts have been circulated with the printed agenda, and Sheena will be happy to answer any questions after the meeting.

6. BUCKLAND PAROCHIAL CHARITY

DJ, as Clerk and Trustee to the charity directed attendees to the Annual Report and Financials for the year ending 31st December 2025, copies of which had been distributed.

DJ asked those attending to be mindful of the needs of residents, shared that it can be challenging to identify those that are in need in the parish and emphasised the trustees will welcome any suggestions and consider all requests. DJ provided assurance that the names of the recipients are never divulged to any outside source.

7. BUCKLAND ESTATE UPDATE

DJ read out a written update that had kindly been provided by Dominic Sanders. The update made reference to recent tree work, undertaken to comply with a Forestry Commission directive to address the surveyed presence of spruce beetle, included a progress report on the restoration of the “Football field”, provided an update on steps being taken to deter incursions into a decommissioned quarry and concluded with advance notice of plans to invite residents to summer drinks at Buckland Park Lake over the summer (date tba).

8. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION – SCC HELYN CLACK

HC expressed her thanks to each of the Cllrs who volunteers their time to serve their local community, and to Sheena with whom she works closely to address local issues and concerns. HC provided an update on the Government plan to restructure our County Council and the eleven Borough and District Councils across Surrey into two Unitary Councils with the Dorking Rural area she currently serves becoming served by East Surrey Council. HC outlined the preparations currently underway and explained the steps the shadow authority can, once elected on May 7th May 2026, start to play its part in the preparation for handover. HC invited questions, noted concerns and undertook to follow up specific queries raised by individual residents.

9. GATWICK AREA EXPANSION

PB introduced GACC to the meeting and gave an update on the status of Gatwick Airport’s expansion plans. PB alerted attendees to the impact on our local communities of the large-scale growth aspirations at the airport and outlined the basis upon which the government decision to grant a Development Consent Order is being challenged. PB emphasised the scale of the challenge GACC faces to raise sufficient funding to continue the fight and shared flyers with the meeting.

PB took a few moments to encourage engagement with the Gatwick Airport Route 4 consultation, a link to which is published on the village website; noting that while the potential routes are all to the south of Buckland that they all have the impact to move aircraft noise closer to the parish and will have an impact on residents of neighbouring Betchworth.

10. CHAIR’S CLOSING REMARKS

DJ, on behalf of everyone present thanked our guest speakers for giving up their evening to address the meeting and expressed thanks to all for attending tonight for what he hoped had been an interesting evening.

DJ expressed thanks to Liz Lockhart-Mure and Fiona Brindley for preparing the refreshments and invited everyone to take the opportunity to continue discussion and debate whilst enjoying tea/coffee and biscuits.

DJ concluded by encouraging anyone who has an issue they consider the Parish Council needs to be aware of to attend a meeting or get in touch.

Appendices

- Buckland Parish Council Forecast Financials 2025/26 (unaudited)
- Buckland Village Charity 2025

End