

# OAKLEY ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Minutes of meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2010 in the Village Hall, Oakley.

## **PRESENT:**

Cllr Mrs J Walker (Chairman), The Mayor of Bedford Borough, 9 Parish Councillors, the Clerk to the Parish Council and 29 members of the public.

### **1. Apologies:**

Cllrs. R. Harris

### **2. Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2009:**

Copies of the minutes of the last meeting were circulated and there were no matters arising.

### **3. Address by the Mayor and Questions from Residents**

The Chairman welcomed the Mayor, Dave Hodgson to the meeting. The Mayor thanked Council for the invitation to attend commenting that he was Mayor of Bedford Borough not just Bedford and that the rural area was important to him. A 2.3% rise in Council Tax had been necessary because of pressures on the budget. Costs inherited from the old County Council had been larger than expected e.g. the cost of capping the Elstow landfill site had amounted to £10 million instead of the £4 million expected. Next year would also be difficult with Government expected to cut local government funding by 5% without reducing police and NHS grants.

The Mayor was working towards a greener Borough and had been pleased to meet the Oakley Sustainability Group recently. The lease for the allotment land was nearing completion and the weir had been considered for generating electricity but the drop was insufficient. Landfill tax would be rising from £80 per tonne to £120 per tonne and there were penalties for failure to reduce carbon emissions so a greener Borough would also gain financially.

Potholes were a problem throughout the Borough and over 800 were being filled each week. He was aware that some of the work had been poor and temporary repairs were now being marked with a T. Temporary repairs were necessary sometimes e.g. when permanent repairs required roads to be closed as a Traffic Regulation Order had to be obtained to close a road. £6 million would be spent on road repairs this year which was £3.6 million more than received from Government for roads.

Bedford High Street was unlikely to be permanently closed to traffic because some shops only had access from the front. The aim was to make the road more pedestrian friendly and it would be closed to traffic on certain days to gauge the impact on surrounding roads and villages. Initially closures would be on weekend days although there would be one weekday closure during the football World Cup. The Mayor was conscious of the need to prevent rat running through villages like Oakley and hoped that funding for the link road would soon be finalised.

Residents were concerned about the poor state of the roads in Oakley before the bad winter, particularly the High Street, Church Lane and Lovell Road and the lack of salting during the winter. The Mayor advised that resurfacing was unlikely this year as potholes had to take priority to prevent accidents and claims against the Borough but the Borough would catch up with the resurfacing programme as soon as possible. Salt had been rationed by the Government and therefore only major roads could be treated. Residents were also concerned about near misses at the Church Lane/Lovell Road triangle and Clerk to request Highways to repaint the white lines and install stop signs.

Residents suggested that streetlights other than those at junctions be turned off in the early hours of the morning to reduce light pollution and save energy costs. The Mayor advised that Cllr. Roydon was considering this but it was difficult to turn off some lights and not others when they were all on the same system.

The state of the bus station was a concern and the Mayor commented that the scheduled redevelopment had been dependent on funding from housing. With the collapse of the housing market, the redevelopment had been delayed. He added that rural bus services received a subsidy of £780,000 p.a. from the Borough. The Chairman reminded residents that a rural transport consultation would be taking place in Reynes Drive on 11.05.10. at 11.00am.

Speeding, particularly along Pavenham Road and at the entrance to The Furlong, was a problem and school buses had been witnessed travelling at 40mph. The Mayor agreed that it was unacceptable for school buses to speed and he would pursue immediately. He added that prosecution was the most effective deterrent and money had been made available through the Partnership Board for cameras with number plate recognition systems. Portable Vehicle Activated signs were also effective and the Borough was looking to make more use of these. Councillors confirmed that speeding had been set as one of the three police priorities for Oakley and that Council was in discussion with the Borough Safety Officer and the police about Pavenham Road. The number

of police checks was determined by the numbers speeding and a data collection wire had recently been installed in Pavenham Road.

Given the recent Anti-Social Behaviour problem in the village, residents asked about cuts to Borough youth services. The Mayor fully supported youth work but with £12 million of savings required he could give no guarantees. He noted that Bedford Borough spent proportionally less on youth services than any other Council in the country and that he had prevented cuts to summer play schemes. However, the services provided Street Rangers, Park Rangers and Play Rangers needed to be better integrated.

Cllr. Fowler asked about the future of the Pilgrim's Progress building in Bedford as many Borough residents were appalled at the proposal to demolish it. The Mayor noted that the proposed rerouting of the road was too expensive at present as it would require compulsory purchase of commercial properties and therefore the building was not likely to be demolished. He hoped that a more imaginative scheme could be put together for Riverside Square as the proposed building was too tall and he wanted to retain the surface car park to encourage shoppers to use the Town Centre.

Chairman thanked the Mayor for attending the meeting and providing residents with an opportunity to put their questions to him.

#### **4. Report of the Parish Council:**

##### **a) Chairman's Report:**

The Chairman reported that it had been a mixed year. The Linch Furlong community nature area was handed over to the village at a successful barbeque launch party in June, but there was also an increase in anti-social behaviour around the public areas in the village culminating in a dispersal order being issued which had only just been lifted. However the year ended on a very positive note with the announcement that the lease is close to being finalised on the land between The Furlong and Linch Furlong to create allotments and a community orchard for the village. The Chairman thanked everyone on the Sustainability group for all the hard work they put into making this happen. Everyone who wanted an allotment plot had been successful.

The barbeque launch of Linch Furlong, paid for by a Lottery Breathing Places grant, was well attended by both residents and stall holders, who demonstrated how to re-cycle, compost, run allotments, carve beautiful wooden sculptures and look after bats and owls. There was abundant food cooked all afternoon by Parish Council volunteers and the newly carved wooden plaques, designed by children at Oakley Lower School were unveiled by the speaker of Bedford Borough Council, Anita Gerrard.

The youth club, supported by the Parish Council, was thriving and the Chairman thanked Emma Hearn and her team of volunteers for providing a vast array of activities for the young people of the village. There were currently 25 to 30 young people attending every week. However, some young people had preferred to gather in the bus stop at the corner of Reynes Drive/High Street and on the village green. The noise and disturbance caused to residents and businesses in these locations led the police to seek a dispersal order to help them police the area more effectively. Whilst this had some success later in the evening, the resulting work carried out by youth workers and councillors with the young people was also encouraging. The dispersal order had now ended but the police had installed a CCTV camera which covers both locations and is monitored by the Borough's town centre CCTV team. The Parish Council on the advice of the police replaced the wooden bus shelter with a new polycarbonate one. As well as discouraging young people from gathering for long periods it has the added benefit of making it easier for bus users to see when buses are approaching. The Parish Council had budgeted for another similar shelter this financial year and the money will either be used to refurbish the Station Road shelter or replace the remaining wooden one at the end of Dewlands.

Part of the Parish Council's retained funds from developer contributions was allocated for the improvement of sporting facilities in the village. Initially the Parish Council was working with Lincroft School to build a multi use games area on the new field. However this money had to be spent within 3 years of receipt and it was clear that the school could not commit to giving up a piece of its land until the plans for its change to a secondary school were clearer. The Parish Council was approached by the Oakley Recreational Association for help to improve their facilities and agreed that some of the retained money should go into improving their club house. At the same time the Parish Council commissioned the ORA to build and host a tennis/netball court for the village with the remainder of the monies. This was now nearing completion and the Chairman thanked everyone at the ORA for all their hard work. Other organisations that the Parish Council had helped this year were the Village Hall, the Day Care Centre, the Villager Bus, Oakley Preschool, the Gardening Club, Oakley Lower School, the Motorcycle Club, Oakley Rangers, and the Royal British Legion.

In December, sadly the ATC moved from the village. Their lease had expired at the Lincroft site and they were unable to find a suitable site in the village to relocate. The school was happy to rent the site back to the group but in the meantime they had negotiated with Bromham Scouts and for the time being are based at Molivers Lane with the improved facilities it can offer them.

In December the new Western relief road opened and it is anticipated that an increasing amount of traffic will use Oakley as a rat run between the bypass and the A6. The village was surveyed last year to gauge if there were any measures that could be put in to mitigate against this increase. Unfortunately the mixed opinion on the measures offered meant that the Parish Council took the decision to reject traffic calming in the village and push hard for the A6/A428 link road to be built.

There had been some changes to the important people who help the Parish Council in the village. Barry Holmes stepped into the enormous void left by the death of Robin Olney as editor of the newsletter. Barry had now produced a complete issue without Robin's help and had continued the high standard set by him. The Chairman thanked him for his help. David Allen, who had been the web-site editor and manager from the start and who built a professional web-site long before other villages had even started to consider having one, moved out of the village and the Chairman thanked Mark Hawkins for taking over this responsibility. David was a most worthy holder of the title of villager of the year a couple of years ago and the Chairman particularly thanked him for all he did in the village. She also thanked retiring Parish Councillor, Steve Nicholas, who had devoted huge amounts of his time to the village and is continuing as Chairman of the Allotments Group. He had chaired the Village Hall Committee and was an active member of the Parish Plan group as well as being a hard working parish councillor. The new councillor is Michael Taylor whose fresh eyes and enthusiasm were already proving beneficial to the Council.

For this financial year the Parish Council had taken into account the current economic situation and had not increased the precept the full amount needed to fund all projects. Instead money would be taken from the reserves. The projects that the Parish Council would be focusing on this year were a new glass recycling container, improvements to the bus shelters and lighting in the village, support for the youth club, bollards around the green to stop the danger from drivers crossing it and parking inconsiderately, financial support to help the allotments set up their services such as water and hopefully a village Christmas tree by the church. The Chairman hoped that residents were content with all that the Parish Council had done for the village over the last year and that they would let councillors know if there was anything else that they thought should be done. Finally, the chairman thanked the Clerk for her support and work during the year.

**b) Parish Precept 2009/2010:**

The Clerk noted that the Council had decided to set a precept of £50,100 for the financial year 2010-11, a rise of 1%, to take account of rising costs and the continuing difficult economic climate for everyone. This equated to approximately £53.00 p. a. for a Band D property.

**c) Draft Accounts for 2008/2009:**

In 2009/10 income amounted to £91,405.77 and expenditure to £132,157.38. Income decreased by approximately £30,000 partly because of the £45,300 developer section 106 payment and County Council Confident Community Grant of £5,500 received in 2008/9 and partly because of a decrease in interest received of £6,000 and a decrease in the VAT refund of £6,000. (The 2008/9 VAT refund was significantly higher because it covered the play equipment bought in 2007/8.) Other income increased by approximately £32,000 as a result of Bedford BC Rural Grants of £30,000 received on behalf of the Friends of the Old School and the Oakley Recreational Association and a Lottery Grant of £1,310 for the Linch Furlong Opening.

Expenditure increased by approximately £77,000 as £53,000 of section 106 monies were disbursed to the ORA for improvements to their premises and construction of the new tennis court and £30,000 of Bedford BC Rural Grants was transferred to the Old School and the ORA. This was offset by a reduction in expenditure on Linch Furlong from £10,000 in 2008/9 to £4,000 in 2009/10. Council made grants and donations totalling £6,684 to Oakley Gardening Club for the upkeep of the village flowerbeds, Oakley Rural Day Care Centre, Oakley Lower School, Oakley Motorcycle Club, Oakley Pre-School, Oakley Rangers, Oakley Village Hall, Oakley Youth Club, the Royal British Legion and the Villager Bus.

**d) Planning:**

During 2009/2010 the Parish Council was consulted on and has commented on a total of 34 planning and related applications, the same number as in 2008/9. Whilst most were for relatively minor works or tree works, Council objected to 4 applications on the grounds of overdevelopment of the site or impact on neighbours.

There were also two large applications. Council objected to the initial application to extend the Barton Petroleum site which was refused. A revised application has recently been granted by the Borough Planning Committee. Council also objected to the application for an incinerator on the Twinwood Business Park because of the visual impact of the building and the environmental impact of 90 HGV movements per day. This application is unlikely to be considered by the Borough Planning Committee until the summer.

**5. Questions from the Floor:**

Residents asked if lighting near the church could be improved and if sensitive lighting could be used in the village. The Chairman agreed that Council would consider the lighting near the church but noted that Highways lighting could not be made sensitive. She added that bollard lighting had been used in new developments like The Furlong.

The Chairman reminded residents that a community litter pick would be taking place on Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> April from 10.00am – 12.00noon, meeting on the Green; the rural skips would be in the village on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> April and Cllr. Bailey had energy monitors for loan to residents to review their energy consumption. She then thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

Chairman