**OAKLEY ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2017**

Minutes of meeting held on 4th April 2017 in the Village Hall, Oakley.

**PRESENT:**

Cllr Phillips (Chair), 8 Parish Councillors, the Clerk to the Parish Council and 5 members of the public.

**1. Apologies:**

Cllrs. Frampton & White

**2. Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting held on 5th April 2016:**

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

**3. Speed Watch Scheme:**

The Police had sent their apologies as they had been unable to attend so Chair outlined the Council’s proposal for a scheme in Oakley. The speed cameras in the four locations around the village had been operation for some months and were having a positive effect on speeds. The ideal is that motorists automatically reduce their speeds appropriately whenever they are in a speed limit whether there are cameras or not but we know, in practice this does not happen. Many residents around the village are telling us that speeding remains a problem in the High Street, Highfield Road, Reynes Drive and Westfield Road.

Council had discussed with the police and they had advised that, because of the cameras, Oakley is better off than many villages and unless we could show a real need for additional enforcement, which would be by way of an increasing number of casualties, then we would be unlikely to receive further speed enforcement. Council was not prepared to wait until there were casualties, whether injuries or deaths and was seeking volunteers to set up a Community Speed Watch Scheme.

Excessive speed has an impact not only on road safety but the on the quality of life for residents who endure it. The scheme enables volunteers to work within their community to raise awareness of the dangers of speeding and to help control the problem locally. The main aim is to promote road safety and educate rather than prosecute. Data collected by Community Speed Watch Groups is passed to the Police who may then contact drivers and they may be prosecuted.

Volunteers are the integral part and a group would be made up of at least two trained operators. Volunteers attend a course with the Police consisting of two modules lasting two hours and covering the equipment, conflict resolution and possibly first aid. The Police provide the equipment which is shared with several Speed Watch groups and the Police have to be informed when a speed check is taking place. Volunteers record details of any vehicle exceeding the speed limit and the results are forwarded to the Police. The registered keeper of the vehicle is then sent a letter informing them that the vehicle was detected exceeding the speed limit and giving the location date and time. Persistent speeders receive a second letter and on the third occasion can expect further action to be taken by the Police. One check a week would be reasonable to begin with so at least eight to ten volunteers would be needed. A scheme can only work if there are sufficient volunteers and if a village this size cannot achieve that number then maybe complaints about speeding are not justified. Chair distributed information leaflets to residents and information would also be put on the website and in the next Newsletter.

Residents asked how many complaints had been received and Chair confirmed that he had received ten about Highfield Road and several had been reported for other roads. Residents had also approached Council last year about reducing the speed limit in Westfield Road. He confirmed that checks could be carried out at any time but would be more useful in busier periods. Two volunteers could cover several locations in a two-hour time slot and three residents and two councillors had already volunteered. An Oakley group would not be reliant on schemes being set up in neighbouring villages as schemes were already operating locally and Oakley could share equipment with them. A resident suggested targeting those living in roads where speeding was a problem and get one resident in each to co-ordinate the scheme. He volunteered to contact Westfield Road residents. Cllr. Fardon suggested letters to all households in the roads where there was a speeding problem.

**4.** **New Play Equipment:**

Chair had requested suggestions for new play equipment on the Green and in The Furlong in the December Newsletter and Clerk had subsequently met with representatives from several play equipment companies to discuss residents’ ideas. Clerk tabled several layouts proposed by the companies all of which included a zip wire, group swing and themed multiplay for the Green and either a swing or slide and small springers for The Furlong. Resident agreed that equipment was needed for older young people but did not want a zip wire on the Green as it would encourage anti-social behaviour. She suggested exercise equipment that could also be used by adults. Residents would feed back any comments to the Clerk and she would also be taking the schemes into the schools.

**5. Report of the Parish Council:**

1. **Chairman’s Report**

2016 – 2017 has been an extremely busy year and I must thank every member of Oakley Parish Council, Councillors and Clerk for their dedication and total commitment throughout the year. I know the amount of work that each and every member commits to the cause of Oakley, for which we should all be very grateful.

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I will travel briefly through the year commencing May 2016 to April 2017 and one of the regular agenda items is Police matters. Visible policing is probably a thing of the past, but the emphasis is now on accessible policing. During the year the Police did mount a couple of operations following some nuisance motor cyclists terrifying residents and for that we are grateful.

Village entrance signs have featured on our agendas regularly and are now in place. These were financed from money from the Oakley Directory, which continues to go from strength to strength and our thanks to Sara Fardon and her production team. The latest edition should have popped through your door in the last month.

Our highways are vital to us and always feature at our meetings. The speed cameras are all operational now and are regularly detecting offenders, yellow lines are in place at Reynes Drive/High Street junction, Dewlands has been resurfaced and many potholes have been reported swiftly and repaired equally swiftly. There have been ongoing discussions regarding Heavy Goods Vehicles in Highfield Road and Pavenham Road going to and from a warehouse in Pavenham. We believe the movements are totally inappropriate and we will continue to argue this point on the grounds on road safety.

The Neighbourhood Plan under the Chairmanship of Pat Olney is progressing very well. The exhibition on 29 January 2017 was reasonably well attended and the views expressed are now being analysed. A meeting took place with developers and land owners regarding a proposal to develop Twinwoods Business Park and a public meeting also took place in May concerning The Lincroft School Playing Field proposals. Bedford Borough Council has extended the time scale for the local plan from 2032 to 2035 and the Council met all developers who submitted proposals in the Borough Call for Sites in September and October when we listened to their proposals.

In June, concern was expressed about the quality of grass cutting by our contractors. Spring/early summer was wet and made the task more difficult but we do keep the cutting under review. We decided to reduce the disabled parking space at Linch Furlong from two to one and the other space will be rented to a resident at Willow Vale.

Necessary tree and hedge work has been carried out when and where necessary. Unfortunately, some car drivers seem to think they can park just where they like whether it be on the verge, junctions, pavements, zig zag and yellow lines and it is up to each and every one of us to stop this happening if at all possible.

The Parish Council supported the reintroduction of The Oakley Show, donating The Best in Show Trophy and congratulate the Committee for their superb efforts. The Council also continues to support worthy activities with grants where appropriate.

The village planting always looks excellent thanks to the efforts of Elspeth and Leo our volunteers but sadly there have been no volunteers to help with the watering during the summer. A new and additional picnic table has been added at Riverside Meadow. The Christmas lights at St Mary’s and the crossroads were admired by many and we were able to use our own tree at St Mary’s this year. The Youth Club closed temporarily at the end of last year mainly due to the behaviour of a minority. It has re-opened with a new leader, new hours, a new age group 11-14 and without the problem youths and we are hopeful that it will flourish. For that we have to say a very big thank you to Sara Fardon.

Concern was expressed about speeding in Westfield Road particularly vehicles travelling from Church Lane. The Borough has been asked about the possibility of a 20 mph zone, but their response is that it will be added to the growing list, but no funds exist.

Residents endorsed thanks to Councillors and the Clerk and asked about progress on the proposed development of the Lincroft Playing Field. Cllr. Walker advised that the Department of Education was only deciding on the proposal to move the field, not the proposed housing and as the process usually took around two years, the Borough Council was not expecting a response this year. She added that the proposed housing would be included in the Local Plan after 2021. Cllr. Olney added that it was not in the village’s interest to try and speed up the process as developers might assume residents were in favour. The Neighbourhood Plan and Borough Local Plan were coming forward and housing development would be set out in these.

Cllr. Fardon suggested a volunteer page on the website for Speed Watch, the Youth Club and any local organisations seeking volunteers. All agreed and Clerk to ask website manager to set up.

1. **Parish Precept 2017/18:**

The Borough Council has again agreed to compensate Parish Councils whose tax base was reduced in 2012/13 but at a lower rate of £421 in 2017/18 compared to £842 in 2016/17. The precept has therefore been set at £51,195 and the Borough grant will raise funds to £51,616. The band D rate has increased by 1% to £53.57.

**c) Draft Accounts for 2016/2017:**

In 2016/17 income amounted to £81,116.47 and expenditure to £133,486.90. Income increased by approximately £12,456 largely as a result of the £15,700 Borough Council Rural Grant paid to the Old School through the Parish Council account and an increase in interest of £1,911 with the maturity of the investment bond. This was offset by a reduction of £4,339 in grants as no Neighbourhood Planning grant was received in 2016/17. Expenditure increased by approximately £71,945 as we have now been invoiced for the average speed cameras, which cost £60,000, the £15,700 Bedford BC Rural Grant to the Old School was paid out of the Council account and tree works cost an additional £2,000 compared to last year. This was offset by a reduction in expenditure of £5,125 in grants to local organisations. Salary costs increased by approximately £4,000 with the introduction of workplace pensions but this was offset by a comparable reduction in expenditure on playground repairs. Donations totalling £2,432 were made to Autism Bedford, the Day Centre, Pilgrim Oakley Cricket Club, the Village Hall, the Villager Bus and the RBL for a poppy wreath.

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**d) Planning**

During 2016/17 the Parish Council was consulted on and commented on a total of 47 planning and related applications, compared to 43 in 2015/16. Most were for relatively minor works or tree works but Council objected to 11 applications on the grounds of impact on neighbours, that proposals were out of keeping with neighbouring properties, tree works were unnecessary and access was unsuitable.

**e) Neighbourhood Plan:**

Cllr. Olney reported that the Neighbourhood Plan Group had continued work on a Plan for the village. The questionnaire circulated in 2015 was used to formulate policies which also reflected both Borough and national strategies. The policies were currently being reviewed in the light of the comments received from the January 2017 exhibition. Initially the Borough Council was looking to allocate 50 – 150 new houses to Oakley but this had now been reduced to 25 – 50, partly because of the extension of the Local Plan to 2035 and partly because of the proposal for at least one large, new settlement.

A consultant had been employed to ensure that the policies were sufficiently robust and that the draft Plan complied with the legal planning requirements. He had written the national Neighbourhood Planning guidelines so was well qualified for the task. It was expected that the draft Plan would be completed by the end May/beginning June and the village would then be re-consulted. Final revisions would be made on the basis of comments received and the draft Plan would then go to the Borough Planning Department for independent examination and the referendum, which it was hoped would take place in autumn 2017.

Bedford Borough Local Plan 2035 would be issued for consultation from 18 April to the 2nd June 2017 and the Westfield Road and Lovell Road sites away from other housing had been excluded. Cllr. Olney encouraged residents to respond as all the other sites put forward were still included. No decisions had yet been made on how many or which of the four large sites put forward for development would be taken forward.

Cllr. Olney thanked the Neighbourhood Plan Group and the Clerk for their hard work in producing the Oakley Plan and residents added their thanks.

**6. Questions from the Floor:**

Cllr. Fardon commented that since the bulbs had been changed street lights in Lincroft were on all night and Clerk to ask Bedford BC to adjust.

Resident commented that hedges were growing over the footway in Grenidge Way and Chair confirmed that Council did write to residents asking them to trim back overhanging vegetation and had written to that resident.

Resident asked about a plot of land in Grenidge Way that was not being maintained. Cllr. Walker confirmed that it was not Parish Council land and the resident opposite had enclosed the land. Resident volunteered to pursue and Chair thanked her.

Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

Chairman