**OAKLEY ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2019**

Minutes of meeting held on 2nd April 2019 in the Village Hall, Oakley.

**PRESENT:**

Cllr Walker (Chair), 6 Parish Councillors, the Clerk to the Parish Council and 11 members of the public.

**1. Apologies:**

Cllrs. Nicholas, Phillips, Saunders & White

**2. Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting held on 3rd April 2018:**

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

**3. Speed Watch Scheme:**

Clerk read Cllr. Nicholas’ report in his absence. Despite having had average speed cameras in operation since October 2016, residents are still concerned about the level of speeding in the village and the fact that the cameras do not cover all sections of roads where speeding occurs. For example, a driver can turn out on to Church Lane from Dewlands or Ruffs Furze and exceed the speed limit without passing through both cameras on a monitored section. Similarly, it is possible to exceed the speed limit on parts of Station Road and there are other roads which are not covered at all.

To make drivers more aware and to help to reassure residents, we have been operating our own community speed watch scheme since October 2017. With a team of 11 volunteers (one recent new volunteer is to be added to the team), the aim has been to carry out at least two exercises a month, in areas and at times when speeding offences have been reported. Since we can only monitor vehicles’ speeds, we pass the information on to the police, who then take any further action deemed necessary.

We have carried out exercises in various locations and with widely varying results. On occasions vehicles have passed a team and kept to the limit, a few rev their engines in contempt and speed off after passing, on other occasions an hour-long survey has resulted in no vehicles being recorded speeding - a good result! A survey on Pavenham Road in 2018 resulted in some vehicles entering the village at excessive speed, through the speed-limit sign, past the Speed Watch mandatory warning sign, past the panel showing their actual speed and the group in hi-viz jackets, without slowing at all.

It was intended that our detection equipment should be shared with Stevington and Pavenham, but as they have yet to set up their own schemes, up to now we have had sole access to the kit. It is not always easy to plan exercises as a minimum of three volunteers are needed to provide sufficient witness and safety cover. Some are not always available due to work and other commitments so more volunteers would be very welcome.

To further improve safety, we have recently taken delivery of a Morelock monitoring, recording and display panel. This will enable us to get a better understanding of the speed situation, in those areas not covered, but, more importantly, at those times the Speed Watch group cannot cover. One volunteer has taken over as coordinator and two others have undertaken planning and installation of the Morelock kit – they are doing a valuable job, looking after administration and providing the necessary data collection and reporting, supported by the whole team.

Community speed watch groups are being introduced across the country and the hope is that, eventually, by a process of enforcement and education, exceeding speed limits will be as unacceptable as drink-driving has now become. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the whole team for their efforts in providing Speed Watch in the village.

**4.** **Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP):**

Cllr. Olney reported that the draft Oakley Neighbourhood Plan would shortly be passed to Bedford Borough Council for the next stage in becoming a statutory document. She thanked the Committee members, the Clerk and three other residents who supported the work of the Plan which will become one of the statutory planning documents for the village for the next ten years. She also thanked the Parish Council for their support during the process. Once adopted, any planning application put forward to the Bedford Borough Planners would need to be considered against the policies in the Plan.

The first exhibition and consultation suggested that there should be between 20 and 40 houses in the village. Residents thought there was a need for housing for young people and for people to down size. Most also valued the open spaces in the village and the countryside views. The Parish Council appointed Bedfordshire Rural Community Charity to conduct a housing survey and again villagers supported around 40 new houses over the next ten years, for young people and for people to down size. This fitted in with the Borough Local Plan as their housing consultation concluded that Oakley would need between 25 and 50 houses during this time. A further exhibition was held on the Plan policies and from the feedback, the policies were amended.

As part of the Local Plan process, the Borough Council issued a call for sites. Many were put forward and many were dismissed because they did not meet the criteria for Highways, sustainability etc. A few were dismissed in Oakley. The NDP Group then engaged a consultant to look at all the possible sites and assess them against our emerging policies, the Bedford Borough policies and the government’s National Planning Policy. The Group considered the report and decided that 3 sites met the criteria and invited those agents to make a presentation to the Group and Parish Council. Two attended for the Station Road site and the High Street site opposite the Bedford Arms. The other agent for the site accessed from Town Farm did not attend.

Smaller sites were supported by residents rather than one large site and the NDP Group and the Parish Council agreed that two sites would reduce the pressure on one particular area of the village. The NDP group and the Parish Council therefore decided to take these two sites forward into the Oakley Neighbourhood Plan.

**OAKLEY ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2019**

An exhibition of the draft Neighbourhood Plan including the proposed sites was held and the statutory 6-week consultation undertaken. Every house received a consultation form and was invited to comment, as were businesses, neighbouring parishes, Bedford Borough Council and government agencies. The feedback and Group’s responses were collated onto a spreadsheet and posted on the website. A Housing Design Statement was also agreed for each site based on the Plan policies which conformed to the Bedford Borough Local Plan and the NPPF.

There was considerable concern about the High Street site and the NDP Group invited the agent to consider if there was an alternative plan based on the Housing Design Statement. An indicative plan was put forward for 10 dwellings which reflected the Plan policies and village aspirations. The 10 dwellings comprised houses and bungalows, a generous open space and hedging which preserved the privacy of the surrounding houses.

The NDP Group and the Parish Council will encourage the agents of both sites to discuss the Housing Design Statement when bringing the sites forward and householders directly affected will be informed and can take participate in discussions. This will ensure that the policies inform the applications and there is minimum disruption to the neighbours directly affected. Both sites will need to be submitted to the planning authority and further consultations will take place at that stage.

A resident was concerned that the indicative layout for the High Street site did not conform to the NDP and NPPF requirement to protect the natural environment and built heritage. The best habitat was where the houses were to be sited as it was adjacent to open fields. The access to the site was also dangerous – the Bedford Arms was a listed building and had been hit by a vehicle that day – and another executive cul-de-sac was not needed.

Cllr. Olney commented that Highways had not dismissed the site because of the access. The layout of the site was indicative and the final plan would need to comply with NDP sustainability & transport policies and the Design Statement. Chair suggested that the resident could ask to speak at the NDP Plan examination.

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

1. **Chairman’s Report**

Cllr. Walker explained that she was giving the report rather than the Chair, Paul Phillips, as he had had a difficult year battling with illness and the Parish Council had covered his chairmanship for most of the year. Everyone on the Parish Council wished him well and was looking forward to having him back at the helm, managing in his quiet but firm way.

I want to begin by thanking many people who have volunteered their time over the last few months. Firstly, we have to thank our Clerk, Ann. She puts in so much extra time and her knowledge and dedication have been exemplary; Bill Chalker, our Newsletter editor who does an amazing job of getting all of the articles in on time and always hits the exact deadlines he has set for publication; the NDP Group who have put in hours of work to produce the plan for the village that we have just heard about; the Speed Watch Group who make sure we do not rely on the speed cameras and are helping to keep the speed down on the other roads; parish councillors who all are involved in various volunteering roles around the village and give so much of their time; Sara Fardon and her Village Directory team who each year produce the helpful document that we all use throughout the year; the volunteers who keep our village sign planting looking beautiful and this year, I want to particularly mention the volunteers who have renovated the war memorial. They have worked very hard to cut back the trees and bushes surrounding it and renovating the memorial itself so that we have somewhere to lay the wreaths. There are so many unsung volunteers who work hard in this village all year round and I wanted to let them know how thankful we are.

Last summer was incredibly long and hot and the village looked parched but we still had a lot of complaints about the new grass cutters we had employed. As a result, we have chosen different contractors this year so we hope for better results.

The village Youth Club goes from strength to strength, led by Dawn Pither who has been amazing at persuading residents and companies to donate items to make it feel more welcoming and fun for the young people. The Parish Council continues to support the club financially and Dawn is now looking to open a separate club for older young people and we wish her as much success with that project.

As you have heard from the Speed Watch report, we have purchased a speed sign that the Group will move around the village to keep reminding drivers to slow down. It will be interesting to see the data from it in due course. We also have data each month from the average speed cameras and whilst we do not publish the figures for each camera, we do report in the Council minutes the number of prosecutions each month. They have gone down tremendously since the cameras first installed which shows they are working as a deterrent, but we do still have quite a number of drivers who go well over the limit.

The Clerk will update us on the budget position from last year and the precept this year, but I just wanted to highlight some of the things that we intend to spend the money on. We pressed the Borough’s planning department, very hard, for a pedestrian crossing at the new Parrot Close site on Lovell Road but our request was not taken up by the planners. This could ultimately be a development of 25 houses with no means of safely walking into the village so we have decided to use the developer contributions from the site, along with money from the precept, to commission a crossing there.

We also know that the bollards around the Green, although now collared, will not last for many more years so we will be replacing a few each year on a rolling programme. Also on a rolling programme, we will be exchanging existing litter bins for the dual waste/dog bins.

A couple of reminders of events for this year. The skips will be in the village this weekend and details are on the notice board and website. We are holding a community litter pick on 27th April, meeting at 10am on the Green and like last year, the Scouts will be providing refreshments for all participants. Litter pickers, bags and gloves will be provided by the Borough Council and Paul White is sponsoring the event with Easter eggs for all young people taking part.

Finally, please do not forget it’s the Oakley carnival this year on 6th July. They have fund raising events planned before that date so please support the carnival committee whenever you can.

**OAKLEY ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2019**

To close, I just want to remind you that the local elections will take place on Thursday 2nd May. We do not yet know if there will be a contested Parish Council election. All current parish councillors, except Steve Nicholas, will be re-standing for office but others may have put their names forward independently. There is also a mayoral election and a Borough Councillor election. This year, after 33 years, Pat Olney will not be standing for the Borough Council. The Parish Council has already thanked her for all her hard work and dedication to the village over so many years but we wanted to take this opportunity to do so formally, with a plaque and a gift voucher for the Art shop in Bedford as she is looking forward to having more time to indulge her hobby of painting. Thank you, Pat for devoting so much of your time to helping everyone in this village.

1. **Parish Precept 2018/19:**

The precept for this year has been set at £52,800 and the band D rate has increased by 1.9% from £53.54 to £54.58 p.a.

**c) Draft Accounts for 2017/2018:**

In 2018/19 income amounted to £81,843.66 and expenditure to £127,634.00. Income increased by approximately £5,906 as Community Infrastructure Levy monies of £9,905 were received on the Parrott’s Yard development and an additional £1,365 VAT refund, offset by a reduction in Neighbourhood Planning grants of £6,810. Expenditure increased by approximately £59,189 largely due to the payment of £39,166 for the new play equipment on the Green and at The Furlong and the corresponding increase in VAT payments of £9,263. A new speed indicator sign was also purchased at a cost of £2,783, spending on the Neighbourhood Plan increased by 4,714 but this was mostly funded by grants and an additional £2,408 was spent on the Christmas lights. Donations totalling £6,218 were made to Autism Bedford, Oakley Brownies, the Day Centre, the Village Hall, the Youth Club, the Villager Bus and the RBL for a poppy wreath.

**d) Planning**

During 2018/19 the Parish Council was consulted on and commented on a total of 47 planning and related applications, compared to 42 in 2017/18. Most were for relatively minor works or tree works but Council objected to 4 applications on the grounds of impact on neighbours, overdevelopment and unsuitable access. Council also objected to the proposal for an additional 10 dwellings on the Parrott’s Yard development on the grounds of overdevelopment, loss of business units, which it was considered were not sufficiently well marketed and because all the affordable housing would be together rather than spread throughout the site. If the Borough Council did grant the application, Council had asked for a contribution towards a crossing on Lovell Road and a condition to prevent parking on Lovell Road. Central Bedfordshire’s approval of the plans to expand Cranfield Airport also caused concern as the flight path is over the Ouse Valley and the number of flights is expected to double. North Bedfordshire villages were not consulted and Oakley and other villages had raised this with both Central Bedfordshire and Alistair Burt.

**6. Questions from the Floor:**

Resident asked about the depreciation of the Council’s capital assets and whether the Village Hall was paid for. Clerk explained that auditors required the assets to be recorded at purchase value and Chair confirmed that the Hall had been paid for.

Resident commented on the litter around the play area and asked if schools discussed litter with students. Chair advised that Council regularly asked schools to remind students about litter and would ask again. Council could also ask the litter picker to target problem areas. Resident who picked up litter in the Highfield Road area noted that on a three-mile route he regularly collected 5 – 10 kg of rubbish. He suggested that the community litter pick should target the outskirts of the village, the rubbish should be collected before Monday and from more sites. Another resident commented that glass and cans were shredded by mowers and became dangerous. Chair explained that the Borough would not collect the rubbish until Monday but Council could request more pick up points. She thanked the resident for his efforts.

Resident asked if cars parked on Station Road belonged to residents or school staff and whether the cameras on the zigzags were impacting other areas of the village. Chair commented that parents would have to park further away but there was no data available from the Borough Council. Cllr Olney noted that only four or five of the vehicles belonged to residents and that parking was a problem around all Borough schools. A resident added that a traffic count in Lovell Road showed that a surprising number of parents waited in Parsonage Close for their children and suggested that the Planning Department should make more provision for parent parking.

Resident asked about the road proposed at the back of Station Road. Chair advised that the road was part of the Lincroft School application to move the Playing Field, which also included 250 new houses and was still awaiting a decision from the Department for Education.

Resident suggested that a one-way system around the village should be reconsidered now the speed cameras would prevent speeding. Chair agreed to include on the May Council agenda for discussion.

Resident asked about the Highfield Road bridleway gate and commented that a metal post would be dangerous as there were live cables underneath the gate. Chair noted that the gate was in the process of being repaired and thanked the resident for the warning.

Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

Chairman