**OAKLEY ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2020 1.**

Minutes of meeting held virtually on 12th May 2020.

**PRESENT:**

Cllr Walker (Chair), 8 Parish Councillors, the Clerk to the Parish Council and 0 members of the public.

**1. Apologies:**

Cllrs. Nicholas & White

**2. Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting held on 2nd April 2019:**

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

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

Cllr. Olney reported that the Plan was now officially Oakley Neighbourhood Development Plan.

On the 23rd of March 2020, Bedford Borough Council “made” (brought into legal force) the Oakley Neighbourhood Development Plan. The plan is now part of the development plan for the Bedford Borough Council. This was a result of the referendum on the 27th of February 2020 when more than 50% of those who voted were in favour of the plan being used to help to decide planning applications.

How did we get there? - The Oakley Neighbourhood Plan (NDP) Group is a subcommittee of the Oakley Parish Council and comprised parish councillors and residents of the village. Over 3 years, they undertook consultations on how you would like the village to develop and what you felt was important to you as a village community. They commissioned Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity to conduct a housing survey and engaged a consultant, Urban Vision, who guided us through the legal parts of forming the NDP and successfully brought us to the examination stage. Different members of the group went through Government guidance, Bedford Borough Local Plan policies and background papers to put together the plan so that it could proceed to examination. It was examined by the Independent Examiner Wendy Burden, who determined that subject to modifications, the plan met the basic conditions and should proceed to referendum.

The Oakley NDP is now a statutory planning document and planning applications in the future must take into consideration the policies within it. Bedford Borough Planning Officers must also take into consideration those policies when making their decisions on planning applications. Recently when a planning application came forward for houses in Pavenham Road, The NDP group and the Parish Council were able to use the Oakley Neighbourhood Plan to object to that development.

The Future – The NDP group will continue to monitor the plan for the Parish Council and continue to respond to the emerging Borough Local Plan, reporting their findings to the Parish Council for their consideration.

Thank you to the members of the group for successfully piloting the plan through the different stages. The professionalism and the care they took over many years shows their dedication to Oakley Village. Thank you to the residents who responded to consultations and gave advice and support during this time. Thank you to the officers of the Bedford Borough Council who read through the document several times and who responded to questions and gave advice freely. Thank you to the Oakley Parish Council who supported the NDP and also contributed greatly to the successful outcome.

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

1. **Chairman’s Report**

This municipal year started and ended in a very strange way. We started early last summer, with an incursion onto the village green, by a large number of traveller caravans. This was the first time the village had experienced, what a lot of other villages and communities in Bedford had been experiencing for some time. It was very frightening for many people but as the village green is owned by the Parish council, we were able to immediately call in the bailiffs and the caravans had all left by the end of the following day. Bollards around the Green are now being strengthened and new bollards on Grange Close Green have been installed to try and prevent further encampments in the future.

The year is ending in an even more surreal situation, with the country in lock down and all meetings being moved online. I am grateful to all of the parish councillors and to Ann Paice who have all quickly adapted to the new way of meeting. So far we have held two meetings where everyone has been involved and we hope as the year goes on and residents get used to looking for “Zoom meeting IDs” we will also have members of the public joining in to listen and ask questions at the public open session parts of the meetings.

**Neighbourhood Development Plan**

We are delighted that earlier this year, the village voted to approve the Neighbourhood development plan. This will now give us a stronger case when replying to planning consultations in the village. It also means we will receive 25% of the levy placed on each property (Community Infrastructure Levey (CIL)) to allocate to projects in the village. An extra 10% over what we were receiving before. The Parish Council and the NDP group will use the responses to the new plan to decide how the money from any new developments will be spent.

**Budget**

Ann’s report will outline the financial position so I will just highlight some of the new projects that we have agreed.

The decision was taken to ask for a 2% increase in the parish’s part of the council tax (Precept) Although this will not give us enough money to carry out any major projects, we will plan for those when we have CIL money to spend. Instead, this year’s precept will mainly be spent on refurbishing areas of the village. The largest single expenditure will be on new gates on the play area at the Furlong. We hope this will make it safer and cleaner for families to use.

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We will also continue with our programme of replacing waste bins with dual dog/litter bins and this year we intend to replace the bin on the green area at the end of Reynes Drive nearest the High Street. Please remember that all waste bins are now able to take both dog waste and litter, so if you find a dedicated dog waste bin is full, please put it in another bin nearby.

Finally, we hope to be able to do some work on the Brockwell meadow to improve the biodiversity there and make it more of a natural space rather than just an open field. Patrick Knight will be supervising this and if we are able, he is planning to arrange nature walks in various locations in the village to highlight the existing biodiversity and explain his plans for the meadow.

Along with this the parish council has supported the following local organisations with grants in the last year: Pre-School, the Day Centre, the Youth Club, Bedfordshire Scouts and the Royal British Legion.

**Railway Bridge – Highfield Road**

After installing new overhead electric cables over the railway line alongside the village, Network rail decided they needed to increase the height of the parapets on the bridge at Highfield Road. Instead of rebuilding the bridge parapets they installed ugly concrete coping stones which were completely out of keeping with the bridge. After a lot of lobbying from local people and the parish council, with the help of the Borough Council, they agreed to remove the silver grey stones and look for alternatives. As they bridge height needed to be raised before the wires became live, a darker grey stone was added which has temporary permission for one year The parish council will be looking closely at the alternatives they offer before it is given permanent permission at the end of the year.

**Bottle Bank**

At the beginning of last year, the Bedford Arms was taken over by new owners who did not want the bottle bank to remain in their car park. We were very lucky that the Village Hall committee agreed for it to be moved to their car park and on the whole, it has been kept tidy and free of litter around it. Thank you all very much for not leaving empty bottles and boxes at the site and thank you to the Village Hall committee for enabling us to keep this facility in the village.

**Thank you**

Finally, I want to end with a thank you to all the volunteers and parish council staff in the village who give so much time to making Oakley such a wonderful place to live. I know that during this lock down there are friends and neighbours all over the village who are helping people who are shielded or self-isolating and generally helping keep people’s spirits up. Thank you all on behalf of the whole village. As far as the Parish Council’s volunteers go, thank you to all of the councillors who work so hard for the village throughout the year and particularly to Ann who goes well beyond her job as clerk, to support us. Also, to Bill Chalker who edits the quarterly newsletter with no fuss or fanfare but gives us a great way to communicate with everyone in the village. Thank you to Susan, our litter picker who keeps the village so tidy and to the team who plant and maintain the village signs. Thank you to Sara Farndon and her team for another valuable Village Directory. It would be great if we can all make full use of it this year to make sure that we are supporting local businesses in this difficult time. Thank you also to the carnival committee team for another fun day last summer and to Dave Ursell who has repainted and refurbished the area around the Memorial at the cross roads and made it ready for our VE day commemoration on 8th May. Thank you to the speed watch team who continue to monitor speeds on our non-camera roads, so that we can make the whole village as safe as possible and finally thank you to Phil Supple for his magnificent Christmas lights display.

1. **Parish Precept 2020/21:**

The precept for this year has been set at £54,400 and the band D rate has increased by 2% from £54.58 to £55.68 p.a.

**c) Draft Accounts for 2019/2020:**

In 2019/20 income amounted to £136,424.64 and expenditure to £146,762.29. Income increased by approximately £54,581 largely because Bedford BC paid double the amount of precept in error. Community Infrastructure Levy receipts reduced by £4,589 and Neighbourhood Plan grants reduced from £3,250 in 2018/19 to none in 2019/20. This was offset by an increase of £9,263 in the VAT refund on expenditure on play equipment in 2018/19. Expenditure increased by approximately £19,129 mostly due to the repayment of £52,800 of precept to Bedford Borough Council, plus an increase of £7,362 in capital expenditure to cover the cost of new bollards on Grange Green and the Green, an additional £2,157 on the play area to repair the surfacing and £820 to remove and clear up after the travellers. This was offset by a reduction of £36,166 in the cost of new play equipment, £5,943 less due in VAT repayments and £4,235 less spent on the Neighbourhood Plan. Donations totalling £6,518 were made to the Pre-School, the Day Centre, the Youth Club, Bedfordshire Scouts and the RBL for a poppy wreath.

**d) Planning**

During 2019/20 the Parish Council was consulted on and commented on a total of 49 planning and related applications, compared to 47 in 2018/19. Most were for relatively minor works but Council objected to 6 applications on the grounds of impact on neighbours, overdevelopment, development outside the Settlement Policy Area and conversion of bungalows to houses. As a general policy Council also objected to 6 applications for the removal of trees unless they could not be saved and asked for replacements to be planted in their place. Council also objected to the proposals for development on land off Lovell Road and behind the High Street on the grounds that the development would be outside the Settlement Policy Area and the sites were not included for development in our Neighbourhood Plan. The High Street application was refused by the Borough and the Lovell Road applications withdrawn. Council also strongly objected to the unsightly parapets on the Highfield Road rail bridge. These have been given temporary permission for a year to enable electrification to progress but we are hoping that something more in keeping with the area will be put forward for the permanent barriers.

**5. Questions from the Floor:** There were no questions so Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.