**OAKLEY ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2022 1.**

Minutes of meeting held on 5th April 2022 in the Village Hall.

**PRESENT:**

Cllr Walker (Chair), 8 Parish Councillors, the Clerk to the Parish Council, Mr. Barlow (BFARE) and 6 members of the public.

**1. Apologies:**

Cllrs. Phillips & White

**2. Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting held on 6th April 2021:**

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

**3. Impact of East West Rail (EWR) – presentation by BFARE (Bedford for a Re-consultation)**

Chair introduced Mr. Barlow who had set up BFARE in response to EWR’s selection of route E to the north of Bedford. Mr. Barlow noted that BFARE comprised 12 parish councils, several Borough Councillors and members of the public, who considered that they were not adequately consulted on the route options and that there was a better option than route E.

An initial consultation was held in 2019, which was inadequate. There was one advertisement in the Times & Citizen and postcards were sent to some residents along the route corridor. There were 174,000 residents along the corridor and 125,000 postcards had been issued. Oakley had received none and only 5% of Clapham residents had received one. Route E was subsequently selected. BFARE considered that this was illogical as a route south of Bedford would be flatter and there was an existing transport corridor which could be followed. Route costs also changed dramatically. In 2019 route E to the north of Bedford was the most expensive. When the decision was made in 2020 there had been a 50 – 80% increase in costs for routes A, B, & C to the south. Mr. Fuller MP had challenged the costings in Parliament but the only explanation given had been for flood mitigation. The use of the line for freight was not included in the 2019 consultation but EWR had been discussing freight with the Port of Felixstowe. At present, electrification of EWR had not been agreed and the impact of diesel freight trains would be huge, especially as a 30% increase in freight was expected between now and 2032. There was also a lack of transparency from Bedford BC, who supported route E. Meetings to discuss EWR had not been made public and in 2019 Bedford BC had commissioned a report on EWR proposals which recommended re-opening the old Varsity line. The report was not published until a Freedom of Information request was submitted and a second report was commissioned which concluded that Bedford BC supported route E as it connected with the centre of Bedford providing economic benefits.

EWR held a second consultation in 2021 on various line alignments within the route E corridor. All the alignments would follow the Midland Mainline to Brew Point then cross the Great Ouse Way, the river, A6 and Clapham Road to the top of the Clapham escarpment. There were then various options, the southernmost followed a line to the south of Ravensden and north of Renhold, the northernmost to the north of Ravensden and Wilden. Again, costs were not revealed, and there was no substantive environmental or business case for the route. The impact on the Sainsbury roundabout would be immense as 42,000 truck movements would be required to dig out the Clapham escarpment alone. Stations and sidings would also need to be moved in Bedford. Bedford already suffered from poor air quality and the works and additional diesel trains would exacerbate the problem.

Chair asked how residents could help and Mr. Barlow suggested writing to the Secretary of State for Transport at Department for Transport, Great Minster House, 33 Horseferry Road, London, SW1P 4DR or shappsg@parliament.uk or the Minister of State for Transport, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA or wendy.morton.mp@parliament.uk asking for information on the business case for EWR and expressing concerns about environmental damage. Residents could also contact the Mayor and Cllr. Headley requesting that their views be taken into account. More information was available on the BFARE Facebook page and website [www.bfare.org.uk](http://www.bfare.org.uk)
Resident asked if a petition would be preferable and Mr. Barlow noted that there was a petition on the BFARE website, which currently had around 5,000 signatures. He added that BFARE was receiving stock responses from EWR and they were pressing for residents’ meetings but without success to date. Cllr. Olney noted that the Local Plan 2040 would be issued for consultation in May/June and residents could comment on EWR in their responses.

In response to Cllr. Saunders, Mr. Barlow commented that the new CEO, Beth West had been invited to meet BFARE but had not yet agreed to a meeting. He confirmed to Cllr. Fardon that Oakley PC was a member of BFARE.

Cllr. Sansom was concerned that EWR could facilitate the building of a new town around Twinwoods but Chair commented that a new town there was not included in the Local Plan to 2040.

Chair thanked Mr. Barlow for attending.

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

1. **Chairman’s Report**

Chair read Cllr. Phillips report in his absence.

2021/2022 had followed the business pattern of previous years, but of course there were some differences brought about by Covid 19.

One of the Country’s long term projects directly or indirectly affecting Oakley was the planning and routing of the East West Railway, the impact of which Mr. Barlow from BFARE had explained in detail. Meetings were attended and Council views expressed concerning a more accurate cost/benefit analysis and a call for a re-assessment of the chosen route. We joined forces with other affected villages working on strength in numbers.

**OAKLEY ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2022 2.**

Much discussion took place concerning Oakley Sports and Social Club opening hours and complaints were made to us about traffic congestion in the village as a result of the overwhelming support the club was receiving for some of their events. We sought legal advice concerning our responsibilities and have two councillors who attend Oakley Recreational Association meetings with the aim of both parties to create and gain greater understanding and promote greater ‘working together’.

We entered Linch Furlong, the Community Orchard and Riverside Meadow in the CPRE Living Countryside Awards 2021 and though we did not win, we got next best being Highly Commended. This indeed is testament to the hard work done by many over the years. We have also had discussions about improving biodiversity in Brockwell Meadow. Local residents have been involved throughout and when the groundwork takes place they will be involved again as will the Scouts/Guides etc groups

Our Tree Policy has been updated and during the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee year we will be planting more trees, as part of the Queen’s Green Canopy. Trees obtained from the Woodland Trust, Bedford Borough Council and others purchased by the Parish Council have already been planted with help from our young people.

Regular discussions took place concerning the new Oakley Pre-school premises off Chapel Pound. The Manager, Staff and Committee have worked hard in making the project a reality and we wish them well. Our local Police Officer attended one of our meetings which was beneficial and informative. We adopted our own Oakley Emergency Plan which we hope we will never have to use and we were represented on Remembrance Day and on Remembrance Sunday at the War Memorial. This year our Christmas lights were as good as ever and it was lovely for many of us to be present at the annual switch on at St Mary’s Church and to be able to sing carols again and enjoy the refreshments available.

The average speed cameras, into which we made quite a large investment, are there very much as a deterrent, but we are provided with enforcement information very erratically and lacking the detail we would like. Despite asking the Chief Constable and the Police and Crime Commissioner the information is still not forthcoming. The Speed Watch volunteer group continues to operate for two one hour sessions twice each month. Our aim is to educate motorists to comply with speed limits here and elsewhere. The safety of all is paramount and we need more help in the form of more volunteers. Two Speed Watch volunteers investigated speeding in the village and put together a very comprehensive report proposing an increase in the number of Speed Indicator Devices around the village. It was decided not to go ahead with the proposal but Council thanked them for their hard work.

The emptying of the dual purpose and other bins has not been without its problems, but thanks to the dogged determination of one of our members, Cllr. Phyllis Jones, most bins are being emptied as they should.

The need to get more from our limited financial resources continues. We purchased and erected new crisp but simple Oakley signs and replaced the litter bin at the Church Lane bus stop with a dual purpose bin. We also spent money on maintaining our play equipment and open spaces and supported many grant applications. Works to maintain our trees throughout the village will be carried out this month.

Our quarterly Oakley Newsletter publications continue to thrive as does the ‘must have’ Oakley Directory from which we are grateful to receive additional funds for the benefit of the village. Our thanks to Cllr. Sara Fardon for leading the Directory team.

In this report I can only focus on a few subjects, but full details can be found on the village website. We all do our best for the good of Oakley and village residents are always at the centre of all we do. I would like to thank our Vice Chair for supporting me at difficult times and our fellow councillors for their support and for the sacrifices they have made to serve their community. I know I speak for every councillor when I say that our achievements are only possible thanks to the total support and dedication of our Clerk, Ann Paice, who has also provided support to me during difficult times. Finally, I would like to thank all our volunteers, who run our village groups, pick up litter, plant and water the entrance sign gardens, look after the War Memorial and run the Speed Watch events. Special thanks also to Bill Chalker for all his work to put together the Newsletter each quarter. We very much appreciate all your efforts.

1. **Parish Precept 2022/23:**

The precept for 2022/23 was set at £55,750 which is a 1.9% increase in the precept amount but a 0.3% decrease in the band D payment from £56.73 to £56.55 p.a. as the number of households paying Council Tax had increased.

**c) Draft Accounts for 2021/2022:**

In 2021/22 income amounted to £94,313.19 and expenditure to £85,722.28. Income increased by approximately £17,883 largely because a £25,000 Bedford BC Rural Grant was received by the Parish Council for payment to Oakley Pre-School. This was offset by a decrease in VAT receipts of £3,078 as capital expenditure was less in 2020/21 than in 2019/20; a reduction in bottle bank income of £2,849 to none in 2021/22 as the bottle bank was relocated outside the parish because of fly tipping and noise and a decrease in allotment income of £1,231 because of a Ward Fund grant of £1,125 for ditch works in 2020/21.

Expenditure increased by approximately £8,526. The Rural Grant of £25,000 was paid by the Borough Council to Pre-School through the Parish Council accounts. This was offset by reductions of £7,000 in grounds maintenance because of the large number of tree works carried out in 2020/21; £3,225 for the Newsletter and Directory as additional monies were spent on the website in 2020/21 to meet new accessibility requirements plus the printing costs for the final Newsletter of 2021/22 and the Directory had yet to be invoiced. Also, £2,542 less was spent on play area repairs; £1,927 less on donations as the Youth Club had been closed for much of 2020 so reserves were higher than usual and £1,655 less on VAT payments as Council expenditure, excluding the Rural Grant, was less than in 2020/21.

Donations totalling £5,072.80 were made to the Pre-School, the Village Hall, the Youth Club, The Day Centre, the Parochial Church Council, the police Bobby Scheme and the RBL for a poppy wreath.

**OAKLEY ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2022 2.**

1. **Planning:**

During 2021/22 the Parish Council was consulted on and commented on a total of 38 planning and related applications, compared to 47 in 2020/21. Most were for relatively minor works but Council objected to 2 applications on the grounds of overdevelopment, impact on the character of the local area and poor access.

As a general policy Council asks for trees not to be removed unless they cannot not be saved and, if they have to be felled, for replacements to be planted in their place. Council objected to the removal of the tree at the entrance to Ruffs Furze as it was an important memorial tree but permission was granted to fell because of concerns about damage to the footway and the neighbouring driveway. A replacement tree was required as part of the planning consent.

Council continued to object to the resin parapets on the Highfield Road bridge as they were completely out of keeping with the surrounding area and these were replaced with the brick effect parapets that have been installed. Not what was hoped for but better than the resin blocks.

Council also objected to the proposal for the 40 houses off Station Road as it is contrary to the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan. Only 30 houses are needed on this site and the site plan includes additional land not allocated in the Neighbourhood Plan.

Council objected to two neighbouring applications, the continued use of the temporary hard standing at East End, Pavenham because of the impact on views across the Ouse valley and the danger from HGV vehicles that would have to use the crossroads to access the site and the broiler unit near Rushden, as fields around Oakley would be used to store and spread the manure contributing to air pollution and creating the potential for polluting the river. The Pavenham application was refused and a decision has yet to be made on the broiler unit.

The draft Local Plan 2040 was issued for consultation and Council commented that the housing requirement of 1,275 p.a. was too high, environmental net gain should be specified rather than biodiversity net gain and should be set at 20% rather than the 10% in Government legislation and delivered on or within 5km of a development site. Protection for the Great Ouse Valley should also be included in policies and the impact of other plans such as East West Rail, which would impact the locations for growth, should be considered. A further consultation on the Plan would be issued in early Summer.

**6. Questions from the Floor:**

Resident asked about the 2022 community litter pick and Chair confirmed that it would be held on Saturday 7th May starting and finishing at the Scout Hut, where refreshments would be available. There would also be chocolate eggs for young people taking part.

Chair noted that residents were welcome to all Council meetings or could email the Clerk and councillors with any queries. She thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.