

Minutes of meeting held on 2nd April 2024 in the Village Hall.

PRESENT:

Cllr Fardon (Chair), 8 Parish Councillors, the Clerk to the Parish Council and 3 members of the public.

1. **Apologies:** Cllrs. Bays and C. Worker

2. **Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting held on 4th April 2023:**

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

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

a) **Chairman's Report**

Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Since last year's meeting, the make-up of the Parish Council has changed with new councillors Richard Worker, Carla Bays, Thomas Saunders and Caroline Worker all taking their seats on the Council. Our Borough Councillors Jane and Jon were returned to office at the election, looking after the joint ward of Clapham and Oakley. Whilst I have served on the Parish Council for many years it was a new year for me as Chair and ably supported by Robert Saunders as Vice Chair, I have found it very interesting and engaging.

The activities of the Parish Council tend to break down into four main areas:-

- 1) Planning
- 2) Looking at good things for the village
- 3) Parking/verges/general anti-social behaviour
- 4) Supporting others to make the village a community

Planning

A really important topic. The full detail of planning and all that the Parish Council has been involved in is going to be covered by Ann. It is worth pointing out though that as Oakley Parish Council we do not have the power to approve or reject any planning application. We have a small group of councillors who review planning applications and make comments for the Parish Council to form its views and feedback through the process. We are very fortunate to also have the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) group, who are knowledgeable in areas of planning. We are keen to ensure that the Neighbourhood Development Plan is adhered to and we have taken steps to be certain that the NDP is given due consideration throughout the planning process.

It is worth mentioning that on East West Rail, the Parish Council is a member of the local representatives' group and councillors have attended each meeting and reported back. East West Rail will shortly be starting a statutory consultation on their preferred route.

Looking at good things for the village

Turning now to good things for the village. We really enjoyed the Christmas Lights switch on last year, along with the carols and dolls telling the Christmas story. Thank you to St Mary's Church for hosting, to everyone who provided refreshments in the church after the switch on

and to the village organisations who supplied beautiful wreaths to decorate it. It really does make it feel like the start of the Christmas Season. Our Christmas tree just inside the car park is growing nicely as well and looked lovely with the range of coloured lights on it. We are investing in new lights this year as the ones at Highfield Road have come to the end of their life, with the icicles being quite delicate now and prone to breakages. We plan to install lights on the lamp columns in Lovell Road to give a festive welcome to those coming into the village from Clapham. It is currently with the Borough for them to approve the use of the lamp columns, so all being well, this will be able to go ahead.

At Brockwell meadow, we have been working to increase biodiversity. The native trees we planted, along with fruit trees are getting established and the wildflowers sown, will hopefully be visible over the course of spring and summer. 25 trees were planted in Riverside and Brockwell Meadows under the Borough Council's free trees scheme in February. We have also applied for hedging in Riverside under the CPRE hedge project and are awaiting a decision on the funding available. Thank you to Pat Knight who manages the land in Linch Furlong and down by the river and works to increase biodiversity and make our environment attractive for us to enjoy.

Anti-Social behaviour

We regularly review and look at the environment we live in and we receive many comments on the activities of "others", who make life difficult for the rest of us. Parking on pavements, across T junctions, to the edges of junctions all causes difficulties for drivers and pedestrians alike. Parking over residents' driveways when the schools start and finish is another. Driving over the verges and tearing up the grass is another. Filling the bin on Station Road is good thing – walking for an extra minute to continue filling a new bin would also be good thing – leaving dog poo bags on top of the bin and next to the full one is not. Chucking litter around is not good – and I have noticed that we do seem to be the exact right distance from fast food outlets for many people to dispose of their packaging as they get onto the bypass at Browns Wood.

A quick thankyou here to our many litter pickers around the village and to Phyllis who monitors all bins and checks they are emptied – usually problems arise when our main dog bin emptier is on holiday.

We have agreed to put some bollards into The Furlong to help residents with access and requested yellow lines at the entrances to Reynes Drive and Flax Close to help drivers and residents at school time on the grounds of safety. These have recently been marked. We have had requests for other places in the village but we do not wish to put in yellow lines at all. We are a village and we want to maintain that feel as much as possible. We do report anti-social parking to the police – if you send a photograph to the Clerk, we will send it on. The school in turn is engaging with "dropper offers" over inconsiderate parking. Of course, the harmonisation of the schools finishing in the afternoon, has not helped. I think we understand this is a short-term issue.

Our Speedwatch group have been diligently monitoring speeds throughout the village – sometimes revealing results to the amazement of us all – someone driving at 50 mph on Pavenham Road. The speed watch team is going to work in different places in the village –

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looking at the bend on Reynes Drive near the green and we feel it may be useful to look at traffic numbers and speed round by the Pub considering the new proposed development. The group have recorded and analysed a lot of data and are really building up a comprehensive picture of the profile of traffic and speeds – bearing in mind that the high viz jackets automatically have the effect of slowing drivers down, meaning in all reality their data is understated. Thank you to them.

Being active within the community

The ambiance of Oakley makes it a great place to live. We are lucky that the boundaries of the river, with its flood plains and the railway act to stop the shape and size of Oakley changing radically. We are active with lots of things to do and lots of people doing their bit to make this a great place to live. Volunteering is good for your health and makes you happier. In Oakley we have a huge variety of groups which are run by amazing volunteers as shown in the annual village directory, which this year has been produced by Parish Councillor Caroline Worker and a group of volunteers. Thank you to everyone who gives their time in this way to run all groups in the village.

On behalf of the Parish Council, we have Bill Chalker who does a magnificent job of producing our quarterly Village News, Sonya Playford and her team who ran the Youth Club, plus all the litter pickers who have a never-ending job helping to keep our village tidy. Additionally, Richard and Caroline Worker have been running the monthly quiz, which has proved

- A) Very popular
- B) Quite popular
- C) Not popular at all?

Of course, the answer is A and recently six village organisations were the recipients of cheques from the proceeds of the quiz – they were AFC Oakley (Juniors) , the Methodist Church (Messy Church), PCC (Messy Church), Brownies, Scout Group and the Youth Club. The Parish Council has limited funds available to local organisations which can be applied for from the Clerk. Last year, the Parish Council gave grants to Country Days (for local children to access a nature project at Felmersham), Oakley Youth Club, Oakley Village Hall and Oakley Day Centre. A poppy wreath was also purchased from the Royal British Legion, which gives me the opportunity to say thank you to all the knitters the village for the fabulous display of poppies.

Thank you to Parish Councillors and to Ann

Last but not by any means least, I would like to thank all councillors for their engagement and responsibilities – from monitoring of bin emptying, to running the NDP, to keeping an eye on the village pavements, potholes, trees, drains – we have worked well together. Thankyou. In particular, I would like to thank Ann for her work as Clerk to the Parish Council. She is exceptionally experienced and as a team of Parish Councillors that is to our benefit. Thankyou Ann.

b) Parish Precept 2024/25:

The precept for this year has been set at £58,200 which is a 2.36% increase and which will increase the band D rate by 1.9% from £57.68 to £58.77.

c) Draft Accounts for 2022/2024:

In 2023/24 income amounted to £74,657.95 and expenditure to £81,815.08. Income increased by approximately £5,137 as a result a Ward Fund grant of £750 for a new defibrillator at the Methodist Church, which will be installed shortly and several other small increases. The precept increased by £1,110, the VAT refund by £565 largely due to the cost of the new slide purchased in 2022/23, the Borough Council, increased their contribution to the cost of grass cutting in the village by £512 and £434 more was received for Newsletter and Directory advertisements.

Expenditure increased by approximately £1,136. Capital expenditure increased by £7,883 due to the purchase of a replacement roundabout at a cost of £7,931 using CIL money from the Parrott Close development and VAT payments increased by £1,399 in consequence. The quiz also raised £1,585.

This was offset by decreases of £2,565 in the Newsletter printing costs as 5 editions were invoiced in 2022/23 and only three in 2023/24; a reduction in grants to local organisations of £2,068 despite the donation of the quiz proceeds, as the ORA and Kindergarten did not apply for grants last year and the Village Hall applied for less; a reduction in wages of £2,151 because an incorrect tax code for the Clerk in 2022/23 resulted in an overpayment of PAYE and consequently no payments were required in 2023/24; £1,826 less spent on the allotments due to the work in 2022/23 to clear new plots and replace the gate and only £100 spent on rent of land from Oakley Properties compared to £1,813 the previous year as the 2023/24 payment fell into the 2022/23 financial year.

Donations totalling £4,550 plus £1,257.44 from the quiz were made to the organisations mentioned by the Chair. The difference in quiz receipts and payments was because the proceeds from the March quiz, which will be included in the 2024/25 donations, had already been paid into the Council account and £96 was spent on prizes in 2023/24.

d) Planning

During 2023/24 the Parish Council was consulted on and commented on a total of 31 planning and related applications, compared to 35 in 2022/23. As a general policy Council asks for trees and hedges 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. Sadly, several large trees owned by the parish fell during the storms last winter but Council will be replacing them in due course.

Most applications were for relatively minor works but Council objected to five applications. We objected to a new detached house behind houses in Pavenham Road and one in place of a garage in Dewlands on the grounds that the applications did not conform to the Neighbourhood Plan or Borough Local Plan. Sufficient new houses are already allocated in the Neighbourhood Plan and these dwellings would constitute back land development and set a precedent. The Pavenham Road dwelling would also impinge on a locally important view in the Neighbourhood Plan to the west along the river valley and the Dewlands dwelling would

be cramped and out of keeping with surroundings. Both are awaiting decisions from the Borough Council.

Council objected to the broiler plant in Northamptonshire because of the impact of spreading of manure from the site on fields around Oakley and an extension in The Drive because it was out of keeping with surroundings. The latter was withdrawn and a decision has yet to be made on the broiler plant. Council also continued to object to the development of 500 homes off Milton Road, Clapham on the grounds that the developer has only offered to fund a quarter of the estimated cost of a footway along Highfield Road as part of the works. Students would be walking to Lincroft School along Highfield Road which currently has no path or lights and they would either have to cross the bypass slip road or Highfield Road twice. They therefore need a path to walk safely. The application has recently been deferred by the Borough Council planning Committee.

The application for up to 40 houses off Station Road went to appeal and although Council and the Neighbourhood Plan Group reiterated our objections to the Planning Inspector, as up to 40 houses are not needed on the site, the appeal was granted. Council and the NDP Group held discussions with the agents for the High Street development and as a result, their proposal for up to 13 houses with no bungalows was reduced to up to 10 and now does also include bungalows. Council therefore supported the outline application for the site provided it complies with the Neighbourhood Plan and is awaiting the Borough's decision.

The 2040 Borough Local Plan was rejected by the Planning Inspector because of concerns about delivery of National Highway projects and how quickly housing could be built at Little Barford and Kempston Hardwick. Further work is now ongoing to reach agreement with National Highways and allocate additional housing but the Borough has confirmed that they would not be looking for more houses in Oakley at present. The Neighbourhood Plan was reviewed in Summer 2022 with no changes needed and will not require another review until after the 2040 Local Plan is agreed.

4. Questions from the Floor:

A resident was concerned that more villagers did not attend the Annual Meetings and suggested Council should publicise better. Council noted that agendas were posted on the website, Facebook and notice boards. Chair added that residents did regularly attend monthly Council meetings to raise specific issues and lack of attendance at this meeting indicated that they were generally satisfied with the Oakley environment.

A resident suggested that a discussion on East West Rail would encourage villagers to attend but Council noted that, as Oakley residents were not directly impacted, they were less concerned than those in Clapham where the line would run through the village. East West Rail was, however, an item on every monthly Council meeting.

Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.