

Minutes of meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 in the Village Hall.

**PRESENT:**

Cllr Fardon (Chair), 9 Parish Councillors, the Clerk to the Parish Council and 2 members of the public.

1. **Apologies:** Cllr. C. Worker

2. **Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2024:**

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**

Welcome to the Annual Parish Meeting 2025. The Parish Council, in this current composition has been in place for two years now and we are well into our stride of serving the village to the best of our ability. The activity of the Parish Council is varied and different - all with the interests of the village at heart and tend to break down into four main areas:-

- 1) Planning
- 2) Looking at good things for the village
- 3) Environment/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 an application. We are one of many consultees and can support or object to an application but the Borough makes the decision and does not have to agree with us. We are very fortunate to also have the 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.

During this year, East West Rail (EWR) started its non-statutory consultation which ran over November - January time. This is just one part of the planning process and there will be more consultation to come. The Parish Council feeds comments into these. We have also raised queries with Richard Fuller, our MP, in relation to the parking around Bedford Hospital, which does give particular cause for concern. Of course we do not have answers for this, but it is good to get it onto the agenda so that the issues are logged for discussion and taken into consideration.

Lincroft School has been on the agenda this year. Its planning intent came out last January detailing plans of the new hall that we can see being built. With many pupils intended to come from the new housing development at Clapham the plan is that they walk to school without increasing traffic and parking.

We objected to the new housing in Clapham as we did not feel that the developers were taking into consideration the need for a footway along Highfield Road - some money had been allocated, but not enough to make a proper footway. The school has also featured recently, as many villagers will know, as it has carried out a consultation to consider extra capacity - this capacity is already being built into the school, so it is not about any new building. Of course, we all know the impact on the village is in respect of parking and congestion at school times and our public meeting held in February covered that in depth - with some good ideas taken back by the school. It is frustrating that the consultation, carried out by the Department of Education, is not there to consider the impact on the village, so we are asking for a representative from the highways team to join one of our meetings in the next month or so.

Unfortunately, each of these projects seems to be dealt with in isolation, rather than a holistic approach being taken across the village. The new housing site on Station Road is now up for sale with its outline planning permission for up to 40 houses. This of course will only add extra traffic to the village and the school area and the new residents may in turn find their locale becoming a convenient parking space for school traffic twice a day.

### **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 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 has really grown, so much so that the lights did not reach the top. We had always said we were going to have the lights in the trees on a temporary basis until our tree grew and now we are in a position to utilise the growing tree fully.

We applied for hedging in Riverside under the CPRE hedge project and have recently received and planted those. 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.

### **Our Environment and Anti-Social Behaviour**

I want to start this section by focusing on grass cutting. We have had the first cut this year and the village looks great, so I am feeling very optimistic and have my fingers crossed that we will continue in this vein. Last year, the grass cutting in the village led to many complaints and Ann has to be commended on her efforts to get the grass cutters to turn up and cut all on one day, to clear up and to trim around the signage and lamp posts. The contractors were very responsive to Ann, but it has to be said we would prefer that they were able to do the job perfectly without complaining.

The Parish Council works hard to make sure Oakley is a pleasant place to live. Of course, this requires engagement and the same feeling from others to contribute. Last year I wrote about overflowing dog bins. This year, I am pleased to see the large-size bins in Oakley have done the trick. Councillor Phyllis Jones is most vigilant in making sure they are emptied regularly.

We do employ a litter picker as well, and as a result, our village generally looks pleasing to the eye. I know that there are many people who do pick up litter around the village, so thank you to them.

Some things do take a good time for us to resolve. We have agreed to put some bollards into The Furlong to help residents with access. They are taking a very long time to get put into place, which does feel unsatisfactory. We have also put in yellow lines at the entrances to Reynes Drive and Flax Close on the grounds of safety, to help drivers and residents at school time. 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 have our Speedwatch Group who have diligently been monitoring speeds throughout the village – sometimes revealing results to the amazement of us all – someone driving at 50 miles per hour on Pavenham Road. The group has recorded and analysed a lot of data and is really building up a comprehensive profile of traffic and speeds – bearing in mind that the high viz jackets automatically have the effect of drivers slowing down, meaning in all reality their data is understated. Thank you to all who are part of the Speedwatch Group. For those that knew him Arwyn Jones, who was one of the founder members of Speedwatch in Oakley, recently passed away and our condolences go to his family.

### **The Village as a Community**

The ambiance of Oakley makes it a great place to live. We are lucky that the river, with its flood plains and the railway act as boundaries 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 who are run by amazing volunteers. Thank you to everyone who gives their time in this way to run all the 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. The newsletter is a great look at village life and tells a good story of all that Oakley has to offer.

In May we agreed to purchase a new defibrillator which was fitted at the Methodist Church. Also, we have done a full review of defibrillators following on from awareness that not all the defibrillators were registered with the Ambulance Service. Enquiries showed that this was because a new system for registering defibrillators has been introduced. We have now got all defibrillators registered and have published details of their locations in the newsletter and will repeat this annually. A map is on each notice board showing the location of all defibrillators in the village.

Additionally, Richard and Caroline Worker have continued to run the monthly quiz, which is exceptionally popular. At the end of the first year local groups received a share of profits and all were very appreciative of the monies received. For 2024/25 the monies have been distributed to Scouts, Brownies/Rainbows, Messy Church., AFC Junior Football, ATC and to the Day Centre and the home for the disabled in High Street. The Parish Council has limited funds available to local organisations which can be applied for from the Clerk.

Over this year, the Parish Council gave grants to the Country Days (for local children to access a nature project at Felmersham), Oakley Kindergarten, Oakley Youth Club, The Villager Bus, OSCC, Oakley Village Hall, Oakley Day Centre and the Brownies. 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)

Last year, there were plans to hold a beacon lighting to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of D Day. This was to be done in conjunction with Clapham. However, as trees had been planted on the previous beacon site Clapham Parish Council needed a new site and they were unable to formalise this in time for the date which was a real shame. However, on 8<sup>th</sup> May this year, the beacons will be lit to celebrate VE Day and we will be joining in with Clapham and welcome all villagers to this event.

Last but my no means least, should 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 and drains – we have worked well together. Thank you to you all. Thank you to Councillor Robert Saunders for being Vice Chair and standing in to chair meetings when needed. In particular, and on behalf of all of us, 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 2025/26:**

The precept for this year has been set at £61,100 which is a 4.98% increase in the precept and which will increase the band D rate by 4.4% from £58.56 to £61.38.

**c) Draft Accounts for 2024/2025:**

In 2024/25 income amounted to £80,964.93 and expenditure to £81,295.74. Income increased by approximately £6,306 as a result of an increase in quiz income of £1,927 and additional interest of £4,177. Ward Fund grants increased by £837 as £1,587 was received for ditch works and a new bin on the Green last year compared to £750 for a new defibrillator in 2023/24 and VAT receipts by £1,399 but this was offset by a reduction of £2,764 in receipts for Newsletter and Directory advertisements.

Expenditure remained very similar to last year, decreasing by just £519. Capital expenditure decreased by £4,386 as new Christmas lights, replacement bins in Lovell Road & on the Green, a new defibrillator case and a replacement flag were purchased in 2024/25 whereas a replacement roundabout cost £7,931 using CIL money from the Parrott Close development and a new defibrillator £750 in 2023/24. The decrease in capital expenditure was offset by increases of £1,475 in grants to local organisations excluding quiz proceeds, an additional £1,064 spent on the allotments for tree and ditch works and £1,539 for the 2023 election costs which were not invoiced until 2024.

Donations totalling £6,025 were made to the organisations mentioned by the Chair and £2,559.51 from the quiz was given to various youth groups in the village.

(There are difference in quiz receipts and payments because the proceeds from the March quiz, which will be included in the 2025/26 donations, have already been paid into the Council account and £194 was spent on prizes in 2024/25).

**d) Planning**

During 2024/25 the Parish Council was consulted on and commented on a total of 29 planning and related applications, compared to 31 in 2023/24. 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. All applications were for relatively minor works and Council did not object to any. The application for a new detached house behind houses in Pavenham Road, which Council objected to and which was awaiting a decision from the Borough Council last April, has still yet to be decided as the Borough Council is awaiting additional information from the applicant. The application for a dwelling in place of a garage in Dewlands, which was also awaiting a decision last year was refused.

The planning consent for the 500 homes off Milton Road, Clapham now includes a condition requiring a footway along Highfield Road as part of the works in addition to the improvements to the footway along Lovell Road. The Parish Council has therefore agreed that the £5,317 CIL money remaining from the Parrott Close development, which was to go towards this footway, can be re-allocated to buy new play equipment and a new seat in the small children's play area on the Green. The outline application for up to 10 houses off the High Street was approved and we are awaiting a reserved matters application, which will detail the layout of the site. As the Chair has said, the land for up to 40 houses off Station Road is currently up for sale.

The Borough Local Plan 2040 has yet to be agreed but an extension to the 2030 Plan ensures the 5-year land supply remains for the present. The Neighbourhood Plan will not require another review until after the 2040 Local Plan is agreed but no new housing is expected to be needed in Oakley up to 2040.

**4. Questions from the Floor:**

A resident asked about the footway in Highfield Road and suggested a path on the Judges Spinney side might discourage fly tipping there. Cllr. Walker advised that it had not been decided which side of the road the path would be as there were issues on both sides. The resident also asked about EWR and Cllr. Walker explained that a statutory consultation was due at the end of 2025 but EWR needed to produce a business case first. Everyone was awaiting the Government decision on the Universal project as that would affect EWR. The lack of a decision on Universal was also the reason why the Local Plan 2040 had not yet been finalised.

A resident asked about the bollards in The Furlong which were due to be installed by the end of March. Council agreed that it was unacceptable that the these had been delayed again and Cllr. Abbott would pursue with the Borough Portfolio Holder.

A resident was disappointed that so few villagers had attended the meeting and asked how many read Council minutes on the website. Clerk to ascertain.

Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.