

Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 9th May 2016 at the Village Hall, Memorial Lane, Bletsoe**Present:**

Cllrs Ann Gibbons (Chairman), John Economides, Alison Foster, Edward Bean, Mary Laws, Claire Woodward, and the Clerk. There were 4 members of the public present.

1. Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending. Full copy of the Chairman's report is on the parish council website at www.bletsoe.net

Alison Field Foster, Mary Laws and Paul Caves joined the meeting.

2. Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 20th April 2015 - copies of the minutes were available for all present. **It was resolved** to approve the minutes as a true record of the meeting.

Clerk

3. Annual Reports from members of Bletsoe Parish Council

Planning – Cllr Mary Laws

Between May 2015 and today the parish council has reviewed and considered 7 applications within the Parish and 1 application outside the parish.

We commented on 1 major application and there were 6 other applications where it was considered that there would be no detrimental impact on the community and it was decided not to comment.

The application outside the Parish was the Growing Beds revised plans, which the parish council objected to on the same grounds as the original application given that it could have a detrimental impact on the community.

I have copies of the Years Planning Reports prepared by our clerk if anyone would like to look through them to see each application that we discussed this year.

All plans can be viewed on line at www.bedford.gov.uk/searchplans

Moving on to much larger plans. We have recently met with Marcol, Bedfordia and DLP who consulted with us on the proposed new settlement on the Twinwoods Business Park site. They have submitted a joint proposal to Bedford Borough council as part of the call for sites. They were keen to make sure that we understood that at present it is just a concept and that we would be consulted at each stage should it be agreed by the Borough call for sites that the site could be developed. If this goes ahead it would be large development taking up to 20 years to complete with 6,000 houses. There would be appropriate infrastructure such as re-aligning of the A6 starting at the end of the Clapham bypass, by-passing Milton Ernest with a road to the new development and 2 single carriageway roads one to come out near the Waterworks on the A6 and another to the Sharnbrook Crossroads. There would also be a new Secondary School, 4 Primary Schools a Health Centre and retail Village. At the meeting, many questions were asked raising our concerns. DLP offered to provide digital copies of the development which we haven't yet received which we could display. It is as I said earlier it is only in the first stages and nothing definite is decided. Copies of the minutes taken from this meeting were offered to

the members of the public so they could see the sort of questions the parish council raised.

Highways – Cllr Paul Caves – currently due to cut backs at the Borough there are no longer regular meetings with Highways or Beds Borough Council. The only route the parish council have to highways is to contact the highways help desk, the pothole hit squad or we occasionally email one of the highways officers. Contact details for reporting any problems regarding highways can be found on the Borough website at www.bedford.gov.uk or telephone the main switchboard on 01234 267422.

Play Area - Cllr Paul Caves. There are currently a few outstanding jobs for the report this year. The play area is regularly checked by myself and I would also like to thank the volunteers who undertook some maintenance and repainting of the equipment in the past year.

Waiting for the Sun appeal – Cllr Alison Foster. As you will be aware the appeal took place at the High Court in October 2015 and the judge found in favour of Mr Allen but advised the Secretary of State that he had grounds for appeal which he has now done. The appeal is now scheduled for the 9th and 10th June at the Court of Appeal in London. Bedford Borough Council has still has not put forward any land of its own in the latest call for sites and this has been the main objection by Mr Allen. A decision should be reached approximately 6 weeks after the hearing takes place.

NDP – Cllr John Economides

I would like to recap on what is a Neighbourhood Development Plan and why Bletsoe needs one?

- A Neighbourhood Plan sets out how OUR COMMUNITY would like its land to be developed and used.
- It covers issues such as where new homes and offices should be built and what they should look like. It also helps us to get the right type of development for our community.
- Plans must also meet the needs of the wider, local area. Saying “no more development” is not an option, but having our say means that our views will be considered as part of the Borough Council’s assessment of housing and other development needs in the local area.
- Bletsoe’s Neighbourhood Plan will be developed during 2014, 2015 and 2016.
- It will be subject to a referendum organised by Bedford Borough Council (now to be held in 2017).
- The referendum will ask our community to vote on a simple question - *“Do we want Bedford Borough Council to use our Neighbourhood Plan for Bletsoe to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area?”* and must gain a “yes” from 50% of those who vote.

Progress has been slower than anticipated these past 12 months, mainly down to the fact that BBC Planning have been slow in providing us with additional information about the way NDP’s should evolve. We have reviewed and discussed at length the various potential development sites for the village put forward at the call for sites made by the BBC in 2014 and we are now in a position where we are finalising our Options and Issues report.

We have applied for additional funding from the DCLG (Department for Communities and Local Government) that has been conditionally approved subject to a due diligence process. We have also recently engaged with Woods Hardwick planners in Bedford, to provide us with planning expertise, so that we can produce an evidence based NDP. The additional funding will be used for their necessary involvement.

We plan to engage with the villagers within the next few months so that we can gauge their response to our suggested/preferred development locations. We have held discussions with BPHA (Pilgrims) about potentially working with them, if we were to go ahead and use the old parish playing field (one of the preferred sites), for future development. These discussions, including a session with parish councillors in March this year, have thus far been very encouraging, as BPHA have demonstrated a very flexible approach to working with us and they are happy for the parish to retain control of any designs of the actual houses we intend to build. We intend to visit some sites where BPHA have recently developed houses to view first-hand the quality of the homes and whether any issues have been met within these communities.

The additional DCLG funding has a time limit of 6 months to complete and assuming this is verified this month, then we must complete our NDP by November 2016. This remains in line with the revised Beds Borough Council schedule for completion of NDP's.

Finance – Cllr John Economides

I personally spent some time with Alison, our Parish Clerk, a few months ago. Although I am not a financial expert, I am happy that Alison follows good practice as regards financial processes and procedures on behalf of the Bletsoe Parish Council.

The Bletsoe parish budget and the associated spend is reviewed at each Parish Council meeting. I can report that the 2015/16 budget was adhered to. Our current year to date spend is within budget and we forecast keeping to this for the financial year.

At a previous PC meeting we discussed the precept for the forthcoming year (April 2016 to March 2017) and we reduced our predicted costs so that the precept for this year is 13% less than last year. This in turn should help to reduce the villagers' council tax bill for the year. However, unfortunately Bedford Borough Council have generally slightly increased the village band costs due to additional policing, fire and rescue, adult social care and council charges.

During the past year grants were requested and awarded by the PC to the St. Mary's Church Chancel project and to the Village Hall improvement project. These grants were taken from undesignated funds and both these initiatives will, we believe, greatly benefit the village community.

Bus and Transport – Cllr Edward Bean. In the past year, the bus service has been reliable and punctual. The Grant palmer depot is based in Flitwick so if a bus breaks down or is involved in accident this takes at least 45 mins minimum to source a replacement. I have requested the statistics for the no 28 bus from Bedford Borough Council and asked for the timings to be altered as there is no suitable late afternoon return service to either Bletsoe or Riseley. I have also proposed a minor change to

the route which would serve more passengers with drop off points via Avon Drive, past St Thomas More School, Manton Lane, Clapham Road down Tavistock Street and St Peters Street. This would attract more customers and could help to reduce pollution and congestion and provide a more useful service to shoppers who are unable to drive. There is still concern that the Coplowe Lane route for buses is an unsatisfactory route as there is concern for motorists turning out of Coplowe Barn and also pedestrians and horse riders on the road. We will continue to monitor the situation and work with Grant Palmer to ensure the drivers are aware of our concerns on this section of the route.

End of Year Accounts

The accounts were noted. What was the spend for the Bletsoe Gazette? This relates to print costs; the remaining balance is being held by the parish council until a new volunteer takes over the Bletsoe Gazette.

4. Public Open Session

No further questions.

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Approved by Chairman 22 May 2017