

**Minutes of meeting of Bletsoe Parish Council held on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> July 2016 at the Village Hall, Memorial Lane, Bletsoe**

**Present:**

Present: Ann Gibbons (Chairman), Edward Bean, Paul Caves, John Economides, Alison Foster, Mary Laws, Claire Woodward and the Clerk. There were also 8 members of the public.

1. **Apologies for absence**

None

2. **Declarations of Interest**

All members declared a local interest in matters relating to the NDP and matters relating to the Old Parish Field. Cllrs Foster & Cllr Laws also declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in matters relating to the NDP. However, dispensations have been granted to all members who therefore have the right to speak and vote on this item. All members also declared a local interest in matters relating to the Waiting for the Sun similarly dispensations have been granted to all members who therefore have the right to speak and vote on this item.

3. **To approve the minutes of previous meeting held on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> May**

**It was resolved** to approve the minutes.

Clerk

4. **Matters arising from minutes**

SMH Fleet Solutions – Cllr Economides had spoken with the owner regarding the light pollution. They were co-operative and have made changes to direction of the lighting direction - currently there are no issues with the lights.

Swings – Solutions for Playgrounds will carry out this work when they undertake the other play area repairs. Cllr Caves to arrange for the new swing seats to be available to the contractors on the day of installation.

P Caves

Flooding on Coplowe Lane near Herdsman Farm – The borough highways department have undertaken a site visit. They will put cameras underground to assess if there are any obstructions i.e. tree roots. Cllr Laws has suggested they contact Cllr Caves who can provide information regarding localised flooding issues in the past in this location.

Thanks to Paul and Adrian who have sanded down and repainted the goalposts on the playing field.

Cllr Towler joined the meeting.

It was reported that the street party and village fete had taken place and both events were well attended.

At the last Town and Parish Network meeting the keynote speaker was Kathryn Holloway who spoke about policing in rural areas. Bedfordshire Police are now reviewing which police stations will be kept and which will be sold off. There was good news for rural areas who will have a greater police presence and currently there is a recruitment drive for special constables to deliver this service. In the future there could be a sharing of facilities with the local fire service. Riseley police station is not being closed at the moment. Currently there is a PC and a special constable based in Riseley although this is only part-time.

5. **Public Open Session**NDP questionnaire

People have expressed disappointment in the last questionnaire which was circulated. The complaints were based on clarity, perceived bias in the part of the development plan in selecting sites and it was not presented clearly with consideration for visually impaired residents. Why was document sent it round in its current condition? Did the parish council support this questionnaire?

Perhaps NDP group should disband. *Cllr Gibbons responded that the NDP group recognised there were errors with the questionnaire which has now been withdrawn and a replacement would be sent out in due course. She apologised on behalf of the group for this mistake but re-iterated to the meeting that all members are volunteers who do not claim to be experts in this field. This was a genuine mistake which would be resolved. The NDP will be discussed in more detail later in the meeting and public questions would be allowed for this item.*

Memorial Bench

The Village Hall management committee (VHMC) would like to install a memorial bench dedicated to David Martin. The VHMC would pay for the bench and installation and would like to permission to install a circular bench around the young Oak tree on the village playing field. **It was resolved** to grant permission for the bench although it might be worth waiting until the oak tree was more mature as some of the branches are still quite low to the ground and there would not be sufficient clearance for anyone wishing to use the bench.

Car park relocation

There is an item on the agenda regarding extending the existing village hall car park. Can the PC explain where the car park would be and whether this would affect the existing children's play area? Also, would the PC consider installing more play equipment for older children? *The chairman reported that the PC had put in an application for funding for equipment for older children's play equipment. Currently we have not made any decisions regarding extending the car park. Cllr Woodward has offered to progress this item on behalf of the PC. Once we have some proposals the PC will consult with residents and the wildflower/playing field steering group to see how any proposals could be incorporated. This would most likely be later on this year when we will know whether our application for funding for play equipment has been approved.*

6. **Wildflower Project**

The seeding event was well attended although we have not managed to seed all the areas but 8 zones have been completed so far. Our thanks go to Adrian and Paul for their work on the field – cutting and undertaking tree work. The steering group has 7 members, we have had 3 meetings so far and are starting to produce a maintenance plan for the village field. A copy of the proposed terms of reference had been circulated prior to the meeting although it was noted that not all members had read the document due to other commitments.

The steering group proposed the following:

To include more than just the wild flower planted areas but also to consider other uses for the playing field whilst considering impact on wildlife for the whole of the field. Members of the PC were in agreement with this item but requested that any actions would need to be brought back to the PC for approval.

The steering group would only be responsible for the village playing field and the car park area and the children's play area would not be included.

The group were considering obtaining charitable status which might enable

access to funding opportunities. Members of the PC urged caution and felt that further discussion was needed on this point. This would need to be reconsidered at a later date

Going forward the group would like a regular item on the PC agenda would this be possible? *The clerk would need include a standing item on the agenda from now on.*

Clerk

The group would like to erect a small sign regarding the wildflower project. Where would be the best location? **It was resolved** to install a sign on the corner wall of the village hall near to the play area.

Steering Group

We would like to manage a page on the Bletsoe website. Can we have a link to the site? *Cllr Gibbons manages the PC site and it was resolved that she would upload this and similarly she could also upload any information onto the Facebook site.*

The group would like to engage with the PC to better understand how the village playing field 10-year plan can be incorporated within the NDP plan.

*Parking, the play area and the village field were things that came out of the original NDP questionnaire. These need to go back to the parish council for consideration, this information will now fall to the parish council to deliver and the NDP steering group in conjunction with Woods Hardwick are working on which sites might be included for development in the NDP Plan which would take us up to 2032. The parish council recognise that collaboration with residents and local groups is the key to getting this delivered successfully and our thanks to the wildflower group for their hard work so far.*

**It was resolved** that members of the PC would meet with the wildflower steering group before the next PC meeting to consider the proposed terms of reference. These would then be formally considered at the September meeting.

7. **Planning**

The report was noted – there were no new applications for consideration.

8. **Financial Matters**

1. **To approve the accounts for payment**

Ch No	Payee	£	Description of services
DD	Bedford Borough Council	180.00	Payroll annual fee
1385	Bletsoe Village Hall Fund	20.00	Hall hire
1386	A Southern	37.00	Working from home allowance
1387	P Vine	36.74	Materials for repairs to goal posts on playing field
1388	A Gibbons	30.00	Plants for War Memorial (S137)
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>303.74</b>	

**It was resolved** to approve the accounts for payment

Clerk

2. To note spend against budget for 2016-17  
The report was noted

9 **To consider options to reduce parking congestion**

**It was resolved** to move this item to the September meeting – Cllr Woodward offered to look at this item on behalf of the PC.

CW

10 **NDP update and request for additional funding**

Prior to this item Cllr Gibbons gave a brief verbal report as follows:

*I am fully aware of the trail of emails, which have taken place over the period of time since the NDP issued the Issues and Options document and questionnaire. As you all know I am not happy or confident when there is any sign of conflict amongst people for whom I have respect and who I have regarded as friends and fellow councillors. I have in the past asked that we, as parish councillors who are all here to represent the village, act as a team. However, of late there is a real sense of this team, for which I feel responsible as your Chair, fragmenting under some of the issues, which have been raised.*

*None of us are guilty of trying to do things, which might mislead or upset our fellow villagers. However, I do recognize that the NDP steering group may have been a little hasty in publishing the Issues and Options without giving it a trial run. For this I am prepared to apologise and I am also happy to do so to any electoral roll member of the village who so wishes.*

*This is now all water under the bridge and I would hope that we can all move forward in a civilized and non-threatening manner and act as a team for the benefit of the whole community of which we are a part.*

Verbal report from Cllr Economides – Chairman of the NDP group

NDP questionnaire was delivered to all villagers in early June and we had planned to offer 3 drop in sessions to assist anyone who needed help in completing the questionnaire. Cllr Laws had received information from residents stating they were unhappy and unclear about the clarity of the questionnaire. I had asked for the names of the residents so that the NDP group could meet and discuss these issues but these were not forthcoming. It should be noted that the NDP had no terms of reference from the PC. The steering group took the decision to focus on the most popular potential development sites coming out of the first village meeting, when people expressed their support for a particular site. Although we did review all sites in the full version of the Issues and Options report that was not circulated due to the number of pages. Apparently this has been criticised by some villagers, who believe we should examine all sites put forward. Again nobody has approached us directly. This has all come via Cllr Laws and in one instance via Cllr Caves.

Unfortunately, because of the withdrawal process, we are now effectively behind schedule, by one month. We have now engaged with Woods Hardwick in Bedford, who are professional architects and planners. It had taken us around 6 months to find a suitable planning company, with the necessary expertise, who were willing to take this on, at a very limited fixed budget of £7,500. Woods Hardwick agreed to do so, even though they would normally charge up to twice this amount and we are very fortunate to have them on board. The plan is for them to consider **all** Bletsoe sites put forward in the Borough call for sites, not just the favoured ones as previously mentioned, including new ones that have recently come to the fore from Bedfordia, that crossover our parish boundary. The Issues and Options report will, therefore, be replaced by a simply worded Site Assessment report, to be produced by Woods Hardwick, on our behalf. This report will examine each site and comment on their suitability, from a planning policy perspective. They will be using the Bedford Borough Planning RAG (red, amber, green) scoring system. A draft site assessment report and a cut down version for the villagers, is planned to be available for the NDP steering group to review on the 13th July.

In hindsight, we should have waited for Woods Hardwick to review and comment upon the Issues and Options report prior to us issuing it. It should be understood that they had only formally come on board the same week we printed the report. However, the tight timescale was foremost in our minds at this time, as well as the upcoming holiday season.

Please be aware that the NDP moving forward will only concentrate on possible development sites. Once we have agreed the format and content of the Site Assessment report, we intend to have a village meeting where we will present the report and explain what we expect of the villagers in selecting their preferred development site for any possible future development. If any adjustments to the report are needed for clarity, then this will be done post meeting. We shall then issue the report by the end of July and ask the villagers to respond by the end of August. If drop in sessions are deemed necessary, then these will be held. However, if the report is simplified and better presented, then we feel this should not be necessary.

We now target September/October to feedback the results to the village, via two consultation meetings, when we will ask for their acceptance of the resultant development sites selected. Woods Hardwick then need to finalise our development plan and we have until the end of November to complete this process and return our NDP to the Borough Council. I must re-emphasise that we are on a very tight schedule and if we do not meet this timetable, then we will forfeit the second phase of the NDP budget given to the village, of £8,900. This would then have to be repaid via Parish funds.

If it is the wish of the PC to complete the NDP to these timescales we need terms of reference which will enable us to complete the project. The proposed terms of reference had been circulated to all members prior to the meeting and are outlined below:

1. The NDP steering group needs to be renamed the NDP Delivery Project and have autonomy from the PC (as per the Village Hall committee). I will continue to manage the project and report back to the PC, at PC meetings, re progress. The project team will have the final say on how the NDP evolves, but any PC input and comments, will be considered. Notes from our meetings will continue to be made available to the PC. Obviously the villagers will have the final say as already covered. (It should be noted that we still have 3 Parish Councillors as part of the project team)
2. All PC vested interest parties (i.e. Cllr Laws and Cllr Field-Foster), cannot comment on the NDP (verbally or in writing), either at PC meetings or be involved with the NDP project in any way. They cannot influence other PC members or villagers as regards the NDP content and voting. This will then safeguard those Councillors as landowners from unnecessary comments. Regarding this condition, it should also be noted that if they, or their family members are found to have influenced the NDP in any way, then they will be immediately reported to the Borough Monitoring Officer and a request for suspension will be made, subject to an enquiry.

At this point in the meeting there was concern raised by members of the public regarding the proposed terms of reference and in particular with reference to the Equality Act 2010 to ensure that everyone is treated equally.

Cllr Laws informed the meeting that she had checked the register of interests held by Bedford Borough Council and seen that Cllr Foster works for the Connolly Foundation. Woods Hardwick work for Connolly Homes. Cllr Laws queried whether Cllr Foster had a connection with the chosen consultants Woods Hardwick and that she should have declared an interest.

Cllr Foster responded and her statement is included in full below:

*I have no connection with Connolly Homes or to Woods Hardwick. I act as a Consultant to The Connolly Foundation which is a charity. The charities objectives are care for the elderly and education in Bedfordshire and it is these areas in which I am involved. I suggest that you try to get an understanding of the difference between the two different legal entities. I have nothing to do with Connolly Homes or with the companies they instruct.*

*I am deeply hurt and disappointed that Cllr Laws and her husband have sought to impugn my integrity as an individual and member of the NDP group in a number of ways over recent weeks culminating in their petition to Parliament and posts on their Facebook pages which are nothing short of defamatory. I am pleased they have chosen to apologise for this and undertaken to remove the offending wording. I accept their apology.*

*However, I do not consider this behaviour befitting of a Parish Councillor or indeed of supposedly committed Christians. It is difficult to view this behaviour in any other way than vindictive and not, as they claim, out of a sense of fair play. Fair play requires openness and transparency, qualities in my opinion that are missing from their behaviour towards me and other members of the DNP group. This is particularly surprising since it was Cllr Laws who insisted on a PC Complaints Policy, a policy we adopted at our last PC meeting. I am surprised therefore that Cllrs Laws has chosen not to follow the policy she herself requested but instead went behind the backs of NDP committee members and with her husband stirred discontent in the village if the statements she has made in emails and attributes to 'village residents' are correct. She still has not provided details of those complainants in the village.*

*I believe this vindictiveness directed at me started with the Parish Council's refusal to support Mary's planning application for 12 houses on her site. Following this as some of you may know Paul Laws made a formal complaint to the Borough's monitoring officer about me alleging that I had led the PC in its rejection because of my interest in furthering my own site. The complaint was unfounded and was not upheld. This vindictiveness has continued against me and other PC members on the NDP committee. Another formal complaint was made to the Borough's monitoring officer a short while later by Cllr Laws about another one of our parish councillors on the NDP committee. Again, this was unfounded and not upheld. I would like to request the Cllr Laws has the decency to utilise the formal complaints policy she requested when raising any complaints in the future about any member of the PC and that she encourages her husband to do the same. Such complaints that they have made have been made without first discussing with either of those concerned or the Chair of the PC and, are not in the spirit of openness and transparency that we should abide*

*by or the Code of Conduct she has requested.*

*Cllr Laws asked to respond and her statement is included in full below:  
It seems that other members of the Parish Council feel that it is ok for:*

*Me to have emails demanding that I do not talk to anyone in the village.*

*Demands made to go against our code of conduct and to disclose the names of those who have spoken to me in confidence.*

*To have emails stating that I will come and put you right.*

*Councillors to actively promote land in the NDP for example I have e-mails stating that Cllr Foster "has continually argued for and supported for inclusion in the NDP at our meetings" land that I own.*

*For a Parish Councillor and the Chair to attend my home on Parish Council business and accuse me of driving my car in an attempt to hurt someone. When after writing to the person concerned and this was proved to be untrue. I was not given an apology by the Chair or the other Parish Councillor.*

All members  
of the PC

*For me not to be listened to on many occasions and then when others eventually come round to realising that I am right the Chair changes her mind to fit with the others.*

*When I have asked to talk to the Chair being told to go home and read my e-mails.*

*To be treated without respect for my opinions.*

*Yet it is not ok for me to try to get things put right that are considered to be wrong by so many. I realise that the petition was badly timed and should not have gone on the Bletsoe Face book page however this is something that really does need to be dealt with through correct procedures.*

*Cllr Laws re-affirmed her belief that parish councillors should be open and transparent and allowed to express their opinions.*

*At this point in the meeting questions were taken from members of the public.*

*Will the PC get an option to view the documents before they go out? Yes, we anticipate there will be a single sheet for each and every site which will be scored on.*

*Can there be a covering sheet which highlights what should be in the pack, and what residents need to answer? Yes, this is a good idea and we will include this information in the pack distributed to all residents.*

*Who can people come to talk to and discuss the questionnaire? Before the next document goes to the villagers will the parish council approve the questionnaire? We are working to very tight timescales but yes the parish council will need to approve the final questionnaire before it is circulated to residents.*

*It was noted that the NDP will focus solely on housing development sites.*

11 **It was resolved** to hold an extraordinary meeting to approve the terms of reference for the NDP group. This would be a public open meeting and would take place as soon as possible.

**Clerk’s report**

The report was noted.

Location of bench on Coplowe Lane – Cllr Bean offered to provide the Clerk with the precise co-ordinates but the location is just below the Ash Tree on Coplowe Lane. Permission would need to be sought from Highways prior to installation. We would need to ask Chris Horne if he could ensure the grass is cut underneath and around the bench once it is installed.

Edward Bean  
Clerk

Field in Trust – correspondence had been received. **It was resolved** not to support this initiative as the Wildflower Steering Group are proposing to oversee management of the whole playing field.

12 **Parish Concerns**

Dog barking issue on the Waiting for the Sun. The Borough Council have installed a listening device and they are investigating. Villagers need to fill in a log sheet and should request this from the Borough officer Lyn Gell. The Borough have written to the landowners.

Would the PC consider installing 5 a side football posts? *We already have these stored at the village hall.*

DBS checks – are these necessary if there are local events running with volunteers and unaccompanied young people? *If outside organisations are running an event, they should have the necessary checks in place. If adult family members are accompanying the young people, then a DBS is not necessary. Permission should always be sought prior to taking photographs for any local events.*

Coplowe Lane – this area is overgrown and has not been cut so far this year. Please can this be reported to the Borough.

The footpath from the A6 along the Avenue is overgrown. Steve Cook volunteered to carry out this work.

12 **Date of next meeting – Monday 5<sup>th</sup> September 2016**

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Approved by Chairman 5<sup>th</sup> September 2016

Further I have at no time argued for the sites in which I have an interest to be put forward. Ironically, the one site I have continually argued for and supported for inclusion in the NDP at our meetings has been your own.