

# BLETCHINGDON Parish Council

## Annual Parish Meeting

Bletchington Village Hall, Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2019 at 7:30pm

**Present:** 20 Parishioners and Cllr Tony Saunders, Cllr Chris Lane, Cllr Mark Taylor, Cllr Duncan Ledger, Cllr Maureen Knight, Cllr Andy Jordan, Cllr Rachel Pirie and District Cllr David Hughes.

The **Notice** of Meeting was read.

**Apologies** for absence were received from Thames Valley Police, Fiona Teddy, Vince & Cathy O'Connor, Oliver Lindsay, Marion McNaught and Judith Ledger.

**Confirmation of Minutes:** The Minutes of the APM held on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2018 were available for all to read prior to the start of the meeting. All electors present confirmed they were in agreement with the minutes. The Chairman confirmed this and signed them.

### **Chairman's Report**

#### **Changes within the Parish Council**

2018 was an election year for your councillors. Cllr Julie Benton stepped down at this election, as she had planned to, and so the remaining six councillors were re-elected unopposed. This however required nominee for co-option as a new councillor. There were three potential candidates for this, two of whom were interviewed, and having received positive responses from each we now had to choose one. At this same time Cllr Martin Kersh announced that he would shortly be moving from the village and as a result he would leave a vacancy which must be filled. After some toing and froing with the District Council we were able to welcome Andy Jordan and Rachel Pirie as new members of your Parish Council, significantly reducing the average age of the Council. I would like to take this opportunity to record my thanks to Martin, in his absence, for his work during his time with us.

Further changes are afoot as we are about to lose our Parish Clerk, who has found herself a full time position. Having advertised for a replacement we are fortunate to have secured the services of Fiona Mason. Fiona lives in St Giles and has been in the village for about 7 years.

#### **County and District Councillors**

Councillors are not present - We currently have 3 District Councillors representing our parish. One of them, Tim Hallchurch, was a candidate in the election on 2<sup>nd</sup> May and we note that he was re-elected. We have had the pleasure of their company at some of our council meeting. Unfortunately it seems that none of them are unable to be here this evening. (Cllr David Hughes arrived later)

Carmen Griffiths remains our County Councillor, and is very active on behalf of the parish. Unfortunately it seems Carmen is unable to be with us this evening.

#### **Enforcement**

Here we are a year and a bit on, and the parish continues to have three areas currently logged with the CDC Enforcement team. The removal of hedges at Tollbrook Corner has apparently been closed by the allocated officers who will no longer pursue the owner in an effort to have the hedges reinstated. The PC has also written a number of times to DEFRA but has received no response. Feedback from our

Enforcement Officer today is that nothing has changed and the case remains closed however she has a meeting with the team leader of enforcement next week to discuss.

Once again the most obvious area for which focussed enforcement has been requested relates to the land south of Diamond Farm, now apparently identified as Oak Farm. This remains an area of rural unsightliness with no effort whatsoever by the owner to comply with the legal requirements placed on him some 18 months ago. Various appeals, non-appeals, and finally a move to sell the property have all thwarted the enforcement process, and prevented formal action taking place. Latest news today is that this land is now under new ownership and the new owners are working with CDC to bring about resolution and compliance with the notices. This should be over and done with, in the next few months.

A new issue has arisen and reported by the PC to the District Council during this year. It relates to building work carried out at a property in Heathfield which is confirmed as having no planning permission whatsoever. The CDC enforcement team have been assessing this and an enforcement notice was drawn up. It was, however, not served as they are looking at whether they can pursue the demolition of the properties as they are in effect new builds. Our officer is liaising with the CDC legal team regarding this.

### **Crime**

There is no one available from Thames Valley Police to attend this meeting, however they have sent a written report which I will read later.

### **Duchy Field**

#### Zero C status

The project itself has shaped up greatly over the last few months and the current phases of unit's known as phases one and 2 is due to complete in August 2019 with the exception of unit 35 which is due by year end. We are hoping the COOP will take possession of their unit and commence fit out in the next month, they need 4 weeks to complete. We are not in control of this one but if completed as planned will all be completed by Mid-July 2019. Information from the DoC and brought to the meeting by Cllr Lane indicates that this has likely extended another two months due to build problems.

Phases 3 and 4 which are the remaining units we are looking to commence in the next few weeks. To achieve this we will need to agree to move the public footpath and also hoping to move the school car park entrance to utilise the new estate roads and paths. We will need to meet the school to deal with this one and indeed yourselves? By implementing this plan we will be able to total segregate our remaining works via one entrance and in doing so avoid keep our works risk free from the public while manageable in one area. These phases we will complete in the last quarter of 2020.

#### Savills status

- A quick summary of the current 'sales' status
  - Occupied – 15
  - Reserved – 12
  - Available – 6
  - Showhome – 1
  - September release – 5
  - Not yet available (inc Phase 3 & 4) – 22
  - Total – 61 homes
- By end September there will be 39 (two thirds) completed and available.

#### BCF status

- The BCF has signed all contract documents regarding the shop, and are currently awaiting DoC and Coop to respond accordingly.

## **Village Hall and School**

This year, the first with Mrs Donaghey as Headteacher has progressed well. Unfortunately, Mrs Donaghey will be leaving at the end of the summer term. Her replacement will be progressed by the Governing body.

Although the Chair of Governors was invited to the meeting, there is no one here from the GB, who it seems are currently meeting in another part of the VH.

The Village Hall continues to be well used, and has become an established facility within the village.

## **The Row**

It seems the housing association owners of the Row (Greensquare) in spite of their website claim to be providers of affordable housing for the poorer in the community, and protecting the affordable housing they have, seem determined to sell the two vacant properties in the Row. Despite representations from the Parish Council and adverse publicity on a Channel 4 Dispatches program, these properties are now signed for Sale by Auction for the third time in this past 12 months.

## **The Blacks Head**

The Blacks Head reopened for the immediate term in November last year, with the objective of providing the village with its pub whilst the planning process for its future development takes its course. The planning application was submitted but then withdrawn whilst amendments are made. It is slowly drawing a larger and regular clientele, and is planning to introduce a food service, menu as yet undefined, in the next few weeks.

## **Roads – potholes and things**

Some months ago I ‘walked’ and drove the village with Cllr Griffiths looking at road surface condition and in particular at white line marking. Cllr Griffiths has fed our requirements into the Highways team.

A few weeks ago, the Clerk and myself met with OCC Highways Engineer Chris Grain, and again drove the village looking particularly at potholes and other road surface damage. Chris agreed significant areas which need addressing, and some of these were repaired in just a couple of days. Unfortunately some remain outstanding and we have chased up with Mr Grain again, who has today, offered the following observations.

- Islip Road – Chris confirmed that his request for patching works on the Islip Rd are in progression. There is an extensive area of Islip Road which has been marked by OCC Technical Officers for repair. He cannot give an exact date for when this work will be carried out but it will be soon.
- The Causeway – Yet to be confirmed but he is trying to get it ‘piggy backed’ on to the patching on the Islip Rd.
- The Duchy Field – He notes the Developers have fixed the uneven surface issue with the footway adjacent to the zebra crossing. He also asked for the speed bump coming in to the village, which had been installed too high, to be lowered – he has asked if we can confirm this is done. Cllrs will review.
- Defects – He raised all the defects we spoke about on our walk around. This includes Tollbrook Corner. However he is still in discussions on what should be done with the entrance to the chicken farm and edge deterioration along Weston Rd.

## **Speed limits**

The speed limit on Kirtlington Road was finally relocated to extend it to where it should have been following the Springwell Close development. It is expected that a further repositioning will take place at some time, as a result of the Duchy Field development. We also now have a Zebra crossing on Station Road at the front of the Village Hall, initially with only one Belisha Beacon but now fully functioning. The PC was

asked by a parishioner if the speed limit on Weston Road could be extended to be outside the built up area. This request was passed to highways for assessment.

### **Traffic**

Traffic through the year has pretty much followed the patterns defined in the traffic survey of 2017, however concerns were raised that HGV movements were increasing. These do seem to be generally unrelated to the Duchy Field development who continue to work with their suppliers to enforce the routing agreement. Unfortunately they do become subject to the vagaries of the HGV driver and his SatNav, with the result that access to the village can be from the wrong direction. There were also concerns expressed regarding the speed with which vehicles make their way through our streets. The PC therefore decided to carry out another traffic survey, the data from which could be compared with the data collected in 2017. There were some considered changes made to the check point locations and the following points selected. Due to site traffic on Station Road it was decided to monitor traffic for both speed and vehicle type on Islip Road at the school crossing warning sign, Kirtlington Road would also be monitored for speed in the light of the repositioned speed limit, with the check point moved to be opposite the entrance to the Duchy Field. Weston Road would be monitored in two places, one near the Nursery in a similar position to the previous survey, and again just past the private road to the Stables at the 'Bletchington' sign. The results will be presented later in this meeting.

### **School buses**

The challenge to provide a new school bus service has been taken up by a parents group who are currently in discussion with the Bletchington Charity regarding funding options.

### **Buses**

Our buses are still with us. My thanks to Elinor Webber for her efforts to 'keep the provider honest'

### **Spring clean**

This was organised by the Clerk over two days, with the second day organised by Cllr Pirie. A small number of parishioners joined them and our gratitude goes to them for their commitment to a cleaner village.

Dogs and their residue continue to make headlines. The Parish Council encourages anyone who witnesses dog fouling to record the details and report the situation to CDC.

### **Planning**

Notable planning applications are currently 'work-in-progress' for building works at both Bletchington Park and the Blacks Head. There are no others of note.

### **The Village News**

I am sure you must all be aware that after only 239 editions of the Bletchington Village News, Greta has decided to hang up her editors' pen and has effectively retired from that job. It would be very remiss of us all not to recognise her enormous contribution to this very unique publication. Greta was presented with flowers as a thank you from the community. The Village News will of course continue.

**And so, finally** ..... My thanks again to the members of our subcommittees. They continue to ease the workload of your Councillors. Thanks of course to your Parish Councillors for their continued commitment to ensuring we have a great and carefully managed community in which to live. Special thanks to Cllr Lane for taking the chair when I have been unavailable, and of course all of our thanks to Rebecca, who has done a 'great job' during her time with us. We wish her good luck in her new job, and have some flowers for her too.

To close can I introduce you to, and welcome Fiona as our new Clerk. She is currently working with Rebecca on a transitional handover, and will be flying solo from the beginning of June.

## Parish Council Finance Report

### Parish Council Accounts

The Accounts for Bletchingdon Parish Council for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 are as follows; During the financial year Bletchingdon Parish Council **received £28,585**. £21,000 of this was from the Precept, which is the money given to a Parish Council by the District Council (in our case Cherwell) to carry out it's duties.

**Bletchingdon Parish Council made payments totalling £19,772 from April 2018 – March 2019.**

We had a carry forward balance in April of £33,718, leaving a balance in hand at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 of £42,576.

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As last year, this is a large figure to have as a carry forward, however, the Parish Council had set aside £20,400 for traffic calming measures and only spent £360 this year on a further traffic survey, which is being used alongside the survey undertaken at the end of 2016 to help understand what types of traffic calming may be required once the Duchy Fields development has been completed. We are not yet at a point where we know if this money will be enough and in future years more may be needed from the precept.

We have funds of £505 remaining for the Conservation Plan project – the website has now ceased for this project but funds are there for the future.

We also have a playground equipment fund pot of £5,347. Since the installation of the current equipment over 10 years ago funds have been used for the replacement of the toddler swings. Unfortunately the teen shelter had been damaged and repaired as well during this time and this year the Councillors decided it would be best to replace this with something that would be more widely useful and perhaps less breakable, so a picnic table has been purchased. Further equipment for older children is hoped to be purchased this financial year using some of this money, but going forward as the equipment ages it is hoped that the playground pot can remain at a healthy balance for all eventualities and some of the precept or current underspend could be added to it.

With these allocated funds discounted we have a very healthy balance of £16,684 going forward into next year.

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In January 2019, our Parish Cllrs agreed to request the Precept be set at £21,420, which was agreed by Cherwell DC. Add the Precept to our carried forward figure and we have £38,104 to spend or allocate to future projects during 2019/20. The Parish Council has a budget drawn up to ensure these funds are enough to carry out all the day-to-day duties to ensure the parish remains in good order or reports matters to the relevant authorities or Council departments to deal with.

For Bletchingdon Parish Council the largest expenditure, with the exception of the Clerk's salary, is on grounds maintenance where we pay for a contractor to undertake the grass cutting of the Village Green, verges on Weston Road and some areas around the Village Hall and in Annesley Close. We also have the trees to look after on the Village Green and at the recreation ground. We pay Cherwell DC to empty the dog bins and we own and are responsible for the play area at the Recreation Ground, but not the one at Springwell Close. We give donations to the church to help with their grass cutting, and to the Village News, and to out-of-the ordinary events, such as the WWII commemorations last year organised by the Village Hall Committee. Providing information to departments within Oxfordshire County Council and various service departments within Cherwell District Council is a key role of the Parish Council along with making the parish a nice place for you to live and work. As parishioners you are entitled to see how this money is spent and to suggest ways in which the Parish Council could improve the Parish, by attending meetings or talking to the Clerk, or any of the Cllrs.

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The full accounts can be viewed they have been audited, either in person, or on the website. A notice will be displayed on the Parish Council Notice Board, but this is usually in August. If anyone is interested in knowing more detail, the monthly expenditure is included in the minutes of each meeting and these can be

viewed on the village website or at the Parish Council Office in the village hall. And I have a copy of the Receipts and Payments Ledgers from 2018/19 here with me tonight.

### **District Councillors Report**

- Councillor Hughes reported that joint working between Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council is going well. Sharing offices and services is helping to save money and the shared Chief Executive Yvonne Rees has been very beneficial with her influence and knowledge.
- This year he is chairman of Cherwell District Council and as such has chosen three charities to support this year. These are 'Arch', 'Rosie', and 'Catherine House Hospice'.
- He also reminded everyone he is happy to be contacted with any District Council issues.
- Councillor Hughes provided a contact with regards to the dog fouling problem. The Clerk will pursue this.

### **Matters from the Floor:**

- Councillor Saunders explained that the Parish Council portion of the Council Tax was reported to increase by 5%, however this is only guideline figure and in actual fact the Bletchingdon Parish Council precept was only increased by 2%.
- Councillor Saunders added that the numbers of parishioners attending the monthly Parish Council meetings has increased in recent months which is positive. He reminded everyone that they are welcome every month but they must put their request in writing prior to any meetings if they wish to speak.
- A parishioner raised a query with regards to the upkeep of the village as they feel some areas are looking scruffy. Councillor Saunders explained that due to Oxfordshire County Council cutbacks certain services are no longer provided. The Parish Council is currently looking at what it can take on with the maintenance team.
- A parishioner asked if there was any update with regards to the stone path leading from Springwell Close to Station Road. Councillor Saunders said he had a meeting with the builders requesting an update. They confirmed they are about to move to stage 3&4 of the development which is adjacent to the area in question. There needs to be further discussions between Bletchingdon Community Foundation and ZeroC. If ZeroC are not in a position to improve the stone path, the Parish Council will pursue it.
- A parishioner asked if the Parish Council were aware of any Mental Health Forums available locally. Councillor Saunders said there is nothing specific in Bletchingdon but there is likely to be in Kidlington. A member from the Bletchingdon Charity mentioned the Café is available for anyone feeling isolated and explained that preventing Social Isolation is one of the Charity's objectives. Therefore the Charity would be happy to hear any proposals for any initiatives that they could support.
- A parishioner raised concerns about speeding vehicles through the Village and asked if funds could be spent on flashing speed limit signs. Councillor Saunders confirmed this is an ongoing project which is currently being looked at.
- A parishioner put forward a suggestion of an NHS sponsored allotment group targeted at helping those suffering with mental health issues. Councillor Taylor is involved with the allotment committee and he will bring this idea to them.
- Councillor Hughes added that there is a street cleaning team at Cherwell District Council who could be contacted for small areas of concern. He said a clean village is a good way of helping deter crime.
- Councillor Saunders thanked everyone for attending and Greta Bickley wanted a special thanks given to Ian Gedding.
- Councillor Saunders gave special thanks to the Parish Councillors for all of their hard work.

Councillor Saunders closed the meeting at 8:30pm.