

BLETCHINGDON Parish Council

Annual Parish Meeting

Virtually held via Zoom, Thursday 21st May 2020 at 7:30pm

Present: 9 Parishioners and Cllr Tony Saunders, Cllr Mark Taylor, Cllr Duncan Ledger, Cllr Matthew Whitehead, Cllr Andy Jordan, and Cllr Rachel Pirie.

The **Notice** of Meeting was read.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Chris Lane.

Confirmation of Minutes: The Minutes of the APM held on 16th May 2019 were available for all to read prior to the start of the meeting. All electors present confirmed they were in agreement with the minutes with one small amendment. The Chairman confirmed this and they will be signed once Lockdown has been lifted.

Chairman's Report

Covid 19

This global pandemic has of course impacted Bletchington Parish Council as well as everything else. Our last proper meeting was in February, shortly before the lockdown came into force, and although this has hindered some of the PC activities, it certainly has not stopped them. The PC has held its March and April meetings using video conferencing, and of course this evening we have the first virtual APM, so thank you to everyone who has shown interest in attending. We were given the option to cancel the meeting entirely, but councillors felt that we should try the technological approach.

The PC per se didn't have a support plan, any more than global governments did, but in the true spirit of Bletchington, a number of offers of help to those impacted most, came from organised groups of villagers, the Bletchington Charity, the Coop, and Zero C, the contractors at Duchy Field, who for a few days were able to provide a shopping delivery service for our elderly before they were sent home to lock down. The PC wishes to thank everyone who has been, is, or will be involved in these activities.

Changes within the Parish Council

In December Cllr Maureen Knight expressed her wish to resign her position as councillor, one she has fulfilled for 22 years. I would like to thank her on behalf of the Parish for her contributions over that time. This left a vacancy which was advertised, with a view to the election of a new councillor, however at the end of the posting period there were no parishioners offering to stand. As a result there would be no election, and instead the council advertised again for parishioners who would consider becoming a co-opted member of the council. Interestingly this brought forward four candidates, and following a short interviewing process, councillors chose to offer the position to Matthew Whitehead. Matt accepted the place and attended his first meeting in February.

County and District Councillors

Councillors are not present - We currently have 3 District Councillors representing our parish. Carmen Griffiths remains our County Councillor, and is very active on behalf of the parish.

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. They are

- Hedges at Tollbrook corner
- Land south of Diamond farm
- Unapproved building works at Heathfield.

In a recent development it has become apparent that the Enforcement officer dealing with these issues has left her employment at CDC, and it is likely that we will need to start over again with a new officer.

Crime

Over the past few years it seems that the parish has been relatively free from crime, right up to the week or two prior to this meeting. There have been a couple of burglaries through the year culminating in the very obvious 'ram raid' at the new Co-op store 10 days or so ago. I am not aware that the burglaries were resolved at all, being potentially a low priority on the crime lists. Regarding the attack on the Co-op, it is probably too early to expect a positive outcome.

The shop

The new Co-op opened in September last year, and has proved to be a very popular addition for members of our community and those from surrounding villages. With it has come issues surrounding car parking and generally increased traffic in that area, but I suspect the disadvantages are significantly outweighed by the benefits. Apart from being extremely convenient for all of us, it has also provided employment for a number of people from the parish. The ram raid was, I suspect, a shock to most of us, leaving us with a feeling that our community had been challenged in some way. The possibility that we could be without a shop once again for the foreseeable future was not a good one, so it was enormously uplifting to see the reaction of the Co-op and their support teams working throughout Monday in order to reopen at 5pm. So I think our thanks to them is in order.

Village Hall and School

As announced at our last APM, the school has been working under the leadership of a new Head Teacher since September. Huw Morgan has joined the Bletchingdon team in addition to his role as Head Teacher at Dr South's school in Islip.

The Village Hall continues to be well used, and has become an established facility within the village. Sadly, due to the Covid 19 outbreak and subsequent isolation conditions the hall is currently closed.

The Row

The two properties in the Row highlighted as 'for sale' at our last APM have now been sold to a private buyer and remain empty.

Roads – potholes and lines

The activity of pothole repairs and white lining, although begun by OCC Highways remains uncompleted.

Speed and Zebra crossings

A number of issues arose through the year regarding the safety of pedestrians using the Zebra crossing. This should be a safe haven for people wishing to cross the road sensibly but there were a startling number of reported incidents of vehicles apparently speeding, and ignoring the crossing, its markings and lights, completely. In order to quantify this, the PC undertook yet another traffic survey, this time on a smaller scale directly at the area between the Coop and the Zebra crossing. Traffic speed and vehicle type would be recorded 24/7 for a week and pedestrian use of the crossing would be monitored for one day – 15 February between 7am and 7pm. For clarity the Coop is to the north of Station Road

Summary

Zebra - South to North – 180 people – peak between 8am and 9am – 73

Zebra – North to South – 172 people – peak between 3pm and 4pm – 70

Traffic volume to the village – 1978 vehicles – peak between 7am and 9am – 772 (2 hours)

Traffic volume from the village – 1964 vehicles – peak between – 4pm and 6pm – 581 (2 hours)

*Traffic 85%ile speed to the village – ave 25.6mph – peak max 29.5 between 5pm and 6pm

*Traffic 85%ile speed from the village – ave 28.2mph – peak max 30.0 between 1pm and 2pm

* The speed at or below which 85% of all vehicles are observed to travel under free-flowing conditions past a monitored point - a metric commonly used by road traffic engineers to review road design and set the speed limit.

Councillors met with representatives from OCC Highways shortly before lockdown to discuss issues in this area, the potential for speed limiting features, the elements of the zebra lighting which it seems may not be current highways specification, and the visibility at the crossing, in particular regarding vehicles parked on the south side of the road. This is obviously ongoing.

Additionally an initial discussion took place regarding changing the speed limit throughout the village to 20mph. There are mixed views on this matter, but it was decided the clerk would make initial enquiries regarding process and costs.

Buses

It was with regret that the PC recorded the passing of Elinor Webber around Christmas time. Elinor was for many years our travel representative and it is mainly thanks to Elinor Webber that we still have a bus service – in normal times. The PC is seeking another avid bus user to take on the role that Elinor did so well. If you are interested, please contact the clerk.

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 Fiona, who has done a 'great job' during her first year as our clerk. She has risen to the challenge and become a very effective clerk in a very short time.

Parish Council Finance Report

The Accounts for Bletchingdon Parish Council for the year ending 31st March 2020 are as follows;
During the financial year Bletchingdon Parish Council **received £28,125.67**. £21,420 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 its duties.

Bletchingdon Parish Council made payments totalling £24,901.90 from April 2018 – March 2019.

We had a carry forward balance in April 2019 of £43,706.62, leaving a balance in hand at 31st March 2020 of £46,930.39.

As with last year, this is a large figure to have as a carry forward however the Parish Council have set aside a large proportion of this for traffic calming measures. What was spent on two new "School Crossing, 20 when Lights Flash" signs, was reimbursed by Cherwell District Council through their Councillor Priority Fund. Therefore the total funds available for traffic calming measures remains the same. The Parish Council are still waiting for additional information with regards to costs of further traffic calming measures so we still don't 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.

At the last Annual Parish Meeting it was mentioned that the Village could use some TLC. When the Duchy Field development is complete, the Parish Council have set aside £2,500.00 to improve the look of each road entrance to the Village and additional funds have been made available to the grounds maintenance budget.

In January 2020 our Parish Councillors agreed to request the Precept be set at £22,000, which was agreed by Cherwell District Council (CDC). 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 in Annesley Close. We also have the trees to look after on the Village Green and at the Recreation Ground. We pay CDC 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, to the Village News and to requests received that are to the benefit of our parishioners, such as the Charity 'Clean Slate' and 'North OXON Citizens Advice'. 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 Councillors.

The full accounts can be viewed after they have been audited, either in person or on the website. A notice will be displayed on the Parish Council Notice Board, which 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.

The Clerk is the only paid member of the Parish Council. The Councillors are all volunteers, with the exception of the Chair who takes a small annual allowance to cover such things as printing costs.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the Councillors who have supported me in my first year as Clerk. You have all made me feel very welcome.

Matters from the Floor:

- A parishioner raised the query, who is responsible for the maintenance of the ground at the entrance to the Allotments? Cllr Saunders confirmed that this land is owned by the Charity and it was confirmed that they are in the process of making arrangements to maintain it.
- A parishioner asked what plans were in place to address the parking issues at the Bletchingdon Co-op Store. Is it possible to change the flower bed area into additional parking to try and prevent people from parking in the road/on the pavement? Cllr Saunders confirmed that a planning amendment has been made to put bollards in place along the Road to prevent people from parking where they shouldn't. He also confirmed that an additional 6 parking spaces will be available once the development is complete.
- Another parishioner asked if additional/anti ram raid bollards will be put in place in front of the store to prevent dangerous parking and also deter further ram raiders. Cllr Saunders confirmed he will speak to the developer about that.
- This led on to a parishioner asking that signs be put in place to let people know where parking is available. Cllr Saunders explained that he will look into temporary signs until the development is complete.
- Cllr Whitehead shared the news with everyone that there are reports of a person sleeping rough in the Village during the last few days. He advised that if anyone sees him, they need to report it to Thames Valley Police by calling 101.

- A parishioner asked why the street lights on Weston Road are on all through the night when they don't need to be. The Clerk will contact the electricity board to request this be changed.
- Cllr Pirie shared with everyone that there have been reports of dog walkers depositing their dogs waste in residents' household waste bins instead of using the dog poo bins provided. This is in the vicinity of the public footpath between Islip Road and New Road where there are no nearby dog poo bins. Could we consider providing an additional bin in this area? This will be put on the agenda for the next Parish Council meeting.
- Saunders thanked everyone for attending.
- Councillor Saunders gave special thanks to the Parish Councillors for all of their hard work.

Councillor Saunders closed the meeting at 8:20pm.