

Minutes

Annual Parish Meeting for the Electors of Colmworth

Thursday 11th May 2017 at 7.30pm in Colmworth Village Hall

Present: Cllr. D. Michell (Chairman), Cllr E. Pegler, Cllr K. Knight, Cllr. T. Frew, Cllr. R. Jones, Cllr B. Brightman, L. Crawford (Clerk), and four members of the public.

Apologies: Cllr P. Ball

1. Minutes of the last meeting

Having been previously published and circulated the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 11th May 2016 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting. Proposed by Cllr Pegler, seconded by Cllr Knight.

2. Chairman's Annual Report (Cllr D. Michell)

Introduction to Councillors

Cllr Michell introduced the Councillors and explained their responsibilities and introduced Cllr Brightman as a new member of the Parish Council.

	Departments
Patricia Ball	
Beverley Brightman	
Tom Frew	Country Park & Playing Field, Neighbourhood Plan
Russell Jones	Planning, Neighbourhood Plan
Lorraine Knight	Highways, Village Hall Rep, Church Rep, Social & Cultural
David Michell Chairman	ROW, Hedges & Ditches, Chronicle & Broadband
Emma Pegler Vice Chair	Heritage, SpeedWatch & Traffic Calming, Social & Cultural
Lucy Crawford	Clerk

Acquisition of the Playing Field

Why is this important? The Parish Council lease the playing field from Bedford Borough Council. The lease was due to expire in 2020. The Parish Council were keen to secure the playing field as an asset for the village in perpetuity – particularly since they own £50,000 of play equipment installed on the field.

Purchase or Lease? The Parish Council attempted to buy the Playing Field from the Borough Council but this was not possible. Instead we negotiated a new 99 year lease which will expire in 2115 and combines and replaces the two previous leases covering the playing field which were due to expire in 2020. There is no rent to pay.

Professional Fees £460. We had set aside £3000 for legal fees for conveyancing but Jeffrey Mills at Adlams agreed to do it at a reduced fee of £460 as a favour to the parish.

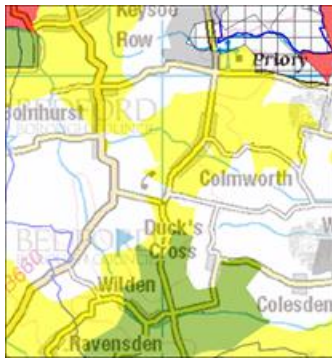
Colmworth Chronicle Annual Report

	2015-6	2016-7
Advertising Sales	1,572	1,570
Cost of Sales	1,129	1,193
Profit	443	377
No. of Advertisers @ year-end	28	30
Bank Balance @ year-end	1,614	2,303

The Chronicle continues to do well and there has been an increase in the number of regular advertisers this year. It continues to generate a profit.

Broadband Update

The main Colmworth Exchange has been upgraded to ADSL2+ and this gives download speeds up to 17MB/s but not everyone experiences these speeds as it depends on the distance from the cabinet.



Most of Colmworth Parish (yellow areas) is due to go Superfast (>24MB/s) in Q2, 2017 i.e. all the lines on the Colmworth exchange. However, Channels End & Rootham's Green are on Cabinet 2 which is not included in this phase and there are no plans to upgrade this cabinet as yet.

Colmworth Parish Council are applying pressure to Bedford Borough Council to convert Cabinet 2 to fibre. However, they are not taking much notice at present – stating that BT Openreach have determined the programme of delivery and this is unlikely to change unless further funding becomes available (which should be announced in November 2017). The Clerk explained that satellite vouchers are available for those experiencing speeds of under 2mbps.

Rights of Way (ROW)

This includes footpaths, bridlepaths and byways

Bedford Borough Council have reorganised Rights of Way which now forms part of the Highways Department. The Highways Inspectors are now responsible for both Highways and ROW. Gareth Turner and Tony Langstaff are responsible for Colmworth.

Bedford Borough Council consulted on a Rights of Way Improvement Plan for 2017-2022 which ended on 3rd March 2017. Cllr Michell responded on behalf of the parish asking for improvements to the maintenance of Rights of Way alongside fields eg. mowing in summer, a reduction in cultivating across footpaths, improvements to make it easier to re-route footpaths which go across cultivated fields where both parties agree and the introduction of more circular routes. Inspectors are due to walk all ROW's (1,000 km) in the coming months to identify where improvements/repairs are required and feedback from members of the public is welcome.

Hedges and Ditches

The Parish Council were able to work with the Housing Association, Landowners and Bedford Borough Council to resolve a problem with a blocked culvert in Colley Close which was causing flooding at the end of February. Bedford Borough Council have confirmed that, because they own the land on both sides of the ditch, it belongs to them and they did an excellent job of clearing the culvert. If you notice any problems with hedges or ditches please contact the Parish Council.

3. Financial Report (L. Crawford – Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer)

The Parish Council opened the financial year with a balance of £20,408 of which £17,900 was earmarked (including £3,774 of unspent Neighbourhood Planning grant money to be returned). Our regular income (ie. precept) was £8,570 and our other income (eg. donations for village gates, Chronicle advertising, grants, VAT) was £5,100. Our regular expenditure (Clerk's salary, maintenance & admin etc.) was £10,100 (£1,530 more than our precept) which demonstrates that our precept was too low to meet our regular outgoings.

Other expenditure was £7,200. Of this other expenditure £3774 was Neighbourhood Plan grant which was returned because it was not spent before the deadline. £2,440 was met by other income eg. £1,200 Chronicle, £770 Ward Fund purchases, £470 VAT reclaimed. £1,000 was not met by other income. This additional, unbudgeted one-off expenditure of £1,000 was for extra hours worked by myself (£440), holiday backpay for the previous Clerk (£100) and £460 legal fees to renew the lease on the playing field.

The original budgeted expenditure was £8,800 (slightly more than the precept). The overspend vs this original budget was £2,300 in total. This comprised £1,300 overspend on regular expenditure and £1,000 one-off expenditure not met by additional income. This meant that we needed to adopt an interim budget in September 2016 and transfer some money from earmarked reserves. The year closed with a balance of £16,800 of which £8,300 is earmarked for projects eg. village gates, street light replacement, traffic calming, the Country Park, the Neighbourhood Plan and the Chronicle.

Budgeted Income vs Actual Income 2016/17

	Budget	Actual	Variance £
Precept & Support Grant	8,610	8,610	0
Chronicle advertising		1,882	
Gardening Club Reserve		40	
Country Park Reserve		50	
Donations for village gates		1,469	
Ward Fund		792	
VAT reclaimed		914	
Total	8,610	13,757	5,146

The Borough Council changed the way it calculated Council Tax in 2013/14 so that people receiving Council Tax support were excluded from the tax base (the number of households paying Council Tax). This meant that council tax for remaining parishioners would have had to increase. In order to prevent this the Borough paid us around £550 which we were able to deduct from our precept demand in order to ensure that parishioners would not have to pay higher Council Tax. However, the Borough have phased out this grant and we only received £41 this year. The precept now has to increase to compensate for this shortfall.

The Chronicle advertising income is steady and is doing well. It should be remembered that some of the income is advance payment for future issues so the excess of income over expenditure of £689 is not all profit. It may be possible to allocate some of the profit to particular projects in future.

Gardening Club donations are earmarked for Gardening Club projects (eg. on the Triangle) and Country Park donations are similarly earmarked for the Park. We have received £1,469 in donations for the white village gates which have recently been installed at either end of the village to help reduce speeding. The total cost of gates is due to be paid shortly and will be £2700 - met entirely by donations.

The Ward Fund is a fund administered by our Borough Councillor Tom Wootton. A maximum of £1000 per year is available to each parish for the purchase of physical items ie. something we can take a photo of. This year we spent it on bark for the play area costing £770.

VAT is reclaimed every year in the year after it was incurred. Therefore, this year's VAT income of £914 was for VAT paid in 2015/16.

Budgeted Expenditure vs Actual Regular Expenditure 16/17

Expenditure	Budget	Actual	Variance
Staff costs (Clerk)	4,000	4,775	775
Country Park loan repayment	1,356	1,356	0
Insurance	730	906	176
Elec for street lights	0	96	96
General maintenance incl. Play Field	1,050	1,225	175
Country Park	500	739	239
Churchyard m'ance	0	200	200
Admin	700	783	83
Other	450	81	-369
Total	8,786	10,161	1,375

Regular staff costs increased this year because I needed to move to 7 hours per week (up from 5 per week worked by the previous Clerk). 3 hours per month will be funded by the government's Transparency Code grant this year and next. The increase in hours is necessary due to an increased workload with additional requirements to publish information on a website, and additional reporting and risk assessments required.

Insurance costs have increased because the asset register was updated to include some assets which had previously been excluded and insurance values were updated leading to a significant increase in the value of the assets to be insured.

We started paying for the electricity supply and maintenance of the Parish Council's 6 street lights for the first time in December 2016. Previously, no one had been certain who owned the lights and no one was being invoiced.

General inspection and maintenance this year included a payment of £250 to a tree surveyor to assess what work is required for the trees in the Country Park. We have a number of dead or dying mature trees and some tree surgery will be required in 2017/18.

We exceeded our budget for the Country Park by £239 because we had to pay for the meadows to be cut for the first time this year costing £500. In previous years the contractor was able to cut it for free as he could use it for hay. The grass now contains a lot of thistles and some ragwort which make it unsuitable for hay. Some of the additional cost was met by funds raised in 2015/16. Other costs include £200 petrol for John Douglas who kindly mows the paths for us and sundries such as dog bags, and wood preserver.

Every year the Parish Council contribute £200 per year to maintenance of the churchyard. Unfortunately, due to an oversight, this did not happen in 2015/16 and was not included in the 2016/17 budget.

Increased admin costs included registering with the Information Commissioner's Office for Data Protection (a legal requirement), increased internal audit costs for the 2015/16 accounts to include the Chronicle account and instigate an interim internal audit in November, and increased costs for administering my PAYE monthly rather than quarterly (necessary due to starting a monthly pension payment).

Other budgeted expenditure included £250 unspecified, £100 for the Triangle and £100 for Section 137 spending (other spending of value to the parish). Other actual expenditure included £64 for hall hire for the Nh'd Plan and £17 spending on a clematis for the Triangle (but an invoice is due shortly for the info board).

Other Expenditure 16/17 (varies year to year & not in budget)

Expenditure	Actual
Additional staff costs (both Clerks)	541
Legal fees for renewing lease on playing field	390
Neighbourhood Plan grant returned	3,774
Chronicle	1,193
Ward fund	766
VAT (will be reclaimed in 2017/18)	538
Total	7,202

On top of the increase in our regular costs (which should ordinarily be covered by the precept) we have other costs which are either met by additional income eg. the Chronicle and Ward Fund or will be reclaimed in 2017/18 (VAT). These are excluded from the budget. In addition, we incurred some additional one-off costs which were not in the budget and were met from unearmarked reserve funds and these are shown in red.

£438 for additional hours worked by myself in June and July 2016 to prepare the 2015/16 accounts for audit (and include the Chronicle account) and to prepare a risk assessment, £103 of holiday backpay for the previous clerk Diane Robins. We also paid £460 of legal fees to renew the lease on the playing field.

In addition we repaid £3774 of unspent Neighbourhood Plan grant which, due to the vagaries of Parish Council accounting, has to be reported as expenditure.

Budget for 2017/18

The precept has increased from £8,568 in 2016/17 to £13,406 in 2017/18 which is an increase of £4,838. This comprises an increase of £3,838 to ensure that regular income covers regular expenditure and £1,000 per year will be saved for future traffic calming projects / street light replacement. Grants are often made available on the basis that a Parish Council contributes up to 50% of the money from their own funds. Interest on a Public Works Loan is high at around 4.5% so it cheaper to save than to borrow. Therefore, it was thought wise to build up a fund to contribute to these projects and / or secure access to grants.

The Parish Council considered increasing the precept gradually but it was agreed that this would reduce our reserves to unacceptably low levels and it may not be possible to increase our precept in future years. The government consulted on the possibility of introducing referendum principles to Parish Councils in 2016 but have decided not to do so for the time being. There are no guarantees that they will not introduce them in the near future. This would mean that we could not increase the precept by more than 2% without a referendum. A referendum would cost the parish £1,500. Therefore, it would effectively be impossible to increase the precept. 2% of £8,500 is only £170 so it would leave us with very little flexibility.

The increase of £4,838 in the precept means an average band D property will pay an additional £25 per household per year ie. £2 extra per month.

Effect on **Annual** Council Tax Bill

	2016/17	2017/18	£ Increase
Precept	£8,568	£13,406	
Council tax base	189	189	
Band A	£30.15	£47.18	£17.03
Band B	£35.18	£55.04	£19.86
Band C	£40.20	£62.90	£22.70
Band D	£45.23	£70.77	£25.54
Band E	£55.28	£86.49	£31.21
Band F	£65.33	£102.22	£36.89
Band G	£75.38	£117.94	£42.56
Band H	£90.46	£141.53	£51.08

The precept was calculated to match our regular costs. The additional new regular costs in the budget for 2017/18 as compared to the budget in 2016/17 are as follows:

£780 additional hours for the Clerk (1.3 extra hours per week (remaining 0.7 hours to be met by the Transparency Code grant making a total of 7 hours per week).

£300 for power to street lights.

£100 for street light maintenance & repairs. A street lighting engineer has prepared an inventory for us and advised that many of the lights are old and may need replacing / significant maintenance in future years. Therefore, we have added £100 to the regular budget for maintenance and we will be saving towards replacement. Even if we were to decommission the lights there would be a significant cost.

£285 extra insurance (the replacement value of our assets has increased and some new assets have been included).

£230 for weed & moss control on playing field. Moss has built up on the playing field and this means that when the grass is cut it is not mulching in easily and so the cuttings became very deep on the playing field in 2016. If we control the moss regularly the cuttings should mulch in again.

£500 for cutting the Country Park. We plan to cut it 2-3 times per year which should control the thistles.

£200 churchyard maintenance. This is a regular cost which was not in the original budget in 2016/17.

£615 handyman to inspect play area and help maintain assets. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents recommends that play areas are inspected a minimum of once per week and a record made. We have contracted Martin Phillips to inspect the play area weekly and empty the litter bin (30 minutes per week) and to carry out maintenance tasks eg. painting the wooden climbing frame with preservative, replacing wooden boards surrounding the safety surfaces, repairs to the equipment, spreading bark, cutting back small branches, repairs to gates, noticeboards etc. He has generously agreed to do this for a greatly reduced rate as a favour to the parish.

£150 has been included in the regular budget for any tree surgery required. This will therefore be in the budget every year. We have a number of mature trees and it is likely that some surgery will be required in alternate years so £150 will be budgeted for on an annual basis and set aside in years when it is not required. £225 Neighbourhood plan (if not covered by grant funds). We expect most Neighbourhood Plan costs to be met by grants. However, these have strict time limits and there may be a need to pay for eg. village hall hire or printing costs between grants.

£215 extra administration costs. One additional interim internal audit in November, registration with the Information Commissioner's office. The previous Clerk was able to split some costs between 5 councils whereas I only work for one other council.

In addition £1,000 will be saved towards traffic calming / street light replacement projects every year.

Finally, the budget includes a £300 contingency. If we exceed our budget by up to £300 we can use this contingency fund. Any more than this requires the Parish Council to approve a new interim budget. This amounts to a total of £4,900 extra regular annual expenditure which is equal to the increase in the precept.

2017/18 Other Budgeted Expenditure

Item	Expenditure	Comment
Chronicle	1,206.00	Printing, postage and admin costs.
Additional hours for the Clerk	474.00	3 hours per month met from Transparency Code grant £394 + £80 from reserves. Total of 7 hours per week.
Assets Purchased (excl GC & CP)	2,700.00	Village gates (£1,459 from donations in 2016/17, £1241 to be donated this year).
Raking turf (playing field) 2017 only	360.00	Once moss under control should mulch in so one off cost
Exceptional tree work (C'try Park & Playing F'ld)	550.00	C'try Park £380 elm, £100 ash, £140 oak + £80 in P'ying F'ld - £150 regular budget for tree work
Extra churchyard maintenance (extra payment due to no payment in 2015/16)	100.00	
Total Other Expenditure	5,390.00	

In 2017/18 we plan to spend £1,010 of our unearmarked reserve funds on one-off costs which will not be met by additional income. These are shown in red on the above table. £360 will be spent on raking the turf on the playing field, picking up the moss and removing it. This should not be necessary in future years as we will be controlling the moss and weeds. We will also cut back dead branches identified as a risk in the Country Park and contribute an additional £100 for churchyard maintenance as we paid nothing for this in 2015/16.

Reserves

Fund Name	Funds Reserved 1/4/2016	Income to 31st Mch 2017	Expenditure to 31st Mch 2017	Transfers to / from Current up to 31st Mch 2017	Funds Reserved 31st Mch 2017	Funds to be added on 1/4/2017	Balance close of 1/4/2017
Garden Club	£111	£40.00	£16.63		£134.80		£134.80
Chronicle	£1,615	£1,786.00	£1,193.15		£2,207.85		£2,207.85
Legal expenses for renewal of Playing Field lease	£3,000		£460.00	-£2,250.00	£290.00		£290.00
Reserved for early repay't of PWLb loan for Country P'k	£9,000			-£9,000.00	£0.00		£0.00
Insurance excess	£0.00			£100.00	£100.00		£100.00
Country Park	£415		£415.00		£50.00	£1,000.00	£1,050.00
Neighbourhood Plan	£3,774		£3,774.00		£0.00	£1,000.00	£1,000.00
Traffic calming					£0.00	£725.00	£725.00
Street lighting					£0.00	£725.00	£725.00
Elections					£0.00	£750.00	£750.00
Village gates		£1,469.20			£1,469.20	£0.00	£1,469.20
Total earmarked reserves	£17,915.43				£0.00		£8,451.85
Available reserves	£2,492.35						£8,349.75

In 2016/17 The Parish Council decided to set aside £3000 for legal costs to renew the lease on the Playing Field. Adlams Solicitors were able to do this for just £460 so we were able to release some of these earmarked reserves. We also began the year with £9000 set aside for repayment of the loan on the Country Park but it became clear that it would be too expensive to repay this early and it would be better to continue to repay in annual instalments so this money was released from earmarked reserves. We decided to set aside £100 to pay the excess in case of an insurance claim. £415 was set aside for the Country Park from fund raising and unspent budget in 2015/16. This was used for maintenance during the year. £50 was donated at the last meeting. We decided to set aside £1000 towards completing the Neighbourhood Plan (in case grants don't cover all our costs), £1,450 for traffic calming / street light replacement (£1000 will be added to this fund every year), £750 for elections (the cost of a contested election for a Parish Councillor), and £1459 has been received in donations for the village gates which will be spent shortly. The unearmarked reserves are £8,350 which is less than the annual precept of £13,406 and represents about 8 months of regular spending. We will be using £1,010 of this for one-off expenditure this year (raking the playing field, tree works and extra churchyard maintenance).

Country Park Loan

We took out a 25 year loan with the Public Works Loan Board (PWLb) in 2010 to purchase the Country Park. The outstanding balance is £15,227. We make a fixed annual payment of £1,356 of which approximately half is interest and half capital repayment. Over time the proportion of interest will fall and the proportion of capital repayment will increase until the loan is fully repaid in 2035. Interest is approximately 4.5% but it is not worth repaying it early due to very high penalties. Unfortunately, Parish Councils can only borrow from the PWLB so we don't have much flexibility.

In summary, our costs have increased significantly due to additional demands on the Clerk's time, additional inspection responsibilities and higher maintenance costs for our assets. Our income has also fallen by £550 per year. However, we believe we have now set the precept at a sustainable level to meet ongoing costs.

4. Neighbourhood Plan (Cllr R. Jones)

The prime objective of a Neighbourhood Plan is to empower the neighbourhood residents to influence the future development of Colmworth. A new committee of 16 residents was formed in September 2016 and reports to the Parish Council. In February 2017 Bedford Borough Council changed its mind on development in Colmworth and other similar and smaller settlements. Their new draft policy is to give local residents more control over development, regardless of having a Neighbourhood Plan.

In the draft Local Plan 2035 which is currently out for consultation regarding the draft policy for development in Group 3 and 4 settlements (p33) it states that:

"Planning permission will only be granted where all of the following criteria are met:

- i) The need for the development is evidenced by an up to date study which clearly identifies the nature and scale of the local need, or the local facility which is threatened with closure, together with evidence to show how the development would maintain that facility; and
- ii) The application is made by or fully supported by the Parish Council or other properly constituted local body which fully represents the local community; and
- iii) The application is supported by evidence that a majority of the local community is in favour of the proposal; and
- iv) Evidence is provided to demonstrate that the scale of the development is limited to that necessary to meet local needs or to support local facilities; and
- v) The development contributes positively to the character of the settlement and the scheme is appropriate to the structure, form, character and size of the settlement."

How can you help? Respond to the Consultation Local Plan 2035 on the Bedford Borough Council website before 9th June 2017. There will be a Village Meeting here at 10am on 20th May 2017 to discuss Bedford Borough Council's local plan and the Neighbourhood Plan.

5. Planning. (Cllr R. Jones)

What are the 3 big planning issues facing Colmworth since last year?

Bedford BC's Local Plan 2035. This is currently out for consultation and members of the public are encouraged to have their say by 9th June 2017.

The Colmworth Neighbourhood Plan

The four "super-sites" of Wyboston (4000), Twinwoods (6000), Thurleigh Airfield (5250) and Sharnbrook (4500). One or more of these is likely to be selected for large scale development.

6. Colmworth Poors Land Charity. (Cllr R. Jones)

What is the Charity's Objective?

"... to relieve either generally or individually persons resident in the Parish of Colmworth who are in conditions of need, hardship or distress."

Who are the Trustees? Russ Jones – Chairman, Patricia Ball – Honorary Secretary, Tom Frew - Treasurer

How can you help? If you know anyone in the Parish of Colmworth who is in conditions of need, hardship or distress, please let them know that help may be available from the Charity, and to contact any one of the Trustees.

7. Crime & other threats to the neighbourhood. (Cllr R. Jones)

What crimes and other threats are considered the highest priority in North Bedfordshire villages according to research by Bedfordshire Police?

Speeding, fly-tipping, unlawful encampments.

What is the Parish Council doing to combat these and other crimes?

The local Neighbourhood Watch scheme is no longer very active and may need reinvigorating. The Parish Council will investigate the options to do this.

Speeding. Cllr. Emma Peglar will cover the measures the Parish Council are using or investigating to reduce this.

Fly-tipping. Cllr. Lorraine Knight has taken responsibility for this. She explained that the Parish Council report any fly tipping to Environmental Services at Bedford Borough Council who come and collect it. However, they will not collect fly tipping if it is on private land (ie. more than 1m from the highway) and the landowner becomes responsible for removing it. She explained that it has been very difficult to get fly tipping on Mill Road removed. However, following an on-site meeting with the Highways Department the Borough have recently agreed to remove at least some of it and the Parish Council are in discussions with a landowner regarding the remainder.

Unlawful Encampments. These continue to be an issue in the area but Cllr Jones explained that landowners can help protect themselves eg. the Village Hall have put a gate across the car park. The rural crime unit of Bedfordshire police are able to offer advice.

8. Highways. (Cllr L. Knight)

Highways 2016/17

Cllr Knight explained that during 2016/17 she had started a programme of Village Walks with Bedford Borough Council's Highways Department which are focused on improving the local area for residents.

- Walk 1: Little Staughton Road to end of Church Road: COMPLETED
- Walk 2: Queens Road, Honeydon Road and Wilden Road: COMPLETED
- Walk 3: Channels End/Ducks Cross: COMPLETED 28th April
- We will now go into a yearly walks schedule with Gareth Turner of Bedfordshire Borough Council, looking at completing one a year

Replacement Road Signs: a large number of street signs and various bend and speed repeater signs were replaced or repaired during the year.

White lines were painted on the bend by Church Lane and additional bollards installed to encourage traffic to slow down following an accident last year.

Village Gates

Two sets of gates on the north and south side of the village were installed this year with a view to reducing speeding by drawing motorists attention to the 30mph residential zone. A number of residents have reported a reduction in traffic speeds since they were installed.

With agreement from Bedford Borough Council the Colmworth village boundary was extended to the north side of the village to improve visibility and reduce speeds for residents exiting City Lane. The funding for the gates was met entirely by donations from village residents and Bedfordshire Borough Council kindly installed the gates at no cost and have provided new Colmworth signs fixed directly to the gates.

Highways in 2017/18

- **Railings** over the brook will be repaired shortly, Bedford Borough Council are coordinating with the insurance company for funding repairs
- **Extension of the 40MPH Speed Limit** at the south of Colmworth to support our existing speed reduction plans and local residents in the Roothams Green area
- **Updating and Renewal of the Signs** on the grass triangle at the junction of Church Road, Little Staughton Road, Honeydon Road and Queens Road
- **After 2 years of Resolving over 50 Highways Issues** with the BBC, we are able to go into maintenance mode moving forward.
- Building collaboration with BBC Highways team continues

9. Speedwatch & traffic calming (Cllr E. Pegler)

Speedwatch

- Colmworth Speed Watch (CSW) held a session in the village in August 2016: 212 vehicles 7.30am to 9am Mon am
 - > 21% speeding
 - Highest speed – 54 mph in a 30 mph
 - > 62% of speeding vehicles at 40 mph or more
- CSW sessions were held at peak times near the Village Hall, Cornfields and Wilden Road.
- Speeders receive letters from the police and a visit for repeat offenders
- Village gates have helped traffic calming
- 30mph flashing vehicle activated signs are also helpful
- **More traffic and speed – it is anticipated that the volume and speed of traffic is likely to increase if the new super sites (large new developments at eg. Wyboston or Thurleigh) go ahead or if there are major works on the A1 or Black Cat.**

Speed Cameras

- Bedford Borough Council's Highways Department say we could potentially qualify for average speed cameras. These cost around £50 000 and the parish would have to make a contribution towards this (eg. around £5000).

- Siemens have demonstrated the capability of the cameras to reduce speed in Great Barford.
- Some accidents have occurred in the parish and there have been complaints to the Parish Council about speed related incidents – which help justify the need for speed cameras.
- We will send out a survey soliciting village views on cameras in the expectation that the situation will continue to get worse and will markedly deteriorate with road schemes and housing developments
- Police traffic divisions are very small now and when they do come and do speed checks they often do them in the middle of the day and are very visible so they rarely catch anyone. Local police enforcement is therefore not an effective option
- Most speeders have been found to be from a distance and not local

10. Country Park. (Cllr T. Frew)

A recently received report from the Wildlife Trust has provided a comprehensive review of the management of the Country Park. The report suggested management considerations for each habitat within the park; these will be incorporated into future developments over time as the park matures.

The report endorses the management of the meadows stating 'The grassland is already more diverse than much ex-arable grassland, and the choice of seed mix, mainly fine leaved grasses, has provided an excellent base for a rich and diverse meadow in future. Recent management seems to be bringing down nutrient levels, and sowing Yellow Rattle in 2015 was a good move'

The woodlands are thriving, though we need to be alert for any signs of ash dieback. The strategy of scything the undergrowth in the woodland has proved to be effective and will be continued and extended to other areas of the park.

The pond is well established with a variety of flora and fauna.

The volunteers continue to provide their time, energy and expertise in maintaining the park and now hold working sessions twice a month.

The final section of the Wildlife Trust report states, 'For future management, I would suggest more of the same' which I read as an endorsement of the management strategies of the Country Park Management Committee over the past ten years.

Unfortunately, there has been some vandalism in the park and a bench donated in memory of H. Colgrave was damaged. John Douglas has provided some wood for its repair which came from Tim Moreby.

11. Transparency & new website (L. Crawford – Clerk)

Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities

In December 2014 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) issued the Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities. The Code is a requirement for smaller authorities to make information available for local people to increase democratic accountability. The information for each financial year will be available on the parish website after the end of the financial year on 31st March and by 1st July at the latest. The list of

councillor responsibilities and the minutes, agendas and papers of formal meetings are published on the website on an ongoing basis.

For each financial year (1st April to 31st March) the following are published in Our files/Finance/Annual Returns

- All payments above £100 (all expenditure noted) in the cash book
- End of year accounts – Accounting Statements
- End of year Bank Reconciliation
- End of year accounts - Explanation of any significant variances (a significant variance is more than 10-15% variance in the statement of accounts for the relevant year and previous year)
- Annual Governance Statement
- Internal Audit Report

The above information and the list of Councillor responsibilities, register of public land and building assets, the minutes, agendas and papers of formal meetings can be accessed from one page of our website. Select “Parish Council Departments”, then “Transparency” and this will give you a page with links to all of the above information.

Websites

Historically the Parish Council were using a Colmworth.org website which cost £120 per year. However, a free website is available from Beds Parishes and Miguel Miramontes adapted this before he left in 2016 to create an impressive new free website. It was more complicated to use than the old site so Miguel offered the Clerk training and in September 2016 we wound down the Colmworth.org website and migrated everything to the Beds Parishes one.

The Clerk demonstrated how to use the website to find the minutes of meetings, view a planning application, view the accounts, view Highways information and view the Transparency Code information.

12. Borough Councillor Wootton’s Annual Report.

Cllr Wootton sent his apologies and submitted a report for the meeting.

Borough Council Budget 2017/18

At a meeting on the 1st February 2017 councillors agreed the Borough Council’s budget for 2017/18. A 4.75% increase in Council Tax was approved in response to the Council’s challenging financial position, caused to a large extent by significant increases in demand for social care and constrained resources.

The budget agreed around £10m of service efficiencies in the next 3 years, including £3.7m of savings to be delivered in 2017/18. There will, therefore, be an array of service changes, some of which were subject to public consultation. Changes of particular interest to Wyboston Ward are set out below:

School Transport

A new School Transport Policy will apply from September 2017. As it stands, pupils are able to access free transport to their 'catchment or nearest school', but a key change will see the Policy narrowed to apply to the 'nearest' school only. The Policy will not apply to SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) pupils or to current Post 16 students.

In addition, the policy will increase school transport fees for Post 16 (Sixth Form) pupils. Those Post 16 pupils who are eligible to use school transport will also now have to pay £890 per year to travel to school, as opposed to the current charge of £381. The current subsidy for low-income families will, however, be retained, which will see these pupils charged £190 a year.

Post 16 transport for Bedford College, Bedford 6th Form, Kimberley College and Shuttleworth College will be withdrawn entirely.

Discretionary Concessionary Travel Scheme

The English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) allows ENCTS pass holders to travel without charge on eligible routes between 9.30am – 11pm from Monday to Friday and anytime at weekends or Bank Holidays. Eligible ENCTS pass holders are those of state pension age or with certain disabilities. The Council also operated a discretionary scheme allowing ENCTS pass holders to travel for free at any time within Bedford Borough.

Following a public consultation, the decision was taken by the Mayor's Executive to introduce a £1 charge for ENCTS pass holders if they are using a bus service before 9.30am. It is estimated that this will save the Council £0.100m a year. While disabled ENCTS pass holders will pay £1 during the specified period, a companion will be able to travel with them for free.

Bin Collections

Fortnightly bin collections came into operation on Monday 31st October in a move to save the Council 0.587m a year. This has seen green and recycling waste collected one week and black bin waste the next. In addition, green waste will no longer be collected over the months of December- February. Around 27% of households have seen a change in their collection day.

Council's Overall Financial Position

The Council's latest Medium Term Financial Strategy sets out an estimated savings requirement for the Council of £27m by 2020/21 (the current revenue (day-to-day spending) budget is around £130m).

In addition to departmental savings, some of which were outlined above, Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) has undertaken a comprehensive review of the Council, which is expected to save £10.4m a year by the end of the decade.

The plans will improve the Council's website and make it easier for residents to use 'self-service' in registering issues and being assessed for eligibility to receive support (for adult social care, housing benefit etc.).

Council Tax

The overall average Band D Council Tax (including: Council; Police; Fire Service; parish, and; Special Area Charge precepts) will be £1,704.11; a 4.26% rise on the current year. The total Band D Council Tax payment for Colmworth is now £1,731.34.

Local Plan 2035

Since 2014 the Council has undertaken work towards its new Local Plan, setting out sites for development for thousands of new homes and employment growth to 2035. The latest Local Plan document will be subject to public consultation between 24th April – 9th June.

The report provides a housing need target of 19,000 to meet estimated population growth. Just over half of this figure is already catered for via existing planning permissions or is included in existing plans. There is a need, therefore, for the Council to find sites for just over 8,000 new dwellings.

The Council is pursuing an option to develop 1 or more new settlement(s) in the north of the Borough to accommodate around a quarter of this target. The document confirms that the sites in Wyboston, Sharnbrook, Twinwoods (between Milton Ernest and Thurleigh) and Thurleigh Airfield are being considered. One or more of these settlements could go forward and are likely to provide around 4,000 – 6,000 dwellings each (although it is estimated that only 2,000 could be developed within the Local Plan period to 2035, thus contributing to reducing the 8,000 target).

Sites earmarked for development in the urban and edge of urban areas are set to accommodate just over 2,000 properties. In addition, a number of villages have been designated as having 'Group 1' status, namely: Wilstead; Bromham; Sharnbrook; Clapham, and; Great Barford and are all set to increase substantially in size with between 500 – 600 new properties in each. An allocation of 1,000 homes has been earmarked for the brownfield site at the former Stewartby brick works.

Group 2 villages across the Borough will see development of between 25 – 50 new homes. Included in Group 2 are: Carlton; Harrold; Milton Ernest; Oakley; Turvey, and; Roxton. Willington is also a Group 2 village but does not have a housing allocation.

The other villages, including Colmworth, are included in Groups 3 and 4. They do not have specific allocations but these communities may wish to bring forward sites for development through implementing Neighbourhood Plans.

To access more information on responding to the consultation and to view the report see www.bedford.gov.uk/localplan2035.

Black Cat / A428

Highways England recently undertook a consultation on proposals to improve the Black Cat roundabout and provide a new dual carriageway to Caxton Gibbet.

Schools

Bedford Borough's schools have been ranked first in the east of England following the verification of 2016's GCSE results and a new measurement of performance.

The Government has decided to abandon the key standard of the percentage of pupils in each school attaining 5 A* - C grades including English and maths. Instead, 'Progress 8' has been introduced which measures each child's progress from their Key Stage 2 results (Year 6 / age 11) to their GCSE performance (Year 11 / age 16). School performance is, therefore, judged on whether pupils are attaining or exceeding their forecasted GCSE results.

Under this new system, the Borough is also ranked 1st out of 11 statistical neighbours (areas deemed to have similar characteristics) and 25th of 152 local authorities nationwide. Mark Rutherford and Sharnbrook, which both serve the village, had Progress 8 ratings above the national average.

The implementation of a new 2 tier education system across the Borough will start from September 2017.

Health and Social Care

Sustainability & Transformation Plan

This plan reviews health and social care services across Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes (BLMK). Councillors have called on the STP leads to be more open about their plans.

There is particular concern around the apparent intention to amalgamate services between Bedford, Milton Keynes and Luton & Dunstable Hospitals. It is unclear at this stage how this will affect services, or if a proposal from the now defunct Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes Healthcare Review to transfer maternity services from Bedford Hospital to Milton Keynes Hospital will be taken forward. All councillors agreed, therefore, to request a commitment from the STP leads that key services, namely A & E, paediatrics and obstetrics (maternity and childbirth) will be retained at Bedford Hospital.

Stroke Services

It was announced in July 2016 that Bedford Hospital would no longer have a Hyper Acute Stroke Unit (HASU) following the resignation of one of its consultants.

HASUs are responsible for treating patients in the crucial 72 hour period after a stroke. From July 2016, patients who would have previously accessed the HASU at Bedford Hospital were instead taken to Luton & Dunstable or Stevenage. They are then brought back to Bedford Hospital to access rehabilitation and inpatient services after 72 hours if they are in a stable condition but are unable to go home.

Policing

Bedfordshire's Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) issued her first Police and Crime Plan after her election in May 2016. Kathryn Holloway has set out the following priorities for Bedfordshire Police:

- A return of more visible policing across the county
- To rebuild public confidence in Bedfordshire Police
- To ensure police are there when needed most after 999 calls
- Putting victims at the centre of policing and prosecutions
- A fair deal on policing whether you live in the country or town
- Protecting the police to protect the public
- Genuinely being a Commissioner for all communities
- Working with partners to break the cycle of crime

She has also published a Rural Crime Strategy, which includes actions such as the appointment of a Rural Crime Liaison Officer with responsibility for working with farmers and parish councils, as well as the extension of a scheme to appoint Special Constables with specific responsibility for the rural areas. For more information see www.bedsppcc.org

Further details of this scheme were announced recently with the PCC implementing 'Operation Sentinel Rural' which will see a team of an Inspector, Sergeant, 4 Police Constables and 4 Police Community Support Officers focus on rural policing issues. It was also announced that the unit will have use of a drone which will be used to acquire evidence.

Ward Fund

Each year Borough councillors are able to allocate monies to support community schemes within their ward. Last year Tom Wootton contributed from his ward fund £791 for bark for the village play area,

If you feel you have a community project which could benefit from his 2017/18 ward fund, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Borough Councillor Tom Wootton

13 Village Hall Annual Report Andy Clarke. No report was received.

14 Open Forum

A parishioner asked why the Clerk's salary had increased from £3000 in 2013-14 to nearly £5000 in 2016/17 and 2017/18. The Clerk explained that the previous Clerk's pay had increased when she passed the CiLCA Clerk's qualification and again when her hours increased from 4 to 5 per week. In addition, it became clear that the previous Clerk should be paid holiday pay and she was awarded backpay for this.

The Clerk explained that when she started as Clerk in June 2016 the Parish Council agreed to contribute 15% to her pension. After a month in the job it became clear that she was not able to do the job adequately in 5 hours per week and the Council agreed to increase her hours to 7 hours per week. This was due to the increased burden of meeting the Transparency Code and complying with all the regulatory requirements for Parish Councils (risk assessments, reporting requirements and additional management and maintenance of the Councils assets).

Another parishioner suggested that other Parish Councils would face similar regulatory burdens and asked how our precept compared with others. The Clerk explained that Colmworth's band D equivalent precept figure will be £70.77 for 2017/18 which puts them in the top quarter of Bedford Borough parishes somewhere between Great Barford and Roxton.

She explained that there is a lot going on in Colmworth with an active Parish Council who are responsible for managing the Country Park and Triangle, the Playing Field and play area, street lights, an extensive website, an excellent magazine and a Neighbourhood Plan. Whilst the Clerk may not be closely involved in managing all of these (eg. Cllr Michell manages the Chronicle and Cllr Jones manages the Neighbourhood Plan) she does need to provide information for the budget, monitor the budget, report the finances, prepare policies, risk assessments, obtain quotes for maintenance tasks etc. and it all adds up to more than 5 hours per week. At present it adds up to significantly more than 7 hours per week but the Clerk is happy to put in additional hours at present in the expectation that the hours will settle in time. She explained that the Parish Council have agreed to keep her contract at 5 hours per week for the time being and pay the remaining two hours per week as additional pay so that if the time commitment permits she can return to 5 hours per week again in future.

A member of the public suggested that Councillors and other members of the public should be used instead of employing a Handyman to inspect and maintain the play area. The Clerk explained that the Council had advertised in the past requesting a volunteer for this without success and she also pointed out that Councillors work very hard for the Parish and there were around 20 volunteers already doing a huge amount in the Triangle and Country Park.

Another parishioner suggested that it would have been better to increase the precept gradually and use reserves or put it up to fix the problem and then put it back down. The Clerk explained that, due to the shortfall in precept compared to the regular expenditure required to run the Council, a gradual increase would have reduced reserves to an unacceptably low level and there was a risk that referendum principals could prevent any future increase in the precept. She explained that if it was possible to reduce her hours back to 5 per week in the future she and the Council would be happy to do so and that if the precept could be reduced in future it would be.

A parishioner pointed out that the Local Plan had not made it clear that only 8000 additional homes were needed on top of those already proposed in urban areas, urban fringe and Stewartby Brickworks. He also felt it had not been made clear that only one or two of the supersites would be needed – not all four.

A parishioner asked the Parish Council to find out how much Bedford Borough Council spend on roads vs other regions eg Hull where the roads were in much better condition. She also suggested that the new 40mph zone should be a 30mph zone. Cllr Pegler explained that the speed limit reductions needed to be progressive and 40mph was more achievable at this stage than 30mph but she agreed that 30mph would be preferable in future.

A parishioner suggested that speed cameras seem to be in decline. Cllr Pegler explained that fixed cameras were in decline but average cameras were increasing and are proving very effective.

A parishioner asked whether 30mph strips in red painted on the road had been effective at reducing speed. Cllr Knight explained that they had not been shown to offer much benefit.

A parishioner expressed concern that the village gates were only at two entrances to the village and yet there are many entrances and that the gates at the south side of the village were not positioned at the edge of the village. Cllr Knight explained that the decision had been made to prioritise the main road through the village but if further donations become available the Parish Council would happily consider gates at other locations in consultation with residents. She explained that the position of the gates on the south side of the village was chosen because it is near a row of houses positioned on the road and where the 30mph zone begins.