

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting

for the Electors of Colmworth

held on Thursday, 6th May 2021 from 7pm held remotely online

Present: Emma Pegler, Lorraine Knight, Tom Frew, Beverley Brightman, Graham Palmer, Lizzie Barnicoat (Clerk), Borough Councillor Tom Wootton, and one member of the public.

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Patricia Bell, and John Douglas.

1. Approval of the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held in May 2019.

Having been previously circulated the minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting. Proposed by Emma Pegler and seconded by Beverley Brightman, resolution passed.

2. Chairman's Annual Report. (Emma Pegler)

EP focused on the recent work done to support the village, in light of the Denybrook development and potential within the Local Plan as an area potentially for significant housing development in such close proximity to the parish. There has also been a lot of work over the year in understanding more about the East West Rail proposed route alignments, in addition to the stacking impact from aircraft at London Luton aircraft and potential issues associated with both these items. This has all been whilst Parish Council meetings have needed to be held remotely due to the global pandemic.

Whilst it is important to engage with Colmworth residents on the future usage of the Country Park, it has been felt it would not be best for this to be done via a remote setting, and it is hoped later on this year a face to face meeting will be held to enable resident input on this village asset.

There has also been a new noticeboard installed at Channels End, which was kindly donated by a family. Congratulations were also given to Lady Rose Justice of the Supreme Court who is a resident of Colmworth on her high profile appointment.

The Council welcomed new Clerk, Lizzie Barnicoat and look forward to working with her.

3. Financial Report (Clerk)

Receipts

In 2020/21 our precept was £14,960. Other receipts of £2,599 included Ward Funding of £250.00 for a new bench and £1500 Ward Fund donation to the Village Hall. An insurance claim had been needed over the year which had resulted in a payment of £723 to the Parish Council as well.

Payments

Over the year there continued to be careful budget monitoring done by the Parish Council. Our largest payments from the precept were the Clerk's staff costs (£4,194), followed by £3,443 for maintenance costs (grass and hedge cutting, repairs general maintenance and for the defibrillator), £1,356 for the Country Park loan repayment, and insurance £508. Payments for general administration costs such as audit charges, subscriptions etc remained static, the Council continued with investing in making themselves accessible with the website costing £889.

The Council ended the year with £5408 of committed reserves to various items such as Neighbourhood Plan, tree works, Gardening Club and various other items. There also remains £8954 earmarked for average speed cameras. The General Reserves is at £14,084 which is within the recommended range of Council reserve's being ideally no more than the annual precept.

Loan

The Council took out a £20,000 25 year loan with the Public Works Loan Board (PWLb) on 28th January 2008 to purchase the Country Park. The outstanding balance is £12,390. We make a fixed payment of £1,356 annually of which approximately half is interest and half capital repayment. The loan will be fully repaid in 2033. Interest is approximately 4.5% but there are very high penalties to pay it off early and Parish Councils can only borrow from the PWLB. The internal audit for this financial year was kindly carried out by Kim Webb, who undertook an independent review of the Parish Council's financial management and internal controls, and following a review of the audited accounts at tonight's Parish Council meeting the accounts will then go on for an external review which has to be carried out by the appointed auditor, which for Bedfordshire is Mazars.

4. Borough Councillor Wootton's Annual Report

Annual Report 2020/21 from Cllr Tom Wootton

This year has been the most challenging ever for Councillors and Borough employees including the operating staff, the external facing support teams for Adult and Children's care, Disability Care, Re-ablement support as well as supporting residents in our care homes.

Borough Hall was closed and all employees with just a few exceptions went to work from home and are largely still there.

Face to face Council meetings were cancelled for a while until a system for holding virtual committee meetings was available. The Borough's broadband was improved to support home working and every single member of the authority has had to learn to fulfil their role in a different way that is COVID safe.

The speed at which the Borough made those changes and managed to keep all services operating, from emptying bins to supporting people with needs is a credit to everyone employed in the Borough.

The political groups put aside their flags and campaigns to effect the changes in a timely and effective manner.

Here is a list of the decisions that have been made and affected the Borough this year.

Budget 2021/22

Bedford Borough Council have approved an increase in core Council Tax of 1.99% supplemented by a 1.75% Adult Social Care Precept, totalling 3.74% giving an average Band D Council Tax of £1,624.14 which was agreed at Full Council on Wednesday 3rd February.

You can find more details about their budget proposals here:

<http://www.councillorsupport.bedford.gov.uk/documents/s53056/Item%2014%20-%20Revenue%20Budget%202021-22.pdf>

At Full Council on Wednesday 24th February the completed budget was finalised and included the precepts of Police & Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire, the Bedfordshire Fire & Rescue Authority and the Parish Councils.

Bedford River Festival postponed until 2022

The Council has again postponed the River Festival until as well as the Kite and Motoring Festival until 2022.

The bi-annual River Festival was originally due to take place in the summer of 2020, but the growing pandemic meant it was postponed until 2021 the new date for the next River Festival is 23 and 24 July.

Bedford Council get money for High Street from Government HSHAZ programme

Bedford will receive £1.76 million to deliver building works and a cultural programme to revive Bedford High Street. The South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership, Historic England and LoveBedford are contributing funding.

Bedford Borough Council has currently earmarked 43 buildings as eligible for funding under the HSHAZ programme. Improvements to these buildings could include:

- Reinstatement of traditional shopfronts.
- Conversion of vacant floor space for retail and/or residential use.
- Repair and reinstatement of architectural details to the façade of buildings.
- Undertaking structural works to help achieve these improvements.

Bedford Council receives £180k boost from round 2 of Culture Recovery Fund

Bedford borough has received £182,349 from the Government to support iconic cultural and heritage organisations and independent cinemas as they reopen and recover from coronavirus.

This is additional to the £710,000 Bedford Borough received in Round 1 of funding in October 2020 which supported local events and venues.

Veolia Awarded Waste Contracts for Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire Councils

Veolia have been given the Bedford Borough Council waste contracts which means the Covanta incinerator site in Stewartby will begin taking in waste from both Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire too. We will continue to look for ways to mitigate the effect of this decision on those living in the vicinity of the Covanta plant and who are most likely to be concerned by the invisible particulate matter that the facility will emit. We continue to believe the Mayor and Borough Council should be looking for ways to destroy the business case for Covanta rather than using it to burn Borough waste and that of our neighbouring Council.

Controversial route 'E' for East West Rail a source of increasing concern for Borough residents

The chosen route selected for the East West Rail project - route E - continues to prove controversial and Borough Councillors received a petition this month, signed by over 1600 Bedford residents, objecting to it. The petition was debated at a heated meeting of the Borough Council on 24th February, when a number of residents from parishes in and around the route, put a series of questions to Council Leaders, and calling for the Council to "hold a full public consultation to be followed by a debate at Full Council in respect of the Council's decision to support Route E".

Many residents felt that there had been a lack of transparency around how the Mayor and Borough had come to support route E and felt that not enough information had been put in the public domain. They also demanded to know how route E, previously identified as one of the most expensive of the 5 options A-E, had suddenly become the cheapest option, without any explanation.

The subject of freight also proved controversial, with residents, parishes and Borough Councillors expressing the view that freight had been underplayed in previous discussions, and more information was required, as it forms a key part of the business case for the EWR project.

In the Council debate that followed, the Mayor's and Council leadership put forward a resolution which reconfirmed the Borough's support for a route through the town centre but didn't really address the concerns of the petitioners. Councillors representing the rural wards

in the north of the Borough, those most affected by route E, objected to the motion. They feel route E will do irreparable damage to the north Bedfordshire countryside. Equally, Councillors in the south of the Borough wanted to ensure the safe delivery of Wixams station and wanted an EWR route that would not jeopardise this. Ultimately, the Mayor's resolution was not unanimously supported.

The EWR Consultation has now opened, the Conservative Group have called for the deadline to be extended and for a number of changes to be made to the consultation.

There are controversies over their 'emerging preferred option' in that it puts up to 97 properties under threat in the north of Bedford, it involves laying 2 new tracks into Bedford Station and increasing traffic congestion in the Midland Road, Queens Park, Ashburnham Road area. The residents in the properties effected were informed the day before the consultation that their property may be subject to a CPO (Compulsory Purchase Order) in the future.

You can view all documents and respond on their website found below. There are also some dates for virtual events. We strongly urge you to respond before it closes on 9 June: <https://eastwestrail.co.uk/consultation>

Boundary Commission update

The Boundary Commission has changed its timetable for its recommendations. There will now be more draft recommendations released on 11 May for 8 weeks of further consultation. The final recommendations will then be released on 31 August.

Bedford Borough Contract with Fusion

After we came out of the first lockdown, Fusion refused to open their services until they were given money they were not entitled to by Bedford Borough Council. After receiving this the country locked down again and Fusion run services have remained closed until Monday 12 April.

The contract remains controversial, there are concerns from residents about the cleanliness, maintenance and quality of service provided.

CLlr Tom Wootton: tom.wootton@bedford.gov.uk / 07771575227

5. Planning (Graham Palmer)

Councillor Palmer highlighted that again this would be a summary of the year and not about any individual planning applications but would summarise the process that the Parish Council go through in reviewing applications. It is important to remember that the Parish Council do not decide the outcome of planning requests, the Parish Council is a statutory consultee who

provides comments. Bedford Planning must take our views into account, but they treat our comments in a similar way to how they treat the comments of any individual.

The process remains fairly simple, all planning applications are recorded on the Parish Council website to assist residents in tracking applications and submitting their views. We divide applications into two categories. Most applications are minor which we describe as "Type1" applications such as house extensions. Anything more substantial is described as a "Type 2" application which in addition to being listed on our website is notified on the Trumpet and Facebook. For Type 1 applications, if there are no objections we will simply send a letter to Bedford confirming that is the case. For Type 2 applications these will be considered at a Parish Council meeting open to all, and the input we receive from the meeting will form the basis of our comments to Bedford Planning.

6. Highways (Lorraine Knight)

This year finally saw the installation of average speed cameras after delays arise from supply issues as a result of Covid, thanks was given to the residents who were supportive and had provided financial contribution to the scheme. There were 79 speeding vehicles reported recently, and whilst the data was lower the previous month, this was due to the cameras not having been active for a whole recording month. There is a consensus that vehicle speeds through the parish have thankfully reduced as a direct result of this installation.

There has also been the replacement of the Mill Road name sign, as well as pot holes and other issues being reported regularly to highways, as the local network is closely monitored by Councillors. Gareth Turner and Andrew Prigmore, Borough Council Officers, were thanked as usual for the continued support to Colmworth.

It was also noted that support has been provided by the Parish Council to St Deny PCC with their grounds and tree work to ensure, which has been gratefully received.

7. Rights of Way (Beverley Brightman)

The Rights of Way continue to be generally well maintained, with thanks given to those that enable this to be the case. It is evident people are taking their own route at times rather than going cross field in some areas, however, there has been no concerns raised with this. All signage appears to be clear, apart from signs for Foothpaths 6 and 19, which appear to be down. These have been reported and the local ramblers group now volunteer to replace these. Councillor Pegler agreed to pinpoint the lack of signage so this information could be passed on, and Councillor Brightman will continue to monitor the network.

8. Colmworth Country Park (Tom Frew)

Councillor Frew reported basic maintenance of the area continues, there has been some issue with locals using the dog waste bin in the park as it appears to be over flowing often. There was a discussion on this being a village wide issue with the dog waste bins, as the bin at the triangle is also often full. Suggestions were talked through, it was agreed that the Clerk to seek feedback from the Borough Council collection team to see if they had noticed any changes in usage, or whether they need to be emptied more frequently.

Volunteers continue to give freely of their time and energy to maintain the park for all to enjoy

9. Gardening Club (Tom Frew)

General maintenance continues.

Cllr Wootton joined the meeting at this point

10. Police and Crime (Beverley Brightman)

Councillor Brightman reported that the local trend has followed the national pattern with burglaries decreasing and sadly domestic violence increasing along with fraud and cyber crime. Articles on improving security have been placed in the Chronicle and there would be an invite to the newly elected Police Crime Commissioner to the parish.

11. Colmworth Village Hall Report

In common with most organisations and charities, 2020 turned out to be a very unusual and challenging year for the trustees of the village hall.

Like the rest of the country, we closed our doors under UK Government instruction on 26th March and, whilst Government guidance could have allowed us to reopen for a limited number of uses during a brief period from August, the on-going restrictions imposed by our qualifying hirers' own associations and governing bodies meant that no-one was able to make use of the facilities. Ultimately, we were forced to close our doors again under new Government restrictions.

Despite this, we had made the hall "COVID secure" by following Government and other bodies advice. Trustees undertook a full-risk assessment and implemented a number of measures. We implemented a one-way system in place with a sanitising station on entry, carpets and curtains (which are especially difficult to decontaminate) were either covered or removed, fabric seating was replaced with wipeable but still soft & comfortable chairs. The kitchen and bar have had to be placed out of bounds and there is plenty of signage and the all-important track & trace QR code in the entrance. A big thank-you to Gavin Jones, who does a fantastic (voluntary) job maintaining the hall and put all of this in place.

Although they may have been unable to make use of the hall, we retained regular hirers' slots, so as soon as they are able to resume activities, their usual bookings could be resumed. Obviously the majority of our income comes from people hiring the hall and, whilst many of our costs (heating, water and utilities, etc) have been minimised, other costs are still incurred. Thankfully, we were able to claim under the Government Hospitality Grants, which has meant that the trustees remain confident that we have at least 12 months funding in place to cover our loss of income, without a need to draw on reserves.

This has also meant that the trustees were able to agree that there would be no increase in hire rates for 2021 and have allowed us to be very flexible with hirers, whilst there remained uncertainty on whether activities could proceed.

Although lockdown as not helped, the trustees continued to move forward with the purchase of the final strip of land on our site from St Albans Diocese and we are hopeful that this can now be concluded in the next few months. We are also grateful to the Ward Fund, which has helped financially to support us with this capital purchase.

As the Government begins to ease restrictions and we emerge from lockdown, we are again allowing hirers to book permitted activities and the next significant milestone is 17th May when a greater range of activities and events will be allowed again. We fully understand that, despite restrictions being relaxed, it is difficult for organisers to judge the level of takeup there maybe from participants and we are being extremely flexible in accommodating changes to bookings. Above all else, the trustees are mindful that we are here to offer a facility to the community and will fully play our part in making it as easy as possible for people to return to normality.

To keep people updated, we have setup a Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/colmworthvillagehall>) and it would be helpful if you could follow us and give us a “like” to help with publicity when we are allowed to fully reopen again.

I would just like to thank the trustees and members of the management committee for their considerable time and effort this year; in many ways, despite being closed, there has been greater demand on the committee this year as we deal with COVID as well as our usual business.

If anyone has any questions or suggestions, please feel free to drop me an email to chair@colmworthvillagehall.org.uk

Councillor Knight has followed up on finding out more information and clarity on the tree issue raised within this report.

12. Open Forum

A resident commented on the East West Rail consultation and associated concerns with freight usage of the proposed line.

Cllr. Wootton highlighted Ward Fund monies are available.

There was a summary on the Chronicle, which continues to a useful resource for sharing information with residents, along with the Trumpet.

The meeting closed at 7.40pm