

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting

for the Electors of Colmworth

held on Thursday 8th May 2025 from 7pm held at Colmworth Village Hall

Present: Emma Pegler, Malcolm Marsh, Patricia Ball, Tom Frew, Borough Councillor Sira, Lizzie Barnicoat (Clerk) and four members of the public.

Apologies for absence were received from Graham Palmer.

Two minutes silenced observed for VE Day

1. Approval of the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held in May 2024

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

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

In many ways it's been a year like any other pre the dramas of housing estates likely to be on our doorsteps and trains passing along the edge of the village. Go back to 2023 and we were working tirelessly to protest at the prospect of Denybrook being built on our door step and turning our quiet village into a town. We participated in many meetings to protest at East-West Rail and then living with the uncertainty of 'will it'/'won't it'.

But after a year with not so much more we could do – the new Labour Government had to decide if it would back East-West Rail and another site was chosen for the major housing development, we now have to deal with the topics again in earnest.

East West Rail will go ahead and I am observing platforms being laid down in local fields. Is there more we can do to mitigate the situation – we need to keep thinking about that. And The Local Plan for Bedford was not approved so again there is the spectre of reopening the debate as to where to locate mass housing, and to protect the village in the interim from speculative development that risks doubling its size while not increasing or contributing to its amenities.

The PC has had consistent membership from dedicated individuals who care about our village. We inspect and looking after our assets – the VH playing field and the country park. We raise money to make repairs. We lobby Bedford Borough Council to look after our roads and verges. It's a nice team and everyone respects their colleagues and we pull together to get stuff done. I would like to thank my fellow parish councillors for working hard and being such thoroughly decent people who give back to our community. I thank Lizzie our clerk who is a thoroughly nice lady who brings a wealth of insights to our meetings from her interconnectedness with other villages and local government offices.

We will continue to support each other in the year ahead.

One area I want to focus on where we can control our destiny, is the Country Park. It is an amazing asset that is loved and used. Upkeep is by a small group of dedicated volunteers and the group isn't getting bigger. Unless more people in the village want to get involved, we will need to think about paying people to do more maintenance in the future. As our trees and hedges mature, they need heavier maintenance because it is harder to do things at ground level and all this costs. I will need to recommend that we raise the precept in the next year to future proof this asset. It is the appropriate and responsible thing to do. We have kept the precept at a constant level for a long time because of the wider challenges in the Economy. To continue to do that will end up being a false economy and we will need to plan in earnest this year.

3. Financial Report (Clerk)

Receipts

In 2024/25 the precept was £16980. Other receipts of £1192 included Borough Councillor Ward Fund contribution including Gardening Club (£1100), interest received (£126) and a refund from Bedford Borough Council (£46).

Payments

Over the year there has as usual continued to be careful budget monitoring done by the Parish Council, thanks are needed to Councillor Palmer for support with this.

The costs of administrative items included administrative support, whilst payments for general administration costs such as audit charges, subscriptions etc remained static. The insurance cost was reviewed to bring a cost saving again in 2024/25. The Council have continued to invest in ways to communicate to the residents, this is done with the website facility being regularly updated with a range of useful document on. The Council also ensures there are multiple outlets to keep residents updated through in addition to the use of social media, noticeboards, Chronicle and the Trumpet which are free resources.

Maintenance such as grass and hedge cutting, repairs general maintenance repairs have also continued throughout the financial year, as well as £1,356 for the Country Park loan repayment. A noticeable area where increased cost is being incurred is for the maintenance and repairs to the playground, regular safety checks are carried out on the equipment and professional advice is sought when needed to keep the equipment in good working order, however, unfortunately this becomes challenging as the level of resources needed to do this often goes above the level of funds available to the Parish Council. The Parish Council spent £3810 on maintenance and were grateful for the Borough Council Ward Fund grant of £800 to play area improvement works.

The Council ended the year with committed reserves to various items such as Neighbourhood Plan, tree works, Gardening Club and various other items. The General Reserves remain within the recommended range of Council reserves 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 £8,986. 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 carried out by Julie Betts. Julie has undertaken an independent review of the Parish Council's financial management and internal controls, then 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. This financial year as the Parish Council expenditure is again below £25,000 so there will be a limited assurance review by the external auditor, however, the internal audit has carried out a thorough review of the Council's finance records and controls.

4. Borough Councillor Sira's Annual Report

Cllr Sira detailed that Universal Studio has been confirmed at a site in Kempston Hardwick, recognised by central government as a great opportunity. Family Hub information shared, school improvement investments in the service, more funding to flashing flooding reserves. Local Plan 2040 update, the latest Inspector letter detailed, the timescales being worked to noted. GP Surgery project expansion of the Great Barford surgery with construction due to start in 2026 and be completed by 2028.

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 (Emma Pegler)

Highways

We continue to put pressure on Beds Borough either to stop lorries using our roads or to repair the roads and verges. We manage to keep our heads just above water on this but Bedford should be doing more particularly if they are wanting more housing and approving major projects like Universal which is great for business but uses the same old roads. We will continue the pressure our end to get traffic calming measures; lobby for 'not suitable for HGV' signs and get repairs to verges. Our variable speed signs on Wilden Road were demonstrating

sustained high volumes of vehicles exceeding the speed limit and we will use this as a bank of evidence to get the speed reduced to 30mph.

Cllr Sira detailed that the local ward parishes to meet with Highways Inspector, Planning Officers, the Mayor to discuss local issues on 2nd July at Little Staughton.

7. Rights of Way (Emma Pegler)

Landowners taking actions has impacted at least one major and important footpath and we are vigilant to respond to any issues brought to our attention. Beds Borough is doing less and less by way of grass cutting and maintenance so we have during the summer certain impassable footpaths and all we can do is lobby. We note that a number of rights of way signs are old and rotted and I intend to focus on that this year.

8. Colmworth Country Park (Tom Frew)

Councillor Frew reported basic maintenance of the area continues, there also continues to be volunteers who kindly continue to give freely of their time and energy to maintain the park for all to enjoy. Six volunteers at present, thanks given to all those that support the work done.

9. Gardening Club (Tom Frew)

General maintenance continues, there has been some vandalism to the statue at the green triangle, footage of the incident has been captured. Cllr. Frew to provide footage to the Clerk for sharing with the local community police team.

10. Police and Crime (Lizzie Barnicoat)

The local Police did attend a Coffee with a Cop event which it was decided to encourage more attendees was opened up to other small local rural communities, which saw a good attendance and a wish from the Police for a further event to be arranged as it had been so successful.

11. Colmworth Village Hall Report

Village Hall representative in attendance detailed that redecoration has taken place, new LED lighting and flood lights in the car park. Community event held to celebrate VE Day with a new policy for community events the hall will be available free of charge to support local community groups set up.

12. Open Forum

No cold calling signs have been removed, feedback to local authority that signs need replacing, Clerk to follow up.

Anglian Water improvement works returning to complete the pipe replacement works commence again shortly.

The meeting closed at 7.50pm