

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**  
Held on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> May 2018 at 7.30pm

**Welcome from the Chair Cllr Patricia Baylis.**

Cllr Baylis welcomed everyone to the 2018 Annual Parish Meeting. She then paid tribute to two councillors: Mrs Pat Peers, Chairman, who very sadly died last November. Pat was an active councillor for many years and in many areas of Benson life including the youth club, library, day centre and many others. She was an active fund-raiser and unstinting in her support for the village. The Council and the Parish owe her an enormous debt of gratitude.

Mr Jon Fowler, Vice Chairman and acting chairman during Pat's last illness. Jon, who resigned last Christmas, contributed enormously to the work of the Council and took chairmanship of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. The Parish Council extends its sincere thanks for the full contribution Jon made to the village over many years.

Finally, Cllr Baylis welcomed two new councillors, well one new and one returning; Mr Bill Pattison and Mrs Claire Robinson.

1. **Apologies:** Cllr Felix Bloomfield, Cllr Tom Stevenson, Cllr Rob Jordan, Cllr Bill Pattison, Cllr Teresa McTeague, Cllr Steve McCann, Cllr Rob Workman and PAGE (Parishes Against Gravel Extraction).
2. **Minutes of the last Annual Parish Meeting on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2017:** the minutes were agreed as a true record. Proposed by Mr P Keeble and seconded by Mr J Sharman.
3. **Presentation of the Don Fletcher Community Award.** Cllr Baylis was very pleased to present the award to Mr John Sharman who has formed the Benson Tidy Group. The Group has been involved in litter picking and tidying of the village centre so far. The Parish Council are very grateful to John for forming the group and being proactive.

Mr Sharman thanked the council very much for the award, which he was most surprised to receive and especially thanked those who had come along and helped. The next session will be on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> June; meeting outside the pharmacy in the village centre.

4. **Presentation of the Bob Griffiths Trophy.** This was awarded to students of the Wallingford School Community Project who have helped with various projects around the village including bridge painting, refurbishment of the fence and gate at Bertie West Field and renovation of the shelter at Rivermead. Unfortunately, neither the students nor their co-ordinator Mr Tim Smith were able to attend to receive the award.
5. **To receive written reports** from Benson Nature Group, Finance, Recreation & Lands and Halls Committees. These reports were available on the night and are also on the Parish Council website. There were no questions or comments arising from the reports.

**Cllr Mark Gray (Oxfordshire County Council)** presented his report to those present. He spoke at length about the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway, his remarks included:

- It would represent a blight on the Oxfordshire landscape

- OCC have no powers to do anything about it
- Only images of the proposed routes are available
- Large amounts of money are involved in its planning and eventual construction
- It will represent a big issue in terms of traffic particularly for Didcot and Bicester

The County Council will not need to make further cuts this year for the first time in around 5 years. In addition, there will be more money from Business Taxes. Cllr Gray has a cabinet position with responsibility for Local Communities and the Voluntary Sector. He will be working on improving Transport in the Community following cuts which have resulted in the loss of bus services.

Locally, Cllr Gray runs a surgery prior to the Parish Council Meeting each month. He has been working on the Littleworth Road issues and also with a small number of residents, supporting a Children's Centre in Benson. He has also been working on a project with Millstream Day Centre; helping to raise funds.

Questions from the floor to Cllr Gray. The first questions and comments concerned the state of the roads and pot holes which have worsened over the winter. Cllr Gray explained that the budget for roads is £16 million but that it costs around £1 million per mile of road and Oxfordshire has 3.5 thousand miles of road. Some savings can be made through use of local contractors, but MG felt on the whole the sub-contractors did a reasonable job. MG confirmed it is possible to claim for damage to vehicles caused by pot holes. He also confirmed that he would continue to push for work on Castle Square.

Other questions followed concerning the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway in terms of timescales and rail infrastructure. MG confirmed it was a long-term project with a 2026 start date. It would involve the construction of one million houses along the route. A rail link will happen sometime and research into need has been done.

6. **To receive an update on the Benson Neighbourhood Plan** (included under item 8).
7. **To receive an update from Parishes Against Gravel Extraction (PAGE)**. PAGE sent their apologies and a written report instead.
8. **To receive an overview of Parish Council Activity**. Cllr Phil Murray (CPM) presented an overview under various headings, with slides.

#### **Representing you properly:**

- Appointment of Interim Chair, Vice Chair & new councillors
- Compliance & Governance
- Working with SODC, OCC, other PC's & 20+ Voluntary Groups etc

Cllr Murray explained that the Parish Council is the fourth tier of government so is duty bound to cooperate with a whole raft of people.

#### **Planning for Benson's future:**

- Neighbourhood Plan – final version, examiners report and referendum
- Contesting Appeals e.g. BEN 5 & 7
- Parish Hall extension

The Neighbourhood Plan has involved 6-7 'man' years of effort, over 2 years and involved nearly 100 people working together. Essentially it has involved looking at the future of Benson and the final plan has now been examined and strongly endorsed by the examiner. It has succeeded in getting a group of developers to contribute to a relief road and at no extra cost to the public purse. The Plan moves forward to referendum on June 28<sup>th</sup> and CPM encouraged everyone to turn out and to vote.

The Parish Council is contesting a number of planning appeals with the latest being 'called in' by the Secretary of State. The Neighbourhood Plan now holds significant weight and should be able to strongly influence any future housing development plans, especially after the referendum.

The Parish Hall extension will include re-building/renovation of the toilets, creating new space for the Parish Office, refurbishment of the kitchen and inclusion of a lift. Project management will go out to competitive tender/procurement.

#### **Improving our environment:**

- Parish Hall floor refurbishment
- Redesigning the Rivermead entrance
- New play equipment in two play areas
- Replacement boilers!
- War Memorial cleaning

The Rivermead entrance is now nicer and safer and play equipment at St Helens and Green Close is much improved. Unfortunately, the boilers had to be replaced as they broke down. The Parish Council has received a grant for cleaning the War Memorial.

#### **Dealing with anti-social behaviour:**

- Litter
- Inconsiderate parking
- Dog fouling!

These are three things which are really important to the quality of village life and also waste a lot of time. The litter problem is getting worse, but the plan is to 'have words with' the various commercial organisations involved. There is simply insufficient land for parking but collectively we should persuade others from parking inconsiderately. If the unacceptable level of dog fouling persists we will need to fence off more of our green spaces.

#### **Filling the Services Gap:**

- Grass cutting contracts
- Children's Centres(?)

CPM stated that OCC budget cuts have continued with divestment of services such as grass cutting and there are no signs that this won't continue. Children's Centres have been closed and this has resulted in strong feelings on both sides. No decision has yet been made for a new children's centre/hub in Benson.

#### **Looking ahead:**

- Delivering the Neighbourhood Plan
- Gravel Extraction (PAGE)
- Oxford to Cambridge Expressway

The major issues now involve moving into delivery of the Neighbourhood Plan. The team are currently looking at the need for crossings in Benson which involves weekends spent observing members of the public crossing roads! OCC will impose gravel extraction on some sites and 75% are in the south, with possible sites in Warborough and Benson. More houses will result in the need for more gravel. The Expressway has already been discussed.

9. **To answer any written questions** – none received

10. **To put questions to councillors from the audience**

**Proposed Children's Centre:** one resident stated that she was not against this, but it was not a black and white decision. In the past, parents had paid for this type of facility

and she was aware that Cllr Gray had been fund-raising in Wallingford. Another resident stated that both Watlington and Chalgrove have Children's Centres and they have a joint management structure – could this be considered for Benson too?

**Benson Tidy Group:** John Sharman pointed out that there is a limit to what the group can do. Can the council consider increasing the groundsman's hours of work?

**Action:** to add to next Finance Committee agenda

**Dog fouling:** discussion concerning this matter included the following points

- More dog bins which are also more obvious
- More strongly worded signage
- Persuade PCSOs to do spot checks
- Larger bin in Mill Lane
- Bag dispensers alongside bins
- Fencing off of play areas

**Action:** to discuss options at next Recreation and Lands meeting

**Litter problem:** large proportion of litter is due to McDonald's. CPM is going to speak directly to them about this.

**Parking on double yellow lines:** this is getting worse and there is an absence of police checks, speed cameras or fines. An example of another cut in services. It was pointed out that district councils should provide these services and not smaller parish councils.

11. **Closing remarks** – Cllr Baylis thanked everyone for attending and stated the Council looked forward to working with all parishioners in the coming year.

Mr Ian Leppard wanted thanks recorded to the Neighbourhood Plan Team for their hard work over a long time and a special thank you to Jon Fowler and Phil Murray for how well they spoke at the last appeal.

Mrs Elizabeth Leppard thanked Cllr Baylis for stepping in and felt she had done a tremendous job holding meetings together.

**The meeting closed at 8.35pm**

*Dianne Brooks*  
*23<sup>rd</sup> May 2018*