

## Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of Fairfield Parish Council held at Fairfield Community Hall on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> April 2018 at 7:30 pm

**Councillors present:** C Bidwell (Chairman), B E Dack, P Daffarn, S J Jones and T Milliken

**Officer present:** Katrina Henshaw (Parish Clerk)

**Also present for all or part of the meeting:** Ward Member Councillor S Dixon, Howard Jones (Orchard East), Wendy Briggs (S106 Public Arts) and twenty-eight members of the public.

### **1 Apologies for Absence**

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors N P Hanks (work commitments) and A M Hunt (Holiday) and Ward Members Councillors B Saunders and J Saunders.

### **2 Disclosures of Interest and Dispensation requests**

2.1 No disclosures of interest and no requests for dispensation were received.

### **3 Welcome from Councillor Bidwell – Chairman of Fairfield Parish Council**

3.1 Councillor Bidwell welcomed residents to the Annual Parish Meeting and advised that there were two guest speakers Central Bedfordshire Ward Councillor Steve Dixon, who will speak about CBC matters and Howard Jones from Project Orchards East, Howard will be speaking about orchards and the environment.

He then read the first part of his report as follows: -

“2017 saw the parish council having to deal with several major issues which have affected Fairfield residents. The positive approach of this council to improve and maintain the feel of Fairfield is clear. This council will continue to provide and to protect the environment and safety, for the enjoyment of residents. The council is constantly looking to improve how it provides to residents.

Each councillor gives considerable amount of their time per week in finding answers to residents’ questions, general enquires, which is shown by their commitment in delivering the detailed answer to residents and to councillors.

This parish council is open and transparent and accountable and acts with reason and care to protect Fairfield and its residents.

At the start of last year Steve Foster joined the parish council. Steve was full of ideas and vigour. Unfortunately, due to personal circumstances, Steve found he could no longer give sufficient time to the council and took the decision to stand down. I would like to thank Steve for the commitment he gave to Fairfield Parish Council. He began the highly successful 5k run which is being run again shortly and we are happy to be able to support it.

Amanda Maria Hunt, who has been a Fairfield resident since the early days of Fairfield, is well known by many of you, put her name forward for election, and was duly elected, unopposed, to the parish council. This saved the council several thousand pounds in costs by avoiding an election.

We have been successful in our achievements in the five years since the parish council was formed. FPC was the first in Central Bedfordshire to have a Neighbourhood Plan. Councillors worked hard with the developers on the designs of the new homes in Fairfield Gardens. We had expert advice on the orchards and other areas which required maintenance.

We are all aware that local government has a speed of its own and sometime our expectations move faster than the actual system will allow. The buildings within Fairfield are unique by design, and this council is working hard to keep that appearance and will work with others to achieve the views of residents shown within the Neighbourhood Plan and Design Statement”.

- 3.2 One resident acknowledged the attendance by electors and work the parish councillors did but did feel that younger people needed to get involved.

Councillor Dixon advised many other parish councils shared this problem and suggested running a shadow parish council for the youth.

- 3.3 One resident asked how important it was that councillors attend meeting as there were several absent and asked what the quorum was.

Councillor Bidwell advised that the quorum for FPC is three. He also advised that Councillor Hunt was very disappointed not to be at her first APM, but unfortunately her holiday had been postponed last minute due to bad weather and she had to take it this week due to school holidays. Councillor Hanks is a Director of a Company and travels a lot so was unable to be here due to work commitments. The Ward Councillors share their wards and Councillor Dixon regularly attends FPC meetings, so the other Ward Councillors only attend when he is unavailable or there are specific issues that needs their attention.

## 4 Report from Ward Member Councillor Steve Dixon

- 4.1 Councillor Dixon read the following report: -

“Reflecting on our 2017 report and looking to the last twelve months, the issue of development continues to prevail. However, while the 2017 report was an account of continued unplanned growth, the last twelve months does feel as if some better control is finally emerging through our local plan.

As many residents may remember, Central Bedfordshire Council decided to accelerate the submission of our plan for examination to the end of April 2018, to protect our right to plan for a lower level of housing, rather than waiting for a potentially higher figure being forced upon us. That difference would probably have seen the annual rate of house completions raise from 1,800 to over 2,500.

While the spectre of development is a difficult one for many residents to come to terms with, the very pressing need for more housing and jobs from population growth alone, are better managed through an approved plan, than by an appeal. This way, the impact of such development can be assessed, and an appropriate level of infrastructure sought. Indeed, the two key themes of our local plan are those of infrastructure and coalescence. Without the first, development simply won't take place and the prevention of coalescence is deemed vital too. Regards this point, it is credit to the residents of Fairfield that they have sought to tackle the potential impact on their community from proposed development in Arlesey, by working through the parish council, with a specialist consultant to prevent coalescence. It is also pleasing to see the introduction of protective countryside gaps in the plan, as with the two areas to the north and south of Stotfold.

The recent public open forums gave strategic planners valuable feedback on residents' views on the plan, which will be considered as it evolves.

The plan will be submitted this month and we hope, be “made” in around twelve months' time. During this time, we cannot stop applications being made, but it's likely that the emerging plan will be considered more material in considering any applications. This is by no means clear cut, but it is a move in the right direction. While the overall quantum of proposed sites in the ward is relatively low, we mustn't underestimate the burden of unplanned growth we have endured in the last eight years.

Across Central Bedfordshire, considerable effort is being put in to looking at the future shape of the authority. Significant work is going into helping key partners develop new models of delivery in areas such as Health, Adult Social Care, Education and Skills. Managing demand is a continuing challenge CBC faces as we look to improve frontline services against the backdrop of a rapidly declining level of central government funding.

While our own adjustments such as moving the Customer Service Desk from Chicksands to Shefford Town Library, improve the accessibility, our current consultation on Domestic Waste Collection, offer the opportunity to continue our journey towards reducing the overall volume of waste collected and an increase in the amount of recycling undertaken across the authority.

It has been pleasing to see Speedwatch being so enthusiastically embraced across the ward. The menace of speeding is becoming more widespread and leading to a number of potential accident hotspots. The evidence gathered through Speedwatch is valuable to the Police and sets a strong cultural tone about speeding in the ward. Thanks to those who have volunteered to date. There is always room for more help.

It took a considerable effort in the last year by CBC, The Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP and the parish council, to ensure the necessary works were undertaken at the Sewage Treatment Works to abate the odour. This done, we sincerely hope that the measures now in place will prevent another similar occurrence. Thanks also to Anglian Water for their co-operation in finding a solution to the problem, explaining their plans and still continuing to monitor for any unpleasantness, albeit perhaps not as quickly as residents would have wished for.

It was a considerable pleasure to have Fairfield become the first parish in Central Bedfordshire to have its Neighbourhood Plan passed. While other parishes have been pursuing this goal for up to three years, the achievement of the plan team to have done so in twelve months, deserves praise. It was also satisfying to see the conclusion to the long running campaign to have Fairfield identified with its own postal address. It has taken some four years to convince the Post Office that an address "divorced" from Stotfold was appropriate and with the overwhelming majority of residents in support of "Fairfield, Hitchin, Hertfordshire".

The issues on Hitchin Road continue to dominate our mailbox. While the need for services from the highway isn't in dispute, the uncoordinated fashion of this activity has caused considerable disruption. Efforts are now being made to bring the various contractors to work in a more cohesive manner.

As ever, we will continue to work for Fairfield residents, as ward councillors and through the roles of Vice Chairman of the Council, Executive Member for Families, Education & Children and Lead Member for Children's Services".

4.2 There were several questions and comments regarding the state of Hitchin Road and the length of time traffic lights have been required.

Councillor Dixon agreed the road was in an appalling state and advised that CBC Officers are speaking to the contractors. He also agreed that the coordination for works on the Highway had been unsatisfactory and traffic lights should not have been required as long as they have been.

Although it is not CBC's responsibility, it granted planning permission so need to deal with all the problems. CBC is looking at being more proactive with developments rather than reactive to the problems as they occur.

4.3 A resident asked if it was an offence to put mud on the road.

Councillor Dixon believed that if you put mud on the road you had to clear it off, but he would confirm this.

4.4 A resident asked if CBC has the power to close a site.

Councillor Dixon confirmed that CBC has the power but must prove it can still meet the five-year land supply so not ideal. CBC needs to work with contractors and be more forceful with them.

## **5 Presentation from Howard Jones – Orchard East**

5.1 Howard Jones advised that Orchard East is an exciting environmental and cultural project covering six counties in the east of England – Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk.

He explained the history of orchards, where the fruits came from and what fruit species are found in East Anglia.

Orchards have been formed by grafting - the technique of growing a shoot of the variety required (scion) attached and bonded to a rootstock and budding - the technique of attaching just a bud of the scion variety to a rootstock. A rootstock is any suitable rooted plant, from a seedling to a large tree.

Howard showed maps of the Three Counties Asylum in the 1880s, 1930s and 1940s. The first map showed the West Orchard and the second map showed the start of a second orchard. The final map showed both orchards. It was very common to have orchard in asylums to feed both staff and patients. Fairfield Orchards have both historic and wildlife value.

The 2005/7 Natural England's Definition of an UK Priority Habitat Traditional Orchard is

- Five or more fruit trees.
- Less than 20m between canopies.
- Large growing trees budded / grafted onto vigorous rootstocks.
- Neither trees nor ground flora sprayed.
- In grazed, or ungrazed grassland, preferably mown once annually after seed drop.
- Preferably with deadwood in canopy, and left on the ground
- With associated hedges and ponds etc
- And preferably with recently planted replacement trees.

Volunteers are needed for orchard surveying and historical research. Leaflets were available for anyone wishing to volunteer and a copy of Howard's presentation is available on request from the parish clerk.

5.2 There were no questions.

## **6 Report from Councillor Bidwell – Chairman of Fairfield Parish Council**

6.1 Councillor Bidwell read the following report: -

"Parish councillors have worked with several of the management companies within the parish. Those we have met with, offered ideas and suggested alternatives in how to deliver objectives identified in the parish plan.

The council will always endeavour to answer residents' questions fully. However, when they are outside of the scope of this council, those questions will be passed onto the responsible authority to ensure those asking receive a full reply wherever possible. Which I believe any resident would expect this council to do.

A great example of working with residents is the idea of the telephone box library, this is well on its way to being completed, located on the corner of Dickens Boulevard and Kipling Crescent. We are now just waiting for the delivery of the phone box. Once the box is fitted out with shelving, the council will place a notice on the website requesting books. It is hoped to have the lower shelving for children's books. If you have some books and you would like to recirculate them you will be able to in a few weeks' time.

Another idea we are investigating, is to install outdoor gym/trim trail equipment. This will be for use for ages of 14 upwards. Several types are being considered and where the best locations are to install the equipment is undecided. You can see on the notice boards, the ideas that are being considered, please take a few minutes before you leave to look at them and give us your views.

Last year we held a litter picking day, which was a great success we again hope to hold this event during the summer months, we will be asking for volunteers to help clear away litter from around Fairfield.

Our Road Crossing Officer has now been in place since September, and the help she has provided to the children and parents is clear. Many thanks to her for coming out in all weathers to ensure our young people are safe. We hope to continue with this and add other road safety improvements.

CBC has now agreed match funding for the road safety measures FPC has put forward and the parish council is now waiting to meet with officer to progress these safety improvements.

This parish council has supported several of our organisations, such as the Scouts, Youth Club, The Lower School, Bowls Club and Community Church by providing funding grants to allow them to proceed with projects which benefit our residents of all ages. One project is Fairfield Church, where its members have worked hard to bring the area of land adjacent to the bowls club into a remarkable garden. These changes made by them with our financial grants, have made such a difference to that corner of Fairfield and to our community. We have worked with the FPRA in the planning and some of the ideas to improve the urban par. This work is due to start, and residents will see a remarkable change to that area.

As part of the World War 1 remembrance, the parish council has purchased a beacon to join in remembrance in November. Our beacon will be one of many around Bedfordshire which will be lit as part of the remembrance service held each year. More details about this will be published later in the year on our website.

The parish council is aware of concerns made recently about the numbers of children waiting at the bus stop in the mornings. Local schools have been contacted and asked to speak to those involved about safety whilst waiting for the school buses to arrive. The council also requested a police attendance to monitor and to speak with those children who risk causing accidents by their behaviour. If you do have to leave your child at the bus stop, please make sure they are aware of road safety and act accordingly.

Some of the street lighting has been repaired by one or two of the developers who have come back and repaired some of the defective street lights around Fairfield. I hope by the end of the summer we may have the more of street lights working. There are still a few which the developers have not yet shown any interest in returning to repair, this parish council, with CBC, will continue to write to them asking them to carry urgent repairs.

Speedwatch has been carried out on Fairfield. We now have six volunteers waiting to be trained by Bedfordshire Police, they will then start checking the speed of vehicles on Fairfield. If you are interested in being a volunteer, please contact the parish clerk.

The orchards have been funded by this parish council and maintained by volunteers for several years. Areas have been cleared of brambles and debris, trees have been pruned under guidance from our specialist and they are now showing signs of improved growth. Wild grass meadow seeds were sown on the area of land at the end of West Drive and new fruit trees of cherry and pear have been planted. Thanks to all the volunteers who come out in all weathers to help in the orchards, with the pruning, clearing and planting.

The parish council is now well on the way to have the orchards included into the Etonbury Green Wheel walks. Information boards, seating and marker post are being designed, many of these you can see on the notice boards. The information boards will be used to identify as much of the wildlife and trees within each orchard. The school pupils have been actively involved with this project, we hope this will be where they learn about the trees and the environment as part of their education. Please take time to look at these designs, do ask questions of Wendy who has design them, and most importantly please give us your views, all will help the decisions that are needing to be made.

Apple day is again planned for 2018 and like the previous years there will be great entertainments and food, along with our cider making and free samples of last year's apple pressing. Each year we see more residents attending. All see it as a good afternoon out with children and free drinks for the adults. This event would not happen without the help of volunteers and the effort they put into making it a very successful enjoyable afternoon for all. On behalf of the council, I would like to thank them for making this a successful Fairfield event.

We have had a problem during the year where youths decided to walk around Fairfield and cause damage to property and vehicles. The Police were made aware and have been asked to carry out visits to Fairfield more frequently. It is believed the youths involved are not all Fairfield residents. FPC obtained advice from the Police on the taking of photographs for recording crime. If you do take photos of a crime in progress, and you want it used by the police for investigating. Please do not post the photographs on any web site, ensure you inform the Police you have taken photographs, and wherever possible have a date time marker imprinted by the camera on each photo.

Please those of you who have a dog. The council and FPRA had sixteen dog waste bins installed, but still some dog owners do not clear up their dog's mess, they just walk away and leave it on the footpaths and grass areas which is a danger to young children and unpleasant to others. If you are not aware, a dog owner can be fined a £1,000 should they allow the dog to foul and not clear it up, any person witnessing this can report it to CBC officers who will then take the necessary actions.

The Anglian Water odour that affected so many residents of Fairfield and beyond, involved Parish Councillors, CBC officers, Ward Councillors and with help from our MP, The Rt Hon Alistair Burt and our own Specialist Derek Manning. All meet with AW representatives over several months, and eventually with Peter Simpson, the CEO of Anglian Water. Thanks to all those involved in bringing AW to finally accept responsibility, and for them to make the necessary changes on how they stored raw waste. The improvements needed are now in operation. I am hoping this summer will be one where we can all enjoy our gardens and homes as we should, and also allow the full use of the open spaces around Fairfield.

The Council is aware some residents have recently suffered from an odour which has been difficult to trace. Recently discovered is a chicken farm, which started operating within the last year. This has caused an odour problem, when they cleared the chicken sheds out. This Farm is licensed by the Environment Agency and the telephone number was printed in recent edition of Fairfield Matters.

During March residents complained of an odour occurring over several days, this could be from the AW site, and investigations are being carried out to determine why and how this occurred. Central Bedfordshire Council did not close the abatement notice. AW is still monitoring their site and Fairfield to ensure there is no odour being emitted. As I mentioned the abatement notice is still enforce, to bring any legal or other actions against AW, residents still need to register an odour nuisance with CBC officers as and when it occurs. The parish council fully appreciates, this situation is unpleasant to have reoccurring. However, for CBC to act for breach of the Abatement Notice they need sufficient evidence that the frequency, duration and level of the odour amounts to a statutory nuisance at residential properties and that the source of the odour was the sewage treatment works. To do that officers require evidence from you and they need to witness it themselves.

How long this may take I cannot say, much depends on other identified locations where an odour maybe issuing. Fairfield is surrounded by fields, some with livestock and other areas are used for arable crops, both will create some form of odour at times during the year. To always point the finger at AW each time slows down investigations into these other potential sources. If an odour is detected contact CBC officers and have it registered so they are aware and can investigate which, if any, of these sites are the cause of the odour.

At the start of this year, I contacted Peter Simpson regarding compensation he offered for community projects. AW have made two offers of compensation and each were considered by the parish council. All Councillors agreed each offer was insufficient to accept the amount equalled to just under £6 per household approximately, which totalled £7,000. I shall be replying to Peter stating the parish council were shocked and felt the level of compensation offered to-date is considered unacceptable.

The council is seeking legal advice on how it could proceed through legal systems to obtain a more acceptable level. Our own solicitors have found evidence of compensation which amounted to £80 per household, this would equal £96k approximately for Fairfield if offered. There are several factors which need more consideration by the council and advice from solicitors. However, taking legal action is a risk, a court may consider a much lower amount, or it could be higher level of compensation. This legal action is yet to be decided by councillors. I am hopeful, this council will not find it necessary to proceed via the legal system.

FPC in its fifth year of existents has achieved many things and is seen by CBC as an active parish council. Without a parish council many of the achievements mentioned may not have happened. It is very important to have a parish council who represent the views of all residents.

Next year in May, the Local Elections are due to take place. I would like to invite any resident who is interested in or considering and would like to know more about being a parish councillor to come along to our meetings and shadow a councillor, that way you will be able to have a first hand view of what is involved and how the council interacts with the community and Central Bedfordshire Council.

Having a Parish Council allows local people to have some controls over their environment, helps local organisations and clubs which need local support, it also allows residents to be involved in determining how Fairfield develops. If anyone is interested, please contact a councillor or the parish clerk for more information.

Tonight, I hope to have given you an understanding of the Parish council, its projects and how councillors work hard to represent all residents of Fairfield at all times”.

- 6.2 One resident stated that there are several incidents in Fairfield where S106 has not been adhered to (e.g. faulty lights on unadopted roads) and asked if it true that CBC cannot declare a builder non-compliant with our required.

Councillor Dixon advised that it is the Developer’s responsibility to approach CBC when roads are ready to be adopted. S106 agreements, however are legally binding. CBC has been poor at enforcing these agreements and is looking at ways to improve.

- 6.3 There were several concerns and questions regarding the dangerous junction at Dickens Boulevard and Tesco car park. Concern was strongly expressed about crossing the road and there was a definite fear of someone being injured or killed.

FPC’s Match Funding application has recently been accepted by CBC and FPC is waiting to have a meeting with CBC to discuss what schemes can be taken forward. FPC cannot do anything on Dickens Boulevard without permission from CBC as it owns the road. Tesco own the car park. The junction is badly designed, so any safety improvements will be difficult.

- 6.4 One cyclist stated that it was unclear who has rights of way as there are no road markings or signs to indicate this.

Again, this will be part of the discussions with CBC but there are some residents very opposed to road markings and signage.

- 6.5 One residents stated that the best effective method for crossing the road was to improve visibility so suggested double yellow lines.  
Councillor Bidwell advised that CBC did not have the resources to enforce this. Councillor Dixon confirmed this and added that CBC can now only use its camera cars outside schools and hospitals. Again, some residents are very opposed to yellow lines.
- 6.6 One resident suggested putting leaflets on cars parked dangerously.  
Councillor Bidwell believed this could be classed as criminal damage so further investigation would be needed to see if this was possible.
- 6.7 One resident asked for a zebra crossing  
Councillor Bidwell advised that FPC had asked CBC for a zebra crossing in that area and had offered to fund it but was advised the area did not meet the criteria.
- 6.8 One resident asked if the Road Crossing Officer could help in that area.  
Councillor Bidwell advised that although FPC fund the Road Crossing Officer, her contract is with CBC and is for outside the school only.
- 6.9 One resident asked if anything could be done about the delivery lorries in Tesco car park.
- 6.10 Councillor Bidwell advised that a previous manager used to coordinate delivery times of lorries, but this was no longer in place. He would speak to the current Tesco manager to see if it could be re-introduced.
- 6.11 One resident said the Tesco car park area was looking very shabby with broken bollards and broken glass near the bottle bank.
- 6.12 As residents clearly felt very patiently about the safety issues in this area, Councillor Dixon offered to ask The Rt Hon Alistair Burt, MP to look at the area as there were somethings CBC was restricted to do by Government guidelines.

## **7 Date of next meetings**

- 7.1 The next Parish Council meeting will be held on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2018 at 7.00 pm for planning and 7.30 pm for all other matters.
- 7.2 The next Annual Parish meeting will be held between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 1<sup>st</sup> June 2019.

Meeting closed at 9.45 pm