

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting for the Parish of Biddenham held on Wednesday 11th April 2018

Present: Peter Chase (Chairman, Biddenham PC), Cllrs Jon Gambold, Chris Gee, Alan Jacobs, Krzys Osuch, Terence Platt, Francia Slade, Joe Warren, Borough Cllr Roger Rigby and 15 members of the public.

Welcome

Cllr Chase welcomed everyone to the meeting including Lyn Lyman who was covering for Alison Southern as Clerk as she was ill.

Minutes of APM held on the 10th May 2017

It was resolved to accept the minutes as a true record of the meeting and they were duly signed.

Reports from Local Organisations in Biddenham:

Ann Williams – SSSI Site

Ann is chair of Bedford Ecology Group spoke about the Geology SSSI site explaining that it is an important geology site. She explained about the work which has been carried out to tidy it up. The Parish Council will be covering the fencing and paths.

Q & A:

a) *Natural England was supposed to have a plan of action:* It is not known whether this is in existence.

b) *With the erosion taking place, has anything been found?* No, it has only exposed the flint.

Gary Ingerson – Biddenham Sports Complex

It is to be known as the Kings Field Sports Club Ltd, and is the new home of Kempston Town (football) and Bedford Tigers (rugby). Gary explained the improvements which have taken place. Soccer Camps etc are to be held during the summer. It will have a Licensed Bar which can be used in the evenings. Exercise classes are to be held during week-days and matches at weekends. It will be open to anyone wishing to use the facilities. They have a website: kingsfieldsports.com.

Q & A:

What will parking be like: There will be parking for 148 cars and 2 coaches.

What about the rubbish/fly tipping on the approach to it: That area belongs to Bedford Borough Highways Department so it will be their responsibility to clear.

Would they like some artwork from the school children? Yes, that would be appreciated as there are a lots of bare walls.

Peter Applewhite – Village Pond

The recent Planning Application received many objections but they worked with the Parish Council to voice their concerns. Work was carried out to the western jetty last year and further work is to be carried out during the year. Annual activities: The Frog Foray was very successful with 18 people turning up. The Spring Work Morning the next day had been very successful.

Q & A:

a) *What about the weeds in the water?* Unfortunately it is inevitable weed will be on the water, but they will try to keep it under control. It was suggested that a weak acid solution could control algae but it is not known what this may do to the newts.

Peter Marks - Biddenham Cricket Club

The club continues to thrive. The Sunday team is in the Beds County team. There are now 82 junior members and 6 junior teams. More volunteers and coaches are needed. Sponsorship was achieved at the beginning of the year which has been very useful. They don't have enough pitches to accommodate the number of teams which they have.

Thanks were expressed for all the help they receive.

Glen Taylor is the new chairman.

Q & A:

a) *Concern was expressed about the village show which may be held on the field this year, as in the past stakes had been left lying in the grass of the Pavilion Field which caused damage to the cricket club mower.* The understanding is that the show will continue to be at the school this year.

Chris Jones – Cowslip Meadow

The rubble has been taken away and no incursions have taken place. There is a lot of ragwort is on the meadow. A small group look after it. The hedge has been planted and a few extra things are to be carried out.

Footpaths: The coffin footpath issues come up a lot. Unfortunately, the footpath surface got ploughed up in error, but now the landowner has said there will be no farming of the field for three years. Hopefully Bedford BC Rights of Way and the landowner will allow it to be laid with shingle.

Footpath 11 - hedge has not been cut again and is growing over the footpath. Gate had been taken down but not been replaced. A barrier needs to be put there.

Biddenham Baulk: trees are being planted and the grass has been cut.

Q & A:

Coffin Path, larger shingle is required. The shingle needs to be larger than pea. Chris is talking to Bedford BC .

Riverside: have they spoken to David Fowler. There may be a permitted footpath created.

Tom Perry - Chairman of Board of Governors

Maria Soulsby - Headteacher St James's Primary

The school has become a primary school. The Ofsted inspection has been carried out successfully together with quite a few other tests with everything having been achieved successfully. Staffing is

being changed and the school is also being changed, the construction project has begun for 3 new classrooms.

Local residents have issues about the expanding the school. Ideas were explained as to how things are being implemented.

The new girls football teams have been very successful.

Q & A:

There was concern regarding the apparent lack of responsibility by parents when they drop off/collect the children. When parents park in the Three Tuns car park, children are being allowed to run across the road. Parents also stop on zig zag lines outside the school. The Headteacher said she is outside the school every morning checking safety of the children.

Chair's report

The full report is available on the parish website www.biddenham.org.uk

Cllr Chase said this is his third year as Parish council chairman has seen some very significant issues, mainly regarding planning, around the village. This is my report for the Annual Parish meeting, held on 11th April 2018.

Firstly, I'd like to thank Chairman of the School Governors, Tom Perry and Headteacher, Maria Soulsby for opening St James's school to us this evening for our Annual Parish Meeting. As the Borough's schools gradually move to the two-tier system, lower schools such as St James's are changing into primary schools. The challenges this brings are being met with optimism and energy. We're able to see here today how the new classrooms being built, necessitated by the change to primary status, are an opportunity not just to "tack on" two more years, but to bring more fundamental benefits to the school as a whole.

I was personally invited to visit the school by Tom and Maria back in October. This followed the Parish Council's decision to award a grant of £2,000 for the purchase of various mathematical learning aids (some of which I tried on my visit). When we finished my look around, we had a very civilised cup of tea in Maria's office, and reflected on the fact that the school sits both physically and socially at the heart of our community. We would like to do more together, and this meeting tonight reflects that intent.

And so I turn to matters outside the gates of this place. Literally just outside, where we have the footpath leading down Main Road to the west. This, we recognise, is in need of resurfacing, and this will be done later this year using money put aside both last year and this. As one reaches the war memorial, I'm delighted to say we have had all the over-grown shrubbery removed along the fence there. The trees are to be pruned back soon, too. These jobs are harder to progress than you might think, which makes the final results all the more pleasing.

Walking further on, we get to the Coffin Path. This time last year it had been ploughed up yet again. But come the autumn we received the good news that the field is not to be cultivated for at least three years. We await the outcome of discussions Chris Jones, the Borough and the Wingfield Estate are having about whether the path can be laid with shingle.

Matters further afield that we have been addressing are the application to fell the trees in Thorpe Close, flooding and drainage, and averting the loss of hedgerow on the main Bromham Road.

One area which seems sadly to be growing in popularity is the idea of demolishing one house to replace it with something much larger. We have failed to have any significant influence over this, both this year and last. And although more may yet be thrust upon us, it is of course very good news indeed that we've seen the refusal of permission to demolish Biddenham House, in the heart of our village and its conservation area. This was a far bigger development than the other developments where one house replaced another. Owners and their developers do seem to like to "try it on" with

the most outrageous initial schemes; we must never be complacent about the need to speak up in opposition to such aberrations.

We can now look back on how we dealt with raising everyone's awareness of the Biddenham House application, and how to voice our individual opinions of it, with some satisfaction. It became, as it were, a rehearsal for the main event – that is the double whammy of the outline planning application for 250 houses on land west of Gold Lane, coupled with the Borough Council's proposal in their Local Plan (2021 to 2035) to remove protections on the green spaces around the edge of our village.

From the initial meeting with the developer, Lioncourt, where we pulled together a potent mixture of the leaders of our community institutions, to meetings with the Borough chief executive and lobbying the consultation event in the Church Barn, we gradually developed the idea of bringing together a group within the village of both stakeholders and helpful, knowledgeable types with experience of dealing with the issues we now face. The resultant Biddenham Advisory Forum has only met once so far, but helped spur the activity we've all seen since.

Key has been the ability to communicate the issues, and to make it as easy as possible to then present individual, personal objections back to the Borough Council – whether that be the planning people or the Local Plan consultation process.

We're grateful for the support provided in arranging the online "Have-a-say" facility, the detailed letters of objection sent by the Biddenham Society and Friends of the Pond, and the three letters Jon Gambold worked on with me which he and his wife Jean then hand-delivered to every house in the village. And special thanks go to Councillor Joe Warren, who has tirelessly kept the village web site updated with the latest news and led efforts to get people to sign paper letters of objection at various events around the village.

We now wait to see how events unfold as the consultation periods for both the application and the Local Plan come to an end. With many hundreds of individual objections, we have surely made certain that the Borough mandarins and their political masters understand the strength of feeling and absolute opposition we have to these plans. Biddenham is a privileged place, and some people think we are all posh types who only care about ourselves. Not so! We are good people. We are people who care about our environment, our heritage and our community. Some things are just plain wrong, and when they are we're going to say so.

Thanks, everybody, for your support. As your Parish Council we will continue to hear your concerns, be proactive, and use the limited influence granted to us.

I'd like to thank all my fellow Councillors, our two Borough Councillors, Jon and Roger, and our clerk, Alison Southern (who cannot be here tonight) for their great commitment and effort.

To note the parish council end of year accounts for 2016/17

The accounts were noted.

The budget was set and the result has been just exceeded.

The precept was increased this year from £40,000 to £43,000, although the growth in the number of households in Biddenham meant this was actually a small decrease for each taxpayer.

Open Session

- a) *The railway bridge is going to be rebuilt.* This will take a number of months to complete. It was wondered whether there could be a cycle route over the new bridge. A notice had been circulated by Network Rail re a consultation event on 20th April in Bedford town centre.
- b) *If the village hall was empty why wasn't the meeting held there?* The meeting was held in the school at their invitation, following the donation made to them by the PC last year.
- c) *Who owns the triangular piece of land as you come into Biddenham as the fence is broken and looks a mess?* The Wingfield Estate are thought to own it but this would need to be checked.

Meeting closed at 20.06.

Signed
Peter Chase, Chairman, 2018/9