

BIDDENHAM PARISH COUNCIL



Biddenham Parish Council hosted the Annual Parish meeting on Tuesday, 20th April 2021 commencing at 7.00pm. Due to the government's coronavirus response, the meeting was held online using Zoom.us.

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING MINUTES

This was a meeting hosted by the parish council on behalf of the residents of Biddenham. All were welcome to attend and anyone could speak to represent themselves or the groups that they run.

1 Welcome from the Chairman – Peter Chase

BPC Chairman Peter Chase welcomed 11 parishioners, 8 parish councillors, and 2 borough councillors to the meeting and explained its purpose.

2 To approve the Minutes of the last Annual Parish meeting held on 10th April 2019.

It was agreed to approve the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting.

3 The Biddenham Society – Will Jenkin

Will Jenkin represented the society and explained that the group had responded to 50 planning applications this year: 8 were objected to as not in keeping with the area or were to the detriment of historic/listed buildings, and loss of green space. 4 of those were granted, 2 were permitted, and 2 they are still waiting on. In general, the group opposes development where it does not fit the character of Biddenham.

4 Friends of Biddenham Pond – Chris Jones

Chris Jones represented the Friends of Biddenham Pond and explained their recent activities, which included: footpath resurfacing and clearing, erection of a new shed for storing their equipment, running their website, looking after cowslip meadow and ensuring it was cut at the right time, and maintaining the parish council's equipment.

5 St James Primary School – Head Teacher, Maria Soulsby

Maria Soulsby explained that the year had been dominated by Covid, with short notice of required closures, but the school had stayed open for key worker children during the summer term. The school was now operating in "bubbles" so that classes don't mix. The school looks after the families as well as just the kids, and the loss of grandparents at pickups was noticed. Some staff had also lost parents to Covid, as well as suffering from the virus. Some positives taken from the pandemic were that it brought the school community close and their ability to connect through computer use. They hope for changes on May 17th. The school would like to have more socials with a wider list of attendees.

- 6 **Biddenham Cricket Club – Glenn Taylor (Chairman) and/or Chris Spurgeon**
Chris Spurgeon spoke for the cricket club. There were 90 children for the new season. Training is held Mondays and Wednesdays, with matches on Tuesdays/Thursdays/Sundays. The clubs challenge is that children are dropping away at 15 rather than joining the adult team. The cricket nets are reaching the end of their useful life and it will cost £20k to replace. The senior team welcome new joiners.
- 7 **Biddenham Tennis Club – Simon Cottenham**
Simon explained that the club has 350-400 members and works as a social club rather than teams. They provide coaching and have kids holiday clubs. The courts are shut for more than half the year and the buckling surface has been repaired.
- 8 **Bedford Town FC Youth Development – Chairman Dennis O’Meara**
Dennis has recently taken over at the Kingsfield ground. He confirmed that football can return now following coronavirus restrictions. They have an increased footprint and have access to a 9 vs 9 pitch for under 11s and 12s. Dog mess and rubbish is still an issue but behaviour is improving. Electricity costs are higher than expected but they are receiving more hiring enquiries; although they currently have no alcohol licence.
- 9 **Biddenham Pavilion – Report from Deborah Slade (Pavilion Manager) read by the Clerk**
Report can be found in the appendix.
- 10 **Any Other Group or Individual**
Comments from the public centred around: traffic concern for Gold Lane in relation to the development, for which the parish council had suggested a new road layout to the developers (not taken up).
- 11 **Biddenham Parish Council – Chairman Peter Chase**
Report can be found in the appendix.

Appendix follows:

Biddenham Pavilion Report May 2021

Cricket and children's clubs are running smoothly and we are excited to welcome the rest of our hirers back next week when we enter phase 3 of restriction easing.

There have been ongoing issues with the heating system and it has been discovered that the expansion tank is leaking and therefore the system keeps losing pressure.

The plumber is due to replace the expansion tank on Friday 16th June and will carry out the service at the same time. The service cost is £180 (3 units) and the expansion tank replacement cost is approx. £300.

The side door has now had the smart lock installed and I will be programming the lock/codes in the next few days ready to hand out the individual codes to the hirers. Hirers will be given a code specific to their allocated hire time plus 30 minutes either side for set up and clear down.

The broadband has now also been installed and users are now able to use the wifi supplied in the building.

The small children's play area had its gate latch replaced and we have now discovered the bigger playground also has a similar problem.

It seems that the post has rotten. Toby Horton has looked at it and seems to think that he can fix it without having to replace the post – I have instructed him to go ahead.

We have been receiving many requests to hire the hall again once lockdown restrictions are lifted.

Items requested to be carried out:

- Replace main hall radiators:

1/ To isolate and remove the existing 6no fan convector heaters in the main Hall totally

2/ To supply and install 6no new Smiths Caspian floor standing fan convector heater units all complete with new isolation valves

Upon completion all work carried out will be tested for good sound working order therefore this quotation reads as follows.

COST	£ 4,435.00
VAT AT 20%	£ 887.00
TOTAL	£ 5,322.00

- Web based booking system

I am now in conversation with Adam from NetwiseUK who look after the PC website. I have requested a similar system to that of Biddenham Village Hall and they have agreed this can be done for a cost of £1150 to include secure UK hosting, support and updates then it would be £250 annually thereafter. This, however, does not include a payment system so I have requested a cost to include this. I still await a response which I have now chased.

Thank you ☺



BIDDENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

APRIL 2021

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

This is my report for the Annual Parish meeting, held on 20th April 2021. My sixth and last year as Parish Council chairman has seen some very significant issues, notably Coronavirus – of course – and the golf course land between us and Great Denham.

But first, I'd like to thank everyone for attending this year's Annual Parish Meeting. This, and the regular Parish Council meetings, all recently held in cyberspace, are intended to be a forum for debate and decisions about issues that matter to us, as a community.

When it comes to debating and deciding what to do, especially if tax-payers' money is involved, the guidelines issued by Government are very clear: Parish Councils can only make decisions at designated Parish Council meetings. The public are always welcome to attend, both to put forward their concerns and their views, and to observe us councillors deliberate and make decisions.

One thing people who attend Parish Council meetings notice is how limited our powers are. We are often asked why we cannot stop a planning application from being approved, or change things like speed limits. Sadly, a Parish Council has little more power than individual residents. It's true that our voice, as that which is considered to represent the village as a whole, has a certain influence beyond any one person. But it is really the Borough Council which has the power, and this is why a lot of what we do involves lobbying them to understand our point of view, and pestering them to get certain things done.

So, if you have strong views on a given matter, then please attend our meetings.

And so to the matters we have tackled this year.

When the first Coronavirus lockdown hit, we were keen to help other organisers, particularly those from St James' Church, who were already taking up the challenge it presented. We wanted a way in which the village community could help itself, and WhatsApp proved to be the best answer. After my first ever socially distanced meeting in the Church Barns, we quickly helped set up a WhatsApp group for every street (or small group of streets). We also set up an email system which, for a short time, was monitored on a rota basis, and likewise a helpline number. These are still in place today, and have cost very little. It's not as if we have had hundreds of calls or messages, but even for the few we have had, I feel we can be proud of the response.

We also purchased our own subscription to Zoom, and all PC meetings have been held using this facility since.

Golf Course land

The biggest new issue of the year has undoubtedly been the move by the Wingfield "Old Ford End trust" to forcibly terminate the Great Denham golf club lease. In the process this killed a successful business, putting several people out of work, left two significant properties empty, took the heart out of what was always billed as a "golf village" and denied the public a valued sports facility. In its place, the land is being left fallow, with occasional sheep grazing. This is intended, we believe, to ensure the land is deemed valueless so as to provide its owners with inheritance tax relief.

Along with members of the community, we have appealed to the trust, via their representatives “Bidwells”, to use the land as originally intended. We met with the mayor of Bedford, our MP Richard Fuller, and held talks with Great Denham Parish Council and members of their community. There is deep concern that, ultimately, the landowner will seek to build houses on the land, robbing the town of Bedford one of its few substantial urban green spaces. As we saw with the land off Gold Lane, if a developer can put forward a case for public benefits in providing housing and construction jobs, this often trumps the value of land as an open, community asset. Even though I’m sure we’d all agree such land is needed, where people can escape the urban sprawl for much-needed mental relief and physical exercise.

As things now stand, we await the post-Brexit government policy on farming subsidies that will replace the Common Agricultural Policy. This will seek to trade public money for community and ecological benefits. It may yet persuade landowners such as the Wingfield family to do something better with the land than leaving it as scrub.

Traffic

Back in the autumn of 2019, we agreed to a suggestion from Bryan Glasper who lives off Gold Lane to buy a speed indication device, or SID. This is the sign that lights up with either a smiley or frowning face, depending on the speed you are travelling in your car. Cleverer still, it logs the speed of traffic in either direction, and so can be used to tell whether it is, of itself, having any effect.

Having calmed things somewhat in Gold Lane, we moved SID to Biddenham Turn in the autumn of 2020, and since then it’s moved again, after Christmas, to Bromham Road. The device has provided us with very useful information on both traffic volumes and speeds people are driving at. Having seen the data from Bromham Road, there is little to argue that something must be done. Nearly a half of all cars are speeding, and some nutters are using Bromham Road as a race track, doing speeds of over 70 miles per hour.

All this has led us to move to consider an average speed camera system for the village. We are also, however, still working with Borough to make the signage of the 30 mile per hour zone along Bromham Road more obvious, and also looking at putting in up to three crossing “refuges”, along with the new roundabout that will be built just east of the Days Lane exit. All of these things should make a difference, and improve the safety of pedestrians and cyclists.

Gold Lane

I will just say, since it would be odd if I didn’t, that there has been little we can do about the new houses to be built west of Gold Lane. We already fought, and lost, in 2018 to stop the outline planning permission and the crazy idea of entering the new estate just south of the Gold Lane junction with Deep Spinney. Now archaeology and earth moving has begun in earnest, I’m afraid there is little we can do. A suggestion to improve the access junction was rejected by the developer, so we are now entirely in the hands of Borough. They may yet be able to influence some minor aspects of the build.

Finally, the Parish Council’s finances are in good health. We have reserves in the bank of around £50,000. Considering our precept is £47,000, and other income brings this up to around £52,000, we are holding about one year’s worth of expenditure in reserve. This is quite reasonable and can be used to pay for planned works or unforeseen expenses.

We are grateful for everyone’s 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 clerks, most recently David Brough, for their great commitment and effort.

Peter Chase

Chairman, Biddenham Parish Council
20th April 2021