ANNUAL PARISH MEETING THURSDAY 17th APRIL 2019 IN SILSOE VILLAGE HALL

ATTENDING: Cllr Jarrard, Cllr Kelly, Cllr Kevan, Cllr Mann, Cllr Flack, Cllr McGrory, Cllr Bache, Cllr Offer, Central Bedfordshire Councillor, Cllr Alison Graham.

Apologies: Cllr Harrison

The Meeting started with a report from Mr John Robinson, who was able to provide an update on the Community Sports Centre:

1.Prior to the opening of the Sports Centre the Trust had agreed a contract and a 3-year Management Plan with Stevenage Leisure. We are now just past our 3rd Birthday and we are able to judge actual performance in comparison to that plan. The Plan said to get to a breakeven cost level, 500 Gymnasium members were needed, plus a certain usage of the other facilities. As of today, we have 670 members and very high bookings of the Hall, Studio and Cafe.

The Centre is now operating at a financial surplus and we hope over a period of time to gradually recover the initial operating losses from our first 2 years after opening. This success is due to the hard work of the staff and very careful management by Stevenage Leisure.

I am pleased to be able to comment very positively on our relationship with Stevenage Leisure and in particular on the performance of the Manager Gemma Garner Higgins and her team at the Centre. They really do work hard and truly care about the success of the Centre. Our customers frequently comment on their friendly helpful attitude and it’s this customer relationship which is the foundation of the Centre’s success.

Since obtaining ownership of the Sports Field last year, we have encouraged organised outdoor games. The first activity was organised by the Vicars Wife Kath Bell who transferred her popular Summer Rounders sessions to the Centre. She was also responsible for England Netballs support at the Centre. We shall be very sad indeed to see her husband the Vicar leave the village in August.

We commenced hiring pitches out for Soccer in early September having made a decision to only provide pitches suitable for children and youth to play. We have both boy and girl teams aged from 7 to 14 currently playing League Football on Saturday and Sunday mornings.

I should explain that a few years ago there was an effort to start a youth football team in the village, which unfortunately failed, and our Primary School Football Team has regrettably decided to continue playing in Wrest Park. The School teams decision has been influenced by the unavailability of the School Playing Field which would have been used alongside our own. So, no Soccer is played by village Clubs at the Centre, our customers are all from outside the village, but they do welcome Silsoe children to join as members.

Tennis, and Walking Netball are played in our MUGA which is also currently also in daily use by the school, due to their small recreation and playground facilities.

Our popular Centre Cafe is now open every day of the week. We have many social groups who use it as a meeting place and the Sports Field Spectators are making big use of it too. The cafe is an important feature of the Centre, anyone, not just members are welcome to walk in, have a drink and sit on the patio in the sun. Ice creams are now on sale for the benefit of the children who we hope will soon be using the nearby Playground.

At the request of the Parish Council in 2016 the Trustees became involved in negotiating the transfer of the ownership of new recreation land from Bloor Homes to the Village. The land consists of the Village Green which extends along Barton Road at the front of the Bloor Estate, the Community Orchard which backs on to West End Road, plus the Cricket Ground and the Community Woodland which includes four ponds and a large Children’s Playground.

Our work has involved liaising with Bloor Homes to agree all the work necessary to achieve a specification level suitable for adoption by the Parish.

This year Bloor agreed requests to improve the trees and shrubs originally planted at the Woodland in 2017. They did have some responsibility to replace young trees and shrubs damaged by the hot summer last year, but they went beyond the point of necessity and planted 1100 shrubs and trees this winter. The area is now well stocked, and we hope will have a high survival rate. Let’s hope we get plenty of rain this summer!

Following many complaints about the poor quality of the footpaths on the Woodland, Bloor have completely excavated and re-laid many of them. One long section was raised nearly 50 cm to avoid flooding in the winter. Bloor were initially reluctant to spend more money on the paths, but once they truly realised the poor conditions, they asked if we would give them a specification which we would be satisfied with. We employed a consultant from BRCC to do this and Bloor promptly carried out all the work.

Last year Bloor provided a Cricket Square and an Astroturf Practice Wicket laid to English Cricket Board Standards. This work has been done by a contractor of our choice, and at a cost to Bloor Homes of £35,000. The work involved removing all the top soil and replacing it with a special loam for Cricket pitches. Seed was sown in the Autumn and Spring grass preparation is now being carried out. The grass begins to look really good and Cricket games on the wicket will start in late summer.

We are encouraging the resurrection of Silsoe Cricket Club and a committee has been formed. We have bought them some equipment to allow play with inexperienced recruits later this year. Subject to negotiation, the Club will be responsible for cutting all the grass in lieu of paying rent.

To create a proper ECB recognised Cricket Club, you will be pleased to know that Children’s and Ladies Cricket, as well as normal Men’s league cricket should be played. Establishing this is going to take a lot of effort, but is well worth it, if we are to have a proper Village Club which we can all be proud of. The Club will use the Sports Centre as their base.

Finally - For some time we have been discussing with Bloor the financial settlement which they must make to enable the village to take over the outdoor recreation areas, which total 28 acres. That is a lot of land.

This is covered by the S106 agreement and part of the builder’s contract. Whilst the builder is required to make the payment, the amount is not fixed and is the subject of negotiations, which are ongoing.

Discussions on this funding started in the middle of last year, but we believe we are now approaching an agreement. There are still some outstanding matters to confirm, but we hope the transfer of the land will be made sometime later this summer.

The Chairman thanked John for his report and also thanked the Trustees for all of their hard work throughout the year.

2. The Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting which took place on 10th May 2018 were signed as a true record of the meeting.

3. The Chairman provided the following report:

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen thank you for attending tonight’s meeting which is our Annual report on the work of your Parish Councillors throughout the past twelve Months.

During the meeting you will hear the reports from Parish Councillors on their various responsibilities and the different aspects of Councils wide ranging amount of work we carry out on your behalf. During the past year we have had a few changes on the Council.

We welcomed Cllrs Jon Bache, Bob Harrison and our latest recruit Peter Offer who has also been working for some time on Silsoe Neighbourhood plan which is in process of being reviewed by Central Bedfordshire. Cllrs Helen Flack and Julie McGrory have been instrumental on this important document; and no doubt we shall be having an update on this during the meeting.

The Nine Parish Councillors that make up our Council have I am pleased to report been recently been elected without any opposition during the council election process and we understand that because of the increase in population we are allowed to add another Councillor to this list and we welcome overtures for a suitable candidate who is willing to join us, we will advertise this in due course.

Our growing population is evident from the three developments that are gradually taking place in the village Including 14 dwellings on the Old School site, 24 Houses in Newbury Lane and of course the 100 or so houses at the North East Side of the High street, groundworks are already taking place on that site. This site which was won on appeal to Secretary of State by the Gladman Organisation. Despite the fulsome objections from Central Bedfordshire and of course the Parish Council.

We however have to accept the findings of the appeal process and endeavour to work with the developing builder to achieve benefits through the section 106 process. The developer has already met with the Parish Council to discuss the implications of the Building process including the traffic from builders’ lorries and machinery and requested That all traffic to and from the site should use the north end of the village to enter and depart,

At present there is an enforcement order in place by CBC due to vehicles not adhering to the Order, we just have to be vigilant to ensure this is being upheld.

Recently some of the village…not all, had a brochure sent through the post indicating that the Gladman Organisation are proposing to another site adjacent to the previous site to erect more houses, this time the site is outside the settlement area of our village. We understand that outline plans for this site are already with Central Bedfordshire Council for deliberation and we can expect these to be sent to us in the near future.

You are assured that we will stringently oppose these plans and trust that CBC Will support us with objections to planning any further large-scale development within our community.

The Gladman Organisation based in the North of England are renowned for their predatory approach to building in the open countryside throughout England on a no win no fee Basis and Councils throughout our country are having to consider the opposition to these Sites. No doubt they will yet again adopt the appeal process and we are therefore in danger of being Overrun by another 100 houses at the North end of the village. We have to have sound planning reasons to put forward our objections to this site.

It is unfortunately not enough to highlight the number of houses we have had to absorb over the last few years which has seen our village expand by over 50%. This together with the amount of traffic we have to contend with through our narrow High Street is not helped by over 400 cars in and out of Wrest Park Industry and offices and Over 100.000 visitors to Wrest Park English Heritage.

We will keep on trying to obtain an alternative entry and Exit road on the East side of the Bridge into Wrest Park which would alleviate an immense number of Cars Vans and Lorries not to mention the Foreign Juggernauts who use our High street and Park Avenue. But this problem is ignored by Wrest Park Limited and English Heritage as well as Central Beds Highways and planners they are instrumental in allowing this problem to exist but choose to ignore our protestations. The long-awaited High-Street improvements are still on the cards and scheduled to commence very shortly, during this year. We cannot be more specific than this, we were told that it was on schedule to commence First of all during 2018, then it was put back to early 2019 and then April May time? However, Ringway Jacobs who are the contractors have not confirmed one way or the other. Personnel within Central Bedfordshire Highways have been changed during this time. I believe Cllr Alison Graham may have another update on this. However, if you do see Highways making a start through the coming weeks hopefully you will understand that we are going to be as surprised as you.

Our growing population of families that have moved within the village has opened up our thoughts about the younger population and how we could safely add to their Requirement for youth participation, yes we have our splendid Silsoe Community Sports Centre which is being well used far beyond our expectations with over 650 members Signed up for the activities.

We are also looking forward to reformation of Silsoe Cricket Club after a long absence since they had to vacate Wrest Park , and I am pleased to report that their new home Is scheduled to be on our New Cricket table which is gradually taking shape on the south perimeter of the village , this is thanks to co-operation of Bloor Homes Who have been instrumental in laying out the area with Grass and Astro Turf to allow the club to play in all weathers, we await their commencement in the near future. We have requested that the cricket club will allow for young and old to partake. In this activity for the benefit of all comers.

But there was also the wish for our younger population to have after school activities so when the village was approached by Beds Scouting to find a solution in the village Together with the Village Hall we have been able to orchestrate the ability to embark on such a venture. Its thanks mainly to village Hall Trustees that they were able to find a time slot in their very busy schedule of hiring commitments to be able to accommodate such a venture for the future generation to enjoy.

As I stated at the beginning of my report we will have and update from my fellow Parish Councillors on their responsibilities but prior to their presentations I would like to thank them for all their hard work in volunteering for their roles and also a huge thank you to Tammy Medley our Parish Clerk for all her help and guidance on all the Procedures we have to adopt as an effective professional parish council. We are indebted to her hard work and tenacity to ensure that we are fed with all the Information, regulations and directives we have to absorb between meetings. Certainly, over the past few years the regulations we have to legally consider on your behalf have escalated, since some of us were elected a few years ago.

The work of the Councillor does not just stop at the meetings it seems never ending. and this work is carried out on a truly voluntary basis, although it is sometimes not recognized by the wider community.

Also, a big thank you to Alison Graham our Ward Councillor for her support at CBC level and for her advice and guidance to our villagers at her regular clinics and attendance at village functions. We wish her well during the forthcoming Council Elections during May and hopefully look forward to her returning to us as our elected Ward Councillor.

Lastly and not least I would like to thank Ian Kelly and Philip Kevan for the enormous work and support they give to the Council.

May I thank you for attending this meeting.

Thank for listening.

4. Cllr Alison Graham reported:

It has been a challenging year. The CBC Local Plan, whilst being delayed, is now with the Inspectors and hearings will be scheduled for the end of May 2019. Once the Local Plan is adopted CBC will be in a stronger position to object to developers’ applications within the village.

An Enforcement case has been opened for land East of the High Street, the conditions have been broken, Cllr Graham will provide updates. Another Enforcement case has been opened for two mobile homes on Silsoe Rd being used as residences.

Cllr Graham outlined two reasons why an access road to the A6 would not be permitted, firstly the cost, it would amount to several hundred, thousand pounds. Secondly a T Junction onto a major road is not permitted within close proximity to a roundabout, the access in this case would be too close to the southern roundabout.

There has been a delay in the work being carried out to the High Street due to final agreements over funding. The work is due to start on 23rd April 2019, Cllrs raised concerns over this as St George’s day is the busiest day of the year for Wrest Park, so the village sees an increase in traffic.

The Horticultural Centre is being extended to provide additional parking and improved facilities.

Cllr Graham is still progressing with talks regarding the Health and Well-being Centre.

Cllrs discussed the trees that have been cut down near the bottle banks, they have concerns for the remaining trees alongside the road, these are within the Green Corridor. Cllr Graham will discuss this with planning.

5. Cllr Mann provided a report on his areas:

As for the past few years of my tenure as a parish councillor I continue to have responsibilities for the current three play areas in the village environment. We still await the completion of the new facility on the Bloor estate. If only Bloor and their contemporaries were as quick to provide the promised amenities as they are to cover our fields with houses. Currently some impatient families are accessing this near completed play area which has now been reduced from three areas to this singular area. I carry out weekly inspections of the current play areas usually on a Friday, reporting to the parish clerk.

I represent the parish council on the millennium green of which I am also a trustee my pleasure is in maintaining the diamond jubilee trees and monitoring the general condition of the green. My compliments to my fellow trustees also volunteers on their diligence and hard work maintaining this lovely green space!

I represent the parish council on the village hall committee and have become a trustee. The committee is aware of its responsibilities to the community and does its best to maintain an aging edifice.

I try to monitor the street lighting, bus shelters, the bottle bank and the ever-present litter, domestic and garden fly tipping and dog excrement.

I am still eagerly anticipating the traffic calming measures, now several years in the waiting also improvements to street lighting.

My other role is the monthly parish pump in the Silsoe news for which I thank their editorial team for their consideration.

I am hopeful that we can soon see some restoration work on the “village cage” and on the wall adjacent to the rowans.

It will be a sad day if we lose yet more fields to the rapacious development companies

My compliments to my fellow councillors and our parish clerk with thanks for all they achieve on behalf of the parish.

Cllr Graham updated the Council that the wall by The Rowans is being looked into and quotes are being obtained.

The New Play are will still need to be subject to a ROSPA inspection and will not be available for use until after that.

6. Cllr Kelly reported:

My duties have covered: -

* **SPC Planning & Development Committee**
  + Dealt with approximately 50 planning applications
  + Written responses on approximately 50% applications
  + S106 Contributions
* **SPC/SCRT – negotiations with Bloor Homes adoption of: -**
  + Football Pitches – adopted and now in use

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| Community Orchard | Community Woodland |
| Cricket Pitches | Village Park |
| Trees & Shrubs | Village Green |
| Building Defects | Play Area |

* + Remedial works –
  + Estimates for S106 contributions
  + Estimates for future budget costs
* **Miller Development**
  + Residents meeting with Mainstay
  + Adoption of Phases 1, 2 & 3 – queries
  + Queries / Confirmation of areas of responsibility
* **Silsoe Community Recreational Trust (SCRT)**
  + Trust Meetings
  + Liaison with SSL
  + Building Defects
  + Cricket Club
* **Highways**
* Meetings with CBC Highways
* CBC – awaiting commencement of High Street works.
* **Grass Cutting & Tree Maintenance**
  + Reduction of grass cutting costs for 2019-20 season
  + Meetings with Grass Cutting Contractor
  + CBC - Grass cutting Review
  + Grounds Maintenance 2018-19 expenditure £21k or 35% of Precept
* **Refuse - Litter/Dog Bins / Signage Review**
  + Tidy Tip negotiations CBC
  + 35 existing bins
  + Additional 8 installed – FOC
* **Street Lighting**
* Conversion of 25 obsolete lamps – complete
* Further lighting upgrades to be programmed 2019-20
* Meeting with CBC Highways Lighting
* Traditional Lighting project deferred (19 lamp standards)
* **Village Medical Facility**
  + CCG / NHS awaiting Feasibility Report
* **Wrest Park - English Heritage Liaison**
  + Routine contact meetings
  + Traffic management
  + Events
* **Wrest Park – Wrest Park Enterprises**
  + Park Avenue – Grass maintenance & pathways
* **SPC Insurance – Game & Co**
  + New areas – Football Pitches on adoption
  + Community Woodland, Village Park, Village Green - added although not yet adopted.
  + Asset List – Update

7. Cllr Flack provided the following report:

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN:

The Plan has been out for consultation, the Health check is now complete at the Steering group are now at Regulation 16, the Plan will be submitted to the Inspector, who has been chosen.

SOCIAL MEDIA/WEBSITE:

The website has received 6940 views and is stable. The new website is accessible, colourful and contains more information. The average view time per page is 1 minutes 25 seconds, most access it either directly or via google. The site is updated regularly with the Minutes, copies of the Parish Pump and other news. The aim is it continue to update it and look at the continuity of use of logos between the site and Councillors.

FACEBOOK:

Currently have 451 followers with 100% response rate and an average response time of 2 days. Important news items have been planning, Plantation view play area and closure of A421.

8. GLADMAN PLANNING MEETING:

Cllr Jarrard and Cllr Offer met with CBC planning dept to discuss the rumour of a forthcoming Gladman application. CBC are aware of the strength of feeling within the village to not have further development. CBC were unable to comment on the case as an application had not yet been received, a Local Plan is currently not in place and therefore CBC will be looking at the potential harm that the application could cause. Gladman do have a judgement in their favour, however this application would be further out of the settlement envelope. Need to build a robust case including sustainability and lack of infrastructure within the village.

Cllr Graham confirmed that the litigation costs of the previous appeal had been covered by CBC as the case was between the Local Authority and the Developer and not the PC.

9. FINANCE UPDATE:

My report is intended to cover the financial position of the Council for the fiscal years 2018/19 and 2019/20. As I am sure you are all aware, the financial year of the Council is April to March. You should also bear in mind that the accounts are prepared on the basis of payments made, so for some commitments e.g. orders placed, or invoices received, but not paid by the end of the financial year, the expenditure will effectively slip into the next year.

The opening bank balance on 1st April 2018 was confirmed by the auditors as £270.2k per my report last year. This included as previously reported ring fenced S106 funding and carried forward spending commitments which meant that the real balance being carried forward for normal Parish Council activities was around £64k. The Parish Council has formed the view that it should maintain a minimum reserve of £15k, so this effectively left around £49k being carried forward as available funding for new commitments.

The accounts for 2018/19 can be summarised as follows:

Bank balance b/f £270.2k

Precept £57.6k

S106 £25.5k (SCSC)

VAT reclaims £13.1k

Other income £20.2k (Grants, allotments, MUGA)

Expenditure (£83.0k)

Bank balance c/f £303.6k

The major items of expenditure were:

Grass, hedges & trees maint £39.4k

SCSC £7.1k (mainly covered by S106 funding)

Street Lighting Maint £6.6k

Clerk Fees £6.1k

Insurance £5.0k

Play Areas Maint £4.4k

The carried forward balance of £303.6k does sound high, so I do need to draw attention to balances of S106 funding ring fenced for particular purposes. At the end of 2018/19 there was £98k held against the Play Areas in the Miller homes development and £112k held against the SCSC. In addition, the Parish Council maintains a minimum reserve of £15k and had outstanding commitments of £6k where invoices are being waited for. This brings the uncommitted balance being brought forward at the end of 2018/19 down to £72k.

I also need to highlight the expenditure last year of £39.4k on grass, hedges and trees maintenance – this compares with £17.2k the previous year! The significant increase in expenditure is due to the Parish Council taking on responsibilities for cutting the grass on the football and cricket pitches near the Sports Centre, and additional tree and hedge maintenance costs both in these areas and in other parts of the village for which the Parish Council is responsible. It is expected that the level of expenditure in the current year will be similar to last years.

The precept for 2018/19 was £57.6k. For the current year, 2019/20, the Parish Council has approved a budget where the Precept cost per household increased by 5.0% from 2018/19 to give a total precept value of £60.9k. As I hope you can understand from my previous comments, around 2/3 of this is expected to be spent on grass, hedges and trees maintenance.

The Parish Council has also already identified the need in 2019/20 for significant expenditure on further street lighting improvements (mainly due to the phasing out of spares for old-style lights) and repairs to the ‘Cage’. This does mean that despite the 5% increase to the per household precept cost, the Parish Council is already expecting to use around £36k of the uncommitted balance brought forward to cover this year’s budget, effectively halving the funds available for other new projects to £36k. The PC’s current funding will therefore only be able to provide limited support for other new projects: such project will need further funds from sources such as grants, S106 agreements etc. which are currently being worked on by fellow councillors.

Finally, I should also mention that the Parish Council is endeavouring to close the final promised community facilities agreed with Cranfield University many years ago. In particular this means the cricket pitch, the community woodland area, village green area to the West of Barton Road, and new play areas on the Bloor Homes estate. If the Parish Council is able to take ownership of these facilities on behalf of the village, it will mean ultimately it becomes financially responsible for their ongoing maintenance, but per the related S106 agreements the Parish Council is trying to obtain funding from the developer to cover these costs for up to 15 years, as it was able to do with Miller Homes for the play areas on that estate.