

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting

held on Monday 2nd December 2024 at the Silsoe village hall.

Present:**Cllr Offer in the Chair**

Cllr Mann, Cllr Kevan Cllr Gearey, Cllr McGrory, Cllr Kelly, Central Bedfordshire Councillor Anna French,

232/24 Apologies and Declaration of interest/ Request for dispensation

Apologies Cllr Willard, Cllr Royer Cllr Appleman, Central Bedfordshire Councillor Cllr Liz Childs.

233/24 Confirm the Minutes/ Matter Arising:

The Minutes of the meetings held on 4th November 2024 were agreed.

234/24 Co-option of a new Councillor:

Peter Virgo has attended several PC meetings in conjunction with his role on the Allotments Committee and has expressed an interest in joining the PC as a Cllr. Proposed by Cllr Offer, seconded by Cllr Mann, all in agreement. Peter has completed the Code of Conduct training; clerk provided him with a form to complete and the link to Declare his interest. Clerk will also share the roles and responsibilities and contacts list.

235/24 Public participation:

None.

236/24 Representative from Marston Vale:

Darren Woodward, Forest development Manager from Marston Vale attended to discuss the proposal for forestry planting in Silsoe. Marston Vale forest team are working alongside DEFRA and the Forestry Commission. Cranfield University are aware of the forest scheme and have decided to instigate this project in an attempt to offset their Carbon and to use the forest as a research opportunity. The site is just under 92 hectares, 35% of the site will be for open space which will allow access to the wood compartments. The project is currently at the Consultation phase, an Environment Impact assessment will be submitted to the Forestry Commission shortly and hopefully a decision will be made early January 2025.

The plan will be to plant the trees over two phases, one per year and will include Native Broadleaf, broadleaf from two degrees south and European species to see how they

perform. The maintenance will be the responsibility of the landowner, and they will be eligible for a maintenance payment for the first 15 years and thereafter will be eligible for a Carbon payment. Any trees that need to be replaced during the first three years will be replaced.

Marston Vale would like to engage with the Community and hold a planting event in early February. They are also willing to set up an information day if required. The planting phase will run from January to mid-March.

Cllrs expressed concerns for where people visiting the site would be able to park? No parking is being planned and parking is already an issue in the village, the Marston Forest group are running the project as a Carbon offsetting project and will not be doing anything to attract visitors so therefore parking will not be addressed.

Any comments the PC have may still be submitted.

237/24 Report by Ward Councillors:

- Ward Cllrs have been contacted by parents of sixth form students who are unable to book a paid seat on the school bus. Parents have had to pay for sixth form seats for some time, however at the moment the seats are not available to pay for. The school transport Consultation is currently on hold.
- The Repair Café was a great success, and one will be planned for Silsoe next year.
- Blake Stephenson MP posted about the issues with First Port and maintain their sites.

238/24 Finances:

December payments:

D Granger £5,068.60

Website/Domain £162

Village hall hire £30.

N Power £81.96

Community heartbeat £990 (defibrillator)

Acoline softeners £1,536.00

Payments proposed by Cllr Kevan, seconded by Cllr Gearey, all agreed.

Approved payments and invoices due for payment in the current year so far total £63,728 (last meeting this was £56,777). The main costs over the last month have been grass cutting/hedge and tree maintenance (£2,939 excluding VAT), a replacement water softener for the Sports Centre (£1,280 excluding VAT, from the SCSC reserves) and the replacement defibrillator (£825 excluding VAT).

The income over the last month was £107.50 for allotment rents (bringing the total received to £1,626) and £767.96 interest on the Barclays deposit account.

The bank account balances as of Dec 1st are:

Current a/c	£50,456.22	was £59,449.03
Deposit a/c	£206,119.46	was £205,351.50
Nationwide	£85,965.94	was £85,965.94

Adjusting for the value of unapproved invoices included and expected to be paid, this leaves a total current PC cash balance of £338,822.82 (balance last meeting was £346,105.53).

There are no old un-cleared payments.

There are currently reserved balances of:

£25,000	General reserve	was £25,000
£1,772	Allotment deposits	was £1,772
£83,999	Sports Centre	was £85,279
£85,359	Miller Homes Play Areas	was £85,641
£187	Village Hall	was £187
£7,500	Village Orchard	was £7,500

Last week we had a meeting to review the budget. To summarise the main points:

1. The tax base of 1,430 equivalent number of band D properties for 2025/6 is unchanged from 2024/25, so any percentage change to the per household precept charge will result in the same percentage change to the total precept received by the Parish Council.
2. We believe we are close to the formal transfer of the community woodland, cricket pitch area, Bloor play area and other areas to the Parish Council (with the Orchard having been transferred last month). As this should come with around £177,500 of funding, nothing was put in the 2025/26 budget for the costs of supporting these assets as initially this will be covered by the funding. However, it was discussed that once this funding was spent, the on-going costs of supporting these assets will require a significant increase to the current precept.

3. The normal, current areas of expenditure were reviewed with in depth discussions around the grass cutting costs and the current challenges with these.
4. With no significant new projects added to the 2025/26 budget and based on some 2024/25 budget being now expected to not be spent and rolled over, a 5% precept increase is proposed which would mean a £9,497.70 deduction from reserves to cover the gap between the proposed expenditure and income. This would reduce the funds available for future projects down to £41,293 (this is very slightly different to the figure given in the budget meeting due to the interest income just received).

Following the meeting, Cllr Kevan looked at the forecast for future years in more detail. He has had to make some estimates on the likely expenditures on the assets to be taken over (he assumed £2,000 per year on the orchard for grass cutting and other maintenance, £33,000 for the Bloor assets including play area maintenance, grass cutting, and tree maintenance, and an extra £1,000 year for the additional insurance coverage). He has also assumed inflation related increases will be between 3% and 5% per annum going forward depending upon the type of expenditure. These assumptions suggest the Orchard funding will cover its costs for around 3 years, and the Bloor funding will last around 4 to 5 years. Therefore by 2030 the PC will need to be funding the full cost of supporting these assets from its normal sources of income. If the precept is increased by 12% per year for the 5 years Apr 2026 to Mar 2031, then the forecast shows the current funding of £41k for future projects will in fact have to cover the cost of all such projects over the next 6 years, and the PC will still be in a position in Mar 2031 where costs exceed income by around £20,000 per year.

The Budget was agreed for the next financial year, proposed by Cllr Kevan, seconded by Cllr Gearey, all agreed. It was also agreed, as the land has not yet been handed over a significant increase to the precept should not be agreed, Cllr Kevan therefore proposed a 5% increase, seconded by Cllr Gearey, all agreed. Clerk will submit the application to CBC.

The Village Hall committee are planning works to the fire alarm system at a cost of £4,600 net, Cllr Kevan proposed the PC pay for these works using the village hall grant of £2,500 and the Post Office contribution of £2,500, seconded by Cllr Kelly, all agreed. Clerk will arrange for payment of the invoices when they are received.

239/24 Planning:

- CB/TCA/24/00577 1 The Rowans, Silsoe, Bedford, MK45 4DG Works to trees within a Conservation Area: Cherry (T1) - Reduce lateral growth by approximately 1m past previous reduction points to create a more uniform crown. No objections.

- CB/24/03136/FULL 4 Fir Tree Rd. Erection of a single storey rear extension, single storey side infill extension between dwelling and garage, raise flat roof level of existing garage, alterations to external materials and new windows to front elevation. No objections.

240/24 Projects:

1. ORCHARD:

Cllr Gearey has met with the Edible Orchard group at the Orchard, which has become very overgrown, he proposed having it cleared at a cost of £880 net, seconded by Cllr Mann, all agreed, 6 trees are outside the boundary, Cllr Gearey will look into this to ensure they are maintained, he will also contact the resident who was keen to become involved. Cllr Gearey will also contact other groups within the village to see if they would like to become involved in the project.

2. DEFIBRILLATOR:

The new Defibrillator has been ordered and paid for, delivery should take place this week and Cllr Offer will ensure it is replaced at the Sports centre.

3. REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY:

The parade went well, Cllr Willard and Cllr Appleman worked hard to control traffic. Cllr Offer suggested it would be nice if more Cllrs could attend next year.

4. CIVILITY AND RESPECT PLEDGE:

SLCC initiated the Civility and Respect project some months ago and asked all PCs if they would take the pledge and sign up. Clerk is keen for Silsoe PC to join this, all Cllrs agreed. Clerk will look at the process involved, and policies required.

5. GROUNDS MAINTENANCE, INCLUDING CRICKET PITCH:

Cllr Gearey and Clerk met with David Granger to run through costs for the next financial year and agree hedge cutting. Cllr Gearey proposed reducing the number of scheduled cuts for the next financial year, currently the village has had 17 cuts and the play areas 30, Cllr Gearey proposed reducing this to 16 cuts but reviewing it quarterly, seconded by Cllr Offer, all agreed. Cllr Kelly recommended carrying out a survey of the areas again.

6. MEETINGS 2025:

THE Councillors agreed they would like to continue meetings on the first Monday of the month, at 7pm in the village hall. Clerk will book meetings for 2025.

241/24 Consultations and correspondence:

The following correspondence was received:

- L&D and Bedford Hospital thank you letter for the donation to the Neonatal units.

- Topic session, Freight strategy.
- Street trading Policy Consultation.
- BLMK ICB Communication and engagement update.
- CPRE Hedgerow update.
- MP Letter, Clerk will make contact with Blake Stephenson and ask him to attend a meeting.

242/24 AOB:

- Cllr Kelly suggested Clerk look into funding for hedges.
- Play areas repairs are being carried out.
- There has been an incident of ASB in Church Rd and an incident at the Star and Garter.
- Bollard is still in the ditch opposite the bus stop.
- The fly tipping is still on the Anglian water land.
- A thank you has been received from the Silsoe News for the PC contribution.
- Cllrs agreed for the agenda to be published before Christmas.
- Most Allotment rents have now been paid, 3 are outstanding and these residents have given up their plots, the group will retain the deposit unless payment is made.

243/24 Date of next meeting:

The next meeting will be on Monday 6th January 2025

Signed

Date