



GREAT DENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Great Denham Parish Council held at 7.30pm on 4th June 2018 in Great Denham Community Hall, 86-88 Saxon Way, Great Denham, MK40 4GP

Present: Parish Councillors

Jim Weir (JW) - Chair; Steve Gallagher (SG); Donna Parsons (DP); Parbinder Kaur (PK)
Martin Stuart (MS)

Borough Councillor

Mark Smith (MWS)

Parish Clerk

Anna O'Meara (AOM)

Members of the Public

70 in attendance

Guests: Dave Hodgson, Mayor; Philip Simpkins, Chief Executive Bedford Borough Council; Paul Pace, Chief Officer Environment

		<u>Action</u>
1.	<u>Apologies</u> All Councillors in attendance.	
2.	<u>Declarations of interest</u> JW declared a non-pecuniary interest as a trustee of Great Denham Community Hall (GDCH) and a governor of Great Denham Primary School. MS declared a non-pecuniary interest as a trustee of the GDCH. SG declared a non-pecuniary interest as a trustee of the GDCH	
3.	<u>Minutes of the last meeting -</u> Resolved: The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and signed by JW.	
4.	<u>Open Space Management (OMS)</u> MS gave a short presentation outlining the discussions and analysis done on behalf of residents with the Borough Council to date. A copy is attached. JW introduced the Mayor, Dave Hodgson, and Philip Simpkins, Chief Exec of Bedford Borough Council as guests to hear and respond to public question on this item. Response from Mayor and Chief Executive to short presentation: - It is important to recognise where planning and management of open space has moved to in recent years, as developers have been enabled to introduce service charges as an alternative to commuted sum. Great Denham is not the only development in Bedford with this arrangement. - David Wilson Homes (DWH) were clear that they were not providing a commuted sum for the maintenance costs of this space. - As CEO at the time the executive Decision was made Philip Simpkins was satisfied that the decision was made impartially and based on the facts known. - DWH treated Great Denham and Land West of Kempston as a single area, and classed it as one development. - They cannot comment on the legal documents or sales material as the Council do not endorse sales material, and must assume that all residents have benefit of legal advice. - The financial statement shows 2017/18 as actual figures, and 2018/19 as forecast for the ring-fenced accounts - It is not in the Council's interests to not be transparent. - Play Areas – the North Play area was always intended to be part of the OMS, the South Play area was included as a result of an amendment via the planning process later on. - The Mayor's statement re this being unfair was in relation to the introduction of this "roof tax" in lieu of commuted sum by the Government. - Equipment is not purchased solely for use in one area as this would be inefficient. Deployment of	

	staff, vehicles and equipment on DWH verges has occasionally been done as it was pragmatic at the time. In response MS clarified two specific points as follows: • He made clear that he had not, within his presentation, questioned the impartiality of the decision in 2009 but instead that it had not been made using the best available evidence. He referred back to the list of data that had not been included in the Report which would have better informed the decision. • He also reminded the Chief Executive that in terms of his reference to the 2017/18 financial statement and being based on 'actuals' these figures still included the acknowledged deployment of staff, vehicles and equipment outside of the OMS Area. The meeting was adjourned for Public Questions on this item.	
5.	<u>Public Questions on OMS</u> 1. <u>Would like to understand how the costs break down in terms of number of people and deployment.</u> As someone who runs an external Landscaping company, the costs quoted by the Council would pay for 4 people full time 4 days a week on site, but don't see anything like this in Great Denham. Would also expect a monthly audit of work to be taking place as Council is providing a service. Resident offered to sit down with the Council team to look at scope of work, quality and audit of work and share learning. Mayor responded that he would like to follow up on this offer and asked for resident to share contact details. 2. <u>Why is there an apparent cost subsidy between Great Denham to West of Kempston?</u> Philip Simpkins responded that it was handed over as one site and it is administered as one site, although this may seem unfair. 3. <u>Are Great Denham and West of Kempston part of same political ward?</u> Mayor responded that the area is covered by 2 Wards (Kempston and Kempston Rural) and 3 Councils (Kempston Town, Kempston Rural, and Great Denham). Whilst he recognised that this is inconsistent with the way the charge is managed, it is not possible to change and align to council areas. 4. <u>Can you clarify the commuted sum? I don't understand why I pay Council Tax for which I receive services but this is additional.</u> The Mayor responded and explained that other areas of Bedford received their services and paid via Council Tax because of sum which was received from the developers many years ago (est. £6.5M) which offset the costs; this was not done in Great Denham. He also explained that had the Council presented an objection to the original proposal from DWH they would have lost the planning objection (because of national policy at the time) and the commuted sum would have been reduced, increasing the level of Council Tax required. 5. <u>If both areas are treated as a single site why isn't the £ per m2 the same for all areas?</u> Philip Simpkin responded that this is due to the household charge being standard although the areas are different in size. 6. <u>How many times has work been done for the 2017/18 actual figures? (E.g. litter picking, ground maintenance etc.). How effectively is our money being spent, given residents organise their own litter picking, yet this is charged for in OMS?</u> Paul Pace responded that no detailed figures were available at the meeting, but residents had only been billed for costs spent on the area. 7. <u>As the Borough has failed to adequately ring-fence the money and has admitted that equipment purchased has been used elsewhere, is the Council using this as a slush fund?</u>	

Mayor responded that the auditors of Council accounts would not allow the Council to do this. Philip Simpkins responded that equally equipment purchased elsewhere is used in Great Denham. 8. <u>As we are paying for services that other people who come into Great Denham from elsewhere are using, are we going to be a gated community?</u> Mayor responded that this will not happen as everyone can go anywhere in the Borough as they have paid in some way for open spaces. 9. <u>The plan of OMS on the Borough website indicates that only the dark green areas are payable and that whilst the small play areas (SLAP) are in the OMS area, the large play areas (NEAP/LEAP) are not.</u> Philip Simpkins responded that a subsequent planning decision had taken place to move the South Play area into the Country Park from another part of the Village. The North Play area had always intended to be part of OMS as was in the plans before the Country Park was installed. The definition of amenity open space is contained in the S106 document. Action: Philip Simpkins agreed to provide details of the changes made to Large Play areas as verbally explained. 10. <u>A resident has been trying unsuccessfully for 6 weeks to get clarification on payments made by previous owners as in process of buying property. Would like to see service from finance department improved.</u> Action: Mayor asked resident to email him with details and he will follow up. 11. <u>There was more than one developer – how has this been managed in relation to this charge.</u> The Mayor responded that DWH were the lead developer for Great Denham. 12. <u>A Kempston resident appears to have paid significantly less than £120.</u> Paul Pace responded that given the date the Kempston resident bought property it would have been a part-year payment (so not full amount) 13. <u>The Federation of Housing Associations using a standard schedule of rates for work done so that things are fair. Why can't this approach be adopted here, e.g. same cost per m2 for grass cutting.</u> Philip Simpkin responded that the Council uses its own schedule of rates, and at moment this is lowest charge in the Borough 14. <u>Transparency regarding equipment – accounts supplied indicate that if chargeback is not happening the deficit will increase and the charge will need to be raised significantly in future.</u> Paul Pace responded that no cross-charging is happening although equipment may be used a small amount, equally equipment from elsewhere is also used and no charges raised. As there are still 600 properties left to build, the service charges from these will increase future revenues. Philip Simpkins responded the capital charge has reduced to £6000 for 18/19, although recognises that equipment will be replaced at some point. 15. <u>Who owns the land and can other arrangements be made by the land owner for this work, e.g. pass the monies collected to the Parish Council for them to manage and deliver work.</u> Paul Pace responded that the Borough Council own the land. Mayor responded that that Borough cannot afford to change the arrangements (monies collected) but is happy to investigate whether passing monies to Parish Council can be done legally. Action: Mayor to investigate legal possibility of asking Parish Council to manage work. 16. <u>Why do we pay different Council Tax to residents in West of Kempston?</u> Mayor explained that there are 4 elements to the Council Tax bill residents received: Council Tax (for Bedford Borough Council), Fire services, Police services, Parish Council Precept. The Council tax element is the same across all areas of the Borough. The Parish Council Precept will be varied by Parish Council. JW confirmed that in Great Denham the Parish Council has been	Chief Exec Mayor Mayor
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	reducing this each year for last 4 years.	
	17. <u>Are TLC (DWH contractor) paid the same amount of money to maintain the area? If so why has the quality gone down?</u> Phil Simpkins responded that this information is not known to the Council, but he will personally look into any area flagged to him. The Mayor responded with offer to visit Great Denham and will walk the patch. Action: Mayor and Chief Executive to visit Great Denham and walk around the Open Space areas. 18. <u>I moved into Great Denham in 2009. Why is my Council Tax based on houses in Biddenham?</u> The Mayor responded that the banding is set by the Valuation Office and this is independent. He advised that appeal is the only approach that can be taken if the banding is disputed.	Mayor, Chief Exec
	JW closed the period of Public Questions and thanks the Mayor, Chief Executive and Chief Environment Officer for coming and responding to questions. The guests then left the meeting and it was re-opened for remaining business.	
6.	<u>Local Services</u> <u>Request to revise timings of Number 11 bus service – update</u> MS updated the meeting that following a number of requests from residents, the Borough Council will ask Grant Palmer to review this; it was noted that the period to implement any changes (if agreed) would take 70 days.	
7.	<u>Planning/Infrastructure</u> Planning application 18/01228/OUT – Outline permission for 2 dwellings on land adjacent to 16 Vicars Close, Biddenham. The Council has received this as it is in an adjoining parish and has no objections. Resolved: Clerk to respond to Planning Department with no objections by deadline.	Clerk
8.	<u>Finance Report</u> a) Finance Report & payments – signature of cheques/initial invoices/approve & initial Bacs payments The Finance Report had been circulated and a copy is attached to these minutes. All receipts were available for inspection Resolved: All payments were approved and all Bacs payments approved by two councillors were initialled together with the invoices.. b) Grant Application – Great Denham Junior Parkrun A request for funding has been received from a resident to establish a Junior Park Run in Great Denham Country Park. The Council discussed this and asked for further information to be sought before reaching a decision, to include: • What other sources of funding have been sought? The request for £2500 would be a significant % of Council Precept funds. • What opportunity exists to link to the Park Run already established in Great Denham (thereby reducing set-up costs)? • Given the parking issues which already occur as a result of the existing Park Run it was felt that another run on a Sunday would increase the traffic issues over 2 days, and assurances from the organisers would be needed. Action: Clerk to go back to applicant to obtain answers to Council questions and bring application back to future meeting.	Clerk
9.	<u>Correspondence</u> All correspondence received was available at the meeting	

