



GREAT DENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Great Denham Parish Council held at 7.30pm on Monday 7th September. The meeting was held remotely in line with government guidance re Covid-19.

Present:

Parish Councillors: Donna Parsons (DP) - Chair; Jo Ruskin (JR); Chris Slinn – from 8pm (CSL); Chris Staite (CST); Louise Evans – from 7.45pm (LE); Helen Allen (HA); Vince Arthur (VE)

Borough Councillor: Jim Weir (JW)

Parish Clerk: Anna O'Meara (AOM)

Members of the Public: 4 members of the public in attendance

Public Questions

There were no questions from the public and the meeting was re-opened.

1. Apologies

No apologies had been received.

2. Declarations of Interest

DP declared a non-pecuniary interest as a trustee of Great Denham Community Hall (GDCH).

3. Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of Extra Ordinary meeting held 17th August 2020.

Resolved: The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and signed by DP.

4. Guest Speaker – Brian Cox, “Save the Great Denham Golf Course Community Group”

Brian introduced himself and the group which has been formed by residents to campaign and work to prevent the closure of the golf club and course, and the protection of the green space.

He outlined the activity and work done to date:

- 20/8 – The group was formed
- 21/8 – an article was published in the Bedford Independent; this included a statement from Bidwells, the agent for the landowners (Old Ford End Trust)
- 22/8 – Brian spoke with the current operators of the Club. They confirmed that they were no longer interested in continuing, given their experience with Bidwells over the proposed closure and their lack of responsiveness.
- 25/8 – The Barrister opinion was received, on the 3 planning questions reported at last Parish Council meeting. The opinion confirmed that any change of use to the buildings would require planning consent and a planning application by the landowners/their agents; it also advised that it was unlikely that a link between the Golf Club/Course and the building of the original 100 houses would be considered.
- 22/8 – 28/8 – volunteers from the community were identified as potential investors in a future operator and to run the club as a not-for-profit enterprise.

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- 28/8 – A formal letter was sent by the group to Bidwells; this outlined a proposal for an alternative management of the club. No response to this has been received.
- 6/9 – a follow-up email has been sent to the Trustees of OFET and Bidwells outlining the disappointment in lack of response and advising that the group would be escalating this issue, both via national and local media and also via legal advice.

A survey was included and distributed with the latest Parish Council newsletter and has generated over 100 responses to date, with a closing date of 13th September.

Brian confirmed that the focus in the immediate term is to keep the course and club open; longer term beyond that will be the protection of the green space and urban gap.
DP thanks Brian for his update.

Action: copies of the letters sent and received by the Parish Council will be sent to the Group.

Action: Clerk to share the list of media contacts she had created with the group.

5. Golf Course – update on plans for Closure

The Parish Councils of Great Denham and Biddenham wrote to the landowners/Bidwells on 21/8 to highlight resident concerns over closure of the course and future housing development, and to ask that Bidwells followed up on their stated commitment to better local engagement with the community.

A response was received on 27/8 – DP summarised the content of this letter, and it was noted that nothing substantial was offered in reply to the issues and proposals raised by the Parish Council.

Meeting with Bidwells - VA reported on a meeting with Bidwells that he attended on 4th September – the meeting was hosted by Richard Fuller MP, and attended by 3 Borough Councillors, the Chair of Biddenham Parish Council and the Mayor of Bedford Dave Hodgson.

Position of trustees

It was made clear that no attempt had been made to find other tenants for the club. The trustees are not open to considering allowing a golf club to continue. This would still hold if someone willing to pay a higher rent expressed interest. They claim that they will generate more income with greater diversity and reliability from these three revenue streams

- Letting out the greenkeepers building
- Letting out the club house for another purpose
- Agriculture, assuming income from subsidies from future legislation to replace the EU Common Agricultural Policy post Brexit. (Based on white paper “Public Money for Public Goods”)

Attendees (other than Bidwells) expressed their doubts that giving up income from the golf club is a purely financial decision as the legislation referred to has not been made yet and such income is far from guaranteed.

Attendees pointed out there had been a lack of engagement with the community and a lack of transparency. Bidwell’s representatives accepted that they had not done well in this and apologised.

The point was made by all attendees that it is completely understandable that there is a lot of distrust and scepticism about the motives of the trustees. It is understandable that residents think it likely that the trustees hope to gain from selling for development in the longer term. Bidwell’s representative stated that he had viewed the golf course and it did not look like the type of site suitable for housing development because of the presence of overhead power lines.

Bidwells accepted the MPs suggestion that there needed to be better communication. It was suggested that the parish councils, borough councillor and Bidwells could set up regular zoom meetings so that the local community is truly engaged in how the land and facilities are used.

Before the meeting closed a statement from the community group "Save the Great Denham Golf Course Land" was read out. This stated that if no response was received to a letter they have sent then legal action would be taken and that they are also consulting a barrister about a group action on behalf of residents

DP informed Councillors that she was liaising with the Chair of Biddenham Parish Council on next steps.

JW advised that he has asked the CEO of Bedford Borough Council to ask the Planning department to write to Bidwells to highlight the planning conditions.

6. Neighbourhood Development Plan

This matter has been discussed at the July Parish Council meeting, where representatives from the Turvey Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group shared their experiences.

Further investigation into the potential use of a NDP for Great Denham has been done by the Clerk; advice received is that, whilst all site for housing development are already identified, the Community can use a NDP to state local policies for use of green spaces, outline expectations for the remaining housing developments in terms of design etc, and to support Bedford Local Plan policies relating to the maintenance of the Urban Gap and avoidance of coalescence with adjoining villages/settlements such as Biddenham.

Grant funding of £10k is available for Neighbourhood Plan preparation, subject to application. Estimated total costs for producing a plan are in the region of £14k. Contact details of planning consultants have been obtained with a view to identifying best expertise to support this work.

A Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group will be established.

The following proposals were made by DP, seconded by LE and CST:

1. To proceed with the creation of a Neighbourhood Development Plan for Great Denham.
2. To apply for grant funding from Locality to support this work; funding applications to be split over 2 financial years as outlined below.
3. To form a Steering Group responsible for putting the plan together.
4. To engage consultancy from the Beds Rural Charities Commission (BRCC) to complete the Green Infrastructure Plan and Ecological Survey, as outlined below.
5. To engage a planning consultant – suitable suppliers to be identified.
6. To include any additional costs in budget preparation for 2021/22

Resolved: all proposals were agreed unanimously.

HA and CST will support the Steering Group once established; LE offered help with the grant funding application.

7. Annual Audit - completion

Notice of completion of the annual external audit was received on 23rd July 2020. No qualifications were made by the external auditor Mazars; the following minor scope for improvement for 2020/21 was identified:

The Council has left Box 11 in Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) blank. Although the answer could be inferred from other answers on the

AGAR the Council should ensure all boxes are filled in, marking nil or not applicable where appropriate.

Resolved: The External Auditors report and recommendations were accepted unanimously.

8. Insurance

The quote for insurance renewal has been received from Came and Company; the Council is currently in year 3 of a 3-year agreement, and the cost for renewal is £4058.27. This includes fees and IPT. Cover is provided for the Community Hall building and contents on the Councils asset register.

Resolved: Renewal of insurance was agreed for the next 12 months.

Quotes from alternative suppliers will be sought for next year's insurance renewal.

9. Safety and Security – renewal of CCTV annual service and maintenance contract

Renewal notice from ACE Security has been received; this covers all service and maintenance of the CCTV cameras. It is noted that the price is consistent with previous years.

Resolved: it was agreed to renew the annual service and maintenance agreement with ACE Security.

10. Christmas Lights

Council has discussed at previous meetings the possibility of putting Christmas Lighting up around the Retail Centre; cost estimates were obtained last year from the Borough Council for this work, as the Council already install and maintain the Christmas lights on the tree on Kingswood Way roundabout.

The Borough Council have confirmed that the cost estimates already supplied are still valid; they provided details of 3 suppliers for the purchase of the fittings, and this can be done by the Borough on our behalf or directly by the Parish Council. Brochures for all 3 suppliers have been circulated to Council in advance of tonight's meeting.

Based on costs available the estimated cost of providing Christmas light decorations on up to 12 streetlights around the Retail Centre would be between £4600 and £6600 – this includes £2100 installation costs. The decorations themselves, subject to choice, are priced in the range of £200 -£400 each.

The 20/21 budget includes provision of £4500 for Christmas lights, to include the £1600 costs for Christmas Tree lighting. This leaves a balance of £2900 for lights at the Retail centre; underspend from previous years' budgets could be used to meet any shortfall.

The Council discussed the costs and options available; the proposal received from MKM Lighting was the most thorough, and included ex-hire products which would help to keep the overall cost down.

It was noted that the weight of the decoration will need to be taken into account; we would expect the Borough to advise on this, as this is their area of expertise. It was also noted that once purchased lights will need to be stored and the Borough may do this, but there may be additional costs.

Resolved: the following was agreed:

- A total budget of £6600 was agreed for this work, using underspend from previous years to meet any shortfall in budgeted monies.
- It was noted that there would be an ongoing cost of approx. £2100 for installation which would be built into future year's budgets.
- Fittings will be purchased via the Borough or directly depending on best value. It was agreed that a mix of 2 different designs of same colour scheme would be preferred.
- Permission from DWH for attachment to lights on unadopted roads to be obtained.
- Provision of Christmas Lights on the tree on Kingswood roundabout was also agreed.

11. Community Events and Engagement

a) Great British September Clean

DP advised that this will take place on Sunday 27th September and will be held in accordance with Covid guidelines. All are welcome to attend.

b) Update on Summer Poster Competition (Road Safety)

Clerk reported that no entries had yet been received.

It was agreed to ask the School to promote via the Parent newsletter and also whether they would like to include in the school activities.

Drop-off point for entries will be moved from the Daily Needs store to the Community Hall.

Action: Clerk to follow up with School.

12. Planning

a) Planning application 20/01761/FUL – Single storey rear extension – 14 Hilda Close, Great Denham

Councillors had reviewed the planning documents and no comments or objections were made.

Resolved: no objections or comments recorded.

b) Planning application 20/01731/FUL – Replacement of fence, landscaping of front garden and erection of a satellite dish – 28 Ryder Close, Great Denham.

LE declared an interest in this application and left the room for the duration of discussion. Councillors had reviewed the planning documents and no comments or objections were made.

Resolved: no objections or comments recorded.

LE rejoined the meeting.

Clerk noted under this section of the agenda that notification had been received that planning application 19/00385/FUL – two storey extension to Nursey building, 90 Saxon Way, Great Denham – has been withdrawn.

13. Borough Councillors Report

JW gave a short report.

- The Borough Council has no committee meetings during August, although the Mayor briefings have continued.
- **Covid** - The Covid snapshot is being published; this is being shared via the Parish Council Facebook page. Of the 6 cases in Newnham reported last week, 5 occurred at ta

family birthday party. The Borough is reinforcing and stressing the need for everyone to continue to follow guidance.

- Covid-champion meetings have been set up with Parish Council chairs, with a view to establishing an approach to local communications. DP is attending the session on 9th September.
- **Ward Fund** – JW still as monies available; the Parish Council has asked for support for bulb planting, and JW will review this.
 - Deadlines:
 - Highways/Green Spaces – 11/9
 - Environmental services – 20/11
 - Outside organisations – 11/12
- Clerk noted that a resident had reported that the trees planted by the Parish Council on Kingswood way were in need of some care, including replacing 2 dead trees. JW will support this via the Ward Fund, subject to receiving a quotation for the work.
Action: Clerk to obtain quotation and forward to JW.
- **Golf Course** – efforts to save this space have taken an enormous amount of time. JW attended the meeting with Bidwell's on 4th September (reported above). He presented a petition from residents to the Borough Council Executive in July, and will be preparing for a debate on this petition at the October meeting.
- **Management Companies.** JW had a meeting with SDL on 25th August regarding the issues that residents are reporting. They committed to better communication, and will be revisiting every courtyard scheme in the development to look at charges/services. JW reported that he is still receiving resident concerns regarding Chamonix and RMG. Management Charges is an item on the Environment Committee meeting this week, and he will get a report from this and share when available.
Action: it was agreed to write again to Barratts regarding the current status of handover to management companies; the last communication with the Parish Council was in 2017, so it is very timely to follow up and expect those areas of the development that were pending in 2017 to be now completed.
- **Medical Centre** - JW is still receiving complaints from residents. He has met with the practice, together with Borough Councillor Roger Rigby. The Practice have put an action plan in place for improvement, due for review mid-September. They are also holding a Patients Panel meeting on 23rd September; this has been promoted via social media and will be put up on PC noticeboards.

14. Finance and Clerk's Report

- 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.

- b) New Payscales from NALC

Agreement on increase to payscales for Clerks has now been reached, backdated to 1 April 2020.

Resolved: this was noted by Council and will be actioned for Clerk pay.

15. Correspondence

All correspondence was available at the meeting and a list is attached to these minutes.

Resolved: No correspondence required discussion.

16. Any Other Business

- DP is attending the Covid Champions call with borough Council on 9th September
- DP noted that review of HR policies and Social Media policy is still outstanding and will be brought to future meeting.
- Clerk reported that she has chased the installation of the pole for the Speed Indicator Device on Kingswood Way.

17. Date of Next Meeting

5th October 2020