

Meeting of Cople Parish Council with the Mayor of Bedford Mr Frank Branston
held in Cople Village Hall on Monday July 27 2009
Present: Mr Peter Moore (Chairman)

Mr Frank Branston Mayor of the Borough of Bedford
Mr Philip Lotan The Mayor's Assistant
Mr Ian Clifton Borough Councillor with responsibility for Rural Affairs
Mrs Carole Ellis Borough Councillor for our Ward

Parish Councillors Mr Tony Fisher Mr David Hughes Mr Mike Vacher Mr David Whitehead
Twenty One Local residents

Apologies: Ms Linda Davis Mr Steye Smith

The quorum of Cople Parish Council is three. Councillors are in Office to May 03 2011.
The Electoral Register in 2009 shows 323 properties & 606 Electors in the parish.

Introduction

The Chairman of the Parish Council introduced the Mayor of Bedford Mr Frank Branston to the Meeting and invited the Mayor to make an opening statement and discuss issues of current interest both to the Borough and to the parish of Cople.

The Mayor - Opening Statement

The Mayor began by referring to the current economic recession and its effect on the Borough. Mr Branston said that in 2002 there was a reasonable amount of property available and the Government was reasonably generous in supporting major projects that benefit the community. But now, the Mayor continued money is tight and we are hamstrung.

The Western By Pass is important to Bedford the Mayor said, and the Government came up with up front treasury funding towards its development. But to finish the work and ensure traffic can be routed beyond the A428 the Mayor recently addressed the Minister on funding for the northern by pass - and received a blanket no. The Mayor turned to a government quango the Homes & Community Agency but the situation we are in he said, could not be recognised.

The Mayor remarked the Government has now halved or halted the allocation for infrastructure projects and quoted the Riverside Square development as one that is now on hold. He continued, there are now lots of problems with sourcing and how long it will last is difficult to say. New dictats from the Government say there is no money for this, no money for that.

Public Transport is one area the Mayor continued that can be examined and changes made and put forward some of the proposals he has in mind. A bus service for late evenings although possibly not in the rural areas; oyster cards that represent a prepayment scheme to use taxis, especially to be aimed at young people who in the evening want to be in the town and know that safe transport is available. People age 60 and over already receive free public transport via the Bus Pass system, the Mayor said the oyster card scheme could be extended to those and suggested the rural areas that are transport poor might benefit.

Mr Branston discussed the question of Traveller Sites. He remarked on the parish of Bletsoe where a recent legal judgement has approved four pitches, to be assessed after three years. The Mayor explained the Government is requiring us to provide 25 new pitches now throughout the Borough and an additional three per cent per annum. The site at Meadow Lane will include facilities for emergency stop over. The installation of water and energy supply should be easy. If we don't designate then someone from Whitehall will do it and we don't want that Mr Branston continued.

The Mayor commented on recent recommendations for two tier Schools, a consultation that has just ended. Mr Branston remarked that from a Cople point of view a two tier system would mean the Lower School converting to a Primary School and pupils staying on for an extra two years before moving on to the new Academy at the present John Bunyan. The Borough Council is yet to vote on the issue the Mayor explained, and hopes it will be decided at the first round rather than go on to conflict resolution.

Rural Crime was a topic the Mayor was requested to include in his discussion. Mr Branston said unfortunately he has no power with the Police, or with any of the emergency services. He has only one occasional County wide meeting that has any input to Bedfordshire Police. Mr Branston concluded his opening comments.

Questions from the Meeting

Taking comment and questions from the Meeting the Mayor was asked about the 2-3 School Tier system. A local resident said now is the wrong time to be looking at this. But the Mayor responded this is about building schools for the future, the future of the education of succeeding generations of children. The Government has said three to four hundred £million will be available provided we are ready with a policy to implement. The Mayor continued, the Middle Schools have run a vociferous campaign to hold on to the existing three tiers but he is amazed at the hysteria of parents at the prospect of change. Change the Mayor said, to two tiers would not be as disastrous as people imagine, people should think about it.

A local resident made representation about Bus Services in Cople, one aspect in particular. That a few years ago the daily route through Cople via Willington Road was withdrawn, resulting in residents having to walk either to the A603 or to the junction of Northhill Road/Grange Lane, the elderly and infirm especially people living in Rye Crescent badly affected by the alteration. The local resident quoted the cost of taxi fares suggesting for example that to get to a GP surgery for four visits in one day can cost up to £60.

The Mayor responded, the system the Borough Council has responsibility for was taken over on April 01 2009. He explained the Bus Operator Stagecoach the routes they operate have to be profitable. The Mayor referred again to the Oyster card, that it might be a useful alternative to buses. He agreed to look at the matter and requested details of how the issue had been examined by the Parish Council.

A local resident enquired about the planned Bedford River Valley Park is it still an ongoing proposal - the Mayor asked Ian Clifton for advice and the Borough Councillor said the matter is proceeding.

A Parish Councillor asked the Mayor to return to the subject of Travellers - if Meadow Lane, Bedford goes ahead will the pressure be taken off Cople. The Mayor replied yes it would, if Meadow Lane goes ahead then the proposals for Cople will not go ahead, we would not look at Cople if we get that. The Mayor continued, we want to get Meadow Lane operational and then look for other sites, and said again we would certainly not come back to Cople if Meadow Lane is ok. In reply to a question from a local resident about expenditure Mr Branston said a large bid would be made to government towards the cost of the site and the amenities it will provide. And responding to a comment from the Chairman of the Meeting that Cople appears to be a hub for the settlement of travellers in Bedfordshire the Mayor stated the Borough has a legal requirement to come up with twenty five pitches by 2012 and forty by 2020.

Conclusion

The meeting concluded with a general reference to policing of rural areas. Referring to travellers again the Mayor said that if you try and accommodate them it is possible to get something better. A local resident remarked that real gypsies many years ago were pleasant people. The Borough Councillor Mrs Ellis commented very often the Police won't turn up when called, they are either not interested or not resourced. Mr Branston commented Bedfordshire Police will soon have a full establishment.

The Chairman, Councillors and local residents thanked the Mayor for being at Cople and giving the opportunity of a broad based debate. Mr Branston, his Assistant Philip Lotan, the Borough Councillors Carole Ellis and Ian Clifton left the Meeting.

The Meeting continued as a Meeting of Cople Parish Council

14. Council's Meetings of May 11 2009 & June 08 2009

A copy of the Minutes of the Meetings of 11.05.09 and 08.06.09 being available to each Councillor were approved today and signed by the Chairman.

Under Minute No: 3 of 11.05.09 the Councillor David Hughes complained to Council that no one had told him the trees in the Churchyard were to be pruned to a height where they could be managed from ground level, that it affects the security of his property.

15. Appointment of a new Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer

The post was advertised in Bedfordshire on Sunday at the weekend of June 21 2009. It appeared also on the Cople website and in the Parish Church Magazine. Council received ninety-eight requests for a Job Description in response to the advert in BOS, one from the Website and none from the Magazine. By the closing date of July 10 2009 there were thirty three written applications for Council to consider and these were presented to Councillors at an informal meeting on July 15 2009. Councillors prepared a short list of four candidates and made an arrangement to interview on Wednesday August 12 2009.

16. The Council's Finances

Council approved these payments.

- £ 16:00 Cople Village Trust. Room charges 11.05.09
136:72 Glasdon UK Ltd. Replacement litter bin, liner & fixing kit, for the A603 lay by in Bedford Road
130:00 RA Gurney. Internal Auditor. Audit of the Council's accounts year end 31.03.09
115:63 E ON UK plc. Footway lighting energy May 2009
158:00 Lawn Lord. Grasscutting in the Open & Closed Churchyard. Third & fourth cuts of the season.
255:29 LSN Media Ltd. Situations Vacant. Advertisement for Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer
111:15 Andy Muskett Ltd. Footway lighting maintenance QE 30.06.09
42:00 Cople Village Trust. Room charges 08.06., 15.07., & 27.07.09
79:00 Lawn Lord. Grasscutting in the Open & Closed Sections of the Churchyard, sixth cut.
400:00 Lawn Lord. Holly Trees on the western side of the Open section of the Churchyard.
Trees pruned, lopped and reduced to six feet. Site cleared and debris removed.
133:40 DJ & JM Green. Grasscutting of highway verges within the 30mph precincts - 2nd cut of the season
144:00 FR Locke. Litter bin in the A603 lay by. Dismantle damaged bin, excavate & remove foundation.
Install replacement bin, new foundation with fixing kit.
312:50 Cople Village Trust. Half year Grant towards maintenance of the Playing Field,
half year 01.01.09-30.06.09. The first three months 01.01-31.03.09 @ £500 per annum, the second
quarter 01.04-30.06.09 at the agreed new rate of £750 per annum.
155:25 BDO Stoy Hayward. External Government appointed Auditors. Audit fee for the year ending 31.02.09
1560:00 John Squire. Clerk of the Council. Pay of the Clerk QE 30.06.09
53:40 Copying & printing QE 30.06.09 apr 741 may 55 jun 94 890 @ 6p

Balances in hand after payment £15354:98 Current AC £254:98 FS AC £4500:00 Investment AC £10600

Audit for the year ending 31.03.09

Council noted conclusion of the Audit by the external auditors BDO Stoy Hayward of the Council's accounts and Annual Return for the year ending March 31 2009. There were no adverse comments. A Notice to the effect of conclusion was posted on the Parish Council Notice Board.

Grasscutting at the Bus Shelter site in Bedford Road.

Council agreed to include the area around the new Bus Shelter in Bedford Road within its grasscutting agreements. The Clerk had made a site visit with the Contractor Lawn Lord and agreed a price of £10 per cut, twelve cuts per annum at the Contractor's discretion and each cut to include the picking up and removal of litter within and around the Bus Shelter.

Council agreed to purchase and install a new Dog Waste Bin for attachment to Parish Council lighting column No: P25 sited adjacent to a field entrance in Water End.

17. Planning & Development

Between the last meeting and today Council examined these planning applications -
35 Northhill Road. Extensions to the dwelling. Peter Moore declared an Interest in this proposal and did not take part in the consultation. By a majority Council objected to the plan principally on the effect to the street scene. Council's view of the loss of the garage to make the extension viable takes away the continuity of line that one with the other is a feature of the general street scene on that side of Northhill Road, and creates also the possibility of more on road vehicle parking.

83 Willington Road. Extension to the dwelling. Peter Moore declared an Interest in this proposal and did not take part in the consultation. By a majority Council objected to the plan on the basis of loss of amenity to the adjoining property No 85 Willington Road. This is a revised plan similar in purpose to a proposal in 2007, and Council holds the view the reduction in height of the proposed extension is not anywhere near sufficient to lessen the impact on No 85.

33 Grange Lane. Extension to the dwelling. Council had no objection and no comment.

Council examined today.

8 Bedford Road. Land to the rear, new agricultural storage building.

21 Northhill Road. Extensions to the dwelling; Porch. Council had no comment or objection to these proposals.

Notifications.

34B Northhill Road. Closing off rooflights, two new dormer windows to rear elevation.

Approved by the Planning Authority.

Cople Cottage 34 Northhill Road. New garage in walled garden. Approved.

Dog Farm bungalow and site in Bedford Road. Conditions attached to change of use to Office development.

The Parish Council supported the Planning Authority in refusing the application to change the conditions of consent to develop the site. The applicant has now gone to Appeal.

18. Allotment provision within the parish

The Councillor Mike Vacher reported he now had about twelve local people interested in taking up an allotment and he asked Council to permit enquiries to be made by the Councillor of any local land owners for the availability of land and facilities. Council agreed the Councillor may do that.

19. Affordable housing - land in Bedford Road

The owners of land in Bedford Road Mr Ron Moss and associates attended the meeting today to discuss with Council how the matter of affordable housing and land provision could proceed. Mr Moss said after four years of negotiation he asks the Council to take up the matter again and secure the services of a Housing Association to undertake the Needs Survey that is required. Councillors accepted the point the closing down of the Rural Housing Trust in January this year had an adverse effect on progress in Cople with the necessary Needs Survey. Council agreed to a suggestion of Mr Moss to communicate with Guinness Midsomer Housing Association in Milton Keynes and invite a representative to a meeting of the Council. The Council did insist that any Survey conducted in Cople and either in the name of or with the support of Cople Parsish Council, the content must have prior consultation and agreement with the Parish Council.

20. Correspondence to the Council

Bedford Borough Council consultation - Green Wheel. A proposed route in many parts of the Borough for walkers and cyclists. But it does not include Cople and the Parish Council responded with disappointment there are no plans to do so. We noted also there are no proposals for a pedestrian link to from Cardington.

Bedfordshire Police - Joint Action Group meeting 12.08.09 Wilden Village Hall. Mike Vacher agreed to attend.

Carillion plc. Highway maintenance contractors of trunk and A roads. Change of address from Kettering to Sandy.

Alistair Burt MP. Meeting with the MP about Rural Crime 06.08.09. Linda Davis and Steve Smith agreed to attend.

CPRE Planning Training Day 28.09.09 at Flitwick. Council did not take this up.

Field Pond on land at the rear of dwellings in Northill Road. The Southill Estate owns the land and had agreed to make the Pond safe by filling it in. When advised of this proposal the Occupier of No 24 Northill Road objected on the grounds it may affect the domestic drainage to his property. The Parish Council understands the Southill Estate is making a representative available to discuss the matter with the local resident to seek a solution to the matter. Council closed this issue today.

Editor of the Cople Parish News requested Council to supply dates of meetings, Councillors names and address and a report of meetings from the Chairman. Council agreed to provide the information.

21. Highways - Rights of Way - Street Lighting

Rights of Way. Council agreed to look further at the provision of a right of way or pedestrian footway to and from Cardington, and resolved in the first instance to walk the area to assess the potential.

Street Lighting. All Parish Council lighting units are functioning correctly.

22. Meetings Councillors have attended representing Council

Mike Vacher is the Council's representative to the Cople Village Trust and reported that a recent meeting was useful and interesting.

23. Any Other Business

Tony Fisher suggested following up the Mayor's comment about the occasional meeting he has with Bedfordshire Police, by requesting the Mayor suggest the local Safer Neighbourhood Police Officer make a point of attending Parish Council meetings as often as possible.