

**MINUTES OF THE BOWERS GIFFORD AND NORTH BENFLEET  
PARISH COUNCIL MEETING  
HELD AT THE BENBOW CLUB BOWERS GIFFORD  
ON WEDNESDAY 11 DECEMBER 2013 AT 7.30 PM.**

**Present:**

**Councillors:** R.Smillie (Chair)  
B.Foster: B.Wall: R.Griffin:

**Officer:** Christine Barlow – Parish Clerk

**Members of the Public:** 8 members of the public

**96/13 APOLOGIES:** Councillor Nigel Tyler

**97/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** To receive any declarations of interest to any agenda items in accordance with Part 2, Paragraph 9 of the Members 'Code of Conduct.

None

**98/13 MINUTES:** Confirmation of minutes of the meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2013 and the Chair to sign as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2013 were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and signed as such by the Chair.

**99/13 POLICING:** Local Police Officers to attend and inform of policing activities for Bowers Gifford & North Benfleet.

PCSO Emma Spurr reported that the police were increasing their patrols in the area due to an increase in burglaries over recent weeks and residents were urged to be extra vigilant and report anyone acting suspiciously, they do not recognise or were behaving in a strange manner by contacting the Police on either 999 or 101. There had also been an increase in cold calling and in these instances residents should ask for identification and ask the caller to show his/her peddlers licence to ensure their legitimacy. Residents were advised not to leave keys in doors or in full view near the front door and lock all windows and doors at night or when going out.

Councillor Griffin commented on communications that appeared legitimate but were found to be scams when checked out. PCSO Spurr advised that in any such instances they should be reported to the organisation that is the people's normal contact. Information on the Essex Police website informed of the latest scams and what to do if affected. Once logged into the website the information could be obtained clicking on to 'Your Neighbourhood'. The Parish Clerk was asked to include the Essex Police link on the Parish Council website.

Comments were made regarding an increase of caravans on the Sadlers Farm traveller site and also pony and traps being driven in Pound Lane. PC Spurr was asked if there

was any reason for this. She replied that she was not aware of any reason.

The issue of irresponsible parking at the school was again raised and PC Spurr advised that the Police had made several requests for the Essex County Council 'spy car' to visit during school hours without response. PC Spurr stated the Police were not responsible for cars parking on yellow lines. The Parish Clerk advised that parking was the responsibility of Essex County Council's South Essex Parking Enforcement Officers.

PCSO Spurr also advised that parking problems had improved in William Road since several vehicles had been identified as not having tax. PC Spurr had spoken to the residents and action taken.

PCSO Spurr was thanked for her attendance and wished a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

**100/13**

**PARISH CLERK'S REPORT:** Parish Clerk to update on relevant business and correspondence.

(i) **The caravan in the bus lay-by outside Clare House:** The Parish Clerk had reported the caravan to Basildon Council and Council officers had advised the Clerk that the appropriate actions to investigate and remove was being taken.

(ii) **Overgrown shrubs at William Road/ Pound Lane:** The Clerk had once again contacted Basildon Council's Highways Maintenance Supervisor by email and informed that the pruning was in the schedule of works to be carried out.

(iii) **Advertising in Parish newsletter:** Two requests had been received regarding advertising in the Parish Council newsletter. The first from a social media website called Streetlife and the second a television programme for ITV called 'Secret Dealers'. The Chair asked if Streetlife.com was a commercial venture and the Parish Clerk confirmed she had trialled the site on behalf of the Parish Council and considered it to be a social media site with a commercial slant. She reported, from information received, that Braintree District Council had signed up to the site and it was attracting interest. She had not however verified this fact and would feedback to Councillors when she had undertaken further research on this information. Councillors confirmed they would consider the request but hold any decision regarding advertising until more facts were known. In regard to the television programme 'Secret Dealers' and their asking the Parish Council to advertise in the Bugle newsletter for participants, the Parish Clerk was able to confirm she had verified the legitimacy of the programme.

The Chair, advised that the policy of the Parish Council was not to generally advertise commercial ventures in the newsletter and as this appeared to be the case with both ventures it was felt at present the Council could not agree to advertise either product. The Parish Council was in agreement with this statement but Councillors **AGREED** to have a look at the 'Streetlife' website and discuss if appropriate at future meetings. It was also **AGREED** to review the Parish Council's position on commercial advertising in the Parish Council newsletter in the New Year.

(iv) **ECC Bus Strategy Review:** Notification had been received from the Passenger Transport Liaison Team regarding the conclusion of Essex County Council's Bus Strategy Review and an analysis of the responses received was now being carried out. The information regarding passenger numbers and journeys taken, would be used to

draft a new Passenger Strategy and there would be further consultations and opportunities to comment once the draft Strategy had been completed. Following this a series of reviews across the County would take place to enable services in each area to be looked at in the light of the new Strategy. Councillor Wall sits on the Bus Transport Forum and would report back on the findings of the report to the Parish Council when known.

(v) **Footpath Order under Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981:** An Order in 2012 to make modifications to the Definitive Map No 529 (Byway Open to Traffic 90 Benfleet and 270 Bowers Gifford had been challenged and a public hearing will be heard on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2014 at the Essex Records Office, Wharf Road, Chelmsford in regard to this challenge.

(vi) **Southend Airport Airspace:** A second email had been received regarding the proposal to re-establish controlled airspace in the vicinity of Southend Airport. Councillors had received notification on the consultation but after considering the proposals felt they had insufficient aviation expertise on the subject to make an informed decision. However, on the information to hand, they did not feel that any changes would affect the Parish. The only comment they would make was there should be restrictions on early morning use of airspace. The Parish Clerk was asked to respond accordingly.

(vii) **Basildon Council's Local Plan Core Strategy (Revised Option Report):** This document had been sent to all Councillors for information and comment and Councillors were asked to consider the content. If Councillors required a hard copy the Parish Clerk would print the document for them.

(viii) **Westlake Park:** The Parish Council had been successful in obtaining a grant from Essex County Council Community Fund Initiatives (CIF) in the sum of £19,500 which added to the grant of £44,000 from Veolia Thames Trust and grant of £17,000 from Basildon Council already obtained, meant that a total amount of grant funding obtained to complete the next phase of the Westlake Park project was £80,500 and this would now enable work to commence on the improvements in the New Year. The grants were time limited and based on the quotations received to create a path around the Park, reinstate the Car Park and access road leading to the Park entrance and new gates and Councillors needed to agree their preferred contractors to carry out the work. Following discussion it was **AGREED** by all that Nelson Anderson & Sons was the preferred contractor to carry out the groundwork, subject to obtaining the necessary references, insurances and accreditations and the drawing up of a contract. This phase of the work would need to be completed by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 due to some of the funding being time limited and would cost in the region of £52,000 plus VAT. It was anticipated that work would commence at the end of January /February subject to weather conditions. Discussions had already been undertaken with the owner of Wilton Pet Shop and residents living in properties around the park had been advised of the work and they would be further consulted when start times were known.

More discussion was needed regarding the installation of the new gates and the barrier which restricted motor bikes and other narrow based vehicles entering the park. It was **AGREED** that the choice of contractor for the gates would be decided at the January Parish Council meeting.

**101/13**      **FINANCE REPORT:** Responsible Finance Officer to inform on financial matters since the last meeting.

Bank balance as at 11<sup>th</sup> December (date of meeting)    £22,853.94

No monies had been paid out since the last meeting

Approximately £1,000 was ring fenced from previous fund raising events for the Westlake Park Project.

**101/13/1**      **To clarify and agree the level of expenses Councillors can claim for out of pocket expenses ( Local Government Act 1972 S174/175)**

The Parish Clerk advised that parking and travel expenses could be reclaimed by Councillors, under the Local Government Act 1972 S174/175 at a rate of 45p per mile. Any claim must be approved and recorded by the Parish Clerk and was then subjected to tax by Her Majesty Revenue and Customs (HMRC). The reimbursement of other expenses i.e. printing or telephone costs, were not covered by the Act and the Parish Council would have to agree a separate policy.

Research undertaken by the Parish Clerk found that some Parish Council's cover expenses and some do not e.g. Billericay Town Council do not have a policy except under the Act but Shotgate Parish Council Councillors can claim expenses, other than mileage, up to £50 per Councillors. All expenses were claimed individually and each Councillor made a claim directly to the Parish Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer who monitored and issued the payments. These expenses are the subject of public scrutiny and taxed where applicable.

Councillors were asked by the Chair for their views on the matter. Councillor Griffin felt that no Councillor should be out of pocket and no individual Councillor should gain as a result of taking on the role. She felt that an allowance of £50 per Councillor to cover 'out of pocket' expenses was a reasonable amount and as far as mileage was concerned Councillors, where possible, should travel to meetings together. The need for Councillors to print documents and the cost of printing was discussed. It was pointed out that the Parish Clerk printed any large documents for Councillors using the Parish Council facilities and also other documentation as and when required.

A discussion was undertaken regarding appropriateness of claiming 'out of pocket' expenses. It was **AGREED** by all to put together a draft policy and discuss at the next Parish Council meeting.

**102/13**      **PRECEPT FIGURE FOR 2014/15**

To agree a net precept figure for 2014/2015 as required by the Local Government Act 1972

The Parish Council budget for 2013/2014 had been discussed at the November meeting and Councillors had to decide, based on information previously provided for guidance, the level of overall precept for the financial year 2013/2014. Precept calculations were based on the number of band D properties in the Parish but in some cases householders would pay more or a little less Precept depending on their Banding for council Tax purposes.

The Government provide each local authority with a Council Tax Support Grant each year and a proportion of this grant is passed on by the relevant local authority administration in the form of a Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) Scheme. Basildon Council Cabinet members were to approve the amount of the grant to be passed on at their meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2013.

Based on calculations provided by Basildon Council Accountants, Parish Councillors considered that as there were no major projects expected for the next financial year except for elections costs in May 2014, which had already been factored into the budget and the Westlake Park project which was grant funded and it was felt under the current financial climate it would not be prudent to excessively increase the overall precept amount. Any smaller projects could potentially be paid for by obtaining grants or from the Parish Council's existing budget.

It was **AGREED** unanimously to retain, as close as possible, the same precept amount as in 2012/2013 i.e. £12,873.06. However if this was not possible, because of the Band Tax figures used, there would be a need to increase the precept calculations on a Band D property by a maximum of 18p. Other properties would pay a higher or lesser amount dependent on their Band. The Parish Clerk was asked to relay the decision to Basildon Council Officers.

**103/13 PARISH COUNCIL EVENT DATE FOR 2014:** To confirm the date of the Parish Council Community Event for 2014

The timing of the events was discussed and the positives and negatives of holding events at certain times during the summer months. Councillors looked at holding two events one in the summer and one at Christmas.

Following discussion it was **AGREED** the date for the Summer Community Event would be Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> August. A decision on the Christmas Event would be made at the January meeting.

Councillor Griffin, who had agreed to head up the Summer event, would speak to Fred Birch, The Benbow Club chairman, to ensure the date was agreeable to them as they had expressed an interest in supporting the event and as the Parish Council would normally use their facilities on such occasions.

Councillor Griffin also informed that the Residents Association would be holding an Easter Fayre in March.

**104/13 PLANNING APPLICATIONS:**  
Councillors to review and comment on Planning Application/s under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)

**TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 - APPLICATION NO: 13/01141/FULL**

Regularisation and retention of stable building - 203 Pound Lane, Bowers Gifford, Basildon, Essex. SS13 2JS

Councillors discussed the planning application as presented to them. It was noted that several previous applications had been refused by Basildon Council. The current application had been revised and an amendment been made to reduce the height

although the overall size of the building was still excessive. It was understood that one letter of complaint had been received from a neighbouring property.

Following discussion all Councillors **AGREED** that height reduction was reasonable but objected to the planning application in principle as being inappropriate building in Green Belt due to the excessive size of the intended construction. They would however concede to any decision by Basildon Council if it was felt the construction was a suitable building in Green Belt.

The Parish Clerk was asked to pass on the Parish Council's comments on to Planning Officers.

#### **104/13/1 PLANNING APPLICATION DECISIONS:**

Planning Application No: 13/00791/FULL: Clissold, Lower Avenue, Bowers Gifford – **Permission Granted.**

#### **105/13 FEEDBACK ON MEETINGS ATTENDED BY COUNCILLORS:**

To briefly update on meetings attended by Councillors.

(i) Councillor Griffin and Wall attended a very interesting briefing on the work of the Citizen Advice Bureau. They were surprised to hear the CAB was self-funding relying on grants and donations and receiving no funding from the Government. In the current climate the service was stretched and had dealt with over 18,000 cases in the district during the past twelve months with approximately 900 of these cases in the Pitsea North West and Pitsea South East alone. They were a victim of their own success and relied mainly on volunteer help to deliver the service. They did have had a paid officer, funded by the National Lottery, working from Pitsea Library in Northlands Pavement one day a week. All Volunteers had to be recruited and trained before they could carry out consultations and give advice which was time consuming and costly. Currently only 35% of calls were able to be answered due to not having sufficiently trained people to answer the calls received. The Parish Council had been asked to help as a point of reference, by completing a form if approached. On completion of the form, as yet to be received, it would be referred to the CAB who would then contact the individual concerned. It was **AGREED** also to put a copy of the advice and contact details in the Parish Council noticeboard and a link on the website.

Councillor Foster had attended Association of Basildon Local Council and had been nominated as the ABLC (Associated Basildon Local Council) representative as the Highways observer for the Basildon area on the Committee which was tasked with researching where Essex County Council Highways Department had spent one (1) million pounds on highways improvements unaccounted for.

#### **106/13 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:** Public participation session with respect to items previously notified to the Clerk.

(i) A resident congratulated the Parish Clerk for the work she had undertaken in successfully obtaining the funding for the second phase of Westlake Park project.

- (ii) Councillors were asked to comment on an article in the Basildon Echo (11<sup>th</sup> December) regarding building in the Green Belt. As most had not yet seen the article they were unable to make comment on the content. However, they stated they had only just received a copy of the Basildon Council's Local Plan Core Strategy (Revised Option Report) document themselves, until they had read the document fully they were unable to make comment on the article. The Local Plan Core Strategy was being presented to the Full Council on 19<sup>th</sup> December after which time there would be a consultation period for comment and discussion would be included on the agenda of the next Parish Council meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> January.
- (iii) The rubbish dumped in Old Church Road had now been removed, however, it was reported that the bollard restricting access to the subway at Old church Road by vehicles had just been dropped into the socket and remained unlocked. The Parish Clerk said she had previously reported this fact to Essex County Council but would contact them again for an update.
- (iv) Councillor Wall stated that lighting column No 20 on the London Road was still not working. The Parish Clerk was asked to report again.
- (v) The beep on the traffic light crossing at the junction of Pound Lane and London Road, as reported at the last meeting, was still not working.
- (vi) The Vehicle Activation (VAS) sign in Pound Lane at the chicane was still not working either, despite several recent requests to repair. The Parish Clerk to contact Essex County Council again for an update.
- (vii) A resident commented that the pathways in Popes Crescent were being repaired and asked what was happening in respect of the poor conditions of pathways in the Parish. Although the Parish Council had complained to Essex County Council on several occasions regarding the condition of the pathways, the last being October 2013, no response had been received. It was suggested that the issues of concern should be raised with Councillor Keith Bobbin, Essex County Councillor for the Pitsea South East area, to ask if he was able to intervene and put pressure on Essex County Council to get the pathway repairs carried out.
- (viii) A resident asked if the Parish Council had a view in reference to the appeal hearing by the DEFA Inspector regarding changes to Wildlife County Act the Definitive Map Appeal on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2014. Councillor Wall commented that at a previous meeting more than 12 months before the Parish Council had been asked to consider the proposals and did not have any objection to the proposed changes as it seemed the only change was to the definition on the map to make it 'open to all traffic' but as far as it was understood there was no intention of putting a road link to Jotman's Lane and Rookery Farm. In turn the Parish Council had not received any complaints from any resident regarding the matter.

(ix) Councillor Griffin advised that the appeal hearing for Little Chalvedon Hall Farm had been confirmed as 24<sup>th</sup> February for two weeks. The Parish Council had already made public its comments and objection to the original Planning Application , along with those from the Residents Association but intended to register their intention to speak with the Inspector on other issues not covered at the time. It was **AGREED** that the Parish Clerk would verify the process for registering to speak with the Planning Inspectorate.

(x) A resident asked if the Parish Council could hold a 'Parish in Bloom' competition during the summer. It was **AGREED** to discuss this request and confirm at the next Parish Council meeting in January.

**107/13****DATE OF NEXT MEETING:**

Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> January 2014 at the Benbow Club, Pound Lane, Bowers Gifford commencing at 7.30 p.m.

All present were wished a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.