

FAIRFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the inaugural meeting of **FAIRFIELD PARISH COUNCIL** held in Fairfield Community Hall, Kipling Crescent, Fairfield on Monday, 13 May 2013 at 7.30 p.m.

PRESENT

Cllrs V C Batten
B E Dack
N P Hanks
G H Smith

Cllrs C Bidwell
P Daffarn
P Mitchinson

Officers in Attendance: Mr N Eigheten – Advising Officer (Central Bedfordshire Council)
Mr L Manning – Interim Parish Clerk (Central Bedfordshire Council)

Others in Attendance: Cllr B Saunders – Ward Member (Central Bedfordshire Council)
Cllr J Saunders – Ward Member (Central Bedfordshire Council)

FPC/13/1 **Election of Chairman for 2013/14**

RESOLVED

that Councillor Dack be elected Chairman of Fairfield Parish Council for 2013/14.

(Note: Following his election Councillor Dack immediately signed his Declaration of Acceptance of Office form for the office of Chairman of the Council).

Councillor Dack in the Chair

FPC/13/2 **Election of Vice-Chairman for 2013/14**

RESOLVED

that Councillor Daffarn be elected Vice-Chairman of Fairfield Parish Council for 2013/14.

FPC/13/3 **Apologies for Absence**

No apologies for absence were received.

FPC/13/4 **Acceptance of Office**

It was confirmed that all Members had signed their Declaration of Acceptance of Office forms for the office of Councillor.

FPC/13/5 **Declarations of Interests**

No declarations of interest were received.

FPC/13/6 **Style and Title of the Council**

NOTED

that the style and title of the Council is Fairfield Parish Council.

FPC/13/7 **Future Parish Council Meetings**

RESOLVED

that future meetings of the Council be held in Fairfield Community Hall on the second Thursday of each month at 7.30 p.m.

FPC/13/8 **Getting Started**

Councillors considered a report by the Interim Parish Clerk on the essential 'setting up' processes for the new Parish Council. Examples of early tasks were the appointment of a permanent Clerk, the approval of Standing Orders and Financial Regulations and Member training. In due course the Council could go on to consider the range of services it might wish to provide and in this context the report contained a list of powers and functions.

The meeting felt that, given the small number of Councillors, and in order to ensure they gained knowledge and experience, they should all be members of the Council's committees during the first year. A possible exception could be a Planning Committee with executive powers, called to consider a planning application as and when required.

Regarding the appointment of a Parish Clerk, the need to progress this matter with urgency was recognised. It was also acknowledged that the Clerk's workload during the Council's initial start-up period would be heavier than normal and this would impact on the hours worked and the salary paid. It was therefore suggested that a locum clerk be appointed for the first year.

RESOLVED

1 that all Members of the Council be appointed to the Council's committees, with the possible exception of a Planning Committee;

- 2 **that the possible appointment of a locum Parish Clerk for the first year of the Council be pursued by the Chairman and that, subject to Council approval of membership, assistance be sought from the Bedfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils.**

(Note: Minute FPC/13/12 also refers)

FPC/13/9 **Localism Act 2011 – Code of Conduct**

Members considered an introduction to the statutory requirement that the Council adopt a code of conduct consistent with the seven Nolan Principles of Public Life. A copy of the code drawn up by Central Bedfordshire Council and previously circulated to, and adopted by, most other town and parish councils within the Authority's boundaries had been circulated with the agenda. It was noted that whilst Members were required to notify Central Bedfordshire Council's Monitoring Officer of disclosable pecuniary interests, as set out in schedule 1 attached to the code, the notification on non-pecuniary interests was discretionary.

RESOLVED

that, in accordance with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011, the Code of Conduct (including schedule 1) as circulated with the agenda be adopted.

(Note: Following the adoption of the Code of Conduct Members were advised of the legal requirement to complete their Register of Interests form and return it to Central Bedfordshire Council's Monitoring Officer within 28 days).

FPC/13/10 **Powers, Duties and Responsibilities**

The principal powers and duties of parish councils, as set out in the Good Councillor Guide, published by the National Association of Local Councils, had been previously circulated to Members.

NOTED

the principal powers and duties of parish councils.

FPC/13/11 **Attendance at Parish Council Meetings**

Members discussed a policy on the attendance of Central Bedfordshire Council's ward Members at Parish Council meetings. The Council welcomed the opportunity to receive contributions from the ward Members.

The Advising Officer also raised the issue of possible police attendance at meetings. In response, the Chairman stated that Sergeant Kidd of Bedfordshire Police had indicated that, as was the usual practice with parish councils, he was willing to submit a monthly report on crime figures to the

Council and ensure the attendance of an officer at the Council's meeting every three months. The Council welcomed this proposal.

RESOLVED

- 1 that an open invitation be issued to all three Central Bedfordshire Council ward Members (Stotfold and Langford ward) to attend the Parish Council's meetings and agendas be sent to them;**
- 2 that the Bedfordshire Police offer to submit monthly reports and for an officer to attend Parish Council meetings every three months be accepted;**
- 3 that the ward Members and Police be advised of the Parish Council's meeting dates for the current municipal year.**

FPC/13/12 Membership of Bedfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils (BATPC)

Members considered a report proposing membership to the Bedfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils and noted that provision had been included in the Council's budget in anticipation of membership proceeding.

The benefits of membership were noted. Subscriptions were based on a formula related to the number of electorate.

RESOLVED

that the Council take up membership of the Bedfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils for 2013/14 at a cost of £482.00.

FPC/13/13 Finance Matters

a) Budget for Current Financial Year

Members noted that the Reorganisation Order fixed a budget for the current financial year (2013/14) of £92,525. In addition Council Tax Support Grant of £2,945.81 had been awarded to the Council by Central Bedfordshire Council which had received a transitional grant for taking on responsibility for Council Tax benefit from central government.

In reply to a question of the level of Reserves required the Advisory Officer stated that the Council's external auditor would normally advise of the recommended level. The Advisory Officer undertook to seek further information on this matter.

The Chairman stated that confirmation was awaited that the local youth club had been awarded a generous, one-off grant from the National Lottery for its first year to fund a Youth Officer. If this was confirmed the club would not require the £15,000 funding earmarked in the Council's budget.

NOTED

the Council budget for the financial year 2013/14 and the award of Council Tax Support Grant.

b) Arrangements for Bank account and Signing of Cheques

The Council was requested to appoint bankers and agree arrangements for cheque signing. Members acknowledged the advantages of the bank having a local branch and a business manager. The Chairman advised that the HSBC had a branch in Letchworth with a resident business manager. He added that he did not bank at the HSBC. The Chairman stated that he favoured the use of internet banking but local councils were not, currently, allowed to do so.

Members also considered arrangements for signing cheques.

RESOLVED

- 1 that the Chairman approaches the Letchworth branch of the HSBC with the aim of the HSBC becoming the Parish Council's bank;**
- 2 that Councillors Bidwell, Dack, Daffarn and Hanks be authorised on the bank mandate to sign cheques on behalf of the Parish Council;**
- 3 that any two Members, of the four authorised on the bank mandate, be authorised as cheque signatories for the Council;**
- 4 that the Parish Clerk be added as a cheque signatory for the Council once the position has been filled on a permanent basis.**

c) Council Insurance

All local authorities should ensure that they had adequate insurance to cover risks arising from their activities. As a minimum, there was a requirement for public liability cover as well as fidelity cover in respect of the Responsible Financial Officer. Members considered details of two quotations from recognised local government insurers for generally comparable policies, one from Came & Company at a cost of £159.00 and the other from Aon at a cost of £352.43.

RESOLVED

that the insurance quotation received from Came and Company for the Parish Council for a premium of £159.00 for 12 months from 4 May 2013 be accepted.

d) Appointment of External Auditor

Members considered a letter from the Audit Commission dated 2 April 2013 which consulted on the appointment of BDO LLP as the Council's external auditor at an annual fee of £300.00 for four years to 2016/17.

There were no reasons forthcoming as to why the Commission should not appoint BDO as the Council's auditor.

RESOLVED

that no objection be raised to the Audit Commission's appointment of BDO LLP as the Council's external auditor.

e) Appointment of Internal Auditor

Members considered the requirement under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 (as amended) to appoint an internal auditor for 2013/14. The Advising Officer recommended at least two quotations be obtained. The possibility of appointing a local (Fairfield) accountant was suggested.

RESOLVED

that further consideration of this item be deferred until the next meeting of the Council.

FPC/13/14 Members' Questions

The Chairman invited the Central Bedfordshire Council ward Members to speak. Both Councillors B and J Saunders spoke in relation to the proposed local gypsy and traveller site (Site 76 – Land south of Fairfield and west of Stotfold Road). In response the Parish Council outlined the measures that were being taken in opposition to the proposed site.

The need for a general introductory briefing on planning issues was emphasised and the Interim Parish Clerk was requested to try to arrange for a Central Bedfordshire Council planning officer to deliver planning awareness training at the next meeting.

Discussion took place on the means by which members of the public could ask questions of, make comments and generally contact the Council. The Chairman asked that suggestions regarding any aspect of the Council be passed to the Interim Parish Clerk or Advising Officer. The Vice-Chairman reminded the meeting that the Residents' Association website and Facebook site were still available for public use though the Chairman stated that a Parish

Council website should be provided as quickly as possible. A suggestion box for public communications at either Tesco's or the Community Hall was also proposed.

Regarding known issues of public concern the Chairman referred to parking problems and the need for the Council to examine this issue. He also referred to matters involving Hotbeds Investments and Central Bedfordshire Council that required resolution. The possible use of the Community Centre as the Parish Council's formal base and working location of the Parish Clerk was noted.

A member of the public asked what area of business each Councillor intended to champion so that the public would know who to approach on issues. In response he was informed that the whole Council would, for the present, deal with all issues though, in the future, it was anticipated that individual councillors would focus on particular matters.

RESOLVED

- 1 that Central Bedfordshire Council be requested to send a planning officer to the next meeting of the Council to provide an overview of planning matters, including those relating to parish councils;**
- 2 that a suggestion box be placed on the table in the Fairfield Community Hall for the public to use;**
- 3 that, for the time being, the postal address of the Parish Council be c/o Committee Services, Central Bedfordshire Council, Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford;**
- 4 that the setting up of a Parish Council website be treated as a matter of urgency;**
- 5 that urgent action be taken to provide a Parish Council email address and the address be publicised in 'Fairfield Matters';**
- 6 that 'Fairfield Matters' act as the Parish Council newspaper.**

FPC/13/15

Correspondence

The Advising Officer had circulated a letter for information received from a resident regarding drug related matters in Fairfield Park and the danger this posed for local children in view of its location. The author sought action from a range of individuals and bodies on this problem. The meeting discussed the location of the property concerned, the previous action taken by relevant authorities and noted that the Parish Council had no powers in itself to remedy the situation and could only support and encourage those that did.

A Member undertook to help progress this matter following examination of the previous responses.

RESOLVED

that a letter be sent to the Aldwyck Housing Association expressing concern that a house let by the Association was apparently being used for drug related matters and suggesting that, in view of the location of the property near to Fairfield Park Lower School and the Community Hall, at which the youth club was based, the tenant(s) be rehoused as soon as was possible.

Meeting finished at 8.45 p.m.