

MINUTES of a Special Meeting of GREAT PAXTON PARISH COUNCIL held on Monday 19th June 2017 at Great Paxton School, Mount Pleasant, Great Paxton.

PRESENT: Councillors W Bond (Chairman), Mrs J Addison, G R Addison, D Beattie, Mrs J Peters, S Peters and R Widdowson.

IN ATTENDANCE: County Councillor Julie Wisson, District Councillor Mrs B E Boddington, Mr P Broadbent-Yale, Sustrans and approximately 42 Members of the public.

1. FORMALITIES

Having been elected in his absence, as Chairman of the Parish Council at the last meeting, Councillor Bond signed the Statutory Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Parish Councillor Paul Goodyer and from District Councillor R J West. There were no declarations of interests nor requests for dispensation.

3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council held on 15th May 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. CYCLE PATH FEASIBILITY STUDY; OPTIONS REPORT – MAY 2017

Using power point, Mr Philip Broadbent-Yale, Network Development East, Sustrans presented the content of an Options Report (copies of which had been circulated in advance to Councillors) and his recommendations to the Parish Council for potential cycle and footpath links between the village and St Neots. By way of background, he added that the Study had been commissioned by the Parish Council using funding awarded by the Cambridgeshire Community Foundation. Mindful of the philosophy of Sustrans – to create routes that achieve cohesiveness, directness, attractiveness, safety and comfort, bearing in mind that the main nodes for cycling were St Neots Railway Station, Doctors surgeries, secondary schools, shopping and recreation and referring to illustrations and photographs, Mr Broadbent-Yale discussed, in detail, the four options that might achieve a potential cycle and footpath connection. The advantages and disadvantages of each option were examined.

Having regard to prohibitive issues associated with safety, cost and the flood plain, Mr Broadbent-Yale recommended that the Parish Council should indicate a preference for the 'red route' and request Sustrans to proceed with a detailed examination and costings for the route from Dovecote Lane, Hawksden Leys Common to the Loves Farm development and Perry's Hill Road in St Neots using woodland belts, existing farm roads, public footpaths and bridges.

The meeting understood that the final report would enable the Parish Council to discuss the possibility of funding and delivery of the route with the County Council as Highways Authority and other grant providers including, potentially the availability of S106 monies arising from the Loves Farm development.

5. OPEN FORUM

County Councillor Julie Wisson – whilst recognising the concerns of parents who were anxious that the introduction of a cycle/foot path might result in the discontinuation of the school bus service, County Councillor Wisson urged the public not to let those fears inhibit their support for the project, particularly, bearing in mind the scale of funding that would be required to put the pathway in place and the likely timescale for its construction. She indicated a preference for the red route.

District Councillor Mrs B E Boddington - expressed her pleasure that the project was underway and her interest in the impact of the proposed duelling of A428 on the cycle path proposals. She also suggested that the District Council might be able to lend support given their current focus to promote and improve St Neots town centre.

Contributions from residents –

Although not directly affected, the speaker drew attention to the impact of the cycle/foot path on Longsands School pupils and the school bus. It was suggested that should the new path lead to the discontinuation of the school bus, parents would have significant security concerns about the safety of their children when travelling to and from school along the path. It was pointed out that although there was an appeals process, a parent would have to demonstrate that a route to school was not safe before transport was provided. It was suggested that, geographically, two thirds of children in the village would be effected as buses were provided when the distance to school exceeded 3 miles. The Parish Council was urged to consult with the County Council's transport team before proceeding so as not to jeopardise the safety and security of village children.

It was suggested that the presentation had been biased towards the red route. The speaker indicated his total opposition to the red route path as it would past the back of his house and spoil the quiet and peaceful outlook across open fields that he currently enjoyed. As a resident of Dovecote Road, the speaker was of the view that all residents directly affected by the proposals should have been individually notified of the publication of the Options Report and the meeting. A resident of 'Windyridge' contended that he had not received any notification of the meeting/proposals and opposed the 'Red Route'. He urged the Parish Council to look carefully at all options presented to minimise the impact of the pathway on people's properties.

Having regard to the impact of a path on the financial value of a property, Mr Broadbent-Yale advised that, in his experience, the creation of a path adjacent to a property had not presented any problems in the past and that there would always be advantages/disadvantages associated with any new development.

Councillor Beattie - took the opportunity to remind the meeting that the proposal had arisen because of concerns that had been raised with the Parish Council over the safety of cyclists on the B1043 to St Neots. With the assistance of grant funding, the Parish Council had agreed to commission a feasibility study to explore what might be possible to create a safe route into St Neots. Taking an option to explore a specific route in further detail was not a final decision but only a next stage in a long process to raise the profile of the project with the County Council and potentially to attract other funding sources/partners.

Councillor Mrs Wisson – endorsed the message of the parish councillor adding that it was the purpose of the feasibility study to explore different options for which there was currently no funding. The Parish Council would have to source funding and demonstrate to potential providers that the residents of Great Paxton supported the project and would actively use the path once it was in place. It was suggested that it had taken over 5 years for the Willow Bridge in St Neots to be planned, constructed and opened!

Mr Broadbent-Yale – confirmed that the meeting was just the start of a long process, that nothing was set in stone and that the Study, once finalised, would offer the opportunity to present a case to the Rights of Way and Cycle Path Teams at the County Council with, potentially, a view to inclusion on their development programme over the next 2-5 years.

A speaker and regular cyclist indicated his preference for the most direct route to St Neots adding that the recent reduction to 50mph on the B1043 had not made much difference to the speed of road traffic. His wife added that she did not feel safe on a bike and, whilst appreciating that people were resistant to change, asked the meeting to recognise that the proposal represented a huge opportunity to improve the infrastructure of the village.

It was suggested that some children used the 'red route' informally already.

The Chairman summarised the contents of a letter received from Mr P Hobbs who was unable to be present at the meeting. Mr Hobbs had expressed support for the 'light purple' route to via the Paxton Pits Nature Reserve and a network of footpaths and cycle ways into St Neots. In response, Mr Broadbent-Yale pointed out that that this route would require a bridge over the River Great Ouse that could cost in the region of £3.5m and would make the project prohibitive. It would also be a less attractive route for commuters because the path would take a direction away from St Neots railway station.

A speaker asked the Parish Council to recognise the potential for visitors to the village from St Neots and the opportunity this presented to open up the village and its facilities to others. Looking at the proposal from the St Neots point of view could generate a more positive response from funding agencies.

A speaker and former Parish Councillor suggested that the Parish Council had previously commissioned a feasibility study on a new bridge across the river and the conclusions were that this was 'unreasonable, unquotable and ridiculous', estimated to cost approximately £7m in early 2000 and therefore not worthy of the scale of investment involved. He also reported that it was 2.8 miles from the former post office to Longsands School and that the safety of the route and not the distance had determined that a school bus was necessary for village children.

There was a suggestion that the Parish Council should seek to discuss an opportunity for joint working with The Offords Parish Council although it was understood that they were more interested in pursuing a route in the opposite direction to Godmanchester.

In answer to questions, **Councillor Mrs Wisson** advised that she was not aware that there were any planned changes to school catchment areas such that Great Paxton children would be linked to Hinchbrook. She reported that there was sufficient secondary school capacity in St Neots despite all the new development. Mrs Wisson explained that County Council would undertake a safety audit of the new pathway once it was in place.

A member of St Neots Cycling Club indicated the club's willingness to engage with the Parish Council on the project if this would be useful.

In terms of what happens next, **Mr Broadbent-Yale** - explained that he would prepare a final report based on a preferred route for the Parish Council by September. He acknowledged that he had noted variations to routes that had been suggested at the meeting and that he would calculate the distance of the 'red' and 'green' routes and include these figures in the report. It would then be up to the Parish Council to use the report as a foundation for future discussions with the County Council and possible inclusion in the authority's future development programme. Discussions with St Neots Town and Huntingdonshire District Council on potential use of S106 funding, commencement of negotiations with effected landowners and planning permission for any engineering works were part of the process that would follow but there would still be opportunities, at various stages, for residents to continue to express their views.

Councillor Beattie - assured the meeting that the Parish Council would do its best to keep the village informed of progress via meetings, the web and face book sites and the recently relaunched 'Paxton Post'.

Other Issues

The Clerk undertook to request the County Council to cut the undergrowth on the verge on both sides of Paxton Hill as it made it difficult for pedestrians to walk safely and to cut the trees/shrubs which were obscuring the 30mph speed limit signs.

Councillor Mrs Peters took the opportunity to invite interest in joining a Speed Watch Group in the village and asked that willing volunteers should contact her outside the meeting.

Appreciation was extended to the Parish Council for arranging the meeting and for keeping the village informed of Parish Council business using 'Facebook'.

6. PARISH COUNCIL DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Taking into account the variations to the 'red route' that had been suggested during the meeting and to avoid, as far as possible, close proximity to residential properties, the Parish Council

RESOLVED

- a) that Sustrans be requested to conclude the feasibility study and produce a detailed report and 'draft costing' for the preferred 'red route' by September 2017 including comments on the likely impact on the cycleway of the proposed A428 dualing and Oxford-Cambridge Railway Corridor; and
- b) that the appreciation of the Parish Council be extended to Philip Broadbent-Yale for his report, presentation to the meeting, advice and guidance on the cycleway project.

7. MINOR FINANCE MATTERS

RESOLVED

that the following donations/payments be authorised as follows –

Donations of £50 to St Neots Museum and Magpas Air Ambulance (approved 15.5.17)

Reimbursement of the following expenses to Parish Clerk –

Postage (Stamps: second class x 6 and large letter) =	£4.34
Mileage (3 x return visits to Great Paxton) =	£12.00
Annual Parish Meeting: cost of sundries =	£19.21
Total:	£35.55

Payment to Easiprint (for production of 'Paxton Post') £99.00

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next ordinary meeting of the Parish Council would take place on Monday 10th July 2017 at 8pm.

Chairman