MINUTES

1: Meeting Header

Meeting Name: Parish Council Extraordinary Meeting
Date: Thursday 24th July 2025
Time: 6:30pm - 7:34pm
Venue: Stewartby Village Hall, Stewartby Way, Stewartby
Chair: Cllr Melville

2: Attendance

Present:
- Cllr Melville (Chair), Cllrs, Banks, Haley, Burnage, Law and Tilly Bartens (Parish Clerk). Borough Councillor Spice also attended.

Apologies:
- Apologies were received from Cllr Serino and Williams.

Absent:
n/a

Officers/Advisers:
n/a

3: Declarations of Interest

None

4: To consider any applications for dispensation

None

5: Public Participation

Cllr Melville welcomed members of the public and press to the meeting that the Parish Council had specifically arranged to hear the views of the local residents before responding formally to the Special Development Order that has been received in respect of Universal Studios. He advised that what we have in front of us is similar to an “outline planning proposal” and therefore much of the detail that residents will be looking for is not there but will follow in subsequent planning applications (“reserved matters”) if outline planning permission is approved.

It is anticipated that Universal Studios will attract 8.5 million visitors a year (55,000 per day). The site will employee 8,050 and there will be a 500-bedroom hotel onsite.

There are concerns about a 44% increase in Stewartby during the peak of the construction phase. It is predicted that the current hotels in the area will be able to meet the need for construction workers however demand for rental properties will increase.

Some concerns were raised about why this application was being dealt with by central and not local government. IT was felt that the 44% increase in traffic would not work for local people and that they would be unable to get to school, work or move around freely as they do know. The impact of the A421 being closed earlier this year due to flooding was raised and now the increase in traffic going through the villages had made it impossible to get anywhere. This would be the daily reality.

The EWR application relating to Stewartby Station was raised however the meeting was informed that this was not part of this application.

Concern was raised about being able to travel in the direction towards Cambridge as the road plans are simply not clear. One resident raised concerns about the viability of being able to get her children to Wootton for school because of the lack of clarity around the roads and junctions and also the increased volume of traffic.

Local residents are concerned about the noise and light pollution and how this is going to be mitigated. Planting will take a number of years to get established leaving the residents open to this for several years. It was highlighted that

Universal talk a lot about the development being inward facing and therefore not intrusive to the local environment however this is difficult to comprehend with structures over 100m. There were lots of concerns, not just about Universal Studios, but also the Borough Council allowing large developments and the loss of green space generally in the area. It was felt that the area will soon be linked to Milton Keynes by buildings.

The construction operating hours were confirmed as follows:
? 7 am – 7 pm Monday – Friday
? Saturday mornings

During peak season, the latest the park will be open daily is 10.00 pm however in the application there is provision for it to be open until 2.00 am on several occasions. The Chair noted that this was largely due to corporate events and licencing conditions.

Concern was raised about parking on Hansons Reach once the park is open. Cllr Spice advised that parking would need to be reviewed through consultation.

Residents raised concerns about how the village would be protected and their homes. They are concerned that lots of properties could be used for short-term lettings and that parking will be an issue. They feel that they will also have to keep their windows closed due to the increase in noise.

With an anticipated increase in traffic, additional traffic calming measures will be needed. There was a suggestion that this should be speed bumps not more cameras.

Manor Road residents are concerned that representatives from Universal Studios are not talking to them about their homes. The Parish Council advised that they cannot got involved in private matters with individual homeowners neither could it comment on this as they would not have been involved in any discussions that may have taken place.

The Chair advised that with any large development there would be good and bad points and winners and losers.

The increased traffic through Stewartby was likened to 60,000 at Tottenham the previous evening. You could not drive anywhere! Traffic should not be able to come through Stewartby and there should be width restrictions.

There were some concerns raised that Universal Studios are saying the residents are pleased with the development however they have not spoken to them directly (Manor Road). The Parish Council advised that, from the feedback received at the consultation events, people were generally positive about the development.

Concerns were raised from residents from Manor Road that they had written to Bedford Borough Council 10 days ago with concerns about their homes being demolished but had not received a response. The Council were asked “At what point they decided to side with Universal?” “Four years ago”?! The Council advised that it was not aware that Universal had acquired the land and had only become aware when it was announced. The Council reiterated that the receipt of this application is now the time for residents and the Parish Council to submit their views.

Concerns were also raised about whether the A421 would take the extra volume of traffic and what would happen if it floods again. Junction 13 is also heavily congested. Visitors to the park will not be travelling at work and school times due to the opening hours.

There are lots of concerns about the road network and plans for junctions. Residents asked for any images to be shared.

One resident suggested that the field between Brick Crescent and the development should be given to the Forest of Marston Vale to plant trees. This would create a buffer.

The Chair advised that the Council will formulate their response to the application over the next few weeks. Residents were strongly urged to submit their own individual responses. He thanked residents for attending and for sharing their views.

The meeting closed as 7.34 pm.