



MINUTES OF MEETING OF WHITCHURCH-ON-THAMES PARISH COUNCIL

At the Village Hall at 20:00 Thursday, February 10, 2022

Members Present

Vice-Chair Diana Smith

Members Katherine Higley
Paul O'Grady

Officers Present:

Clerk Jane Yamamoto

Public and Press: 7 residents, Cllr Dragonetti

The meeting started at 20:00.

1 **Apologies for absence & Mission Statement** 20:00

Cllrs Brazil and Donahue sent their apologies.

2 **Declaration of Interests**

2.1 Cllrs Higley declared an interest in the playground.

3 Public Forum - an opportunity for members of the public to express their point of view on any item on the agenda.

There were no members of the public that wished to comment.

4 Chairman's Announcements 20:05

Platinum Jubilee Celebrations

Roy Bailey Band – 2-4pm, Sunday, 5th June. The Clerk is coordinating.

Nicola Armstrong who is a parent at the school has volunteered to help with the jubilee celebration.

Beacon above Chalkhills Farm is planned for Friday 3rd June – visible from the Village Green. Green Team coordinating with the owner.

Coordinating with Cricket Club for use of Pavilion.

Thames Path Signs

Wooden sign at Hartley Steps installed

- Hartley Steps is clearly labelled in honour of Eric Hartley whom they were named after due to his efforts to get OCC to install them several years ago

- Sign stating on either end:

Cyclists Proceed with Caution

Slow Down for walkers

Thank you"

- The decayed Thames path sign to the Church by the Mill House has also been replaced by a volunteer on the Thames Path team.

20 mph update

The OCC public consultation is open until the 4th March. If there are objections, it will need to go to OCC Cabinet decision meeting that is likely to be held on 24th March.

Pavilion

The WCC have responded that they support the idea of PC support for the refurbishment of the pavilion and the removal of the tea hut. I am discussing the WCC plans for the pavilion and how public access to the upgraded pavilion would work. One option they are considering would be to install a small kitchen in the pavilion instead of the showers.

Muddy Lane

The Green team are investigation options to reduce muddy areas on Muddy Lane. We have received one quote from Dan Hazel to improve the surface and are seeking additional quotes. The Clerk will submit an application to the SODC Councillor grant for £1,250 to cover half of the costs in the quote.

Meeting with OCC Countryside Officer with Charles Cotgreaves to be held 18th Feb.

Ownership is unclear:

- Doesn't appear to have any clear owner – both OCC and SODC checked the land `registry and don't own it. OCC suggested that the PC may own it.
- OCC has confirmed that it is a footpath
- Parish Council could apply to request ownership.

Residents Issues:

- Safety rails on the Cut should be repainted Black. I have asked he Green Team to look into this.

5	To approve minutes of the meeting of January 13, 2022.	20:15
	Resolution: The Council voted to approve the minutes with minor changes.	
6	Planning Applications – to discuss and agree Council's response to the following:	20:20
6.1	P22/S0242/HH 3 Old Barn Cottages, High Street, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7EZ Loft extension, single storey rear extension, front bay window and internal alterations. Resolution: The Council voted to support the application subject to the Conservation Officer's report.	
6.2	P21/S54312/FUL Technology Centre, Bozedown Drive, Whitchurch Hill RG8 7QR Additional ecological information received January 14, 2022. Resolution: The Council voted to support this application subject to the Conservation Officer's report.	
7	To receive reports from the representatives of Oxfordshire County Council and South Oxfordshire District Council	20:25
7.1	SODC District Councillor Report – Cllr Dragonetti (Attachment 1)	
7.2	OCC County Councillor Report - Cllr Bulmer (Attachment 2)	

8 **Finance:** 20:30

8.1 To approve the payment schedule for February:

Payment	Amount
Clerk salary (February 2022)	TBC
Old Stables (TAPWG February 24/22)	£15
APT (grant for toilets) Attachment 3	£800
SODC Dog bin Q4/21	£430.56
Nova Press (Bulletin Q4/21)	£425 BACS
CFO (Membership renewal)	£55
NSALG (Membership renewal for allotments)	£66

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the payments.

8.2 Bank reconciliations and reports

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the reports.

9 Motion to approve the WOT PC Safeguarding Policy as at January 2022. Clerk seconded 20:35
by Cllr Higley (Attachment 3)

Resolution: The Council voted to support the motion.

10 Motion to approve to amend Standing Order 11. (e) Councillors will carry out training on 20:35
data protection issues annually. Clerk seconded by Cllr Donahue (Attachment 4)

Resolution: The Council voted to support the motion.

11 Motion to approve the commissioning of a replacement bin liner for the playground in 20:40
Manor Road as per the quote provided by Country Metal Crafts. Cllr Higley seconded by
Cllr Smith (Attachment 5)

Resolution: The Council to approve the motion.

12 Motion to agree the following policies and procedures and agree that they form part of 20:45
the Standing Order 21:

-policy and procedure to respond to an individual exercising statutory rights concerning
their personal data;

-policy in place for responding to and managing a personal breach;

-record for all personal data breaches comprising the facts relating to the personal data
breach, its effects and the remedial action taken and a

-written record of all processing activities to be maintained by all Councillors and
submitted to the Clerk on a six-monthly basis – Cllr Higley seconded by Cllr Smith
(Attachments)

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the motion.

13 Motion to pay a local supplier to cut back the overgrown Laurel bush at the entrance to 20:50
Hillside. This has been raised to OCC for a year without action. Quotes to be provided
ahead of the meeting – Cllr Donahue seconded by Cllr Smith (Attachments)

Resolution: The Council voted to not pass this motion on the basis that, although
technically it was OCC's responsibility, they were very unlikely to do the work and so the

	Parish Council would need to fund any work on the bush. Quotes will be requested to remove the bush and a new Motion brought to the Council.	
14	Muddy Lane Update – Cllr Higley	20:55
14.1	It was already deemed a footpath in the Chairman’s Update.	
15	Playground Update – Cllrs Leadbeater-Hart and O’Grady	21:00
15.1	Cllr Leadbeater-Hart will have the ToR ready for approval at the next meeting. Companies to survey the playground were backlogged with work, but the Councillors were hopeful that they would have additional information from them for next meeting.	
16	Oxfordshire South and Vale Citizens Advice grant (OSAV CA)	21:05
16.1	It was agreed that a motion should be proposed for next month’s meeting when more information had been requested.	
17	The Bulletin – options for printing and advertising – Cllr Donahue Deferred.	
18	To review progress on any open actions from previous Parish Council meetings and agree any revision of actions on the action list.	21:10
19	To confirm the date and time of the next meeting on Thursday, March 10, 2022 at 20:00.	
20	Confidential discussion for thank you notes from the Parish Council	
21	Meeting closed.	21:15

Attachment 1 - Report to Whitchurch Parish Council February 2022

Council Operations

We continue to see the benefits of the cancellation of the contract that outsourced many of the core activities of the Council. I am on the audit and scrutiny committee, and it was apparent that having finance people who were not employed by the Council “doing the books” resulted in additional costs.

This was particularly apparent when it came to preparing the annual accounts, as Ernst & Young were delayed doing the audit, which resulted in additional costs to the Council.

With the accounts now done in house, the senior finance team are better able to analyse and plan, and so draw a clearer picture of the Councils finances.

One of the key documents that the Finance Department has to prepare is the Medium Term Financial Plan, looking ahead five years. This has often presented a rather alarming picture, showing a deteriorating financial position. The first such plan I saw, in May 2019, predicted that the General Fund Balance, ie the Councils reserves, would have fallen from £26 million to £5 million by 2022/23. As it has turned out, the latest plan shows that the expected £5million actually came in much better at £25million for 2022/23, and looking ahead the next 5 years the balance is £18 million. By scrapping the outsourcing contract with Capita, not only does the Council now have a better control over the accounting and book keeping processes, it has also made significant savings.

It undoubtedly helps that at least three of the members of the Cabinet of the Council are qualified Accountants, and are therefore able to provide a professional approach to the Councils finances. As far as I can ascertain, there were no qualified accountants in the SODC cabinet in the previous administration.

The Council has saved £1.5 million over the last year, and innovative forward thinking plans such as a joint Local Plan and Design Guide with the Vale of White Horse District Council will save more money. This year, £5 million secured from developers, will go towards truly affordable houses, not the “affordable” housing as defined by the government that is only affordable by the few.

It was the decision in the past to freeze Council tax, while losing control of the finances by outsourcing so much to Capita, that gave rise to the alarming forecast. However, despite the improving position, the Councils finances are not yet sufficiently robust to prevent an increase in Council Tax. There is no point in making a political gesture by freezing council tax if the Council ends up, like Northamptonshire or Slough, completely bankrupt.

It is worth pointing out that the Council Tax covers the County Council, Parish, and Police as well as SODC, and of the total SODC has only 6%, the Police 10% and the Parishes 5%, with OCC using 78%. The SODC Council tax is one of the lowest in the country.

Consultations

There is currently a consultation on a new Design Guide for South Oxfordshire and Vale.

<https://data.southoxon.gov.uk/JDG/Guide.html>

Covid 19 Support

South Oxfordshire residents can apply through Citizens Advice for Household Support Vouchers, and businesses are eligible to apply for support; as the details change from time to time, its best to go to the dedicated webpage <https://www.svbs.co.uk/omnicrom-hospitality-and-leisure-grant>

Peter Dragonetti

**BRIEFING TO GORING DIVISION PARISH COUNCIL FEB 2022
FROM CLLR KEVIN BULMER**

OCC Budget

Today, the Conservative Opposition at Oxfordshire County Council voted against a Council **Tax rise of 5%** pushed through by the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance comprised of Labour, Lib Dem and Green Councillors.

Further details of the budget can be found [here](#) and sees Oxfordshire County Council increase its share of Council Tax to the legal limit – **the joint highest in the country**.

Day-to-day spending will increase by over £6.2m – equivalent to 1.5% of Council Tax – with further spending financed by record borrowing of over £88m at a cost of an extra £5.3m a year – or 1.3% on Council Tax.

Leader of the Opposition, Eddie Reeves, said:

"This budget is a bad deal, not a fair deal, for families.

"The Left-wing coalition in County Hall simply doesn't share the values of hardworking people in Oxfordshire: not content with forcing people to eat vegan at Council events, 'progressive' Councillors are now forcing families to pay for a traditional tax and borrow budget at a time when families' energy and food bills are rising.

"A Conservative-run County Council would not increase Council Tax to the legal limit like this. Such a large increase is unnecessary and leaves Oxfordshire County Council with the joint highest rise in the country.

"Not all investment in services is wrong, but now is not the time for such a large amount of extra spending. It totals more than £6.2m – equivalent to a 1.5% rise in Council Tax before their borrowing plans are taken into account.

"Future taxpayers will also be forced to pay for borrowing of nearly £90m, which will cost us an extra £5.3m a year to service the debt – that's another 1.3% on Council Tax."

The Conservatives' Shadow spokesman for Finance, David Bartholomew, a former Cabinet member for Finance, added:

"The Government has been generous with its Local Government Settlement, investing [9% more](#) in local government this year – the highest in over a decade. In practical terms, that means the Council receiving £9m more this year than it expected to last year. Rather than use this extra money in imaginative ways to help residents, the administrative has buried most of it into an opaque fund called the 'Budget Priority Reserve' and chosen to tax-and-borrow more today to make up the 'shortfall'.

"This administration is intoxicated by power that it has never previously enjoyed and is ideologically driven to spend money at a time when prudence should be the watchword. As the Cabinet member for Finance during the last administration, I put plans in place that would have seen a maximum rise of 4% on the basis of a pessimistic settlement from Whitehall. With this fresh Government investment, we could have cut our Council Tax rise to less than 3.5%."

The Conservatives' Deputy Leader, Jane Murphy, who is also Leader of the Conservatives' Opposition on South Oxfordshire District Council, observed:

"The last Conservative administration never borrowed a penny from external sources. Now, Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green Councillors are proposing extra debt of almost £90m in a single budget cycle.

“Currently, we have no clear idea about how it will all be spent, but my concern is that Liberal Democrat and Green Councillors’ mismanagement of South Oxfordshire’s Local Plan is now at risk of leading to extra capital spending on the Didcot Garden Down, the Appleford Bypass and other important projects.

Liam Walker, Shadow spokesman for Highways, commented:

"The proposed capital borrowing of nearly £90m is staggering. While some of this might be unavoidable, much is open to question. Residents in the city of Oxford may or may not welcome £500,000 being spent on Broad Street pedestrianisation, but I'm sure residents outside the city will question whether this is a good use of their Council Tax in such challenging times.

“I was also very disappointed that my suggestion for free 'Park & Ride' for one year using the surplus settlement funds fell on deaf ears.

For myself I note that despite very vocal support for buses no money has been found by the administration to support buses despite asking government for more money. This is at a time when bus services are being cut & more cuts to come. Also the administration has plans to remove bus lanes and turn them into cycle lanes, not noticeable helpful for non oxford residents who use bus or very supportive of bus companies.

Those who wish to dip into the tome that is the administration budget may wish to look at page 15 where under “what we spend on council services”, will see that it is somewhat lacking in detail in that next to every item it says ‘xxx’ rather than a actual % or a figure.

OCC/CHERWELL JOINT WORKING

The administration (despite praising it as a success) has decided to cancel this agreement and disband the joint CEO and joint working. We have no substance as to why this decision has been made or more worryingly the likely cost, which given it was announced at a budget setting meeting is somewhat a surprise.

CONTACT DETAILS

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Attachment 5

Dear kitty Higley

Sorry for the delay on sending you the quote for the bin liner.

The price to manufacture the mesh bin liner to your measurement painted black would be £450.00+VAT.

Your sincerely
Steve Neal
Country metal crafts