



MINUTES OF MEETING OF WHITCHURCH-ON-THAMES PARISH COUNCIL
At the Village Hall at 20:00 Thursday, March 9, 2023

Members Present

Chair	Jim Donahue
Vice-Chair	Diana Smith
Members	Nick Brazil Katherine Higley Frances Parkes

Officers Present:

Clerk, RFO	Jane Yamamoto
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Public and Press: Cllr Dragonetti

The meeting started at 20:00.

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

Cllr O'Grady sent his apologies.

2 **Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations.

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 wanted to express an opinion.

4 **Chairman's Announcements** 20:05

Fibre to the premises in the village:

- Airband has connected at least one resident for fibre to the premises this week on Hardwick Road. They state that they are receiving 300 Mbps for £30 per month.
- I spoke to Gigaclear's Customer Liaison Office last week:
 - They are planning to provide fibre throughout the village but do not have dates yet.
 - They would like to use existing underground Open Reach conduits wherever possible and existing BT poles, much as Airband have done.
 - The initial design for the village they came up with was not cost effective and they are working on a redesign.
 - They say they offer 200 Mbps guaranteed speed both up and downlink and they quoted £19.99 per month rate.
 - I encouraged them to proceed as there is significant interest in the village for fibre to the premises.

Conservation Area Appraisal:

- SODC has provided feedback on a draft of the Whitchurch CAA and the consultant has responded to the comments. Cllr Higley can share the document with the comments.
- SODC have subsequently requested descriptions of the Non-Designated Heritage Assets. They will be used for planning applications, which will be placed in an Annex. There are approximately 50 of these in the village.



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Scofell will carry out the services (**Services**) and/or provide and install the materials (**Materials**) for the customer and on the basis specified below:

Customer	Whitchurch upon Thames Parish Council
Start Date	1 st March 2023
End Date	31 st November 2023
Annual Fee	£6659.82 + vat per annum
Payment Terms	Monthly in arrears @ £739.98 + vat per month – payment to be made 30 days after date of invoice (for 9 months March – November)
Specification	As per client specification 2021 – revised spec 15/2/23 – with additional Polish Gardens £890 and hedge cutting £367.50
Internal ref:	4194

Any services or materials to be provided by Scofell under this quotation will be governed by Scofell's Standard Terms current at the date of acceptance of this quotation a copy of which can be obtained from Scofell.

Signed for

Scofell Landscapes Limited

By its duly authorised representative

Belinda Wickens		21 st February 2023
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Signed on behalf of

Whitchurch upon Thames Parish Council

By its duly authorised representative

J. M. Yamamoto		9/3/2023
(print name) PARISH CLERK	(signature)	(date)

- Cllr Higley updated that she will work with SODC to provide text for the Annex and will circulate this in draft to the Parish Council for comment once they are completed.

Muddy Lane Ownership - Cllr Smith has been in touch with Neil Huntington, who is the guardian of Muddy Lane, to formally apply for transfer of ownership from to the PC. There currently is no clear owner of the Muddy Lane according to the Land Registry. Neil has approached the village Allotment Society and the National Allotment Society which are responsible for the land neighbouring Muddy Lane, and will approach the school to make sure all are in agreement for the Parish Council to begin the application for ownership of the lane. He will draft an Adverse Possession for the Clerk to send. It was recommended that the Parish Council ask a long-serving resident for confirmation that the Council has been maintaining Muddy Lane for many years in order to help our case for ownership. Cllr Smith also updated that we are still waiting for a contractor to repair the surface of Muddy Lane. The PC had previously received a grant for this work from OCC.

Residents Issues:

- **Yew Tree work on Manor Road** – I received another email from a resident on Manor Road who was concerned about the removal of the Sycamore and other trees. They suggested that communications to local residents for something like this should have been done with leaflets via a door drop. I know we have done thing previously for surveys such as the Community orchard at the polish Memorial church and High Street Traffic surveys so agree this is something we should consider.
- **Damage to Pavilion** – The windows broken on the pavilions are still not repaired by the WCC despite a request from the PC following the February meeting. We received an email from the WCC suggesting that WOT PC should address anti-social behaviour in the village implying the damage to the Pavilion windows was not their responsibility and that they would not be taking action to repair them in the foreseeable future. We are not aware of the WCC filing a police report or of evidence that the incident was due to vandalism as opposed to some kind of accident.
- **Eastfield House Security and stole bicycles** – As you may be aware, two bicycles were stolen from outside properties on Swanston Field during half term.
 - I was also contacted by another resident of Swanston field who had a bicycle stolen which appears to be related to Eastfield House.
 - We have received an email from a resident who lives adjacent to Eastfield House asking for our help in raising a request to Urban Villages to repair the fence and general security. I contacted the Programme Director for Urban Villages and he said that they are planning to improve security across all fences and increased CCTV and other security measures once work commences. They are waiting for approval of a Bat Licence to mobilise their contractor and expect this to happen within the next two months. They are looking at options to start some of the work earlier.

5 To approve minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council meeting of February 9, 2023.

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the minutes.

6 Planning Applications – to discuss and agree Council’s response to the following: 20:10

6.1 P22/S4285/HH

19 Swanston Field, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7HP

Detached garden room/outbuilding (additional information received 3 March 2023)

Resolution: The Council voted to not send any further comment as their previous submission to object on January 13, 2023 was sufficient.

7 To receive reports from the representatives of Oxfordshire County Council and South Oxfordshire District Council 20:15

- 7.1 SODC District Councillor Report – Cllr Dragonetti (Attachment 1) 20:20
 7.2 OCC County Councillor Report – Cllr Bulmer (Attachment 2)

8 **Finance:** 20:25

8.1 To approve the payment schedule for March:

Payment	Amount
Staff expenditure	£506.80
THP Solicitors	£607.20
Asset Heritage (CAA)	£780.00
OALC (Annual membership)	£161.46
OPFA (Annual membership)	£45.00
Heritage Tree Services (Manor Road)	6,306.00

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the above payments.

8.2

Receipts	Amount
Whitchurch Allotments (half of rental)	£252.71
Herald Graphics (commissions)	£140.00

8.3 Bank Reconciliation for February 2023

9 Motion to approve the Community Emergency Plan - Cllr Donahue seconded by Clerk 20:30
 (Attachment 3).

Cllr Donahue provided an update from the annual Village Emergency Planning Team meeting held in February in the Village Hall. There were a number of minor updates, including a GDPR review by our Clerk, who contacted all of the contacts listed in the document.

- One development is that the Village Hall now has a generator for back-up power:
 - John Bradon knows how to use it. He plans to purchase LED emergency lights, a Kelly kettle, and USB charging ports. It was agreed that bedding etc for overnight stays was not likely to be needed.
 - Cllr Donahue will arrange an emergency practice scenario with Jean Marc and the Team to simulate a scenario where power is cut in the village for an extended period of time. More than 6 hours is considered an emergency according to the plan.
- Two Community First Responders in the village have moved away so we are looking see if there are any other certified First Responders in the village to have their details listed in the Emergency Plan. I will mention this in the Bulletin asking if there are any qualified volunteer responders in the village.

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the updated Emergency Plan.

10 Motion to approve the Scofell Maintenance Contract for 2023 – Clerk seconded by Cllr Donahue 20:35
 (Attachment 4)

10.1 The Clerk advised that despite the increase in fuel and labour costs, Scofell had maintained all their costs for the village’s maintenance. The only additional cost was £320 + VAT for the additional earlier cut to the Polish Church Memorial site. Last year the first cut did not start until July. The PCM site maintenance group agreed that an earlier cut would be recommended.

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the Motion.

11 Motion for the Parish Council to write to Urban Village Group (UVG) to ask for the evidence that 20:40
 establishes that there are no Great Crested Newts or bats at Eastfield House and its surrounds given that surveys can only be carried out between mid-March to mid-June. Cllr Higley seconded by Cllr Smith

- 11.1 Cllr Higley advised that UVG could not possibly have carried out a survey as they did not take possession of the property until a week after the end of the time of a review could be carried out. Cllr Donahue would provide the copy of the Great Crested Newt survey provided by David Choules of Urban Village Group, owners of Cedar Grove Care Home (formerly known as Eastfield House). He will also ask for a copy of the Bat Survey they provided to Heritage England for approval.
- Resolution:** The Council voted to approve the Motion.
- 12 Motion that, subject to agreeing Heads of Terms with the Cricket Club, the Parish Council agrees 20:50 in principle that ownership of the 3 buildings on the Village Green will be transferred to the Parish Council and that the Parish Council will be responsible for those buildings going forward. – Cllrs Parkes seconded by Cllr Donahue
- 12.1 Cllr Parkes said that the PC had reached a stalemate with the WCC. They did not seem to want to maintain it. For example, they refused to repair the windows because they believe that it would encourage vandalism. Cllrs agreed that the WCC did not seem interested in refurbishing the buildings. In 2019, they had 6 paid memberships subscriptions. They now have a Pay and Play scheme which worked better.
- 12.2 Cllr Parkes had been in touch with the Treasurer, Andy Heard. He shared a lot of information regarding costs of the pavilion, including not having insurance for their property in the case of damage, which breached their own rules. They felt that they could not afford a quote of £500/a. The danger was that if there was an incident within the pavilion, the PC could be liable as owners of the Village Green and our insurance does not cover the pavilion.
Action: The Clerk will look into the costs for adding the insurance of the three buildings, plus the cricket practice net to the village insurance.
- Cllr Parks believed that utilities costs should not be excessive, especially since the WCC are in credit with their water account due to paying without readings. In terms of electricity, their use is minimal and they have re-negotiated better terms, which was estimated to be less than £300/a. Andy Heard said that the usage of the pavilion was minimal (12 Sundays/year for matches) and would like the use of it on match days.
- 12.3 Cllr Parkes said that the ownership of the buildings and Heads of Terms needed to be done first before a survey was commissioned to find out if the buildings were sound enough to refurbish or to demolish and work carried out. Any refurbishment could be completed in stages. For example, Cllr Parkes recommended that an electrician make the building safe etc.
The Clerk reminded all that the PC had received £2,500 for the Tea Hut. The County Council had asked her for updates on the intentions of the PC to determine if we still planned to use it.
Cllr Parkes and Donahue draft an updated Heads of Terms document for the pavilion ownership and present to the council at the next meeting.
- Cllr Donahue will go back to them that the Heads of Terms will be forthcoming but that the PC request that they board up the windows, particularly because they have no insurance.
- Resolution:** The Parish Council voted to approve the Motion.
- 13 Parish Council Elections – Thursday, May 4, 2023 – Clerk (Attachment 5) 21:15
- 13.1 The Clerk advised all councillors that she had sent them an example of a completed nomination form. Once she had received them all, she will check and ensure that all had been filled out

correctly. She will then place up the Public Notice of Election on March 20 before she submits the forms to the Elections Office in Abingdon.

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|----|--|-------|
| 14 | Village Green Car Park – Cllr Parkes - deferred to next meeting | |
| 15 | To review progress on any open actions from previous Parish Council meetings and agree any revision of actions on the action list. | |
| 16 | To confirm the date and time of the next meeting on Thursday, April 13, 2023 at 20:00. | 21:20 |
| 17 | Confidential discussion for thank you notes from the Parish Council. | |
| 18 | Meeting closed. | 21:30 |

Attachment 1

Report to Whitchurch on Thames Parish Council March 2023 Housing for Refugees

The Council is planning to acquire about 25 homes for refugees, taking advantage of a grant scheme offered by the government which will pay part of the cost. The balance of the cost will come from the Councils reserves.

Operational Matters

The integration and development of back office systems continues, following the removal of Capita from handling some of these functions. This includes integrating the administration of the garden waste service into the finance system and developing other functions onto the new CRM system. This should help to have all interactions with residents and other customers through one portal.

The telephone system will need to be replaced in due course, as support for the existing system will cease before the end of the year. The option of bringing the switchboard in house and away from Capita is still being examined.

Voter ID

A new law passed in 2022 requires all those casting votes in local and national elections to show photo ID. As the election draws near, there will be more publicity for this perhaps unnecessary development. If there is a problem with voter impersonation, I am sure it does not occur in our District.

2023-24 Budget

During February SODC set its budget for the 2023-24 financial year.

In 2019, the new Council was drawing down £3.2 m from Reserves and New Homes bonus to balance the books, which was not sustainable. The budget today has a deficit of less than £700k, and this has been achieved despite the problems caused by Covid, Brexit and a chaotic government, and puts the Council in a strong place to tackle future challenges.

Planning Appeals

There were 4 planning appeals heard in February 2023, with only one where the Inspector found against the Council.

Water

In addition to the Abingdon reservoir proposal, there is a project called Severn to Thames Transfer that is in the early stages. This includes potential redeployment of water from Wales to the south east of England, with Lake Vyrnwy, originally built to supply Liverpool, being tapped to direct flows into the Severn and then via pipeline or reuse of disused canals into the Thames.

Toilets for people with Severe Disabilities

Funding has been awarded to install specialist toilets for people with severe disabilities at Wallingford Town Centre, the Riverside Park and Pool and Thame Market house. Once installed, these will remove a source of worry for people with severe disabilities.

Nature Recovery

Grass at nine sites of SODC owned land in South Oxfordshire will be allowed to grow long and natural this year for the benefit of wildlife, and a new wildflower meadow will be created in Didcot. The nearest of the nine is in Woodcote. I hope that residents appreciate the benefit to wildlife and do not get alarmed at the lack of hard mowing.

Attachment 2

**REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS MARCH 2023
FROM CLLR KEVIN BULMER**

GENERAL OCC REPORT

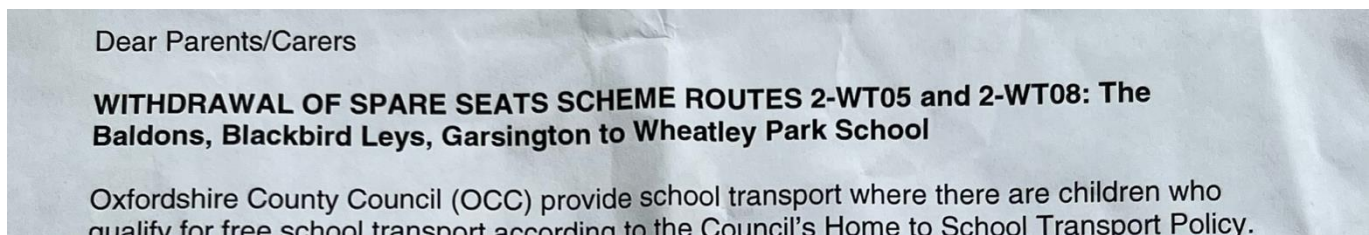
COUNCIL TAX TO RISE BY 5%

The unexpectedly generous Local Government Funding Settlement left OCC with £9m more than anticipated at the time the draft Budget was drawn up. This presented the administration with an opportunity to cut the proposed Council Tax increase from 5% to 4% which they failed to take. The administration is ploughing on with pet projects the Opposition view as indulgent at a time when household budgets are under pressure. The alternative Budget put forward by the Conservative Opposition showed how the increase could be held at 4% without impacting on key services. The OCC Director of Finance confirmed the Conservative Budget was robust.

SOME OF THE EXPENDITURE ITEMS CHALLENGED BY CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION

- £6.5M** on Oxford traffic filters (the four-sector plan)
- £3.0M** on tree planting
- £0.5M** pedestrianizing Broad Street in Oxford
- £0.2M** developing Oxford Workplace Parking Tax
- £173k** repairing Oxford Low Traffic neighbourhood barriers
- £152k** advertising 20mph campaign
- £30k** on 'Living Wall' in Council car park
- £5k** on vegan lunches in County Hall

HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT SPARE SEATS SCHEME CANCELLATION



Prior to the Full Council meeting on 14 February, councillors were bombarded with emails from concerned parents and pupils alarmed by the administration's decision to withdraw the 'Home To School Spare Seats Scheme' in certain areas. Councillors understand that 235 children could be affected by bus service cancellations between now and September, with as many as 1,384 children facing their school bus service being taken away as bus contracts are retendered. The Conservative Opposition proposed an additional £100,000 in their budget to fix this problem, however, as stated above, this was voted down by the administration.

OXFORD TRAFFIC FILTERS FUNDRAISER TO MOUNT LEGAL CHALLENGE

An appeal to raise funds to mount a legal challenge to Oxford's traffic filters (the four-sector plan) has raised £50,000 of its £80,000 goal in three months. The Go Fund Me appeal has had 551 donations since it started in November 2022. The key grounds for the legal action relate to a deficient consultation process, non-disclosure of data to support the traffic filters within reasonable timeframes of the consultation and, the group believes, an absence of impact assessments prior to making the decision or, if any impact assessments have been made, to

make them publicly available. A leading Oxford law firm, has been instructed and the first step has been taken by issuing a letter of intention to OCC.

THOUSANDS JOIN PROTEST AGAINST TRAFFIC SCHEMES

On February 18, thousands of people joined a protest in Oxford against measures where roads are shut off to stop motorists driving through. Campaigners against Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) and traffic filters (the four-sector plan) gathered in Broad Street and marched through the city. Thames Valley Police said: "Our officers are facilitating peaceful demonstrations, supporting the public's right to protest whilst keeping the community safe."



NEW 20MPH RESTRICTIONS WILL MAKE JOURNEYS TAKE LONGER SAYS BUS CO

An Oxfordshire bus company has claimed that OCC's 20mph programme across the county will negatively impact bus journey times. Oxford Bus Company has said that many of the roads involved in the proposal and the reasons behind this decision do not justify the introduction of the 20mph limit. The group has also said that this will negatively impact bus journey times. The company's Managing Director Luke Marion said: "The roads involved constitute movement corridors where frequent and planned mixing between traffic and vulnerable road users does not happen to a level justifying the introduction of the 20mph limit. This will have a negative impact on bus journey times that would result."

OCC GIVEN A GOLD AWARD BY STONEWALL

OCC has been given a gold award by Stonewall for its work supporting LGBTQ+ staff to be themselves at work. The Conservative Opposition agrees with OCC's support for staff, but questions the council's participation in the Stonewall programme given its high cost to the council. Many Government departments, local councils and the BBC have left Stonewall as concerns over its relative treatment of different minority groups have increased.

VISITORS TO HWRCs ASKED TO SORT OUT THEIR WASTE BEFOREHAND

Visitors to Oxfordshire's household waste recycling centres (HWRCs) are being asked to separate recyclable material from their general waste before disposing of it. OCC wants residents to sort their mixed rubbish out before their visit, in a bid to prevent items that can be recycled from ending up in the general waste and bulky skips. Visitors are encouraged to separate their recycling so it can be put into the relevant containers which are on site, including plastics, card, textiles and shoes, metals and electrical items, before setting off. It remains to be seen what impact this will have. Details of where to find the nearest HWRC is available at oxfordshire.gov.uk/recyclingcentres.

COUNTY PARTNERSHIP REAFFIRMS ONGOING SUPPORT TO UKRAINE

Local authority partners across Oxfordshire marked the invasion of Ukraine by Russia a year ago by reaffirming their joint commitment to continue to provide vital help and support to those affected. The county council, city and district councils all observed the national one-minute silence at 11am 24 February and flew the Ukrainian flag to stand in solidarity with Ukraine. The councils, alongside health and voluntary and community sector partners, formed a dedicated working partnership to enable a joined-up response to the government's Homes for Ukraine scheme launched in March 2022. This partnership has evolved to work collectively to support all

refugees and those who seek asylum in the county and will keep supporting Ukrainian guests, and their hosts, as the war in Ukraine continues.

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