



MINUTES OF MEETING OF WHITCHURCH-ON-THAMES PARISH COUNCIL
At the Village Hall at 20:00 Thursday, December 11, 2025

Councillors Present: Jim Donahue (Chairman), Diana Smith, Debbie Leach, Frances Parkes and Romilly Swann.

Officers Present: Brian Inglis (Clerk and RFO)

Public and Press: One member of the public was present.

District or County Councillor: None

1 Apologies for absence & Parish Council Declaration –

Apologies from Cllrs Katherine Higley and Paul O’Grady. Cllr Donahue read the Parish Council Declaration

2 Declarations of Interest – None

3 Public Forum – One member of the public was present but did not wish to speak at this point.

4 To approve minutes of the meeting of November 13, 2025.

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the minutes, and these were signed by the Chairman.

5 Chairman’s Announcements - See Appendix 1

6 To receive reports from District and County Councillors

6.1 SODC District Councillor – No Report

6.2 OCC County Councillor – No Report - See **Appendix 2**

7 Planning Applications – Councillors agreed the following response(s).

7.1 **P25/S3590/HH** Proposed new rooflight and change of fenestration

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

Councillors voted to SUPPORT this application

7.2 **P25/S3756/HH** Proposed ground floor front/side extension.

Royal Oak Cottage High Street Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7HF

Following input from the applicant, Councillors voted to SUPPORT this application

8 The Clerk gave a brief report on general planning matters

9 Finance:

9.1 To approve the payment schedule for December and to note payments and receipts since the last meeting:

Payments:	Sub-total	VAT	Total
Staff Expenditure (November)	-	-	637.00
National Allotment Society	-	-	590.00
Scofell Landscapes – Grass Cutting	694.44	138.89	833.33
Lloyds Bank – Service Charges (DD)	-	-	4.25

Receipts: None	
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Resolution: The Council voted to approve the payments. RFO to action.

9.2 Bank Statements and Reconciliations for November 2025:

The RFO gave a concise report on documents which had been previously circulated and scrutinised by councillors. The Reconciliation report was approved by Councillors.

- 9.3 **DRAFT Budget for 2026/27:** After a full discussion and input from all Councillors, it was **RESOLVED** to adopt the DRAFT Budget for 2026/27, including the amount of the Precept Request. (Action – RFO to publish)
- 9.4 **Precept Request for 2026/27:** It was **RESOLVED** to request a Precept amount of £29,291 which is unchanged, with no increase on the 2025/26 figure. (Action – RFO to raise the Precept request)
- 10 The Clerk gave a report to Councillors on the progress of the Hardwick Road Verges Project, as follows -
The works have been completed, to the satisfaction of the WoTHABS Volunteers and with an extra spend of £150 on Tarmac to fix a badly damaged surface area. Phases 1 and 2 of the grant have been claimed from Mend The Gap, totalling £8,000 and this has been approved for payment to the PC by the end of December. The Contractor invoice is in line with the submitted quotation and it was agreed that this invoice can be paid. Mend The Gap have agreed to allow an over-ride into January 2026 for the claiming and approval of Phase 3 funds, which will be up to £7,000 as required and to be agreed by all parties.
- 10.1 Councillors approved a payment of £500.67 to The Clerk as Project Management payment
- 11 Cllr Parkes gave a brief report to Councillors on plans for the repair, maintenance, and upkeep of benches in the village, which is ongoing.
- 12 To review progress on any open actions from previous Parish Council meetings and agree any revision of actions on the action list. The list was updated, with some actions being marked as complete.
- 13 To consider the wording for any Thank-You notes to be sent on behalf of the Parish Council. No Thank-You notes to be sent at this time.
- 14 Items for Report and Inclusion on the next scheduled Agenda – deadline Tuesday, December 30, 2025.
- 15 To confirm the date and time of next meeting as Thursday January 8, 2026 at 20:00

Signed Date

APPENDIX 1 – CHAIRMAN’S ANNOUNCEMENTS – Cllr Jim Donahue

Christmas Eve Torchlit procession

This is becoming an increasingly popular annual event. Starting at the Greyhound Pub at about 6:00pm on the 24th, the procession is normally led by Alastair Dunstan playing the bagpipe, sometimes joined by other musicians. It includes carols and mulled drinks at the Village Green with the procession carrying through the village streets back to the pub. I have purchase torches to be provided by the Parish Council.

Eastfield Lane:

- Still chasing for the final patch to be filled of the 11 larger FixMyStreet reports in front of Riverdale. I have chased with OCC Highways – it should have been completed by 24th November.
- With the recent rains there has been continued flooding around certain drains with one resident raising a concern about a blocked gully near pavilion house. I have raised this as a FixMyStreet Super User for action within 28 days.
- A resident has raised concerns about parking on Eastfield Lane questioning whether it should be considered for double yellow lines. I have asked them to coordinate with Cllr Smith who is leading this for the PC.

Eastfield Lane Culvert Topological Survey follow-up

We are following up on the options to reduce the risk of flooding in the village following the SODC Topological Survey of the Eastfield Lane Culvert. At the moment, Option 1 seems the most promising. Options 2 and 4 could also be pursued in parallel:

1. A trial has been set up to reduce the flow of water at the entrance to the culvert to the river under Eastfield Lane at Walliscote Farm. The culvert change effectively limits the rate of water from the farm into the culvert to a level that that Eastfield Lane culvert can cope with during flooding periods without overflowing onto Eastfield Lane. There is a risk that it would increase flooding on Walliscote Farm so this is just a trial at this point. The SODC Engineer and Flood Forum are supportive of this trial.

2. Investigating the SODC recommendation that the ditches behind Eastfield Lane be cleared of silt leading to the river making use of the £20k budget that the Parish Council could use for this. SODC's view is that this should be done prior to any changes to pipes going through properties because the silt is built up above the level of the pipes outflow. This would require consent from affected riparian landowners.
3. Replacing the pipes under properties south of Eastfield Lane with wider pipes or open ditched leading to the ditches to the river. This option would be more difficult because landowner consent would be required and the SODC engineer believes the cost would be in excess of £50k. OCC/SODC would be unlikely to support this level of funding. The Flood Forum team believes this work should be done but agrees it is likely to be too difficult to achieve.
4. Jet and clear the pipes under the affected properties on Eastfield Lane. SODC believed that clearing the ditches behind them must be done first and we are discussing whether this can now go ahead. I am also requesting clearing of drains on Eastfield Lane where required as a Fix My Street Super Use.

Mayors for a Drinkable Thames – I am following up with Pangbourne PC on potential to have a joint River Committee between Pangbourne and Whitchurch to work with key stakeholders of the river. Planning to get together to discuss further, but initial feedback is positive.

Resident issues:

- The gate at top of Muddy has now been repaired by James Norman and one of his colleagues Mark. I purchased the two wooden posts from Bouchiers. Thanks also to Charles Cotgreave and Neil Huntington.
- There is a Green Team activity to clear Muddy Lane of leaves at 11am on Friday 12th December.
- Overgrown hedges blocking the pavement near the tollbooth has now has now been cut back by the landowner.

APPENDIX 2 – REPORT from OCC COUNCILLOR – Cllr Maggie Filipova- Rivers

1. New Scheme to Minimise Disruption from Roadworks Approved

Oxfordshire County Council has received government approval to introduce a Lane Rental Scheme (LRS), allowing daily charges for utility and developer roadworks on the busiest routes at peak times. The scheme aims to reduce delays, encourage off-peak working, and speed up completion, with any surplus reinvested to improve the highway network. Read more on the [Oxfordshire County Council website](#).

2. Cowley Branch Line to Reopen with Two New Stations

The government has announced £120 million to reopen the Cowley Branch Line for passengers, with new stations at Oxford Cowley and Oxford Littlemore. The project will connect Littlemore, Cowley, Blackbird Leys, and Greater Leys to central Oxford in under 10 minutes, and directly to London Marylebone. It will also link major innovation and growth sites along one route, ARC Oxford, The Oxford Science Park, the Ellison Institute of Technology, Oxford West End, and Oxford North. Reopening the line has been a long-standing priority for both the county and city councils.

The scheme will help unlock thousands of new homes, support over 10,000 new jobs, and deliver around one million return journeys each year. It forms a core part of Oxfordshire's sustainable transport plans and the emerging OxRail 2040 Plan for Rail. Local partners will contribute £35 million towards the project, including £2.5 million from the county council. Work will also identify new bridges, cycle paths, and bus connections to link the stations to local communities.

3. Shaping the Future of Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue

A 12-week public consultation is now open on proposed changes to Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, running from 28 October 2025 to 20 January 2026. The service faces falling on-call firefighter numbers, down 36% over ten years, and increasing pressures from population growth and rising risk areas. Proposals aim to **improve response times, efficiency, and resilience** by introducing new day-shift fire stations, modernising buildings, and relocating resources to areas of greatest need. Other options include creating a new north Oxford fire station, combining existing sites, and reviewing low-availability on-call stations. The consultation seeks views on three themes, effectiveness, efficiency, and investment, and will inform Cabinet's decision in early 2026.

Full details and consultation materials are available [online](#) or by emailing <mailto:Fire.Consultation@oxfordshire.gov.uk>.

4. Drainage and Gulley Cleaning

Oxfordshire County Council has significantly accelerated its drainage maintenance programme, emptying nearly 70,000 highway gullies between April and October as part of a £2.6 million initiative to clean all 145,000 gullies in the county by March 2026. The work follows additional investment in the 2025–26 budget and has seen the number of crews doubled to ensure every drain is reached, using both daytime and evening shifts to maximise efficiency. The intensified programme aims to improve flood resilience, road safety and infrastructure reliability by clearing silt, repairing connections and gathering detailed asset data for future planning.

While progress is strong, around **2,500 gullies could not be accessed due to parked vehicles**, with residents encouraged to move cars when signs appear. The council notes that although routine gully clearing reduces surface water, no system can fully cope with extreme rainfall events like the one experienced recently.

5. National Highways and Transport (NHT) Network 2025

Oxfordshire is taking part in the national Highways and Transport satisfaction survey, asking residents for feedback on key transport and infrastructure areas, including road maintenance, accessibility, congestion, public transport, and cycling. Residents can complete one or more of the surveys, which are **open until 28 February**. The survey is [here](#).

6. Primary School Applications Now Open

Parents and carers of **children born between 1 September 2021 and 31 August 2022** can now apply for primary school places for September 2026. Applications should be submitted online at oxfordshire.gov.uk/primaryadmissions **by 15 January 2026**. Last year, 94.59% of children were offered their first-choice school. Parents are advised to list four preferences to maximise their chances of securing a preferred school place. National Offer Day will be 16 April 2026.

7. HART of the Community: New Teams Target Areas Most in Need of Highway Work

New Highways Asset Response Teams (HARTs) are now operating across Oxfordshire, tackling the maintenance issues residents care about most. These agile teams carry out rapid, visible repairs, from clearing overgrown vegetation and fixing potholes to cleaning signs and removing damaged railings. In their first 10 weeks, the teams have cleared vegetation at 313 sites, cleaned 213 signs, repaired 128 potholes, and completed over 80 additional tasks including footpath repairs and debris removal. Locations are chosen based on data from the Fix My Street reporting portal and engagement with town and parish councils.

Councillor Andrew Gant said: “By being present and responsive within the community, we’re not **just maintaining infrastructure we’re building trust, improving safety and ensuring that local concerns are acted on swiftly and effectively.**” Residents can continue to report issues directly via [Fix My Street](#), providing photos and detailed information to help the HARTs target work efficiently. Read more [here](#).

8. Mental Health Training for Councillors

Free online Mental Health Awareness Training is now available for councillors across Oxfordshire. The sessions are designed to help members recognise the signs of poor mental health, start supportive conversations, and signpost people to appropriate help. The training also covers maintaining personal wellbeing for those in public roles and provides access to crisis resources and ongoing support networks.

Eight course dates are available between November 2025 and March 2026, each delivered online by Oxfordshire Mind. Councillors can register via the [training link](#) or email trainingcourses@oxfordshiremind.org.uk for more details.

9. Sue Ryder to Expand Palliative and End-of-Life Care

Leading healthcare charity Sue Ryder has been awarded a major NHS contract to expand palliative and end-of-life care across Reading, Wokingham, Newbury and South Oxfordshire, starting January 2026. The new services will include a Hospice at Home offer and a Virtual Ward, enabling patients to receive hospital-level care and comfort at home. There will also be an out-of-hours advice line, bereavement support, and therapy and wellbeing services.

The long-term partnership with NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board will improve access to compassionate care for people with life-limiting conditions and their families. Sue Ryder is also recruiting new healthcare staff as part of the expansion. Find out more at www.sueryder.org.

10. Government Funding Boost for Youth Support

Oxfordshire has secured £634,347 from the government's Local Youth Transformation Pilot to help shape a sustainable model for youth services. The grant recognises the strength of the county's **Targeted Youth Support Service (TYSS)**, which works with young people aged 11–18 (and up to 25 with additional needs).

Funding will be distributed among local partners to deliver projects across the county, focusing on young people at risk of exploitation, isolation, or youth violence. Councillor Sean Gaul, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, said: "Youth work is not a luxury, but a necessity. This funding will help us and our partners design youth support that's future-proof, inclusive and community-led." Further details about TYSS are available [online](#).

11. New Streetlighting Proposals Give Communities a Say

A new framework could give communities the power to request changes to streetlighting times in their areas. Under the proposals being considered by Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet, local parish or town councils, alongside their county councillor, would be able to ask for **lights to be switched off overnight, between 11.30pm and 5.30am in rural areas and midnight to 5.30am in urban areas**.

The updated part-night lighting policy follows extensive consultation and includes safeguards to protect safety, excluding areas such as main roads, junctions, waterside paths, and high-crime zones. Council Leader Liz Leffman said: "This approach balances community choice with safety and environmental benefits. Where suitable, **reducing lighting hours can cut energy use and carbon emissions and help improve biodiversity**."

Any community opting into the scheme would take part in a further consultation before implementation. Oxfordshire currently manages around 60,000 streetlights, and changes will only be introduced where they are locally supported and proven safe.