

Whitchurch-on-Thames Parish Council

MINUTES of the Annual Parish Assembly held in the village hall, Manor Road, on Thursday 25th May 2017, commencing at 7.30pm.

PRESENT

Chairman	Keith Brooks
Vice-Chairman	Jim Donahue
Councillors	Dave Bowen Denise Huxtable
Clerk	Felipa House
District Councillor	Rob Simister

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Bill Lewis, Richard Wingfield, Peter Hawley & Keith Williams.

APOLOGIES

Cllr. Hatcher, Cllr. Leadbeater-Hart, County Councillor Kevin Bulmer, Geoff Weir (Whitchurch Bridge Company), Chris Martin (Whitchurch Theatre Club), Leslie Maynerd (MOWS),

1. Report from the Chairman of the Parish Council (Cllr. Keith Brooks)

Over the last year we have delivered on many projects and started other ones.

One of the most enjoyable experiences was going to the local primary school to tell them about a competition where they could design a new village sign. The schoolchildren duly obliged and we had the task of picking some winners and giving out book tokens. This has now come to fruition and we are on the point of ordering the signs.

We had a well-attended meeting last May when we asked residents to let us know their views on putting together a neighbourhood plan, and over the last year a group of residents and councillors have been working hard on this. A full report will follow.

The Parish Council also took an interest in our local pub, The Greyhound, when it appeared to be closing down. The pub is obviously a great asset to the community since a lot of people meet there to socialise and if we lost it this would be a disaster. Fortunately it is now in the capable hands of an experienced landlord and thriving as a result of this. I would like to think that our perseverance in this matter influenced the outcome.

Another facility which we championed the continuation of was the bus service which was threatened with closure. Together with Goring Heath Parish Council we took over its funding and there will be a more detailed report on the latest developments later in the programme. Another success for our Parish Council!

The allotment gates in Muddy Lane were in a sorry state and during the year they were replaced by a local firm in Woodcote and now look splendid. It is good to employ local business for this means that residents' money is helping the local economy and ensuring that they can continue to provide a local service. Incidentally, the allotmenters were very pleased with their new gates.

We arranged for The Cut to be resurfaced, again using a local company, and pressure by the Parish Council on Oxfordshire County Council also resulted in the road to the school being resurfaced.

In March, as part of the Great British Spring Clean event which took place all over the country, the Parish Council organised a thorough clean of all the streets in the village. Much rubbish was collected and put into sacks, which were collected by SODC.

During the year one of our councillors, James Polansky, left to take up a position as head of a school in Fareham. However, we were lucky enough to have someone to step in to take his place; Denise Huxtable is our new councillor.

Lastly, I must mention some ongoing projects. These include a new pavilion on the village green, restoration of the war memorial up the hill which Goring Heath Parish Council have organised (many thanks to them), the Polish Chapel Memorial Garden and the work by MOWS around the village. I would like to say a big thank you from the Parish Council to all the people in the village who turn out in all weathers to give their free time so that we continue to have a lovely well-kept village where everyone wants to live; keep doing what you do.

The Clerk then stated that the Council had been under budget by about £4,000 for the financial year. The internal audit was passed & copies of financial information for 2016/17 were available to view & would be published shortly on the website. The precept for 2017/18 was not increased & the new financial year sees the potential for many new projects, for which the Clerk has set aside funds.

2. County Councillor's report (Cllr. Kevin Bulmer. Received after the meeting)

Education

An important item from the last meeting of the education committee on which I sit was the funding formula which lots of people have raised concerns about. The committee agreed and decided to lobby government, MPs & others, as well as responding to the consultation that the current ideas unfairly disadvantage rural small schools and to ask government to rethink.

Health

I've also sat on the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee which is responsible for scrutinising all aspects of the NHS in Oxfordshire apart from primary care (GPS). We have written to the NHS (CCG) & Health Secretary to register our concern that proposed changes to NHS delivery would lead to additional pressure on an underfunded and stretched primary care system. We've also expressed our concerns to the NHS (CCG) about faults in the present two-stage consultation process on the future of the NHS. The general thrust of their ideas, which is basically treating patients (where appropriate) closer to their homes, has merit, but people should be given all the information and in clear, easy-to-understand language.

Coming soon to a road near you in Oxfordshire

Following the successful introduction of the first new pothole-fixing machine in 2015, the county council's highways contractor, Skanska, will soon put a new 'dragon' to work on the county's rural routes. The original machine was shared with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, but the new machine will be dedicated to Oxfordshire. It is nicknamed 'the dragon' because it breathes fire to de-ice and dry out the road surface, enabling it to work all year round. The area is then cleaned with compressed air and sealed with a stone mix and hot bitumen emulsion. With the pothole gone in just two minutes, the patcher can move onto the next repair.

County Councillor David Nimmo Smith, Cabinet member for Environment, said: "The dragon patcher is five times faster than traditional methods and can do more work for the money. It is also safer as it is operated from the vehicle's cabin and we found that it was well suited to Oxfordshire's rural roads. Since 2015, it has made 5,000 repairs to potholes and larger patches across Oxfordshire."

The original dragon patcher has been working hard during 2016 with great results: 23,000 miles covered across Peterborough, Cambridgeshire and Oxfordshire & 29,779 potholes fixed across Peterborough, Cambridgeshire and Oxfordshire.

Government minister hails superfast broadband boost for Oxfordshire economy

The £35 million Better Broadband for Oxfordshire roll-out is being led by Oxfordshire County Council and BT, with additional funding from Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP). It is part of the Government's Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) programme and builds on private sector investment.

Across Oxfordshire more than 70,000 businesses and households now have access to superfast fibre broadband as a result of BBfO. The figure rises to around 273,000 when combined with commercial roll-outs.*More than 6,500 Oxfordshire businesses can now access the technology as a result of the BBfO roll-out, including around 250 firms on Milton Park, home to some of the county's most dynamic industries, innovative small and medium businesses and world-leading life science companies.

Councillor Ian Hudspeth, leader of Oxfordshire County Council, said, "We expect at least 95 per cent of Oxfordshire premises to have access to superfast broadband by December, and I'm delighted to announce an ambition to improve on this. In partnership with BT, we are finalising plans to make the technology available to a further 2,000 premises as a result of contract savings achieved in this successful programme to date. We're also about to launch a co-funding scheme whereby Oxfordshire County Council will support those very rural or very small communities which are too expensive to upgrade using public funds alone."

Further details are available on the BBfO website: www.betterbroadbandoxfordshire.org.uk

*Source: www.thinkbroadband.co.uk

Ten years of flood prevention work in Oxfordshire

More than £6.8million has been invested in flood prevention work in Oxfordshire over the last ten years, thanks to Oxfordshire County Council, with more to come, according to the Leader of Oxfordshire County Council. The county council is the Lead Flood Authority for the area and each year contributes in the region of £600,000 towards work that protects properties from flooding.

Councillor Ian Hudspeth said, "On top of this the county council's drainage teams work all year round to keep drains and ditches – that can make a big difference – clear. As an example, in West Oxfordshire, we have spent £2.8m on drainage work alone in the last decade."

Over the last 10 years the money has been spent by the county council on flood bunds, replacement culverts, additional culverts, upsizing highway drains, new highway drainage systems, flood storage areas, ditch maintenance, maintenance of the highway drainage system and jetting and investigating existing drainage systems.

Plans to transform adoption services across the Thames Valley

OCC is joining forces with neighbouring councils to create a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) for the Thames Valley. The agency will improve outcomes for both children and adopters, including the ability to match children with families more quickly and improve support services for adopters. The Government has advised that a grant of £300k will be made available to help set up the new service. OCC will be the host authority within a partnership known as 'Adopt Thames Valley', alongside six other councils (Bracknell Forest, West Berkshire, Windsor and Maidenhead, Wokingham, Swindon and Reading) and two Voluntary Adoption Agencies (PACT and Barnardo's).

Extra funding secured in addition to 2017/18 budget proposals

The County Council set its budget for 2017/18 in February. Ahead of the meeting, it was announced the Council had £1,957,000 extra as a result of better than expected business rate collections, council tax collection fund surpluses and a higher than expected grant. The County is proposing to hold £926,000 of this until the 2018/19 financial year to deal with future pressures. Cabinet proposes to spend the rest of the money (£1.03m) in this financial year in the following ways:

- £170,000 to be spent on additional grass-cutting work on highway verges. This is an area of spend that has been reduced in recent years.
- £250,000 one-off funding initially for a pilot Communities Fund for parishes and towns to bid for matched funding schemes following changes/reductions for funding for services.
- £600,000 additional funding for children's social care - a part of the council that has been exempt from cuts since 2010 but has continued to experience significant rising demand in common with children's social care departments across England.
- £11,000 increase on the Council's Flood Defence Levy.

A total of £0.776m of the £1.957m of new funding will be added to balances in 2017/18 so that the Cabinet can consider how this money will then be spent in the 2018/19 financial year. The council is still in the throes of saving £377m from 2010 to 2020.

The council has more than 35% fewer staff and 40% fewer managers, with further reductions in senior management to come. The council uses more than 90 fewer buildings than it did a decade ago.

3. District Councillor's report (Cllr. Rob Simister)

Cllr. Simister had no report to make but replied to comments relating to SODC matters as they arose during the meeting.

4. Neighbourhood Plan report & residents' issues update (Cllr. Jim Donahue)

The Whitchurch-on-Thames residents' issue list was initiated by Vice-Chairman Donahue in April 2015 through a door-to-door informal survey of what issues residents wanted the Parish Council to address. Since that time more issues were added as they were raised to the Council for a total of 67 issues that are of concern to one or more residents.

The Council now considers that 26 of these issues have been addressed and 11 more have been taken as far as we can as a Council.

Open	30
Closed	26
No further action	11
Total	67

As a reminder, some of the issues closed during the previous year related to issues around the bridge toll and management of the village green, as well as addressing enquiries from several residents.

Since last year's meeting the following issues have been closed:

1. Raised crossing at the bridge
2. Addressing cancellation of 143 bus subsidies
3. Potholes on Eastfield Lane
4. Puddles on Hardwick Road near entrance
5. Piles of spoil on Bozedown Farm verge on Hardwick Road

6. Re-surfacing The Cut
7. Replacement of allotment gates
8. Improved dog-fouling signs.

The 30 issues that are still open are all high on the Council's priority list and are actively being worked through initiatives such as TAPAG, MOWS, and the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee.

A full list of all issues and the actions the Parish Council has taken or plans to take is maintained on the village website.

Cllr. Brooks mentioned that residents are concerned about the lack of activity at Eastfield House. Keith Williams spoke to Majesticare recently, who said that it might/should be open within 18 months. Cllr. Simister will check whether there are any planning restrictions on it at the moment which could be delaying work. The Clerk will write to Majesticare on behalf of the Parish Council to officially request an update on progress.

Peter stated that he would be lobbying for traffic through Pangbourne & Whitchurch to be electric vehicles only within approximately 5 years. He felt this would greatly reduce damage to homes along this busy route, especially as he felt there is no hope of a new bridge. Cllr. Donahue suggested he contact PAWS & send the Parish Council some further information. Cllr. Bowen also recommended that he contact Antoinette Solera in Pangbourne for help & support.

The village has initiated a Steering Committee under the auspices of the Parish Council to develop a Neighbourhood Plan for the village. It is still in the early stages of development and we are planning two open days where members of the Steering Committee will be available to share more information.

- Saturday 13th May at the Village Hall from 10am to 1pm – at least 26 residents attended – gathering feedback
- Saturday 3rd June at the Art Café Old Stables, from 10am to 12:30pm

Some background on the Neighbourhood Plan process:

- South Oxfordshire District Council's (SODC) draft Local Plan for development from 2018 to 2033 is expecting smaller villages to grow from 2011 levels by approximately 5 to 10%. For Whitchurch, this could mean at least 16 new houses in our village during that period.
- The neighbourhood planning process is a way for us to have a say in what that development looks like: where any new houses are located, how many are appropriate, and policies guiding their development. If approved by the village, a Whitchurch-on-Thames Neighbourhood Plan would become a legal document as part of the SODC Local Plan, used to review any new development proposals. If we don't have a plan, SODC planners can decide for us.
- The process includes intensive consultation with the residents of the village and local stakeholders that could culminate in a referendum by village residents that would likely take place by May 2019. These initial consultations are just the start of the village consultation process.

The goal of these initial consultations is to get input from the village residents on our overall vision of our village for the next 15-20 years and the objectives for the plan.

We will be asking people to provide responses to the following questions:

1. What is unique about Whitchurch?
2. What do you like best about Whitchurch?
3. What might Whitchurch look like by 2033?

The Steering Committee has also drafted an initial vision and set of objectives that are described below, but these are really just to get people thinking as we want them to be based on the inputs of as many people as possible.

A vision for our community could look like:

Our vision is to conserve Whitchurch as a beautiful riverside parish with an active and supportive community at its heart. To ensure future development maintains and enhances the village's unique character and location by the Thames and at the foot of the Chiltern Hills, preserving the AONB and character of the historic village and its rural and agricultural surroundings.

Initial objectives that the Steering Committee have been discussing include:

- *The objective of the Neighbourhood Plan is to give local people more say in future housing development in the village.*
- *Oxfordshire County Council has a target for a 5-10% increase in housing stock in smaller villages over the next 15 years (this would be at least 16 more houses).*
 - *Residents will appreciate that more people will wish to live in the village. They may also have views on the type of housing required (e.g. more affordable housing for younger families and children of residents).*
- *It is likely that residents will wish that development:*
 - *Does not detract from the character of the village (much of Whitchurch-on-Thames is a Conservation Area)*
 - *Does not detract from the beauty of the surrounding area (Whitchurch is in the Chiltern Hills AONB)*
 - *Takes into account geographical constraints including the river and flood plain*
 - *Does not seriously increase traffic congestion in the High Street (which, along with other roads, has single-car-width bottlenecks)*
 - *Takes into account the impact on class sizes at the primary school*
 - *Does not have a negative impact on local natural habitats (the parish includes a Site of Special Scientific Interest).*

Both the vision and objectives are meant to be initial examples to encourage village residents to come up with comments and their own ideas as part of the consultation process.

So please have a think about this and come along with your questions and ideas about the future of our village!

Cllr. Donahue informed Richard that there could be a public advertisement in due course for interested landowners to come forward. £5,000 towards the costs of the Plan is available from SODC & a further £9,000 in grants could be available. Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money also increases from 15% to 25% should the village have a Plan in place. Cllr. Simister reminded everyone that a Neighbourhood Plan does not guarantee anything, however.

Peter felt that Eastfield House should be included within the Neighbourhood Plan. If Majesticare's plans for the site fail then surely the Plan should include a definition as to whether that area should be kept solely for a care home or not. Could it be put up as a listed building? Cllr. Simister will enquire. He felt that the Plan should specify what this area should be.

Cllr. Simister also stated that he could offer support for any grants that we might need. The Clerk will send him the planning portal number for the village pavilion as his help with that would be much appreciated.

5. Roads & traffic report (Cllr. Rachel Hatcher. Read by Cllr. Keith Brooks)

Recognition needs to go to Councillor James Polansky as he worked very hard and was very close to all the TAPAG issues in our lovely village. Such was his dedication that he met Geoff Weir and personally demonstrated, with his own buggy and children, the experience of pushing a buggy over the speed bump on the bridge. Thanks to both James and Geoff we now have the much-improved speed bump that makes crossing on the bridge (and driving) a much nicer experience.

Looking ahead we have a new team of 6 people taking a fresh look at the options in the village to address the following areas:

- Safety - speed of traffic and crossing the road
- Congestion - solutions to aid the flow of traffic through the village
- Parking - addressing the parking need of residents in the village.

We will soon be asking some of our villagers to complete a survey - which we will pop through your door - to find out what your parking needs are. Understanding the village needs, whilst investigating some options and solutions adopted in similar villages, will help us come up with a proposal to address these three key focus areas.

In the meantime we are keen to address immediate issues - like overgrown bushes, potholes, water leaks etc. - and we are open to suggestions and even new members, so please feel free to give Rachel Hatcher a call.

High Street & the Hardwick Road junction parking is still an issue & Cllr. Brooks mentioned that he had spoken to our PCSO, who had mentioned several potential solutions. Peter made it clear that it was important to find out who was actually parking on the High Street, as it might not be who is currently blamed. For him, the 12 or so houses in the village which have no off-street parking should take precedence over through-traffic. He also highlighted several danger points off the High Street, e.g. the entrance to Swanston House, that should be taken in to account.

6. Transport report (Cllr. Dave Bowen)

Cllr. Bowen mentioned that the Council had subsidised the 143 bus service for nearly a year to enable its continuation. Thanks to Geoff Weir for waiving the toll, which helped greatly to keep costs down. The Saturday service was lost, however. Following liaison with Goring's 'Going Forward' bus service the Parish Council & that of Goring Heath has managed to secure the new 142 bus service. The route has been very carefully thought out & a Saturday service is about to resume as well.

7. Planning report (Cllr. Leadbeater-Hart. Read by Cllr. Keith Brooks)

Planning Review – 2016/17

This year has been a busy time for parish planning. We have reviewed 35 applications this year (April 2016-April 2017). Each of the applications is reviewed in detail and, where necessary, a site visit will be carried out to understand the impact that any proposed development will have on neighbouring properties, the village and the environment. The council have met the 8-week response time for all the applications submitted.

Members of the public have a few weeks to comment on a planning application. The deadline for comments is 21 days from the date a site notice is put up or notice is served on neighbours, or 14 days from when an advert appears in a local newspaper. Parish and town councils have 21 days from the date they were notified to make an official comment.

30 of the applications were designated as MINOR Development, which consists mainly of householder extensions. The remaining 5 applications were designated as MAJOR Development. These were all associated with the redevelopment of Eastfield House Care Home. The Parish Council strongly objected to the large-scale demolition proposed. Majesticare adapted the proposal from full demolition to maintaining the building front façade; again the Parish Council objected, as did SODC. This decision was over-turned at appeal. Majesticare have permission to complete the redevelopment of Eastfield House. However, as yet, work has not begun other than to secure the site.

Looking forward to 2017/2018!

Planning permission has been submitted to replace the existing cricket pavilion with a new, fit-for-purpose sports pavilion – and it will be a thing of beauty!

All the existing buildings are to be removed and a single, traditional-style sports pavilion be erected. It will, of course, be built with the potential for flooding in mind, and will be fully accessible for disabled users. All village sports and social users are encouraged to utilise it, and take advantage of this new facility and its wonderful views!

Construction is planned to begin after the summer cricket fixtures are complete and it will hopefully be ready for a grand opening in April 2018.

8. Allotment report (Cllr. Denise Huxtable)

- The allotment society continues to be a thriving village group
- The society is keen to welcome new members, even offering to set up a working party to help new members get started
- New gates were installed by the Parish Council. These were much appreciated by the allotment society
- The pump has been replaced as it was no longer possible to repair the old one
- The society remains financially stable, but with less than £20 surplus income it was decided to increase subscriptions from £20 to £24 for a full plot and to £12 for a half plot. This is still very good value compared with other local allotments
- David Robinson has improved the website page to provide more detail and photos
- Ros Heath has stepped down as Chair after 15 years. Bill Lewis has taken over as Chair
- Other committee members have stayed the same:
 - Treasurer: Mike Marshall
 - Secretary: John Coupland

9. Village organisations

i. Allotment Society

Bill then stated that the allotmenters were thriving. There are 30 or so on the books & new, young families are now coming along. There are 2 people on the waiting list. One plot has not been tended so this may be offered to one of those waiting. The society's income currently matches its expenditure. He passed on official thanks & appreciation for the new gates, especially as attempts have been made to steal equipment.

ii. Bulletin (Richard Williams. Read by Cllr. Keith Brooks)

2016/17 - Four editions of the Bulletin were produced at a net cost of £1,271 (see breakdown below). All the Bulletins included a colour front photo featuring a local scene or event and were distributed before the end of the relevant month.

I have nine distributors in the village and this year we managed to find someone for the Eastfield Lane distribution, although I still have no-one to distribute to Hardwick Estate.

Edition	Pages	£ Cost
Spring (April)	16	£343-60
Summer (July)	20	£343.75
Autumn (Oct)	20	£343-75
Winter (Dec)	16	£310.00
GROSS COST		£1,341-10
Less Advertising Income		(£70-00)
NET COST		£1,271-10

2017-18 - The objectives this year are to :

Get **more local advertisers** and thus reduce the net cost of the Bulletin to the Village to about £1,100 (half what it cost when I took over, albeit that included six editions p.a.). The Goring Heath Newsletter includes about 11 pages of adverts in a 30 page publication (35%) and I think we should aim for something like 4 pages out of 20/24 (about 15-20%). There is a need to seek out local businesses more proactively; to date I have only tried communicating through the Bulletin itself and the Village web-site. So far, we have two advertisers.

Try to get **more contributors** within the Village; for example the last Bulletin didn't receive contributions from the Art Café, Hardwick Estate and the police for events taking place in the village during the spring like the yarn bombing. I have already spoke to Gill (Art Café) and plan to add Mark Bell and Miriam Rose to the email distribution list.

Richard Wingfield wondered whether an advert could be placed on the website to ask for volunteers to help him with fundraising. Cllr. Brooks will pass on this suggestion.

iii. Whitchurch & Goring Heath Twinning Association (Vicky Jordan. Read by Peter Hawley)

Our visit to La Bouille last year had three highlights. Firstly there was Nick Brazil's photographic exhibition, with a champagne reception; secondly the dinner, with dancing to a twelve-strong jazz band; and lastly the outing to Honfleur, which included a boat trip and a visit to a maker of Pommeau. As usual our hosts were kindness itself and we spent time in their company, going on visits to markets, around the countryside, or eating dinners!

I said in my reception speech (in French) that no matter what the outcome of the Brexit vote would be, as two villages we would remain friends. Accordingly, on Saturday 29th April this year, for the 39th time, we welcomed a party from La Bouille to spend the weekend with us. This year there were 31 people, including four children. In preparation, some of us had been meeting for French conversation with Antonia of the Pangbourne Twinning Group. Our banner was also on the toll bridge as a contribution to the "yarn bombing", which was admired by our visitors, and featured in many photographs.

The weekend followed our normal pattern, with a reception and dinner on Saturday evening, at which there was a showing of a short extract of Nick Brazil's film on the River Thames, with a commentary in French. Good wishes for the success of the visit from Keith Brooks, Chairman of Whitchurch Parish Council, were relayed to everyone, and Peter Dragonetti of Goring Heath Parish Council addressed us in English and French. Our Sunday outing was to the Cotswold Wildlife Park where we picnicked and saw rhinos and penguins and looked the giraffes in the eye. This was followed by a short tour of the Cotswold countryside to Stow-on-the-Wold for cream teas, antiques and shopping.

Peter then mentioned that at the moment the association is self-funding. Vicky & her husband want to give up the chairmanship soon, however. He also felt that the Parish Council should officially thank Gill Williamson for setting up & running the Art Cafe.

iv. Whitchurch & Goring Heath History Society (Vicky Jordan. Read by Peter Hawley)

Our year has been full of interest with eight talks and two outings (to the police museum at Sulhamstead and the museum at Thame).

We were fortunate in having our offer of a book launch for “The Real Mr Toad” accepted by Michael Redley, the author, who had previously spoken at Hardwick House. Whitchurch village hall was packed for the event in January.

We were saddened by the sudden death of our treasurer, Tony Voysey, but will carry on as no doubt he would have wished.

A recent meeting was a lecture by Dr K. Bradley on ‘Votes for Women in Oxfordshire’ and on May 18th there was a members’ evening. A visit to Basing House has been arranged for June. All our meetings are open to non-members at £3 including coffee and biscuits.

The Society will attend both fetes in the summer, when Peter Hawley’s extended and revised” Relics and Monuments” will be on sale.

v. Whitchurch United Charities (Peter Hawley)

Peter is the temporary chairman. Trustee turnover has been high recently but new trustees have now been found. They have to be approved by both Parish Councils, however.

Take-up of the funds available fluctuates a lot so word-of-mouth publicity is needed. 3 unsolicited donations from villagers were received this year. £500-£1,000 is paid out each year, depending upon take-up, which represents the annual interest earned by the fund, which dates from 1624!

The Chairman thanked everyone for coming & closed the meeting at 9.30pm.