



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

Members Present

Chair	Jim Donahue
Vice-Chair	Diana Smith
Members	Nick Brazil Katherine Higley Paul O'Grady

Officers Present:

Clerk, RFO	Jane Yamamoto
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Public and Press:	Cllr Dragonetti
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The meeting started at 20:00.

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

Cllr Parkes sent her 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**

Eastfield House update – Cllr Donahue provided an update that Ross Healthcare has confirmed that the sale of Eastfield House to Urban Village was successfully completed as of early December. He was contacted by David Choules of Urban Village, who is their Project Director for Eastfield House. He provided the following update relating to their plans:

- They are engaged in the planning and preparation to start redevelopment of the care home in accordance with the approved planning consent
- No further significant planning applications are planned other than as required to satisfy planning conditions or adhere to building regulations that may have changed since the original planning application in 2010.
- They are working through things like Bat Surveys, Newt inspections, and tree root protection planning.
- They will start clearing out the site both inside and outside the building so skips will be present in the next couple of months.
- Subject to achieving required permissions, they hope to start full scale building work in March or April with a goal of the building being ready for operation by the end of 2024.
- The on-site Project manager will be Andrew Young who will be available to arrange visits from councillors and residents once work gets to a certain point.
- The care home is being renamed as Cedar Lodge Care Home to align with the naming of other care homes owned by Urban Villages that are also named after trees.

Cllr Higley advised that they could not possibly have done a newt survey until April.

Cllr Smith updated that OCC have approved the 3 sites for Speedwatch and a speed survey could take place as early as March 2023. Also, the Parish Council are waiting for OCC to get in touch with our Clerk to how to proceed with the traffic regulations.

Yew Tree work on Manor Road – Cllr Donahue received two emails from residents concerning the work. One was quite supportive, and the other expressed concerns about the potential hazard to pets from poisonous yew tree berries. Cllr Higley has responded to both residents.

5 To approve minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council meeting of January 12, 2023.

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the minutes.

6 Planning Applications – to discuss and agree Council’s response to the following: 20:15

6.1 P23/S0056/DIS

BP Technology Centre, Bozedown Drive near Whitchurch Hill RG8 7QR

The application is for Discharge of conditions 3(materials schedule) & (glazing) on application P19/S4248/FUL as amended by non-material amendment application P22/S2567/NM

Resolution: The Council voted to submit a comment that although the intent of an electrical car batter facility was good, the discharge required an independent review of hazardous waste and pollution of ground water because the consultants have said that they did not have access to all areas on site.

6.2 P22/S3223/FUL

Technology Centre, Bozedown Drive, Whitchurch Hill, RG8 7QR

For development work as amended by plans received 12 January 2023

6.3 P23/S0025/HH

New Barn Manor Road, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7EW

Proposed garage conversion in to habitable space with windows and door to front in place of garage door.

Resolution: The Council voted to support the application.

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

7.1 SODC District Councillor Report – Cllr Dragonetti (Attachment 1) 20:30

7.2 OCC County Councillor Report – Cllr Bulmer (Attachment 2)

8 **Finance:** 20:25

8.1 To approve the payment schedule for February:

Payment	Amount
Staff expenditure	£506.80
Rialtas annual subscription	£255.71
APT (Pangbourne toilets grant)	£800.00
National Allotment (membership)	£66.00
Herald Graphics (Winter Bulletin)	£528.00 with £59 refund = £469 - a further £170 was received in new advertising
Community First (membership)	£55.00

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the above payments.

8.2

Receipts	Amount
VAT refund 2021 and 2022	£5,346.11

- 8.3 Bank Reconciliation for January 2023
- 9 Motion to approve the Standing Orders 2023. Clerk seconded by Chair (Attachment 3)
The Clerk advised that the only change to the Standing Orders was the change of where the addition of last year's consideration of sustainability with each Motion by the Councillors was. It went from Item no. 27 Standing Orders Generally to 9 Motions to a Meeting.
Resolution: The Council voted to approve the Motion.
- 10 Motion to approve the Parish Council pay £535 plus VAT for the planting and £920 plus VAT for the 8 Yew Trees to Heritage Trees Services Limited in the Manor Road Conservation Area. The trees are currently on order/waiting delivery – Cllr Higley seconded by Cllr Smith 20:40
- 10.1 Cllr Higley updated that the diseased trees had been taken out and that work had been started to grind out the stumps. However, Heritage Tree's equipment broke but they will return to complete the work.
She has found residents to pay for half of the trees. The trees will be about 2m high and the holes to plant them were quite substantial.
Resolution: The Council voted to approve the Motion on the basis that at least half of the trees will be paid for by residents.
- 11 Motion to approve the payment of 50% of the electricity bills for the pavilion for the past three quarters for a total of £143. -Cllr Donahue seconded by Cllr Parkes. 20:50
- 11.1 Cllr Donahue advised that the Cricket Club did not use any electricity and would like the PC to pay for all of the electricity for the standing charge. The only use of the pavilion's electricity was used by the Village Green's defibrillator. The Cricket Club has said that they would shut the electricity down if it was not paid for. The Parish Council would offer half of the charge.
A Councillor said that they should upkeep the building to a safe standard. One Councillor picked up the broken glass on the Village Green from recent vandalism to the pavilion, but it has not been repaired and is still a danger to the public.
Resolution: The Council voted to approve the Motion.
- 12 GDPR Annual form for Council – Clerk 21:00
The Clerk advised that a link to free training had been sent to all the Councillors to complete their annual GDPR training. She provided a form for all the Councillors to be completed and returned to her.
- 13 Parish Council Elections – Thursday, May 4, 2023 – Clerk (Attachment 4,5) 21:05
The Clerk advised of the Parish Election Time Table and distributed nominations forms to each Councillor. She has asked that the forms be completed by the next meeting so that she can hand them into the Returning Officer in Abingdon as they cannot be received by post or electronic means.
- 14 Legal report for the ownership of the pavilion – Cllr Donahue 21:10
- 14.1 Cllr Donahue updated all on the legal report of the Village Green buildings ownership. Their conclusion was that whilst the PC/CC agreement 'does not meet the formalities of a contract' their view was that, as it has been in place for 10 years, it from a legal perspective the Cricket Club should be considered owner of the buildings. The consensus of the PC members at the meeting this week was that this addressed our concerns and confirmed that the PC is not liable for the pavilion and other buildings from a legal perspective and should respect that finding. This allows us to move forward on discussions with the Cricket Club on how to work together on a refurbished pavilion based on this understanding. Cllr Donahue said that the Cricket Club was

open to the idea of the Parish Council taking over its ownership in exchange for agreed access and potentially having it leased back to them.

- 14.2 A Councillor said that once it was refurbished, it could be a valuable asset for our village. The Parish Council could not afford to fund all the required pavilion work. Grants would need to be applied for which would be most likely on the basis of a community building and not an organised sports facility as the Cricket Club is unlikely to meet the funding criteria.
- 14.3 A Councillor said that consideration must be made to who will maintain and organise and the purpose of the pavilion prior to committing money and to apply for grants. For example, insurance, fire, electrical, cleaning etc.
- Another Councillor said that it could be used for community events or private parties in our beautiful setting of the Village Green.
- Cllr Donahue recommended that the Council would need to get feedback from the Cricket Club in how they wanted to proceed and review the previous Heads of Terms agreement to propose next steps.
- 15 To review progress on any open actions from previous Parish Council meetings and agree any revision of actions on the action list. 21:30
- 16 To confirm the date and time of the next meeting on Thursday, March 9, 2023 at 20:00. 21:40
- 17 Confidential discussion for thank you notes from the Parish Council. A thank you note for Geoff Weir was approved.
- 18 Meeting closed. 21:50

Attachment 1

Report to Whitchurch on Thames Parish Council February 2023

Housing Delivery Strategy and Action Plan

A new housing strategy has been approved to help residents on lower incomes access safe and secure affordable housing. This will enable the Council to build its own homes for social rent and will also help us to tackle the climate emergency to reduce carbon emissions by encouraging developers to use sustainable materials while building well-designed energy efficient housing. It also aims to encourage housing providers and residents to access grant funding to help retrofit their homes to reduce their carbon footprint. In December a further £2m was allocated to this programme, putting those CIL payments to good use!

Energy Saving and Money Saving

The District Council has been successful in its bid for government funding of more than £370,000 towards the installation of solar panels and air source heat pumps at Cornerstone, the council's arts centre in Didcot.

The grant has come from the Government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, and other funding for the project is expected to come from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

The council is expecting significant carbon emission savings from no longer using gas-fired boilers and through generating renewable energy from the new solar panels.

In addition to the positive action on climate change there will be financial gains too. It is forecast that Cornerstone's utility bills will be reduced thanks to the decarbonisation programme by around £20,000 per year - at current rates. The heating system at Cornerstone is due for replacement in any case.

Voter ID

A new law passed in 2022 requires all those casting votes in local and national elections to show some form of photo identification at the polling station. This law was passed despite there being virtually no evidence of voter fraud in the UK, and the acceptable forms of ID seem designed to make it difficult for younger citizens to cast their vote, as they may not have a driving licence or a passport. This change will affect all voters at the next local elections on **4th May 2023**, so make sure you don't lose your democratic right to vote by ensuring you have an acceptable form of ID or by registering for a postal vote. No doubt we will hear all about this over the next few months.

2023-24 Budget

During February SODC will be setting its budget for the 2023-24 financial year.

Although we continue to run an annual deficit, SODC is not in the same dire financial straits as many local councils, which means we are still able to allocate funds for discretionary services and to support our local communities with grants and well-being projects.

In fact, the outlook for 2023/24 is considerably better than the one we inherited from the previous administration, thanks to proactive in-sourcing of key services, improved financial reporting, analysis of historical underpayment of business rates, increases in fees and charges and sensible allocation of external funds to cover project costs. The Council is also benefiting from the rise in interest rates. The projected deficit for the next financial year is under £1m, compared to approximately £3m in previous years. Each year the Finance Team prepare a 5 year Medium Term Financial Plan, and while in 5 years time things don't look so good, the versions of such plans in previous years also gave a bleak outlook; in reality SODC is financially robust.

Peter Dragonetti

GENERAL OCC REPORT

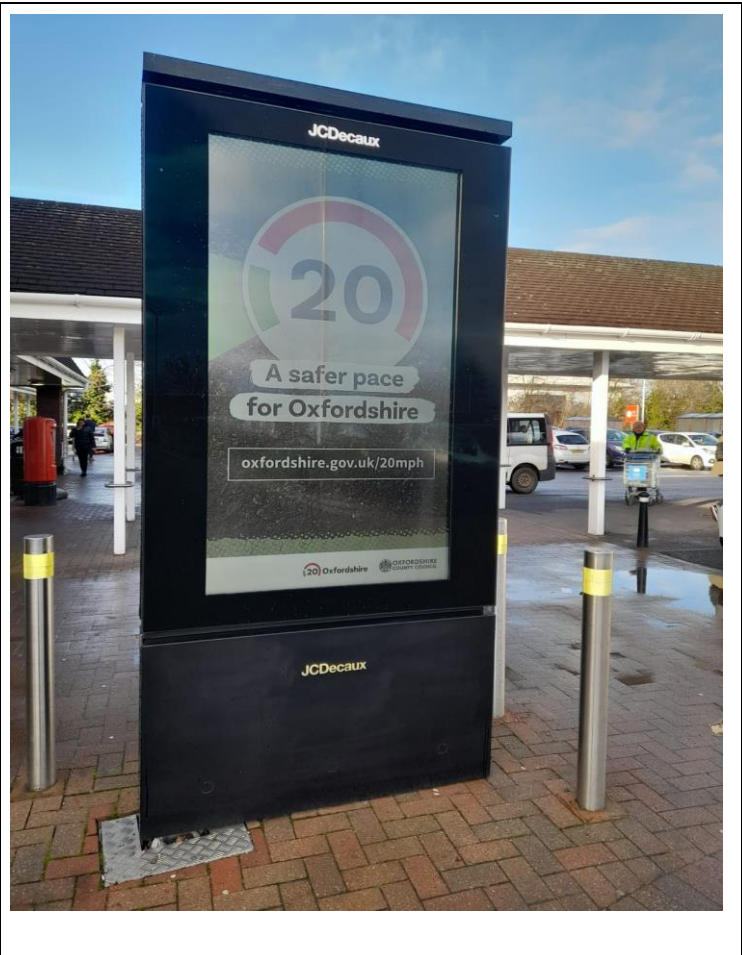
COUNCIL BUDGET FOR 23/24

OCC has received an unexpectedly generous Local Government Settlement which has resulted in the council having a surplus of £9m relative to the draft Budget that has been out for public consultation. Rather than use this surplus to cut Council Tax, the administration is looking for ways to spend the money. This approach is being contested by the Conservative Opposition. The Budget will be debated and voted upon by Full Council on 14 February.

OCC SPENDS £152K ON 20MPH SCHEME ADS – £10K IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE!

The LibDem/Green/Labour administration at OCC is spending £8m of Council Tax payers' money switching 85% of the county's 30mph speed limits to 20mph. This is little more than a cosmetic sign-changing exercise, and in most cases is not supported by the police, who are unlikely to enforce it. Nevertheless, many parish councils are giving the scheme a go. (Why not? It costs parish councils nothing directly.) Others are concerned that lots of money is being wasted.

While there is disagreement on the merits of the scheme, almost all Oxfordshire residents will be baffled why they are funding the administration's self-congratulatory advertising aimed at BUCKINGHAMSHIRE residents! This photograph was taken at Tesco, Broadfield, Aylesbury, BUCKS on Sunday 8th January. The 'out of Oxfordshire' element accounts for about £10,000 of the overall advertising budget of £152,000 for the campaign.



PLANS TO SPLIT OXFORD INTO FOUR SECTORS WIDELY ATTACKED

As previously reported, OCC plans to spend £6.5m on traffic filters that will split Oxford into four sectors: North, South, West and East. When the traffic filters are operating, for cars without a permit, movement within each sector is unrestricted, but direct movement between sectors is not possible and requires use of the ring road. Affected motorists will face much longer journey times and distances. The intention is to force a change in

behaviour. These plans are hugely controversial and have resulted in abuse being directed at council officers and councillors. The Conservative Opposition has grave concerns about the sectors proposal but condemns this abuse and the misinformation that is being spread.

OXFORD LTNS REMOVED FOR REPAIR AS TAXPAYER BILL SOARS

The Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) scheme continues to be highly controversial. In November 2022 OCC said it had spent £72,000 repairing vandalised plastic bollards. Many of the plastic bollards have now been removed at various locations in Oxford. OCC is temporarily replacing them with metal plates embedded in concrete. Officers said this is a safety measure while bollards are being repaired or replaced. (The metal plate makes the site safe while there is no bollard there by covering any damaged fixings.) OCC is now spending £100,000 to replace the plastic bollards with steel ones to prevent further damage.

NHS HEALTH CHECKS IN OXFORDSHIRE NOW AVAILABLE IN MORE LOCATIONS

It is easier than ever for people aged 40 to 74 to get a free NHS health check, with the service now available in even more locations. Health Checks Oxfordshire is now providing free NHS health checks on behalf of OCC at convenient community-based locations across the county, including libraries. This is in support of existing GP practice provision, making it easier than ever to get one. An NHS health check can lower a person's risk of developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and (certain types of) dementia. More information is available on the Health Check website: <https://www.healthchecksoxfordshire.org>

OCC CABINET APPROVES CONTINUED STADIUM DISCUSSIONS WITH OXFORD UNITED

OCC's cabinet has authorised its officers to start negotiations with Oxford United FC on outline legal and commercial terms relating to the club's proposal to lease land for the development of a new football stadium. Discussions to secure information and undertakings that meet OCC's objectives will continue. Any final decision regarding the leasing of the land will be taken in public by a future cabinet meeting, based on whether the council's objectives have been met.

PROPOSAL FOR GIANT RESERVOIR FACES CONTINUED OPPOSITION

Renewed efforts by water companies to move forward with proposals for a giant reservoir near Abingdon are again facing opposition. OCC's cabinet discussed its draft responses to a series of consultations taking place concerning future water supplies, including the Water Resources South East (WRSE) draft regional plan. The WRSE plan includes proposals for a reservoir located between Abingdon, East Hanney, Steventon and Marcham, which would hold up to 100 million cubic metres of water – known as the South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO) – as well as other options for securing future water supply. In the council's draft response, the WRSE consultation is described as “deeply flawed” and based on “unrealistic and non-evidence-based assumptions” about climate change, as well as “ludicrously outdated population projections”. The response calls the £1.244 billion reservoir “a destructive scheme, both environmentally and in its impacts on local people”, with bill-payers effectively being asked to “sign a blank cheque”, with no clear cost-benefit analysis or justification.

PLANS FOR NEW ACTIVE TRAVEL FUNDING

OCC has secured £520,415 from the government's Active Travel Capability Fund to invest in improving access to active travel options across the county. This investment will be used to deliver projects that enable more people to walk, wheel or cycle as a first choice for local transport. It will also be used to enhance high streets and improve access to work and education. Active Travel Minister, Jesse Norman, announced an additional £32.9m of government funding under an Active Travel Capability Fund last week. The fund supports Active Travel

England's ambition for half of all journeys within English towns and cities to be made through walking, wheeling, or cycling by 2030. The funding enables OCC to deliver more of its wider active travel strategy across South and Vale, Cherwell and West Oxfordshire districts.

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