



**MINUTES OF MEETING OF WHITCHURCH-ON-THAMES PARISH COUNCIL**  
**At the Village Hall at 20:00 Thursday, February 13, 2025**

**Councillors Present:**

Jim Donahue (Chairman), Diana Smith, Katherine Higley, Debbie Leach, Paul O’Grady and Frances Parkes.

**Officers Present:**

Clerk, RFO – Brian Inglis

**Public and Press:** None

- 1 **Apologies for absence & Parish Council Declaration** 20:00  
There were no apologies.  
Cllr Smith read the Parish Council Declaration.
- 2 **Declarations of Interest** – There were none. 20:02
- 3 **Public Forum** – a time for members of the public to speak on any item on the agenda. 20:02  
No members of the public were present.
- 4 **To approve minutes of the meeting of January 9, 2024.** 20:05  
**Resolution:** The Council voted to approve the minutes.
- 5 **Vacancy on the Parish Council** – 20:05  
An updated document showing what is involved in being a parish councillor has been posted to the village website. The Chairman noted that one resident has shown willingness to serve on the Parish Council and is likely to apply to fill the current vacancy.
- 6 **Chairman’s Announcements** - See **Appendix 1** 20:05
- 7 **To receive reports from District and County Councillors** 20:20
- 7.1 SODC District Councillor Report – Cllr Dragonetti (not present). See **Appendix 2**
- 7.2 OCC County Councillor Report - Cllr Bulmer (not present). See **Appendix 3**
- 8 **Planning Applications** – to discuss and agree Council’s response to the following: 20:20
- 8.1 **P25/S0035/HH**  
Alterations including changes to the external fenestration and replacement of the existing deck terrace.  
Proposed balcony on front (east) elevation.  
**The Mill High Street Whitchurch on Thames RG8 7DG**  
**Resolution:** Councillors voted to make no comment on this application.
- 9 **Planning Appeal Consultation** - to discuss and agree Council’s response to the following: 20:25
- 9.1 **P24/S3513/DA**  
Without planning permission, in relation to the building sited on the Land in the indicative position as shown edged orange on the Plan and inset map, the material change of use of that building from agriculture, to mixed use of agriculture, general storage and residential dwelling. Without planning permission, the creation of hardstanding sited on the Land in the indicative position as shown hatched blue on the Plan and inset map, that facilitates the material change of use. (SE23/55).  
**Butlers Farm Goring Heath Road Whitchurch Hill Oxon RG8 7PN**  
**Resolution:** Councillors voted to make the following comment - *WoTPC would not have supported any planning application for the development which has taken place without consent in open countryside and to the detriment of the National Landscape. WoTPC considers this development to be in breach of local and national planning policy and recommends the rejection of this appeal.*

10 The Clerk gave a brief report on decisions made by SODC since the last meeting and updated Councillors on the status of applications which are still under consideration 20:30

11 **Finance:** 20.35

11.1 To approve the payment schedule for February:

Payment	Sub-total	VAT	Total (£)
Staff Expenditure (February)			639.10
Stamps and Stationery – ASDA (Paid)		NIL	10.30
National Allotment Society – Annual Membership	70.00	14.00	84.00
Printinco – Winter Bulletin		NIL	507.00
OALC – Training Course (Cllr Donahue)	60.00	12.00	72.00

**Resolution:** The Council voted to approve the payments.

11.2 To note receipts as detailed:

Receipts: None	Amount
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11.3 **Bank Statements and Reconciliations for January 2025:**

The RFO gave a concise report on documents which had been previously circulated and scrutinised by councillors, answering questions to the satisfaction of councillors.

11.4 Recommendation to approve the re-appointment of Claire Connell as Internal Auditor for the Council Year of 2024/25 and to approve the signing of a Letter of Engagement.

**Resolution:** Councillors voted to retain Claire Connell as Internal Auditor and authorised the signing of a letter of engagement by The Clerk/RFO.

11.5 To consider Grant Applications as below:

1. Action for Pangbourne Toilets – Request for £800.00

**Resolution:** Councillors voted to provide a grant of £800.00

2. Whitchurch-on-Thames Twinning Association – Request for unspecified amount

**Resolution:** Councillors voted to provide a grant of £200.00

**Action:** The Clerk to inform both applicants and arrange payment.

11.6 To consider and agree to continue to automatically receive CIL Money from SODC

**Resolution:** Councillors voted to continue to automatically receive CIL Payments for another year.

**Action:** The Clerk to inform SODC Infrastructure Team

11.7 To consider the renewal of the membership to Community First Oxfordshire, at a cost of £55.00

**Resolution:** Councillors voted to renew the membership

**Action:** The Clerk/RFO to make necessary arrangements and pay the renewal fee.

12 **Motion:** Proposer Cllr Higley, Seconder Cllr Smith 20:40

To purchase native daffodils for Manor Road Conservation Area following a request from a resident.

**Resolution:** Councillors voted to approve spending up to £40 for this project.

13 Traffic and Parking Matters 20:45

13.1 Cllr Smith gave a concise update to Councillors on Traffic and Parking matters in the village, including enforcement activity and resident opinion, answering questions from Councillors as they arose. This update can be viewed on the village website.

13.2 **Motion:** Proposer Cllr Smith, Seconder Cllr Parkes

To close down the Traffic and Parking Working Group (TAPWG)

**Resolution:** Councillors voted to approve the closing of this Working Group.

**Action:** Cllr Smith to contact the village website to update the information on TAPWG held there.

13.3 Cllr Parkes provided analysis of the November 2024 speed monitoring in the High Street. This analysis has been made available on the village website and will appear in the next Whitchurch Bulletin

- 13.4 Councillors discussed possible steps which could be taken to protect the safety of pedestrians in The Lower Narrows following resident reports of recent near misses. Various options to be followed up, including advice to be sought from OCC Highways.  
**Action:** Cllr Smith to contact OCC Highways Officer for guidance on any options
- 13.5 **Motion:** Proposer Cllr Parkes, Seconder Cllr Donahue  
To purchase 4 solar lights at a cost of £45.99, to permanently install in the Upper Narrows following successful trial period.  
**Resolution:** Councillors voted to purchase and install the lights.  
**Action:** The Clerk to arrange purchase and delivery of the lights.
- 13.6 Cllr Donahue gave an update to Councillors on the progress of ongoing construction projects, road conditions and resident safety issues on Eastfield Lane. See **Appendix 4**, available to view on village website
- 14 Cllr Higley gave a report to Councillors on the Ruth Popper Playground, as follows 21:40
- SOHA fence has been re-installed along the correct boundary and to the appropriate standard.
  - Heritage Trees have been to look at the trees and will provide a quote for the work needed to raise the crowns of some of the trees. Motion for next meeting (dependent on receiving quote).
  - Agreement reached with adjoining landowner to carry out an independent survey of the playground's boundaries. Cllr Higley is in the process of gathering quotes from surveyors.
- 15 The Clerk gave a report to Councillors on the progress of the Hardwick Road Verges Project, as follows 21:45
- A site meeting had taken place on 30<sup>th</sup> January, with our contractor, officers from OCC, case manager from Mend the Gap, Cllrs Donahue and Smith and members of WoTHabs.
  - The WoTHabs team have submitted an online form to the OCC Biodiversity Officer, and our contractor is in the process of applying to OCC for a permit required to carry out work on the highway, with no complications anticipated in either matter.
- 16 Cllr Parkes gave a concise report to Councillors on the Village Green Tea Hut project, as follows 21:47
- On the advice of our architect, a pre-planning application is to be submitted to SODC to highlight any challenges which might need to be addressed before the process is taken any further.
- 17 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, with one new action. **Action:** The Clerk to order extra keys to the parish council notice board in the High Street. 21:50
- 18 Items for Report and Inclusion on the next Agenda – deadline Thursday, March 6, 2025. 21:55
- 19 To confirm the date and time of next meeting as Thursday March 13, 2025 at 20:00. 21:55

#### **APPENDIX 1 – CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS – Cllr Jim Donahue**

**Sink Hole:** A large sinkhole on Maor Road by the playground was finally confirmed by Thames Water as a leak in the main pressurised rising sewage line between the Eastfield Lane pumping station and the Manor Rd Sewage Treatment Plant.

- Thames Water has now fixed this as of 8<sup>th</sup> February, after much back and forth between OCC and Thames Water since 17<sup>th</sup> December. Thames Water apparently does not answer to OCC Highways so accountability for the issue was a problem.
- 4 large tankers to empty the sewerage line and keep village sewerage working caused disruption on High Street and Eastfield Lane as well.
- Sewage overflow ran down High Street – last Wednesday morning 5<sup>th</sup> February. The issue was resolved fairly quickly and I have raised to OCC and Thames Water but not received a response.
- Roadwork cleanup completed 12 February.

At this point, **Cllr Smith provided an update** received from Thames Water on 13<sup>th</sup> February as follows –

*“We’ve completed an infiltration survey on Eastfield Lane and found minor infiltration. Our Field Operations Specialist is waiting to speak with our contractor, Cappagh before raising the necessary works. This work will comprise foul sewer lining. To explain lining is when we insert a polymer sleeve to internally coat the pipe to improve robustness and prevent infiltration of things such as tree roots or groundwater. This can be used if we find a small hole or crack in the foul water sewer or surface water sewer. I’ll continue to monitor this and will contact you by 11<sup>th</sup> March with a further update”*

Cllr Smith was thanked for her diligence in pursuing this situation on Eastfield Lane.

**Muddy Lane Adverse Possession** – Received a promising update from Land Registry asking for clarification on Gas Utilities easement. The Clerk is investigating and will report back to Council.

**Polish Memorial Gardens Camping** – a suggestion was made for a DoE group to camp there.

- I offered to have us discuss it, but they decided on another location.
- Whilst it seems like a good idea for a DoE event with close access to Village Hall toilets, I raised this to the guardians and The Clerk and the main concerns seemed to be disturbing the neighbouring homes and the precedent that the site could be used for camping.

#### **Residents’ issues:**

- One resident requested that we consider traffic calming action with flashing lights in the High Street
- I had a request for street cleaning on Hardwick Road – issue of street cleaner truck coming when cars are parked on school run. I raised this and even though they started later some spots were still occupied. I have raised this to our District Councillor as a general issue.

#### **APPENDIX 2 – REPORT from DISTRICT COUNCILLOR – Cllr Peter Dragonetti**

##### **Latest News on Local Government Reorganisation**

As you will no doubt be aware, the White Paper issued by the Government in December covered both “English Devolution” (i.e. the establishment of new Mayoral Strategic Authorities covering approximately 1.5 million people) and Local Government reorganisation (i.e. the creation of Unitary Authorities to replace the current two-tier system).

Both matters are being hotly debated by the Leaders of all the local authorities and the Government is also likely to want to influence what happens in this part of the world, given its recent announcements about the Oxford-Cambridge “Growth Corridor”. Even Swindon Borough Council has been involved in these discussions; their Leader has made it clear he prefers to “look East” towards Reading and Oxford than west towards the rest of Wiltshire as part of a “Wessex” strategic authority.

Given the lack of agreement (at the time of writing) on the boundaries of the new Mayoral Strategic Authority, it is almost certain that the OCC elections scheduled for 1<sup>st</sup> May, based on the new electoral boundaries, will go ahead as planned. There are still many unknowns surrounding this whole process, including how a new Mayor would be elected and how many Councillors will represent residents at the new Unitaries, but I hope to keep you informed as plans evolve! The Leader of SODC spoke at the OCC Cabinet meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> January and recent press releases are here:

- [Councils should seek to influence Local Government Reorganisation for the benefit of communities](#)
- [Oxfordshire should be working with Berkshire and Buckinghamshire](#)

##### **SODC 2025/26 Budget**

On Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> February SODC will (hopefully) approve its capital expenditure and revenue budget for 2025/26 and the Medium-Term Financial Plan for the next 5 years. While we are confident that nothing is going to change substantially over the next year in terms of service delivery, the later years are still something of a mystery so our MTFP is necessarily cautious. However, it is worth noting, and celebrating, that 2025/26 will be the first year since the current LibDem/Green Administration came to power at SODC that we will not need to use our reserves to cover an annual operating deficit. Much more detail on the budget will be provided next month, following the Council meeting in February, although the full papers are already in the public domain on the SODC Cabinet webpage. There are no proposals to reduce any of our services.

## 5 Year Housing Land Supply

In January SODC has updated its latest 5 Year Housing Land Supply Statement – see <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/planning-and-development/local-plan-and-planning-policies/our-development-plan/five-year-land-supply/>

The headline figure is **4.5 years**, which now incorporates the 5% buffer required by Government policy. This compares to the figure published in September 2023, which was 4.2 years. It is worth noting that SODC has won a number of major appeals over the past 18 months, indicating that the 5 YR HLS is not the only factor taken into account by Inspectors. Neighbourhood Plans continue to be very important to protect communities from unwelcome applications, but paragraph 14 of the new NPPF makes it clear that NPs without any site allocations for new housing will be less well protected.

## Performing Arts Grant now open for applications

At the end of 2024, a new Performing Arts Grant Scheme (total value of £60,000) was approved by the Cabinet, which will enable community and voluntary organisations to apply for up to £5,000 to support projects that enhance the cultural landscape and improve the quality of life for local residents and communities. The scheme will open for applications on 5th February; applicants must show how their projects meet the community values and priorities of fostering a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable performing arts scene in South Oxfordshire. More details can be found at [www.southoxon.gov.uk/grants](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/grants).

## Garden Waste Changes – starting in April!

As you may recall from last year's communications, we are introducing a new permit scheme for garden waste collections this year. This permit scheme is like the one successfully operated in West Oxon (and many other parts of the country), and a key benefit of the new system is that it prevents people who have not paid for the service from having their garden waste collected. To receive garden waste collections from 1 April 2025, residents must purchase an annual permit. This will replace direct debits, which are surprisingly troublesome to collect each year.

What residents need to do:

- From late February, visit [www.southandvale.gov.uk/GardenWastePermit](http://www.southandvale.gov.uk/GardenWastePermit) to make a one-off, annual payment for garden waste collections.
- When customers get the permit in the post, they need to stick it to the lid of their brown bin.

Garden waste customers can also sign up for an online account on our website to make things easier when they purchase the next permit in 2026. Anyone who cannot easily sign up for a permit online can call us on 01235 422422 for support. Visit the New [Garden Waste FAQ](#) page for more information.

## Oxfordshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy

More than 2,100 Oxfordshire residents, landowners and organisations took part in last year's public consultation on the county's draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Using an interactive map, people sent in comments on the nature areas already mapped and lots of suggestions for additional areas to be included.

The LNRS team (a partnership of organisations including South and Vale) now has the mammoth task of compiling the responses into a public report and the final version of the strategy is due to be published in autumn this year. For more information about the LNRS and the nature groups involved see the [LNRS webpage](#).

## Local Government Reorganisation

Bit of a confusing picture from government on the reorganisation of LA in Oxfordshire but seems the May the first election will go ahead in Oxfordshire. It seems its cancelled in nine councils, affected are East Sussex, West Sussex, Essex, Thurrock, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Norfolk, Suffolk and Surrey.

Rayner claims it is cancelled in those areas because they will become unitary authorities, which is the cunning plan for Oxfordshire so why there is a difference is somewhat a mystery to me. Rayner said she only agreed to postpone elections in places where this is central to labour promise to deliver devolution and there not in the business of holding elections to bodies that won't exist and where they don't know what will replace them.

This is the statement from Oxfordshire, which makes no sense in relationship to what Rayners saying, so could be a timing thing or the reorganisation plan is too vague (who knows 🤔) watch this space. It will be interesting to see how the various political parties fight this election with this hanging over their heads, their going to have to set out a preferred route if they are going to be honest with the electorate. The statement seems to suggest its timing with out being clear or commenting on the rejection of their request (remember the Liberal administration asked for a postponement):-

*We re writing with an update following our [letter to government responding to the white paper](#) on devolution and local government reorganisation.*

*Our county elections on 1 May 2025 will go ahead as planned.*

*Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner has announced that all 21 two tier (district and county council) areas in England, including Oxfordshire, will be asked to submit plans for unitary structures. We await further information from government on future timescales as to when a new unitary council or councils would go live. You can [read the full statement](#) online.*

*Changes will ultimately mean that the present two-tier system of county and district councils that has been in place in Oxfordshire since 1974 will be replaced by consolidating all council services into unitary authorities. This is already the case in neighbouring areas such as Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Northamptonshire.*

*As a group of partner councils in Oxfordshire, we are continuing to discuss and prepare for the transition to a unitary authority or authorities. We are also continuing our discussions with neighbouring authorities across the Thames Valley about devolution*

## Street Lighting Turnoff

Oxfordshire have revised plans on this and it will now need local community support (not sure how that will work) but anyway good news for rural communities with the lack of pavements and answers the real concerns on safety & potential for increased isolation put forward by women's groups.

## APPENDIX 4 – Update to Agenda Item 13.6 – Cllr Jim Donahue

**Agenda Item 13.6: - Eastfield Lane construction and safety:** I have had some feedback from residents on my update in the Bulletin and the Website on 3<sup>rd</sup> February (attachment below) and have since followed up with the contractor and other parties. As of this week the contractors are still confident that the main work will be completed by the end of March after which the number of vehicles will be dramatically reduced.

The Parish Council met on 13 February to discuss suggestions that have been received by residents, including:

1. Zephyr X should sweep the road at least a couple times a week:
  - Zephyr X have now started sweeping it every Wednesday and Friday.
  - Zephyr X says the mud should almost completely stop the week of 17 February when the following activities will commence:
    - Some of the large containers will be removed to make way for landscaping
    - The earth in the front of the site will be removed and replaced with stone base for the front drive

- *They also note that the large cedar tree will be cut pruned in accordance with the arboriculture survey previously approved*
2. Drains have been clogged again recently despite being cleared in November:
    - *ZephyrX have hired a Gulley Sucker. It came on 5<sup>th</sup> February – drains no longer blocked*
    - *They will repeat cleaning if needed in the future*
  3. Reduce the number of cars parked on the road – I have raised this previously and ZephyrX now parks some vehicles on Swanston Field and the Village Green Car Park. The overall number of vans working on the site likely will continue to be at peak numbers until the end of March.
    - I have spoken to them again and they are willing to move many cars to Swanston Field or other locations pending our guidance. The parish Council agreed to requesting that this be increased to around a dozen. We have also asked that this be done in a considerate manner in line with traffic regulation including not having cars running in idle unnecessarily.
    - A resident had suggested the High Street residential parking spaces be temporarily allocated to contractors, but the Parish Council understands that changes to Highways regulations for residents parking would be difficult and time consuming to change so this option is not really realistic.
  4. There is a need to push ZephyrX to reinstate as much of the road and verges as possible. I have made my views and those of OCC Highways clear to ZephyrX and J Guest that the roads and verges need to be made good at least as well as they were prior to start of work. I suggest it is best to follow up in the April timeframe as completion nears, as points 1-3 are the priority for the next 6 weeks.

**Eastfield Lane construction and road safety update from  
Parish Council Chairman, Jim Donahue  
03 February 2025**

I have provided an update on the situation on Eastfield Lane in the Winter Bulletin magazine, but this is an evolving situation that I know a number of residents are concerned about, so I am providing this update. You may have seen that Zephyr X, the company building the Cedar Lodge Care Home, tidied up the verges and cleaned the street before the Christmas break making for an improved situation over the holidays, but with heavy rain in the past week or two, street conditions have returned to a muddy, crowded and unsafe situation.

You are likely aware that there have been at least 8 or 9 different construction projects in progress on Eastfield Lane raising serious concerns about the risks to traffic and pedestrian safety, especially for parents and children using the lane. Apart from the Cedar Lodge care home work, these projects include a new large home at the end of the lane by the school with regular large construction vehicles coming and going. Unfortunately, no one can control when individual projects can start, and we seem to be in a situation of a perfect storm of an unprecedented number of projects on a small, narrow lane.

One positive note, after more than 10 years of planning discussions and deterioration of this historic village building, there should be light at the end of the tunnel. I have been in communication with the Programme Director of ZephyrX who manages the Cedar Lodge project, and they have provided the following update:

- **By the end of March – in less than two months:** Work on Cedar Lodge work should be largely complete and handed over from site contractor J Guest to ZephyrX. The building work should be visibly complete including front and rear landscaping and driveway and parking – so an end to most of the mud and a great reduction in vehicles.
- **April** – the focus will be on furnishing the building and readying it for residents, so there will still be delivery vehicles but hopefully most will be on site instead of parked in the road. The end of April is the likely time frame for them making the street repairs and verge repairs equivalent to the state it was prior to the start of the work as there should be no more contractor vehicles after this point.
- **May** – is when they expect the Care Home to become operational with the first residents.
- **Roof Gable Planning review** – Zephyr X hopes that the dispute on the roof gable size will be resolved in February, but this is dependent upon the SODC Planning process which ZephyrX is engaged in. The proposed change has been strongly objected to by the Parish Council twice now, and Zephyr X has cordoned off the area with scaffolding and tarp to allow them to complete the rest of the site with this bit outstanding.

As a Parish Council, we have limited control over the situation but are doing what we can and I have been working in my personal capacity as Chairman with various parties to try to keep the area as safe as possible.

1. **Road surface improvements** - I have been working with OCC Highways to address urgent road surface damage, and they had repaired the 'ditch' on the south side of the lane in November although I see that it seems to have already deteriorated so we have raised this with OCC again. Both OCC and the Cedar Lodge contractor Zephyr X agree that the contractor is responsible for restoring the road and verges to their original state once work is complete, likely by the end of April once work is complete. Zephyr X has also agreed to clear the drains in the vicinity that are already blocked despite being in November. Once the road is made good, OCC will assess whether a larger resurfacing makes sense.
2. **Contractor car parking** - I have asked Zephyr X if they can look at options to reduce the number of cars on the street. They are aiming to predominantly park only in front of the Cedar Lodge property and will seek to minimise parking on the street as more space becomes available on-site. They say they are trying to park in other locations, but with all the other work going on, it is really hard to know which vehicles belong to which project.
3. **Utilities works disruption –**
  - Thankfully, the SGN utilities work that caused traffic delays in December still always allowed residents access as only half the width of the road was dug up at a time. I am told the build now has full gas and electricity connectivity to the mains.
  - Whilst additional Thames Water work added to the congestion for a few days in November and January, the good news is that there are now two fully operational pumps at the Eastfield Lane sewage pumping station. In peak flooding periods both primary and back-up pumps can now be used to help keep sewage off the streets. Thank you, Cllr Diana Smith and the Flood Forum Team, for raising this with Thames Water!
4. **Communicating with the school** - I have also been updating the school to the generally dangerous situation and asking them to reinforce the message to parents to avoid driving on Eastfield Lane and taking extra care as pedestrians on the road for the next few months.
5. **Muddy Lane maintenance** - I participated in a Green Team working party to clear the leaves off Muddy Lane in December that will ensure the route to school is as clear as possible and protect the surface for the year to come. I hope you'll agree that the surface is remarkably free of puddles and mud for this time of year. Thanks to Neil Huntington and Jill Bradon for organising!