



MINUTES OF MEETING OF WHITCHURCH-ON-THAMES PARISH COUNCIL
At the Village Hall at 20:00 Thursday, March 10, 2022

Members Present

Chair	Jim Donahue
Vice-Chair	Diana Smith
Members	Nick Brazil Katherine Higley Carrie Leadbeater-Hart

Officers Present:

Clerk	Jane Yamamoto
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Public and Press: 2 residents

The meeting started at 20:00.

1	Apologies for absence & Mission Statement	20:00
1.1	Cllrs Dragonetti and O'Grady sent their apologies.	
2	Co-option of Councillor	20:05
2.1	Resolution: The council voted to co-opt Frances Parkes as a Councillor.	
3	Declaration of Interests	
3.1	There were no declarations.	
4	Public Forum - an opportunity for members of the public to express their point of view on any item on the agenda.	20:10
4.1	Charles Cotgreave provided an update from the Green Team. (Attachment 3)	
5	Chairman's Announcements	20:15

20 mph update/Lower Narrows Bollards- The OCC public consultation on 20 mph in the village closed on the 4th March. There were a few concerns or objections raised so it will now go to an OCC Cabinet decision meeting that will be held on 24th March.

OCC contractors are now planning to start work on the bollards on the lower narrows the week of 15th March. I will notify the key stakeholder: Ferryboat, School, Bridge company, and web-site team.

Pavilion - The WCC have asked how much we would contribute to the pavilion upgrades. I have asked to meet with them to understand what the plans are for the upgrade and how it would work in terms of public access, ongoing maintenance costs and responsibilities, etc. but have been unable to arrange a time to meet. One option they said that they are considering would be to install a small kitchen in the pavilion instead of the showers, but this would likely increase costs and require additional fundraising.

Pedestrian Safety on the Bridge access road on Pangbourne side - I have been investigating the feasibility of getting the toll bridge access road and pavement widened on the Pangbourne side by the surgery and Dolphin Centre to address long standing pedestrian safety concerns. This is not an easy situation to fix as the road is owned by the Bridge Company which has no motivation to fix it and the land is in West Berkshire and Pangbourne jurisdiction which also don't see it as a

real priority. Whitchurch residents make up the majority of pedestrians crossing the Bridge and so we have the greatest interest in making improvements.

I have met with members of PAWS, the Chairman of the Pangbourne PC, and West Berkshire Country Councillor Gareth Hurley. They are all generally supportive of this, but see it as a big initiative that would have some time to get funding approved as a priority. They also see this as something to be led by the Whitchurch PC as it affects us the most.

Some background:

The Bridge Company committed to looking at options to address it as part of the toll settlement in 2015 when the toll was raised to 60p. They factored the cost of widening of the approach into the justification for the toll rise. In 2016 the bridge company hired Peter Brett Associates to assess options to address the problem. The report outlines 4 options to do this.

- 2 options to widen the road on the east (Dolphin centre) or West side (Surgery). These were not recommended due to the cost and impact to a number of mature trees and neighbouring land.
- 2 options to use local widening of footpaths and highway in parts of the route, one with a chicane to force traffic to give way for traffic calming.
- A fifth option was proposed by a resident to build a footbridge through the trees, parallel to the bridge, similar to the temporary bridge that was built during the bridge replacement.

In about 2017-18 the Bridge company reviewed these options with West Berkshire Council who gave a non-committal response saying that it would be to be assessed for impacts to trees and neighbouring landowners. The Bridge Company did not push for anything to happen and instead focussed on improvements to the white railing on either side of the existing access routes and extending 20 mph across the bridge.

I am happy to drive this and am looking to develop a joint WG with Pangbourne PC and would like someone to help me with this from the village, preferably a TAPWG member. Cllr Frances Parkes has volunteered to support this.

Muddy Lane - The Green team are investigating options to reduce muddy areas on Muddy Lane. We have received one quote from Dan Hazel to improve the surface and are seeking additional quotes.

- SODC Councillor grant was requested for £1,250 to cover half of the costs in the quote. This was rejected as they saw footpaths as OCC responsibility and not appropriate for SODC funding.
- Cllr Bulmer has said that he has grant money available and will support this so propose to apply for the OCC grant.

Met with OCC Countryside Officer Jacky Smith with Charles Cotgreaves and others in Feb.

- OCC gave us authorisation to do the work as proposed by Dan Hazel
- They also provided us with names of other contractors to get additional quotes. Neil Huntington is progressing this.

Ownership is unclear:

- Doesn't appear to have any clear owner – both OCC and SODC checked the land registry and don't own it. OCC suggested that the PC may own it. I have raised a Land Registry search to confirm the ownership.
- OCC has confirmed that it is a formal footpath and are able to approve our work on that basis.

- Parish Council could apply to request ownership. Cllr Smith has volunteered to apply for PC ownership.

Hardwick Road Project - John Bradon/ Sally Woolhouse working on grant for verge protection. Bill of materials developed for verge protection to get cost estimates from OCC for the grant application.

Village Emergency Team Meeting - To be held on 31st March at 8pm to have an annual review of village emergency plan. All residents interested in being involved are welcome.

Residents Issues: Safety rails on the Cut should be repainted black. Neil Huntington volunteered to do this in April timeframe.

6 To approve minutes of the meeting of February 10, 2022. 20:30

6.1 **Resolution:** The Council voted to approve the minutes.

7 Planning Applications – to discuss and agree Council’s response to the following: 20:35

7.1 P21/S5271/HH Woodlea, Hardwick Road, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7HW
Amended plans received February 1, 2022 detailing proposed works to front drive.

Resolution: The Council voted to submit no comments.

7.2 P21/S4829/HH Herringbones Cottage, High Street Hardwick Road, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7ET,
Repositioning of existing garage and erection of a greenhouse.
Resolution: The Council voted to support this application subject to the Conservation Officer’s approval of the corrugated material to be used on the roof of the garage.

7.3 P22/SO437/DIS Church Cottage, High Street, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7DL 20:40
Discharge of Conditions 3 (Materials) and 4 (Surface Water) on planning application P21/S1496/HH and Conditions 3 (Materials) on planning application P21/S1497/LB Proposed erection o kitchen extension and glazed link to outbuildings, new WC extension.
Resolution: The Council voted to submit no comments.

7.4 P22/S0653/HH Ebony Old Gardens, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7EH
Addition of detached garage, new front fence position, raised patio and brick and cladding colour
Resolution: The Council voted to support this application.

8 To receive reports from the representatives of Oxfordshire County Council and South Oxfordshire District Council 20:45

8.1 SODC District Councillor Report – Cllr Dragonetti (Attachment 1)

8.2 OCC County Councillor Report - Cllr Bulmer (Attachment 2)

9 **Finance:** 20:50

9.1 To approve the payment schedule for March:

Payment	Amount
Clerk salary (March 2022)	TBC
OALC (Training Cllr Higley)	£66.00
OALC (annual membership)	£160.63

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the payments.

9.2 Bank reconciliations and reports

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the reports.

10 Motion to approve a donation of £250 to the Oxfordshire South and Vale Citizens Advice. 20:55
Cllr Smith seconded by Cllr Higley

Resolution: The Council voted to support the motion.

- 11 Discussion on Treescapes report– Cllr Higley 21:00
- 11.1 Cllr Higley advised that she had shared the report with WoTHABs. They were quite critical of the report and did not want to engage with it. SODC have advised that they wanted landowners to see this report before it was shared more widely. Cllr Higley said that certain criteria had to be met for any grant applications.
- 12 The Bulletin – options for printing and advertising – Cllr Donahue 21:05
- 12.1 Cllr Donahue showed examples of other parish bulletins.
If this printer produced our village bulletin, the costs per quarter would remain the same. The printer would share the income from advertisements, thereby reducing the cost of the printing.
- 13 Playground Update – Cllrs Leadbeater-Hart and O’Grady met with some suppliers of surfaces and equipment. 21:15
- 13.1 Surface - They were advised of the following surface options: i) wood chip – although initially neat, becomes messy and may require topping up, especially under swings; ii) recycled rubber – can adhere onto children’s clothing; iii) wet pour – is the gold standard. One supplier said that the current surface is out of date and not fit for purpose. Although wet pour is expensive, it is low maintenance. Inter-locking rubber matting with grass growing through it is not appropriate for the play area and trees. The supplier will come back with prices.
- 13.2 Playground equipment – some of the equipment had already been supplied by one of the suppliers that they met with. The supplier thought that the large metal climbing frame was not fit for purpose and would not be installed today. Large multi-play was also recommended to be replaced. Swing frame is still in good condition, but the swings could not be replaced by them. Small two play items were in good condition. The itemised quote would be in the region of £100k to replace and to re-surface. The detailed quote would be received around April 23, 2022. Other ideas included: picnic benches/tables under the trees. Cllr Higley said that we would need to seek permission from the landowner.
- 14 To review progress on any open actions from previous Parish Council meetings and agree any revision of actions on the action list. 21:25
- Cllr Donahue gave an update on PC-173 to raise the request to SODC/OCC or get a private quote if they are not able to support the cutting back of the large laurel bush at the bottom of Hillside.
 - Since the last meeting quotes were received to completely remove the bush and stumps in addition to cutting it back. Quotes for removal were about £1,000 which were about double the cost for cutting it back.
 - Residents of about 10 homes on Hillside near the bush were asked their view and they all wanted to keep it, but just cut it back. They also agreed that they would ask the Hillside maintenance contractor to maintain it once it was cut back to keep it under control.

- It was agreed to ask Eldon Tree Surgery to cut back the Laurel Bush at a time that would not impact bird nesting in the Laurel Bush.

15 To confirm the date and time of the next meeting on Thursday, April 14, 2022 at 20:00 and the Annual Assembly Thursday, May 26th.

16 Confidential discussion for thank you notes from the Parish Council

17 Meeting closed.

21:30

Attachment 1

Report to Whitchurch on Thames Parish Council March 2022

Council Operations

One of the obligations on SODC is to provide Bed and Breakfast accommodation; we discovered that the council had been received capital funding some years ago, ring fenced to this issue, which had not been used, and this is now going to be used to acquire some property that can be used to address this obligation, potentially saving £65,000 a year.

Budget for 2022/23

The budget and council tax for next year has now been approved, and while there is an increase in council tax of £5 for a band D Dwelling our council tax remains the 8th lowest in the country for a similar rural district. Though more careful stewardship and planning, the savings made in the last year and projected forward have improved the financial position. As a result, £500,000 is available to improve our environment through hedge and tree planting, promoting green skills and businesses and cleaning up our built environment. I have suggested that the parishes are consulted on the annual Deep Clean that Biffa do, as I think it is currently operator driven rather than user directed, and this is going to be taken up.

Parking charges

Parking charges are increasing at the council owned and run car parks. The objective is that the car parks breakeven, however over the last two years income dropped to just over £700,000 a year, while costs were just under £1million. The intention is that the car parks should self finance and not require subsidy from Council tax.

There is normally one free hour for all motorists, and car parking in South Oxfordshire is relatively cheap compared to Reading or Oxford.

The Council is also installing electric vehicle charging points at car parks in Henley and Wallingford, and these will be available for overnight booking for residents.

Consultations

There are currently consultations on CIL and SPD (the latter the new name for S106). It is proposed that the current CIL exemption for housing specifically for older people will be removed. This seems to have been exploited by developers. The exemption for Self Build is a national policy; while perhaps intended for people who actually spend their evenings and weekends building their own homes with their hands, it now seems to be mainly used by property developers.

There could be different rates for different parts of the District. The southern parishes, including ours, will be a higher rated area.

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/cilchargingschedule>

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/developercontributionsspd>

Peter Dragonetti

Attachment 2

REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS MAR 2022 FROM CLLR KEVIN BULMER

GENERAL OCC REPORT

BUDGET MEETING OVERSHADOWED BY FARMERS' PROTEST



At the County Council budget-setting meeting on February 8th the left-wing administration forced through a whopping 5% Council Tax increase, despite the Conservative Independent Alliance showing how the increase could be limited to 3.5%. However, the meeting at County Hall was overshadowed by a farmers' protest outside. As previously reported, the administration is trying to impose a vegan diet at all council-catered events. Richard Binning, a beef farmer from Steventon, said: "The message they are sending out is really dangerous - they are suggesting it's ok to eat avocados from Brazil, instead of our wholesome British beef." The farmers' protest received national press coverage. The motion to impose the vegan diet has to be ratified by the OCC Cabinet at its meeting on March 15th. Conservatives will be addressing Cabinet and urging them to seek change through education, persuasion and choice, not diktat.

BAD WEATHER IS THE PERFECT STORM FOR ROGUE TRADERS IN OXFORDSHIRE

Residents are being warned to be wary of cold callers or leaflets offering to do work on roofs after the recent storms. OCC's trading standards team believes it is a perfect opportunity for rogue traders to take advantage of residents who have a leaking roof or broken tile. Any Oxfordshire resident who has concerns about cold calling or potential scams can contact the Citizens Advice National Consumer Service on **0800 144 8848** or by visiting its website [citizensadvice.org.uk](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk).

CONTROVERSIAL PROPOSALS FOR RESTRICTIONS ON CARS IN OXFORD

OCC and Oxford City Council last month revealed highly controversial joint proposals to cut car use in the city with the introduction of a city-wide workplace parking levy, traffic filters and a wider Zero Emission Zone (ZEZ) to

cover the entire city centre. The chairman of Oxford High Street Association condemned the proposals and said: "I am totally depressed by what these two councils are doing to our city." More details on the ZEZ below.

BRITAIN'S FIRST ZERO EMISSION ZONE (ZEZ) BEGINS IN OXFORD

Britain's first ZEZ started on 28 February. Launching as a pilot, the streets included in the ZEZ are: New Road, Bonn Square, Queen Street; Cornmarket Street, New Inn Hall Street, Shoe Lane, Market Street, Ship Street and St Michael's Street. The ZEZ pilot is a precursor to the introduction of a larger ZEZ covering most of Oxford city centre next year (2023), subject to further public consultation. The ZEZ pilot will operate from 7am - 7pm, all year around. All petrol and diesel vehicles, including hybrids, will incur a daily charge unless eligible for a discount or exemption. However, zero emission vehicles, such as electric cars, can enter the pilot area free of charge. The charge will vary from £2 to £10 per day depending on the emission levels of the vehicle. Automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) cameras have been installed to enforce the zone. The scheme has been criticised as being a tax-raising measure and not a true ZEZ, as all vehicles are allowed into the zone as long as they pay the tax.

BID SUBMITTED TO DELIVER 159 ELECTRIC BUSES FOR THE OXFORD AREA

A new fleet of state-of-the-art electric buses could be coming to Oxford and its surrounding areas after a bid for government funding was submitted. OCC last month applied for £32.8 million from the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) scheme. Along with £6m from the council and £43.7m from bus companies Go Ahead and Stagecoach, the scheme could deliver 159 electric buses and the infrastructure to charge them in a package worth £82.5m.

If successful, the electric buses would operate in an area stretching from Kidlington in the north to Sandford in the south, and from Cumnor in the west to Wheatley in the east. There are no proposals to support the south of the county.

PARTNERSHIP WITH CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL

Efforts to unpick the agreement between OCC and Cherwell District Council continues.

A joint officer working group has been established to review the extent and cost of the current arrangements. The group reports to the member-led Joint Shared Services and Personnel Committee, and is made up of the two chief executives, monitoring officers and s151 officers. Once the group has completed its initial review, it will then prepare a transition plan. The Conservative Opposition continues to press for transparency in relation to the costs when they have been identified and quantified.

CONSULTATIONS

OCC is currently conducting a wide range of consultations at the moment. Residents can make their views known by responding. Current consultations include: Local Transport and Connectivity Plan; Location of cameras to enforce traffic regulations; Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND); and Library and heritage services. An interesting recent example is the proposal to make permanent the Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) in parts of Oxford. The consultation showed that 74% of respondents objected to the measure or had concerns, with just 26% in support. This has resulted in the administration putting the brakes on the scheme at the last moment, which was due to be approved last month. It will be reconsidered by Cabinet later in the year.

<https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk>

CONTACT DETAILS

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Attachment 3

Green Team activities update - Q1 2022

1. Manor Rd playground. At the request of councillor Higley, we cut back and tidied laurel bushes around the edge of the playground.
2. Eastfield House verge. We completed phases 2 and 3 of the project proposed by Councillor Smith. This involved cutting back sumac plants to 1 foot height, and weeding, digging and seeding a derelict stretch of verge.
3. Village Green. We have continued to remove invasive plants and generally improve the south end and 'the mound'. We are trying to use constructive ways of disposing of the considerable amount of waste material that results, including shredding and using the mulch to cover foot-worn muddy patches. We have emptied the cricket club's grass-cuttings box and plan to use the soil elsewhere on the ground.
4. Polish Garden. Aside from general maintenance and clearing away storm debris, we levelled the ground in the south-east corner and dug holes for the first 3 trees of the community orchard. We also planted a hornbeam hedge to form a more attractive backdrop to the chapel platform.
5. Jubilee Beacon project. We helped select a location for the beacon visible from the village green, and began phase 1 - clearing and preparing the site. We will be responsible for completing Phase 1 according to the requirements of the landowner, but villagers generally will be able to take part in Phases 2 and 3 - building the beacon and lighting and managing it in the first week of June.
6. Muddy Lane. We had 2 leaf clearing sessions at the north end, near the gate. The path surface has in places deteriorated to the point where patching no longer seems adequate, and we are therefore taking part with the PC in assessing options and approaching contractors to undertake remedial work.
7. Storm damage - fallen trees. We cut up 3 fallen trees at the school end of Eastfield Lane and one tree in the Maze. We also cut down 2 trees in Muddy Lane that were threatening to come down.
8. Misc - cricket club liaison, guardians. The cricket club has provided a schedule of matches which has been passed to the PC and the contractors. Neil Huntington has joined the Green Team as Guardian of Muddy Lane.
9. Requests/suggestions. We would suggest placing tree stumps around the flower bed at the entrance to the village green car park to discourage people from driving over it. We would also propose selective controlled burning of waste in a discretely selected spot behind 'the mound' using appropriate controls, e.g. moveable incinerator, and fire-proof base.
10. It is estimated that the work completed as described above amounted to 98 man hours.

CHC/14 March