



MINUTES OF MEETING OF WHITCHURCH-ON-THAMES PARISH COUNCIL
At the Village Hall at 20:00 Thursday, September 12, 2024

Members Present

Chair Jim Donahue – acting as Clerk

Members

Diana Smith – acting as Chair
Katherine Higley
Debbie Leach
Paul O’Grady

Officers Present: none

Public and Press: 11 members of the village the local press attended the meeting.

The meeting started at 20:00.

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

Cllrs Brazil and Parkes and the Clerk sent their apologies.

2 **Declaration of Interests**

No conflicts of interest were raised.

3 **Public Forum** – an opportunity for members of the public to express their point of view on any item on the agenda.

The residents of the village were all in attendance to raise concerns about the Cedar Lodge Care home planning application and the chair requested that the concerns be addressed under the planning agenda item.

4 **Chairman’s Announcements** 20:05

High Street Residents Parking scheme now implemented – As of this morning all the new lines and signs are in place. OCC has issued a statement saying that the new scheme will be enforced starting next Monday 16th September. We have had some feedback from residents with various concerns such as not being on the scheme that we have tried to address. I have also had some anecdotal feedback that traffic is speeding up in certain stretches of the road or that some cars are now parking on Eastfield Lane and Hardwick Road. I’ve also had feedback from some residents that the new scheme is fantastic. None of this comes as a surprise, and we need to give it time to bed down. OCC’s view is that it should be reviewed in 8-12 months, when longer term patterns will be clear and specific actions can be taken to address any new issues resulting from the changes.

OCC Highway Engagement Team - Cllr Parkes and I met with OCC Highways engagement team to discuss a number of areas that need to be addressed in the Village. We discussed the following issues on-site:

- Speeding and safety concerns in the upper narrows – Frances is following up with OCC Highways contact for this – meeting planned later in September.

- Maintenance of drainage grips/soakaways coming down Whitchurch Hill into the village clearing of drainage sewers generally on the High Street.
 - o The policy of clearing drains has changed from once a year to every 4 years. This is clearly unacceptable for Whitchurch due to the geography of the street.
 - o Jim is liaising with OCC Highways Drainage Team to understand plans for clearing High Street drains and improving soakaways/grips on Whitchurch Hill.
 - o Recent flash flooding exacerbates the situation with more and more debris on the High Street. Drains by Greyhound are working sufficiently once they are cleared of debris. The Greyhound manager needs to keep a close eye on them!
- Raised concerns on state of roads needing attention on parts of Manor Road, Eastfield Lane and Hardwick Road – Highways Engagement team said they would check with their colleagues. Some roads, such as Manor Road are already listed as Cat 3, meaning they need to be addressed for future resurfacing but not considered urgent.
- We also asked them to look into the state of the road at Path Hill Farm and at dip in road further down.

Bellmouth Wall Damage – I've been in touch with the residents responsible for the wall and they report that things are progressing well. They have a preferred builder and the company responsible for the damage is being very cooperative with covering the costs for the work.

Tea Hut replacement Update – Following the Tea Hut demolition earlier this year, Cllr Parkes and I have been looking into options for its replacements including:

- Option 1 - Replacing with a new building, or
- Option 2 - Try to work with the Cricket Club to refurbish their Pavilion

Re-use of the existing pavilion would have the advantage of reducing the number of buildings on the Village Green to one rather than two. The Cricket Club were generous with their time and giving us access to look at the state of the Pavilion. We also asked for advice from a builder with experience on these types of building for local parishes including a similar project in progress at Little Marlow.

Unfortunately Option 2 does not look feasible for two reasons:

- **Insurance:** Having discussed this with our insurers (again) it is clear that unless we own the building we cannot insure it and the Cricket Club has not changed their position on transferring ownership.
- **The State of the Pavilion:** we took the builder to have a look they were quite clear that the building does not meet modern building standards and were we to start remedial work we would in all likelihood be opening a can of (expensive) worms, to try to bring it up to where it needs to be, even for a simple building. The builder was not optimistic about the long term viability of the building. The Cricket Club have done a great job recently to refresh the outside of the building, but we have no insight into plans to refurbish the inside.

Based on this feedback, Frances and I have come to the conclusion that Option 1 now looks like the only realistically achievable approach and better value investment for the village. We have taken advice from a builder with fairly extensive experience with these types of buildings and their recommended next steps were that we:

1. Engage an architect to come up with one or more designs for the replacement building to act as a basis to acquire building quotes. Likely one preferred replacement design, and a minimal scaled back version.
2. Seek at least three builder quotes on these designs.
3. Confirm whether a new or modified planning application is required.

These quotes could allow us to make a decision on the way forward and proceed with fundraising, grant application and building a replacement. We have started getting quotes from local architects and plan to make a recommendation to the next meeting.

Residents Issues:

- A resident raised a concern about a low spot on the village Playground where their child twisted an ankle. Cllrs Highley and Smith have filled a small hole in the Playground with soil and applied grass seed and will fill the larger and older dip in the ground as soon as possible.
- The concerns about the overgrown nature of the Polish Memorial gardens were resolved by asking the maintenance contractor to cut the area ahead of the annual schedule. In the future, the plan is to have the contractor keep a path cleared by the fences bordering residents homes in addition to current regularly cut paths.
- A resident of Hardwick road has raised a concern about work going on at Hillside concerning waste that was stored along Hardwick Road this week. The builders were not wearing hi-vis jackets and the area was not lit at night. The resident felt that the builder may not have the OCC Highways licenses to store waste on the road and raised it to the OCC Councillor and FixMyStreet. The waste is now removed and the resident is following up with the OCC Highways Licensing team. No further action from the Parish Council required.

5 To approve minutes of the meeting of July 11, 2024.

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the minutes.

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

6.1 P24/S2309/FUL – Extension to comment approved?

Land to the north and west of Pangbourne Technology Centre Bozedown Drive Whitchurch Hill RG8 7QR

Installation of ground mounted photovoltaic solar panels and battery energy storage system to supply electrical power to Pangbourne Technology Centre; associated plant, plant enclosure and cabling; access driveway; landscaping; and ancillary works.

Resolution: The Parish Council voted to object to the application, supporting the Heritage and Landscape Officer recommendations to avoid development on AONB green land and consider car park mounted solar panels.

6.2 P24/S1965/FUL – Extension to submit comments approved.

Whitchurch Primary School, Whitchurch Pre-school Group, Eastfield Lane Whitchurch-On-Thames RG8 7EJ

Replacement of a single storey "terrapin" type building currently used as a pre school with a new building of the same overall footprint constructed to current standards for the same use.

Resolution: The Parish Council to support the application.

6.3 P24/S2700/S73

Cedar Lodge Care Home, Eastfield Lane, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7EJ

Variation of conditions 3 (Landscaping compliance), 11 (Windows obscure glazed and fixed shut) and 14 (Approved plans) on application P23/S4055/S73 to allow internal and external changes to the approved building and changes to landscaping. (Variation of conditions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 13 and 14 of planning permission P11/S0126 to allow changes to tree protection measures and landscaping details. (Partial demolition of existing care home, Eastfield House, construction of extensions and associated works and change of use of land at the rear of the home from C3 to C2 to provide additional external amenity space).

Several members of the public attended the meeting and raised concerns related to:

- The changes that were made were not compliant with the approved plans. Cllr Dragonetti pointed out that their approach to seeking retrospective approval for plans was legal, with the developing doing this at its own risk.
- Others felt the actions by the developer was not being supportive of the community as they were not consulted and the changes had a significant impact on them as neighbours.

Resolution: The Parish Council voted to strongly object to planning application due to the increased massing of the extension and there are concerns about the implications to the tree plan which has not been provided. The proposal was implemented without approval and is considered unneighbourly due to increased over-dominance and overlooking from a gable end that has previously been objected to and rejected. The building in question is a key part of the village Conservation Area with the plans impacting neighbours on all sides.

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

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

7.2 OCC County Councillor Report - Cllr Bulmer – not received

8 **Finance:**

8.1 To approve the payment schedule for September:

Payment	Sub-total	VAT	Total
Staff expenditure (August and September)			£1,083.75
ROSPA (Annual Inspection)	£90.00	£18.00	£108.00
Printinco (Summer Bulletin)	£524.00		£524.00 BACS
Whitchurch Pre-School Grant (from CIL)	£2,929.48		£2,929.48
Moore (External audit)	£210.00	£42.00	£252.00

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the payments.

8.2 Receipts:

Receipts	Amount
VAT return to 2023	£3,717.57
VAT return to 2024	£3,364.36
Invoice for Bulletin Ads	£50.00

8.3 Bank Reconciliations for June and July 2024 - These were presented to all councillors and signed off by Cllr Donahue.

- 8.4 External Audit Report – The Clerk confirmed that this report was completed and was posted publicly.
- 8.5 The Internal and External Audit reports had been received and the Council has taken appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audits. Confirmed by the Clerk.
- 8.6 Notice of Conclusion of Annual Audit was confirmed by the Clerk and distributed to all councillors.
- 9.0 Motion to approve Clerk/RFO to role commencing October 1, 2024 -Cllr Donahue seconded by Cllr Smith
Cllr Donahue explained that four clerk candidates were interviewed by himself along with Cllrs Smith and Parkes. The recommended candidate was the only candidate with previous clerk experience, working for a another Oxfordshire Parish Council near Bicester. He is working towards his professional clerk certification which would bring benefits to the Parish Council and his temperament and approach seemed to be a very good fit for the Parish Council and residents of the community. The new clerk lives near Twyford which is outside of the village so may provide a level of objectivity when working with residents. A handover and transition to the new clerk could happen leading up to the October Parish Council meeting.
- 9.1 **Resolution:** The Parish Council voted to approve Brian Inglis as the new clerk at the salary level SCP-25.
- 10.0 Motion to approve the OALC subscription increase - Cllr Smith seconded by Cllr Donahue.
- 10.1 **Resolution:** The Parish Council voted to approve the increase subscription by 7% to £200+ VAT.
- 11.0 Motion to approve the Parish Council share the costs of keeping the defibrillator running at the Cricket Pavilion for 6 months in every calendar year, by sharing these costs with the Cricket Club in a 50/50 share. In 2024 this will be £88 + 5% VAT (Attachment 13) – Cllr Donahue seconded by Cllr Smith.
Resolution: Parish Council approved the motion.
- 12 Annual inspection of the Ruth Popper Playground – Cllr Higley
Cllr Higley highlighted a few new risks that were identified in the report that she will action them with the Playground WG team. Previous risks with benches and the bin have been removed. The risk of the damaged surfaces still needs addressing and remedial work will be carried out as soon as possible.
Action-200: Cllr Higley to install two gate buffers and two “No Dogs Allowed” signs to address risks highlighted by the playground inspection report.
- 13 To review progress on any open actions from previous Parish Council meetings and agree any revision of actions on the action list. Updated Action Log provided with minutes.
- 14 To confirm the date and time of the next meetings is Thursday, October 10, 2024 at 20:00.
- 15 Confidential discussion for thank you notes from the Parish Council
- 16 Meeting closed at 9:20pm.

Local Plan

The District Council is pressing ahead with the programme for the new Joint Local Plan, not least because having an up to date local plan is very important in considering significant planning applications, especially when applications go to appeal. A special meeting of the District Council will be held on 19 September to approve the Regulation 19 Publication version of the new Joint Local Plan.

NPPF

The new government has published proposed changes to the National Planning policy Framework, NPPF, which sets out the basic approach to planning and the proposed changes are to enable the government to achieve the increase in new homes as set out in its stated objectives.

Many of the changes are of technical interest to Planning Authorities and large developers, and appear to be not unreasonable in the overall scheme of things.

One change that would affect people is an increase in the cost of a householder planning application from £258 to £528; this is to cover the cost the Local Authority incurs in handling these applications.

The changes to the NPPF are currently out for consultation until 24 September

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-reforms-to-the-national-planning-policy-framework-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system/>

Oakley Wood Recycling Centre

This is going to be shut for two days this week, Thursday 12th and Friday 13th

Revenue Grant Scheme

This grant scheme from the District Council can help organisations cover fundamental operational costs, with a minimum grant of £10,000 and maximum of £125,000 per annum over the two year period. The schemes must be able to demonstrate direct benefits for South Oxfordshire residents and contribute to at least one of the councils corporate plan priorities,

- Action on Climate change and Nature recovery,
- Inclusion, accessibility and accountability,
- Thriving and healthy communities,
- Homes and infrastructure that meet local need.

Deadline 1 November