Minutes of the Meeting of
WHITCHURCH-ON-THAMES PARISH COUNCIL
Held at the Village Hall on Thursday, 10th September 2026 at 8pm

Councillors Present: Jim Donahue (Chairman), Diana Smith (Vice-Chairman), Katherine Higley, Romilly Swann, Paul O'Grady and Debbie Leach.
Officers Present: Brian Inglis (Clerk and RFO)
Public and Press: None Present
District or County Councillor: Cllr Peter Dragonetti (SODC)

1 **Apologies for Absence & Parish Council Declaration** – There were apologies from Cllr Bernarde Hyde. Cllr Smith read the Parish Council Declaration

2 **Declarations of Interest –** None recorded

3 **To approve minutes of the Parish Council meeting of Thursday 9th July 2026.**
The Council RESOLVED to approve the minutes, and these were signed by the Chairman.

4 **Public Forum** – No public present

5 **Chairman's Announcements -** See **Appendix 1**

6 **To receive reports from District and County Councillors**

6.1 SODC District Councillor – Cllr Dragonetti expanded on a previously circulated report – See **Appendix 2**

6.2 OCC County Councillor – No report

7 **Planning Applications** – Councillors agreed on a response to the following application.

7.1 **P26/S3438/HH - Willow House, Eastfield Lane, Whitchurch-on-Thames, Reading RG8 7EJ.**
Proposed detached garden room / gym outbuilding incidental to the enjoyment of Willow House.
Response: Councillors voted to support the application

8 **Planning Update –** There was no update on a previously circulated report from The Clerk.

9 **Finance**:

9.1 To note August payments and to approve the payment schedule for September:

August Payments (to note)	**Sub-total**	**VAT**	**Total**
Staff Expenditure (August) **PAID**			693.35
Printinco (Whitchurch Bulletin) **PAID**			542.00
Scofell Landscapes (August Grounds Maintenance) **PAID**	729.16	145.83	874.99
Information Commissioner's Office (Annual Fee) **PAID - DD**			47.00
Reading Recycling (Village Green Skip) **PAID – DEBIT CARD**	230.00	46.00	276.00
Moore (External Audit Fee) **PAID**	315.00	63.00	378.00
PlaySafety Ltd (Annual Playground Inspection) **PAID**	95.00	19.00	114.00
September Payments (to approve)			
Staff Expenditure (September)			802.85
Scofell Landscapes (September Grounds Maintenance)	729.16	145.83	874.99

The Council RESOLVED to approve the payment schedule. RFO to action.

9.2

Receipts: Councillors noted the following -	
Hannah Dunbar (Village Green Hire)	100.00

9.3 **Bank Statement and Reconciliation for August -**
Documents were scrutinised by councillors. The Reconciliation report was approved by Councillors.

9.4 **Budget Monitoring - C**ouncillors noted a budget monitoring document to the end of August 2026.

9.5 **Grant Application** - Councillors considered a grant application from Action for Pangbourne Toilets and approved a grant payment of £850. (Action – RFO to process the payment).

9.6 **Grant Application** - Councillors considered a grant application from Whitchurch Village Hall and approved a grant payment of £1200. (Action – RFO to process the payment).

10 **Governance**

10.1 Councillors noted receipt and publication of the External Auditor Report for 2025-26

10.2 Councillors noted the publication of the Notice of Conclusion of Audit for 2025-26

10.3 Councillors approved the appointment of Claire Connell as Internal Auditor for 2026-27

10.4 **To approve the adoption of an Equality and Diversity Policy.** This item was not considered by Councillors. Councillors agreed that new policies cannot be brought for adoption by Councillors on the recommendation of The Clerk, but must be listed for consideration via a Councillor motion on the agenda.
(Action – Cllr Smith will propose the adoption of an Equality and Diversity Policy at the next meeting)

10.5 **To approve the adoption of a General and Sexual Harassment Policy.** This item was not considered by Councillors. Councillors agreed that new policies cannot be brought for adoption by Councillors on the recommendation of The Clerk, but must be listed for consideration via a Councillor motion on the agenda. (Action – Cllr Smith will propose the adoption of a General and Sexual Harassment Policy at the next meeting)

11 **Health and Safety –** Councillors discussed a range of issues, with no decisions taken.

12 **Parish Council Action List.** New action **-** Clerk to circulate a proposed policy register for the information of Councillors. One action item was marked as complete, with others being updated.

13 **Items for Report and Inclusion on the next Agenda – deadline Thursday, 1st October 2026.**
Cllr Donahue outlined his intention to place two matters on the agenda for the October meeting and thanked Councillors for helpful input to the wording of both individual items.

14 **To confirm the date and time of next meeting –** Thursday 8th October 2026 at 8pm.

Signed…….. Date……..

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

Since the July meeting the work to resurface Eastfield Lane has been completed:

- We received a lot of positive feedback on the work that was done
- In addition to the new road surface, a lot of work has gone into improvements in the drainage at several points along the road, which along with the new kerbs, will make some very important improvements on the drainage along the road in an area that is very susceptible to flooding.

Virtual footpaths at the Greyhound intersection followed a few days later:

- The work was meant to include some resurfacing on the High Street in front of the Greyhound to improve drainage, but we were told that there were contractual issues, it wasn't included in the Eastfield Lane work.
- The virtual footpath painting was done a few days later. OCC Highways officers consider this an innovative solution bespoke to the narrow lanes and difficult crossing areas. This is the first use of grey crossing footpath for this type of situation.
- A few people, including me, questioned the visibility of the grey colour of the footpath, but the OCC Officer insisted that other colours – buff yellow or red would not be appropriate for the Conservations area. It's been pointed out that Goring has plans for a number of red crossing and we also have one by the tollbooth. OCC asked that we hold off requesting any changes until after a trial period. The Officer felt the rain may clear the traffic dirt off.
- Due to the bespoke nature of the virtual
- footpaths, there have been a number of questions over how it should work on the village message board. I have been responding to some of them and put an article on the village web-site, but should probably put one in the next Bulletin as well:
    - Do cars need to stop for pedestrians on High Street (no) vs Eastfield Lane (yes)
    - Have the Greyhound been consulted? What if someone parks on the footpath in front of the Greyhound?
    - Can a raised crossing be used like the one in Goring and by the Toll booth?
    - How does the Shared Space Symbol on Eastfield Lane really work?

Unsafe structure behind pavilion has been removed:

- At least three residents, including the exercise class teacher on the Village Green raised concerns about the safety of the area behind the pavilion.
- I organised a couple of working parties on the Village Green to remove the unsafe corrugated iron structure and other debris behind the pavilion. Thanks to Neil Huntington and Mark Dunstan for helping.
- The material was put in a skip and removed.

Whitchurch Cricket Club (WCC) refurbishment of the Pavilion:

- You may have seen builder's vans by the pavilion recently. The cricket club has had a builder working to refurbish the inside of the pavilion The primary work is to replace the showers with a kitchen area and other refurbishments throughout, including new electrical infrastructure and replacement of rotted walls.
- Bernarde and I have since had discussions the WCC and have had a tour of the facility – there are some promising developments described in a brief I have provided separately. This will be for discussed under agenda item 13 as we will likely be raising motions on this for the October meeting.

Large pothole filled at Hillside:

- OCC now allows FMS Super users to report larger potholes of up to 2x 3 sq m. This allowed me to have a large pothole filled at Hillside.
- Please let others know in the village that this is now possible. But also note that potholes can only be filled if they are 4cm in depth.

MP Surgery at Village Hall – I met with our MP Freddie van Mierlo, that was also attended by County Cllr Maggie Filapova-Rivers and OCC Leader Tim Beader. I raised a number of issues that they committed to following up on:

1. **Condition of Hardwick Road** – the upper narrow section of the road is in bad shape due to the poorly repaired utility trenches. Even though these don't meet the criteria for a FMS Super user to report a pothole as they are not 4cm in depth, they are a tripping hazard and have ruts that are dangerous for cyclists. I have asked the FMS Super User Team about this previously but and working with then again with Maggie's support. I have identified 23 areas that need to be resurfaces each approx. 1m x 5m.
2. **Resurfacing of Manor Road**. I have raised this to OCC Highways and Maggie previously as one of our priorities and am requesting again that it be considered for next year's road's programme. The road is worn in many places from the daily visits of large Thames Water tankers to the sewage plant at the end of the street.

3. **Poor conditions of the B471 from Whitchurch Hill to Cray's Pond** – I noted that I have heard concerns about the condition of the road after surface dressing applied by OCC Highways last June. It has never seemed to be of very good quality as the surface remained rough. It has now deteriorated with hot weather to the point where it is slippery and OCC has put in temporary signs to reduce the speed to 20mph cautioning drivers to be aware of skidding risks. **I have asked if Tim and Maggie please ask the Highways dept to investigate if the work was warranted, and whether it can be repaired or redone?** I have heard that the weather immediately following the work was severe and may have affected the surface, but regardless of the cause, the road is still poor quality with a dangerous surface. I have alerted the Goring heath Parish Council of my concerns and that I have raised these concerns at this meeting.
4. **Narrow Access Road and pavement by Toll Bridge on Pangbourne side of the river.** This is a long-standing pedestrian safety risk for residents travelling to and from Pangbourne. There was also a serious car accident there in the past year. I have raised this to Maggie, Cllr Matt Shakespear from Pangbourne and West Berkshire Council. Some feasibility work has been done, but we need support from MPs and Councillors on both sides of the river to get it progressed. I suggested that this could be a good issue to work with West Berkshire as part of the new Ridgeway Council as it is getting lost between the two councils at the moment.
5. **SODC Grants –** Maggie mentioned that she could help us secure grants for a new pavilion or tea hut, or potentially a storage facility for village green activities and accessible toilets. I stated that we were still investigating options before we go down that route.
6. **SODC Flood Resource** – I stated that the SODC Flooding engineer had stated that the village of Whitchurch had been approved for a £25,000 Flood Prevention Grant to address desilting of a culvert leading to the River Thames. We had been notified of this in April but have been unable to get in touch since then. Maggie and I have followed up on this but it is still in progress.
7. **Cedar Lodge noise issues** – Maggie and Feddie said that they were following up with SODC Planning Enforcement over the outside heating and cooling equipment impacts on neighbours. This will also likely be raised in another session with residents meeting with Freddie.

We also talked about other topics such as our support for Bathing Water Status in Pangbourne, the cycling Greenway between Goring and Wallingford and my support for the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan I am involved in as part of the Goring Gap Active Travel Group.

Note to Parish Council on High Steet community board:

- A resident of the village posted a note on the High St notice board expressing the view that the primary purpose of the noticeboards should be to support local events, particularly as not everyone has access to the internet or social media. In addition, many small businesses operate from homes in the village. Although commercial, these businesses provide services to local residents and therefore serve a valuable community function.
- It was suggested that to keep advertising rules clear and accessible, the current policy document could be replaced with a shorter, more supportive document - "something more friendly and less high-handed".
    - In addition, the parish council could seek planning consent for the main notice board to allow small-scale, local commercial activity.
    - Alternatively, the noticeboards could be relocated outside the conservation area—specifically along high-footfall Hardwick Road and near the school—to avoid extra restrictions.
- Interestingly and by way of an example, our neighbouring village of Goring-on-Thames has at least two noticeboards sited within its conservation area, one by the village hall, and another Parish Council board by Viv's café in the shopping arcade. At the top of the board it clearly states: "Local events on A4 portrait posters only. No staples". All appear to be laminated.

Residents' issues:

- A member of the green Team is refurbishing the three plaques by the cherry trees near the Village Green gate. They have been removed until the refurbishment is complete.
- We received a note of thanks for to the parish council and the team looking after the maze. I've not been for a while, but went today to visit the memorial tree there for my parents - Susie and Andrew Seager. Despite the drought the tree looked good which was nice to see. I passed this on to Sally and Pete Woolhouse.
- I received a call from a resident seeking feedback from OCC Highways on the residents parking consultation. They asked how many residents parking permits were issued and how many visitors permits were issued which I said I would follow up on.

APPENDIX 2 – DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT – **Cllr Peter Dragonetti**

- **Local Government Review**

After all the excitement and decision making in respect of the unitary authority to replace SODC etc, the Government announcement made yesterday was that it is undertaking a review of the LGR Programme, and that decisions in respect of several areas have been withdrawn. SODC and indeed all authorities that were affected by the LGR Programme have been instructed to cease work on the implementing the LGR.

As you might imagine, reorganising Local Government is quite a big operation, and so this is a something of concern. Will LGR ever happen here or not? There is an expression which perhaps is relevant here, "Order, Counter Order, Disorder". Fortunately, this is something parish councils are not involved with.

- **Devolution – Strategic Authority**

The government is also keen on Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSA) and has expressed a wish for a Thames Valley MSA to include Swindon and Buckinghamshire, and also wishes for there to be Spatial Development Strategies (SDS), and these should align with the MSA. Announcements on this should be happening in September and also alongside the Autumn Budget in October

All of these changes create huge amount of work for our officers at the council, and as we are a very efficient council, ie with little spare capacity to do extra stuff, all this change will be hard for the officers to manage.

- **Planning System**

The latest National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has come into effect, and the most interesting aspects are the strengthening of the protection of community assets, for example pubs and of protected landscapes, which includes what were formerly known as AONBS. There is also a requirement for housing development to go near railway stations, however Pangbourne and Goring are both in AONB, while Moulsford station is actually right on the boundary of the North Wessex Downs AONB. I wonder how these conflicting requirements will be addressed.