

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF WHITCHURCH-ON-THAMES PARISH COUNCIL
Virtually at 20:00 Thursday 11th February 2021

Members Present

Chairman	Jim Donahue
Members	Hanna Ferguson Katherine Higley Carrie Leadbeater-Hart Diana Smith Jon Steward

Officers Present:

Clerk	Jane M. Yamamoto
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Public and Press:	Resident
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The meeting started at 20:00.

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| 1 | Apologies for absence & Mission Statement | 20:00 |
| | No apologies were made. | |
| 2 | Declaration of Interests by Councillors on any items on the Agenda | |
| | No declarations were made. | |
| 3 | Public Forum - an opportunity for members of the public to express their point of view on any item on the agenda. | 20:05 |
| 3.1 | A resident raised their concern of the selling of The Greyhound Pub and its use potentially being changed to a private dwelling. They offered their help to support maintaining the property as a pub.
Cllr Smith responded by saying that the council was reviewing the boundaries of the pub land for pedestrian safety issue possibilities only. The Parish Council stated it would also like the pub to remain as a pub, but it had limited powers. It would wait to see if anyone applies for a change of use for the building before contemplating a strategy. | |
| 4 | Chairman's Announcements | 20:10 |
| | With the recent high river levels, the WOT Emergency team had been in communication via WhatsApp and email. Thankfully, it looked like the river levels were decreasing without flooding in the central village.

A resident contacted Thames Water to ensure the pumping station on Eastfield Lane was not overwhelmed as happened in 2014. They sent lorries to pump out foul water to ease the pressure on the system with extra surface water in the infrastructure.

I am sure that the work we have done to address drainage issue with OCC since the June flash flooding has helped. We will be pushing to complete the work for a longer-term solution next fiscal year. We also plan to prepare a leaflet for residents explaining how they should prepare for emergencies. | |

The Pre-school fete has unfortunately been postponed from May this year. They hoped to have it at some point this year, if at all possible, as they have significant fund-raising needs and they recognise that we could all use a party after this long lock-down!

With the recent fare change on the Toll Bridge, I contacted the owners to ask them to explain the recent toll increase. £20 toll card purchases now only provide 47 crossings instead of 45. This was effectively an increase from 40p per crossing to 43p. A rise from 40p to 45p for card holders was apparently agreed when the 2015 Secretary of State approved the new 60p toll for a 10-year period. The reason given was due to a recent rise in minimum wage. They said they had no plans for a further increase for at least 12 months.

I have had some residents' issues raised that I have logged in our register:

- Sadly, we lost long-time resident, Tanya Hawley, this month. Her widower, Peter, asked that we raise a request to the Bridge Company that health care workers in uniform be exempt from paying the toll at the bridge at least during the pandemic. I have raised this to them but did not have a positive response. This was something that others have asked for and they have considered, but they concluded that it would be difficult to draw a line between carers, health workers, and other essential workers such as teachers and doctors, etc.
- A resident raised concerns about yew trees along Manor Road potentially damaging their property and made a number of suggestions to help avoid this impact to their house. Cllr Higley was investigating this and liaising with SODC. We will need to consider options to address the concerns and will discuss it at the March meeting if there are any decisions that need to be made.
- Someone suggested that there may be a problem with litter and dog foul bags along Hardwick Road and that there may be a need for dog and/or litter bin(s) by the Veg Shed. Cllr Higley has offered to monitor the situation over the next few months. Hardwick Estate was not supportive of having an additional bin by the Veg Sed. Some walkers have anecdotally indicated that they left dog bags on Hardwick Road on a walk and picked them up on the way back. We can discuss at a future meeting once the situation was investigated.
- A resident of Hillside asked that we contact SODC about having the large Laurel at the bottom of Hillside cut back. It has grown quite large in recent years. They said SODC's initial response was that they had no budget for this.
- Action 173: Cllr Donahue to raise the request to SODC/OCC or get a private quote if they are not able to support it.

- 5 To approve minutes of the meeting of January 7th and 14th, 2021. 20:25
Resolution: The Council voted to approve the minutes for January 7 and 14, 2021.
- 6 Planning Applications – to discuss and agree Council's response to the following:
- 6.1 P20/S4054/HH
Royal Oak Cottage, High Street, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7HF
Clearance of a small garden area and erection of an extension to form additional living accommodation.
Conservation Officer has raised no objections to the proposed development.
Resolution: The Council voted to support the application.
- 6.2 P20/S4130/FUL 20:30
Uplands Cottage, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7HH

Demolition of existing bungalow and erection of replacement two-storey 5-bedroom dwelling (garage wing removed and dwelling repositioned closer to existing bungalow as shown on the amended plans).
Resolution: The Council voted to object this application specifically about overlooking still and recommended they follow the feedback provided by SODC that the second level be under a slanted roof with dormer windows.

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

7.1 SODC District Councillor Report (Attachment 1)

8 **Finance:**

20:35

8.1 **Resolution:** The following payments were approved for February:

Payment	Amount
Clerk salary (February 2021)	BACS
Zoom (February 2021)	£14.29 DD
Mole Valley (Benches for Polish Church)	£482.37 DC
Alexa Duckworth-Briggs (Planters for Polish Church)	£231.95
Nova Press (Bulletin)	£445 BACS
Kingdom Signs (replacement 2 m fence £1,828.04 and sign £483.26 = £2,311.30 ex VAT) Agenda Item 11 for insurance reimbursement of £1,969.85 (PC to pay £91.45)	£2,773.56 incl. VAT
VG Padlock	£29.50 DC
NALG (annual membership)	£66
SODC (Q4 Dog bin)	215.28
Heritage Trees (Village Green)	£45

8.2 CIL Monies received of £1,464.74 on January 22, 2021 due October 2020.

9 Standing Orders

20:50

9.1 Motion – Cllr Smith seconded by Cllr Higley (attachment 2)

1. Standing Order 1 page 3. To rectify a typing error the second s and t be replaced with u and v.

2. Standing Order 10 page 10. Minutes that do not require written notice. Add a further category

xviii To make a decision on a matter of urgency relating to the safety of the Village or Government emergency legislation or guidance (attachment 3)

Resolution: The Council voted to approve both Standing Orders.

9.2 Motion – Cllr Smith seconded by Cllr Higley

To add to the Standing Orders an Appendix giving changes to the Orders to apply to Remote Meetings. This should apply until May 2021 and be renewed as necessary. The Appendix compiled by the Clerk is attached to the agenda (Attachment 4)

Resolution: The Council voted to approve this Appendix.

- 9.3 Motion to clarify differences between Committees and Working Groups in Standing Order 4. - Cllr Smith seconded by Cllr Donahue (Attachment 5)
Resolution: The Council voted to defer this to March 11, 2021.
- 10 Terms of Reference 21:25
- 10.1 Motion to adopt Generic Terms of Reference template for Committees and Working Groups – Cllr Smith seconded by Cllr Donahue (Attachment 6)
Resolution: The Council voted to approve the TOR.
- 10.2 Motion to review and to approve the proposed tea hut replacement working group Terms of Reference - Cllr Ferguson and seconded by Cllr Donahue. (Attachment 7)
Resolution: The Council voted to approved the TOR.
- 11 Motion to accept quotation for 2m fence and sign seconded by Cllr Steward 21:45
(Attachment 8)
Resolution: The Council voted to approve the quotation.
- 12 Councillor Grant application (deadline February 19th)
Resolution: The Council voted to approve to apply for the additional football goal netting and the work to place concrete to secure the footings.
- 13 Pavements in Manor Road – Cllr Steward 21:50
Cllr Steward raised the concerns of residents that the pavement work in Manor Road was uneven and a potential hazard. It was updated that there was still work to be completed when the weather became warmer.
- 14 Village Hall Management Report – Cllr Donahue (Attachment 9)
Cllr Donahue presented the report by Jean Marc Grosfort. He advised that the Village Hall’s governing document needed to be updated. As the Village Hall is a charity and standard TOR would not apply, it had been recommended that the relationship between the Parish Council, trustees of the Village Hall and the Village Hall Management Committee be clarified.
Resolution: Cllr Higley volunteered to become a trustee and work with the members on drafting a document. As this required some urgency, an Extraordinary Meeting would be called to approve the updated document.
- 15 To review progress on any open actions from previous Parish Council meetings and agree any revision of actions on the action list.
- 16 To confirm the date and time of the next Meeting on 11th March 2021 at 20:00.
- 17 Confidential discussion for thank you notes from the Parish Council
No new thanks you notes identified. Councillors should send emails ahead of the meeting with candidates in the future.
- 18 Meeting Close 22:00

Attachment 1

Report to Whitchurch on Thames Parish Council February 2021 – Cllr Dragonetti

SODC Budget and Council Tax

The proposed budget for SODC will be considered at the SODC full Council meeting this evening. The Council continues to face challenges in achieving a balanced budget over the medium term, with the consequences of the ambition in previous years to have a very low council tax continuing to have an impact. The Council is limited to a council tax rise of £5 for a Band D dwelling, so the accumulated shortfall cannot easily be rebuilt. This rise will be considered at the Council meeting along with the overall budget.

I would point out that the current SODC element of the Council Tax at £126 is dwarfed by the County Council element of £1,527, and SODC's council tax is still one of the lowest in the country. The financial year that is about to end has been adversely affected by loss of income from car parks etc and additional costs arising from the pandemic, although the grants that the Council has been giving to business and individuals are funded by the government.

The budget for the coming year includes the development of the project to establish a housing delivery vehicle (corporate speak for a distinct business) to enable the Council to build genuinely affordable homes.

Covid

The Business Support Grants scheme is still running, and while I am, of course, not aware of the details of grants to businesses etc, as a Trustee of Goring Heath Parish Hall I was pleased to learn that a further grant was received at the end of January.

The Council is supporting individuals with grants, and those poorer households already in receipt of Council Tax Support are being granted a reduction in liability of up to a further £270 in addition the £150 already granted. The waste bin collections have been disrupted through the Biffa workforce being affected by Covid, and while the garden waste service is still currently on hold it is hoped that it will resume shortly.

Planning

The Council is handling a higher number of planning applications, up 17% on the same period last year. The enforcement team still have a heavy work load, but have recruited consultants and permanent staff to address the backlog.

Peter Dragonetti

Report on Village Hall activities 2020 and 2021

February 2020 was the last time we had activities in our Village Hall. In March we had planned a Special Afternoon tea in support to Poppy Appeal, but new restrictions taken by government cancelled that event.

We also lost all our club and group activities from March 2020.

We did all what we could in April and May, after a full COVID Risk Assessment to set up and organise the Hall by investing in all necessary protections, signages, gels and products to be able to re-open safely - unfortunately this has not been possible up to now.

The Camera club had originally proposed to come back 1st of July but they informed us in June that the committee is postponing the return to weekly meetings till September and then till further notice due to the high percentage of members being over 60.

The bridge club due to social distancing rules could not consider coming back till all clear.

The yoga team tried a few meetings when authorised with proper distancing and limited participants, but it was not economically viable and stopped.

So, the team has used the opportunity to paint and redecorate the toilets, to finish the installation of the kitchen with the new appliances and cooking material, to change the flower arrangement outside, to clean the carpark where local residents had dropped bags of material and clothes, to clear, clean and re-organise the space under the stage and to consider what is needed to be done before our new opening this spring.

- 1- Repair and paint the front of the stage.
- 2- Reinforce the mobile stair set for the stage.
- 3- Repair the toilet next to the stage (which has a leak and needs a new part).
- 4- Repair and paint some of the boards used during the Art Exhibition.
- 5- Paint part of the walls in the main hall and the meeting room.
- 6- In April empty and clean the gutters.

As main activities for the future of our hall we still plan before May 2021 to:

- 1- Install a proper reservation system which will be linked to our website and will give everyone a better view of the activities and reservations made.
- 2- Set up new contract to be used for every event or meeting
- 3- Improve the web site with new text, new photos and new rates.
- 4- Set up a minimum marketing plan to promote the hall.
- 5- Set up a mini-investment plan to keep the hall in proper condition based on our monthly maintenance report.

As regards financing we received a £10,000 grant from SODC and with the new boiler paid by the PC, we can support the running of the hall with no revenues.

Some savings have been made on salary expenses since January.

Our budget for 2021-

We ended 2020 with £6800 in credit. With the assumption that business was coming back slowly from January we forecasted a positive year end of 2021, including the annual PC contribution of £1000. With up to the first 6 months of 2021 with no business, our finances could become a challenge. As soon as we know when we can properly have the clubs and groups returning to the hall, we will redo a budget for 2021 and will present it to the PC.

We are finalising documents for our new bank account. It was a big surprise to be told, totally out of the blue and with no explanations, that HSBC had decided to close our bank account. All discussions with them could not solve the situation. We have approached Co-Operative bank and we hope to have a new bank account before we resume activities at the hall.

We would like to mention the fence behind the Village Hall. We have to accept that it looks cleaner than the old one but does not help with the luminosity inside the hall. JMG has been discussing with the group installing the fence to see if we could improve the situation.

All in all, it has been a very challenging time for all village halls, and we are very much looking forward to welcoming everyone back.