



MINUTES OF MEETING OF WHITCHURCH-ON-THAMES PARISH COUNCIL
At the Village Hall at 20:00 Thursday, February 8, 2024

Members Present

Chair Jim Donahue

Vice-Chair Diana Smith

Members

Katherine Higley
Debbie Leach
Paul O'Grady
Frances Parkes

Officers Present:

Clerk, RFO Jane Yamamoto

Public and Press: 1 Henley Standard reporter

The meeting started at 20:00.

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

Cllr Brazil sent his apologies.

2 **Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interests.

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

4 **Chairman's Announcements** 20:05

High Street Traffic scheme – was approved by OCC Highways Cabinet Member on 25th January. Feedback from OCC is that the scheme is likely to take at least 3-4 months before implementation. They stated it was likely to be April at the earliest.

Residents Issues:

- **Yellow lines need repainting at the school on Eastfield Lane** – Resident asked if we could raise this with OCC as parents are parking in an inconsiderate manner and blocking the road at school drop-off. The school has reported it. Two Councillors have been in touch with OCC about this but received the impression from them that this was not a priority due to budget constraints.
- **Light still out in upper and lower narrows**
 - Light at upper narrows (no. 7) – OCC and SSE still going around the houses – SSE has visited the site 4 times and say it is working, but OCC says it is not. They are trying to arrange a meeting with both on site week of 12 Feb.
 - I have also asked if they can address the light near the Little House that is covered in ivy.
- **Cleaning of streets and pavements on Hardwick Road and High Street** – OCC have now cleaned the streets again and also had a mobile team clean the pavements on Hardwick Road, but didn't seem to do the High Street pavements. Thanks to Jane for organising this! I have discussed with Jill from the Green Team an option of requesting resident of the village to participate in a village "Spring Cleaning" by encouraging them to sweep the pavement in front of their homes.

- **Abandoned bike locked on to a pole near The Greyhound in Eastfield Lane** – The bicycle has now been removed by the owner.
- **Posters on the Village sign** – The large blue Goring Gap Walk sign has been removed – also one on a tree at Muddy Lane. Policy for advertising in the village to be discussed later on the agenda.
- **Vegetation overhanging from Walled Garden** – We have put the Green Team activity to cut back the vegetation on hold due to resistance from the land owner. There are also no fig dropping this time of year so not urgent. It may be best to wait awhile to see if the house is sold.
- **Toll Booth is out of cards** – Bridge company says that they are planning to replace the current card system due to supply issues of the cards but are trying to obtain some as a stop-gap until a new system can be implemented. Apparently, residents without a card can still get the discounted rate if they request.
- **Playground surface and Climbing Frame**– A FixMyStreet complaint was raised about the condition of the Playground surface being slippery and climbing frame being covered with rust. The members of the Playground Working Group are aware of this and plan to address rust and clean the surfaces when the weather improves in the Spring. The Chair is unable to post a message on the FixMy Street comment as it is now closed – stating that they should contact their Town Council.

5 To approve minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council meeting of January 11, 2024.

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the minutes.

6 Planning Applications – to discuss and agree Council’s response to the following: 20:15

6.1 P23/S4055/S73 EXT granted

Eastfield House, Eastfield Lane, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7EJ

Variation of conditions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 13 and 14 of planning permission P11/S0126 (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) to allow changes to tree protection measures and landscaping details.

Resolution: The Parish Council voted to submit the comments that they support the Planning Officer’s decision to have the outbuildings removed from the planning application.

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

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

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

8 **Finance:** 20:30

8.1 To approve the payment schedule for February:

Payment	Sub-total	VAT	Total
Staff expenditure			£541.80
APT (annual grant)	£800.00		£800
NSALG Membership	£55.00	£11.00	£66.00
CFO			£55
Herald Graphics	£496.00		£496.00

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the payments.

8.2 Receipts:

Receipts	Amount
WOT Allotment Society	£275.71

8.3 Bank Reconciliations (January 2024) (Attachments 3, 4, 5, 6)

9.0 Motion to approve the Maintenance Contractor for the next 3 years (Attachment 7,8)– Cllr Donahue seconded by Cllr Parkes 20:40

- 9.1 The Council discussed the comparison table of the Maintenance Contractors. There was only a 10% price difference between them. It was agreed to remain with the incumbent contractor, Scofell.
Action: Clerk to update the Maintenance Schedule of the contract with the correct number of cuttings and scope to be included in updated contract.
Resolution: The Parish Council voted to approve Scofell as the Maintenance Contractor for the village for the next 3 years.
- 10.0 Motion to approve the Policy for Signage in the Village (Attachment 9) Cllr Donahue seconded by Cllr Parkes 20:50
- 10.1 The Parish Council discussed the policy for the signage in the village. The Council recommended that private schools and organisations, for example, could contact the Toll Booth to advertise any events. The Council also thought that part of the policy should be that if signs were placed up, they should be removed.
- 10.2 The Whitchurch on Thames Parish Council policy for advertisements in the village is as follows:
- The village offers notice boards on the High Street and Manor Road for advertising events in the area.
 - The small notice board on the Village Hall is intended for events taking place in the Village Hall.
 - The village entrance signs will generally not be used for advertisements. Exceptions to this policy must be approved by the Clerk and could include advertisements for:
 - The Fete
 - Events at the village schools
 - A special event at the church
 - A charity providing specific benefits to the village that can't use the toll bridge advertising
 - Requests for advertising should receive the following replies:
 - Charitable organisations should be directed to the Toll Bridge, which allows limited advertisement for charities
 - The policy for all other organisations should:
 - Make use the village notice boards
 - Reasonable advertisement on existing wooden fences or posts in the village will be tolerated if removed after the event
 - No advertisements should be made on Highway signs
 - No advertisements should be made on trees
 - Any advertisements not following these policies will be removed.
- Resolution:** The Parish Council voted to approve the policy.
- 10.3 Cllr Leach will investigate wooden board near to the school entrance and the Clerk will post the Advertising Policy on the Village website.
- 11.0 Motion to approve Standing Orders 2024 (Attachment 10) – Cllr Donahue seconded by Cllr Parkes 20:55
- 11.1 **Resolution:** The Parish Council approved the Standing Orders.
- 12.0 Motion to approve a £500 contribution towards the cost of a replacement post in the WOT Allotments – Cllr Higley seconded by Cllr Smith
- 12.1 **Resolution:** The Parish Council voted to defer the Motion.
- 13 Motion to send a request to OCC Highways for the badly potholed and crumbling carriageway of Eastfield Lane to be resurfaced, apart from the section at the east end which was resurfaced a few years ago. Also, that the damaged verges are reinstated and where there are none, that kerbs are placed on each side of the lane to protect the verges - Cllr Smith seconded by Cllr Higley
- 13.1 **Resolution:** The Parish Council voted to defer the Motion.

- 14 Motion to remove the laurels and scrub that are on the boundary of the playground with SOHA land and replace with a beech hedge. SOHA are supportive of this. Cllr Higley seconded by Cllr Smith. 21:00
- 14.1 SOHA have agreed to give the PC money to remove the laurels. Mend the Gap recommended that a tunnel of trees for the children to play through be planted and encouraged to grow. SOHA would pay for a fence along the boundary side and fund the planting of the trees. Cllr Higley will seek advice from Heritage Trees to remove the laurels and the planting. She will remove the scrub herself. SOHA will also speak to all residents involved. The resident most affected will be provided with a fence. The laurels are currently taking up too much valuable playground space. SOHA will also re-wild around the tree with posts that they own in another area in Manor Road.
Resolution: The Parish Council voted to approve the Motion.
- 15 Motion to approve that SSEN provide additional black sheathing on top of the low voltage cables in Manor Road. 21:05
Resolution: The Parish Council voted to approve the Motion.
- 16 GDPR Forms for 2024- Clerk
- 16.1 The Clerk had reminded Councillors to complete their annual GDPR training either from the link that she had provided or from their separate work.
- 17 To review progress on any open actions from previous Parish Council meetings and agree any revision of actions on the action list.
- 18 To confirm the date and time of the next meetings is Thursday, February 8, 2024 at 20:00. 21:10
- 19 Confidential discussion for thank you notes from the Parish Council
It was agreed to send thank you letters to the members of TAPWG that are not Councillors.
- 20 Meeting closed. 21:15

Attachment 1

Report to Whitchurch on Thames Parish Council February 2024

Joint Local Plan

The consultation on the New Joint Local Plan has been extended to 26 February – so an extra weekend for us all to put our view in.

This local plan is reducing the number of new homes that were proposed in the previous Local Plan which the newly elected administration was forced to adopt in 2020, and in particular the Strategic site of Chalgrove Airfield with an expectation of 3000 new homes has been dropped, as well as two smaller sites in Nettlebed in the AONB.

The Chalgrove site was heavily backed by Homes England, a government agency, but objected to by the owner of the airfield. The site is also very isolated without any public transport so is not a sustainable location.

There are all sorts of interesting policies coming forward, and the consultation document puts forward and explains alternatives and the merits and drawbacks.

I note that on the large Grenoble Road Scheme just south of Oxford the option of undergrounding the power cables is in the consultation document, picking up from a motion I put forward some years ago about the benefit of doing this.

I would urge everyone to have a look at this, and to respond to the consultation. <https://theconversation.southandvale.gov.uk/corporate-services/jlp-preferred-options-consultation/>

Council Budget

At this time of year, we have to set our budget for the coming year and produce an important document called the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) This looks forward about 5 years to forecast if the Councils finances are sustainable. As you may know, several councils have had severe financial difficulties because of bad decisions and management, and we are aware of other councils that are approaching similar problems.

While we obtain much finance from Council Tax, there is also funding from Central Government. This year we should be receiving an extra 4.63% from Central Government, £6.775 million. The headline figure local government increase funding was 6.5%, with a maximum for District Council of 4.9%. This is conditional on Council Tax being increased by 5%.

SODC has increases in costs, including a salaries settlement of 6.5%, and increases in the cost of the Biffa waste contract which has been extended for a further 2 years.

Local government finance is a complex issue, and we are fortunate that SODC does not have responsibility for Social Services where the cost pressures and demands are relentless, and we are also fortunate that the SODC has been well managed financially.

Areas of concern are the costs of the Cornerstone Arts Centre in Didcot, which costs about £500,000 a year, and we are looking at reducing that deficit. Escaping the expensive temporary offices in Milton Park has been a good saving.

Below is an extract from the report to the Scrutiny Committee this week from the Head of Finance which indicates a satisfactory position.

62. In view of the process undertaken and his own knowledge of the budget, the head of finance is satisfied that the budget for 2024/25 is both prudent and robust and reflects a positive improvement over previous estimated budget positions for that year. However, to maintain that position in future years will require non-inflationary cost pressures to be managed so that net expenditure remains sustainable. The Chief Executive has provided assurance to the head of finance that this will be achieved.
63. The Head of Finance is satisfied that there is very strong member and officer commitment to ensure financial sustainability is achieved in the longer term, and that responsible action will continue to be taken in a timely manner, should that become necessary as the longer-term financial position becomes clearer as the funding intentions of Government become known in coming years.

Peter Dragonetti

**Attachment 2
REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS FEBRUARY 2024
FROM CLLR CLLR KEVIN BULMER**

GENERAL OCC REPORT

COUNCILS SECURE £600M ADDITIONAL FUNDING PACKAGE

Communities Secretary Michael Gove last month announced a total of £600m of additional funding for local authorities in England – including a £500m addition to the social care grant, and a £100m increase in core spending power. OCC is expected to benefit to the tune of approximately £5m.

BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2024/25

This unexpected development noted above means that the Liberal Democrat/Green administration and opposition groups are having to rework their Budget proposals. As previously reported, the minority administration cannot pass a Budget without support of the opposition parties. A meeting of Full Council on Tuesday 20th February will vote on the options, however intense negotiations between the parties are expected in advance of this once the proposals have been published.

JUMP IN PROFITS MADE KEEPING CHILDREN IN CARE

The Times reported last month that Children's groups have accused private sector-backed firms of making "obscene" profits, charging councils up to £280,000 per year to care for young people. An investigation reveals the average cost of residential care for a child is £5,400 per week, exceeding £10,000 in some cases. Councils pay 25% more than two years ago, and the income of the top 20 independent care operators reached £1.63bn last year, with 19% as profit - up six points from the year before. The House Magazine survey shows the average annual cost of residential placement is £281,000, six times the cost of keeping an adult in prison. The highest annual average was £373,000 in the London borough of Sutton. The Children's Home Association argued: "There is a huge difference between 'profit' and 'profiteering'. The cost increase between public and private provision has been comparable for several years."

FIXMYSTREET APP IMPROVEMENTS FOR QUICKER AND MORE EFFICIENT RESPONSE

Oxfordshire's FixMyStreet app, which allows residents to report potholes, faulty streetlights and a host of other street defects and queries, has been updated. The number of categories has been streamlined but they have now been split up into sub-categories to make it easier for people to find the section they are looking for. In some cases, more information and illustrations have been provided to help users choose the most appropriate category. The changes are aimed at reducing the number of reports sent to the wrong department or council, which can delay the problem being resolved. The updated version also includes an aerial map of the county, as well as a regular map, to help people pinpoint the location of the problem. The changes will be monitored over the next three months to see what impact they have, and the views of users will be sought. More than 1,000 reports are regularly made to Fix My Street every week, with users encouraged to include photographs of the defect to help the inspectors. Where the issue is Oxfordshire County Council's responsibility, an inspector will prioritise it depending on how dangerous it is and the person making the report will be kept up to date on its progress.

LAUNCH OF ALL-ELECTRIC BUS FLEET TO SERVICE OXFORD PASSENGERS

A partnership between OCC and bus operators has launched what will be one of the biggest UK fleets of electric buses outside London. The £82.5 million project will deliver 159 new battery buses on to the roads of Oxford – the first of which have already gone into service. It has also funded two associated electric charging hubs at the city's bus depots. The bus fleet has been funded through a collaboration between the county council and Oxford Bus Company, owned by The Go-Ahead Group, and Stagecoach. The council was awarded £32.8m from the government's Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) scheme and contributed £6m directly, while bus operators invested £45m. The Conservative Opposition welcomes this development but continues to lament the focus on Oxford at the expense of rural areas.

DISPOSE OF LIMITED QUANTITIES OF DIY WASTE FREE – BUT BOOK FIRST

A new system is in place at recycling centres following change in legislation. Oxfordshire residents can now dispose of limited amounts of DIY waste free at the county's household waste recycling centres (HWRCs) by using an online booking system. The booking system, which was launched by OCC last month, means householders wanting to use their free DIY waste allocation will need to book in advance through the [website](#). The move follows a change in government legislation which now permits small amounts of household DIY waste to be disposed of free. The legislation came into force at the beginning of January. Online bookings for free DIY waste only are for a single visit. Oxfordshire residents will need to register their address, vehicle registration number, email address, and the date they wish to visit, along with the site they want to use. They will then receive an immediate email confirmation of their booking, which must be shown to site team on arrival. It is important residents stick to their booked date otherwise they may be charged, and only authorised bookings will be accepted.

Free allocations are limited to five standard DIY items for free, or one plasterboard sheet, once every seven days. Where more than the allocated free allowance is presented, the cheapest items will be treated as free. Any DIY waste above this level or deposited more frequently than every seven days will remain fully chargeable at the advertised rates. Full details and examples of charging scenarios are available on the [Oxfordshire County Council website](#) and will be available on site. Examples of DIY waste include baths, sinks, toilets, cisterns, and a 20-litre bag of rubble or tiles. Five of these items would make up a household's free seven-day allocation. The booking system for free DIY waste will only permit residents to make one visit every seven days. For example, if a free booking is made for a Tuesday, the next free allocation will not be permitted until the following Tuesday. However, all residents can visit more often than every seven days, but the DIY waste brought on those visits will then be fully chargeable at the advertised rates. The booking system and free DIY allowance is only for Oxfordshire residents. Non-Oxfordshire residents can still use the county's sites for DIY waste without booking but will be charged in full at the advertised rates.

PROPOSAL TO MOVE COUNTY COUNCIL OFFICES TO NEW OFFICES TO PROGRESS

After extensive and independent evaluation, and consideration by a cross-party cabinet advisory group on city centre accommodation, it's proposed that the council moves its Oxford headquarters from County Hall to a reimaged Speedwell House campus. The sale or lease of County Hall is expected to meet the refurbishment costs of Speedwell House, which is already owned by OCC. The old part of County Hall, which includes the council chamber and coroner's court, would be included in engagement with the market to inform a final decision on its future. The report to Cabinet was clear that doing nothing is not an option – there would be significant investment required in County Hall to bring up to appropriate standards. It adds that by proposing to proceed with relocation to Speedwell House, not only would the council regenerate that part of Oxford but the release of County Hall would allow for better strategic planning in the West End of Oxford. The report was approved by Cabinet on Tuesday, 23 January.

Address: Councillor Kevin Bulmer, County Hall, New Road, Oxford OX1 1ND

Email/Tel: kevin.bulmer@oxfordshire.gov.uk 07803005680

Twitter: [KevinBulmer@bulmer_kevin](https://twitter.com/bulmer_kevin)





Attachment 4

Scofell will carry out the services (**Services**) and/or provide and install the materials (**Materials**) for the customer and on the basis specified below:

Customer	Whitchurch upon Thames Parish Council
Start Date	1 st March 2024
End Date	31 st November 2025
Annual Fee	£6250.00 + vat per annum
Payment Terms	Monthly in arrears @ £694.44 + vat per month – payment to be made 30 days after date of invoice (for 9 months March – November)
Specification	As per client specification 2023
Internal ref:	4194

Any services or materials to be provided by Scofell under this quotation will be governed by Scofell’s Standard Terms current at the date of acceptance of this quotation a copy of which can be obtained from Scofell.

Signed for

Scofell Landscapes Limited

By its duly authorised representative

Belinda Wickens		7 th February 2024
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Signed on behalf of

Whitchurch upon Thames Parish Council

By its duly authorised representative

J.M. Yamanst		14 MARCH 2024
(print name)	(signature)	(date)

