MINUTES OF MEETING OF WHITCHURCH-ON-THAMES PARISH COUNCIL
At the Village Hall at 20:00 Thursday, July 10, 2025

Councillors Present: Jim Donahue (Chairman), Diana Smith, Katherine Higley, Debbie Leach and Frances Parkes.
Officers Present: Brian Inglis (Clerk and RFO)
Public and Press: 2 members of the public and Alex Carter (Henley Standard)
District or County Councillor: District Cllr Peter Dragonetti

1 **Apologies for absence & Parish Council Declaration** –
There were apologies for absence from Cllr Paul O'Grady and Cllr Romilly Swann. The Chairman read the Parish Council Declaration

2 **Declarations of Interest –** There were none.

3 **Public Forum** – A member of the public spoke on an item on the agenda, distributing a handout to councillors in support of his comments and was thanked for his contribution.

4 **To approve minutes of the meeting of June 12, 2025.**
Resolution: The Council voted to approve the minutes, and these were signed by the Chairman.

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

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

6.1 SODC District Councillor Report – Cllr Dragonetti spoke on a previously submitted a report. See **Appendix 2**

6.2 OCC County Councillor Report – No report

7 **Planning Applications** – to agree Council's response to the following notification(s).

7.1 **P25/S1535/HH -** Existing rear extension to be replaced with new single storey orangery extension.
Meadow Court High Street Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7DB
Councillors agreed to submit the following comment – *"The Parish Council notes the comments of the Heritage Officer and neighbour and encourages the applicant to review their application in greater detail with these consultees"*

7.2 **P25/S1536/LB -** Existing rear extension to be replaced with new single storey orangery extension.
Meadow Court High Street Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7DB
Noting that this application is the "Listed Building" element to the above application, councillors agreed to submit the same comment – *"The Parish Council notes the comments of the Heritage Officer and neighbour and encourages the applicant to review their application in greater detail with these consultees"*

8 The Clerk gave a brief report on decisions made by SODC since the last meeting and updated Councillors on the status of applications which are still under consideration, including works to trees in the village. Councillors noted that a significant amendment has been made to Application no P24/S2959/FUL and agreed to send a comment to the SODC planning team.

9 **Finance**:

9.1 To approve the payment schedule for July:

Payments:	**Sub-total**	**VAT**	**Total**
Staff Expenditure		-	620.20
Scofell – Monthly Grounds Maintenance – Inv 36534	694.44	138.89	833.33
OALC – Cllr Donahue (Training)	30.00	6.00	36.00
Pd - Lloyds Bank – June Bank Charges		-	4.25
Pd - Heritage Tree Services - Playground	345.17	69.03	414.20
Pd - Annual Assembly Refreshments (Cllr Reimbursement)			50.40
Pd - Leslie Maynerd – GROW Team Expenses (Reimbursement)		-	39.99

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the payments.

9.2 To note receipts as detailed:

Receipts: There were no receipts	**Amount**

9.3 **Bank Statements and Reconciliations for June 2025:**
The RFO gave a concise report on documents which had been previously circulated and scrutinised by councillors, answering questions to the satisfaction of councillors.

10 **Motion:** The Parish Council to accept an s19 grant from OCC of £2,500 and to spend the whole amount on the Topographical survey to be carried out by Brunel Ltd.
Proposer: Cllr Donahue**, Seconder:** Cllr Smith
Resolution: Councillors voted to approve the motion.

11 **Motion:** Conduct a review of dead trees and branches on Muddy Lane in cooperation with the Green Team Guardian and WOTHabs to make a recommendation to the Parish Council on which ones should be removed.
Proposer: Cllr Donahue**, Seconder:** Cllr Smith
Resolution: Councillors voted to approve the motion, clarifying that a qualified tree surgeon would be engaged to carry out this review. (Action – Cllr Higley to secure quotations from 3 tree surgeons)

12 To consider the increased instances of dog fouling in the village and to agree steps which the Parish Council can take to address this problem.
Councillors agreed to invite the school to become involved in producing artwork for some new signage, in the hope of such signage having an impact on those responsible (Action – Cllr Leach to contact the school)

13 Benches on The Village Green - Cllr Parkes gave an update on the ongoing plan for a replacement bench, involving a resident, and outlined some long-term plans for benches on the village green in general.

14 The Clerk gave a report to Councillors on the progress of the Hardwick Road Verges Project, as follows -
The Highways permit is yet to be issued, but our contractor is hopeful of this being imminent.
The posts and reflectors have been delivered to the site.

15 To review progress on any open actions from previous Parish Council meetings and agree any revision of actions on the action list. The list was updated, with some actions being marked as complete.

16 To consider the wording for any Thank You notes to be sent on behalf of the Parish Council.
(Action – The Chair to send thank you notes to two residents as identified)

17 Items for Report and Inclusion on the next scheduled Agenda – deadline Thursday, September 4, 2025.

18 To confirm the date and time of next meeting as Thursday September 11, 2025 at 20:00

APPENDIX 1 – CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS – Cllr Jim Donahue

Muddy Lane adverse possession – I am pleased to report that I have received the Official copy of register title confirming that the Whitchurch Parish Council as the owner of the lane. It has been suggested that the get a new sign or potentially a Parish Council sticker to cover the SODC portion of the Muddy Lane sign.

Related to this I received two residents' issues:

- The Primary school raised an issue about an old, barbed wire fence found in the trees near the Village Green by the school entrance. I was able to remove this with Muddy Lane Guardian Neil Huntington.
- I also received concerns from a neighbouring resident with small children about dangerous dead trees and branches along the lane that risk falling on children or other users of the lane. I have raised a motion for discussion later in today's meeting.

Highways Issues escalation – I have escalated the 9 priority issues agreed in our June meeting to OCC Highways and our County Councillor:

- Three issues were raised to Jon Beale of OCC Highways who provided the following updates:
    - Pedestrian Crossing at Greyhound – He noted similarities to a project in Goring at Station Road, and is working with colleagues to get the whole junction area resurfaced first, so to provide an even surface for the small section of footway, as well as improving the surface over the wider junction. Currently the surfacing aspect is shaping up for next financial year, but he is looking for opportunity to bring this forward.
    - Lower Narrow Pedestrian Safety – he had opportunity to discuss with one of the leading UK bollard manufacturers about making a thin shallow mounted, flexible bollard that is aesthetically 'smart' in appearance. Rather surprisingly, they harnessed the idea (as no other manufacturer makes these) and were looking to undertake development on this… he will keep us informed although it is uncertain how long the product may take to get to the marketplace… The downside of any bollard will encourage the buildup of road detritus as machine road sweeping will not be easily possible.
    - Bollard on Lower Narrows - The existing leaning bollard has now been inspected and is in the workstream of being replaced through our routine maintenance programme.
- Feedback on potential resurfacing for Eastfield Lane, Manor Road, Hardwick Road and Path Hill Farm Road was less forthcoming – stating that there are ongoing inspections and work prioritisation processes. I pushed back for more specific and definitive responses and know our County Councillor is also following up.

Village maintenance:

- Thanks to our clerk for following up with the contractor to get the weed killing done and removal of larger weeds.
- Considering the dry weather and grass not needed cutting – Frances will communicate with the maintenance contractor.

Resident issues:

- New Bench on Village Green – Frances is working with a resident to replace one of the benches that is damage with a new one in honour of a former resident.
- I am still following up on getting a High Street drain cleared that was missed previous drains clearing earlier this year.
    - FMS super users have now been given the ability to action blocked drains – meant to be fixed by 12th July. [Note: these were cleared the evening of 10th July following the Parish Council meeting]
- A resident raised concerns over an overgrown hedge obstructing a pavement. I followed up and the gardener involved stated that they were unable to trim the hedge before the beginning of July due to bird nesting regulations. The hedge has now been cut back as of last week.

APPENDIX 2 – REPORT from DISTRICT COUNCILLOR – Cllr Peter Dragonetti

IT System

Over the last few weeks some of the IT Systems at SODC (and Vale) have been suspended while they were upgraded, and although there are still some things that are not running as smoothly, most of the systems are now back up. However, this has created a backlog of matters such as planning application to build up which is now being addressed. I understand that there will be another period of downtime before the end of the year to do more work of a similar kind. The main part of this process has been to move systems off the Capita systems and the next stage will be to replace the current system with a new one.

Several people have reported problems with accessing the planning system, and I have also experienced this, and there will be recognition of this issue when considering comments on applications and the associated deadlines.

Capital Grants

This scheme offers funding for parish councils and community organisation, although as these have to be capital projects rather revenue it can be difficult to frame an application that meets the criteria. However, some of the examples of past grants can indicate possible opportunities. There is a deadline of 25 July

Councillor Grant

The amount I have available has been increased to £7500, and the scheme opens on 18 August. Information about the funding guidelines and decision-making timetable is on the SODC Website

Planning

In May there were 8 planning appeal decisions, of which 6 were dismissed and 2 allowed. Interestingly, 2 out of the appeals dismissed were decisions that had been made by the Planning committee against officers' recommendation

Local Government Reorganisation

The favoured option of South Oxfordshire and The Vale of White Horse District councils is for there to be two unitary councils in Oxfordshire, with the City, Cherwell and West Oxfordshire forming one council and South Oxfordshire and Vale joining with West Berkshire to form the Ridgeway Council.

A public engagement exercise is still running but ends very soon.

More information on the internet, google ridgewaycouncil.org or go to www.southandvale.gov.uk/twocouncils

New Offices in Didcot

Although the days of SODC might be numbered, one of the pieces of unfinished business is the building of new offices to replace the one destroyed by fire 10 years ago. The plan was to build a modest size building in Didcot opposite the station, and the plans are all drawn up and the Planning Committee of SODC has just given it planning permission.

While it could be argued that there is now no need for such offices when the Council will no longer exist, many of the back-office functions will carry on, and not everything can be done from home. It is therefore sensible to proceed to complete the current planning stage of the process so that a decision to proceed or not proceed in actually creating the building is not blocked by the lack of planning permission.

Although it's rather like marking your own homework, in this case planning permission for the new office is given by the Planning Committee of the District Council. This may not be the ideal way of doing this, but it's the only way under the current legal framework.