MINUTES OF MEETING OF WHITCHURCH-ON-THAMES PARISH COUNCIL
At the Village Hall at 20:00 Thursday, November 13, 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: 5 Members of the Public
District or County Councillor: Cllr Dragonetti (SODC)

1 **Apologies for absence & Parish Council Declaration** –
Apologies from Cllrs Paul O'Grady and Romilly Swann. Cllr Donahue read the Parish Council Declaration

2 **Declarations of Interest –** None

3 **Public Forum** – One member of the public spoke about the condition of the gate post at the top of Muddy Lane. This item was not on the agenda, and the points made were noted by Councillors.

4 **To approve minutes of the meeting of October 9, 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 from Cllr Peter Dragonetti - See **Appendix 2**

6.2 OCC County Councillor – No Report

7 **Planning Applications** – Councillors agreed the following response(s).

7.1 **P25/S3121/O** The erection of four dwellings with all matters reserved except access.
Land south of Hardwick Road Hardwick Road Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7HL
Response: After some discussion, including input from members of the public, Councillros voted to OBJECT to this application, on several grounds. Comments can be viewed on the SODC Planning Portal

7.2 **P25/S3326/HH** First floor dormer extension to the rear for new ensuite bathroom to principal bedroom. Replacement cladding to front and rear gables of new weathered ash. New enlarged doors to rear garden. New roof light to stair well. New timber pergola to rear with glazed roof.
13 Swanston Field, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7HP
Response: Cllrs voted to support this application.

7.3 **P25/S3228/FUL** Replacement of a fence. Existing fence is in poor state of repair in places. Proposal to increase height of garden boundary fence to 1.8m from 1.35m.
Land adjacent to Church Cottages, High Street, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7DL
Response: Cllrs voted to OBJECT to this application and suggested a compromise. Comments can be viewed on the SODC Planning Portal

All members of the public, and District Cllr Dragonetti, left the meeting at this point, with the meeting continuing with no public in attendance.

8 The Clerk gave a brief report. No decisions have been made by SODC since the last meeting. Councillors were given an update on the status of applications which are still under consideration. At the time of the meeting, there were no applications for works to trees in the village.

9 **Finance**:

9.1 To approve the payment schedule for November and to note payments and receipts since the last meeting:

Payments:	**Sub-total**	**VAT**	**Total**
Staff Expenditure (November)	-	-	637.00
SODC – Dog Bin Emptying	936.47	187.29	1123.76
Scofell Landscapes – Grass Cutting	694.44	138.89	833.33
Lloyds Bank – Service Charges (DD)	-	-	4.25
Printinco – Autumn Bulletin	-	-	507.00
Royal British Legion – Poppy Wreath (Pd)	20.41	4.08	24.49
Receipts:			
SODC – CIL Payment			9525.60
OCC – Flood Prevention Grant			2500.00

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the payments. RFO to action.

9.2 **Bank Statements and Reconciliations for October 2025:**
The RFO gave a concise report on documents which had been previously circulated and scrutinised by councillors. The Reconciliation report was approved by Councillors.

9.3 **DRAFT Budget for 2026/27:** A current FY 2025/26 budget monitoring document has been circulated to Councillors for consideration. The document was not discussed at the meeting, but Councillors agreed to provide input to the 2026/27 DRAFT Budget which needs to be approved at the December meeting of council.

10 The Clerk gave a report to Councillors on the progress of the Hardwick Road Verges Project, as follows -
The Highways permit has now been issued, and a site meeting has been arranged for Thursday 27th November. A start date of 1st December has been set. (Action – Clerk to update Mend the Gap (Funder)

11 Cllrs Higley and Parkes gave a brief report to Councillors on plans for the repair, maintenance, and upkeep of benches in the village, with costs being currently worked on. An update will be provided at a future meeting.

12 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.

13 Councillors discussed a string of correspondence between The Clerk and a resident relating to the results of a recent survey which had been carried out on an area of Parish Council land, and after discussion, agreed that legal advice would be sought to determine the next steps to be taken by the Parish Council.

14 Cllr Donahue gave an update to Councillors on the Annual Appraisal carried out with The Clerk, who has completed one year's service in the post.

15 To consider the wording for any Thank You notes to be sent on behalf of the Parish Council. (Action – Cllr Parkes to provide wording to The Clerk for a thank you note to a resident)

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

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

APPENDIX 1 – CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS – Cllr Jim Donahue

Eastfield Lane:

- Still waiting for the final patch to be filled of the 11 larger FixMyStreet reports in front of Riverdale. I have chased with OCC Highways and they had said it should be completed by 24th November.
- We are still due to be considered for further work in the next fiscal year. OCC explained that this could mean a full resurfacing, partial resurfacing or selected areas of large patches.
- With the recent rains there was flooding and a resident raised a concern about a blocked gully near pavilion house. I was able to escalate this as a FixMyStreet Super User for action within 28 days.
- A resident has raised concerns about parking on Eastfield Lane questioning whether it should be considered for double yellow lines. From what I can see, this is not necessarily a daily chronic issues but should be assessed as part of the review of village parking.

Eastfield Lane Culvert Topological Survey follow-up

There are a couple of options to move forward:

- Mark and Emma Candish are investigating a trial to reduce the flow of water at the entrance to the culvert at Walliscote Farm. This seems promising as if it would effectively slow the flow of water from the farm into the culvert to a level that is similar to the level that water flows thought pipes under properties on Eastfield lane. There is a risk that it would increase flooding on Walliscote Farm so this is just a trial at this point. The SODC Engineer and Flood Forum are supportive of this trial.
- The SODC Flood management and drainage engineer has also recommended that the ditches behind Eastfield Lane be cleared of silt leading to the river. He says a £20k budget is available that the Parish Council could use for this. SODC's view is that this should be done prior to any changes to pipes going through properties is increased because the silt is built up above the level of the pipes outflow. This would require consent from affected riparian land owners.
- A final option of replacing the pipes under properties would be more difficult because Land owner consent would be required and the SODC engineer believes the cost would be in excess of £50k. OCC/SODC would be unlikely to support this level of funding. The Flood Forum team believes this work should be done but agrees it is likely to be too difficult to achieve. An alternative could be to at least jet and clear these pipes.

Dolphin Centre Youth Coordinator – Cllr Leach and I met with youth leader at Dolphin Centre. They are keen to support youth in Whitchurch with Dolphin Centre half-term programmes. There are a certain number of places each half term for youth. Debbie can advertise this within the Whitchurch Youth Club. They are also seeking financial contributions from local councils. I have asked them to confirm the numbers of youth in the village who have benefited from the scheme.

Mayors for a Drinkable Thames – I attended an event in Maidenhead Town Hall with Mayors and councillors from many communities along the river committed to improving water quality. There were representatives from Kingston upon Thames, Windsor, Reading, Henley, Maidenhead and many other communities and organisations. There was a focus on sharing best practices with river quality monitoring volunteers and cooperation and sharing of data. Henley-on-`Thames has created a River sub-committee of various stakeholders of the river such as Hobbs of Henley. I am aware that Pangbourne has started regular monitoring of the river with a group calls Thames 21. I will pursue this further, but I believe that it would make sense for us to work together with Pangbourne on these things as we share the river with them.

Resident issues:

- The gate at top of Muddy Lane is not working well. I am investigating options to replace the wooden hinge with a metal hinge, working with James Norman and Neil Huntington.
- I worked with Jill Bradon of Green Team to clear figs, grapes and other debris on the High Street pavement in from of Walled Garden. A number of residents were slipping on the debris.
- We discussed some overgrown hedges blocking the pavement neat the tollbooth last month, but it appears that this has now been cut back by the landowner.
- I have followed up with the owners of the Greyhound Pub on the red bins that are permanently on display. They agreed to look at options to address this.

APPENDIX 2 – REPORT from SODC COUNCILLOR – Cllr Peter Dragonetti

Planning – Local Plan

Following on from the directive from the Planning Inspectorate that SODC withdraw the Joint Local Plan, the council has written a second letter to the Inspectors in response to their advice to withdraw the draft Plan, as in this link.

https://www.southandvale.gov.uk/app/uploads/2025/10/LPA40-South-and-Vale-letter-to-our-Inspectors-20-October-2025.pdf

The letter points out the most recent correspondence from the Matthew Pennycook MP, Minister of State for Housing and Planning, to Paul Morrison, Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate. The Minister outlines his expectation that local plans submitted in the current plan-making system should be treated with an appropriate degree of flexibility. He specifically refers to the Duty to Cooperate (DtC), asking Inspectors to be proportionate in what is expected as the DtC evidence, and to consider the context. Furthermore, Oxford City Council has re considered its housing need and published a draft option with lower housing numbers than previously outlined. Over 20 planning authorities have had their draft local plans rejected by the planning inspectorate in recent months – the government is clearly in damage control.

Local Government Reorganisation

The government's plan to replace the current two-tier system in Oxfordshire (and across the country) with one or more new unitary councils, is gathering pace. Councils submitted initial proposals in March 2025 and are required to submit final proposals by **November 28, 2025**. The government is expected to make a final decision in 2026 for new councils to be formed in 2028. The main options being considered are a single unitary council for the entire county (One Oxfordshire), two unitary councils (Two Councils), or three unitary councils including an enlarged Oxford City. This approach is being proposed by Oxford City and would involve much of Oxford's Green Belt being subsumed into a larger Oxford City with the northern part of the county and the southern part forming two separate unitaries

Homeless Prevention

The council has approved a new Joint Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy, aimed at taking a proactive approach to preventing homelessness, and reducing the use of temporary housing such as BnB accommodation.

While demand for homeless services has increased locally and nationally, the councils manage to keep homelessness levels low through working closely with people at risk of homelessness to help them find sustainable accommodation. Details of the homelessness strategy and information on how people can get support can be found at: https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/housing/are-you-homeless/

Housing Allocations – How to Get on the Social Housing Register

Following a public consultation, the council has now put in place an updated joint Housing Allocation Policy. This sets out the criteria on who can join the housing register and the rules for how social housing is allocated. You can view the policy online: https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/housing/social-housing-and-join-the-housing-register/ You can apply to join the social housing register at HomeChoice: https://www.southoxfordshirehomechoice.org.uk/#

Missed Bin Collections: Please Report

If your bin collection is missed, please do report it by **5pm the day after collection day**. You can email: admin.southoxford@biffa.co.uk or waste.team@southandvale.gov.uk or phone 01235 422 123