



MINUTES OF MEETING OF WHITCHURCH-ON-THAMES PARISH COUNCIL

At the Village Hall at 20:00 Thursday, October 10, 2024

Councillors Present:

Jim Donahue (Chairman), Diana Smith, Katherine Higley, Debbie Leach, Frances Parkes and Paul O'Grady

Officers Present:

Clerk, RFO – Brian Inglis

Public and Press: 1 resident, plus Alex Carter (Henley Standard)

In Attendance: District Cllr Peter Dragonetti (SODC)

The meeting started at 20:00.

- 1 **Apologies for absence & Mission Statement** 20:00
Cllr Brazil sent apologies. The Chairman read the Mission Statement.
- 2 **Declaration of Interests** 20:05
There were none
- 3 **Public Forum** – an opportunity for members of the public to express their point of view on any item on the agenda. 20:05
No members of the public spoke at this point.
- 4 **Chairman's Announcements** 20:10

Communal sandbags for flood defence – Following the flooding experience in January, the Emergency Team recommended that we provide a communal sand bag storage facility in the village, although we are still strongly recommending that all residents who may be at risk of flooding keep their own sandbags. As it is not possible to predict the full extent of future flooding,



a communal sand storage bin is now available off Eastfield Lane at the Village Green car park to supplement supplies held by residents. Neil Huntington of Eastfield Lane has a supply of about 20 sacks that can be filled with sand in the event of flooding. If you need sandbags, please contact Neil at 07979 751985, or you can contact me or another emergency team contact if he is unavailable. The village emergency plan is on the web-site.

Village drains clearing, 1-8 November – Another important preparation for flooding is to ensure that village's drains are working effectively. OCC Highways have confirmed that they plan to be in the village for 6 full days from 1-8 November to clear the drains on the High Street and other streets in the village. I am told that this will be a full cleaning including the gulleys as well as the street run-off pipes between them along the High Street. OCC Highway's policy of clearing drains has officially reduced from once a year to every four years, but they now arrange these 'full' cleanings, as and when, based on identified flooding risks. So, it pays to raise issues with drains on FixMyStreet.

I have also asked if they can improve the 'catch-pits' on the steep part of Whitchurch Hill to see if they can upgrade these to soakaways that would be more effective. Budget approval is required for this which they said they will consider. The present catch-pits are not very effective and stones and other debris flow into the village filling High Street drains and leaving debris on the road. This debris also impacts the drains at the Greyhound Pub, which fortunately still appear to be effective in removing water, but only after debris is swept off the drain grills manually after heavy rains.

High Street Residents Parking scheme – The changes have now been in almost one month since 16th September. My feedback since the last meeting has been very positive. One clear benefit of the changes is the increased visibility that pedestrians now have crossing the High Street near Eastfield Lane.

Cllrs Smith and Parkes are in discussion with OCC Highways on the virtual pedestrian crossing by the Greyhound, probably at some point in the next year. We are also evaluating options for at least one speed activated traffic calming sign.

Residents Issues:

Some residents have raised concerns about the recent demolition of Walled Garden on the High Street. They are concerned that it did comply with all planning conditions such as tree protection and care for bat roosts. We advised them to raise this to SODC Enforcement, who have confirmed that they are investigating the request.

A number of residents complained about the poor pavement repair work by the Ferryboat that SSE did after the week-long repair work. I am heartened that they at least made an effort this time, however feeble the results were to the point of being somewhat laughable. I have raised these concerns with photos to OCC Highways and their response was that they were ‘shocked at the state they left it in.’ A resident compiled a report of a number of shortcomings of the entire SSE repair operations including severe pedestrian safety risks during the week that could have been avoided. I have also forwarded these concerns to OCC Highways.

A resident raised concerns about debris on Eastfield Lane and Hardwick Road from construction and flash flooding making it difficult for the school run with children walking and on cycles. I have raised this to SODC street sweeping. This would also tie in well with the drainage clearing planned for November to avoid them getting blocked again quickly.

5 To approve minutes of the meeting of September 12, 2024. 20:30

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the minutes.

6 **To receive reports from the representatives of OCC and SODC** 20:35

6.1 OCC County Councillor Report - Cllr Bulmer. No report received

6.2 SODC District Councillor Report – Cllr Dragonetti.

Draft Joint Local Plan

Council approved the Regulation 19 publication version of the new Joint Local Plan on 19th September, so we are on target to submit it for inspection in December, taking advantage of the transitional arrangements announced by the Government. From 1st October the draft JLP will be available for comment for a period of 6 weeks, enabling stakeholders to give feedback and to comment on whether or not the JLP meets all the relevant requirements. Any comments will be submitted along with the draft JLP to the inspector, although this stage of the process is a highly technical one and is not inviting any new policies or significant changes to the proposed ones.

More information can be found here: <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/planning/the-next-steps-for-councils-joint-local-plan/>

The Policy team has also responded to the Government’s consultation on the new NPPF – You can view the councils’ response here: [South response](#)

The main thrust of our response is that we believe local planning authorities are best placed to determine local housing need and that top-down targets are not the right approach. We are also concerned that the progressive and ambitious policies set out in our draft JLP should not be hampered by the drive to build 1.5m houses. Interestingly, Oxford City Council has been instructed to withdraw its draft Local Plan from examination as the inspector found that they had not demonstrated meaningful dialogue and cooperation with its neighbouring planning authorities.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Every responsible authority (in our case the County Council) is required by law now to produce a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). SODC is a member of the Local Nature Partnership, to which this responsibility has been delegated, and there have been a number of workshops involving large numbers of stakeholders over the past 18 months or so. The final draft LNRS will be available for public consultation for 6 weeks from 15th October, so watch this space!

Homes for Ukraine Grant Scheme

Community organisations are now able to apply for The Homes for Ukraine Grant Scheme with grants ranging from £250 to £2,000. This grant scheme is designed to help fund projects or services that support the successful integration and settlement of Homes for Ukraine guests into their new communities across the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire.

The scheme opened for applications on 16 September. The grant scheme is being administered in partnership with Cherwell District Council. You can download the application form [from the SODC website](#) alongside this [guidance document](#).

Council Finances

It's that time of the year again when we start the process of setting the Council's budget for the next financial year and beyond. We are also now reviewing the results of the 2023/24 budget to see how accurate our projections were and how we used public money to deliver a very wide range of services. I'm pleased to report that the Council's finances remain very robust and our outturn for 23/24 was balanced, with the operational shortfall of around £1m easily covered by increased income from our investments.

Of course, we don't yet know what the new Government will do when it comes to agreeing a financial settlement with local government. We are hoping for an end to the hand-to-mouth approach taken by the previous Conservative Government and a steady reversal in the swingeing cuts which local authorities have experienced for the past 14 years. Crucially, Councils need to be able to plan ahead, so multi-year settlements are essential as is the removal of the wasteful system of competitive bidding for grants, which often come with strings attached and many unhelpful conditions. After all, we are legally required to produce a 5-year financial plan every year, but in the absence of information years 3 to 5 tend to be works of fiction.

Climate Action

Everyone is invited to the Didcot Eco Fair at Cornerstone on Saturday 2 November from 11am to 3pm when we will be celebrating all things green and showcasing our districts' fantastic sustainable businesses, with a clothing swap, great ideas on how to avoid food waste and advice on how to save energy. Didcot Garden Town, in partnership with South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and Sustainable Didcot, is hosting the free family-friendly event. Centre stage will be the Eco Marketplace with a variety of eco-friendly stalls specialising in handmade products, clothing, food and drink.

Home Energy Upgrade Scheme

Anyone who is struggling and looking for ways to make their home cheaper to heat and more comfortable to live in may be eligible for free energy efficiency upgrades. With the Home Upgrade Grant from Oxfordshire County Council, homes can be installed with a variety of options from insulation to solar panels.

Applications must be made by 31 October 2024. If household income is less than £39,000 and the energy efficiency rating for the property (EPC) is D or lower, residents can get in touch to see if they could be eligible for up to £38,000 worth of work on your home. Apply through the [website](#) or help us spread the word.

7 **Planning Applications** – to discuss and agree Council’s response to the following: 20:45

7.1 **P24/S2959/FUL**

The works are the laying of a hard non porous surface of about 104 square metres to the rear of the property. The resurfacing covers an area of grass and is designed to mitigate issues created by flash flooding which is becoming more frequent. (Retrospective)

The Greyhound High Street Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7EL

Resolution: The Parish Council voted to submit the following response –

“The Parish Council requests that reports from SODC Drainage Team, OCC Flood Team and OCC Highways are submitted to provide sufficient expert opinion to allow councillors to make a fully informed decision. The PC realises that the impact on neighbours as a result of these works within the Conservation Area are yet to be seen, but considers that a porous material would be more appropriate in this location which lies in Flood Zone 3 and that the Flood Risk Assessment submitted by the applicant lacks detail, considering that the OCC Flood Toolkit is freely available for reference. The PC has concerns over the stated intention to deal with run-off surface water from this location via the main sewer, and requests clarification on this point.”

7.2 **P24/S2999/HH**

New openings made in existing rear elevation to provide French doors and a new window.

1 Eastfield Lane Whitchurch-on-Thames Reading RG8 7EJ

Resolution: The Parish Council voted to support this application.

7.3 **P24/S3000/HH**

First floor rear bedroom extension with glazed balcony.

Glebelands Eastfield Lane Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7EJ

Resolution: The Parish Council voted to support this application.

8 **Finance:** 21:10

8.1 To approve the payment schedule for September:

Payment	Sub-total (£)	VAT (£)	Total (£)
Staff expenditure (October)			617.40
Wickes	59.58	11.92	71.50
Roadware Ltd	132.95	26.59	159.54
Zoro	22.05	4.41	26.46
Whitchurch Cricket Club			92.40

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the payments.

8.2 **Receipts:** There were none recorded

8.3 **Bank Statements and Reconciliations for August and September 2024:** Not presented

9 **Motion:** To replace the Parish Council's Mission Statement to a declaration that *“The Parish Council will serve the Village by, as a Council, and individuals, following the Seven Nolan Principles of Standards in public Life and an eighth Principle of Candour as we carry out our public duties.”* – Cllr Smith, seconded by Cllr Higley. 21:15

Resolution: The Council voted to adopt, subject to an amendment, the declaration to read *“The Parish Council will serve the Village by, as a Council, and individuals, following the ‘Nolan Principles’ of honesty, openness, objectivity, selflessness, integrity, accountability, leadership and candour as we carry out our public duties.”*

- 10 **Motion:** To approve contract of employment between the Parish Council and the new Clerk, Brian Inglis - Cllr Donahue, seconded by Cllr Smith. 21:30
Resolution: The Council voted to approve the contract, which was duly signed by The Clerk and The Chairman.
- 11 **Motion:** To approve the cost of securing an architect to develop one or more designs for a replacement tea hut. The Parish Council will use this design to seek competitive proposals with cost estimates using this design. This motion is only to develop a design and secure costs estimates. A final decision on a possible replacement tea hut in terms of design, costs, and supplier would of course be discussed with the Parish Council at a later date. 21:35
 At least three quotes for architect's costs have been received and will be presented to the Parish Council for a decision - Cllr Donahue, seconded by Cllr Parkes.
 Cllrs Donahue and Parkes gave some background to the tender process, and a discussion on the project took place between Councillors.
Resolution: The Council voted to engage Cutler Architecture of Wallingford to carry out design works and other services as specified, up to a cost of £3320.00
 Cllr Donahue undertook to keep Councillors abreast of progress as it develops, with this item being added to the agenda for the next meeting of full council.
- 12 To review progress on any open actions from previous Parish Council meetings and agree any revision of actions on the action list. 21:55
 12a – Cllr Higley reported that the dip in the playground has been filled, with significant help from resident Brian Howse. It was agreed that Mr Howse would be sent a “Thank You” note from The Chairman in recognition of his contribution to this task.
 12b – Cllr Higley reported that the door which was fly-tipped in the village has yet to be removed, following SODC's refusal to deal with it. The laurel tree stumps have successfully been removed by Heritage Trees stump grinding team.
- 13 The deadline for submission of items to The Clerk for inclusion on the next Agenda is close of business on Friday, November 8 2024.
- 14 The date and time of the next meetings was set as Thursday, November 14, 2024 at 20:00. 22:00
 The meeting closed at 22:00