



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

Councillors Present:

Jim Donahue (Chairman), Diana Smith, Katherine Higley, Debbie Leach, Frances Parkes and Romilly Swann.

Officers Present: Brian Inglis (Clerk and RFO)

Public and Press: 2 Members of the public

District or County Councillor: Cllr Peter Dragonetti (South Oxfordshire District Council)

- 1 **Apologies for absence & Parish Council Declaration** 20:00
Apologies were received from Cllr Paul O'Grady
Cllr Swann read the Parish Council Declaration.
- 2 **Declarations of Interest** – There were none. 20:02
- 3 **Public Forum** – a time for members of the public to speak on any item on the agenda. 20:02
With The Chairman's permission, one member of the public spoke at some length about a planning matter which was not on the agenda. The Clerk stated that the Parish Council has been notified as a statutory consultee and has been given the opportunity to comment on the case in question, with a deadline for comments of April 25th 2025. Accordingly, The Clerk advised Councillors that an extra meeting of the Parish Council should be called to allow Councillors to consider the detail and agree a response.
This advice was accepted, with a date and time to be fixed at the end of the meeting.
- 4 **To approve minutes of the meeting of March 13, 2025.** 20:25
Resolution: The Council voted to approve the minutes, and these were signed by the Chairman.
All members of the public left the meeting at 20:26
- 5 **Chairman's Announcements - See Appendix 1** 20:27
Action: Cllr Higley will organise a working group to address the situation of the uneven ground around the manhole in the playground, currently surrounded by barriers for safety, removing the barriers when the work to level the ground has been carried out.
- 6 **To receive reports from District and County Councillors** 20:35
 - 6.1 SODC District Councillor Report – Cllr Dragonetti. See **Appendix 2**
 - 6.2 OCC County Councillor Report. None received
- 7 **Planning Applications** – to discuss and agree Council's response to the following: 20:45
 - 7.1 **P25/S0794/HH**
New front dormer, replacement rear extension, new single storey side extensions and demolition of existing front extension and garage.
Lerryn Eastfield Lane Whitchurch-on- Thames RG8 7EJ
Resolution: Councillors voted to make no comment on this application
 - 7.2 **P25/S0669/HH**
Loft conversion and single storey rear extension.
5 Hillside Hardwick Road Whitchurch-on- Thames RG8 7HL
Resolution: Councillors voted to support this application

- 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. It was noted that the quarterly planning update is due to be sent for publication in the Whitchurch Bulletin (Action – Clerk) 20:50
- 9 **Finance:** 20:52
- 9.1 To approve the payment schedule for April:
- | Payments: | Sub-total | VAT | Total (£) |
|--|-----------|-------|-----------|
| Staff Expenditure – April | | | 639.10 |
| Rialtas Business Solutions – Accounting Software | 203.00 | 40.60 | 243.60 |
| Lloyds Bank – March Bank Charges | | | 4.25 |
| Site Spider – Website Hosting | | | 65.59 |
- Resolution:** The Council voted to approve the payments.
- 9.2 To note receipts as detailed:
- | Receipts: | Amount |
|--|----------|
| South Oxfordshire District Council – 1 st Half of Precept | 14645.50 |
- 9.3 **Bank Statements and Reconciliations for March 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.
- 9.4 **Update on Year End and plans for Internal Audit and AGAR submission**
As in previous years, the AGAR will be completed and submitted to council at the June meeting.
- 10 The Clerk gave a report to Councillors on the progress of the Hardwick Road Verges Project, as follows - 21:00
The Highways permit is yet to be issued, but our contractor is hopeful of this being imminent.
The posts have been ordered and will be delivered to the site in due course.
- 11 **Motion:** To approve a quotation for work on the trees in the Ruth Popper playground. This will include the production of a risk assessment for the next 5-10 years. 21:02
Proposer: Cllr Higley, **Seconded:** Cllr Smith
Resolution: Councillors voted to approve the quotation from Heritage Tree Services Ltd to carry out work as detailed, at a total cost of £935.00 + VAT
- 12 **Motion:** To approve a quotation for a survey on the boundaries of the Ruth Popper playground. 21:06
Proposer: Cllr Higley, **Seconded:** Cllr Smith
Resolution: Councillors voted to approve the quotation from Greenhatch Group to carry out work as detailed, at a cost of £1,150.00 + VAT
- 13 **Motion:** To move the invasive non-native Spanish Bluebells along Hardwick Road and the Ruth Popper Playground and replace with English native Bluebells. 21:12
Proposer: Cllr Higley, **Seconded:** Cllr Smith
After discussion, this motion was withdrawn.
- 14 **Motion:** to submit an expression of Interest application form to OCC for funding of flood prevention grant related to clearing blockage near Eastfield Lane. See **Appendix 3** 21:20
Proposer: Cllr Donahue, **Seconded:** Cllr Parkes
Resolution: Councillors voted to submit an expression of interest form, with thanks to Geoff Weir for work involved in this project.
- 15 **Motion:** To review and approve the updated Village Emergency Plan, following annual review. 21:27
Proposer: Cllr Donahue, **Seconded:** Cllr Parkes
Having been previously circulated, with updates following the recent team meeting and Power Outage Emergency Scenario at the Village Hall, version 1.6 of the Village Emergency Team Plan was reviewed.

Resolution: Councillors voted to approved the updated plan. Thanks to John Bradon for organising this successful demonstration with support from Charles Cotgreave and Adrian Dixon. Thanks to Neil Huntington for volunteering to be a contact for future power outage scenarios at the Village Hall.

Action: Clerk to contact all named individuals on the plan, to satisfy GDPR requirements.

Action: When complete, Clerk to submit updated plan to OCC Resilience Team and village website.

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|----|---|-------|
| 16 | 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. | 21:34 |
| 17 | To set the date of the Annual Village Assembly (to be held before 1st June 2025)
This will be held on Thursday 22 nd May, in the Village Hall with a start time of 7:15pm for 7:30pm.
Action: Clerk to send invitations to village groups, as per list of previous years.
Action: Chairman to submit publicity of the meeting to the village website. | 21:36 |
| 18 | Items for Report and Inclusion on the next scheduled Agenda (May) – deadline Thursday, May 1, 2025. | 21:40 |
| 15 | To confirm the date and time of next meeting as Thursday April 17, 2025 at 19:30. | 21:41 |

APPENDIX 1 – CHAIRMAN’S ANNOUNCEMENTS – Cllr Jim Donahue

Manor Road Sinkhole inspection

I have asked OCC Highways to inspect the Thames Water repair work from the sinkhole on Manor Rd.

- I sent photos that show the kerb on the east side of the road that is sunken, apparently from the temporary road work that was put on the verge when traffic was diverted. OCC indicated that this is likely from the sewage line leakage.
- There are also still some barricades that I assume are from Thames Water left over. These are on the village playground surrounding a manhole - I assume that they are no longer needed but it is a concern to parents with children on the playground as it gives the impression that there is still a problem there.

OCC Highways have assured me that they are looking into these issues and will have them rectified.

Biffa Deep Cleaning of Pavements

The Parish Council requested this annual deep cleaning to address all pavements in the village, including Hardwick Road and the High Street.

- I came across a Biffa worker sweeping the pavement by the toll bridge this week, and he was able to put me in touch with the Biffa Team who confirmed that our village's deep cleaning is scheduled for 12-14 May.
- I have also requested cleaning of the High Street again which I hope should happen soon.

Cedar Lodge

You may have heard that there was a problem with the main Cedar Lodge contractor, J Guest.

I have spoken to the ZephyrX Programme Director who confirmed that their contractor J Guest has gone into liquidation after 35 years of business due to a cash flow shortage stemming from other projects which they were engaged in unrelated to Cedar Lodge.

Zephyr X quickly replaced their main contractor with another contractor that they use for other care home projects. All subcontractors now report to this new contractor and work continues. They tell me that this delays the expected completion of the main building work from the end of March until mid-April. There is a CQC inspection of the completed Care Home in early May and an opening event is still planned for 9th May.

Residents will likely move in afterwards in May. There was an event at the Elephant in Pangbourne on Thursday evening for Care Home staff to engage with the community that I was unable to attend.

Eastfield lane – There is less mud and debris due a number of factors, including the dry weather.

- OCC Highways Engagement team visited Eastfield Lane on March 10th and took some photos of the edge deterioration and raised some 28-day defects for this lane to cover the worst areas and ensure safety until all works are complete and we can revisit.
- This road is due for an inspection in May, and further defects may be raised if necessary.

- OCC Highways position seems to have changed that the Cedar Lodge contractor is not necessarily responsible as the road is used for other construction projects and they cannot determine which contractor caused the damage.
- ZephyrX will repair verges but say that are not allowed to repair the road other than temporary fill with gravel and dirt which they have been doing.
- I would like to see the road resurfaced and am trying to find the best route to get this achieved.

Clerk Probation Complete

Our excellent new Clerk Brian Inglis started in October, so Cllr Smith and I met him this week to confirm that he has now completed his 3-month probationary period. He has actually completed 6 months.

As we have passed the end of the Fiscal year, Brian is also eligible to have a pay increment rise from SCP-25 to SCP 26. This happens automatically, 'subject to satisfactory performance.'

This is supported by Cllr Smith and I and all councillors.

Resident issues:

- A resident requested cleaning of the High Street and pavements. This is covered by above and planned deep cleaning.
- A resident requested a High Street drain be cleared that was missed during previous drains clearing earlier this year. I have raised this to the OCC Highways Drains Supervisor responsible for this and he understands that this needs to be prioritised, however there are a number of changes happening at the moment at OCC Highways:
 - A new OCC drainage clearing contractor has just started this fiscal year and the clearing process has changed along with it.
 - This is part of the new £1.5million that has been approved to clear all county drains. The planning is still under way, but they will be starting with larger towns such as Wheatley and Didcot and it may be some time before they get to the reactive service available to clear this specific drain.
 - He understands that this drain is critical as it may be blocking street drainage to the river. I will stay in touch with him to confirm when he can commit to a timeframe.
 - Separately the drains team are repairing a brick culvert on the upper High Street that is suspected of leaking into a resident's basement.

APPENDIX 2 – REPORT from DISTRICT COUNCILLOR – Cllr Peter Dragonetti

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

With all the other things going on in the world, this seems to have gone a little quiet.

Car Park Machines

The ticket machines in the car parks are now apparently quite old and replacement parts are difficult to obtain, so two different machines are being trialled in some car parks. These machines do not issue tickets, so presumably fewer working parts inside to fail. If you do come across one of the new machines and use it, please complete the survey to help the council make the best choice of the two machines.

Free Fun Days

There are free fun days, the next one on Monday 14 April at Cholsey Pavilion, OX10 9PT. 10 am to 3 pm

Book via www.southandvale.gov.uk/holidayactivities,

I think it is for children only, so no parish councillors!

Community Grants

Don't forget all the various grants

- Everyone Active - £50,000
- Capital Grant scheme - £320,000
- Performing Arts Grants - £60,000
- Councillor Grant - £7,500 per ward (was £5,000)
- Community Infrastructure Levy Grant - £750,000

Garden Waste Changes

I have not had any negative feedback about the change to the garden waste system, so I trust everything is OK. To receive garden waste collections from 1 April 2025, residents must purchase an annual permit. This will replace direct debits, which are surprisingly troublesome to collect each year.

What residents need to do:

- From late February, visit www.southandvale.gov.uk/GardenWastePermit to make a one-off, annual payment for garden waste collections.
- When customers get the permit in the post, they need to stick it to the lid of their brown bin.

Garden waste customers can also sign up for an online account on our website to make things easier when they purchase the next permit in 2026. Anyone who cannot easily sign up for a permit online can call us on 01235 422422 for support. Visit the New [Garden Waste FAQ](#) page for more information.

APPENDIX 3 – Supporting information of Motion – Cllr Jim Donahue

Expression of interest for Emergency Flood Management funding

When the River Thames is very high (e.g. in January 2024) the culvert is unable to cope with the water entering it from above Pangbourne weir. Water from the culvert then escapes upwards from the culvert to street level flooding the area around the junction of High Street and Eastfield Lane and eastwards along Eastfield Lane for about 150 metres, causing flooding in at least 5 properties.

Following discussions with SODC's Flood Risk and Drainage Engineer, the following actions are proposed to investigate the pipe/culvert/watercourse south of Eastfield Lane downstream towards the Thames, as at this stage it is considered that this is where the culvert capacity problems exist

- 1 Carry out a topographical survey of the culvert/watercourse south of Eastfield Lane downstream towards the Thames
- 2 Clear the open ditch downstream of the culvert (pipe) exit for as far as is necessary to ensure a free flow from the culvert (pipe)

Depending on the outcome of this work, further actions may be proposed. Our aim is to investigate and resolve the culvert capacity issue at minimum cost and disruption to the riparian landowners and our local residents.