



MINUTES OF MEETING OF WHITCHURCH-ON-THAMES PARISH COUNCIL
At the Village Hall at 20:00 Thursday, December 12, 2024

Councillors Present:

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

Officers Present:

Clerk, RFO – Brian Inglis

Public and Press: No public or press were present.

In Attendance: Mr John Bradon was present at the start of the meeting, specifically to contribute to Agenda item 11

The meeting started at 20:00.

- 1 **Apologies for absence & Parish Council Declaration** 20:00
District Cllr Dragonetti sent apologies.
The Clerk read the Parish Council Declaration.
- 2 **Declarations of Interest** – There were none. Cllr Smith noted that some (not all) residents of Eastfield Lane had received a gift from Zephyr X, and that some had returned the gifts as unwanted.
- 3 **Public Forum** – a time for members of the public to speak on any item on the agenda. 20:05
No members of the public were present.
- 4 **To approve minutes of the meeting of November 14, 2024.** 20:10
Resolution: The Council voted to approve the minutes.
- 5 **Chairman's Announcements - See Appendix 1** 20:10
During the Chairman's report, Councillors noted that significant disruption continues along Eastfield Lane, with concerns over what seems to be irregular work patterns and poor communication between contractors, utility companies and the local authority.
- 6 **To receive reports from the representatives of OCC and SODC**
 - 6.1 SODC District Councillor Report – Cllr Dragonetti. See **Appendix 2**
 - 6.2 OCC County Councillor Report - Cllr Bulmer. No report received
- 7 **Planning Applications** – to discuss and agree Council's response to the following: 20:20
 - 7.1 **P24/S3591/HH**
Loft conversion with rear dormer to allow floor space for a fourth bedroom with a possible en-suite.
11 Hillside, Hardwick Road, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7HL
Resolution: Councillors voted to support this application.
- 8 The Clerk gave an update on planning decisions made since the last meeting, as follows - 20:25
 - P24/S2999/HH** – GRANTED
 - P24/S3000/HH** – GRANTED
 - P24/S3273/HH** – GRANTED
- 9 **Finance:** 20:30

9.1 To approve the payment schedule for December:

Payment	Sub-total	VAT	Total (£)
Staff Expenditure (December)			639.10
Amazon – Traffic Cones	46.66	9.33	55.99
National Allotment Society – Annual Rental		NIL	567.00
Rialtas Accounting – Clerk Training	70.00	14.00	84.00
Whitchurch Village Hall (not on agenda)		NIL	25.00

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the payments.

9.2 To note receipts as detailed:

Receipts	Amount
John Roxborough – Bulletin Advertising	75.00
Hannah Dunbar – Village Green Hire	150.00

9.3 **Bank Statements and Reconciliations for November 2024:**

20.35

The RFO gave a concise report on documents which had been previously circulated and scrutinised by councillors, answering questions to the satisfaction of councillors.

The RFO reported that the Lloyds Bank account will change from a “Treasurers Account” to a “Community Account”, with a small monthly maintenance charge of £4.25 being payable from January 2025.

9.4 **To discuss the 1st DRAFT of the 2025/26 Parish Council Budget (circulated prior to the meeting), and to consider the PRECEPT calculation.**

20.40

Cllr Donahue gave a presentation on budget comparisons for the current FY2024/25, and initial workings on the FY2025/26 Parish Council Budget, noting that the final approval of the DRAFT budget would be made in January, taking account of input from councillors. A full discussion took place on the initial workings, allowing Cllr Donahue to update the DRAFT budget to the satisfaction of councillors, particularly in matters of major projects such as the Playground and the Tea Hut, the final figures to be agreed at the January meeting.

Action: Cllr Donahue to circulate his workings to Councillors, as a 2nd DRAFT (Action – Cllr Donahue)

An increase of 4% on the Precept Calculation was included in the initial workings of the FY2025/26 budget, also to be finalised and agreed in January before submitting the claim to SODC.

Cllr Donahue noted the need to retain approximately 50% of the Precept as General Reserves.

10 **Motion: Proposer Cllr Donahue, Seconder Cllr Smith**

21.05

To approve the Oxfordshire Councils Charter, a framework for better partnership working in Oxfordshire, including shared commitments and principles.

Resolution: Councillors voted to sign up to the charter, with reservations surrounding the wording of the charter as it stands, noting that more can and ought to be done to build relationships across Oxfordshire, with clearer lines of communication being available.

Action: Clerk to approve, summarizing the above comments on behalf of councillors, (Action – Clerk)

11 **Motion: Proposer Cllr Smith, Seconder Cllr Donahue**

21.10

a. to accept a grant of up to £15,000 from 'Mend the Gap' to pay for the repair of the passing places and verges in Hardwick Road according to the schedule of works agreed by the Parish Council in November 2022.

b. to confirm that the Parish Council will take ownership of the post which will protect the verges being eroded at the ends of the passing places and use the Parish Council's Public Liability Policy to indemnify Oxfordshire County Council for up to £10m against any agreed claim involving the posts.

c. to agree to contract either “Supplier A” or “Supplier B” to carry out scheduled works.

Supplier A - a quotation of £13,350

Supplier B - a quotation of £11,920

d. to agree to cover the additional (estimated) costs of the project -

1. Posts and paint £350

2. Reflectors £200

3. Seed	£100
4. Diagrams of Utilities in the verge	£440
5. Project Management	<u>£2190</u>
Approx. amount	£3280 minus £1650 grant residue = £1630*

*It is hoped that 'Mend the Gap' will agree to an additional grant to cover at least some of this amount.

John Bradon gave a presentation on the history and current status of the project, which was followed by a discussion among councillors on all parts of the proposal.

Resolution: Councillors voted to approve part (a) and part (b) in full.

Resolution: Councillors voted to appoint "Supplier B", identified as Butler & Proctor Ltd as contractor on the project, subject to availability and previous assurances around completion times.

Resolution: Councillors voted to approve part (d), noting that some volunteer involvement may bring about some savings on these estimated costs.

Action: Clerk to make immediate contact with "Mend the Gap", to confirm acceptance of the grant and to put the next steps in motion, including offer letter. (Action – Clerk).

Action: Clerk to make immediate contact with Butler and Proctor Ltd, to confirm engagement as contractor, subject to assurances on completion times for the project of end June 2025. (Action – Clerk).

Action: Clerk to act as Project Manager, liaising regularly with Cllr Smith, OCC, WoTHabs Mend the Gap, project contractor, and other stakeholders as appropriate. (Action – Clerk)

- 12 Cllr Parkes gave a demonstration of a sample light, solar powered, with motion sensing, suggesting that some can be positioned at low level within the Upper Narrows, at positions to be determined. After discussion, it was agreed that Cllr Parkes would table a motion to the January meeting of full council regarding a trial period. (Action – Cllr Parkes) 21.35
- 13 **To review progress on any open actions from previous Parish Council meetings and agree any revision of actions on the action log.** 21.45
New action - to investigate future maintenance of benches in the village (Action - Cllr Parkes/Cllr Higley)
New action – to follow up on the matter of access via the gate from the paddock to the village green (All)
- 14 The deadline for submission of items to The Clerk for inclusion on the next Agenda is close of business on Thursday, January 2, 2025.
- 15 The date and time of the next meetings was set as Thursday, January 9, 2025 at 20:00.
The meeting closed at 21.47

APPENDIX 1 – CHAIRMAN’S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Village drains clearing and street cleaning/pedestrian safety:

- OCC came back on 18th November and cleared a number of the difficult drains marked with red dots, including those along Hardwick Road which had roots deep in the drain that needed to be cleared.
- Unfortunately, they didn't have time to fix all the drains, including one on the High Street near the Ferryboat. OCC now reports that 25 March is the soonest that they can come back due to other priorities in the county,
- I raised a request for SODC to clear the leaves from the village streets to avoid drains getting filled again quickly and this work was completed on Monday, 11 November. I have requested a street cleaning again on 9th December now that all the leaves have fallen and they came out today – 12 December!
- I see that the bridge company hired contractors to clear the pavement on the bridge this week which will help pedestrian safety.
- We are requesting an OCC deep clean of all pavements in the village that is likely to happen in the February/March timeframe.
- I have also chased them to improve the 'catch-pits' on the steep part of Whitchurch Hill.

Eastfield Lane construction and road safety:

At November's Parish Council meeting we heard that there may be 8 or 9 different construction projects going on at the moment - raising serious concerns about safety for local residents and the risks to traffic and pedestrian safety, especially for parents and children using the lane. A situation like this with so much work happening in one street is unprecedented in the village and unlikely to happen again. Unfortunately, no one is really able to control when individual projects start - it is just bad timing that so many are happening at the same time.

The only thing that does seem to be somewhat coordinated are the OCC road closures. We met SGN contractors open Monday waiting for approval from OCC to set up a road closure as last week's Thames Water Road closure was still in effect even though the work was complete. Apart from Eastfield Lane, many will be aware of major construction projects on the High Street and Hardwick Road – on the positive side all this work is reflective of a vibrant and changing community that many will benefit from once all these projects are completed.

Apart from Cedar Lodge these projects include a new large home at the end of the lane by the school. I have seen a number of HGVs and other large construction equipment coming and going. In the short term, we all just need to be aware of the safety risks that the situation is causing and adapt to it accordingly.

There is only so much we can do as a Parish Council, but I am trying from several angles:

1. Road surface improvements - I have alerted OCC Highways to the urgent need to address road surface damage, especially along the south verge of the street for safety before they get much worse. They promised to repair the 'ditch' on the south side of the lane within 28 days and it looks like they have now done this work. They will reassess things in March once work is completed and Zephyr X and reinstated the road and verges.
2. Reduce the number of Zephyr X contractor cars - I asked Zephyr X if they can look at options to reduce the number of cars on the street. As of this week, they are now parking in the Village Green car park and Swanston Field to allow SGN contractor access, predominantly parking only in front of the Cedar Lodge property.
3. Manage SSE disruption - Zephyr X also highlighted that the road will be torn up to connect to the SSE and Thames Water mains so it may get worse before it gets better. The SGN work is now happening as of 9th December and will likely continue into the week 16th December. The only good news is that Eastfield Lane residents will still have access as they will only dig up half the width of the road at a time. But it will still be tight.
4. Communicating with the school - I have also been updating the school to the generally dangerous situation and asking them to reinforce the message to parents to avoid driving on Eastfield Lane and taking extra care as pedestrians on the road for the next few months. This message is being reinforced with SSE work at Cedar Lodge now in progress and this has reduced parent traffic significantly.
5. Muddy Lane clearing - I participated in a Green Team working party to clear the leaves from Muddy Lane on the 11th December that will ensure the route to school is as clear as possible and protect the surface for the year to come. Thanks to Neil Huntington and the Green Team! We also replied to a Land Registry request for more information on the Parish Council's adverse possession for ownership of Muddy Lane which is still in progress.
6. New sewage pumps - Finally, a bit of good news – the Thames Water work at the sewage pumping station is now complete. They installed a second new pump December 4 & 5th. The station now has both a new primary pump – and possibly the secondary pump although we are hearing conflicting messages from Thames Water. In peak flooding periods both pumps can be used to help keep sewage off the streets. Thank you, Diana and the Flood Forum Team, for raising this with Thames Water!

Christmas Eve Torch Procession –

- Planned for 24th December – time and route TBC and communicated to residents.
- PC to contribute cost of box of 25 torches - £44.

Training – I have signed up for a Leadership training course in January.

- Brian is taking a Rialtas course later in December.
- I encourage others to consider training course this year as they become available.

Residents Issues:

- **Eastfield Lane Resurfacing** - A resident raised concerns about resurfacing Eastfield Lane due to construction. We conformed that both OCC and Zephyr X are in agreement that the building contractor is responsible for repairing the highway 'as it was' once construction is completed, which is now planned to be done by March 2025. The contractor has been doing some repairs and street cleaning where needed on an ongoing basis. I agree that Eastfield Lane is in need of resurfacing, and we have raised this to OCC Highways, along with the need to resurface parts of Manor Road and Hardwick Road. The work is not part of this fiscal year's budget, but will be considered for fiscal year 2025/26 which starts in April, so it would work well with timing for the completion of Cedar Lodge.
- **Parking on double yellow lines** – we have received 2 resident complaints about a vehicle being parked on double yellow lines impacting traffic in the upper narrows. This has been raised to OCC and is being investigated. We are awaiting feedback on whether parking enforcement officers have visited the village and whether any fines or warning have been issued.

APPENDIX 2 – REPORT from DISTRICT COUNCILLOR DRAGONETTI

Planning

As I write this, the Joint Local Plan 2041 has been submitted on 9 December to the Secretary of State, so it is now in the hands of the Inspector who will be appointed to examine it.

I was pleased that another decision by the Planning Committee which was made against officers' recommendation was upheld by a Planning Inspector on Appeal. This case was relatively minor, and concerned advertising and flags and other promotional material that was around a new retirement home complex right by a Conservation Area in Thame. I argued against this gaudy and unnecessary display in a sensitive location, and it's gratifying that the Planning Inspector agreed with me

Grants

The Councillor Community Grant Scheme closed on 29 November, and there are more applications than the funds I am allocated.

Council Owned Homes

As a result of SODC taking advantage of the Local Authority Housing Fund, the Council now owns 45 residential properties. All the properties require on going repair and maintenance, as well as refurbishment as required, and after a tender process a contract has been awarded to Oxford Direct Services Trading Ltd, a company wholly owned by Oxford City Council. This company will have multi skilled operatives so that all the works required can be done without requiring multiple visits from different trades. In addition to the service from this contractor, we also plan to recruit two in house technicians. The rent collection will also be handled in house.

Christmas Waste

As usual, waste collections are slipped by 2 days from the 25th onwards for that week and the following week, and 1 day for the subsequent week. Garden waste collection is stopped from 25th December to 7th January, resuming on 8th January or 13th January on the usual day.

Remember that clean dry foil can go in the green bin, and that bottles of any colour go in the green bin. Broken wine glasses should go in the black bin, as its different sort of glass from bottle glass.

Glittery wrapping paper should go in the black bin, as should any paper that doesn't rip.