



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF WHITCHURCH-ON-THAMES PARISH COUNCIL
Village Hall 20:00 Thursday 13th February 2020

Members Present

Chairman Jim Donahue

Members Jean-Marc Grosfort
Katherine Higley
Diana Smith

Officers Present:

Clerk Jane M. Yamamoto

Public and Press: Nick Brazil, Hanna Ferguson, Neil Huntington, Shirley Hutchins, Carrie & Nick Leadbeater-Hart, Laura Lucas, Sally Trinder, Richard Wingfield

The meeting started at: 20:00

- 1 Apologies for absence & read Mission Statement 20:00
Cllrs Hatcher and Steward sent their apologies.
- 2 Declaration of Interests by Councillors on any items on the Agenda 20:05
- 3 Co-option of New Councillor 20:10
Cllr Donahue nominated Hanna Ferguson to become a Parish Councillor. Cllr Grosfort seconded the motion. The council voted to co-opt Hanna Ferguson as a new councillor.
- 4 Public Forum - an opportunity for members of the public to express their point of view 20:10
on any item on the agenda. With the Chairman's permission, a member of the public may express their point of view on specific items of business. Five minutes are reserved per item.
- 4.1 Nick Brazil expressed his concern for the vulnerability of both the maze and the allotments to inappropriate development. He contacted the National Allotments Society on how to best protect these two packets of land. He found out that these two pieces of land were subject to application through Section 8 with the Secretary of State, if a housing development was proposed, for example. If the National Allotments Society objected to an application, it would put a stop to it. His chief interest was the maze which was part of his heart of Whitchurch. He asked if there had been any recent consideration by the council to dispose of this land. Cllr Donahue explained that the land had been donated by Lady Rose to NSALG, which owned them. He confirmed that the Parish Council rented it from them and in turn, the council charged the Allotment Society an annual rent. There is a recurring long-term contract between the PC and the NSALG and there have been no suggestions to change this.
- 4.2 Neil Huntington raised his concerns over the planning application of Eastfield House. He had discussions with Cllr Smith and expressed his concerns, which were mostly over

the size of it. It would be the biggest building in the village and the traffic and parking issues generated by the 43-bedroom building would change the tone of Eastfield Lane. He recommended that the PC object on the grounds of the traffic and un-neighbourliness of the building.

4.3 Nick Leadbeater-Hart advised of the re-branding of the Pre-School fete type fun day event, Whitfest, on behalf of the organiser, Hannah Dunbar. The change of the name to Whitfest would make the event more like a festival with music and all the village societies would be involved. The biggest request from the organisers was to ask for volunteers to help on the day. The event would be from 1400 to 1800 on Saturday, May 2nd. The marquee would be built on the Friday with the consent of both the Cricket and Football Clubs. They would check that no one was using the village green on the Friday, May 1st. There is a need for volunteers and he encouraged anyone that was interested in helping to contact Nick or Hannah Dunbar.

4.4 Village Parking – Carrie Leadbeater-Hart represented a group that formally objected to the TAPAG proposal for improving the flow of traffic in the village. She said that it would negatively affect those that had no off-street parking and that there was no mechanism for residential parking. Cllr Donahue confirmed that he is trying to arrange a meeting with Carrie and members of TAPAG to discuss her concerns. He added that TAPAG had been working on this proposal for over 2 years. The OCC consultation so far was informal, as was the Open Day public consultation. Members of TAPAG and the PC have raised the issue of Residents parking for the village with SODC and OCC councillors, who are looking into this, but this is a separate initiative from the redesigned traffic flow, which is a necessary first step.

5 Chairman's Announcements 20:15

-The Chairman extended his congratulations to John Bradon and the team for the excellent work on the Village Plan, which has now been delivered to all households in the village. He noted:

- All of the 9 major recommendations are being progressed, some to be discussed tonight, including the Emergency Plan approval, Village hall improvements, and selection of contractor for Conservation Area Assessment
- Most of the 11 minor recommendations are being progressing, including the establishment of Polish Gardens, which we will also discuss tonight.
- TAPAG had very good turnout for the Open Day to get consultation for the first phase of the Traffic and Parking improvements on Saturday, which is considered the highest priority from the village plan.

6 To approve minutes of the meeting of 09th January 2020 20:20
Resolution: Minutes approved

7 Planning Applications – to discuss and agree the Council's response to the following: 20:25

7.1 P19/S4631/O
Eastfield House, Eastfield Lane Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7EJ

Partial demolition of existing care home, construction of extension and associated works and change of use of land at the rear of the Home from C3 to C2 to provide additional external amenity space.

Cllr Smith read out her prepared statement.

Resolution: The Parish Council voted to object on the grounds of the size, the traffic, the parking and other associated issues from the construction of a 43-bedroom facility that was inappropriate for the size of the land and area. Cllr Smith's statement to be included in the objection.

7.2 P20/S0145/LB
I Swanson Cottages High Street, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7ES
Fix leaking roof replacing slipped and broken tiles.

Resolution: No objections

7.3 P20/S0223/FUL
Lane End, Eastfield Lane, Whitchurch on Thames RG8 7EU
Variation of condition 2 (drawings) to reinstate a double garage in place of the approved single garage and to be resited to respect existing trees on application ref P19/S0671/FUL

Resolution: No objections

7.4 20S05/20S06 Coombe Park and Coombe Farm Park
Tree preservation orders

Cllr Higley advised that she had reviewed the previous TPOs and requested to ask SODC why there were a lot less trees listed. She detailed the missing trees in an email attachment.

Action: PC-136 – Clerk to ask SODC to respond to Cllr Higley's queries.

8 To receive reports from the representatives of Oxfordshire County Council and South Oxfordshire District Council. 20:50

8.1 SODC District Councillor Report Peter Dragonetti sent his apologies, but submitted his report by email. See Attachment 1.

8.2 OCC County Councillor Report – no report.

9 Finance 20:55

9.1 **Resolution:** The Parish Council approved the payment of the following invoices:

Payment	Amount
Action for Pangbourne Toilets grant	£750
SODC (Dog bin Oct-Dec 2019)	£55.26
SODC (Dog bin (July-Sept 2019)	£55.26
Community First Oxfordshire	£55
Printing of Village Plan	£382.52
NSALG (annual membership fee)	£66.00

WOT Emergency Planning 21:05

10 Cllr Donahue summarises the Community Emergency Plan that has been recently updates at a meeting of 10 residents of the village. The purpose of the plan is to ensure the village is prepared for emergencies and that action can be taken in a timely manner to minimise any negative impacts. The most likely scenarios foreseen in the plan are:

- Flooding
- Roads/pavement blocked
- Power cuts for an extended period of time

Actions are listed in the plan to prepare for, and respond to, these scenarios.

He requested approval of the plan so that it can be maintained on the web-site and communicated to OCC and SODC emergency planning contacts. A telephone tree had been established and over a dozen representatives have been appointed as he coordinator for various streets or areas of the village. Cllr Donahue would be the overall coordinator and notify those on the telephone tree via email, phone or a WhatsApp group and the Village Hall would be used as the primary support centre. Cllr Grosfort to look into applying for a grant for funding to support this.

PC Action -135: The Clerk reported on a related action from the previous meeting. That was how much the PC had authority to spend in the event of an emergency without holding a formal meeting to approve the spending. The response from SODC was that all parishes had authority to spend £8.72/electoral registered person (622 x £8.72 = £5,423.84) was available to the council without requiring formal resolution to approve an emergency fund.

Resolution: The Council approved the emergency plan.

11 Conservation area assessment quotes update 21:15

Cllr Higley advised that it was difficult to find people that provided assessments in this area. All had to follow a statutory guidance. Blue Stone was considered as they had produced a good objection to the last Eastfield House objection. Artillis was the most expensive quote at £8.5k. She recommended the cheapest quote from Heritage at £6k. Their appraisal was the best. Cllr Higley said that the company would have to visit the village and review its historic features; create an action plan to take forward; obtain SODC approval. She said that a recommendation to extend the current Conservation Area could be part of the assessment. Residents will be able to review and make comments on a draft before approval of the final plan. She estimated that this may take up to one year.

Resolution: The Parish Council approved the Heritage quote and Cllr Higley would confirm this to the company.

12 Update on repair of Manor Road Pillar 21:25

Cllr Smith provided all three quotations and although Phil Wise was local and had done excellent work on the Maze, he gave no commencement date. Kirk Construction quoted £1,400 to use as many original bricks as possible and could start in 6 weeks.

Resolution: The Parish Council voted for the Clerk to contact Kirk Construction to accept their quotation as long as they could commence work within 6 weeks.

13 Update and invoices for Village Hall new kitchen 21:30

Cllr Grosfort updated the progress of the refurbishments in the Village Hall. He will organise with the Parish clerk the payments via the Parish Council of all invoices and the transfer of Village Hall donation money to the Parish Council. He will also present at the next meeting the costs of a new combi boiler.

Resolution: The Parish Council approved the £945 budget for flooring.

14 Green Team's Proposal for Polish Church Garden 21:35

Alexa Duckworth-Briggs of the Green Team said that she had met with local residents and representative of the Green Team and agreed the overall design provided in her plan. (provided as Attachment 2). She had received 3 quotations for a base to be created for the church footprint. They had decided that it should be vandal-proof, hard-wearing, low maintenance with benches and an information board. All included VAT, and had access approved. One had been excluded as it was double the price of the other two. Another one suggested gravel, but the last one raised the concern about accessibility. It also supplied two quotes for Indian sandstone and concrete with hard wooden surrounds.

Cllr Donahue asked why the team had not considered a wild meadow rather than a hard base. Alexa responded that residents wanted a quiet, long-lasting place of remembrance for the future site. It was confirmed that the area for the slab was small in relation to the whole area. The green team members and local residents also provided the feedback that 50-60% of the area should be close mown similar to the maze and the rest of the area to have wild flowers. It was unclear in this area will need to be maintained by the village grass cutting contractor in the future, but 2 people had already volunteered to maintain the area after the initial contractor work was done. Cllr Grosfort said that stone would need to be maintained each year. He recommended that a quotation for concrete with stones to provide colour may be more appropriate and less maintenance. He also suggested that it was not level, but sloped to ensure water ran off of it.

Resolution: The Parish Council approved the budget of £4,112 for the site. Alex would ask for the quotations for concrete with stones and the costs of the benches, plaque, information board and cross. She would also seek any grants available to support other costs related to the commemorative/information plaque and signages.

- 15 To review progress on any open actions from previous Parish Council meetings and agree any revision of actions on the action list - including the following: 21:40
PC 134 – Clerk to update on Cricket Club water
The Clerk said that she had found that the Parish Council had mistakenly paid for the water bill during the previous year. Castle Water recommended that another tap was installed and meters were placed upon both taps.
Resolution: The Council asked the Clerk to approach the Cricket Club to see if they would like the council to ask the adjoining field owner if the above would be an agreeable solution.
- 16 Proposal to remove concrete posts at Primary School 21:45
Keith Brooks raised the proposal to remove the 17 unused concrete posts along the edge of the Beechwood Hedge at the Village Green. Cllr Steward obtained a third quote from Azalea for £420. Cllr Donahue confirmed that this had been approved in the budget for the Village Green.

Resolution: The Council approved the works and the quotation to go ahead using the recommended firm Azalea for the work.

17 Whitchurch Society proposal for Parish Council to select the winner of the annual volunteer award 21:50

Laura Lucas of the Whitchurch Society advised that they felt that the most transparent way to vote for the award would be to request nominations from residents for contributions from an individual or group and have the Parish Council select the winner. Cllr Donahue recommended that the list of nominees be short listed to 3-5 nominations. Laura said that nominations would be open from the 1st of April to 1st of May and that an email summary of why each of the short-listed were nominated would be sent to the Parish Council ahead of the meeting.

Resolution: The Parish Council voted to select the winner at the close of their meeting under Confidential Business. Afterwards, the Whitchurch Society will write an article for the village website. The winner will have the award presented to them by the PC at the annual Parish Assembly in May.

18 To confirm the date and time of the next Meeting on 12 March, 2020 at 20:00. 21:55
To confirm the date and time for Annual Assembly on 28 May 2020 at 20:00.
Both Parish Council meeting dates were confirmed.

19 Meeting Close 22:00

District Councillors Report to Whitchurch on Thames Parish Council February 2020

Local Plan

This continues to be an issue, and the leaders of the Council have had meetings with officials from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government; it appears that the government is looking to strip the newly elected South Oxford District Council of its planning power and gives it to Oxfordshire County Council. Other Councils across the country have similar concerns about the Government potentially removing a local authority's planning powers. So much for localism.

Council Budget

At the next Full Council meeting on 13th February we hope to approve the SODC budget for 2020/21. This has been a very thorough and challenging process, going through all departments and areas of discretionary expenditure to identify cost savings, while also seeking ways to increase revenue through fees and charges (many of which have not increased in some time). While we cannot balance the budget in a single year, we believe we have taken significant steps towards reducing our reliance on transfers from the Council's usable reserves, as well as giving ourselves some room to invest in new initiatives, particularly around affordable housing and the climate emergency. Longer term, we await news from the Government on the proposed replacement for the New Homes Bonus and so are unable to be certain about future cuts or investments.

New Crowmarsh building - exhibition and feedback day

On Thursday 13 February we will be revealing the design concept for the look and feel of our new building at a special exhibition and feedback day. Members of the public are invited to come along to Milton Park, Meeting Room 1, any time between 7am and 7pm to see the designs for themselves and to make any comments.

The SODC project team and architects and project managers, Ridge, will be on hand to answer any question, together with Councillor Andrea Powell, the Cabinet Member responsible for this project. We will also be announcing the shortlist of names for the new building following a competition run for staff and councillors – 107 suggestions were received in total!

Waste Enforcement Efforts

You may have seen recent publicity about fly-tippers being prosecuted by SODC. Now we are launching a new campaign to highlight the anti-social blight of littering. A waste enforcement team will be attending a number of local events to explain the laws around littering and fly-tipping, and to answer questions.

I have a good relationship with an officer on the Waste Team who is very active in following up fly tipping incidents that I report, and keen to find evidence to support prosecutions. It seems that one source of flytipping locally is a cannabis grower dumping exhausted planters.

Anti-Idling

The anti-idling campaign is continuing throughout the next few months, with posters distributed widely, adverts placed on petrol pumps and flyers included with Council Tax bills. This is a major initiative to address the problems we have with Air Quality in many of our towns, including Henley, Watlington and Wallingford.

Changes to how SODC will support Neighbourhood Development Plans

At its meeting on 30th January, the Cabinet considered and approved a proposal to change the way the Council supports Neighbourhood Development Plan teams, following changes in the way that central government grants operate. From 1st April 2020, the Council will continue to be responsible for any Referendums or Inspections that are required by law, and will provide a wide range of advice at all stages of the process (including reviews), but will no longer provide grant support.

The background to this decision is that the funding provided by central Government to the district council has changed in the following ways:

- It has reduced by £10,000 per plan.
- In most cases the council only becomes eligible to receive grant funding if a plan successfully reaches the referendum stage rather than at different stages throughout the process.
- Revised arrangements limit the number of claims that can be made in a neighbourhood area when progressing a neighbourhood plan review. Only one claim may be submitted per neighbourhood area in a five-year period.

Historically, we have been one of a very limited number of councils that have passed on part of the grant funding we receive from central Government to cover our costs in supporting neighbourhood planning directly to neighbourhood planning groups.

At the same time, the grant support from the government directly to neighbourhood planning groups has increased over the years - it includes up to £17,000 financial support, additional financial support up to £10,000 on a pilot scheme for those seeking to promote affordable housing, and technical support.

Officers will continue to help Neighbourhood Planning groups to identify and apply for alternative grant funding, and will offer expert advice and technical support.

Grants

I am sorry to note that the application for a grant for the new pavilion is being recommended for refusal, principally I think because it is not clear how the balance of the funds needed would be raised. There is also, it seems misunderstanding about the total cost of the project. It would seem to me that the route forward is to look at other grant applications that have been made. There is the opportunity for someone to speak at the Grants Panel Committee meeting which is on Tuesday 18 February at 10 am at Milton Park.

Eastfield House Planning Application
P19/S4631/0

On the advice of SODC councillor Peter Dragonetti , I have spoken to Katherine Pearce, the planning officer for this application. I made it clear that the conversation was informal and that the Parish Council decision will be sent to SODC after our meeting on 13th February. The useful information she gave me is that if the PC reject the application it will have to go to the Planning Committee. Also, that although this application is virtually the same as previous ones that have been passed it does not mean that it will automatically be passed by her or the Committee. Any change of circumstance will be considered.

Having looked carefully at the plans, speaking to near neighbours of EH and reading the 22 adverse comments, 14 from the village and 8 from outside, on the SODC website I feel that the following should be considered.

1. History and Planning Creep

This saga has been going on for coming up to fifteen years: the first date on the submitted plans is a topographical survey of Dec. 2005. Other plans are dated 2008, 2010 and 2016 and finally a bat survey of 2018. After two appeals, one successful and one not, the Applicant is back with a plan which in 2018 they claimed was not economically viable. The application is for 45 rooms, not residents. Some of the Applicants homes have double room occupancy. If this happened at EH it may mean additional staff and visitors. Some village residents feel that if this plan is passed more will be demanded until opposition is worn down.

2. Bulk and Over development

The existing building sits in its site in the Lane with distinction and elegance. The 2019 Appeal Decision points out, "this section of the Conservation Area is characterised by well-proportioned dwellings which stand within generous grounds and which is, by reason of the mature and low density of housing, verdant and spacious in nature and appearance." The new building would have 66% more rooms than the original home. The rear extension is huge and would protrude above 2/3 of the roof of the existing building. It will also be visible on each side and will intrude on the near neighbours. The site plan is contested by one neighbour who says that part of their main property is not on the plan. Another neighbour claims that the tree plan is not accurate. The building fits very closely into the rear of the site so access for the Fire Service should be checked.

3. Foul Sewers

Considering the 66% increase in rooms therefore residents and staff, can Thames Water be sure that the existing sewers in the road can cope? They need to be adequate in times of flood and high ground water as well as more normal times. In the 2014 flood foul sewage came up into gardens and drives in the Lane and ground floor lavatories would not flush.

4. Traffic and Parking

(i) Traffic:-

The Applicant claims that the site has good road access. This is extremely questionable. It ignores the fact that The High Street has two pinch points plus the Toll Bridge and Pangbourne Railway Bridge, four in all, each which causes traffic holdups and tailbacks especially in rush-hours. Eastfield Lane is a cul-de-sac with a long single track entrance. It has a 120 pupil Primary School and a Pre-School at the far end producing many extra child and adult pedestrians and vehicles from 8-9.15am and 3-6 pm; plus Pre-School traffic at lunch time.

Since 2016 traffic in the Village and the Lane has seen a natural increase; more resident's cars and delivery vans. This increase is not likely to stop

(ii) Parking

The Applicants plan is for a total of 14 car spaces, 11 + 2 disabled and 1 large vehicle. The staffing is stated as 40 full-time equivalent. It does not state the numbers employed for 27 rooms in 2016. As many of the staff will be part-time there will presumably be hand over periods and so more vehicles trying to park. This need, together with visitors and deliveries will not only add to road traffic but would appear to make parking provision wholly inadequate. The ratio is less than 3:1, max. 45 rooms to 14max (including disabled) spaces. Similar Care Home have 2:1 spaces. It is highly likely that cars will be parked on the road outside EH and probably adjoining properties. The Lane cannot safely accommodate a concentrated area of parked cars on a regular basis. Such parking may also impede residents opposite from using their drives. A travel Plan has been requested but how can staff and visitors be forced to abide by such a plan? It should be noted that there is no longer a bus service through Whitchurch.

Conclusion

It is not denied that a Care Home is needed in the area, however, the words of The Inspector who turned down the 2018 application should be heeded; ..."there is no evidence before me to suggest that suitable sites for provision of care homes within the District do not exist elsewhere". This was for a 50 room home and the demolition of the whole building but the verdict still applies to a 45 room home which will be a blight on the Conservation Area and Eastfield Lane and has potential to cause increased traffic and parking problems.

Diana Smith

12.02.20