MINUTES OF MEETING OF WHITCHURCH-ON-THAMES PARISH COUNCIL
At the Village Hall at 20:00 Thursday, March 12, 2026

Councillors Present: Jim Donahue (Chairman), Diana Smith (Vice-Chairman), Katherine Higley, Debbie Leach, Paul O'Grady and Romilly Swann.
Officers Present: Brian Inglis (Clerk and RFO)
Public and Press: One member of the public was present.
District or County Councillor: Cllr Peter Dragonetti (South Oxfordshire District Council)

1 **Apologies for absence & Parish Council Declaration** –
There were no apologies. Cllr Smith read the Parish Council Declaration

2 **Declarations of Interest –** None

3 **Public Forum** – No public wished to speak at this point

4 **To approve minutes of the meeting of February 12, 2026.**
Resolution: The Council voted to approve the minutes, and these were signed by the Chairman.

5 **Chairman's Announcements -** See **Appendix 1**
(Action – Clerk to book Village Hall for the Annual Village Assembly on 7th May 2026, and to invite residents and village groups to attend and participate)

6 **To receive reports from District and County Councillors**

6.1 SODC District Councillor – Cllr Dragonetti expanded on a previously submitted report - See **Appendix 2**

6.2 OCC County Councillor – No Report

7 Vacancy on the Parish Council – One resident has applied and, having been interviewed, was proposed, seconded and unanimously approved as a co-opted member. Bernarde Hyde was duly elected and was invited by The Chair to join the meeting. Cllr Hyde signed a Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

8 **Planning Applications** – None received

9 The Clerk gave a brief report on planning decisions and applications under consideration by SODC, also noting receipt of an application which has been received since the publication of the agenda. An extension of time has been requested, to allow Councillors to consider this application at the April meeting.

10 **Finance**:

10.1 To approve the payment schedule for March and to note payments and receipts since the last meeting:

Payments:	**Sub-total**	**VAT**	**Total**
Staff Expenditure (March)	-	-	637.00
Cutler Arch Ltd – Approved at February Meeting (Paid)	910.00	182.00	1092.00
Cutler Arch Ltd (Tea Hut Technical Design)	910.00	182.00	1092.00
Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (Annual Subscription)	210.00	42.00	252.00
Lloyds Bank (Service Charges -DD)	-	-	4.25
Action for Pangbourne Toilets - Approved at February Meeting (Paid)	-	-	850.00

Receipts:	
Mend the Gap (Hardwick Road verge restoration grant)	6700.00
PR Motors (Bulletin advertisement)	195.00

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

10.2 **Bank Statements and Reconciliations for February 2026:**
The RFO gave a concise report on documents which had been previously circulated and scrutinised by councillors. The Reconciliation report was approved by Councillors.

11.1 The Clerk recommended adoption of an IT and Email Use Policy, adapted from the model shown in the 2025 SAPPP Practitioners' Guide. Councillors voted to adopt the policy. (Action – Clerk to publish to website)

11.2 The Clerk submitted options and costings for the implementation of a Parish Council owned email service for Clerk and Councillors, using a *GOV.UK DOMAIN*. After discussion, Councillors voted to engage Parish Online Ltd to provide an email address to The Clerk only, at no cost to the Parish Council. (Action – Clerk to progress)

12 **Motion:** To submit a response in support of bathing water status on Pangbourne Meadows.
Proposer: Cllr Donahue, **Seconded:** Cllr Leach.
Councillors voted to send a response in support of this. (Action – Cllr Donahue to send the response)

13 **Motion:** To agree to permit metal detecting on the Village Green (and any other Parish Council land), and to adopt the Permission Agreement and Code of Conduct as issued by the National Council for Metal Detecting, including any agreed modifications. **Proposer:** Cllr Higley**, Seconded:** Cllr Smith
Councillors voted to not permit metal detecting on Parish Council land, unless a professional archaeologist were to apply to carry out an investigation. (Action – Cllr Donahue to inform the resident who enquired)

14 **Parish Council Action List.** Some minor wording was changed, and some items were marked as closed.

15 **Thank-You notes.** Councillors agreed that notes would be sent to the contributors to the village Arts Exhibition. (Action – Cllr Donahue to draft and deliver the notes)

16 Items for Report and Inclusion on the next scheduled Agenda – deadline Thursday, April 9, 2026.

17 To confirm the date and time of next meeting as Thursday, April 16, 2026 at 20:00

Signed…….. Date……..

APPENDIX 1 – CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS – Cllr Jim Donahue

Eastfield Lane Condition – No updates this month but will look at raising more FMS pothole reports now that the weather is getting dryer.

Update of 9 Priority issues for OCC Highways – Only issue that has been closed is that the bent bollard on the lower narrows has been fixed. OCC also say that Annual drain clearing started in Whitchurch at the end of January. They provided no real proof of this, but there is anecdotal evidence that some drains have been cleared and drains in the village are still in generally good shape due to a number of drain clearing initiatives over the past year or two.

Flood Prevention - Eastfield Lane Culvert Topological Survey follow-up

- We seem to have avoided major river flooding so far this year.
- I am still waiting to hear back from SODC on recommendation that the ditches behind Eastfield Lane be cleared of silt leading to the river making use of the £20k budget that the Parish Council could use for this. We have gained consent from affected riparian landowners and SODC is investigating suppliers to do the work.
- Romilly and I have complete Flood Warden training. OCC rep would like to come out to visit us to formalise this.

Tea Hut draft design has been prepared by Architect that I have shared with Councillors.

- We have now received more detailed building regulations for the Tea Hut required to develop cost estimates.
- Payment of £1,029 is required for these regulations.
- Will require Clerk support to send out request for quotes.

Resident issues:

- **Sewage leak at playground manhole:** A resident on Manor Road raised an issue that the sewer manhole cover on the playground was overflowing. I asked them to raise this to raise this to Thames Water.
    - This was near the leaking sewer pipe under the road where a sink hole was raised from last year.
    - Thames Water responded fairly quickly and shut down the sewer line from the Eastfield Lane pumping station through use of large tankers. They identified the issues as an old leaking pressure release value under the manhole cover.
    - Thanks to Cllr Higley and the playground WG team for staying on top of the situation and notifying the website that the playground should be temporarily shut down.
    - The leaking valve has now been replaced, the area decontaminated, and the playgroup is reopened.
- **Streetlight on Lower Narrows:** Cllr Leach raised issue of streetlight at lower narrows by the Old Stables. Has this has now been resolved.
- **Thames Path repair:** I raised a report to OCC on the dangerous condition of the deteriorated Thames Path on the Hartley steps. The Countryside Officer is aware of this and they are following up.
- **Metal Detecting:** A resident requested permission for their son to perform metal detecting on the Village Green and Maze area. The Parish Council is discussing how this can be accommodated whilst ensuring that the playing field is not damaged.
- **Village Green water leaks**: I met with Cricket Club Representative Andy Heas. We are preparing to get quotes for the VG plumbing repair. Request support from Clerk to communicate with suppliers for quotes.
- **Storage Facilities on Village Green:** Hannah Dunbar has asked for a storage facility for her outdoor exercise classes on the Village Green. We don't have anything like this now. She asked for permission to place a locked storage box near where the old tea hut was. As discussed in tonight's meeting. The Parish Council does not have an issue with this but cannot take responsibility if the box is damaged or stolen.
- **Date for Annual Parish Meeting**: Needed by end of May. We are now proposing 7th May. Brian will send out initiations. Pangbourne Annual Parish Meeting Tuesday 28th April 2026.

APPENDIX 2 – DISTRICT COUNCILLOR's REPORT – Cllr Peter Dragonetti

New Year – New Budget

At a meeting of the Council a couple of weeks ago, the budget for the coming financial year was agreed. Unlike many other councils, and indeed South Oxfordshire itself under the Conservative administration, SODC now has a good financial position and is not drawing on reserves to balance the budget.

One of the factors causing the positive position is the greater than expected income from investments, which was boosted by a interest rates being higher than anticipated. In the coming year, there will also be income from the new packing waste tax, pEPR. This has been introduced to reflect the increasing cost of councils handling the ever greater volume of packaging waste, not least that generated by online shopping.

The District Council is responsible for collecting council tax, but only a small proportion of it actually comes to the District Council, as the big spenders are the County Council and police, and surprisingly often town and parish councils take more than the district.

The biggest part of SODC's day to day expenditure is basically staff salaries and similar people costs, and like all organisations that cost has increased with inflation, and so the Council tax has also increased, by the maximum allowed by the government of £5 to £156 for a band D property. This is the 10th lowest in the country for similar districts, where the average is £221

The council is continuing to invest in housing, buying existing homes as well as, in Didcot, building a small block of flats on the Broadway.

Head of Planning

Adrian Duffield, who has been head of planning for many years, has retired. I am not aware of the new head.
There is a new chief executive, Adrianna Partridge, who was previously one of the deputy chief executives.

Local Government Review

There are no developments is respect of this matter, as its all now down to a government decision as to whether we are to be one Oxfordshire or something else.