Whitchurch-On-Thames Parish Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Council
at Whitchurch-on-Thames Village Hall
on Thursday, 12th November 2026 at 20:00

DRAFT

Councillors Present: Jim Donahue (Chairman), Diana Smith (Vice-Chairman), Katherine Higley, Romilly Swann, Bernarde Hyde and Debbie Leach.
Officers Present: Clerk was not present
Public and Press: 3 members of the public were present
District or County Councillor: None Present

1 **Apologies for absence and Parish Council Declaration** – Clerk Brian Inglis sent his apologies

2 **Declaration of Interests by Councillors on any items on the agenda** – none were raised

3 **To approve minutes of the Parish Council meeting of Thursday, 8th October 2026.** The Council RESOLVED to approve the minutes, and these were signed by the Chairman.

4 **Public Forum** – a time for members of the public, with the Chairman's permission, to express their point of view on any specific item of business on the agenda. 5 minutes are reserved per item. Two members of the public spoke about their experiences with the High Street parking scheme tonight.

5 **Vacancy on the Parish Council** – to note any applications for co-option. The Chairman updated that vacancy is still being advertised until the end of November. So far one candidate had applied, and they were notified of the requirement to live in the surrounding area of the village for at least 12 months or to be registered in the electoral register of the village.

6 **Clerk vacancy** – The Chairman provided an update on the interviews that were held with two candidates who had applied by the 30th October deadline. The interviewers included Chairman Donahue, Cllr Smith and Cllr Hyde. The interviewers all agreed that one of the candidates had significant experience and motivation, and met the criteria to act as a qualified clerk, despite still undergoing training. The Council resolved to make an offer to Sanjana Nomula subject to satisfactory references and agreement on a contract of employment. The Chairman would also ensure that handover from the Clerk Brian Inglis could start with a goal of Sanjana starting at the December meeting.

7 **Chairman's Announcements** – The Chaiman's announcements are summarised in Attachment 1.

8 To receive reports from District and County Councillors.
8.1 South Oxfordshire District Council – not received
8.2 Oxfordshire County Council – provided in Attachment 2.

9 Planning Applications – to agree the Parish Council's response to the following notification(s).
9.1 P26/S4698/HH – Walled Garden, High Street, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7EP
Addition of a new side extension and replacement of existing wooden ramp with a new brick and slab.
Response: Councillors voted to support the application.

9.2 P26/S4982/LDP - Herons Reach South, Eastfield Lane, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7EJ
Proposed single storey rear extension and ancillary outbuilding. – As this application was submitted as a Certificate of Lawful Development Planning Statement, no response was provided by the Parish Council.

10 Planning Update - A report on decisions made by SODC, and applications currently under consideration was provided and can be seen in Attachment 3.

11 Finance

11.1 To approve the payment schedule for November:

Payment	**Sub-total**	**VAT**	**Total**
Clerk November Salary			711.70
Printinco (Bulletin Printing)			542.00
South Oxfordshire District Council (Dog Bin Emptying)	1041.75	208.34	1250.06
Scofell Landscapes (Grounds Maintenance)	729.16	145.83	874.99
Leslie Maynerd (Reimbursement – MOWS Expenses)			39.98
Royal British Legion (Remembrance Wreath) **PAID (Debit Card)**	26.25	5.25	31.50

The Council RESOLVED to approve the payment schedule. RFO to action.

11.2 To note Receipts:

Receipts	**Amount**
SODC (CIL Payment)	9525.60
PJ Wise & Sons (Bulletin Advertising)	75.00

11.3 To approve the Bank Statement and Bank Reconciliation to the end of October 2026 - Documents were scrutinised by councillors. **The Reconciliation report was approved by Councillors.**

11.4 To consider a Budget Monitoring document for 2026/27 to the end of October 2026

12 To discuss OCC Highways document "Whitchurch-on-Thames Parking Scheme Post-implementation review 2026" including proposed amendments to the Whitchurch-on-Thames Parking Plan, and to agree on the wording of any response from the Parish Council.
The council discussed the response and agreed that Cllr Smith should respond to OCC:

- Affirming our support for the findings of the report and that the parking scheme should remain in operation
- Asking for a more complete analysis of parking on Manor Road to address visibility issues from cars parked further down Manor Road at the bend in the road
- Highlighting the need for further enforcement of parking on the High Street during out of hours parking

13 **Motion:** To approve the adoption of a Parish Council Grant Policy and Application Form.
Proposer: Cllr Donahue. **Seconder:** Cllr Hyde
The Council RESOLVED to approve the resolution with minor changes. Changes included a reference that grantees would only need to account for money received in the grant if requested by the Council. The Approved grant Policy wording is provided in Attachment 4

14 **Motion:** To approve the co-signing of the school's contract with Happy Circus for an event planned for 7th May 2027 on the Village Green and to have entrance to VG car park cut back to help with access.
Proposer: Cllr Donahue. **Seconder:** Cllr Hyde
The Council RESOLVED to approve the resolution. This includes an action for Cllr Donahue to follow up with the owner of the land adjacent to the left side entrance of the car park to have the overhanging branches cut back to ensure circus vehicles have sufficient access. He will also ensure that the school is

aware that they need to assess whether the WCC pavilion toilets are sufficient or if they needed to rent their own portaloos.

15 **Motion:** To give approval to Cllrs Donahue and Hyde preparing an application for a 2027 SODC CIL Funding Grant for a storage facility on Village Green and improvements to pavilion toilets to make them accessible.
Proposer: Cllr Donahue. **Seconder:** Cllr Hyde
The Council RESOLVED to approve the resolution.

16 **Motion:** To approve an annual update to the Residents Issues List for publication.
Proposer: Cllr Donahue. **Seconder:** Cllr Hyde
The Council RESOLVED to approve the resolution. Some issues were updated in the meeting. The updated residents list to be posted on the web-site.

17 **Motion:** To approve the adoption of a Parish Council Health & Safety Policy
Proposer: Cllr Hyde. **Seconder:** Cllr Smith
The Council RESOLVED to approve the resolution. The approved policy to be posted in the website is provided in Attachment 5.

18 **Motion:** To discuss and agree on the siting, design and cost of a new general Village notice board to be placed outside the Village Conservation Area.
Proposer: Cllr Smith. **Seconder:** Cllr Higley
The discussion focussed on:

- The state of 4 notice boards on the village High Street, some of which are in need of repair. Some of the boards are on the wall belonging to the owner of the Walled Garden. The owner has indicated that he is happy to support them in principle as there are adequate protections for the wall.
- Potentially adding two new notice boards outside of village Conservation area. These notice boards would not be subject to the same limitations as those on the High Street and could be used to advertise events and services put on by local small businesses and other organisations that may or may not be for-profit enterprises. Suggested locations focussing on one at the cut by Eastfield Lane and one near the school entrance by the clothes donation bin. It is assumed that this would be on land owned by the school. Cllr Smith will approach the school for permission.

19 To discuss the contents of a DRAFT Parish Council Health and Safety Risk Register. The motion was deferred due to meeting time constraints. Cllr Hyde asked all councillors to send her comments on the draft ahead of the next meeting.

20 To review progress on items on the Parish Council Action List and agree any revision.

21 Items for Report and Inclusion on the next Agenda – deadline Thursday, 3rd December 2026.

22 To confirm the date and time of next meeting as Thursday, 10th December 2026 at 20:00.

Attachment 1 – Chairman's Update

Chairman's Update – November 2026

I have followed up on some of the issues raised at the recent MP Surgery at Village Hall:

1. **Condition of Hardwick Road** – OCC Highways inspected the road in early October and marked several small areas for repair which have now been completed. While this is an improvement it is a small fraction of the 23 areas that I had identified as needing to be resurfaced each approx. 1m x 5m. I consider the surface still very rough for drivers and cyclists and have asked that it be considered for resurfacing. I assume this would have to be in next fiscal year's programme.
2. **Poor conditions of the B471 from Whitchurch Hill to Cray's Pond** – I have alerted the Goring Heath Parish Council of my concerns and that I have also been raised by residents in both Whitchurch-on-Thames and Whitchurch Hill. They have agreed that I should raise this as a work warranty issue to the Head if OCC Highways, in addition to our MP, County Councillor and OCC Leader which I had previously raised this to.
3. **SODC Flood Resource** – I have re-engaged with the SODC Flooding and Drainage Engineer who agreed to take advantage of the current dry conditions to try to insert a CCTV camera and clear the pipe under houses on Eastfield Lane as a starting point. This was done on 28th September and whilst we are waiting for the official outcome, the good news is that it appears that no blockage was found, however the route of the pipe is inconsistent which may lead to drainage issues.
4. **Cedar Lodge noise issues** – This is an issue that is of ongoing nuisance to residents in the area surrounding the Care Home since it has been opened over a year ago. This is something that SODC is ultimately responsible for and our MP Freddie van Mierlo and Maggie, as SODC leader, had stated that they were working on thus with SODC Planning Enforcement. The latest update is that an independent noise monitoring contractor appointed by SODC is now in place as of early November with monitoring activities ongoing.

Drainage on the High Street upper narrows – You may have seen the road markings on the upper narrow. This is from a surveyor hired by OCC Highways Drainage Team prior to the work to divert run-of water that is likely to be done early next year. This will overcome blockages from collapsed pipes in two areas, reducing the risk of flooding on properties in the area.

Remembrance Sunday Traffic Volunteers – Thanks to Lucy Norman for volunteering to stop the traffic flow at the upper narrows during the Remembrance Sunday ceremony.

Attachment 2 – County Councillor's Report

County Councillor Update

October / November 2026

Cllr Maggie Filipova-Rivers

Dear Clerks, Chairs and Councillors,

This update covers some of the key developments at Oxfordshire County Council, including highways maintenance, flooding, transport and support for residents, alongside two major proposals for the future of local government: Local Government Reorganisation and devolution. Both could have lasting implications for how services are delivered and funded across Oxfordshire.

As Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council and a County Councillor, a considerable amount of my time has been devoted to these complex issues in recent months. I appreciate your patience as I balance this work with addressing local concerns and progressing casework across our division.



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1. Local Government Reorganisation: Government announces revised proposals

Following a pause in September, the Government announced on 29 October that it is minded to replace the seven existing councils in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire with three unitary authorities. A unitary council brings together services currently split between district and county councils, including planning, waste collection, highways, education and social care. This remains a proposed decision, with a further opportunity for council leaders and MPs to make representations over approximately three weeks and an update to Parliament expected before Christmas.

The proposed new councils are Greater Oxford, covering Oxford and surrounding areas; North Oxfordshire, covering most of Cherwell and West Oxfordshire; and Ridgeway, bringing together West Berkshire with most of South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse.

I remain disappointed that the proposal divides South Oxfordshire, moving some rural villages into Greater Oxford despite their connections to surrounding rural communities. We have consistently argued for an approach that better reflects local identity, service delivery and financial resilience. However, I welcome the fact that the revised boundaries would now retain Nuneham Courtenay, Culham, Clifton Hampden, Marsh Baldon, Great Milton, Wheatley, Waterstock and Holton within Ridgeway rather than Greater Oxford.

For county services, the practical challenge is considerable. Existing county responsibilities, including social care, education and highways, would need to be divided between the successor councils while maintaining continuity for residents. The transition must be judged by whether services remain effective and financially sustainable, not simply by where lines are drawn on a map.

The Government has indicated that representations can still be made and proposals refined. I am considering how best to use this opportunity, drawing on evidence about local identity, travel patterns, service relationships and infrastructure. Parish councils with specific concerns or evidence about the proposed boundaries are welcome to let me know.

Oxfordshire County Council issued a formal pre action protocol letter to Government in October, seeking the evidence and analysis underpinning its original decision to divide Oxfordshire into three unitary councils. It also lodged a protective claim with the court ahead of a potential judicial review.

Following the Government's new minded to decision on 29 October, the County Council has been advised that its previous legal action no longer applies. The Council remains opposed to the three unitary model, citing concerns about financial sustainability, service delivery and accountability. It intends to make further representations to Government and is considering whether to pursue a new legal challenge. No decision to launch a further challenge has yet been announced.

Under the current timetable, elections to the new shadow councils would take place in May 2028. Those shadow authorities would prepare for the transition but would not yet deliver services. The existing councils would continue until 1 April 2029, when the new councils are due to take over. The scheduled May 2027 local elections are expected to proceed on existing boundaries.

2. Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority: opportunity and questions about devolution

Separately from local government reorganisation, the Government is proposing a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) for Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Swindon. This would create a new regional level of decision making, led by an elected mayor, with potential powers and funding for strategic transport, infrastructure, housing, skills, economic development and investment. It would sit above the local councils rather than replace them.

I support the principle of devolution: decisions affecting our communities should be taken closer to them, and greater local control over investment could bring substantial benefits. But the geography and the way this proposal has been developed raise serious questions. Our preferred arrangement has been Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, reflecting existing economic and public service links across the Thames Valley.

The Government instead proposed including Swindon while Buckinghamshire is not currently participating. That could have implications for established partnerships and service boundaries, including policing, fire and rescue, health and other regional arrangements. The costs, disruption and practical benefits have not yet been adequately established.

Following a ministerial meeting on 21 October, leaders were effectively given just two working days to respond. That was insufficient time for a decision with such lasting consequences to be properly examined by councils or communities. I therefore wrote to Minister Jim McMahon on 26 October, setting out both our support for devolution in principle and our reservations about the proposed geography and process.

OCC has agreed to participate in the next phase of developing the proposal, but this is not an endorsement of the final arrangements. We need a credible, evidence based assessment of the funding, powers, costs, governance and impacts on existing services, followed by meaningful public consultation. Any final proposal would still need to pass through the appropriate democratic processes.

For Oxfordshire residents, the relationship between a future mayor, the new unitary councils and existing countywide services will be particularly important. I will be looking closely at democratic accountability, transport priorities, rural representation and whether new investment genuinely reaches communities beyond the main urban centres.

3. Oxford Growth Commission and Proposed Development Corporation

Another significant strategic issue that has taken considerable time and attention is the Oxford Growth Commission's proposal for a Greater Oxford Development Corporation. While its direct impact on villages in the south of our district is likely to be limited, the wider implications for planning, housing and infrastructure are important.

Following conversations with the Chair of the Commission, I can share several developments:

- Boundaries: The proposed Development Corporation's area is likely to closely mirror that of the proposed Greater Oxford unitary council.
- Planning powers: The Corporation is expected to take responsibility for planning decisions above a certain threshold, focusing on major strategic development sites. The precise scope and thresholds still need to be defined.
- Housing growth: The interim report included some eye watering projections for future housing growth, including development in the Green Belt. However, the more immediate and realistic priority is likely to be unlocking existing allocated sites that have stalled because of economic conditions and infrastructure constraints
- Infrastructure first: One potentially positive development is the Commission's emphasis on delivering infrastructure before housing, alongside efforts to secure additional government funding. Under current planning arrangements, infrastructure is often delivered in stages as developments reach agreed housing numbers, rather than being provided at the outset.
- Representation on governance board: I have been reassured that district councils will be represented on the board until such time that LGR takes place.

I was critical of the interim report's rather negative portrayal of local authorities and have been assured that the final report will present a more balanced assessment. The final recommendations are expected in November, with consultation on the Development Corporation proposals to follow. I will continue to scrutinise the implications, particularly for local democratic accountability, planning powers and the delivery of infrastructure that our communities need.

4. 4 million Investment in Electric Vehicle Charging

Oxfordshire County Council is rolling out a £4 million government-funded programme to install more than 1,500 public electric vehicle charging points by summer 2028, more than doubling the county's existing provision. The first 11 on-street locations were approved in September, including sites in Berinsfield and Henley. The programme is particularly important for the estimated 30% of Oxfordshire households without private driveways, who cannot easily charge vehicles at home. Most new chargers will be installed in public car parks, with others on residential streets. Read the county council announcement.

The programme also includes community charging micro hubs, offering parish councils and other community organisations the opportunity to host public chargers at village halls, sports facilities and other suitable car parks. Residents without driveways can also apply for pavement cable channels to charge vehicles using their home electricity supply. Parish councils interested in hosting a micro hub can contact EVInfrastructure@oxfordshire.gov.uk, and residents can suggest locations for future chargers through the county council's EV infrastructure webpage.

I am pleased to confirm that Wheel Orchard car park in Goring is included in the programme for new electric vehicle charging facilities. I will share further information on the anticipated installation timetable as soon as it becomes available.

5. New £6 Million Recycling Centre Planned for Oxfordshire

Oxfordshire County Council has announced plans for a new £6 million household waste recycling centre in Bicester, replacing the ageing Ardley facility, which is now over 40 years old. The proposed site, next to Bicester Park and Ride, would provide modern recycling facilities and a new reuse shop where suitable unwanted items could be given a second life. The council is aiming for completion by 2030, subject to planning permission and public consultation.

The current planning permission for Ardley expires in December 2026, and the council is seeking an extension until March 2031 to allow sufficient time for the replacement to be built. The proposals have attracted some local concerns about traffic, particularly around Vendee Drive, and these will need to be examined through the planning process. The scheme also aims to achieve a 20% biodiversity net gain.

For residents in Goring, Woodcote and surrounding villages, there are no proposed changes to Oakley Wood recycling centre near Wallingford. The investment is intended to maintain Oxfordshire's existing network of seven recycling centres, rather than reduce provision. Residents should remember that visits to all Oxfordshire recycling centres now require advance booking.
Further information: OCC announcement | Detailed plans and consultation information | Find and book a recycling centre

6. Oxford Traffic Filters: What Residents Need to Know

Oxford's six traffic filters came into operation on 28 September 2026, replacing the temporary congestion charge. The aim is to reduce congestion, improve bus journey times and make walking and cycling safer. The filters restrict cars travelling through certain roads during specified hours, but they do not prevent anyone from driving to any part of Oxford. Drivers without a permit may simply need to take a different route, often using the ring road.

I appreciate that the scheme has been controversial, and the early experience has not been without problems. There have been reports of significant congestion around Botley Road, Oxpens Road and the Westgate shopping centre, as well as concerns about the impact on businesses and journey times. These are legitimate concerns which need to be properly assessed rather than dismissed. I recently drove to Westgate myself and found that, while I had to take a longer route, it added around ten minutes to my journey. This will not be everyone's experience, but it illustrates an important point: Oxford remains accessible by car, even without a permit. The question is whether the benefits of reduced traffic and improved public transport ultimately outweigh the inconvenience of longer journeys for some drivers.

For residents of Goring, Woodcote and surrounding villages, the most useful thing to know is that Oxfordshire residents are entitled to 25 free day passes per year. These allow you to drive through the filters on days when you need to, without taking a diversion. You must apply for a free permit and register your vehicle. Residents who already had an Oxfordshire permit under the temporary congestion charge should have had it transferred automatically, with their allocation reset. There are also additional permits available for Blue Badge holders, unpaid carers, frequent hospital patients and certain other groups. You can check eligibility and apply for your permit here. The filters operate between 7am and 7pm at four locations, with shorter peak-time restrictions at Hollow Way and Marston Ferry Road. Driving through without a valid permit can result in a £70 fine, although first-time contraventions during the initial six months receive a warning rather than a penalty.

Importantly, this is a trial, not a permanent decision. It can run for up to 18 months, with monitoring of traffic, bus journey times and other impacts. The public consultation is open until 28 March 2027, and I would encourage residents to share their experiences, whether positive or negative. Decisions about the scheme's future must be based on evidence, including its impact on people travelling into Oxford from our rural communities.

Further information: Traffic filter locations and guidance | Apply for free permits | Public consultation and FAQs.

7. Support Available for Unpaid Carers in Oxfordshire

More than 50,000 people in Oxfordshire provide unpaid care for a family member, friend or neighbour, often without recognising themselves as carers. This might involve helping an elderly parent with shopping and appointments, supporting a partner with a long-term illness, or caring for a child with additional needs. If this sounds familiar, there is a range of support available, and you do not need to provide full-time care to ask for help.

Through Carers Oxfordshire, residents can access free advice, emotional support, local support groups and a free carer's assessment, which looks at how caring affects their own health, wellbeing and daily life, and what additional help they may need. This can include exploring respite care, practical assistance, emergency planning and support for the person being cared for. Carers can also apply for a free Carer ID card and access wellbeing offers, including (Some offers have eligibility conditions or associated costs):

- discounted leisure activities
- subsidised counselling
- opportunities for short breaks.

Financial support may also be available. Those providing at least 35 hours of care each week may qualify for Carer's Allowance, subject to eligibility and earnings rules, while Carer's Credit can help protect National

Insurance contributions towards a State Pension. Carers should also register with their GP, who may be able to offer additional support. Young carers can seek help through their school, GP or the county council's family support services.

I would particularly encourage residents who have taken on caring responsibilities gradually to explore what is available rather than waiting until they are struggling. Contact Carers Oxfordshire on 01235 424715 (Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm) or email carersinfo@carersoxfordshire.org.uk. Further information is available in the Oxfordshire County Council guide to caring for someone and its carer's assessment guidance.

8. Highways Maintenance: Potholes and Drainage

I continue to work closely with Oxfordshire County Council's highways team to address potholes, blocked gullies and drainage problems across Goring, Woodcote and our surrounding villages. I have been able to get quite a few longstanding issues resolved, and am currently pursuing several urgent repairs. There is still plenty to do, particularly where poor drainage is contributing to road deterioration and localised flooding.

Please continue to report potholes, blocked drains and other highway defects through Fix My Street, ideally with photographs and an accurate location. Even if you have raised an issue with me directly, having it formally logged with a picture helps ensure it is recorded and assessed by the highways team. If a problem remains unresolved, or you believe it needs urgent attention, please escalate it to me, preferably with the Fix My Street reference number. I cannot promise every repair will be immediate, but I can follow up with officers and press for action where needed. Your help with reporting really does make a difference.

The county council is also progressing its wider highways maintenance programme, including resurfacing works on 38 roads covering approximately 115,000 square metres, scheduled for completion in November. Residents can check planned gully cleaning and find out more about local highways activity through the council's highways information pages.

9. Preparing for Flooding: Oxfordshire Flood Toolkit

With winter approaching, I would encourage residents, particularly those living in areas that have experienced flooding, to explore the Oxfordshire Flood Toolkit. This is a comprehensive online resource offering practical advice on preparing for flooding, protecting homes and businesses, understanding who is responsible for drainage and knowing where to turn when problems arise. Flooding is not limited to properties near rivers. Heavy rainfall, surface water, blocked drains and overflowing ditches can all cause serious problems, as we have seen in villages across our area.

There are several particularly useful resources within the toolkit:

- Check your flood risk: An interactive flood risk map allows residents to search by postcode and explore risks from rivers and surface water, alongside information about drainage assets and flood investigations. The maps provide general guidance rather than definitive assessments of individual properties.
- Prepare a household emergency plan: The preparation guide includes a nine-step checklist and links to downloadable templates. It explains how to prepare an emergency bag, safeguard important documents, move valuables and vehicles to higher ground, protect doorways and air bricks, and make arrangements for family members and pets.

- Protect your property: The flood prevention section explains measures such as removable flood barriers, flood-resistant air bricks, pumps and other ways of reducing damage. The toolkit also includes guidance on flood insurance, recovery and obtaining professional advice.
- Monitor warnings: The local weather warnings page brings together Met Office weather warnings and Environment Agency flood information. Residents can also sign up for free flood warnings.
- Know who to contact: The emergency guidance explains how to report flooding depending on whether it involves a highway, watercourse or sewer. Highway flooding and blocked road drains should be reported through Fix My Street. For immediate danger to life, call 999.
- Support for parish councils: The Flood Library contains community flood plan templates, guidance on establishing local flood resilience arrangements, information for volunteer flood wardens and even template letters to landowners about maintaining ditches and watercourses. These are particularly useful for communities experiencing recurring flooding.

I am continuing to pursue a number of longstanding drainage and flooding issues locally, including blocked gullies and problems that require coordination between the county council, district council and landowners. However, there is also considerable value in being prepared at household and community level. I would particularly encourage parish councils to review their emergency plans and residents who have experienced flooding to familiarise themselves with the toolkit before the next period of heavy rainfall.
The toolkit is available at www.oxfordshirefloodtoolkit.com.

10. Oxfordshire County Council Budget: Difficult Decisions Ahead

Oxfordshire County Council faces significant financial pressures, despite balancing its budget for 2025/26. This was achieved partly through contingency funding and higher than expected investment income, neither of which can be relied upon indefinitely. Changes to government funding are expected to leave the council £24 million worse off over three years, while demand for adult social care, children's services and SEND support continues to rise. Substantial savings will be needed, and some difficult decisions lie ahead.

A particular concern has been the growing High Needs deficit, arising from the gap between government funding and the cost of supporting children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. Oxfordshire's accumulated deficit was forecast to reach approximately £166 million by March 2026. The Government has committed to covering 90% of historic deficits, subject to conditions, and we have recently had the news that OCC has been successful. The challenges nonetheless remain. Improving SEND services while managing these pressures is very difficult.

One example of the difficult choices facing the council is the proposed reduction in the amount disabled residents receiving adult social care can automatically retain for disability-related expenses. The previous council introduced a particularly generous allowance, considerably higher than in comparable authorities, and I was proud of that additional support. Even with the proposed reduction, Oxfordshire's allowance would remain above that of many comparable councils. While the blanket allowance would be removed, individual disability-related expenses would still be considered on a case-by-case basis, recognising that people's needs and circumstances differ. These are not easy decisions, particularly when they affect vulnerable residents, but they illustrate the increasingly difficult choices councils face in balancing financial sustainability with protecting essential services.
Further information: OCC budget and financial planning | Adult social care contributions consultation

Attachment 3 – Planning update from the Clerk

Whitchurch-on-Thames Parish Council
Planning Update – November 2026

Planning Ref	Address and Details of Application	Comments by Parish Council	SODC status
P25/S3121/O 10/10/2025	**Land south of Hardwick Road, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7HL** Erection of four dwellings with all matters reserved except access. * Amended plans submitted 22/06/2026 for re-consultation.	OBJECTION – Comments available to view on the SODC Planning Portal OBJECTION re-stated on 10/7/26	Under Consideration
P26/S3438/HH 19/08/2026	**Willow House, Eastfield Lane, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7EJ** Proposed detached garden room / gym outbuilding incidental to the enjoyment of Willow House	Councillors voted to SUPPORT this application	GRANTED on 9th October
P26/S3775/HH 24/09/2026	**Fawney, High Street, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7DD** Erection of a single storey side extension, dormer extension, gravelled car parking and pathway, and alteration to the fenestration	Councillors voted to SUPPORT this application	Under Consideration
P26/S4698/HH 30/10/2026	**Walled Garden, High Street, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7EP** Addition of a new side extension and replacement of existing wooden ramp with a new brick and slab.		Under Consideration
P26/S4982/LDP 03/11/2026	**Herons Reach South, Eastfield Lane, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7EJ** Proposed single storey rear extension and ancillary outbuilding.		Under Consideration

Attachment 4 – Parish Council Grant Policy

Whitchurch-on-Thames Parish Council

Grant Policy and Application Form

Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 allows Whitchurch-on-Thames Parish Council (WOTPC) to spend a limited amount on activities for which it has no specific power, but which it considers will bring direct benefit to the area, or any part of it, or all of some of its inhabitants. WOTPC will consider financial assistance to local organisations and groups if it believes that such a grant would benefit the parish and / or its electorates.

Grant Philosophy

The Council is aware that it does not have the financial resource to fund every request and must often make difficult decisions as to which projects and organisations to prioritise to provide funding.

Any Community / Voluntary / Charitable organisation may apply to WOTPC for a grant. WOTPC awards grants at its discretion to organisations which can demonstrate a clear need for financial support to achieve an objective which will benefit the Parish in one of the following ways, by:

- Providing a service
- Enhancing the quality of life
- Improving the environment and promoting the Parish of Whitchurch-on-Thames in a positive way.

Grant Conditions

- The award must be used for the purpose for which the application was made
- If the award cannot be for the stated purpose, all monies must be returned to WOTPC
- The applying organisation must have a bank account as disbursement cannot be made to individuals
- If requested, awards must be properly accounted for and evidence of expenditure should be supplied. If WOTPC is not satisfied with the arrangements, it reserves the right to request a refund of monies awarded.

Grants will **not** normally be awarded:

- To individuals, commercial organisations or political parties
- To Registered Charities in response to a general fundraising appeal via a central HQ
- For additional applications within a 12-month period
- Where the WOTPC considers there to be a statutory duty upon local or central government departments to fund activities or provide.
- To a school, for an activity that takes place within the school day.

Maximum Grant Levels

- Most grants should be less than £1,500
- Grants will be considered up to a maximum of £3,000 for significant village undertakings (circa 10% of the precept)
- Groups operating outside the parish boundary will normally be limited to an upper limit of £100.00 unless there is a direct benefit to a significant percentage of village residents.

Application Process

Applications must be made in writing by using the Grant Application Form provided in Appendix A of this policy and submitted to the Parish Clerk.

Any payments made are subject to the normal annual budgetary constraints of WOTPC. A resolution for financial assistance to an organisation will be made by the Parish Council and recorded in the minutes.

A request for a grant will be considered at the next Parish Council meeting when a resolution will be passed to either;

1. Approve or refuse the request
2. Reduce the amount requested and approve the reduction
3. Request additional information or place conditions on the grant.

The Clerk will action this resolution as soon as possible after the meeting.

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.

Policy dated: 12 November 2026
Date of next review: April 2028

Appendix A: GRANT APPLICATION FORM

Please read the Whitchurch-on-Thames Parish Council Grant Policy
Complete this form in block capitals and submit to the Parish Clerk clerk@whitchurchonthamesparishcouncil.gov.uk

Name and address of the organisation requesting a grant.	
Amount requested.	£
Purpose(s) for which the grant will be used	
How this will benefit the parish and/or residents of Whitchurch-on-Thames?	
Have you requested, or are you receiving funding from other sources? If yes, please provide amount and funder(s) details	
If your application is successful, payment will be made by BACS. Please provide the bank details	Account Name: Sort Code: Account Number:

Print Name: _____ Position_____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Decision: Yes / No

Comments/conditions:

Date: _____ Minute Reference: _____

Signed: (Chair)_____ Clerk: _____

Appendix 5 – WOTPC Health & Safety Policy

Whitchurch-on-Thames Parish Council
Health and Safety Policy

Policy Review	
Signed	
Parish Council Minute Reference	
Date ratified	12 November 2026
Date of next review	

1. Scope

This policy applies to all premises and activities for which the Whitchurch-on-Thames Parish Council (WOTPC) is responsible: including facilities, and employees and councillor activity undertaken on behalf of the Parish Council.

It is expected that other Parish groups will have their own Health and Safety policies and proactively manage health and safety risk and therefore will be outside the scope of this policy. These groups include:

- The Youth Group, which is a Church sponsored activity
- Allotments, which have their own management group. WOTPC rent them the land.
- Village Hall, which is managed by its Trustees.

Highways and the river are public land owned by OCC and the Environment Agency respectively, not PC owned land but we will be mindful of associated risk and will seek to mitigate it when and where appropriate.

2. Policy Purpose

This policy sets out the general principles and approach that WOTPC will follow to meet the requirements of Health and Safety legislation: Health and Safety at Work Act (1974), and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1998), for premises and activities for which the Council is responsible. **It is the responsibility of all councillors' and employees of the council to be aware of the following policy statements on Health and Safety and of the organisational arrangements made to implement these policies.**

3. Responsibilities

- WOTPC is responsible for managing safety, based on its Health and Safety policy
- The Clerk is responsible for monitoring and reporting to WOTPC any Health and Safety issues
- Day to day matters of Health and Safety are dealt with by the Clerk acting on behalf of the Council
- All Councillors, employees/contractors and volunteers have a duty to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of any persons who may be affected by their acts or omissions.

4. Health and Safety Policy Statement

In accordance with legal requirements WOTPC accepts its duty to provide and maintain both physically and mentally, safe and healthy working conditions for its employees and accepts its duty of care to other persons such as volunteers and contractors who work on behalf of the Parish Council.

WOTPC will take all reasonable steps to ensure that it complies with the law on Health, Safety and Welfare and any relevant Regulations, Approved Codes of Practice and Guidance. It will provide the resources to ensure the safety of its employees and others affected by its work.

Reasonable steps include, to ensure:

- Information, instruction, training, supervision, equipment and facilities necessary to achieve a safe working environment for employees, members of the public, contractors and volunteers are provided
- Its work, in all its forms, is done in ways so that members of the public are not put at risk. Where necessary the council will obtain specialist technical and Health and Safety advice for any projects or pieces of work that could affect the general public.
- Arrangements are in place for the safe use, handling, storage and disposal of all substances and equipment that may endanger health or welfare
- This policy is brought to the attention of all employees, members of the public, contractors, volunteers and Councillors and is reviewed periodically.

5. Employers' liability insurance

Local councils are required by law to insure against liability for injury or disease to their employees arising out of their employment under the provisions of the Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969. A copy of the Parish Council Employers Liability Insurance Certificate is published on the WOT website.

6. Risk Management and Assessments

Proactive health and safety risk management is a priority for WOTPC. Health and Safety is a standing WOTPC monthly agenda item with discussion focused upon risk mitigation.

WOTPC carry out risk assessment of its activities as and when necessary and review these annually.

The Parish Council requires contractors (and venue hirers, where applicable) prior to starting any **major works** on behalf of the council, to supply Risk Assessments, written Method Statements and Safe Systems of Work.

7. Health and Safety Procedures

WOTPC have set up and monitor policies and procedures to reduce any risks that are identified. Health and Safety Procedures are set out in Appendix A.

8. Policy Review

This policy shall be reviewed at least once per council term.

Appendix A: Health and Safety Procedures

1. Health and Safety records management

The Clerk shall keep copies of all risk assessments, method statements and Health and Safety documents and maintain the Equipment Maintenance and Safety checks log.

2. Equipment Maintenance and Safety Checks Log

For WOTPC owned equipment that requires regular maintenance and/or safety checks a log is maintained to help ensure that appropriate and timely checks are made and that if appropriate risk mitigated. The log includes:

- Equipment location
- Equipment type
- Check required
- Check frequency required
- Date of last check
- Outcome
- Mitigation of any identified issues.

3. Reporting accidents

All accidents, no matter how small, must be reported in the first instance to the Clerk and details entered in the WOTPC Accident Book. Thereafter, all such accidents will be brought to the attention of the Council.

In the event of a serious injury or dangerous occurrence, the Chairperson, or in his absence the Vice Chairperson should be informed immediately.

4. Health and Safety Risk Register

A Health and Safety Risk Register is maintained, which is reviewed at each regular WOTPC Meeting. The focus of discussion is on proactive risk management and the mitigation of potential risk.