

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Monday 3rd February 2025

Present:

Geoff Webster	(GW)	Vice-Chair
Joe Deane	(JD)	Councillor
Sandra Cosier	(SC)	Councillor
Trudi Gasser	(TG)	Parish Clerk

In Attendance:

19 Members of the public
 Steve Cosier (SCo) District Councillor
 Dan Levy (DL) County Councillor

MIN REF	ITEM
25/001	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Keith Hickson (KH) Chair Jim Coleman (JC) Councillor Charlie Maynard (CM) MP
25/002	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST No Declarations made.
25/003	APPROVAL OF MINUTES Minutes Parish Council Meeting of the 4 th November 2024 were approved for publication.
25/004	MATTERS ARISING Minutes approved 24/110 - Waste Bins: a Green Waste Bin a Licence had been delivered. TG to draft a notice for the cemetery regarding disposal of waste and circulate to all for comment/approval.
25/005	COUNTY & DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORTS See attached appendix for full reports. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steve Cosier, District Councillor, WODC. • Dan Levy, County Councillor, OCC. • Charlie Maynard, District Councillor and MP
25/006	QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trees in the village: It was reported that some trees in the village required tidying up – a map highlighting the trees was given to the PC – TG to contact the maintenance team. • Cemetery Green Waste: It was reported that green waste was being fly tipped in the cemetery. The PC are to monitor.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The size of the PC: It was questioned whether the PC should increase in size, considering the expansion of the Parish with the recent developments. TG to follow up with WODC. • Defibrillator in Sutton: The PC were asked whether a defibrillator would be installed in Sutton. The PC would explore options of where it could be located, as it would need to be on a public building with a power supply.
25/007	<p>PLANNING</p> <p>The PC had received the following application for comment:</p> <p>APPLICATION NO: 24/03277/FUL PROPOSAL: Demolition of majority of existing stable building. Erection of seven dwellings with associated works to include new access road, carports, parking bays and soft and hard landscaping LOCATION: Land (E) 441191 (N) 205720 Blackditch Stanton Harcourt APPLICANT: Bury REGISTERED: 17th January 2025 These applications are in or affecting the Stanton Harcourt and Sutton Conservation Area</p> <p>The Application had been circulated for comment. The PC would be submitting objections on the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Impact on the Environment 2. Impact on Traffic and Transportation 3. Impact on Noise Levels and Pollution 4. Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area (Policy OS2 and OS4) 5. Impact on Sustainability 6. Impact on Neighbouring Properties and Privacy 7. Impact on Local Amenities and Services <p>All in attendance objected to the application and asked the PC how best to object. All were encouraged to comment on the application. SCo recommended that anyone wanting to object should read the proposal from the developer on the planning portal.</p>
25/008	<p>PC VACANCY</p> <p>The PC currently has a vacancy due to the relocation of a Councillor. GW welcomed applications from interested residents. One person expressed an interest to join to PC – GW to follow up.</p>
25/009	<p>PC WEBSITE</p> <p>A summary of the available options was circulated to the PC – GW will provide a recommendation at the next meeting.</p>
25/010	<p>VILLAGE VOICE</p> <p>Copy for next edition: GW volunteered to provide copy for the next issue. It was asked whether the Parish Council proofreads the issue before publication. It was confirmed that proofreading usually occurs. Two members of the public offered their proofreading skills if required. TG to pass their details to the Editor.</p>

25/011	<p>GUARDROOM</p> <p>Insulation: The insulation had been installed in the roof – the PC thanked SC for arranging and overseeing. JD requested a report of the roof structure, which would be useful for the solar panel installation. It was noted that the wall could not be insulated.</p> <p>TG to explore options for blinds in the Old Guardroom.</p> <p>Defibrillator: Following the unexpected death of a resident, funds had been raised to purchase a further defibrillator for the Parish, which had been installed at the Old Guardroom. The Parish Council expressed thanks to all involved and especially to <<name>> for organising the collection for and acquisition of the Defib.</p> <p>Whilst funds had been raised to maintain the defibrillator, JD proposed that the PC adopt the Defibrillator as an asset and thereby take on all responsibility for future maintenance. All voted in favour. TG to add to asset register.</p>
25/012	<p>SPEED SIGNS</p> <p>The installation would be discussed at the next meeting (KH). The PC were asked to consider a further sign which would capture data of traffic travelling toward Eynsham in Sutton.</p> <p>It was reported that the Traffic Calming on Main Road in Stanton Harcourt was damaged in the recent storm. TG to report on fixmystreet.</p>
25/013	<p>CORRESPONDENCE</p> <p>Request had been received from two residents for an allotment in the parish. TG to contact Savills to enquire whether the plot opposite the Manor was still available for allotments.</p>
25/014	<p>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</p> <p>Internet Service at The Old Guardroom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TG to progress
25/015	<p>NEXT MEETING</p> <p>7.30pm on Monday 3rd March 2025 in the John Holland Room at the Village Hall</p>

Signed

Date

ACTIONS CARRIED FORWARD FROM EARLIER MEETINGS:

	ACTIONS CARRIED FORWARD	
Pre-June	<p>B4449 Reducing the noise and vibration BT OpenReach replaced the wrong manhole cover. The one by 10 Beaumont Green has been recorded as Urgent by both OCC Highways and BT OpenReach.</p> <p><i>The PC now has reference numbers to report issues.</i></p>	Actioned
CFW from July mtg	21/092 All/PC to continue logging TW complaints with DL/OCC None received – Notice to be put on Village Voice (Hardcopy & Facebook) asking all issues to be sent to Parish Clerk with the Title ‘Water Issues’ PC will then progress with Thames Water. Action MJ	Ongoing
CFW from June mtg	22/026 Welcome Pack JD currently drafting a document	Cfw
CFW from April mtg	<p>JD to produce a draft S106 submission for Guardroom Solar Heater for the next meeting.</p> <p>JD to continue to try to resolve the lighting issue, to enable the lights to be dimmable.</p>	<p>Cfw</p> <p>Cfw</p>
CFW Sept	<p>23/088 Planning</p> <p>ACTION: TG to check the Planning Application Tracker and report any decision notices issued at future meetings.</p>	Ongoing

County Councillor Report, February 2025

Stanton Harcourt Parish Council

This is the first report of 2025

A slightly belated Happy New Year to all the residents of Stanton Harcourt and Sutton. The customary quiet period over the Christmas break didn't apply this year, for reasons explained below. Apologies that this month's report is very long and mostly on one topic.

Local Government changes.

Government mandate

The Government White Paper on Devolution and Local Government in England was published in December, and the government demanded input from top tier local authorities, ie, county councils and unitary councils, by 10 January.

Among other things, the government strongly hinted that it expected any authority wanting to get the set up it wants to ask for a postponement of elections in May. Carrying on with elections would be seen as being half-hearted about the new governance arrangements.

It has been made explicitly clear that "do nothing" is not an option, whether we like what we are being required to do or not.

The reorganisation will end up with all authorities being unitaries, of a minimum size of 500,000 residents, ie there will be no more district councils and no small unitary councils. A unitary council does all the things that are currently done separately by county councils (like social care and road maintenance) and by district councils (like planning and refuse collection).

WODC will cease to exist at some time during this parliament, probably in 2027. And each authority will be part of a Strategic Combined Authority, most of which will have mayors, with the mayor being directly elected and with additional funding in areas like inward investment and infrastructure. As additional powers and money will go to these mayors, the government is calling this devolution, although in reality power is being taken further away from local communities rather than closer. The Mayor is typically leader of a committee comprising the leaders of all its constituent unitaries, and a key determinant of how successful an authority will be can be how much influence those members have on mayoral activities.

It is also requiring these two separate and complex things – unitarization and the creation of combined authorities – to happen at the same time, which is ambitious.

Oxfordshire

Oxfordshire's letter to the Secretary of State was sent on 10 January. It said that Oxfordshire wishes to be part of the fast track for this process. We are working with neighbouring authorities to create a Thames Valley Mayoral Combined Authority (which will have almost the same footprint as the Thames Valley Police minus Milton Keynes and a very similar footprint to the local NHS commissioning board), and that we want to unitarize at pace. Some parts of Oxfordshire are calling for Swindon to be part of the MCA.

We believe a unitary covering the whole of Oxfordshire best meets the minimum size criterion and will cause least disruption to key services like social services, which

otherwise would have to be partitioned between different unitary authorities.
Oxfordshire contains about 750000 residents.
<https://data.oxfordshire.gov.uk/population/current-population/>

Each of the district councils has had input to the letter. All of the districts bar the City Council endorsed it. All the party leaders at the County Council have given backing to the County Council approach.

Oxford City Council has suggested we should not be looking to get the first – and hence most empowered – Mayoral Combined Authority, and that instead of a whole Oxfordshire unitary, there should be a new Oxford Unitary using an “enhanced geography”, ie the city will encompass areas like Cassington, Kidlington, Kennington, Botley and Eynsham, and probably Witney and Abingdon. This is unlikely to meet the half million resident qualification, and would create a financially challenged authority from the start as well as being unwelcome in many swallowed – up places. The remaining, non-Oxford area, would also have insufficient people and be an odd set up.

Democracy and elections

We have called for County Council elections to go ahead in May, unless the government can guarantee that a shadow authority can be in place by May 26 and that elections to that shadow can happen then. Even if elections are postponed at the edict of the government, we expect a number of by-elections to take place.

This has been misreported as calling for elections to be cancelled. The opposite is true. The next full set of elections will either be for the unitary or unitaries, or for the County Council under the new boundaries which have come into force.

By-elections will be under the present boundaries. Although it will require a statutory instrument from the government to make this happen. Apologies for the uncertainty and complexity.

We had been led to expect further guidance from the government by the end of January, but instead got a “holding message”. We are working on the assumption that there will be elections in May unless told otherwise.

There is much more detail on the County Council website.
<https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MIId=7978&x=1>

Parish and Town Councils

My belief, and certainly that of my party and our Green colleagues, is that we must ensure that decisions can still be taken locally where that is the best place for them to happen, and where that can ensure that residents can best have a say. So things like planning still need to happen at a much more local scale than the unitary authority, and parish and town councils need to have stronger local powers, possibly in combination with other parishes where appropriate.

There clearly is an issue that some town councils and parish councils, like Witney, are large and well-resourced, and others are not. Not all of the places in Oxfordshire have a parish council.

Budget, roads, flooding

The County Council budget will be agreed on February 11th.
The finances for 25-26 look to be reasonably secure, given the prudent management of the county council and substantial progress on making efficiencies, combined with a sensible council tax increase of 4.99% and a moderately generous grant from government.

This is true despite only being reimbursed about 80% of our direct additional costs of employee national insurance (ENIC) and none of the costs of ENIC borne by our contractors and suppliers.

Future years may be more difficult, as the government has said it will rebalance funding to support more disadvantaged places and there are likely to be (unhelpful) changes to business rates and various grant schemes. Oxfordshire is relatively prosperous, despite having pockets of very severe deprivation.

Among other measures, we are restoring annual gulley clearing. The budget of 2021 had reduced this to once every four years. There will be more money for flood measures and nearly £50m for road maintenance. We are maintaining the investment in children's services and adult social care, which together take up the bulk of the budget.

We are also suggesting putting a substantial amount aside as a reserve to cover some of the upfront costs of the reorganisation that is coming.

A40

Thank you to everyone who took part in the consultation about the improvements to the A40 from Wolvercote to Eynsham. The data is being collated so it can be part of refinements to the plans.

Work will start on Shores Green in February to make the junction four way. There will be some temporary closures at times, which will be advertised as usual. Construction will take some time and I appreciate that it will be disruptive. The new junction will create a new way for people in Stanton Harcourt to get onto the A40 westbound - the traffic calming measures in South Leigh have been put in because of the potential use of their village by more through traffic.

As ever, please contact me at dan.levy@oxfordshire.gov.uk

**Stanton Harcourt Parish Council – MP and District Councillor update,
3rd February, 2025**

I gave evidence to the High Court today, on behalf of Thames Water's 16 million customers. As you will know, the company is putting up its bills from April by £19 a month. What is particularly upsetting is that more than a quarter of our bills is being spent on just paying the interest costs of their enormous debt mountain. Thames Water is proposing adding a further £3bn of very expensive debt to the £18bn of debt already in the company. I am intervening in the court process to urge the judge not to permit this and instead to put the company into bankruptcy, also known as Special Administration. This is so that much of its existing debt can be written off and the company's finances stabilised. The company must have a sufficiently strong financial position to be able to fund the large amounts required to fix our sewage treatment works and networks. I am also happy to report that the Judge provided me with a "Protective Costs Order" this morning, which means that I cannot be sued for all my worldly goods, which was a possibility and is consequently quite a relief. We believe a judgement will be announced on February 14th.

On Saturday, January 18th I went on a walk across our ward. I set off at 7am from the roundabout just south of Eynsham and walked across Pinkhill and through Sutton to join Matt and Rob, Men's Breakfast leads (first Saturday of the month at 8am!) in the Harcourt Arms. My fellow ward councillor and SH resident, Steve Cosier, joined me there and for all of the rest of the walk. We chatted our way to Bablock Hythe where we talked through all the flooding troubles there (I'm asking parliamentary questions on this issue) and then on to Northmoor where the Saturday market was in full swing. So much so and there so many people to chat to and issues to talk through that we were late for our pints in the Black Horse in Standlake. We went the back way via St. Marys', Shifford through Cote and on to Aston. We watched the men's football team not do so well against Uffington (no, I won't give the score) and then on to Aston Pottery for tea, cake and discussions on flooding and housing. No surprises there, just yet more housing sites and the same old flooding. What I am happy to see is that the water level loggers pioneered in Standlake are now in use in Aston (well done Paula, Kathy), allowing residents to record hyper accurate data on water levels, rather than being dependent on data collected by hydrologists which are themselves funded by developers. Linking this up with drone surveys and photos and compelling cases are being put together which help protect our villages. By the end of the walk, I was very tired, hoarse and very happy. I loved meeting as many people as we did and loved the walk too. We are lucky to live such a beautiful place.

As I said soon after July's general election, I will be standing down as your district councillor. I will be doing this in sync with the upcoming council elections on May 1st. This avoids the time and cost of having to run an extra by-election. Sandra Cosier will be standing to replace me. As many readers beyond the parish council will already know, Sandra is a Stanton Harcourt Parish Councillor, previously worked for the RAF and the NHS and has a very sensible head on her shoulders. She is also a bell ringer at St. Michael's and is married to the abovementioned Steve. We are very lucky to have such an excellent candidate.

Best wishes,

Charlie