

## Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2024

**Present:**

Keith Hickson	(KH)	Chair
Geoff Webster	(GW)	Vice-Chair
Joe Deane	(JD)	Councillor
Jim Coleman	(JC)	Councillor
Sandra Cosier	(SC)	Councillor
Trudi Gasser	(TG)	Parish Clerk

**In Attendance:**

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

MIN REF	ITEM
<b>24/100</b>	<b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b> Ellen Judson (EJ) Councillor Charlie Maynard (CM) District Councillor
<b>24/101</b>	<b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b> No Declarations made.
<b>24/102</b>	<b>APPROVAL of MINUTES</b> Minutes Parish Council Meeting of the 4 <sup>th</sup> November 2024 were approved for publication.
<b>24/103</b>	<b>MATTERS ARISING</b> Minutes approved  24/089 - Waste Bins: New litter dog bin installed at cemetery.  24/098 - Sign to Cricket Field: Sign installed  24/091 - Blackditch Brook: KH to contact David Bury regarding clearing the brook. GW to follow up re discharge with the EA.
<b>24/104</b>	<b>COUNTY &amp; DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORTS</b> See attached appendix for full reports.  Steve Cosier, District Councillor, WODC: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Winter Fuel</li> <li>• Mental Health</li> <li>• Phase 1 Electoral Review</li> </ul> Dan Levy, County Councillor, OCC: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Budget Consultation</li> <li>• A40 Consultation</li> </ul>

<b>24/105</b>	<p><b>QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speeding in the Village: The PC were asked to provide an update on the speeding signs due to be installed on the B4449. KH confirmed currently in discussion with OCC Highways regarding installation. The purchase of the signs has been approved, it was just the installation that needed to be agreed.</li> <li>• Royal British Legion: The donation had not yet been received. TG confirmed that the previous donation had been £60. JD proposed the PC make a donation of £60, GW seconded, all in favour. It was RESOLVED to make the donation – TG to progress.</li> <li>• Planning: The PC had recently objected to a planning application 24/01726/HHD   Demolition of single storey rear extension and porch, erection of two storey rear extension, conversion of outbuilding into a utility room and associated works (amended plans)   Farmside Sutton Lane Sutton Witney Oxfordshire OX29 5RU</li> </ul> <p>The applicant requested more information from the PC as to why they had objected. The PC replied that all applications are reviewed by the PC on their own merit, with the WODC Planning Policy in mind.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Green Hedge: It was reported that there is currently a large gap in the hedge on the green opposite the School entrance which could pose a risk to children using the gap and crossing to school on a dangerous bend. It was suggested the PC consider purchasing more hedge to fill the gap or insert a temporary fence to prevent this. KH to review.</li> </ul>
<b>24/106</b>	<p><b>PLANNING</b></p> <p>No new applications had been received for comment.</p>
<b>24/107</b>	<p><b>PC WEBSITE</b></p> <p>Still looking at host for the website for the new gov.uk address. A report would be circulated to the councillors before the meeting.</p>
<b>24/108</b>	<p><b>VILLAGE VOICE</b></p> <p>Copy for next edition: GW volunteered to provide copy for the next issue.</p>
<b>24/109</b>	<p><b>GUARDROOM</b></p> <p>SC had purchased lights and other accessories for the Guardroom.</p> <p>Discussion had taken place with Hayfields regarding the insulation in the loft, as it is non-existent. Hayfields were being uncooperative, claiming the building was insulated, when it clearly isn't. SC to progress.</p> <p>Bookings are steady. A request had been received to hold a party with a toddler's bouncy castle in the room, the PC discussed and it was felt the bouncy castle was too large – TG to reply accordingly. JD to provide dimensions of the Guardroom for reference.</p>

<b>24/110</b>	<b>CEMETERY WASTE</b> A letter had been received regarding disposal of waste at the Cemetery. It was discussed among the PC, there are no facilities to dispose of garden waste at the cemetery, the green bin was for the groundsman's use only and all members of the public should be encouraged to take their waste home for disposal. TG to chase EJ to produce a notice for the bins and the cemetery noticeboard.
<b>24/111</b>	<b>FINANCE</b> Initial discussions for the budget plans: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NALC had completed the pay review resulting in an increase to the Clerk's pay to £17.79 per hour, backdated to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.</li> <li>• The budget was discussed and agreed by the PC. TG to circulate the final budget to all.</li> <li>• KH proposed the precept for 2025/6 be set at £40,000 – JD seconded, all in favour. It was RESOLVED to set the precept at £40,000 – TG to progress.</li> <li>• The PC currently have 2 accounts, one for the PC and one for the Guardroom. TG proposed the accounts be combined to one account to save on bank fees. All agreed.</li> <li>• TG to circulate the S106 fund information to all for information.</li> </ul>
<b>24/112</b>	<b>CORRESPONDENCE</b> Nothing to report as covered earlier in the meeting.
<b>24/113</b>	<b>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</b>  Christmas Tree Lights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matthew Judson kindly volunteered to install lights on the Christmas tree.</li> </ul> Key to Airfield Bunkers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hayfield claimed to have given the key to the bunker to the PC. The PC do not have the keys. JD/SC to investigate.</li> </ul>
<b>24/114</b>	<b>NEXT MEETING</b> 7.30pm on Monday 3 <sup>rd</sup> February 2025 in the Old Guardroom.

Signed .....

Date .....

## ACTIONS CARRIED FORWARD FROM EARLIER MEETINGS:

	<b>ACTIONS CARRIED FORWARD</b>	
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	<p>21/092 All/PC to continue logging TW complaints with DL/OCC None received – Notice to be put on Village Voice (Hardcopy &amp; Facebook) asking all issues to be sent to Parish Clerk with the Title ‘Water Issues’ PC will then progress with Thames Water. Action MJ</p>	Ongoing
CFW from June mtg	<p>22/026 Welcome Pack JD currently drafting a document</p>	Cfw
CFW from April mtg	<p>JD to produce a draft S106 submission for Guardroom Solar Heater for the next meeting. 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 ACTION: TG to check the Planning Application Tracker and report any decision notices issued at future meetings.</p>	Ongoing
CFW Sept	<p>23/090 Guardroom ACTION: JD To continue progressing the Guardroom Solar Heating project.</p>	Cfw

## **Roads**

### **A40**

The revised HIF2 A40 plans are now in the public consultation phase. There is a drop in events on 4 December in Eynsham. Information on the scheme and on how to comment is at <https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/share-your-views-on-a40-eynsham-park-and-ride-to-wolvercote/>

Those with long memories may remember that my predecessor as your county councillor Charles Mathew and I both opposed the plans to build the park and ride and focus on A40 bus travel as the way to make the A40 work, as we neither thought it was going to be effective. However, the previous administration set up the scheme, and we need to make it work as effectively as possible. We will do that by focussing on the junctions, to make sure that they are as efficient as they can be. Improvements to the Eynsham roundabout and to the Cassington junction will make a huge difference. We will also ensure that the bike lane between Eynsham and Wolvercote is upgraded.

There will be additional bus stops, and bus lanes for much of the length of the road. The Park and Ride – built to budget – will come into operation.

Unfortunately, the funding for the scheme from central government is insufficient for what was originally envisaged, and we have to make the most of what we have been offered.

### **Barnard Gate**

There is work in Barnard Gate to strengthen the bridge on the old A40. Once that is finished, the County Council will address the ongoing problem at the more westerly junction with the A40, which is both dangerous and difficult to use. It is likely that only left turns will be allowed at the junction, which may inconvenience a high proportion of current users, or at least require them to take a different route.

### **Bus improvement**

There continues to be a lot of work with the bus companies to make services as useful as possible. The H2 service is being doubled in frequency, and is a brilliant way to get to the JR and to Headington. The government has awarded additional money for Oxfordshire, mainly for capital projects such as buying new buses, rather than to allow support for fares, and has of course increased the cap on fares from £2 to £3 from next year.

### **Budget**

The budget cycle at the County Council is well underway, although the government is being unhelpfully opaque about what money will be available for local government. We have not, for instance, been told whether the rebate of the Employer NI contributions for council employees will be made from grants already announced. We certainly don't expect that there will be reimbursement for the additional costs being incurred by suppliers and partners, for instance in adult social care. Our final proposals for the budget will be published once the government settlement is made in December. Initial proposals went public at the end of last week and a consultation is open – it would be good to hear from many residents. The budget has to be agreed by the council in February.

One of the areas that will be addressed is flood resilience. We are getting much more frequent flood events because of climate change. Flooding is happening in places that have not habitually had issues, as well as in places that have flooded more regularly. We have announced that, among other things, we will spend a substantial amount of improving the drainage associated with the road network.

### **Winter Fuel Allowance**

Winter Fuel Allowance is now means-tested, at a level of about £13k pa. This will affect far more

people than is fair. Only those in receipt of pensioner credit will get WFA. Despite opposition from the Labour group at the County Council, we agreed to write to the Chancellor to ask her to review the policy, and to ensure that we financially support organisations helping pensioners to claim what they are entitled to. We work with, among others, the excellent Citizens Advice in Witney. Please do point people in their direction if they need assistance.

### **Recycling Centres**

The County Council is going to introduce a booking system for household waste and recycling centres, including Dix Pit, in order to reduce queues and improve efficiency. It is likely to come into operation before the Redbridge site, in the City, is closed for refurbishment. We expect that the booking system will have the additional benefit of removing the abuse of the system by trade waste being disguised as household waste.

<https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/recycling-centre-booking-system/>

As ever, please contact me on [dan.levy@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:dan.levy@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

### **WINTER FUEL PAYMENTS**

At Full Council a motion was passed with regards to winter fuel payments. The Executive has since considered a report at Informal Executive covering both the aspects of the motion but also our wider support to people facing financial hardship.

I would like to update you on the work being done by the Council across a range of areas:

### **The Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT) programme**

This scheme, being delivered by our Revenues and Benefits Team, is a new and innovative way to use data to target support for people at risk of crisis. Working with Policy in Practice, our data will be combined with other data and analysed to identify households at risk and they will then be sent targeted communications to help them access relevant support and avoid crisis.

### **The Household Support Fund**

The Household Support Fund comes to upper tier authorities only and Oxfordshire County Council approves a small discretionary pot to the district councils in Oxfordshire. The latest round of HSF funding has just been agreed at the OCC cabinet meeting in November. We have been planning the distribution of this targeted financial support ahead of this decision and we have now issued communications letting residents know how the funding will be used in preventing homelessness and providing direct payments to residents in receipt of certain benefits.

### **Engaging with communities and charity partners**

The council is actively engaging with communities and charity partners around cost-of-living impacts for a number of years – providing funding, advice and wider support.

More recently we have delivered a wide range of support:

Direct communications out to community networks via:

- the Community Wellbeing newsletter via direct and targeted emails to 3rd sector partners at events and network meetings such as the West Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Alliance.
- The Council's Resident Support Worker remains available to support any residents facing financial barriers to accessing food or energy. The phone line is 01993 861077.
- The Council will provide support to Age UK who are running several pop-up events across West Oxfordshire during the Autumn (through the 3-year service level agreements). They have a particular push on Pension Credit and provide a variety of resources to share with communities.
- The Community Wellbeing team oversees the distribution of the 'discretionary' element of Household Support Fund (HSF). HSF 5, which covered the period April to September 2024, has been distributed to 3rd sector organisations who work with those who are vulnerable and face financial barriers to accessing food and energy.

Using our communications channels to inform residents of support:

WODC have been issuing communications across a wide range of channels in recent months to encourage people to take up financial support where it's needed. This has been in support of some large national campaigns run by Government departments and charities encouraging take up of pension credit.

WODC have:

- Shared campaign messaging around the pension credit campaign across all the council channels including social media (Facebook, Nextdoor, Instagram, LinkedIn) and the councils e- newsletter
- Included contacts in the annual WODC Voice magazine which was delivered to all

residents from 18th November. We will look to include more financial support information in the council tax bill due to be issued in March 2025.

- We maintain their Cost-of-Living page on the website and also keep a prominent link on the website home page
- The Council's Cost of Living leaflet is widely distributed and is now being used by Age UK. It includes contacts for a wide variety of support organisations. It mirrors the information on the Council's website. In addition, our Resident Support Worker has produced a version tailored especially to older residents.

#### MENTAL HEALTH

At Full Council I supported a motion to help the Council's Mental Health Champion and officers to increase the council's support for staff and residents suffering with mental health issues. The council has agreed to join the Zero Suicide Alliance and provide signposting to cost of living material in their literature, use the on-line community hub and in provide support in arrears letters. Members voted for my amendment below to help the council:

- That the leader of the council write to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care urging that the government ensures that the suicide prevention strategy is fully funded, with sufficient resources allocated to local councils to assist in their front-line suicide prevention efforts.
- That the leader of the council write to our local MPs to urge them to lobby the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to ensure that the Government extends the suicide prevention funding to support its new suicide prevention strategy.

#### PHASE 1: ELECTORAL REVIEW OF WEST OXFORDSHIRE

West Oxfordshire District Council is subject to an electoral review by The Local Government Boundary Commission for England ("the Commission"). The review is primarily aimed at addressing variances in the numbers of electors in wards across the district, with 12 of 27 wards outside a variance of +/-10%, and Witney West ward at +31%. The Commission has a duty set out in law to review every local authority "from time to time" and West Oxfordshire was last reviewed in 2001.

WODC are Phase 1 of the review, and that is to consider the future size of the Council i.e. the number of Councillors, also known as Members, on West Oxfordshire District Council. The Council is invited to submit a Council Size Proposal to the Commission by mid-February 2025.

Regardless of what the future size of West Oxfordshire District Council is, the Council will be required to hold whole-Council elections on new ward boundaries in May 2027.

Councillors elected at the local elections in May 2026 will serve a one-year term.

Thank you

Steve

Steve.cosier@westoxon.gov.uk



**Farmers** - I met with a big group of local farmers in parliament who had travelled to London to raise their concerns about the impact of Labour's tax changes on the family farm. We had a really useful and constructive conversation. I believe that the tax changes represent an existential threat to family farms and that is on top of many other problems that have been piled on farmers. The government is accelerating the withdrawal of the Basic Payment Scheme, is hiking both national insurance contributions and the minimum wage and is insufficiently activist in ensuring that all agricultural gains aren't pocketed by the supermarkets and processors at the expense of the farmers. There is also little prospect of the reduced access both to international markets and labour caused by the last government being resolved.

**Winter Fuel Allowance** – I voted against this cut and I am now working with colleagues to see what can be done to contact pensioners who are still eligible for their winter fuel allowance but not claiming it, with the goal of increasing the uptake of allowance from those most in need.

**Assisted Dying vote** – last month I organised a discussion in the Corn Exchange in Witney with four well qualified experts setting out the case both for and against the Bill. The auditorium was filled to the brim and the audience had the chance to ask lots of questions. On November 29<sup>th</sup> I and 329 other MPs voted in favour of the Bill. The Bill now passes to the next of many stages, where it will be considered, line by line, at committee before the report and third reading stages and review by the Lords. I was relieved and pleased to see serious, considered, respectful debate by all parties, with very fair arguments being made by both sides.

**Sewage** – I met with Emma Hardy, the under-secretary of state responsible for sewage. I made the case to her that our rivers, our communities, our country and her government would all be much better off if Thames Water was placed into Special Administration now and its debts massively written down. Allowing vulture funds to end up in control of the company, as will be the case through the proposed restructuring, will serve no one and will result in the company continued to be swamped with debt. She does not appear minded to take action, at least for now.

**Flooding** – Storm Bert was brutal. Some areas such as Eastfield Road and Hailey Road in Witney came up in a flash; some like Bablock Hythe, were slower to arrive but worse in scale. Thank you to everyone who helped out. We have a long term issue which is getting worse, with flooding becoming both more frequent and more severe. I am going to be taking part in the review process as to what worked well and what needs to be improved. I also asked Steve Reed, Secretary of State for the Environment, for help with funding the modelling regarding rivers including the Thames, Windrush and Evenlode. Yes, we need to be as prepared as possibly can be as a community, but we also need to work with the communities and farmers upstream on a medium to long term plan to lower and slow the flood crest through holding more water back further upstream. Getting this modelling done is a key early step in that process. Mr. Reed said he would revert with more news after the New Year.

**Health** – on the back of Dr. Steve Bright's suggestion, Standlake resident and Witney GP, I asked Wes Streeting for his help in accelerating putting QR codes on the NHS App so that patients can be more quickly and more safely processed. One of the things I most enjoy doing in parliament is pushing forward constituents' practical, sensible suggestions, such as this one. Mr. Streeting responded positively to the suggestion. We will be following up.

**PMQs** – I asked my first Prime Minister's Question. I asked Keir Starmer that while I recognised that he and his party had decided to continue the Conservative's economically ruinous decision to leave the single market and customs union, would he agree with the principle that where it is in our country's interest to maintain alignment with EU standards so we can better sell our products internationally, we align; and where it is in our interests to diverge, we diverge?" I did not get a clear answer.

**Witney Rail** - the 2024 Planning and Land Use Barrister of the Year has kindly offered his services for free to help us incorporate the rail project into West Oxfordshire's Local Plan. We have a meeting on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> with key WODC councillors and officers to discuss this further. I continue to work hard on this given both the dire state of the A40 and the new government's very onerous housebuilding targets for West Oxfordshire.

**Christmas!** – I very much enjoyed the Lights switch-ons in both Witney and Carterton. I wish you and your loved ones a very, very merry Christmas and a happy 2025.