

EYE & DUNSDEN PARISH COUNCIL
Minutes of a Meeting held on November 16th 2021 at 7.45pm at Dunsden Village Hall

Present: Cllrs David Woodward, Ian Pringle, Cllr Richard Berkley, Naomi Baylis, Clive Leeke, David Bartholomew (OCC +SODC) and Leigh Rawlins (SODC)

129/21 Apologies for absence None

130/21 Declarations of interest None

131/21 Minutes of the last meeting The minutes from the meetings on September 21st 2021 were adopted. Adoption was proposed by Richard Berkley and seconded by David Woodward.

132/21 Matters arising from the minutes

126/21 Richard Berkley will respond to the e-mail from Grabloader in order to move towards arranging a liaison meeting. **(Cllr Berkley to action)**

123.02/21 Footpath from the allotments to the Flowing Spring: Savills have passed the request for clearing the first section of the footpath to Tarmac.

123.03/21 OCC has responded positively to the request for pedestrian signs to warn motorists that pedestrians are crossing between footpaths over the B481. OCC are consulting on a scheme which may allow 20mph limits in more built up areas. **(Cllr Baylis & Clerk to action)**

133/21 County Councillor's report Cllr Bartholomew summarised his local reports. The full report will be attached to the minutes. Discussion about the lack of enforcement by SODC again took place especially regarding the amount of planning breaches at Caversham Lakes. It was decided to write to SODC Chief Executive & Enforcement regarding this. A letter to Tarmac is also being prepared. **(Cllr Berkley to action)**

134/21 District Councillor's Report Cllr Rawlins summarised his report which is attached to these minutes. Cllr Rawlins mentioned the opportunities for applying for grants. He also asked if the PC had thought about any plans for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. It was decided that this item should appear on the January agenda.

135/21 Public Question Time/Correspondence None

136/21 Financial Position

136.01/21 The present financial situation had been previously circulated.

136.02/21 The November accounts were presented for payment. Invoices to the value of £683.38 were agreed. David Woodward proposed the accounts be paid. This was seconded by Richard Berkley. All agreed.

136.03/21 The budget figures had been forwarded to Councillors prior to the meeting. These were discussed in the light of expenses expecting next year. Ian Pringle proposed that the precept be increased this year. This was seconded by Richard Berkley. A 15% increase on the current precept which had been unchanged for the last two years was suggested. All agreed. **(Clerk to action)** The CIL figures were also discussed as the Clerk will need to prepare the annual report. The CIL monies will be initially used for the signage repairs in Dunsden, Playhatch and Furleigh Bank to be discussed in January. **(Clerk to action)**

137/21 Planning Matters

New Applications

P21/S4201/HH Detached garage Jay Cottage 3 Row Lane Dunsden RG4 9PS This was discussed and will be recommended for approval. All agreed. Decision ratified.

P21/S1298/FUL Amendment Ecological Appraisal Report The Mill at Sonning (Theatre) Ltd.
(For information only)

P21/S4539/FUL Build a new external skin of brickwork to the flat roof extension to afford support to the existing wall. A false pitched facade to the roof of the flat roof extension. Remove the roller shutter door and make the opening smaller for some new glazing. Alter / add doorways windows to elevations. Mill Farm Sonning Eye RG4 6TR This was discussed and the PC had no strong views on this application. All agreed. Decision ratified.

Applications Granted

None

138/21 Eye & Dunsden Village Hall The village hall manager has resigned. The management committee requires new trustees.

139/21 Neighbourhood Development Plan The NDP is aiming to limit expenditure where possible but has requested a further £5000 grant from the PC to help cover the cost of the official public consultation. In the light of the budget discussion it was proposed that this should be granted from next year's income. This was proposed by Naomi Baylis and seconded by Ian Pringle. All agreed.

140/21 Community Orchard. Nothing to report.

141/21 Highways, Footpaths & Open Spaces

141.01/21 Naomi reported that the rebuilt pillar near the Mill at Sonning had been knocked sideways and was now partially blocking the pavement meaning that buggies and wheelchairs would have to pass on the road. This will be reported to OCC. **(Clerk to action)**

141.02/21 Clive Leeke reported that an extension to the reservoir at the top of Foxhill Lane was being constructed.

141.03/21 A lot of work has taken place to improve the flooding and the state of Sandpit and Tagg Lane. However, the work undertaken by the contractors was of a poor standard and will not last. An e-mail will be written to Highways explaining the problem. **(Cllr Pringle and Clerk to action)**

142/21 Allotments There is one allotment to let. Rents are coming in. **(Clerk to action)**

143/21 Website The Chairman has been searching for someone to update the website and make it compliant. Cllr Baylis offered to look at the problem. Richard Berkley also suggested a contact who may be able to help. **(Cllr Baylis and Cllr Berkley to action)**

144/21 Minerals/Playhatch & Sonning pit Liaison Groups No recent meetings

145/21 Remembrance Day The Chairman laid the wreath at the Remembrance Day Service.

146/21 Matters for future consideration Various signage; Platinum Jubilee Celebration; possible Dunsden Conservation Area; website.

Next meeting

January 18th 2022

REPORT TO EYE & DUNSDEN PARISH COUNCIL NOV 2021 FROM CLLR DAVID BARTHOLOMEW

GENERAL OCC REPORT

LEADER BELATEDLY CALLS ON GOVERNMENT FOR MORE MONEY

Long after the consultation period closed, the OCC Leader belatedly wrote to the Prime Minister two days before Government's autumn budget to ask for more social care funding.

FIRST THEY BANNED 'CHAIRMAN', NOW THEY WANT TO BAN MEAT & DAIRY

I have previously reported how the administration has banned the use of the word 'chairman', now a member of the Liberal Democrat Green Alliance is bringing a motion to Full Council on November 2nd to ban meat and dairy products from being served at Council-catered events and meetings. Veganism is a personal choice that should be respected but this attempt to dictate the diet of others is totally unacceptable. I have proposed an amendment that does not ban meat and dairy but ensures a vegan option is available. I hope it is accepted.

PROPOSALS FOR 20MPH SPEED LIMIT ACROSS OXFORDSHIRE TOWNS & VILLAGES

On October 19th the OCC Cabinet approved a proposal that has the objective of switching 85% of the county's 30mph speed limits to 20mph. The document can be read [here](#). Whatever side of the argument parish councils and residents are on, the proposal is unlikely to satisfy anyone. Key points are:

- The plan is to spend £8m changing 30mph signs to 20mph signs (para 12 of report).
- The new lower limit will not be enforced by the police (para 26).
- In the unlikely event of a speeding fine being issued, there is a high degree of probability it could be successfully legally challenged as the usual procedures will not have been followed (para 32).

- Everything hinges on drivers obeying the new limit as a matter of conscience (para 9). The reality will be that the word will get out that the limit is a paper tiger with no teeth and it will be widely flouted: diligent drivers who currently observe limits will continue to do so, but speeders will continue to speed. Many might think the county would be better spending the £8m on more road repairs.

HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING CENTRES SET FOR REFRESH IN NOVEMBER

People planning to use Oxfordshire's household waste recycling centres (HWRCs) during November are being warned about a series of short closures to enable essential work to be carried out. OCC will be shutting each of its centres for two days to allow for deep cleaning and essential maintenance to take place. This includes jet washing the sites and structures, repainting lines and safety areas, as well as other general work to improve the customer experience. The closing dates for Oakley Wood are Tuesday 16 and Wednesday 17 November.

NEW TRANSPORT PLAN WITH CONFUSED OBJECTIVES APPROVED BY CABINET

The Local Transport and Connectivity Plan sets out to reduce the need to travel and to discourage individual private vehicle use. The ambition is to press residents into walking and cycling, or to use public and shared transport. While there are merits in parts of these proposals, residents in rural areas will have concerns about how this is to be delivered given Oxford always seems to take priority. OCC is proposing to undertake a further public consultation on the plan and supporting strategies in due course with final adoption of the plan currently scheduled for spring 2022.

CHANGES TO PARKING ENFORCEMENT GO LIVE ON 1 NOVEMBER

The way parking is controlled in parts of Oxfordshire will change next week. From 1 November, OCC will take on responsibility for civil parking enforcement from Thames Valley Police. The council already enforces parking in Oxford. It has also delegated the role to the district council in West Oxfordshire. OCC is now taking over in South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and at Cherwell District Council. The new arrangement also means the creation of extra on-street pay and display car parking spaces in the Vale of White Horse, South Oxfordshire and Cherwell districts. The hope is that the new arrangement will be self-funding, with the extra pay and display spaces helping to pay for enforcement costs, although there will be some limited funding from the three districts.

SPECIFIC OCC REPORT FOR EYE & DUNSDEN

HUMANE DISPATCH OF DEER INJURED ON ROADS

Across all my parishes, I often get enquiries about what can be done to prevent deer getting injured on roads. Unfortunately, there is little that can be done other than erecting signs in appropriate places. I was therefore concerned to learn that it appears the process for the humane dispatch of injured animals is not running smoothly. As a result of this, I have asked the OCC Director of Community Safety to make contact with Thames Valley Police so that the matter can be investigated.

GENERAL SODC REPORT

NEW CORPORATE HQ IN DIDCOT

At the Full Council meeting on October 7th, Council was asked to approve the budget and borrowings for a new £multi-million corporate headquarters in Didcot. The objective of the administration is to construct a building bigger than that needed by the council in order to rent-out the surplus office space to produce an income stream. The Conservative Group continues to oppose this proposal on the basis that the council would be entering into speculative property investment using borrowed money, and that there may already be other existing council buildings in Oxfordshire that could be re-purposed.

SPECIFIC SODC REPORT FOR EYE & DUNSDEN

P20/S3501/FUL-3: CHANGE OF USE OF LAKE FOR RECREATION/SPORTS PURPOSES

The application has been refused, but an appeal is anticipated. A full report is available on the SODC website. As this was a retrospective application, SODC Enforcement has opened a file and officer Julie Perrin has been allocated to the case.

SODC ward councillor's report Eye & Dunsden – 16th November 2021

Covid-19

Covid cases are fluctuating around a similar range. A rather lower overall than last month but much higher than at the equivalent time last year - as the Delta (Indian - B.1.617.2) variant continues to make its mark. Overall not a drama, but UK rates are higher than many elsewhere, albeit that a 4th wave is now surging in Austria and Germany. At 9/11, Oxford City was at a weekly rate of 247 per 100k population. By comparison, Cherwell DC was 342, West Oxon DC at 427, SODC at 310 and Vale of WH DC at 359. Reading BC (to 9th November) was at 277. The vaccine programme continues – with particular focus on completing the younger groups down to age 16, completing 2nd doses and boosters. Some younger recipients seem hesitant – perhaps influenced by scares on social media. The booster programme is now in full swing - prioritising the top 4 vulnerable groups and moving on to address the over 50s; this is then to be extended to over 40s. A broad-based flu inoculation programme is underway to try to protect the NHS during the winter. Government is hopeful that we may have seen the worst from known Covid variants. The key seems to be to maintain antibody levels and to protect against flu. The risks of co-infection or twin infection with both flu and Covid are troubling virologists.

Refuse collection

The national shortage of HGV drivers continues. The Government have made tweaks to their proposals and temporary changes. Managers at BIFFA are doing their best to recruit more. In the meantime the brown bin garden waste collections have been on temporary stop. The Brown Bin “Garden Waste” service resumed on 4th October but initially was on a four-weekly cycle. At each collection Biffa will take a full bin and as much again in garden side-waste. Subsequently, the fortnightly collection of the Brown bins resumed from 1st November – starting with a “double” week of a full bin and as much again in garden side-waste. Biffa are working hard – including weekend working. Users’ annual subscriptions will be extended by 3 months before a new start-of-year DD payment is taken.

New offices for SODC

Progress is being made on new offices for SODC following the fire that destroyed the Crowmarsh offices in January 2015. The previous administration did all too little to progress matters causing all the insurance money and millions more to be eaten up by the expensive temporary costs of Milton Park. Decisions to progress with more detail are proceeding with a view to utilise the Didcot Gateway site efficiently. The council owns this site within a wider Homes England owned site right opposite the Didcot railway station. In the wake of Covid and changed home-working patterns the council is planning for some 200 desk spaces for the shared council administration (rather than c. 400 before) and for 100 desks of commercial space on a floor above. The Gateway site is about 6 miles from the fast-growing Milton Park office park. (In 2019 in their prospectus, MEPC the owners of the MP site forecast expansion from 9 thousand jobs to 20 thousand by 2040.)

SODC Finances When the current administration SODC took over in 2019 it inherited a situation where SODC had a deficit of around £3m per annum. Deficits can only be funded from revenue reserves. Many factors contributed to this. These included past unjustified decisions to not increase or indeed to reduce the Council Tax level. In the period from April 2012 to date the cumulative effect of which are to worsen each current year’s deficit by more than £2m! Those decisions were made against officers’ advice and were not made in the context of revenue surpluses. The council now has the 8th lowest council tax charge amongst shire district councils in England. Overall SODC has a very low operating cost, despite operating in the high-cost South East and its problems are certainly not because of excess expenditure. However other issues have contributed to a significant reduction of its revenue reserves. These include an extremely slow response to provide new permanent office accommodation after the arson attack of January 2015 and other flawed decisions including a badly conceived and effected outsourcing arrangement that has largely had to be reversed and a complacent failure to review fees and charges. Overall these inappropriate past decisions have depleted SODC revenue reserves by some £20m (by March 2022). The new administration has reviewed and acted on many areas of neglect and sought to stem future deficits. Unfortunately legislation prevents SODC from increasing Council Tax by more than £5 per annum for a Band D property yet past mistakes have left the charge £35 below what it should have been. For the average Band D property this £35 difference would represent about £0.70 per week – but for the council it

makes large difference. Over the years since 2010, government austerity has reduced funding to local councils by some 45%. Clearly Covid has also brought additional challenges. Many local councils have deficits and very limited reserves such that in future years central government will either have to provide more central funding or to allow councils more scope to increase their Council Tax charge. SODC's problem is rather different from many in that our problem has been largely created locally in the past. There are some limited opportunities to increase charges and fees. There are however very limited opportunities to reduce costs. There are some areas of discretionary provision – such as Leisure Centres and there could also be opportunity to provide a lesser “minimum” statutory service – such as in planning or waste and recycling. However any such cost reductions would affect the service outcomes and cause residents to ask why their council services were worse than the standards expected elsewhere. Past poor decisions are at real risk of constraining future options for SODC.

IT Strategy

SODC is updating its IT Strategy with a view to addressing the neglect of past years, bringing hardware, IT comms and software up-to-date and addressing areas previously not properly covered. New and improved areas include customer relationship management and property.

Grants

The capital grants scheme is now open for applications from voluntary and community sector organisations and town and parish councils until mid-December. This vital funding offers capital grants to improve community facilities to help build and support thriving communities and improve the quality of life for the residents of South Oxfordshire. The total budget is £320,000 and organisations can apply for up to £75,000, and a maximum of 50 per cent of their total project cost – so matching funds are required. For further information about the grants scheme and scoring criteria please take a look at the website southoxon.gov.uk/grants. The Community Enablement Team on communityenablement@southandvale.gov.uk will welcome enquiries for help and advice. This is expected to be a very competitive funding round.

The Councillor grants scheme (round 2 of 2) will re-open on 22nd November. David and I work together to pool our grants. I believe that closure will be around the end of January. Eye & Dunsden PC's share would be £500 of grant. I would suggest preparing a project before Christmas, with a contribution from PC/organisation funds and progressing quotes ASAP.

Keep safe!

Leigh Rawlins
District Councillor