

EYE & DUNSDEN PARISH COUNCIL
Minutes of a Meeting held on January 18th at 7.45pm at Dunsden Village Hall

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

Due to the Government ruling that does not allow Parish Councils to meet remotely no decisions could be made at this meeting. Most items had to be deferred. In addition, there was no heating in the hall so the meeting was cut short.

001/22 Apologies for absence Naomi Baylis, Clive Leeke

002/22 Declarations of interest None

003/22 Minutes of the last meeting Signing the minutes from the meeting on November 16th 2021 will be deferred till February.

004/22 Matters arising from the minutes Deferred

005/22 County Councillor's report Cllr Bartholomew summarised his local reports. The full report will be attached to the minutes. Cllr Bartholomew was asked about speed checks as the police had indicated that this was the next step in sorting the ongoing problem of motorbike noise racing along the Henley Rd. Cllr Berkley will decide on position and the Clerk will request the check. **(Clerk to action)**

006/22 District Councillor's Report Cllr Rawlins summarised his report which is attached to these minutes. Cllr Rawlins mentioned the opportunities for applying for grants. The idea of applying for the cost of trees in the hall field for planting to commemorate the Queen's jubilee was discussed. The Clerk will look into this. **(Clerk to action)** Enforcement was discussed again. Cllr Rawlins assured the PC that it was essential that due process was followed.

007/22 Public Question Time/Correspondence None

008/22 Financial Position

008.01/21 The present financial situation had been previously circulated.

008.02/21 The December & January accounts were presented for payment. Invoices to the value of £10,399.66 were agreed. David Woodward proposed the accounts be paid. This was seconded by Richard Berkley online. The invoices will be paid and this decision will be ratified at the next meeting.

009/22 Planning Matters Noted

010/22 Eye & Dunsden Village Hall

011/22 Neighbourhood Development Plan Deferred

012/22 Community Orchard Deferred

013/22 Highways, Footpaths & Open Spaces Deferred

014/22 Allotments Deferred

015/22 Website The Chairman confirmed that research was being undertaken.

016/22 Minerals/Playhatch & Sonning pit Liaison Groups Most items deferred. Cllr Pringle asked for the e-mail from Mark Bostok to be forwarded. **(Clerk to action)**

017/22 Platinum Jubilee Deferred

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

Next meeting

February 15th 2022

REPORT TO EYE & DUNSDEN PARISH COUNCIL JAN 2022

FROM CLLR DAVID BARTHOLOMEW

GENERAL OCC REPORT

LARGE RISE IN COUNCIL TAX PROPOSED

The previous Conservative-led administration had put in place a Medium-Term Financial Strategy featuring a maximum of a 4% increase in Council Tax for 22/23. The new left-wing administration is proposing to increase this by a quarter to 5%. They intend to use the extra increase to fund a variety of proposals including £0.83m on climate action, £4.4m extra for adult social care, a £0.8m subsidy on assessed care needs, £1.2m extra on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and £1.15m extra on children's social care. The extra 1% increase in Council Tax could potentially be avoided altogether as the council has received an unexpected and generous grant of £6.1m from central government, equivalent to 1.5% Council Tax. My mailbox is dominated by issues relating to roads and drains and I am disappointed that there is no mention of these matters in the preliminary budget statement, which can be found at <https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/budget-202223/>

LEFT-WING ADMINISTRATION BANS MEAT & DAIRY PRODUCTS FROM EVENTS

The left-wing administration moved a motion at the Full Council meeting on 14th December to ban meat and dairy products from all council-catered events and meetings. I recognise that veganism is a choice to be respected and moved an amendment to say that a vegan option should always be available at council events and meetings, but meat and dairy products should not be banned. My amendment was not accepted and the ruling parties forced the proposal banning meat and dairy products through. The decision has to be ratified by Cabinet and I would urge those who believe in freedom of choice and those who wish to support our local farmers to lobby Cabinet Members. Their email addresses are on the OCC website.

OXFORDSHIRE AT TOP OF RECYCLING TABLE FOR EIGHTH YEAR

For the eighth year in a row, residents in Oxfordshire have topped the table nationally when it comes to recycling, reusing, and composting. Oxfordshire County Council has once again been named the best performing county council waste disposal authority in England. In 2020-21, residents recycled, reused, or composted 59.5 per cent of their household waste, an increase on the previous year's figure of 58.8 per cent, according to government figures. The total amount of household waste produced in Oxfordshire was 310,479 tonnes for 2020/2021. And 186,052 tonnes were reused, recycled and composted, which created a carbon benefit of 126,603 tonnes of CO₂e compared to disposing of it through landfill. Oxfordshire's five district and city councils, which operate the kerbside collections, also achieved excellent results in their national categories. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse came second and fourth respectively, while West Oxfordshire, Cherwell, and Oxford City were all in the top performing 25 per cent.

MAKE HENLEY SHINE CAMPAIGN (ILLUMINATING HENLEY BRIDGE)

A campaign in support of illuminating Henley Bridge is gaining momentum, resulting in positive noises coming from OCC, according to the Henley Standard. However, I am aware that many parish councils and residents are in support of 'dark skies' and are opposed to unnecessary illumination and consequent light pollution; indeed, this is my own view. Provisionally, I intend to OPPOSE the illumination proposals but welcome input from parish councils before coming to a final decision.

SPECIFIC OCC REPORT FOR EYE & DUNSDEN

MAKE HENLEY SHINE CAMPAIGN (ILLUMINATING HENLEY BRIDGE)

Should the PC wish to make its views known to officers, the relevant emails are:

paul.fermer@oxfordshire.gov.uk for transport/infrastructure aspects

nick.mottramr@oxfordshire.gov.uk for culture/heritage aspects

sarah.gilbert@oxfordshire.gov.uk for energy/climate change aspects

Should the PC wish to make its views known to Cabinet Members, the relevant emails are:

tim.bearder@oxfordshire.gov.uk Cabinet Member for Highways Management

neil.fawcett@oxfordshire.gov.uk Cabinet Member for Cultural Services

pete.sudbury@oxfordshire.gov.uk Cabinet Member for Climate Change Delivery and Environment

HUMANE DISPATCH OF DEER INJURED ON ROADS

Subsequent to my previous reports, I have now managed to put a senior TVP officer in contact with the concerned local volunteer, and the matter is being progressed.

GENERAL SODC REPORT

PLANNING ENFORCEMENT

As previously reported, the administration at SODC has changed its planning enforcement policy. The Conservative Group continues to oppose these changes.

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. I continue to receive complaints about activities at this site.

SODC ward councillor's report Eye & Dunsden – 18th January 2022

For completeness I will cover reporting for December and January separately:-

December 2021

Covid-19

Covid cases are increasing quite sharply. We now have increasing impact from autumn/winter weather and of course the new Omicron (B.1.1.529) variant. Omicron is known to be much more transmissible and has some extra capacity to somewhat evade past vaccinations (1st and 2nd) – especially as anti-body levels fall over time. However, early evidence suggests that the current booster vaccinations (3rd jab) really improve our defences. Because of superior transmissibility the Omicron variant is expected to become dominant over the current mostly Delta (Indian - B.1.617.2) variant in the near future. It is suggested that the doubling rate of the new Omicron variant may be a little as 2.5 days – indicating exponential growth potential. Accordingly the Covid alert level has been raised from 3 to 4 – meaning fast growth likely to cause more NHS pressure. The highest level is level 5 (which is defined as being a situation where the NHS is at risk of being overwhelmed). Because of natural lags the likely hospitalisation rate of Omicron and indeed its death rate are not yet known. Early evidence – including some from very different conditions in South Africa suggest a somewhat lower rate than for Delta. However because of the high transmissibility and growth of infections, even lower rates have the potential to take the number of NHS beds occupied with Covid to the highest ever in the UK at a time when the NHS faces strong demand from the previous backlog of conditions and where flu may make more impact than it did last year. The Government have instituted “Plan B”. Those changes, which have now been expanded in light of the variant, are:

- Reintroducing guidance to work from home, if you can, from 13 December
- Legally mandating face masks in "most public indoor venues", including theatres and cinemas from 10 December, with exceptions "where it's not practical, including while eating, drinking, exercising or singing"
- NHS COVID passes required for nightclubs, unseated indoor venues with more than 500 people, unseated outdoor venues with more than 4,000 people, and any venue with more than 10,000 people
- Daily testing for people identified as a contact of a coronavirus case - with isolation required only for people who test positive

Face masks were already a legal requirement in shops, banks, post offices, hairdressers and on public transport in England as of 30 November. Presently there are no restrictions applicable to hospitality where face masks are not required – not at the bar, in general circulation - or of course at tables. However the sector is reporting a lot of cancellations and reduced demand. There are however suggestions that a Plan C may be required – with more restrictions – subject to fast evolving evidence.

At 14/12, Oxford City was at a weekly rate of 863 per 100k population. By comparison, Cherwell DC was 935, West Oxon DC at 723, SODC at 915 and Vale of WH DC at 882. Reading BC (to 14h December) was at 856. These rates are around double or in some cases nearly treble what I reported to you in November.

The vaccine programme continues – with particular focus on boosters and reaching out to those with vaccine hesitancy. The booster programme is working down to those in their 30s and is now being rapidly expanded to extend on to all adults (18 or over and 16 or over if vulnerable). Walk-in centres are being offered and expanded with the aim of getting boosters to as many as possible before the New Year. However the resources to deliver this surge of vaccination are

desperately stretched. Second doses are now being offered to 12-15 year olds. Flu vaccines are also available – free for those over 50, those who are vulnerable or whose health job or care role implies a particular need. The risks of co-infection or twin infection with both flu and Covid are troubling virologists. Whatever the rules may be, the advice must be to proceed with caution to enjoy the festive season and protect the more vulnerable.

Enforcement

Like the NHS, planning enforcement built up a backlog during Covid. SODC is a top performer amongst councils with regards to enforcement – although the Government do not specify planning enforcement as a statutory obligation on councils and in fact have greatly eroded enforcement powers over time. SODC spends rather more on enforcement than most councils – and some councils do not offer an enforcement service.

SODC treats enforcement seriously and, given the backlog has set out a recovery plan. Within this plan resources will be focussed on the most urgent and the most serious cases. Thus a system of “triage” and assessment will be used to focus on these. Processes are being tightened up and less resource will go on the most minor cases. Moreover for reasons of GDPR and efficiency less updates will be given to residents during the investigation process. Due to the backlog many requests are received for updates which are eating a lot of resource and cause GDPR issues and risks. By exception district councillors will be able to get updates on key cases.

The intent is to recover the backlog by summer 2022 and to then review the process going forwards with lessons learnt.

Gambling policy

At council on 9th December SODC approved updates to its gambling policy as regards the licensing of premises. As had been done some years ago by Vale of White Horse, SODC has also set policy to oppose any casino proposition that might come forwards. Whilst the likelihood of a casino proposal does not seem particularly likely it is also judged not to be appropriate to the rural character of South Oxfordshire and its use of land.

Constitution review

With the advent of a new head of service for the Legal and Democratic service at SODC and VoWH (Vale) there is to be a review of the constitution of each council. As the two councils shares officers and offices, the constitution is considered jointly – although there are certain differences between the two when it comes to detail. The review group will consist of 6 councillors with 6 from each council. Final decisions will be made by each council following recommendations being put forward by the review group(s).

Separately updates of the councillor code of conduct (including as regards parishes) and councillors’ parental leave policy were agreed by council.

Motions

At its council meeting on 9th October SODC agreed :-

1) To write to ask the Secretary of State to review the national planning enforcement system and to make it tougher with additional powers. Also to propose certificates of commencement and completion (as applies in Scotland) to improve the clarity of process. This was unanimously agreed.

2) To write to and engage with the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) to address lack of delivery of built facilities and services to support housing growth. Also to seek assurances that matters will improve with the Bucks., Oxfordshire and West Berks Integrated Care System (ICS) which is scheduled to take over from the CCGs under the latest reorganisation. Unanimously agreed.

3) To publish a Climate Change Action Plan to address key issues, to encourage the Government to provide the necessary powers to help drive forward the aims agreed at COP26 and to work with other councils and partners for success in this.

4) To seek further detail on the national planning and housing policy of the LibDems. (This was proposed by the Conservative group as a Christmas joke and with a view to receiving guidance on levelling up and mix as it relates to policy on housing numbers – with particular reference to how it might relate to South Oxfordshire. Many abstained from this Xmas joke.

Inspired Villages/Little Sparrows

SODC’s application for a Judicial Review of the highly unconventional approach of the Inspector in the above case was refused, appealed and refused again. The courts now take the view that Appeal Inspectors can virtually do as they like with scant recourse even where bizarre, unconventional and apparently irrational approaches are taken. In my view this decision underlines the extent to which our national planning system is broken. The only positive being the change of Secretary of State and the promise of a review to improve things; we shall see.

Grants

The capital grants scheme closed for applications from voluntary and community sector organisations and town and parish councils on 17th 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. The Councillor grants scheme (round 2 of 2) has re-opened and will close just after the end of January. It is appropriate to see that this is used if at all possible. 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.

January 2022

Covid-19

Covid cases have surged. We now have increasing impact from autumn/winter weather, Christmas gatherings and of course the new Omicron (B.1.1.529) variant. Omicron is known to be much more transmissible and has some extra capacity to somewhat evade past vaccinations (1st and 2nd) – especially as anti-body levels fall over time. However, early evidence suggests that the current booster vaccinations (3rd jab) really improve our defences. The Omicron variant is now dominant and has shown strong growth. It is clear that the vaccinations and natural antibodies are reducing the hospitalisation rate and death rate of Omicron. However the surge of infections indicate that, even with a much lower hospitalisation rate, hospitalisations are still significant by comparison with the national 34k peak seen last year on 22nd January 2021. At the time of writing and with data not fully up to date there were on the 13th January just under 20k nationally this year – although the numbers may now be plateauing. This at a time when the NHS faces strong demand from the previous backlog of conditions and where flu may still potentially make more impact than it did last year. Happily deaths remain low and even with hospitalisations the severity of cases – particularly for those with antibodies – is less than seen previously.

Further to “Plan B” the government have indicated some further grants to certain business sectors – like hospitality – who have suffered sharply from falls in demand and cancellations. These are, it seems, to be limited to those businesses with business rates and they are subject to precise parameters set by the BEIS ministry. SODC will be releasing these locally very soon. The government are loathe to impose further restrictions – apart from face masks in schools.

At 11/01/2022, Oxford City was at a weekly rate of 1,210 per 100k population (it peaked at 1,504 on 6th Jan.). By comparison, Cherwell DC was 1,177 (peak was 18,826 on 3rd Jan.), West Oxon DC at 968 (peak was 1,565 on 3rd Jan.), SODC at 1,052 (peak was 1,522 on 3rd Jan.) and Vale of WH DC at 1,112 (peak was 1,565 on 3rd Jan.). Reading BC (to 11th January 2022) was at 1,337 having peaked at 1,780 on 4th Jan. These levels are high; by way of comparison at 4th November SODC was at 363 and by the 3rd December was at 764 – now at 11th January at 1,052 weekly per 100k of population! That said, they now seem to be falling back somewhat.

The booster and vaccine programme continues – with particular focus on boosters and reaching out to those with vaccine hesitancy. Resources are desperately stretched but have achieved very high numbers. Boosters are available to all adults and are now being extended down to all of age 16 and above. Walk-in centres are being offered and expanded with the aim of getting boosters to as many as possible. Second vaccine doses are now being offered to 12-15 year olds. Flu vaccines are also available – free for those over 50, those who are vulnerable or whose health job or care role implies a particular need.

Government have now suggested that the requirement to self-isolate with Omicron should only be 5 days – subject to clear PCR tests on days 5 and 6 (in advance of re-emerging). The risks of co-infection or twin infection with both flu and Covid are still troubling virologists. Whatever the rules may be, the advice must be to proceed with caution and to protect the more vulnerable.

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Leigh Rawlins
District Councillor