

EYE & DUNSDEN PARISH COUNCIL
Minutes of a Meeting held on February 21st 2023 at 7.45pm at The Flowing Spring

Present: Cllrs David Woodward, Ian Pringle, Richard Berkley, David Bartholomew (OCC + SODC) and Leigh Rawlins (SODC). Cllr Paul Carnell from Reading.

018/23 Apologies for absence Naomi Baylis, Clive Leeke.

019/23 Declarations of interest No new declarations.

020/23 Minutes of the last meetings The Chairman proposed that the minutes of January 17th 2022 were accepted as a true record. This was seconded by Richard Berkley.

021/23 Matters arising from the minutes

089.03/22 Playhatch permissive path. Richard Berkley is to contact Adrian Beales about the possibility of a permissive path between Playhatch and the Flowing Spring. A letter from the Flowing Spring will be included. **(Vice Chairman to action)**

124.04/22 The Clerk reported that an acknowledgement of the request for pedestrian signage near the Flowing Spring and the steps to the footpath entrance could be purchased. This will be chased. **(Clerk to action)**

022/23 County Councillor's report Cllr Bartholomew summarised his local reports. The full report will be attached to the minutes. Cosmonaut Leisure was discussed. Enforcement action re change of use is now authorised and enforcement notices are to be up next month. It was noted that Cosmonaut leisure continue to trade illegally and advertise for future events etc.

Both SODC & OCC Councillors joined in the discussion of the Caversham lights junction with the marina access road. Many accidents have occurred there but none are serious enough to be reported in the traffic data. The situation is complicated as responsibility is divided between Reading Borough Council and OCC. The road leading to the marina is private so that it is also difficult to improve pedestrian access. Cllr Bartholomew said that little could be done at present.

023/23 District Councillor's Report Cllr Rawlins summarised his report which is attached to these minutes. He asked Cllr Carnell for his comments about the Caversham lights junction. Cllr Carnell reported that he was very aware of his constituents' concern about the increased number of accidents at the junction and wished to see OCC and RBC working together over the issue. Discussion took place over the possibility of slowing down the traffic on the A4155 as it approaches the junction from the Playhatch roundabout.

024/23 Public Question Time/Correspondence A letter to the Phillimore Estate was handed to Richard Berkley re the permissive path from The Flowing Spring to Playhatch.

An e-mail from a resident expressing thanks for her hedge restoration had been received.

025/23 Financial Position

025.01/23 The present financial situation had been previously circulated.

025.02/23 The February 2023 accounts were presented. Invoices to the value of £1,915.36 were authorised for payment. These payments were proposed by Ian Pringle and seconded by Richard Berkley. All agreed. **(Clerk to action)**

025.03/23 An invoice from Terra Firma Consultancy Ltd to the value of £1,200 has been paid. This is the first of invoices that need to be paid by EDPC initially and claimed back from the members of JPAG that was set up to submit the report to Natural England. **(Clerk to action)**

025.04/23 A request for a donation to Clean Slate has been received. A donation of £30 was proposed. All agreed. **(Clerk to action)**

026/23 Planning Matters

New Applications:

For determination by OCC: Details pursuant to condition 22 (Aftercare Scheme) of planning permission no. (MW.0044/21) at Sonning Quarry, Sonning Eye, Reading, RG4 6TX No response to be made.

Applications Granted

P22/S2354/FUL Amendment (No 1) Amended design and access statement and amended plans submitted on 28th October 2022 to show existing wall to be retained and new fence to be located behind existing wall as to not damage the wall.

The Clerk was asked to enquire whether there is an SODC process for evaluating possible new Conservation Areas as there may be a case for this. **(Clerk to action)**

027/23 Eye & Dunsden Village Hall Bookings continue to be made. A wedding brochure is now available. The Village Hall will pay for the commemorative sign for the sweet chestnut trees planted last year.

028/23 Community Orchard Heights Treecare have completed the work on the Community Orchard. A kissing gate at the entrance is being considered in order to stop the deer entering.

029/23 Neighbourhood Development Plan The first draft of the Neighbourhood Development Plan is

being reviewed.

030/23 Joint parishes AONB Group The group is making good progress. The next meeting is in March.

031/23 Highways, Footpaths & Open Spaces

031.01/23 Permissive path request. See 089/03/22 above

031.02/23 Litter in Spring Lane. This has been reported.

032.03/23 The 20mph designation was discussed. Areas to be requested for consideration are the road from Sonning Bridge as far as the mini-roundabout and Playhatch from the roundabout on the A4155 up through Playhatch as far as Newbury Cottage. This was proposed by the Chairman and seconded by Richard Berkley. This was approved. An application will be made. **(Clerk to action)** Cllr Bartholomew will support the application.

031.04/23 Potential TPO's: Deferred.

031.05/23 Richard Berkley has found a contractor to keep the Playhatch bus shelter area tidy and re-erect the speed limit post.

032/23 Allotments A pile of rubbish has accumulated at the end of the allotments. The tenants have been asked to remove it.

033/23 Website The Chairman will put the person who is prepared to make the website compliant in touch with the Clerk. The PC agreed to fund this work at £200 a day up to a maximum of £600. **(Chairman to action)**

034/23 Minerals/Playhatch & Sonning pit Liaison Groups. The Vice Chairman attended the recent Grabloader meeting. The French Drain is being inspected by Grabloader but it is necessary for Highways to clear the drain under the Playhatch roundabout regularly.

035/23 Coronation This was discussed and deferred until the next meeting.

036/23 Emergency Planning A Flooding Emergency Plan has already been written but further work is necessary. The Village Hall is the ideal place for an emergency venue and this is being considered by the Village Hall committee. The Clerk will make a response to the survey. **(Clerk to action)**

037/23 Matters for future consideration Potential TPO's; New Conservation Areas

Next meeting: TBA

REPORT TO EYE & DUNSDEN PARISH COUNCIL FEB 2023

FROM CLLR DAVID BARTHOLOMEW

GENERAL OCC REPORT

COUNCIL BUDGET FOR 23/24

OCC has received an unexpectedly generous Local Government Settlement which has resulted in the council having a surplus of £9m relative to the draft Budget that has been out for public consultation. Rather than use this surplus to cut Council Tax, the administration is looking for ways to spend the money. This approach is being contested by the Conservative Opposition. The Budget will be debated and voted upon by Full Council on 14 February.

OCC SPENDS £152K ON 20MPH SCHEME ADS – £10K IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE!

The LibDem/Green/Labour administration at OCC is spending £8m of Council Tax payers' money switching 85% of the county's 30mph speed limits to 20mph. This is little more than a cosmetic sign-changing exercise, and in most cases is not supported by the police, who are unlikely to enforce it. Nevertheless, many parish councils are giving the scheme a go. (Why not? It costs parish councils nothing directly.) Others are concerned that lots of money is being wasted. While there is disagreement on the merits of the scheme, almost all Oxfordshire residents will be baffled why they are funding the administration's self-congratulatory advertising aimed at BUCKINGHAMSHIRE residents! This photograph was taken at Tesco, Broadfield, Aylesbury, BUCKS on Sunday 8th January. The 'out of Oxfordshire' element accounts for about £10,000 of the overall advertising budget of £152,000 for the campaign.



PLANS TO SPLIT OXFORD INTO FOUR SECTORS WIDELY ATTACKED

As previously reported, OCC plans to spend £6.5m on traffic filters that will split Oxford into four sectors: North, South, West and East. When the traffic filters are operating, for cars without a permit, movement within each sector is unrestricted, but direct movement between sectors is not possible and requires use of the ring road. Affected motorists will face much longer journey times and distances. The intention is to force a change in behaviour. These plans are hugely controversial and have resulted in abuse being directed at council officers and councillors. The Conservative Opposition has grave concerns about the sectors proposal but condemns this abuse and the misinformation that is being spread.

OXFORD LTNS REMOVED FOR REPAIR AS TAXPAYER BILL SOARS

The Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) scheme continues to be highly controversial. In November 2022 OCC said it had spent £72,000 repairing vandalised plastic bollards. Many of the plastic bollards have now been removed at various locations in Oxford. OCC is temporarily replacing them with metal plates embedded in concrete. Officers said this is a safety measure while bollards are being repaired or replaced. (The metal plate makes the site safe while there is no bollard there by covering any damaged fixings.) OCC is now spending £100,000 to replace the plastic bollards with steel ones to prevent further damage.

NHS HEALTH CHECKS IN OXFORDSHIRE NOW AVAILABLE IN MORE LOCATIONS

It is easier than ever for people aged 40 to 74 to get a free NHS health check, with the service now available in even more locations. Health Checks Oxfordshire is now providing free NHS health checks on behalf of OCC at convenient community-based locations across the county, including libraries. This is in support of existing GP practice provision, making it easier than ever to get one. An NHS health check can lower a person's risk of developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and (certain types of) dementia. More information is available on the Health Check website: <https://www.healthchecksoxfordshire.org>

OCC CABINET APPROVES CONTINUED STADIUM DISCUSSIONS WITH OXFORD UNITED

OCC's cabinet has authorised its officers to start negotiations with Oxford United FC on outline legal and commercial terms relating to the club's proposal to lease land for the development of a new football stadium. Discussions to secure information and undertakings that meet OCC's objectives will continue. Any final decision regarding the leasing of the land will be taken in public by a future cabinet meeting, based on whether the council's objectives have been met.

PROPOSAL FOR GIANT RESERVOIR FACES CONTINUED OPPOSITION

Renewed efforts by water companies to move forward with proposals for a giant reservoir near Abingdon are again facing opposition. OCC's cabinet discussed its draft responses to a series of consultations taking place concerning future water supplies, including the Water Resources South East (WRSE) draft regional plan. The WRSE plan includes proposals for a reservoir located between Abingdon, East Hanney, Steventon and Marcham, which would hold up to 100 million cubic metres of water – known as the South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO) – as well as other options for securing future water supply. In the council's draft response, the WRSE consultation is described as “deeply flawed” and based on “unrealistic and non-evidence-based assumptions” about climate change, as well as “ludicrously outdated population projections”. The response calls the £1.244 billion reservoir “a destructive scheme, both environmentally and in its impacts on local people”, with bill-payers effectively being asked to “sign a blank cheque”, with no clear cost-benefit analysis or justification.

PLANS FOR NEW ACTIVE TRAVEL FUNDING

OCC has secured £520,415 from the government's Active Travel Capability Fund to invest in improving access to active travel options across the county. This investment will be used to deliver projects that enable more people to walk, wheel or cycle as a first choice for local transport. It will also be used to enhance high streets and improve access to work and education. Active Travel Minister, Jesse Norman, announced an additional £32.9m of government funding under an Active Travel Capability Fund last week. The fund supports Active Travel England's ambition for half of all journeys within English towns and cities to be made through walking, wheeling, or cycling by 2030. The funding enables OCC to deliver more of its wider active travel strategy across South and Vale, Cherwell and West Oxfordshire districts.

SPECIFIC OCC REPORT FOR EYE & DUNSDEN

TRAFFIC LIGHTS ON A4155 AT BOTTOM OF CAVERSHAM PARK DRIVE

I have been contacted by Cllr Paul Carnell of RBC in relation to accidents at this location. With the agreement of the Chairman, I invited him to this meeting to discuss his concerns.

COUNCILLOR PRIORITY FUND

I am still awaiting confirmation that the £5000 I awarded to the AONB project has gone through the OCC approval process.

GENERAL SODC REPORT

SODC BUDGET AND HQ MOVE

On 16 February, the Conservative Opposition voted against the administration's Budget principally on the grounds it could not support the £25M of Council Tax payers' money being wasted on an unnecessary new HQ in Didcot.

SPECIFIC SODC REPORT FOR EYE & DUNSDEN

P22/S1691/FUL CHANGE OF USE OF LAKE

Enforcement action was authorised last week following consultation with the council's solicitor. The case officer again visited the site last week to ensure that the enforcement notices, when issued, capture the full extent of the breach of planning control as it currently exists on the ground. The officer is currently updating the draft enforcement notices to reflect the comments from the council's solicitors and his site visit last week. It is anticipated that enforcement notices will be issued and served early in March.

SODC ward councillor's report Eye & Dunsden – 21st February 2023

Covid-19

The reliability of data on Covid cases is now much reduced following the end of test and trace. However national figures have shown falls in cases – contrary to what might be expected for this time of year. At 11th February 2023, reported cases in SODC were at a weekly rate per 100k of population of 67 (it peaked at 1,504 on 6th January 2022) – a very low level - albeit that reporting may be somewhat incomplete. Separately, there has been significant levels of flu causing some references to a “twindemic” in terms of absences and pressures on the NHS.

SODC Budget

Annual revenue budget and MTFP

The draft budget provides for a Band D precept increase of £5 per annum – the standard figure assumed by government in their financial settlement. The deficit for the 2023/24 year is budgeted at £(0.6)m – a mere fifth of the level we inherited for the 2019-20 year – despite inflation and other challenges. Efficiencies and prudent adjustments have enabled progress after many pre-2019 years of neglect and poor decisions – including botched outsourcing. As noted previously, a host of poor past decisions have eroded SODC's reserves by many millions of pounds and built an ongoing annual deficit that was set to grow to the point that usable revenue reserves would have been exhausted. It was also the case that the Crowmarsh fire of January 2015 created new capital and revenue pressures – without a sufficiently swift response. Since 2019 a series of steps have been taken to seek to improve matters and to restore a philosophy plus an action programme towards sound finance. What went before was clearly not sustainable and we have spent the last 4 years clearing up that mess. In 2019/20 the budget was for a deficit of £(3.2)m in the year and the forecast for 2023/24 was for a deficit of £(6.1)m. (With 2024 closing with General revenue reserves of only £4.0m (less than a year's worth) and an empty capital receipts reserve (forcing routine capital renewal to fall against the inadequate revenue reserve.) SODC did of course hold other funds for example as earmarked for CIL/s106 projects etc). This was not a good situation. (SODC did of course hold other ring-fenced funds for example such as earmarked developer funds for CIL/s106 projects etc). By contrast the 2023/24 budget provides for a deficit of £(0.6)m and a revenue reserve of £28.8m. This is very much better than the previous administration left behind! Despite pressures on all service areas from rising costs, there are no cuts to key services in this budget. Indeed we have proposed to continue to provide funding for the Community Hub (together with Vale of White Horse council). The core funding increase from Government, known as the local government settlement, came in at 5.3% versus inflation of over 10%. However, thankfully the efficiency work done last year, and continuing now, is yielding real benefits that have allowed our improvement to continue; controlling costs and finding opportunities for working smarter. Unfortunately, because it has one of the lowest (last year it was the 8th lowest) Band D Council Tax charge for a Shire District in England (despite being in the expensive South East) SODC incurs more cost than income for extra dwellings (and associated population). In the very short-term this effect is temporarily offset by “New Homes Bonus” (NHB) payment from government – something which is overtly subject to a

government review. Thus this Council Tax effect increases the council's net costs over time; together with the propensity for government to impose ever more statutory obligations and associated costs on the council! This year, the 2023-24 budget papers forecast growing deficits, based on cautious assumptions that inflation will take its toll, that central government funding will fall over time and that interest rates will fall and reduce future investment and treasury incomes in the years ahead. Accordingly the deficit is prudentially forecast to rise - possibly up to £(8.5)m for 2026-27, closing that year with £7.0m of General revenue reserves and also £2.4m of capital receipts reserve. However, this forecast does not take into account actions planned to effect transformation of the councils IT systems and processes which are expected to yield significant efficiencies and financial benefits through savings in the future. The budget includes appropriate increases in charges and fees and curtailment of expenditures. Much of the benefits come from the sound decisions that have been made. These include the costs saving of a JLP (Joint Local Plan with Vale), correcting some crazy outsourcing problems, moving out of the hugely expensive Milton Park office and investing in assets that save costs. The budget and capital programme provides an outline envelope of funding to address SODC's office problem after the Crowmarsh fire and thus reduce the deficit effect from the use of the temporary and highly expensive Milton Park offices. This is part of a key regeneration project for Didcot, right opposite the railway station. The interim Abbey House office has only a tiny amount of spare space for SODC (it is mostly occupied by OCC officers who work in the field in the SODC and Vale of White Horse areas (e.g. re Highways, Education and Social Care). Using savings, the budget also provides for extending the priority project funding, that supports the council's corporate plan priorities, at £500k for an additional two years. This includes the Community Hub, community well-being, activity grants and climate/biodiversity action such as planting trees. The government have further deferred a promised "Fair Funding Framework" whereby Local Government can plan ahead for their finances with less uncertainty. There are risks that reviews of funding may cut the levels of central government grant and NHB to councils like SODC in favour of "levelling up" and deprivation. If so they would cause difficulties for the council. However many other councils would also fall into even more extreme difficulty in such a scenario. Clearly SODC continues to run a deficit in the draft budget – but currently a much reduced one. There is plenty more to do in the future but there is also a clear direction of travel towards a return to sound finance.

Capital programme

As regards the capital programme effort has gone into putting to work developer funds held from earmarked s106 and CIL funds. In the past these lay idle for too long and despite the delays of Covid, these projects are now being delivered - and funded for future delivery. This includes a new Leisure centre in NE Didcot which is appropriate given the vast growth of development in Didcot. Unfortunately it has been necessary to provide for £1.5m deal with the end point of the Conservatives "5Cs" outsourcing project that has caused so much grief to the council. On a better note funding is being put behind our Housing Delivery Plan. This includes £4.6m to match funding offered from Central Government, to get people fleeing conflict out of hotels and temporary accommodation. This will address a problem now and increase the housing stock available to the council for the future. The budget and capital programme was approved by full council on 16th February.

NPPF consultation

The consultation remains open for input. The draft revised NPPF – with tracked changes - has been released for consultation:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/levelling-up-and-regeneration-bill-reforms-to-national-planning-policy>

Joint Local Plan - Issues Consultation Results

You may have already seen the launch of our Consultation Results document and updated interactive website which summarises the findings from last year's Joint Local Plan Issues consultation. The feedback process, including the new interactive website, was very well received – when asked about the feedback process, about 70 per cent of respondents said they were satisfied or very satisfied. When asked, 85 per cent of people supported the emerging vision for our districts in the Joint Local Plan. The results help us focus on what matters to our residents and will help guide the next stage of the process, when we launch a consultation on the preferred options for the Plan in summer 2023. You can view the Joint Local Plan Issues Consultation Results document and updated interactive website on both the South Oxfordshire website. Keep an eye on our social media channels where we'll be posting video summaries of the results, you can view and share the first video from South social media channel.

Great British Spring Clean

This year SODC will again be supporting the Keep Britain Tidy Great British Spring Clean by loaning litter pickers, high-viz jackets and bags to community litter picking groups and individuals. The event runs from Monday 17 March to Sunday 2 April. Equipment can be booked by completing and returning the booking form and declaration document to waste.team@southandvale.gov.uk. The forms are available on the South litter picking pages. Equipment is limited so to avoid disappointment bookings should be made as soon as possible. Bookings for litter picking equipment can be made at any point during the year, not just during The Great British Spring Clean! (On the subject of littering, we've included an appendix to this report which is a response sent by the Council's lead officer in response to some queries from a different parish council. Hopefully it is helpful information!)

Housing Support Fund Now Open To All

On Monday 13th Feb SODC opened the Household Support Fund so anyone who hasn't received support since May last year and can't afford life's essentials such as paying for food and energy bills, can now apply. The limited funds are expected to go very quickly - so we're asking people to make sure they attach all the evidence requested on their application form so that their application can be processed readily and promptly, or they might miss out receiving support. If a resident, who has previously received Household Support Fund, has already applied to this round of funding they do need to submit their application again as SODC are not holding waiting lists of applications. Please share this information including on social media and please continue to direct people to the SODC website for details on how to apply, email our Community Hub (communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk) or call them on 01235 422600 (select option 1).

AONB extension

All parishes have approved their share of likely cost and the work is proceeding. Phase 1 of the work has been done and phases 2 and 3 of the work are expected by the end of February. The next meeting is pencilled in for 15th March 2023.

Councillor Grants Scheme

The local bids have been approved. I believe payment will proceed by end of March.

Leigh Rawlins

District Councillor