

BINFIELD HEATH PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Binfield Heath Parish Council Meeting held on Monday 27th February at 7.00pm in the Palmer Room at Dunsden Hall

Meeting of the Recreation Ground Charities & Allotment for the Labouring Poor Charity

04/23 Allotments. Any answers to the Clerk's email to tenants regarding the beehive have responded positively. **(Clerk to action)**

05/23 Recreation Ground

02.01/23 Regular inspections have taken place.

02.02/23 A spring mechanism for the sandpit gate is still required. The Clerk has been unable to source this. **(Cllr Davis and Clerk to action)**

06/23 Public Forum A request was made for a litter pick. If it can be arranged a request for volunteers could go into the village newsletter for next month. **(Cllr Ransom to action)**

The meeting of the Parish Council

Present Cllr P Rollason, Cllr L Ransom, Cllr H Lacey, Cllr Robert Davis, Cllr Fulton-Urry and a member of the public.

018/23 Apologies. Cllr Summerland, Cllr D Bartholomew (OCC, SODC), Cllr L Rawlins (SODC).

019/23 Declarations of Interest None

020/23 Minutes of the meetings held on Monday January 23rd 2023. Cllr Ransom proposed the minutes were accepted as a true record. This was seconded by Cllr Lacey. All agreed.

021/23 Matters Arising All items on the agenda.

022/23 County Councillor's report Cllr Bartholomew's full report is attached to the minutes.

023/23 District Councillor's report Cllr Rawlins' report is attached to these minutes.

024/23 Financial Situation

024.01/23 The financial position had been circulated.

024.02/23 The February accounts were presented. Invoices to the value of £3,043.92 were authorised for payment. These payments were proposed by Cllr Ransom and seconded by Cllr Davis. All agreed. **(Clerk to action)**

024.03/23 A £50 cheque for the Citizen's Advice Bureau will be signed next month. **(Clerk to action)**

025/23 Planning Matters

Applications granted by SODC

Frieze Cottage Crowsley RG9 4JL P22/S4634/LB Rebuild top of both chimney stacks and replace pots to ensure top of pot is sufficiently raised above surface of thatch - re-thatch the roof - replace windows with double doors to Boot Room and Study - replacement of side gate and re-surfacing of adjacent hard-standing - replacement door to rear Hall. - minor repairs

Elm Tree Farm Common Lane Binfield Heath (P22/S3007/FUL) Relocation of entrance driveway (including removal of existing driveway) (As amended by plan received 19 January 2023 to demonstrate details of new gate and fencing) (As amended by plan received 30 January 2023 to remove access gate and propose post and wire fencing and native hedging along access) (As amended by plan received 2 February 2023 to re-instate access gate further down driveway).

Completed applications for ratification

Iona Kiln Lane Binfield Heath RG9 4EL P23/S0053/HH Erection single storey rear extension and installation of solar panels. A working party had no objections to this application. Decision ratified.

New Applications None on the agenda

026/23 Neighbourhood Plan Councillor Davis had sent an update to the NP. The grant acceptance form has been completed and returned. This should provide enough money to complete the plan now on its final straight.

027/23 Neighbourhood Watch Nothing to report.

028/23 Community Matters

028/01/23 The PC has been asked to complete a survey about Emergency Planning that the Clerk will complete. **(Clerk to action)**

028.02/23 The electrician will meet the Chairman this week regarding installation of the defibrillator. **(Clerk to action)**

028.03/23 The Coronation was discussed and it is hoped to have a Sunday Lunch (7th May) on the Recreation Ground. The flag will be raised outside the Forge. The PC may be asked to contribute to the cost.

028.04/23 Community Bus The reduced bus service was discussed and although requested in the newsletter, few comments have come in from residents about which buses are needed. Needs are various and maybe Fish could be further used.

029/23 Highways/Transport and General Maintenance

029.01/23 Bus shelter. Erection delayed due to warped wood

029.02/23 Emergency road Closures and buses This is proving difficult as the signs are not removed even when the road is cleared and then the bus does not come through the village.

029.03/23 Provision of rural bollards OCC is to be asked to provide rural bollards to protect the drain covers on the grass verge near Kings Common Close. **(Clerk to action)**

030/23 Green & Open Spaces

031/23 Website Compliance The website compliance is still being investigated. The Clerk is in touch with some who may be able to help. **(Clerk to action)**

032/23 Public Forum Footpaths were discussed. On Footpath 11 Heathfield Ave/New Road junction, one of the anti-car bollards has broken off and needs replacing. On Footpath 9 where it crosses 11 (Heathfield Ave), a post need repainting in white as a local person with poor sight cannot see the post in the middle of the path. **(Clerk to action)**

033/23 Shiplake Memorial Hall Cllr Lacey proposed a motion that Mrs Fairbrother of Edwinstowe, Kiln Lane, be appointed as a Trustee to the Shiplake Memorial Hall for 2 years from 11th May 2023. All agreed. The resolution was passed.

034/23 Matters for future consideration

The meeting finished at 8.55pm.

Date of next meeting: Monday March 27th 2023 at the Scout Hut

REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS FEBRUARY 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.healthcheckoxfordshire.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

SODC ward councillor's report Binfield Heath – 27th 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 18th February 2023, reported cases in SODC were at a weekly rate per 100k of population of 76 (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, 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 then forecast to close 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). 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 and Community Hub

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, could apply but all the funds have now been taken up. However those in difficulty can still seek advice and support . This is available from the SODC Community Hub e-mail (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