

## BINFIELD HEATH PARISH COUNCIL

### Minutes of the Binfield Heath Parish Council Meeting held on Monday November 22<sup>nd</sup> 2021 at 7.00pm in the Scout Hut

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Meeting of the Recreation Ground Charities & Allotment for the Labouring Poor Charity  
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**024/21 Allotments** Rents are coming in. Two new tenants have taken over the available plots. Reminders to be sent to those tenants still to pay. **(Clerk to action)**

#### **025/21 Recreation Ground**

025.01/21 Regular inspections have taken place.

025.02/21 Playdale has carried out an inspection of the equipment and have provided a quotation for the necessary repairs. Two volunteers have offered to paint the horse. Materials will be provided. **(Clerk to action)**

025.03/21 Now that the area near the River Binn is clear it was decided to try to plant some bulbs. The Clerk will ask if the cubs or scouts might like to do some planting. **(Clerk to action)**

**026/21 Public Forum** No questions

### The meeting of the Parish Council

**Present** Cllr P Rollason, Cllr L Ransom, Cllr H Lacey, Cllr Sarah Fulton-Urry, Cllr R. Davis, Cllr D Bartholomew (OCC, SODC), Cllr L Rawlins (SODC), three members of the public.

**117/21 Apologies** Cllr S Summerland

**118/21 Declarations of Interest** None

**119/21 Minutes of the meetings held on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2021.** Cllr Lacey proposed the minutes were accepted as a true record. This was seconded by Cllr Ransom. All agreed.

#### **120/21 Matters Arising**

**121/21 County Councillor's report** Cllr Bartholomew briefly discussed local matters. His full report is attached to the minutes. When asked about enforcement Cllr Bartholomew informed the PC that he was unable to discuss enforcement at a public forum. He suggested that the PC write to the enforcement team with its concerns. **(Cllr Ransom to action)**

**122/21 District Councillor's report** Cllr Rawlins had sent his report. His full report is attached to these minutes.

#### **123/21 Public Forum**

123.01/21 A resident asked about the lack of working equipment in the recreation ground. The Chairman explained that the ROSPA summer inspection had led to a significant amount of necessary repairs and some prohibited usage. Finance is being discussed in order that the money can be found to fund the repairs.

123.02/21 A resident asked about tree planting. The possibility to combine some planting with the Platinum Jubilee celebration next year was discussed. It will go on the January agenda. **(Clerk to action)**

#### **124/21 Financial Situation**

124.01/21 The financial position was circulated.

124.02/21 The November accounts were presented. Invoices to the value of £4,438.39 were authorised for payment. These payments were proposed by Cllr. Ransom and seconded by Cllr Lacey. All agreed. **(Clerk to action)**

124.03/21 Budget notes had been sent to the Councillors prior to the meeting. These were discussed. The Clerk explained that apart from the Neighbourhood Plan there was some necessary expenditure to account for within the budget. The recreation ground repair cost is the major expense despite seeking a small grant. The Chairman was reassured that the costs of the Neighbourhood Plan should hopefully be covered by Government grants. The cost of the defibrillator could be covered by the residue of the BT money. However, a 28+% increase in the precept for next year appears to be necessary to cover additional costs. A precept of £18,000 was proposed and will be requested. All agreed. **(Clerk to action)** (This increased figure was requested in 2012 and reduced again the following year.)

## **125/21 Planning Matters.**

### ***COMPLETED Applications for Ratification***

P21/S4592/HH Variation of condition 2 (approved plans) on application P21/S2100/HH (Single storey rear extension. New pitched roof to replace flat roof). 7 Heathfield Close Binfield Heath RG9 4DS Decision ratified.

### ***NEW Applications for Discussion***

P21/S4670/HH and P21/S4672/LB Proposed demolition of existing rear extension and 2 x existing ancillary outbuildings and erection of replacement linked extension. Elm Tree Farm Common Lane Binfield Heath RG9 4JY. This was discussed and there are no planning reasons why this application should not be recommended for approval. All agreed.

P21/S4756/FUL Variation of condition 2 (approved plans) on application P21/S2478/FUL to add office detail and dormer roof features. Demolition of existing cottage and new replacement with two semi-detached villas. Elm Cottage Dunsden Way Binfield Heath RG4 4LE. There is no planning reason why this variation should not be recommended for approval. All agreed. Cllr Ransom took no part in the discussion.

**126/21 Neighbourhood Plan** Cllr Davis updated the PC on progress: The first grant application was successful. Smaller groups are now working on design codes and planning policies. A Landscape Character Assessment will take place in January/February if the next set of funding can be sought. The village history is in progress. The settlement boundaries will be considered at the next NP SG meeting on December 6<sup>th</sup> at the Scout hut.

## **127/21 Community Matters**

127.01/21 Defibrillator Sarah Roberts answered questions about the defibrillator by phone. The PC is still concerned about the difficulty of covering a village that is so spread out just by a defibrillator centrally situated. It was decided that it would be a good idea to see if the other areas of the village could be covered as well. A letter to the Phillimore Estate and Orwell's will be written to see if there is interest in covering the whole village. **(Clerk & Chairman to action)**

127.02/21 Litter Pick The litter pick took place on 20<sup>th</sup> November. The Clerk was asked to write a letter of thanks to the organiser. **(Clerk to action)**

**128/21 Highways/Transport and General Maintenance** Nothing to report this month.

## **129/21 Green & Open Spaces**

129.01/21 The Clerk was notified that the damaged area along Footpath 20 is to be repaired by Countryside Access.

129.02/21 The Clerk was asked to check whether the entrance to Keeps Lane is cleared. **(Clerk to action)**

**130/21 Website Compliance** Cllr Ransom has looked at the website compliance information. The Clerk will ascertain a local website that is compliant and a comparison can be made. **(Clerk to action)**

**131/21 Neighbourhood Watch** Nothing to report.

**132/21 Grants** An application for a Community Grant to improve the playground will be made **(Clerk to action)**

**133/21 Possible Community building** Item deferred.

**134/21 Community Governance Review** This is to take place in 2022. Cllr Ransom wondered if the EDPC parish boundary near Blackmore Lane should be considered for a slight boundary adjustment.

**135/21 Remembrance Day** Cllrs Ransom and Fulton-Urry were thanked for laying the wreath. **Matters for future consideration** Neighbourhood Plan; Platinum Jubilee; Tree planting; Playground repairs; defibrillator; community governance review.

The meeting finished at 9.43pm.

**Date of next meeting: Monday January 24<sup>th</sup> 2022**

# **REPORT TO BINFIELD HEATH 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 BINFIELD HEATH**

#### **FOOTPATH ALONGSIDE THE A4155 LINKING LOWER SHIPLAKE TO SHIPLAKE CROSS**

I investigated the feasibility of constructing a rural-style footpath to run from the junction of Memorial Avenue and the A4155, alongside the A4155 to where a path exists near the speed camera and obtained outline costings, but Shiplake PC has decided not to progress the matter.

#### **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**

As previously reported, the administration proposes to construct a new HQ in Didcot. It would be bigger than that needed by the council in order to rent-out the surplus office space to produce an income stream. The Conservative Group opposes this proposal on the basis that the council is effectively entering into speculative property investment using borrowed money at a time when future demand for office accommodation is highly uncertain. The Conservative Group believes that there may already be other existing buildings in Oxfordshire that could be re-purposed under the Government philosophy of 'One Public Estate', but in any case, if a new building is built, it should not include the surplus, speculative, space.

### **SPECIFIC SODC REPORT FOR BINFIELD HEATH**

#### **P18/S4298/FUL HIGH WALL HOUSE**

As a result of complaints, Joanne Cooper, Planning Officer (Enforcement), visited the site but I have been instructed by the officer that I cannot discuss the outcome of the meeting with you as it is covered by GDPR. I am querying this with a senior officer and the Cabinet Member.

#### **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.

#### **P21/S4102/RM: RETIREMENT VILLAGE RESERVED MATTERS**

A full 'Reserved Matters' application has now been submitted. Shiplake PC is an official consultee in respect of this and very close scrutiny of the complex application is required. For example, the 'Landscape Masterplan' shows a break in the woodland shielding the site and the construction of a pavilion to overlook the wider landscape. This conflicts with many residents' views that the site should be shielded as much as possible. Another example is the possible impact of light pollution which should also be carefully considered. BH PC may also wish to examine this application.

#### **P20/S2808/DIS: THAMES FARM DRAINAGE**

Following objections from OCC and SODC drainage/flood engineers, Taylor Wimpey has now withdrawn its revised drainage proposal which involved pumping the surface water from the site along the A4155 to a discharge point near Sheeplouse Lane. I am enquiring whether there are any plans to tidy up the site which is likely to remain uncompleted for a considerable period.

#### **P21/S4524/DIS: THAMES FARM CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT PLAN**

This has now been submitted and contains an outdated Highways Condition Report and the grouting/compaction proposals. The latter item has already been ruled as requiring a separate planning application by SODC.

## **SODC ward councillor's report Binfield Heath – 22nd Nov 2021**

### Covid-19

Covid cases are fluctuating around a similar high range which is much higher than at the equivalent time last year - as the Delta (Indian - B1.617.2) 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 16/11, Oxford City was at a weekly rate of 354 per 100k population. By comparison, Cherwell DC was 522, West Oxon DC at 447, SODC at 456 and Vale of WH DC at 451. Reading BC (to 16th November) was at 419. 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. Children down to age 12 are receiving a single dose of Pfizer. 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.

### 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 Milton Park site forecast expansion from 9 thousand jobs to 20 thousand by 2040.) The concept design for the building is available to view on the council's website. Because of its location the building is being designed to reflect the town's industrial and railway heritage as well as meeting the principles set out in the Didcot Garden Town delivery plan, meaning it reflects both local history and the town's future. The central location – opposite the railway station and well served by bus routes will be more accessible to the public and employees alike.

## 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.

## 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 had 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 CT 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, central 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. The central government settlement for the 2022-23 year is awaited, but it is clear that at SODC, past poor decisions are at real risk of constraining future options.

## 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](https://southoxon.gov.uk/grants).

The Community Enablement Team on [communityenablement@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto: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. It will close around the end of January but since quotes are required I would suggest trying to be ready with a project by Christmas. David and I work together to pool our grants.

Keep safe!

**Leigh Rawlins**  
**District Councillor**