

Dorchester-on-Thames Parish Council (DRAFT)

The Annual Parish Meeting was held in the Village Hall on Wednesday 13th April 2011 commencing at 7.30 p.m. The Chairman of the Parish Council, Cllr M Metcalfe, presided; present were Cllrs C Hill (Vice-Chairman), K Bryan, M Day, S Gibbons, Mrs J Nudds, M Stevenson and M Williams with G Russell in attendance. Also present were District Cllr John Cotton, County Cllr Lorraine Lindsay-Gale and 28 residents.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were accepted from Denise Boaden.

2. Minutes of the Meeting dated 5th May 2010

These Minutes were taken as read, approved and signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

3. Chairman's Report

In Cllr Margot Metcalfe's report she thanked Cllr Ken Bryan for his five years of service as Chairman. She was delighted that he had indicated his willingness to remain on the Council and continue to give the Parish his years of knowledge and experience.

Cllr Mrs Jenny Nudds and Cllr Mark Williams would, however, be standing down at the forthcoming Parish Council elections. She thanked them both for their contributions to the Council over several years and made a presentation to Jenny Nudds, who had now completed 20 years of service on the Council including a period as Chairman from 1995 to 1998.

John Cotton had been our District Councillor since 1999, most recently as part of a two-man team with Phil Cross. But John lives in Burcot and following the vacancy caused by the sitting councillor moving away from the district he has been invited to stand in his home ward. The Chairman thanked John for his support and assistance over the past twelve years and wished him well in his new ward.

The opening of Abbey View Meadow as an event car-park had been a great success; it was hoped that permission would be gained to use the facility on more days in 2011 and to separate the access used by pedestrians from the one used by vehicles.

The Parish Council has been a leading supporter of Parishes Against Gravel Extraction and has sponsored the campaign with £2,000 paid in past 12 months. The Chairman or Vice-Chairman have attended PAGE meetings and present indications are that the campaign has been successful.

The lack of funds for road repairs is well-known but at least some resources had been found to deal with the poor state of Drayton Road and this was much appreciated.

Cllr Metcalfe thanked members of the Council for their hard work and support over the past year. She thanked both County Cllr Lorraine Lindsay-Gale and District Cllr John Cotton for all their help, Geoff Russell, Parish Clerk, for his work and support and Helen Russell for hand-writing the Minutes.

After the May elections the new Parish Council will have to think about the implications of the Localism Bill and the 'Big Society' – to name just two current issues. What will these mean for the village, and for the work of the Parish Council? What do we want our village to look like, and what sort of place do we want to live in, in five, ten, twenty-five years from now?

(The full text of the Chairman's report is attached as an appendix to these Minutes)

4. Draft Accounts for year ended 31st March 2011

The Clerk reported that the Council's receipts in the current year had exceeded the Council's payments by just over £9,000 and that the Council's reserves are now considered to be adequate. There are currently no plans for any major items of expenditure although, having in recent years spent considerable sums on providing facilities for young children, there have been suggestions that the Council should consider providing amenities for older children and adults.

The Clerk told the meeting that after many years as the Council's Internal Auditor, Mr Douglas Jupp had indicated his wish to retire. The Clerk said that he was most grateful for all the help that Douglas had provided, on a voluntary basis, since the new audit system of Parish Council Accounts had been introduced almost ten years ago.

5. Presentations:

County Council: County Cllr Lorraine Lindsay-Gale said that there had been substantial cuts to Oxfordshire County Council's budget amounting to approximately £109 million over the coming four years.

All areas have taken a share of the cuts in government funding representing approximately 26% of their budgets.

One of the services that have had to make savings is the Library network and unfortunately Berinsfield Library was one of the 20 libraries listed as those about to lose their funding. However the subsequent campaign to save the Library has been part of a huge public outcry against the funding cut backs and OCC has promised to 'think again'. Every library will, however, now have to make its case for survival.

The amount of extra money the Government is allocating to OCC for highways maintenance is more than expected - £3.5 million rather than £1.1m. This is to be used to invest in improving the structure of our roads which in turn will prevent pot holes developing. It is not available simply to fill potholes. The types of work will be: large areas of patching, resurfacing of areas of road and full reconstruction.

Speed cameras were turned back on 1st April, funded from the Speed Awareness Courses run by the police. On 16th February the County Council officially launched its £600,000 Big Society Fund, which will enable local people to bid for start-up funding to help them take responsibility for providing services in their community.

On 19th October the County Council Cabinet took the decision to concentrate gravel extraction in existing areas of the county. Cllr Lorraine Lindsay-Gale has consistently supported the option to continue working at existing sites and said that any other option that would have blighted so many rural communities without justification was totally unacceptable.

The waste strategy has fallen behind in the timetable due in part to the delays in choosing a site for the county's incinerator. Two sites were proposed, one at Sutton Courtenay and the other at Ardley near Bicester. This issue has now been settled and much to the relief of some local residents the incinerator will be built at Ardley. The policy on waste recycling plants is due to go out to consultation in June with the minerals proposals.

(The full text of County Cllr Lorraine Lindsay-Gale's report is attached as an appendix to these Minutes)

District Council: District Cllr John Cotton said that he would concentrate his report on four important matters.

The SODC Core Strategy has been out for consultation. Although the proposals for more housing in Wallingford are satisfactory and it looks as though there will be small-scale developments spread around the district, which is to be welcomed, Cllr Cotton believes that the wrong site has been selected for Didcot. He will make representations to the Public Enquiry and still hopes that there will be changes.

SODC has been shown to be one of the least costly to run out of all 230 district councils in the country. The shared management with Vale of White Horse District Council is saving both councils millions of pounds. SODC has substantial reserves of around £70m. Although some of this is with Icelandic banks this is all hoped to be recoverable.

The waste recycling rates in SODC are now above 70% which is a great achievement that residents should be proud of.

Cllr Cotton said that he has enjoyed working with the Parish Council over the past 12 years and wished Dorchester-on-Thames well for the future.

PAGE: John Taylor, with Richard Douglas and Steve Thompson in support, gave the meeting a progress report on the work of Parishes Against Gravel Extraction. First, though, he thanked the Parish Council for its financial support and also the many volunteers who had helped in the campaign, the field walkers and so. John emphasised that the PAGE campaign was based upon an evidence-based approach.

The area that includes Dorchester (SG13) has been taken out of the plan as impossible to deliver but extraction techniques may change and some existing sites will definitely be exhausted before 2030. John also pointed out that the recent decisions of the County Council have been taken only after some very close committee votes.

There is still the possibility that the would-be gravel extractors will submit new data and/or new evidence so decisions may change. It is still therefore important to retain funds that have been earmarked for use in the PAGE campaign should further expert testimony be required.

Cllr Mark Stevenson commented that the development of aggregates recycling would reduce demand for newly extracted materials so the pro-active promotion of the use of recycled aggregates is important. John Taylor pointed out that construction of the latest designs of sustainable buildings requires less material.

6. Any Other Business

a. George Hall, Chairman of the Dorchester-on-Thames Society, told the meeting that in all probability the Society will decide to close in the near future. Despite publishing appeals in Dorchester News the Society has been unable to attract sufficient members to form a new committee. George thanked all those who have contributed to the work of the Society over its 40 year life and the present committee, especially Mike Kerr, who has been the Society's Secretary in recent years. The Society has around £270 of funds which it will distribute to village 'good causes'.

b. Malcolm Corry suggested that the new Parish Council might wish to encourage residents to form a special interest group or groups later in the year.

The Meeting closed at 8.54 p.m.

Appendix 1

Parish Council Chairman's Report DORCHESTER HIGHLIGHTS 2010-11

Ken Bryan steps down after 5 years as Chairman

In June Cllr Bryan said that having served as Chairman for five years he felt that it was time to stand down and he would therefore not offer himself for re-election.

Cllr Margot Metcalfe, who has served as Vice-Chairman since 2005/6, was elected as Chairman and Cllr Hill as Vice-Chairman.

Football's coming home to Dorchester (we hope)

After an approach from a group based outside the village failed to work out, The Council was delighted when Michael Stimpson said that he is leading a group that wishes to start playing in the coming 2011/12 season – watch this space

Event Car Parking Capacity doubles

The first use of Abbey View Meadow was for the Open Gardens charity scheme on Saturday 19th June. This was followed by the Dorchester Lecture on 24th June and the Oxfordshire Schools' Festival of Voices throughout week commencing 28th June.

Like some other major events The Festival of Voices produces enough demand for off-road parking that the Recreation Ground had to be used as well.

In fact having large parking areas at both ends of the village is a very useful amenity in that it prevents a lot of traffic from having to enter the village centre, which is after all the most congested area.

The Council plans to install a pedestrian access gate between Abbey View Meadow and Old Bridge Meadow, and to apply for a limited number of additional opening days,

Planning

In the past 12 months (ended 31st March) the Parish Council has been consulted about 41 applications for planning permission, listed building consent, conservation area consent or change of use. Many are small scale domestic extensions and so on but some are major projects such as the building of incinerators. In addition we have been consulted about the South Oxfordshire District Council's Core Strategy document which sets out policy up to 2026 and includes plans for the expansion of Didcot and Wallingford. Dorchester also played a part in the submissions sent in by 'DROP' – the Didcot Ring of Parishes'. We have also been consulted on Transport – mainly buses.

Parishes Against Gravel Extraction (PAGE)

The Parish Council has been a leading supporter of Parishes Against Gravel Extraction and has sponsored the campaign with £2,000 paid in past 12 months. The Chairman or Vice-Chairman have attended PAGE meetings.

Archaeology

Relevance to planning and to PAGE, but also the long-term project on the Allotments. The project has been deferred to 2012 (no dig this year) and the Council, having taken

advice from the Allotment Society Committee, has approved continuation of the project for a further three years.

Allotments

There is currently no waiting list, and sufficient vacant plots to meet demand. The Council will be reviewing rents this year with a view to an increase this autumn in line with other similar allotments in the area. A significant leak had to be repaired in 2010.

Trees and grass

In any year the Parish Council spends most of its money on what can be described as Village Maintenance. This ranges from cutting the grass, to keeping the trees in a safe state (especially in the burial ground and around the Recreation Ground), to picking up litter and arranging for the dog waste bins to be emptied regularly. This all adds up to well over £12,000 per year. It is thus very annoying when we see examples of anti-social behaviour by some dog-owners and some people who are thoughtless about leaving litter. More volunteer action would be welcomed – help keep the village clean!

Recycling

We lost our ‘Bring’ recycling facility at the top of Oxford Road and no suitable alternative site has been found. We have to guard against fly-tipping and to be ever-ready to report anything that we may notice – the end of Drayton Road seems to be a favoured spot!.

{It is not always necessary to report through the Parish Council- Page Two of Dorchester News carries a whole range of contacts for things like faulty street lights, blocked drains, missed rubbish collection, pot-holes, fly tipping, etc).

On the whole the new ‘wheelie bin’ service seems to be working well although the nature of many properties in the village means that red and green sacks are the norm.

Drayton Road Surface

Speaking of potholes, we were very pleased that much of the appalling rough and holed surface of Drayton Road was resurfaced this year by the County Council (thank you Lorraine).

BT Adoptabox - Red Telephone Box in Bridge End

Among the unusual assignments this year has been a request to find an alternative use for the Red telephone Box in Bridge End, which we can buy for £1 (although annual insurance would add £50. Despite appeals to residents we still haven’t come up with any good ideas, so please keep thinking!

We are losing John Cotton

John has been our District Councillor since 1999, most recently as part of a two-man team with Phil Cross. But John lives in Burcot and following the vacancy caused by the sitting councillor moving away from the district he has been invited to stand in his home ward, which (curiously) is called ‘Sanford’ even though it stretches virtually all the way from the City boundary to Didcot.

Parish Council Elections

This is the last time you will see the present eight Councillors at your annual meeting, as two are stepping down, and we have elections for the new Parish Council in May. This will be the first contested election to the Parish Council since 1999, with 10 candidates for 8 places and there was at one time a chance that there would be 12 candidates. I am pleased that the two who dropped out at the last minute have both said that they hope to stand in 2015. This is a very healthy state of affairs, and witness to people's willingness to serve the whole community..

Queen's 2012 Diamond Jubilee

Looking ahead the Parish Council, together with the Rector and Dorchester Abbey PCC, and other village organisations, will be planning next year's celebrations. June 2012 may seem a long way away but we need to start soon and we shall be very pleased if people volunteer to come forward and help. The more people involved, the better a celebration we can look forward to.

The Future?

The new Parish Council will of course continue to be responsible for the traditional items you see on every agenda, but we find we are increasingly required to look and think 'outside the box' and beyond our immediate boundaries, at the wider area, and the implications of long-term planning. Just to pick two current issues - the Localism Bill and the 'Big Society' - we shall need to think about the implications of these for the village, and for the work of the Parish Council. What do we want our village to look like, and what sort of place do we want to live in, in five, ten, twenty-five years from now?

Appendix 2 County Councillor's Report

County Councillor's Annual Report April 2010 – 2011

The Budget

Oxfordshire County Council provides 80 per cent of the local government services in the county. Our revenue budget for 2010/11 is £973 million. Of this, 65% is funded by central government; 29% comes from the council tax and 6% from charges and income. As we all know, however, we have faced significant reductions in central government funding this year amounting to approximately £109 million from our budget over the coming four years. This has meant changing both the services we provide and how we deliver them.

This scale of cuts could not be achieved simply by efficiencies. It was very clear that the situation required a wholesale review of services and some fundamental thinking about priorities. The county council has been asked to make some very difficult and in some cases very unpopular decisions.

It was not until mid December that we finally received a financial settlement announcement from central government which left only a few weeks to settle a budget for approval by Council on 15th February 2011.

We gave a commitment to a zero council tax increase for 2011/12 and this has been achieved by planning for a 2.5% rise in council tax revenue which is being funded by a central government grant to lead to a council tax freeze. Given the current economic position, this freeze will be welcomed by many Oxfordshire council tax payers. Our largest area of spend is Children, Young People & Families at £540 million. Of this £400 million goes straight to schools and is ring-fenced by the government. Also included is Children's Social Care of £43 million, School Transport of £17 million; Special Educational Needs of £28 million; Youth and Connexions Service of £12 million and Children's Centres of £11 million. Our second largest area of spend is on Adult Social Care, totalling almost £200 million. This is under severe pressure with a growing elderly population. Next is Environment & Economy at £83 million, including Transport at £48 million and Waste Disposal at £22 million. Smaller but important service areas include our Fire & Rescue Service at £25 million; Libraries & Heritage at £12 million; our Schools Music Service at £2.7 million and Trading Standards at £2.5 million. With properties valued at £1.3 billion we have debt requiring annual debt repayments of £40 million. All areas have taken a share of the cuts in government funding representing approximately 26% of their budgets and we have faced with some very difficult decisions around prioritisation.

Change of Approach on funding for Libraries

One of the services that has had to make savings is the Library network. Out of all the county council services the loss of 20 libraries out of 43 has caused the most public concern, and given rise to a very vocal campaign to keep them open. The county council has listened to the people of Oxfordshire and although it remains committed to finding savings in expenditure, it wants to do so in a way that has sustained popular support. To that end the policy towards libraries is changing to keep them open and seek to improve the level of service that the public receive. The aim is to go ahead with £1m savings in terms of central costs by increasing efficiency and reducing the number of staff at OCC with responsibility for this area. The additional £1m savings originally identified will be contingent on making efficiencies in the library network and will not be met through a programme that involves funding being withdrawn from the 20 libraries identified in previous proposals. Every library will now be assessed during a consultation process that will commence at the end of May and continue until September.

Additional Funds for Highway Maintenance

The amount of extra money the Government is allocating to OCC for highways maintenance is more than expected - £3.5 million rather than £1.1m. This is to be used to invest in improving the structure of our roads which in turn will prevent pot holes developing. It is not available simply to fill potholes. The types of work will be: large areas of patching, resurfacing of areas of road and full reconstruction. This will enable the County Council to invest in the long term future of the roads – rather than just firefighting. The Council is required to publish what this funding has achieved by the end of Sept 2011. Therefore the plan is to have a programme of works agreed during April and for work to start during May. This will enable OCC to deliver the schemes during the

period of better weather. It is essential that work starts quickly and is spread throughout the summer to achieve the best value for money. In addition the Council will be ensuring that the programme is communicated widely to the public to ensure that wide coverage can be given to what is achieved.

Speed Cameras

Last summer the county council decided to stop funding the Thames Valley Partnership to save money. This organization was responsible for running the speed cameras in the county and they decided to turn them off. However, after negotiations with the Thames Valley Police it was agreed that from 1 April 2011 speed cameras would be turned back on and funded from the Speed Awareness Courses run by the police. The level at which these courses are offered and also the cost they charge for them is being raised. The cost of the courses has gone up from £79.50 to £95.00. People caught speeding will only be able to attend one course in a 3 year period. Oxfordshire County Council funding is restricted to the maintenance of fixed sites. The media has been making selective use of statistics supplied by Thames Valley Police. They report that road fatalities have increased from 12 over a year to 18 – citing a “50% increase”. However, there is no evidence that the additional fatalities were the result of speed nor that they happened in proximity to inoperative speed cameras. Public opinion appears to be polarised on this issue.

The Big Society

The coalition government launched its “Big Society” idea to enable and encourage local communities to provide services that local government will no longer be able to afford. On 16th February the County Council officially launched its Big Society Fund, which will enable local people to bid for start-up funding to help them take responsibility for providing services in their community. The council is keen to create an environment in which it is as easy as possible for communities to do things for themselves, and the £600,000 Big Society Fund is a part of this. Projects could include but do not have to be restricted to taking on responsibility for libraries and youth services, day opportunities for older people or community transport. The council will require a viable business case from communities but is determined to work closely with people to advise them on the process. I hope community groups and local individuals in my area will see this as an opportunity to come forward with creative and sustainable ideas and I look forward to working with them.

Minerals & Waste Development Framework

As the County Councillor who represents seven parishes in South Oxfordshire who feared they would be devastated by large scale gravel extraction I was hugely relieved that the County Council Cabinet took the decision on 19th October to concentrate gravel extraction in existing areas of the county. I have consistently supported the option to continue working at existing sites, and I would suggest that any other option that would have blighted so many rural communities without justification was totally unacceptable. The local communities came together in November 2009 and the successful defence of our area was due in no small measure to the dedicated and highly effective campaign run over the last year by PAGE (Parishes Against Gravel Extraction). As a result the

Dorchester/Warborough/Benson area is now precluded from assessment within the period of the proposed Minerals & Waste Development Framework up to 2030. In addition as a result of representations made by their Parish Council supported by myself, Nuneham Courtenay has been taken out as well. In the unlikely event that gravel is required from this area the preferred site for extraction will be Cholsey. However the "Stadhampton/Berinsfield" and "Clifton Hampden" areas are being retained by OCC as "not being precluded from further assessment". These proposals will now go out to a further round of consultation in June 2011.

In addition, the Atkins report sponsored by OCC on gravel supply and demand in Oxfordshire that I began calling for a year ago, was presented to cabinet on 16th Feb. It supports our contention that 2.1mtpa was far too high a target figure for gravel extraction and comes down in favour of 1.26mtpa. This is very good news and if successfully promoted to central government could be the first blow Oxfordshire strikes for localism! Once finalized and combined with the County's Waste Strategy, the Development Framework will be subject to public enquiry probably by the end of 2011.

The waste strategy has fallen behind in the timetable due in part to the delays in choosing a site for the county's incinerator. Two sites were proposed, one at Sutton Courtenay and the other at Ardley near Bicester. This issue has now been settled and much to the relief of some local residents the incinerator will be built at Ardley. The policy on waste recycling plants is due to go out to consultation in June with the minerals proposals.

Berinsfield Library

Unfortunately Berinsfield library was one of the 20 libraries listed as those about to lose their funding. The public meeting held on 15th January to discuss the withdrawal of funds was attended by about 60 people. I explained that if it was impossible to keep the library as it is there could be a whole range of options for saving it such as re-locating it or facilitating a co-location with another community service in the existing building to reduce costs. Since then I have formed a Berinsfield Library Working Group to liaise between the County Council and the Parish Council and it met for the first time on 8th February. I am currently working with OCC officers to provide the necessary information with which to help the group produce a robust case to save the library because although OCC has now responded to the huge public outcry against the funding cut backs with a promise to 'think again' every library will now have to make its case for survival.

Berinsfield Day Centre

For some time now I have been a Trustee of the day centre which meets on Tuesdays and Fridays at the Marsh Baldon Village Hall because no suitable accommodation could be found in Berinsfield. At a recent meeting of the Trustees it was agreed to try again to find a suitable venue within the village. Several site visits have taken place and a favoured site has been identified. If all goes well the day centre should be able to return to Berinsfield within the next few months.

Culham Primary School, European School

Sadly after three years of trying to find a new head teacher, and experiencing falling pupil numbers and consequential loss of funding, the Primary School is facing closure from August 2011. A very active campaign is being waged to try and buy the Governors time

to find a new head teacher and to establish a federation with another local school. The county council Cabinet has tried to give the School Governors as much time as possible to rectify the situation.

The European School at Culham has had its European funding withdrawn and has failed in an attempt to become an Academy School, and is now trying to set up as a Free School from next September. It would be a wonderful solution if the two schools could come together as a Free School. However this outcome looks uncertain at the moment.

Lorraine Lindsay-Gale
County Councillor
Dorchester & Berinsfield