

Dorchester-on-Thames Parish Council

The Annual Parish Meeting was held in the Village Hall on Wednesday 9th May 2012 commencing at 7.30 p.m. The Chairman of the Parish Council, Cllr Mrs M Metcalfe, presided; present were Cllrs C Hill (Vice-Chairman), K Bryan, M Day, S Gibbons, M. Kitson, and M Stevenson with G Russell in attendance. Also present were 7 residents and Anton Nath from Oxfordshire Rural Community Council.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were accepted from Gillian Johnson, Sally Greenaway, District Cllr Marc Hiles and County Cllr Lorraine Lindsay-Gale

2. Minutes of the Meeting dated 13th April 2011

The Minutes as circulated were approved and signed as a true record.

3. Chairman's Report

Cllr Mrs Margot Metcalfe submitted a written report, a copy of which is annexed to these minutes.

Frank Norman asked where the Parish Council intended to plant the trees to commemorate The Queen's Diamond Jubilee that had been received from the Woodland Trust. He suggested that there are suitable places on the Allotments and adjacent to the Bridge End car park. The Chairman said that trees had so far been planted around the perimeter of the Recreation Ground and also alongside the ditch in the Cemetery but there were still plenty of trees available.

Jerry Nudds said that the signs indicating that a short length of Henley Road near the junction with the Dorchester by-pass has no speed limit made no sense to him or to several other drivers. It was explained that these signs are the responsibility of the County Council.

Mrs Irene Osborn-King said that she thought roundels on the road surface have much more impact on drivers than speed limits marked on posts by the side of the road. Mrs Osborn-King asked for additional litter-bins by the toilets in Bridge End. She said that she thought that the residents of Watling Lane should pay for the upkeep of Watling Lane and not the Council. The cost of maintaining Wittenham Lane is shared between the residents who live along Wittenham Lane and Orchard Haven and the residents of Watling Lane should follow this example.

4. Draft Accounts for year ended 31st March 2012

The Clerk presented these accounts, which are subject to audit. A copy is annexed to these minutes.

The Precept for the year had been £38,900 (£37,750) and there had been a small excess of Total Receipts over Total Payments leading to a net gain in funds of £3,036. Closing bank balances amounted to £51,755.

Jerry Nudds asked why, in view of its large reserves, the Council felt that it needed to increase the Precept. The Chairman replied that the Council believes in having modest annual increases in line with cost increases rather than having the occasional very large

increase. As both County and District Councils attempt to cut their expenditure there is also pressure upon the Parish to take over some of their services.

Every year the Council discusses setting the annual precept and its budget at both the December and January meetings and the Chairman suggested that more residents should attend these meetings where their views could be expressed.

Frank Norman suggested that Allotment rents should be increased. He said that in Dorchester-on-Thames they are very much less than in other villages in the area.

The Accounts as presented were accepted by the Meeting.

5. Guest Speaker: Anton Nath from Oxfordshire Rural Community Council.

Anton took as his topic “How recent changes in legislation empower local communities / neighbourhoods to plan for their future and why a large number of local residents should be involved.” He explained such things as the ‘Community Right to Buy’; the ‘Community Right to Build’; and the ‘Community Right to Challenge’.

Neighbourhood Planning shapes the policy about the new things that can be built in the community and becomes part of established Planning Policy.

Anton explained the process of Neighbourhood Planning and stressed the importance of an ‘evidence-based’ approach. The process cannot be used as a barrier to development – to get less development than is already called for in the Local ‘Strategic Plan’, for example – but Dorchester-on-Thames is one of the District’s smaller villages with no imposed quota of development. Such things as a village ‘Design Statement’ can also be prepared and have a similar impact upon planning policy.

The whole process is new and already it is clear that there are several different ways in which the matter can be approached and with different levels of expenditure too. One thing is clear, however: there has to be substantial involvement by local residents.

The choice is whether the Parish is happy to leave these matters entirely within the control of the District Council or would prefer to have a greater say its own future.

6. Presentations:

Written reports from County Cllr Lorraine Lindsay-Gale and District Cllr Marc Hiles have been received and will be annexed to these Minutes.

7. Any Other Business

John Metcalfe proposed a vote of thanks to members of the Parish Council for their dedication and skill and this was approved unanimously.

The Meeting closed at 9.14 p.m.

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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.

Chairman's Report 2012-13

The Parish Council elected in May 2012, in addition to its regular activities, took responsibility for organising the **Jubilee** Day in June and distribution of mugs for children. Since then, a major focus has been to initiate a revival of the parish planning process through a **Neighbourhood Development Plan** and a **Community Led Plan**. Many of you attended an open meeting in October; you will have had an opportunity to find out more about progress on these at the Exhibition held in conjunction with the Annual Parish Meeting.

The recent survey on **High-Speed Broadband** indicated the high level of frustration of residents and businesses with the current speed, and provides ammunition to have Dorchester included in the County Council project.

Your Parish Council budgeted a 1.8% increase in the **Precept for 2013-14** to £40, 650, an increase of £750 which allows for some of the anticipated costs of the planning exercise, for which grants will also be sought. This appears in Council Tax bills as a 7.1% increase, or an average £77.02 per household per year, due to the decrease in number of ratepayers in the parish from 555 to 528.

Sadly at the end of last summer Stuart Gibbons felt that he could not continue on the Council due to heavy work commitments, and Mike Hill of Overy has joined as a co-opted member. We thank Stuart for all his work on behalf of the Council, most recently chairing the Jubilee committee, and master-minding (the playground refurbishment, and welcome Mike.

Legislation and Planning

As we commented last year, the Localism Bill, the National Policy Planning Framework, and SODC's Local Plan and Core Strategy have implications for Dorchester. We also said that we would need to have our own plan, and that while the SODC Core Strategy has no housing allocations for Dorchester, it does for towns where our children go to school (notably Didcot and Wallingford expansion), and for neighbouring villages like Berinsfield, so it becomes our business. We have decided to develop our own plan, and much effort will be put in during the coming year by councillors and residents to produce our Neighbourhood Development Plan (Chair Mark Stevenson), which will then be accepted at district level as THE Dorchester planning document. We are also looking to develop plans for specific areas of concern identified by the community; we have a group for Transport and related topics (Chair Malcolm Corry), but need more resident participation to take any other initiatives forward.

Planning - In the past 12 months (ended 31 March 2013) the Parish Council has been consulted about more than 30 applications for planning permission, listed building consent, conservation area consent or change of use. We continue to be vigilant, looking into each one very carefully, but are often disappointed by the lack of adequate documentation, such as Design and Access statements, and lack of awareness of implications for the village as a whole. We do encourage residents to discuss their plans

with the parish council, and/or with SODC planning officers before submission, and/or to attend the parish council meeting where it will be discussed. We are also sometimes frustrated by lack of consideration at District level of our carefully worded responses when we recommend rejection of an application. We continued in dialogue with SODC throughout 2012 about the development at 32-36 High Street, but failed to get any changes agreed.

PAGE – It seemed that the question of quotas and location of gravel extraction had been resolved in the County Council's recommendations, but the outcome of the recent CC elections will almost certainly mean a further review. We therefore continue to support PAGE (Parishes against Gravel Extraction) by attending meetings and contributing financially to the campaign on your behalf (£1000 in 2012-13, a further £1000 allocated for the current year. John Taylor of Overy is the current PAGE chairman.

Other changes – you will be aware that the county council constituency boundaries have changed, and that the number of county councillors has been reduced from 74 to 63. We also face reduced numbers of District Councillors, in a restructured ward, which will be reflected in the District Council elections in 2015. The probability is that the number of district councillors will fall from 48 to 36.

Parking, Transport and Roads

Parking – despite our efforts, especially having two temporary parking arrangements, increased coning and notices, it is very difficult to get a public event parking system which satisfies everyone, and we continue to get complaints. For those not aware, we have an ongoing dialogue with the Abbey for their entire calendar of events to decide which facilities are needed, and the Parish Council receives payment (cost reflected in ticket sales) when its services are used. However, residents' own parking, especially in the High Street (as is evident early in the morning, before any visitors arrive), the school, and events other than those in the Abbey where non-residents come to the village, contribute to the problem as well. We have been very grateful to the George and White Hart for accommodating some local parking over the past year, but they need their facilities for their own clients. We urge residents to use off-street parking where they can, to park considerately when using the Co-op and dropping off at the school, and ask organisers of all events to consider parking implications, and give out parking information in advance.

Bus services – we reported on our bus survey last year, and we keep a watching brief on bus services. These services will also be reviewed in the Community Led Plan.

Dial-a-Ride – this service has just been extended to South Oxfordshire; we do not have any feedback from residents as to its take-up and usefulness.. Details are available from the Parish Clerk.

Speeding - in response to residents' concerns, and at the Parish Council's suggestion, our local police have mounted speed checks along the Abingdon Road, and on the bridge. Views may differ on this process, but safety is the overriding concern. We have also

received kit from the County Council for monitoring speeds at certain points in the village. Once again, residents could assist by being aware of danger points, such as the school and Martins Lane, and blind spots, such as the bridge. The whole village, from Meadside to Burcot, is a 30 m.p.h. zone!!

Watling Lane

The Parish Council obtained quotations for repairs, but meanwhile the PC and residents continue to lobby the County Council to get the potholes repaired. Work on the Watling Lane potholes did commence towards the end of last year but it was not completed due to the bad weather. The Parish Council is keen to find out when the work will restart.

Affordable Housing

A further Housing Needs survey was conducted in September; its results and any recommendations will be incorporated in the Neighbourhood Plan.

Crime and Security

The revival of Neighbourhood Watch has been much appreciated, and the local coordinator keeps in close touch with the Parish Clerk and the police. We urge residents to report every incident, however small, via the non-urgent police number, as these frequently link up with other, similar incidents, and help the police track down those involved.

Disaster Planning

Thanks to the village emergency plan, we were well prepared for the winter snow, with gravel and shovels, and with sandbags for the bouts of flooding. Thanks to Councillor Chris Hill, in particular, for his work on this.

Sport and Recreation

Sport – As well congratulating the football team on its continued success, we have been delighted to support the Tennis Club's applications for funding for a multi-purpose surface and other refurbishment to improve tennis facilities and offer other sports. More ambitiously, we have set up a committee chaired by Ken Bryan, to develop a plan for a new pavilion to meet future needs. Many of you responded to the questionnaire about location; now you have the chance to look at the first draft of the plan. Major fund-raising will be needed, but the objective is a resource of which the village will be proud, and which will serve many activities and future generations.

Playground – this is inspected regularly to ensure that it meets health and safety requirements, and we replaced one set of swings in 2012, as a Jubilee initiative. Sally Greenaway has taken over responsibility for the regular inspection, so please let her know if you notice any problems.

Footpaths

It took several months and many complaints before we found a durable solution to the path between Martins Lane and Drayton Rd. past the cemetery; we hope that the new

path meets everyone's needs. The path down to the bus stop is another problem; it has recently been tidied up, again, and we shall continue to maintain it.

Cemetery

Apart from regular maintenance, we have done a major clearout of the ditch nearest to Herringcote, and continue to manage trees. We have yet to install planned notices advising cemetery regulations. We increased rates for grave plots this year, in line with practice elsewhere. Councillors Day and Bryan take particular responsibility here, and Councillor Day also looks after the closed churchyard attached to the Abbey (a parish council statutory obligation).

Allotments

There are still some empty plots, and a few needing maintenance. Sally Greenaway is the Council member with allotment responsibility.

The Discovering Dorchester' archaeology project resumed in 2012, and will start this year on June 30th, for 4 weeks.

Routine Maintenance

The Parish Council spends well over £15, 000 annually on village maintenance – from grass cutting, tree safety (especially in the burial ground and around the Recreation Ground), to picking up litter and arranging for emptying of dog waste bins.. Our village handyman does a superb job cleaning up litter, so it is very annoying to have to deal with anti-social behaviour in the form of litter-dropping and dog fouling. Help from local volunteers in keeping the village clean would be most welcome, and we have some kit for doing this.

Queen's 2012 Diamond Jubilee

The Diamond Jubilee was extensively reported in Dorchester News; the Parish Council is proud to have organised the major event on June 4th in the Recreation Ground, with help from many volunteers, and was delighted with both attendance and response. It is not too late to purchase a souvenir mug, on sale in the Museum, Hair and the Parish Clerk.

Other activities

Red telephone box in Bridge End – the box has been purchased, and its refurbishment is likely to form part of a larger project recognising the achievements of its architect, Giles Gilbert Scott and his grandfather, George Gilbert Scott – the latter designed many buildings in Dorchester and environs, and played a major role in the later Victorian Abbey restoration.

Land registration – the Council has completed a review of small plots of land which have no known owner, and is planning to register some of these. We have also been asked to look at property boundaries.

Drainage

We await a report on a recent survey of drainage in the village, especially location and role of ditches in the flood control system.

Web site – some improvements have been made to web content, and we are trying to keep updating its information. Mike Kitson and Geoff Russell are working with Simon Ratliff on behalf of the Council. The Council, but we would welcome assistance from residents in making this a vibrant village facility.

Village Hall – the Hall now has broadband, paid for by the Parish Council.

The future?

Planning for the future will be our main activity in the coming year. We ask all residents who care about Dorchester, especially those who expect to be here for the foreseeable future, to engage in the planning process, so that when the final Neighbourhood Development Plan is put to you in a referendum during 2014, it incorporates your views and your decisions.

Post Office

We end the year on a sad note; the village will lose its post office at the end of June. Despite strenuous efforts by the Post Office authorities, including discussion with the Co-op, no feasible solution has yet been found. The Parish Council continues to be involved in efforts to find an alternative.

Thanks

As ever, I should like to thank all the Parish Councillors for the amount of time and energy they put into supporting this community – much of what they do is invisible, but all their activities help to make Dorchester a better place to live in. Our Parish Clerk works extremely hard on our behalf, as does Geoff Willis, the handyman, to keep the village neat. Finally, thanks to everyone who has worked so hard to set up today's Exhibition and Forum.

MM 13/5/13

County Councillor's Annual Report 2012/13

It has been an extremely difficult time for the County Council which has been faced with finding close to £200 million of savings to help clear the national debt . So far we are on track to do this while protecting front line services such as Adult Social Care, Childrens Services, the Fire Service and our Libraries.

But with the economy remaining flat we expect to have to look at further ways to save money. We are now focused on co-location of services with other public service providers. From April we take over responsibility for Social Care in the County working with the newly established Health and Well Being Board, while at the same time facilitating most of our schools to become Academies.

We are proud that Oxfordshire has the most efficient Fire Service in the country, and that it is the top recycling county in the country. We are pleased to be investing £19 million in a programme to provide Superfast Broadband (24Mbps) to 90% of Oxfordshire by 2015.

As lead member of the newly established City Deal we are working with our district and city colleagues, the university, and the Local Enterprise Partnership to attract inward investment from the private sector that will create jobs and growth for the local economy.

However we are aware that we are not achieving the level of service that we would like on highways maintenance – yes potholes. That is why we have announced that we are boosting our pothole repair programme. In a 'normal year' we might expect 24,000 defects. We're currently looking at around 36,000 for 2012 to 13. So we have nearly doubled highway repair gangs from 10 to 19 to get to grips with problem. An additional £250,000 – enough to fill more than 4,000 extra potholes - has been added on top of around £5 million spent so far throughout 2012 and 13.

The Public Inquiry into the County Council's proposed Minerals & Waste Plan has been delayed, and will probably now take place in the Autumn. If the Plan is accepted without change this area will be protected from widespread gravel extraction until after 2030.

For the past year I have been chairman of the County Council's Strategy & Partnerships committee and have worked on a plan that will radically change the way the county council operates its governance, policy-making and scrutiny functions, making them more streamlined, focused, effective and inclusive.

Among my personal highlights for the year has been the provision of the pedestrian crossing at Shillingford funded from my Councillor's Community Budget. Although it is not located where we would have liked it to be because of the bend in the road by the Kingfisher Pub, it will provide a safe crossing between Shillingford and Warborough on the A4074 for the first time, for those who want to use it.

Other good news has been that I have been able to fund the improved access to Clifton Hampden primary school, equipment and a storage facility for the Nuneham Courtenay lunch club, stage lighting for the Greet Hall, Warborough, a sound loop for Dorchester Village Hall and give contributions towards the new youth shelter at Berinsfield, plans for the redevelopment of the Village Hall at Sandford, speed reduction measures in Clifton Hampden and Burcot and work on the Village Plan at Culham. I was also delighted to sponsor a successful £50,000 bid to the OCC Big Society Fund on behalf of the Stadhampton Community Building project which has started work to adapt their parish church into a community centre.

The County Council held elections on 2nd May. We have reduced the number of Councillors from 74 to 63, which has resulted in the remaining Divisions becoming larger, on average representing approximately 8,400 residents. This Division now includes the parishes of Marsh Baldon, Toot Baldon and Garsington.

I was returned with a 634 majority, taking 47% of the vote. Although UKIP made a strong standing in many areas of the county they did not win a seat. The composition of the council is now that no party has overall control: Conservatives 31. Labour 15, Liberal Democrats 11, Green 2 and 4 Independents. The Conservative Group has negotiated an alliance with three Independent Councillors and will continue to run the administration.

I have been re-appointed to the Cabinet, with the portfolio for Community and Cultural Services, which means I will be responsible for libraries, museums, the history service, the Coroner's service, adult learning and tourism.

Lorraine Lindsay-Gale
Berinsfield and Garsington Division.