

Dorchester-on-Thames Parish Council

The Annual Parish Meeting was held in the Village Hall on Wednesday 30th April 2014 commencing at 7.30 p.m. The Chairman of the Parish Council, Cllr Mrs M Metcalfe presided; present were Cllrs Maurice Day, Chris Hill, Sue Graney and Mike Kitson, County Cllr Lorraine Lindsay-Gale and 32 residents with G Russell in attendance.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mike Hill, Ken Bryan and Mark Stevenson, Denise Boaden, Simon Broadbent and District Cllr Marc Hiles.

2. Minutes of the Meeting dated 15th May 2013

The Minutes were taken as read and approved for publication on the Village website.

3. Chairman's Report

The Chairman's Report in full is annexed to these Minutes and is supplemented by a list of the current members of the Parish Council with their areas of special interests/responsibilities. A copy will also be published in 'Dorchester News'.

4. Draft Accounts for year ended 31st March 2014

The Clerk presented the Draft Receipts and Payments Accounts which showed that total receipts had exceeded total payments by £23,418 (compared with £8,065 in the previous year). There had been substantial grant income, mainly towards the cost of the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) on the old tennis courts but also £5,000 towards the costs of the Neighbourhood Planning Exercise. While the MUGA project would soon be completed, the bulk of the other grants (for Neighbourhood Planning and IT education) was held as 'earmarked funds'.

The significant increase in burial fees received reflected increased demand rather than increased prices but prices are due to rise in 2015.

On the expenditure side the Council had paid £1,667 towards the cost of the planned memorial to the Gilbert Scotts. The costs of maintaining footpaths had fallen but this would increase again in the new financial year when Malthouse Lane is re-surfaced.

5. Presentations:

County Councillors Report

County Cllr Lorraine Lindsay-Gale submitted a written annual report, a copy of which has been annexed to these Minutes

District Council Report

District Cllr Marc Hiles was unable to attend the meeting due to work commitments and had sent his apologies. He said that these commitments would prevent him from standing for re-election to the District Council in May 2015.

Through the Clerk, District Cllr Marc Hiles reported that the District Council has given its support to many parishes, including Dorchester, which are developing Neighbourhood Plans. These are essential but must fall in line with the District Council's Core Strategy. However, the SHMA (Strategic Housing Market Assessment) has now been published and may change the volume of new housing indicated in the Core Strategy. This may increase the 109 houses assigned to Berinsfield and, if the volumes increase, it may even give small villages the opportunity for small developments.

The District Council has made progress with its cost efficiencies and there is a zero increase in the SODC share of Council Tax. As part of the savings Vale of White Horse officers will move to the SODC offices at Crowmarsh and some Oxfordshire County Council departments will be moving into the Vale offices at Abingdon.

6. Report from PAGE (Parishes Against Gravel Extraction)

John Taylor, Chairman of the PAGE committee, referred to the map and notes that had recently been prominently posted around the village. Since 2009 PAGE has tried to reduce the quantities that had been estimated to be required for extraction and also to have another site chosen. Initially, the campaign had been successful.

When, however, Jonathan King, the inspector appointed by the Secretary of State to examine the County Council's proposals, had begun his appraisal he had told the County Council that he required more information about the scheme that the County had approved. Faced with this opposition the County had withdrawn its proposed plan and had appointed Atkins Consultants to review the strategy that it had used.

PAGE has also appointed consultants, Gardiner Planning of Saffron Walden, who advise that quantities set for extraction should be based upon ten years demand as shown by actual sales.

John Taylor said that forecast new house-building in this part of the County is split roughly 50:50 between South Oxfordshire and West Oxfordshire District Councils and the County has therefore stated that its policy will be based upon an equal share of the extraction quantity.

Other factors to be considered are that changes in technology have significantly reduced the demand for gravel as a house-building material and that Oxfordshire County Council is the only authority that is using an 'Areas of Search' method. PAGE has responded to the latest developments with an on-line statement that is the equivalent of 50 pages long.

The County will resubmit its plans for consultation in September/October prior to giving final approval to its plan by the end of 2014. This plan will be subject to an examination in public, which will probably take place in July, and it is anticipated the final plan will be known by the end of 2015.

The on-going process means that PAGE is still going to need the Parish Council's financial support in 2014/15 and, probably, beyond. Dorchester Parish Council has been contributing £1,000 each year but it now needs to consider whether this figure should be increased.

7. Pavilion Development Progress Report

A Committee comprising members of the Parish Council and Dorchester Sports Club has been reviewing the options for improving facilities. This has included looking at building a new pavilion on the Oxford Road end of the Recreation Ground / or a new building close to the present site / or extending the present facilities. Providing an office for the Parish Clerk as part of the new structure has also been considered.

Following a survey of village residents it is clear that development on or close to the existing site is preferred to creating a new building near Oxford Road.

The question of how such a project could be funded is being explored. For the time being it is intended to make the existing facilities more 'family friendly' in the hope of increasing their utilisation. Any future application for grant aid will have to demonstrate an appropriate demand.

The Meeting closed at 8.45 p.m. and was followed by a meeting of the Parish Council.

Dorchester Parish Council Chairman's Report 2013-14

It is 120 years since the first annual parish meeting; the first parish council was elected in 1894; some 'hot topics' remain surprisingly similar! The present council has, as usual, combined routine activities, such as maintenance and commenting on planning applications, with a mix of responsibilities and initiatives, some directly related to the village, others with a wider scope. People ask 'What does the Parish Council actually do?'; I hope this report will help answer this question. There is no doubt that the range of activities and involvement expected of councillors has expanded, with an increased workload. Localism can be a mixed blessing, and budget cuts further up the line bring more responsibility and need to find solutions at parish level, and greater need for volunteers.

Council Membership: All our council members work very hard on behalf of the community, as will emerge in this report. In 2012 we welcomed Mike Hill of Overy to the Parish Council; he has taken on responsibility for footpaths, is on the Neighbourhood Plan team, acted as flood warden for Overy, and has overseen the tennis court project on behalf of the council. In 2013 Sally Greenaway, having been a very active member for two years, decided she needed to devote more time to other commitments, and we thank her very much for her contribution, especially to the Jubilee in 2012, and looking after the Playground. We have been very fortunate to co-opt Sue Graney, who has many years experience as teacher, parent, and local organiser, and who brings new skills, not least her willingness to take over as webmaster for the village web site, and to find ways of increasing awareness of the Parish Council's role and actions in the community. A list of members' responsibilities is attached to this report.

At this point I should also like to thank Simon Ratliff, who took on the job of webmaster following Brian Oliver's untimely death in 2006, and, in spite of his other commitments, has continued to maintain the site without any payment or public recognition. The Parish Council is extremely grateful for his contribution, and will recognise this appropriately in the near future.

The **Neighbourhood Development Plan** (NDP) is making progress (reported regularly on the green pages in *Dorchester News*); its Steering Group is chaired by Cllr Mark Stevenson, supported by a team which includes three other parish councillors, Maurice Day, Mike Kitson and Mike Hill, as well as Malcolm Airs, John Metcalfe, Chris Smith and Richard Winslet. A public consultation is planned for autumn 2014. While we have no Community-led Plan as such, we have taken forward particular issues arising from the public meeting in October 2012 which do not fall directly under the NDP, including provision for the elderly, bus transport, and parking. Malcolm Corry, in particular, has been active on transport issues.

Gravel: As mentioned last year and well-publicised around the village in recent weeks, gravel extraction is back on the agenda; Dorchester Parish Council is an active member of PAGE (Your PC Chairman is on the Steering Group), and we also support its work financially (£100 per year). John Taylor, Chairman of PAGE, is reporting at this meeting.

Finance: The Parish Clerk will present our financial report, but to give you some background: your Parish Council managed a **Precept for 2013-14** of £40, 650, increasing to £41, 450 in the current year, an increase of £800 (1.9%), or less than £1 per head of Dorchester's population. Additional income comes inter alia from burials, and we have received a one-off grant of £5000 from SODC towards the NDP. We charge for event parking, but this is largely absorbed by labour and signage costs. Much of our expenditure (ca £15, 000) is committed, e.g., maintaining the Cemetery and Recreation Ground, grass cutting and other maintenance, water for the Rec and Allotments, as well as paying for rubbish and dog bins. We also maintain the closed churchyard and its trees. In addition, we often take on extra maintenance, such as footpaths, and this is likely to increase. Many of our costs are increasing this year; we are also raising cemetery fees, and rationalising allotment fees.

Sport and recreation have been high on the agenda this year. We have been excited by the new **tennis court** project (thanks to Claire Andersson for her tireless work in getting the project off the ground, and Cllr Mike Hill for overseeing this on behalf of the council, especially its potential to offer new sports, and with a grand opening scheduled for June 1st. It is disappointing that despite the efforts of Cllr Ken Bryan and his committee, ambitious plans for a new **pavilion** have had to be curtailed, mainly because we have to demonstrate considerably more use of the facilities than at present to attract grant funding. However, the pavilion committee and sports club are 'on the case' to upgrade what we have and attract more usage. [as will be reported later]. And we should applaud our football club for continued their success, at a higher level, this season.

Post Office: the Parish Council has been fully committed to finding an optimal solution for Post Office provision in Dorchester since before the PO closure last June, and has participated in discussions involving the Post Office and the Village Hall in recent months. A statement from Robert Worley, Post Office Field Change Advisor, states that: 'Post Office Limited is committed to return a Post Office to Dorchester-on-Thames. A solution we are considering at present is to open an Outreach service from the Village Hall and we are in initial discussions with an interested party to run the service'. We cannot say more than this at present.

Planning – dealing with planning applications is an important and time-consuming part of Council business, even if we are not able to determine the final outcome. In the past 12 months (ended 31 March

2014) the Parish Council has been consulted about more than 30 applications; some are well-prepared and/or non-controversial; others require considerable research on our part, especially when documentation is inadequate. We have dealt with several applications for extensions which come under the government's recent permitted development rules, which are generally approved unless very good planning reasons for refusal can be demonstrated. We continue to urge architects, and residents, to discuss their proposals with us, SODC and their neighbours before submission, giving as much information as possible, as this assists us in our deliberations, and can avoid delay. As the NDP progresses, we are tending to look at applications in this context, although the plan cannot yet be cited as a reason for our recommendation. However, one ongoing application, for change of use at Overy Court, is going to appeal. We have also registered the old post office as a community asset, so that the community gets first refusal in the event of sale.

Parking, Transport and Roads/Footpaths

Parking – successive parish councils, over many decades, have grappled with this issue, and no solution suits everyone, or solves all the problems. A **questionnaire on residents' parking** will be circulated by Cllr Chris Hill early next month, the aim being to reach a consensus on what could/should be done, even if it some measures are difficult to implement.

Bus services – Malcolm Corry and the Bus Users' group have worked very hard since the planning public consultation in October 2012, but as you will have read in recent Dorchester News, there is little hope of achieving improved services through the village.

Speeding - Many residents have expressed concern at speeding in the village and its approaches, and we shall be borrowing kit from the police in the next few months to monitor speeding in critical areas. Volunteers are needed to help with this.

Watling Lane

Finally, thanks to lobbying by the PC and residents, and by our county councillor, it seems many the potholes will be filled in the near future.

Footpaths

The cemetery path is old news; we hope that a similar surface in Malthouse Lane will soon be installed. Thanks to our County Councillor, Lorraine Lindsay-Gale, the Chainey Lane surface has been improved. The wet weather brings particular problems, but we have been advised by the County Footpaths Officer not to use temporary measures such as chippings on muddy paths. Volunteers cleared the Drayton Rd to Martins Lane footpath, and we are likely to need volunteers for other footpath projects, such as alongside Watling Lane. And after years of lobbying by the PC and successive County Councillors, the footpath from Dorchester Bridge to Meadside has finally been 'sided out'; the other side of the road is more problematic, although we are attempting to get the bus stop moved.

Emergency Planning

In 2012-13 it was snow; this year it has been floods. We have had ample supplies of sandbags, and while some residents had particular problems requiring outside agencies' assistance, the village's own emergency measures proved very effective. Special thanks are due to Cllrs Chris Hill of Bridge End and Mike Hill of Overy for being such vigilant flood wardens during this time, and to the many residents who helped one another with pumps, baling out and transporting sandbags.

Allotments

The Parish Council has installed new fencing along the Watling Lane boundary. We are informed there are relatively few plots available, but some have not been recently cultivated/maintained. Margot Metcalfe is the Council member with allotment responsibility.

The Discovering Dorchester' archaeology project will start its 2014 season in late June.

Routine Maintenance

As I mentioned earlier, 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 – did you know it can cost as much as £900 to maintain a large chestnut?), 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. We hope to get a village spring-clean under way during May – this was a regular feature in the past, and everyone joined in.

Other activities

Web site – Sue Graney is about to start on updating and improving the site, and would welcome offers of help.

Broadband - Thanks to the tremendous response to the survey initiated by Chris Hill on behalf of the Parish Council, Dorchester anticipates being included in the County Council project, although timing is uncertain – possibly end 2015. Cllr Hill will report on this.

Red telephone box in Bridge End – the refurbishment of the box, and its use as an information centre/book exchange, will form part of a larger project recognising the achievements of its architect, Giles Gilbert Scott and his grandfather, George Gilbert Scott.

Land registration – the Council’s review of small plots of land which have no known owner has involved considerable research, but we hope to register some of these during 2014.

Drainage – Following the report on a recent survey of drainage in the village, especially location and role of ditches in the flood control system, some remedial work was done at the junction of Oxford Road, Abingdon Road and High Street, and on Overy Lane. The retention and upkeep of ditches is an essential part of Dorchester’s drainage and flood control, so we urge residents whose land encompasses such ditches to check on their status and keep them clear.

War Memorial - We owe thanks to generations of residents, many related to names on the memorial, for looking after the site. Most recently, Cathy Pepper and Sally Greenaway have regularly planted flowers. We now need new ‘caretakers’ for this special site, especially as we enter this commemorative period, and are looking for volunteers.

Support to older residents – the parish has ca 300 residents over 65, a third of our population. The Parish Council, supported by the Abbey’s Pastoral Care group, worked with AgeOxfordshire to run an Information forum on services/activities for older residents. Future activities will include an IT club, for which equipment will shortly be purchased, thanks to a grant obtained via our County Councillor, Lorraine Lindsay-Gale.

Newcomers Evening – more than 40 new residents met local societies and organisations at this friendly event on April 1st.

Mary’s Tree - A Whitebeam, *Sorbus aria Lutescens*, has been planted at Bridge End to mark Mary Tame’s 100th birthday; a more formal, ceremonial planting is being arranged.

The future?

Completion of the Neighbourhood Development Plan is an important goal for 2014/15, and we urge you to participate fully in public consultation - if you plan to stay in Dorchester, it is your future. There will also be an increasing need for volunteers for many activities around the village – footpaths, litter.....A small-scale project will be to install cycle racks outside the Co-op. there will be Parish Council elections next May.

Thanks

As ever, I should like to thank all the Parish Councillors for the huge amount of time and energy they put into supporting this community – some activities have a high profile, other work is done behind the scenes, but whatever their role your councillors all help to make Dorchester a better place to live in. Geoff Russell, our Parish Clerk works extremely hard on our behalf, and as part of the wider community – we could not manage without him, and I am especially grateful for his guidance. Geoff Willis, the handyman, works hard to keep the village neat, and was particularly active during the floods. We have had tremendous support from Lorraine Lindsay Gale, our County Councillor, but much less contact with our District Councillors this year.

Margot Metcalfe, Chairman
28th April 2014

Appendix: Parish Councillors 2014

Chairman: Margot Metcalfe

Vice-Chairman: Chris Hill

Councillors: Ken Bryan, Maurice Day, Sue Graney, Mike Hill, Mike Kitson, Mark Stevenson

Parish Clerk: Geoff Russell

Specific responsibilities

Allotments: Margot Metcalfe . There is also an Allotments Committee, chaired by Ed Metcalfe

Broadband: Chris Hill

Car Parking: Ken Bryan, Chris Hill and Margot Metcalfe

Cemetery: Ken Bryan and Maurice Day

Emergency Planning: Chris Hill

Flooding & Drainage: Chris Hill (also Mike Hill, flooding in Overy)

Footpaths: Mike Hill

Hurst Water Meadow: Chris Hill (PC trustee)

Neighbourhood Development Planning: Maurice Day, Chris Hill, Mike Hill and Mark Stevenson (non-PC

members are Malcolm Airs, John Metcalfe, Chris Smith and Richard Winslet)

PAGE (Parishes against Gravel Extraction): Margot Metcalfe on PAGE Steering Group - Chris Hill to deputise as required

PCC (Abbey): Maurice Day

Planning Scrutiny Group (examines all planning applications and make recommendations to full PC): Margot Metcalfe, Maurice Day, Chris Hill, Mark Stevenson and Mike Hill

Playground: Sue Graney

River Users Group: Simon Broadbent on behalf of PC

School Governor: Mike Kitson

Sports Club: Chris Hill & Mike Hill. There is also a Sports Club committee, and committees for e.g. tennis.

Street Lighting: Ken Bryan

Tourism: Margot Metcalfe

Transport policy including Bus Services: Mark Stevenson (also Malcolm Corry, non-PC, bus users)

Tree Officer: Maurice Day
Village Carbon Project: Mark Stevenson
Village Fete: Sue Graney (chair 2014)
Village Hall: Maurice Day on VH committee
Village website: Sue Graney

Councillors also attend and report back on meetings and events organised by SODC, OCC and other bodies.

County Council Report

COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S ANNUAL REPORT BY LORRAINE LINDSAY-
GALE
APRIL 2013 – APRIL 2014

ELECTIONS

The County Council held elections on 2nd May. The number of Councillors was reduced from 74 to 63. This resulted in the remaining Divisions becoming larger, with each Councillor representing approximately 8,400 residents. This Division now includes Marsh Baldon, Toot Baldon and Garsington. The name has also been changed to reflect these larger communities, so it has become the Berinsfield and Garsington Division.

What services does the county council provide?

Oxfordshire County Council provides around 80 per cent of local government services in Oxfordshire. Apart from schools which are directly funded by Government, the largest areas of spend are social services for adults and children. The council also provides highways and transport services, libraries, services for children and families, the fire service, trading standards, waste disposal, the Countryside Service.

THE BUDGET

Since 2010, the County Council has saved £127 million from its budget, and had plans to save another £74 million over the next four years. Despite this, further cuts to our budget were imposed by Central Government last year which meant that we had to find **another £64 million** of savings bringing the total reduction to **£265 million**. In November we held 6 public meetings across the County at which residents were invited to talk to the Leader of the Council about their concerns over the proposed cuts. The most contentious issues were Children's Centres and Home to School Transport. After listening carefully the Council adjusted their proposals and helped by some good news in December that we would have £4m more than we anticipated, we were able to invest £2.7m in priority areas, and reduce other proposed savings by £1.3m. The Cabinet agreed its budget on 28th January 2014. The proposals were debated by all councillors on 18th February 2014 and ratified. Every service has had to make savings and all the decisions have been extremely difficult.

CITY DEAL

In February the Government announced the award of the Oxfordshire City Deal. This special status means that around £55.5 million of government funding can now be controlled locally to boost innovation and business growth, create jobs and help secure Oxfordshire's place as a world leader in technology, knowledge and expertise. Ultimately the deal is expected to be worth over £1.2 billion when private sector investment is taken into account.

Funding will support a raft of measures to support business, with skills training, transport infrastructure and accelerated building of new houses to back up ambitious expansion plans for the county. It is anticipated that the deal will bring nearly 19,000 high value new jobs to the county, in addition to a further 31,400 in

construction. Training people in the skills needed to fill these jobs is a high priority, supported by an investment of £1.5 million. Plans include the delivery of over 500 new apprenticeships with more than 60% in key high-tech sectors such as advanced engineering, life-sciences and cryogenics where Oxfordshire businesses excel globally.

The plan centres on an 'Innovation Spine' running through the County from north of Bicester, through Oxford City, to Culham and Harwell. It builds upon our existing world-wide reputation for scientific research, engineering and academic excellence. The deal includes funding for the A40/A44 link road that will improve the capacity at the Wolvercote and Cutteslowe roundabouts making the A40 flow better. There will also be upgrades to the A34 and major improvements to the Milton Common interchange.

Reacting to the requirement under the City Deal to have an up to date housing assessment, the local authorities commissioned an Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment to assess the scale of housing needed for the period up to 2031, including both market and affordable housing. The report was published in March, and it concludes that there is a requirement for over 100,000 new homes by 2031. The most significant need is in Oxford City and West Oxfordshire. The local authorities have agreed to negotiate and consider all *reasonable* options within individual districts or even cross administrative boundaries. Both the County Council and South Oxfordshire District Council oppose large scale development on the Oxford Green Belt at Grenoble Road, Sandford. But under the new 'duty to co-operate' they may be over-ruled as the land is part owned by the City Council and the University.

MINERALS & WASTE CORE STRATEGY

On the 9th July the County Council voted to withdraw the approved Minerals & Waste Core Strategy that had been submitted to the Secretary of State on 31st October 2012. The appointed Inspector had raised a number of questions and requests for further work in order that the Strategy could meet the new requirements of process brought in by the Localism Act and the new National Planning Policy Framework. On 26th November the OCC Cabinet ratified a new, lower figure for minerals extraction up to 2030. Most important for this Division was the revised figure for sharp sand and gravel down from 1.26mtpa to 0.96mtpa (million tonnes per annum). It was also agreed to adopt a 10 year rolling average of production figures as the foundation for the Local Area Assessment, a key element of new requirements under the new National Planning Policy Framework.

OPERATION BULLFINCH

The distressing case of seven Asian men who were convicted in June of grooming young white girls in Cowley hit the national headlines and raised numerous questions at County Hall. The Council is desperately sorry that the abuse was not spotted and stopped earlier. However it was due to the painstaking and delicate work carried out with the victims by OCC social workers and the police that finally led to the convictions. Unfortunately this type of crime is being committed across the nation and we need national action to prevent it happening anywhere in the country in the future. There will be an Independent Serious Case Review led by David Spicer QC who specialises in child protection law. This will be open and transparent and the Leader of the Council, Ian Hudspeth intends to implement all the recommendations.

BETTER BROADBAND FOR OXFORDSHIRE

On Monday 5 August, the County Council announced that BT will be the provider for a multi-million pound investment in the county's broadband network and infrastructure. Faster broadband is vital to Oxfordshire's economy and the aim of the Better Broadband for Oxfordshire programme is to extend the reach of superfast broadband to an additional 65,000 homes and businesses by the end of 2015. The £25 million programme is made up of £10 million from the council, £4 million from the government and £11 million from BT. We have been able to make a large contribution by including the replacement of the County Council's own network in this contract and therefore getting better value for money for the public purse.

GRANTS

I was delighted that the County Council was able to award grants to the Sandford-on-Thames Village Hall redevelopment project of £9,000 and £7,000 to the Warborough Parish Council to help towards repairs to the Greet Hall Roof. Through my Councillor's budget I have awarded £1,874.74 for the setting up of the Berinsfield Sewing Bee by the Employment Action Group; £5,000 to Vale House, Sandford-on-Thames, OCC's Alzheimers Care Home, for software to support their fund-raising campaign; £1,500 to Dorchester PC for computer equipment for senior citizens teaching, and £1,000 for their Tennis Club for upgrading their courts. Through my Stewardship Fund I have funded various schemes for pavement and ditch clearing, the refreshment of road markings and replacement kerbs in Stadhampton, Warborough, Dorchester, Garsington and Marsh Baldon. I have part funded some entry gates into Drayton St Leonard, and I was very pleased to be able to contribute to the legal work necessary for the establishment of a new 40mph speed limit at Berinsfield. This is the prerequisite for a pedestrian crossing. We are not there yet, but I live in hope.

PERSONAL

I was returned with a majority of 634, taking 47% of the vote. I would like to thank everyone who voted for me, and pledge myself to work hard for all the residents of this area regardless of whether they supported me or not. I was appointed to the Cabinet as the portfolio holder for Cultural and Community Services. This includes libraries, museums, the history service, the Register Office, Coronor's Court and the Adult Learning Service. Since then I have also been appointed to a range of organisations: Trustee of the Victoria County History; Trustee of the Oxford Preservation Trust; Trustee of Cogges Farm Museum; Board Member of the Arts Council, South East Area; Board Member of the Oxfordshire Buildings Trust; Board Member of Experience Oxfordshire.