**Dorchester Parish Council**

Due to the prevailing Government Regulations, the Monthly Meeting of the Parish Council on Wednesday 13th January 2021 was held remotely via Zoom in accordance with the guidance published by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and circulated to councillors in April. The Meeting commenced at 7.30 p.m. The Chairman, Cllr Mark Williams, presided with Cllrs. Rob Ballantyne (Vice-Chairman), Mike Corran, Maurice Day, Chris Hill, Mike Rimmer and Keith Russell together with G Russell (Clerk to the Council). They were joined for part of the meeting by County Cllr Lorraine Lindsay-Gale, District Cllr Robin Bennett and one resident.

1/1. Apologies for absence

None; all Parish Councillors were present.

2/1. Parish Council Vacancy

John Edwards was proposed by Cllr. Chris Hill for co-option as a member of the Parish Council until the elections in May 2023. This was seconded by Cllr Mike Corran and passed unanimously. Cllr John Edwards signed his Declaration of Acceptance of Office which will be counter-signed by The Clerk. His Declaration for the Register of Interests will be filed with the Monitoring Officer of South Oxfordshire District Council within 28 days.

Cllr Edwards joined the meeting.

3/1. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Cllr. Mark Williams concerning village maintenance work that is carried out by any company with whom he works, principally grass-cutting and grounds maintenance; Cllr Chris Hill in connection with Planning Application P20/S3769/HH for 11 Bridge End, as a near neighbour; and Cllr Mike Corran regarding the Council’s new banking arrangements.

4/1 . Public Participation including new appeals for funding.

John Taylor from Overy, who has been involved in many local initiatives such as PAGE and FODLWOS, had arranged in advance with the Chairman to talk to the Council about the future management of ‘parish assets’, using this term in its widest sense.

He suggested that the Council should draw up a register of all these assets, regardless of their legal ownership, ranging from footpaths through environmental qualities and benefits to village amenities, and assess the risks that could harm or even prevent the enjoyment of such assets by future generations of Dorchester residents and visitors.

As an example of village assets under threat, John Taylor pointed out that several popular village footpaths are not registered as public rights of way and that the deadline for arranging this process is now less than 5 years away (1st January 2026). Such things should be recorded in a Parish document, the preparation of which could involve many village residents taking advantage of the community’s reserves of ‘time, talent and treasure’.

Having recorded both the assets and all the possible threats against them, the document would set down a Village Action Plan for taking all necessary protective measures. The Plan would be owned by the Parish Council with regular reports submitted to the community. The objective of the Plan would be to protect the Village from suffering the severe consequences that could follow from an unexpected occurrence – a ‘Black Swan Event’ – but with the emphasis on including measures and proposals which the local community can influence.

John Taylor said that if the Parish Council wished to take this matter forward, he would be pleased to continue his involvement – perhaps by helping to run a village-wide workshop to follow the Council’s drafting of an Asset Risk Register over the next three months.

The momentum that had been created five years ago for the campaign to remove the designation of green belt land from the ‘Demesne Field’ off Drayton Road had shown what can be achieved when there is an issue that really motivates village residents. The FODLWOS campaign is another example of this and continues to function.

Councillors welcomed John Taylor’s suggestions and agreed that, as with the preparation of the Neighbourhood Development Plan, non-members of the council should be involved so that the community as a whole could benefit from their knowledge and enthusiasm.

It was suggested that the Council’s drafting of the Asset Risk Register could commence with a ‘brainstorming’ event which is separate from the regular monthly parish council meeting.

In conclusion John Taylor thanked the Parish Council for setting aside a donation of £10,000 (including VAT) towards the cost of widening many of the public footpaths across Bishops Court Farm. He said that he has received pledges of donations by others amounting to £6,000.

He suggested the Council should investigate ways to secure the routes of the footpaths from Henley Road to the Thames Path across land farmed by S M Cook of Shillingford.

5/1. Minutes of the Meeting held on 9th December 2020.

It was proposed by Cllr Keith Russell that the corrected version of these Minutes be approved as a correct record. This was seconded by Cllr Chris Hill and approved unanimously.

6/1. Matters Arising from the Minutes

a. The plans for the development at Allens Pit are still a work in progress with SODC.

b. The Council noted that the direction sign for the new houses at 19 and 21 Martins Lane has been ordered by SODC and will be installed shortly.

c. It was agreed to ask the County Council to postpone the village traffic speeding survey scheduled for early February and re-arrange it after the current lockdown period.

7/1. Update on measures to care for residents during COVID-19 Crisis.

The Tennis Courts are now closed again but the Play Area is allowed to remain open and the arrangements for regular cleaning will continue. Cllr Ballantyne has updated the information given on the Parish Council’s website and replaced the signage on the Farm footpaths where a one-way system has been introduced to aid social distancing.

The Council will make enquiries about whether any local residents need help with transport to the local Vaccination Centre in Clifton Hampden Village Hall.

8/1. Planning Applications:

P20/S3769/HH 11 Bridge End second amendment: One and half storey side extension.

The Council considered this amendment but agreed that it would not change its previously expressed view that the Application should be refused.

P20/S4373/LB Little St Simons 13 High Street; To replace rotten wooden patio doors to the rear of the property with wooden tri-fold doors. There were No Objections to the Application.

9/1. County Councillor’s Report

The County Councillor’s written report and her update have been circulated. They will be published in Dorchester News and available to read via a link in the village website. County Cllr Lorraine Lindsay-Gale confirmed that the local waste recycling centres remain open.

10/1. District Councillor’s Report

The District Councillor’s written report has been circulated. It will be published in Dorchester News and available to read via a link in the village website. District Cllr Robin Bennett said the closing date for applications for discretionary grants is fast approaching. He will keep the Parish Council informed about the progress of plans for Berinsfield Garden Village. He said that he thought that the development of housing at Allens Pit will produce a CIL payment.

11/1. Council’s Four-Year Vision

a. Village Hall update; following the granting of planning approval, the next step is to appoint a quantity surveyor who will prepare detailed specifications and costings. This will give the fund-raising team the target for the forthcoming campaign.

b. Sports Pavilion Update; Richard Anderson, the architect of the approved plans, has suggested that Tim Fisher is asked for a quotation.

c. Play Area Update; Cllr Ballantyne has asked District Cllr Bennett if he can suggest parents of young children who might be interested in joining the project planning group.

12/1. Finance: Bank Balances & Payments

NatWest Current Account balance at 13th January 47,215.47

NatWest Reserve Account balance at 10th January 48,055.18

 £95,270.65

The Council noted that a VAT repayment of £5,833.71 is included above.

It was proposed by Cllr Mike Corran that the following payments be approved. This was seconded by Cllr Keith Russell and unanimously approved.

Q Transport (Oxford) Ltd (Container rental) 92.76

The Landscape Group Oxford (Cemetery entrance & sundries) 2,940.00

Jenks Oxford Ltd (Cemetery and Abbey Churchyard) 558.00

Longpine Limited (Pavilion repairs and anti-climb paint) 3,720.00

Face North Forestry (work in Page Furlong & Cemetery area) 1,008.00

Dorchester Village Hall (Telephone and broadband for 2020) 1,131.97

Communicorp (annual subscription to ‘Local Councils’) 100.00

Trevor Greenaway (fixing Memorial plaque) 45.00

Tina Pratt (play area cleansing) 97.00

Geoff Willis (Village Handyman 5 weeks) 376.25

Sue Ryder Fundraising 250.00

G. Russell (purchases: chalk spray and village domain name) 155.00

G Russell (salary) £810.33

 £11,284.31

It was agreed that the Clerk will provide a schedule of the charitable donations that the Council has made in recent years so that the Council can review its policy.

It was proposed by Cllr Rob Ballantyne that the Annual Precept for 2021/22 should be £44,500, which is an increase of £1,150 (2.63%). This was seconded by Cllr John Edwards and passed unanimously.

After reviewing the offers that have been made to NatWest customers who switch their business before 28th February 2021, it was suggested that the Clerk should get more details from the Co-Operative Bank and TSB. This was proposed by Cllr. Chris Hill seconded by Cllr Rob Ballantyne and passed unanimously. (Having declared an interest, Cllr Mike Corran took no part in this decision.)

It is known that from the Co-Operative Bank, the offer is £1,500 cash back and 30 months free banking with a ‘Business Directplus Account’. From TSB the offer is £1,500 cash back, with extra cash available to customers who transfer balances over £50k. and free banking for 25 months.

Councillors agreed that they would like the account to be with a bank which requires two signatures on the instructions for each approved payment.

13/1. Correspondence with Chairman and/or Clerk

a. The Chairman reported that the Parish Council has been approached by the representative of a committee seeking to raise money to purchase IT equipment for the Village School. The details will be forwarded to each Councillor. The committee will be invited to take part in the Public Participation section of the Council’s February meeting.

b. The Council noted that Gillian Johnson had sent a Christmas Card asking that all Councillors be thanked for their work during 2020.

c. It was agreed that although the Parish Council might be willing to provide some funds towards the cost of a Village Fireworks Display in November, the event would have to be fully organised by another group. Footsteps Foundation has been asked if they would like to take this on for another year, but no reply has been received. The Clerk will ask The UK Firework Company, our regular provider, if they are available on Friday 5th November. Councillors thought that there may be other interested parties wishing to raise funds.

14/1. Village Maintenance

Andrew Clements has suggested a volunteer plan for the cemetery and surrounding areas. Despite COVID 19 he has managed to increase the number of volunteers for 2021. An article will appear in the February edition of Dorchester News which publicises their work and asks for contributions of plants or donations of funds with which plants can be purchased.

Andrew asks for communication channels with the Parish Council’s contractors to be open, especially regarding work on hedges and any areas where the volunteers have plans to increase wild flowers. He would prefer that such areas are maintained by the volunteers unless the help of contractors is specifically requested.

During the rest of January he plans to finish off work on the Abbey View car park roadside hedge, and girdle ivy in the lane and cemetery as required. The work will then turn to tasks which encourage Spring wildflowers, especially in the cemetery ditch.

Andrew asks the Council if it wishes him to extend the project right down to The Hurst.

15/1. Bishops Court Farm Footpaths

The Clerk has received confirmation that following the recent work on the Farm, the County Council will update its records of footpath widths, but this process is taking some time because of delays at the Land Registry. Keith Ives has been away and so the VAT invoice requested by the Parish to cover its contribution of £10,000 has not yet been produced.

16/1. Lighting of path leading to By-pass bus stop.

There is a possibility that the Parish Council will receive a grant from District Cllr. Bennett’s discretionary funds and an application is being prepared by Cllr Rob Ballantyne.

The Clerk has corresponded on this topic with the adjacent landowner, Ian Reid at Queenford Farm, who has asked for a reduction in the height of the lighting pole at the top of the steps.

17/1. Routine Reports:

a. Sports Pavilion, Recreation Ground & Playground;

The Pavilion roof repairs have been completed. Anti-climb paint has been applied with warning notices posted on the walls below. A notice will appear in Dorchester News.

The markings of the Pavilion defibrillator have faded. The Clerk is in contact with Viviane Quirke who is still listed with the Ambulance Service as one of the guardians of this device.

b. Footpaths including measures to reduce dog fouling;

More chalk sprays have been purchased from the previous supplier. ‘Dorchester News’ will be used to promote the Countryside Code which includes measures against dog fouling.

Signs banning horses from the footpath between Drayton Road and Manor Farm Road will be supplied and fitted by Dan Haines @ £165 + VAT each. It was suggested that the County Council should be mentioned on these signs and the Clerk will ask for permission to do this.

c. Cemetery/Closed Churchyard;

Following the advice of the Council’s arboriculturist some cherry trees have recently been felled in the new portion of the Cemetery. They are to be replaced and Jenks Oxford has been asked to make some recommendations.

d. Allotments;

After a suggestion to create extra space for parking/turning on allotment land that is not suitable for cultivation, some costings have been requested. Similar work has recently been carried out adjacent to Roke Village Hall and there has been some strengthening of the entrance to the Recreation Ground. Both of these projects could provide indicators of how the space of the Allotments might be turned into the desired amenity.

To assist with property location/deliveries etc. SODC is willing to install direction signs for 47,49 and 51 Watling Lane as has been arranged for 19 and 21 Martin’s Lane.

The Council approved a request from the new owners of 45, Watling Lane that they should be allowed to move the dog waste bin and bag dispenser which, now that their boundary hedge has been removed, are clearly visible from their home. These units will be moved closer to Watling Lane but at no cost to the Council.

18/1 Any Other Urgent Matters

a. Cllr Chris Hill thanked all the people who had helped with the removal of the Parish Christmas Tree this year.

b. Cllr John Edwards said that he has been told that the Orchid Lakes Carp Fishing Lake will re-open for business later this year.

c. The Chairman said that he and the Clerk are in contact with two residents in the hope that they may be able to get involved with some special project work on the Council’s behalf.

There being no further business the Meeting closed at 10.10 p.m.