

Sydenham Parish Council

Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting 12th May 2016

Present: Alison Isherwood
Rachel Blake
Janet Potts
Mike May
David Wilkins
Heather Mullins (clerk)

The meeting was pleased to welcome seven members of the parish.

Report from the Chairman of the Parish Council - given by Alison Isherwood:

Whilst I report as Chair of the PC all Councillors work equally on projects for the benefit of the village.

Carried forward from last year's report Sydenham Grove

The tenants have all been moved to Kingston Blount. Of the 3 owner occupied properties one of the houses is now vacant following a successful negotiation between SOHA and the owners. One of the other 2 properties is now vacant to be sold; the owner of the final property is independently negotiating with SOHA.

The Parish Council visited the site with John Howell MP in September and has requested regular meetings with SOHA. Initially we requested that the site was made secure and maintained, this has taken place to a degree although the Police were called recently to apprehend intruders.

Plans for the site are not yet in place. The planning application for demolition of the empty properties was recommended for refusal by the PC, which was upheld by SODC, as we felt it was premature with 3 of the properties still occupied.

Meetings will continue to be requested so the PC is kept up to date with developments on the site and the eventual plans for redevelopment.

Undergrounding of electricity supply by SSE

The progress of this project continues to be stalled by the signing of wayleaves. Mike May continues to lead on this project, now as a Parish Councillor. His patience and negotiating skills with the sewer re-routing project were finally rewarded so this project is in excellent hands.

Broadband

The green broadband cabinet was eventually installed on the green and high speed broadband was available to properties connected to this cabinet from September, not June as planned. High speed broadband has to be purchased through householder's service providers. Varying speeds are experienced due not only to distance from the cabinet but also hardware within each property.

Properties that have chosen not to pay for an increased speed have experienced a much slower speed. The properties at the Emmington end of the village which are not connected to the cabinet on the green are still awaiting a high speed connection; this is due by March 2017.

The problems with broadband were highlighted to John Howell in September, who had already asked Ed Vaizey, Minister responsible for Rural Broadband, to attend a constituency meeting at the beginning of October. Two representatives from the Parish attended and stated the issues being experienced. We are yet to receive any official response, despite reminders from John Howell's PA.

Emergency Plan

As reported last year we have an Emergency Plan in place and our grant application queen, Rachel Blake, ably assisted by Janet Potts were successful in a grant application to SSE for essential items in the event of an emergency. The Sydenham Survival Kit is now being stored in the cupboard as you go into the OSR and a generator is soon to be in place for emergency power.

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Other on-going projects

• **Speeding**

Sadly this continues to be an issue in the village and various speed reduction measures are being investigated. The SID device is regularly deployed in the village with a team of willing volunteers. There is an option to purchase a device for deployment at various positions around the village which does not need to be manned and records data. This data cannot, however, be used by TVP.

OCC are undertaking a speed survey in the village and we are obtaining costs for highway speed reduction measures.

Once we have the costs for all options we will consult with the village to find the preferred option.

• **Mobile Signal Coverage**

We have investigated the schemes run by both EE and Vodafone. The infrastructure required for both schemes required installation at various points and attracted a cost, this was the initial stumbling block. Once the cost barrier was removed both schemes closed.

We will continue to investigate schemes and will keep the village informed.

• **Playing Field**

Our grant queen has been very busy again and, following the successful grant application for the new climbing equipment that has been enjoyed by the ever increasing numbers of young people in the village, another application has been made and progressed to replace the A frame and the swing frame, both of which were highlighted in the ROSPA report as rotten and in need of replacement.

Adult exercise equipment is also being explored together with grant funding. Sydenham Cricket Club are looking to upgrade the nets at the back of the playing field, both adults and juniors alike will benefit.

• **Neighbourhood Plan**

The District Council is encouraging Parish Councils to look at producing a neighbourhood plan and have grants available to help cover the costs of doing so. A Senior Planning Officer has spoken at a PC meeting and several Councillors have attended meetings to help get a better understanding of the pros and cons. We held a village meeting in January which was attended by the officer at SODC leading on Neighbourhood Plans. She took many questions from villagers, the conclusion being that there isn't a clear steer either way. She recommended the next step is to do a housing needs survey, which would be one of the steps in the Neighbourhood plan and would assist with evidence for the future development of Sydenham Grove. In progressing this it has come to light that to qualify for a neighbourhood plan grant from South Oxfordshire District Council you have got to have your neighbourhood area designated. This also applies to grants from government (DCLG My Community website). She has said however that it may be worth trying the Big Lottery Awards for All website for funding to put a survey to decide whether or not you wish to do a neighbourhood plan

• **Oxfordshire Together and Unitary Councils**

OCC have further budget reductions to manage and with the increasing cost of Adult and Children Social Care other budgets must be substantially reduced. Highways are devolving responsibility for verge grass cutting to Town and Parish Councils and other services may follow. The grant given to PCs is at the contractor rate which OCC negotiate for the County with economies of scale that small PCs cannot enjoy. We have therefore told OCC to continue grass cutting in the village and we will supplement if required.

The budget reductions have further focussed Councils and unitary authorities are being investigated where greater economies of scale can be achieved. OCC will be consulting with the public next month and we will keep you updated as to how you can contribute via the newsletter and Sydenham mail.

• **Precept increase**

For the first time in eleven years, we have resolved to increase the precept, which is the funding that the parish receives from the District Council and is used for the general maintenance, upkeep and project work in the village. For the financial year 2016-17 the precept will be raised from £8,000 to £9,000. Based on a band D dwelling, the increase will be £3.96 for the year which equates to 8p per week.

The reasons behind this increase are:

- The general cost of expenditure required, such as various insurances, maintenance etc. has increased over the last eleven years alongside the cost of living
- The actual amount of general maintenance requirements have increased, as we are having to take on the responsibility of managing more of the verge and hedge trimming from the County Council, and with the warmer weather there is a longer growing season, which means more cuts are required than previously budgeted

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- The hours spent on Parish Council business by the Clerk were closely monitored over the last twelve months and the reality is that a further 76 hours per year are needed due to the increase in work, which needs to be reflected in their salary
- The Parish Council are actively investigating physical traffic calming measures for the village, and Oxfordshire Highways have advised that there would be no budget available from the council for these. Therefore the Parish Council is looking to budget for £10,000 over the next five years for a potential scheme

● **Communications**

The PC will continue to keep the village up to date with their business with a regular newsletter article; Rachel Blake is to be thanked for undertaking this task so ably. The next step is to look at a separate website and community Facebook page allowing just accepted people to share news and views; grants are available for the capital expenditure. We will keep the village updated via the newsletter and Sydenham Mail in the meantime. As always villagers are very welcome to join us at our monthly meetings, the first Thursday of the month except August.

Report from District Councillors Lynn Lloyd and Ian White – the councillors were unable to be present due to a meeting at SODC but sent the following report:

District Councillors' Report 2015 / 2016

It was a very hectic period leading up to the May election, as the Chinnor Ward boundaries had been changed. We can only thank all of the people living in the Chinnor Ward, for giving us the opportunity to represent you at South Oxfordshire District Council.

One of the first things we decided on being elected was to set up a monthly report to our Ward Parish Councils on our activities and we hope that this has been useful. We know that some publish this on their web sites for residents to see, and we also ensure that there is a report in Chinnor's Pump news magazine. In addition to that Ian now produces a monthly newsletter for all Parish Councils in the District, setting out what the District Council is doing.

Dealing with Issues - We have actively supported our Parish Councils and residents with questions and issues concerning development ranging from questions about fences and hedges up to issues around new major developments, and we have attended the three Planning Appeals in Thame. We also successfully encouraged the District Council to fight two of these rulings with Judicial Reviews in the High Court this coming May.

Committees - Ian is a member of the District Council's Planning Committee, and has been surprised at the constraints regulation puts on the decision making process councils have to follow. He is also a member of the Licensing and Scrutiny Committees, and the Police & Crime Commissioners Panel which includes oversight of the County's Community Safety Partnership.

Lynn was re-appointed to the Cabinet as Portfolio member for IT, HR, Customer Services, Corporate Services Project. Lynn is also a member of the Joint Staff Committee and a Board member at the Chiltern Conservation Board.

SODC successes

Community Safety - Even with the major cuts of the austerity years, our Police & Crime Commissioner has introduced initiatives seeing Thames Valley Police Force's performance improve from one of the least effective forces to the group right at the top of the League.

Waste And Recycling - For the second year SODC has been awarded top place in the Recycling League Table in the country. During the last year, the kerb-side collection of fabrics and small electrical items for recycling has been introduced. We are occasionally asked if waste really is recycled, and we can confirm that that is the case. We both visited the BIFFA recycling Centre at Edmonton which was an eye opener! We both visited the Agrivert Food and Garden Waste Facilities at Benson & the Anaerobic Digestion Facility at Cassington.

Finances - South Oxfordshire remains a financially sound council. Despite increasing financial restrictions we have been able to decrease, and for the coming year freeze, our part of the council tax. Our sound and prudent approach to money has still allowed us to maintain our Capital & Revenue Grants scheme. A scheme that has provided Chinnor

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with funds towards the Pavilion Project. SODC financial management commitment to the future, is being driven through the Corporate Services project, with joint working between 5 councils to bring down costs. Other areas for this type of saving are being regularly reviewed.

Local Matters

We have both helped secure grants for our Parish Councils, supported the various initiatives being taken with neighbourhood planning and provided help and advice in any areas where we can.

Lynn's personal Crusade to get completion of the IDO requirements at Old Kiln Lakes continues, with her support to the Parish Council and residents.

We also both support and attend the Community Leaders Meetings initiated and run by our Rector Maggie Thorne. That's our summary of 2015/2016. Fuller details are in our Monthly Reports which are provided to the Parish Councils and printed in the Chinnor Pump.

Report from County Councillor David Wilmshurst – Mt Wilmshurst was unable to attend the meeting but sent the following report:

GENERAL OCC REPORT

PROPOSALS FOR UNITARY COUNCIL

Without consulting the public or OCC, on Thursday 25th February a surprise announcement was made by Oxfordshire's District Councils and Oxford City Council. It called for the abolition of OCC and the establishment of four district quasi-unitary councils. In addition, the announcement called for the creation of an unelected quango to be known as a 'Combined Authority' to take on difficult areas of responsibility currently with OCC, such as social care and major road projects.

The Districts put out a tender to consultants to produce a report to support their proposals. Their brief to consultants initially stated: "The District Councils' view is that a single county-wide unitary authority is not the right solution for Oxfordshire". It went on to say that any finding suggesting a single county-wide unitary is best would not be approved. The OCC view was that a single county-wide unitary authority was an option that should be considered, and stated that it would therefore be forced to commission a separate report.

As a result of OCC and public pressure, District Council leaders eventually agreed to commission a report covering all the options. However, the protocol relating to the commissioning and management of the report could not be agreed between OCC and Districts, so the nett result is that two separate reports costing in excess of £100,000 each will proceed. Initial findings will be available June/July with public consultations to follow. It is likely the Secretary of State will rule on the reports in the autumn.

CHILDREN'S CENTRE CONTRACTS EXTENDED UNTIL SPRING 2017

OCC has extended contracts for Oxfordshire's children's centres and early intervention hubs until 31 March 2017. The Cabinet is due to meet on 24 May to consider a proposal on how to allocate an additional £2m that the County Council agreed not to cut from early intervention services when the budget was set in February. The extension to the contracts until the spring of 2017 is intended to allow more time to manage the transition into the new service, pending decisions being taken on how the £2m is to be spent. It will also allow more time for OCC to continue working with community groups to develop the best possible local solutions for the continuation of open access services – including proposals for the continued use of children's centre and hub buildings. Following the decision of the Cabinet, the council will carry out an extensive staff consultation regarding the new Children's Service model and the roles within it.

OXFORDSHIRE TOGETHER - HIGHWAY SERVICES NEXT STEPS

Since the launch of the Oxfordshire Together proposals in September 2015, around 140 town and parish councils have expressed an interest in taking on delivery of some local highway services that the council will no longer be able to deliver in the future, or will only deliver to the statutory minimum standard. OCC is now inviting all interested town and parish councils to sign the necessary agreements that will allow the council to formally transfer the undertaking of highway services under the Oxfordshire Together proposals to town and parish councils that wish to take them on. More information on Oxfordshire Together and the approach and services which can be taken on by

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Towns and Parishes can be found at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxfordshiretogether and any questions or comments should be sent to localities@oxfordshire.gov.uk

COUNTY'S ADOPTION WAITING TIMES AMONG NATION'S SHORTEST

Children are waiting less time to be adopted in Oxfordshire than almost anywhere else in the country, latest Government figures show. The council is rated among the best performing authorities on three key measures linked to the time taken for children in care to move in with adoptive families. Between 2012 and 2015, 73 per cent of Oxfordshire children waited less than 16 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family - the third highest figure out of 149 authorities across the country. The council was sixth best for the average time taken between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, and recorded the 15th shortest average time between receiving court authority to place a child and matching them with a family.

PIONEERING PROJECT BRINGS SERVICES CLOSER TO THE PEOPLE WHO USE THEM

People in Oxfordshire with learning disabilities have taken a lead role in the commissioning of services that will provide them with care and support. The project run by OCC involved about 60 people with learning disabilities and members of their families in the appointment of five new service providers to run contracts worth a total £15million. Service users and/or a member of their families sat on the evaluation panels which examined all the bids to provide 18 supported living services before deciding on the five successful providers. This means that on April 1, 2016 when the contracts came into force the appointment of the new providers will have been heavily influenced by some of the people who will use them.

TAXI SAFEGUARDING TRAINING

All taxi drivers and passenger assistants transporting children and vulnerable adults as part of OCC contracts are now required to have completed safeguarding training. This training also covers bus and coach drivers. The aim of the training is to raise the bar for the safety of all passengers – and empower drivers to play a key role in protecting those in their care. Like other professionals who come into regular contact with children – including those with complex care needs – OCC wants to ensure they are equipped with the knowledge they need to feel confident in that environment and to ensure the safety of all passengers in their care.

ONE AND A HALF TIMES AROUND THE WORLD FOR OCC'S GRITTERS

OCC's gritters travelled the equivalent of one and a half times around the world this winter to keep the roads as safe as possible during the colder weather. The winter was not one of the coldest in recent times – so the total of 39,907 miles covered was not unusual compared to previous years. Gritters are on standby from October 30 right the way through to April in Oxfordshire – similar to many neighbouring councils. In total the gritters were sent out countywide on 32 occasions. In addition they were sent out on five occasions to specific areas in the north and south of the county only. A total of 6,374 tonnes of salt were used during the course of the winter – within the resources that had been brought in at the start of the colder months.

LATEST INFORMATION ON CRIME AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IN OXFORDSHIRE

An updated version of the Safer Oxfordshire Partnership's Strategic Intelligence Assessment has been published. The Strategic Intelligence Assessment (SIA) provides the latest information on crime and community safety in Oxfordshire. It aids understanding of emerging trends and patterns in crime and disorder, and it explores future threats and opportunities. The SIA is part of the evidence base which supports community safety partners to plan and target their work. It is a good first port of call for anyone wanting to know about crime and community safety in Oxfordshire. The headline long-term trend shows that crime in Oxfordshire has fallen by 33% over the past eight years. The full report and an executive summary can be seen via this link:

<http://insight.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/community-safety-0>

Report from Munday's Charity - given by Paul Stancliffe

This charity runs the two areas of allotments and the upper field known as 'Holly Bounty'. The income for the year has been £386.00 and expenditure has been £71.00 which includes cutting the hedges. This leaves a balance of £2214.85 in hand.

The income from this charity can be given to groups and amenities operating within the parish, and ideas of what the funds could be spent on would be welcomed.

Munday's Charity has arranged with OCC for new gates to be fitted on the footpaths into the allotments and on the circular footpath between Holliers Close and Sewells Lane to enable better access. These gates are due to be installed in May and Munday's Charity is paying £682 towards the costs.

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Open Forum

The Children's Assessment Centre on the edge of Thame was discussed, with regard to planning application and the removal of an entire hedgerow without the need for permission.

A question was raised as to how the Parish Council will control the number of houses and resulting traffic for the development of Sydenham Grove. The Parish Council cannot dictate the development but is trying to have input on any potential scheme and any plans submitted. The access to the site was discussed together with the need for affordable housing and the requirements in planning terms. John Howell MP was taken to view the site when he visited the village, and has been made aware of the situation.

The discussion on the Grove led to a query on how much influence a Neighbourhood Plan would have on the situation. A Neighbourhood Plan would take a couple of years to achieve, and whilst it can identify a potential development site it cannot dictate what is built on it, although there could be an influence on the density of development.

An update was given on the undergrounding scheme from SSE. It is hoped that a solution has been found to the problems but it has yet to be confirmed. SSE are still in favour of proceeding and are willing to undertake more expensive measures to reach a resolution.

There being no further questions the Chair thanked everyone for coming and the meeting closed at 9.00 for refreshments.

Signed Date