

Sydenham Parish Council

Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting 29th April 2014

Present: Paul Stancliffe
Alison Isherwood
Rachel Blake
Janet Potts
Heather Mullins
Apologies: Roy Harrison

The meeting was pleased to welcome Councillor Dorothy Brown, Councillor David Wilmshurst, Gordon Hunt and Bethan Morgan, and two members of the parish.

Review of previous minutes from Annual Parish Meeting on 6th June 2013

Report from the Chairman of the Parish Council - given by Mr Paul Stancliffe

- The Parish Council has dealt with nine planning applications, one of which was contentious. This application was recommended for refusal and withdrawn by the applicant, but a further revised application has been submitted (as of 29/04).
- Sewells Lane road surface was a subject discussed, however it was discovered that predecessors in 1950's had categorised it as a Bridleway, so the issue still continues with no resolution.
- Brookstones Pumping Station is now moving ahead with Thames Water spending £2.5 million to develop a new pumping station with a lot of activity already underway on the Chinnor Road.
- Another major problem in the village is power cuts. There are moves afoot to address this, with a scheme to be implemented this financial year by SSE.
- Broadband issues continue to be a concern with an update from Nick Carter that BT are doing surveys this month and are committed to installing high speed broadband throughout the county by the end of next year.
- The application for the diversion of Bridleway 7 has been discussed at great length with no resolution so far.
- The introduction of the Defibrillator to the village has been achieved by a team within the village, with the responsibility for the equipment now passing to the Parish Council.
- All details of the minutes are available on the village website <http://council.sydenhamvillage.net/Minutes>.

Report from District Councillor Dorothy Brown – attached, but the highlights include:

- Local area affected by the flooding, with Sydenham suffering severely. The council continue to work in challenging times with widespread cuts. A number of efficiency savings have been made with Council Tax reduced by 5%.
- New Homes Bonus money for new homes built in the district has benefitted a number of amenities such as play park improvements.
- Dorothy has attended various charity events around the district.
- The local plan has been approved, with the council being asked to consider the number of houses required in the area. Potential sites will be discussed at a meeting on 7th May.
- Planning has now got a new officer – Emma Turner who is moving the system and process forwards.
 - emmaturner@southandvale.uk – now in charge of planning enforcement and making dynamic changes
- Waste – we are one of the highest recycling councils in the country, looking at working with Aylesbury Vale. They are now looking to scrap the biodegradable bags and recommending households wrap kitchen waste in newspaper.
 - JP to email ian.matten@southandvale.uk to determine available alternatives.
- Car parking in some market towns is now free such as in Henley.
- Leisure Centres are well used.
- The boundaries have now been defined with the number of councillors reducing from 48 to 36 in May 2015 election. This is based on the view that more people are able to contact councillors through emails etc. so each councillor is able to take on a larger area. Sydenham will be joining the Chinnor Parish.
- Office space at the SODC has now been fully rented out, to reduce overheads.

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Report from County Councillor David Wilmshurst – see attached, but highlights:

- Financial savings have been made by the council, by reducing workforce by 30% and the number of managers by 40%. There is on-going activity on this front.
- However, there is an additional £1million for highway maintenance with £350k for community budgets.
- 63 councillors were elected in May 2013 elections.
- Key expenditure highlights:
 - £873.6 million expenditure for 2014/18.
 - Key OCC strategic responsibilities are Children's Social Services, Social Care for Adults and Older People, Highways & Transport, Education Services, Fire & Rescue, Waste Management, Trading Standards, Emergency Planning and Public Health.
 - 30,000 potholes were filled in 2012/13.
 - 12,000 primary and secondary school places were allocated.

Report from Munday's Charity - given by Paul Stancliffe

This charity runs the allotments, and during the past year received income of £371. Seven people in village have allotments with the large areas farmed by W Munday and P Quainton. The charity donated £500 for the defibrillator fund leaving the accumulated funds at £1,695.54. There is now more latitude for how these funds can be spent, as the Charity Commission have approved the amendment to the rules of expenditure. The income can be given to groups and amenities operating within the parish, and ideas of what the funds could be spent on would be welcomed.

Presentation by Bethan Morgan and Gordon Hunt of OCC on Flooding Action Groups

The County Council is the lead flood authority for Oxfordshire, with responsibility for and a duty to sustainable drainage systems, flooding, flooding structures and watercourses. OCC take a more local role, while the Environment Agency takes a strategic national role.

The department has a £1m capital budget, and there is also a budget for drainage defects.

The county cleans the road gullies, with contractors undertaking work on a risk based approach. Gullies are cleaned every three years unless there are problems with flooding in the meantime, in which case cleaning will be done yearly. There has been an extra budget of £440k because of the flooding this year, and OCC are deciding how this should be spent.

Where flood groups are set up, it is useful for the drainage team to receive reports. If necessary notices can then be served on riparian owners not carrying out their responsibilities. OCC are able to support flood groups financially by reimbursing purchases of spades, waders, jackets etc for clearing watercourses. As well as clearing, flood groups can maintain watercourses and help with flood plans. Flood plans are essential in problem areas (such as the Towersey junction). OCC can check on the area concerned and the flood group can undertake the maintenance themselves. Ideally the flood group walk the streams and pick up on any problem areas. If they cannot undertake the work themselves they report to the parish council who can in turn speak to the landowners. If required an ongoing problem can be reported to the County Drainage team who will then speak to the landowners, and can ultimately serve a legal notice if necessary. There are rights of access for officers of the council but not for the public.

Discussion followed on what constitutes maintenance, and what work can be undertaken by volunteers. Bank clearance should not be undertaken, but brambles/branches can be cleared from the middle of the stream which will clear the silt and enable faster flow.

The procedure for setting up a flood group was discussed, including the registration form and a standard constitution. The group would require a formal constitution and would report back to the parish council.

Mike May asked if there could be use for a 'parish lengthsman', which is a scheme that has been reintroduced into other counties. The role could even be shared between parishes if it made it more effective. Gordon Hunt suggested that this could be discussed with our county councillor regarding the budget, but that health and safety issues could be a problem. Gulley maintenance requires jetting rather than rodding, so could not be dealt with this way.

The clearance of roadside ditches was discussed, as the landowners are responsible not the Highways department. Although the Environment Agency and OCC have details on their websites, some smaller landowners are unaware of their riparian duties. Gordon's team are promoting the knowledge of what needs doing, when the work should be carried out and how to do it.

Bethan then spoke on Emergency Groups and Community & Personal Resilience. The idea of emergency planning has been fed into parish councils and community events, to promote the idea of personal and community resilience and to raise knowledge of the issues on which people can help themselves. The scheme helps communities plan

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for, respond to and recover from emergencies such as snow, floods, utility failures, fire etc. Examples were given for personal/household and community levels.

A local community plan would include names of key people to contact, volunteers who could provide medical or practical and technical help, and reception centres in case of evacuation. Emergency teams would then find it easier to provide food and shelter and to bring in any necessary specialist care. Information leaflets and enrolment forms were distributed to the parish council.

There followed further discussion about reminding local landowners of their responsibilities. Gordon Hunt's team would be able to send letters to landowners if local information can be provided, and help was volunteered on this, together with local knowledge of the watercourses and causes of flooding to highways and property. A site meeting is to be arranged with the Drainage Engineering team. The process and timescale of legal notices being served was also discussed.

A query was raised regarding the Fixmystreet online reporting tool, as reported problems are listed as 'fixed' once the work is given to a contractor instead of when it is completed. Bethan to report back to Highways on this.

Open Forum

There being no further questions the meeting closed at 9.50 for refreshments.

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South Oxfordshire District Council Annual Report – 2014**Aston Rowant Ward – Aston Rowant – Kingston Blount – Sydenham –Tetsworth and Towersey.
Cllr Dorothy Brown**

Locally we have been affected by the flooding and I have worked in partnership with Councils to help people who have been affected and also work for the future to ensure that a better outcome if such violent weather comes again.

Overall Report

The Council continues to work in challenging times but has been able to cope without any cuts to services. The efficiency savings made over the last five years by joint working with the Vale of White Horse District Council and shared contracts have meant the the Council can once again reduce Council Tax by 7.5% which is very positive.

New Homes Bonus money is received from Government for new homes that are built in the district. We received one million pounds this year and expect to receive nearly two million pounds next year. This money will be spent on projects where houses are being built to improve infrastructure.

Grants

The council continues to understand the difficulties communities and charity groups face when trying to develop their own facilities, for that reason we continue to have a one million pound community grant fund, in my year as Chairman I have attended many openings of various facilities all over the District, many of them are encouraging young people to take part in sport, rowing gym in Wallingford – Village Hall facilities in Stadhampton Church for use of all the community.

The Council has given a £15 million loan to SOHA to enable them to accelerate their housing programme, to provide homes for residents on the housing waiting list.

Planning

The Council is pleased to have an approved local plan which means that large developers cannot gain planning permission on any site they feel is desirable, this occurs in Districts where there is no Local Plan.

During the last few months we have been working with other Oxfordshire districts as instructed by the government to review social housing numbers, this means that we are shortly starting a process SHMA this is similar to the local plan to accommodate more houses and the plan will be extended from 2027 to 2031. This is not a happy position but is one where we have no choice.

There are more houses actually being built than in previous years.

Neighbourhood Plans

Thame now has an agreed neighbourhood plan following their referendum and Woodcote will shortly be holding their own referendum. We have lots of similar plans in the pipeline such as Chinnor. Smaller parishes in the Ward - Tetsworth are preparing a Community led plan.

Planning Enforcement

We have put additional resources into this area as it is important to explain to parishes what we can and cannot do. Where there is a breach of planning there is frustration at the limit of what the council can do and the speed at which it can be done. We are required to give those in breach of planning time to make amendments where possible. However some issues raised as enforcement are actually minor developments and are now permitted under permitted development rights.(exceptions are conservation areas it is always best to check with the council before proceeding. Government reforms have now made it easier for people to erect extensions.

Housing

The Council continually works in partnership to keep the number of homeless people needing temporary accommodation low. We have seen a rise in this number in the past year but it remains fewer than 20 Households. The cost of providing temporary accommodation can be high so it is important to keep this number down.

Waste

We continue to be one of the highest recycling councils in the country. The joint contract with the Vale of White Horse District Council works very well. Floods this year did cause disruption to the collection of waste, but everyone did there best in exceptional circumstances.

The Big Clean Up continues to be a huge success so once again we have increased the budget by £90K and more money for market towns over the next two years.

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Market Towns

The market towns are very important to the district and we work in partnership with town councils, business partnerships and share costs of town centre co-ordinators where agreed. SODC's economic development team work hard across the whole district involving many small businesses. Car Park charges have not increased and free parking on Saturday afternoons in some of our car parks has proved popular. Any surplus car park income is spent on up grading toilets and car parks and not on any other services.

Leisure Centres

Leisure centres are well used by all ages. We work with the contractor to ensure that the facilities are of a standard acceptable to the user. The present provider's contract comes to an end next year so we have been going through a procurement exercise for the letting of the new contract which will be shared with the Vale of White Horse District Council giving more scope for better value.

Didcot

Didcot is the largest growth area in the district with Great Western Park building 3,000 houses, on of the largest sites in the South East. We are working with Hammersons to achieve phase two of the Orchard Centre development which is still proving difficult to secure an anchor store in the current economic climate. Didcot will benefit from Science Vale Oxford as the government has agreed millions of pounds to encourage new business growth to the science parks. There will also be government monies for infrastructure. This is a very exciting part of the district which should create spin off business for the whole of the area. Cornerstone Arts Centre is well worth a visit for the wide variety of shows exhibitions and children's sessions plus the café.

Boundary Review

The boundary review is now complete and the commission agreed the reduction in the number of Councillors from 48 to 36 which will happen following the May 2015 Election.

Community Governance Reviews

Community Governance Reviews have not taken place for many years and started at the end of last year. The process is looking at parish boundaries so we are suggesting some changes and where it would affect residents they are being consulted. Parish councils have already been involved and not changes will be made until we hear the views of the parish councils and resident. The review must be complete by August and will be decided at the council meeting in July.

Office Accommodation

If you have had reason to visit the council office at Crowmarsh you will have seen a lot of activity, the Vale staff are moving into our accommodation giving an annual rent of £175,000. Their Abingdon office is being rented to an Oxfordshire County Council service. This is good partnership working of local authorities.

We will continue to work hard to provide services and value for money in partnership with others.

The Council website www.southoxon.gov.uk can give you details of all our services, councillors allowances, contractors and meetings that you can watch at home as they are webcast.

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COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT 2014

I am giving this report against a tough economic background whereby OCC has a task of making savings of some £64m between now and 2014. Through organisation change and other measures some £170m will have been achieved between 2010 and 2014 with a target of £265m by 2018. To achieve these savings the workforce has been reduced by 30%, the number of Managers reduced by 40% etc.

Despite these saving targets an additional investment of £800,000 agreed to end 15minute personal care visits by extending the time of visits. Other positive investments include additional £1m for highway maintenance, £400,000 to deal with flooding issues, and £315,000 for community budgets

Following the elections in May 2013 63 Councillors were elected. The Conservative Group missed an outright majority by one and formed an agreement with 3 Independents to form create a Conservative Independent Alliance. For the period 2014/18 OCC expenditure will be £873.6m. 49% is funded from Council Tax. The key OCC strategic responsibilities are Children's Social Services, Social Care for Adults and Older People, Highways and Transport, Education Services, Fire and Rescue, Waste Management, Trading Standards, Emergency Planning and Public Health

In 2012/13 some 34000 potholes were filled, the care needs of 11000 vulnerable people were assessed, 12000 primary and secondary school places were allocated, Trading Standards investigated 3,200 complaints, to name but a few of the OCC delivery of public services

On a personal front amongst by other OCC activities I remain the Chairman of the OCC Audit and Governance and am joint Chairman with the T U Representative of the OCC Personnel Related "Employees Joint"

David Wilmshurst
County Councillor Thame and Chinnor

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