

Sydenham Parish Council

Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting 4th May 2017

Present: Alison Isherwood
 Rachel Blake
 Janet Potts
 Mike May
 David Wilkins
 Stephanie Johns (clerk)

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

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

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

One of the most memorable events this year was the retirement of our long standing Clerk Heather Mullins. After 16 years she decided to stand down as Clerk leaving us a little anxious as to how we would manage. In typical Heather style, thinking of others, she worked until the end of July so we could limp along in August, a quite month in the Parish, try and work out what we should be doing whilst trying to find a replacement. Luckily Steph, previously Clerk to Aston Rowant Parish Council, was looking for a local Clerk's job with fewer hours so Aston Rowant's loss was our gain. Rachel and I shared the Clerk's duties until the beginning of November when we were relieved to hand over to Steph, who has stepped up to the plate magnificently and even manages to keep up with the many and varied topics we discuss.

Carried forward from last year's report Sydenham Grove

There has been a great deal of activity on the future of Sydenham Grove which has involved the village. In summary:

SOHA attended a village meeting at the end of 2016 to show their plans for site. The site is their most valuable and they proposed private housing only with two semi-detached properties on a shared ownership scheme. There was unanimous agreement that housing should be provided for the previous SOHA tenants who had moved to Kingston Blount with the promise of moving back once the site was redeveloped. After support from the village, District Council, involvement of the PC and MP the residents who do want to return to Sydenham will be able to.

The type of housing proposed on the site is not conducive with the surrounding conservation area and the number of properties proposed has not increased from the current 8. With local pressure on increasing housing stock and the lack of affordable housing in the village there is a general consensus that the number of properties on the site needs to increase and type of housing changed to smaller units.

We are awaiting revised plans from SOHA and have been promised by their Chief executive that the PC will be consulted at an early stage.

Undergrounding of electricity supply by SSE

This project is in the final stages of concluding agreements with landowners, with the aim of being implemented this year. Mike May continues to lead on this project. His patience and negotiating skills with the sewer re-routing project were finally rewarded so this project is in excellent hands.

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Broadband

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 date slipped to December 2017. Craig Bower, Programme Director, was invited to attend a village meeting so residents affected could ask questions directly. The meeting was well attended and Craig continues to provide us with updates.

Craig is currently off due to ill health but his colleague has given the following update:

Work is progressing well on the Emmington end of the village. The stated target for delivery is Dec 2017, but speaking to the Openreach project manager this morning he anticipates the work being completed by October 2017. The reporting mechanism is quarterly, so this means you have been advised Dec 2017 as the quarter covers Oct, Nov, Dec. He has looked at the scheduling work and currently he is scheduling this work for completion in October. This is good in that there is a buffer for work to be delayed and it is still inside the target you have been communicated. Our mapping systems can only report quarterly so anything showing online will be Q3 17/18 (i.e. Dec 2017).

Emergency Plan

The generator purchased with grant funding as part of the plan is still awaiting an agreed place for storage. The OSR Committee do not want the generator stored in the adjoining outside cupboard in case it poses a fire risk. Alternative storage areas outside the OSR have been investigated but have not been suitable for various reasons. A recent 9 hour power cut would have brought the generator into use as part of the emergency plan. An alternative location is to be investigated where the generator can be wired in and used if power cuts continue.

The Icy Road signs were used in the winter when a ditch overflowed followed by a prolonged spell of freezing weather leading to a number of accidents and treacherous conditions, both for motorists and pedestrians. Whilst we have ordered additional salt bins from the County Council for the village we await delivery, hopefully before next winter!

Other on-going projects

Speeding

A village meeting was called attended by Keith Stenning from OCC Highways to present the various traffic calming measures.

OCC have undertaken the speed surveys in the village and we have shared the results with the village. They show a continued problem with speeding at the Emmington end of the village and also by Box Tree House. The County Council Officer has suggested a temporary pinch point at this location and a subsequent speed survey to see if it has been effective before the cost of a permanent feature is investigated. We were promised installation of the temporary pinch point in April but there have been inevitable delays and it will now be installed next Monday or Tuesday.

We have ordered a replacement sign display for one of the current VAS signs in the village, by Park House as the speeding issue was fractionally worse here, showing a sad or smiley face depending on the speed recorded. It will also capture speed information so we can ascertain if the new display is effective, and if it is will replace the display on the other VAS sign.

The police mobile camera van continues to have a regular presence in the layby on the B4445. We have spoken to Chinnor PC on a number of occasions about traffic calming measures here as this road is in their Parish in the hope of sharing the cost but have made little progress

Playing Field

Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful with the latest grant application to replace the A-Frame, swing frame and gate for accessibility, however we are currently funding the replacement of the Toddler Swing and all the swing shackles. This year has also seen a lot of damage to the goal posts which have been repaired several times with spares that we had available, plus the odd purchased piece. The goal posts will be continued to be monitored, as we see these as a popular element of the space. In addition, we are going

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to be looking at alternative grant funding for replacing the A-Frame and also re-instating some of the loose surfacing which over the years has diminished. Ideally, we would also like to add some additional clamber ropes to the new climbing equipment at a lower level for younger children to enjoy this equipment too.

Neighbourhood Plan

The District Council is encouraging Parish Councils to look at producing a neighbourhood plan and their Neighbour Plan Officer was invited to a meeting in the village at the beginning of December, together with villagers who had expressed an interest in a plan. No villagers attended the meeting and as the Neighbourhood Plan group cannot be just the PC we have not progressed any further.

Oxfordshire Together and Unitary Councils

Whilst the OCC element of Council tax has risen by the maximum amount allowable to help cover the increasing costs of adult social care their budgets continue to be reduced and a unitary council is being proposed so economies of scale can be enjoyed across the County, reducing costs where possible. We have not had any support from our County Councillor this year and continue to contact the relevant officers at OCC directly where necessary.

Precept increase

For the financial year 2017-18 the precept was raised from £9,000 to £10,000 to help cover the increased grass cutting costs and to contribute towards the speed reduction scheme.

Communications

The newsletter continues to be sent out by the Parish Clerk keeping villagers up-to-date with news in between issues of the hard copy newsletter. There have been some complaints regarding the new format of the newsletter and timely production. These issues have arisen during the period when we did not have a clerk and whilst the new clerk was learning the ropes. We hope that matters have now been resolved. We have a new village website, huge thanks to Rachel for her time in getting this project to fruition, which will be kept up-to-date by the clerk. The new website address is www.sydenhamvillage.co.uk and the new clerk's email address is parishcouncil@sydenhamvillage.co.uk As always villagers are very welcome to join us at our monthly meetings, the first Thursday of the month except August.

Other projects

Ditches and drainage

The flooding by Box Tree House and subsequent icy conditions led to Mike investigating the problems with ditch draining in the vicinity with Will Munday, who is very familiar with the village drainage system. Two landowners needed to clear out the ditches on their land and this has now taken place. Will has cleared the ditches on the road side and we await heavy rain to test that the problem is resolved.

A number of storm drains throughout the village are blocked and/or have collapsed. Dave has been liaising with the County Council who are responsible for Highways to get the problems identified resolved. This project is ongoing and progress is thwarted by budget constraints.

Potholes

The repair of potholes is the responsibility of the County Council, who have surveyed the village roads and marked all the potholes in need of repair. The standard of repair is poor and not all are done at the same time so efficiency is low. We will continue to report problems to Highways. Parishioners are also encouraged to report any problems with Highways via the County Council website, www.oxfordshire.gov.uk.

Footpaths

Munday's Charity paid for replacement gates on the footpath that crosses Richard Cooper's land behind Holliers Close. These gates replaced stiles that were in poor condition and made the footpath more accessible. The gates were installed free of charge by the Countryside Services dept. of OCC.

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A TOE2 (Trust for Oxfordshire Environment) grant application has been made to improve the drainage and surface of the section of bridleway that runs in front of The Jays at the end of Brookstones and also to replace 2 stiles on the path that runs behind Manor Farm and joins up with the allotment path. Our application will be considered this week and we hope to hear soon whether we have been successful in getting some or the entire grant.

We have approached a voluntary organisation for help in clearing some of the vegetation but cannot now do this work until September due to nesting birds.

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 reports:

District Councillors' Report 2016 / 2017 (Chinnor Ward)

It doesn't seem possible that two years have passed since we were elected to SODC and that we are now half way through this Council's four year term. It has been a very busy period for both of us and the last year, even more challenging than 2015/2016.

We continue to provide our newsletters to the Parish Councils, the Chinnor Pump and to all of the Parish Councils in the District.

Dealing with Issues - We have continued to 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. We encouraged the District Council to fight two Planning Appeal rulings with Judicial Reviews in the High Court at the start of this Council year, but unfortunately the Court found in favour of the developers.

We have both worked with our MP John Howell in trying to get back control of development. John has been the driving force behind the Neighbourhood Planning Bill and White Paper proposals that were before Parliament before the General Election was called, and if the present administration is returned to government, these will hopefully become part of Planning Law. As it stands, John worked hard to get Planning Minister Gavin Barwell support for Neighbourhood Planning, resulting in his Written Ministerial Statement before Christmas, which has helped the Planning Committee refuse unwanted applications. Lynn, through her Cabinet role, was able to support the council's officers in bringing pressure to bear on SOHA concerning their plans for Sydenham Grove supporting the work done by the Parish Council.

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 and leads a Working Group of councillors and officers looking to improve the communications around Planning matters.

Lynn has continued in 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. Lynn is also the District Council's representative on Chinnor's Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.**

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 maintain its position as one of the effective forces, right at the top of the League.

Waste And Recycling - For the third year SODC has been awarded top place in the Recycling League Table in the country. . We are occasionally asked if waste really is recycled, and we can confirm that that is the case. We have both worked with the council's Waste Team and BIFFA, who are up-grading their fleet of lorries and trialling new collection methods.

Finances - South Oxfordshire remains a financially sound council. Despite increasing financial restrictions we have been able to freeze for the second year running, our part of the council tax. Our sound and prudent approach to money has still allowed us to maintain our Capital & Revenue Grants scheme. This scheme has provided funds towards the up-grade to play equipment for children, helped Chinnor Village Hall with its car park and other projects in the Ward. SODC financial management commitment to the future, is being driven through the Corporate Services project, with joint working

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between 5 councils to bring down costs which is a major focus for Lynn. Other areas for this type of saving are being regularly reviewed.

Unitary Authority Bids – our proposals for a Unity Authority were ruled by the changes within the Government following the Brexit decision last year. Following the County Council’s publication of it’s revised proposals earlier this year, we and the Vale council decided to join them in preparing a combined bid which would deliver based on the strengths of all three councils, which is now with the Department for Communities and Local Government.

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, and drove the provision of funding for the Queen’s Ninetieth Birthday Celebrations in June last year.

That’s our summary of 2016/2017. Fuller details are in our Monthly Reports which are provided to the Parish Councils and printed in the Chinnor Pump.

District Councillors’ Report 2016 / 2017

Dealing with Issues - We have continued to 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. We encouraged the District Council to fight two Planning Appeal rulings with Judicial Reviews in the High Court at the start of this Council year, but unfortunately the Court found in favour of the developers, ending our Five Year Land Supply.

We have worked with our MP John Howell in trying to get back control of development. John has been the driving force behind the Neighbourhood Planning Bill and White Paper proposals that were before Parliament before the General Election was called, and if the present administration is returned to government, these should become part of Planning Law. As it stands, John worked hard to get Planning Minister Gavin Barwell support for Neighbourhood Planning, resulting in his Written Ministerial Statement before Christmas, which has helped the Planning Committee refuse unwanted applications, most notably at Sonning Common.

Didcot Garden Town is a major part of our plan for development in the District, offering a significant number of jobs and home. Following the consultation, all comments from the website, events and conversations with community groups are being used to help prepare a draft masterplan for the Garden Town. This masterplan will be published soon.

Our plans to ‘refresh’ Berinsfield are progressing at a good pace and will bring significant benefits to this community and the wider district.

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 maintain its position as one of the effective forces, right at the top of the League. Our Community Safety Team work closely with the CS Partnership strengthening the County’s contributions.

Waste And Recycling - For the third year SODC has been awarded top place in the Recycling League Table in the country. We are asked if waste really is recycled, and we can confirm that that is the case. We have worked with the council’s Waste Team and BIFFA, who are up-grading their fleet of lorries and trialling new collection methods to further improve the service.

Finances - South Oxfordshire remains a financially sound council. Despite increasing financial restrictions, we have been able to freeze for the second year running, our part of the council tax. Our sound and prudent approach to money has still allowed us to maintain our Capital & Revenue Grants scheme. This scheme has provided;
Revenue Grants - £391,037 to 15 organisations towards their 2016-17 running costs. We also awarded £1.7 million to a further 17 organisations for the four years 2017-21.
Capital Grants - £998,817 to 25 projects including play area improvements, window replacements and defibrillators. and we shall be maintaining this in the coming year.

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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.

Unitary Authority Bids – our proposals for a Unity Authority were stopped by the changes within the Government following the Brexit decision last year. Following the County Council's publication of its revised proposals earlier this year, we and the Vale council decided to join them in preparing a combined bid which would deliver based on the strengths of all three councils, which is now with the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Other Matters

In June 2016 the councils pledged to resettle eight Syrian refugee families under a Home Office funded scheme. The scheme is making good progress - Two families have been resettled in South Oxfordshire, We have published the Encouraging volunteering in the districts report, a summary of consultation and research undertaken to develop an understanding of how volunteering could be supported and encouraged by the councils. The survey shows that about 25 per cent of residents from all age groups across South and Vale undertake voluntary work. The types of volunteering are varied with community and environmental activities the most popular.

We have 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.

Our housing needs team has picked up a Bronze Award from the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS) as part of their ongoing work in preventing homelessness. This demonstrates again the commitment of both councils and its staff to work together to help prevent people in the most vulnerable households from becoming homeless. The standard for these awards is very high so this is great news and highlights the improvements the team have made to their service. They will deservedly pick up their Bronze Award at the NPSS conference in July.

South and Vale urban design officers together with collaboration from other specialist officers have had the South Oxfordshire Design Guide shortlisted for the Public Sector entry in the Francis Tibbalds Urban Design Awards 2017. Being shortlisted for the award is a good step towards raising the profile of the Council and the need to secure high quality design in South Oxfordshire. Awarded by the Urban Design Group, the awards give more recognition to urban design work, particularly at project stage.

We helped drive the festivities for the Queen's Ninetieth Birthday Celebrations in June last year and helped with provision of funding. 72 parishes were awarded £50,626 to help pay for community events including street fairs, barn dances and firework displays.

That's our summary of 2016/2017. Fuller details are in our Monthly Reports which are provided to the Parish Councils.

Report from Sydenham Cricket Club - Toby Roe:

Toby reported that of the 11 games played last season, 5 were won and 6 were lost though 4 of these were very narrowly and he is really pleased with the progress of the club. New players have been recruited and Aston Rowant Cricket Club are excellent hosts for the training sessions.

Not so long ago there were hardly any cricket club members from the Village of Sydenham but of the 30 current members, half of these are now made up of parishioners which is a great boost for a village club. Nets are played every Wednesday throughout the summer.

Fund raising events have raised £9,000 towards the target of £18,000 to improve the cricket nets in the play area, including St George's Day & St Patrick's Day Dinners. Grants have also been given by The Sydenham Fayre and Tesco. Toby finished by thanking everyone for their continued support.

Report from Sydenham WI - Siobhan McKee:

Siobhan (President) reported that the WI meet on the 3rd Thursday of each month, usually in the OSR. Currently there are 27 members, mostly from Sydenham with 3 joining from outside of the Parish. Food and drink feature greatly on the agenda with talks such as 'Pub Signs in the UK'! A Summer Garden party is planned, as well as a Christmas party and occasionally there is a cooking demonstration. Other outings re also organised such as a walk & some of these are arranged by the WI federation. All ages are

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welcome to come along and more information is available on www.sydenhamwi.com (which will shortly be updated).

Report from St. Mary's Church - Siobhan McKee:

Siobhan reported that the Church is not very well supported but they are extremely grateful to all who do help help with the cleaning, bell ringing & general maintenance etc. There are 10-12 helpers in total and it would be really lovely to see more faces.

The Choir is going from strength to strength with a total of about 22 now. There were 4 performances last year with 'Sydenham Last Night of The Proms' being the best. There are some weddings coming up and also one at Aston Rowant Church. This September a 'Night of Variety' is planned – venue tbc.

Report from Sydenham Fayre - Jason Benfield-Harbour:

Jason reported on the planned activities for this year's Fayre. Money has been set-aside for the Playing Field equipment from the proceeds of last year and the plan this year is to support the OSR, perhaps with new curtains and a new floor as these need replacing. A cause is always needed so that there is a prime purpose for the Fayre.

This year the costs of the programme have been slightly reduced by making it smaller but printing more copies. The timing of the Fayre is also slightly different – from 12.30 – 4.30pm. Work behind the scenes is getting more difficult which could be made easier with more volunteers as more hands really do make lighter work.

Report from Munday's Charity – Report from Paul Stancliffe presented by Gordon McLeod:

Following the death of Peter Carter on 10th May 2016, Gordon McLeod was appointed as A Trustee on 2nd June. Currently therefore, the Charity's three trustees are Paul Stancliffe, Richard Cooper and Gordon McLeod.

There were only five active villagers maintaining allotments during the year and this number is expected to continue in the current year despite one allotment holder leaving the village.

The Charity's income during the year from allotment rents and interest was £386.50 and we spent £753.00. This was made up of £682 on the four new footpath gates on Footpaths 3, 5 and 13, £60 on hedge trimming and "11 on hire of the OSE and our annual donation to the Church.

At the beginning of March the Trustees agreed to contribute £350 towards the costs of replacing two stiles with gates on Sydenham's Footpath 11 if the scheme proceeds.

The balance in the Charity's Business Premium Account is currently £1,827.00.

Open Forum

The discussion on the Grove led to a query on when the revised plans would be submitted to SODC. The Clerk will write again to Richard Peacock of SOHA requesting a meeting to discuss the proposed plans.

Following the presentation from Jason regarding Sydenham Fayre funds, it was requested that the remaining amount needed to fund the new A Frame for the Play Area was released to the Parish Council. Jason will confirm this at a later date.

The Clerk will help to promote help needed for the Fayre by sending out an additional 'eNewsletter' (aside from the usual bi-monthly Newsletter) to remind villagers to sign up.

There being no further questions the Chair thanked everyone for coming and the meeting closed at 9.30pm for refreshments.

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The discussion on speeding led to a query about the potholes and the inadequate workmanship on repairing them. This had already been discussed at the Annual Parish Council meeting and the Clerk is to find out who the Parish Council can complain to.

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