

**MINUTES OF ASTON, COTE, SHIFFORD & CHIMNEY PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON
Thursday 9th January 2025 at the Village Hall, Aston, at 7.30pm**

Members R La Forte (Chair)
Present: J Ordish
G Ball
P Sparrowhawk
B Lings (to 9.30pm)

In Attendance: Elaine Anstee – Clerk
7 members of the public

- 1. Apologies from Members:** There were apologies from R Anstee and D Outen.
- 2. Parish Councillors - Disclosure of interests on agenda items** – R La Forte and P Sparrowhawk declared a nonpecuniary interest in agenda item 12 as they are trustees of the Community Trust.
- 3. Minutes of the previous meetings** of the Parish Council on 5th December 2024 were agreed, and it was RESOLVED as proposed by R La Forte, seconded by P Sparrowhawk, with all in agreement, that the meeting Chair signs them.

4. Meeting Open for Public Participation – None

L Nicholls confirmed that she will stand for the district council as the ward district councillor if the elections go ahead in May, as scheduled.

Kingsway Cottages – resident confirmed that Thames Water is investigating ongoing issues with sewage flooding inside No 1 and 2. A caseworker has been appointed, and they are looking at installing a ‘non return valve’ for all the cottages. The issue has occurred since the development of St Joseph’s Court.

P Sparrowhawk reported the concerns of residents about the number of sewage movement lorries coming through Aston and across the Aston/Ducklington Hills. It is believed that they are coming from Clanfield, possibly, to the sewage treatment works at Witney. Additionally, there had been a large lorry tip over on the hills in the week.

The ongoing issue with flooding of the Great Brook Road resulted in the suggestion of permanent signs being installed on the Beddles Turn and at the far end of the road. These to say, ‘Road Flooded no through route’ or ‘Road Closed Ahead’. Clerk to contact OCC Highways to identify correct wording and apply for installation.

5. WODC/OCC Matters

Cllr C Maynard ((MP) and WODC) sent his apologies and provided the report attached at Appendix A.

Cllr D Levy (OCC) provided the report attached at Appendix B and updated the meeting on the results of the extraordinary Executive meeting at OCC on 9th January 2025 where the English Devolution White Paper was discussed. District and County Councils would merge into a single unitary authority.

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There will be a new Strategic Authority which may cover 3 counties. The timeline is very tight as this is to be in place by the end of the current parliament in 2029.

Whilst parish and town councils (the seemingly forgotten third tier of local government) were outside the scope of the review and their future roles and responsibilities (if any) are currently unclear.

Cllr S Cosier (WODC) reported on his attendance at a WODC planning committee meeting where the discussion had focussed on the lack of affordable housing in West Oxfordshire. This has been an ongoing issue for the last 25 years. His report is attached at Appendix C.

6. Matters Arising from Previous Meetings

a) Quick updates:

- *Electronic Speed Signs* – the order has been submitted to Westcott and the location on the Bampton Road needs to be finalised before installation.
- *Cote Chapel* – no news.
- *Gate at St James Church* – It was decided that a metal/wrought iron gate would be too costly. J Ordish will contact Bampton Church where they have recently installed oak gates to get recommendations for suppliers.
- *Footpaths/Treescapes* – for discussion on the February agenda.
- *Thames Water* – currently awaiting a response from Thames Water on next steps following the receipt of the data from the loggers that they put in earlier in 2024.
- *Traffic Calming* – deferred until VAS (see first point) installed and effects analysed.
- *Great Brook Bridge* – metal defences put up but no news on repairs. The bridge issues were first reported in 2015 and have been consistently reported since and to date both directly to OCC and via Fix-My-Street. Clerk to contact OCC as work had been promised to be done by end of 2024.
- *North Street* – discussed with OCC on 16th October and has been referred to the roads team for programming of surface repairs.
- *Beddles Turn* – first reported in 2019 and repeatedly reported since then both directly to OCC and on Fix-My-Street. Most recently reported in November 2024 and clerk to follow up again.
- Land south of Bampton Road – Croudace – the Parish Council continues to collect information. There has been ongoing, intermittent, activity on site from the building company looking at water levels.
- Defibrillators – Brier Furlong (Aston Pottery) and cabinet (Aston & Cote Primary School).

b) Neighbourhood Plan

The Chair reported on the meeting with the consultant in regard creating a Design Statement. Further information on the value of a design statement compared to a Neighbourhood Plan is required for a decision on the Parish Council's options.

It was RESOLVED, as proposed by R La Forte, seconded by B Lings, to pay £100 plus VAT for a consultation with A Towlerton, MRTPI.

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c) *Data Loggers and Project Groundwater*

Report circulated by email and 4th data logger on order.

d) *History Board Update*

No update.

e) *Anti-Social Behaviour* – None reported.

7. PLANNING

New planning applications

Reference	24/03083/FUL
Alternative Reference	PP-13483624
Application Validated	Fri 20 Dec 2024
Address	Land North of Foxwood Close Aston Bampton Oxfordshire
Proposal	Erection of public art sculpture
Status	Under consideration

No Objection but there were concerns raised as to who would be responsible for it going forward, who would own it, who is going to maintain it and that the drawings were not true to the final product. There would need to be a plaque near to explain the thought process behind the design, the 'sixteens'. The History Group could help with this (Action Chairman).

Reference	24/03209/HHD
Alternative Reference	PP-13641895
Application Validated	Wed 18 Dec 2024
Address	Willow Farm Cote Bampton Oxfordshire OX18 2EG.
Proposal	Erection of single-storey rear extension, remodelling of existing rear and side extensions, new glazed cloister to rear, raised roof and remodelling to barn and landscaping works.
Status	Under consideration
No Objection	

Update on Ongoing Planning Applications – For Information

- a) Brier Furlong – no update at date of meeting.
- b) Marsh Furlong – agenda item 7 under Thames Water – no news on adoption of the pumping station.
- c) St Joseph's Court – agenda item 7 under Thames Water.
- d) No application from Croudace yet for the Land on Bampton Road. The Parish Council will continue to gather evidence, both local and expert.
- e) North Farm – R La Forte will be attending a meeting on 10th January 2025 with the OCC land agents, Bluestone.
- f) Potential new development – Lone Star Land (land agents) application will be discussed/decided at the WODC Lowlands Planning committee on 10th February 2025.

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Reference	24/02632/HHD
Alternative Reference	Not Available
Application Validated	Wed 23 Oct 2024
Address	21 Foxwood Aston Bampton Oxfordshire OX18 2DZ
Proposal	Construction of front entrance porch and two storey side extension. Rendering of external walls.
Status	Decided
Decision	Approve
Decision Issued Date	Mon 16 Dec 2024

8. New Business

a) *Asset Register 2025*

It was RESOLVED as proposed by J Ordish, seconded by P Sparrowhawk, with all in agreement, to accept the Asset Register subject to the removal of the laptop costs for the Clerk's laptop as this would be fully depreciated as it is over 3 years old.

b) *Donation for Oxfordshire Mind/Mind in Berkshire*

It was RESOLVED as proposed by G Ball, seconded by B Lings, with all in agreement donate £100 to Oxfordshire Mind.

Clerk to request that they provide an article for Voices, to include acknowledgement of the donation and an explanation of their work.

c) *CPRE Renewal 2025*

It was RESOLVED as proposed by R La Forte, seconded by P Sparrowhawk, with all in agreement, to renew the Parish Council membership of CPRE for the sum of £36.

d) *Appointment of Internal Auditor for 2024-25.*

Clerk to write to previous internal auditor reference internal audit for 2024-25.

9. Governance – Policies for Review – None

10. Community Trust

There was no Community Trust management meeting in December.

The planning application for the MUGA will be considered at the WODC Lowlands Planning committee on the 13th January 2025.

The reviewed constitution is ready for sign off and submission to the Charity Commission.

The ground maintenance for the surrounds of the recreation grounds maybe contracted out.

The changing room upgrades are out for quotes.

11. Parish Infrastructure

a) *Village maintenance – nothing to report.*

12. FINANCE

- a) *Account Balances to 31 December 2024 – noted.*
- b) It was, RESOLVED, to approve the following payments for the period January 2025 as proposed by R La Forte, seconded by G Ball, with all in agreement.

	NET	VAT	Gross Amount
SLCC – Annual Membership RFO	80.00		80.00
Extended Works Ltd – Advice Neighbourhood Plan	100.00	20.00	120.00
Des Johnson Inv 2508 Village Maintenance	49.00		49.00
E A Anstee – Refund cost of flowers	50.00		50.00
WODC Inv 33578168	888.00		888.00
Total to be decided and approved	£1,037.76	£20.00	£1,057.76
JOFLOWS – Flooding report (already	675.00	83.76	758.76
Total of already approved/paid	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Monthly Standing Orders/DDs			
Clerk’s CC – Microsoft £65.88, Gift Card datalogger installation £100, Bank Charge £3	157.90	10.98	168.88
Clerk’s Salary including WFH Allowance	225.38		225.38
RFO Salary including WFH Allowance	201.20		201.20
HMRC PAYE	93.40		93.40
Total SDOs	£677.88	£10.98	£688.86
Total	£1,715.64	£30.98	£1,746.62

13. Budget for 2025-26

It was, RESOLVED, as proposed by R La Forte, seconded by P Sparrowhawk, with all in agreement, for the revised budget, as presented to be approved. This being expenditure of £37,291.04.

14. Resolution to set Precept for 2025-26

WODC has advised that the council tax base will be 636.52 not the 634.37 originally advised. It was, RESOLVED, as proposed by R La Forte and seconded by J Ordish, with all in agreement, that the precept be set at £31,659.24 and that the council makes no increase to the £49.74 per Band D equivalent household for the 2025-26 precept year.

15. Parish Councillors’ and clerk’s reports from meetings attended since last meeting.

G Ball reported that she had attended the Bampton Foundation meeting and Aston School had received a donation of £250 towards a drum kit for their music provision.

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16. Matters for inclusion on next agenda.

Footpaths – specifically thinking of those off Bull Street and the potential of new ones in associated with new developments.

Road marking along the stretch of road by Aston Pottery/St Joseph’s Court.

Flood meeting on the 16th January which P Sparrowhawk will be attending.

17. Date of next meeting: Thursday 6th February 2025, 7.30pm

Being the monthly meeting of Parish Council.

Meeting closed at 21.32 hrs.

Signed.....Dated.....

Appendix A

MP and district councillor update - Charlie Maynard

January 2025

Sewage - I've been picked to be one of two Lib Dem MPs, alongside Tim Farron, on the Water Bill committee. We've collectively submitted 44 amendments. That's a big number and sadly reflects how lacking the bill is in getting to the fundamental problems behind the sewage situation we are now in. The government is lining up to support a new debt package for Thames Water which adds a further £3bn of debt on top of the £17bn in place. If that goes through, more than a third of customer's bills will just be paying interest on Thames Water's debt. We're campaigning to address this, put the company into special administration (otherwise known as bankruptcy) and cut the debt so that the company has a sufficiently strong balance sheet to be able to spend what's required. It is vital that we do this so that we get the basics in place in Aston including more flow meters so we can see where the worst infiltration is, spending to solve that infiltration by sealing pipes and manhole covers and increasing the capacity of the Bampton sewage treatment works which is where Aston's and Cote's sewage is supposed to be treated. We're also seeking explicit pollution reduction targets and flowmeters at all overflow sites. Labour looks every bit as captured by the water industry as the Conservatives have been.

Flooding – sticking with water, I spoke in the chamber on Monday about the need to reform the current ridiculously ineffective and bureaucratic Environment Agency restrictions on “Main Rivers” which to you and I are in many, many cases, just ditches. This designation means both that there is a vast amount of paperwork required before being able to get on and clear a ditch and that it is almost impossible to “de-designate” a Main River down to being an “ordinary watercourse” which requires much less paperwork. The result of this is that no permits are granted by the EA and that far too many of our ditches are no longer functional. I am writing to the minister to provide her with more information.

Rail – I'm working hard with a large number of colleagues at the district council and my office to get the rail project into the Local Plan, the key development framework for West Oxfordshire for the next 15+ years. Moving forward well.

Walk Round – I'm planning a walk of the ward next Saturday, 18th starting super early at Pinkhill, heading through Sutton, Stanton Harcourt, Bablock Hythe, Northmoor, Standlake and Aston. I am keen to meet as many people as possible along the way and please do join me for part of the way. Details coming separately.

Appendix B

County Councillor report Aston Parish Council
9th January 2025

Can I take the opportunity to wish the members of the parish council and residents a very happy New Year. I hope 2025 works out well.

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It is normal at this time of year for a report to be brief, given that usually little happens over the Christmas break. Alas, the government has had different plans, and lots has been going on. Local Government reorganisation.

Government mandate The Government White Paper on Devolution and Local Government in England was published in December, and the government has demanded input from top tier local authorities, i.e., county councils and unitary councils, by 10 January, i.e. tomorrow. Among other things, the government has strongly hinted that it wants us to ask for a postponement of elections in May. The reorganisation will end up with all authorities being unitaries, of a minimum size of 500,000 residents, i.e. there will be no more district councils. And each authority will be part of a Strategic Combined Authority, most of which will have mayors, with the mayor being directly elected and with additional funding in areas like inward investment and infrastructure. As additional powers and money will go to these mayors, the government is calling this devolution, although in reality power is being taken further away from local communities rather than closer.

Oxfordshire There is a Cabinet meeting on 9 Jan to finalise the letter to the Sec of State, and it will almost certainly say that Oxfordshire wishes to be part of the fast track for this process, that we wish to be part of a Thames Valley Mayoral Combined Authority (which will have the same footprint as TVP minus Milton Keynes and a very similar footprint to the local NHS commissioning board), and that we want to unitarize at pace. We believe a unitary covering the whole of Oxfordshire best meets the minimum size criterion and will cause least disruption to key services like social services, which otherwise would have to be partitioned between different unitary authorities. Each of the district councils has had input to the letter. **Democracy and elections** We have called for County Council elections to go ahead in May, unless the government can guarantee that a shadow authority can be in place by May 26 and that elections to that shadow can happen then. Even if elections are postponed at the edict of the government, we expect a number of by-elections to take place. The next full set of elections will either be for the unitary, or for the County Council under the new boundaries (so Aston will be part of Carterton South and Bampton division). By-elections will be under the present boundaries. Although it will require a statutory instrument from the government to make this happen. Apologies for the uncertainty and complexity. There is much more detail on the County Council website.

<https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MIId=7978&x=1>

Parish and Town Councils My belief, and certainly that of my party and our Green colleagues, is that we must ensure that decisions can still be taken locally where that is the best place for them to happen, and where that can ensure that residents can best have a say. So, things like planning still need to happen at a much more local scale than the unitary authority, and parish and town councils need to have stronger local powers, possibly in combination with other parishes where appropriate.

Budget, roads, flooding The County Council budget will be agreed on February 11th. The finances for 25-26 look to be reasonably secure, given the prudent management of the county council and substantial progress on making efficiencies, combined with a sensible council tax increase of 4.99% and a moderately generous grant from government. Future years will be more difficult, as the government has said it will rebalance funding to support more disadvantaged places. Among other measures, we are restoring annual gulley clearing. The budget of 2021 had reduced this to once every four years. There will be more money for flood measures and nearly £50m for road maintenance.

As ever, please contact me at dan.levy@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Appendix C

District Councillor Report – Councillor Steve Cosier (SASH WARD) – January 2025 WINTER

Government White Paper - local government reorganisation - OCC (An executive summary of meeting I attended as your district councillor)

The Government's White Paper announces that they will facilitate a programme of local government reorganisation for two-tier areas, and for unitary councils.

Cabinet (OCC) are meeting today to work on the information that the Government has provided through the White Paper to allow local authorities to work towards becoming a unitary authority (or single tier of local government). OCC wish to form a single unitary authority and as such will be working with the local leaders in existing districts toward the aim of becoming a single tier of local government.

Under the unitary authority there will have to be some form of local government organisation underneath the said authority. Discussions are taking place to decide whether we have one or two local unitary authorities. OCC will be looking at the formation of local committees (made up of elected councillors) to deal with issues at a local level governance such as; planning, social services, recycling and bins, roads, environmental protection, planning, libraries, housing, and children's centres etc. There are several existing models that OCC are currently investigating. One model is the unitary authority in Somerset. This is a model which seems to work well.

OCC wish to become a unitary authority to improve local government and service delivery across the area of the proposal, giving greater value for money, generating savings, providing stronger strategic and local leadership, and which should give more sustainable localised structures.

Places like Oxford City Council will not be large enough to form a unitary authority, because they don't reach the minimum size of 500,000 residents. new unitary councils should have a population of 500,000 or more.

A paper will be issued shortly which will express that OCC wish to proceed and become a unitary authority. They will work with partners in the Thames Valley area, looking at local government re-organization.

OCC do not want to postpone elections in May but will be looking at all out elections in 2027 because by that time we will have become a unitary authority (This election issue must be decided by the government). OCC feel that it is quite ambitious to have elections in 2026 and have all the boundary changes in place by that time.

Report Addition – 9th January 2024

Executive Summary – Overview and Scrutiny Committee

This report outlines the Council's commitment to maximizing the delivery of truly affordable homes, particularly social rented housing, across the district. Recognizing the significant

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housing pressure and the limitations of traditional development approaches, the Council is exploring more interventionist strategies to increase the supply of social rented homes.

Key Interventions:

- Leveraging Commuted Sums: Utilizing funds from developers to support affordable housing projects, including community-led initiatives.
- Strengthening RP Partnerships: Collaborating with Registered Providers (RPs) to optimize housing mix, secure grant funding, and explore joint ventures.
- Developing Council Land: Evaluating and developing Council-owned land for housing, including sites like Knights Court and Woodford Way.
- Addressing Temporary Accommodation Shortage: Increasing the number of available temporary accommodation beds to address the growing need.

Challenges and Opportunities:

- Waiting List Pressure: The report highlights the significant pressure on the housing waiting list and the need for increased social rented housing to address this.
- Interventionist Strategies: The Council is exploring a range of interventionist strategies to increase social rent delivery, including leveraging commuted sums, strengthening RP partnerships, and exploring innovative financing options.

Next Steps:

- Continued exploration and implementation of interventionist strategies to increase social rented housing supply.
- Addressing the critical shortage of temporary accommodation.
- Further analysis of waiting list trends and the impact of housing delivery.

Overall, this report emphasizes the Council's commitment to addressing the housing crisis in the district through a multifaceted approach that prioritizes social rented homes and innovative partnerships.

This summary focuses on the core message of the report, emphasizing the Council's commitment to increasing social rented housing, the challenges faced, and the key intervention strategies being pursued.

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