

**MINUTES OF ASTON, COTE, SHIFFORD & CHIMNEY
ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD ON MONDAY 25th April 2022
IN THE VILLAGE HALL, ASTON AT 7.30 PM**

1. Present:

Parish Councillors:

Russell La Forte (Parish Council Chairman)

Phil West

Gill Ball

Paul Sparrowhawk

Ben Lings

Elaine Anstee (Parish Clerk)

Dan Levy, Oxfordshire County Councillor

Carolyn Simmonds, Chair of Aston & Cote Community Trust

Emma Butler, Fete Committee

Trevor Jackson, Fix My Street Super User

Roy Williams, Allotment Trustee

33 members of the public

- 2. Apologies:** There were apologies from J Ordish (Parish Councillor), Jane West (Parish Councillor) and Cllr Lysette Nicholls (WODC).

3. Welcome

Russell La Forte, Meeting Chairman, welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the members of the Parish Council and the Clerk.

4. Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting on 8th November 2021.

These were accepted as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

5. Parish Council Report – Russell La Forte

Our Parish Council Our Parish Council comprises 7 unpaid councillors who are elected or co-opted to serve for 4 years and they are assisted in their duties by a salaried clerk (Elaine Anstee). Since our last Report (in Voices) in May 2020, the key issues for FY 20/21 are summarised below.

Despite actively promoting this year's local elections and much-increased public interest in council proceedings over the past 12 months, there have been only 5 nominations for the required 7 seats. Regrettably therefore, the election for the Parish Council on 5 May this year will be uncontested. The 5 councillors for 2022-26 will be Alex Chapman, Gill Ball, Russell La Forte, John Ordish and Paul Sparrowhawk. Notwithstanding this, the Council does have the power to co-opt suitable volunteers for the 2 vacant seats. Anybody wishing to nominate themselves are encouraged to do so as soon as possible, ideally before the first meeting of the new council on 19 May 2022.

Flooding and Drainage The Parish Community Emergency Plan identifies flooding as a major (and the most likely) risk throughout the Parish, and is the Council's foremost concern in all planning matters. We also sit on the Bampton Flood Prevention Group to keep pressure on the Environment Agency to maintain drainage regimes and have encouraged riparian landowners to keep drainage ditches clear. The lack of capacity in Thames Water's ageing infrastructure is a long-standing issue that continues to attract the personal attention of our WODC and OCC councillors and local MP, directly with the Chief Executive. For its part, the Parish Council has continued to engage directly with Thames Water, for example on examining potential measures to mitigate specific issues at St Joseph's Court as well as the Bampton Road and Bull Street pumping stations. At the Council's behest, Thames Water have also undertaken specific examination of the impact of the Hawthorns and Marsh Furlong developments. No quick or easy solutions are likely, but the problems are at least now formally identified, quantified and feature in Thames Water's long-term maintenance programmes.

Housing Development and Planning Issues Whilst it is WODC that determines all planning matters, the Parish Council is a statutory consultee on all planning applications in the Parish (18 in FY 21/22) and exercises a degree of influence accordingly. Wary of development 'creep', a recurring concern for the Council is to highlight the sustainability requirement for all development, noting the Conservation Area status of much of the Parish and stressing (especially) the inadequacies of the already overloaded drainage and sewerage system.

OCC Children's Home on Back Lane Following continued liaison with the Council, the design and layout of the proposed OCC children's home on Back Lane was amended and scaled down. Nevertheless, WODC objected to OCC's subsequent planning application on the grounds of 'conflict with planning policy and harm to heritage assets', citing 2 previous refusals in the same area. A revised application with amended design details has now been submitted.

North Farm Very extensive public consultation culminated in a definitive third round conducted between 8 Dec 21 and 18 Feb 22 that sought the specific views of residents on the 5 illustrative options provided by OCC. With 15% of residents (20% of households) responding - very good for public consultations of this nature - the Parish Council was confident of a mandate upon which to formally respond in March to OCC on behalf of the local community. In sum, this stated that assuming the site's continued unviability as a farm, the project should proceed using the '9 houses' option as a foundation for further refinement, negotiation and continued (binding) engagement between all 3 levels of local government and the local community. The involvement of WODC as the Local Planning Authority (LPA) is considered critical to project development and is probably overdue and OCC still await the results of their pre-application process from WODC, expected at the end of March. For its part, the Parish Council will need to further develop and better define the relevant and tangible community benefits of the project for consideration by the LPA. Planning refusal by the LPA will result at best in a de facto 'do nothing' situation - not acceptable to the community - and could at worst see OCC dispose of the site at

market value albeit without planning permission, very likely to a developer for 'land banking' for future intensive development - the worst outcome of all for the community.

Marsh Furlong The Council was as alarmed and surprised as everybody else early this year by notification of an intended 40-house development behind Marsh Furlong and Foxwood - the same site that was refused planning permission (confirmed in a subsequent appeal to the Planning Inspectorate) for a similar development in 2018/19. We were implacably opposed then and remain even more so today after a 20% increase in housing stock already over the past 18-months. The ensuing, entirely predictable and dire impacts upon already overloaded local infrastructure mean that our village simply cannot sustain another development of this size. With WODC assuring us that housing targets in Aston have been met for at least the next 5-6 years and with the land in question not appearing in the Local Plan, common sense ought to prevail, but we will monitor the situation extremely closely. Touted as an ostensibly 'affordable housing' development, this is in our view merely a cynical attempt to circumvent the Local Plan. The timing of this speculative bid (along with a large number of others across West Oxfordshire) arises from a 5-yearly review of the Local Plan currently underway by WODC but in which we understand that no changes affecting the Parish are envisaged. We have been advised of a public consultation phase in this review later in the year and will keep residents appraised accordingly.

Hawthorns Development The Hawthorns development nears completion in the next couple of months, somewhat delayed. All houses are now sold and all but one occupied. Once final groundworks are complete, a 2-year maintenance phase will commence whereby Matthew Homes will retain maintenance and repair responsibility.

Traffic Calming Traffic-related issues rightly remain a major local concern. The first Section 106 receipts enabled the implementation last year of Stage 1 of the Council's traffic calming project. Stage 2 was completed this year with signage for more minor access roads. A further, comprehensive Stage 3 project has been submitted to OCC Highways, including potential adjustments to speed limits and zones. We still await formal recommendations from OCC regarding traffic management in The Square.

Finance The Parish remains in good financial state, as confirmed by our external auditors in 2021. Following its bold decision not to increase the Precept, the Council continued to exercise financial prudence and operated comfortably within its agreed budget of £37, 805. Some £7,362 of Section 106 money from the 2 developments on Cote Road has been used to fund Phases 2 and 3 of the Council's traffic calming project. Total Section 106 receipts over the period 2020-28 will total some £186, 000. Financial grants, donations, and projects in the financial year (totalling £4,146) included the new Day Centre, Voices magazine, grass cutting for Cote Chapel and the churches of St James and St Mary's, Aston minibs, Aston History Project, Aston Community Trust, Aston Community Shop, Aston Football Club, Cleanslate, Volunteer Link Up and Citizens Advice.

The Budget for Financial Year 2022/23 was agreed at the Council meeting in December 21. For the fourth consecutive year, we were delighted once again to be able to make no increase to the Precept, which at £29, 715 keeps the Band D equivalent household at £49.74 (around 3.6p/month for each parish resident). As with all Council business, full details may be found on the Council website, including fully audited annual accounts.

Questions:

Q: It was understood that the land at the back of the Hawthorn's development would be public open space, but it has been completely fenced in?

A: The Parish Council had asked to have it gifted to plant trees for the Platinum Jubilee, but Matthews Homes (MH) is retaining the land and it will not be public open space. Fencing now installed was not on the original planning application which had mitigation of view by hedging and trees. MH is using this land as offset for development elsewhere. Enforcement have been and inspected the situation. They agree that the fence along the road should only be a metre high and will enforce the replacement of the hedge along the footpath between Sael Close and Bull Street. Other issues raised by the PC such as the grass edge at the front of the site are also being investigated.

6. Aston & Cote Community Trust (CT) – Carolyn Simmonds, Chairperson

It had been hoped to present new website but there have been some delays - watch this space. The purpose of the new website is to make the CT more accessible. There is a monthly meeting on the 3rd Wednesday of every month in the Committee room. Going forward the first 15 mins of these meetings will be available for public discussion. The Constitution has been updated. Special projects such as Muga and Parking the CT is looking for people with suitable qualities and experience to support these activities. The CT needs people to help support them. Web address will be published once it is live.

Q: There are two holes one in the car park and one in the field that need repairing.

A: These will be repaired for fete.

7. Fete – Emma Butler

There is a new fete committee this year and the focus of the event is the Platinum Jubilee. Planned activities include - Battle of Britain flyby of the Lancaster, stalls, raffle, refreshments, photo opportunity on a throne, cash bar and a school poster competition has been completed. Family disco in the evening with limited tickets. Main sponsor is Hooks Hatchery and support from PC plus garage sale made £150.00. Charity is 'Youngs Minds' (<https://www.youngminds.org.uk>) and local groups within the parish as well. Date 4th June at 11am to 4pm. Disco 7pm.

8. Fix My Street – Super User – Trevor Jackson

Originally saw an article on South Today and decided to volunteer. Oxfordshire County Council created OXTOG – Oxfordshire Together – to mobilise and support a team of volunteers around the County to help look after their own roads, pavements and public rights of way. As part of OXTOG there is a growing team of volunteers known as *Fix My Street Super Users*.

The Super Users are, in effect, the ‘eyes and ears’ of the County Council Highways Officers and are trained to report and action certain road repairs, specifically potholes and damaged kerbs, on low-speed, minor roads using **Fix My Street**

Trevor has been a super user for year, regularly meeting with the area Highways officer. Recent successes are the reporting of the Bampton Road and the retexturing from Back Lane through to Mount Owen due to commence on 28th April 2022. North Street the potholes have also been done.

When Trevor first started only the unclassified roads and inside the 30mph roads were allowed but working with other super users they have now got permission for all roads and footpaths. Super users have been pushing for permanent fills rather than the ‘fill and sweep’ option.

Q: Can anything be done to get access visibility improved from Cote – the farmer refusing access to Mears Home to reduce the hedgerow from the roadside.

A: This is the planning authority’s responsibility – the clerk will follow up with them.

9. Allotments – Roy Williams, Trustee

The last growing season part of the allotments that had been given to North Street farm have been reclaimed (7-9 new ones). Also, some of the original larger allotments have gone into disuse and will be reclaimed in the new season. The current allotments are large and take a lot of looking after. The roadway along the side of the allotments has fallen into disrepair and needs assessment so that a plan for repair and funding can be put together.

10. OCC Councillor Dan Levy

It was an honour to succeed Charles Mathew as County Councillor for Eynsham Division in May 2021, and any annual report ought to start by paying tribute to his service to this part of the county over many years. Charles was unfailingly helpful to me as a resident, as a district councillor and after I was elected as a county councillor, and I know that other residents share my gratitude to him for helping them during his period of office.

The election results meant that no party at County Hall had an overall majority, and so the Liberal Democrats, Greens and Labour agreed to work together as the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance, with Cllr Liz Leffman as leader. The three parties share a great deal in common, and it was not difficult to find huge areas in which we are looking to make fundamental changes to the way that Oxfordshire is treated.

We put together 9 priorities, which guide what we are trying to achieve. These are:

1. Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work.
2. Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire.
3. Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents.
4. Support carers and the social care system.
5. Invest in an inclusive, integrated, and sustainable transport network.

6. Preserve and improve access to nature and green spaces.
7. Create opportunities for children and young people to reach our full potential.
8. Play our part in a vibrant and participatory local democracy.
9. Work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic, and social benefit.

Much time has been spent managing the detritus left after 16 years of the previous administration, including managing the leftover uncancellable mega-projects including the two HIF schemes (in Didcot/Culham and the A40) and the emergency repair of the Oxford bypass (which was left hideously underfunded by our predecessors). You will see from the state of the roads and inadequate school transport, among many other things, how much we must fix.

However, we have also made an energetic start to implementing our priorities.

Consultation is now easier, with a new consultation system in place. We of course consulted on the 9 priorities. Consultation is not a referendum, and it is certainly not a case of who shouts loudest gets heard most. We are however, determined to make our local democracy as vibrant as possible and to listen to residents and businesses.

We have committed to supporting active travel and transport. This includes introducing electric buses, building new bike lanes such as between Bladon and Hanborough and (soon) between Hanborough and Eynsham, and providing support for community bus services such as the one that connects Standlake, Stanton Harcourt, Eynsham, Freeland and Hanborough Station. We wish we could do more, more quickly, but as ever an absence of funding slows things up.

After being abolished by the previous administration, we have reintroduced a youth service to Oxfordshire, which will work with charities and other providers to make sure that, where we can, young people in danger of going astray are assisted to stay as positive members of our communities. This helps them and the rest of us. Recruitment for these roles is taking place now.

A key election commitment was to reduce speed in our villages, and we have introduced a much simpler route for Parish Councils to get 20 mph zones. Around 70 have already applied, and a number are already in place. The long and expensive process before has been replaced with a simple local consultation and parish request. All the parishes in Eynsham division have expressed an interest and the first approval is imminent.

Although it is outside the control of local authorities, a problem across Oxfordshire, and especially in this part, is the deplorable performance of Thames Water, and its readiness to put sewage in our rivers, including the Evenlode, Thames and Windrush. I have had numerous meetings with TW, from CEO downwards. All we can do is keep putting pressure on them and remind them that they must invest in their failing infrastructure.

There is a lot going on. For instance, there is a review of Home to School transport, with a view to ending the position in places like Standlake where there is some confusion over which secondary school entitles parents to get transport and in which the County must lay on additional services to multiple schools. That should report later in the year.

We have of course had several international crises to manage at a local level. Covid remains at very high levels in the County, regardless of the assumption that it has now ended. And we have welcomed first Afghan and then Ukrainian refugees to the County. The generosity of the people of West Oxfordshire is noteworthy.

Anyone with an issue or who wants to share their opinion can get hold of me at

dan.levy@oxfordshire.gov.uk.

11. Dan Levy on behalf of WODC Councillor Lysette Nicholls

The meeting was reminded about election and Steve Good standing down after many years of service. Some of the main things WODC is responsible for are bins, council tax, planning and parking. Ubico have done a magnificent job of emptying the bins. Both Lysette and Dan sit on the Lowlands Planning Committee and where the parish's planning applications go to. Anything not on the Local Plan 2031 is dependent on a housing supply and for WODC there are 4 major developments in Chipping Norton, North Witney and 2 in Eynsham. These will meet the housing supply, thereby remove the need for areas such as Aston, if they work in a timely way but can cause an issue if they are delayed. This affects the available land supply, and the WODC must manage this land supply. The planning authority is constrained by the law which is why the appeals system often overrides LPA decisions. Loss of s106 if the planning appeal is lost. Parking – OCC has given notice to WODC that on street parking will be taken back in house by OCC partly because the DC have not been doing it effectively and so that specific places, Woodstock, can have an RPZ. Off street parking – no change and stay with the WODC – there will be no parking charges for off street parking.

12. Day Centre – Karen Stay

The Day Centre is a not-for-profit organization and registered with companies' house. It is completely staffed by volunteers. Started in November 2021 but had to shut again in December due to covid. During the 12-week period it was shut the volunteers continued to deliver meals and keep in touch with members through phone calls, prescriptions/shopping collections. Reopened on 16th March and have been open for 5 Wednesdays.

Volunteers wear masks and lateral flow tests are done by all which has helped keep it safe and managed the risk.

Large care home has reached out to do combined activities. Karen has reached out to very local care homes as well. They were offered a minibus, but the committee did not feel that they could afford the financial risk of running one at this time. Karen has been in touch with Abingdon & Witney College plus Cokethorpe School to encourage 6th formers and college students doing social care qualifications to come in help. Activities have included therapy dogs, guide dogs have visited, seated exercise in the morning, arts, and crafts. There are 21 regular members. Funding to support people who may not feel they can afford to pay.

13. Open Questions – A Summary

Q: Parish speeds – are there moves a foot to reduce the speed limits on the roads? The Parish Clerk explained the current submission for 30 mph extensions and 20 mph areas that are with OCC highways for action.

Comment: Grave concern about the proposed new development behind Foxwood. There is a resident group that have been set up to fight any planning application from Terra. 40 affordable homes on the land North of Foxwood, unused pastureland (seeded today 25/4/22). Want to extend the residents group to be a 'parish action group'.

Q: Ukrainian refugees and North Farm – community very supportive of this but no further news at the moment. Investigation is with OCC on what needs to be done to make it habitable. Visa issue is slowing process.

14. Close of Meeting

Russell La Forte thanked the speakers for their presentations and the members of the public who came for attending and participating in the meeting.

On behalf of the local community, the Chairman proposed a warmly received, heartfelt thanks to Jane West who was retiring as a parish councillor, for her outstanding service to the Parish over the past 15 years.

The meeting closed at 21.22pm.

Signed

Dated.....

Draft Minutes – to be finalised at the Annual Parish Meeting in 2023.

