

**MINUTES OF ASTON, COTE, SHIFFORD & CHIMNEY  
ANNUAL PARISH MEETING  
HELD ON MONDAY 8<sup>th</sup> November 2021  
IN THE VILLAGE HALL, ASTON AT 7.30 PM**

- 1. Present:** Parish Councillors:  
Russell La Forte (Parish Council Chairman)  
John Ordish (Parish Council Vice Chairman)  
Phil West  
Gill Ball  
Paul Sparrowhawk  
Jane West (via TEAMS)  
Ben Ling (Via TEAMS)
- Elaine Anstee (Parish Clerk)  
Lysette Nicholls, West Oxfordshire District Councillor  
Carolyn Simmonds, Chair of Aston & Cote Community Trust  
Paul Farrow, Trustee of Aston & Cote Community Trust  
Nick Angus, Football Club and Aston & Cote Community Trust  
45 members of the public

**2. Apologies:** There were apologies from S Good (WODC) and Cllr Dan Levy (OCC).

**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 20<sup>th</sup> May 2019**

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

**5. Parish Council Report – Russell La Forte**

The Parish Council is an elected civil local authority (synonymous with town councils) and is the first tier of local government, responsible for representing the local community, delivering services to meet local needs, and improving community quality of life and wellbeing. Parish councils are funded by levying a ‘precept’ collected from within the Council Tax paid to WODC by parish residents. Our Parish Council comprises seven unpaid councillors who are elected or co-opted to serve for 4 years (the next elections are due in May 2022), and they are assisted in their duties by a salaried clerk (Elaine Anstee). The Parish Council should not be confused with the Parochial Council that deals purely with St James Church and Shifford Chapel, nor with the Community Trust who are responsible for the Village Hall and Recreation Field.

Since our last Report (in Voices) in May 2020, the key issues for FY 20/21 are summarised below.

Impact of the Pandemic Whilst 2020 will certainly be a memorable year, mostly for all the wrong reasons, life continued nonetheless – Parish Council business included, conducted successfully throughout the year virtually on the now ubiquitous ‘Zoom’. Sadly though, the Annual Parish Meeting scheduled for 27 April 20 had to be cancelled. It was heartening to see community spirit in our Parish at its best throughout 2020, with volunteers stepping forward in large numbers to assist those more at risk with shopping, collection of prescriptions and so on. Our thanks to them all and to our Parish Clerk Elaine for coordinating the overall effort.

**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 applications and discussions with developers. 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 unhelpful blend of proximity to the floodplain, an ongoing 20% increase in housing stock and the woeful state of Thames Water's sewer and drainage system in the Parish was graphically illustrated at the end of January this year, following a period of persistent, heavy rain. Whilst winter flooding in local fields is the norm, this year seemed especially widespread and we also had sewers overflowing for up to a week, including by the Village Hall and in Bull Street. Small consolation perhaps, but we were not alone in this, with similar reports widespread across the District and County. The simple lack of capacity in the Thames Water infrastructure is a long-standing matter that continues to attract the personal attention of our WODC and OCC councillors and local MP, directly with the Chief Executive. No quick fixes seem likely, but the Parish Council continues to directly inform and support this debate.

**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 (23 in FY 20/21) 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, including respect for the Conservation Area status of much of the Parish and stressing (especially) the inadequacies of the already overloaded drainage and sewerage system. The Council have engaged proactively and directly with the Matthew Homes developers to provide a conduit for parish concerns and mitigate wherever practicable, the impact of the ongoing work. WODC Enforcement action was requested successfully on one occasion.

**OCC Children's Home on Back Lane** Following an on-site meeting with the Council earlier in the Summer with OCC and their planning agency to discuss OCC's feasibility study into building a new children's home on Back Lane, a public consultation day was held in Sep 20. The Council remains in close liaison with OCC on the matter.

**North Farm** The Parish Council was concerned that the OCC-owned North Farm site had been empty for several years, was becoming increasingly derelict and could potentially eventually become yet another high-density development site. We believe that the community, through the Parish Council, should be involved in determining the future of the site, ideally as a community-led development that maximises the social and other benefits to the Parish. Judging that the risks of doing something were greatly outweighed by the risks of doing nothing, we consequently submitted in Nov 20 a detailed paper to OCC on our initial thoughts, in principle, to get an understanding of what might be possible on the site. In tandem with this, an initial stage of public consultation was undertaken, with a second begun towards the end of the reporting period. We remain in close, constructive liaison with OCC on the issue.

**Parish Infrastructure** We saw some real progress in a number of projects throughout the year in question, including the new bus shelter opposite Foxwood, the defibrillator installed in the refurbished Cote telephone box and the VE75 bench at St James Church. Grounds maintenance contracts also underwent a significant overhaul, and we are pleased thus far with the quality of services provided. Probably our most significant infrastructure project though has been traffic calming measures.

**Traffic Calming** Traffic-related issues rightly remain a major local concern. The arrival of the first Section 106 receipts enabled the implementation of Stage 1 of the Council's traffic calming project, informed fully by (ongoing) public consultation. This saw the automation of the school 20mph signs, as well as new village signage installed (very ably assisted by OCC) on the main access roads through Aston and Cote. Pending further funding receipts, planning for subsequent stages continued, including signage for more minor access roads and potential adjustments to speed limits and zones. We also invited OCC Highways to make formal recommendations to address the knotty issue of traffic management in The Square.

Finance The Parish remains in good financial state, as confirmed by our external auditors in November. Following its bold decision not to increase the Precept, the Council continued to exercise financial prudence and operated comfortably within its agreed budget of £37,916. Financial grants, donations, and projects in the financial year (totalling £5,385) included Voices magazine, grass cutting for Cote Chapel and the churches of St James and St Mary's, Aston minibus, Aston History Project, Aston Community Trust, Aston Community Shop, Aston Football Club, Cleanslate, Volunteer Link Up and Citizens Advice. From July 20, the first of the Section 106 money from the two developments on Cote Road became available for its closely prescribed uses, enabling commencement of the Council's traffic calming project. Total Section 106 receipts over the period 2020 to 2028 will total some £186, 000.

The Budget for Financial Year 2021/22 was agreed at the Council meeting in December 20. For the third consecutive year, the Council were delighted once again to be able to make no increase to the Precept, which at £29,319 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: What is the parish council doing about speeding in Aston and the wider parish?

A: The Parish Council has had an ongoing programme of measures including the gates at the entrances/exits of all four communities in the parish. There is a plan with OCC, awaiting formal consultation, to extend the speed limits on North Street, On the road from Cote to Shifford, Bull Street and to link up along the B4449 from Aston all the way to Cote. This consultation includes 20 mph for Back Lane, North Street, Bull Street and all the housing estates in the parish. The build out on Cote Road, by the village hall has also been included in this consultation. The request is fifth on OCC's list. The financial costs for this consultation are £3,255. The cost of the build out on Cote Road, if passed by OCC, would be in excess of £27k.

Q. Could the 30 mph on the B449 towards Bampton be included in the OCC consultation?

A: This is not currently on the consultation list, but the Parish Clerk will contact OCC and see if it can be added. It should be noted that the Parish Council can only request, and it is the responsibility of OCC and Thames Valley police (TVP) to make the decisions.

There followed a debate on speeding, specifically in Aston and how best to address this. The TVP are fully aware of the issues and have been out to do some speed checks. There was commentary about enforcement, whether the changes to speed limits would have any effect without the threat of enforcement. Curbridge and the new electronic signage was sighted as a positive example. There was strong feeling that physical traffic calming was more useful and then again that speed traps/people acting would be more significant. The Parish Clerk agreed to explore the 'Speed watch' option and asked that those interested let her know. There is training for the new system due to start in November 2021.

Q: What is the evidence base for 20mph being effective?

A: This question will be referred back to WODC, OCC and TVP for a response those present did not have the detail to respond.

The chairman noted that this was a significant issue to the residents of the parish and the Parish Council would continue to research ways of reducing speeding in the parish.

## **6. Aston & Cote Community Trust – Carolyn Simmonds, Chairperson**

The community trust is run by a committee of volunteers and is self-funded. The 500 Club is a significant income stream, and the trust appreciates all those to take part. This year the hall has had a new floor, been redecorated and blinds have replaced the curtains. Current issues are car parking

especially on Saturday mornings and these issues are being looked at by the trust. They are looking at an extension to the solid area plus some grass matting.

The Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) is another project that the trust is working on and the funding for this will come from S106 and the Parish Council. The trust is dependent on volunteers and new members are always welcome.

Paul Farrow joined the Community Trust in 2017. He has a background in charity funding and was a real driving force with the playground project. He continues to support the trust with funding applications and working with the trust is rewarding. He is passionate about the trust's drive to get community spirit around the provision of sport for all.

Russell La Forte thanked Carolyn and Paul for all their work for the trust and giving the meeting an update.

**7. Sport Aston and Green Spaces – Nick Angus**

In 2015 Dan Long set up Sport Aston to encourage 'sport for all' in the parish and to build up the football club. Nick has continued this work and now the football club has 128 children under 16 and 20 coaches. The football club also runs youth and adult teams. The club is out growing the existing provision and will need to look at alternatives, one of which is to use the recreation field on a Sunday as well as a Saturday. This would allow them to spread out matches and manage the wear and tear on the pitches.

Looking to the future there are plans to improve the changing rooms, support the Community Trust with the car parking issues and continue to look for new green space for the club to use.

Carolyn Simmonds thanked Nick for all his hard work and enabling the football club to grow.

**8. OCC Councillor Dan Levy – Report read out by the Parish Clerk**

*There is an alarming increase in the incidence of Covid 19 in Oxfordshire, and I would urge everyone to remember that the epidemic is by no means over, and to carry on taking the sensible measures we all followed previously.*

*The budget did no favours to local government finances – the key labour costs, particularly in social care, have gone up, and we are being told by the Treasury that we should try to meet these costs via an increase in local taxation. The much-publicized increase in National Insurance for NHS and Social Care purposes will initially send nearly all the money to the NHS, while the additional NI costs to OCC are approx. £1.5m per annum. The lack of money makes it even more important that we focus on the key issues facing the County, not least the climate emergency.*

*It is also likely that the resurgence of inflation won't be reflected in the settlement for local government, and it will certainly affect the major infrastructure projects we have inherited, such as the A40 work.*

*The County Council has a new consultation system, Let's Talk Oxfordshire.*

*<https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/>*

*It is much easier to use than the previous system, and we very much hope more residents will use it than before.*

*Local issues.*

*The "First and Last" bus service to Eynsham and Hanborough is now scheduled to start on 4 January to coincide with the schools going back. I hope that it will be used by some residents of Aston, with the nearest stop being in Brighthampton. It will be helpful to have feedback once it starts, for instance if there are issues with timetables or overcrowding.*

*I continue to be in dialogue with Thames Water about the issues with pollution and flooding in the area, including the deplorable level of raw sewage coming out of the SH and Cassington plants and*

*clear inadequacy of the Aston pumping station. It was disappointing to see the House of Commons reject a bill originating in the Lords to address this issue.*

*The new 20 mph zone scheme was, as expected, approved by OCC, and applications from parishes are now welcomed. They require the parish to have consulted with residents (not necessarily via a formal consultation) and the approval of the local county councillor to the proposal, which you will certainly get for your village.*

*The County Council is currently capturing HGV data at key points all over the county. We want to review the whole HGV routing. This is a complex task, as changing one route invariably has an effect elsewhere. The issues with HGVs in Aston are very obvious, and I will stress the need to address the problem.*

*Finally, Dix pit will be shut on Tuesday 23 and Wednesday 24 November for a deep clean.*

*Please contact me by phone 07852 748362 or email [dan.levy@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:dan.levy@oxfordshire.gov.uk)*

## **9. WODC Councillor Lysette Nicholls**

Lysette Nicolls reported that she became a district councillor for the first time in May 2021. She sits on the Licensing, planning and scrutiny committees at WODC. Her passions are providing communities support with speeding issues and the problems faced by many parishes of sewage and flooding. She set up a speed watch group in her own village and supported the Standlake group. Speed watch has been instrumental in reducing the number of occurrences and raising the profile of the issue within communities. She would support a group in this parish.

## **10. Open Questions – A Summary**

*Q: What is happening with North Farm?*

*A: The Parish Council has been in discussion with OCC, who own North Farm, on what is to happen with the site which has been unoccupied for over 6 years. The aim is to have a community led project working with OCC. On 4<sup>th</sup> November 2021 the Parish Council received a presentation from OCC which outlined what could be done, the 'art of the possible'. OCC must get 'best value' for the site under its statutory responsibilities, Section 123 of the Local Government Act. They also want to maximize the other influencing factors such as health & wellbeing and the environment.*

*The presentation gave 3 options, but these were illustrative, and nothing has been decided at this point. The next step is to consult with the parish for the third time with much more detail so that a direction of travel can be agreed with OCC. This will then allow them to look at pre planning application to WODC, the planning authority, before a plan is finalised to go into full planning application.*

*Q: What about the wildlife on the site, Barn owl family living in one of the barns, why not leave the site to rewild?*

*Q: Could the site be a local farm run by the community?*

*A: Both these questions have the same answer - OCC have already identified that the site is no longer viable as a farm and would still have to achieve 'monetary best value' for the site. Environmental studies will have to be done before any planning application is made and the Environmental Officer at WODC will look at the site as part of the planning process. A suggestion from the Parish Council meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2021 was that other land owned by OCC in Aston could be part of this project and 'set aside' for 'biodiversity offset' which would keep it safe from future development.*

*Q: Will there be an opportunity to vote on options once consultations have been completed?*

*A: It had not been thought to go to a vote following the third consultation. It would be impossible to get everyone to agree and there will be people who object to what ever is done with the site.*

*Previous consultations had a 15% response rate and only one negative response.*

*The project has to be realistic, and it is possible that as part of the process it is identified that the ecology of the site, conservation area restrictions or lack of a consensus from the parish stops the whole project. The Parish Council has already stated that sewage must be contained on site as part of its normal response to any planning application, pre-empted in this case.*

*Q: When is the building going to stop?*

*A: The Local Plan 2031 identifies all the land set aside for building on in West Oxfordshire. This means that there should not be any building in the parish as there is no land identified here for building. The meeting was made aware of the Oxford Plan 2050 (Oxfordshire) and the Oxford-Cambridge ARC (UK Government) plans that would have a direct impact on the parish and if interested would be worth looking at.*

**11. 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. He reiterated that all are welcome to parish council meetings which are on the 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of the month at 7.30pm in the village hall.

There was a short presentation from Carolyn Simmonds thanking John Ordish for his time on the Community Trust and his commitment to the parish as a volunteer. The committee room at the village hall is to be renamed the ‘Ordish’ room in acknowledgement of this.

The meeting closed at 21.06pm.

Signed .....

Dated.....

Draft Minutes – to be finalised at the Annual Parish Meeting in 2022.