

**Minutes of the Northmoor Parish Council Meeting
Held on Wednesday 13 December 2023 at 8:00pm in the Village Hall**

Attendees

Parish Councillors

Dr Graham Shelton Chair
Mr Neil Reeves
Miss Stacey Reed
Mrs Juliet Druce
Mr Chris Isaac Clerk

County/District Councillors

WODC Cllr Lysette Nicholls

Members of the public

Mrs E Hare, Mr I Miles, Mr M Ryan, Mrs V Ryan, Mrs L Brangwin, Mrs J Williams.

1. Apologies for absence

Mrs Carrie Berry, OCC Cllr Dan Levy, WODC Cllr Charlie Maynard.

2. Co-opting of new councillors

Miss Stacey Reed and Mrs Juliet Druce signed their Declarations of Acceptance of Office, to become Parish Councillors.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest

4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting on the 8 November 2023, copies of which had been previously circulated to all members, were agreed as a true record, and were signed by the chairman.

5. Matters Arising.

There were no matters arising from the previous meeting.

6. Reports from Councillors

WODC Cllr Lysette Nicholls gave her report to the meeting, a copy of which is included at the end of the minutes. She also added that the Northmoor Christmas Market was fantastic and wished everyone a Merry Christmas.

Regarding Coronation Community Orchards, Graham Shelton proposed that the Parish Council should consider applying for some trees in Jubilee Wood, and the Parish Councillors unanimously agreed.

Mike Ryan suggested that the Kings Copse would also be a good site, but Historic England would need to be approached for permission as it is on the edge of an ancient monument. *Clerk to investigate.*

Graham Shelton read out OCC Cllr Dan Levy's written report, which is included at the end of the minutes.

(Post Meeting Note: WODC Cllr C Maynard sent a written report after the meeting which is also included at the end of the minutes.)

Carrie Berry had sent an email regarding the recent road closures, and the condition of the road which was causing issues for the school bus getting through the village, and that the operator was considering stopping the service.

Lysette Nicholls suggested that many people report the issues on "Fix My Street" as more people reporting it would raise its visibility.

Mike Ryan stated that Charlie Maynard had asked for a Point of Contact to mark out and report the potholes. Scott Gillam had volunteered, but there had been no further updates. *Clerk to investigate and report back.*

There had been another email regarding potholes in Moreton Lane, but they had been repaired the following day and so was now considered closed.

7. Issues

a. Parking on grass area in Griffiths Close

The clerk had received a hand written note regarding cars parked on the grass area in Griffiths Close which was causing a safety issue as they were blocking the view for cars coming out onto the road and was also causing a mess with the grass being churned up. Graham Shelton stated that the grass area was owned by Cottsway Housing Association and not the Parish Council, so all that could be done was to raise the issue with Cottsway. *Clerk to write to Cottsway.*

b. Thames Water road closure notice period and signage

There had been a second instance of Thames Water closing the roads for emergency repair work, but the road closed signs had stayed in place for a far longer period than the work has lasted. It had also had a detrimental effect on the Village Christmas Fayre and the local Pub as there was no signage to indicate that access to village/businesses was unaffected. Graham Shelton asked Lysette to request that Dan Levy look into this issue and formally complain about the effect it had on the local businesses.

c. Potential disruption to traffic with Standlake Road bridge repairs

Andrew Williams had written to the previous Parish Clerk with concerns about the "structure demolition works" that were mentioned on the "roadworks.org" website in connection with the recent bridge closure on Standlake Road.

Lysette Nicolls said that she had received an email regarding a potential 4 to 6 week closure that we should have also received, but would ensure that a copy was forwarded to the clerk.

d. Playpark proposed funding model.

Lyndsey Brangwin briefed the council on the proposed funding model for the Play Park refurbishment. There is a grant available as the playpark is near to Dix Pit Household Waste Recycling Site. The Parish Council must apply for the grant as they own the playpark, and although the grant is subject to a 10.75% contribution from a third party, that will be paid by the Northmoor Village Trust so it will not cost the Parish Council anything. The grant will only cover the play equipment but the funds that have been collected by the Playpark committee will be used to cover the landscaping and benches along with enough money to cover 15 years of ROSPA inspections which are required to validate the 15-year guarantee on the equipment.

The Clerk note that the additional expenditure going through the council's accounts would result in an external auditor being required next year. Lyndsey agreed that they would be prepared to fund the external auditor next year.

The closing date for the grant application is 28 February 2024, and Lindsey would liaise with the clerk in the New Year to go through the application process.

Graham Shelton offered the Parish Councils gratitude to Lyndsey and the playpark committee for all of their hard work.

8. Finance

a. To set the Precept for 2024/25

Mike Ryan explained how the figures for the precept had been calculated using the actual expenditure to date along with the know expenditure for the rest of the period, including 3 options for Miscellany (£300, £400 & £600), which would result in a 3%, 5% or 9% increase to the Band D Council Tax.

The council unanimously agreed to apply the 9% increase.

Clerk to submit Precept paperwork to WODC

b. Allotment water bill

There had been conflicting paperwork received from Castle Water due to an estimated bill being issued closely followed by a bill based on a meter reading, which had resulted in the account now being in credit.

Juliet Druce asked if the Allotment holders would get a refund

Mike Ryan informed the meeting that the allotments had effectively been subsidized as the charges hadn't covered all of the water bill.

Juliet Druce agreed to take over responsibility for the allotments from Val Ryan

c. Charity donations.

As there had only been one request received to date the council agreed to postpone until the next meeting.

9. Planning Applications.

The following Planning Applications has been received: -

- a. **23/02867/HHD.** Mr & Mrs I Miles, Cruck Barn, Church Road. Application to Erect a Three-Bay Garage and Greenhouse with associated hard and soft landscaping. The application was supported by the Council. *Clerk to write to WODC Planning Officer.*

10. Correspondence and Any Other Business

- a. Graham Shelton received an email from Denise Blackwell regarding a discussion with Robert Courts about brook. As there was insufficient information to discuss fully it was agreed to revisit this at the January meeting.
- b. Juliet Druce raised the issue of official email accounts. The clerk will investigate providing email accounts for all Parish Councillors and report back at the next meeting.
- c. There was a discussion regarding the defibrillators. Mike Ryan briefed the meeting on the maintenance requirements and Juliet Druce volunteered to take responsibility for their monitoring and maintenance.
- d. The Emergency Plan was discussed and it was agreed that Graham Shelton, Stacey Reed and Juliet Druce would form a working group to update the plan. Julie Williams said she would supply an updated list of Village Hall key holders.

- e. Parish Council Planning Policy and Guidance 21-23
The council agreed to extend this document to cover a further year so that the newly elected Council can make their own changes to it if they deem necessary.

Date of next meeting Wednesday 10 January 2024.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 9:15 pm.

Signed..... Date. 13 December 2023.

County Councillor Report – Dan Levy - Dec 23

Please find a report on areas covered by the County Council which may be of interest.

Budget

The budget at County Hall is currently being created. The headline figures are that there are £36m of pressures, caused by underfunding, by demographic changes and by inflation, including a higher than expected rise in the National Living Wage by 9.8% with no additional money from the government that announced it. We spend over half the budget on adult and children's services, including social care. The County Council is making savings, and becoming more efficient. For instance we are building new childrens' homes, including one in Aston, to enable us to look after Oxfordshire children in the county.

The headline gap between expected income and expected spending for 24-35 currently stands at £9m, which we will have to fill to create a balanced budget. Despite this we are in a better position than most other County Councils of all political persuasions.

There is a consultation open, which can be found on the County Council website. We do want to hear from as many residents as possible.

Roads

There was a planned closure of the road between Standlake and Stanton Harcourt/Northmoor between 6th and 8th December between 9-30 and 3-30 each day. This was for bridge work. Timings were set to permit school traffic. The work finished early, and I hope wasn't too disruptive. Unfortunately, there have also been a set of road closures for urgent water mains work on the roads through Northmoor.. Thames Water has requested these with no notice. Some of the signage put up hasn't made it clear that through traffic is disrupted but access to the village centres of Northmoor and Bablockhythe is retained, and TW have been asked to improve this. There is also a closure planned for Tar Lane, between Stanton Harcourt and Witney, in January, to replace the bridge parapets on the A40 crossing. That will last several weeks.

There was another serious crash at the Barnard Gate junction a few weeks ago. Officers are investigating how to make this crossing safe. It was going to be part of the reworking of the A40 using money from Homes England, but this phase of the project has had to be deferred as the costs of the whole project have exceeded what government made available – this was predictable from the point at which the P&R/A40 scheme was first sketched out. So we do need to do something. This might include shutting the junction to right turns, which will be very inconvenient mainly for people living north of the A40 in places like Freeland, who use the junction to get onto the A40 going westbound.

The National Highways work on the A420/A34 junction continues to cause long delays. The County Council is powerless to get NH to manage this better, nor to coordinate its work on the A34 with other works organised by the County Council.

Botley West Solar Farm

The next phase of consultation is now open. Residents can and should have their say on the scheme proposed by PVDP and mainly using land owned by Blenheim. Councillors like me who sit in cabinets are taking the view that we are best commenting through the councils, which will have an obligation formally to report their concerns to the secretary of state, who will be making the decision. Those councillors who are not so bound are free to stand with those residents who are making their voices heard.

As ever, please contact me with queries, comments or requests.

dan.levy@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Dan

More households in West Oxfordshire could benefit from a government backed grant to make homes more energy efficient and cheaper to run, following a change in the eligibility criteria.

The second phase of the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) scheme helps owner occupiers and private tenants living in poorly insulated properties access free energy-saving measures worth thousands of pounds - including insulation, low carbon heating systems and solar panels - to make their homes healthier and more affordable while reducing household greenhouse gas emissions.

To be considered, households must not use mains gas as their main source of heating.

Until recently only those with a combined income of under £31,000 could apply. Changes to the grant, which is being delivered by Oxfordshire County Council, in partnership with West Oxfordshire District Council and Welcome the Warmth, means that households with an income of up to £39,000 could now be eligible to receive help.

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Change at West Oxfordshire District Council, said: "With plenty of cold weather ahead many in our district will find themselves struggling once again to meet their energy bills and keep their homes warm. Rural properties and those living off-gas are more likely to suffer from fuel poverty, and with the announcement last week that the energy price cap will go up in January, many will be facing greater uncertainty around what they can expect to pay for their bills come the new year.

"Some of the highest carbon heating fuels are oil and coal. Raising the income threshold for the Home Upgrade Grant is very welcome news, supporting more West Oxfordshire households to access the energy saving measures they need while reducing the impact those homes will have on the environment."

The increase in the income threshold for the HUG in West Oxfordshire accounts for the higher cost of living Oxfordshire residents face, compared to elsewhere in the country.

A household is considered fuel poor if its income, after fuel and housing costs, is below the poverty line and they live in a property with an energy efficiency rating of band D or below. In 2022, there were 3.26 million homes in fuel poverty in England.

Households that use alternative fuels, such as solid fuels, oil or liquified petroleum gas (LPG), or electricity for their heating are more likely to be classified as being in fuel poverty than other households. Research suggests they are also more likely to experience deeper or more extreme levels of fuel poverty.

To be considered for the HUG energy-performance upgrades, householders must live in an energy inefficient home with an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of D or lower. Properties without a current EPC can still apply and will be assessed as part of the application process.

Householders can check their home's EPC rating: <https://www.gov.uk/find-energy-certificate>

To find out more visit: <https://www.welcomethewarmth.org.uk/> or call Welcome the Warmth's freephone number 0800 038 6775.

Thames Water Launches New App

To report a problem, please visit <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/help/report-a-problem#/view-and-report-problems> or to check the progress of reported issues in your area via the mapping tool, see <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/edm-map>.

Residents are being urged to be watchful over the festive period to avoid becoming victims of a fraud scam. Christmas is a great break for families but is also a traditional time for fraudsters to try to take advantage of the season of goodwill.

To help keep you safe here is some advice on how to avoid some of the main scams over the festive period.

Car parking scams

In some cases fraudsters have been replacing QR codes in car parks and using fake websites to pose as on-line payment providers and have duped some drivers into entering bank details when they park to go Christmas shopping.

To avoid any scam payment websites, it is important people access online payment providers safely. If you choose to pay by this method when visiting car parks, make sure you follow one of the routes below:

- Download the parking fee app directly from the App Store or Google Play Store
- Visit the website of the parking fee provider directly into the search bar

If you do use a QR code shown on signage in the car park, check that it does not appear to have been doctored.

Facebook Marketplace scams

There has been a 75% increase in people being scammed when shopping for items such as cars, tickets, clothes and holidays on Facebook Marketplace. To avoid falling victim to a Facebook Marketplace fraudster keep in mind the following advice:

- Is it too good to be true? When something appears to be a fantastic offer remember it isn't a bargain if it never arrives or doesn't exist
- Do you have to pay immediately? Legitimate sellers will not pressure you into paying
- Can you meet the seller in person? Try and buy locally so you can check the item before paying
- How are you being asked to pay? Do not pay by bank transfer. Pay by debit or credit cards to protect yourself

Online shopping scams

More than ever we are buying presents online. Criminals sometimes set up fake websites that look identical to real ones to steal personal details and money. Or it could be a website for a fake company selling a product you really want.

To avoid any scam websites always check for the following

- Buy securely - only make payments online if there is a padlock symbol in the browser address bar.

- Check - make sure you've examined the web address for the https protocol make sure there is an 's' present, it represents the site is secure.
- Accuracy - Look for subtle misspellings, extra words and characters, and other irregularities.

Councillor Geoff Saul, Cabinet Member for Housing and Social Welfare, said, "While the festive season is all about giving and caring, unfortunately there are those who take advantage of people over this period. We are encouraging everyone to follow our tips and be on the lookout for fraud and avoid falling victim to these scams.

"If you have been the victim of fraud you can report it to Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040 or online <https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/>

"You can seek free and confidential advice from Victim Support on 0808 281 01 12 or 0808 1 68 91 1 1 or by visiting <https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/>

Orchards

Local groups and organisations wanting to establish community orchards in their neighbourhoods, and with space to plant at least five fruit trees, are now being invited by the District Council to come forward and apply for a slice of the E50,000 fund which the Council is distributing.

Helping to restore lost habitats, the orchards will play a positive role within communities by connecting more people to nature and their local green spaces, while providing much-needed habitat for birds and giving sustenance to pollinators and other wildlife.

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Change at West Oxfordshire District Council, said: "We know there's a lot of interest in the benefits that orchards can offer, both as a means to boost biodiversity and provide new habitats for wildlife, and as a way of bringing communities together. Yet currently orchards account for less than 1 per cent of the district's land cover. In the last hundred years or so over 80 per cent of orchards have disappeared across Oxfordshire, with half of those which remain reported to be in poor condition. The trees planted in the Coronation orchards will play an important role not only by increasing the number of trees in the district, but as they age these trees will develop hollow trunks and rot holes that will offer nesting sites for bats and birds and support an abundance of insect life throughout their life cycle.."

Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment at the District Council, said: "The launch of the Coronation Community Orchards fund is a really exciting opportunity for parish and town councils, schools, landowners and other groups within the community to get involved and plant orchards in their local area in spaces close to where people live. Orchards really are exciting places that bring people together to plant and cultivate the trees, learn new skills and enjoy their harvest. They can act as a focal point for community activities while offering people a space to learn more about the wildlife around them.."

The planting of community orchards is a key action within West Oxfordshire District Council's draft Biodiversity Action Plan and contributes to the county-wide ambitions of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership which works collectively to deliver nature recovery for the county.

The orchards - which need to be planted on publicly accessible land to allow as many people as possible to benefit from them - will leave a visible and lasting legacy to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III. Groups must be able to plant at least five trees, the minimum number required to qualify as an 'orchard.' There is no upper limit to the number of trees being applied for.

As well as offering multiple benefits to nature, trees play a pivotal role in tackling the effects of climate change by capturing and storing carbon dioxide and also reduce the risk of flooding by taking water out of the soil.

To support organisations with their application for Coronation Community Orchard funding and to ensure that trees thrive once planted, the District Council will host a webinar event in partnership with the International Tree Foundation to offer guidance about which trees to select, planting plans and tree-care advice.

The closing date for first-round applications is 19 January 2024. Successful applicants will be notified by 31 January with planting expected to take place during February and March. A second application window will open in the autumn in time for next winter's tree planting season.

More details about the fund and how to apply can be found at:

<https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/CoronationOrchards>

District Councillor update for Northmoor – Charlie Maynard - 13 Dec 23

1. Taking on the Planning & Sustainable Development role at West Oxfordshire District Council

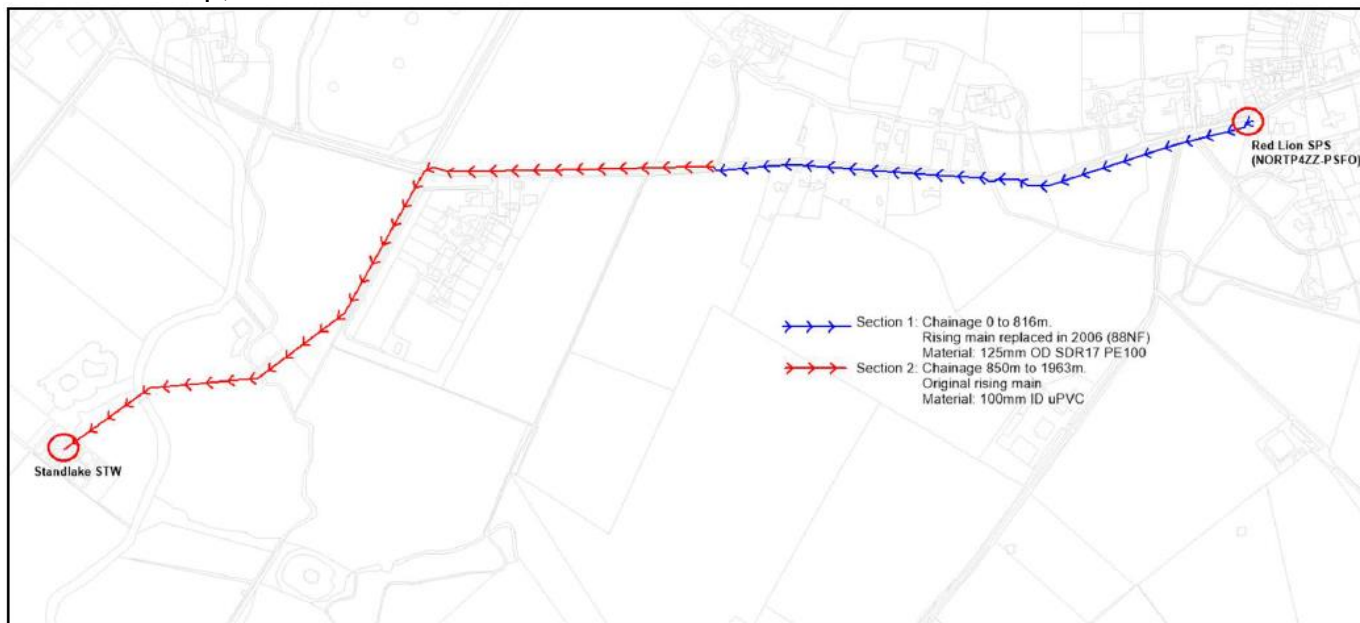
Carl Rylett recently stepped down from this role as he has moved day jobs and needs to give more time to his new day job. I was offered the Planning role and accepted it. I am now three weeks in and have a list of ideas and questions three pages along which I am enjoying working through with officers. A selection of topics includes:

- doing everything possible to keep WODC inside its five year housing land supply and therefore out of the clutches of developers
- managing the Local Plan process so that West Oxfordshire ends up with an excellent Local Plan which truly works for residents and our environment
- Progressing the Oxford-Eynsham-Witney-Carterton rail project
- Building more social rent housing
- Improving monitoring and enforcement of planning conditions
- Improving customer service
- Managing s106 process and implemented Community Infrastructure Levy payments
- Botley Solar Farm
- Salt Cross Garden Village
- North Witney
- West Witney

2. Thames Water

I had an update call with them yesterday. The most significant information re Northmoor I learned is the below diagram. The blue section was replaced in 2006. TW state that they are soon “looking to replace part of the rising main from Red Lion (Northmoor) SPS that pumps directly to Standlake STW.” How soon “soon” is, is unknown and will depend on TW’s settlement with Ofwat which won’t complete for a few months. Given the dire state of TW’s finances I think it is far from certain that this will be completed in the 2025-2030 plan period.

I also received for the first time a detailed map of the Standlake Sewage Treatment Works catchment map, which I have attached to this email.



3. Thameside

WODC flood and EA officers were on site at Thameside a couple of weeks back. They also met with the local farmer to discuss ditch clearance. The WODC and EA teams have agreed to work together to ensure that the correct EA permit is applied for so that the ditch north of Thameside can (finally, finally) be cleared. Given how wet everything is, it's unclear exactly when this work will be done. I am pushing all parties as hard as I can to get it done ASAP / before the spring.

4. Christmas Market at Marriotts

This was a big success with lots of stalls and lots of visitors. Footfall was up 59% year on year which had a knock-on positive effect for the shops at Marriotts and also across the town. This compares to national retail figures which were down 4.5% for the same period. Good news to see a local asset being turned around and so popular. Good to get Christmas off to a good start and I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a very happy 2024!



Standlake.pdf