

**Minutes of the Northmoor Parish Council Meeting
Held on Tuesday 3 December 2024 at 7:00pm in the Village Hall**

Attendees

Cllr Juliet Druce Chair
Cllr Lindsey Brangwin
Cllr James Florey
Cllr Stacey Reed
Cllr Henry Spielberg

Mr Chris Isaac Clerk

OCC Cllr Dan Levy and WODC Cllr Steve Cosier.

6 members of the public.

1. **Apologies for absence.** To receive apologies for absence.
WODC Cllr Charlie Maynard.

2. **Requests for Dispensations, Declarations of interest, gifts and hospitality.** To receive any requests for Dispensations, Declarations of Interest from Councillors relating to items on the Agenda.
Nothing was declared.

3. **Public Participation.** To receive questions from members of the public relating to items on the Agenda.

There were no questions relating to the agenda but a number of residents had attended to raise a concern on another issue.

The Clerk reminded everyone present that it was a Parish Council meeting, which is a meeting held in public and not a public meeting, and so members of the public should only comment on agenda items at the allotted time unless invited to do so by the Chair. He also added that if a member wished to raise a subject for discussion at a Parish Council meeting a request should be sent to the Clerk in advance so that it can be added to the agenda if the council choose to discuss it.

The Chair agreed that in this particular case the residents could raise their issue.

The residents were concerned about the excessive noise coming from a plant project at Lynch Hill that was recycling concrete from the HS2. Cllr Cosier informed the residents that the company involved had a licence to operate the machinery, and so the only course of action that could be taken was to keep a record and complain to WODC.

The Clerk was requested to publish the website and email address to the residents via the Parish Council; Website, Village Facebook Page and 2 Village email lists.

Website: <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/environment/noise-pests-pollution-and-air-quality/noise-and-other-nuisances/>

E-mail address ers@publicagroup.uk

4. **Minutes.** To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 1 Oct 24 previously circulated.
It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes be accepted as a true record and were signed by the Chair.

5. **Reports.** To receive reports for information only from Councillors and Clerk.

a. OCC Cllr Levy was delayed so the Chair presented his report to the meeting, a copy of which is included at the end of these minutes.

b. WODC Cllr Cosier presented his report to the meeting, a copy of which is included at the end of these minutes.

- c. The Chair presented WODC Cllr Maynard's report to the meeting in his absence, a copy of which is included at the end of these minutes.
- d. Cllr Brangwin informed the council that the playpark would be closed from today until after the new playground equipment was commissioned in order to protect the new turf that has been laid. The installation work is expected to start at the beginning of January weather permitting.
- e. Cllr Reed informed the council that Bablock Hythe was flooded, and that the vulnerable and elderly residents were affected most. The residents had received a warning, but it was at short notice. It was also noted that the nearest sand and sandbags were stored in the playpark at Northmoor Village Hall and Northmoor residents were needed to fill and transport them to Bablock Hythe.
The Clerk to investigate funding provision for a box closer to Thameside Court
There had been no help offered by the site owners and Cllr Cosier offered to look into the details of the licence and when it was due for review.
Lysette Nicholls gave an update on the Bablock Hythe bank revetment grant/work, her report is included at the end of these minutes.
- f. The Chair informed the council that the water meter reading had been submitted and the defibrillators had been checked. The trees on the southern hedge of the allotments had also been cleared.
Cllr Florey added that the trees along the western hedge next to Chapel Lane would be cleared in the near future.
The Chair had been approached by several residents enquiring if the money raised by the Produce Show, Summer Fair and Dog Show was going to be made public, this was passed on to the Village Hall committee representative.
- g. Cllr Spilberg enquired if anyone had been approached by residents regarding the new speed limits. The consensus was that it hadn't changed behaviours and people were still travelling at speed through the parish. He also noted that the WODC Voice pamphlet had some interesting information, including that WODC still have funding for community orchards and promoting the Rural Crime Survey.
Cllr Florey added that there was an under reporting of minor crime in rural areas, which was hiding the true extent of the issue.
The Clerk informed the councillors that the previous council had considered the Community Orchard, but had realised that it was not feasible as the Parish did not have any land other than the Playpark. He added that the details of the Crime Survey had been promoted on the village Facebook page and via the village email lists on 15 November.
- h. The Clerk reported the following points:
- i. **Winter Fuel Payment.** The information was posted on the Parish Website, the village Facebook page, and both village email distribution lists on 5 October, with a message to pass onto those in the community who may not have internet access.
 - ii. **Bank Mandate.** The bank mandate change form has been returned. The Council need to nominate an Internal Financial Controller as per the Internal Auditor's recommendation.
Cllr Spilberg volunteered to be the Internal Financial Controller.
 - iii. **Road Closure.** (TTRO (T14786) Temporary Road Closure Notice, Northmoor, Standlake Road). Thames Water are replacing the rising main from Cow Lane Corner to Pinnock's Farm. There will be discussions between the Clerk, OCC Cllr Levy and the contractor as the proposed closure and associated diversion (Moreton Lane) would be extremely disruptive to the residents.

6. **Policy Review.** To review the Financial Regulations (updated 2024 version).
The Council considered the Financial Regulations and **RESOLVED** to agree to adopt them.

7. **Charter approval.** To approve the Oxfordshire Councils Charter.
The Council considered the Charter and **RESOLVED** to agree to adopt it.

8. **Playpark proposals.** Cllr Brangwin briefed the council on Playpark committee's proposals to install a double gate at the Chapel Lane entrance end of the playpark, replace and move the sandbox, and remove the grass box completely as they were in the locations of the new equipment.

After further discussion the Council **RESOLVED** to approve the installation of the double gates, and the replacement and relocation of the sandbox so that is accessible from the Village Hall car park. It was agreed to trial grass mulching in the playpark and the removal of the grass box was approved with the agreement that it would be rebuilt in a different location if the trial was not successful.

9. **Finance.** To consider the following items:

a. **25/26 Budget.** The Clerk presented the draft budget which the Council considered. Following discussion, the Council **RESOLVED** to agree to a budget of £11,195. The increase in the budget was primarily due to the increase in the amount allocated for the Clerk's salary as per the Internal Auditor's recommendation: *"For the future, the Council must budget for an adequate salary for a paid Clerk"*, as well additional funding required to cover the internal and external audits and waste bin emptying.

It was noted that as the Clerk does not currently draw a salary, the money would be used to build the council's reserves which was also a recommendation from the Internal Audit *"I note that the Council does not have adequate reserves. The Council should recognise the wider responsibilities and account for those responsibilities"*.

It was noted that there had been a historic low costing for the Precept in previous years, in the face of ever-rising costs, which has left the PC with minimal funds or the reserves that it is required to hold. In order to deliver the required services for the residents, the Parish Council needs to be adequately funded, and the only source of income is the Precept (the allotment fees just cover the ground rent and water rates).

b. **25/26 Precept.** To consider and agree the setting of the Precept. WODC had informed the Parish that the estimated Tax Base for 2025/26 would be 197.55 (previous year 190.01). Having agreed the budget, the Council considered the Precept and **RESOLVED** to agree to an increase of £5,900 on the previous year to £11,195. The annual cost to a Band D household would be £56.67, an increase of £28.93 over the whole year.

For context this year the Band D Council Tax was £2,320.36, and the average Town/Parish Council portion was £106.14 or 4.6% (WODC portion was 5.4%, OCC was 78.5% and TVP was 11.5%). Next year's proposed Precept of £56.67 would be 2.4% of the total and so only just over half of last year's average Parish Council portion.

c. **Donation to First and Last Mile.** The responses to the Councillors' questions were that numbers varied from 1 to 7, but more likely 4 to 6 on a Wednesday, and that other parishes have given between £250 - £500, however any donation would be greatly appreciated. The Council **RESOLVED** to approve a payment of £150 that was allocated in the budget for S137 grants.

d. **To consider the following payments:**
The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the following invoices for payment which Cllr Brangwin would authorise online.

- i. £290 to Scott Gillam for September's grass cutting.
- ii. £17.40 to Castle Water for September's allotment water.

e. The Clerk reported that £1000 had been transferred from the Business Premium account (Savings) to the Community Account (Current) to cover the above payments, and that the S106 payment of £26,584.00 for the Playground had been paid into the PC account, and subsequently transferred to the Business Premium account (Savings).

10. **Planning Applications.** To consider all recent Applications received from West Oxfordshire District Council detailed below and any other Planning Applications submitted between the circulation of this Agenda and the meeting:

a. **APPLICATION NO: 24/02815/HHD** (Town and Country Planning Act)
PROPOSAL: Demolition of existing single storey side extension and erection new single storey extension. West Cottage, Standlake Road, Northmoor.
The Council considered the application and **RESOLVED** to respond that there were no objections to the proposal.

11. **Correspondence.** To note correspondence received not otherwise on the agenda where decisions are not required.

12. **Items for information or next Agenda only.** All items for the next agenda to be submitted to the Clerk by Mon 30 Dec 24.

13. **Date of Next Meeting.** To confirm the date of the next meeting.
The Council **RESOLVED** to agree that the next meeting of the Parish Council would take place in the Northmoor Village Hall on Tue 7 Jan 25 commencing at 7:00pm.

14. There being no further business the meeting closed at 9:00pm.

Signed.....Date.....

OCC Councillor Report Dan Levy Dec 24

Roads

A40

The revised HIF2 A40 plans are now in the public consultation phase. There is a drop in events on 4 December in Eynsham. Information on the scheme and on how to comment is at <https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/share-your-views-on-a40-eynsham-park-and-ride-to-wolvercote/>

Those with long memories may remember that my predecessor as your county councillor Charles Mathew and I both opposed the plans to build the park and ride and focus on A40 bus travel as the way to make the A40 work, as we neither thought it was going to be effective. However, the previous administration set up the scheme, and we need to make it work as effectively as possible. We will do that by focussing on the junctions, to make sure that they are as efficient as they can be. Improvements to the Eynsham roundabout and to the Cassington junction will make a huge difference. We will also ensure that the bike lane between Eynsham and Wolvercote is upgraded. There will be additional bus stops, and bus lanes for much of the length of the road. The Park and Ride – built to budget – will come into operation.

Unfortunately, the funding for the scheme from central government is insufficient for what was originally envisaged, and we have to make the most of what we have been offered.

Barnard Gate

There is work in Barnard Gate to strengthen the bridge on the old A40. Once that is finished, the County Council will address the ongoing problem at the more westerly junction with the A40, which is both dangerous and difficult to use. It is likely that only left turns will be allowed at the junction, which may inconvenience a high proportion of current users, or at least require them to take a different route.

Proposed Road Closure between Northmoor and Standlake

Thames Water have said they will shut the road to Standlake from 17 January potentially to the end of February for major watermains work. They have the legal right to do this, and the County Council does not have the power to stop them. However the suggested alternative routes will make it very difficult for people to get to school in Standlake from Northmoor or to Bartholomew School from Standlake. I am working with the parish councils to try to get a rethink from the contractor.

Bus improvement

There continues to be a lot of work with the bus companies to make services as useful as possible. The H2 service is being doubled in frequency, and is a brilliant way to get to the JR and to Headington. There is a more frequent service from Standlake to Abingdon and Witney. The government has awarded additional money for Oxfordshire, mainly for capital projects such as buying new buses, rather than to allow support for fares, and has of course increased the cap on fares from £2 to £3 from next year.

Budget

The budget cycle at the County Council is well underway, although the government is being unhelpfully opaque about what money will be available for local government. We have not, for instance, been told whether the rebate of the Employer NI contributions for council employees will be made from grants already announced. We certainly don't expect that there will be reimbursement for the additional costs being incurred by suppliers and partners, for instance in adult social care. Our final proposals for the budget will be published once the government settlement is made in December. Initial proposals went public at the end of last week and a

consultation is open – it would be good to hear from many residents. The budget has to be agreed by the council in February.

Flooding

Once again we have had the sort of rain that we formerly expected once in a century. One of the areas that will be addressed in the budget is flood resilience. We are getting much more frequent flood events because of climate change. Flooding is happening in places that have not habitually had issues, as well as in places that have flooded more regularly. We have announced that, among other things, we will spend a substantial amount of improving the drainage associated with the road network.

There was a Flooding summit last week for key stakeholders to address the issues that are affecting places like Bablock Hythe.

A reminder that there is a flood tool kit for Oxfordshire at <https://www.oxfordshirefloodtoolkit.com/> And in an emergency residents should call the Fire Service.

Winter Fuel Allowance

Winter Fuel Allowance is now means-tested, at a level of about £13k pa. This will affect far more people than is fair. Only those in receipt of pensioner credit will get WFA. Despite opposition from the Labour group at the County Council, we agreed to write to the Chancellor to ask her to review the policy, and to ensure that we financially support organisations helping pensioners to claim what they are entitled to. We work with, among others, the excellent Citizens Advice in Witney. Please do point people in their direction if they need assistance.

Recycling Centres

The County Council is going to introduce a booking system for household waste and recycling centres, including Dix Pit, in order to reduce queues and improve efficiency. It is likely to come into operation before the Redbridge site, in the City, is closed for refurbishment. We expect that the booking system will have the additional benefit of removing the abuse of the system by trade waste being disguised as household waste.

<https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/recycling-centre-booking-system/>

Season's Greetings

And finally, as this is the last report of the year, could I wish all residents and all parish councillors a very Merry Christmas, and a successful 2025.

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

WODC Councillor Report Steve Cosier Dec 24

WINTER FUEL PAYMENTS

At Full Council a motion was passed with regards to winter fuel payments. The Executive has since considered a report at Informal Executive covering both the aspects of the motion but also our wider support to people facing financial hardship.

I would like to update you on the work being done by the Council across a range of areas:

The Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT) programme

This scheme, being delivered by our Revenues and Benefits Team, is a new and innovative way to use data to target support for people at risk of crisis. Working with Policy in Practice, our data will be combined with other data and analysed to identify households at risk and they will then be sent targeted communications to help them access relevant support and avoid crisis.

The Household Support Fund

The Household Support Fund comes to upper tier authorities only and Oxfordshire County Council approves a small discretionary pot to the district councils in Oxfordshire. The latest round of HSF funding has just been agreed at the OCC cabinet meeting in November. We have been planning the distribution of this targeted financial support ahead of this decision and we have now issued communications letting residents know how the funding will be used in preventing homelessness and providing direct payments to residents in receipt of certain benefits.

Engaging with communities and charity partners

The council is actively engaging with communities and charity partners around cost-of-living impacts for a number of years – providing funding, advice and wider support. More recently we have delivered a wide range of support:

Direct communications out to community networks via:

- the Community Wellbeing newsletter via direct and targeted emails to 3rd sector partners at events and network meetings such as the West Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Alliance.
- The Council's Resident Support Worker remains available to support any residents facing financial barriers to accessing food or energy. The phone line is 01993 861077.
- The Council will provide support to Age UK who are running several pop-up events across West Oxfordshire during the Autumn (through the 3-year service level agreements). They have a particular push on Pension Credit and provide a variety of resources to share with communities.
- The Community Wellbeing team oversees the distribution of the 'discretionary' element of Household Support Fund (HSF). HSF 5, which covered the period April to September 2024, has been distributed to 3rd sector organisations who work with those who are vulnerable and face financial barriers to accessing food and energy.

Using our communications channels to inform residents of support:

WODC have been issuing communications across a wide range of channels in recent months to encourage people to take up financial support where it's needed. This has been in support of some large national campaigns run by Government departments and charities encouraging take up of pension credit.

WODC have:

- Shared campaign messaging around the pension credit campaign across all the council channels including social media (Facebook, Next-door, Instagram, LinkedIn) and the councils e- newsletter

- Included contacts in the annual WODC Voice magazine which was delivered to all residents from 18th November. We will look to include more financial support information in the council tax bill due to be issued in March 2025.
- We maintain their Cost-of-Living page on the website and also keep a prominent link on the website home page
- The Council's Cost of Living leaflet is widely distributed and is now being used by Age UK. It includes contacts for a wide variety of support organisations. It mirrors the information on the Council's website. In addition, our Resident Support Worker has produced a version tailored especially to older residents.

MENTAL HEALTH

At Full Council I supported a motion to help the Council's Mental Health Champion and officers to increase the council's support for staff and residents suffering with mental health issues. The council has agreed to join the Zero Suicide Alliance and provide signposting to cost of living material in their literature, use the on-line community hub and in provide support in arrears letters. Members voted for my amendment below to help the council:

- *That the leader of the council write to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care urging that the government ensures that the suicide prevention strategy is fully funded, with sufficient resources allocated to local councils to assist in their front-line suicide prevention efforts.*
- *That the leader of the council write to our local MPs to urge them to lobby the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to ensure that the Government extends the suicide prevention funding to support its new suicide prevention strategy.*

PHASE 1: ELECTORAL REVIEW OF WEST OXFORDSHIRE

West Oxfordshire District Council is subject to an electoral review by The Local Government Boundary Commission for England ("the Commission"). The review is primarily aimed at addressing variances in the numbers of electors in wards across the district, with 12 of 27 wards outside a variance of +/-10%, and Witney West ward at +31%. The Commission has a duty set out in law to review every local authority "from time to time" and West Oxfordshire was last reviewed in 2001.

WODC are Phase 1 of the review, and that is to consider the future size of the Council i.e. the number of Councillors, also known as Members, on West Oxfordshire District Council. The Council is invited to submit a Council Size Proposal to the Commission by mid-February 2025.

Regardless of what the future size of West Oxfordshire District Council is, the Council will be required to hold whole-Council elections on new ward boundaries in May 2027. Councillors elected at the local elections in May 2026 will serve a one-year term.

Thank you

Steve

Steve.cosier@westoxon.gov.uk

MP and WODC Councillor Report Charlie Maynard Dec 24

Farmers - I met with a big group of local farmers in parliament who had travelled to London to raise their concerns about the impact of Labour's tax changes on the family farm. We had a really useful and constructive conversation. I believe that the tax changes represent an existential threat to family farms and that is on top of many other problems that have been piled on farmers. The government is accelerating the withdrawal of the Basic Payment Scheme, is hiking both national insurance contributions and the minimum wage and is insufficiently activist in ensuring that all agricultural gains aren't pocketed by the supermarkets and processors at the expense of the farmers. There is also little prospect of the reduced access both to international markets and labour caused by the last government being resolved.

Winter Fuel Allowance – I voted against this cut and I am now working with colleagues to see what can be done to contact pensioners who are still eligible for their winter fuel allowance but not claiming it, with the goal of increasing the uptake of allowance from those most in need.

Assisted Dying vote – last month I organised a discussion in the Corn Exchange in Witney with four well qualified experts setting out the case both for and against the Bill. The auditorium was filled to the brim and the audience had the chance to ask lots of questions. On November 29th I and 329 other MPs voted in favour of the Bill. The Bill now passes to the next of many stages, where it will be considered, line by line, at committee before the report and third reading stages and review by the Lords. I was relieved and pleased to see serious, considered, respectful debate by all parties, with very fair arguments being made by both sides.

Sewage – I met with Emma Hardy, the under-secretary of state responsible for sewage. I made the case to her that our rivers, our communities, our country and her government would all be much better off if Thames Water was placed into Special Administration now and its debts massively written down. Allowing vulture funds to end up in control of the company, as will be the case through the proposed restructuring, will serve no one and will result in the company continued to be swamped with debt. She does not appear minded to take action, at least for now.

Flooding – Storm Bert was brutal. Some areas such as Eastfield Road and Hailey Road in Witney came up in a flash; some like Bablock Hythe, were slower to arrive but worse in scale. Thank you to everyone who helped out. We have a long term issue which is getting worse, with flooding becoming both more frequent and more severe. I am going to be taking part in the review process as to what worked well and what needs to be improved. I also asked Steve Reed, Secretary of State for the Environment, for help with funding the modelling regarding rivers including the Thames, Windrush and Evenlode. Yes, we need to be as prepared as possibly can be as a community, but we also need to work with the communities and farmers upstream on a medium to long term plan to lower and slow the flood crest through holding more water back further upstream. Getting this modelling done is a key early step in that process. Mr. Reed said he would revert with more news after the New Year.

Health – on the back of Dr Steve Bright's suggestion, Standlake resident and Witney GP, I asked Wes Streeting for his help in accelerating putting QR codes on the NHS App so that patients can be more quickly and more safely processed. One of the things I most enjoy doing in parliament is pushing forward constituents' practical, sensible suggestions, such as this one. Mr. Streeting responded positively to the suggestion. We will be following up.

PMQs – I asked my first Prime Minister's Question. I asked Keir Starmer that while I recognised that he and his party had decided to continue the Conservative's economically ruinous decision to leave the single market and customs union, would he agree with the principle that where it is in our country's interest to maintain alignment with EU standards so we can better sell our products internationally, we align; and where it is in our interests to diverge, we diverge?" I did not get a clear answer.

Witney Rail - the 2024 Planning and Land Use Barrister of the Year has kindly offered his services for free to help us incorporate the rail project into West Oxfordshire's Local Plan. We have a meeting on Friday 6th with key WODC councillors and officers to discuss this further. I continue to work hard on this given both the dire state of the A40 and the new government's very onerous housebuilding targets for West Oxfordshire.

Christmas! – I very much enjoyed the Lights switch-ons in both Witney and Carterton. I wish you and your loved ones a very, very merry Christmas and a happy 2025.

Lysette Nicholls Update on the Bablock Hythe Flood Revetment Grant

Overview

We have finally managed to get 3 quotes with one contractor giving us two different options for the bank revetment work at Thameside Court. We had contacted 15 contractors in total and six contractors visited the site and five of them have stated that the bank needs a more structural solution. Some contractors subsequently withdrew from the project. There is currently an eclectic mix of solutions along the bank currently to try and protect homes, but some have no protection, and many residents are vulnerable along this part of Thameside Court.

The bank that is adjacent to Thameside Court is in some areas considerably worse than others. A few homes are precariously close to the bank which is failing. When we had our initial meeting with the officer from the Local Flood Authority some properties were identified as a higher priority, so we are currently focusing on this area.

Where quotes are higher contractors have advised they are happy to do it in sections so that we can apply for further grants. The aim would be to have a consistent approach along the bank with EA approval, but this will take time.

Local Flood Authority

A pre application was submitted to the EA by the LFA and they have responded now so we have some steer. The ecology survey has also been concluded which the LFA organised and funded. We had a meeting today and the application for the FRAP is being submitted. They are setting up the Purchase Order so that once the invoice comes in the money can be paid to the Parish Council so they can pay this invoice. We are up against it time wise, but the officers at the LFA are advising and steering us. The EA may want the licence changing or have conditions so there is a process to this application.

One of contractors however does issue licences on behalf of the EA so we are hoping their knowledge may help with the process.

Please can the Parish Council approve permission to apply for the FRAP licence.

Landowner Adjacent to Thameside Court

We would like to thank all those that have assisted us and especially the landowner adjacent to Thameside Court who has been flexible and allowing us to conduct the relevant surveys and allowing contractors on site so we can get a true understanding of what is required. The landowner was upset to read a recent post online as they had been doing everything to help and support this project and we would like this noted.

The landowner also had a contractor lined up to do desilting along the stretch adjacent to Thameside Court but whilst some work was started the contractor that was booked to do the work was unfortunately delayed and this is now not possible until the levels drop. They have every intention of doing this however this alone will not stop the flooding as the licence the EA has given is limiting.

Further Actions

We will be reaching out to our MP as we would like him to look at how to manage the water further upstream. There is a correlation to flooding in Thameside Court when sluices and locks are opened and this has repercussions at Bablock Hythe, in particular Thameside Court.

Lysette Nicholls & Stacey Reed, Project Team