

# Minutes of the Northmoor Parish Council Meeting Held on Tuesday 7 January 2025 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

WODC Cllr Steve Cosier

1 member of the public

1. **Apologies for absence.** To receive apologies for absence.  
OCC Cllr Dan Levy and 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 resident had submitted a question regarding the field in Moreton Lane that was potentially being gifted to the Parish from Hansons.

As there was just a question and no background information it has been covered in the Correspondence section at paragraph 8 below.

The resident expressed their desire to have a discussion around the subject but as the council had not received any background information they were not in a position to do so.

The clerk requested that the resident supply the background information so that the council could be in a position to decide if it should be added to the agenda for discussion.

The clerk then reminded everyone that Parish Council Meetings are not open forums, they are meetings held in public not public meetings and so members of the public can only ask questions on items in the agenda.

The resident then questioned why the minutes of the December meeting had said that historically the precept and reserves were insufficient.

The clerk restated that it was from the Internal Auditor's recommendations, as per paragraph 9a of the December meeting minutes, (copied below with the relevant parts in italics for ease of reference)

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 as 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).

4. **Minutes.** To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 3 Dec 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 sent an email in response to Cllr Cosier's report. The words from the email are 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. He added that whilst there were positives in having just one organisation to refer to, local knowledge may be lost and Parish Councils could face a more difficult future so they would need to work together.
  - c. MP and WODC Cllr Maynard sent a report, a copy of which is included at the end of these minutes.
  - d. The Chair asked if the village Christmas tree could be supplied earlier in future. Cllr Florey offered to ask St Hughs and possibly Cokethorpe School if we could have their tree once they closed for the Christmas break in mid-December.
  - e. Cllr Reed stated that she would be asking Green Wood Parks if they would give permission to put a sand box on the grass by the Parish Council notice board so that it was closer to the area that regularly flooded.  
She also suggested that we should start advertising the spare allotment plots before the new season in March.  
*The Clerk agreed to start the advertising soon.*  
The Chair noted that the water had been turned off in November to prevent burst pipes. Cllr Reed added that the FRAP (Flood Risk Activity Permit) has been submitted for the Bablock Hythe bank revetment work and there should be an update from the team at the next meeting. Time was now of the essence as the clearance work needed to be completed before the nesting season.  
Cllr Cosier added that he had suggested to Stanton Hardcourt Parish Council that they needed to take responsibility for the ditches in their parish that run towards Bablock Hythe.
  - f. Cllr Florey reported that the old wooden sand box that was in the playpark had been dismantled and that the sand was now held in bulk bags in the track near to the Chapel Lane gate. Quotes and funding were being sought for a replacement box which would be sited against the fence between the playpark and the Village Hall car park.  
Cllr Brangwin had not received a valid response from WODC regarding any sand bin specifications or designs, as their reply was regarding salt bins.
  - g. The Clerk reported the following points:
    - i. There were some forthcoming training opportunities that would benefit the Clerk and Council, namely New Clerks' Finance on Tue 28 Jan for £35 which entitled the candidate to attend a second course free. The second course would be Year End & Audit for Councils over £25,000 on Tue 25 Feb. There was also Commenting Effectively on Planning Applications 19 May £30.  
The council agreed that the Clerk should attend the courses.
    - ii. There were ongoing discussions between the Clerk, Thames Water's contractor, and Cllr Levy regarding the proposed closure of Standlake Road on 20 January for 6 weeks to replace the rising main. It had been suggested that as the pipes were in the

verge the contractor consider traffic control rather than complete closure. At the time of the meeting there had been no progress.

iii. There were still some outstanding recommendations from the Internal Audit, namely a financial risk assessment was needed along with a Section 137 grant policy and a document management policy. There was also the requirement to purchase a laptop and mobile phone for Parish Council use.

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

a. To consider the following payments:

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the following invoices for payment which Cllr Brangwin would authorise online.

i. £221 for hire of the Village Hall from Jan to Dec 24.

b. To note the following payments that were approved previously by email:

i. £290 to Scott Gillam for October & November's grass cutting.

ii. £150 S137 donation to First and Last Mile.

iii. £2.93 to Castle Water for October & November's allotment water.

iv. £35 Direct Debit to ICO for Data Protection Fee

7. **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:

There were no Planning Applications received

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

a. The Clerk received an email from a resident asking what progress had been made with the field that was potentially being gifted to the Parish from Hansons, and how much in legal costs had been accrued".

The Clerk responded that there had been no progress as there had been no correspondence received on the subject, apart from that from the resident, and no background information had been given to the Clerk.

9. **Items for information or next Agenda only.** All items for the next agenda to be submitted to the Clerk by Mon 27 Feb 25.

10. **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 4 Mar 25 commencing at 7:00pm.

11. There being no further business the meeting closed at 19:50pm.

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

## **OCC Councillor Report Dan Levy Dec 24**

As Steve's report understandably covers County Council issues as well as WODC, there isn't much point in me replicating it.

The Cabinet meeting to approve our approach is on Thursday, and is of course open to the public. We are going to propose a Thames Valley Mayoral Combined Authority and an all Oxfordshire Unitary council, but there will be a lot of bumps on the road before we get there.

The only other key thing to add is that the budget will be determined on 11 Feb. Among other things, we will be restoring the annual clearing of gulleys which had been made once every four years in the 2021 budget, and a very large investment of £46m in roads maintenance.

Dan

## **WODC Councillor Report Steve Cosier Jan 24**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **MP and WODC Councillor Report Charlie Maynard Jan 24**

Everyone – a very Happy New Year to you all. I am sorry I could not make it to the parish council meeting on Tuesday evening. I hope you all had a good break and enjoyed lots of time with your loved ones. 2025 is moving fast. Here are a few updates of what I am up to.

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

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

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

**Walkies** – I'm planning a walk of the ward next Saturday, 18th starting super early at Pinkhill, heading through Sutton, Stanton Harcourt, Bablock Hythe, Northmoor, Standlake and Aston. I am keen to meet as many people as possible along the way and please do join me for part or all of the way. Details coming separately, but I plan on being in Northmoor in time for the market. Hopefully see you there!

Charlie