

WOOTTON PARISH COUNCIL

Annual Parish Meeting

Monday 17th May 2021 at 7pm, Burditch Hall

Minutes

1. Approval of minutes of the Annual Meeting held on 13th May 2019 at 7pm.

The Minutes from the Annual Parish Meeting held on 13th May 2019 were unanimously approved

2. Report from Chairman of Wootton Parish Council

Wootton Parish Council – Chairman’s Report

It has been two years since our last Annual General Meeting. A lot has happened during that period, mostly plague related.

Life goes on.

Wootton Parish Council has had seven councillors, up to the recent election. They are:

- Karen Braden
- Simon Gabbattis
- Barry Gubbins
- Len Seymour
- Joan Thomas
- Andy Warner
- and myself.

I would like to record my thanks to them for all the time and effort they put in on behalf of our community. Of course, we all must thank Bobs Damerell our Clerk, for all he has done for Wootton Parish Council over the years.

Karen, Simon and Barry have retired for the foreseeable future and Jane Hoare has taken one of the places.

Activities of WPC have included:

- There have been a number of planning applications approved during the years.
- The annual accounts have been approved and are about to be signed off by the Responsible Financial Officer as is the internal audit report for 2020/21.
- The balance brought forward to 1st April 2021 is £10,038 and in the no. 2 account £1,198 which is owed to Wootton Playing Field. Fixed Assets held at £86,856.
- Five grants totalling £3,100 were paid out in 2019/20 and six grants totalling £4,450 in 2020/21 (2018/2019 - £3,763) in response to precept applications.
 - These precepts were to be paid in two halves to match the precept payments to us from WODC.
 - I would remind applicants that we would like to see full details of how this year’s precepts have been spent and a detailed breakdown of how monies requested will be spent in 2021/2022.

- Sadly, the provision of public transport is far from satisfactory but at least we have a limited service from Our Bus Bartons for which WPC gladly continues to make a financial contribution.
- I would also like to thank all the organisations whose members do so much for the village, to the Responsible Financial Officer (Ric Adams) and the Internal Auditor (Phil Parker) and of course to our County and District colleagues.
- Finally, I would like to encourage more members of the Parish not only to consider becoming Councillors but to attend our meetings which are open to all. This enables the Council to hear first hand the feelings and thoughts of those we are here to represent.

3. Presentation by Community Police Officer:

No report was provided

4. Presentations by village organisations:

Wootton village organisations are invited to attend and may make a short report:

- *Wootton Stores – No report was provided*
- *Wootton C of E Primary School – No Report provided*
- *Outreach – No Report provided*
- *Sports Club – No Report provided*
- *Playing Field – Cllr Warner read out the report below*

Wootton Memorial Playing Field Management Committee

Annual Report for Parish Council, May 15th 20201

Activities:

- The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the playing field usage this year, with no fundraising undertaken as no social activities have gone ahead. Nevertheless a good level of enthusiasm and key activities were undertaken, including:
 - Wootton sports - both football teams made the most of a reduced season.
 - Multiple aged youth pitches marked out a great success to get local kids and parents using the field.
 - The 2020 precept (£1500) was used to pay for sharpening of the gang mower, which is now in regular use.
 - A new sign was also erected, welcoming the public to the playing field.

Thanks to volunteers:

- We are very grateful to a good core of volunteers who have helped to maintain the field voluntarily, including several with many other commitments.
- We are particularly grateful to John Benfield for his regular grass mowing of the playing field for many years
- We are very sad to mark the passing of Mickey Lewis, who has been a major force in encouraging village youth interest in using the playing field.
- This year also marked the stepping down of Ann Day as Chairperson of the PFMC, after many years of stalwart and expert service – for which we are immensely grateful

Post pandemic plans:

- We plan to open up for the community as soon as we are out of lock down, with sanitisers provided on site. This will include providing marked out grass tennis courts etc
- Ambition to in 2021 to approach community to gauge interest in multi use hard surface court (tennis, netball, basketball....) and investigate location and project cost for future PC submission and discussion. We will also undertake fundraising for new park benches.

James Bateman, PFMC Secretary, May 2021

- *Village Hall – No report was provided*
- *Wootton Conservation Trust - The Clerk read out the report below*

WCT Chairman's annual report 2020/21

As this will be my last chairmen's statement I intend to reflect a little on the past and the future as well as recording events of the past year. Our emphasis on conservation of one the last extensive remnants of lowland sedge bog and scarce ancient limestone grassland has depended on the help of other landowners and sympathetic contractors. The Trust has benefitted from government subsidy for 22 years so far, firstly the Environmentally Sensitive Upper Thames Tributaries area (ESA) and then the Environmental Stewardship Scheme (HLS and ELS) that followed for land owners committed to best conservation practices as a condition of public subsidy. However, a new subsidy regime is being prepared that will come into force by 2024, possibly even more focussed on good practice.

Management under our existing agreements strictly limits the numbers of cattle and sheep to ensure that at no time is overgrazing possible. It requires grass to be short enough to encourage wild flowers and limits mowing for weed control to generally no more frequently than 3 years (4 years + for the sedge in rotation). Before we were able to acquire the land for conservation, the farmstead at Home Farm had been sold for conversion and Manor Farm had similarly been broken up.

Dairy farms no longer exist in the area and most grassland has been converted to arable. Other nearby conservation areas have struggled to manage grassland but the Trust has been fortunate to have the services of one of the last stock farmers based in Middle Barton. If in future it becomes necessary to find a replacement, it is likely that it will be necessary to use the environmental subsidy to buy in grazing assuming that a farmer with sheds will be willing to help. This problem is having to be faced across the wildlife conservation sector.

The first major activity of the year was to attempt to redress the consequence of under grazing of the Dorn Warren Bank field. It had always been our intension to encourage wild flowers there and orchids had been flourishing. However, a coarse invasive grass known as tor grass has become dominant. We found that we are not alone with this problem that has for instance smothered out grassland flora on Stonesfield common and is indeed a problem throughout northern Europe. After advice from the best minds on the subject we have had help with drinking troughs and pumps to facilitate intensive grazing after mowing under a special derogation.

Similarly a comprehensive survey of the Glyme catchment to control nitrate pollution and damage to river banks by livestock resulting in silting was followed with financial help for new fencing etc.

Deterioration of internal fencing had become a problem as fence posts now have a short life as they can no longer be adequately chemically treated. Priority had been given to boundary fences first and a comprehensive survey has shown this to be a continuing problem throughout the site and a contract was let during the year.

A project to discourage access to the Dorn Meadow, the quietest area of the meadows was helped by surprise funding for a new fence along the main drainage channel. We have had special subsidy to maintain small fields but grazing is easier if cattle and sheep can roam freely and the division of Long Meadow into flood land and limestone bank is not being restored.

A cooperative project with RSPB and the school to feed and encourage farmland birds is underway and the regular use of the meadows by the school is most welcome.

We welcome and have come to rely on the regular assistance of the Oxford Conservation Volunteers who as always have tackled a wide variety of tasks such as scrub control on Long Meadow. Covid restrictions have limited consultation on outstanding issues such as finding a volunteer to be trained in safety inspection of trees, maintenance of new plantings, the need to program removal of silt from water courses, always difficult with unpredictable flooding, encouragement of bats and nesting birds, scrub management, hedgerow management etc.

J H Fletcher, Trust Chairman

- *PCC – The Clerk read out the report below*

Report from the PCC to the Parish Council.

Once again, we wish to thank the Parish Council for the grant towards the maintenance of the Churchyard and Church Clock. This is very much appreciated. Along with most organisations, the last two years have not been easy. We have been grateful for the continued support of Church members and the community. Church Services have continued on “Zoom” and we have been able to have some Services in Church, in accordance with the Guidelines laid down during the Pandemic. Sadly, however, we could not hold our usual events for fundraising and contact with the wider community. We did manage a toned-down Christmas Bazaar, and a “Takeaway Tea” Afternoon! The Church Clock has been well-maintained, and adjusted when the hour changes, even if a day or so late! We had a couple of changes in the Contractors who have been mowing the Churchyard, but now we have an amiable and enthusiastic young man who is doing an excellent job. The front of the Churchyard, particularly the roses and the area around the Peace Memorial, has been cared for by some parishioners, and we are grateful to them for their help in ensuring that the surroundings of the Church are well-kept and looking good. We are going forward in faith, hoping once again, to be more involved in the community, and continuing to provide a place for worship, reflection, and meeting together.

- *Wootton Toddlers Group – No Report provided*
- *Wootton Cricket Club - No Report provided*
- *Wootton Relief in Need to give accounts - No Report provided*
- *Outgoing County Councillor Ian Hudspeth provided the report below*

CLLR IAN HUDSPETH Oxfordshire County Council ANNUAL REPORT 2021

I'm sure nobody could have imagined the year that we have had, the pandemic has completely changed the way we all are working and living. We are in a situation where we must learn to live with COVID as we approach a new normal.

My thanks go to all Oxfordshire County Council staff who have worked incredibly hard over the last year as well as being flexible to ensure we provide services for the vulnerable in Oxfordshire. I would also like to thank all the community groups that were created to assist locally which helped all services to be delivered.

Oxfordshire County Council has worked hard with all partners including West Oxfordshire District Council and the NHS to support residents during these difficult times. Last year when there were problems with getting personal protective equipment, we purchased £2 million which we then distributed to our care providers particularly the smaller organisations who struggled to get bulk discounts or even just a delivery. I made phone calls to some local suppliers who helped us get supplies to those who needed them. We also provided every school with a pack of PPE before they reopened and have been working with all schools to assist them to be COVID secure. I want to say a big thank you to all teaching staff as they have continued to provide education whether that be online or in the classroom to continue teaching for key worker and vulnerable children.

We have received extra funding from central government to assist during the crisis which meant we made some in year budget adjustments in September to enabling us to deliver a balanced budget by the year end. There were some savings due to not using office space and travel which we will look at for future budgets as we approach the new normal.

The Council set its budget 9th February with £400,000 extra funding for drainage/vegetation clearance and 20 mph speed limits in villages that want them. The heavy winter rainfall has highlighted some areas that require additional work to keep the drains clear, I'll be making sure that those areas are cleared more frequently. It's important to coordinate the work with WODC to ensure the kerbs are clear otherwise the rain simply pushes the detritus into the drains. The additional funding for 20 mph speed limits will be to work with Parish Councils that see a lower limit as part of the solution to bring down road safety.

Other key points of the budget:

- A total of £1m long-term funding would be invested in expanding the youth offer in Oxfordshire. A study is due to report in the Spring on the needs of young people and how the wider partnership of the voluntary, community and public services can best provide support. An additional £500,000 of one-off accelerator funding will also be provided to develop sustainable long term approaches and help tackle the impacts of the pandemic on young people.
- An extra £4m will be added to the adult social care budget for 2021/22. This includes a total of £1.35m for managing risks such as provider sustainability.
- The Better Care Fund (BCF) is a programme spanning both the NHS and local government. It seeks to join up health and care services so that people can manage their own health and wellbeing and live independently in their communities for as long as possible. For 2020/21, the County Council agreed with health partners that £1.2m of the improved BCF for Oxfordshire would be used to support activities to deliver better outcomes over the winter period in the county. However, it was one-off funding. The council is proposing to continue the funding for 2021/22, which would be used to support measures to help people be discharged from hospital, enable new ways of working and better outcomes for residents.
- The number of adults of working age with physical disabilities has increased during 2020/21 and there are forecast overspends for both care at home and for residential care. Whilst this is being managed within pooled

resources between the NHS and council in 2020/21, it is not anticipated that it can be maintained in the longer run. Pending a review of the needs and activity for these service users, £750,000 has been proposed to support expenditure on assessed care needs from 2021/22.

- Since it was formed in 2017, the County Council has been part of a joint partnership to procure and manage services for single homeless people in Oxfordshire since it was formed in 2017. A further one-off contribution to the partnership of £500,000 was included in the budget, with £250,000 of this allocated for 2020/21 and the same in 2021/22. The council is proposing to continue the council's support for the partnership from 2022/23.
- During the period of the pandemic, more people have chosen to take up drugs and alcohol residential rehabilitation services and this has led to the council proposal to put £50,000 more into existing services.
- A £300,000 fund to support innovative community-developed projects and activities that improve people's health and wellbeing in Oxfordshire is proposed. A total of £150,000 of this will be new funding and £150,000 will come from existing public health budgets.
- An extra £330,000 will be invested into children's services on increasing early intervention services, increasing the skill base of children's social care workers and improving special educational needs related services.
- A total of £100,000 would be invested in issues linked to digital exclusion.
- A total of £81,000 will be invested in providing services for domestic violence and £150,000 into apprenticeships.

We will continue to find savings by transforming the way we work not just within the council but with our partners. This is to protect frontline services along with new investment as part of Oxfordshire County Council's budget proposals for 2021/22. This includes a proposed 1.99% rise in basic council tax rise, plus an extra 1% specifically for investment in adult social care, making a total of 2.99%. we recognised that this year has been difficult financially for some residents and we wanted to keep the tax increase as low as possible.

Given the circumstances I think we produced a good budget that provides investment for the future along with safeguarding current services. I was disappointed that the Liberals failed to produce any alternatives and voted against these proposals at the budget meeting. The Labour group did put forward some proposals which were accepted and supported the overall budget.

There was good news for West Oxfordshire residents as they benefit from a funding deal with Homes England for £102m from the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) dedicated to providing a significant upgrade to the A40 west of Oxford.

The key route carries up to 32,000 vehicles a day on the section between Witney and Oxford and is single carriageway in some sections.

The sum of £102 million will deliver the Housing Infrastructure Fund 2 A40 Smart Corridor which comprises:

- An extension of the dual carriageway from Witney to the proposed Eynsham Park and Ride, including improving cycling facilities along the route
- An extension of the A40 westbound bus lane from west of Duke's Cut canal and railway bridges close to Oxford near to the proposed Eynsham Park and Ride
- A40 capacity and connectivity improvements to widen access at Duke's Cut canal and railway bridges, extending the eastbound and westbound bus priority lane, prioritising bus rapid transit at this pinch point

This is in addition to the Local Growth Fund of £35 million which will deliver the west bound bus lane along with the Eynsham Park and Ride.

The work will increase A40 capacity for all users of the route between Witney and Eynsham, whilst providing a high-quality, congestion-free public transport, cycling and walking link for travel between Witney, Eynsham and Oxford to encourage residents and travellers to adopt active travel to slash emissions and improve air quality.

The development is great news for residents in the villages along the A4095 as it should reduce vehicles using the road as an alternative to the A40 in particular HGVs.

I can understand that some residents will ask how this will help them in other parts of the county. The real benefit will be seen in future years when the investment of over £600 million in highways will mean routes such as the A40/A4130/A415 will not require as much maintenance releasing funds that can be used elsewhere in the county.

Congratulations to all those involved in saving The White House pub in Bladon which is now owned by the community and reopened. It has been stop/start with the restrictions and I look forward to the complete reopening in summer. The work carried out has been fantastic and the new team are brilliant, working hard to produce good food. In Stonesfield the same process was followed with The White Horse which is listed as a community asset. The funds were raised which was brilliant news, but the pub was sold to another bidder. I hope that at some point the community scheme can buy the pub; if the community spirit is anything like that of Bladon it'll be a success. This is just the start and we all must remember to support our pubs if they are to survive and become sustainable particularly during the winter months. I try to support all the pubs in the division but my wife, Carolyn, thinks it's just an excuse for me to have a pint or glass of wine.

The recent reduction in the number of COVID-19 infections is welcome news as is the consequent reduction in the number of hospital admissions which reduces the pressure on the NHS. The vaccination programme is being rolled out at pace and again, I want to thank those helping to ensure everybody gets a jab as soon as possible. Oxfordshire County Council is working with its partners to assist where required and will continue to help protect vulnerable residents across the county.

The road map set out by the Government gives us a view of the way forward which is welcome news. However, we must all continue to play our part by observing the guidelines so that life can return to what will be a new normal as quickly as possible.

Stay safe and I wish you a better 2021 to come.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth

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Date of Next meeting: 9 May 2022