

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD IN THE JUBILEE HALL ON 12th MAY 2025

The meeting was attended by:

The Lewknor Parish Councillors:

- Mrs Caroline Hjorth
- Mr Duncan Boulton
- Mr Ray Hudson
- Mrs Margaret Poole
- Mr John Poole
- Mrs Andrea Fawell

Mrs Donna Evans (LPC Clerk)

Also present were:

- Clr Georgina Heritage (SODC and OCC)
- Angus Richards (Savills)
- Two residents

Item 1: INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

Mrs Hjorth opened the meeting. She thanked all those present for attending. All councillors congratulated Clr Heritage on the local elections and looked forward to continuing to work with her in both her roles for District and County.

Item 2: ANNUAL REPORT ON PARISH ACTIVITIES 2024/25

Every year it seems that much of the Council’s time is taken up with reporting problems right across our large Parish area, mostly to do with Highways but also footpaths, fly tipping and general maintenance. This past year has been no exception and I want to say again a huge thank you to fellow Councillor’s and many residents for their tireless efforts in reporting issues, that mean a lot to everyday living in our beautiful neighbourhood. Once again the annual litter pick went brilliantly in both Lewknor & Postcombe, and Biffa collected the 45 bags full very quickly!

Our big news this year has been that we said goodbye to our Clerk Barbara after 12 years of keeping us all in order, but even bigger news is that our new Clerk Donna is as competent at organising us!

Also, we said goodbye to Les Gordon, and thanked him for many years contributing to the Council, and we do miss the humour too! Just last month we co-opted Andrea to the Council and look forward to her expertise and help.

We’re very pleased to report that we were successful in securing an SODC Capital Grant for 50% after accepting Solar Generation UK proposals to site twenty six panels on the Hall roof, this will give huge benefit to the future cost of running the Hall and hopefully will lead us to greener credentials. We are actively trying to apply for other grants to make up the difference, so if anyone is aware of organisations please do get in touch.

During this year we’ve seen the village shop given a makeover and rented by a local wedding dress Company as the tenant.

A defibrillator awareness evening arranged by the Community Heartbeat Trust was well attended in October. Brand new noticeboards for Postcombe and South Weston plus three planters in Postcombe to brighten up the grassed area at the entrance to Box Tree Lane. A big thank you to those who ensure all the planters are stocked and looking lovely, including

Chair:

Date:.....

the two at the entrance to Lewknor.

The Postcombe Speedwatch team have been very active for the second year; once again you have been warned!

Planning does seem to increase year on year, often creating more home space for residents and enhancing our valued group of villages. The largest of which this year is a sympathetic application approved for Knapp Farm, Lewknor, one of the many listed sites in the village. We are aware that several more applications are imminent, so the Council does urge all residents to submit their views in reply to new applications.

Lastly to thank fellow Councillors, and Donna for their attendance at training sessions, often taken in their own time, it all contributes to ensuring the smooth running of Parish Council.

Item 3: DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT

By Councillor Georgina Heritage

I hope that throughout the year I have captured all news and SODC activity in my monthly reports, which are available online via parish council websites and in some local newsletters. I very much encourage residents to contact me via georgina.heritage@southoxon.gov.uk if they have any questions, concerns or suggestions arising from my reports.

For this annual report I am highlighting some of the bigger news items from SODC from the past twelve months, and I do hope the following information will be of interest to residents:

Local Government Reorganisation

In 2024 the Government released a white paper on local government reorganisation which will mean that two-tier authorities (like we have in Oxfordshire) will end, and instead we must form Unitary authorities serving at least 500,000 residents. Unitaries must then combine to form a Combined authority serving a population of around 1.5 million, likely to be overseen by an elected mayor. Government will make the decision on the direction South Oxfordshire will take, however an initial proposal for "Ridgeway Council" has been submitted on behalf of South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and West Berkshire Council, which would see the three areas combined. This has been developed due to the demographic and economic similarities and historic ties between the areas. Following the government's request that Oxfordshire authorities submit interim proposals together, the County Council has submitted an outline proposal for the Ridgeway Council and North Oxfordshire Council to the government, alongside two other options being developed in Oxfordshire which include a county-wide Oxfordshire proposal. There will be opportunities in the coming months to hear the views of our communities before the final proposal is submitted, and the councils will also continue working positively and collaboratively with the other authorities in Oxfordshire.

SODC Budget 2025-26

The council met in February and approved its 2025-2026 Budget. Diligent financial management ensured that SODC could deliver a balanced budget and marks the first time in nine years that the council has not needed to transfer funds from reserves. Major funding will be made available to support the purchase of more affordable housing across South Oxfordshire. Having already committed £10 million to provide more safe, secure and compliant housing, purchased under the Local Authority Housing Funding (LAHF) schemes, the district council has now committed to make a further £10 million available to support the council's long-term ambitions to meet local housing need. The budget also includes funding to secure the future of the council's Community Hub on an ongoing basis. This valued

Chair:

Date:.....

service provides practical support and advice for those with cost-of-living concerns or who are finding life difficult. The councillor grant budget will increase by 50%, to £7,500 per councillor, while the Capital and Revenue grant schemes for voluntary organisations will continue. This is something we're particularly happy about at SODC, since many councils are not in a financial position to offer such grants programmes. The council will continue to fund an ongoing programme to improve leisure centres, including major decarbonisation & refurbishment projects at Thame Leisure Centre, such as solar panels, a sauna and gym equipment replacement. TLC opening hours will be maintained despite the high cost of energy, which renewables will help with. Council tax for services provided by South Oxfordshire District Council were set at £151.24 for a Band D property. This means just £2.91 per week for a wide range of services including waste and recycling collections, community support, leisure services, parks and play areas, housing and planning services, environmental health and licensing.

Joint Local Plan

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district councils worked together to produce a Joint Local Plan (JLP), which aims to help meet their local communities' need for affordable housing, jobs and infrastructure while tackling the climate emergency. Following a series of public consultations, the plan was submitted to Government in December 2024 for the examination stage. If successfully adopted, the plan will replace the existing Local Plans for both councils. In the new Plan, the councils have shown that there are enough new homes in the pipeline already. This means that there is no need to build on any extra new greenfield sites over the next 15 years, beyond what has already been allocated. Only one area of expansion has been earmarked, which is on the brownfield land owned by the Ministry of Defence at Dalton Barracks near Abingdon. Crucially, the plan also sets out new firmer environment policies so that development is net zero carbon and delivers twice the national level of biodiversity net gain to help with the recovery of nature. By completing and submitting the Joint Local Plan to an accelerated timetable, it will be tested against the previous housing numbers and government policies set in the National Planning Policy Framework 2023, rather than the new (higher) housing numbers and new policies of the new NPPF 2024. Although the Joint Local Plan was not required to meet the new higher housing numbers, and once adopted the housing numbers will be pinned to those in the Joint Local Plan for five years, the new NPPF does require us to calculate housing land supply differently, straight away. A key government change is that all authorities must now demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply, regardless the age of their local plan. This reversed the changes in the previous NPPF, which had withdrawn the 5 year land supply test for councils where their plan was less than five years old.

Haseley Trading Estate

For the Haseley Brook ward, one of the major topics over recent months has been the announcement from South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse councils that they are the new owners of Haseley Trading Estate and, subject to planning, the site will be used as a vehicle depot for waste and street cleaning fleet. This is something I was admittedly nervous about initially, particularly as I was concerned that local residents may assume the estate is intended to be a waste transfer station. It's very important to me that our residents can feel assured of transparency and our parish councils are fully informed. With this in mind, I contacted Andrew Busby, Head of Development and Corporate Landlord, who made direct contact with parish councils in Haseley Brook. To clarify, the new site would be used as a depot for parking vehicles and for vehicle maintenance. There would be no storage or disposal of waste. The current vehicle depot in Culham is due to be redeveloped for new

Chair:

Date:.....

homes and the existing contract and lease expires in 2026, and the councils have spent a very long time searching for a suitable new location to ensure statutory waste collection services are not interrupted in any way. The plan is to redevelop and retain one of the existing buildings and make improvements to the site, which will include improving the screening with planting, and managing the adjoining woodland which has suffered some neglect in recent years. They will also be reviewing their vehicle movements to keep the impact on the surrounding areas as minimal as possible. The new owners intend to be good neighbours and show respect to the surrounding villages. I am nonetheless highly conscious of and sensitive to the concerns of our local communities, and I will work with residents to ensure their voices are heard and their concerns are responded to. If residents have any questions about the intentions for Haseley Trading Estate I am very happy to offer support and assist in getting them answered.

Other Highlights

- Almost 49,000 residents are now signed up to the new garden waste permit scheme in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse districts. This kind of scheme is offered successfully by many other local authorities, including in neighbouring West Oxfordshire. The permits help the waste collection crews identify which bins should be emptied. This will ensure that only households that have paid for the service have their garden waste bins emptied and the changes are part of the councils’ ongoing work to improve the efficiency and value of public services.
- We were pleased to partner with Soha Housing, Thame Community Land Trust and Thame & District Housing Association to deliver 49 affordable homes in Thame and Wheatley, largely funded by Section 106 affordable housing grants from developer contributions.
- A strategy for the future of sports and leisure facilities was approved, and action plans will be created to work with sports clubs, town and parish councils, national governing bodies, leisure providers and other organisations to allocate funding and support projects going forward.
- Work has been ongoing to bring empty homes back into use, including working with owners and reviewing council tax on empty properties.

Item 4: COUNTY COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25 - TBC

Cllr Heritage apologized for no County Council Annual Report. Following the local elections, Cllr Heritage had only been in post a few days when the annual report was due. In due course there will be an update from County that will feed in parish council meetings.

Item 5: THE PROPOSED WATLINGTON ROAD DEVELOPMENT

Angus Richards from Savills (agents for All Souls College) was in attendance to give a short update and answer any questions he could from councillors and local residents.

Angus confirmed that the outline planning application for the proposed Watlington Road development of no more than 25 houses (10 affordable homes, 1, 2 and 3 beds built below the contour line) has now been submitted and they were waiting on this to be validated. Once validated and registration complete it will become public. The clerk confirmed no notification had been received as of yet. Cllr Hjorth did raise the issue that not all residents in the parish received a consultation document and so missed the opportunity to respond. Angus confirmed that Rainier had sent 410 consultation documents out via Royal Mail service.

Chair:

Date:.....

Cllr Hudson asked about whether the feedback from the public consultation would be shared. Angus confirmed that Rainier had collated this and it would be part of the application, therefore it will be made public in due course. The clerk did highlight that she had tried to contact Gavin Gallagher from Rainier regarding the feedback as he had said that he would share it with councillors however no response has been received on this. Cllr Fawell raised the issue of the timeframe for responding and it was confirmed that the minimum time for consultation was 10 days and it was exactly 10 days that was provided. Cllr Boulton raised that the consultation did limit the response that could be given.

Angus stated that the consultation process is there to help them sense check ahead of submitting the planning application but once this is validated there is then to be a consultation that goes with the planning application. Cllr Margaret Poole asked about the affordable housing and if families were going to be housed there then how would this impact school places as the local schools are already full. The question being, would the school have the capacity to take these children? Angus confirmed that Lewknor School would be one of the consultees on the application so they would be able to submit a response.

A resident raised the issue of the consultation and the responses received, Angus confirmed that Rainier would have to confirm that they have consulted as part of the application and then what they have done about the consultation. He would hope to see that they have demonstrated how they have taken those responses into consideration.

Cllr Heritage asked if the housing would be social housing or affordable to purchase. Angus said that his understanding was that it was policy driven and SODC would set out what they like to see in those instances. Angus confirmed he did not know the answer.

Angus stated that the solar proposal application is likely to come forward in the next few weeks. He confirmed that if this went ahead the grid connection would be going north, through the Adwell Estate, underground along the edge of the motorway.

Angus also confirmed that Knapp Farm development is now on the market, this includes the farmhouse. The farm house is being offered at the same time but is a separate dwelling and can be sold together or separately. The farmhouse comes with a planning application that got consented for a garage like building at the far side of the farmhouse. The intention is to not build it but to sell it with the application.

Cllr Boulton and Cllr Hudson asked if All Souls College have any further plans for development in the village at the moment. Angus confirmed that there were no further plans in the pipeline for land or development in the village however there was a caveat to that there are things that come and go but there were no plans in the pipeline. He confirmed that the resident had renewed his lease for the land next to Manor Close and there were no plans to build on this land at the present time, however in years to come this may lend itself to further development.

Cllr Hjorth thanked Angus for attending and stated that it had been very useful to have links with Angus in order to talk with All Souls College regarding the village and she and fellow councillors hoped to see this continue.

Item 6: MATTERS RAISED BY THE PUBLIC

No other issues were raised by residents.

The meeting closed at 7.50pm

Chair:

Date:.....