

Dorchester Parish Council

The Monthly Meeting of the Parish Council was held in the back room of the Village Hall on Wednesday 11th October 2023 commencing at 7.30 p.m. The Chairman, Cllr Mike Corran presided with Cllrs Mike Atkinson (MA); Charlotte Garside (CG), Chris Hill (CH); John Taylor (JT), Vice-Chairman; Becky Waller (BW); and Mark Williams (MW) present with the Clerk, Geoff Russell (GR), in attendance. Also present for part of the meeting were County and District Cllr Robin Bennett and eight residents.

Standing Items Part 1

1/10. Chairman's opening remarks

The Chairman, Cllr Mike Corran, reported that notice of the adoption of the Dorchester-on-Thames and Overy Conservation Area appraisal and boundary revision has just been received from the Heritage Office at South and Vales District Council. He invited Cllr Mark Williams to comment as MW has been the Councillor most involved with this process, which followed the Parish Council's Neighbourhood Plan and called for new areas to be included.

MW explained that the report – a 47-page document – has been formally adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document following a South Oxfordshire Cabinet Meeting which took place on September 29th. The Cabinet Report and Public Consultation Report, summarising the consultation responses and how they will inform a revised final document, can now be found on the District Council's website. The new Overy Conservation Area boundary encloses the whole of 'Cook's Field' and the area between the Thames Water Treatment Works and Meadside. This gives Overy extra protection from proposals that it should be used for gravel extraction, for example. The Demesne Field has not been added to the Dorchester Conservation Area but has been designated as an Area of Special Local Interest.

2/10 Apologies for Absence:

Apologies were accepted from Cllr Jon Brydges (JB) who had a work commitment.

3/10 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Cllr. Mark Williams concerning village maintenance work that is carried out by the company with whom he works, principally grass-cutting and grounds maintenance and Cllr Charlotte Garside on any matter concerning Bishops Court Farm where she is employed.

As the next-door neighbour, Cllr Chris Hill declared an interest in Planning Application P23/S3155 9 Bridge End. The SODC Democratic Services Manager has been consulted by the Clerk and his advice is that, although CH may speak on this issue, he must leave the room while the rest of the Council discusses the Application and makes its decision.

4/10 Public Participation

A representative of the Dorchester Branch of the Royal British Legion reminded the Council that the plans for the tradition Remembrance Sunday service would go ahead as normal on 12th November. **Action: Clerk to organise marshals to supervise the closure of High Street during the required period.**

5/10 Minutes of Parish Council Meeting held 6th September 2023

Subject to the addition of a short sentence from Cllr Becky Waller which was entered as Minute 24/9 and headed 'Governance', the Minutes as circulated were approved and signed by the Chairman, Cllr Mike Corran, as a true and accurate record. Before publication, **references to future actions will be marked in bold type.**

6/10 Council and District Council

Reports from Cllr Robin Bennett have been received for both the County and District Councils. They have been circulated to Councillors and will be included in the November edition of Dorchester News and published on the village website.

Focus of Meeting: Priority Items

7/10 What's On in Dorchester Event, Monday 16th October

The Clerk reported that support for this event would be in excess of 30 'exhibitors' and with some further confirmation of attendance expected the number could be approaching 40. Cllr Mike Atkinson has been helping with the organisation of the event and Cllr Jon Brydges has created the attractive advertisement and poster.

8/10 Parish Council Transformation and Governance Refresh

Cllr John Taylor introduced a paper prepared by BW, MC and himself which described that over the last six months they have discovered many issues and failures in the governance of Dorchester Parish C operations coupled with a general lack of rigour and oversight. The current governance falls short of today's standards and legal requirements for a public authority.

The paper proposed that we accept "We are where we are" and should now collectively move forward with a plan to significantly raise our standards and compliance.

All councillors and the clerk agreed that DPC has some major operational governance issues to be addressed and jointly committed to planning for the future with a transformational mind set.

The Council unanimously supported the paper and the proposed ten point plan which includes a number of items in today's agenda.

JT suggested that this could end with Dorchester Parish Council becoming one of the very few Oxfordshire Parish Councils accredited by the Local Council Awards Scheme (LCAS).

The Council unanimously supported this paper and the need to modernise and transform how the Council operates.

The Chairman proposed a paper, which has been circulated for immediate consideration by the Council and laid out the approach to updating the governance documents under which the PC operates.

In addition, the Chairman advised that governance documents will be brought to the Council in batches before the end of 2023 for approval. The first batch of policies were approved with minor amendments as follows:

- Retentions & Disposal Policy and Procedure – **Action Cllr Becky Waller to validate the retention period for Certificates of Employers Liability and Certificate of Public Liability is correct at 40 years**
- Complaints Policy – approved as drafted
- Equality & Diversity Policy - approved as drafted
- Health & Safety – typo on COSSH (should be COSHH) in 4.1; numbering from 6 onwards to be corrected; clause 6.1 (7.1 in old numbering) to read assets and activities”.

The Council acknowledged that some elements of these policies were not fully operational, and that implementation would be progressed with the new Clerk when in post. **Action: Clerk to ensure policies are loaded to the PC website**

9/10. Proposal for Recruitment of New Parish Clerk

JT recommended the appointment of the recruitment specialists 9-2-3 Jobs who would place details of the vacancy on their own and specialist websites such as those of The Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (OALC) and The Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) and deal with enquiries and applications in return for a flat success fee of £1,000. This was agreed and advertising will commence on 16th October with the deadline for applications being 3rd November. The wording of the advertisement and the job description and person specification has been drafted by JT and approved by the other members of the Recruitment Working Group, MC and MW. **Action: JT to address concerns from BW regarding the wording on the location of the role holder** in the advertisement

The specialist HR firm Gap HR of Goring was recommended by JT to provide professional support on matters including contracts with employees, the employee handbook, PAYE and pensions. Gap HR will ensure that DPC remains legally compliant in the future and suggests that they are appointed for a 18 months starting with their Gold package of services which has a monthly retainer of £395 plus VAT payable by Direct Debit. After three months the bulk of their work is expected to be complete, and this agreement will become a Bronze services package at £47 per month. The cost for the first 12 months of the contract will therefore be just over £1,600, although any work not covered by the prevailing service package will be chargeable at £195 per hour pro rata. The Council approved this recommendation with the decision to roll the contract forward to be made in September 2024.

10/10 Oxfordshire Councils' Councillor Code of Conduct

At its meeting on 11th January 2023 Dorchester Parish Council unanimously approved the adoption of the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire District Council Model Code of Conduct and this is displayed on the Parish Council's website. At its meeting this evening the Chairman proposed and the Council unanimously confirmed this decision and agreed that the Code will be reviewed annually commencing in May 2024.

11/10 AGAR Submission for 2020/2021

It was agreed by the three Councillors who had been members of the Parish Council in 2020/21 (MC, CH and MW) that the AGAR submission for 2020/2021, which had been reviewed by the Internal Auditor, Kevin Rose, in August 2023, could be signed by the Chairman so that it can be sent to Moore East Midlands, the auditors. Other Councillors abstained as they had not been in office at the time,

Action: The Clerk will now progress the AGAR submissions for 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 and present them to the Council meeting on 8th November.

Updates Other workstreams

12/10 Playground & Recreation Ground

The reports arising from the annual visit on 13th September by RoSPA Inspector Jonathan Peters have been received and digital copies are available. Although nothing has been identified as being of high risk, the reports contain several suggestions for action. A copy will be supplied to a specialist local company seeking a quotation for these actions taking into account the plans for further Playground improvement that are already approved.

Installation of the new 3/4 Practice Football Nets has taken place and is proving to be a popular facility. The new Exercise Equipment has kit delivered and in use. **Action: BW said that she would arrange for some professionally-led classes to be organised** to help people to become familiar with the opportunities that are offered by the new amenity.

Following the Council's considerable investment in play and recreation facilities, to be completed by further work in November, **Action: JT is to prepare a review of the way in which these assets are being managed** with the intention of identifying ways in which this

process should be improved. The Clerk repeated the need to identify people who would carry out regular inspections.

13/10 Dorchester 2030 and beyond

Around 100 survey responses have been submitted to date. **Action: JB/MC to arrange a poster campaign to promote completion of the questionnaires.** Also there will be a reminder in Dorchester News and the closing date will be delayed by a few days to support this effort. The Chairman confirmed that South Oxfordshire District Council has confirmed that it will grant £800 to cover the costs of the Survey.

14/10 Affordable Housing – Allen’s Pit Project

Cllr John Taylor reported that Hastoe’s bid to the selected building company has been rejected and that further research is now needed to find new potential building contractors. In view of this uncertainty Hastoe has decided not to attend the Village Information Evening on 16th October.

Standing items Part 2

15/10. Planning Applications:

P23/S3155 9 Bridge End New veranda, reduction and modification to existing shed, replacement greenhouse and new cold frame.

Cllr Chris Hill, who lives next door to this site, told the Council that he had commented on the Application via the Council’s on-line Planning portal. CH said that he thought that the published Design and Access statement is unclear, and that more certainty is needed because the plans involve the future of some very ancient walls. As had been advised by SODC’s Democratic Services Manager, after stating his reservations CH then left the room.

MW suggested that the Council should recommend that the Application should not be determined without taking the advice of the Conservation Area Officer, who is not as yet shown as a consultee. This was agreed and **Action: Clerk to convey this comment to the Planning Team.**

16/10 Finance: Bank Balances & Payments

NatWest Reserve Account 11 th October 2023	£32,555.65
NatWest Current Account 11 th October 2023	£36,974.75
Unity Trust Bank 11 th October 2023	<u>356.00</u>
	£69,886.40

Cllr Mark Williams suggested if the Council is now happy with the service provided by NatWest, that the account with Unity Trust Bank should be closed. **Action: The Clerk will report on this matter to the next meeting.**

It was proposed by Cllr Becky Waller that the following payments should be approved. This was seconded by Cllr Mike Atkinson and passed unanimously.

Q Transport (Oxford) Ltd (Container rental)	116.76
The Landscape Group Oxford (September grass/ Abbey View)	1,431.66
Shield Maintenance (General waste bin services)	181.99
Shield Maintenance (Dog bin services)	108.79
Dan Haines Signs (MUGA)	60.00
JRB Enterprise Ltd (dog waste bags)	255.84
Trevor Greenaway (August & September)	350.00
Moore East Midlands (Audit surcharge)	378.00
Personnel Advice & Solutions Ltd (HR Services re Clerk contract)	120.00
Horted (Coronation Rose gift to Maurice Day)	72.00

Behind Closed Doors (Pavilion shutters servicing and new signs)	1,167.41
Broxap Supply and fitting of new Exercise Equipment	<u>12,378.30</u>
	£16,620.75

The Clerk reported that he has been informed by SODC that the Council will be receiving a CIL Payment of £4,102.36 in October. This arises from developments at 55 Abingdon Road (£1,200) and 64 Watling Lane (£2,902.36).

There being no further business the Meeting closed at 9.59.p.m.