

Dorchester Parish Council

The Monthly Meeting of the Parish Council was held in the back room of the Village Hall on Wednesday 14th June 2023 commencing at 7.30 p.m. The Chairman, Cllr Mike Corran, presided with Cllrs Mike Atkinson, Charlotte Garside, Chris Hill, John Taylor and Mark Williams present and the Clerk, Geoff Russell, in attendance. Also present for part of the meeting were County and District Cllr Robin Bennett and five residents.

1/7. Chairman's opening remarks

The Chairman thanked councillors for the exchange of emails that had taken place since the Annual Meeting on 10th May. There had been several suggested changes to the way in which Parish Council business should be conducted and the agenda for the current meeting reflected the general desire to ensure that matters which require immediate attention are given priority in the order of business.

Cllr Corran said that he would meet with Cllr Robin Bennett to discuss if there should be any changes to the way in which County and District Council information is communicated and acted upon.

2/7. Apologies for Absence:

Apologies were accepted from Cllrs Jon Brydges and Becky Waller, both of whom had previously arranged commitments.

3/7 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Cllr. Mark Williams concerning village maintenance work that is carried out by any 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.

It was suggested that publicity should be given to the list of all Councillors' registers of interest which is maintained and published by the Democratic Services team of the District Council. **Action: Clerk to confirm when this list becomes available to view.**

4/7. Minutes of Annual Parish Council Meeting held 10th May 2023

It was agreed that the Minutes as circulated were a true and correct record and the Chairman signed the written record. **Action: Clerk to aim to meet the Council's request that he should produce draft minutes no later than seven days after a meeting.**

5/7. Matters arising not covered by the Agenda elsewhere

i. **Action: Clerk to compile and circulate a summary of the training events- both on-line and in person - that have been sent to councillors over the previous weeks. Action: Clerk to propose a budget to cover the cost of taking advantage of these opportunities for approval at the next meeting.**

ii. The overgrown footpath which leads off Watling Lane to Bishops Court Farm has attracted a lot of discussion about the responsibility for its maintenance. In previous years the Watling Lane end has been maintained by the Parish Council. **Action: Clerk to add this work to the list of tasks undertaken by the Council's contractors. Action: Chair to raise the footpath managed by Bishops Court Farm with their management.**

iii. Having reviewed the list of Parish Councillor responsibilities brought forward from previous years, the Chairman has circulated his suggestions for amendment,

which have been reflected in the allocation of specific councillors to lead discussions in the meeting that follows. Cllr Mike Atkinson is to take on responsibility for Emergency Planning. **Action: Clerk to organise MA's completion of the form required under GDPR.**

6/7 County and District Council Reports

Reports from Cllr Robin Bennett have been received for both the County and District Councils. They will be published in Dorchester News and on-line. Cllr Bennett drew attention to a June & July survey that will ask parish councils about their experience of contacting the County Council to access services and advice. This is the beginning of a process that will lead to drafting of a Town and Parish Charter which it is hoped will be adopted in November. OALC is also involved with this process.

A new Minerals and Waste Plan is expected soon, and Cllr John Taylor asked to be involved with discussions about its methodology.

Cllr Bennett said that he had recently met with the County Council's officer in charge of bus services. No increase in service frequency or routes covered is expected in the near future.

7/7. Priority Items

Affordable Housing

The paper prepared by Cllrs John Taylor (JT) and Chris Hill (CH) had been circulated in advance of the meeting and is attached to these Minutes as an appendix. CH confirmed that Sovereign have agreed to hand over their working papers to Hastoe. Cllrs Charlotte Garside (CG) and Mike Atkinson (MA) raised an additional point regarding the need for 3 bed houses. Cllr Mark Williams (MW) reminded the Parish Council of his understanding of how rural exception sites are agreed.

MW also suggested the Council should look at all possible sites and this was generally supported as was the need to make every effort to encourage individuals expressing their need for Affordable Housing to join the District Council's Housing Register. **Action: JT/CH to review all possible sites and to clarify the process for exception sites and to report to the PC.**

It was noted that Yolandi Evans of LAPD Architects has offered to attend the July or August Parish Council meetings and is willing to share the pre-application work that has been carried out for the site along Abingdon Road which belongs to Bishops Court Farm. **Action: JT to invite the BCF advisors to present plans for the BCF affordable housing to the PC.**

Playground

The paper prepared by Cllrs Becky Waller (BW) and Charlotte Garside (CG), with thanks to former Cllr Rob Ballantyne, and dated 12th June had been circulated in advance of the meeting and is attached to these Minutes as an appendix. CG explained that the consultation with young teenage residents is on-going. The paper was supported with a number of additional comments.

MA said that with all the opportunities that have been identified for introducing new activities, the Council has the opportunity to 're-launch' the Recreation Ground, although it is recognised that space for event parking will continue to be required. MA said that there may be future opportunities to involve voluntary fund-raising initiatives to purchase even more kit.

Invited to speak on behalf of Dorchester Tennis Club (DTC), Claire Andersson said that the members would welcome access to some reasonable toilet facilities. After a site meeting with BW, there has been agreement about how access to the two courts should be managed and publicised. DTC does not wish basketball to be played on the courts. Changing the number of sports played on the second court would increase

maintenance costs which the Tennis Club would not wish to pay. The matter needs further discussion.

Annual Parish Meeting 28th June 2023

The paper prepared by Cllr Mike Corran (MC) and dated 5th June had been circulated in advance of the meeting and is attached to these Minutes as an appendix. MC explained the role that Communityfirst Oxfordshire (CFO) will play during the final part of the Meeting. This has been planned as a discussion which is open to all about the future priorities which should be adopted by the Parish Council. CFO will collate the comments received during this discussion and use them to prepare a future survey. There will be further discussion and investigation to see how the feedback from the Annual Parish Meeting could also assist in the review of the Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan. This will include further contact with the NDP Team at SODC. The paper was approved.

8/7. Other Workstreams

Digital strategy

The paper published by Cllr Jon Brydges (JB) has been available on-line via 'Google Docs' and some comments have been received. The Clerk confirmed that the Parish Council's email and website services using the domains dorchester-on-thames.co.uk and dorchesteronthames.co.uk have been managed by Data Systems Management LLP, a company introduced to the Council by former Cllr Sue Graney, at an annual cost of £588 excluding VAT. The website manager is a local resident whose part-time services are voluntary.

In addition to looking at starting a new website for the Parish Council, JB's paper discussed options for councillors to communicate with each other between meetings. The Council agreed that the benefits of opening a Microsoft 365 Business Basic account should be pursued alongside a new website design and development partner with site access more widely available, especially to the Clerk. New email addresses would be used by all the Councillors and the Clerk. **Action: Clerk to add the decision about the Council's new domain name to the next Council meeting.**

The future of the existing 'Village website' after the Parish Council section has been removed needs discussion as do the management of the transfer of Parish Council email services to the new domain and the Parish Council's use of social media to communicate with village residents.

Budget briefing

The Clerk circulated Councillors with extracts from the Minutes which showed the setting of Annual Precepts over the four-year period 2019/20 to 2023/24 and confirmed how £45,000 had been allocated as 'earmarked funds in October 2019. A new allocation of funds is yet to be agreed. It was agreed by the Council that there is no commitment to the village hall and the pavilion.

The Clerk gave details of the new fees for Dorchester Cemetery which had come into force on 1st March 2023, an increase of 12.5% since October 2020.

The Receipts and Payments Account for the year to 31st March 2023 will be presented at the Annual Parish Meeting on 28th June and Councillors were shown a copy of the previous year's accounts so they could see the detailed analysis of where the Council receives and spends its money. At every monthly meeting the Council will continue to be informed about bank account balances and given the list of that month's payments which require approval.

Henge event funding request

A letter emailed from Adrian Brookes on 4th April was sent to all Councillors by the Clerk on 12th June. This explained the ways in which Parish Council donations to the Henge events in 2020 and 2022 had been applied and requested a further donation for

a 'Henge at the Cornerstone' exhibition in November 2023 and a 'Weekend Henge Festival' in Summer 2024.

Action: Clerk to obtain some details about the benefits that will come to Dorchester as a result of these planned activities for the Council to make a decision. Some Councillors were concerned that the proposed event at Didcot's Cornerstone would dilute the connection with Dorchester.

War Memorial

Councillors had seen an exchange of emails between Cllr Mike Corran and Charlotte Bennett (CB) on behalf of Dorchester and District Branch of RBL which confirmed that after many years of service Phil and Sally Greenaway have decided to retire from the responsibility of looking after the garden surrounding the War Memorial. For the time being CB and Andy Pay have taken over these duties and new plants have been purchased. It was agreed that the Parish Council will continue to fund the full cost of planting and the Council's contractor will continue to cut the grass. The Parish Council has been invited to consider offering an honorarium to assist the recruitment of a new volunteers(s) but this is not thought to be desirable as it might set a precedent.

Action: Clerk to compose and send a letter to Phil and Sally to convey the Council's gratitude for their outstanding service over many years.

Village Information Meeting

The Clerk supplied all Councillors with details about the Village Information Evening held on 20th February 2020 including some photographs of the table-top displays. The purpose of the event, which is free to attend, is to give all village societies and specialist interest groups an opportunity to communicate in an informal way with prospective members and supporters, with refreshments provided by the Parish Council. The Clerk suggested that a similar event should be held this year on either Thursday 5th October or Thursday 19th October. **Action: MW to check these dates in the Village Hall Diary. Once the date has been settled the Clerk will send details to all the prospective exhibitors.**

9/7. Planning Applications:

P23/S1883/LB 2 Queen Street

Living room fireplace - A. Restoration of 'original' fire surround. B. Removal of 'modern' fireback. C. Installation of woodburning stove. D. Insertion of insulated flexible metal flue liner.

The Council agreed that it had no comment to make on this Application and would accept the recommendation of the District Council's Conservation Officer.

P23/S1094/HH 2 Drayton Road,

Single storey rear extension as amended by plans received on 30th May omitting the detached garage and adding an additional privacy screen to the second rear balcony. The Council had considered the original Application at its meeting in April 2023 and had raised a number of concerns about possibly unneighbourly overdevelopment. The omission of the detached garage is an improvement which removes most of these concerns although Cllr Mark Williams drew attention to the proposed balcony but no further comment will be made.

10/7. Finance: Bank Balances & Payments

NatWest Reserve Account 14 th June 2023	£48,357.18
NatWest Current Account 14 th June 2023	£32,068.29
	£81,444.09

The following payments were unanimously approved:

Q Transport (Oxford) Ltd (Container rental)	116.76
The Landscape Group Oxford (May grass cutting)	1,149.66

Shield Maintenance (General waste bin services)	181.99
Shield Maintenance (Dog bin services)	108.79
Going Forward Buses (Dorchester Flyer May)	50.00
Castle Water Sportsground & Pavilion	484.21
Castle Water Allotments	595.24
JRB Enterprises (dog waste bags)	255.84
Dorchester Village Hall Meeting charges & cleaning	75.00
Trevor Greenaway (event parking x 8; some maintenance tasks)	460.00
G Russell (salary)	<u>905.89</u>
Total	4,383.38

Action: The Clerk said that he will arrange for Cllr Mike Corran to be added to the list of approved NatWest signatories and notify the Bank about former councillors whose names should be removed.

11/7. Any Other Urgent Matters

i. Cllr Mike Atkinson said that he will work on plans to improve communication between the Parish Council and teenaged residents which may possibly result in a proposal for a 'Junior Council'. This will include making contact with youth groups in surrounding villages especially Berinsfield.

ii. The Chairman will continue to review the Council's existing Governance documents including Standing Orders.

iii. Although the Parish Council's long-established meeting frequency, date, time and venue is the second Wednesday of every month in the Village Hall commencing at 7.30 p.m., it was agreed that councillors should be given an opportunity to suggest changes to that routine. **Action: Clerk to conduct a survey of all councillors and ask if they have any preferences.**

Meeting closed at 9.41 p.m.