

**Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 19th May 2021
in the Pine Lodge, Little Milton**

Present: Cllr Francois van der Merwe (Chairman)
Cllr David Wakeling
Cllr Steve Sidhu
Cllr Adam Sheppard
Cllr Howard Harrison

Mrs Andrea Oughton (Parish Clerk)
Eleven members of the public

Apologies for Absence

County Councillor Freddie van Mierlo, District Councillor Caroline Newton.

01/05/21 Introduction by Chairman

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Annual Parish Meeting.

02/05/21 Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Thursday 25th April 2019 were taken as read approved as a true record of the meeting.

03/05/21 Report by Chairman of Parish Council

The Chairman reported membership of the Parish Council had changed over last few years. Alaric Smith who joined the Council in 2019 and had been Chairman since then decided to move away from the area and resigned as Chairman towards the end of 2020 and as councillor from 31 March 2021. The Council hoped to fill the vacancy at the next Parish Council meeting. The Chairman expressed his thanks and appreciation, on behalf of the Council, to Alaric for his service.

In addition, the Council's long-standing clerk, Raymond Fergusson, resigned at the end of April 2021 after 18 years in post. His exemplary service, attention to detail, and ever-present initiative and guidance is an example to us all and was certainly of immense help to me and no doubt Councils and Chairmen before. We also welcome, and look forward to working with, Andrea Oughton as our new clerk.

The Parish Council was able to continue meet virtually during the pandemic and although a poor substitute for face to face meetings it enabled the Parish Council to continue to carry out its duties.

South Oxfordshire District Council's Local Plan was eventually adopted after numerous delays and political wrangling. However, the Chalgrove Airfield development application from Homes England, which potentially has significant impact on our parish, was thrown into some doubt after intervention from the Civil Aviation Authority. The Council will continue to monitor this closely.

One major potential impact of the Chalgrove development could be an exponential increase in traffic, especially Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) traffic, through the village. HGV traffic has long been a major issue for the parish, and the Council has re-commenced an effort to get Oxfordshire County Council to address the issue. The Council met with members of SODC and OCC on four separate occasions to pursue the goal of having a 7.5 tonne weight limit applied to the A329 through the village. The Parish Council also held a well-attended virtual meeting with the village on this topic and the input and support we received from the parish on this was much appreciated. The latest development was a detailed letter sent to OCC requesting a formal investigation and implementation of a weight limit.

The Village Newsletter continues to be supported by the Parish Council. It remains a popular and useful publication for the parish. The Chairman reported he was pleased that Raymond Fergusson would continue to edit and co-ordinate this important part of parish life.

The Chairman reported Steve Harrod, had lost his seat at the recent local elections. Steve had been a great supporter of the village, and especially helpful with the A329 HGV campaign. The Chairman



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thanked him for his service over the years. Freddie van Mierlo had been successfully elected as County Councillor and the Parish Council looked forward to getting to know and work with him.

The Chairman summarised the Parish Council's main priorities for the year ahead. The campaign for a weight limit on the A329 will continue.

The MUGA and tennis court needs significant maintenance and renewal, and a working group is being set up to tackle this. Ideas are being gathered of how to further improve the recreation ground and the open areas around the village shop's patio area. The Chairman welcomed input from the community.

Alternative ways of managing the verges and open space around the village to encourage wild-flowers and biodiversity. It is very early days and the Parish Council hopes to report more on this in the coming months. Cllr Steve Sidhu, who is leading the project would be delighted to hear from anyone who would like to become involved.

Significant developments are expected from both the District Council as it starts to prepare its next Local Plan (Local Plan 2041, to be implemented in 2024), as well as from the Oxfordshire Growth Board's Oxfordshire 2050 plan. The latter is influenced by central government's Oxford-Cambridgeshire Arc plans. The Parish Council will do its utmost to keep abreast of these high-level developments, keep our community informed and act as the voice of our parish where needed.

The Parish Council will continue to provide a forum for the parish to assist in dealing with important issues, whether they be property planning related or otherwise. The Council expects a number of significant development proposals to be lodged this year and will, in addition to discharging its duties of commenting on planning applications, also aim to provide a forum for the parish to voice their concerns and questions.

The Chairman said his thoughts were with those who had lost loved ones and who suffered hardship during the last 12 months due to the profound direct or indirect impact of COVID. We were blessed to have a number of amenities and initiatives in the parish which made an enormous difference to parishioners.

COVID made normal operation for many impossible, but not for Little Milton! The shop and post office continued to operate, we enjoyed fantastic walking fairs, had a pop-up fresh produce shop at the pub – these were but a few examples of how the parish pulled together. The Chairman thanked all those people and volunteers who often went beyond the norm to make all this possible.

04/05/21 Financial report

Raymond Fergusson presented the financial report as Clerk for the financial period being reported. Raymond had served the Council as Clerk for over 18 years and had an association with the Parish Council beyond his appointment as Clerk. Raymond presented the financial report, copies were circulated to those present.

The finances were very straight forward, the Parish Council needed to explain what services and facilities it provides to its parishioners and that it manages the finances responsibly by holding an appropriate level of reserves to meet future needs. As the income and expenditure for the year were below the £25k threshold which allowed the Council to Certify itself as exempt from an external audit. However, the finances continued to be reviewed by our internal auditor Ian Dennis who also reviews the Council's internal control systems.

Raymond started by reviewing the expenditure for the year ending 31st March 2021. The total expenditure was £15,414. The main headings are as they have been over many years, as follows: Parish

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Newsletter £4,123, Recreation / Playground £2,774, MUGA £806, Load Repayment (last instalment) £1,545, Council Administration £3,372, other expenditure £2,338 made up of Verge maintenance £650, Election Costs £450, Subscriptions £148, Core Insurance £558 and Annual Service of Clock £186.

The Parish Council receives money to pay for its expenditure which is not all funded through the Precept to provide excellent facilities and services. The Precept is the amount of income the Parish Council requests the District Council to include in the Council Tax that households pay each year. For every £1,000 the Parish raises through the Precept it adds around £4.65 per annum to the Council Tax bill. The Precept of £12,500 costs £58.00 per annum for a Band D property. The breakdown for income of £18,466 is as follows: Grants (Verge OCC) £529, Newsletter advertising £5,176, MUGA £252 and Precept £12,500.

Finally, Reserves are what we all need to manage the unevenness of the patterns of expenditure as well as to manage the cost of unexpected expenditure. The overall reserves are £20,198, an increase of £3,052 from 31st March 2020. The Budget for 2020-21 planned for reserves to reduce by £2,500, the increase is due to the delay in expenditure on the recruitment of the Clerk and lower levels of expenditure on the MUGA, playground, recreation ground and other areas of Council expenditure. Some of which was Covid related. This means the current reserves will allow the Council to address the MUGA facilities and support their vision to improve other amenities. The reserves in the current year are budgeted to reduce by £3,161. The Council believe the level of reserves is adequate to meet future events and normal ongoing expenditure.

05/05/21 District Councillor Report

The District Councillor's report was delivered by the Chairman, the key issues covered:

Joint Local Plan

At Full Council on 25th March, the SODC administration proposed that the next Local Plan (LP 2041), the spatial strategy for the district, should be created as a Local Plan with the Vale of the White Horse District Council. The motion was carried with a very small majority.

Work will now start on creating the LP 2041. Over the coming months officers will be in discussion with potential developers in the search for sites. The number of houses that will need to be allocated will be driven by the work of Oxfordshire 2050 Plan which in turn will be framed by the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, the Government's regional strategy for economic development. The LP 2041 is due to be adopted in 2024.

Housing Land Supply

South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) is expected to be able to demonstrate a 5year Housing Land Supply (HLS) As part of the Growth Deal agreement with Government, for 3 years from March 2018, local authorities in Oxfordshire were required only to show a 3year HLS. This period has now concluded and all local authorities are back to a 5year HLS. Some local media coverage has misleading indicated that this was unexpected. In fact, it has been anticipated since 2018 and SODC has planned its HLS accordingly.

Bioabundance

Following SODC's adoption of LP 2035 in December, an environmental pressure group, Bioabundance, applied for a judicial review of the decision. On 30th March 2021 the application was refused and costs awarded against Bioabundance. On 1st April 2021, Bioabundance appealed the decision and SODC await notification from the court of the hearing date.

Virtual Meetings

Regulations allowing local council meetings to take place virtually expired at the beginning of May. Minister's position is that an extension of these powers would require stand-alone primary legislation

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and that there is no time in the legislative calendar. A legal challenge to this position argues that virtual meetings can continue without additional legislation. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is now conducting a consultation to consider whether, if necessary, to introduce legislation.

06/05/21 County Councillor Report

The County Councillor's report was delivered by the Chairman, the key issues covered:

Covid-19

The past year has been dominated by dealing with Covid-19 pandemic which has had a huge impact on how the County Council delivers its services. Most of the offices have been closed with many staff working remotely online. All Council, Cabinet and other committee meetings have been held online. A positive to this has been the discovery that much of our work can be delivered far more efficiently via online systems.

The long-term effects of Covid on how OCC conduct their business are yet to be felt but OCC intend to take forward the positive lessons learned by implementing such things as hybrid meetings to minimise travel time and costs and selective home-working for staff.

Some savings achieved during the pandemic include; a potential £306,000 saving in utility bills, £400,000 is expected as a result of reduced spend on travel, printing, stationery, expenses and other areas.

Adult Social Care

Additional funding from the Hospital Discharge Scheme (HDS) will save £1.3m. Additional funding from NHS England is expected to be made available nationally. This means OCC funding for care now being met by HSD can be released on a temporary basis.

Better Care Fund (BCF)

OCC contribution to BCF pooled budget in 2020/21 is £102m, by increasing the focus on maximising the use of residential and nursing beds available through existing contracts, and looking at creative ways to meet needs at lower cost whilst also helping service users to be as independent as possible, it is anticipated it may be possible to reduce spend by around 1% saving £500,000.

Children's Social Care

A total of £903,000 will be saved due to a revised model of implementation for the new family safeguarding model of delivering care, which is being introduced during 2020/21.

Youth Services

OCC allocated £200,000 in 2020/21 to carry out an assessment and redesign of youth services. Covid-19 prevented OCC from progressing this work. However, OCC has designed a proposal for the assessment that can take place this year, for which £25,000 is earmarked. A saving of £175,000.

Community Support Services (CSS)

CSS have remained open throughout the pandemic which required the use of different approaches to support people. This has enabled OCC to identify an alternative base for its community support service in Didcot which has merged with Wantage. This will save £175,000 and offers the opportunity to explore alternative delivery models for CSS in the future.

Highways

£500,00 relating to various schemes will be charged to capital (project) budgets instead of from day to day spend in revenue budgets. Extra money (as a one off) was allocated for additional vegetation clearance and sign cleaning. A total of £175,000 of additional allocation is being offered back as a potential saving. This does not affect OCC's normal level of service.



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Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue

Proposals to delay plans to replace older diesel vehicles with electric vehicles by one year will save £200,000.

Unitary Government

Cherwell District Council and OCC recently commissioned PwC to undertake a piece of work to look at the various options that may be viable in the county. The report sets out high level appraisal of three options: Optimising the existing two-tier collaboration, establishing a new single unitary authority or establishing two new unitary authorities, based on a 50/50 split of the population.

The review does not seek to make recommendations but instead examine the three options to provide a useful basis for a positive conversation. A direction from central government is awaited as to how these options may be moved forward.

Council Budget

Full Council agreed a balanced budget in February 2021 that will provide continued investment in key services and avoid any cuts to frontline delivery. Locally, the Councillor's Priority Fund budgets have been reduced, spreading the usual £15,000 over a two-year period.

07/05/21 Report from Village Hall Management Committee

Mr Giles Denby gave the following report on behalf of the Village Hall Management Committee.

From an external perspective The Pine Lodge has probably had the most inactive year in its history along with all public venues in the UK. However, we have made every effort to reopen the hall and make it available as a safe venue whenever guidance allowed. We have also used the time to undertake some pressing renovations to improve the facilities without disrupting users.

There have been some changes to the committee during the year. After many years as a highly active member on the committee we were extremely sorry to lose Kay Ward. Kay has been a huge contributor to the running of the hall and as it's secretary, with her in depth knowledge of not only what needs to be done, but how to do it has been invaluable. Her tireless energy and effort to keep everyone abreast of requirements has ensured actions have been taken in a timely and comprehensive manner. A huge thanks from us all to Kay for her considerable contribution. Steve Willis has taken on the role of secretary on a temporary basis, whilst the committee look for a new member to join the team to fill this important role. Following the 2020 Annual General Meeting we gained a new member, Angus Hutchinson.

During lockdown the hall kitchen was renovated to make it a Covid compliant workspace and improve the facilities for functions. Perspex serving screens installed, cabinets replaced, and a new glass cleaner, oven, and water boiler installed. All the canvas chairs have been fully cleaned and renovated where necessary.

To enable the hall to open in compliance with fluctuating guidance has taken a significant effort. Get to grips with documentation to assess risks, meet requirements and co-ordinate hirers has been a real stretch which many village halls gave up on and remained closed for the entire Covid period. In particular thanks go to Steve Willis for helping particularly on the risk assessment and mitigation side and to Linda Lovegrove in managing the implementation.

The hall opened during the summer of 2020 and was used for Yoga, Pilates, Women's Institute, Craft Club and the Textile Workshop. The hall was also used for the recent local elections. We plan to reopen to regular users with the first Pilates class in mid-May and then for events from mid June.

On the finance side, the hall has been very fortunate to receive several government grants to supplement lost income. Hence the hall finds itself in a surprisingly strong financial position. The hall made a profit



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for the year of £6,055 (including depreciation) compared with £722 for the prior year which was largely due to government grants coupled with low operating expenses. The hall continues to have a healthy balance to be able to fund maintenance and undertake routine upgrades.

The hall continues to make contributions to local charities and good causes:

- The hall participated in a very successful 'remote' Christmas Fayre and Treasure Hunt in December with all profits shared between the Orchard and St James's Church.
- This year's annual Senior Citizen's lunch, which is funded by the hall, was prepared as usual by The Lamb and delivered door to door due to sheltering requirements. Many thanks to Teresa Quesada for co-ordinating and assisting with this.

The committee is currently working hard on planning an event for the community 'Little Milton Unlocked' on Saturday 28th August 2021. A wide range of family activities have been proposed. In the evening a 20 piece 40's swing band has been booked plus a pig roast. The hall plans to contribute to part of the cost of the event.

08/05/21 Report from Little Milton Shop

Mr Kevin Hunt, Chairman of the Village Shop, gave the following report on behalf of the Shop Management Committee.

The Chairman thanked wholeheartedly the small number of volunteers and shop staff who give their time and effort consistently every week on behalf of the community. This has been admirably demonstrated during the uninterrupted service of all three elements of the village amenity; the Post Office, Shop and Café during the Covid lockdown periods. As a point of note two people within the volunteer group do not even reside in Little Milton. The Covid pandemic has demonstrated the importance of having a local shop and Post Office whose existence should not be taken for granted. It would therefore be remiss of me not to thank the village community who consistently support the shop and Post Office with their patronage.

The objectives outlined at last year's Parish AGM have all been met. The patio to the rear of the shop has been installed and further enhanced with a glass balustrade to improve the outside café experience. In addition, a display freezer was added within the shop enabling the introduction of a small frozen food offer, customer toilet facilities were improved by installing a new hot air hand dryer and loo. The shop opening hours were extended during the summer months. It is our hope to do this again starting in June, however, this will only be achieved if more volunteers step forward. We cannot rely on or expect the current small band of volunteers to continually step up.

From a financial point of view the shop continues to improve its financial position year on year with revenue improved of the previous year by 10.4% and value per transaction by 17.5% even though the number of transactions over the year was down by 0.88%. As the financial position continues to be more robust the committee feel it is an appropriate time to replace the aging over counter display unit and possibly the dairy and soft drinks chiller, both of which have been in place over 10 years. A subsequent benefit could be that well-chosen replacements could free up a little more space to enable the shop to increase its grocery range offer.

Last year the importance of the SODC lottery to the shop was mentioned, as it contributes in cash terms to the shop, this enables consideration of improvements to the facility for the benefit of the community. If you do not currently participate please consider visiting www.socharitable.co.uk as the shop is granted 50p for every one pound ticket purchased.



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The Chairman and Committee assured the community of their overriding goal to ensure the continuity of offer and improve current services.

09/05/21 Report by Chair of Little Milton School Governors

Linda Longshaw Chair of Governors gave a report on behalf of Little Milton School.

In common with all schools, it has been an eventful year. Following a successful and safe return to school for all children and staff in September 2020, Hannah Brown, headteacher, was appointed to a new role at Clifton Hampden School. Hannah left with our thanks and very best wishes at the end of the autumn term.

Hannah's resignation gave governors the opportunity to re-evaluate leadership in line with our vision, values and the financial position of the school. In consultation with representatives from the local authority and the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education, it was agreed an interim acting headship provided the best way forward, enabling governors to continue to work to put in place a sustainable leadership model.

Current class teachers Hannah Blest and James Bell have successfully shared leadership responsibilities since January 2021. They have led the school with great skill and sensitivity, and did not anticipate what lay ahead of them in terms of a further lengthy lockdown when they agreed to take on interim co-headship in December.

Throughout the lockdown nursery and school places were available for all families who met government requirements and wrap around care provision continued. Daily live remote teaching was provided for children at home as well as weekly work plans online. Our hard-working staff team was pleased to receive very positive feedback and support from parents, particularly at this difficult time.

All children returned to school on 8th March and settled quickly, due in large part to the excellent work that had been done at home with parents and carers throughout the previous challenging weeks and months. We welcomed a new part-time teacher, Sue Graham, in Rowan Class.

Since the return to school there has been a focus on the children's well-being with regular Forest School sessions, creative projects and even yoga. Teachers have conducted informal assessments and put in place support and interventions to ensure that any gaps in learning are addressed. Our visiting French, ukulele and music teachers have been able to return following the introduction of twice weekly Covid testing for teachers.

Throughout the last year, Covid-19 security has been paramount, and we have not recorded any cases in our community. Restrictions have meant that parents have not been able to access the school site and so the children's achievements and work have been shared digitally, via Twitter and through virtual assemblies. We hope that in the near future we will be able to welcome our school and village community back on site.

Despite restrictions, we have continued to benefit from generous donations and ingenious fundraising initiatives organised by the Friends of Little Milton School including Zoom bingo, a virtual pancake tossing competition and the walking Spring Fayre. If the government's roadmap goes to plan, we hope to hold our traditional sports day and Maypole event later in the term for all members of the village and school community to enjoy. Details will be shared in the village newsletter.

In common with many local rural primary schools and as the local birth rate has fallen, our roll is currently smaller than we would like. Our school provides a high quality, personalised and positive learning experience for every child and we are always keen to welcome new families from the village and further afield.



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According to village records, the school was built in 1861 and so has been at the heart of the community for 160 years, through world wars and now a global pandemic. We thank the parish council for supporting this valuable asset throughout and look forward to the year ahead.

10/05/21 Report from Orchard Pre-School

Representatives of the nursery had given their apologies.

11/05/21 Report on St James' Church

The Reverend Simon Cronk's report on behalf of St James's Church was presented to the meeting by Raymond Fergusson.

It has been a challenging year for everyone during the pandemic; regular worshippers, families grieving lost ones and those getting married. The church rose to the challenge of online services which provided regular contact for those near and far with between 30-35 participants. It indicates the wide community impact of the church and its importance to it.

The church buildings are still a major concern. A tendering exercise has now been concluded and the Parochial Church Council (PCC) will consider what the implications are for funding.

The church continues to have close links with the village school which is important.

The church suffers, like other organisations in the village, from the lack of people prepared to put themselves forward to serve on the PCC. However, the support given to the church fete is always appreciated and last year although there was no fete, the raffle was well supported.

As we emerge from lockdown the churches will re-open and will examine the best way forward.

To end on a positive note, St James' was built in 1844 and will continue to be vital part of the community along with the other village organisations.

12/05/21 Parish Forum

No questions were raised.

The meeting closed at 7.25 p.m.

Signed by:

FRANCOIS VAN DER MERWE

Chairman.....

Date.....

11 MAY 2022