

Stadhampton Parish Council

Chairman's Report for the 2022-23 year

Team Changes

We welcomed Omar Bayoumi by co-option to the council in March 2022. Omar's background in property development and his wide-ranging experience in relation to planning and legal issues.

Doug Struthers stepped down from the council after several years of service to the council. The council are very grateful for Doug's contribution over the years, his keen interest on affairs relating to the village green have resulted in many improvements, not least the annual Village Green Fete/Party which Doug continues to organise.

We also said farewell to Michael Pawley as he stepped down from the role of Parish Clerk. Michael's contribution has been immense. His wise counsel and encyclopaedic knowledge of local authority and council regulations, combined with a sharp legal and financial mind, supported the council ably through difficult times from 2018 to 2022.

Community Projects

- **D'Oyleys pond and Manor pond works** have been funded by s106 infrastructure funds to make them safer, renew the handrails, posts, and improve the retaining bank. Further work due in the summer on Manor pond.
- **Tree planting on the north side of the Green** has been undertaken by Councillors Odell and Campbell to improve the biodiversity and the aesthetics of the green through the planting of a new avenue of trees on the North Green, and a wilding area. As the years pass, the new avenue and the footpath through them will bring enjoyment to many.
- **Traffic calming project:** Councillor Fitzgerald has completed a thorough and balanced review of the village from the perspective of traffic calming and managing speed and his work has resulted in a series of recommendations to put to Oxfordshire Highways, the recommendations are evidence-based and pragmatic. We greatly appreciate the work and effort that Councillor Fitzgerald has put into this project, and the support that he has shown in order to get the Speedwatch project off the ground in Chiselhampton.
- **Rainwater capture project:** The new allotments on Copson Lane have proved to be a great success and very popular. There is no mains fed water available on the allotments, to address this the council investigated the implementation of a stand pipe but ruled this out due to concerns over cost, and future costs, of metered water and the environmental impact. Instead, a rainwater capture scheme will be implemented to allow those working their allotments to have access to an environmentally sound source of water to cultivate their produce.
- **Bus shelter project:** This was finally approved, resulting in a budget being agreed to spend on the implementation of a wooden bus stop on the Stadhampton-Watlington route at the top of school lane, accompanied by a scheme to improve the aesthetics of the triangle. Planning advice is being sought for the bus stop, now that OCC have agreed to the design and positioning of it on Highways controlled land.
- **Play area project:** The subcommittee - that had been formed before the pandemic by members of the parish to make recommendations to the council for the replacement of the play area - effectively disbanded and the project stalled. The parish council sought quotes independently to understand the costs of replacing the play area. It became apparent that CIL funds alone would not be sufficient to fund the replacement of the existing play area and existing external funding will need to be sought to replace it. In the interim we will work to repair and fix the existing play area until external funding can be secured.

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Grants

Despite financial pressures on the parish council arising over the past 12 months we have been please to be able to continue our s137 grant support for Chalgrove and Watlington First Steps Family Hub and for Stadhampton Primary School.

Legal Work

The development of two new homes on Cat Lane gave rise to a series of concerns from residents and the parish council, as the construction appeared to deviate from the construction management plan resulting in disruption to residents and damage to the Green. SODC officers visited the site and received assurances that the Green would be restored and disruption for residents would cease. The parish council continues to engage with the developers to resolve unanswered questions related to access to the new developments.

The question of Allotment 13 was resolved to the satisfaction of both parties resulting in the improvement of the setting of the allotment in a wonderful private corner of the village, and secured the use of the allotment for generations to come. The process that led us here has been costly and arduous for all concerned. We must remain hopeful that in future any such situations arising can be resolved swiftly, amicably and reasonably.

Illegal encampments

Two illegal encampments on the Village Green resulted in considerable expenditure to remove them, and repair the damage to trees and the playground. However, we are assured by both OCC and the wider community that our zero-tolerance stance on illegal encampments has resulted in fewer encampments and less damage, and is now being used as a template for other parishes to follow.

Other Issues

Other work the Parish council has been involved with is responding to all Planning Application on behalf of the residents of the Parish. The Parish Council also sent a letter of condolence to His Majesty King Charles III on the death of his mother, Queen Elizabeth II on behalf of residents, which was acknowledged. The Council has signed a Civility and Respect pledge to support civility and respect in all communications and call out bullying or harassing behaviour. The Chiselhampton defibrillator was recalled, and has been updated and is in "active" service based at the Coach and Horses, Chiselhampton.

Finance

Accounts and governance were all managed with a good audit for 2021/22, and the accounting documents can be viewed on the website. The budget deliberations for 2023/24 were challenging to meet a balanced budget, and we worked to identify small savings wherever possible. However, the Parish Council has benefitted in recent years from windfall income from easement payments. These have been used to subsidise the precept and are now exhausted. The general reserves are now very low; the majority of the money held is Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding earmarked for infrastructure works as a result of development and cannot be used for operating income. It is important to say that the budget is for operational spending and does not include large projects which all require external funding sources. The budget supports looking after the green and public spaces, tree work, the playground, dog bin emptying, the church clock running the sports pavilion and supporting staff.

Cllr Stuart Wells (Chairman of Stadhampton Parish Council)