

**Little Milton Parish Council**  
**Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> May 2025**  
**At 7pm in the Pine Lodge, Little Milton**

*Present:* Cllr Francois van der Merwe (Chairman), Cllr Giles Denby, Cllr Howard Harrison, Cllr Ed Horwell, Cllr David Wakeling, Mrs Andrea Oughton (Parish Clerk) and 15 members of the public

**Apologies for Absence**

Steve Willis, Village Hall Committee.

**Introduction by Chairman**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Annual Parish Meeting.

**01/05/25 Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> May 2024 were taken as read and approved as a true record of the meeting.

**02/05/25 Report by Chairman of Parish Council**

Members of the Council remain unchanged. Georgina Heritage remains as our District Councillor. However, we have a newly elected County Councillor following the elections on 1<sup>st</sup> May, Judith Edwards.

Notable points from last year

- Completing the MUGA resurfacing. This was done on budget, with the majority of costs covered by a grant secured in 2024 from the FCC Communities Foundation. We now have a top-quality surface for sports to be used by the village, the wider community, the school and the nursery. In addition, the lights have been updated to LED spotlights, and new token timers installed. Thanks to Cllr Horwell who is responsible for the sports facilities.
- The joint initiative we started between the shop, hall and parish council led to strong co-operation and constructive engagement on several projects: Most notable is the solar panels installed for the benefit and sustainability of the community shop, with immense support from the village hall and facilitated by the parish council. In addition, the parish council assisted in funding the new doorway into the community shop. Thanks to Cllr Denby who is responsible for liaison for the parish council, Steve Willis, Chair of the Village Hall Committee and Kevin Hunt, Chair of the Community Shop.
- After much lobbying from the parish council, residents and councillors, Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) finally addressed the persistent flooding and poor state of the road at the bottom end of Church Hill. The roads leading through the villages suffer from the nationwide issue of potholes and manholes, through Fix My Street we were able to get some of these repaired. Thanks to Cllr Sheppard for co-ordinating all things related to utilities and highways.
- Apart from our ongoing maintenance of our green spaces, the parish also benefitted from several mature trees being planted or donated around Old Field and Milton Manor Drive and also renewed bark chippings on the church footpath. Thanks to Cllr Harrison for his boundless energy and commitment to this area.
- The playground has a new entry gate, something which has been an issue for a long time. As a facility for children, keeping this space safe and compliant is a big job. Thanks to Cllr Wakeling for his continuous efforts in maintaining this great village asset.

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Looking Ahead

The Council's main priorities for the year ahead are:

- The A329. As with previous years, working towards limiting the weight and speed, and numbers of HGV, traffic through the village remains a priority. To this end we aim to install at least one Speed Indicator Sign on the A329 and may look to add a second in the village if the first is a success.
- Related to the above, with the recently announced South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) waste logistics site at Haseley Trading Estate, the significant increase in traffic and heavier vehicles presents an unwelcome development. We aim to engage strongly with the relevant parties and authorities on this, especially through the imminent planning application.
- The tennis and football courts will be getting an online booking and payment system; we look forward to the various community groups and people from the community embracing these fantastic facilities. I understand there is a reinvigorated five-a-side football initiative using the facilities.
- Flooding and drainage, this troublesome area is something we have no authority or control over. However, we will continue to lobby for improvements around the Haseley Road bridge.

Last year I encouraged everyone to attend our monthly parish council meetings. We explicitly have a 'Parish Forum' session at the beginning of proceedings to hear from the community about issues or topics they wish to bring to our attention. This plays a significant role in informing our priorities, please make use of it.

Lastly

There is so much more happening behind the scenes, often performed by people not on the council and using their free time to keep things ticking along. Raymond Fergusson continues his invaluable service to the community as the editor of our beloved village newsletter. The volunteers helping with our flowerbeds and defibrillators deserve a special mention, thank you to Carol and Kate.

**03/05/25 Financial report**

Andrea Oughton presented the financial report as Clerk for the financial period to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

The Parish Council needs to explain what services and facilities it provides to its parishioners and where it receives the money to pay for those services / facilities and that it manages the finances responsibly by holding an appropriate level of reserves to meet its future needs.

For the year 2024-25 the Parish Council's expenditure is over the £25k threshold and is required to submit its accounts to Moore, the Government appointed external auditor for Oxfordshire. The Parish Council's internal auditor will review the adequacy of our internal controls as has been done in previous years.

Income

You will be pleased to know that this is not all funded through the precept. The precept is the amount of income that the Parish Council requests the District Council to include in the Council Tax that householders pay each year.

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The sources of income of £122,063 are:

Precept	£14,000
Newsletter Advertising	£6,306
Grants: (OCC re verges) SODC grant	£83,478
Community Infrastructure Levy	£17,717
Other Income	£53
Bank interest	£509

The Council is delighted that the Village Newsletter continues to be self-financing and in 2024-25 generated a net contribution of £1,189.

The Council received Grants as follows:

OCC	Verge cutting	£528
SODC	Flood Mitigation	£2,967
FCC	MUGA Refurbishment	£53,859
SSE & SODC	Solar Panels (shop)	£27,181

The main headings of expenditure of £104,840 are:

Newsletter	£5,117
Open Green Spaces	£12,570
Council Administration	£4,500
Other Expenditure	£3,868
Playground	£512
MUGA	£72,329
Community Shop	£5,944

Reserves

Reserves are what the Council needs to manage the unevenness of its patterns of expenditure as well as to manage the cost of any planned or unexpected expenditure.

Our overall reserves of £41,918 are higher by £17,223 from those held at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. This is primarily due to receipt of grant funding for the installation of solar panels on the roof of Pine Lodge to generate energy for the community shop.

The Council believe that this level of reserve is adequate to meet known future events and normal ongoing expenditure.

**04/05/25 District Councillor Report – Cllr 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](mailto: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.

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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 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.

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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 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.

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- 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.

**05/05/25 County Councillor Report**

Newly elected County Councillor Judith Edwards was unable to attend and sent her apologies.

**06/05/25 Report from Village Hall Management Committee**

Steve Willis was unable to attend and sent his apologies. Giles Denby presented the report.

The introduction of a new online booking system and website has had a direct impact resulting in 30% increase in hires to 500 per year. Income has come mainly from bookings from non-residents for children's and other parties and keep fit classes. The summer period was a bit slower.

Finances

Revenue has increased by 30%, the cost of running the hall is around £13k excluding repairs and maintenance. Open balance of funds was £40k, external renovations including wood repairs to windows and doors and repainting as well as a small meeting room and storage area for the shop created resulted in a £23k spend reducing cash held to £17k.

Events

The annual fireworks night was well supported and a good fundraiser as were the two plays performed at the hall.

The Committee is made up of a good strong group of volunteers who help and the running of the hall is totally reliant on them. A new member with event experience has recently joined.

Finally, a big thank you to all those who support the events and the volunteers.

**07/05/25 Report from Little Milton Shop**

Mr Kevin Hunt presented the report from the Village Shop.

Firstly, as always, I want to thank wholeheartedly the small number of resolute volunteers and shop staff who give their time and effort consistently every week on behalf of our community. I would also like to thank our new volunteers your support it is very much appreciated. However, the ongoing need for volunteers is still paramount.

Financial summary.

The sales in 2024-25 were £126.5k and that was down slightly on the previous year (£131.3k) and our gross margin was maintained at 35%. Our two biggest overhead costs are salaries and electricity and this year we reduced our energy cost by 15% ((£2,200) this was achieved by changing our daily closure procedures.

The Post Office income at £22.5k was up 8.5% and is an important part of our business and with the closure of Milton Post Office there is potential for this to increase in the next reporting period.

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Our SODC lottery income of £2.4k forms a beneficial source of income that everyone can participate in to help their community shop. Moving forward we intend to engage more with residents to maximise its financial benefit.

The lifeblood of any business is cash. The Shop ended the year at £24.3K that was down from the previous year due to the loss of £3k and capital expenditure of £1.5k

Lastly Little Milton Shop and Post Office finances are in a good place and with the support of the community will continue to provide a vital service to Little Milton and the surrounding communities.

I stated earlier energy is one of our largest costs therefore, I hope you spotted that we have taken further steps with the installation of solar panels and the end of the current tariff will see significant savings in 2025-26. The investment cost of the panels is £18k and we have funded this through grants.

We have also during the period renewed our patio furniture and you will, I hope noticed the new shop front, this was required through necessity as the wooden structure had warped to the extent that the shop could not be secured. My thanks go to the Parish council for funding the renewal. In addition, with the reconfiguration of the village hall we have been able to secure a second stock room.

Finally, after 16 years Alison our Post Mistress and Shop Manager has decided to take retirement at the end of June, so I am sure you all along with me want to thank her for her commitment to our community during her tenure and the very best in the future.

**08/05/25 Report by Chair of Little Milton School Governors**

No report received.

**09/05/25 Report from Orchard Pre-School**

The Orchard Community Pre-School continues to provide a stable, caring and happy environment for all of the children. There are currently 27 children on roll and four members of teaching staff.

Following a significant dip in numbers last year child numbers have built throughout the year and are now at a healthy level including a waiting list. We have had a significant increase of children due to the rolling out of the new government working parents funding.

Provision

The Orchard currently offers a learning EYFS childcare setting from 9am to 2.45pm. There are mornings and afternoon sessions, and younger children often start with just a few sessions a week and then build up to longer hours when they are ready. There is also a session on a Tuesday afternoon, called 'Big Club' aimed specifically at children of 4 years of age to help prepare them for the transition to primary school.

From September 2024 we have now changed our hours to include being open on a Thursday afternoon. We also now offer a breakfast club from 8.30am Wednesday to Friday should parents require it.

OFSTED

We have not been further inspected since Monday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2022 where we were rated as GOOD.

Environment

Improvements continue to be made to ensure the wellbeing and safety of the children and staff. The garden is regularly maintained by volunteers, and we are very thankful for their help.

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In October half term 2024 we were extremely grateful to Kilnbridge who donated a large team of workers and all materials to treat the building for woodworm and paint the exterior walls. The team were also able to design and build our new play bus, a rear awning, planters, mud kitchen and repair the raised walkway. This work has made a huge improvement to our outside space, we were hugely appreciative of the parents, and staff who helped arranged the work.

Staff

The Orchard is very fortunate to have a strong, experienced and ambitious team. They undertake CPD regularly and all legally required training is up-to-date. Jess Ford has been the Supervisor for four years this May, supported by Clair West as Deputy Supervisor. This academic year we have welcomed Jess Lewis as a Qualified Early Years Educator and Donna Webber as an unqualified Early Years Educator. Alison Vallance continues in the role of Office Manager, as well as taking charge of the finances.

Fundraising

Fundraising has once again been tricky with a very small committee. We are extremely grateful for the support and generosity of Little Milton Villagers and the local community at the Spring and Christmas fayres. We are also grateful for the support shown at the fireworks cake sale and to Kilnbridge again for a generous cash donation.

Committee

Mr James Painter was appointed as our new Chair at our AGM in October replacing Mrs Jane Comyn who held the position for two years. We thank Jane for all her contributions to the management of the Pre-school. The committee remains quite small with almost all parents now working and having limited time. As before, if there would be any members of the local committee willing to step forward and join the committee, it would be most appreciated.

Future vision

The team at The Orchard are keen to continue to improve and always provide the best childcare for the children. The staff are all undertaking CPD and preparing for more yet more changes to the EYFS. The next project on our wish list would be to renovate our outdoor hard surface area. Thank you very much to both the staff and the committee who work incredibly hard to ensure the children are well looked after and cared for in such a safe, positive environment. The parents are very supportive, and we are very grateful for all the support and hard work that helps to make The Orchard successful.

James Painter  
Chairperson

**10/05/25 Report on St James' Church**

Reverend Simon Cronk gave a report on behalf of St James' Church. Rev Cronk thanked the Parish Council on behalf of the village for all they do.

**11/05/25 Parish Forum**

No questions were raised.

The meeting closed at 19.54pm

Signed by:

Chairman.....



.....Date.....

13 May '26