



Members Present:

Cllr R Faulkner (RF), Cllr M Canning (MAC), Cllr A Bird (AB), Cllr B Phillips (BP), Cllr M O'Callaghan (MO), Cllr P Forster (PF), District Cllr L Arciszewska and County Cllr L Walker and Clerk Fay Friend (FF).

Additionally 61 members of the public were in attendance.

**1. To receive apologies for absence**

Apologies have been received from Cllr P Holt (PH), District Cllr A Al-Yousuf (AAY) and PCSO Helen Duffield

**2. To approve minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2022** It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes were signed as a true record and a copy was on display at the back of the hall for electors to read.

**3. Annual report by Roger Faulkner, Chairman of Freeland Parish Council** Welcome to our Annual Parish Meeting. For those who do not know me my name is Roger Faulkner and I am the current Chair of the Parish Council. There have been a few changes in our team over the last year especially our Clerk, Fay Friend, who is just about to complete her first year with us. Fay has been a tremendous asset to the Council and has been a joy to work alongside her. I would also like to thank our outgoing Councillors, Andy Bain, Perrin Hatwell and Amy Jackson for their invaluable contribution. We have welcomed two new Co-opted members to the Council, Mark O'Callaghan and Phil Holt who I am sure will both be a great asset. That leaves four other continuing Councillors: our Vice Chair, Mary Ann Canning, Bill Phillips, Peter Foster and Andrew Bird. Together we will continue to serve the needs of our village to the best of our ability. We are currently one member short so if anyone would like to be considered for co-optation onto the Council, to serve for a year until the local elections in May 2024, please have a word with either Fay or myself.

During the last year we have consulted with everyone in the village on a wide variety of matters, particularly through a village survey last May. A highlight of the year was the Jubilee picnic held in June in, what has to be said, was not the best of weather, but hundreds of people turned out and had a good time. Social activities, to bring people together, was one of things that the survey highlighted so in February we held a public meeting to see if there was a possibility of setting up a couple of Working Groups. With a team of only seven Councillors we cannot do everything ourselves and need others from the village to step up. Following this first meeting two further meetings were held earlier this week with the aim of setting up both a Community and Sustainability Working Group. The Parish Council are keen to help and support these groups who have already come up with a number of ideas. These include:

- Energy efficiency and heat saving initiatives. We have borrowed a thermal imaging camera and need people to volunteer to undertake a simple imaging training session so that we can undertake a home thermal imaging project in the winter.
- Sustainable transport. We want to support the 411 bus and help people to understand the timetable. There may well be a promotional week in the summer and illustrations of possible journeys and stories of actual journeys to help people to see the potential.
- Nature recovery and Treescapes. There is a bat walk on 13th May and a meeting on biodiversity on Sunday 21st May at 6.00pm in The Yeoman.

- Social events. It is regretted that it has not been possible to organize anything for the Coronation but we would like to set up an annual event in the village starting in 2024 if we can get some volunteers on board.
- Cinema. We are discussing the possibility of resurrecting the cinema but would need a few folk to help with this.
- Ad hoc fun events for adults and children. A number of suggestions have already been made but again it needs people to get involved to make it happen.
- Repair Café, Swap Shop. Maybe a quarterly event to coincide with the Farmers' market.- Reintroducing the Tuesday Club and a possible Business Breakfast are also on the table.

If you would like to see these things actually happen we all need to do what we can. You have all got a copy of a brief questionnaire and by filling this in you can indicate which of the various activities you would be interested in helping with. Please fill one in and leave it by the door either during our break for refreshments or at the end of the evening. All the day to day work of the Council has made good progress during the last year: installation of new play equipment and maintenance of all our much used play park, the monthly checking of all our footpaths, maintenance of the Garden of Remembrance, the playing field, The Green and various other pieces of land for which the Council is responsible.

But it is without a doubt that the thing that has taken up the vast majority of our time and effort has been various planning matters. We have considered all individual planning applications submitted to the Local Planning Authority and have commented when concerns have been expressed by the Council. We have also liaised with the Freeland Community Benefit Society regarding the Methodist Church, which has now been closed for six years. The Community Benefit Society were again successful in obtaining a change of use to a shop and café but West Oxfordshire District Council refused planning permission sought by the West Oxfordshire Methodist Circuit who applied for a change of use to a residential dwelling. The current situation is that the Methodist Church has still not been put up for sale and the future intentions of the Circuit for this listed and iconic building are presently unknown. We also held a public meeting in October to bring everyone up to speed with the progress of Salt Cross and the possible reduction in the speed limit in Freeland.

There are three ongoing large scale applications, Inspired Villages, Spitfire Homes and the Botley West Solar Farm. I will say something about each of these. Inspired Villages proposal to build a retirement village of 160 units between Wroslyn Road and Freeland House was received by many in the village with horror. In fact, almost 300 individuals objected to their plans as did the Parish Council and an action group of local residents, Freeland Friends, which was formed to fight this proposal. WODC refused the application but Inspired Villages appealed this decision which meant that the Planning Inspectorate arranged a Public Inquiry. The Parish Council and Freeland Friends joined forces and applied for, and were granted, what is called Rule 6 Status which meant that we were given equal status at the Inquiry with the Appellant (Inspired Villages) and the Defendant (WODC). An awful lot of time and hard work was then undertaken. I would like to take this opportunity of publicly thanking my colleagues on the Parish Council and the members of Freeland Friends but especially Amy Jackson and Mike Gilbert, our local planning consultant, who both did such an outstanding job. The Inquiry took place over six days in November after which the Inspector considered all the evidence and, in January, published her decision which was to dismiss the appeal. However, this is not the end of the road as Inspired Villages have sought leave to appeal the Inspector's decision in the High Court. Many people have asked, "What happens next?". The first thing is that the Inspired Villages claim will be considered by a High Court judge based on written submissions. If permission is refused, Inspired Villages has

the right to apply for an oral hearing. If permission for this is refused Inspired Villages can take it to the Court of Appeal. However, if permission for the case to proceed to the Court of Appeal is refused this is the end of the process. On the other hand, if permission is granted, the claim will proceed to a hearing and if this appeal is upheld the Planning Inspectorate will appoint another Inspector and a second Public Inquiry will take place. If, after all this, their appeal is dismissed Inspired Villages could go to the Court of Appeal and all the way to the Supreme Court for a final decision.

This process can take many months, or even years, so there is still a long way to go! Having come to the end of this exhaustive process, at least for the time being, we then found ourselves with a second speculative proposal from Spitfire Homes who have applied for permission to build 80 houses on the land opposite the Inspired Villages site, in the field on the corner of Wroslyn Road and Pigeon House Lane. We organised a public meeting on 15th March at which Spitfire Homes presented their proposals so that local residents could hear more about the details and had the opportunity to put questions directly to them. Once again, many local residents objected with 180 lodging their objections with West Oxfordshire District Council. The Parish Council submitted a full and detailed objection and are working closely with the newly formed local action group, Freeland Friends 2, to fight this proposal which is due to be considered by the District Council on 25th April. If the decision is to refuse planning permission we have it from Spitfire Homes themselves that they will go to appeal so we may be in the situation of having another lengthy fight on our hands.

As if that wasn't enough we then had the Botley West Solar Farm proposals which would see the largest solar farm in Europe right on our doorstep. The Parish Council has not yet come to a decision as to how to respond to this but will do so in the second round of consultation which is planned to take place soon. In the meantime, we have repeatedly asked for residents to let us know their opinion, whether in favour or against, so as to inform our discussion but, to date, we have received only 7 replies, 4 of which were in favour and 3 against. I would therefore like to encourage you to attend a meeting on Tuesday 2nd May at The Pavilion in Long Hanborough commencing at 7.30pm to find out more about what is happening and what's next? Please let us know your thoughts. Also, Stop Botley West campaign group have published a flier with more details and with a request for people to contact their MP. A copy of this flier is on the noticeboard for you to have a look at.

These planning matters have taken a lot of effort and sapped much of our strength but the day to day work of the Parish Council continues as we attempt to serve our local community. In this we are ably assisted by various other groups so I would like to thank the members of the Village Hall Management Committee who do such a good job in managing and maintaining this amazing place, the group who look after our Little Free Libraries, the volunteers who run the weekly community bus, First and Last Mile who operate the 411 bus service, our Speedwatch team who monitor and report vehicles travelling at excessive speeds – one vehicle was recorded recently doing 70mph as it approached The Green – and to the many local groups, clubs and societies who do so much for Freeland.

And so we move on to another year. You will all have received your Council Tax details for 2023-24. In these difficult financial times it is perhaps not surprising that District Council has increased by 4.4%, the County Council by 5% (which includes 2% for adult social care) and Thames Valley Police by 6.2%. On the other hand, I am pleased to say that the Parish Council have asked for a 0% increase so the Parish precept will remain at exactly the same level as last year.

We will continue to explore the possibility of setting up Working Groups, to which I have already referred, carry forward the discussions on the possible reduction in speed limits and address the various parking problems, especially in the vicinity of the school. Two

new noticeboards have been ordered – one to replace the existing one outside the school with the other being located next to the new bus stop on the A4095 at Freeland Gate and, of course, those planning applications.

There will be an opportunity for any questions later this evening but before I close I would just like to point out that last year's financial statements and reports from various groups in Freeland are displayed on the noticeboard which you can have a look at during our break for refreshments.

I would now like to hand over to our County Councillor, Liam Walker to share one or two thoughts with us.

#### **4. Financial report and reports from the various clubs in Freeland**

A copy of the annual finances for year ending 31st March 2023 were on display at the back of the hall together with all the club reports. Reports from Allotment Association, Craft Club, Freeland preschool, Freeland Primary school, Freeland Baby and Toddler group, Little Free Library, Football, Gardening and Wine Club.

Additional information about potholes, Botley West Solar Farm and the Green Tea meeting were also on display at the back of the hall.

#### **5. Annual report from County Councillor- Liam Walker**

Liam introduced himself and is always how amazed how well attended Freeland Parish meetings are. It has been a very busy year as he has 8 parishes in total.

Firstly the local transport in the area- The First and Last Mile services is much more beneficial than the previous 11 service. The new addition of the S7 bus with runs much earlier in the morning and much later in the evening. Additionally the continuation of the £2 single fair running until the end of June. But we must keep using services otherwise we will lose them.

The 20mph zone- this has been a big issue especially with how it was brought in for Witney Town. Freeland is awaiting for County Council to deliver the consultation.

Botley West Solar Farm- Liam is against the application that is being proposed by Blenheim when application for homes are still going in without putting solar panels on roof tops first. Additionally where will it stop and will more fields after the initial proposal be used. Long Hanborough has recently received an application for an additional 600 homes by the station. This is due to the lack of a robust local plan.

A40- this is currently awaiting a decision from County Council as to where they would like the multimillion pound funding that they have received from the government. Once the park and ride has been completed it'll sit there as there would be no bus lane for it to filter into.

Potholes- are in very bad condition and continuing to deteriorate. The app Fix my street needs to be used to help identify all the potholes for the county council to rectify.

Thanks was given to the Parish Council for all of their support over the last year.

#### **6. Annual report from District councillors- Alaa Al-Yousuf and Lidia Arciszewska**

Alaa Al- Yousuf- Good evening. I am grateful to Freeland Parish Council for giving me the opportunity to address you in absentia and for the unsung hard work that its Councillors do throughout the year on behalf of us all.

I would not be surprised if you have filled the Hall to the rafters as usual, and this is a remarkable testament to your extraordinary community spirit and active engagement in village life. And I am guessing the atmosphere in the Hall is tentatively relieved to learn that the Spitfire application has been recommended for refusal on Tuesday but somewhat anxious about the outcome of a likely appeal. Here we go again!

As your councillor, over the past year, I discharged several additional duties on your behalf: as Chairman of the Finance and Management Committee, as member of the Climate and Environment Committee and as a member of the Planning Committee. I therefore feel I contributed to decision-making that affected the whole district and represented your interests. All the while, I kept the Parish Council abreast of key decisions.

Now allow me to give you my take on a handful of issues:

1. On strategic planning, I have been vocal about the District Council's weakened position to uphold its Local Plan 2031. This has encouraged several developers to challenge its decisions through appeals. I believe that WODC may have to declare its current plan out-of-date in September while continuing to work on a new Local Plan 2041. In the meantime, the district will remain vulnerable to speculative developments.
2. On financial matters, I have raised my concerns about the District Council's inflated budget for this year and its financial strength over the medium-term. I have cautioned that some frontline services might have to be reduced to make savings unless the Executive curbed discretionary spending.
3. Related to that, WODC has acquired Marriotts Walk shopping precinct-- the one with the cinema and M&S--with a view to revitalising it and making a good return on investment. I have argued that if the investment turned out as planned, it would support future budgets, but this would be a big challenge that required professional management.
4. On sewage pollution in waterways, the District Council recently announced that it had been working closely with Thames Water to take steps to reduce discharges. While I welcomed this, upon closer examination, I expressed my dismay and concerns that there wasn't a binding written agreement. Moreover, a new request to developers to submit a declaration about the adequacy of capacity at sewage treatment works sounded great but, alas, it is unenforceable and so will be optional. So, I will continue to press these issues.
5. Finally, on the proposed Botley West Solar Farm, the information you've received from the developer so far is by way of a pre-application community engagement and I have found it inadequate. The application is expected to be submitted to the planning inspectorate later this year. That will then trigger a formal consultation process and the district council will be required to submit reports on the adequacy of the consultation process and the project's local impact including on the environment. I hope to contribute to that process.

On all the above and more I will keep everyone informed. Thank you for listening and have a wonderful evening.

Lidia Arciszewska- I am delighted to report on the accomplishments of the District Council within the last year

The Council's work was guided by five priorities:

1. Putting Residents First
2. Enabling a Good Quality of Life for All
3. Creating a Better Environment for People and Wildlife
4. Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency
5. Working Together for West Oxfordshire

Specifically we have focused on delivering in several critical areas.

1. Holding Thames Water to Account. We've been having monthly discussions with Thames Water. By studying its own data we discovered that the capacities of Thames Water network infrastructure and its sewage treatment works are well below what is needed. TW has now accepted that 8 out of the main 9 STW in West Oxfordshire have insufficient capacity. We are working to have these expanded. Moreover, from now on any housing development must have sufficient sewage treatment capacity before the new residents can move in.

2. The Council has become more proactive towards improving the health of our waterways and in setting up a much better flood management system. We have been negotiating with the Lead Local Flood Authority and Environment Agency to ensure that they are meeting their statutory obligations with regard to flood prevention. We have been reaching out to other external partners such as Evenlode Catchment Partnership and Windrush Catchment Partnership and other local voluntary organisations to take advantage of their expertise on how to create natural flood management schemes, wild meadows restoration and other natural recovery projects.

We have provided a platform for making new partnerships between these groups and the district residents through Council hosted Waterways Day.

3. The Council is developing a new Local Plan. The previous Council administration signed off a plan, which had unrealistic housing target numbers. As a consequence, two months into the new administration's tenure it became apparent that the Council couldn't provide evidence of 5 years land supply delivery. We are now working hard to deliver the new plan 2041, which will have a much more realistic housing numbers. This plan will also address many issues relating to climate emergency and environment, such as natural flood management, renewable energy rollout and nature restoration.

4. Regeneration of our town centres. The Council has purchased Marriotts Walk shopping Centre to give Witney town centre a new breath of life.

We have also commissioned a feasibility study to obtain insights on how we can use the recently obtained UK Shared Prosperity Fund to effectively support our other town centres.

5. The Council is standing up for residents. We are contesting the National Planning Inspector's decision on the Moors in Ducklington to stop housing development on the flood plain.

6. We have been standing up for the environment. The government inspectors crossed out a zero net carbon requirement for Salt Cross Garden Village and a provision for a cycle path between Eynsham and Hanborough Station from the development's Area Action Plan. Following another public consultation the council challenged the inspectors' position. The cycle path was placed back in the plan. Unfortunately, Inspectors maintained that Salt Cross doesn't need to be built to net zero standards. The Council's stance is now supported by RCA Rights Community Action collective who issued a High Court challenge of the inspectors' position.

7. Finally, throughout the year the Council has been supporting residents, who have been affected by the cost of living crisis.

## **7. Annual report from Thames Valley Police**

Unfortunately, PCSO Helen Duffield could not be present at the meeting due to work commitments. Despite repeated requests no report was received but it was confirmed that TVP had dealt with parking issues and thefts from the allotments.

## **8. Update on Salt Cross Garden Village**

Due to matter outside of her control Andrea was unable to attend in person.

The full presentation was read aloud and has been added to the Freeland Parish Council Website here:

<https://www.freelandpc.org.uk/community/freeland-parish-council-12755/salt-cross-gardenvillage/>

We cannot adopt the current area action plan until the high court case is resolved. WODC would be taken to court if they accepted the application. Court case has just been accepted. There are cases in other parts of the country where zero net gain was accepted. This was dependent upon the inspector of each case.

**Break for refreshments at 20:25**

**Meeting reconvened at 20.50**

### **9. Presentation by Evenlode Catchment Partnership**

A member from the Evenlode Catchment Partnership attended and gave an update on everything they do for the local area and the Evenlode. The powerpoint presentation has been uploaded onto the parish council website. Link to the website:

### **10. Update from First and Last Mile and Community Action Plan for Zero Carbon Energy.**

First and Last Mile has been honoured to provide the 411 bus service to Eynsham and Hanborough for over 15 months. This has only been possible through the support of many members of the community and the Parish Council for which we are very grateful. With funding now in place to secure the future of the service our focus is now turning towards providing an even better service tailored to passenger needs. Thank you to all those who replied to our recent survey. We welcome feedback positive or negative at all times and if anyone has further comments or suggestions please get in touch.

The 411 does connect with the new S7 service to Witney and Oxford. Restoring a direct service to Oxford, if only from the Turn with evening and improved Sunday service should be welcomed. First and Last Mile will never compete with that but we can ensure that there is a bus running through the village open to all 5 days a week. Freeland is in the fortunate position of having 2 community buses each meeting a separate need and a regular 7 days a week bus service. At a time when use of public transport rather than the car is encouraged at least there is now the choice.

**Community action plan-** Green TEA members are organising an open meeting next Wednesday at Eynsham Village Hall, to discuss the Community Action Plan for Zero Carbon Energy and we're encouraging all who are interested to attend.

We'll be sharing the main findings of a study we have been involved with for the last 2 years which we hope will help local communities understand what actions they can take to help avert the climate crisis.

We hear on the news on a weekly basis about the severity of the climate and biodiversity crises and how important it is to reduce global carbon emissions to zero by 2050. But it can be difficult for individuals or households to know what this means for us today and what we can actually do locally.

Some action is definitely needed which can only be done by governments, and we can hope for some new technological solution, but time's ticking on and global emissions aren't coming down yet. I for one am determined to see us turn the corner in my lifetime! We simply can't wait for these actions by others which are largely outside our control. Many of the changes will have to be made in our homes, workplaces and in our individual travel decisions anyway, so we need to start taking actions ourselves, now.

As if the challenge isn't difficult enough, locally, we face rampant development right outside our doors! The prospect of 3000 new homes being built in the next 10 years in and adjacent to Eynsham galvanised Green TEA members (and many others) to oppose these developments.

When we failed in that, we switched to trying to ensure that any new houses would be shining examples of how buildings can be designed to need very little heating, adding no more carbon emissions in our area. And protecting biodiversity. We were promised zero carbon homes in the garden village – in the early days. But now that promise seems to be in jeopardy.

It's much more difficult and expensive to retrofit older houses to bring down their heating requirements than it is to build new ones this way – so it seems madness to miss the opportunity to do it right first time.

Following our active engagement with the consultation process for the Garden Village, Green TEA was invited onto the local steering group for the 2-year Community Action Plan study. Other participants included Oxford and Oxford Brookes Universities, Scottish and Southern Electricity, Energy Systems Catapult, Low Carbon Hub and various experts and companies specialising in renewable energy and how the electricity grid works. The work was funded by Innovate UK (and is part of a larger project called Local Energy Oxfordshire - LEO). It's the first study to use the latest modelling tools to try and map out the transition to a zero carbon energy supply in a *rural area*, and also the first one to look at a community of *thousands* rather than *hundreds of thousands* of residents.

To get to zero carbon using *currently available* technology, our heating and transport needs to switch from using fossil fuels to using electricity. If this transition is allowed to happen in a chaotic way, it could mean a tripling of electricity demand compared with today. One of the aims of the study was to see if careful planning and design could reduce this to a doubling of electricity demand (this rate of growth is not unprecedented as it was achieved between 1960 and 1980).

Because the electricity network is so key to our future energy, it made sense that the area studied should be expanded beyond Eynsham itself to include the whole Primary Substation Area. This is the area whose electricity is fed into homes and businesses via the substation on Cuckoo Lane - and that area includes the whole of Freeland, as well as parts of 6 other parishes.

Another aim of the study was to see if it's feasible to generate, within the area, all of the (clean) electricity needed in that same area. Not necessarily meeting the instantaneous power at every moment, but in total, over the course of a year.

As members of the local steering group, we requested a set of practical targets for progress by 2030, broken down by parish, to help us all start down the path towards net zero. We're hoping that local councils will adopt the plan and that residents will join us in finding ways to start implementing the recommendations and reducing carbon emissions. Local action helps us keep more control over the process and can bring benefits such as local ownership of community schemes.

We hope to see you at our meeting, where you will hear the main findings; there will be much more detail in the final report. We'll also have information on how you can participate in coming years.

Refreshments will be served from 7pm. Location: Eynsham Village Hall.

## **11. Report from Freeland Hall Management Committee**

The village hall has had a good year. The hall is still very popular but there has been a reduction in the number of large events and parties which could be due to the financial crises. Regular bookings are keeping it afloat. Thanks to the management committee which has remained constant and hard working. Minor changes to the fire regulations have been made.

Complements to the cleaning team. Mindful of the increase in energy bills currently in the process of making the hall self-sufficient with possible solar and/or ground source heat pump. Planning for the future takes times and if anyone has personal experience please reach out. New curtains have been installed and the floor has been re-sanded.

## 12. Questions and Answers

Resident 1- If we are lucky enough to see off spitfire and inspired villages. The land that is owned by witney town charity will be attempted to be built on by another building firm. Could we (Freeland) make the move ourselves?

Julie- The Christmas lunch has been run for 5 years and Julie is looking for someone else to take on the lead? An advert will be in the June grapevine. Other people need to step up and help not just the same 5 or 6 people. If we want nice events to continue to happen then support for them is needed.

Defibrillator training- it was asked Parish Council could provide basic first aid and defibrillator training. This will be added to the May agenda

Resident- thanked Green TEA and all the work they were doing to try and help save the future.

Allotments- following the recent thefts they have put in some cameras to try catch the culprit.

Chairman- gave thanks to those in attendance and the helpers who ran the refreshments.

Resident- thanks given to Roger

There being no further business the Chairman thanked everyone for their time, interest and input and the meeting closed at 21:31.