

**MINUTES OF ASTON, COTE, SHIFFORD & CHIMNEY
ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD ON TUESDAY 18th April 2023
IN THE VILLAGE HALL, ASTON AT 7.30 PM**

- 1. Present:** Parish Councillors:
Russell La Forte (Parish Council Chairman)
Ben Lings
Gill Ball
Alex Chapman
Robert Anstee
- Elaine Anstee (Parish Clerk)
Dan Levy, Oxfordshire County Councillor
Lysette Nicholls, WODC Councillor
Ian Dunstan, Chair of Aston & Cote Community Trust
Trevor Jackson, Fix My Street Super User
Karen Stay, Aston and Cote Day Centre
Alaric Smith, Aston Community Shop
61 members of the public

- 2. Apologies:** There were apologies from J Ordish (Parish Councillor), Paul Sparrowhawk (Parish Councillor) and Cllr Charlie Maynard (WODC).

3. Welcome

Russell La Forte, Meeting Chairman, welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the members of the Parish Council and the Clerk.

4. Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting on 25th April 22.

These were accepted as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

5. Parish Council Report – Russell La Forte

Our Parish Council Our Parish Council comprises 7 unpaid councillors who are elected or co-opted to serve for 4 years and they are assisted in their duties by a salaried clerk (Elaine Anstee). Following a shortfall of 2 councillors following last year's (uncontested) election, we were delighted to co-opt Ben Lings and Rob Anstee onto the Council, thereby bringing us back to a full complement of 7.

Whilst this Parish is not scheduled for elections this year, residents should note that from May 23, those wishing to vote in person (including nominated proxy voters) at UK elections will now be required to provide photographic ID (a wide range of documents are acceptable that need not be current so long as the photo is accurate). Those on the electoral register who do not have an approved version of such ID can apply, free of charge, for a 'Voter Authority Certificate'. Applications can be made online at <https://voter-authority-certificate.service.gov.uk/>, via a paper form from WODC, or calling in person at their offices (more information available on 01993 861410, or email to elections@westoxon.gov.uk . Postal voters are not affected, having already provided signature and date of birth ID.

Flooding and Drainage The Parish Community Emergency Plan identifies flooding as a major (and the most likely) risk throughout the Parish, and is the Council's foremost concern in all planning matters. We also sit on the Bampton Flood Prevention Group to keep pressure on the Environment Agency to maintain drainage regimes and have encouraged riparian landowners to keep drainage ditches clear. This year we have also established closer links with lobbying groups Windrush Against Sewage Pollution (WASP) and Cotswold Rivers Trust. The lack of capacity in Thames Water's ageing infrastructure is a long-standing issue that continues to attract our ongoing personal attention, as well as that of our WODC and OCC councillors. Whilst we are pleased to see a planned, long-overdue upgrade to Bampton Sewage Treatment Works that will increase its capacity by 31% by the end of 2024, the principal cause of sewage outages in the Parish - widespread water ingress into ageing pipes - still remains unaddressed. Indeed, the situation has in fact deteriorated following a 23% increase in housing stock in Aston in the past 2-3 years.

Housing Development and Planning Issues Whilst it is WODC that determines all planning matters, the Parish Council is a statutory consultee on all planning applications in the Parish (21 in FY 22/23) and exercises a degree of influence accordingly. Wary of inexorable development 'creep', a recurring concern for the Council is to highlight the sustainability requirement for all development, noting the Conservation Area status of much of the Parish and stressing (especially) the inadequacies of the already overloaded drainage and sewerage system. The bombshell admission last Summer from WODC that it cannot meet its statutory 5-Year Housing Supply, despite previous repeated reassurances to the contrary, was met with dismay by communities across the district with the removal of a crucial curb to speculative housing development such as that proposed by Terra behind Marsh Furlong.

Terra Development Without doubt, the main parish news at the end of 2022 was the refusal on 5 December by the WODC Lowlands Planning Committee (LPC) of the planning application by Terra for 40 new houses behind Marsh Furlong. This was despite the initial application having been revised following criticism by WODC over the proposed affordable housing mix. After many, many months of community uncertainty and impassioned preparation by the Parish Council and the Aston Action Group, this success has met with acclaim by Aston residents. Particularly satisfying for those of us present at the meeting and who were expecting a much tougher fight, was the fact that the application was refused firmly and unanimously by all members of the LPC, all of whom had taken the trouble to conduct a site visit prior to the meeting to see for themselves the impact of the proposal on our community. However, whilst this battle was won, the war is not over, with the wholly predictable submission of an appeal by Terra made on 22 March. The Public Inquiry by the Planning Inspectorate is scheduled for 20 Jun in Witney and is expected to last up to 5 days; the appeal decision is expected around 25 August. Given the community's implacable opposition to the proposed development and major concerns over the robustness of WODC's grounds for refusal, the Council has successfully applied for Rule 6 Status, whereby it will play an active, major role as a third party to the Inquiry. This will entail an extremely significant and complex amount of work, aided, as far as limited financial resources allow, by planning counsel (a specialist barrister) and expert witnesses. Fortunately, the Council is able to call gratefully upon pro bono legal assistance from a retired solicitor in the Parish. Members of the public are also able to make online representations to the Planning Inspector, as well as speak at the Inquiry if they wish.

Hawthorns Development With the access road now recently completed at long last, completion of the Hawthorns development seems imminent after much delay. Once handover to the relevant authorities is complete, a 2-year maintenance phase will commence whereby Matthew Homes will retain maintenance and repair responsibility. Two issues of concern remain. Firstly, the precise arrangements for contracted grounds maintenance, including the governance role of Hawthorns residents, have yet to be determined. Secondly, after objecting vehemently to the retrospective planning application by Matthew Homes to retain their ugly, incongruous, and unnecessary wooden fencing at the southern end of the site by Bull Street, we were delighted to see the application's refusal by WODC in November. Without prior consultation with the Council, WODC have recently agreed a variation to planning conditions that will see the current 2m-high fence replaced with a 1m-high fence, together with new perimeter hedging and the replacement of removed hedging alongside the public footpath to the west.

North Farm Frustratingly, after a promising initial response to our extensively researched Community Development Proposal made to OCC (the landowner), all has gone extremely quiet regarding North Farm. We understand that OCC and WODC (the planning authority) are now currently discussing the matter in detail, and we have been promised greater clarity in the next month or so. We shall see.

OCC Children's Home on Back Lane Following a fascinating archaeological dig on the site, work is now well underway with ground floor construction completed and roof trusses erected. The project is on schedule, with completion expected on 27 October. The Site Manager, Kevin Carter, is available on 07970 529997 and is happy to talk with any resident who may have questions.

Traffic Calming Traffic-related issues rightly remain a major local concern. Last year, the first Section 106 receipts enabled the implementation of Stages 1 and 2 of the Council's traffic calming project. This year, a further, comprehensive Stage 3 project was submitted to OCC Highways, including potential adjustments to speed limits and zones. Following mandatory public consultation, OCC considered the matter in October, and after approving the proposals, should have referred them back to the Parish Council to agree their precise implementation, in accordance with OCC policy and repeated assurances by OCC officers. Instead, the measures were peremptorily introduced with neither consultation nor notice in November. Whilst we are broadly content with the new measures, opinions vary on particular elements. We have therefore asked for further feedback from residents (culminating in the Annual Parish Meeting) before raising the matter formally with OCC shortly thereafter.

Royal Matters The past year has been a momentous one for our Monarchy, one that saw HM The Queen celebrate her Platinum Jubilee in February as our nation's longest-serving monarch, followed by her passing in September. Following her death, the Parish Council forwarded written condolences on behalf of our community to HM The King and opened a Book of Condolence in St James Church. In November, following a joint initiative with the Community Trust, a number of new trees were planted in the southwest corner of the Recreation Ground as part of the Platinum Jubilee 'Queen's Green Canopy' national initiative, a fitting memorial to our late Queen. With the Coronation of HM King Charles III approaching on 6 May, we plan a permanent memorial to this historic event through the procurement of a

commemorative side access gate from Church Lane to St James' Church, complementing the existing front gate that commemorates the Silver Jubilee of 1937.

Finance The Parish remains in very good financial state, as confirmed by our external auditors in 2022. Following its bold decision not to increase the Precept, the Council continued to exercise financial prudence and operated comfortably within its agreed budget of £37,916. Total Section 106 receipts over the period 2020-28 will total some £186,000. Financial grants, donations and projects in the financial year (totalling £4,441) included the new Day Centre, Voices magazine, grass cutting for Cote Chapel and the church of St James, Aston Community Trust, Aston Youth Football Club, Cleanslate, Volunteer Link Up and Citizens Advice.

The Budget for Financial Year 2023/24 was agreed at the Parish Council meeting in December 22. In sharp contrast to successive, inexorable Council Tax rises at county and district level, we were delighted, for a remarkable fifth consecutive year, to be able to make no increase to the Precept. This, at £30,166 keeps the Band D equivalent household at £49.74 (around 3.6p/month for each parish resident). As with all Council business, full details may be found on the Council website, including fully audited annual accounts.

6. Aston & Cote Community Trust (CT) – Ian Dunstan, Chairperson

The Community Trust is self-funded and registered as a charity with the charity commission. The committee looks after the recreation field and village hall. The committee consists of a group of volunteers drawn from the regular user groups and trustees. There is a new website at [Aston&Cote | Village Hall and Recreation Ground \(astoncotevillagehall.org.uk\)](http://Aston&Cote | Village Hall and Recreation Ground (astoncotevillagehall.org.uk)). There is a major project to install a MUGA using S106 funding and supported by the Parish Council. Future projects include extending the car park and replacements of the soffit/guttering on the village hall.

7. Fix My Street – Super User – T Jackson

The original road-tax ceased in 1937 and the Road Fund was abolished in 1955. Maintenance of our highways is now taxpayer funded, through income tax, council tax, business rates and VAT.

The OCC highways teams work in all weathers and conditions to maintain the 3,000 miles of road for which they are responsible. They also manage 2,000 miles of footway, 1,200 bridges, 400,000 trees and 80,000 streetlights.

The period straight after winter is always the most difficult and resources are allocated with that in mind. In weather conditions that we have experienced recently, potholes can appear very quickly. Potholes are prioritized by those that pose the greatest safety concerns first. OCC currently spends more than £2m per year repairing potholes and over the past couple of years has changed the way repairs are done. The vast majority (97%) are now cut square, joint sealed filled and compacted, to undertake a first-time permanent fix instead of the temporary sweep and fill method previously used. More than 30,000 defects were repaired in the last financial year. Last year the average reactive repair cost, per pothole, was estimated to be £71.40.

A recent freedom of information enquiry revealed that Stoke on Trent took 18.5 months to fix a pothole after being alerted to it. Several other councils were taking between 270 and 556 days to fix their potholes.

My reports are acted upon by the County Council contractors promptly and they should be completed within 28 days. In some cases, the contractor was on site repairing potholes in the same week as I had reported them. Admittedly this tends to be in the summer months, but they are nearly all fixed within the 28-day limit.

My tours of the 17 miles of parish roads have been somewhat curtailed over the last few months because of the wet weather. It's quite difficult to identify a pothole when the roads are so wet with puddles everywhere and spraying the white paint on a wet surface means the identify marking won't last very long.

Potholes will be fixed where the depth is greater than 40mm on a road and 20mm on a pavement. Overall size is crucial too; small potholes should be at least 15 cm² and up to 1 m². Large potholes should be at least 1 m² and up to 2m².

My first year as a Fix My Street User from Apr 21 to Apr 22 I identified, marked up and reported for repair 76 potholes. Since Apr last year, that has risen to 156 further potholes and a few curbstone repairs. This is total of 232 reports loaded up to the Fix My Street platform at a cost to repair of over £16,500.

Highway Capital Program for this financial year:

B4449, through Aston, is earmarked for surface dressing from the junction with Foxwood, through The Square and along the High Street as far as the junction with Vicarage Close. Aston Road is earmarked for road edge strengthening from the Yelford crossroads at the end of the Aston Mile over the hills to just before the junction with the A415 at Ducklington. On the Great Brook Road raising the parapets and installing trief kerbs is planned at the lower-level section that floods, between the wooden bridge and the junction with the Bampton to Buckland Road at the Isle of Wright Bridge.

Outside of the boundary but possibly of interest is the A415 Ducklington Bypass, earmarked for surface dressing, from the first Ducklington turn coming from Standlake, to the Ducklington roundabout. Some patching on a short section by the Standlake industrial estate and Standlake Areana. Some patching at Newbridge, by the Rose Revived pub.

Q: What is being done about the potholes and road surface along the B4449, outside the pottery?

A: This is the planning authority's responsibility – the clerk will follow up with them.

8. Aston and Cote Day Centre – Karen Stay, Founder

The Aston and Cote Day Centre is for people over the age of 65 years to come together, participate in activities and have lunch together. It originally opened in November 21 and then had to closed again for COVID. It reopened on the 16th March 2022 and is every Wednesday. There are 26 members who take part in activities such as seated exercise and music/sing song. The Centre is reliant on the volunteers who support the Day Centre and enable it to continue to thrive.

9. Aston Community Centre

The community shop in Aston continues to trade steadily with income of about £13k per month giving an 18% gross profit giving a net profit of about £500 per month. In the last year £6k was spent on the roof and repairs plus £600 for a new floor. Current assets, mainly stock, are at £25k. The shop is a CIC so does not pay dividends but can make donations to other

charities. The shop is run by volunteers and currently has about 30 but is always looking for new people to join the team. A special thank you was made to Linda and Richard Lincoln for the work they have done.

10. OCC Councillor Dan Levy

Now 2-years into its first 4-year term, it is an opportune moment to reflect on the progress made by the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance administration since taking control from the Conservatives. The alliance of Lib Dems, Greens and Labour continues to work together resiliently and is committed to its key tasks. Its vision is laid out in the 9 priorities adopted, that includes 'putting climate at the heart of everything we do'. The IPCC's 'final warning' to humanity in March this year, puts back into focus the importance of following through on this commitment – even in the face of rising opposition from conspiracy theorists, climate change deniers, and those who would wish to see a much-diminished role for the county council. It has been an eye-opener to see some of these conspiracy theorists close up, as they pursue their completely incorrect interpretation of why the County Council is trying to make the roads safer and less congested and improve air quality.

The County Council is responsible for delivering a range of services to residents of Oxfordshire, including adult social care, children's services – including for children with special educational needs and disabilities, and of course, maintaining Oxfordshire's highways and transport infrastructure, and a range of other services, including libraries, fire and rescue, and coroners' services.

There are colossal demands on resources, but our budget this spring was as generous as it could be. I was pleased that the councillor priority fund was renewed for another two years, as I have been happy to be able to support some really worthwhile local causes up to now.

Adult Social Care and Childrens' Services.

Adult social care is largest responsibility of OCC in terms of spend. Demand is growing due to our ageing population and an increase in complexity of needs. In Oxfordshire, we are seeking to manage this demand with a pioneering 'Oxfordshire Way', that aims to keep people active and independent for as long as possible in their homes and communities. As part of this, OCC has been promoting a scheme to empower small scale care businesses in the community to thrive. Support is provided to 'micro-enterprises' to navigate the paperwork and start out as a commercial enterprise. An all-age unpaid carers strategy review is also ongoing to better support this vital group in our communities.

Children's services remain a challenge, particularly in the area of SEND. The service receives this year an inflation busting boost to its budget of 12.3% (£18.8m), which will provide much needed funds to improve the assessment of EHCPs in particular. The county was also successful in bidding for £5.2m to fund new residential homes for children with autism and children with adverse childhood experiences. The new Aston home is under construction.

Transport and Highways.

In transport and highways, the county is leading the way, alongside the Welsh government, by moving to 20mph as the preferred speed limit for villages and towns. There is no obligation

on any parish or town to apply for such a speed limit, and each parish council has the choice to do so or not.

All of the parishes in the Eynsham Division have now applied, which I strongly support. Many have their 20 zones in place.

The newly adopted Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP5) is a radical change from the previous plan, and places an emphasis on active travel, public transport and reducing car journeys. Its ambitious targets to reduce car journeys by 25% by 2030 and 33% by 2040 will shape infrastructure decisions going forward, and be a powerful tool when developers seek massive car centric developments. We are also committed to Vision Zero, which is to have no deaths on our roads, and I chair a team that addresses this issue, looking at the interests of vulnerable road users including pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders and motorcyclists.

The freight strategy (which sits as part of LTCP5) is being developed further with inputs sought from communities on area weight restrictions and problem areas for HGVs. The strategy seeks to move non-local freight onto the strategic road network (M40, etc.), rather than use inappropriate local roads. I very much hope to see a reduction in the use of the more minor roads in the division reduced to a minimum. There are places that ought not to have through heavy vehicles.

I have been working to try to ensure that the response from the County Council, both in highways and flooding, to planning applications before the district councils is more robust and more based on the evidence on the ground. There have been too many cases where there clearly are issues that might be considered grounds for refusal by a planning committee, but where the failure of the statutory consultees prevents them being considered. I trust in next year's report, this won't be an issue.

Additional investment is being made in taking on stubborn highways flooding issues that will see more projects brought forward in 2023 and 2024 to take on problem areas. There is of course insufficient money available, with the annual roads maintenance grant from central government (including the extra small amount announced in the budget) being £19m, and the need for routine work being somewhere between £45m and £55m.

The A40 plans are edging towards adoption. The schemes on the A40 were prepared by the previous administration, and to be funded by money from central government related to the building of the new developments at Salt Cross and W Eynsham, and the Oxford North business park. Unfortunately, there is insufficient money in those grants to do the whole schemes, and they are under review to try to do as much as possible within budget. There has also been an assessment by a consultant for the County Council on the Carterton-Witney-Eynsham-Oxford railway, and that report should be issued in May. I very much hope this scheme can get the initial go-ahead.

One area that has been of huge concern to many residents is that of Home to School transport. The county council does more than it is legally required to do, and spends more money on it than many residents would like, but nonetheless for any parent or pupil concerned it is vital. I am very pleased that the First and Last Mile bus service, set up and run voluntarily, acts both as a scheduled service linking the south of the division to Eynsham and then Hanborough and as a school transport service. This has been really helpful for people to

the south of Eynsham. We are effectively not permitted to subsidise rural bus services, and it has been brilliant to be able to support this scheme.

Electoral issues

Finally, with Oxfordshire's growing population, the Electoral Commission has determined a review of current county council division boundaries is required. The election commission has agreed with a recommendation from council that the number of councillors be increased from 63 to 69, which would keep the number of electors per councillors roughly the same as they are were when the current borders were adopted up to 2029 at around 9000 per seat. The proposal which the Electoral Commission will assess and which will open for public consultation at the end of April is that the Eynsham Division will stay largely as it is, but the two parishes of Aston, Cote & Chimney and Standlake will become part of a new South Carterton and Bampton Division.

If adopted, this will make no difference to your representation up to the next election, and I look forward to continuing to work for all the residents of the area.

As ever, the best part of being a councillor is being able to help people who need support and discuss issues with residents. You can always get hold of me on dan.levy@oxfordshire.gov.uk.

Q: Are there any plans for new bus services?

A: OCC are not allowed to subsidise new services but continue to support existing services.

Q: Is there to be any 'zoning' to reduce through traffic in Eynsham?

A: There are no existing zones and nothing proposed.

Q: The proposed bus gates around Oxford will prevent people from driving through Oxford and it appears they will therefore affect residents. Will they have to go out onto the ring road and back in to move around? How will taxis move around?

A: Residents and taxis drivers will have passes.

Q: Are there to be any changes to the park and ride strategy with the implementation of the congestion charge?

A: The park and ride strategy remain the same and there is no congestion charge.

Q: Are there going to be car park closures?

A: No planned car park closures that aware of but OCC do not run them.

11. WODC Councillor Lysette Nicholls

Lysette reminded the meeting that the main things WODC is responsible for are refuse (including bins), licensing, housing and communities, planning and parking. Ubico continues to do a magnificent job of emptying the bins. Both Lysette sits on the Lowlands Planning Committee and where the parish's planning applications go to. Anything not on the Local Plan 2031 is dependent on a housing supply which is currently making decision challenging at the 5-year land supply is not proved. Councillors cannot be prejudiced or make pre-determined decisions. The planning authority is constrained by the law which is why the appeals system often overrides LPA decisions. Loss of s106 if the planning appeal is lost.

Carlie Maynard (WOC Councillor) continues to work tirelessly with Thames Water to address the issues facing the parish and its neighboring parishes.

12. Open Questions – A Summary

Several questions on the 20 mph and a debate with the following summarized comments:

- 20mph encourages 25mph and people to slow down but conversely some people go even faster (40 to 60 mph) as the 20mph annoys them.
- 20mph unenforceable and the police not interested so no deterrent.
- The different speeds along Cote Road/B4449 are confusing. (National speed limit into 20mph at Cote and then back to NS between Cote and Aston for 237 meters before going back to 20mph). These needs joining up.
- Excessive to have 20mph everywhere and the parking on North Street, High Street and Cote Road helps reduce the speeds anyway.
- The 20mph is important at Cote crossroads as it is on blind bend.
- The flashing lights on North Street and Cote Road need to be updated and new one at Kingsway Farm.

The chair thanked everyone for their comments and took a straw poll of those for and against the 20mphs. The split was evenly balanced. The comments made would be taken back to the next monthly meeting of the parish council in May.

13. Close of Meeting

Russell La Forte thanked the speakers for their presentations and the members of the public who came, for attending and participating in the meeting.

The meeting closed at 21.30pm.

Signed

Dated.....