

OXHILL PARISH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF AN ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
HELD ON 7th MAY 2024 AT 7.30PM
IN THE VILLAGE HALL

Present

Cllr Stuart, Cllr Connolly, Cllr Rivers-Fletcher, Cllr Robertson and Cllr Storey

Christine Coles - Parish Clerk, County Cllr Chris Mills, District Cllr Malcolm Littlewood and three villagers

1. Welcome and Apologies

None.

2. Report from Parish Council (Cllr Lis Stuart, Chair of Parish Council)

The Parish Council (PC) is the most local tier of government and Oxhill sits within the Ward of Red Horse, which in turn forms part of the Stratford District Council (SDC).

Like most public institutions, the Parish Council budgetary year runs from April to March, so it is common to look back at the year to celebrate successes, take on lessons learned and plan for the coming year. While District and Ward Councillors receive some form of allowance it is always worth remembering that your PC team is entirely voluntary and gives up substantial amounts of time to help the community with common issues.

Please remember that all PC meetings are public and members of the community are always welcome to attend. Each session has 10-15 minutes of 'open floor' time where people can raise any issues for discussion having 3 minutes for each individual.

I would like to thank my fellow Councillors and our committed Clerk for their hard work this year and their continued dedication to both the landscape of Oxhill and the community.

It had been a busy year with planning again, sadly many applications being the removal of trees. There have been no significant development proposals, and we continue to wait for news of the digester.

The Parish Council worked with the Warwickshire Rural Community Council to ascertain the housing needs within the community from this a Housing Needs land Survey was produced although it was not possible to move forward currently.

We have continued to maintain the defibrillator ensuring that it is in good working order and have planned training for next month.

We continue to work with the Oxhill footpath group to maintain the local footpaths and seek funding for repairs.

We ran a successful Autumn Litter pick and this has been followed by on going litter collections by members of the community ensuring that the village is almost litter free, something that we can be proud of. Thanks go to all those that continue the task.

We have continued to report issues such as missing road signs, potholes, fly tipping drainage issues, to the relevant organisations and remain a conduit for the community for information and sign posting.

Speeding has remained a topic for discussion and concern, PC speedy joined the team, having a short vacation before resuming his duties on a part time basis (day light hours only).

We have continued to support the Village Hall in it's rebuild providing funding for projects e.g. the projector. Obtaining funding for the Welcome to Oxhill noticeboard.

We continue to fund the production of the Oxhill News, which welcomed through letter boxes each month, our thanks go to the editors and all those who contribute. Both this and the community website have a wealth of information about village life both past and present.

We would also like to thank Cllr Chris Mills and Cllr Malcolm Littlewood for their help, support and attendance at meetings.

3. Presentation of accounts for year ending 31st March 2024

The draft unaudited accounts were presented by the Parish Clerk. Income was £13K and expenditure £7.8K. Balance at year end on 31st March 2024 was £30.1K. The accounts are healthy and money is ring fenced for Chapel Field. There is no CIL money left in the account. The remaining CIL balance was given to the village hall during 2022/23.

4. To receive a report from the County Councillor and District Councillor

County Cllr Chris Mills read out the following report.

There was a tax increase of 4.99% for 2024/25 and planning an assumption of a 2.99% annual increase in future years. The increase was the maximum that WCC could take but significantly below the inflationary and demand pressures that as a Council had to absorb. The increase is to support the rising cost of £26m for Adult Social Care, totaling £226m per year. There is also an increase of £18m for SEND and an extra £8.9m for home to school now totaling £28m per year, driven in part by SEND and pressure on school places.

A significant long-term milestone has been reached for Warwickshire with the news in the Chancellor's spring budget that the County Council is to be one of three councils to be awarded a Level 2 Devolution Deal. The deal will give the County increased powers to tackle two key agendas, levelling up and climate change-through devolution of its own Adult Education budget and strategic oversight of the UK Prosperity Fund. The investment Zone brings thousands of new jobs, £2bn of economic growth and £180m of Government investment with reinvestment into Advanced Manufacturing sector.

WCC launched the Sustainable Futures Strategy and its delivery plan outlining how the Council will collaborate with partners to mitigate climate change and work toward fulfilling the Counties net zero commitments. Warwickshire County Council once again, ranked 7th of 21 Council's against the sustainability West Midlands Benchmark.

There is also an emphasis on investment:

Warwickshire County Council made an investment of £1.5m in apprenticeships, benefitting both young career-seekers and employers. A £100m investment in the Warwickshire Property and Development Group (WPDG) and £50m for the Warwickshire Investment Fund (WIF) demonstrating WCC's commitment to support the recovery and growth of Warwickshire for the benefit of residents and communities. £20m investment in school places. £25m investment in significant expansion of Resource Provision to support those with SEND in mainstream settings.

Warwickshire County Council opened four new SEND Resourced Provisions in Warwickshire offering enhanced specialist support for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

There has also been a focus on domestic abuse by Warwickshire County Council. The report from the Director of Public Health for Warwickshire reported that over 17,000 women and over 7,000 men experienced Domestic Abuse. The report recommended that WCC Education Services promote in any training relating to violence against women and girls. Linking with Coventry and Warwickshire Suicide prevention strategy and supporting child victims of domestic abuse.

Despite the challenges, the Council remains in a relatively solid financial position. Our financial position compares favourably with other councils and benchmarking shows that we are a relatively low-cost Council in most areas with average or above average performance and strong financial resilience indicators, therefore we are not in immediate S114 territory.

The Council's approach has been dynamic, flexible and can do. We continue to focus on collaboration, partnerships and working with communities as well as committed to protecting services and the most vulnerable residents in our society.

District Cllr Littlewood has had an interesting first year with SDC. They were clearing up from the last administration. Planning has been very busy. The Officers get a lot of criticism but cannot make their own judgements. The Anaerobic Digester is a big application.

Various projects are underway such as rejuvenating the area in Stratford Upon Avon, Warwick Street to the railway station. Solar panels are being put on leisure centres. Another project is Public Houses and other community assets. Some pubs have closed. There is a cross party working group involved. The South Warwickshire Local Plan is underway. Two districts are making a coherent plan.

Cllr Rivers-Fletcher asked when the Core Strategy should have ended. It is still current and will run until 2031. The Parish Council has a strong input and in rural areas a small change can make a big difference.

Cllr Chris Mills also agreed that Parish Council's are vital.

5. Open Forum

A villager spoke about the impressive figures that WCC quote but asked what they will spend it on as figures on their own do not mean a lot. Cllr Mills replied that WCC have budgets and bigger budgets increase council tax. Some services will have to be trimmed. Its all about being prudent.

The Chair of the PC noted that working in local government has changed over the years. The population is bigger with less money and jobs are taking longer to do.

Meeting finished 8pm.