**Dorchester Parish Council**

The Monthly Meeting of the Parish Council was held in the Village Hall on Wednesday 11th September 2019 commencing at 7.30 p.m. The Vice-Chairman, Cllr Rob Ballantyne presided; present were Cllrs. Maurice Day, Chris Hill, Viviane Quirke and Keith Russell with G Russell (Clerk to the Council) in attendance. Also present for part of the meeting were County Cllr Lorraine Lindsay-Gale, District Cllr Robin Bennett, guest speaker Rebecca Chiazzese and one resident.

1/9 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from the Chairman, Cllr. Mark Williams, and Cllrs Mike Corran and Mike Rimmer.

2/9 Public Participation

Representing the Earth Trust, Rebecca Chiazzese, Pre-construction Project Manager of the River of Life II initiative in Overy Mead, showed Councillors a map of its location and explained that it is the follow-up to the River of Life 1 initiative towards Shillingford, which was established in 2014.

She explained the project would create two backwater channels at Overy Mead to provide habitat for spawning fish and boost biodiversity, amongst other benefits. She said that a public exhibition of the proposed scheme will take place in the Village Hall on 17th October from 3-7 pm and be open to all.

The work program is set for 4-5 weeks next summer and funded by a Water Environment Grant. Soil excavated to create the backwater channels is to be removed directly to the A4074 and not through the village. The Earth Trust will want to use the Council’s car parking land next to the sewage works for temporary storage of spoil and equipment.

The current circular walking route at Old Bridge Meadow will be restricted during the excavation phase with access for walkers to and from the Thames Path maintained throughout. The Planning Application will be submitted in November. Richard Oram, Oxfordshire County Council’s Planning Archaeologist, has been fully involved in the surveys carried out to gain information on the buried archaeology at the site.

3/9 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None.

4/9 Minutes of the Meeting held on 11th August 2019

Cllr Keith Russell proposed that the Minutes of the Meeting as circulated should be approved as a correct record. The was seconded by Cllr Chris Hill and approved unanimously. The Minute Book was signed by Cllr Rob Ballantyne, Chairman of the meeting.

5/9 Matters Arising from the Minutes

i. Following the recent visit by Highways Inspector Mark Pearce, Cheyney Lane has been marked up for repair. The Clerk will ask when this work will be done.

ii. The replacement gates for Abbey View Meadow have now been fitted. They are secured by the same heavy-duty chain and padlocks that were previously used.

iii. The Clerk has booked the Village Hall main hall for the ‘Newcomers Evening’ on Thursday 20th February 2020. All village societies and groups will be invited to publicise their activities using table-top displays.

iv. The broken BT manhole cover at the High St./Queen St junction has still not been repaired but it has been screened off by the contractors and the work is expected soon.

6/9 County Councillor’s Report

A written report from Lorraine has been received and circulated in advance of the meeting. This included some information about ‘Park and Charge’, a County Council initiative which has funding from Innovate UK to install up to 300 chargers for electric cars in residential areas around the County where properties do not have their own off-street parking. It was thought that this could be of interest in Dorchester-on-Thames and Lorraine was asked to provide further information to the Clerk.

7/9 District Councillor’s Report

District Cllr Robin Bennett had circulated his report by e-email just before the meeting. In response to questions he said that the next SODC discussion about the Local Plan would take place at the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 3rd October and the Council meeting on 10th October.

He said that applications for funds to be allocated under the local councillor grant scheme have to be made on-line and the closing date is 10th January. The Council thought that providing a defibrillator in the old phone box at Bridge End could be a suitable candidate for a grant application. A new capital projects grant scheme is expected to be opened soon.

There was no comment about the District Council’s plans for the future maintenance of public lavatory in Bridge End.

8/9 Council’s Four-Year Vision

The Council agreed with the suggestion that, while improvements to the Village Hall was the first priority, making improvements to the Play Area should be included as one of the Council’s priorities during its four years in office. Warborough and Crowmarsh Gifford have been given as examples where excellent work of this kind has been carried out recently. Perhaps there will be an opportunity to include equipment which is suited to all abilities and also to adults.

9/9 Planning:

i. Applications:

P19/S2499/HH 70 Watling Lane; Single-storey front extension; garage conversion; erection of a new garage; internal alterations. (as amended by drawing no.s 19-748-01 Rev A, 19-748-02 Rev A, 19-748-03 Rev A, 19-748-04 Rev A and 19-748-05 Rev A to amend size of garage to meet minimum standard requirement received on 23 August 2019).

It was noted that no design and access statement has been provided. The Council believes that the property has previously been extended and the question was raised as to whether a further extension is permissible. These are clearly matters which will be determined by the Planning Officer and the Council, while having no objection, will inform him that it is concerned about the size of the proposed enlarged dwelling in the Green Belt.

P19/S1602/LB and P19/S1601/FUL 3A Queen Street ; Change of use of premises from office to residential to provide two-bedroom dwelling.

The Council noted that the Planning Officer had recommended approval of this application despite the Parish Council’s recommendation for refusal because it did not cover parking requirements, which is contrary to the Neighbourhood Plan. District Cllr Bennett said he would enquire whether the application could be called in and would inform the Clerk of his findings.

ii. Affordable Housing Project Progress Report

Cllr Chris Hill said that the Parish Council’s suggested design changes, based upon comments made by Professor Malcolm Airs, have been accepted by Sovereign and will be incorporated into the planning application. The Council welcomed this news and noted that there have been some suggestions of names for the proposed housing project. With the closing date for the competition being 30th September more entries are anticipated.

10/9 . Finance:

 i. Bank Balances & Payments

Current Account balance at 30/8 £30,567.72

Reserve Account balance at 5/9 £47,980.50

 £78,548.22

On 4th September Council received payment of the second half precept of £21,140.

It was proposed by Cllr Keith Russell and seconded by Cllr Chris Hill that the following payments be approved and this was unanimously agreed.

Q Transport (Oxford) Ltd (Container rental) 92.76

Oxfordshire County Council (Flyer August) 187.50

James Rockall (Culham Garden Services) 400.00

Castle Water Ltd (Allotments) 246.21

Castle Water Ltd (Sportsground) 49.38

JRB Enterprise Ltd (dog waste bags) 234.24

UK Firework and Events Company Ltd 1,650.00

Data Systems Management LLP (Village website annual fee) 539.99

The Landscape Group Oxford (August grass cutting) 1,162.20

The Landscape Group Oxford (Abbey View Meadow gates) 954.00

Denis Froud (quarterly charge pest control) 805.00

Moore Stephens (auditors) 96.00

Neil Willis (Village Handyman) 65.63

Geoff Willis (Village Handyman) 288.75

G Russell (salary) 549.65

G Russell (admin 3 months) 244.20

 £7565.51

Cllr Hill complained that the service for emptying dog waste bins is unreliable. This is managed by SODC and the Clerk was asked to pass on the Council’s concerns.

ii Budget setting including Project Ringfencing

The Clerk’s detailed financial forecast for the year ended 31st March 2020 showed the Council’s expenditure to be in excess of its receipts by £875. This compares with the actual deficit in 2018/19 of £7,213. It was agreed that the Precept for 2020/21 will need to be increased as will cemetery fees, which have not been increased for two years and are understood to be relatively low by comparison with other nearby parishes.

It was agreed that the aim should to be to maintain a reserve equal to one year’s estimated council expenses (£55,000) and to allocate funds in excess of that amount to specific capital projects. Village Hall improvements, including the provision of an office for the Parish Clerk, will take priority in the allocation of these funds.

11/9 Correspondence with Chairman and/or Clerk

a. Bishops Court Farm Footpath Diversion; the County Council seeks the Parish Council’s views about these proposals which are currently going through an ‘informal’ consultation process supervised by the County Council’s Rights of Way Officer. The Parish Council agreed that it is not at this stage formally objecting to the proposed footpath diversion, but considers that any change should first be subject to formal consultation, with the proposal being publicised by the display of official notices which can be seen by all the users, and information on how residents make representations if they wish to do so.

Given a choice, the Council would prefer that the existing route is maintained. It is more interesting and educational because there is an opportunity to view the working farm and it is more scenic because the views of the surrounding countryside are better.

The Council is not convinced about the reasons given for changing the existing route and suggests that the County Council should ask for further details of the incidents to which the applicant has referred.

b. Fireworks, Saturday 2nd November; the event is being organised once again by staff from the Footsteps Foundation who have asked if Parish Councillors will assist with crowd and traffic control as in previous years. It was found that up to six members plus the Clerk would probably be available.

c. A resident of Watling Lane has asked the Clerk to contact the management at Bishops Court Farm about the cutting of a hedge that is located between 14 Watling Lane and 71 High Street. The Clerk will write to Mr Reid.

12/9 Land Registration

The Clerk continues to work through Wellers Hedley and a letter has been received from solicitors acting on behalf of some property-owners in Bridge End.

13/9 . Village Maintenance including Volunteer Projects

Andrew Clements continues to liaise with the Chairman and Cllr Chris Hill. A site visit to his projects is planned when the Chairman is back from holiday

Louise Beland has written to the Council requesting support for the project that she is heading up outside 20 Meadside, a property owned by SOHA which is screened by a wooden fence which is both taller than is allowed by local covenants and also incorrectly sited outside the previous boundary. Alongside this fence is a bank of soil which has become overgrown. This has reduced the width of available footpath, with nettles hanging over the path making matters even worse.

Louise wishes to keep plant growth on the bank to a minimum. This would make the area less unsightly and also preserve the width of the path, which is a road safety matter. In the near future she would like, possibly with the assistance of volunteers, to reduce the size of the bank and establish upon it some native wildflowers and grasses. Once such work has been done, she believes that on-going maintenance of the area would be minimal.

She would like this to be an official Parish Council project, with funds for things like skip hire provided by the Council, and cover for herself and fellow volunteers provided by the Parish Council’s insurance. The Clerk is checking with Zurich Insurance about the cover provided for volunteers and their use of hand tools etc.

The Council noted that the fence outside 20 Meadside is too high and in the wrong place. The Clerk will contact SOHA asking that the fence be reduced to the correct height and correctly located. It is such a prominent feature right at the entrance to the village and this would be an improvement. The Council recalls that when a fence that was higher than the regulations was erected elsewhere in Meadside the owners were compelled to lower it.

It was agreed that, while the Council would not take on the reduction and replanting of the bank as an official project, it was happy to support residents in doing this work and would make available a grant of around £300 towards the cost of reducing the size of the bank of soil and replanting it. Although one councillor cautioned that the Parish Council should not take over projects that are properly the concern of the District Council, it was agreed that this project is in line with the Council’s general policy to improve the appearance of the village.

14/9 Remembrance Sunday Arrangements

The Clerk has asked the Rector about the status of her plan to mark Remembrance Day (a Monday) with the village school gathered at the war memorial. The Parish Council will be pleased to support this initiative by arranging traffic control.

It is understood that no one has come forward to run poppy selling in Dorchester and so for this year it will be supervised from the Royal British Legion’s branch in Benson. Cllr Chris Hill will liaise on these matters via his contacts in the Legion and the Clerk will ensure that the Parish Council Chairman is supplied with a wreath for the war memorial commemoration as usual.

15/9 Routine Reports:

a. Sports Pavilion Recreation Ground & Playground;

The maintenance actions identified by the Play Inspector’s July report are being costed by Aplin Playgrounds Limited.

The damage to the playing surfaces being done by rabbits has been reported to be still a problem by Dorchester Cricket Club and the Clerk has told Denis Froud the pest controller about this.

b. Footpaths;

The next visit by Wallingford Green Gym is due in October and a programme or work will be arranged by Cllr Chris Hill.

c. Cemetery/Closed Churchyard;

Cllr Day suggested that the height of the hedge between the public footpath and the section of the Cemetery nearest to Herringcote should be reduced. This will be discussed at a site meeting. Maurice also said that the Council must monitor the construction of the new properties on the former Belcher Court site to ensure that the access to the Cemetery is maintained at its previous width. This can only be achieved by regular inspection while the work is in progress.

d. Allotments

The Council noted that the Allotments Society AGM will be held on 26th September. Details of the proposal to create an orchard over the area that over many years has been excavated by Oxford Archaeology need to be supplied to the Parish Council.

16/9 Any Other Urgent Matters

Cllr Chris Hill said that the roadside signs promoting opposition to the proposed Oxford/Cambridge Expressway are looking very tired and should be removed.

The Meeting closed at 9.51 p.m.