

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING HELD ON 13 MAY 2024
AT 7.30PM IN THE VILLAGE HALL

Present: Cllr T Suter, Chair of the Parish Council
Six members of the Parish Council and the Parish Clerk
Four members of the public

The Chairman welcomed everyone. The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 3 April 2023 were approved and signed.

Chairman of the Parish Council's Report

The existing Council stood for re-election in May 2023. The election was uncontested, so all seven councillors were duly elected.

Highlights of the past year include:

- Recognising the impact of the cost-of-living squeeze on parishioners, the precept rose very slightly by £100 to £16,400 despite the increase in the budget due to anticipated higher costs.
- Renewal of the play equipment on the Miss Cross Field, financed from a successful application for National Lottery funds, Community Infrastructure Levy and supplemented by direct fund-raising from the village.
- Adoption of the Great Haseley Climate Action Plan, with several obligations placed on the Parish Council for supporting and promoting initiatives to support a greener economy.
- Support for Haseley Earthshot Group, supported by the Parish Council, attracting 135 volunteers contributing over 460 hours of voluntary work.
- £5,000 raised to support environmental projects in and around the village from third party funds and grants.
- A number of occasions, supported by the council, to bring the village together, including:
 - The King's Coronation party
 - Village event on the Recreation Ground
 - Apple picking in the Millennium Wood resulting in our very own delicious Apple Juice.
- Completion of the availability of ultra-fast broadband across the villages.
- Support for the History Group's B17 commemoration event.
- s.106 funding available to commission public art: formation of a steering group to oversee the process of commissioning the work, and agreeing the focus should be on using the works to enhance the paths and connections within the villages.
- Neighbourhood Priority Statement: public consultation to narrow down the priorities to cover the protection of views and green spaces, the principles for sustaining the local character of the villages, and initiatives to enhance physical connections between our villages and neighbouring communities and facilities.
- Consideration of Planning Applications: we have addressed applications covering all areas of the village and all types of development: domestic, agricultural and commercial.
- Consultation responses to South and Vale Local Plan, OCC Travel policy.
- Relationship with Haseley Brook Action Group

I am grateful to the Parish Councillors and all volunteers, who give so freely of their time for the benefit of the village. We welcome all members of the public to attend our meetings: there is always an opportunity to contribute in the Public Discussion part of each meeting: and we welcome suggestions for items to be included in our agendas, either by contacting a member of the Council, or our Clerk.

Finally, I must end by marking the sad passing of Deirdre Mann, a former member of the Council and a tireless promoter of projects for the enhancement of village and community life.

Responsible Financial Officer's Report

Internal Audit

From a financial point of view the internal audit of the 2022-23 financial accounts was undertaken by Mr Dick Heinrich between 15th May and 8th June 2023 following the Scope of Work agreed by the Parish Council.

The internal audit concluded that the control objectives had been achieved throughout the financial year and the Income & Expenditure account and the Balance Sheet were a fair reflection of the financial position of the Council for year ended 31st March 2023.

This is the 2nd year that Scribe software has been used for the whole period and by using additional functionality within the software, the quality and transparency of all financial matters has improved further. In particular, adding the Budget as recommended by the internal auditor last year has made it easier to compare performance against budget.

Following a further recommendation the various categories of Reserves the Council holds has been added into the software, to enable any changes during the financial year either through receipt or through expenditure to be tracked easily.

External Audit

Due to Income receipts being over the £25k set by the Local Audit (Smaller Authorities) Regulations 2015 the Parish Council completed and submitted Form 3 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) with a requirement to submit all accounting information to Moore, the Government appointed external auditor for Oxfordshire.

Following conclusion of the external audit on 7th September 2023, the auditor reported that the submitted Annual Governance and Accountability Return was 'in accordance with Proper Practices and no other matters had come to their attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements had not been met'.

Expenditure

Total expenditure was £15,634, the main headings of which were, council administration, grass cutting, dog waste bin emptying, accounting software, annual play inspections, subscriptions and insurance. Other expenditure included cleaning and refurbishment of the war memorial, refurbishment work to Millennium Wood. The Parish Council continues to support charitable organisations including Citizen's Advice and the Maple Tree along with annual grants to the Village Hall and a contribution to St Peter's Church towards the cost of grass cutting.

Income

Total income was £30,472 made up of the Precept (£16,400), the amount of income the Parish Council requests from the District Council to include in the Council Tax that home owners pay each year, bank interest Community Infrastructure Levy (£3,460) collected from new development, grant funds from OCC and SODC of £1.8k. Grant funding from the Trust of Oxfordshire Environment (£5.8k) towards refurbishment of Millennium Wood.

The Parish Council were pleased to support the work of Great Haseley History Group with to the B17 memorial project by enabling finances related to the project to be administered through the Council accounts. This in turn resulted in receipt of £1,785 of donations through the accounting period 2022-23.

Finally, I would like to thank the Parish Councillors for their support during the year and my thanks on behalf of the Parish Council as well as personally to Dick Heinrich for his continued support as Internal Auditor.

County Councillor's Report

County Councillor Freddie van Mierlo had given his apologies and submitted his annual report for 2023-24, as follows:

2023 saw both significant changes to the administration running Oxfordshire County Council and progress against county-wide and local objectives.

In October, the Liberal Democrat-Green group set up a minority administration following the departure of the Labour group from the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance. The Labour group walked away after parents and Lib Dems/Greens called for the resignation of the Labour cabinet member for Children's Services following a poor Ofsted report into Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The new administration created a dedicated cabinet portfolio for SEND improvement, now headed by Cllr Kate Gregory (Thame and Chinnor), with significant progress already made against the SEND improvement plan. Cooperation still exists between the Labour group and Lib Dem/Green administration who voted together to pass a budget in early 2024.

The macro budget environment for councils across England remains extremely challenging, with falling government funding and rising demands for adult social care and children's services. However, recognizing the importance of protecting vulnerable adults and children, the administration passed a budget with above inflation rises for both these services. All parties put forward proposals for the maximum allowable tax rise of 4.99%. 2023 also saw new SEND schools in Didcot approved and an unpaid carers strategy approved.

Highways remains the main way in which residents interact with council services on a daily basis – and also the source of much correspondence. 2023/4 saw improvements to how residents can report road defects through Fix My Street and ongoing efforts to improve customer service. While the council receives well below the budget needed to maintain the roads from central government, the administration approved a £7m project for 2024/5 to repair roads with a programme of surface dressing. Locally, with the support of residents and parish councils, wherever potholes and drainage issues occur I have sought to encourage speedy and long-lasting repairs for our area. I am delighted that this year we will see extensive surface-inlay (resurfacing) to the B480 at Cuxham and Brook Street in Watlington, as well as drainage improvements across the network. Progress continues on plans for the Watlington Relief Road, with a public consultation held in 2023/4 on a planning application, which will be determined later this year.

Climate has also been at the heart of the council's activity, with heavy rain focusing minds on the consequences of a changing climate. Key initiatives, including the Strategic Active Travel Network, Mobility Hubs, Vision Zero, EV charging, electric buses, and active travel funding bids are all contributing towards OCC's overarching vision of a cleaner and greener transport network. Oxfordshire County Council's hard work was recognized as it topped the Climate Emergency UK climate action score card league table for upper tier authorities. I am also extremely proud to have welcomed new rural bus routes to Chalgrove and Watlington division, bringing back services for the first time since Conservatives cut them. Watlington is now served by not only the 11 bus to Oxford, but also buses to Reading (Mon, Wed, Fri) and Thame (Tues, Thur). My sincere hope is that this is just a starting point of a revival of buses in our area.

As ever, I continue to advocate for projects and issues important to local communities and individual residents. Issues have ranged from road agreements, trees, road markings, flooding, children's services, traffic calming and much more! Some issues seem interminable with progress excruciatingly slow – for example the pedestrian link between Red Kite View in Watlington and Cuxham Road, or progress on traffic calming in Cuxham. However, I remain determined to represent residents and parishes to the Council and push for progress – however slow. I have also again been privileged to support community projects through the council's Priority Fund, including First Steps Family Hub Chalgrove, Watlington Concert Band, Watlington Allotments, Watlington Bowls Club, Nettlebed Sports Association, and various projects with parish councils across the division.

The next County Council elections will be in May 2025. These will be fought on new divisional boundaries, which split the Watlington and Chalgrove division into two separate divisions. Watlington will become part of a 'Watlington and Rotherfield' division, while Chalgrove forms its own division with part of Thame. Ewelme moves to become part of a revised Benson division. This means regardless of the outcome of upcoming national and local elections many villages I currently represent will get a new county councillor from 2025. Over the next year I will continue to work with residents and parish councils to move forward projects and resolve issues, leaving them hopefully in a better state than when I started in 2021!

District Councillor's Report

Councillor Heritage had submitted her annual report for 2023-24, as follows:

In May 2023 the ruling administration at SODC was re-elected with an increased number of councillors; the partnership is now made up of 21 LibDems and 8 Greens. The majority party, the Liberal Democrats, made the decision to continue the administration partnership with the Green party. There was one change to the membership of the Cabinet, with Cllr Freddie van Mierlo joining following his election in Watlington. Cllr David Rouane (LD) continues as the Leader of the Council, with Deputy Leaders Cllr Maggie Filipova-Rivers (LD) and Cllr Robin Bennett (G).

This resounding result vindicated the focus that had been placed on nature, climate change, affordable housing and community well-being over the previous four years and gives us the confidence to develop a new 4-year strategic plan through to 2028 which builds on the progress made during our First Term. This annual report highlights some of those achievements and explains how our strategic priorities are being translated into delivery by Council officers.

Affordable Housing Delivery - The SODC Local Plan 2035 includes a policy which ensures that 40% of new housing developments of 10 or more units are affordable, with a variety of tenures included. In 2023/24 156 affordable home completions have been registered so far (with another quarter to go), and a new Housing Delivery Strategy adopted in November 2023 will enable SODC to build up its own stock of houses for social rent or to provide funding for 3rd parties such as Community Land Trusts or Housing Associations to deliver more homes.

A small development on the Broadway in Didcot will be the first homes built by the Council in over 25 years, and we have also been able to purchase over 20 houses with the help of a 40% grant from the Government as part of the Local Authority Housing Fund programme.

A new Empty Homes Policy has been adopted in March 2024 to enable the council's Housing Team to more actively engage with private owners to return properties to the rental market as our housing list grows.

During the past year, SODC has allocated over £7m of CIL funding for infrastructure projects across the district.

Joint Local Plan 2041 - Over the past year the Planning Policy team has been working hard on the development of the new Joint Local Plan (covering both South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse districts), which will guide the kinds of new housing and jobs needed and where they should go, informing planning decisions for the districts. A key milestone for the JLP was the "Preferred Options" consultation held between 10 January and 26 February 2024, which was carried out both online and with in-person events and which attracted a very high number of submissions. Feedback from this consultation is now being processed and analysed, and the next stage will be a consultation on the draft Plan in the autumn of 2024.

Having an up-to-date Local Plan is essential to avoid speculative planning applications and unwelcome proposals which do not align with our strategic vision, our housing need or our environmental aspirations for our district. Just as important as the housing site allocations in the Local Plan, are the

policies to protect and restore our natural environment – such as reducing light pollution, delivering biodiversity net gain, and securing open green spaces for our communities.

Community Hub becomes permanent - The Community Hub was first set up during Lockdown to provide support for residents during the pandemic. Government funding ceased in 2023 but SODC committed to on-going funding for this important service, particularly as so many residents have been affected by the cost-of-living crisis. The Hub has now been made a permanent part of the Council's structure and will continue to offer advice and support on a wide range of issues including financial help, housing and homelessness concerns, Council Tax payments and Health and Wellbeing. The Active Communities team runs a variety of activities and programmes to help people recover from Covid-19 or to help families access free or low cost activities that provide physical and mental wellbeing opportunities.

SODC Grant Schemes including new CIL Grant Fund - Each year SODC provides capital and revenue grants to a wide range of voluntary and community organisations to support their on-going operations or to fund a one-off project or event. Many local groups and projects have benefitted from this scheme.

The newly launched CIL Grant Fund is designed to provide much-needed infrastructure to support the growth of the district as a result of recent housing developments. It is the first time local organisations are able to bid for grant funding from SODC's share of the CIL receipts collected from house builders. At the time of writing, many Expressions of Interest have been registered and funds will be allocated later in 2024.

Reducing our Carbon Emissions - As a Council we have a very ambitious target to achieve Net Zero in our own operations by 2025. Over the past year we have continued to decarbonise our leisure and arts centres by switching to non-fossil fuel heating systems, reducing the temperature of water in swimming pools, circulating warm air more efficiently and generally upgrading the fabric of the buildings. This has helped to reduce emissions considerably, but the largest source of emissions for us is our waste management service, which accounts for over 57% of SODC's total emissions. Decarbonising the entire waste fleet at a time when technology is still evolving and while we were waiting for clarity from the Government on future recycling requirements would have been expensive and impractical, so we haven't been able to make the progress we would have liked. However, we have now agreed a 2 year extension with Biffa and are in the process of acquiring a new fleet of more efficient vehicles and a waste management strategy that will take us further forward towards reaching our goals.

We also continue to collaborate with other authorities across Oxfordshire on the delivery of the "Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire" action plan, which includes installing EV charging stations, retrofitting homes to make them more energy efficient, exploring Biodiversity Net Gain projects and renewable energy infrastructure.

Recycling Champions! - We were very excited to be announced as the country's top recycling district in DEFRA's latest tables! Initiatives such as our "Check it before you chuck it" promotional campaign in autumn 2023 demonstrate our commitment to maintaining this position.

Financial Stability - When the council were first elected in 2019, one of the first priorities was to stabilise the finances of South Oxfordshire District Council. They were in a very poor state and the Council were having to draw on around £3m of reserves each year to plug the funding gap in its operating activities.

Over the past few years the Council has restored financial stability and for 2023/24 approved a balanced budget with only a small (sustainable) draw on our reserves. The Council was fortunate to benefit from higher interest rates but we also employed a specialist officer to seek external grant funding to supplement our own resources. This officer has paid for himself several times over by securing government funding for projects such as the decarbonisation of our leisure centres and covering the increased costs of our swimming pools.

The Council Tax charged by SODC remains one of the lowest in the country and it still costs us more to deliver services to new households than we earn in Council Tax receipts, so we have to generate income from other services and grants to cover all our costs. The Council have worked hard to balance

increases to fees and charges with the pressures of the cost-of-living crisis and providing value for money remains a priority.

Openness and Accountability - We are committed to transparency in the way we make decisions (almost all our public meetings are live-streamed and all papers are in the public domain at least a week in advance) and to reporting on our performance with honesty and accountability. Our quarterly performance reports are online at www.southoxon.gov.uk/corporateplan and our quarterly Climate Action Plan reports are also online at www.southoxon.gov.uk/climateaction .

Reports from Organisations in the Parish

Great Haseley Cricket Club (Chris Groves)

Summary of Season 2023: 48 Matches Scheduled ~30 Completed

- GHCC (4)
- Tiddington IIIs (9)
- Tiddington IVs (9)
- Tiddington U15s Boys(2)
- Tiddington U15s Girl (1)
- Holton (7)
- Bodleian (2)

GHCC broke new territory with three Thursday evening T20 matches, no wins, but all were well attended by supporters and players, this guided decisions on the future direction of the club.

Developments since 2023 Season:

- Rebranding of GHCC as Haseley Millers
- Morgan & Associates sponsorship
- Bespoke Kit designed (See appendix)
- First tranche of club shirts shipped
- Order for personalised shirts pending
- Games mainly to be played on Thursday nights

2024 Season:

Sadly, Tiddington will be unable to field a Fourth team this season as it was found to be too challenging last season. That being said, there is still plenty of cricket (potentially 38 fixtures) to be played at Haseley Rec this summer.

Fixtures Breakdown for Haseley Rec Fixture 2024:

Tiddington CC III	9 Saturday League Fixtures
Tiddington U19s Boys (TBC)	2 Monday Evening Fixtures
Tiddington U17s Boys (TBC)	2 Wednesday Evening Fixtures
Tiddington CC U15s Boys	7 Monday Evening Fixtures
Tiddington CC U13s Girls	5 Tuesday Evening Fixtures
Tiddington Vixens	2 Sunday Triangular Tournament
Haseley Millers	1 Sunday Fixture, 7 Thursday night T20s
Holton CC	8 Sunday Friendlies
Bodleian CC	1 Sunday Friendlies
Waddesdon CC	1 Saturday League Fixture

Great Haseley History Group (Jane Simcox)

The Great Haseley History Group has had a very busy and productive year working on the Buttercup project.

The Group raised the money for the permanent memorial to the plane crash that took place in 1943. Fourteen family members of the crew came over from the USA for the event on Remembrance Sunday including the 103 year old elder brother of the pilot. American air force representatives came from RAF Fairford and RAF Croughton along with a large number of villagers and local people. The families were then given lunch in the Village Hall and were then taken by tractor to the crash site.

A publication was written about the event and distributed to all households in the parish, all the donors and families in the USA. As there is money left over the History Group will be making donations to the Village Hall and Cancer Research. The Group is indebted to the Parish Council for its help and encouragement with this project.

The Group is now starting a new project looking at wells, springs and water supplies in the parish. If anyone has a well in their garden, the History Group would love to know about it, photograph it and record it. Hopefully there will be a short publication on the completion of the project.

Anyone wishing to join the group is more than welcome and should contact me on 01844 279631 (jane@janeanddavid.co.uk) and I will keep you informed of meetings etc.

St Peter's Church (Toby Garfitt)

The church has had an interesting and joyful year. Services have been well attended, particularly the Harvest Festival held in the barn at Peggs Farm, the Crib Service on Christmas Eve, and of course the Carol Service the week before. There have been more families with young children attending church than for quite a few years. Remembrance Day was a memorable occasion, with the regular Act of Remembrance at the War Memorial being followed this year by the unveiling of a new memorial in the churchyard to the crew of the American bomber which crashed near Latchford in 1943. The experiment of holding some traditional midweek services for special occasions has proved popular: Evensong for the Feast of St Peter in June, Sung Compline for Epiphany in January, the Easter Vigil on the night before Easter. There was a big wedding in September, and there have been three funerals of longstanding village residents: Rita Green in July, Deirdre Mann in January, and Margaret Visram earlier this month, with that of Eileen Newell to come at the beginning of June. On the 15th of April, the bells were rung in a full peal lasting nearly three hours in memory of Deirdre Mann, who learned to ring them in the 1970s, and always loved to hear them.

The new section of the churchyard was dedicated and blessed on the 30th of April last year by the Bishop of Dorchester. A new hedge was planted along the south-western boundary in December, and is growing up nicely, except where some of the plants have been maliciously removed. The churchyard took part in the Haseley Open Gardens event in June, and an enthusiastic group came to hear about the wildflowers and lichens, of which a professional survey had been carried out earlier. The Parochial Church Council is grateful to Richie Sheehan for organizing the hedge planting, and also for preparing a churchyard management plan which is currently under consideration. In 2023 and again this year, some sections of the churchyard have been roped off between May and July to allow the wildflowers to grow and set seed. Permission has been obtained from SODC to trim some of the trees and remove the dead sweet chestnut, and we have plans to widen and improve part of the public footpath leading through the churchyard. The Parish Council has generously agreed to contribute to this project.

A new digital visitor guide has recently been developed and installed in the church, enabling visitors to use their phone or iPad to find out about the village and explore the history and architecture of the church. We hope many residents will want to bring their guests to enjoy this resource.

This week we are organizing the annual collection for Christian Aid, to help people across the world who are much needier than ourselves. And every month for the past eighteen months we have partnered with the Parish Council in organizing a collection of food items for the Thame Food Bank,

which provides vital help to those in our area who are struggling to make ends meet. This regular support is hugely appreciated.

Great Haseley Sports Club (Lucy, Victoria, Emily, Sarah & Jo)
The Great Haseley Sports Club has had a busy year.

Committee - We have welcomed a new member to the GHSC committee – Sarah Walden-Jones, who joined us at our AGM last week. Courts The courts remain in a good condition following the winter. We did not feel the need to have them professionally treated given we did that last year. We gave the courts a spring clean before the tennis coaching began in March and are going to periodically remove the weeds as the summer progresses.

Membership & Fundraising - Membership remains steady. With costs slightly increasing we have increased the annual membership fees for the 2024/25 season to £45 for a family, £27 for adults and £17 for juniors/seniors. We also held a successful fundraising event in the Haseley Village Hall in early March taking over the pop up pub and plan to do so again either later in the year or in Spring 2025.

Coaching Tennis - Coaching commenced on Sunday 24th March 2024 with Neil James - our long standing coach - delivering 18 weeks of lessons on Sunday mornings. There are 21 children having lessons every Sunday followed by two adult lessons. Following the success of the tournament we had last summer we are planning on having a mini tournament for the children and parents on Sunday 7th July, which should be really fun.

Village Hall (Paul Woodrow)

The year kicked off with a very successful event on the recreation ground for the King's coronation. The most popular part of the day being the dog show which definitely got the whole village to come out and enjoy the event and luckily the sun shone.

We have had a busy year with hirings especially for local children's parties which is the perfect use of our community asset.

We have again had a great year of pop-up pubs which have been very well supported with an average turn out of around 30 people and recently more young families enjoying the space and a pint. To give a little variety we have added food and music nights and next month will include a quiz.

In the Autumn we held an apple picking day in Millennium wood with a pumpkin soup lunch and a pop-up bar of course. The apple juice has nearly sold out so I reckon we got it just right, thanks to Richie Sheehan.

Yet again the carol singing outside the hall on Christmas Eve was a wonderful event with about a hundred people singing their hearts out with great help from Tim Suter.

The hall was recently the hub for the village clean-up day which was very successful and well supported and followed by some gorgeous soup from Jen Webster.

Thanks to our new treasurer David Ball we can clearly show this year's accounts which allows us to see exactly how much work goes into keeping the hall going. We have a £600 deficit but the £1,500 from the parish council is not shown as this is held in parish council reserves at my request.

Thankfully the current committee enjoy giving their time to all these events and the days of organising that go into them but it very clearly emphasises the constant struggle to keep the hall going and even though we are getting ever nearer to the refurbishment of the heating and insulation this will not be a magic pill to fix the problems faced by many halls like ours.

Open Forum – Questions from Electors / Public Discussion

The Chairman thanked all those involved in village groups, we are extremely fortunate to live in such a vibrant and active village.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8pm

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Chairman
12 May 2025