

MINUTES of the VIRTUAL ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF BERINSFIELD PARISH held on Monday 26th April, 2021

PRESENT : Councillor Stuart Scott-Ely, Chairman of Berinsfield Parish Council
16 members of the public
Annette Loveland, Clerk to the Parish Council
County Councillor Lorraine Lindsay-Gale,
District Councillor Robin Bennett

1. Apologies for absence were received from Councillors. S. Crawford, E. Croft, D. Smith and Mrs. R. Stockford.

2. **Report from County Councillor Lorraine Lindsay-Gale.** County Councillor Lorraine Lindsay-Gale had prepared a written report which had been circulated to all members of the public who attended the virtual meeting. She informed the meeting that she was very proud of the County Council staff, who had maintained the public services throughout the last year. While the Libraries were shut the staff had carried out other duties including directing traffic queues at waste recycling centres, answering the telephones for the Shielding Operation and delivering vital legal documents around the county so that Registrars could register deaths. She paid a special tribute to the Teachers who have coped with a hugely demanding situation of having to provide a virus free as possible environment for the children, while dealing with the uncertainty of whether they would be open or have to close.

County Councillor Lorraine Lindsay-Gale informed the meeting that she had campaigned for a long time to get transport links for Berinsfield and as from 1st September, 2020 Thames Travel began running service 45 between Abingdon, Culham, Berinsfield, Science Park and Cowley Centre. She encouraged residents to make good use of the bus service.

County Councillor Lorraine Lindsay-Gale also provided funds from her Councillor's Priority Fund to run a bus service from Berinsfield to the secondary schools in Abingdon. This year she has provided funding for the Berin Centre and for the purchase of eight laptops for the primary school.

The Chairman, Councillor Stuart Scott-Ely thanked County Councillor Lorraine Lindsay-Gale for attending the meeting and presenting her report.

3. **District Councillor's Report.** District Councillor Robin Bennett had prepared a written report which had been circulated to those present at the meeting. District Councillor Robin Bennett informed the meeting that the Covid-19 crisis had dominated the Council's operations over the past year with up to 40% of Council Officers redeployed to Covid response at any one time. Officers have distributed business grants, set up a Community Hub to support those in financial need and established the asymptomatic testing centre at the Beacon in Wantage. Each District Councillor was awarded a £2000 Covid grant to use in their ward. District Councillor Robin Bennett made grants to Berinsfield Information and Volunteer Centre, Riverside Counselling and paid for a sign for the Community Larder.

District Councillor Robin Bennett informed the meeting that he was appointed as joint Deputy Leader of the Council in addition to his Cabinet portfolio of Economic Development and Regeneration. He is also working with Officers on a local Economic Recovery Plan to complement higher level Government schemes.

The District Council has drafted and unveiled its new Corporate Plan. The key themes of the Corporate Plan are :-

- a) Protect and restore our natural world
- b) Openness and accountability
- c) Action on the climate emergency
- d) Improved economic and community wellbeing
- e) Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs
- f) Investment that rebuilds financial viability

The District Council will also develop a Wellbeing Strategy as part of the new Corporate Plan.

District Councillor Robin Bennett informed the meeting that the District Council has ring fenced more than £4 million of developer funds to provide affordable and social housing to help meet the District's urgent need for affordable, sustainable homes for key workers. The District Council is moving forward with a plan for the site the Council owns at 116 – 120 Broadway, Didcot which will include a community space and low-carbon affordable housing.

The Local Plan 2035 was adopted by South Oxfordshire District Council in December 2020. It is now exploring the option of a potential joint Local Plan with the Vale of White Horse District Council with a view to sharing costs and achieving uniformity across the two Districts in terms of environment and sustainability measures.

The District Council had to increase its part of the Council Tax for 2021-22 to avoid service reductions as its finances were affected by loss of income and costs arising from the pandemic.

The District Council has appointed a Cycling Champion, Councillor Sam Casey-Rerhaye, a River Thames Champion, Councillor Jo Robb and two Tree Champions, who will give particular focus to trees and ancient woodlands.

The Chairman, Councillor Stuart Scott-Ely thanked District Councillor Robin Bennett for attending the meeting and presenting his report.

4. **Report from Councillor Stuart Scott-Ely, Chairman of Berinsfield Parish Council.**

Coronavirus pandemic Councillor Stuart Scott-Ely thanked everybody in the village who, in one way or another, provided services to residents who required support during the coronavirus pandemic. He stated that staff and volunteers at the Berinsfield Information and Volunteer Centre co-ordinated much of the community support as well as continuing to provide their normal advice and support services, but that many other organisations and residents had provided services to residents. The Community Larder has continued to operate with the help of its volunteers and this has also been much appreciated by many residents. On behalf of the Parish Council he thanked everybody for their help during the unprecedented and difficult times.

The last year has provided many challenges, but the Parish Council remained open and continued to meet virtually. The Parish Council's ground maintenance contractors worked through all of the lockdowns to ensure that there was no interruption to the Council's services.

Solar Farm Funds. The Parish Council was able to get the new outdoor gym equipment installed on the recreation ground, although due to Government guidelines, this had to be closed during the last lockdown. The outdoor gym equipment was one of the items requested by residents when the village survey was carried out as to how the Solar Farm Funds should be spent. The Parish Council is also arranging for a scented meditation garden to be installed in the Burial Ground when lockdown eases. This was also one of the requests from residents.

Parish Council meetings. Councillor Stuart Scott-Ely informed those present that Members of the public are welcome to attend all Parish Council meetings and can speak during the first 30 minutes of the meeting. The Parish Council is always pleased to hear from residents and will do its best to resolve any issues raised as quickly as possible.

Village Litter Pick. There are no plans at the present time to arrange a village litter pick, but if it is possible to arrange one later in the year, details will be posted on the notice boards and on social media.

Parking on pavements and grass verges. Councillor Stuart Scott-Ely said it is unfortunate that there continues to be a lack of car parking in the village, but vehicles parked on pavements causes problems for people using mobility scooters or pushing prams and buggies. By parking on the grass verges, particularly near to junctions, it causes visibility problems for drivers and could cause an accident if a driver's vision is obscured when pulling out from a junction. The Parish Council ask that residents and visitors try to park considerately and not obstruct pavements or park on grass verges.

Dogs fouling on public open spaces and pavements. One of major complaints made to the Parish Council is about dogs fouling on footpaths and open spaces in the village and dog owners not clearing up after their dog. It is very anti-social to allow a dog to foul in a public place and not clear it up and offenders will be prosecuted and fined. The Parish Council provide dog litter bins in the village and pay to have them emptied regularly so would appreciate residents making use of them.

Hedges, shrubs and trees overhanging public footpaths. Occupiers of all properties are responsible for cutting back any hedges, shrubs or trees that grow in their garden to ensure that they do not overhang public footpaths and cause obstructions for pedestrians. This includes paths that are at the rear of properties as well as the paths at the front and sides of properties. Failure to keep the public footpaths clear will result in Oxfordshire County Council issuing letters asking for the hedge, shrub or tree to be cut back and if this is not done promptly, they can arrange for contractors to carry out the work and the occupier will be responsible for paying for it. Residents' help and co-operation in keeping boundary hedges, shrubs, or trees cut back from public footpaths would be much appreciated.

Berinsfield Emergency Plan. The Berinsfield Emergency Plan is on the Parish Council's website and is updated as and when necessary. This is designed to focus on what to do in the event of a major emergency in the village. Comments from residents are always welcome.

Pavilion. The pavilion is now seventeen years old and is still well used by the football clubs based in the village. The Pavilion has a kitchen, meeting space and toilet facilities and will be available for hire when COVID-19 restrictions are hopefully lifted on 21st June 2021. Further information can be provided by the Parish Clerk, upon request.

Website The Parish Council's website, www.Berinsfield-pc.gov.uk is available for use by any organisation in the village free of charge. Information can be passed to the Clerk either in writing or via email and she will be pleased to include it under the Community Activities section of the website. Information from the Parish Council and other organisations is also placed on the two notice boards in the village, one outside the Information Centre on Fane Drive and the other just inside the gates of the Burial Ground.

5. Financial Report

The accounts for the year 2020-21 have been reviewed by the Internal Auditor and will be submitted to the Parish Council for approval at its meeting on Tuesday 4th May, 2021. The accounts will be available for inspection and details of the dates will be posted on the Parish Council's notice boards and website. The accounts will be posted on the Parish Council's website following the external audit.

Council Tax 2021-22 Due to the unsettled year most residents have had during 2020-21, the Parish Council agreed not to increase its portion of the Council Tax for the year 2021-22. It remains at £124,500 and this is used to provide all of the Council's services in the village.

Grant Aid The Parish Council has been pleased to award grants to voluntary organisations in the village recently. In awarding the grants the Parish Council acknowledges the tremendous amount of commitment from the many volunteers and staff of the organisations it has supported.

6. **Questions** from Members of the Public

a) Planning application P21/S1443/FUL, Proposed development is conversion of existing bungalow to a 2 x 4 bed flats residential, 13 Bullingdon Avenue, Berinsfield. Several members of the public had attended the meeting to express their objections to the planning application. The Chairman, Councillor Stuart Scott-Ely informed the meeting that the Parish Council would be considering the application at its meeting on 4th May 2021 and if the Parish Council decided to object to the application, it would be called in and would be considered by the South Oxfordshire District Council and not under delegated powers. Members of the public would be entitled to attend the South Oxfordshire District Council meeting and could request to speak against the application at that time.

b) Fir trees overhanging public footpath. A resident informed the meeting that it is difficult to walk along the path between Lay Avenue and Evenlode Drive due to the fir tree hedge overhanging the footpath. The Chairman confirmed that this would be reported to Oxfordshire County Council as they are the authority able to contact the owners of the hedge to ask that it be cut back from the pavement.

c) Uneven pavements. Comments were made about the state of the pavements in the village. The Chairman, Councillor Stuart Scott-Ely informed the meeting that he hoped that this would be one of the issues that could be addressed by the Garden Village scheme.

d) Grass cutting. Stephen Perkins commented on the poor state of the grass cutting on the Parish Council's land

e) Denise Wickson-Dix referred to the motorcyclists who meet at the H-Café and asked if the Parish Council was monitoring the situation. The Chairman, Councillor Stuart Scott-Ely informed the meeting that the Parish Council had recently discussed this matter following a request from Dorchester on Thames Parish Council to join with them to monitor the situation. It was noted that there had been a Police presence at the H-Café recently. It was understood that the Police are having a major drive over the next few weeks and that speed camera vans will be in operation.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and the meeting closed at 8.30 p.m.