

HORSPATH ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

DUE TO THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS IN PLACE FOR THE CORONAVIRUS EMERGENCY, HORSPATH PARISH COUNCIL HAS CANCELLED THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING. THE MEETING WILL NOW BE HELD REMOTELY VIA ZOOM.

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Tuesday 27th April 2021

Present: Mr D Burgess
Mr J Dobson
Mr P Dobson (Chairman)
Mrs J Dobson
Mr P Ewart
Mrs J Horne
Mrs B Oakley
Mr M Timbs
Mrs L Yendole
Mrs H Kogel, Clerk
Mr T Bearder (County Councillor)
Mrs E Gillespie (District Councillor)

Apologies: Mrs L Hofen
Absent:

Public: 3

Mr Peter Dobson asked Councillors and members of the public to join him in holding a minutes silence as a mark of respect to the Duke of Edinburgh and local residents who have passed away during the last year.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Mrs Hofen was absent from the meeting.

2. MINUTES FOR APPROVAL

The minutes of the Annual Parish meeting held on Monday 13th May 2019 were approved and signed by the Chairman as correct.

3. STATEMENT OF PARISH COUNCIL ACCOUNTS 2020/21 – Un-audited.

A statement of un-audited accounts for 2020/21 was circulated. No questions were asked. The statement of accounts had not at this point been audited.

4. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – Mr Peter Dobson.

Good Evening and welcome to the Annual Parish Meeting.

The last year has been a very difficult time for many residents in Horspath and surrounding areas due to the impact of Covid, with many parents trying to balance their day between working from home and home schooling. I would like to thank Beverley Oakley for organising a team of volunteers to help and support any resident needing assistance with urgent or necessary requirements whilst self-isolating or shielding. The Parish Council like many other councils has had to negotiate a number of new technologies, including the use of zoom for communicating with councillors and residents at meetings. With the arrival of new vaccines, we hope that we can all return to some sense of normality in the near future.

Horspath Stone Pit Charity has now been in operation for about six years and continues to enjoy a quarterly income for the benefit of Horspath residents. 2020/21 has been a difficult year for Horspath residents and organisations. In June 2020 trustees agreed to set up a hardship fund to support the residents of Horspath suffering financial hardship during the covid-19 Pandemic. This fund has

continued into 2021. In item 7 Mr James Dobson will give an update on the number of grants made and the trend during this unprecedented time. In August 2020, the Stone Pit Charity Trustees agreed to fund the full cost of an intervention teacher for one year to enable Horspath School pupils who were most adversely affected by the school's closure due to Covid-19. The grant was given as the intervention teachers salary was not a statutory requirement, but no additional government funding was available to support extra educational costs as a result of the pandemic, therefore not funded by the River Learning Trust. The trustees and advisors are continually seeking improvement and transparency and will again be reviewing their policies during this financial year. I would like to take the opportunity to thank residents, Trustees and Independent Advisors for their support and commitment in the management of the Trust.

Horspath Hub along with many other organisations has experienced a difficult year, but has where possible tried to maintain the services of the post office, for which the village residents are most grateful. The Parish Council will continue to support the Hub where possible and wish them a quick and successful return to providing the community with a warm welcome.

Village Bus Service – Following a trial by Heyfordian, the bus service through Horspath was ceased in December 2016 due to the removal of Oxfordshire County Council funding. In 2017 Horspath Parish Council transport representatives worked hard to establish an interim bus service providing funding via the Horspath Stone Pit Charity for a bookable taxi service. During 2019, Horspath Parish Council led by Mrs Lisa Hofen negotiated and fully funded a Pick-Me-Up bus service which worked very well until June 2020, again funded by Horspath Stone Pit Charity. More recently Oxfordshire County Council led by Councillor Tim Bearder worked with other interested parties to establish a one-year trial bus service through Horspath, commencing in January 2021. This being a weekday, hourly service, again partly funded by Horspath Stone Pit Charity. Unfortunately, due to the Covid 19 Pandemic the bus service has not been used to its full capacity but hopefully with the Covid situation improving this service may be used more in the near future.

Planning – 2019 and 2020 has been a very difficult time for Horspath and surrounding villages with regards to the Local Plan 2035, and changes to the future planning system. For that reason, I have asked our planning advisor Mr Martin Harris to provide an overview of planning in item 8 of the Agenda.

Traffic Calming – Prior to the Covid 19 Pandemic, the Parish Council were in discussion with Oxford County Council to review/replace the existing traffic calming measures in Oxford Road as part of a commitment to improve the safety of residents and the traffic movement through the village. Unfortunately, on advice from the County Council this was put on hold due government lockdown measures and reduced traffic through the village. The Parish Council will be engaging with the County Council and other interested parties to move this project forward when Covid restrictions allow.

Horspath Wildlife Conservation Area - The restrictions imposed during the lock-down in response to the Covid-19 pandemic have had two significant effects on the Wildlife Conservation Area: firstly the restrictions have limited the work by volunteers to assist Martin on the Parish Council's behalf to maintain this facility, so that only small family groups have been able to carry out essential maintenance during the pandemic, and secondly, the effect of so many more people needing to stay at home in the village to self-isolate, or simply work from home, has generated many more visitors.

A variety of wildlife thrives in this area and the Council's policy of committing to minimum maintenance and interference with nature allows the natural sequence of trees growing, dying and falling to the ground, and then providing rich habitats for invertebrates, which in turn provide food for many birds. However, some trees have fallen or have threatened to fall across the gravel paths, and these have been felled professionally for the Parish Council as soon as they present a safety risk to the public. This established local wildlife site continues to be a valuable amenity for residents of the village.

I would like to thank Martin Harris as manager and volunteers for their hard work in the Conservation Area, who provide continued maintenance support, and I'm sure Martin would once again welcome any additional help as the maintenance season approaches. Anyone wishing to volunteer can contact the clerk.

Horspath Play Park- The play park was open in line with government guidelines during 2020/21. Safety maintenance work has recently been carried out in line with the latest ROSPA inspection report on both the children's and adult play areas. The Parish Council has set up a sub-committee to explore the possibility and options of refurbishing / updating the existing play park.

Horspath Railway Bridge - I was most surprised when on the 23/02/21, I was advised by a member of the Parish Council that contractors had implemented an emergency road closure under Horspath Bridge to carry out emergency removal of the parapets for safety reasons. Following discussions on site with contractors, I was advised that the road would be closed for up to 18 days and that, the bridge was likely to be demolished within a year. This was due to the County Council not authorising a road closure for up to twelve weeks whilst agreed refurbishment work took place. The Parish Council were most concerned about the lack of communication leading up to the road closure and the initial decision to demolish the bridge, particularly after the village fought for many years to save the bridge which included representation at an inquiry held in 2003, where the inspector found in Horspath's favour. Following much communication and discussion with Historic Railway Events the Parish Council, Oxfordshire County Council, supported by Councillor Tim Bearder, it was agreed that OCC would order a road closure to refurbish the bridge when required. HRE have stated that their future plans are to refurbish the bridge which will allow it to remain for the local community. The refurbishment could start as early October subject to the findings of ecological surveys. When the parapets were removed from the bridge, brickwork was transported and stored at Mr Timmo's yard for safe keeping. Over the last few weekends Mr Timmo has organised a group of volunteers to clean, prepare and stack the bricks in readiness to be used during the bridge refurbishment, for which I thank Mr Timmo. We now look forward to the bridge being refurbished and remaining part of the village for many years to come. Following concerns from residents and adjacent landowners regarding public safety and continued anti-social behaviour, we are currently in dialogue with HRE for security fencing to be installed on their boundary.

Parish Council Website - Horspath Parish Council are in the final stages of building a new stand-alone website in order to cope with the vast increase of material required. It will have links to all other village organisations and activities, provide accessibility features and be more user friendly. I would like to thank Heather for her help and total dedication in providing the parish council with an excellent website for many years.

Horspath Feast - In September 2020 the Parish Council made the difficult decision to cancel Horspath Feast for the first time in many years due to the Covid-19 Pandemic and government guidelines. We very much hope that the fair will be able to return this year.

2020 saw the resignation of Mr Martin Harris, who for many years has been the Parish Council's planning advisor, representing the Parish on numerous committees and planning enquiries. Martin continues to advise the Parish Council on planning issues.

The Parish Council also saw the resignation of Mrs Heather Palmer. Heather who has represented the Parish Council on a number of committees including the transport group continues to be the village webmaster. We thank both Martin and Heather for their continued support.

In 2020/21 the following Councillors were co-opted on to the Parish Council:- Mr Michael Timbs, Mrs Louise Yendole, Mrs Jessie Dobson and Mrs Joanne Horne, and we thank them for their help and support.

I would like to thank: -

Tim Bearder our County Councilor and Elizabeth Gillespie our SODC Councillor for their help and support throughout the year.

Parish Council colleagues for their continued help and support during a difficult year.

Hayley for her excellent work as Clerk.

The residents of Horspath for their continued support and confidence in the Parish Council.

Mr David Horsley for managing the Burial Ground.

The Cricket and Speedway Club members for their continued support, and on behalf of the Parish Council I would like to take this opportunity to wish both Clubs every success for the 2021 season.

Councillor James Dobson for managing the Hardship Fund monitoring system and Hayley for her work in interfacing with referral agents and arranging the distribution of vouchers.

There is a currently a vacant position on the parish Council. Anyone wishing to express an interest please watch the notice board. Or contact the Clerk.

5. SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN 2035 AND THE FUTURE CHANGES TO THE PLANNING SYSTEM. – Report from Mr Martin Harris.

Horspath Parish Council is part of the lowest tier in the hierarchy of local government, and in Planning it has been consistent in putting the interests of Horspath's own residents first, whereas it has been unfortunate in the past year that Planning policies imposed from the higher tiers of government above the Parish Council – including the District Council, the County Council and the sub-regional authority of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc have often made it very difficult for small villages like Horspath to confidently plan for their future based on local democracy. The main threat to Horspath as a small village located very close to Oxford City is that in pursuing the national policy of 'Build, Build, Build' and the 'growth agenda' of the Oxfordshire Growth Board, the upper tiers of government will progressively remove the ability of Horspath to remain physically separated as a distinct rural community from Oxford City which continues to expand outwards into the Green Belt. This is nothing new, but it is an indicator that local democracy will in future play a lesser role in local Planning, and partly because of the Covid pandemic's restriction on public meetings, and partly because all existing Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs) will now need to be revised to synchronise with a new national Planning system, Horspath Parish Council has 'paused' the work to develop a Horspath NDP until large public meetings can again be safely arranged, and until the requirements of the new national Planning system have been made clear by actual changes in the Planning legislation.

The Parish Council's aim has been to take all reasonable steps to protect Horspath as a small village in the Oxford Green Belt against being annexed into an ever-expanding City of Oxford, and this means not only making recommendations every month on the Planning Applications submitted to South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) by Horspath residents to extend or modify their existing homes in the village, so that residents' own aims are achieved without adversely affecting other residents' enjoyment of the village, but also, approximately every 15 years, contributing to the development by SODC of a new Local Plan to establish Planning policy for the whole District for a further 15 years. A new Local Plan was developed for SODC during 2017-18, which controversially proposed abandoning the long-held policy of keeping the Oxford Green Belt open and free from any inappropriate building encroachments into it from Oxford City, and it included building a new housing estate to be called 'Northfield' on Brasenose College farmland in Garsington, alongside the Unipart site, which is very close to Horspath. The Local elections in May 2019 brought in a new Lib-Dem and Green administration at SODC, and they wanted to scrap this controversial Plan, but the Secretary of State at the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHLG), the Rt. Hon. Robert Jenrick, forced them to submit it without modification for Public Examination in June 2020 by an Inspector appointed by the Planning Inspectorate. Unpopular as this was with the electorate who had elected the new District Councillors in May 2019 to produce a new Local Plan which did not involve building new housing estates in the Green Belt, SODC felt that it must comply with the direction from Robert Jenrick or risk losing any future control of Planning policy in South Oxfordshire, which he had proposed to hand over to Oxfordshire County Council if this controversial Local Plan was not examined and then adopted as policy by SODC before the end of 2020.

Over the preceding year Horspath Parish Council had already submitted a series of very detailed written Planning objections to SODC about the proposals in the emerging Local Plan to build a housing estate on Brasenose College's farmland in Horspath and Garsington, and to some extent the Council was successful in preventing the proposed Northfield estate from being extended into Horspath Parish in the final version of the Plan which was submitted to the Inspector. However, the final Plan still included the proposal by Brasenose College and its development partners L & Q Estates to build 1,800 new dwellings on 68 hectares of land in Garsington Parish alongside the Unipart site, which would narrow the width of the open Green Belt separating Cowley from Garsington village from about 1,000 metres wide to around only 230 metres, and this would also affect Horspath. Not only would there be more unwelcome traffic noise, air pollution, and night-time light pollution brought into the countryside adjacent to Horspath if Northfield was to be built on our parish boundary, but the narrowing of the strip of Green Belt land between Garsington village and Cowley would have an adverse affect on an important long wildlife corridor which runs from the Shotover Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), via Horspath Common and the Horspath Parish Council Wildlife Conservation Area and the disused railway embankment, southwards via the proposed Northfield site in Garsington, to join another important wildlife migration corridor along the River Thames at Sandford-on-Thames. Such wildlife migration corridors are vital to maintain biodiversity during the current period of rapid climatic change, and protecting this corridor would be consistent with Defra's 25-year Environment Plan, with the declaration of a Climate Emergency, and with the aims of Oxfordshire's Nature Recovery Network, so both Horspath Parish Council and Garsington Parish Council considered that they had a good case based on this, as well as on the need to protect the integrity of the Green Belt according to national and local Planning policy, for asking the Planning Inspector chairing the Examination to remove Northfield from the emerging Local Plan.

With a common interest in presenting as strong a case as possible to the Planning Inspector, Garsington and Horspath Parish Councils joined forces to develop a carefully co-ordinated strategy for submitting Written Representations to the Inspector in advance of the hearings, to formally set out the various aspects of our case for removing Northfield from the Local Plan, and for contributing our verbal representations, as a team of 6, to the Inspector in the oral hearings of the Examination in June 2020. Given that most of the other parties with an interest in developing Northfield would be represented by Planning barristers and experienced Planning QCs in these oral hearings, Horspath Parish Council sought professional advice and representation from Ms Saira Kabir Sheikh QC, a very successful and experienced Planning lawyer from the Francis Taylor Building Chambers based in the Inner Temple in London, which specialises in Planning and Environmental Law. Because of Covid-19 restrictions, all the preliminary legal consultations with the QC were held jointly with Garsington PC via Zoom, and all documents exchanged via e-mail before the oral hearings of the Examination in Public (EiP) which were conducted online via Microsoft Teams virtual meetings software.

The EiP chairman Planning Inspector, Mr. Jonathan Bore, exercised his full lawful discretion to select which aspects of the Local Plan he wanted to hear more about during the hearings, and unfortunately he excluded all the Horspath and Garsington Parish Council representatives and our QC, from joining the first hearing session on the Green Belt strategy in the Local Plan, for which we had instructed our QC and had prepared arguments, but he listened earnestly and politely to all our concerns and well-structured arguments in the later hearing session devoted exclusively to the discussion of the inclusion of Northfield as a strategic housing site in the Plan. There is no doubt that, as a result of the cancellation of large public meetings in response to Covid-19, we were disadvantaged in this EiP by needing to use Microsoft Teams, in a configuration where we could see only the face of the Inspector on our screens at home, and not those of around 20 other participants in those discussions, as one would normally see them in a meeting room. Several hundred members of the public with Internet access and MS Teams software watched the EiP hearing sessions throughout June 2020, and while the Inspector followed the new procedures as carefully and as professionally as this new technology would allow, it was the case that objections to the development of Northfield by Horspath Parish Council were countered by contrary

views expressed to the Inspector by the specialist Planning lawyers representing the developers and SODC Planning Service. Under Mr. Bore's chairmanship there was no opportunity provided for any debate to develop online between the objectors to including Northfield in the Local Plan, and the lawyers representing the landowners, developers and SODC officers. However, Mrs. Elizabeth Gillespie, the SODC Councillor representing Horspath and Garsington, who has always opposed building this housing in the Green Belt, succeeded in presenting a good case to the Inspector for planting a belt of new woodland within the perimeter of the proposed Northfield site to improve biodiversity and to create a visible and permanent edge to this extension of the built-up area of Oxford City.

When the EiP Inspector's Report was published on 1st December 2020, Horspath and Garsington Parish Councils were massively disappointed to read that, despite all our reasoned objections to the building of the Northfield housing estate in the Green Belt between Unipart and Garsington, it will be permitted on the basis of the Inspector's 'Planning judgement' that the need to provide additional housing for Oxford City and the nearness of the site to Oxford City constituted the legally required 'exceptional circumstances' for removing these 68 hectares site from the Green Belt. This judgement was based upon the Inspector's acceptance of the accuracy of the calculation of Oxford City's very large claimed unmet housing need, which it could not accommodate within the city boundary and which the Parish Council's legal and Planning advisers felt was a massive over-exaggeration of the future housing need of the City, because it appeared to be based on the use by the City Council of the wrong Strategic Housing Market Assessment data and calculated using an incorrect method. Unfortunately all that had already been accepted in the Local Plans adopted for Oxford City and in the Local Plans for other three surrounding District Councils which would need to provide sites in their Districts for their share of Oxford City's claimed unmet housing need. An additional legal problem which would most probably defeat any attempt to have Northfield legally removed from the Local Plan was the need for SODC to comply with its duty to co-operate with adjacent Local Planning Authorities, and also SODC's legal obligation to agree to house-building in excess of the District's local needs as calculated on the basis of the projected population increase, because SODC was a signatory to the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, which required the County to build an additional 100,000 dwellings by 2031 in order to receive a government payment of about £216 million towards infrastructure costs. The apparent enthusiasm by the signatories to the Growth Deal for receiving this modest additional funding for the county seemed to Horspath Parish Council to be unjustified when Oxfordshire County Council had already assessed the cost of its future infrastructure needs as being in excess of £8 billion, especially when the environmental cost of building the excessive number of houses required the surrender of large sites in the Oxford Green Belt close to the city boundary which were very easily accessible for use by city residents for their important health and recreation. On the basis of highly qualified legal advice, Horspath Parish Council decided not to seek a very costly Judicial Review of the emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (SOLP 2035) as this would have a low probability of ultimate success in the High Court, where High Court judges have tended not to over-ride any 'Planning judgements' made by qualified Planning Inspectors and by Local Planning Authorities unless there have also been unlawful procedural errors made in the course of reaching them, and in this case no procedural errors were identifiable. Such considerations did not prevent the Bioabundance Community Interest Company, formed in South Oxfordshire in an attempt to prevent serious damage to the environment, from seeking a Judicial Review in an attempt to render this damaging Local Plan unlawful and to provide a legal basis for SODC to start work on a less contentious Local Plan. It was a brave attempt to test in law the legality of the decision by SODC's Councillors to adopt the Local Plan when many of them stated publicly that they were voting to adopt the Plan only because the Secretary of State had informed SODC that if they did not, he would transfer SODC's Planning responsibility for the Plan to the County Council which had already expressed a willingness to accept this. There were also other environmental arguments used as the basis for the legal action started by Bioabundance, but this request for a Judicial Review was rejected. Horspath Parish Council felt that this was unfortunate, but the

Council's advisers regarded it as not unexpected, given that it effectively constituted a full-on challenge to the unprecedented intervention in the local democratic process by a government Minister.

A Planning Application to SODC is now expected from Brasenose College and its development partners L&Q Estates for the building of the Northfield housing estate alongside Unipart, and it is hoped that, in producing a masterplan for this site, that Horspath Parish Council will be invited to make some input in order to try to protect the rural environment of the Green Belt around Horspath. The Inspector also recognised in his Report that the proposed visual impact of the edge of the built-up extent of Oxford City on the south boundary of Northfield could be improved, in the way suggested by Councillor Elizabeth Gillespie, and in paragraph 154 of his Report he wrote:

“At the present time this part of the Oxford urban edge is abrupt and hard, with large scale buildings dominating the Green Belt. The allocation site would contain sufficient space to include boundary and structural planting which would soften the edge of the built-up area compared with the present view of Unipart and minimise the impact of the development on the Green Belt.”

There is now some reason to hope that the tallest buildings in the Northfield estate will be positioned within the site closer to Unipart, with the lower buildings located towards the southern boundary of the site where they will be separated from the remaining narrow strip of agricultural fields in the Green Belt by a broad strip of woodland planting and newly created wetland habitats for increasing biodiversity and for flood control. This will be an important matter for Horspath Parish Council to take a keen interest in during the coming year.

However, even now when the large housing sites in the Green Belt are permitted, another requirement of the Growth Deal has not so far been met, in that there is not yet in place the required Oxfordshire Joint Statutory Spatial Plan, now renamed ‘Oxfordshire Plan 2050’, and as a penalty, the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has required that all Districts in the county should be able to demonstrate that they have access to a 5-year supply of land for housing in order to take Planning decisions according to their adopted Local Plans. The risk is that, if sufficient land is not allocated in advance to meet the housing requirements as set out in the Local Plans, it becomes possible for developers to propose building on sites which have not been allocated in the Plans, and although in our case SODC may well refuse to grant Planning permission, it is however likely that a Planning Inspector appointed by MHCLG would grant Planning permission on Appeal if the Local Authority cannot show evidence that it has its designated 5-year land supply. Such a dangerous situation would put more areas of the Oxford Green Belt at risk from inappropriate building development, and would make land development in the District unpredictable while creating a ‘Wild West’ situation for speculators. One of the weaknesses in the legal and Planning arguments put forward by Horspath Parish Council, and many other Councils, has been that in the Green Belt policy in the NPPF, the principle characteristic of the Green Belt to be protected is its ‘openness’, and as a result, exhaustive legal and Planning debates occur about what degree of ‘openness’ is relevant in determining any Planning Application in the Green Belt. In the past year of Covid restrictions Horspath Parish Council has seen the Green Belt land within and around the village used much more intensively every day by the residents and visitors alike for their healthy outdoor recreation, with unprecedented large numbers of walkers crossing the fields to and from Garsington on the public Right of Way field path which is part of the “Green Belt Way” all around Oxford. The high value of open spaces within the village such as the very attractive 5-acre Horspath Parish Council Wildlife Conservation Area in Butts Road and the much larger Recreation Ground, sports field, grass conservation meadow and planted woodland on the Council's Oxford Road site, are now also recognised by government as valuable community facilities for sustaining public health, both mental and physical, and connecting people with the natural environment. Horspath Parish Council hopes that in the new government Planning system, the value of the Green Belt for public health, recreation and rehabilitation, for air pollution and climate control, and for enhancing biodiversity will be added to the simple concept of ‘openness’ when evaluating the need to protect it, and the Council has responded to numerous government consultations in the past year to try to promote these ideas.

In August 2020 central government launched a consultation on proposals set out in a White Paper entitled “Planning for the Future” on a totally radical restructuring of the entire Planning system for England, and it has caused a great deal of alarm to Horspath Parish Council, and in many other local Councils, as the proposals seemed to take away much of the scope for any Horspath Neighbourhood Development Plan, or indeed for even the District Council, to specify the local levels and types of housing and building design, and it reinforced the Parish Council’s decision to ‘pause’ our own NDP until any new Planning system is confirmed.

Since 2017 Horspath Parish Council has been represented on the Planning Committee of the ‘Expressway Action Group’ (EAG) which includes amongst its 44 Parish Council members all the Parish Councils in South Oxfordshire which were under threat of having a section of the proposed Oxford-Cambridge Expressway built across a large slice of the Green Belt in South Oxfordshire to connect the A34 from near Abingdon to join the M40 near Wheatley. Such a road would have bisected many parishes, split up viable farms, interrupted numerous important wildlife migration routes, and would have resulted in a large increase in traffic through villages unlucky enough to be located near any of the proposed road junctions for getting on and off this Expressway. The likely consequences for Horspath with one of these junctions being near Wheatley would have been a great increase in through traffic on the existing ‘rat run’ between the Oxford Ring Road and Wheatley, with an unacceptable increase in noise and air pollution and a great reduction in road safety in the village. Two members of Horspath Parish Council met informally with the Director of the Oxford-Cambridge Expressway project for Highways England, and one Councillor met with him formally on several other occasions, and while he seemed to be a perfectly reasonable and highly professional road-building engineer with a proper concern to avoid damage to the local environment, the decision on whether or not to build this Expressway was clearly not his, but was to be taken at a Ministerial level in the Department of Transport in consultation with the Treasury, and with some other unelected advisory bodies such as the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC), which had proposed the idea of the economic development of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc in its report “Partnering for Prosperity” in November 2017. Therefore lobbying against the Expressway was escalated to a political level by the EAG, NEG, CPRE Oxfordshire, the Open Spaces Society and the Oxford Green Belt Network, and the Parish Council was kept informed by its representative in all of these organisations, until the very welcome news was released by the Department for Transport on 18th March 2021 that the Oxford-Cambridge Expressway project was finally cancelled. While there should be great relief at this news, there remains the prospect that central government apparently still intends to allow the building of 1 million extra homes along the original 100 miles of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, and it is feared that this may still put pressure on land for development and on local infrastructure in South Oxfordshire.

Keen to see some progress made by the County Council on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, the Oxfordshire Growth Board has published in March 2021 its own “Oxfordshire’s Strategic Vision for Long-Term Sustainable Development” which optimistically and in only very general terms presents the ‘growth agenda’ as being ‘sustainable’, but it fails to explain exactly how this is to be delivered. It is perhaps significant and ominous that nowhere in that document is there any mention of the positive value of maintaining the Oxford Green Belt. The necessary formal and official public consultation under Regulation 18 of the Planning Act on a draft version of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 will be carried out by Oxfordshire County Council during the summer of 2021, and that will be a very important consultation for Horspath Parish Council and for every resident of the village to respond to.

At an even higher spatial or geographical scale within the Planning hierarchy, in which Horspath Parish Council sits at the very bottom, is the idea promoted the publication in February 2021 by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government of “Planning for sustainable growth in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc – an introduction to the Oxford-Cambridge Arc Spatial Framework”, and so any public consultation on its vision and formulation in the spring of 2021 will require a response by every Parish Council in Oxfordshire as this proposed strategy may in future years limit the scope for both the County and the District Council to determine the course of ‘sustainable growth’ in our locality.

In terms of sub-regional Planning there exists yet another group with apparently emerging influence on Planning policy - The 'Oxford-Cambridge Arc Leaders Group' – consisting of the elected Leaders of all the Local Councils in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc plus representatives of all the Local Enterprise Partnerships in the Arc. This Group has published its 'OxCam Arc Economic Prospectus' in 2020 to invite financial investment in the economic growth strategy for the Arc, and in April 2021 published its latest document 'Shared regional views on protecting, restoring and enhancing the environment in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc'. It will be important for Horspath Parish Council to let the Leader of SODC know that a policy of 'economic growth at any price' is unacceptable here.

It is perhaps surprising that there is in existence an even more geographically extensive Planning group than the Arc Leaders Group, and this is the 'English Economic Heartland' (EEH) which stretches from Swindon to Cambridgeshire and from Northamptonshire to Hertfordshire, and, to quote from its own profile: *"brings political and business leaders together in a strategic collaborative partnership with a shared commitment to realise the region's economic potential while achieving net-zero carbon"*. Central government has assigned to EEH the role of being the 'Sub-national Transport Body'.

With so many different levels of Planning policy-making bodies now in existence, all with potential, if not actual control over what may happen here in Horspath, it can be difficult for any Parish Council to determine how much effort needs to be put into sustaining a dialogue with each of them. Of most immediate concern to Horspath Parish Council in 2021 will be the implementation and delivery of the South Oxfordshire Plan 2035 in the context of the development of the nearby Northfield strategic housing site, and being able to respond effectively to any official government Planning consultations on future Planning policy and the design of any new Planning system. To achieve this, Horspath shares its experience with the nearby Parish Councils through its membership of the Oxford Green Belt Network of Parish Councils and CPRE Oxfordshire where it is represented at committee level.

However, at the truly local level of Planning inside the village, a success was recently achieved by the Parish Council, with considerable help from Councillor Mr. Tim Bearder, the Oxfordshire County Councillor for Horspath, in that the Horspath railway bridge has, yet again, been saved from hasty demolition. There have been various attempts since 1998 to demolish this bridge, which forms a unique part of the landscape of the village Green, restricts the speed of 85% of the vehicles passing underneath it to less than 31 mph, and physically prevents the largest articulated HGVs from using Horspath as part of a 'rat run' between the Ring Road and the M40. The bridge also serves as part of a long wildlife corridor extending from Shotover and the Horspath Wildlife Conservation Area, across this Cuddesdon Road bridge, into the hedgerows lining the streams which run south all the way to the Thames, and it is also a potential pedestrian footbridge linking two public Rights of Way paths on opposite sides of this busy road. The last time that demolition was threatened in 2005 a Planning Inspector held a week-long Planning Inquiry in the Village Hall and in his Report he made it very clear that in his judgement it was important for the bridge to remain. The current owner of the bridge is the Department for Transport, and the engineers in the Highways England department for the Historical Railways Estate, based in York, had selected the Horspath bridge for demolition this year, most surprisingly without any public consultation in Horspath, before the demolition team arrived one Monday morning. As a result of some rapid communications by our County Councillor and by Horspath Parish Council with Highways England, reminding them of the Planning Inspector's decision and of the ongoing amenity value of this bridge to the residents of Horspath, the decision to demolish was reversed and the Horspath bridge will soon be refurbished and maintained.

In the past year, Horspath Parish Council has thus needed to deal with a very great variety of Planning issues which directly affect the lives of the residents of the village, our very attractive rural environment, and inevitably also the value of property in the village. Virtual Planning meetings and the electronic communication of almost all Planning documents is now standard, but the volume of official documents which Parish Councillors are expected to read each month has significantly increased, and the 5,000 pages of basic Planning reference documents which were important to read before engaging with the Planning Inspector in the recent Public Examination of the Local Plan is some indication of the

increased workload imposed on Parish Councils, just to keep abreast of changes and challenges to the Planning system. However, for a variety of good Planning reasons, it has been hugely beneficial to Horspath to be physically separated from the City of Oxford during the Covid pandemic, and Horspath Parish Council's Planning policy intends to ensure that this independence continues. Mr Peter Dobson passed thanks to Mr Harris for his report.

6. VILLAGE HALL COMMITTEE'S REPORT AND STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS.

Mr Peter Dobson circulated a statement of accounts and gave the following report:-

2020/21 was a challenging year for Horspath Village Hall due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with no income from letting during that period. We were most fortunate to receive a Business Rate grant of £10,000 which kept the accounts in the black for the period 1/4/20 to 31/3/21. We also received a £1,000 grant from OCC Councillor Tim Bearder which went towards the decoration of the main hall. We also replaced hand dryers in the toilets, serviced both heating boilers and replaced the external kitchen door and the boiler house door. We are fortunate to have secured a letting to Oxford County Council for three days per week. The toddler group and the art class have recently returned. The number of bookings is slowly increasing, including weddings for 2021/22.

I would like to thank Penny Drew for her help in reconciling the accounts and preparing them for year end and acting as interim booking clerk, also Catherine Riley for keeping an eye on the village hall and showing prospective hirers round the village. The Horspath Village Hall bank account stands at £14,556, with August utility and other bills yet to be paid.

7. HORSPATH STONE PIT CHARITY STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS.

A copy of the un-audited 2020/21 accounts was circulated to all Parish Councillors and members of the public, no questions were asked. Mr James Dobson gave a short presentation on the Horspath Stone Pit Charity Hardship Fund.

8. HORSPATH RECREATION CHARITY STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS.

A copy of the 2020/21 accounts was circulated to all Parish Councillors and members of the public, no questions were asked.

9. FRIENDS OF HORSPATH – Report from Sheila Frankum.

During this last year the Hub and the Friends of Horspath have been quite quiet with the pandemic ruling curtailing most of our activities. When it was possible to open the Hub we drew up an extensive Risk Assessment and had a deep clean to cover all rules and making sure opening to the public was as safe as possible.

However there have been a few things going on for some of the time when lock down was lifted. The Post Office was able to continue from June 2020 as it was an essential service and it has been used by many villagers as well as some from further afield. After Christmas Judy was feeling vulnerable before having her injection so Christine from Great Milton took over for over a month as she felt that Horspath was a very important area for the PO. We managed to open the Friday morning cafe for a few weeks in October following the government guide lines. People had to book to avoid disappointment but all went well until we entered tier 3 and we could no longer have people indoors. It was good to see those who were able to come. One Pilates class has continued throughout, using Zoom very effectively. Also the Art class has had Zoom classes as well as weekly homework and some outside lessons. They are now planning an exhibition taking place as soon as we are able to open the Hub to the public.

The Creative Writing group has also continued with Zoom meetings and this too has now concluded with all their writings in print, in booklet form and on sale at the Hub for £5.00. We mustn't forget the talents of the photographers in the village who have now been in print with two calendars as fundraisers for the Friends and St Giles church.

We held our AGM in November this was also over Zoom and we have been holding trustee meetings in the same format each month. At the last meeting it was decided to go ahead and open the cafe on a Friday morning outside in the garden. Again following all the correct procedures, it worked well so we are hoping to continue as long as the weather holds and until we can bring everyone indoors. Hopefully classes and bookings will start again when all restrictions are lifted.

10. SODC COUNCILOR'S REPORT – Mrs Elizabeth Gillespie.

The past year has been something of a rollercoaster for us all.

As I am sure you know, I am now an Independent Councillor. I could not support the Local Plan, which the last Conservative administration submitted, as six of the seven strategic sites were allocated to the Oxford Green Belt. I am the only Councillor who has consistently voted against this Plan as I believe it to be deeply and fundamentally flawed and will ultimately devastate our city, towns and villages.

The Coalition Council Cabinet had voted to reject the Plan and were taking it to full Council where it was anticipated that this decision would be officially confirmed by the Lib/Green Council. However, at the final hour, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick, intervened and directed the Council to submit the Plan for examination. The regretful action of depriving a District Council of its democratic rights and duties continued beyond the Examination in Public stage to adoption where, once more, the Minister intervened to ensure that the Coalition adopted the Plan. My frustration at the outcome was in part alleviated in that I succeeded in persuading the Inspector to insert in the Main Modifications that there should be community woodland – a wide canopy of trees - between the new estate developments and our villages. Planning for the future hangs over us, which will inevitably bring about substantial change and we need to remain vigilant.

There is, of course, the Arc project, which includes Oxfordshire, and which aims at further development in the county and across the Arc (much like the previous administration but more so). The Arc project apparently aims at more housing supply, capitalising on the industrial/business development strengths of Oxfordshire and across the Arc. The official framework statement on the Arc from the Ministry of Housing and Communities and Local Government does not mention the Green Belt, which is a matter of great concern.

The good news is that the Expressway has been cancelled and that the threat to Cuddesdon has therefore been lifted. I have been a member of EAG since its inception, which has been ably led by Peter Rutt, but I think that we still need to keep a watchful eye on future road proposals which cater for the new housing.

As always, working with you, even via zoom, has been a pleasure. I must say, however, that I am very much looking forward to our customary face-to-face meetings.

11. OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT – Mr Tim Bearder.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps announced the cancellation of the Oxford-Cambridge (Ox-Cam) expressway on 18th March 2021, after “analysis confirmed the proposed project was not cost effective” Whilst I believe this is tremendous news (albeit he seems to have based the decision entirely on the finances of the case), there have been several reports in the Oxford Times about the “Expressway by Stealth”. Responses to recent FOI requests indicate that changes were made to the South Oxfordshire Local Plan at a late stage on the initiative of County Council Officers, with no Councillor involvement – in particular the addition of a proposal to “improve” the B4015, the removal of the safeguarding plan for Stadhampton Bypass and the inclusion of possible M40 junction changes outside the District. All this gives support to the suspicion that a major new route through our area is being planned.

Government have announced an intention to establish a new single voice for the area – an ARC Growth Body, to drive and support economic growth. Already we have a wealth of bodies like England's Economic Heartland who are pushing for a very large number of new houses. I asked a question of the cabinet last month, which revealed 862,000 new houses across the ARC are expected, the National Infrastructure Commission recommended a million. Either way, that would represent continuous and

unchecked housing delivery for the next 30 years, at rates far in excess of anything seen in the last 20 years – possibly ever! A growth of 105% in Oxfordshire compared with the 16% predicted for the nation as a whole by the Office of National Statistics.

Oxfordshire County Council have contacted Historical Railways Estate and advised that they are happy to work with them on the diversion associated with the refurb works. HRE consequently instructed their consultant to “bin” the planning application relating to demolition. The ecologists have been told to plan for surveys relating to refurbishment rather than demolition – they think they may only need summer bat surveys at the moment, so it may be ready to go earlier than expected. So, fingers crossed! This is a vital piece of infrastructure that prevents large lorries accessing the Ladder Hill area of Wheatley and is a much loved historical landmark.

Mistakes made over the awarding of a parking contract have cost Oxfordshire County Council more than £1.6m. This is incredibly disappointing because that is enough to pay for the rent on the Maple Tree Children’s Centre, which I’ve been part funding from my Councillor Allowance, for 160 years! To make matters worse, they spent £20,475 on an independent report to look at what went wrong and are now refusing to show that to Councillors because it’s confidential. There was a motion moved to end last month’s full council meeting early, because we’d had an emotional debate on domestic violence. That was the item before the Parking Contract was to be discussed. The Chair of the Council has decided that there should be an Extraordinary Meeting on the 7th to finish the meeting.

The Government is asking Local Transport Authorities to begin the process of establishing Enhanced Partnerships with bus operators across their entire area by the end of June, otherwise they will lose a lot of funding. This is a similar approach adopted for the Active Transport funds last summer. It led to some rushed decisions and lots of white lines being repainted. I will of course be pressing their feet to the fire on it and trying to get some long term funding for the Wheatley to Temple Cowley Bus and asking them to look at an enhanced Otmoor Flier set up as a proper bus service.

I have been actively involved in the preplanning exercise set up by Christchurch, looking at the land north of Bayswater Brook and have held meetings with Brookes about the development site in Wheatley. It is essential that we are very closely involved in all these plans, so that we can get the best for the community. It doesn’t seem that the Planning Inspector has left us many levers to compel developers to improve cycle paths or develop car free plans, but it is something I will be pushing for as hard as I can because the impact on the local infrastructure of these many thousand houses will be immense.

Mr Bearder stated that he is very impressed with what Horspath has done with the Horspath Stone Pit Charity Hardship Fund

Mr Peter Dobson passed thanks to both Mrs Gillespie and Mr Bearder for their help and support.

12. AOB.

a. Mrs Oakley asked Mr Bearder about the high number of road works around Blackbird Leys, Stadhampton and other local areas, and asked if this is in preparation for building to start on developments. Mr Bearder will liaise with OCC local teams to obtain information.

Mrs Oakley passed thanks to Mr Peter Dobson for his work as Chairman.

b. Mr Peter Dobson thanked Councillors and members of the public for their help and support, and hopes that we can look forward to a better 2021.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING. – To be confirmed.

Signed Date