



OXTED PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Oxted Parish Council held at Oxted Community Hall
on Tuesday 14th February 2023 at 7:00pm

Cllr Deb Shiner – Chairman
Cllr Katherine Saunders
Cllr Peter Giles
Cllr Reg Hull
Cllr Peter Damesick
Cllr Neil Rivers
Cllr Jean Inker
Cllr Alan Feesey
Cllr Denize Wallace

Mrs Maureen Gibbins
Clerk to Oxted Parish Council

MINUTES

1. **Apologies for absence:** to receive and accept apologies for absence.
Cllrs Paul Whitehurst, Liz Parker and Barbara Harling
2. **Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest:** *To receive any disclosure by members of personal interests in matters on the agenda, the nature of any interests, and whether the member regards the interest to be prejudicial under the terms of the new Code of Conduct. Members are reminded of the need to repeat their declaration immediately prior to the commencement of the item in question. Anyone with a prejudicial interest must, unless an exception applies, or a dispensation has been issued, withdraw from the meeting. There were none declared.*
3. **Public session:**
District Cllr Catherine Sayer reported as follows:
 1. Balancing the budget and keeping the Council solvent, has been, and continues to be, one of the hardest issues that the Independents and OLRG Alliance has faced since becoming the administration.
It's crucial to get it right, as demonstrated by our neighbours in Croydon where residents are faced with a 15% rise in their Council Tax because the Council has gone bankrupt.
In May 2021, when we became the administration, Tandridge Council was itself threatened with bankruptcy and a £920,000 annual hole in the budget was discovered due to a pension costs error.
Our 2023/2024 budget, agreed by the full council last Thursday, had to address this inherited position, together with unprecedented economic pressures stemming largely from inflation and the uncertainties in central government funding.
I am really pleased to say the budget has been set without major cuts to services or cuts to the amount of money available for grants to voluntary organisations. We have also been able to keep free car parking around the district, including the 2 hours free in Ellice Road car park in Oxted.

Some fees are rising but increases for services to residents have been kept to a minimum. The Council Tax rise is 2.99% which is £6.90 per year for an average property (or 13p per week). We have also managed to bring in a new Cost of Living Fund to help residents in serious financial difficulties.

For the current financial year which has also necessitated major savings, we can say 90% of those planned savings are on track and despite high inflation and economic volatility, we're expecting to meet the budget. To be prudent, we'd built in a level of contingency and whilst it is likely we'll need to draw on at least some of this, crucially we will not need to touch our reserves.

To protect services to residents and to avoid using our modest reserves that have been run down in recent years, a programme has been established to develop and implement a series of changes enabling a significant reduction in the Council's own operating costs – the Future Tandridge Programme. This is aimed at ensuring that expenditure no longer outstrips income. We have also brought in stricter accounting and reporting rules.

For 2023/2024, the Future Tandridge Programme has a savings plan of £1.7m, a major challenge when you consider the revenue budget for the year is £11.9m.

We are working on sharing services with other councils, on digital innovation to give better customer experience and efficiency and on commissioning at least some services from outside providers to achieve better value for money.

2. Planning difficulties

At the end of August 2022, there was an upgrade to the Civica software that runs our planning portal and stores all our planning documents. The upgrade failed and, despite persistent pressure on Civica to rectify the position, the planning service continued to be badly affected in the months of September to November 2022.

The failure resulted in the Council having to cease validating applications as the public were unable to view them online and were therefore unable to comment. It also resulted in planning officers being unable to view planning documents properly online thereby delaying determination of applications and having to print off paper copies for Parish Councils which could not access documents themselves.

The issues with the Civica upgrade have now been largely resolved and lessons have been learnt in terms of managing providers delivering upgrades to our systems. We now have 4 members of staff carrying out overtime to clear the validation backlog. We have already brought down the backlog of applications waiting to be validated from 8 to 3 weeks. We are proposing to keep the overtime running until we are down to a 1-week turnaround. As part of the Civica upgrade now in place, our planning application validation process has been simplified and is more efficient.

Also, there have been issues with the recruitment and retention of planning staff - as you may be aware this is an issue not unique to Tandridge. It has resulted in an over reliance on interim and temporary staff, which in turn has affected the overall resilience and effectiveness of the planning service.

We are pleased to report that this issue has now largely been addressed with, as of January, over 90 per cent of officers in the Development Management team being full-time permanent employees. This position of stability allows us to invest in and develop staff to support the overall improvement of the service.

We have engaged SJH planning consultants (a local consultancy company) to assist us with the backlog of householder applications.

We also intend to have a dedicated week where we are going to try and isolate the DM team from any outside distractions and get them to 100% concentrate on clearing the backlog. Looking to do that in the week commencing 27 February.

- 3. Local Plan** – Hopefully, the Local Plan is about to get underway again. You've probably seen the Government's recent proposals for changes to national planning policy. These give out some mixed messages, but on the back of them we have employed DAC/Arup planning consultants to help us decide the way forward. Arup have advised that our

original idea for a shorter term Plan was a good one and we need to go back to the Inspector to press him over it. The idea is to reword the proposal for a shortened plan to try to answer the Inspector's concerns about the original Plan, to acknowledge the Government's recent proposals for changes to planning policy, and to improve infrastructure provision for those sites that go ahead.

4. **AONB** consultation on the proposed boundary change for the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty due in early March. Expansion expected for Tandridge.
5. Moving the taxi rank to outside Lorimers. It's Surrey County Council's proposal and final decision but please do give your views to the current consultation.
6. Voter ID coming in for the first time at the May elections

Cllr Sayer enquired as to the position with CCTV and was advised that tenders are due to be submitted to the parish council by Monday 20th February.

County Cllr Cameron McIntosh reported as follows:

- The TfL proposal to extend ULEZ is being challenged due to the lack of proper consultation. Zone 6 for travel needs to be extended further than Upper Warlingham and Caterham. The car scrappage scheme needs to extend to Surrey. SCC will not permit the erection of signage until a full consultation has been undertaken. There is a requirement for 'free routes' to accommodate children crossing borders for school, residents attending hospital appointments and residents working across the borders.
 - Balanced budget set. Surrey Council tax - 0.99% and 2% increase for adult social care.
 - 152million in highways
 - Capital programme announced for Highways, Transport and the Environment
 - All street lighting is being changed to LED and scheme should be completed within the next couple of months.
 - Provisional date for resurfacing outside Esso garage and Church Lane is the beginning of April.
 - Resurfacing of Pollards Wood Road on 20/21 February
 - Station Approach - money has been set aside for the flooding issue to be resolved.
 - Parking Enforcement and grass cutting to be taken back in house to Surrey.
 - Master Park roundabout - the councillors had considered the £4k on the original breakdown was for the design works which had already been paid for. Cllr McIntosh explained that the £4k is for road safety audit works and, if not used, will be refunded to the parish council. The Chairman called for a vote for the works to be undertaken. Cllr Shiner proposed, Cllr Saunders seconded - 8 in favour 1 abstention the motion was carried. Cllr McIntosh confirmed if there were any additional costs, he would cover them.
4. **Minutes:** To approve the Minutes of Full Council meeting held on 10th January 2023. The minutes were approved and signed by the Chairman of the meeting.
 5. **Planning Committee:**
 - i) Planning Committee approved the minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 24/01/23.
 - ii) Full Council received the minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 24/01/23.
 6. **Burial Committee:**
 - i) Burial Committee approved the minutes of the Burial Committee meeting held on 10/01/23.
 - ii) Full Council received the minutes of the Burial Committee meeting held on 10/01/23.
 - iii) Cllr Giles expanded on the proposed burial ground fees paper which had been previously circulated. Following discussion, it was proposed and agreed 5:4 in favour to increase the

parishioner fees by 35% and the 7 year parishioner rate by 20%. The increases will be effective from 1st April 2023.

7. **Finance:**

i) Accounts update –RH confirmed that the 2023/24 has been notified to TDC and the 2023/24 budget has been agreed and signed off. Burial income is greater than on the revised budget. The next Finance Working Group meeting is scheduled for 4th April.

ii) To note payments approved and authorised

Clerk Expenses	£ 63.30
Country Garden Services	£ 1,250.62
Clerk Salary & Office	£ 1,381.53
Clerk Expenses	£ 273.24
Country Garden Services	£ 1,250.62
Clerk Salary & Office	£ 1,381.53
Computer Solutions – Laptop battery	£ 126.00
Surrey Hills Society Annual Membership	£ 30.00
Master Park – 4 th ¼ donation	£ 1,000.00

8. **BID** – There was no update available. The Clerk confirmed that the BID have reiterated their commitment to paying for the heritage lantern on Master Park Roundabout.

9. **CIL** – PD highlighted that the CIL funding to the Master Park Roundabout now totals £23,195.

Hurst Green Infants school have applied for funding to install a pond for wildlife education with quotes ranging from £18k to £21k. The CIL Working group recommend a maximum CIL contribution of £10k which is conditional on the school seeking support from other organisations also. Cllr Saunders abstained from discussions and voting as she is a Governor at the school. All remaining 8 councillors were in favour of the funding.

Barnetts Shaw play area works are due to commence week commencing 17th April. A pre works meeting is to be scheduled. Cllr Shiner reported she attended the Tandridge Access Group meeting who expressed the appreciation of the inclusivity of the equipment and would wish to attend the reopening of the play area. It was agreed the reopening will require publicising when confirmed.

Pollards Oak Precinct – there is no further update at present.

Cllr Hull raised the issue of the letter of support to St Marys school. It was agreed this is a letter to be sent on behalf of the parish by the Clerk.

10. **CCTV** – Cllr Giles confirmed the Invitation to Tenders are due in on 20th February. Cllrs Hull and Giles have responded to questions from suppliers. Cllr Giles is trying to speak to another supplier but running out of time within the tendering process.

11. **Annual Parish Assembly – 21st March 2023, United Reformed Church, Bluehouse Lane**

- **Format** – invite recipients of funding to show how funding has been utilised.
- **Suggested Speaker** – Dr Anna Mustill – GP – Growing Health together.
- **Timings** – 7 for 7:30
- **Responsibilities** – TBC
- **Invitations** – 100 invitations

12. **Chairman’s announcements:**

i) Coronation event and funding – Master Park are holding an event, not related to the Coronation, that weekend. Cllr Saunders will look into what events may be being organised in Hurst Green

- ii) Grit bins – maintenance and ownership – no update was provided
13. **East Surrey Transport Committee Update**
Minutes and reports circulated when received so all councillors are aware of the updates.
Next meeting - March 8th. New station sign for Hurst Green has been erected. Agreement to repainting of the Oxted underpass which Cllr Feesey will follow up.
14. **South-East Community Rail Partnership**
 - i) Minutes and reports circulated when received so all councillors are aware of the updates.
 - ii) Disabled access at Hurst Green station.
15. **Actions Log for reference and update**
The Actions log was noted.
Cllr Giles confirmed he would attend the AONB webinars.

Meeting closed at 2040

Date of the next meeting Tuesday 14th March 2023

Copies of Parish Council minutes are held by the Clerk and are available on the Parish Council website: www.oxted-pc.org.uk Mrs Maureen Gibbins, Parish Clerk, Phone 07510 226989