

# Tetsworth Parish Annual Meeting

## Record of the Annual Meeting of Tetsworth Parish Held at 7.30pm on Wednesday 22nd May 2024 in Tetsworth Memorial Hall

### Present

Parish Councillors: Paul Carr – Chairman  
Seb Mossop  
Sue Rufus  
Chris Thompson  
Sean Whitehead

Meeting Clerk: John Gilbert

In Attendance: Cllr Georgina Heritage (SODC)

Members of the public: 16, including representatives of village organisations

### 1. Welcome – Paul Carr

The Chairman welcomed all present. He explained that the Annual Meeting of the Parish was not like other formal meetings of Tetsworth Parish Council, and was an opportunity for all registered electors to hear about and question community activities within the village. The Parish Council was required to convene, chair and make a record the meeting.

### 2. Tetsworth Parish Council – Paul Carr

Tetsworth Parish Council had enjoyed the unchanged membership of 6 Parish Councillors for the past year, but had been without the services of an employed Parish Clerk since August 2023. The Chairman had taken on the additional roles of Interim Proper Officer (IPO) and Responsible Finance Officer (RFO). John Gilbert had once again taken on the voluntary role of Minutes Clerk since then. The previous Parish Clerk's resignation had not taken effect until March 2024, but a recruitment campaign was now underway with 4 candidates expressing interest in the post.

The Council's achievements during the past year included:

- Donation of £5,000 to Tetsworth Primary School for refurbishment of its Early Years Garden
- Installation of entrance gates on the A40 at the Milton Common end of the village.
- Installation of an outdoor exercise bike on the Village Green.
- Installation of replacement benches alongside the War Memorial and on the Jitty.
- Completion of the Tetsworth Primary School car park through lobbying of OCC.

Current projects underway included:

- Reduction of the village speed limit to 20mph, subject to consultation.
- Improved access by 2 kissing gate on the Oxfordshire Way footpath pending OCC-led installation.
- Installation of an emergency generator in the TSSC building to support the Tetsworth Emergency Plan. Funding largely provided by grants from SSEN, OCC and SODC.

- Replacement of the PATCH play area surface with a durable, all-weather material, starting on 3<sup>rd</sup> June. Funding provided by village CIL reserves and grants from SODC, the National Lottery and the Cozens Bequest.
- Fitting of a replacement entrance gate for the Forest School.
- Continued lobbying of OCC to complete the formal land transfer of the Tetsworth Primary School extension site from the Blackthorn Rise development company to OCC.

Projects coming forward for the current year include:

- Addition of entrance gates on the A40 at the Postcombe end of the village, subject to funding discussions with OCC.
- Cleaning of the Tetsworth War Memorial, to be supported by a grant application.
- Commissioning a non-permanent support arrangement for a village Christmas tree on the Village Green.
- Considering options for replacement of PATCH play area fencing with more durable and accessible railings.

### **3. Tetsworth Neighbourhood Development Plan Review – John Gilbert**

93% of voters gave the ‘thumbs up’ to Tetsworth’s Neighbourhood Plan in the May 2021 local referendum triggering its incorporation into South Oxfordshire’s Local Plan 2035. Since then, many or even most residents have been in blissful ignorance of the Plan unless they have had a particular Planning axe to grind.

However, our Neighbourhood Plan is important for all of us as it contains policies on such issues as land use, housing development and growth, and environmental and heritage protection of specific relevance to our community. It has teeth, albeit modest ones of influence, and I can report that SODC, as our Local Planning Authority, has so far supported our Plan’s policies in determining Planning Applications in the Parish. We had hoped that modest, routine updating would keep our Plan current through to 2035. However, our Parish Council, as our Qualifying Body, recognised last autumn that SODC and the Vale of White Horse’s development of a Joint Local Plan 2041 could render our Plan outdated. It would become powerless if we did not keep it in step with any new emerging policies at the higher level. The two District Councils currently expect their Joint Plan to be adopted in late 2025.

As a result, the Tetsworth Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group was resurrected with resident and Parish Councillor membership. We do not anticipate making root and branch changes to the existing Plan, but will be making updates resulting from 2021 census data and reviewing the coverage of our policy statements and our Evidence Base documentation. Our review will be subject to the raft of formal consultation and examination hurdles, but we are hoping that our changes will be modest enough to escape the need for another referendum. The Steering Group is currently meeting on a two monthly basis and makes routine reports to the Parish Council. We are planning to keep in step with progress of the Joint Local Plan development and you will be able to comment on our revised Plan proposals when we reach the Regulation 14 Pre-Submission Consultation stage. If you would like to contribute to the review, please get in touch with me.

### **4. Forest School – Julia Proom**

During the year, operation of the Forest School had been transferred from the Tetsworth Outdoor Learning Centre to Free Range Foxes, although the site remains owned by the Parish Council.

Organised sessions for young children and their parents had become routine, and Tetsworth Primary School was also using the facility.

It was disappointing to report that the site had been subject to 2 recent episodes of vandalism, and options to deter future occurrences were under consideration.

### **5. Tetsworth Sports and Social Club (TSSC) – Anthony Bottone**

Submission of a post-meeting report awaited.

## **6. Tetsworth Memorial Hall – Caroline Cann**

The Memorial Hall's car park had been resurfaced and replanting of the garden was underway. However, completion of the rolling programme of upgrading the Hall's facilities hit an unwelcome challenge during the replacement of the kitchen area, fittings and equipment. This project started just before Christmas but soon encountered a structural problem with the kitchen floorplate. An insurance claim for remediation was eventually rejected, but a solution had been designed and planned for implementation during the summer holiday period. The refurbished kitchen area should be back in operation by the early autumn in time for the Hall's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.

Despite this setback, the Hall had continued to cover its costs with ongoing bookings from its regular hirers. The pre-Christmas Crafts Fair organised by Sarah Griffey and the regular Thursday Coffee Shop sessions run by volunteers were both highlighted as particularly successful use of the Hall. Thanks were due to all residents and organisations supporting the Hall and its committee would welcome new volunteers to help with the building and its grounds or to become a Trustee.

## **7. Tetsworth Primary School – Anna Bowden and Paul Henkey**

### **Head of School**

After 2 years as Head of School at Tetsworth, Anna Bowden would be leaving at the end of the school year. Her successor was already a member of the school staff ensuring continuity of leadership.

### **Curriculum Development**

The school has been developing the curriculum to keep it up to date and fresh for the children. We are making use of the village and accessing facilities such as the church and Village Green a lot more to help their learning. The children are excited to learn about more varied topics. Our computing curriculum has been enhanced by the fact that every child now has a device to themselves, with huge thanks to Sean Whitehead for donating 50 laptop devices recently.

### **Tidying Up the School and Site**

We have cleared the school of a number of skips-full of items accumulated over the years but no longer wanted, and the school is now looking much fresher. The school hall now has a new floor offering a fresher appearance and better fitness for purpose. Trees around our perimeter have been cleared to allow for more light and to maintain the area. In June we have a working party coming to clear overgrown bushes at the front of the school to bring it back to its former glory.

### **Library Remodelling**

A parent is volunteering their time very kindly to revamp, restock and remodel the school library. We will have lots of new books and are really looking forward to seeing it finished.

### **Outdoor Area**

The main piece of work of interest is the Early Years area that has been revamped and brought up to a higher standard. We were delighted to be able to open the area recently with Cllr Seb Moffat cutting the ribbon for us. The children love the area which is now great for their development and expands their learning space three-fold. Huge thanks go to the Parish Council for giving us £5000 to purchase the moveable parts without which it would be an empty space.

### **School Capacity**

In response to a question, it was explained that fluctuations in annual birth rates had resulted in some year groups being over-subscribed with others under expected capacity. However, the school was currently within its maximum overall pupil capacity.

#### **8. St Giles Parochial Church Council – Carolyn Carr**

St Giles Church is part of a Benefice of six villages, with Adwell, Lewknor, South Weston, Stoke Talmage and Wheatfield, all of which are the responsibility of the Team Vicar the Revd Peter Waterson, The congregation at St Giles' Church remains small but continues to flourish. We have a regular pattern of services at 10.30 throughout the year, with only few exceptions. Revd Waterson officiates at communion services on the first and fourth Sundays of each month and at the special services at Christmas, Easter, Harvest and Remembrance. We have a Morning Worship service on the second Sunday of the month, led by Jeneva Paul, and a more informal service on the third Sunday led by members of the congregation. Where there are five Sundays in a month we do not have a service but can attend a service in one of the other Churches in the team. In addition, St Giles' Church hosts a number of Marriage, Baptisms and Funeral Services together with services, assemblies and special facilities for Tetsworth School.

The average attendance at our services is still low (generally around 10-12) but the sense of community is strong. We share tea or coffee and cake at the end of the service which is an important part of our time together each Sunday, except during Lent.

Donations by the the Friends of St Giles and funds from a bequest continue to cover the insurance, churchyard maintenance and repairs to the church.

#### **9. St Giles Church Leadership – Revd Peter Waterson**

After 14½ years at Tetsworth, Revd Peter Waterson is being obliged by Church of England age regulations to retire from his appointment before the end of September. He explained that his official status as a 'house-for-duty' vicar meant that he and his wife would be leaving the Tetsworth rectory on the High Street and would probably be relocating away from the parish in his retirement. He advised that the rectory would then undergo a 'zero carbon' refurbishment by the Church of England before being offered for commercial rental to recover the refurbishment costs. The house might later return to occupation by a future 'house-for-duty' vicar should one be appointed. There was no news of an immediate successor to Revd Waterson.

The meeting expressed its fulsome appreciation of Revd Wateson's pastoral support of Tetsworth and its surrounding parishes over the years and wished him and his wife a long and happy retirement.

#### **10. Cozens Bequest – Carolyn Carr**

The Cozen's Bequest was founded in 1923 to provide pensions to poor widows and spinsters of good character professing the Protestant religion and living in Tetsworth or adjacent parishes, which comprise Thame. Great haseley, Stoke Talmage, Wheatfield, Adwell, Lewknor and Aston Rowant. In 1991, the scope of the Charity was extended to relieving, either generally or individually, persons resident in the area of benefit who are in conditions of need, hardship or distress by making grants of money or paying for items, services or facilities calculated to reduce the need, hardship or distress of such persons. However, we are not allowed to use the charity's assets to replace or make up shortfalls where a statutory body has the funding responsibility.

The Trustees of the Charity are Carolyn Carr (Chair), Steve Lingard (Treasurer), Revd Peter Waterson, martin Paul and Sue Rufus (Parish Councillor). This year, grants had been made for renovation of Tetsworth and Kingston Blount play areas as well as a donation to Tetsworth school to provide funds for a residential trip. Requests for funds should be made to any of the Trustees.

#### **11. Senior Citizens' Christmas Party – Paul Silver**

The Christmas Party was held in December in the Memorial Hall. Thirty senior residents attended the event and enjoyed a buffet lunch and tea and cakes. Particular thanks are due to Linda, the local Asda life champion, for her support. The older children from Tetsworth Primary School sang some Christmas songs and handed out presents.

The committee has decided that the 2024 Christmas Party will be its last event, and thanked all volunteer helpers and attendees for their support over the years.

## **12. South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) – Cllr Georgina Heritage**

Cllr Heritage had submitted the following report and spoke from it at the meeting.

### **First year of a Second Term for the Liberal Democrat/Green Administration**

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**

The Community Hub was first set up during Lockdown to provide support for residents during the pandemic and has now become permanent. 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 and quarterly Climate Action Plan reports are available online.

### **13. Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) – Cllr Kate Gregory and Cllr Nigel Champken-Woods,**

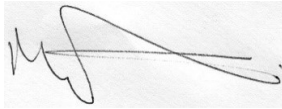
Neither councillor was able to attend the meeting.

A brief report noted that they were pursuing the following recent issues raised by Tetsworth Parish Council:

- Earmarking £1,000 from their OCC Councillor Grant scheme to support replacement of the PATCH play area fencing.
- Their continued pressing for OCC officers to complete the transfer of ownership to OCC of the Tetsworth Primary School extension site with the Land Registry.

### **14. Open Forum**

No questions were raised. However, Revd Waterson proposed a vote of thanks to Tetsworth Parish Council for all of its work on behalf of the community. This was endorsed by all present.



John Gilbert  
Meeting Clerk

27 May 2024