

MINUTES OF THE SOULDERN ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**HELD IN THE VILLAGE HALL****ON 20th MAY 2025****Present:**

Nick Oakhill (NO) [Chair]
John Hoodless (JH)
Neal Ship (NS)
Heidi Dennison (HD)
Rob Large (RL)
Cathy Fleet (CF) CLERK

Members of the Public:

Katie Draper
David Carlisle
Clive Smith

1. Welcome and apologies

Apologies had been received from Kate Green and Joanna Carlisle

2. Minutes of the Annual Parish meeting 26th May 2024

The minutes of the last Annual Parish meeting held on 24th May 2024 were checked for content and accuracy and signed as a true record of the meeting.

3. Matters arising

There were no matters arising

4. Chairman's Report

Good evening.

Firstly, I would like to thank my fellow councillors and Cathy Fleet, our Parish clerk, for their continued efforts over the past year. It has been a struggle to keep on top of everything with only four Councillors, it definitely feels that we have been thin on the ground. With the recent addition of Rob Large and Kate Green, we had got ourselves back up to full strength, until Neal Ship, Our RFO resigned. We thank Neal very much for his contribution to the Council and his efforts in maintaining the Parish accounts. Neal will be replaced as a Councillor by Amanda Sharman at our next meeting in June. The new RFO will be nominated later this evening.

The council has, as in previous year's met its legal obligation to represent the residents of Souldern without favour or otherwise and is keen to hear from any residents who would like to suggest any improvements that could be made to ensure its obligations to the community continue to be met.

The village website is painstakingly maintained by David Carlisle, who does an excellent job, and I would like to thank him for his continued efforts in keeping the village updated with relevant public service information. Over the coming 18 months the Parish Council is required by Government legislation to make changes to its website and contact procedures. In complying

with these changes it will give us an opportunity to review the existing website and update it where necessary.

Many thanks to Tim Vincent and his team for their work in NBW. I have a short annual report from Tim to read out after this.

Nigel Prickett and his team continued to make sure that the villages grassy areas were kept tidy, and his services have been retained for this season. Whilst Nigel comes into the village monthly, there are many areas which are maintained by individual Parishioners, such as the Pond and Village green. These little things can go unnoticed, but make a positive difference to the general appearance of the community. We thank those benevolent folk for their efforts and Community spirit.

We are 18 months into a five agreement with Brackley Town football club, who continue to use the playing fields for their junior and ladies matches.

Having pushed hard in 23/24 to get the playground operational, this year has been a year of consolidation. For the Council, concentrating on the basics. Highways/ Drains/ Trees and Community spaces. Councillor Hoodless has worked tirelessly to get some form of action from OCC and CDC on both the roads and clearing the drains. I would like to say that this has been addressed, but unfortunately the resources of both councils are directed to the urban areas, and so we have seen some improvements, but not all that is required. John will continue to push for improvements where possible.

General village maintenance has been undertaken by various work parties, with a spring clean carried out at the end of March, which was well attended. The Wall on the roadside at the Hill has been completed thanks to the efforts of Malcolm Sweetman. Several trees have required remedial attention, and we will continue to work through Nicholson's tree survey report in an effort to keep the community trees in reasonable order. A recent survey conducted on the Beech on the hill has shown it to be in good health, with recommendations for a further survey to be conducted in 8-10 years' time!

Alan Smith has handed responsibility for the Playground, and its regular inspections, over to Rob Large. We thank Alan for his efforts with the Playground. There are funds in place for us to commence phase two of the Playing field upgrade, and in the near future the Council will make a decision on where these funds are best directed.

Our primary regulatory function, continues to be related to planning applications and our input on them to CDC. This last year has seen 20 applications in the village (21 in 23/24), of which 11 have related to tree works (6 in 23/24). Thankfully, for the most part, the character and heritage of our small community continues to be respected, although everybody seems to have something against the trees on their property.

Nick Oakhill

20/05/25

5 Financial Report

MAIN ACCOUNT		PLAYGROUND ACCOUNT	
	£s		£s
BALANCE B/F 01.04.24	7,515.87	BALANCE B/F 01.04.24	9,118.44
INCOME	8,984.85	INCOME	543.26
EXPENDITURE	(10,109.85)	EXPENDITURE	0.00
BALANCE C/F 31.03.25	6,390.87	BALANCE C/F 31.03.23	9,661.70

Combined Funds total: £16,052.57

INCOME BREAKDOWN - MAIN		INCOME BREAKDOWN - PLAYGROUND	
PRECEPT	£7,994.00	DONATIONS	£52.30
OCC (RE GRASS)	£440.85	INTEREST	£251.24
PITCH HIRE	£550.00	HMRC VAT Refund (23-24)	£239.72
TOTAL	£8,984.85	TOTAL	£543.26
EXPENDITURE BREAKDOWN			
SUBSCRIPTIONS			£140.00
INSURANCE			£579.05
CLERK SALARY			£1,971.84
BANK CHARGES			£71.40
VILLAGE HALL/POST OFFICE			£705.44
GRASS CUTTING			£2,576.00
TREE MAINTENANCE			£1,200.00
GENERAL MAINTENANCE			£82.95
DOG BINS			£557.70
PLAYGROUND			£591.80
*OTHER			£520.00
VAT			£1,113.67
TOTAL			£10,109.85

* Helen White Internal Audit £100, Moore Audit Fee £420.00

Neal Ship
21st April 2025

Report from Nancy Bowles Wood (Tim Vincent)

1. The picnic table and the long bench seat in the glade have been cleaned and repainted.
2. The bench seat just inside the gate has been cleaned.
3. The grass in the glade has been half mowed to allow easy walking for visitors and provide a space for picnics. In the other half of the glade I am allowing the grass to grow longer to benefit wildlife, it will be cut later in the year.
4. One small tree that came down across the path on the approach to the glade was cleared away.
5. Two dead trees were cut down. While I prefer, if possible, to leave dead trees in situ to provide valuable wildlife habitat, these particular trees were very close to the main footpath, very close to the log bench and very close to where the children have their forest school activities. Hence, I felt it best to remove them.

I have no specific plans for the coming year other than mowing and general maintenance as required.

On a separate but related issue it would be good if something could be done to fill in the very deepest ruts in the track up to the Wood,

Tim

Report from C/Clr Gareth Epps

County Councillor's Report May/June 2025

My thanks to all of you who took part in the election process – in whatever way. I'm delighted to be elected as County Councillor for the Deddington division.

I'm sorry not to be able to join you at Souldern; unfortunately we are in half term, and I have a pre-arranged family holiday. The June meeting is in my diary and I look forward to meeting you.

Bicester Motion

The annual meeting of the Council was overshadowed by the terrible news from Bicester of the loss of life of two firefighters and a worker at the Bicester Motion centre. I have signed the book of condolence; the council observed a minute's silence, and there will be opportunities in due course to mark the memory of those involved. The courage and bravery of those who put themselves forward to protect us goes without saying, all our deepest sympathies go to the family and friends of those who didn't make it home after answering the call.

The Council and Committees

The Liberal Democrat majority administration was confirmed with a new Cabinet with Cllr Liz Leffman as Leader. Cllr Neil Fawcett becomes Deputy. I am joining the Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee (which also scrutinises the Berks, Oxon & Berks Integrated Care Board), Remuneration Committee, Uniformed Fire Services Consultative Committee and Police & Crime Panel. Unusually we have two opposition groups of similar size, the third party in the election having joined forces with Independents. This entitles their lead members to receive additional allowances that could total £180,000 over the full term of the council, under the scheme recommended by an independent remuneration panel. A number

of us are uncomfortable with this, and the level of allowances (not the grouping of independents) is highly likely to be reviewed.

Initial work

It will surprise nobody reading this report that the bulk of my caseload to date has been on highway-related matters. I have escalated a number of issues raised during and since the election. Some of these have proved quicker to fix than others. For example:

- A Deddington streetlight repeatedly marked 'fixed' on FixMyStreet. The software mapping attached the wrong light column number to the report, which was picked up when I sent photos of the offending light.
- After repeated issues were reported with silting up of a gully in Somerton, cleaning has taken place. Here and in another village, drainage issues are caused by run-off from agricultural land where owners are not managing land to avoid issues downstream. The trouble is, enforcement in these matters is the responsibility of the Environment Agency, whose funding has been repeatedly cut in recent years. While some remedial work can take place, this will be temporary until the root causes of the issues are addressed.

SignedChair Souldern Parish Council

Date