

**MINUTES OF DUCKLINGTON PARISH COUNCIL MEETING
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 1 APRIL 2026
in the Lilac Room, Village Hall commencing at 7.30 pm**

42.26 Parish Councillors Present: David Duthie (Chairman)
Peter Almgill (from 7.45 pm; min no: 47.26)
Matthew Barker
Richard Border
John Dunsdon
Jo George
Paul Lishman
John Smyth
Sarah Varnom

In Attendance: Steve Smith (Clerk)
Cllr Thomas Ashby (OCC)
Liam McKenzie (WODC Conservative Candidate)

43.26 Parish Councillors' Apologies: None

44.26 Public Participation

The opportunity was provided for public participation; however, no members of the public were present.

45.26 To approve the Minutes of the Parish Council meetings held on 11 February 2026 and 4 March 2026:

Cllr Varnom proposed and Cllr Barker seconded and the Council **RESOLVED** to accept the minutes of the Parish Council meeting of 11 February 2026 as a true record of the meeting.

Cllr Border proposed and Cllr Dunsdon seconded and the Council **RESOLVED** to accept the minutes of the Parish Council meeting of 4 March 2026 as a true record of the meeting.

46.26 County Council (OCC) / District Council (WODC) Matters:

FLAGS AT DUCKLINGTON ROUNDABOUT

Oxfordshire County Council has issued a formal legal notice to Raise the Colours in response to their continued placing of flags across Oxfordshire.

This notice requires an individual or organisation to stop a specified activity. The council has taken this action following the repeated installation of flags on or near highways without consent.

If the group does not comply with the letter, the council will consider all available options to include, but not limited to, civil and criminal proceedings against the organisation and individuals affiliated with it to prevent further unauthorised action.

Councillor Liz Leffman, Leader of Oxfordshire County Council, said: *“The scale and persistence of this activity is affecting communities across Oxfordshire.*

“We are proud of our diverse communities in Oxfordshire and of being the first county council to be awarded Local Authority of Sanctuary status. We proudly fly the Union Jack and St George’s flags, which are visible symbols of democracy and unity.

“However, the widespread installation of flags by Raise the Colours is not a sign of patriotism. It is an act of intimidation and division that is having a real and damaging impact on our communities.

“Our residents report feeling distressed, unwelcome and unsafe in their own neighbourhoods. Our teams removing the flags, together with residents who have challenged the individuals installing them, have been subject to abuse and threatening behaviour. This is totally unacceptable.

“The council has a responsibility to act where behaviour undermines community cohesion and the safe and inclusive use of public spaces. That is why we are taking firm action.

“We won’t hesitate to take further legal steps where necessary to protect residents and support the cohesion of our communities.”

Cllr Thomas Ashby (OCC) reported:

HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING CENTRE RULES

The Oxfordshire Alliance motion to scrap the new HWRC rules was voted down by the Liberal Democrats at Full Council in March. The new rules mean that residents must fill in pages of forms and produce a physical ID to simply dispose of their waste at tips in Oxfordshire.

I think the new rules are grossly unnecessary and will lead to increased fly-tipping. So far, there has been a small increase in fly-tipping in West Oxfordshire compared with last year, but we will request further data later on in the year.

Residents who wish to book their slot at our tips, now must follow:

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/waste-and-recycling/book-recycling-centre-visit>

FREE PARK AND RIDE TRAVEL TO CONTINUE

Free journeys around Oxford will continue from Oxford’s Park and Ride sites until at least the end of May 2026. The Park and Ride sites into the City Centre are:

- Seacourt
- Oxford Parkway
- Redbridge
- Pear Tree
- Thornhill

ROADS / ROADWORKS

The County Council have well and truly missed their deadline for the pothole repairs in the village. This has been reported again and I am currently waiting for a new date for them to be repaired.

- A415, Standlake Road - Closure - 04:00-18:00 - 29th April - 3rd May 2026. Limited access will be maintained for emergency services and for frontages within the closed

section of the road.

- A415, Standlake Road - Closure - 04:00-18:00 - 13th May - 17th May 2026. Limited access will be maintained for emergency services and for frontages within the closed section of the road.
- A40 Westbound from Ducklington Slip-Lane - Closure - 20:00-06:00 - 20th April - 23rd April. Limited access will be maintained for emergency services and for frontages within the closed section of the road.

DOG BIN REQUEST FOR MILL MEADOW

Sadly, the request for a dog bin for Mill Meadow, free of charge, by WODC was rejected.

WITNEY HIGH STREET

The Witney High Street Scheme has been signed off by Oxfordshire County Council. Works to make the site safe, and the short construction of a site depot at Woolgate Car Park (the old long stay car park, by the wall facing Witan Way) will commence in April. Full works on the High Street Scheme will start in May with a completion date of late October.

PARKING ON WITNEY ROAD / CURBRIDGE ROAD JUNCTION

This is still sat with OCC who are identifying whether something can be done about the parking here.

WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL FLOOD ASSESSMENT

The Head of Operations is yet to review the flood assessment that has been received. As soon as this has been reviewed and presented to the Halls, Cemeteries and Allotments Committee, WTC will be happy to share with DPC.

NB: Cllr Thomas Ashby (OCC) is a member of the opposition Conservative political group.

Cllr Adrian Walsh (WODC) was not present and had not sent a written report

47.26 Parish Councillors - Disclosure of interests on agenda items

None declared.

48.26 PLANNING

New Planning Application:

Application No: **26/00450/HHD** - 38 Beanhill Road, Ducklington

PROPOSAL: Erection of single storey rear and side extensions, replacement front porch, demolition of detached garage, and associated works.

Applicant: Mr and Mrs A Britnell

Town and Country Planning Act

RESOLVED: That Ducklington Parish Council (DPC) has **no objections** to the application.

Existing Planning Applications:

- a) Planning Application No: **MW.0057/24** - Land North West of Gill Mill Quarry, Standlake Road, Ducklington OX29 7UD - Notice of Submission of Further Information accompanied by an Environmental Statement (Regulation 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 as amended) involving mineral extraction including conveyor link to processing plant with restoration to lakes including amenity and conservation afteruses with permanent diversion of Windrush path and network of additional footpaths upon restoration.

Applicant: Smith & Sons (Bletchington) Limited

Town and Country Planning Act

The Clerk reported that the deadline for making comments is 27 April 2026.

Cllr Lishman offered to review details of the application.

Cllr Barker referred to previous representations made by DPC in response to concerns from residents in Bartholomew Close. The Clerk advised that any comments made previously will still be taken into account in the determination of the application. There is no need to write again unless the council has further comments specifically on the new information or amendment to the proposals.

RESOLVED: That Ducklington Parish Council has **no objections** to the Notice of Submission of Further Information and formally approves the details as submitted.

- b) Planning Application No: **24/02878/RES** - Land East of Witney Rd, Ducklington (the Moors) - Reserved Matters Application for Appearance, Landscaping, Layout and Scale together with associated works for 105 dwellings.

Applicant: Mr John Brooks

Town and Country Planning Act

The Clerk updated members on the Parish Council's request for detailed flood modelling data from West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) and the Environment Agency (EA).

James Nelson (Principal Planner, WODC) has stated that the data has not yet been shared because the EA has identified missing information in the applicant's submission. The EA has advised WODC that the current modelling data is incomplete.

James Nelson has reiterated his commitment that no decision will be made on this application until the Parish Council has had the opportunity to review the full data.

Once the EA confirms that the applicant has submitted all necessary files, WODC will formally consult the Parish Council and share the complete dataset.

For reference, the applicant is currently challenging the flood risk categorisation of the site. They are attempting to argue that the River Windrush has no connection to the application site and that flood risk should only be assessed based on the Colwell Brook. The detailed modelling is the applicant's attempt to prove this theory, which the EA is currently scrutinising.

The Clerk will continue to monitor the situation and will alert Councillors as soon as the data is validated by the EA and released to us for our own technical analysis.

Cllr Barker asked whether the application could be time lapsed. The Clerk advised that, generally speaking, a reserved matters application can "lapse" or expire if it is not submitted within the strict time limits set out in the outline planning permission. If the reserved matters—such as layout, scale, appearance, and landscaping—are not approved by the local planning authority before the deadline, the outline planning permission expires and cannot be used, effectively stalling the development.

- **Submission Deadline:** Typically, a reserved matters application should be submitted within three years of the date the outline planning permission was granted, although this can be a shorter period if specified in the decision notice.
- **Commencement Deadline:** Once the final reserved matters are approved, the applicant generally has two years to begin work on the site.
- **What Happens if it Lapses:** If the time limit passes, the permission lapses. You cannot extend or renew an expired permission; the applicant will have to submit a new planning application.
- **Exceptions:** While extensions were available during the COVID-19 pandemic, these temporary measures no longer apply.
- **Partial Submissions:** You can submit reserved matters in phases or individually, but all must be submitted before the initial three-year deadline lapses.

RESOLVED: To note the proactive steps taken to scrutinise the flood risks via independent experts and to continue pressing WODC for the release of the necessary modelling data.

Neighbourhood Plan

Cllr Lishman provided a verbal update on the progress of the Neighbourhood Plan. The following key points were noted:

- **Baseline Analysis:** The Baseline Analysis is now largely complete. This data is currently being utilised to prepare a formal consultation survey to be issued to the community.
- **Policy Development:** Cllr Lishman has produced a first draft of the proposed policies. These have been shared with Community First Oxfordshire (CFO) for review. Following a recent progress meeting, Cllr Lishman is working to add further detail to these drafts to ensure they align with the strategic objectives of the plan.

- Community Engagement: It was proposed that the Council utilise the "Big Lunch" event on 7th June 2026 to host a public presentation. This would provide a vital opportunity to update residents on the plan's current status ("where we are") and the roadmap for the remainder of the year ("what happens next").

RESOLVED:

1. To note the progress on the Baseline Analysis and the drafting of the consultation survey.
2. To approve the proposal for a Neighbourhood Plan presentation and resident information session at the Big Lunch event on 7th June 2026 (if deemed appropriate-concerns expressed about suitability; alternative date and/or venue (e.g. Village Hall or Sports Club) also mooted).
3. To request Cllr Lishman to continue the refinement of policy wording in conjunction with Community First Oxfordshire.

49.26 Matters Arising from Previous Meetings

a) **Hotel**

Cllr Varnom reported that the Home Office has given notice that the Witney asylum hotel will be closing shortly. The current focus has shifted entirely towards supporting the remaining 80 or so residents during this transition period. Occupancy is expected to decrease steadily as individuals are either relocated following successful asylum applications or transferred into designated dispersal accommodation. The key support priorities are to provide guidance and assistance to vulnerable groups, including:

- Pregnant women and new mothers.
- Individuals managing mental health issues or complex medical needs.
- Those in the final stages of their asylum applications.
- Families requiring specialised housing advice.

The emphasis is on ensuring the facility "closes well".

RESOLVED: to note the report

b) **Village Hall**

Cllr Varnom updated members on various Village Hall related matters :

- She recently met with the Treasurer and reported that the finances remain in a healthy state, bolstered by a notable increase in recent bookings.
- The website has received favourable feedback from users.
- A new defibrillator has been sourced and is scheduled for installation imminently.
- The next Committee meeting is scheduled for June 2026, and the Annual General Meeting (AGM) will take place in September 2026.

RESOLVED: To note the report.

c) **CCTV Camera Log**

Nothing to report.

d) **Village Newsletter**

Councillors are reminded to submit articles for publication in the June / July Village Newsletter (Issue 238) to Emma Buckard: newsletter@ducklingtonparishcouncil.gov.uk

Please note the deadline for entries is 15 May 2026.

It was agreed that the 'Meet the Councillor' series be postponed for this issue due to the forthcoming election.

The Council briefly reviewed the selection of a preferred printing contractor for the village newsletter. It was **RESOLVED** to defer the final decision pending the following:

- Quality Assessment: A review of printing samples recently procured by Cllr Lishman to ensure production standards meet requirements.
- Payment Infrastructure: Confirmation of progress regarding the Unity Trust Bank corporate charge card.

e) **Projects Committee**

Procurement of Plants for Sensory Garden - Councillor Priority Fund

The Council considered the Clerk's report regarding the acquisition of plants for the Sensory Garden, funded by the Councillor Priority Fund (allocated by then-Cllr Ted Fenton).

The following key factors were noted:

- Budget: Of the original £1,500 grant, £1,325 remains following the initial purchase of trees in 2025.
- Comparison: Two quotes were evaluated for value and volume:
 - Cassington Nurseries: 189 plants at £1,248.00 (ex. VAT).
 - Burford Garden Centre: 146 plants at £1,504.00 (ex. VAT).
- Analysis: The Cassington Nurseries proposal provides 43 additional plants while remaining within the grant's financial constraints, leaving a £77 contingency.

RESOLVED: To approve the purchase of 189 plants from Cassington Nurseries at a cost of £1,248 plus VAT, utilising the remaining balance of the Councillor Priority Fund.

Proposed: Cllr Varnom | **Seconded:** Cllr George | **Vote:** All in favour.

Sensory Garden Project - Procurement of Climbing Plant Supports

The Council reviewed the Clerk's report regarding the procurement of essential support structures for the Sensory Garden's climbing plants.

- **Requirements:** To ensure the infrastructure is in place for the upcoming growing season, heavy-duty rope and specialised fixings have been sourced from Rope Services (Online).
- **Cost:** The total cost is £287.50 plus VAT. It was noted that while this expenditure was previously authorised within the total project budget, this report serves to confirm the specific allocation and supplier details.

RESOLVED: To formalise the purchase of materials from Rope Services at a cost of £287.50 plus VAT to complete the climbing plant supports.

Proposed: Cllr George | **Seconded:** Cllr Border | **Vote:** All in favour.

Sensory Garden Project: Final Material Requirements and Delivery Schedule

The Council reviewed a report from Cllr Barker regarding materials required for the volunteer working party on Saturday, 11 April 2026.

- **Materials:** Three bulk bags of topsoil (est. cost £158.97 + VAT) and assorted timber (est. cost £93.34 + VAT) from Travis Perkins, Witney.
- **Funding:** To be met by the current project budget and utilising a small credit (£25.44) currently held by Travis Perkins, Witney .
- **Deadline:** Delivery is required by 10 April 2026.

RESOLVED:

1. To approve the soil and timber expenditure.
2. To delegate authority to the Clerk to finalise delivery for 10 April 2026.

Proposed: Cllr Border | **Seconded:** Cllr Lishman | **Vote:** All in favour.

Art Trail Project - Ongoing Projects Update and Final Preparations

The Council reviewed the remaining schedule and promotional plans for the Art Trail and Sensory Garden:

- **Installations:** The benches are scheduled for placement in the Sensory Garden on Friday, 3rd April. Delivery of the Fritillary sculptures by Chris Townsend is expected on Wednesday, 8th April, contingent on the galvanising process.
- **Art Trail Leaflet:** Cllr George is to liaise with Jenny Greenway regarding the production of an Art Trail leaflet. Photos will be provided for the design, and a formal quote is required. It was noted that the current £40.00 budget may need to be increased upon receipt of the quote.
- **Signage:** To enhance the visitor experience, small metal templates will be installed alongside each art piece to explain its significance.
- **Opening Event:** Plans are currently being formulated for a formal opening ceremony.

RESOLVED:

1. To note the delivery and installation timelines for the benches and sculptures.

2. To authorise Cllr George to progress the Art Trail leaflet and provide a final quote for approval.
3. To approve the creation of interpretive metal templates for the art installations.

Proposed: Cllr Duthie | **Seconded:** Cllr Barker | **Vote:** All in favour.

Cllr Duthie, Cllr Barker and the Clerk agreed to schedule a meeting to discuss a mains water connection for the Sensory Garden

f) **Nature Plan / Wild Ducks**

The Council received a written report from Cllr George regarding environmental strategy and local nature recovery. Key points included:

- District Strategy: WODC is prioritising on-site biodiversity improvements in the Local Plan 2043. A new Community Grant scheme (£555k over three years) will open for applications in June 2026.
- Green Space Management: A meeting is scheduled for 8th April with Wild Oxfordshire to discuss biodiversity enhancements for parish land.
 - Marilyn Morris will lead the implementation of the Land App to map and record land usage.
 - Instructions have been given to the grass-cutting contractor regarding the maintenance of the Starnham Road triangular area.
- Community Outreach: A nature recovery stall will be featured at the Big Lunch, providing WODC resources on pond restoration and hedgehog conservation et al.

RESOLVED:

1. To note the report and support the ongoing land-mapping and biodiversity initiatives.
2. To approve the nature recovery display and leaflet distribution at the Big Lunch event.

g) **Village Pond**

The Council reviewed the proposed maintenance plans for the village pond following consultations with local stakeholders.

- Project Sequence: It was noted that essential tree pollarding must be completed before any dredging of the pond bed can take place.
- Biodiversity Advice: Additionally, Cllr George will consult with Imogen from Wild Oxfordshire during their scheduled meeting on 8th April to ensure the proposed works support the pond's ecological health.
- Dredging and Disposal: Smiths and Sons (Bletchington) Limited have offered to undertake the dredging once the tree work is finished. It was noted that for the previous dredging, Paul Hutchinson provided the land for the disposal of arisings; the Council aims to secure a similar arrangement for this project.

RESOLVED:

1. To note the consultations with local stakeholders and the offer of support from Smiths and Sons (Bletchington) Limited.
2. To finalise the scope and timeline for the pollarding and dredging.
3. To confirm the disposal arrangements for arisings with Paul Hutchinson once the maintenance schedule is established.

h) Village Events Committee

1. The Big Lunch (7 June 2026)

Plans for the upcoming Big Lunch event were discussed. The Council noted the following progress and required actions:

- Entertainment: Ryan Buckard is currently in the process of sourcing local musical talent. He aims to secure four acts to perform throughout the event.
- Licensing and Compliance: The Village Events Committee is reviewing whether a PRS (Performing Right Society) licence is required for the scheduled music. The Committee will also determine if a TEN (Temporary Event Notice) is necessary for the sale of alcohol or regulated entertainment.
- Logistics: The Clerk was formally instructed to apply to WODC for a temporary road closure to ensure the safety and success of the event.
- Sponsorship: It was noted that the local brewery may offer a contribution toward event costs; further updates will follow once confirmed

2. Community Donations and Fundraising

Cllr George provided a report on the distribution of funds raised during recent community activities:

Christmas Fayre Proceeds

A total of £241.08 was raised from the sale of cakes and refreshments. This has been donated in full to the Warm Welcome Space.

Village Calendar Sales

The proceeds from the sale of village calendars were divided equally among four local causes. Each of the following organisations received a donation of £88.38:

Recipient	Amount
Warm Welcome Space	£88.38
Friends of Ducklington School	£88.38

Wild Ducks	£88.38
Seniors Lunch Club	£88.38

3. Financial Update: Earmarked Reserves

The Clerk confirmed that the current balance held in the Parish Celebration Group earmarked reserve is £1,636.91.

i) **Training on Storing and Sharing files in Google Drive**

Members agreed to defer this item until after the forthcoming election

j) **EV Microhubs**

The Council considered the Clerk's report regarding the legal framework for the proposed EV Microhub, including the Cluster Member Agreement and Lease.

Discussion: Members debated whether to pursue an independent Legal Review (est. £1,500+) or rely on an Internal Review, noting that Witney and Banbury Town Councils have already accepted the documents without recourse to independent legal advice. It was observed that the contract is a standard Oxfordshire-wide template.

Option	Key Considerations
Internal Review	Cost-effective and maintains project momentum; however, carries higher liability and reliance on non-specialist interpretation.
Independent Review	Provides professional indemnity and expert oversight on "End of Contract" terms, but involves unbudgeted costs and potential rollout delays.

RESOLVED:

- Letter of Intent: The Council formally agreed to proceed. The Clerk was instructed to issue a Letter of Intent to Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) immediately to ensure Ducklington is not "timed out" of the current rollout.
- Power Supply: Members to provide any historical data or site-specific access details for the proposed power supply to the Clerk.

Proposed: Cllr George | **Seconded:** Cllr Duthie | **Vote:** All in favour.

k) **Replacement Speed Indicator Sign**

Nothing further to report

l) **Parking Concerns: Witney Rd and Curbridge Rd**

See Cllr Thomas Ashby's report (min. no. 46.26). Nothing further to report.

m) **Parish Council Elections 7 May 2026**

The Clerk provided an update regarding the nomination process for the upcoming elections. The following key points were noted:

- **Nomination Deadlines:** Any individual intending to stand for election (including current Councillors) must hand-deliver their completed nomination papers to the West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) offices no later than 4:00 pm on 9 April 2026.
- **Elector Poll Numbers:** The Clerk confirmed he is authorised to provide elector poll numbers to prospective candidates for themselves, their proposers, and their seconders. Members were encouraged to contact the Clerk directly for this information.
- **Support:** The Clerk remains available to answer any queries regarding the election timetable or the formal nomination process.

RESOLVED: That the Clerk's report be received and the deadlines for nominations noted.

n) **Annual Parish Meeting**

Cllr Duthie as Chairman confirmed the meeting start time will be 7.00 pm.

o) **Unity Trust Bank Corporate Purchasing Card Application**

Cllr Duthie reported that the Council's bank, Unity Trust Bank, has introduced a Corporate Purchasing Card in partnership with Lloyds Bank. This facility is designed to modernise how local authorities manage small-scale, day-to-day expenditure, moving away from personal expense claims or petty cash systems.

Key Features and Benefits

- **Operational Efficiency:** Enables the Clerk to make necessary purchases (online or in-store) without administrative delays.
- **Enhanced Oversight:** Provides real-time tracking, spending limits, and simplified monthly reconciliation for the Council.
- **Digital Integration:** The cards support Apple Pay and Google Pay, allowing for secure contactless payments via smartphone or watch.
- **Security:** Includes fraud monitoring and card-level controls to protect Council funds.

Financial Breakdown

The costs associated with the facility are as follows:

Item	Cost
Set-up Fee	£50.00 (One-off)
Monthly Fee	£3.00 (Per card)
Late Payment Fee	£10.00 or 2% of balance
Repayment	Full balance must be repaid monthly via Direct Debit

Governance and Compliance

As a charge card, the full balance is cleared monthly. This is a critical distinction from a credit card, ensuring the Council does not carry ongoing debt. Approval is subject to a 15–28 day processing period and requires signatures in accordance with the Council's current bank mandate.

If adopted, this would replace the need for the Clerk or a Councillor to use personal funds for Council business, ensuring a more professional and transparent audit trail.

RESOLVED:

Members reviewed the benefits of the facility. It was noted that the facility is a charge card requiring full monthly repayment, thus adhering to local government financial guidelines. The Council also noted the £50.00 set-up fee and the £3.00 monthly charge.

The report was received and noted. Cllr Duthie will bring a formal proposal to the next meeting should the Council wish to proceed with an application.

p) **Grass Cutting Contract**

The Council discussed the requirements for the upcoming grass cutting season and the formal tendering process.

1. Specification Approval: Members reviewed and formally agreed upon the contract specification. Key terms include:

- Frequency: A total of 14 cuts per season.

- Scope: The contract covers all designated parish green spaces, with the specific exclusion of the sports field, which remains under separate maintenance arrangements.

2. Tendering Process: Cllr Duthie confirmed that the agreed tender forms have been sent out to prospective contractors.

3. Next Steps: Completed tenders are to be returned by the specified deadline for review at the next Council meeting. The Council will evaluate bids based on cost-effectiveness, reliability, and adherence to the agreed specifications.

RESOLVED: That the grass cutting specification be approved and the commencement of the tender process be noted.

q) **Sycamore Tree at Peel Close**

The Council considered the Clerk's report comparing two competing quotes for the maintenance of the Sycamore tree (reduction to previous pruning points).

Discussion: Members noted that the quote from Max Everett was significantly more cost-effective, representing a saving of £348.00 (inc. VAT) over the second quote. Furthermore, the Council noted that Max Everett had identified the potential requirement for a planning application and offered to manage the regulatory process as the Council's agent.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Council declines the quotation from AMTS Trees (£1,440.00 inc. VAT) on the grounds of cost-efficiency.
2. That the Council accepts the quotation from Max Everett for the reduction of the Sycamore tree at a cost of £850.00 + VAT.
3. That the Council authorises an additional fee of £60.00 + VAT for Max Everett to act as agent in submitting the necessary planning applications for the works.
4. That the Clerk be delegated the authority to oversee the scheduling of works once planning permission is granted.

Proposed: Cllr Duthie | **Seconded:** Cllr Dunsdon | **Vote:** All in favour.

r) **Annual Risk Assessment**

Nothing further to report

s) **Annual Review of Internal Controls**

Nothing further to report

t) **Annual Inspection of External Assets**

Cllr Duthie reported that a formal inspection had been carried out. It was noted that all areas inspected were found to be in a satisfactory condition, with no immediate defects or maintenance issues identified.

RESOLVED: That Cllr Duthie's inspection report be received and noted.

u) **Annual Investment Policy Review**

The Council confirmed the ongoing practice of moving monies between accounts, as previously approved, to continue maximising interest yields.

Financial Regulations: The Clerk was instructed to revise the Council's Financial Regulations to formally incorporate these practices and present the updated draft for approval at the next meeting.

50.26 New Business

a) **Review of Financially Supported Bus Services**

The Council considered the Clerk's report regarding the OCC review of financially supported bus services, specifically the X15 and 19 routes, ahead of new contracts commencing in August 2026.

Discussion: Members emphasised the strategic importance of these routes for Ducklington, noting their role in maintaining connectivity for the aging population and supporting future parish growth.

RESOLVED:

- Lead Action: Cllr Lishman (Parish Transport Representative) was appointed to draft the Council's formal response to OCC, highlighting the vital nature of these services for the community.
- Review Process: Cllr Lishman will circulate the draft response to all Members for comments prior to submission.
- Submission: Cllr Lishman is authorised to submit the final feedback to OCC Public Transport by the 20 April 2026 deadline.

b) **OALC Membership Subscription 2026-27**

The Council considered the Clerk's report regarding the renewal of the annual subscription to the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (OALC) and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC).

Discussion: The Clerk outlined the professional benefits of membership, including access to specialist legal advice, HR support, and councillor training. It was noted that membership is essential for remaining informed on upcoming Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) changes within the county.

RESOLVED:

- That the Council renews its annual subscription to the OALC and NALC for the 2026-27 financial year.
- That the Clerk be authorised to process the payment upon receipt of the invoice to ensure compliance with the 31 May 2026 deadline and avoid any late payment surcharges.

Proposed: Cllr Duthie | **Seconded:** Cllr George | **Vote:** All in favour.

c) Notice of Definitive Map and Statement Legal Event Modification Order 2026

The Council received a report from the Clerk regarding a Legal Event Modification Order (LEMO) issued by Oxfordshire County Council (OCC).

Discussion: The Clerk clarified that this is an administrative "housekeeping" exercise to consolidate all legal changes to the Definitive Map and Statement that occurred between 1 January 2025 and 31 December 2025.

Key points noted were:

- Nature of the Order: The update is retrospective and administrative; it is not a consultation, as the physical changes (diversions or creations) are already legally in effect and implemented on the ground.
- Ducklington Specifics: The order updates the definitive statement for Footpath 2 (extending from the west end of Tristam Road to Curbridge Road), reflecting that part of the path was superseded by all-purpose highway.
- Financial Impact: There are no financial implications for the Parish Council.

RESOLVED: That the Clerk's report be received and the updated extract for the Parish records be noted.

d) Flood Project Funding Expressions of Interest - Oxfordshire County Council Priority Action Flood Projects 2026/27

The Council reviewed the Clerk's report regarding a new grant funding stream from Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) for community-led flood schemes, which offers up to £25,000 for small-scale projects.

Discussion:

- Grant Funding: Members discussed potential sites for an Expression of Interest (EOI). It was noted that while several historical drainage matters were raised, no new or specific projects were currently identified for the 2026/27 funding round.

- Standlake Road Culvert: Separate from the grant discussion, County Cllr Thomas Ashby offered to investigate reports of long-standing damage to the culvert at Standlake Road. This investigation into the historical maintenance of the site is intended to clarify responsibility and the extent of the damage.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Council notes the OCC grant funding opportunity and the 4 May 2026 deadline for Expressions of Interest.
2. That the Clerk remains the point of contact for any residents wishing to propose a specific community-led scheme meeting the grant criteria.
3. That Cllr Thomas Ashby's offer to investigate the Standlake Road culvert be noted.

e) Campaign to Reinstate a Rail Station in Grove

The Council considered a request from Olly Glover MP (Didcot and Wantage) seeking formal support for a regional campaign to reinstate the railway station at Grove. The MP requested that the Council co-sign a letter to the Government to assist in securing funding for the delivery phase of the project.

Discussion: Members discussed the strategic merits of the project, acknowledging its potential to reduce regional car dependency and support sustainable growth within Oxfordshire. However, during the debate, the following points were raised:

- Geographical Proximity: It was noted that Grove is located a significant distance from Ducklington, and the direct benefit to parish residents was deemed limited.
- Precedent: Members expressed a preference for focusing formal Council support on infrastructure projects located within the immediate parish boundary or those with a direct, demonstrable impact on the village.

RESOLVED: After due consideration, the Council decided not to formally support the request at this time.

f) Community First Oxfordshire Membership Renewal

The Council considered the Clerk's report regarding the renewal of the annual membership with Community First Oxfordshire (CFO).

Discussion: Members noted the value of CFO's specialist advice on rural housing, community planning and its support on the Neighbourhood Plan. The Clerk highlighted that membership rates have been frozen at 2025 levels and that the charity can leverage Gift Aid on contributions.

RESOLVED:

- That the Council approves the renewal of its membership with Community First Oxfordshire for 2026.
- That the Council notes the membership rates have remained frozen at 2025 levels.
- That the Clerk be authorised to complete the renewal form and process the payment of the £70.00 annual subscription fee.

- That the Council authorises the Clerk to complete the Gift Aid declaration where applicable to maximise the charity's benefit from the contribution.

Proposed: Cllr Lishman | **Seconded:** Cllr Duthie | **Vote:** All in favour.

g) **The Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR form)**

The Council received a report from the Clerk detailing the statutory requirements and deadlines for the 2025/26 Annual Return.

Discussion: Members noted the critical nature of the 30 June 2026 submission deadline and the potential for financial penalties and loss of "exempt" status in the event of non-compliance. The Clerk highlighted new requirements for the current year, specifically Assertion 10 regarding Digital and Data Compliance, and changes to the wording for Trust Funds in Box 11.

RESOLVED:

- Statutory Compliance: That the Council notes the legal duty and strict deadlines associated with the 2025/26 AGAR submission.
- Audit Working Group: That Cllrs Duthie and Almgill be appointed to form an Audit Working Group to assist the Clerk/RFO in preparing the documentation, focusing on the new digital compliance criteria and the explanation of significant variances.
- Approval Process: That a working meeting be held prior to the next Full Council meeting to ensure the accounts are robust and ready for formal approval well ahead of the 30 June deadline.

h) **West Oxfordshire Lowlands Movement and Place (MAP) Plan**

The Council considered the Clerk's report regarding the formal response submitted to the West Oxfordshire Lowlands Movement and Place (MAP) Plan on 27 March 2026.

Discussion: Due to the restricted consultation window, the response was submitted ahead of the meeting following a review by the Parish Transport Representative. The submission prioritised the protection of the X15 and 19 bus services, supported the Carterton to Oxford (CWORC) rail link, and advocated for improved rural-to-hub connectivity.

RESOLVED:

- Ratification: That the Council formally ratifies the response submitted to Oxfordshire County Council on 27 March 2026.
- Endorsement: That the Council endorses the specific representations made regarding bus service sustainability and the safeguarding of the rail corridor through the Parish.
- Acknowledgment: That the Council records its thanks to Cllr Lishman for his work in drafting the technical response under a restricted timeframe.

Proposed: Cllr Varnom | **Seconded:** Cllr Border | **Vote:** All in favour.

51.26 Playgrounds, Cemetery, Litter, Open Spaces, Sports Pavilion, Sports Field, Allotments

a) Playgrounds - Inspection Reports

The Council reviewed the maintenance action summary for the Chalcroft and Glebelands play areas following the inspection report dated 28 November 2025.

Discussion:

- Remedial Works: The Clerk reported that instructions had been issued to Craig Warner (Functional Art) to proceed with urgent safety repairs, including replacing a screw on the play horse and sealing a finger entrapment hazard on the seesaw.
- Future Inspections: Members discussed the long-term arrangements for playground inspections. It was noted that the previous playground inspector might now be available to resume his former duties for the Council. Cllr Duthie agreed to contact him to gauge his interest in returning to the role.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Council notes the inspection findings and ratifies the Clerk's instruction to Functional Art to carry out the identified safety repairs.
2. That Cllr Duthie be authorised to approach the previous inspector regarding a potential return to service, with a report on his availability to be provided at the next meeting.

b) Cemetery Management

- Review of Cemetery Regulations and Fees: Draft Regulations: Cllr Duthie circulated the draft Churchyard Regulations, which the Council agreed to formally rename the Cemetery Regulations. Following discussion, Members requested further time to review the document in detail before formal adoption. Cemetery Fees: The Council reviewed the proposed fee schedule.
- Policy Development: Memorials and Ashes A lengthy discussion took place regarding a proposed policy for the scattering of ashes, memorial tree planting, headstones, and benches. County Cllr Thomas Ashby suggested that the Council consult Witney Town Council to obtain a copy of their policy for comparison and best practice.
- Specific Request: Bartholomew Close The Council considered a request from a family wishing to bury ashes and plant a memorial tree at the Bartholomew Close open space. The Council agreed to the request in principle. Action: Cllr Duthie and the Rector to liaise with the family to identify a suitable location on the site.
- Next Steps: Cllr Duthie requested to compile a comprehensive report incorporating the policy feedback and the Witney Town Council comparisons for presentation at the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That the prescribed fees for the Cemetery be increased by 10% with immediate effect, subject to a further review in three months.

Proposed: Cllr Almgill | **Seconded:** Cllr Varnom | **Vote:** All in favour.

c) **Litter Picker's Report**

Councillors noted the Litter Picker's report for March.

d) **Village / School Car Park - Drainage Issues**

Nothing further to report.

e) **Sports Field - Application to Hire for Local Community Event**

The Council considered an application from Amie Pells to hire Glebelands Sports Field on Saturday, 11 July 2026, for a community fundraising event in aid of Ducklington Primary School and Ducklington Sports Club.

Discussion: Members noted the family-oriented nature of the event, which includes food stalls, inflatables, and live music. The Clerk confirmed that the Sports Club would manage the bar and that the hirer will ensure the site is left clear and tidy following the event.

RESOLVED:

- Approval: That the Council approves the application for the use of Glebelands Sports Field on 11 July 2026 for a community fund raising event.
- Compliance: That the approval is subject to the Clerk receiving and verifying all necessary documentation, including Public Liability Insurance (minimum £5m), Risk Assessments, and Event Management plans.
- Fees: That the Council waives the hire fee in recognition of the event's non-profit status benefiting local organisations, subject to the payment of the £25.00 administrative booking fee.

Proposed: Cllr Border | **Seconded:** Cllr Almgill | **Vote:** All in favour.

f) **Allotments**

Allotment Management and Security

The Council received a report and update regarding the management and security of the Parish Allotments from Cllr Dunsdon.

Discussion:

- CCTV Operations: Members discussed the protocols for the oversight of the newly installed security cameras. The Council formally agreed upon the arrangements for managing and monitoring the CCTV images to ensure compliance with data protection requirements.
- Police Liaison: Cllr Dunsdon informed the Council that allotment holders have held preliminary meetings with the local police to discuss security concerns and collaborative measures to deter rural crime.

- Vacant Plots: It was noted that the recent advertisement in the village newsletter generated significant interest. Three plots currently remain vacant.

RESOLVED:

- Newsletter Communication: That the Clerk be instructed to draft an article for the next issue of the village newsletter explaining the purpose and operation of the CCTV cameras at the allotment site.
- Tenancy Management: That the Clerk be instructed to expedite the letting of the three vacant allotment plots to the individuals who have expressed interest, ensuring the site returns to full occupancy.
- Monitoring: That the agreed CCTV management arrangements be implemented with immediate effect.

52.26 FINANCE

a) Account Balances, Debts due to Council and Bank Reconciliation

Account Balances

The Clerk advised members that the sum currently held in the Unity Trust Bank Current T1 account is £304.82 (as at 31 March 2026) and in the Unity Trust Bank Instant Access account is £44,285.92 (as at 31 March 2026), which includes £237.30 credit interest added on 31 March 2026.

Debts due to Council

The Council received a payment of £217.00 from the Treasurer of Creditor 1 on 27th March 2026 to reduce the outstanding balance to £1,302.00

Bank Reconciliation

The Clerk circulated a Bank Reconciliation to councillors at the meeting which was signed by the Chairman.

b) Invoices due for payment

Councillors considered the schedule of proposed payments set out in the Briefing Pack and **RESOLVED** that all be paid. Cllr Duthie, Cllr Barker or Cllr Almgill to authorise the payments.

53.26 Other comments/Matters for next Agenda

a) The Council formally recorded the resignation of Cllr Richard Border, who is stepping down after 19 years of dedicated service to the Parish Council and the wider Ducklington community. Several Councillors expressed their sincere appreciation for Cllr Border's "sterling service" and commitment for nearly two decades. Members spoke warmly of his significant contribution to Council business and his long-standing advocacy for the village. On behalf of the Parish, the Council wished Richard a very fond farewell and a happy retirement from his duties.

RESOLVED: That the Council records its formal thanks and highest appreciation for Cllr Border's 19 years of service



b) Cllr Almgill reported the recent emergence of a new sign at Mill Meadow which purports to restrict public access to the area. Members discussed the legal status of the land and the access route. The general consensus was that the footpath is Highway Maintainable at Public Expense (HMPE) and, as such, remains accessible to the public at large regardless of the new signage. Cllr Lishman offered to investigate the original planning permission associated with the site to clarify any access conditions or designations. He will report his findings at the next meeting to determine if further enforcement or formal communication is required.

c) Cllr George provided an update regarding a damaged vehicle previously abandoned on the public highway. Cllr George detailed the various enquiries and steps taken to address the presence of the vehicle. It was observed that the vehicle has since been removed from the highway, and the matter is now considered resolved.

d) **Planning Application MW.0057/24** - Cllr Lishman provided feedback regarding planning application MW.0057/24 (min no. 48.26). Cllr Lishman reiterated the various commitments made by the applicant in connection with the proposal. These community benefits include:

- Provision of a community woodland and orchard area.
- Installation of a bridge link.
- Dredging of the village pond.
- Formal support for the Parish Council's art trail initiative.

Members noted the update and agreed to monitor these commitments in line with the ongoing planning process.

54.26 Date of Next Meeting: Parish Council Meeting, Wednesday, 13 May 2026 - 7.30 pm, Lilac Room, Village Hall.

The meeting closed at 9.55 pm.

Signeddated.....2026
Chairman

Draft