

Begbroke Parish Council

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Minutes of the ANNUAL PARISH MEETING (AGM) of Begbroke Parish Council held by Zoom on Tuesday 4th May 2021 at 7.00pm.

Meeting ID: 831 6424 9376

- 1 Present: Cllr Malcolm Ryder (Chair); Cllr David Wintersgill (Vice Chair); Cllr Beverly Appleton; Cllr Leslie Allen; Cllr Lindsay Gregory; Jeffrey Wright – Clerk; Susan Blackshaw
- 2 Apologies - none
- 3 There were no declaration of disclosable pecuniary Interests, gifts, or hospitality.
- 4 The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting (AGM) held on 7th May 2019 were read and confirmed.
- 5 There were no matters arising from the minutes of last Annual Parish Meeting 7th May 2019 (AGM)
- 6 Chairman's gave his Report.

"Firstly, I would like to thank everyone for attending this meeting and it is nice to see so many familiar and new faces here this evening.

COVID-19

This has been unprecedented time in the history of the Parish Council.

We give our deepest condolences to those who have lost loved ones over this pandemic, I know COVID-19 has impacted millions of people across the country. As we all continue to navigate through these unique and evolving challenges, we hope there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

It has been a stressful time for the Parish Council which has been meeting online using Zoom. Even under the restrictions of Stay home; Protect the NHS; Save lives.

The Council managed to complete several projects over this extended year, close the play area for some months and then reopen with new signage and Covid-19 preventative measures in place. As we come through this crisis we hope to come back to some sort of normality, and I am keen to have Committee meetings face-to-face once again.

I would like to introduce the committee - Cllr David Wintersgill (Vice Chairman); Cllr Beverly Appleton; Cllr Lindsay Gregory, Cllr Leslie Allen, and Cllr Darron Rudkins. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Jeffrey Wright our Clerk for looking after the village accounts and particular thanks as he has tirelessly worked on our behalf above the normal duties or requirements for a clerk. He has put in a lot of extra time and effort sorting through all the new rules and changing regulations. Thanks to everyone on the committee past and present for giving their time and efforts in considering issues presented to the parish.

Councillor roles

Cllr Leslie Allen is our representative on the Begbroke Village Hall management committee.

Zoom

Zoom software has been used as our means of council meeting and keeping in contact with each other during the long year. We have managed to get grants to licence the software. I would especially like to thank our Clerk Jeff Wright for being the first point of contact for all our ills and woes. He will take on many other village issues for example he will take Photos of reported problems and acts promptly on my behalf. He has attended meetings and progressed schemes with contractors and Council officials.

Potholes and uneven roads

Potholes and uneven roads need addressing rather than spend £30m on lightning fixes that then need revisits due to inferior quality and tiny repairs. A good example are the numerous repairs when coming off the roundabout at Loop Farm.

Web Site

Jeff has setup a very user-friendly web site which is well worth a visit and can be found by putting this URL into your web browser: www.begbrokepc.org.uk

Footpath 5

The anomaly on footpath 5 has not been resolved and so we continue to pursue this.

FP 10

We have now opened this route diverted in 1945 and had become unused. There are still some minor details to be sorted.

Other footpath issues have been resolved and discussed with landowners.

Crossing on the A44

The speed indicators signs are up and running and showing just how many vehicles speed through the village. Little progress has been made on a crossing at Begbroke although there may be other work, we do not know about to increase the flow around the roundabout due to the increase in traffic flow. The council has submitted a Freedom of Information Request to OCC for information to support our repeated request for a crossing when others appear to have no problems.

Village assets

These are inspected every six months and defects remedied. One example was that loose tiles were found on the eastern bus shelter roof. These were repaired and a snow Guard fitted to contain any that may come loose preventing any falling and possibly injuring someone.

Wildflowers / Trees

We have sown wildflower seed to provide Flowers for Pollinators & Beneficial Insects.

Wildflowers: Woodland Shade mix, Flower Garden Fragrant Annual mix, and Beneficial Flowers for Pollinators. Seeds planted and sown along Begbroke Lane. There will be further planting weather permitting. Unfortunately, not many of the flowers have been seen and more work on the diminishing number of trees in the Parish needs to be addressed.

A duty of Care tree survey was commissioned.

The Oak trees on the A44 have been replaced so this season will be crucial to see if they have taken. There are several gaps on the A44 to fill in some of the gaps to the North of the village and along Begbroke Lane that has seen some wind damage over the winter.

We co-operate with Begbroke Village Hall Management Committee who keep the Village Hall operational with limited funds. Our representative is Cllr Leslie Allen This year we funded new cycle racks, a Fire Safety Audit, and an Asbestos survey.

I would also like to Thank Mark Richardson for continuing his excellent maintenance work and cleaning of the bus shelters.

Graffiti

We together with Yarnton and other locations, were badly hit by graffiti on the bus shelter and other locations. Thanks to Jeff and Mark's prompt action the graffiti has been removed to a particularly good standard ready for anti-graffiti painting.

Play Area

With Jeff's help and guidance the council has a new seesaw has been Installed in the play area. Mums I have spoken to say it is a "great addition to the play equipment" and thank the Parish Council for providing the play equipment. One of the best in the area.

Sandy Lane Level crossing closure

I feel strongly we must stop the closure of Sandy Lane crossing which is a vital link between Begbroke and Kidlington which at two hundred car movement an hour, Network Rail should repair the faults listed and not use them as an excuse for closure. Barrier down times are 30 seconds for a passenger train and 45 seconds for a goods train so they increase the train speed these times will come down. We have been told that if District or County council are the key people and Network Rail cannot close it so why do not the council get on and do it and support in our opposition into its closure.

Grass cutting Mr Prickett has make an excellent job of cutting the village hall grass, but now OCC has stopped cutting the A44 verge it will be down from 7 to only 1 per year I would urge Oxfordshire County Council to use better grass cutting equipment and cut the A44 more often this would save money, look better.

Path Warden

I am now the authorized Parish Footpath Warden for Begbroke Parish.

Litter picking

Litter picking has gone on a pace with several groups taken on the work themselves because of the increase activities during the pandemic.

Flooding

Has been an increasing problem in Begbroke due to Rowel Brook being blocked by rubbish, fallen trees and felled trees filling in the water course. There is a WhatsApp group "Rowel Brookers" keeping an eye on water flow and wildlife.

Sewage

Sewage processing plants in the area have been dumping sewage into rivers. Here in Begbroke flood water has been entering the land drains then into Rowel then to Oxford Canal. The entire system cannot cope. So, I am surprised there is no mention of it in the planning application of 4400 houses (15,000 houses in the area).

Begbroke Lane

Begbroke Lane has become very well used by village. We have some issues with the erosion of the surface at the far Eastern end of the lane, along with grass taken over the path edges making the path narrower. This has been removed by OCC and left the surface damaged.

I am pleased to see many people using this route starting out from Begbroke and Kidlington ends. We have installed rustic benches and dog waste bins and the lane is proving to be extremely popular with all types of walkers and cyclists.

Snow drops, cowslips, wild daffodils, primroses, and bluebells from previous planting appear throughout the spring. Wildflower seeds were also sown to provide ongoing displays. It has been noted that only a small number of plants have survived. More daffodils have been planted on the A44.

Grants

We continue to support village and other organisations with grants. Applications are welcomed with a statement of why they are required.

If you think you can use a grant, please apply to the clerk.

Real Time display at the Bus stop

The real time display has been a bit of a failure, I think it could be good if it were setup properly. Lately every time pass, it shows "refer to time" table.

The Link

The link continues to flourish, may I congratulate them on a very professional looking publication the use of colour has worked well making it one of the best in the area. Recently the clerk obtained them a COMF grant of £1000 from CDC.

Ongoing issues.

We have issues with parking on junctions and on pavement and grass verge also parking the wrong way round on Roads overnight this seems to be widespread throughout the village people seem to think they have a right to park outside their house which they do not it is only over their own drive this causes friction here and in Yarnton. Parking on pavements is a problem for partially sighted people, people with pushchairs and pedestrians.

Potholes around the Village have been reduced but there is still work to be done.

Road surface along the A44 service Road East.

Uneven Road and surface in Willow Way.

We need to replace fallen trees.

Ongoing issues with fibre outages with BT lines.

Overgrown hedges proved a particular problem in Begbroke Lane.

If anyone has a particular project that they would like us to consider or issues – please contact a councillor or the clerk".

7 Clerks Financial Report

The clerk gave his financial Report: He said that the annual governance and accountability return had been completed, internally audited, and sent to the external auditor. The accounts reconciled satisfactorily. The notice of public rights and publication of the same had been set for Thursday 3rd June 2021 until Wednesday 14th July 2021. He said that £9601 had been carried forward from last year, the precept was £28,182, other receipts £2,816, Staff Costs £9132, other payments £26,128 and that £5339 was being carried forward to 2021-22 financial year. He also said that the asset value had been increased to £92,344 mainly due to the provision of See-Saw in the play area. He also highlighted some of the main expenses incurred during the year.

Income and Spending

Between 01/04/2020 and 31/03/2021

Category	Total
Income Categories	
BANK INTEREST NATWEST	1.17
GRANT	324.22
PRECEPT	28181.5
VAT REFUND	2491.32
Total Income Categories	30998.21

Expense Categories

ANNUAL SUB TO ORGANISATION (non-VAT)	68
AUDIT - EXTERNAL	240
AUDIT - INTERNAL	200
CHEQUE VOIDED	0
CLERKS REIMBURSED EXPENSES	933.74
DOG WASTE BIN EMPTYING	360.36
GRANTS SECT 137 LGA	3145
GRASS CUTTING PLAY AREA & FOOTBALL PITCH	894
GRASS CUTTING VILLAGE VAT	1998
HEDGE CUTTING VILLAGE HALL VAT	364.8
INSURANCE - COUNCIL	1228.8
PLAY AREA INSPECTION	90.6
PLAY AREA NEW WORK	6784.55
PLAY AREA NEW WORK NON-VAT	260
PLAY AREA REPAIRS non vat	570
PLAY AREA REPAIRS VAT	754.8
RISK ASSEMENT	300
STAFF COSTS	8177.96
STAFF COSTS VAT	954
TRAINING	120
TREES - DUTY OF CARE	384
VILLAGE NEW WORK VAT	276.22
VILLAGE ASSET INSPECTION NON-VAT	220
VILLAGE GARDENING NON-VAT	546.17
VILLAGE HALL NEW WORK NON-VAT	3975
VILLAGE HALL NEW WORK VAT	658.79
VILLAGE HALL SAFETY INSPECTION NON-VAT	370
VILLAGE HALL SAFETY INSPECTION VAT	450
WEBSITE CHARGE vat	935.98
Total Expense Categories	35260.77

Grand Total	-4262.56
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8 Reports from County (none) & District Councillors:

8.1 There was no County Councillor report, However the Progressive Oxfordshire Group, Cllr. Tyson: Cllr Middleton and Cllr Copeland submitted their District Council parish report reproduced as Appendix 1 below)

9 General question time.

9.1 Sue Blackshaw considered the chairman's report particularly good and demonstrated the range of activities and problems dealt with by the committee. She offered a vote of thanks to the committee which was accepted and appreciated.

9.2 Sue raised the problem of pavement parking and whether anything could be done about it. Issues such as narrow roads and difficulties for pedestrians and children were discussed. It was understood, this was a common problem throughout the village. Cllr Gregory suggested that 901 was contacted; obtain a reference no and continue to use this each time there was a further incident, thereby flagging the issue up.

9.3 Cllr Gregory thanked the clerk for his work on behalf of residents at the top end of Fernhill Road.

9.4 A discussion took place on the issue of rubbish collection and recycling. It was apparent that there was no national or even a local strategy as councils had different policies. For example, some collect glass bottles whilst others do not. Also, there is no consistent policy on bin colours.

Proposed date of next Annual parish meeting – TBA.

Signed

Chairman May 24th, 2022

Appendix 1

Given that the pandemic resulted in annual meetings being cancelled last year this is the first official report from your local Cherwell District Councillors to the Parish. This report will be on behalf of the Progressive Oxfordshire Group, which is cross-party and made up of Cllr Katherine Tyson (Liberal Democrat), Cllr Conrad Copeland (Liberal Democrat), Cllr Ian Middleton (Green), Cllr John Broad (Independent), and Cllr Nick Cotter (Independent). Since being elected in May 2019 Cllr Katherine Tyson and Cllr Conrad Copeland have been serving as District Councillors for Kidlington West, and Cllr Ian Middleton for Kidlington East. Sandra Rhodes resigned in 2019, and it was decided to wait until the May 2020 elections to fill the vacancy; however, given the cancellation of local elections in 2020 due to the pandemic Kidlington West has only had two of their three District Council representatives from 2019-2021.

On July 22, 2019, a Climate Emergency Motion was passed by Cherwell District Council declaring a 'Climate Emergency' with the pledge to make Cherwell District Council carbon neutral by 2030. There was a mechanism that council should receive reports about the actions being taken to address this emergency, but the pandemic has meant that this has not been the central focus. The Progressive Oxfordshire Group has been working tirelessly to push the District Council to place climate change at the heart of its activities. That is why at this first meeting we presented a motion about Cherwell's Local Plan to try and save the green belt surrounding Kidlington, Gosford, Yarnton and Begbroke This motion was lost. Additionally, we presented a motion about the Oxfordshire Pension Fund to try and decarbonize the portfolio on both ecological and economic grounds. The motion was also lost, meaning Cherwell District Council refused to place the climate change emergency at the heart of their pension fund.

On October 21, 2019, the Progressive Oxfordshire Group amended a gutted and weak Oxford-Cambridge Expressway motion that would "keep an open mind" about the development to include reference to the climate change emergency. Specifically, that "the Council notes that clarity on potential routes is due but if any road route is likely to have serious environmental implications which is incompatible with the council's climate change emergency priorities, then we'll seek to stay consistent with our Council's commitment to combating Climate Change.

The Council therefore requests Officers to assess the implications for Cherwell and the Oxon 2050 Plan with due consideration to our climate change emergency motion and to provide recommendations for Members via Scrutiny and the Executive. In the meantime, the Council will maintain an open mind." This amendment was passed, but the motion continued to state that Cherwell Council would keep an open mind on the OxCam Expressway, and the Progressive Oxfordshire Group supported the Labour motion at the December 16, 2019, meeting to take a stronger stance against the expressway, but this was defeated by the Conservatives.

The Progressive Oxfordshire Group submitted two written questions to the December 2019 meeting. The first question was concerned by the Government meddling in local government and asked the Leader to write a response in relation to the communication with MHCLG, ministers or the Secretary of State regarding the holding decision applicable to South Oxfordshire District Council. The second question addressed the Oxfordshire Pension Fund motion that Progressive Oxfordshire tabled for the July 2019 meeting as further evidence had emerged that pension funds with a carbon-intensive portfolio were underperforming against decarbonized alternatives.

Also at the December 2019 meeting, a raft of constitutional changes was presented. These changes would undermine input from Councillors and the community, so the Progressive Oxfordshire group proposed six amendments, supported by the Labour Party. Each of the six amendments failed to pass as the Conservative Party whipped the vote: thus, constitutional changes took place without the support of Labour, Greens, most Independents, or the Liberal Democrats. This move has created tension at Cherwell Council, with further draconian rules being put into place in the following year to stop debate, motions, and participation from the public. None of the constitutional changes have taken place with any cross-party support, even with a cross-party consultative group set up to draft the second round of constitutional changes as the conservative leadership rejected the outcomes of that group, added their own additional restrictions, and whipped their vote on these more draconian alternatives.

It was also at the December 16, 2019, meeting that Cllr Sandra Rhodes officially resigned from Kidlington West after 6 months of not being able to attend due to ill health. This position has been vacant since 2019 due to the pandemic.

At the February 24, 2020, meeting Cllr Nick Cotter officially joined the Progressive Oxfordshire group. It was also at this meeting that the Tree Planting motion was passed, committing to double the tree cover within the district by 2045. The Progressive Oxfordshire group proposed several amendments to try and strengthen the motion with specific reference to the amount of tree cover that will be lost because of the plans to build on green belt, particularly on the North Oxford Gold Club, but these were defeated. The original motion was carried. This meeting debated the budget, which was carried and saw an increase in the level of Council Tax for Cherwell District Council of £5 for 2020/21 on a Band D property. Given that this was the first budget for the Progressive Oxfordshire group no amendments were submitted, but we raised issues with the budgetary process and the lack of input available for councillors. This was supposed to be rectified in the 2020 process, but the global pandemic meant that this year's budgetary process was filled with losses and the process was akin to putting out a fire. As a group we were able to get agreement that raising the rent on the Council's tenants was not appropriate. However, the 2021 budget is projecting even worse losses, and the Progressive Oxfordshire Group is committed to trying to maintain as many services as possible and to ensure that Cherwell Council's financial situation does not fall on the shoulders of our most vulnerable residents.

The global pandemic meant that the May 2020 local elections were cancelled, thus the May 20, 2020, Annual Council was cancelled because no elections took place. It was replaced with an extraordinary council meeting. The May 2020 meeting was to give the constitutional changes to the council the temporary powers to run remote meetings given the regulations that came into place on April 4, 2020. These powers were given until May 7, 2020, and the government has not seen fit to extend them. It is the view of the Progressive Oxfordshire Group that this is a mistake, and the central government needs to allow local bodies to conduct meetings both in person and virtually moving forward. No substantial business was conducted at this meeting given its extraordinary nature.

At the July 20, 2020, meeting Cllr John Broad joined the Progressive Oxfordshire Group. Two questions were asked to the Leader Cllr Barry Wood.

The first question was in relation to Castle Quay Shopping centre and to request that councillors could see the updated risk assessment. The Leader advised that this had been shared with the Castle Quay Management Group, which has no representation from the Progressive Oxfordshire Group. This lack of representation has been raised several times, but we have been informed that because it is not a statutory committee that there is no requirement for cross-party representation, even though the council frequently refers to it as a 'cross party group'. It is instead a Banbury issue that only required members from that area to be engaged. This lack of respect for the taxpayers of the rest of Cherwell has been raised, as it is all Cherwell residents that underwrite the investment in Castle Quay and the Waterfront regeneration. It is Progressive Oxfordshire's view that non-Banbury representatives should be able to sit on the body dealing with the risk assessments for an investment in the hundreds of millions, especially given that retail is collapsing at an even greater speed due to the pandemic's closure of businesses.

The second question was in relation to the Climate Emergency motion to see if any progress had been made in establishing the Member Working Group, which had been mentioned when the motion was first passed in July 2019. No definitive answer was given. The Progressive Oxfordshire Group is continuously working towards pushing Cherwell District to take seriously the Climate Change Emergency that they passed, and we are disheartened that more systematic work has not been accomplished. This question has never been answered by the leader, despite repeated requests by our group and repeated promises to respond by the leader. We feel that this is extremely disrespectful to us as councillors and to the people we represent.

At this meeting, a Peat Free Compost motion was passed where: “this Council agrees that officers will investigate sustainable alternatives in relation to the design and planting of our bedding schemes which will include perennial plants that are cost-effective, insect-friendly, and attractive to pollinators.” Progressive Oxfordshire proposed an amendment to strengthen the motion. It was clear during the debate that the report that supported the motion was flawed and full of inconsistencies. We pointed these out, but the motion was still carried in its unamended form.

At the July 2020 meeting the Progressive Oxfordshire group proposed a motion on the Government Covid-19 Recovery Plan. The motion was greatly amended to give it less teeth but was carried. This motion means that the council is calling on the government to:

- 1) work towards ensuring everyone has access to wholesome food, free healthcare, income, and job security, affordable zero carbon housing, renewable energy, superfast broadband, public transport, clean air, and green spaces.
- 2) promote building homes on brownfield sites.
- 3) build residential provision above stations and retail spaces; create new woodlands and invest in conservation.
- 4) acknowledge the value of our carers and educators by protecting and investing in our NHS, social care, schools, colleges, and early years care; protect genuine local democracy on planning matters.
- 5) restructure public and private finance to give power to local communities and guarantee provide sufficient funding to councils to provide high quality local services for everyone.
- 6) decarbonise the economy and create thousands of new, well-paid, secure jobs in green industries; and
- 7) ensure that the longer-term recovery will promote human rights, prevent environmental damage, protect the environment, and tackle injustice.

Also at the July 2020 meeting, a motion was presented to Council to try and make sure that the lack of democratic representation for Kidlington West would not go beyond May 7, 2020. At the time the government was talking about further delaying the local elections, and the Progressive Oxfordshire Group presented a motion to “Guarantee Democratic Accountability in 2021”. This was asking the council to write to the central government to express support, and to seek clarity, on the local elections. It also asked for local elections to happen on May 6, 2021, at least to fill vacant and expiring seats. We felt that this was important as the vacant seat previously occupied by Cllr Sandra Rhodes had not been filled since 2019 – leaving a democratic deficit for Kidlington West on Cherwell District Council. This motion was defeated.

A Special Council Meeting was called for September 7, 2020, to deal with the Local Plan, the delegation of enforcement powers from Oxfordshire County Council to Cherwell District Council, and to revise the budget given the dire economic situation facing the council.

It was at this meeting that delegation of enforcement powers from Oxfordshire County Council to Cherwell District Council under Covid-19 legislation took place. These give local authorities authority relating to the control and prevention of coronavirus. These provide the District Council with powers to carry out enforcement actions, be authorised to enter into all necessary and appropriate contracts and agreements to implement the delivery of the enforcement work on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council, and that authority be delegated to the Assistant Director Regulatory Services to perform the enforcement duties of OCC.

The Revised Budget 2020/21 was also submitted to reflect the financial impact of COVID-19 and to propose savings required to achieve a balanced budget. The central government has not given local authorities any relaxation in the requirement to balance the budget in the pandemic; additionally, no losses from business related failings will be compensated by the central government. This has meant that Cherwell District Council has lost a significant amount of money that will never be paid back by the central

government; thus, significant cuts are having to be made both in the 2020/2021 and the 2021/2022 budget. £1.2m of the reserves were approved to be used at this meeting.

It was also at the September 2020 meeting that the Partial Review of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 - Oxford's Unmet Housing Need: Inspector's Report and Plan Adoption took place. The Progressive Oxfordshire Group stood up against this, but in the end, it was passed (15 against, 28 for) even with substantial public outcry. The Progressive Oxfordshire Group had submitted two previous motions to stop this local plan from going through, but at each instance the Conservative party whipped to support the Local Plan. Other Kidlington conservatives spoke out against the whipped vote and the lack of concern for the residents. We were told that this was the way politics worked, and that those who win did not need to "listen or play to the gallery". The Progressive Oxfordshire Group cannot condemn more strongly the idea that our residents do not deserve to be listened to and cannot understand the draconian approach to local politics taken by the Conservative controlling group. It is our belief that Cherwell deserves better, and we are sorry that we could not persuade Conservative members to go against their whip.

At the October 19, 2020, meeting Progressive Oxfordshire presented a motion on Badger Culling calling on the council leader to write to DEFRA expressing our opposition to the badger cull across Oxfordshire. This was put to the vote and was lost. It was also at this meeting that the further Constitution Review was proposed. There was an establishment of politically balanced, informal cross-party working group, but in the end the group's recommendations were ignored and the conservative group whipped their members to support more draconian limitations to council participation. All political parties worked on this group, but in the end the recommendations were only carried by the conservatives at the December 2020 meeting as both Progressive Oxfordshire and Labour decried the Orwellian process. However, both Labour and Progressive Oxfordshire tried to work in a cross-party fashion before the December meeting in the hope to better serve our residents.

On December 14, 2020, the Progressive Oxfordshire Group submitted written questions and three motions.

The question to the leader concerned the Castle Quay shopping centre to try and make the Working Group more transparent. The Leader advised that the remit of the Working Group had been detailed in the published response to the written question and explained that an All-Members Briefing of Castle Quay 1 and Castle Quay 2 in the New Year. There was again a rejection that the working group should be politically balanced or include representatives from places outside of Banbury. The leader was yet again reminded that he had still not responded to our question on the formation of a committee to deal with our response to climate change.

At this meeting we presented a motion seeking to demonstrate the council's support for the Climate and Ecological Emergency (CEE) Bill that is making its way through Parliament. This is a Bill that has cross party support and seeks to strengthen the UK's response to the climate emergency. A motion was also presented calling on the council to prevent local hunts from operating in our district while the police were investigating evidence that trail hunting was being used as a smokescreen to allow fox hunts to take place covertly. This was to protect the council's position in terms of legal liability for such actions. Both votes were lost. The Progressive Oxfordshire Group will continue to place the climate change emergency and the protection of wildlife and biodiversity in front of Cherwell District Council, and it is frustrating that a climate change emergency can be called yet little to no action is being taken to demonstrate that the council understands the meaning of the word emergency.

There was also a motion about improving Coronavirus Testing and Tracing. This meeting was before the second national lockdown, when an inadequate centralised system was already showing signs of failing. Our motion was to support more localised test and tracing to avoid national lockdowns – and to support the call from the Conservative leader at Oxford County Council –for more local authority engagement in testing and tracing. This was surprisingly a very contentious motion, and the Conservatives again whipped against supporting it because "it had come from the Progressive Oxfordshire Group". Along with all of Labour, the Progressive Oxfordshire Group spoke out against such an immature and dangerous approach to council business, especially on an issue as important as testing and tracing and the impact that this will have on economically devastating lockdowns. The Conservative controlling group decided to whip however, and the vote was lost. Within a fortnight we were back in a national lockdown, and the centralised system was devolved down to local authorities, but with Cherwell District Council playing no leadership role and instead sticking their head in the sand while Cherwell residents suffered. The Progressive Oxfordshire Group believes that residents deserve leadership that takes seriously the economic devastation that national lockdowns bring. We think that a crisis should warrant less blatant partisanship and winner-takes-all mentalities.

It was also at the December 2020 meeting that the Constitution Review was passed with opposition from both the Progressive Oxfordshire and Labour Groups. Amendments were proposed by the Progressive Oxfordshire Group to adopt the committees' original constitutional proposals, and these were supported by Labour. However, the conservatives stated that as controlling group they could do what they wished, and that as the working group had not come up with the proposals that they had preferred they would be voting against any amendments to push through yet more draconian limitations on debate. This pretence of a democratic working group created a new low of political cohesion on Cherwell District Council, as a second round of constitutional changes in a year were pushed through by a whipped Conservative vote. This means that public participation will be more difficult in the future, and it is a Progressive Oxfordshire pledge that, if politically possible, we will reverse the measures that make local resident engagement less representative.

The last meeting was on February 22, 2021, and this meeting contained the budget. It was unanimously passed the Councillors would not be increasing their member's allowances given the economic conditions being faced by our residents due to the pandemic. The budget contained several cuts but given that the central government mandates by law that all councils must produce a balanced budget – and none of the revenue shortfall from businesses were being covered by the central government – the officers were structurally forced to make cuts. This will become worse in the next budget unless central government policy changes.

At this meeting, a Flooding motion was also presented by Progressive Oxfordshire and was passed. This motion addresses concerns over numerous incidents of flooding across Kidlington, Gosford Yarnton and Begbroke over the past year. Particularly notable events were in Kidlington Garden City around Lock Crescent where the Thames Water pumping station failed again. Numerous councillors attended the incident, and this was followed up with the CDC CEO afterwards. It appears that action has now been taken on this although there is still some remedial work pending with local landowners.

Yarnton experienced 2 serious flooding incidents at the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021 and flood defences have since been given some much-needed maintenance. However, this has prompted further action by local councillors to try to deal with the long-term nature of the issue.

On each occasion the response has been variable with no clarity on which agency should be dealing with the problem.

Subsequent discussions with OCC and CDC have resulted in some action with what are claimed to be improved contact points although these have yet to be fully tested in a live situation.

A motion was brought to the council by The Progressive Oxfordshire Group in February 2021, calling for a more joined up approach to the issue. This called on the council to:

- 1) Encourage areas that are at risk of flooding to establish a 'flood resilient community', including forming local flood response groups, forums for residents to feedback information on current and potential flooding risks, and the setting up of their own flood response stores to provide locally available flood alleviation equipment.
- 2) Publish regularly updated surveys and maintenance programs, with maps of drainage and flood defences and associated repair responsibilities; and
- 3) Call on all risk management agencies to set up a cooperative task force, which we would participate in, including the provision of a centralised contact point which can trigger an immediate, proportionate response to all emergency flooding events.

The first point was inspired by the formation of the Yarnton flood defence group which has provided an exemplar for the kind of local response we should be encouraging from residents. Points 2 and 3 are still a work in progress although Cherwell did convene a Members Briefing on flooding 2 weeks ago which was attended by District and Parish Councillors Katherine Tyson and Ian Middleton. We heard a presentation from OCC which mainly focused on their re-vamped website which they are claiming more fully addresses the concerns raised in the Cherwell Motion. Ian asked if this could be stress-tested offline before it is needed in an active incident and was assured that it would be. There are still some concerns from both Ian and Katherine that the system may still not be completely fit for purpose.

Unfortunately, no Kidlington County councillors were present at the briefing so the only point of contact with the county council now is via the Parish and District officers/councillors. The County is traditionally slow to respond through these channels so it is hoped that our County Councillors will be able to pick up on these issues. It is understood that County Cllr Billington recently convened a meeting with CDC and OCC and some members of Yarnton Parish Council, although as no other local councillors were

invited to attend and no agenda has been published. It is therefore difficult for us to know the purpose or the outcome of the meeting. Hopefully, the minutes from this meeting will be made available at the various APMs.

There has also been some local concern about the expansion of the Oxford London Airport in Kidlington with additional hangars being built on site to house an increased number of passenger helicopters for the aviation company Airbus.

Cllrs Tyson and Middleton are both members of the airport consultative committee and have expressed concern over the past two years about the lack of meetings or liaison between the airport management and the local community. As a result of local concerns being raised by councillors over a recent planning application submitted by the airport a meeting has now been convened to take place in June. This is not a public meeting, but councillors will report back to the community via the local parish councils. Any further concerns in the meantime should be addressed to Cllrs Tyson and Middleton.

As part of our commitment to the climate emergency motion the Progressive Oxfordshire Group does not see an increase in traditional air travel as compatible with a desire to achieve carbon neutrality. We are also concerned with the health impact of noise and air pollution for both our residents and the local wildlife. We will therefore be very judicious about any proposals that would seek to widen the remit of the airport or expand its operations in the area.

This is a difficult time for local authorities, and the Progressive Oxfordshire cross-party group will continue to advocate and work for our residents in 2021/2022. The recovery from the pandemic will be difficult, and if you notice any issues that need to be raised to the District Council, please do not hesitate to contact Cllr Katherine Tyson, Cllr Ian Middleton, or Cllr Conrad Copeland.