

Weston on the Green Annual Parish Meeting

held in the Village Hall on 22nd April 2025

Minutes - DRAFT

Attendees:

Members of the parish.

Parish Councillors: Diane Bohm, Susan Davis, Tracy Rowan, John Miller, Michael Aldridge.

Diane Bohm (Chairman of Parish Council) welcomed all to the Annual Parish meeting.

25.1 Resolution To Approve: Minutes of 2024 Annual Parish Meeting held on 15th April 2024

The minutes of 15th April 2024 Annual Parish meeting were moved by Diane Bohm and seconded by Susan Davis. The motion was supported unanimously by attendees at the meeting.

25.2 Annual Report – Diane Bohm (DB), Chair Weston on the Green Parish Council

DB provided the annual report from Weston on the Green Parish Council; this can be found in full on the Parish Council website. DB noted that many longstanding issues continue to require the Parish Council's attention.

Oak Tree Footpath: After five years of sustained effort, the concrete footpath around the veteran oak tree has now been removed (February 2025). The path had been inappropriately constructed without due regard to the protected tree and created visibility concerns for drivers. Following persistent lobbying, including significant work by Roger Evans and support from County Councillor Nigel Simpson, 35 tons of concrete were removed and the tree roots treated and restored. The outcome of this work will be a relief to many and a source of curiosity to new villagers.

Playground and Spinney: New playground equipment was installed last spring, which included new swings and frame plus a basket swing for younger children. However, petty vandalism is now an issue and has been reported to the Neighbourhood Police. Thanks were expressed to Councillor Ben Lanham for leading this work prior to his relocation from the village; he will be hugely missed on the Council.

Neighbourhood Watch: No volunteer has yet come forward to lead the Neighbourhood Watch scheme following last year's annual parish meeting presentation. A coordinator is still sought.

Weston Community Shop: The Community Shop successfully opened under the leadership of Sam Sharp and the SOS Committee. Appreciation was expressed to all involved, including Yasemin for her longstanding contribution to the village.

Traffic and Speedwatch: The Speedwatch scheme continues, with particular concern about speeding on Church Lane. Plans are in place to apply to reduce the B430 speed limit to 30mph. Thanks were

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given to the Traffic Advisory Group for their hard work with special thanks to Graham Barnett and his dedicated team of villagers in collecting speed statistics on Church Lane and the B430.

Planning and Development: Considerable time has been spent responding to planning consultations, including the Cherwell Local Plan. Preservation of the School Field as meadowland remains a key concern. While most of the land is now protected from development, two remaining plots (lacking infrastructure) may go to auction.

Community Bus: The Community Bus had a successful year, supported by grant funding. However, we are not able to apply for OCC funding next year, presenting an ongoing financial challenge (current annual cost around £2.2k).

Gigaclear Broadband: The broadband installation is largely complete following earlier delays and complaints. Thanks were extended to those involved in helping to start the project (James Henderson and Mark East) and also to those street co-ordinators in progressing the project.

Biodiversity and Environment: David Williams was thanked for securing 300 trees and 250 bushes for the village and spinney, supporting biodiversity initiatives. David has been working with a group of volunteers and some of the young people have enjoyed being involved as well.

Village News: Thanks were given to Alex Reid and the volunteer delivery team for producing and distributing the Village News which continues to be colourful, informative and very supportive of village projects.

The Clerk, Jane Mullane, was thanked for her dedication and professionalism.

Priorities for the Coming Year

- Traffic management
- Flooding
- Milestone Lane development issues
- Wider and speculative development pressures
- Securing funding and planning for the future of the Community Bus

In conclusion, DB thanked the Parish Councillors, Susan, John, Tracy and our new councillor Michael Aldridge for their energy and enthusiasm. Each one is a post holder and oversees a specific area of our work. The team has a development plan which you will find on the website. Residents were encouraged to volunteer and become involved in village life.

Finally, a word of support was given to Paula and Bob Hessian who recently lost most of their home in a fire. Updates are given on the village Facebook page including requests for help.

25.3 Presentation “Planned development in the Bicester region: impacts on Weston on the Green” - Councillor Susan Davies

Councillor Susan Davies provided an overview of how the planning system works – hierarchy of decisions via:

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1. National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Major decisions on national planning strategy are set out in the NPPF and its guidance documents put together by the Government – reviewed after last election - those decisions filter down through tiers of planning.

Changes:

- More centralised (national) decision making to emphasise house building on a grand scale
- New standard method for deciding housing density (increased); urban uplift which previously prioritised urban and suburban sites for development has been removed
- New definition of 'grey belt' land which can be developed in existing green belt.

2. Cherwell District Council Local Plan

- The Local Plan considers planning across the region of Cherwell and is currently in review to 2042. It is expected to be adopted by January 2026. Since 2000, Cherwell has grown by >16%. Bicester is projected to grow its population from 36,000 in 2000 to 90,000 by 2050.
- The Local Plan must have a Housing Supply figure of 5 years but the current supply is only 2.3 years. Therefore, Cherwell is vulnerable to unfettered development on technical grounds.
- Cherwell is considered overwhelmingly a rural area. Consequently, rural villages will now have increased pressure to meet national housing targets.

The main aims of the current proposed Local Plan 2042:

- Focus growth around Bicester
- Limit strategic growth in rural areas to larger more sustainable towns and villages
- Control development in open countryside
- Accommodate >4,400 homes from unmet Oxford housing need.

There are five area strategies around: Bicester, Banbury, Kidlington, Heyford Park and the rural areas. Weston on the Green is therefore central to much of the major development aims and will therefore be impacted by infrastructure pressures.

Longer term developments: Oxford Cambridge Arc and Oxfordshire Knowledge Spine are planned to support high tech employment and associated housing.

In the new Local Plan Weston on the Green is re-categorised as a smaller village and is not expected to have strategic housing developments but there will still be some pressure to support some smaller scale housing sites.

3. Neighbourhood Planning

Neighbourhood Plans provide policies that support a shared vision for your neighbourhood. These policies take precedence over existing non-strategic policies in the Local Plan.

Weston on the Green has prepared a Neighbourhood Plan which was adopted in May 2021 and is due to be reviewed during 2025 onwards. The Parish Council encourages community engagement in the Neighbourhood Plan review to reflect the villages needs and manage development impacts and there will be village meetings held to gather the communities feedback input on the village's future.

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The Parish Council is a statutory consultee on all planning applications that come through the Cherwell District Council route. In responding, the Parish Council implements the Neighbourhood Plan policies.

- **Map showing proposed sites in the wider area was showed which included:**

- North west Bicester (towards Bucknell): 7,500 houses
- Outside Chesterton: 147 houses
- Heyford Park: 1,600 houses
- South east Bicester: logistics, warehousing, technology development
- A41: Symmetry Park/Siemens development site
- Ardley rail freight interchange to road: could be consequences for the village as 90% of freight that goes on rail has to come on road. Vehicles will be directed to not go through Weston on the Green but inevitably traffic will pass through
- Great Wolf resort: unknown currently if to be developed or site sold off for housing
- North of Bucknell - Puy du Fou proposed site: significant pressures on transport system, when running at capacity there is an expectation of 1m visitors/year to the site
- Botley North solar farm
- Airport land, near Woodstock: 450 houses

All this wider development will create added pressures on all roads which could create a real issue for Weston on the Green.

- The Parish Council's job is to manage the impact of development in and around our parish to support and protect our valued way of life.

- 1. Context of the development:**

Greenspace and biodiversity

Scale and density

Impact on traffic volume and transport options

Pressure on social infrastructure (medical, schools)

Employment opportunities

- 2. Detail of the development:**

Conservation Area

Type and style (Neighbourhood Plan design code) for our parish

Population (what kind of housing do we need?)

Noise and light pollution (dark skies policy – not welcome lights on all night or bright commercial lighting)

Impact on parking

- **Practical actions for the Parish Council in planning:**

- Policy consultations: for Local Plan 2042 review and Neighbourhood Plan policies
- Engagement with developers: S106 requirements (local infrastructure mitigation)

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- Interaction with other bodies

- **The Treescape Project Aims:**

- To identify areas that could enrich biodiversity (new/repared/reinstated hedgerows; water courses/ponds; tree planting; meadows; wild areas)
- To provide information on current use and landownership
- To help engage with landowners to see what could be achieved within their productivity parameters.

A resident observed: There is significant pressure to meet housing need. A decision has been made in Oxfordshire to effectively double the county's population, including associated business growth. This appears to be driven by a wider economic development strategy.

The planning system is intended to be plan-led. In practice, it operates through a six-stage process, starting with a 'call for sites' where the council identifies potential development land and then sites are assessed and evaluated over time. Over time, this will lead to development of fields in a piecemeal way, without necessarily reflecting joined-up or strategic thinking.

The planning system is seen as not fit for purpose, it is perceived as failing to deliver high-quality development. Protections can be easily overridden and historic villages are considered particularly fragile and vulnerable to inappropriate development.

The Council agreed with the comments made – the infrastructure e.g. utilities are not available quickly enough for developers to fully invest so perhaps proposals are more ambitious than reality. Healthcare provision is also a concern.

A Cherwell District Council parish liaison meeting is held twice a year which Councillors attend, they will continue to raise ongoing concerns relating to the village.

Questions on other matters:

- Lorries utilising Church Lane - can anything be done as particularly a problem when issue on A34?

Unfortunately a chicane is not a viable option as it limits the passing of agricultural vehicles. The parked cars act as a natural limiter. Vehicles exiting Staplehurst have also been requested to turn left which has helped.

- Flooding concerns as it will only get worse with increased development.

OCC has provided the opportunity to apply for a grant to support work in the parish. The Parish Council has recently submitted an expression of interest and are waiting to hear if they have been successful.

DB thanked villagers for attending.

Should you wish to find out more information or offer help in any way at all please do contact one of the Councillors or email the Parish Clerk on: clerk@westononthegreen-pc.gov.uk

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