

Parish Council Annual Assembly – 12 April 2021

Introduction. The Council meeting scheduled for Monday 12 April is also the 'Annual Assembly'. The Annual Assembly is an important occasion in the year as it is the opportunity for the Council to report on its activities for the previous year, its plans for the year to come. It is also an opportunity for any residents to raise any issues which they think are important. (But don't forget that issues may be raised at any time by contacting one of the Councillors or the Clerk).

The meeting this year cannot be an open meeting in the Village Hall as usual, but will be conducted digitally over Zoom, as have been all our meetings for the last year. The meeting is open to members of the public, so if you wish to join, please apply to the Clerk for a link.

In addition to forming the basis for the discussion at the Zoom meeting, this report will be published in the weekly newsletter, on the website and notice board and in the forthcoming Spring Courier.

Elections. There has been no change to the composition of the Council since the local council elections in May 2019; the next election is due in 2023.

Chairman's Report for 2020 / 2021

This year's report is in two sections:

1. The period to January 2021
2. From January 2021

Simon Jenkins stood down as Chair in January 2021 after nearly 6 years in the post, and Mike Oldnall was appointed as Chair with Simon taking over as Vice Chair, by unanimous vote of the Council. Simon would like to thank all those who have served on the Council during this time, including Julia Evans, Clerk and RFO, for all their support and hard work, and also all the many residents who have shown interest in the Council's work, contributed with their feedback and ideas and taken part in many aspects of 'looking after our village'.

Section 1. The Council's Aims and Objectives for 2020 / 2021 were:

Aims

- To provide effective, efficient and accountable local government for the parish.
- To communicate our plans, actions and achievements, enabling residents to be involved in their future development.
- To be a strong voice for residents, working to improve the overall village area, both built and natural, while preserving the setting and character of heritage areas.

Objectives

- To ensure ongoing compliance with all legislation pertaining to local government
- Manage in a cost-effective way the assets of the Council including the Old School Room
- Encourage and support within the parish all relevant policies and initiatives of the UK Government, Oxfordshire County Council and Vale of White Horse District Council relating to climate change and sustainability of our environment
- Consider very carefully all applications for planning permission, ensuring to the best of our ability that they all comply with the policies of the Vale of White Horse District Council Development Plan, including the adopted Uffington and Baulking Neighbourhood Plan

- Monitor projects utilising S106 funding and consider and prioritise any further eligible applications
- Review and improve where necessary the Council's communications to villagers to ensure residents receive appropriate and timely information
- Prepare an Emergency Plan for the village
- Update the website to comply with accessibility legislation

Without wishing to seem complacent, I think that we have achieved all those Aims and Objectives to a surprising extent, given that we have been in lockdown or subject to other restrictions for much of the year.

The mention of lockdown inevitably takes one's thoughts to the Covid-19 pandemic. It has been the most important topic for governments all over the world in the last 12 months and it has been a very difficult year for many people. We would like to express our sympathies to all who have actually had Covid-19, and particularly to any residents who may have lost family, relatives or friends to the disease. We would like to express the thanks of all in our villages to the many people who have continued to work in support of us, sometimes at personal cost to themselves; they are too many to mention individually, but locally they include all NHS staff, those who work in Uffington Post Office and Stores, Uffington Primary School, and particularly all those who volunteered in the very early days of the first lockdown to form the 'UBW Covid Support Group'. The Support Group are (they are still there) local residents who happily took on the job of looking after any elderly, shielding, vulnerable people who happened to live close to them, who were self-isolating, without family or friends to help with shopping, or anybody just to have a chat with, from time to time.

A few words on some of the above Objectives:

Climate change. The pandemic has diverted attention away from this very important topic, but we stand ready to support worthwhile initiatives in any way that we can at a local level.

Planning. It is heartening to see, and proves how worthwhile the effort was, that the policies of the Uffington and Baulking Neighbourhood Plan are being taken into account by the Vale District Council as well as ourselves in assessing all planning applications in the village. Planning applications under consideration are listed on the agenda and discussed at Council meetings and the results are published in the Minutes, on the website and in the Courier.

S106 funding.

- In the last year, we are very pleased to have been able to support the Uffington Community Garden in their installation of a large new greenhouse, to which the White Horse Show Trust also made a generous contribution.
- We were also pleased to assist the Uffington Football Club with the purchase of a new mower – to be seen in action on the Jubilee Field and Sports Club field during the summer.
- We are currently working on a project to improve Uffington Footpaths 387/ 18, 19 and 27, with the installation of kissing gates to replace the existing stiles. These footpaths are used by many local people and visiting walkers to get from the village to the Uffington White Horse, Uffington Castle, The Ridgeway and Waylands Smithy and for circular walks via Woolstone, Fawler and Kingston Lisle. At the time of writing, it is good to be able to report that the funding package has been agreed, 13 kissing gates have been ordered and a local fencing contractor has been appointed to install them. A full report will appear in a future edition of the Courier after we have completed the project.

Communications. We are always conscious of the need to make sure we communicate enough (but not too much!) to residents. We do this through the weekly newsletter, the website, the notice board at the Shop, the Welcome Note to new residents and the quarterly Courier. Ideas for improvements are always welcome.

Update the website. We recently had to spend some money on updating the website, to comply with government legislation to make the website more accessible to all. Regular visitors may have noticed that the colour scheme has changed slightly to make it easier to read for those with colour impaired vision.

Emergency Plan. Despite some scepticism about the value of this Plan, we are required to have one and after some years of talking about it, an Emergency Plan for the village has been written and approved by the Emergency Planning team at Oxford County Council. It is very unlikely that any such plan should turn out to be perfectly tailored and appropriate for the emergency which actually happens, but a flexible 'template' will give the Parish Council and other key people involved a head start in dealing with an emergency. At a time when the normal way of life may be disrupted, people injured and / or in a state of shock, and when you get personally involved, and under stress, it can be difficult to think logically. Experience has shown that businesses and communities which have spent time planning and preparing for an emergency are better able to cope and recover more quickly. Communications are vital and our Emergency Plan therefore contains a lot of personal information so that those concerned stand a good chance of being able to speak with each other in what may be a confused situation. For GDPR reasons, the Plan will not be published on the website in order to protect this personal information. If you feel you have equipment or skills which may be useful in an emergency and would like to have this recorded in the Plan, please contact any member of the Council.

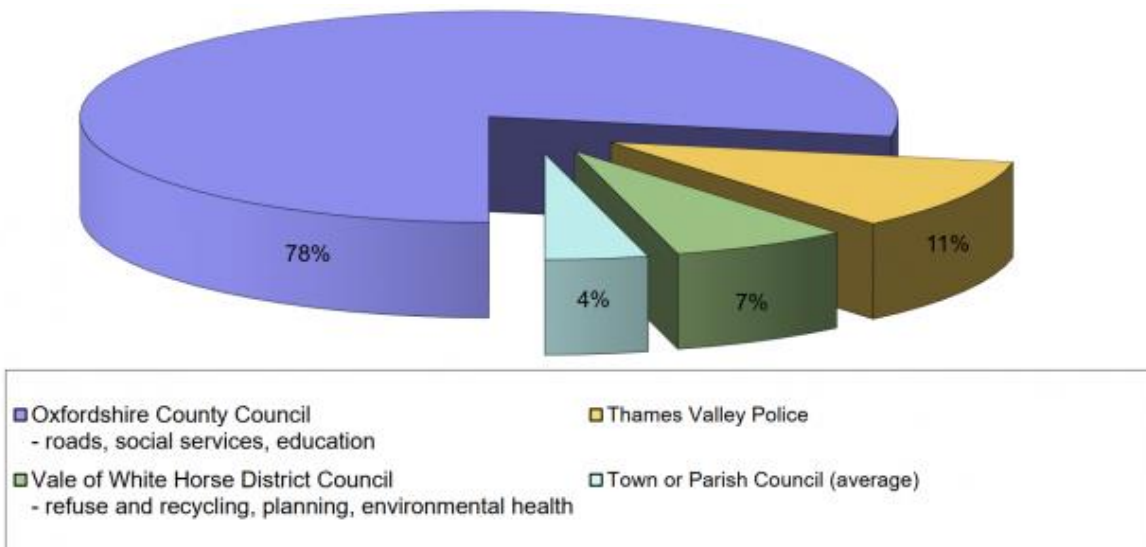
Simon Jenkins
April 2021

Section 2 - from January 2021

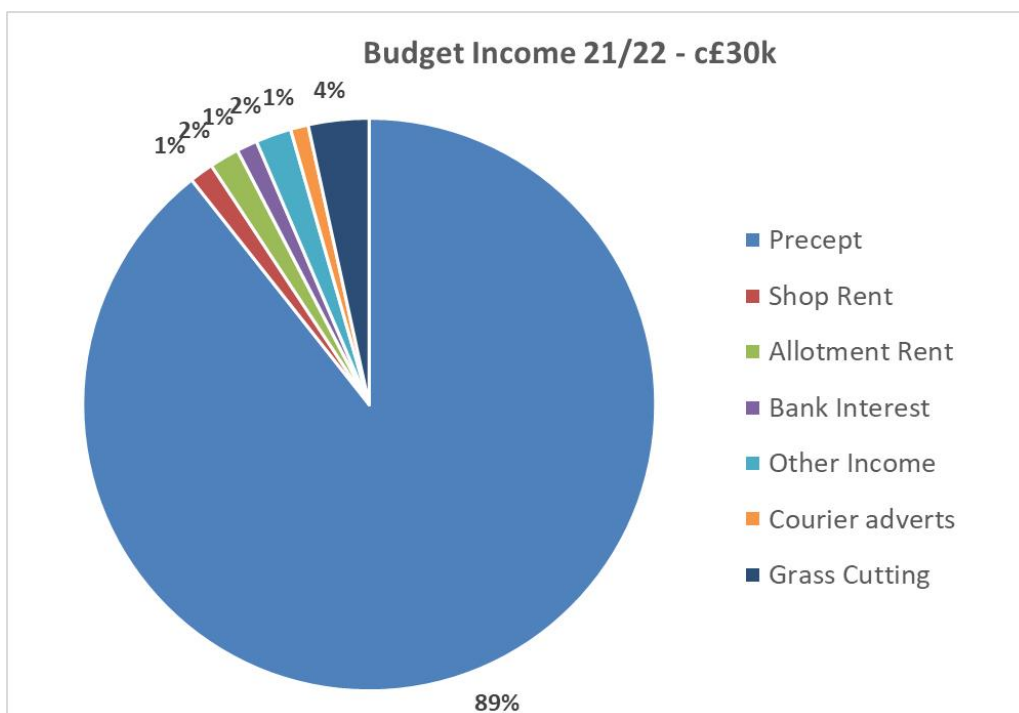
As mentioned above, Mike Oldnall took over as Chair in January 2021 and he would like to thank Simon for all his hard and tireless work over the past 6 years which has resulted in a wide range of improvements to the facilities in and around the village.

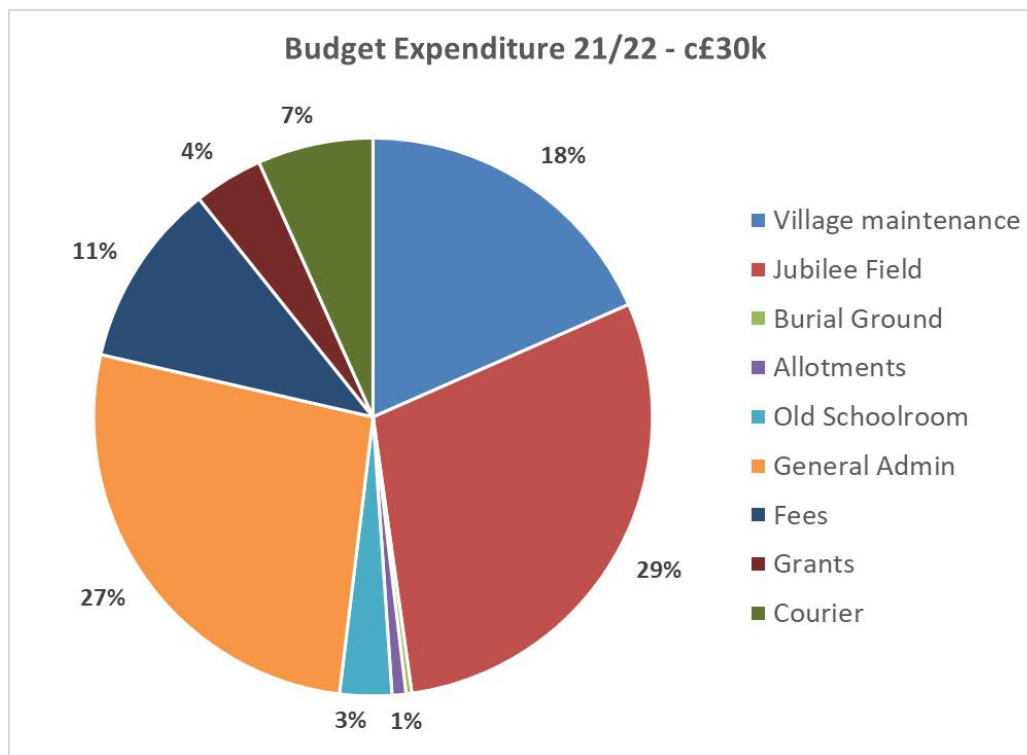
Chairman’s Report for 2021/22

Finance. The Council set its budget in January having decide to keep the precept at the same level as for 202/21. Whilst the precept, which is less than 5% of your Council tax, is usually increased to at least keep pace with inflation it was decided that, in the current situation and as the other elements (District, County and Police) of the precept would inevitably increase, the level would not be increased.



The breakdown of the budget income and expenditure is shown on the 2 graphs below.





Aims and Objectives. The ongoing objectives remain very much the same as previous years but currently with three specific objectives for 2021/22:

- Continue to provide support for local Covid-19 activities
- Complete the kissing gates project
- Improve broadband in Uffington

As the lockdown is eased and other things become necessary, or ideas come forward, these objectives may need to be expanded. Below is more detail on the 3 objectives above:

- **Covid-19.** Whilst we all hope that the impact of Covid-19 will reduce significantly during the coming year, there may well be a need to provide ongoing support for those affected. As stated above, the local Support Group is still in existence and its members have confirmed that they remain ready to assist as necessary. One of the most visible signs of the pandemic is the sanitiser bottles and signs on the children's playground. It remains one of our primary aims to keep this popular and heavily used facility open as long as possible and we urge all users to observe the latest regulations so that it can remain open as long as possible.
- **Kissing Gates.** Simon has volunteered to continue managing the kissing gates project mentioned above – a project which has been almost 2 years in the making – so far! Hopefully this year will see it completed – weather and funding permitting.
- **Broadband Improvement.** Uffington received its first 'fibre' broadband in 2018 and this has proved its worth, especially during the pandemic. The pandemic has also highlighted the limitations of the current system, especially for those forced to work at home. With the next generation of fibre broadband (fibre right into individual premises) becoming available a project has just started to look at the options and get sufficient commitment to make it economically viable. Further information will be made available over the coming weeks. The first action will be to hold a public (Zoom) meeting on 28 April at 7:30pm.

Two other aspects of the Council's work also deserve a specific mention:

Traffic Calming. Due to the ongoing complaints received about traffic speeds in the village, the Council continues to pursue a range of initiatives to address this:

- Current measures include the 20mph school signs, the vehicle activated sign on the Fawler Road and 30mph 'roundels' on some approaches. We previously had a Neighbourhood Speedwatch team of volunteers but this has had to be suspended pending approval of a new handheld device by Thames Valley Police as part of their relaunched [Community Speedwatch](#) programme.
- We have recently added a moveable vehicle activated sign that, in addition to showing a coloured 'face' and vehicle speed, also records the speed of every passing vehicle. This data will allow us to identify peak times and locations where vehicles regularly travel at excessive speeds. We plan to use this data to target the Neighbourhood Speedwatch radars once these have been approved. Annex A is an example of the type of information available.
- Finally, we will monitor the National/County initiative '20's Plenty' which hopes to introduce 20mph limits in all towns and villages across the county.

And Finally - **Village Maintenance.** A significant part (almost 50%) of our expenditure is on village and Jubilee Field maintenance and it is probably the most visible aspect of what we do. As part of our ongoing maintenance of the Jubilee Field, more of the new hedge, started last year, has been planted along Upper Common Lane to replace the overgrown tangle that was there. This has been planted with native species to encourage wildlife. I, on behalf of the Council and all villagers, would like to thank the 'Army' of volunteers who help to keep the village looking so clean and tidy – clearing the streams, litter picking, mowing small areas of grass, trimming hedges – the list goes on. I won't mention anyone by name but it really does make a very visible difference. If it wasn't for these volunteers, who aren't getting any younger(!), we would have to spend even more on buying in these services.

Mike Oldnall
April 2021

OPEN FORUM

