

**East Hagbourne Parish Council  
(EHPC)**

**Minutes of the Parish Council meeting duly convened and held on  
Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> September 2019**

**1) ATTENDANCE, APOLOGIES, DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST AND VACANCIES.**

Present were Chairman I. Duff, Vice Chairman D. Button, Councillors D. Rickeard, C. Gover, P. Dixon, J. Elliott and C. Shaikh, County Councillor S. Clarke and District Councillors J Murphy and A-M Simpson.

In attendance: L. Lloyd (Parish Clerk) plus one member of public.

No apologies were received.

I. Duff indicated there is 1 vacancy for a parish councillor.

**2) PUBLIC FORUM AND QUESTIONS: NONE**

**3) REPORTS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLOR AND DISTRICT COUNCILLOR:**

S. Clarke confirmed that it has been a quiet period for the county council and as such he had nothing to report.

A-M Simpson provided a report which was circulated prior to the meeting (see attachment 2). The District Councillor Grant Scheme was discussed briefly, and both A-M Simpson and J Murphy advised that it was best to put in any requests early for consideration. I Duff queried what amount was considered a reasonable request, and it was confirmed that it depends on other applications within the district. Applications should be made online.

J. Murphy had nothing to report.

**4) CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 25<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2019:** The minutes of the meeting of 25<sup>th</sup> July were approved and signed.

**5) ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

**2017-09-04: Progress St Anne's Court Transfer:** L. Lloyd reported that Didcot Town Council (DTC) have now requested a quote from OCC Solicitors. It has been made clear that EHPC will need a clear written statement that full responsibility for the land was passed to DTC, as well as the land transfer documentation.

**2018-04-10: Traffic signs by War Memorial:** C. Shaikh reported that following a meeting with I. Duff and J Beale, the sign arrival is still pending although J. Beale assured councillors that it would be worth the wait.

**2019-03-01: Road Safety and Traffic Calming:** C. Shaikh reported that a meeting has been held with J. Beale resulting in the following: The hedge cutting at Grange Farmhouse is considered to be a satisfactory improvement to the road visibility; J. Beale confirmed the line painting is on the OCC waiting list but has not been scheduled; there is no given timescale

for this to be completed; the road resurfacing at Blewbury Road/Lower Cross is not yet on a waiting list, but it was confirmed that it would not make sense to paint the road until the resurfacing work had taken place.

**2019-04-03: Main Road 20mph speed limit:** I. Duff confirmed that following the aforementioned meeting with J. Beale the decisions that are required for the speed surveys to proceed are:

Agreement of where the Parish Council would like the 20mph speed limit to start and finish along Main Road – there was discussion regarding the likely speed of traffic at Manor Lane where the speed limit should commence, and also regarding Harwood Road, as if this falls within the 20mph zone either an additional speed survey would be needed or 30mph signage would need to be installed at the junction of Harwood Road/Main Road.

D. Button expressed concern over the speeds between Kingsholme and Lower Cross.

After further discussion, I. Duff proposed that the council proceed with two speed surveys, one at Parsonage Close, and a second between the school and Manor Lane. All councillors present approved this.

It was agreed that a letter would be drafted to OCC to send with the speed survey request, making it clear that the school position and the new development next to the village hall should be taken into consideration when assessing the results.

It was agreed that at this stage the planned Community Speedwatch monitoring would provide useful data for New Road and Blewbury Road and therefore paid surveys were not required at these locations at this time.

**2019-04-04 Village Gateways:** C. Shaikh presented the costings for village gateways to replace the existing signage at the three entry points to the village. It was noted that the gateways are most effective if placed right next to the road, giving the impression that the road narrows. This is not possible at the New Road location due to the footpath. The total cost is c. £6,000. D. Rickeard spoke in favour of the gateway proposal. C. Gover questioned whether the existing signs could be re-used to save money. It was also noted that the Main Road location was not immediately viable due to the new development and possible addition of a footpath to the cemetery/railway bridge. It was agreed that C. Shaikh would further investigate the cost of the signage and also clarify with J. Beale regarding the font – although S. Clarke confirmed that this should not be an issue as DTC installed their own signage without any problems.

**2019-04-01: Parish Council Email List:** I. Duff confirmed that the list is currently being advertised in the Parish Magazine, and on the village Facebook page to garner interest. There has been a limited response so far.

**2019-04-02: Village Hall Defibrillator:** L. Lloyd reported that the defibrillator is now in situ at the village hall, and registered with South Central Ambulance Service. There is a minor issue regarding the power for the lighting in the cabinet which is being resolved by the village hall handyman.

**2019-04-05 Pavilion Lease Agreement:** D. Rickeard reported that SODC Grants Team have prepared instructions that have been passed to their Legal Team, but they have not so far responded. It was noted that it may be necessary for a solicitor to be appointed if any additional work on the grant agreement is necessary.

**2019-05-02 Neighbourhood Plan website migration:** See 6.e

**2019-06-01 Flood Group Assistance- neighbour maintenance:** I. Duff reported that the householder requested to clear their section of Hakka's Brook has employed a contractor who has done some work to clear the vegetation, however it is not very thorough and will need continued maintenance. This will need careful monitoring and ongoing communication with the owners.

It was agreed that items for discussion would be addressed out of sequence for the benefit of the County and District Councillors present.

## **6) ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/DECISION**

**6.h) SODC Local Plan:** I Duff reported that a Press Release from SODC this afternoon confirms that officers from MHCLG have offered to explore what options may exist regarding the local plan. Discussions will take place over the next couple of weeks between SODC and MHCLG, recognizing democratic timescales, pressures and the shared desire to maintain existing Growth Deal commitments. A-M Simpson confirmed she has not had a chance to speak with other Liberal Democrat/Green Councillors since the statement was released, The Sandringham Road development application was discussed. I. Duff noted that when the local plan was submitted, larger applications such as Taylor Wimpey were withdrawn, as they were not on allocated sites on the submitted plan. If the plan is withdrawn the £200 million Housing and Infrastructure Fund (HIF) will also be lost. J. Murphy stressed how difficult it is to fight Green Gap developers, and expressed concern over the infrastructure which is already at gridlock. J. Murphy explained that an independent inspector would make the decision on which sites are strategic. She said that if the Emerging Local Plan were withdrawn, it could mean that Hagbourne triples in size because, if speculative plans go to appeal, the Neighbourhood Plan won't hold weight if the current plan is not approved. The cost implications of fighting the speculative developers are also very significant. The HIF monies is vital for infrastructure in and around Didcot. Another crossing of the Thames would be a much-needed solution to ease the pressures on the A34 and other routes to Oxford.

J. Murphy noted that there are three upcoming meetings at which it would be beneficial for councillors to attend and speak at: Scrutiny meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> October, Cabinet meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> October and the full Council meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> October. The meetings are open to all so members of the public can speak too. A-M Simpson also encouraged the participation of speakers from the Parish at these meetings.

D. Button queried the lowering of house prices on Great Western Park to sell, and S. Clarke confirmed that this actually helps make more affordable housing available.

J. Murphy encouraged councillors to speak with the town councillors to ensure they understand the potential impact on East Hagbourne if the plan is rejected.

**6.i) Discussion re: attendance at Oxford Growth Board Meeting on Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> September:** I. Duff asked for volunteers to attend the meeting. P. Dixon agreed to attend.

**6.m) Oxfordshire Neighbourhood Plans Alliance (ONPA):** D. Rickeard confirmed that C. Topping will circulate the minutes of the ONPA meeting on receipt. I. Duff asked whether councillors wish to support the ONPA and become members. All councillors were in full support and membership was approved, with the cost of £50.00 to be on the October agenda. D. Rickeard confirmed that it was necessary to have a lead delegate as part of the membership and that C. Topping has volunteered. M. Wood and B. Barksfield have volunteered to be substitute representatives if required. The council approved all three representatives. P. Dixon expressed an interest in being involved but not as a substitute.

**7.e) Shoe Lane/The Croft Junction: Issues regarding parking and road surface repairs during construction work:** I. Duff confirmed that there was still some uncertainty over the responsibility for this. The Croft is a private road, but also an official footpath. However, SODC have agreed to add a sign at the noted footpath junction and this is now on order.

**6.n) MacTaggart and Mickel:**

**i) EHPC response to the amended P/19/S0357/RM application:** I. Duff reported that EHPC responded to the amended planning application highlighting the areas of ongoing concern, but the general feeling is that M&M are maintaining good discussion with EHPC.

**ii) Feedback from the visit to the M&M Milton-under-Wychwood site:** I. Duff reported that councillors met the Chairman of Milton-under-Wychwood Parish Council who confirmed that ongoing dialogue and some resultant amendments to the plans meant that he was pleased with how the site development had progressed. The site appeared to be well run and management of ground staff and safety measures were evident.

J. Murphy confirmed that keeping Harwood Road and Lake Road residents informed of any progress is key to ensure they feel well informed. It would be worth asking M&M to speak to the residents directly to show they are willing to listen, and also to ensure that residents know they can speak to EHPC about the development at any time.

**iii) To accept the offer from MacTaggart and Mickel for the extension to the Parish Council car park:** I. Duff outlined the proposal to transfer land to EHPC and asked if councillors were in agreement. All councillors were in agreement to accept the proposal, however it was noted that the use of the term 'village hall land' in the letter is inaccurate and needs amending. The Section 106 refers to the land inaccurately as 'village hall land', but D. Rickeard suggested that perhaps a footnote explaining the mistake would be the solution. It was agreed that I. Duff will draft a response to the offer letter. R. Elliott, Chairman of the Village Hall Committee, requested that the offer letter be emailed to him and agreed that the ownership of the land being transferred needed to be clear.

**iv) Presentation by Cotswold Archaeology:** I. Duff reported that Cotswold Archaeology are keen to do a presentation (through M&M) on their findings on the site. I. Duff proposed that a date in October/early November would be good. D. Rickeard proposed that it should be held at the village hall and R. Elliott agreed. It was agreed that it should be advertised to the general public, and local History Groups should be invited to attend. It was agreed that I. Duff would look at suitable dates. R. Elliott queried what would happen to the artefacts. J. Murphy suggested that a display could be set up in St Andrew's Church for viewing.

J. Murphy left the meeting at this point.

**6.a) Parish Council Car Park Lighting:** D. Button reported that the lighting was installed on 20/21 August. He noted that there is an outstanding query over the shields, which do not appear to have been fitted, and that L. Lloyd has emailed to clarify the situation regarding this. I. Duff queried the timings of the lighting, and D. Button confirmed that they are currently switched off at midnight. There have been no information on how to change the timing controls, and it was agreed that L. Lloyd would enquire about this.

**6.b) Parish Council Car Park usage and management:** I. Duff discussed signage as the current sign is completely hidden by the hedge and has no rules listed. J. Elliott spoke against the idea of 'no overnight parking' as there are organized trips that pick up at the village hall and attendees leave their vehicles in the car park. In principle, it was agreed that a new sign is required. D. Rickeard proposed that a separate smaller meeting should take place to discuss what actions should be taken, and it was agreed that D. Rickeard, D. Button and J. Elliott would meet for this purpose and present at the October meeting. D. Button stressed that the car par will need repainting due to the proposed E-W facing new spaces close to the car park entrance. I. Duff asked R. Elliott to check the village hall booking form to ensure that it stipulates clearly that booking of the village hall does not give exclusive use of the village car park, as a recent event seems to have believed this to be the case. I. Duff confirmed that the Parish Council will speak with the school about parking later in the term.

**6.c) Community Speedwatch:** L. Lloyd confirmed that the indemnity form has been signed and returned to Thames Valley Police and there has been recent communication confirming that additional training material will be provided. However, it has not yet been established when the equipment will be available to EHPC. Some volunteers have come forward

following entries in the Parish Magazine and on Facebook alongside R. Bartlett's own volunteer request, but more are needed. It was agreed that L. Lloyd would continue to chase for information.

**6.d) Dog Waste Bins:** L. Lloyd reported that no progress has been made with this over the summer period. A-M Simpson confirmed she has not followed this up and it was agreed that L. Lloyd would send information to A-M Simpson to follow up.

**6.e) Neighbourhood Plan including:**

**Approval of website migration costs quoted by Dark White Digital as outlined below:**

**Formation of new folders to contain the documentation at a cost of £105.00**

**Migration of all documents at a cost of £100.00**

D. Rickeard proposed that the structural and migration costs be accepted at a cost of £205.00, and this was approved. D. Rickeard proposed that additional documentation not essential for viewing should be retained on the council computer and backup drive. This was also approved.

**6.f) Village Tidiness:** No specific items for discussion.

**6.g) Main Road 20mph Speed Limit:** See comment under actions from previous meetings

**6.j) Bench Refurbishment:** C. Shaikh confirmed that there has been no further progress on this, and proposed that the level of work required should be contracted out. It was agreed that C. Shaikh and D. Rickeard will walk around the village and obtain a quote for the work to present at the October meeting.

**6.k) Cemetery Database Hours – To approve payment of work on the cemetery database as a cost separate to the clerk's monthly salary, as proposed at the 25<sup>th</sup> July meeting:** D. Button reported that M. Butler of West Hagbourne Parish Council is in agreement that the Cemetery Database implementation should be paid separately to the clerk's standard salary. 9.5 hours work has been completed so far, and D. Button proposed and the council agreed that this should be included in the clerk's October pay. L. Lloyd confirmed that there was likely a total of 45 hours work involved. It was confirmed that these costs would be against the Cemetery project account.

**6.l) Web image folders** – to approve the cost of \$25 (converted to £ at time of payment) to increase the number of folders for cataloguing website imagery: C. Gover explained the need for additional folders, and asked for approval of the \$25 annual fee. This was approved. D. Button wished to record his appreciation for the efforts of C. Gover with the website.

S. Clarke left the meeting at this point.

## **7) Items for Report**

**a) Planning Applications:** I. Duff reported briefly on planning applications that have been submitted since the last Parish Council meeting:

P19/S2502/O Sandringham Road – while this is outside the parish, I. Duff proposed that EHPC should post a comment as the development would have a big impact on the village and subsequent planning applications. P. Dixon and C. Shaikh will take the lead on this, with P. Dixon to draft a response and I. Duff to approve prior to submission. D. Button suggested looking at the Persimmon application for historical reference. Concern regarding the flats which would be knocked down as part of this proposal were discussed, as there is no mention of rehoming residents.

P19/S1268/FUL 56 Blewbury Road – demolition of bungalow and erection of 2 new dwellings. This has been granted planning permission with a number of conditions.  
P19/S2476/HH (also P19/S2477/LB) Blewbury Mill – Alterations and extension to listed building – the council had no objections.  
P19/S2550/HH 3 Kingsholme Close – A rear extension to replace a conservatory and brick store – I. Duff proposed a response of no objection to this application and the council agreed. L. Lloyd to post comment.

**b) East Hagbourne Sport and Recreation Committee (EHS&RC):** D. Rickeard reported that he has received a letter from SODC regarding polling stations. Both D. Rickeard and R. Elliott proposed that when elections affect both East and West Hagbourne the preferred location should always be the village hall. The council agreed, and D. Rickeard confirmed that he will email SODC to confirm this, copying in R. Elliott and L. Lloyd.  
D. Button circulated the 5 year cumulative accounts which show that EHS&RC accounts are healthy. D. Button confirmed that he was contacted in August by SODC and has confirmed that EHS&RC wish to continue to pay no business rates.  
D. Rickeard queried the cost assigned to electrical repairs and D. Button will check as this may have been incorrectly allocated. I. Duff thanked D. Button and D. Rickeard for their continued efforts in looking after the Pavilion and Recreation Ground.

**c) Cemetery Committee Report:** D. Button confirmed that he is currently reviewing the regulations which have been amended by L. Lloyd.

**d) Upper Cross: Update on the incident on 24<sup>th</sup> May:** L. Lloyd reported that the repairs have been completed and Grundon have paid the stonemason directly. This is now resolved. I. Duff did query whether some additional posts should be installed to protect the vulnerable corners.

**8) Correspondence:** L. Lloyd reported that a Lake Road resident had emailed regarding new graffiti under the railway bridge. Following discussion, it is not clear where the responsibility for the railway bridge lies, and it was agreed that L. Lloyd would send the details to S. Clarke (and copy in A-M Simpson) to establish what could be done.

## 9) Finance Report.

Finance Report: Annual Parish Council Meeting 12th September 2019						
Payee	Item	Cheque Number	Amount	VAT	Total	Date
a) Payments since last meeting						
Grundon Waste Management	Cemetery Bin June	DD	51.14	8.52	51.14	24-Jul-19
L Lloyd	July Salary	102671	558.54		558.54	31-Jul-19
EDGE IT Systems Limited	Annual Fee	102672	237.6	39.6	237.6	1-Aug-19
EHS & RC	Meeting Room Hire 20/6 (PC and Planning) and 25/7 (PC)	102673	75		75	1-Aug-19
BGG Garden and Tree Care Limited	July Village cut 20/7 and St Annes Playground 20/7	102674	330	55	330	1-Aug-19
Dark White Digital	August Web hosting	102675	30		30	1-Aug-19
Castle Water Limited	July Allotment water	102676	18.14	3.02	18.14	8-Aug-19
J Taylor	Bench Installation	102677	512		512	8-Aug-19
Hagbourne Village Hall	meeting room hire Feb-July	102678	88.7		88.7	20-Aug-19
SODC	Dog Bin Emptying 01/04/2019 - 30/06/2019	102679	165.77	27.63	165.77	20-Aug-19
SODC	Uncontested Election Fee 2019	102680	100		100	22-Aug-19
Grundon Waste Management	July Bin Collections	DD	48.48	8.08	48.48	28-Aug-19
L Lloyd	August Salary	102681	558.54		558.54	31-Aug-19
Playsafety Limited	Annual RoSPA Inspection	102682	94.8	15.8	94.8	1-Sep-19
Dark White Digital	September web hosting	102683	30		30	6-Sep-19

b) Receipts since last meeting			
From	Item	Amount	Date
AA Payne	Allotment Rent 2019/20 - Plot	20.00	01/07/2019
Tonks Brothers	Freda Dever Interment and second inscription on memorial - CM30	190.00	05/08/2019
Mr S Corrigan	second inscription on memorial C80	25.00	06/08/2019
M J Didcock Funeral Services	F Murphy EROB and Full Burial F169	600.00	06/08/2019
Tonks Brothers	Freda Dever Interment and second inscription on memorial - CM30 - additional £5.00 to make up to correct fee total	5.00	07/08/2019
Reeves Memorials	Newport Memorial CM63	85.00	24/08/2019
c) Accumulated Account Balances (reconciled as of last bank statement through 29/08/2019)			
Barclays Bank Accounts (2)	£46,512.02		
d) The Special Project Balances (as of 25/07/2019) are:			
Neighbourhood Plan		£2,740.78	
Planned Development Support Fund		£5,303.15	
Cemetery		£8,071.24	
Community Infrastructure Levy Fund 1	£2,090.82		Received 24/10/18 so requires spending by 23/10/23
Community Infrastructure Levy Fund 2	£2,458.47		Received 24/04/19 so requires spending by 23/04/24
	£4,549.29		
Expenditure - Village Car Park Lights	2643.32	£1,905.97	New balance of CIL funds
		<u>£18,021.14</u>	

I. Duff queried the Grundon bin costs and D.Button clarified that these were being paid from the Cemetery Fund.

I. Duff also queried the CIL funds, as some of this has now been spent, the remaining balance is from CIL Fund 2 with a spending deadline of 23/04/24.

I. Duff also queried the RoSPA Inspection. The inspection was completed at the end of July, after the last Parish Council meeting and D. Rickeard confirmed that it was a good report with only minor action points required. D. Rickeard agreed that he would send round a summary to all councillors.

#### 10) Items for report and inclusion on the 10<sup>th</sup> October agenda:

A-M Simpson extended her apologies for the 10<sup>th</sup> October as she will be attending the District Council meeting. J. Elliott also extended apologies for the October meeting.

The council would like the following on the October agenda:

- ONPA – Formal approval of the £50.00 subscription fee.
- Bench Refurbishment – quote
- Parish Council Car Park

The meeting closed at 10.20pm. The next meeting is on the 10<sup>th</sup> October at the Pavilion.

Signed.....Dated.....

## ATTACHMENT 1: ACTION LIST

Action No	What	Who	Status
2017-09-04	Progress St Anne's Court Transfer	LL	In Progress
2018-04-10	Traffic signs by War Memorial	ID/CS/LL	In Progress
2019-03-01	Road Safety and traffic calming	CS	In Progress
2019-04-01	Parish Council Email circulation list	LL	In Progress
2019-04-02	Village Hall Defibrillator	LL	Complete
2019-04-03	Main Road 20mph speed limit	ID/LL	In Progress
2019-04-04	Village Gateways	CS	In Progress
2019-04-05	Pavilion Lease Agreement	DR	In Progress
2019-05-02	Neighbourhood Plan website migration	DR/CG	In Progress
2019-06-01	Flood Group Assistance – neighbour maintenance	DR/ID	Ongoing
2019-09-01	Defibrillator Training Sessions	LL	In Progress
2019-09-02	Parish Council Car Park Extension	ID/LL	In Progress

## ATTACHMENT 2:

<b>Title</b>	District Councillor's Report
<b>Author</b>	Cllr Anne-Marie Simpson
<b>Meeting</b>	East Hagbourne Parish Council
<b>Date</b>	12 <sup>th</sup> September 2019

### Emerging Local Plan 2034 (ELP2034)

The leader of the council and cabinet members have had meetings with members of Oxfordshire County Council, Highways and Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), regarding the impact on the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) of withdrawing the Emerging Local Plan 2034 from the inspectors. We are still awaiting clear answers.

ELP2034 was submitted in March and currently remains at the examination stage. Planning inspectors due to carry out a public examination of the plan have provided an initial list of questions and comments. This is the normal first stage of the process for the examination of the Local Plan and the list of questions is available on the council's website [http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/ccm/support/dynamic\\_serve.jsp?ID=1105149597&CODE=EA757EA167A69C867C3FAB6F6934FF87](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/ccm/support/dynamic_serve.jsp?ID=1105149597&CODE=EA757EA167A69C867C3FAB6F6934FF87)

ELP2034 will come back to be considered by Council at the beginning of October.

### Councillor Grant Schemes

The councillor grant scheme can make a big difference to small projects. Each of the 36 district councillors in South Oxfordshire has a budget of £5,000 as part of the councillor grant scheme to help fund projects in their ward areas.

The individual councillor grant scheme has recently opened and is available to local 'not for profit' organisations (including parish councils) whose work benefits local residents. The funding is ideal for projects which are relatively low cost (between £500 and £5000) and are expected to be completed within a year.

This is the third year the scheme has run and previous projects which have received funding include:

- **AN OUTDOOR GYM IN EWELME**
- **A 'WALKING RUGBY' SCHEME FOR OLDER RESIDENTS IN DIDCOT**
- **NEW GOALPOSTS IN HENLEY**
- **SUPPORT FOR ACCESSIBLE BOAT TRIPS FOR WHEELCHAIR USERS IN WALLINGFORD**
- **MONEY TOWARDS A WILDFLOWER MEADOW IN BENSON**
- **A SENIOR CITIZEN CHRISTMAS LUNCH IN THAME**
- **A FREE CHILDREN'S PLAY AND ACTIVITY DAY IN WHEATLEY AND HOLTON**
- **REPAIR AND REUSE WORKSHOPS IN DIDCOT**
- **THE WALLINGFORD CARNIVAL**
- **DEFIBRILLATORS IN MAIDENSGROVE, PISHILL AND STONOR**
- **THEATRE ROOF REPAIRS IN THAME**
- **ENERGY EFFICIENT LIGHTING IN CHINNOR**

To make an application groups should get in touch with their local councillors (myself and Jane Murphy) as soon as possible and submit online via the council's website. For more information and to view the grant scheme's guidelines visit

<http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/community-advice-and-support/grants-and-community-loans>

The scheme closes 10 January 2020.

## **Audit of accounts and Budget 2020/21**

Our unaudited financial accounts for 2018/19 are now available online on our website.

<http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/about-us/how-we-work/our-finances/statement-accounts-0>

This year, our audited accounts were not available by the 31 July deadline due to a delay by our external auditors. They have written to both South and Vale councils in a joint letter to explain the reasons for the delay and have let us know that the audits will now take place later this month in September. Once the accounts are audited, we will publish them on our websites.

### **Budget**

The budgeting process begins this month and the council will begin drafting its new medium-term financial plan. The District, in common with councils across the country, is in difficult financial straits.

Over the past five years the council has been taking an average of £2m per annum from usable reserves to balance its budget. At this rate, the usable reserves will last seven years. David Turner, cabinet member with responsibility for finance, and William Jacobs, the council's head of finance, have asked for all cabinet members to work alongside heads of service to identify savings and potential ways of increasing revenue through fees and charges. New projects should seek external funding sources.

It should be noted that the average council tax charge in shire district councils for a Band D property is £186 compared to SODC which charges £122 for a Band D property.

### **Electric Blanket Testing**

As autumn approaches and temperatures fall, residents might think about getting out their electric blankets. Oxfordshire County Council Trading Standards and Fire & Rescue Service are offering free electric blanket tests. Safety test sessions take place in different locations around Oxfordshire and appointments need to be pre-booked by calling 01865 895999 or email [communityengagement@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:communityengagement@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

There is a session in Abingdon on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> October at Abingdon Fire Station, Ock Street, Abingdon, OX14 5DH.