



Minutes of a monthly business meeting of the West Oxfordshire Green Party

Tuesday, 3rd November 2020 at 8.30 pm
ONLINE

Present: Malcolm Brown (MB), Rae Cather (RC), Tim Eden (TE, Treasurer), Katy Jennison (KJ), Celia Kerslake (CK, Secretary/Membership secretary), Stuart Macdonald (SM), Helen Moore (HM), Frances Mortimer (FM, Deputy Chair), Andrew Prosser (AP), Julia Shay (JS), Barry Wheatley (BW, Chair).

Apologies: Helen Gavin (HG), Alma Tumilowicz (AT).

Item	Action by
<p>1. Attunement – omitted (as the meeting followed directly on from an EGM).</p> <p>2. Apologies had been received from Helen Gavin and Alma Tumilowicz.</p> <p>3. Minutes of 6 October meeting and matters arising</p> <p><u>Correction</u>; In the list of those present, “Macgregor” was corrected to “Macdonald”.</p> <p><u>Actions noted in minutes</u> (unless dealt with later in the agenda)</p> <p><u>Item 3: 4.2.2</u> BW, TE and FM had not yet had time to meet to review the budget set at the start of 2020. BW proposed that be done in the current week.</p> <p><u>Item 4.3</u> The draft joint welcome letter to new members from OGP and WOGP had been finalised and approved by Kate Robinson (OGP chair). It was now ready for us to send out.</p> <p><u>Item 5.3.1</u> BW had not sent the lists of members and supporters in their wards to the ward organisers. [This had been a misunderstanding, as the work had not yet reached that stage.] What he had done was to send CK, who was going to act as the main communicator with the ward organisers, a spreadsheet showing our strong supporters and members throughout West Oxon, to facilitate her task of proposing a fair distribution of the wards between the six people we currently have registered as ward organisers.</p> <p>4. Officers’ and councillors’ reports</p> <p>4.1 Chair (BW) and Deputy Chair (FM)</p> <p>BW said this month a lot of time had been spent on the constitution, getting things in order so that when the time came for campaigning we could concentrate entirely on that. He and FM had also started working on media matters, and thanks to MB a couple of good press releases had been got out, one on Covid-19 (calling for the county to move into Tier 2) and the other on retrofitting homes. The first had had some take-up. Both were available for sharing on the news page of the OGP website.</p> <p>4.2 Treasurer (TE)</p> <p>TE, who had been co-opted to the post at the last meeting, said he was still in the process of acquiring access to all the relevant accounts, and the retiring Treasurer had compiled this month’s report. With little movement in the past month or so the balance on 2 November stood at £2671.87. TE had an official email address, which he would communicate to CK for display in appropriate places. He welcomed questions from members and would be happy to help in any way he could.</p>	<p>BW, TE and FM to meet to review budget.</p> <p>TE to communicate his official email address to CK and CK to post it appropriately.</p>

4.3 Membership secretary (CK)

CK apologised for not having got the welcome letter out yet, and said she hoped to do it in the next few days. [Follow-up note: letters went out on 7 November to the members who had joined since July.]

4.4 Witney Town Councillor (AP)

- Climate, Biodiversity and Planning Committee: A lot of big planning applications going through, notably the East Witney development – 495 houses in the Cogges area. The committee has deferred a decision while cemetery access is being sorted out. But AP was pleased about the town council's positive response so far on green issues such as cycle access into town. No movement on the North Witney development yet, but that was expected soon.
- Sport and Play Committee: The committee was trying to get funding for a new path across one of the playing fields included in the budget for next year. This would encourage more walking and cycling. They were also pressing for new play equipment.

5. 2021 Election campaign

5.1 General issues

5.1.1 Nominations

- FM screen-shared a list of potential candidates for the parish, town and district council elections in May 2021, which represented the latest stage of her work with BW to identify a suitable candidate for each seat that is up for election and to verify that person's willingness to stand. In the case of the district council, these would be paper candidates except in the case of Witney North and Eynsham. However, they were always on the lookout for people who were interested in being more serious candidates in the long term, and she would be in favour of giving priority to such candidates.

This was not yet a final list. Ideally, the final list of candidates should be ready for approval at the January business meeting. Any comments or suggestions should be submitted to BW/FM before that.

- SM drew attention to the key role of the Elections Liaison Officer in overseeing the collection of nomination signatures for each candidate and ensuring that the forms are submitted on time to the district council offices. He said WOGP had often fallen down on these procedural matters in the past with negative consequences. He also advocated following the practice of other parties in collecting 20-30 nominations per candidate rather than just the prescribed 10, because this looked impressive on the lists voters see as they enter the polling station.
- FM said we must renew our efforts to fill the post of Elections Liaison Officer. Although in the absence of a dedicated officer she and BW would do their best to perform the tasks involved, the two of them would be better used performing the duties attached to their own offices, and she was also worried about the Election Liaison Officer's tasks falling between the cracks.
- AP wondered what Green Party procedure was for vetting candidates standing in local elections. He was worried about the possibility of someone putting themselves forward that we didn't really know, and something

FM to initiate a renewed search for someone to take on the role of Elections Liaison Officer

BW to consult DN about procedure for

We still lacked a mechanism for people to sign up to receive these e-newsletters. FM had been entering on NationBuilder the data of people whose email addresses we had obtained in the last couple of years from surveys and other activities. No e-newsletters had gone out yet, but the hope was that eventually they could be used in the gaps between the paper newsletters.

- Individual letters to the press: This point was raised by SM, who said that, with the honourable exception of KJ (whose letters he praised as “works of art” that were admired by people well beyond the Green Party), he thought no one had written a letter with a green tinge to the local press in the last 18 months or 2 years.

FM agreed on the usefulness of letters to the press, but pointed out that KJ had not signed hers as a member of the Green Party, and asked whether that was deliberate. KJ replied that she thought a letter had more impact if it did not appear to be partisan (a view endorsed by SM). But KJ added that she could perhaps bring the party in subtly by saying something like “This is what the Green Party does; why doesn’t everyone else?” Signing herself as a member of the Green Party would make the letter look like some sort of official communication, whereas she wanted to write as a member of the public.

FM fully took this point, but said it would be good if we as the Green Party, or perhaps Andrew, could be getting letters in there as well.

- ‘Activist’ space in the Witney Gazette: SM drew attention to the section of the WG immediately below the letters part, which used to be open only to councillors and our MP but is now open to activists from any party. He suggested we take advantage of that as well. AP very much agreed.
- Stunts? SM pointed out that on the day when Andrew’s article pressing for Tier 2 Covid measures got on to page 2 of the WG, the Labour Party were seen on the front page putting paper plates on Courts’ front door. We should make use of areas where we are strong, like air quality or river cleanliness, to devise attention-grabbing stunts to get us also some front page coverage. (Little ducks floating down the Windrush...?) AP said there were some ideas of this kind gently brewing...

5.3 District-wide preparation for county, district and town council elections in 2021

(Covered under 5.1.1.)

6. Reports on other issues, local campaigns and initiatives

6.1 West Oxon DC

6.1.1 Response to proposed changes to planning processes

AP confirmed that (as reported at last month’s meeting, Item 4.4) Witney Town Council had endorsed West Oxfordshire District Council’s critical response to the government’s proposed changes. And nationally other Green Parties and Green councillors had been making their voices heard on these issues.

6.2 Salt Cross Garden Village Area Action Plan

No discussion in absence of HG.

6.3 East Witney development – update

AP said there was a lot of detail on the energy side in the planning application for East Witney. The developers had committed to 30% renewables, which is more

ambitious than current legislation requires. They might possibly avoid gas central heating, which is not a requirement yet but will be when the Future Homes Standard comes in in the middle of the decade. So basically on the energy side the proposals for East Witney are pretty good compared with other proposals AP had seen. Being ambitious on energy was something that in earlier discussions the town council had pushed for – and it was satisfying to see the fact that we have a climate emergency actually referenced in these planning documents.

In answer to a question from CK about the provision of social housing within the plan, AP said the requirement that was being pushed for by WODC's planning officers was 40% affordable housing. The town council and WODC were pressing for a high proportion of that to be social housing. Interestingly also, out of the 495 houses 50 are to be self-build, which is quite distinctive and gives considerable flexibility as well.

7. Events and meetings

7.1 Future activities – suggestions

- Green homes, green jobs: Following the decision at the last meeting (Item 7.1) to organise a webinar on this theme, FM had written to Geordie Stewart of Cosy Homes Oxfordshire. He had agreed in principle to give a talk, but he seemed to be very busy and reluctant to commit himself to a date. After some discussion of whether it was worth going ahead with the idea, and if so, how, it was agreed that FM should ask Liz Reason if she would be prepared to give the main presentation in place of Geordie (with AP following on with a talk on the 'green recovery' aspect).
- National Green Party conferences: Liz Reason had sent a message to the WOGP email group saying that (i) there were going to be two crucial GPEW conferences in 2021, which promised to bring in much-needed changes to the party's governance arrangements; (ii) there should be some participation from WOGP; (iii) she would be happy to offer a session on "The joys and frustrations of GP conferences" to give us an insight into how these gatherings work. BW thought we should take her up on this, although he was not hopeful that there would be a big response.
- Climate Action Extended Briefing: FM said that Julian Dean, the GPEW's Climate Action Officer, had been in touch via Liz Reason to offer us a briefing on what a local Climate Action Plan should look like, how to measure the progress being made by our local councils and what further steps we can push for. AP said he was familiar with the material being disseminated by JD through the Association of Green Councillors, and it was very good indeed. FM and BW both said how useful it would be to receive an expert critique of the WODC's published Climate Action Plan. After considerable discussion, the idea of waiting for a volunteer to take on the organisation of such an event was abandoned in favour of BW and FM (yet again) picking up the baton. The preferred date was 19 November (third Thursday of the month), where it would replace Green Drinks, which had been very poorly attended (except by our core members) since it became 'virtual'.
- OGP quiz: TE mentioned that the next OGP quiz was due to take place on 21 November. Thanks to the involvement of Carl Kowalski (North Oxfordshire Green Party), who used to run a pub quiz, these were successful fundraising events (the last one raised £260) and had a social element to them. He suggested that if we failed to arrange an event for the 19th, we could put together a team for the quiz on the 21st.

FM to ask LR if she could do the retrofitting presentation

BW/FM to contact JD to ask if he could offer us his briefing on 19 November.

8. AOB

- SM said the county council had met that afternoon and passed a motion in support of a railway along the course of the A40, going past Salt Cross. It was the first time the county council had supported this idea. And it had a long way to go yet, because the district council, being interested only in getting the housing, is sure to oppose it.

Amazed delight was expressed at this news, and BW said we must look into it.

- FM raised again the OGP Policy Working Group (see 6 October minutes, Item 4.1) and said that she and BW had not been able to attend any of the subsequent meetings but had been following the correspondence. They felt that it would greatly benefit us to be involved in the development of county-wide positions on issues such as planning, because this would enable us to adopt a more radical stance on development applications, questioning the arguments about housing need rather than simply opposing plans on grounds of (e.g.) insufficient infrastructure.

BW said Mary Franklin (Secretary of OGP) had rung him today to say that the papers including the 12 policy headings were expected to be made public within a week or so, and there would then be an opportunity for branches to suggest members to contribute to the discussion of particular policy areas. FM said she thought only a two-week window was allowed for this. BW undertook to contact everyone who had been at tonight's meeting to see if they would be interested in taking part in some aspect of this policy work.

- FM mentioned the email notice that she (and presumably all other members of GPEW) had received today from Chris Williams (Head of Elections and Field Operations) about the **Campaign Academy**, billed as "the Green Party's brand new online training course, which will create the next team of organisers to win seats at the 2021 elections and beyond". This would be taking place over 3 days (6-9 December) and the deadline for applications was 10 November. FM said it would be "super beneficial" to have someone with that sort of training behind them, but neither she nor BW were hopeful of finding anyone able to give up that amount of time.
- AP mentioned some changes on WODC. There was a new Leader of the Council, Michele Meade (Con, Carterton South), [taking over from James Mills (Con, Bampton and Clanfield)]. A second ex-Labour councillor, Merilyn Davies, had joined the Conservatives to hold on to her seat in Freeland and Hanborough.
- TE said that as an OGP officer he was in regular contact with various OGP committees and knew that several of them (e.g the Elections Committee) were suffering from such a shortage of members that they were not able to act effectively. He appealed to WOGP members who felt they could spare even an hour or so a month to contact the convenor of a committee and offer to be the contact person between WOGP and that committee. We must remember that we are all members of OGP as well as our particular branch. The OGP committees exist to provide support to all parts of the county organisation, and if an OGP committee collapses each branch will feel the loss of that support.
- BW mentioned that OGP had recently lost two members of its management team through resignation: Robert Nixon, the Local Party Organiser (a paid

BW to contact active members about joining in OGP policy discussions on particular topics

post) and Kaddy Beck (Volunteers Coordinator), an elected officer. TE commented that everyone seemed to be going through something of a crisis of faith at the moment, and he didn't know why. SM said all branches, including WOGP, had problems in motivating members to contribute time and effort to the party. He suggested that elections were a good time to recruit active involvement from people who support the Green cause but are not party members. They may feel motivated to do something for the party at such times, while most established members feel they have done their bit by paying their subscriptions. BW said we must try to get our members much more engaged. CK said that's where the ward organisers come in, and promised to get the ward organiser list completed (see Item 3: [5.3.1](#) above).

CK to produce proposal for distribution of all West Oxon wards among ward organisers

9. Date and place of next meeting

Confirmed as Tuesday, 1 December, online 8-10 pm.