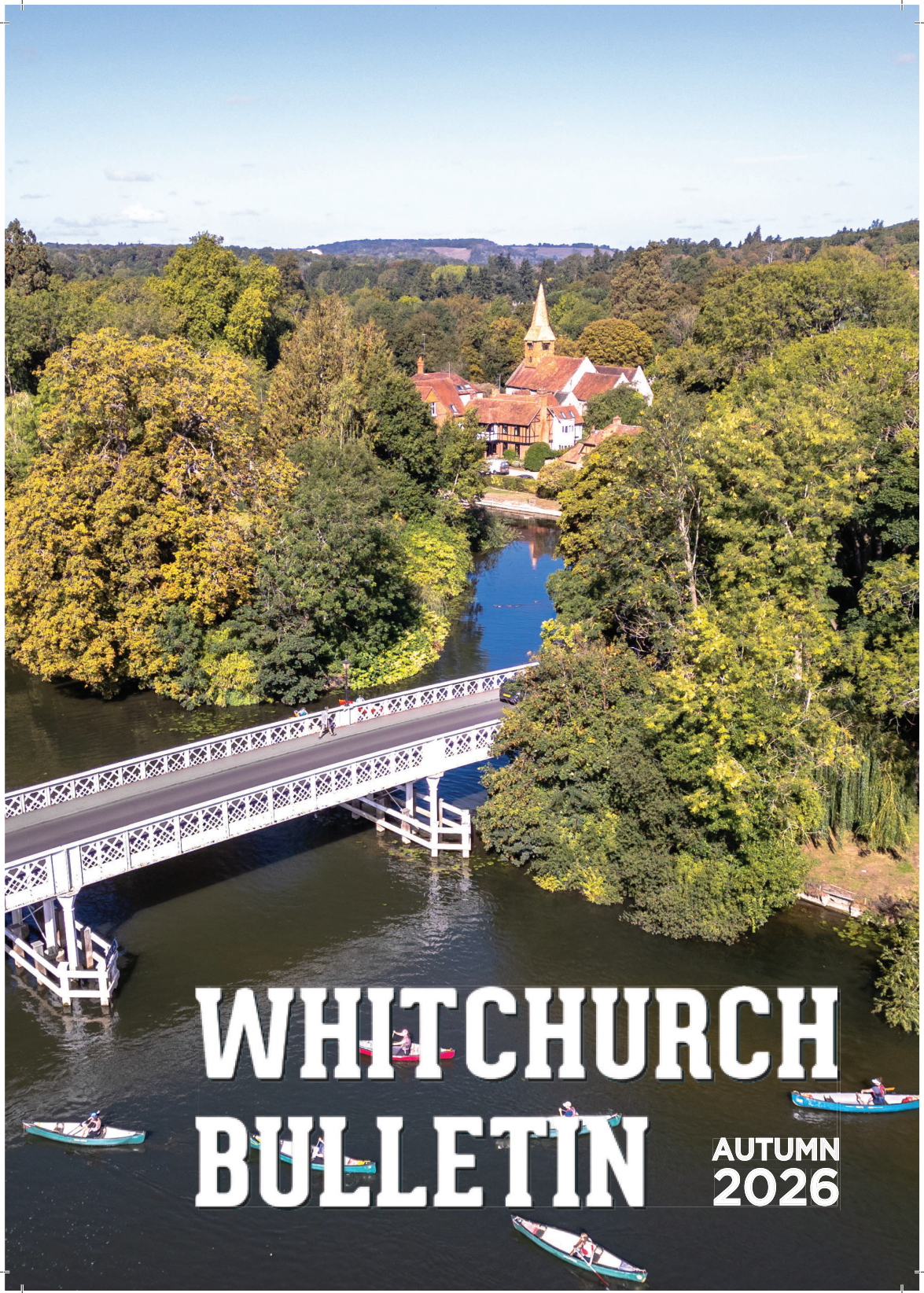


WHITCHURCH BULLETIN

AUTUMN 2026

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*OX10 0, OX10 6, OX10 9, OX11 0, OX11 9, OX49 5, RG18 0, RG18 9, RG20 6, RG20 7, RG20 8, RG4 7, RG4 9, RG7 5, RG7 6, RG8 0, RG8 7, RG8 8, RG8 9, RG9 4, RG9 5, RG9 6.

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CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE – OCTOBER 2026

I would like to start this edition of the Bulletin by honouring some of the many residents that have recently been helping our community to address issues as they come up around the village. When the Parish Council learns about issues, we can help make sure the right people get involved to address them. In many cases, the residents who raise the issues can also help to get them resolved. Related to this, I would like to draw your attention to the two vacancies we have for anyone looking to get more involved in our community. Details of both are provided separately in the Bulletin:

- Parish Clerk Vacancy – a paid position for someone with the right administrative, organisational and financial skills to replace our current Clerk Brian Inglis, who is sadly stepping back from his work as a Clerk. This will role will be advertised until the end of October with interviews to follow.
- Parish Councillor Vacancy – to replace Parish Councillor Paul O'Grady who is sadly moving with his family to another village in the area. Paul has been a very solid member of the Parish Council contributing in many ways for about five years. He has been especially valuable in the area of planning application reviews where he was able to draw on his professional experience. This role will be advertised until the end of November.

Recent Volunteer Activities:

- Memorial Plaques refurbished – Thanks to Gill Goodwin of the Green Team for refurbishing the three plaques by the cherry trees near the Village Green car park gate. Gill did this of her own initiative with the help of Pete Woolhouse and Charles Cotgreave to reinstall it.
- School sign cleared on Hardwick Road – Thanks to Mark Reynolds for helping to cut back the growth over the school crossing cautions and 20mph signs on Hardwick Road that were previously blocked by vines.
- Protruding bolt – Thanks to Melanie Hardwick for spotting a dangerous protruding bolt on the new gate at the top of Muddy Lane. There was a concern that it was about eye height for children using Muddy Lane. And thanks to John Woodings for cutting it down in size.
- Water Leak – Thanks to Rev. James Leach for identifying a leak on the new Village Green water infrastructure by the football net. This has now been repaired by the contractor that did the recent water infrastructure work.

Cover: Drone photo captures the completed Spire with Bridge & Mill Pond in foreground, courtesy of Jim Donahue

- **Removal of dangerous structure behind the Cricket Pavilion** – Thanks to Neil Huntington and Mark Dunstan for helping me to remove the unsafe corrugated iron structure and other debris behind the pavilion. At least three residents, including the Village Green exercise class teacher on the Village Green had raised concerns about the safety of the area behind the pavilion. We put the material in a skip and had it removed.
- **LED Street Light on during the daytime on Eastfield Lane** – Thanks to Susan Lee for raising this to me. Cllr Smith and I have in turn raised this as a FixMyStreet report to OCC.
- **Remembrance Sunday Traffic management** – Thanks to Cllr Bernarde Hyde and her husband Pete who have volunteered to stop the traffic flow at the upper narrows during the Remembrance Sunday ceremony planned for 8th November at the War Memorial at 11am.
- **Maintenance of the Maze** – We received a note of thanks to the Parish Council and the team looking after the maze and the good condition of a tree that was a memorial to former residents Susie and Andrew Seager. We passed this on to Sally and Pete Woolhouse. The tree continues to look good despite the recent drought and the cancellation of some Maze working parties this summer due to lack of growth.

Public Display Boards in the Village – Some of you will have heard that the Parish Council has recently become aware of regulations that limit the types of notices that can be posted in a Conservation Area. This policy applies to the two notice boards on the High Street that fall within the Conservation Area. The regulations state that advertisements in a Conservation Area should only support advertising for charitable purposes.

- We fully understand the feedback raised by some residents that the prime purpose of the noticeboards should be to support local services or events, particularly as not everyone has access to the internet or social media. We also understand that many local services that may be commercial in nature offer important services to residents and include classes and other events that foster our vibrant community spirit.
- The Parish Council is now investigating the feasibility of new noticeboards being relocated outside the Conservation Area—likely one at "the Cut" near Eastfield Lane and another one by the school at Muddy Lane. As these would not be in the Conservation Area, they would allow for commercial advertising, although there would still likely be some limits – focussing on local business and events, for example.

MP Surgery at Village Hall – I met with our MP Freddie van Mierlo who chose Whitchurch-on-Thames as one of his constituency surgeries in August. The meeting was also attended by County Cllr Maggie Filipova-Rivers and OCC Leader Tim Bearder. I raised several issues that they committed to help us with, some of which we are starting to see some movement:

1. **Condition of Hardwick Road**– The upper narrow section of the road is in bad shape due to the poorly repaired utility trenches several years ago that have been getting worse. I have identified several areas that need to be resurfaced, and OCC Highways have now recently sent an Inspector who made their own markings that they believe meet the pothole criteria. Whilst their markings are less than mine, I expect at least some improvements to the road in the coming weeks. And will keep pushing to get the area improved.
2. **Poor conditions of the B471 from Whitchurch Hill to Cray's Pond** – I raised my concerns about the condition of the road, which was redone with a "surface dressing" last June which many feel was not of good quality. You may remember the road was marked as unsafe during the recent hot summer. There were temporary signs cautioning skidding danger with reduced speed limits. As the Leader of OCC was at the meeting, he indicated that the work was under warranty and could be investigated. I am also discussing this with the Goring Heath Parish Council.
3. **SODC Flood Resource** – I have re-engaged with the SODC Flooding and Drainage Engineer who agreed to take advantage of the current dry conditions to try to insert a CCTV camera and clear the pipe under houses on Eastfield Lane as a starting point. This inspection had been tried unsuccessfully on two or three occasions since the flooding in 2014, so it is quite an achievement that the inspection was successful this time. Whilst we are still waiting for the official feedback from SODC, the good news is that it appears that no blockage was found. This rules out one of the suspected factors contributing to flood risks on Eastfield Lane and also reinforces our current strategy of limiting the water flow upstream of Eastfield Lane.
4. **Cedar Lodge noise issues** – This is an issue that is of ongoing nuisance to residents in the area surrounding Cedar Lodge since it has been opened over a year ago. Those living close to Cedar Lodge hear an ongoing sound that is reminiscent of an airplane in the distance. It is something that Cedar Lodge owners and SODC are ultimately responsible for with our primary contacts being our SODC Councillor Peter Dragonetti and Maggie, who is the leader of SODC. They have stated that they were working on this with SODC Planning Enforcement. I have recently chased the MP's Office for an update and the reply they forwarded from SODC Planning Enforcement was that they were still working to get a contractor in place to monitor the noise and assess the situation. This is sadly the same update residents have been getting for over two months.

LCWIP - I am working with the Goring Gap Active Travel Group as the coordinator for a new Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). The LCWIP will cover the area along the river between Wallingford on one side and Caversham and Sonning Common on the other.

- OCC has recently confirmed that £20,000 of funding is available to hire a consultant to simulate routes to prioritise walking and cycle journeys in the area.
- The scope would include Pangbourne and Streatley on the West Berkshire side, and potentially Purley and Tidmarsh.
- A key output would be a list of prioritised improvements in the area where improvements in cycling or walking routes could improve take-up of active travel in the area in the short, medium and long-term.
- I will provide more information on how residents can get involved in raising issues to be considered for the plan. Potential issues to be addressed could include issues such as improvements to the narrow access road and pavement on the Pangbourne side of the toll bridge and improvements to the route to Caversham via Hardwick and Mapledurham.

Community access to the Cricket Pavilion - You may have seen builder's vans by the cricket pavilion on the Village Green recently. The Cricket Club has refurbished the inside of the pavilion that has replaced the showers with a kitchen area and other refurbishments throughout, including new electrical infrastructure and replacement of the floor and some walls. The Parish Council is in discussion with the Cricket Club on how we can now make this upgraded facility available to community organisations for events on the Village Green. Please note that this is not a venue that would hold events on its own, but it would provide facilities such as a kitchenette, toilets, and electricity for events held outside on the Village Green during the warmer months. This would include events such as a Village Fete, School Sports Day and fundraising events for community organisations. Whilst we are still discussing the details, both sides seem committed to making this work so we are optimistic that it will be available for community events in the near future.

Eastfield Lane – Last but not least, since the Summer Bulletin, the work to resurface Eastfield Lane has been completed:

- This is clearly a significant and much needed improvement to the road used by many pedestrians and cyclists including parents and children attending the school. We received a lot of positive feedback on the work that was done.
- In addition to the new road surface, a lot of work has gone into improvements in the drainage at several points along the road, which along with the new kerbs, will help reduce flooding in an area that is very close to the flood plain.

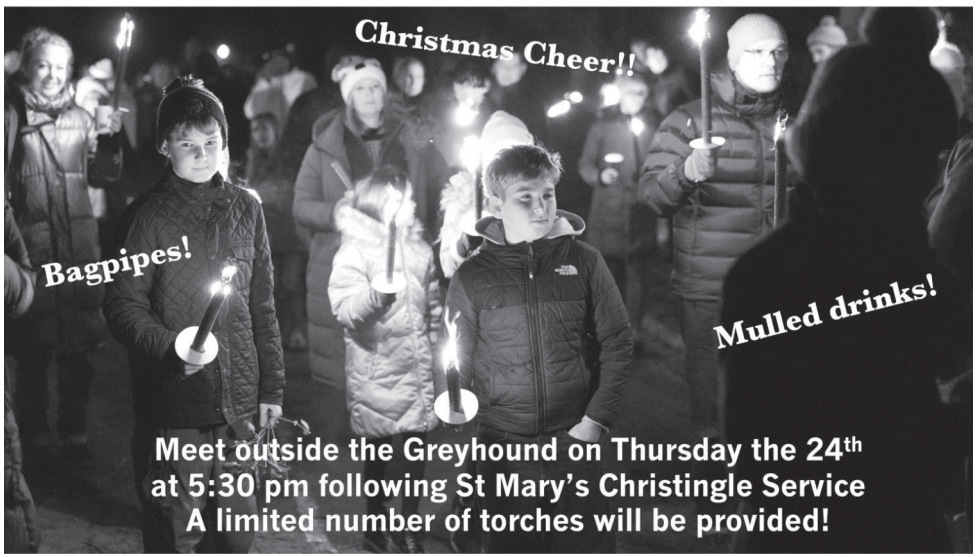
- Virtual footpaths were implemented at the Greyhound intersection of Hardwick Road a few days later. The Parish Council has been discussing this crossing with OCC Highways for several years and we were pleased to see it finally implemented. This was a bespoke solution designed and painted by the OCC Highways team. As it is unique to this intersection, it is understandable that there were questions about it by some residents. I have written a separate article later in the Bulletin to answer some of the questions we have had about it.



Kind regards,

Jim Donahue
Chairman, Whitchurch-on-Thames Parish Council

Join us for the Whitchurch-on-Thames Christmas Eve Torch Procession!



Whitchurch-on-Thames Parish Council Clerk Vacancy

Location: Primarily working from home apart from monthly Parish Council meetings and occasional meetings in the Village Hall.

Hours: 35 hours/ month – average of 1 day a week

Target Salary Scale: £16.89 – 19.47 per hour (SCP 18-25) – may have some flexibility depending upon existing experience.

Detail: The Parish Council is seeking a primarily home-based, part-time parish clerk, working an average of 8 hours per week, or 35 hours a month. The successful applicant will be responsible for organising monthly parish council meetings, maintaining accounts, supporting parish councillors and managing the village maintenance contractor. The clerk is also a key point of contact for residents to raise questions or local concerns, some of which can be sensitive in nature. A full list of responsibilities is available on request.

Qualities: The ideal candidate would be a resident of the local area with general finance and administrative skills interested in getting involved in the community. As mentioned above, the clerk will need to be able to handle personal and sometimes sensitive issues and be able to gain the trust of residents of the village as well as members of the Parish Council. Prior experience as a clerk is preferred but not mandatory as training is available for the role.

How to apply: Please send a covering letter highlighting your relevant experience to Cllr Jim Donahue at cllrdonahue.whitchurchonthames@gmail.com or call 07557668601. A CV would be helpful but is not mandatory.

Deadline for applications: 30th October 2026

Interview date: Target 2-5th November

Whitchurch-on-Thames Parish Council
Vacancy for a Parish Councillor

This is a voluntary position and requires a minimum of one evening a month to attend Parish Council meetings, currently the second Thursday of the month. You may choose to focus on specific areas that will require you investigate issues and meet with stakeholders in the village or externally. Councillors bring local issues to the attention of the council, help it make decisions on behalf of the local community, and represent the views of residents within and outside the village.

The key requirements are that councillors have a minimum age of 18, on the electoral role, and a citizen of UK, Commonwealth, EU or Ireland. They must be a resident of the village or within 3 miles of the parish, own land or work in the parish.

We are looking for people who are interested in local issues with a willingness to represent the views of the whole community in a professional and effective manner.

To apply, or to obtain a full job description, please contact Jim Donahue or our Parish Clerk, Brian Ingis, by 30th November:
parishclerk.whitchurchonthames@gmail.com

There is a lot more information on the Parish Council section of the webs-site that may be helpful including an article called “Make a Change, become a Parish Councillor!”

Please feel free to contact Council Chairman Jim Donahue or any councillor if you have any questions.

WHITCHURCH ON THAMES PARISH COUNCIL
Quarterly Planning Update - July to September 2026

Planning Ref	Address and Details of Application	Comments by Parish Council	SODC status
P25/S3121/O 10/10/2025 and 22/06/2026	**Land south of Hardwick Road, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7HL** Erection of four dwellings with all matters reserved except access. * Amended plans submitted 22/06/2026 for re-consultation.	The Parish Council submitted a detailed OBJECTION to this application. Comments submitted can be viewed on the SODC Planning Portal. OBJECTION re-stated on 10/7/26	Still under Considera-tion
P26/S1609/ HH 09/06/2026	**Swanston West, High Street, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7ER** House: Proposed front extension, insertion of new windows to first floor side elevation and roof lights to main house. Roof: Retiling of main house roof with tiles to match, replacement double glazed windows to main house. Garage: Demolition of existing conservatory, construction of new pitched roof extension for home gym and raising of existing roof to enable home office in roof space.	Councillors voted to delegate this decision to the SODC Heritage and Conservation Officer.	GRANTED on 11th September
P26/S3438/ HH 19/08/2026	**Willow House, Eastfield Lane, Whitchurch-on-Thames, Read-ing RG8 7EJ** Proposed detached garden room / gym outbuilding incidental to the enjoyment of Willow House	Councillors voted to SUPPORT this application	Under Con-sideration
P26/S3775/ HH 24/09/2026	**Fawney, High Street, Whitchurch-on-Thames, Reading RG8 7DD** Erection of a single-storey side extension, dormer extension, gravelled car parking and pathway, and alteration to the fenestration	Councillors voted to SUPPORT this application	Under Con-sideration

FROM THE DISTRICT COUNCILLOR

After all the excitement of the Local Government Review (LGR), with the prospect of us being merged with West Berkshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils, it's now all off and, for the moment, we are back where we started. That end of term feeling which some of us at South Oxfordshire District Council were enjoying has now been snatched away, and we now have full attention on our usual responsibilities. The main effect is that there will be an election in May 2027 in accordance with the previous four-year cycle. I am sorry for the council officers in all the authorities concerned who had been working out how everything was going to be divided up, combined together, reallocated or redesigned. That was a lot of work that was in hand and was still to come, which for now at least, has gone away.

As it is, many of the changes that South Oxfordshire has been doing in the last few years, such as putting in new back-office systems to replace the mess that Capita had left us with, are now going to be able to be used for a reasonable period.

For the moment however, we are still facing the prospect of being part of a regional Mayoral authority, and the current thinking is that this would be an area that encompasses not only Oxfordshire and Berkshire, but also Swindon and Buckinghamshire. There has previously been very little interest in the election of the Police and Crime Commissioner, and probably wouldn't be for a future Mayor either.

LGR or not, SODC is also pressing ahead with a new Joint Local Plan (JLP2), even though the most recent Joint Local Plan (JLP1) is still under examination, and a consultation on which priorities the Local Plan should include has just ended.

An update to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has also come into effect, maintaining protection for National Landscapes (in our case the Chilterns AONB), and also emphasising the value of trees, old and new, in developments. The importance of Green Infrastructure is given greater weight than previously, noting that in addition to climate change mitigation, green infrastructure is important for recreation, good place design and health and well-being.

Also coming into effect are changes to how planning decisions are made, with the role of the planning committee being considerably diminished and the relevance of parish council views virtually abolished. Up until now, every local Council that was a Planning Authority had its own constitution to arrange how planning matters were handled, but now all Planning Authorities have to do things in the same way, with most decisions being taken by Planning Officers.

My experience of being on the Planning Committee at SODC is that while in most cases the Planning Officers get it right, there have been a number of occasions where the Planning Committee has disagreed with the officer's recommendation, and at a subsequent appeal the committee decision was upheld, and so the Planning Officer's recommendation was overruled.

So now that level of democratic oversight has been lost, and without it, the world is a worse place.

Peter Dragonetti
District Councillor for Whitchurch on Thames

County Councillor Report (Extracts)

South Nature and Climate Action fund. Officers are currently building the online grants scheme, in preparation to open on the 28 September.

We have £100,000 to award to projects across South Oxfordshire which support communities to take action to address and adapt to climate change and support nature recovery. Grants of between £250 to £10,000 will be available for projects which could focus on areas such as:

- Energy
- Waste and consumption
- Transport and travel
- Adaptation
- Nature recovery
- Community access to nature

If you know of organisations that could benefit from this scheme, but would like to talk through their project ideas, please signpost them to the climate team Climateaction@southandvale.gov.uk

Further information can be found on the website:
South Nature and Climate Action Fund - South Oxfordshire District Council

Maggie Filipova-Rivers
County Councillor for Goring and Woodcote

Whitchurch Primary School

New Headteacher. Whitchurch Primary School is delighted to announce the appointment of Nikki Blyth as our new Headteacher, following a thorough recruitment process involving governors, staff, pupils and the Local Authority. A teacher at Whitchurch for the past ten years, Nikki impressed the selection panel with her passion for the school, her clear vision for the future and her ideas for building on its existing strengths. We are thrilled that someone who knows and loves Whitchurch so well will be leading the school into the future. The appointment marks an exciting new chapter for the school, while also recognising the wonderful foundations laid by her predecessor Dawn Chesters, whose dedication and leadership have helped shape Whitchurch into the school it is today. We are hugely grateful to her and the staff team for all they have done to build such a strong and caring school community.

It's been a brilliant start to the new school year! Our reception children are settling in beautifully with help from their Year 6 buddies. Across the school, classrooms have been buzzing with children getting stuck into their learning. Practical maths and science activities have been underway, and creativity has been flowing with some children busy making their very own "Mood Monsters" a fantastic way to explore feelings while getting creative.

Our Year 5 and 6 children have already had an exciting start to the year too, a five-day residential trip to Kilvrough in South Wales. Action-packed opportunities including; bodyboarding, climbing, abseiling and caving, as well as plenty of time to have fun and make memories. Our year 4s have been to Hooke Court where they have enjoyed fossil hunting and team bonding experiences.

Time to celebrate. We wanted to take this opportunity to celebrate the FANTASTIC KS2 results achieved by our children this year. The school is incredibly proud to have achieved results placing it in the 97th and 98th percentiles nationally. This is a truly fantastic achievement and reflects the hard work, dedication and commitment of the children, teachers and the whole school community. A huge congratulations.

PTA Event - let the fun begin. Get your dabbers ready because BINGO is coming! Join us on 19 November at 7:30pm at the Village Hall, Manor Road for an evening of fun, laughter and, hopefully, a few winning numbers. Every penny raised by the PTA goes towards supporting the school and creating even more fantastic experiences and opportunities for our children, so your support really does make a difference.

A special thank you. We'd also like to take the opportunity to thank the Whitchurch-on-Thames Parish Council and Cricket Club for their continued support of our events and for generously allowing us to use their facilities. Their contribution is greatly appreciated.

Hayley Wilkins
Treasurer: Whitchurch Primary School Parents' Association

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WHITCHURCH & GORING HEATH
TWINNING
QUIZ NIGHT
& CHILLI SUPPER
Q1. WHEN IS IT?
SATURDAY 31ST OCTOBER 2026
6.30 PM FOR PROMPT 7 PM START
Q2. WHERE IS IT?
GORING HEATH PARISH HALL RG8 9AG
Q3. HOW MUCH?
£15 PER PERSON
TO INCLUDE A DELICIOUS CHILLI SUPPER WITH A VEGETARIAN OPTION
LICENSED BAR
Q4. HOW MANY?
TEAMS OF 4-6
COME AS A TEAM OR JOIN OTHERS TO MAKE A TEAM ON THE NIGHT
Q5. HOW TO BOOK?
TICKETS VIA SARAH DRAGONETTI
SARAH@DRAGONETTI.CO.UK
ADDING IF YOU WANT VEGETARIAN CHILLI
* QUIZ QUESTIONS WILL PROBABLY BE TOUGHER THAN THOSE ABOVE
POSTER DESIGNED BY @BAHTISTIC

Whitchurch & Goring Heath History Society

Or next meeting is on Thursday 19th November when Tom Crook brings us up to date with an account of Satire, Scandal and the Establishment in post-war Britain. His history of Private Eye may well be an eye opener!

This meeting is at 2.30pm at Goring Heath Parish Hall. Non-members are welcome, and the £3 fee includes tea and biscuits.

WoTArts: The Whitchurch Art & Craft Exhibition 2027

The next Exhibition will be held on the weekend of **27th–28th February 2027.**

It will be in the same popular format in the Whitchurch Village Hall and open for all current residents and ex-residents of Whitchurch-on-Thames, Whitchurch Hill and Goring Heath to enter, and also children attending the local schools.

There are various categories – something for everyone! Our judges will be awarding cups for best exhibits in Art, in Craft, in Photography and for Film & Animation. There is also recognition for the best first-time adult exhibitor, Best in Show overall, and junior winners in four age groups too.

The planning team will soon be meeting to decide on the 2027 theme for the Joyce Voysey prize – it will be announced in the next issue of this magazine and on our WoTArts website. Meanwhile, please get the dates in your diaries and start planning your entries in any of the categories – remember that they can be on any subject. Those long winter evenings ahead of us are ideal for working on your favourite projects!

All the information about how to enter the exhibition will be available in due course on our website at www.wotarts.co.uk and on our Facebook page.

We very much look forward to seeing your creations next Spring!

Sally Woolhouse
sally@wotarts.co.uk

Save Our Spire Update

It is wonderful to see the newly restored St Mary's spire and the associated works now complete. A big thank you to everyone who has made this possible from across the community and beyond, and for your support and interest in the project.

We celebrated two weddings at St Mary's in September following the re-opening, and Sunday services resumed from the first Sunday in September.

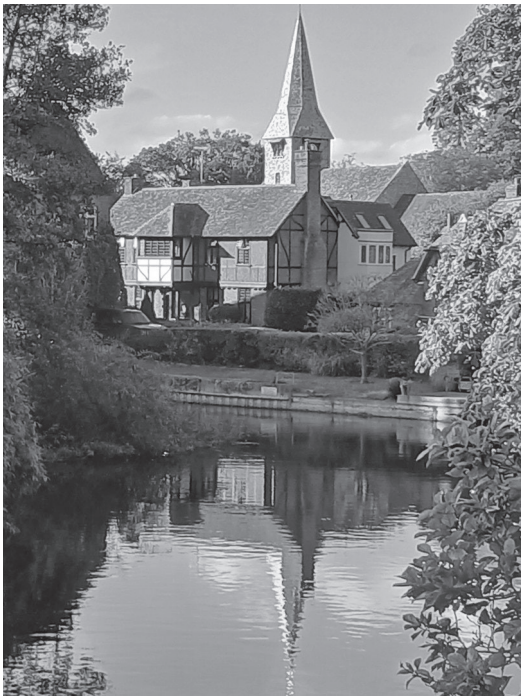


Photo courtesy of Richard Williams

We will be sharing further information about the project and other updates over the coming months, but in the meanwhile, please "Save the Date" for this years' **Community Christmas Concert which will be on Saturday 12th December 5-7pm at St Mary's.**

We hope you can join us there to celebrate completion of the project as well as Christmas festivities. More details will be available on the Whitchurch Village Website and on posters nearer the time.

Sue Cockeram
Save Our Spire Project Team

The Friends of St Mary's and St John's

The Friends are an independent charity and welcome members from all faiths and none. We aim to bring together the local community in support of the preservation and improvement of our two churches and their churchyards.

Working Parties. Our regular churchyard working parties at St John's take place on the last Wednesday of the month, and have been a bit sporadic due to all the heatwaves we have experienced. Our next working parties will be on 28th October and 25th November.

As well as battling against bramble which is an ongoing task, we find that there are many saplings from all sorts of trees that constantly try to establish themselves in this open sunny location. Prime culprits are the elm suckers along the north border, and oak and ash saplings, but also many saplings from the false acacia or Robinia pseodoacacia which stands on the south easterly side of the churchyard. This tree is native in the United States, but has naturalised in many countries. It is fast growing and can be considered to be invasive. The young trees are often spiny and prickly and difficult to remove, as volunteers have discovered! With this in mind, and to assist us manage St John's churchyard now, and in the future, the PCC are considering applying for a faculty from the Diocese to remove the mature tree, and wanted to first find out from parishioners if anyone had an attachment to this tree, or knew how it had come to be in the churchyard. Please contact Sally on the email below if you have any strong thoughts or relevant information.

Working parties at St Mary's churchyard are less frequent but we have scheduled the next one for Wednesday 21st October starting at 10am. The main task will be clearing around the large memorials on the south side of the church; this area was inaccessible while the scaffolding was in place.

Thank you to all those who make a regular appearance as many hands really do make light work.

If you fancy joining one of these sessions, please get in touch with Sally Woolhouse at whitchurchfriends@gmail.com. A welcome cup of coffee is always provided at half time.

Save our Spire! The new Spire is now complete, and looks very elegant now that the scaffolding has been removed. We are so grateful to the PCC for achieving this, as a lot of energy and thought has been required in order to plan the work, raise the funds from a number of sources and agree the contract with a suitable workforce.

Other improvements at St John's. We are currently planning to replace the dilapidated notice boards at St Johns Church and are just checking out finer details of the quote we have received. The natural areas near the northern boundary and also to the rear of the church will soon be marked with attractive rope and metal poles to help designate these protected sections, and distinguish them from the rest of the churchyard which is more closely mown and managed. The right type of posts and rope are being sought, and it is envisaged that this initiative will add to the aesthetic appeal of these 'wilder' biodiverse areas.

Fund Raising. A successful Art Café was held in The Old Stables on 1st August when £145.50 was raised. Our next **Art Café will be on November 7th** followed by one on December 5th. Please consider dropping in to join us for a cup of coffee or tea and some home-made cake and convivial conversation.

Future Events. Our AGM will be held on October 31st at The Old Stables at 3pm. All are welcome. On 12th December, a Community Christmas Concert will be held at St Mary's and the PCC are now busy planning the programme. Please note it in your diaries as it promises to be festive and fun.

Membership. We are always keen to welcome new Friends. We are delighted to have recently welcomed two new members bringing our membership to 69. For more information on how to join please go to the Whitchurch on Thames village website at **https://whitchurchonthames.com** and follow the link for the Church, or ask me, or Sally Woolhouse. Subscriptions start at a minimum of £10.00 per year and can be Gift Aided.

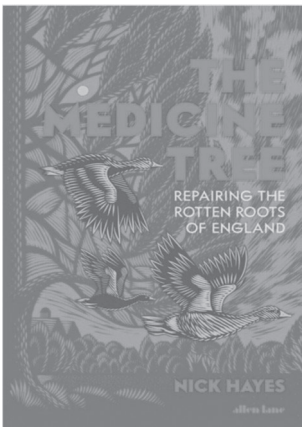
Sarah Dragonetti, Chair of The Friends
Registered Charity no. 1168335
whitchurchfriends@gmail.com

Hardwick Happenings

Like all of us, the Hardwick Estate has been suffering the extreme drought of this summer in a variety of ways; Not enough grass or hay for the cows or sheep, mature trees (especially beech which is very susceptible to drought stress) losing limbs, and a population explosion of American crayfish in the river due to warmer water.

The increase in drought years underscores the need for more resilience in agriculture and forestry, and the importance of producing food on all the land we can in a sensitive way, as reduced fertility makes Britain even less food secure than ever. In the woods the benefits of our near-natural woodland management are also evident as naturally regenerated saplings are proving much more resilient to drought than plantations.

Meanwhile the local author Nick Hayes has published his latest book 'The Medicine Tree - Repairing the rotten roots of England' in early October. The book details the Hardwick's transition process and how its community are trying to reconnect with responsibility for land and each other, which he argues is extremely important for the English people, especially in view of the loss of common land and connection with our own indigenous traditions in this country, as well as the impacts of the British colony abroad. It's a deeply thoughtful and well researched book. Available at all good bookstores!



Hardwick's Interim Trustees (who will become the first Trustees of the community-led Trust that will soon own the Estate) have spent some time this summer fine tuning the vision, mission and values of Hardwick with the community here, in order to guide decision making around the development of the old Stud farm, as well as new agriculture in former horse fields.

The final wording of the Trust's vision is:

Our vision is to be a pioneering, living model of community-led stewardship, where people and nature flourish together, cultivating organic enterprise and food autonomy, enabling sustainable rural livelihoods and sharing the benefits of access to land with the local community and those who need it most.

We seek to address the colonial history that links us to the rest of the world, have the courage to do what's needed locally to respond to the social and global ecological challenges we face, and to learn from our experience and share what works, educating and inspiring others to do the same.

If any of this resonates with you and/or you would like to be involved in the Estate via volunteer days or subscribe to the 'Friends of Hardwick' newsletter, please do get in touch.

Upcoming events:

Saturday, 12th December, 9am – 3pm, Hardwick Winter Market at the Stud Farm. Food, music, coffee and unique artisan crafts and food products for Christmas presents and more!

Miriam Rose
Transition Lead

Wild Oxfordshire

Winter Wildlife. When the weather turns cold, it might seem as though most wildlife has disappeared until spring. But if you take a closer look, you'll find that plenty of insects and other creepy crawlies are still around.



Ladybirds often spend the winter sheltering together in places such as conifers, old seedheads, and hollow plant stems, clustering together to stay warm. Various species can also be found on ivy, such as the 7-spot, 22-spot, and harlequin ladybird.

Bees have different ways of getting through the colder season. On milder days, you might spot buff-tailed bumblebees out and about, as this species is being seen flying more often during the winter months, and bumblebee queens may emerge from hibernation during these mild spells. Honeybee queens usually stay inside their hives for the winter, only venturing out on particularly sunny days, while solitary bees leave their nests when they are ready to mate. For any bee active in winter, finding nectar is vital, as there is a real risk of starvation if food is scarce.

One of the simplest ways to help winter pollinators and other insects is by growing plants that flower during the colder months. Single-flowered hellebores are particularly useful because their open blooms make pollen and nectar easy to reach. Crocuses are another good choice, especially when planted in a sunny position where the flowers can fully open. Snowdrops and aconites also provide valuable food, while ivy offers both shelter and a late nectar source.

You don't need to be a keen gardener to make a difference. Leaving fallen leaves where they land or creating small piles of twigs and leaves can provide important habitats for insects. And if you come across a queen bee that appears to be struggling, you can gently move her to nearby flowers or offer a 1:1 sugar and water solution.

Making Room for Nature: Micro-Habitats in Urban Areas

You may think nature only thrives in big reserves. But it also squeezes into the cracks and corners of our urban environments.

So, whether that's a garden, a balcony, a windowsill, or just the wall of your home, there's always room for a splash of green amongst the urban landscapes.

Mini or Micro habitats - what's in the name? In ecology, a "microhabitat" is a small area with its own unique environment that differs from the surrounding habitat. But you may know them by a different name. Mini ponds, bee hotels, and even bird boxes, each create a quiet refuge for the creatures sharing our built landscape (just remember that bird feeders in warmer months increase the risk of disease in birds). These small sanctuaries carry real ecological weight. Never underestimate the power of cumulative effect: each species, no matter how small, has a part to play in all ecosystems.
The key benefits of micro habitats include:

- Attracting insects that play a role in pollination.
- Storing moisture and regulating temperature
- Breaking down organic matter

Walls. Urban walls can host a surprising range of ecological functions. Living walls are particularly beneficial to local wildlife. These vertical green sites, formed of flowering climbers and wall mounted planters, can attract bees, hoverflies and other pollinators.

Micro planters and crevice habitats, which are small pockets of soil, stacked tiles, logs with holes, stone crevices or even swift bricks attached or built into walls, create nesting and overwintering sites for solitary bees and beetles.

Water. Water sources such as ponds or streams with natural features are ideal, but rare in highly urban areas. But artificial water sources such as birdbaths or rainwater pools/ponds can still support amphibians, insects, birds, and mammals while contributing to local microclimate regulation.

For example, a recent study in the *Journal of Urban Ecology* found that urbanised aquatic microhabitats, such as water-filled tree holes and other small standing waters in cities, create "unique but inconspicuous" breeding habitats for a range of insects.

Gardens. Gardens are probably the first green space that comes to mind when discussing microhabitats. And that's because even small spaces can support many microhabitats due to the varying environments and features which can be created within them. Gardens are a mosaic of interconnected micro-ecosystems within one space. But when discussing our urban environments, rewilding towns and cities might sound like something left to greater powers, such as your local council, but in fact, urbanisation doesn't need to mean a loss of biodiversity.

You don't need a large rural garden to support nature – urban gardens are becoming ever increasingly vital passages in our increasingly fragmented country.

These small patches of green can become a wildlife sanctuary surprisingly easily: try growing as many different types of plants as you can, including native species, and provide natural food sources. And importantly, let nature do its work! Sometimes, the best thing you can do is simply step back and leave a corner (or two!) undisturbed. For example, fallen or stacked logs and retaining piles of leaves and wood chip can serve as habitat for insects, fungi, amphibians, reptiles and small mammals.

Jessica Bouwer
Wild Oxfordshire

The New Virtual Crossing at the High Street and Greyhound Intersection

As described in the Chairman's update, The Parish Council has been discussing how to improve safety for pedestrians crossing the High Street with OCC Highways for several years and we are pleased to see it finally implemented. The main concern it was intended to address was improving safety for parents and children crossing from the west side of the High Street into and out of

Eastfield Lane during the school run especially when it coincides with traffic rush hour. Having a "lollipop lady" was another option but the school has always struggled to resource or fund this. Part of the design of the parking restrictions implemented on the High Street in 2024 was to move cars away from the crossing point to improve visibility. Both drivers and pedestrians should now be able to see each other from the statutory 20m distance.

The virtual footpath design and painting was done by the OCC Highways team who consider this an innovative, bespoke solution for the narrow road at the top of Eastfield Lane and the difficult High Street crossing into the front of the Greyhound. As it is a unique solution not seen anywhere else, it is understandable that there have been questions about it by some residents that I try to answer below:



Do cars need to stop for pedestrians on virtual footpaths? It is important that pedestrians understand that cars do not need to stop for pedestrians at the virtual crossing on the High Street. Cars would only need to stop if there was a zebra crossing. The primary purpose of the footpath is to guide pedestrians to the safest place to cross the road with the greatest amount of visibility to oncoming traffic. It also gives drivers a heads up that pedestrians may be crossing the road so they should drive cautiously. Confusingly, cars do need to stop for pedestrians at the Eastfield Lane virtual crossing. This comes from the Highway Code H2 rule which requires drivers to wait for pedestrians to cross before turning into or out of a junction.

- **Why was a grey colour used for the footpath**? A few people, including me, questioned the visibility of the grey colour, but the OCC's view was that the other colour options available to them – buff yellow or red – would not be appropriate for the Conservation Area. It's been pointed out that Goring has plans for at least a few red crossings in their Conservation Area and we also have one by the tollbooth. OCC asked that we hold off requesting any changes to the colour until after a trial period.

- **Has the Greyhound been consulted? What if someone parks on the footpath in front of the Greyhound?** Yes, the Greyhound has been aware of this for at least a few years. The land where the virtual crossing runs is part of the highway verge owned by OCC, not the Greyhound. Cars can still be parked in the space where the footpath goes. In theory, drivers with large vehicles overlapping the footpath could get a ticket, but this would likely only happen if it became a problem. The footpath seems to be encouraging drivers of shorter cars to park in this spot and we have already had feedback that this has been very helpful in improving visibility for drivers turning out of Eastfield Lane.

- **How does the Share Space Symbol on Eastfield Lane really work?** OCC had wanted to use virtual footpath down the narrow part of Eastfield Lane dedicated to pedestrians similar what you may have seen implemented recently on Station Road in Goring. This was not possible due to the narrow width of Eastfield Lane near the High Street which is effectively a single lane road. Drivers are already aware that they need to take turns if another car is coming as there is clearly not room for two cars to pass. The "Share Space" symbols are just a reminder to all users that there is also not enough room for a car to pass as well as a cyclist or a pedestrian. In some cases, cars should wait for cyclists and pedestrians to pass before entering this part of the road. In other cases, cyclists or pedestrian may need to move off to the side of the road to let cars through. In either situation, all users should be aware that they need to share the road and take turns.

- **Can a raised crossing be used like the one in Goring and by the Toll Booth?** This is of course possible, but estimates for this are approximately £30,000 for design, consultation and implementation. It would also be difficult to have this going into an area used for parking cars at the Greyhound.



Stay in your Lane: Station Road in Goring has room for a dedicated pedestrian lane and cars driving in one direction at a time.



Shared Space: Eastfield Lane does not have room for a dedicated pedestrian lane. Cars, cyclists and pedestrians need to take turns using this narrow part of the road.

Jim Donahue
Chair, WoT Parish Council

THE PARISH OF WHITCHURCH ON THAMES, OXFORDSHIRE

Acreage – 1,320, Population – 824 (2011 census), Electors – 622

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WHITCHURCH PRIMARY SCHOOL		
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Head of Parent Association	Rachael Kelly	
Chair of School Governors	Eleanor Sugrue	

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Chair of School Governors	Alan Dunstan	01491 680514

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High Street			
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GORING HEATH GUIDE AND SCOUT GROUP			
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PANG VALLEY SCOUT GROUP			
The Barn, Purley on Thames			
Contact	Ian Shenton	ishenton@ntlworld.com *(Beavers, Cubs, Scouts)*	0118 9678769

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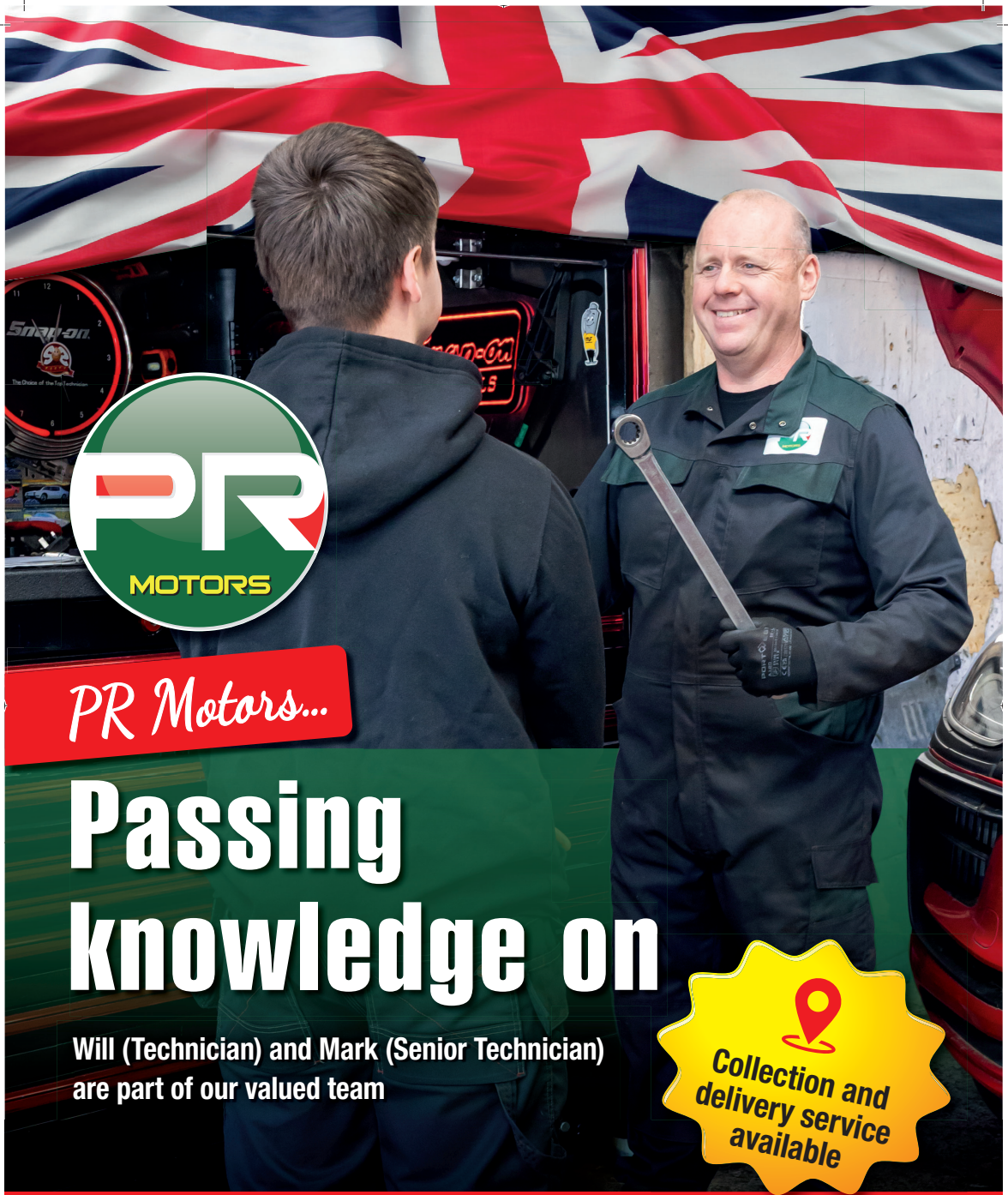




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