



**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH ASSEMBLY OF WHITCHURCH-ON-THAMES**  
**Held at the Village Hall at 19:45 Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> May 2022**

**Members Present**

Chairman                                      Jim Donahue

Members                                        Nick Brazil  
    Diana Smith

**Public and Press:**                        Alistair Aitchison, Alan Copeland, Nicola Armstrong, John Bradon, Gill Williamson, Charles Cotgreave, John Coupland, Cllr Dragonetti, Peter Ferguson, Hilary Jenson, Ken Baker, Peter Ferguson, Richard Wingfield Sally Woolhouse, Geraldine Witcher, and 5 residents

The meeting started at 19:45.

1                      Chairman's Update

- Since Last year:
  - o No longer have to deal with issues of lock-down and social distancing.
  - o We are no longer on Zoom. We have had face-to-face meetings since July.
  - o Looking forward to Platinum Jubilee Tea party – Sunday the 5th June now in less than 2 weeks time. Nicola from the pre-school will have more about this.
  - o Also, the Beacon Lighting on 2nd of June. People should gather on Village Green by 9:45pm. I believe that Charles and the Green Team will have more to say on this.
  - o Some residents may still have anxieties about social interaction, especially those with relatives who may be in care home or are otherwise vulnerable, but a lot of people have getting back together in person again – so look forward to hearing about how it has been going tonight!
  - o We welcomed new Councillors Nick Brazil and Frances Parkes who has filled the seat that was vacated by Jon Stewart. Nick will be the PC contact for the Green Team activities and Frances is already a member of TAPWG.
- I will try not to cover areas that other speakers will be covering tonight, but would like to highlight some of the key achievements
- This year has not quite as dramatic a change as we had the previous year:
  - o We had no major floods or major cycling accidents
  - o Improvements that were put in place last year in road, street furniture, and drainage and pavements are continuing to serve the community well.
  - o Some improvements continued this year including the long-needed replacement drainage pipe by the Greyhound und the High Street last summer. The new owners of the Greyhound plan some further improvements near the entrance to the pub that the Parish Council has said we will support.

- Some of the major initiatives we have been pursuing this year relate to traffic and pedestrian safety
  - The biggest change is that 20mph was finally achieved throughout the village! This is after over 10 years of requesting this, certainly, going back to both the 2009 and 2019 Village Plans.
    - This will benefit to pedestrian safety and active travel in the area, especially the school run, shopping in Pangbourne, and cyclists and walkers who visit the area.
  - Pedestrian safety at the lower narrows is the other main area we have been pursuing this year.
    - You are probably aware that OCC had planned to provide bollards in front of the Ferryboat Inn.
    - OCC determined that they would fit in the narrows after a short trial and ordered the new flexible bollards and planned installation.
    - Unfortunately, it is now not considered practical due to location of high voltage power cables directly beneath where the bollards were planned.
    - OCC now believes that we have now exhausted the options available to improve pedestrian safety at the lower narrows. The physical limits of the lower narrows present certain inherent risks and the current solution may be the best option in an imperfect stretch of road. In addition to bollards, at last 4 other options were pursued and ruled out:
      1. Raised pavement was too difficult due to lack of highway width, complications with drainage, the need to access to land owned by the pub and tripping hazards.
      2. Rumble strips were considered noisy and not appropriate for residential neighbourhoods.
      3. The trial of giving right of way for traffic going from south to north concluded was that this would exacerbate tensions for drivers in a situation that is already often tense. This would result in a worse situation than the current dual Give Way set-up.
      4. A two or three-way stop light is an option, but the costs are prohibitive, and it is unlikely to be seen as appropriate in the village conservation area.
      5. We recently escalated the situation to our County Councillor Bulmer – he raised a suggestion that we look at putting heave planters there to protect pedestrians. Whilst this option should have further consideration, OCC’s initial view is that there is not sufficient space for the type of planters that would be required.
    - Given where we are, I think there are at least two recent actions that will help to improve the situation:
      - The new 20 mph speed limit will increase safety to some degree
      - The recently resurfaced road and repainted white lines make the virtual pavement clearer for both drivers and pedestrians. We need to ensure it is repainted as required.

- TAPWG is continuing to investigate residents parking and other pedestrian safety initiatives and Cllr Smith will provide that update shortly.
- The Parish Council in investigating improvements to the Manor Road Playground to ensure it stays safe and continues to meet health and safety standard. Cllrs Leadbeater-Hart and O'Grady are working with suppliers and will soon be engaging members of the community with a broader village survey and working group.
- The Polish Church Memorial Garden, whilst still not officially opened, has seen improvements in the form of planting a new Community Orchard. I am sure that Charles from the Green Team will have an update on this with plans to complete finishing touches on it and formally open in the near future.
- The draft Appraisal of the village Conservation Area has been completed by a consultant hired by the Parish Council and submitted to SODC for review and approval. This document will more formally define the village conservation area and provide a tool for evaluation of planning applications to ensure it is appropriately persevered. Given SODC's backlog of work, we don't expect this to be formally adopted for at least another year. There will be a public consultation process as part of this and I know that members of the Whitchurch Society have already provided some inputs to it.
- Muddy Lane – despite an unusually dry period at the moment, the Parish Council has approved a motion to improve the surface of Muddy Lane with the support of an OCC grant from OCC County Cllr Kevin Bulmer. This is also something that has been considered for many years and was initiated by the Green Team with Charles and Neil Huntingtin leading this.
  - The main benefit would be for the parents and children on the school run who park at Hardwick Road. This should have a side benefit of encouraging more parents to park at Hardwick Road during the school run, reducing traffic on Eastfield Lane and improving pedestrian safety for those families going to school by foot.
  - It will not significantly change the appearance of Muddy Lane and which will certainly not make it complete mud free. It will still need to be maintained at least once a year to clear the leaves from it to ensure it doesn't return to a muddy state in the future.
- Manor Road trees - Following the maintenance of yew trees and verge on the north side of Manor Road and the Playground last year, the Parish Council has approved a motion to reinstate yew trees on the south side of Manor Road. This will involve the removal of 18 mostly Sycamore trees and Laurel bush undergrowth to be replaced by new yew trees. This will ultimately restore this section of Manor Road to its historic tree-lined entrance to Coombe Park.

- A number of Thames Path sign improvements were made to ensure walkers passing through the village do not get lost and can travel safely on the steep dip at Hartslock wood.
  - A sign to caution cyclists to slow down for walkers was installed by the dip now formally labelled the “Hartley Steps” after the work Eric Hartley did to have the steps replaced in 2011/12.
  - Improved arrows by Manor Road to avoid walkers turning down the road from the High Street by mistake.
  - Replacement of a rotting Thames Path sign by the Church.
  
- I am sure that Cormac from the Cricket Club will be providing an update on the plans to refurbish the existing pavilion.
  - The Parish Council is no longer looking to replace the Tea Hut which is now beyond use. We have agreed with the WCC that the focus should be on renovating the pavilion for now. They have lived without the Tea Hut’s use for the past two years and no longer see it as a priority.
  - The Parish Council is considering a contribution to the Pavilion’s renovation in return for them providing access to some basic support for community events such as Fetes and Royal celebrations. In general, we would just need access to power, water, and potentially the toilets. Other enhancements could be considered.
  - Our experience on the Platinum Jubilee Tea Party will help us to understand what improvements may be desirable and most important for community events.
  
- A summary of our Parish Council Finance:
  - As of April 2021 – we had reserves of £24,603
  - We received payments of £37, 964
    - £26,896 – Precept
    - £11,046 – CIL, Insurance reimbursements for the village sign, and grants
  - We spent £34,048
  - Our reserves at the end of March 2022 were £28,519
  - Thanks to our Clerk Jane Yamamoto for successfully completing the internal and external financial audits on time during this period!
  
- Finally, this was a year when we lost some important long-time residents who have all been active members of our community over the years...
  - Gwen Bruce
  - Nigel Groves
  - David Lee
  - Graham Dednum
  
- We also have had a number of new residents in the past few years, that may not have been as noticeable unless we are close neighbors, especially with lockdown. I hope we can all reach out to welcome them and encourage them to get involved in local activities as well.

- Finally thank you all for being here tonight to celebrate our community!

## 2 District Councillor Report – Cllr Dragonetti

Looking back over the year, the District Council has been facing new issues.

Although now a distant memory, the garden waste collection was a major concern for much of last year.

The plan for new offices at Crowmarsh was put aside, as the reality that we did not need all that space became apparent, and we are now going to take temporary smaller offices in Abingdon as a stop gap.

Taking back control of the council's finances has proved to be a good thing, cutting out Capita has saved costs and improved efficiency.

The financial outlook for the council is much improved, and although the reserves are declining, the forecast position is much better than it appeared when I was first elected.

I have been the District Councillor for 3 years now, and during that time I have been the most active councillor on the District. I have attended 103 meetings since I was elected, more than any other councillor. The next best attended 84 meetings. It has helped that many meetings are now online.

I have also attended the meetings of every other parish council in the ward, that's Goring Heath, Kidmore End and Mapledurham. It is some relief that Mapledurham only meets every two months. In addition to writing in the Whitchurch on Thames Bulletin, I also write in the Goring Heath Newsletter and Kidmore End Newsletter. As the readership does not overlap, I confess that I use the same material in each publication when I can. I think that it is important to communicate as much as possible, and also be visible. I am not a great user of social media.

That's enough about me, now I want you all take part in the first round of consultation on the new local plan that the South Oxfordshire is doing jointly with the Vale of White Horse; this is a innovative way of consulting, and the council is really looking for your opinion as to how the district should be planned for over the next few years. All too often, the views of the developers and property consultants dominate such consultations, so this time we really want to hear from residents. The consultation is all online, and our communications team are very proud of the unique way it has been made simple and easy, probably the first time in England that it has been done in this way.

To find it, just google SODC Local Plan 2041 and crack on.

This is just another way that South Oxfordshire District Council, under the control of Lib Dems and Greens, has in my view run the council efficiently and effectively for residents, and I am proud to be a member of it.

## 3 TAPWG – Cllr Diana Smith

Last May I outlined three things which had happened since the first public consultation carried out by TAPAG in February 2020. These things have altered considerably in the last 12 months.

Firstly. The change in traffic volume and parking seen during the Covid lockdown's has nearly reverted to pre-Covid patterns; although, the times of traffic congestion are more varied, probably due to home working on some week days. Commuters are back during the week and on some nice days at weekends cars can be parked almost nose to tail along much of the High Street.

Secondly. The District Councils and OCC took over parking enforcement powers from the police at the end of 2021 which means that we can now apply for a residents' parking scheme.

Thirdly. In September 2021 TAPWG conducted a Village wide survey to find out residents' opinions on traffic and parking in the Village. The Report of Findings was sent to the Parish Council and publicised on the Village Website in February. Thank you to everyone who took part.

An early success from the Survey has been to provide evidence of the residents' support for a 20mph speed limit in the Village. This helped us to be the first village in South Oxfordshire to get a village wide 20mph limit.

The Report of Finding showed that residents believe that there is a traffic and parking problem. Speed of traffic raised moderate to major concerns: this should be addressed by the 20mph speed limit; if not, TAPWG will look at setting up a speed watch team. Volume of traffic was considered to be a concern. As our High Street is an important B road there is no remedy open to us reduce volume. Traffic congestion is a high concern together with worries about pedestrian safety, cyclist safety and parking for residents. These are concerns to which we have the ability to take action to improve the situation. Other highlighted worries were pedestrian safety in the Lower and Upper Narrows. Using these findings TAPWG is now working on defining options for the PC to consider.

At some expense our predecessor, TAPAG, had to use traffic consultants to draw up a traffic plan. This is not wasted. That 2019 plan was approved by OCC Highways so gives us a guide of what would be acceptable to work into options. I am pleased to tell you that five days after taking up his new position the leader of the OCC Residents' Parking Team came to speak at a TAPWG meeting and is now working on a draft plan for Whitchurch which we hope to use in our options for the PC. We are also being helped by OCC Highways who are looking at the possibility of some kind of pedestrian crossing on the High Street in the vicinity of Eastfield Lane. This help from OCC should help us to avoid employing private traffic consultants which looked to be the only option some

months ago. In the end OCC Highways will have the final say about what can be done and so their input now is important to save time and money.

The 2021 Survey did show that the provision of electric charging points in the Village is not a high priority but it will be important to residents with no private parking. TAPWG has been investigating the progress of the introduction and availability of charging points in the area; and beyond. Again, we are hoping to be getting advice from OCC. We have accepted an offer from their EV Charging Project Manager to visit the Village to look at the possibilities.

TAPWG have held two Public Forums. One on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2021 attended by one resident and the second on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022 attended by four residents in person and three on Zoom. These meetings were publicised on the Village website, the Notice Board and on Facebook.

Along with the Parish Council, TAPWG feels that it is very unfortunate that the plan to put safety bollards in the Lower Narrows cannot go ahead. Together with a member of the Parish Council we will look at alternatives.

To end on a positive note, I am glad to tell you that in the week beginning on 6<sup>th</sup> June 13 white posts will be erected on the East High Street verge above Duchess Close which should prevent more verge erosion. The rather unlovely and battered traffic cones will go!

#### 4 Village Hall – Charles Cotgreave for Jean Marc Grosfort

- 1- With the great addition of John Bradon, Charles Cotgreave and Katherine Higley to the team we consolidated the management of this Hall. Keith was re-elected Chairman, John was elected treasurer, Charles was elected the secretary and Jean Marc (JM) was elected the Events Manager. Katherine Higley is the representative of the Parish Council. Richard Scarce remains the manager of the hall.
- 2- The team has worked hard to create a new interesting and inviting web site which has been very well received. A great addition to the new web site is an easy, functional booking system which gives us a better understanding and control of the bookings at the Hall.
- 3- The new boiler, paid for by the PC, has allowed us to better control the temperature inside the hall at different times of the day and offers improved comfort. It has also enabled us to have hot water directly from the tap in the kitchen. This is a simple thing but critical for our baking sessions and also for

some future activities we would like to develop.

- 4- The Afternoon Teas are doing well and several helpers join JM on the day and are learning new baking skills. We are grateful to the Lottery Fund for a £1,000 grant for the equipment to enable us to bake in the hall.
- 5- When groups and associations came back after the pandemic, we made a point of meeting them to discuss what we can do to make their sessions even more successful. The feedback we had was very positive about the new décor, the heating and the atmosphere and general quality of the Hall.
- 6- You may not know that the Village Hall is a charity. Its objective is to provide an excellent place for local activities. We are very pleased that three new activities started this year: A Mother and Baby Group, Circuit Training (twice a week) and now a Theatre Group initially for Primary School age children. We are pleased that these new activities cover a wide range of ages. We are also pleased that the existing groups are recovering from the pandemic. The Bridge Club is doing well – it's very friendly as are the two Yoga classes. I also want to mention the Camera Club. We are lucky to have such a well-run club with excellent speakers.
- 7- Our aim now is to develop more private functions. When a booking is made for a private function JM will immediately contact the person who booked it and as Event Manager, JM will meet the person to discuss and understand all their requirements to ensure we do everything to make each event a special one. The team is working on a marketing approach to promote private events at the Hall.
- 8- On the financial side we thank the PC for their annual support of £1,000 and we are pleased to see our business growing to the point that we are now getting into a positive cash flow situation. A fantastic result for the team and a very encouraging result for the future.

5 Village Green Working Group – Alistair Aitchison

General

Surface areas now cut on summer schedule (weekly/biweekly)

Football pitch lined weekly

Cricket Club

- new member of VGWG committee - Jonathan Murrell

- summer match schedule now underway

Football Club

Pitch now on summer E-W orientation with ball catcher re-installed



Improved litter situation since bin installed - emptied each week and recycled  
Summer training schedule in place  
Dads training combined with U18 on Thursday evening at 7:30pm  
Ongoing repairs to both tap and north goalmouth

#### Wothabs

Advising all groups on care of green spaces (see Green Team report for specifics)

Some of our green spaces have regular recurring maintenance schedules, e.g. the Maze, the Village Green. On the Village Green, we have cleared a large number of invasive plants, and experimented with various ways to dispose of the resulting cuttings. At the entrance to the car park we have established a flower bed, with cotoneaster, ferns, and geraniums. People have now voluntarily begun to contribute further plants. We have just begun a second bed nearby.

School - Gavin Jones

New Defibrillator installed, registered and monthly service regime in place

Next VGWG meeting - Monday 30th May at Greyhound

## 6 Green Team report

### Our Mission

The Green Team is a team of both core and ad hoc volunteers who help look after and maintain the green spaces in Whitchurch-on-Thames. Coming together in this way also encourages a sense of community and is a good way of getting to know people.

### Terms of Reference

These can be found here;

[https://whitchurchonthames.com/groups/](https://whitchurchonthames.com/groups/Terms%20of%20Reference%20for%20the%20Green%20Team%20Agreed.pdf)

[Terms%20of%20Reference%20for%20the%20Green%20Team%20Agreed.pdf](https://whitchurchonthames.com/groups/Terms%20of%20Reference%20for%20the%20Green%20Team%20Agreed.pdf)

### 2021 Working Parties and Work

From June 2021 onwards we held 20 working parties as well as 10 individual work sessions to maintain the Green Spaces in the village. Thank you to all those involved in these. Here are some of the things we did:

- Working parties at the Maze to mow and edge the grass around the bricks and the picnic tables
- Working parties to maintain the wild areas and hedges on and around the Village Green
- Working parties on the Manor Road Verges
- Working parties at the Polish Church Garden, including installation of a cross
- Working parties at the entrance to Wallingscote Drive
- Installing a trellis and plants at the corner of the High Street and Hardwick Road
- Sweeping and tidying parts of Muddy Lane
- Removing an unused cricket net and emptying the cricket team's grass cuttings box
- Reducing sumac trees that were obscuring visibility outside Eastfield House

The Green Team Elves:

The village also has a set of “elves” who do all sorts of tasks throughout the year across the green spaces in the village without anyone having to ask.

#### 2022 Work

We've have held 15 working parties as well as 16 individual work sessions so far with a schedule in the What's On section of the website. Work performed, besides the regular tasks referred to under 2021, included:

- Planting a community orchard in the Polish Garden, as well as cutting down unwanted sycamores and elm suckers, and installing bird boxes and a hornbeam hedge
- Preparing a site and materials for a Jubilee beacon
- Cutting up fallen trees, felling damaged ones, and clearing debris resulting from the storms in February
- Liaising with potential contractors over resurfacing Muddy Lane
- Joining with the Friends of St Mary's & St John's in working parties at both churchyards

Our 2022 goals are:

- Find a guardian(s) for every green space in the village
- Continue to prioritise looking after and maintaining what we have
- Engage and involve more people in helping look after our green spaces
  
- Involve the school and pre-school more in Green Team work
- Complete the Polish Garden Project
- Complete the resurfacing of Muddy Lane

#### Polish Church Garden

This a project where the area needed investment and development, as opposed to just maintenance.

The next steps are to install an information board, provided that grant funding is forthcoming, to hold a formal opening, and to complete the planting of the community orchard..

More details on the plans can be found on the dedicated web page for the project.

<https://whitchurchonthames.com/groups/polishgarden.html>

#### List of Green Spaces and Guardians

The list of Green Spaces that the Green Team maintain and look after is detailed on our webpage. One of the goals for 2022 is to get more owners/maintainer names against each space and create more detailed maintenance plans for each area;

<https://whitchurchonthames.com/groups/greenteam.html>

We now have Neil and Anna who join Frances and Martin, Adrian and Sarah as well as Tim as Guardians of Green Spaces. They join Sally, Pete, Gill, Charles, Keith, John, and Geoff in the core team.

Thank you!

Thank you to the core Green Team members who give so much time and energy to the village's Green Spaces and nature.

A special thank you to everyone who has joined a working party, picked a task to help

with, or otherwise looked after and cared for our Green Spaces.

## 7 Whitchurch Society Award – Cllr Donahue

This year the Whitchurch Award is to be awarded to Gill Williamson!

- Gill was the driving force behind the Saturday morning Art Café. These are now a regular fixture each week in the village. Gill's hard work and dedication to this communal meeting provided a regular warm and welcome place for many of our residents to meet and to support the many charities that it has fundraised for over the years.
- Even though she has now handed over the reigns of the Art Café, Gill's artistic skills and commitment continue to be an inspiration leading the Crafty Knit & Stich group each Thursday. Her imagination and creativity are well-known within the village and beyond after the Yarn Bombing of the Whitchurch Bridge in 2017 and the Totem Poles in Pangbourne Meadow in 2018, inspiring many residents to participate – including myself! Both of these were great fun!
- I now look forward to the work she is doing with the pre-school to decorate the village with bunting!
- She has now taken a new role fund raising for the British Legion in the village. An astounding amount of £2,682 was raised despite the pandemic and our now cashless society. This was achieved by Gill's extraordinary ability to find organisations willing to match funds raised and by the skill and the creativity of hand-made poppies.
- I understand that Gill had received by far the most votes for the award this year with a number of enthusiastic endorsements.
- Congratulations Gill!

## 8 Whitchurch Village Groups

### 8.1 AFC Whitchurch – Alex Hilton

This last season (2021-22) has seen a welcome return to regular football club for all our teams, but also reaches a culmination as we say farewell to our two U18 teams who now head off into various adult teams. During the season we have fielded 6 competitive teams including the recent creation of an U8 team, (U8, U13, U14, U15 and two U18s) plus a weekly training programme for our youngest members aged 5-7 that we call our Academy group. This latter group is growing massively so please get your sons and daughters involved. Our training and playing principles for all ages are inclusivity, competitiveness, and fun. We will host an end of season awards event for many of these teams on Saturday 4th June at 10.30am.

The football club has been running for many years and many children have passed through the ranks. We currently have over 70 children representing AFC Whitchurch either competitively or just for fun! Sadly, we will also be losing our current U14 team

(thanks for Matt Lorrimore and Cormac Neeson for their coaching over the years). As their players reach the end of school year 8 many are heading off to new schools so can't commit the time with school sporting commitments having to take priority. For the 22/23 season ahead (starting in September) we will therefore have an U9 squad (head coach Ash Dunbar), an U15 squad (head coach Alex Hilton) and an U16 squad (head coach Ren Bottini). Phil Scott will continue to lead the Academy team but will look for further parental support.

These younger teams are vital for the continued success of AFC Whitchurch and boys, girls and parents are all welcome to be involved. Our coaches and parents are active supporters and advocates of the club, and we are always looking for energetic new talent, team-members, and coaching support.

Football training on the village green will continue through the summer months. The erection of the ball catcher behind the westerly goal seems to be very effective but still the occasional mishit ball finds its way into the paddock. An easier access to the field (such as the original stile) with appropriate signage to caution about the horses would be welcome. Children are not inclined to accept the loss of their expensive football and concerns over scaling the high and dangerous fence still exist.

Any prospective players or parents should contact us at [afcwhitchurch@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:afcwhitchurch@yahoo.co.uk) The annual Whitchurch Village versus Whitchurch Hill dad's match will hopefully happen at some point over the summer, date still to be confirmed. This has been played for many years and new parents to either village are welcome to be involved. The village dad's are currently enjoying a weekly kick about on the green every Thursday from 7.30-8.30pm.

## 8.2 The Sun Chess Group – Chris Bergmann

We meet every 1st and 3rd Wednesday between 12:00 and 14:00 at The Sun Pub, Hill Bottom, Whitchurch Hill. Our group started with 4 players in August 2021. We now have 9 players from several different villages of varying skill or rating. Most of us started playing at a younger age and have not played for some time. Lockdown seemed to have re-ignited old interests.

Our aim is to provide a social chess group without commitment to a chess club. Having said that we have played a friendly match against Henley Chess Club and intend to play another in June.

There is no charge to join us, so anyone can just turn up with or without a chess set.  
01189843952

## 8.3 Cricket Club – Cormac Neeson

The cricket club continues to thrive post Covid. If in a somewhat altered way. We continue to play a set of 20+ (friendly) fixtures, both home and away. With a growing playing base of 20+ regularly participating, and another 10(ish) occasional players. However, we no longer supply "cricket teas" for the players and supporters as this was banned under Covid. And people seem quite happy to bring their own. And it helps keep costs down for the club. Neither do we provide showers for the players, as this

was also banned. Though it appears that we adhered to the rules a bit better than some of those running the country.

The condition of the facilities, however, remain an area of concern. The old Tea Hut is now in a serious state of disrepair and has been the subject of numerous break-ins over the winter, again. And we have had to shut off water to it, and the changing rooms due to repeated (underground) water leaks. And we are in the process of having the water supply repaired and reconnected (at least to the changing rooms) in the coming weeks.

The changing rooms are also in desperate needs of upgrade if they are to remain usable for the next 20+ years, and to this end we are in the process of trying to raise £20k to refurbish them. The refurbishment will hopefully involve replacing the doors and windows, renewing the internal stud walls. Upgrading the external toilets. Improving the electricity and water supplies. And repainting both internally and externally. We have so far raised over £10k and we would be delighted to hear from anyone in the surrounding area who would be willing to contribute to the improvement of this village feature.

Later this summer we will be allowing the (free) use of our facilities electrical supply to the village for the Jubilee party. As well as an event in benefit of the local school later in the summer. And we look forward to welcoming back other entities such as the village fête (should that take place again). Which we have supported for many years.

In addition to this we have recently agreed to host on behalf of the village, and we have installed the new cardio defibrillator on the cricket club tea hut and connected it to the electrical supply. And this is now up and running.

The PC has generously offered to contribute towards the cost of new cricket nets at the bottom of the village green, as the old ones were falling apart and there were increasing incidences of balls flying out of the practice area. And we hope to have these in place next month (pending delivery).

We have also donated the old "click-clack" plastic practice surface to another cricket club, as it was no longer being used by us and was going to have to be disposed of otherwise.

Later this summer, we will again be going on Cricket Tour to Northamptonshire to play a series of fixtures against village teams there.

As ever, we would be delighted to hear from local cricketers of all ages and abilities. We are an inclusive local club, who have been playing in the village for nearly 150 years, and we look forward to continuing this quintessential part of English village life, in Whitchurch on Thames.

#### 8.4 PAWS – Jo Smith, Secretary on behalf of Lady Hoskins (Chair)

The aim of PAWS over the last year has been to emphasise the importance of action, whether by individuals, local or national authorities to prevent catastrophic climate

change. So we have worked hard to bring to the attention of the two Villages, West Berks, and the two MPs the importance of reducing carbon emissions and increasing biodiversity. The focus on climate change was to coincide with the COP 26 World Meeting last November. Planting trees is one way to reduce carbon in the atmosphere so we developed the idea of a Tree Fest. This involved working closely with Pangbourne Parish Council to plant more than 40 trees on the Thames side Meadow. This was followed by a Day of Action, outside Garlands in Pangbourne, with information about COP 26, tree planting and other actions individuals can take to reduce carbon emissions. Lots of people stopped to talk about COP and the outcome was a petition made up of the hopes, fears and wishes of the people for the outcome of COP 26. We sent it on to our MPs, Alok Sharma and John Howell. We also supported Gill Williams (art café) and her art group to provide a mural on the side of Forrester's Hairdressers in Pangbourne to encourage people to plant more trees through the Woodland Trust. We have two sub-groups who have been working hard throughout this past year on the same theme, to reduce carbon and increase biodiversity. One is the Active Travel group. Its aim is to increase the use of cycles and walking into Pangbourne so that the number of car journeys will be reduced, resulting in the reduction of carbon emissions and improvement of the air quality for everyone. The group is working with local parishes, West Berks and local landlords to improve the provision of safe walking and cycling ways along the A329, A340 and Whitchurch Road. For example, we have written in support of Whitchurch Parish Council's proposal to West Berks to improve the pavement at the side of Whitchurch Road to make it safer for walking and cycling. These are very demanding and time-consuming tasks as there is an alarming amount of inertia in local government as well as the UK Government. The second group is the Biodiversity group. Its aim is to help local people understand the necessity of maintaining and improving biodiversity in the environment. This brings benefits from the joy and wellbeing of an attractive place to live, but also removes carbon and other pollutants from the atmosphere.

Last summer the group ran a competition for families to find & identify 10 trees in Whitchurch and 10 in Pangbourne. The competition has finished but the free trail leaflets are available at the Library in Pangbourne, Garlands Organic Shop and on line.

Kat is continuing to work on the biodiverse rich footpaths in Pangbourne. She is identifying the various plants and then she will prepare a leaflet to encourage families walk along the paths and appreciate the various plants and their role in the eco-system. This work has been supported by a grant from the Pangbourne Rotary Club. We have also collaborated with the Whitchurch Habitat Study group ([WoTHabs](#)) to connect with BBOWT about concerns over the damage being done to the richly biodiverse verge on the Hardwick Road.

We have managed to maintain our meetings through the pandemic by using Zoom. This worked really well when we were able to link with Dr James Morison at the Forestry Commission, and he told us about his latest research work on the importance of trees for carbon reduction and the necessity of maintaining and increasing the UK forests. We are lucky to have the film producer, Gareth Ellis-Unwin (award winning producer of the *King's Speech*), living in Pangbourne and he gave an in-person talk about his present film on the almost extinct Iranian cheetahs. He is a great advocate for sustainable filming. We hope to hear from him again in the Autumn.

This month we helped Pangbourne Parish Council with their litter picking day. On Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> April we had a talk and discussion about pollution in our local rivers. On 12<sup>th</sup> June we will hold our annual joint WoT Habs/ PAWS Meadow Walk on James Norman's meadow, on the Hardwick Estate. In July we are planning a visit to the new Hydro scheme on the Thames in Reading that is providing the electricity for the Lido. As a group, PAWS is very committed to being truthful and reliable, and is determined to leave the planet to our grandchildren in a far better state than it is at present. We welcome all new members who can be as involved as much as they like, from receiving newsletters to organising events, planting trees or writing letters. We have an active Facebook page with all the latest information.

#### 8.5 St. Marys PCC – Rev James Leach, Team Minister

2021 was a year of transition out of lockdown with a gradual return towards 'normal' Sunday worship that continues into 2022. With conditions changing from week to week, the team minister, churchwardens and PCC were constantly having to respond to new Covid regulations, recommendations and the different attitudes of congregation members towards risk and freedom. Doing all of this while trying not to lose sight of the overall mission of the church was not easy!

We began the year with all our services online, via Zoom, though St. Mary's was open for prayer on Sunday and Wednesday afternoons. 'Live' Sunday worship started back up, with various Covid-related restrictions, at St. Mary's, on Palm Sunday. That began a pattern of a live service at 9.30 am followed by a Zoom service at 11.00 am and this pattern continued to the end of August when the Zoom services were discontinued. September saw the reintroduction of congregational singing and St. John's opened up for live worship with a Harvest Thanksgiving service on September 26<sup>th</sup>. Since then, we have had the regular pattern of first and third Sundays at St. Mary's, and second and fourth Sundays at St. John's, all at 9.30 am, with Langtree Team services happening on fifth Sundays.

In November we had a well-attended Service of Remembering on the 7<sup>th</sup>, for those wishing to remember loved ones, and the Act of Remembrance on the 14<sup>th</sup> had a great turnout at the War Memorial following the 9.30 Remembrance Service. The Advent Sunday Service at St. John's on November 28<sup>th</sup> was also the occasion of our first

baptism in over 18 months. It was lovely to be able to follow up the Harvest Thanksgiving with another service deliberately aiming to have something for all ages. Along with Christmas, Mothering Sunday and Easter we have several opportunities throughout the year when more young families attend than usual and we are making an effort both to be welcoming and to help every generation engage with God at these services.

Sadly there was no Christmas Carol Concert in 2021, but we were able to have a Service of Nine Lessons and Carols followed by mulled wine and mince pies at St. John's on December 12th, a Christingle Service on Christmas Eve and a Family Communion service on Christmas Day. Of these, the Christingle Service was especially well attended despite Covid restrictions, with over 130 people present at St. Mary's. Clearly there was a real hunger to get out of the house to celebrate together and the only complaint that I heard was that people would have liked to have sung more carols. We also trialled holding a second Christingle service at St John's in Whitchurch Hill and this may become a regular event.

It has not been possible for the bellringers to ring during the past year and we have missed their call to prayer. Equally we have missed the choir which has only sung at the service of Nine Lessons and Carols.

However, we are very grateful to our organists, Sara Benbow and Carrie Leadbetter-Hart and to Geraldine Witcher and Leslie Maynerd who have accompanied our singing when we able to start again, particularly at our All Age Worship services. We have also enjoyed the opportunity to have coffee and biscuits again after services and appreciate the opportunity to meet others and catch up with them then. Thank you to Sally Woolhouse and everyone else who has made this possible.

At a time when the coronavirus has again constrained our opportunities to be together, the quarterly parish magazine, delivered by volunteers to every home in the two villages, has been particularly important. Our thanks go to Wendy Ferguson, Angi Simpson and Rosemary Pearce – the editorial team and to the faithful team of deliverers who make it possible.

We are delighted that good numbers have come back to the Art Café held each Saturday in the Old Stables – not only for the excellent refreshments and opportunity to support a worthwhile charity - but also for the enjoyment of being with others from the community. Thank you also to Sue Searce who, along with Angi Simpson, restarted Community Coffee on Tuesday mornings, which has been a real blessing to those who come.



The Women's Bible Study Group has continued to meet in members homes twice a month, reading and discussing a variety of books and Bible passages. There has also been a weekly Wednesday evening Compline Prayer Group on Zoom hosted by Peter Ferguson, which is supported by people from far afield as well as from within the parish.

As well as one wedding and one baptism there have been many funerals during the year and we thank all those involved in arrangements for those special services, which show the importance of the Church to so many in and connected with our villages. This year we were particularly saddened by the death of Tanya Hawley who has been such an important part of church and village life for many decades.

The two churches, particularly St Mary's on the Thames Path continue to attract many visitors and are a precious part of village life. We thank those who clean and care for our churches, for those who do the flowers and those who join the working parties to keep our church yards in good order. Running historic buildings is expensive and requires real skill and commitment. We are very grateful to the Friends for their financial and practical help and to Graeme Pearce for his work to maintain and enhance the fabric. The PCC also thanks the Whitchurch Parish Council for their ongoing contribution to the upkeep of the St. Mary's churchyard.

Finally, thanks go to our churchwardens Sue Matthews and Ken Baker, to members of the PCC who undertake a variety of key roles and to the members of the congregation who have supported the life of the church throughout the coronavirus and as we gradually come through it. This year will be Sue's last year as churchwarden and we are especially grateful to her for her many years of dedicated service, for her hard work, her wisdom, and her love for the church and community.

#### 8.6 Whitchurch and Goring Twinning Society – Vicky Jordan

No visit took place last year, and in September a new team took over running the Association. An Art Café was held in February.

It is our turn to visit La Bouille in 2022, and arrangements are being made for a trip later this year, from 30th September to 3rd October. A small group is also visiting on the early May Bank holiday weekend.

#### 8.7 Whitchurch and Goring Historical Society – Vicky Jordan

History meetings did not take place until October of last year, when Martin Wise talked about his parish map and local place names. In November a small group looked at various documents from our archives, helped by a glass of wine.

This year we have had our AGM in February and well attended talks on Civil War characters from Stephen Barker, and on Oxfordshire portrayed in art by Marie Louise

Kerr. We learned about Oxford Castle from Mark Davies and of the literary and artistic footprints of the Thames Valley from Nick Brazil. We hope the renewed interest of members carries on.

During lockdown the Society circulated news from around Oxfordshire so that our members could access speakers via Zoom, and we also answered questions received through the web site, such as the “Bear Pit” in Hardwick woods, and several family history enquiries. A landmark moment was the publication by the Victoria County History of Oxfordshire (with a little help from the Society) of volume XX, which includes the history of our Parish.

## 8.8

### Whitchurch Primary School – Dawn Chesters

It has been great to be back in school this year without the ongoing changes that Covid brought to the education system over the last 24 months. It was refreshing to be able to give the children a full year's school experience.

Although Covid led to us facing many new challenges, there are some things that we have kept from that time which have been beneficial to the running of the school, such as online Parents’ Evenings, Upper and lower school split assemblies and lunchtimes.

Today we celebrated the Queen’s Jubilee, and it was lovely to be able to invite the parent body to join us for the second time this year as a whole school. I hope you will be able to enjoy the bunting on the bridge sponsored by local businessman Pete Williamson. A big thank you to Nicola Armstrong and Gill Williamson for all their hard work coordinating and making the children’s portraits into beautiful bunting.

For those of you who follow our Twitter feed you will have seen that our pupils have continued to enjoy a wide range of enrichment opportunities this past year including a trip to the Milestones Museum in Basingstoke, Henley River and Rowing Museum and the Ashmolean and Pitt Rivers Museums in Oxford. Meanwhile, our youngest children in Willow have embraced outdoor learning with weekly visits to South Stoke to visit Forest School where they learn about the environment we live in and enjoy activities such as fire building.

We have taken the children on residential trips to Youlbury, Oxford and Dolygaer, South Wales, giving the children chances to take part in a range of educational activities away from the classroom including: crate stacking, team canoeing and caving. You may have also encountered our older pupils in Pangbourne in recent months as they carry out studies on the local area.

On the sports field, our pupils have continued to excel, with our school winning numerous tennis, cross country, football, netball and athletics tournaments for both boys and girls.

We have continued to offer many other extra-curricular activities including singing, art, gardening and drama as well as a range of sports.

Members of our school community have organised events such as a cake sale and a toy sale to raise money for Ukraine. We have also raised money for Red Nose Day and Young Minds, a children's mental health charity.

We are extremely grateful to our Parent Association and parent body for their support of the school. They not only organise fundraising activities enjoyed by the parents but also fun activities and experiences for the children. They have raised money to replace the astro turf on the field to the rear of the school which ensures they have a large play area on which they can have break times and their PE lessons regardless of inclement weather as it drains so well. They also fund things like our parent mail system, teaching resource websites and tools for e safety, as well as many items that teachers put on their wish lists.

Our parent body also support the school through voluntary donations and we are very grateful to them as this greatly benefits the children of our school.

We would also like to thank the Whitchurch community as a whole for their support for the school and we look forward to another 12 months of success. We look forward to playing our part in supporting our children as they become well prepared for their lives as global citizens in an ever-changing modern world.

## 8.9 Whitchurch Society – John Bradon

The Whitchurch Society's aims are:

- To stimulate interest in and appreciation of the beauty, history and character of the Village.
- To encourage the preservation and improvement of existing features and, for new development, to encourage good architecture compatible with the character of the Village.

We do this by arranging exhibitions, lectures, publications and events.

A great example is the garden walks on 19<sup>th</sup> June this year. If anyone is new to the village, the idea is that people generously open their gardens (this year we have some new ones including Foxglove Manor). It a great way to see and appreciate the variety of houses and gardens in the village.

The Arts & Crafts exhibition was back physically this year as well as online. Thanks to Sarah & Adrian Dixon and Sally Woolhouse for organising it so well. We had a special Christmas Cards section and the winner is Vivien Chambers with her inspired bauble design based on the Maze. Cards will be on sale later in the year to raise funds for village improvements.

We recently held our AGM and we are pleased that Nick Brazil has joined the committee which is now Laura Lucas, Sarah Hanfrey, Will Barclay and me. Laura and I swapped roles so I'm chairman and she's treasurer. I thank Laura for her hard work. I'd like to mention three other things in progress:

- **Village Archives.** Nigel Groves gave some photos, posters, books & twenty years of bulletin editions plus a fine bookcase which you can see in the small meeting room in which to store them. We need a village archivist so let me know if you're interested. Also if you have suitable photos, books, etc.
- **Restarting village walks.** Some of the later ones were not well intended but I'm hoping we can restart perhaps in a different format.
- **A Bench** to commemorate the Jubilee. We will liaise about where to put it.

Final message: Please come to the Garden Walks on 19<sup>th</sup> June.

8.10 Whitchurch United Charities – Sally Woolhouse, Chair  
(Registered Charity No. 264826 of 22.3.1907)

The purpose of the Charity is to provide support to local students, in the form of grants to help with funding of essential equipment such as books, and any other costs associated with educational needs. The trustees meet twice a year to consider applications which have been made in the past six-month period. Applications are treated in the strictest confidence. Since the previous report made in June 2021, the trustees have awarded four grants (totalling £920) to students representing all age groups. This amount is greater than the average annual income of the charity but there was a smaller total amount granted in the previous year. In the forthcoming year, the trustees expect to receive further demands on the charity funds, due to the continuing financial challenges being experienced by many families.

The ex-officio trustees currently are:-

Rev James Leach, Ken Baker and Paul Witcher.

and the representative trustees are:-

Sally Woolhouse (Chairman), John Bradon (Secretary), Sarah Dixon (Grant Applications Secretary), Nick Leadbeater-Hart (Treasurer), Katherine Higley (Publicity Officer), Sarah Dragonetti (Safeguarding Officer) and Katharine Martin.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to all the trustees for their commitment to this important local charity and their careful and thorough consideration of all the applications which are received.

Finally, Sue Matthews retired from her position as churchwarden earlier

this month and therefore automatically stepped down as an ex-officio trustee of Whitchurch United Charities. She served as a valued trustee for 23 years and her wisdom and experience will be much missed. We will be welcoming Paul Witcher, the new churchwarden, to our next meeting in October.

#### 8.11 Village website – Richard Wingfield

There seems to be more news than usual competing for space on the front page of the website – currently there are 12 items – and on the What’s On page there is a bulging list of future village occasions as well as all those bin-days. I think this shows a welcome recovery in community life as we come out of the Covid period.

I would like to thank our Page Editor **Hilary Jensen**, our Events Editor **Pam Scott** and our IT host **Phil Weir** for all their work through the year. Thanks also to our Photographer-at-large **Nick Brazil** and our Nature Editor **Sally Woolhouse**.

Please keep sending in news, messages, and photos. Thank you!

Richard Wingfield, News Editor  
[rmwingfield@btinternet.com](mailto:rmwingfield@btinternet.com)

#### 8.12 WOT Wallopers – Peter Ferguson

The handbell group continues to meet at 3pm on Sunday afternoons at 3PM at 21 Swanston Field.

Covid prevented us from practicing this last year. But we resumed after Christmas.

Under our able and experienced leader, Carol Wheeler, we have learned a medley of popular songs like “Singing in the Rain”, with an effective “thumb damping” technique, “Pomp and Circumstance”, “Rule Britannia”, and other well-known traditional songs and Christmas carols.

We had a successful outing at the Goring Community Club in March where we performed in front of an appreciative audience of pensioners celebrating a birthday. We also rang “Happy Birthday”. Our inspired leader Carol was also able to gain participation with some of the audience who had a go in ringing some bells to music. We are in demand at care homes and are taking bookings.

We need a minimum of six people to form a handbell practice choir. We are learning to ring the Queens Celebration 70 as well as the Ukrainian national anthem.

We were privileged to have a husband and wife from Ukraine who are being accommodated by Hannah Hayes, one of our members, join us at our last meeting. We were able to play the Ukrainian national anthem which they appreciated.

If any person has time on Sunday afternoons and can read basic music, that is two notes that are coloured red and green on the music sheet, with one bell in each hand

and can count the designated beats to the bar and ring on the note, this might be something you would like to try your hand at. You would be most welcome to join us. It is not as formidable as it sounds, and one gets better as we practice more. Let Peter Ferguson know at 21 Swanston Field, (tel. 07557 383634). We have over 32 bells and another spare octave, if required to train newcomers.

#### 8.13 WoTHABs – Sally Woolhouse, Treasurer

The Whitchurch-on-Thames Habitat Study Group (WoTHabs) continues to aim to meet its main objectives, which are to encourage the protection and enhancement of habitats in our parish and to promote local interest and enthusiasm for the natural environment. We also liaise with the PAWS group, particularly on biodiversity matters.

Last July, WoTHabs and PAWS held the popular walk in the wonderful Hay Meadow at Hardwick. This event was well attended and was led by knowledgeable botanists and hosted by James Norman who manages this important and bio-diverse site. We are planning to hold it again this year, on Sunday 12th June at 2pm. It is always an enjoyable and very informative event, so do try and come along!

The gradual erosion and deterioration of the grassy verges along the length of Hardwick Road, caused by vehicles, has been of great concern to WoTHabs for many years now. These verges are very species-rich, and include some uncommon species. Over the past year, with the agreement of the Parish Council, we have been in discussions with Jo Watson, a project manager for Mend The Gap, which is a possible suitable source of funding, as well as with Jon Beale, of OCC Highways. Our proposal is to restore approximately 175m of eroded verge by banking up with soil, seeding with a local seed mix and protecting with wooden posts (as specified by Highways). As you will appreciate, any work next to a highway and that might affect utilities underneath the verge, is fraught with complications but we are still hoping to succeed. This is obviously not seen as a high priority project from Highways' point of view and we will soon be looking for support from the PC to move this forward. In conjunction with the restoration and protection of the verges, it should then be possible to meet the aim in the Village Plan to establish a footpath along the full length of the road on the south verge, safe from traffic.

We also continue to act in an advisory role to the PC on the development and management of the diverse green spaces in the parish. We are pleased to have been consulted on the Village Green, the Maze area, the Polish Church garden and the Manor Road north verge. Gill Goodwin is the WoTHABS' representative on the Village Green Working Group and we are grateful to her for taking on this important role. We are also actively involved in the various working parties organised by the Green Team in the green spaces in the village.

#### 8.14 Village Plan – John Bradon

The current Village Plan was completed in 2019, 10 years after the previous one.

**Reminder of Survey Result:** Residents love the village. They want to keep it the way it is, retaining its rural feel. Some things - like the village hall and pavilion were rather

neglected and there was a wish get them back into a good state. People wanted more activities - especially for young people.

We identified 9 top priorities and lots of nice-to-haves. So, 3 years on from 2019, how are we doing?

The biggest concern was **Roads & Traffic**. This was one area where little progress was made on the 2009 plan and some actions were carried over. They are difficult. Now the 20 mph limit is done. The need for better parking management to avoid gridlock was eased by pandemic but will become an issue again in future. Work is progressing on pedestrian safety. We have pleasing progress and a good team. Still much to do and I know people are keen to keep it moving.

**Village Hall.** To add to what Charles said, the management committee have done a lot of work behind the scenes scheduling electrical & fire safety testing, maintenance, safeguarding, etc., etc. In the Village Plan survey, people had wanted more activities younger people, so we are really pleased that this year a Mum and Baby Group and also Youth Theatre Group have started up. We're lucky people have come forward to run these activities. We have two very good yoga classes, circuit training and an excellent camera club. Many people are involved in running societies who use the hall. Last week, Carol Martin the treasurer of the bridge club mentioned to me it was a thankless task so I'd like to thank her.

The Art Café and the Afternoon Teas are great events that lots of people of all ages enjoy. If you think "I haven't seen so-and-so for a while" - please invite them.

**Cricket pavilion.** It was hoped to work with the Cricket Club to replace the pavilion. A group met other cricket clubs, designed a new pavilion, set up a charity and began applying for grants. Two important messages came back: grant-awarding bodies will only support if you will set up a youth team (or women's' team) AND if you've started to raise money yourself. A couple of years ago, these were a difficult message for the cricket club – they wanted to play cricket not write safeguarding policies! Recently though they have raised some funds and I think as soon as they are seen to be making progress, they will get support in the village. I certainly hope so.

**Community Emergency Plan.** We developed a plan, now on its second or third iteration. This helped at the start of pandemic as we had an initial list of volunteers. Lots of work has been done on flooding (thanks to Richard Wingfield and John Southey) and we are currently working on fitting out the village hall a place of safety. I've written a draft leaflet coming out with the next bulletin which will say more about preparations for an emergency.

**Pavements.** The PC have put money into resurfacing some of the pavements in worst condition which is another priority action ticked off.

**Conservation Area Assessment.** The PC have paid a consultant who has created a draft document which we'll soon see. This should highlight the important aspects of the village, which helps protect them in planning assessments. When the council dig up

the road, they put back granite paving stones. Await the assessment with interest and hope the Whitchurch Society will help get people involved.

**Green Team** Thanks Alexa for starting this and Charles for taking over. They have succeeded identifying guardians for the open space areas listed in the Village Plan. Great progress has been made on the Polish Church Memorial Garden. Lastly to mention **Conservation**. The Village Plan did not make specific recommendations on habitats other than restoring Hardwick Road verges (mentioned in the PAWS report). However, the plan does point out that we are lucky in having two groups: PAWS and WoTHABS with very competent members. I believe there may be things we can do to protect our habitats – I suggest they PC should make use PAWS and WoTHABS to look at this.

**Summary** Of the 9 major item on the Village Plan, 5 are done and progress is being made on the two remaining traffic & parking items plus the Conservation Area Assessment. I'm sure these won't be carried over into the 2029 plan. Let's keep working on the pavilion and look at the remaining minor items in the plan. (In fact, we are at least halfway through the minor items but I'm too short of time to review these here)

**Final point** – I hope it's clear that the village depends on volunteers. This year we lost Nigel Groves, Gwen Bruce and Graham Dednam all of whom, in their different ways, helped to make life in the village more interesting. Let's think how to support and encourage our helpful volunteers.

9.0 Meeting Close – 9:30pm.