

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT, JANUARY 2019

Hi everyone and Happy 2019! I hope you had a good holiday season and are ready to start the New Year afresh.

I am pleased to say that we have now filled the Parish Council vacancies that have been outstanding for a number of months:

- Two new Parish Councillors, Katherine Higley and Warren Beard joined us in November. Katherine is a long-time resident of the village who will initially be helping with our GPDR processes and liaison with the Allotments Society. Warren lives with his family on the High Street and is interested in helping to tackle some of the Traffic and Parking issues that many of us are experiencing.
- I am also pleased to welcome Ina Chantry who has now replaced Felipa House as our Clerk. Ina is a Parish Councillor for Bix and Assendon outside of Henley, and brings much relevant experience and new energy to the role. I know all of the councillors are enjoying getting to know her. Many thanks to Felipa for all the work that she has done for the village over the past few years.

One of our focusses over the last six months has been to improve how we work together as a Council to more effectively address village issues.

- You may have noticed that Parish Council meeting minutes now clearly identify both “Resolutions” to show where decisions have been made, and “Actions” to identify where the Council has agreed to take actions. Since July, we have agreed to take 80 actions. The Council now maintains an **Action Log** spreadsheet on the Village website that shows what steps we have taken to complete each action.
- We encourage residents of the village to contact the Council with feedback on issues they would like to see addressed as well as positive things they would like to see more of! To raise an issue, you just need to contact me, our Clerk Ina, or any Councillor via email, phone, or letter. We are maintaining a **Resident's Issues**

**List** on the website that also explains the process we use to address the issues. We log all issues on the anonymous list to ensure they are not forgotten and to enable residents to see how they have been addressed. Of course, it may not be possible to address all issues raised to the Council, but if this is the case we will explain why. Since May, we have closed 16 issues and are working to address 5 more.

- Our meetings are moving back to the Village Hall starting 21st February and will be held on the **3rd Thursday of the month** going forward. We had been having meetings in the Old Stables recently due to scheduling of Village Hall availability (which is surprisingly busy during the week) combined with the scheduling availability of all 7 councillors and Clerk. With the new team, we have found a suitable slot in the Village Hall. Parish Council meetings are open to the public so we welcome anyone to attend, even if it is just to listen to see what is happening in the village. There is a **Public Forum agenda** item near the beginning of each meeting in which anyone has the opportunity to raise issues to the Council for up to 5 minutes each. Please note that due to Parish Council processes, we cannot take decisions on issues raised during a meeting, but can take an action to review them for a future decision.

Some of the key issues the Parish Council has been addressing in the past few months include:

- **Eastfield House** planning application – I am pleased to say that SODC issued a rejection of Ross Healthcare's application to demolish Eastfield House on 18th January. This is good news for the village, but of course the situation is far from resolved. Ross Healthcare may choose to appeal the decision as they have done in the past, and even if the appeal is rejected, the building will remain empty in a growing state of disrepair until a positive decision can be made for its use at some point in the future. Review of this application has been a priority for the Council in

the past few months since we initially objected to the application in October:

- o Ross Healthcare has provided a number of amendments to the application, most of which are studies and statements aimed at trying to counter the numerous objections raised by the community and other players such as SODC flood engineers.
- o SODC commissioned an independent assessment that questions the Ross Healthcare viability assessment that they needed to demolish Eastfield House and provide a modern facility with at least 48 units to be economically viable. The SODC study showed that a care facility could also be viable using the existing building with the previously approved planning application for 45 units.
- o Historic England wrote a letter to the SODC Planning Officer confirming the architectural merit of Eastfield House and recommended that it not be demolished. They also stated that if the building was unsuitable for Ross Healthcare that other uses could be appropriate such as development of flats or a single home.
- o The Parish Council held an Extraordinary Meeting on the future of Eastfield House in October. The meeting was a joint discussion with a number of residents to better understand the issues with the application, see what can be done to ensure the house does not fall into a further state of disrepair whilst it remains vacant, and to protect the larger village Conservation Area in the future. 11 Actions were agreed from this meeting and the status of these can be seen on the Action Log.
- o Following our January meeting, the Parish Council submitted an updated Objection to SODC.

- We will continue to watch this situation closely and be proactive where we can, to try to ensure it doesn't fall into a state of disrepair, and to ultimately help find a suitable use for this important building.
- **The Boat on High Street** – As discussed in the previous Bulletin, there has been a number of concerns raised by residents about the boat, but there has also been a growing show of support from the community towards it. It's use as a community focal point for Remembrance Sunday and Christmas celebration was overwhelmingly positive and was an expression of community spirit and creativity. The Parish Council had a discussion with Gill Williamson of the Crafty Knit and Stitch group, who are responsible for the decorations, and Leslie Maynerd of MOWS, who maintains the flowers and garden area at the church entrance. We agreed a plan whereby the Knit and Stitch group would continue to decorate the boat during dormant seasons, and also keep the somewhat shabby top hidden under a canvas cover at least through Easter. In the Spring, when the weather is dryer, MOWS will work with volunteers to refurbish the boat to make it tidier and less shabby to address the concerns raised by residents. It will likely result in a smaller, more manageable planting area for the summer growing season.
- **Grass Cutting on the Village Green** – Some residents have expressed concern that the Village Green is not cut frequently enough during peak growing season, resulting in excessive grass clippings. The Parish Council is now looking to increase the cutting frequency to weekly during the peak growing season which will have the effect of reducing the size of grass clippings. The costs for this have not been finalised, but the Cricket Club has agreed in principle to support some of the extra cost.
- **New Pavilion** – I am pleased to say that the design for the new pavilion received planning approval from SODC on 10th January. There is still a long road ahead before it will be completed, but this approval enables us to proceed with critical steps such as

developing a detailed specification for bids from suppliers, and progressing grant applications. Please contact Keith Brooks or Neil Huntington with questions on plans for its development. Cllr Hanfrey will be leading work on fundraising and grant applications.

All the best,

*Jim Donahue*

## **VILLAGE PLAN: TRANSPORT AND PARKING GROUP (TAPAG) (NOTE: NEW ARTICLE)**

The feedback from the various presentations held to inform residents of the updated Village Plan overwhelmingly highlighted traffic safety and parking concerns as the most urgent issue to resolve for an improvement to our quality of life. As one might expect everyone had a solution; from double yellow lines throughout the village to residents only parking. All of these have their merits but in isolation will not have a consensus nor likely be possible from a legislative point of view.

TAPAG has been meeting regularly and a plan has gradually evolved. The objective has been to build a picture to present to the necessary authorities. In addition to this speed and parking surveys have also been carried out. The initial work has, in the main been completed, and has been presented to the Parish Council who have allocated funds to retain a Traffic Consultant should it be necessary to finesse the plan and make the necessary approaches to the various authorities, predominantly Oxfordshire County Council where responsibility for roads and verges lies. Approaches were made to several traffic consultants and preliminary meetings have been held with two.

Aside from the costs for a consultant there is likely to be significant cost associated with the legal and consultative procedures which will fall out of the plan but are both necessary and time consuming.

It is likely to be a long and tortuous path, but we must pursue it as things will only get worse with limited parking in Pangbourne and at the station along with an increase in traffic as housing developments around us continue to grow.

There will be regular updates in the bulletin and on the website.

*The TAPAG team*

## **PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

**P18/S2918/HH**, 'Lane End', Eastfield Lane – Proposed first floor extension and extensions to northern and southern flank elevations. Provision of new parking and turning area to north of house. The Council voted unanimously to object to the planning application.

**P18/S3451/LDE** 'Heron's Reach South', Eastfield Lane. This item was for information only.

**P18/S29650**, 'Eastfield House', Eastfield Lane. Amendments nos 2,3 and 4. For information only.

**P18/S3606/HH**, 'Ebony', 2 Old Gardens, High Street (2 storey extension). 'No objections'.

**P18/S3809/FUL** Bozedown Farm, Hardwick Road (Part replacement an existing Dutch barn with a new two-storey barn). 'No objections'.

## **WHITCHURCH & GORING HEATH HISTORY SOCIETY**

Stephen Barker will speak at our AGM on Thursday 21st February on the subject of "The Armistice of 1918 and after", a timely reminder that the grim events of the First World War didn't end with the silencing of the guns on the western front.

Clive Williams will speak at our meeting on March 21st about his book "Shire Hall Through the Looking Glass" an account of his legal career.

Both meetings are at Whitchurch Village Hall, starting at 8pm, coffee served from 7.30pm. All are welcome, and non-members pay £3 to include coffee and biscuits.

We will have a varied programme of meetings throughout the year, including Simon Draper's account of his researches for the Victoria County History book which includes Whitchurch and Whitchurch Hill. Why not join us?

## **WHITCHURCH & GORING HEATH TWINNING ASSOCIATION**

Our AGM will be on Tuesday 12th February at 7.30pm, at the Old Rectory Stables in Whitchurch. All are welcome at the meeting, and at the events we will be planning for the visit of our friends from La Bouille at the beginning of May.

## **THE ALNUTT ALMSHOUSES (GORING HEATH) COBBLED FORECOURT CONTROVERSY**

*The first part of this article was published in the Autumn Bulletin. This is the second and final part and reports on the responses of the various bodies entrusted with protecting our heritage and administering our planning process (Editor – Richard Williams).*

English Heritage was surprisingly unhelpful considering that this was the publicly funded body charged with '*championing England's built heritage*' and '*giving expert, constructive advice*'. Initially a brief report of the Alnott situation was sent to Customer Services at English Heritage and given contact number 507984363. The first response was 'I would advise you to contact our Case Work Team at your local English Heritage Office'. It was then pointed out that it was the job of Customer Services to forward the report to the appropriate office. Under the threat of making an official complaint the report was forwarded within minutes! This turned out to be the south east office in Guildford. A reply on March 24, 2015,

from an 'Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas' (R.P.) was not exactly encouraging. Although it was asserted that listed building consent had not been applied for in this instance, the advice was to contact the conservation Team of the Local Planning Authority as they had the power to take enforcement action. Effectively English Heritage was passing the buck and saying it was not interested any further.

## **SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE AND VALE OF THE WHITE HORSE DISTRICT COUNCIL [SODC].**

Consequently, the report was sent to SODC. On May 15, 2015, the Senior Enforcement Officer (T.S.) was the first respondent and he asked for the site address of 'the complaint'. Not an auspicious start and precisely why 'Alnutt Almshouses' was not in the lexicon of the SODC planning department was not explained. On May 20, 2015, an Enforcement Officer (L.V.) made contact. He reported that 'it appears listed building consent was not sought at the time of the works which was apparently over ten years ago'. Clearly, he was totally confused since the removal of the cobbles was just over six months previously! He went further to say - *'My early thoughts are that [it] is probably not expedient or proportionate to take enforcement action. I will keep you informed'*. In response, it was pointed out (a), he had muddled the current case with the courtyard modifications undertaken in 1993, (b) the geo-conservation importance of the cobbles, (c) it being an integral part of a Grade 1 listed building and (d) that there was now no safety hazard because of the path network installed in 1993. The main justification for removing the cobbles given by the Almshouses Trustees was that the cobbles, despite the flagged path network, were a safety concern. Yet ironically, on their web site, is a colour picture of Morris Dancers performing on the cobbles (taken pre-2014). Obviously, the cobbles were insufficiently hazardous to discourage dancing on them!

In a follow-up email, on September 21, 2015, re Planning Enforcement Investigation SE15/120, L.V. stated *'whist there is a breach of planning control, I am of the opinion the works do not amount to*



*any significant planning harm in relation to the listed building. I have given the owner the opportunity to apply for retrospective planning permission in order to regularise the works – this would receive officer support and the matter will not be pursued further’.* Note that there was no reference to any consultation with the SODC conservation officers. It was LV’s decision alone.

Yet on June 4, 1992, SODC granted listed building consent to the trustees for – (i) formation of stone flag paths, (ii) setting of cobbles into a concrete bed and (iii) provision of surface water drains to the courtyard. Specifically, the reuse of the existing cobbles was mandated. This was justified so as *‘to safeguard the architectural and historic character and appearance of the listed building and the amenity of the area’.*

The plot thickens. It is now known that on July 15, 2011 (i.e. four years earlier), a conservation officer (JP) wrote to the trustees informing them that the proposed resurfacing needed planning permission although it was likely to receive officer support. Further a site visit had occurred with the very English Heritage Inspector who had shown little interest in the 2015 exchanges. It is hard to believe that the latter was not fully informed on the proposed removal of the cobbles. Apparently end of story until...

After almost three years, the Chair of the Whitchurch-on-Thames Parish Council (KB) knowing of the earlier 2015 SODC exchanges, forwarded a copy of a letter to SODC which he had received. This was from the Listed buildings Sub Committee of the Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society (OAHS). As democratic protocol demands, as part of the normal planning procedure, the Goring Heath Parish Council, had been given details by the SODC of a retrospective planning application from the Trustees of the Almshouses. Note that this was seven years after being advised that this was necessary. In view of the nature of the application, the Oxfordshire branch of the Council for the Protection of Rural England was appraised of the issue and it alerted OAHS as an interested party. The latter was able to act as a local agent of the Council of British Archaeology. All these bodies unanimously believed the

SODC had displayed total incompetence in handling the cobble issue. Even Private Eye has run the story.

The SODC Conservation and Design Officer (SA) advised the current Principal Planning Officer – Enforcement (RC) on June 28. 2018 that lifting of the cobbles required planning permission, but in her view listed building consent was not required. Interestingly, she noted that the now lifted cobbled surface was consistent with other similarly cobbled surfaces within the Chiltern AONB yet considered its removal was unarmful. The Trustee's view is that the cobbles are modern and that negates their importance. However, this flies against a formidable amount of evidence that this view is totally erroneous.

Mysteriously, it was then discovered that the Trustees had withdrawn their application for retrospective planning permission and instead have now applied for a 'Certificate of lawful development'. This has not been copied to Goring Heath Parish Council for comment. A stitch-up avoiding planning law is suspected with SODC as an accomplice. Predictably the planning department is digging in its heels in the face of mounting opposition to its irrational behaviour – are they the guardians of the people's interests? Watch this space!

Acknowledgements –  
Invaluable help has been received from George Lambrick & Liz Woolly (OAHS), Richard Wingfield, Nici Worth (CCE), Keith Brooks (WPC), and especially Peter Dragonetti (GHPC).

*Peter Worsley, Svartisen House*



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## **THE FRIENDS OF ST MARY'S & ST JOHN'S**

The Friends, an independent charity has now been established for over two years and has made good progress in achieving their aims.

This is to bring together as many people as possible from the Whitchurch community who are interested in the historical and social value of the two churches and surroundings. It includes people of different faiths and some of no faith. Funds are being raised to assist in the upkeep and development of the two historical church buildings.

Projects completed last year included the installation of a new sound system and loop in St John's Church, a new notice board on the High Street for St Mary's, notice boards at St John's repaired and replaced, together with improved security at St John's. Churchyard workdays have also been carried out at both churches.

The major project for 2019 will be the repair and restoration of the clock at St Mary's Church. This clock has not been in working order for about 20 years. Funds of the Friends have been increased as a result of many generous donations for this project by members of the Whitchurch community.

Various social events are arranged throughout the year, the most recent being the 'Evening of Music' held at St Mary's Church. This was a most enjoyable evening that provided music of many tastes including classical, jazz, popular and concluded with a symphony for organ. All the music was performed by very talented local artists. This was followed by a buffet and drinks.

The Friends also continue to run the Artcafe at the Old Stables on the first Saturday every other month (i.e. January, March etc.)

The Friends Trustees are:-Rev. Claire Alcock, Ken Baker, Theresa Elsome, Gordon Painter, Graeme Pearce, Paul Witcher, Keith Williams and Secretary Sally Woolhouse.

The Friends are always pleased to welcome new members so do contact me if you are interested.

*Keith Williams, Chairman*, Friends of St Mary's & St John's, Whitchurch,  
0118 984 1139 (email: [keithc.williams@btinternet.com](mailto:keithc.williams@btinternet.com))

## **THE 2018 WHITCHURCH ART & CRAFT EXHIBITION – 24TH / 25TH NOVEMBER**

This annual exhibition certainly hit the headlines last November. The biggest surprise of course was that the top prize in the Under 6's section was won by Harold the dog – Nick Brazil's constant companion. This was such a quirky story that James Burton of the Henley Standard gave it a full page write-up, which must be a first.

It was a very successful show all round, with 195 entries, representing high standards and great skills in all the Art, Craft and Photography sections. We were also pleased to welcome 4 new adult exhibitors, as well as many of the regular supporters, a total of 118 in total.

The theme for the Joyce Voysey Prize was 'Dogs' – if you visited the exhibition, you could not fail to be charmed by the wonderful range of pictures and models of dogs, large and small. The theme for 2019 has not yet been chosen but will be announced in the spring.

We also introduced the Nick Brazil award which is presented to the best short video. It was jointly won by Scarlet and Tess Higley for their films on the themes of 'Remembrance' and 'Autumn' respectively. We hope this will become a much contested award in the years ahead.

Colourful displays of work by children at the Pre-School, the Primary School and the Oratory Prep School were very eye-catching and showed great promise.

Visitors enjoyed refreshments all weekend and meeting up with friends and neighbours before the prize-giving ceremony at 4-30pm on Sunday.

Congratulations to all the prize winners; a full list of these can be found on the village website.

Very many thanks to all exhibitors and also to everyone who helped with the setting up, dismantling and running of the show, including serving the refreshments and making delicious cakes. Finally, my special thanks to Sarah Dixon, Wendy Ferguson, Jean-Marc Grosfort and Peter Smith who helped me in the planning stages and to the Whitchurch Society members who supported us.

*Sally Woolhouse (sally@wotarts.co.uk)*

## **WHITCHURCH PRE SCHOOL**

Christmas is a busy time for everyone and our pre-schoolers were no exception, with a diary jam-packed with festive fun. In between the usual activities: stories, crafting, French, cookery, PE and yoga (and a lot more besides), they got stuck into Hallowe'en, supported Children in Need, crafted festive Christmas cards, illustrated their own tea towel and put on a fabulous Christmas concert. The children were impeccably behaved and took to the stage in style, with a programme featuring classics as well as some new numbers, and even a song sung in French! Such an impressive performance, and a Christmas memory to treasure for parents and staff.

The end of term Christmas party was a huge success, with Bertie Slippers providing uproarious entertainment (as well as very popular balloon hats and animals), and just after we heard some jingle bells on the roof, Father Christmas himself came along to steal the show, giving out presents and making the whole event completely magical.

In between this high excitement, the children created some gorgeous artworks for the Whitchurch Art and Craft Exhibition, themed around poppies, fireworks and shapes. They all loved getting stuck into science during a visit from Mini Professors, and we have continued our focus on outdoor activities, making full use of our lovely play area, as well as nature walks in the surrounding countryside.

Dreaming of sunnier days, the Whitchurch fete will be held on Saturday 4th May 2019, so get the date in your diaries! It's the pre-school's biggest fundraising event, and a fantastic way to celebrate our wonderful village and the arrival of summer.

Our pre-school is nearly fully subscribed at the moment, but we're accepting registration forms for 2019. If you're interested in your little one joining our happy band, contact Kathleen on 0118 984 4516 or [whitchurchpreschool@me.com](mailto:whitchurchpreschool@me.com)

*Elizabeth Multon*

### **SPRING 2019 BULLETIN**

The deadline for articles will be Sunday 14th April and these can be sent to [rlwilliamsafcw@btinternet.com](mailto:rlwilliamsafcw@btinternet.com) in Word or PDF format. Bulletins will be distributed by weekend 28-29th April.

*Richard Williams*



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