

Whitchurch-on-Thames Parish Council

MINUTES of the Annual Parish Assembly held in the village hall, Manor Road, on Thursday 24th May 2018, commencing at 8.00pm.

PRESENT

Chair	Jim Donahue
Vice-Chair	Rachel Hatcher
Councillors	Sarah Hanfrey Denise Huxtable
Clerk	Felipa House
District Councillor	Rob Simister

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Many residents and representatives of village organisations.

APOLOGIES

Cllrs. Brooks and Bowen, County Councillor Kevin Bulmer, Richard Williams ('Bulletin' editor), Peter Ferguson (handbell ringers), Jackie Hoskins (PAWS), Geraldine Witcher (WoTSing), Liz Gibson (flower and produce show).

1. Report from the Chair of the Parish Council (Cllr. Jim Donahue)

Welcome everyone.

This is the Annual Parish Assembly, which is not a normal Parish Council meeting where decisions are made. The purpose of the Annual Assembly is to give both residents and the Parish Council an opportunity to hear from local community groups and give people a chance to interact with the Parish Council.

In May, we have what we call the Annual Meeting of the Council, which is a Parish Council meeting, and at that meeting each year we elect the Parish Council Chair and Vice-Chair. I assume you are aware that the Parish Council elected me Chair and Rachel Vice-Chair at this meeting just over a week ago. Keith is not able to make tonight's meeting, but I would like to thank him for all the work he has done in the past three years as Chair. It is my expectation that he will continue in the roles he has recently been leading such as the village green and village hall.

I have already made a statement that I consider it a great honour to be Parish Council Chair of this wonderful village and will do my very best to ensure that the Parish Council works well together to effectively meet the need of our vibrant community.

Please also note that we have one vacancy that we will be advertising shortly. We had decided to co-opt someone as a Councillor at our last meeting, but sadly they have had to step down for personal reasons.

I can't help but feel optimistic at the moment with the beautiful weather we've had and some things that have been happening in the past week.

- The lovely Royal wedding celebration on our magical village green; thanks again to Lissie, Leslie and everyone who contributed to this
- Repairs to the hole in the wall opposite The Greyhound have now almost finished
- Leslie says flowers for the boat at the church entrance have been purchased and MOWS will plant it on Saturday
- We have 3 lovely new signs greeting people to our village and the war memorial has been refurbished to its original glory.

But there is still much to be done, and indeed I would have no interest in being Chair if there weren't things we needed to accomplish. Some of the things we have already started working on include:

- building a new pavilion on the village green
- refurbishing the village hall
- addressing long-standing traffic and parking issues on the High Street.

The traffic and parking issues are clearly the most pressing issue for many residents of the community. This is something that was raised in the last Village Plan of 2009 and there is still much to be done. The results of the village plan survey are still not complete but, based on the feedback we've had on the two recent open days, I expect them to be the top priority.

I am committed to working with our council, our County Councillor Kevin Bulmer and whomever else we need to work with to ensure that the recommendations from the village plan update are fully implemented. These include traffic and parking and any other recommendations that come out of village plan update recommendations.

The key update on the village plan is that we are now asking everyone in the village to complete the survey. Every household was issued with a hard copy or it can be completed online. The questions are meant to focus on areas that were originally highlighted in the 2009 Plan and more work may still be required. This is a group effort from the Village Plan team and is a much-reduced set of questions from last time, as many areas have already been addressed and do not need to be repeated.

I'm very pleased with the number of residents outside the Council who have been engaged in the village plan process so far. Some of them are here tonight and some, such as Sarah, have subsequently joined the Council. Rachel has also had great engagement from a number of residents in the TAPAG working sessions.

Parish Council finances for this financial year ending 31st March 2018:

- Operating income: £28,997.53
- Total payments: £23,919.13
- This left about £5,000 to add to our reserves
- Reserves have increased from £50,118.24 to £55,196.64
- Reserves are earmarked for general reserves as well as future projects such as the new pavilion and the verge improvements along Hardwick Road, and can be available for new initiatives coming out of the updated village plan.

To close, I'd like to thank everyone, first of all for being here tonight to show your interest in our community, and secondly for the work you do for our community. Volunteers to run local groups and contribute in any way to our community are at the heart of our vibrant community life.

I count 15 community groups on our website with a number of new ones in the past few years, including the fabulously successful Art Cafe, as well as MOWS, WOTJam and now the new WOTSing community choir.

2. County Councillor's report (Cllr. Kevin Bulmer)

Apart from my basic councillor's duties I sit on a number of committees at County. I'm Chairman of the County Pension Committee, Vice-Chairman of the Brunel Pension Fund Oversight Committee, Vice-Chairman of The Remuneration Committee (not councillors' Remuneration but officers), member of the Oxfordshire Health Oversight Committee and I sit as the elected member on the Children's Adoption Panel.

The Brunel Pension Fund is a Government initiative for public bodies to combine pension funds to achieve savings of scale and cost. We've combined with 8 other similar minded counties and the Environment Agency to create a fund of approximately £29 billion.

Household waste recycling centre update

As detailed in the July '17 Parish Report, OCC has signed a new Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) contract that secures all seven sites in the medium term, with no change to the sites' opening hours or days.

Changes to daytime support

OCC is introducing a new daytime service. This follows a review of adult daytime support and a public consultation. From 1 October 2018 OCC's Health and Wellbeing and Learning Disability Daytime Support Services will be replaced by a new Community Support Service. This will be delivered from eight centres: Abingdon, Banbury, Bicester, Didcot, Oxford, Wallingford, Wantage and Witney.

OCC steps up pothole work as winter hits the roads

Repeated cycles of ice, thaws and snow created the worst possible weather conditions for roads over the last few months, leading to a rise in reports on Fix My Street from 3,000 pre-Christmas to 7,000 during January. 36,000 potholes were repaired in the year.

Councillor Priority Fund key part of budget proposals

A key proposal for the upcoming Oxfordshire County Council budget is to have a Councillor Priorities Fund; all County Councillors will have a £15k fund each to support parish council highways needs and community group projects.

Oxfordshire's libraries are thriving, not just surviving

Libraries Minister Michael Ellis MP attended the official opening of Oxfordshire County library in February. The newly-refitted facility welcomed more than 100 guests, including staff, volunteers and community groups who have helped ensure the county's 43 branches have a bright future.

OCC budget 2018/19

OCC agreed its budget at a full Council meeting on 13 February following a five-hour meeting of all 63 County Councillors. Council tax will rise by 5.99%, the maximum amount allowed without a referendum. Key points include:

- Finances are sound compared to other councils, with difficult decisions having already been taken
- The council tax rise will deliver extra money for adults' and children's social care
- Proposal to extend £500,000 contribution for homelessness for an extra year in 2019/20 (subject to consultation)
- 10-year programme to improve transport network and release more money for road maintenance
- £15,000 for each of the 63 County Councillors to spend on local priorities in their area.

Ox-Cam expressway

The National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) has published its report to Government on the Oxford-Cambridge arc. It advised on the need for long-term investment funding for new transport infrastructure to harness the region's economic potential to benefit local people and boost UK plc. in a post-Brexit landscape. Its route is currently Didcot, Abingdon and after that still under consideration, together with its exact route past Didcot and Abingdon.

Campaign to recruit care staff to reduce delayed transfer

Against a background of increasing demand for care services, particularly from older people with complex problems needing support, a major campaign to recruit more care staff was launched on 20 November.

Council and Carillion

The Council has worked very hard to reduce the effect of the Carillion bankruptcy and a lot of work is still ongoing to assess the state and situation of all Carillion's maintenance and new-build contracts across the county, with particular emphasis on schools.

Contact details

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3. District Councillor's report (Cllr. Rob Simister)

Dealing with issues - We have continued to actively support our parish councils and residents with questions and issues concerning development, ranging from questions about fences and hedges up to issues around new major developments. We have again been to the High Court to challenge a planning appeal ruling with judicial reviews but unfortunately the Court would not hear our case that the Inspector had miscalculated our land supply. We have ended the year with the positive announcement that we now have a 5.4 year land supply.

We have worked with our MP John Howell in trying to get back control of development. John has been the driving force behind the Neighbourhood Planning Law and the proposals before Parliament which are expected to become law later this year.

Didcot Garden Town is a major part of our plan for development in the district, offering a significant number of jobs and home. Work on this project continues with various funding opportunities being announced.

Our plans to 'refresh' Berinsfield are progressing at a good pace and will bring significant benefits to this community and the wider district.

Work on the new Local Plan continues and we are entering the final phase. Whilst additional development is never welcome in the majority of our communities the growing population, and housing, mean that unpopular decisions must be taken.

SODC successes

Community safety - Even with the major cuts of the austerity years, our Police and Crime Commissioner has introduced initiatives seeing Thames Valley police force's performance maintain its position as one of the effective forces, right at the top of the league. Our Community Safety Team work closely with the CS Partnership strengthening the County's contributions, for example by putting together a short guide on how to spot examples of modern slavery. We have also introduced two Public Spaces Protection Orders in Thame and Henley to allow police to target specific anti-social behaviour offences that can occur in public spaces.

Waste and recycling - For the third year SODC has been awarded top place in the recycling league table in the country. At this time last year we were experiencing issues with delayed deliveries due to Biffa's ageing waste collection fleet. Our concerns were shared by Biffa and replacement was under way, together with a plan to make the collection service more efficient. These measures are now in place and there has been a significant improvement in the service.

As part of this refresh, a competition was run with schools across the South and Vale Districts to name the new food waste trucks. This recently resulted in a pupil in each district winning a prize for themselves and for their school. The winning names are Trashosaurus and Munching Molly.

Finances - South Oxfordshire remains a financially sound Council. Despite increasing financial restrictions, we have been able to maintain our full range of services with a minimal £5.00 increase in our part of the council tax. Our sound and prudent approach to money has enabled us to maintain our Capital and Revenue Grants scheme. This scheme has continued to provide much-needed funding for facilities in our communities, including funding to help refurbish the Wallingford Cornmarket Exchange, Ewelme pavilion and play areas at Little Milton. We have awarded a grant of £250,000 to Thame sports club, which will help to provide a new building for the whole community to use. Both Thame and Henley leisure centres have also benefited from major upgrades to their changing facilities and, although mostly not visible to the public, Didcot Wave received major maintenance and refurbishment.

Our Councillor Grants Scheme has also enabled councillors to give grants to local causes that may not otherwise have qualified for funding.

First So Community Lottery Draw - Almost 50 charities and voluntary groups have so far applied to benefit from an exciting new community lottery launched in South Oxfordshire (27 March). SO Charitable Lottery has been set up by South Oxfordshire District Council to raise funds for local good causes.

Housing team win silver award - Well done to our housing needs team who have achieved a prestigious silver award from the National Practitioners' Support Service for the work they do to help prevent the most vulnerable people becoming homeless. We are only one of 24 councils, out of the 326 councils in the country, to achieve silver or gold and it builds on our previous success of winning a bronze award last year. The team will pick up their silver award in July.

New Changing Places toilet in the Orchard Centre, Didcot - Didcot's second Changing Places disabled toilet has opened at the brand-new extension of the Orchard Centre, making the newly improved town centre even more accessible.

Changing Places facilities go beyond statutory requirements in helping those that cannot use standard accessible toilets. South Oxfordshire District Council has paid £20,000 to install the new facility, which includes a height-adjustable changing bench, hoist and space for up to two carers to help support people that require assistance.

Unitary authority bids – Following the County Council's publication of its revised proposals last year, we and the Vale Council joined them in preparing a combined bid which would deliver based on the strengths of all three councils. This was submitted last year and is with the Secretary of State. A decision has been delayed by various changes in central government and we are assured that one will be made in the near future.

Other matters

Free workshops for businesses were run as part of the economic development team's support for local businesses, and examples of this included 'Placing a Value on Intangible Assets – Secure and Protect Your Business IP' and 'GDPR – Should you be concerned?'.

Go Active Gold has been getting great results in the past 2 years with over 2,000 people from our rural villages across both districts engaging in Go Active Gold activities. The Go Active Gold team aims to encourage people aged 60 and over living in rural areas to live more active lifestyles. The GO Active Gold team was awarded the Sports Development Project of the Year award at the 12th annual Oxfordshire Sports Awards held at the Kassam Stadium on Friday 19 January 2018.

We've also launched Go Active Juniors, a new project for anyone up to 18 years old. The project aims to increase participation in sport and physical activity by getting young people active in our area. The team offers a range of support including helping to find new coaches to deliver sports sessions, assisting clubs set up new activity sessions and helping clubs with equipment.

Food standards - We are one of only 24 district councils to have completed all the food hygiene inspection programmes for the year according to the Food Standards Agency. We have ensured that 95% of food businesses were considered to be compliant with food hygiene laws. A number of businesses were subject to enforcement notices and we have successfully prosecuted a number for serious breaches of the regulation.

Berinsfield Community Investment Scheme - we have continued working with residents, organisations and businesses based in Berinsfield on the plan to build up to 1,700 homes to help raise the funds needed to provide the facilities and services that residents identified were important.

'Safe Place' Scheme - A new support network is now available for vulnerable people visiting Wallingford and Didcot. Safe Places aims to provide a safe location for someone to go if they are feeling lost, worried or threatened, and are identified by a distinctive logo. We are now looking to extend this to other communities including Thame.

4. Village green and village hall reports (Cllr. Jim Donahue)

The village green

- Community events like the Royal wedding celebration
- Working to clarify the plans for the next village fete
- Working party by the football teams
- New village maintenance contract where we added additional cuts and developed a process to ensure dates of cuts are clear and aligned with cricket fixtures
- Had some feedback in the past week on grass cuttings and dog fouling, which I will look into
- Found a volunteer from the community to take over the work that Carrie Leadbeater-Hart was doing to move this forward
- Question on the village plan survey about what addition facilities residents may want, or to keep it as it is.

The village hall

- The PC is committed to maintaining the village hall for at least 5 years and potentially to 2029
- The VH Management Committee re-established and working on plan for refurbishment with a goal of making it:
 - structurally sound
 - insulated to keep energy costs down
 - attractive and useful for residents for private hire to increase use.
- Questions in the village plan about what additional facilities may be required
- Good work by Charles Cotgreave and Jean-Marc Grosfort so far
- Will need to balance costs with other priorities and also look at grants

5. Traffic and parking report (Cllr. Rachel Hatcher)

A new TAPAG team has been formed and results so far are very positive. The objective has been on fact-finding: looking at issues, who is affected by what, and possible solutions. 3 main focuses have emerged from these investigations: safety (cycling, pollution, speeding, walking children to and from school, crossing the road), parking and traffic flow.

Activities undertaken so far include an open day at the Art Café, a survey of High Street residents, an intensive 7-day survey to look at the cars parking on the High Street on a daily basis and 2 electronic traffic surveys monitoring speed and volume of cars and pinch points.

TAPAG have received an axle count from the Bridge Company and are talking to the police and OCC about the implementation of a 20mph limit in the village. They are also researching pausing spaces and parking time limits which might ease parking in the High Street. External consultancy support will be needed to ensure the most appropriate solutions are found. Drain clearing is also being investigated, as well as verge erosion. Once any major changes are planned then a consultation process for the village will be undertaken.

6. Village organisations' reports

AFC Whitchurch (Alex Hilton)

We are an enthusiastic, parent-run football club, currently managing 5 teams plus a training section for our youngest members. Our training and playing principles for all ages are inclusivity, competitiveness and fun.

The football club has been running for many years and many children have passed through the ranks. In the 2017/18 season we have had 82 children representing AFC Whitchurch. This year sees the culmination for the U18 team who started as 5-year olds and now conclude their junior football to join the world of senior/adult teams.

Arguably the best gift we can give our children is our time. Our coaches and parents are active supporters and advocates of the club and we are always looking for energetic new talent and team-members of all ages.

Funding is always a challenge for us - facilities are expensive to hire in the winter - so it is wonderful to have access to the football pitch on the village green. During the spring and autumn months this is our regular training facility, but sadly the pitch is not big enough for FA-recognised matches so we play in leagues in and around the Reading area.

Through the fantastic generosity of an anonymous local patron we will be able to buy all our players complete new kits for the 2018/19 season. In return for the patronage our parents will be supporting the village community by sponsoring some new bricks in the village maze.

For the new 2018/19 season from September we will be fielding teams in the following age groups:

U15s: coach, Alistair Aitchison - 11 a-side

U13s: coaches, Renato Bottini, Jon Ridley and Geoff Hardwick - 11 a-side

U11s: coaches, Alex Hilton and Martin Park - 9 a-side

U10s: coaches, Matt Lorrimore, Cormac Neeson and Greg Watkins - 7 a-side

Academy (U5-U7s): coaches, Chris Mulrooney, Will Moffett and Jon Shuttleworth - offering training only for this age group.

We are always looking for new players and would welcome both boys and girls (we have no girls-only teams at the moment). We would also love to fill some of the age gaps so if any parents would be willing to start a new year group they would be most welcome. Any prospective players or parents should contact us at afewhitchurch@yahoo.co.uk .

Art café (Gill Williamson)



Objective

To provide a community cafe where you can enjoy tea, coffee and delicious homemade cakes, sold on behalf of charities and community groups, whilst browsing unique art and crafts from local and emerging artists.



Benefits

- strengthens local community
- fund raiser for charities & community groups
- showcase for local and emerging artists
- base for community art projects



Strengthens Local Community



.... and encourages visitors



Fund Raiser

	<u>2016</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>Total</u>
• Charities	5,446	8,726	14,172
• Church & Friends	3,366	3,199	6,565
• Thames Path Together*		4,920	4,920
• Total	8,812	16,845	25,657

* Distributed to charities and community fundraisers that ran Art Cafe coffee mornings in 2016; of which The Friends of St Mary's and St John's received an additional £1,900.



Showcase for Local Artists



Base for Community Art Projects



Art Cafe Together



Knit & Stitch



Cricket club (Cormac Neeson)

The cricket club had a very successful season last year. There were fewer teams but the quality was higher. They want to encourage children's teams, and particularly girls, but extra members for all teams are always needed. The state of the changing rooms and facilities is now a matter for serious concern. Roof repairs have already had to be made and the windows and floors are now very poor. The club would encourage the Parish Council to begin the new pavilion as soon as possible and offer their help with the process, including raising funds.

Goring Heath and Whitchurch Flower and Produce Show – April (Liz Gibson)

In spite of one of the wettest and coldest springs on record, the show was very successful, with an increase in both the number of entrants and the number of entries. One must give it to the hardy daffodil and the whole narcissi family for coming up trumps. There was quite a good showing of the smaller spring flowers, too. Sincere thanks go to the judges who willingly give of their time and expertise, and to all the entrants for their many varied efforts in the different classes. Thank you to the committee members who put the show together to ensure its smooth running. Finally, a very big thank-you to Sarah Hanfrey for all the computer work on our behalf!!

MOWS (Make Our Whitchurch Special) (Leslie Maynerd)

I formed this group a couple of years ago because I was upset that there were a lot of weedy areas in the High Street, most particularly the areas by the church, which looked awful. I got permission from Sally Howard, who owns the land, to develop these areas and found a core of like-minded people to help (probably about half a dozen in total). The right-hand side was done first; with the help of my husband Dave and Geoff Weir 2 raised beds were made with sleepers from Bouchier.

The Council have very generously given us a budget to work to each year and Stan Remington, from The Walled Garden, has been incredibly generous and paid for many plants bought from Notcutts and also for the bench in memory of his wife Pockets, which is a lovely addition.

The left-hand side has had a big makeover this year with planting, and a boat donated by Beale Park for planting up. This has caused some controversy as it is a bit on the large size but I think once planted up (this weekend) it will certainly look very attractive. Whether it remains there after the summer will remain to be seen. Plants have again been donated by Stan, and a lot grown by Rosemary from Whitchurch Hill, who also turns up to help when she can.

The church has had permission to put an outside tap outside The Stables kitchen, which will certainly make life a lot easier for me to water!

PAWS (Pangbourne and Whitchurch Sustainability group) (Jackie Hoskins)

Pangbourne and Whitchurch Sustainability group has had a very successful year. We held a very well attended barn dance in October where we raised sufficient funds to buy two cycle racks. One was placed on the spare ground outside Garlands organic shop and the other will be close to St. James the Less church. However, we did meet a snag in making sure that the “Garlands” rack was held firmly in place. We hope that this has been solved and it is now in place for use when visiting Pangbourne village. We hope that the one at St. James will be fixed in the near future.

Last year was particularly good for apples and so, rather than have a huge number of apples go to waste, we again held an apple pressing day in Whitchurch. Families gathered in the Maze with their boxes of apples and everyone joined in the washing, cutting and pressing of the apples to make gallons of delicious juice that were poured into bottles to take home. This was an excellent example of limiting food waste, reusing plastic bottles and a fun activity for the community.

Another good news story for the year was the discovery of the rare butterfly found in the Maze at Whitchurch and the excellent elm planting by Whitchurch PC. I have been in touch with Peter Cuss from Butterfly Conservation to see if we can help provide more disease-resistant elms on the Pangbourne side of the Thames. PAWS have passed this information on to Pangbourne Parish Council and are hoping that the Parish Grounds Committee will be able to support this initiative.

Once again PAWS supported the two Parish Council litter picking days. Unfortunately, the one in Whitchurch had to be postponed because of late snow on the ground. The Pangbourne one went ahead. A remarkable job was done by all who participated, despite the weather being so wet and cold and not at all helpful.

This year PAWS decided to concentrate on the problem of plastic waste, both on land and in the oceans. We have started our campaign with articles in the spring village magazines. Following a request from Whitchurch Primary School, the PAWS education group gave an assembly on 17 April to start the school’s Earth week with a talk on reducing plastic waste. On Saturdays 21 and 28 April PAWS had a table outside Garlands organic shop with information on alternatives to single-use plastics. If you missed them we hope to have a stall

at the Pangbourne fete where we will have the latest information on plastics and lots of examples of alternatives.

This spring we have been working with Pangbourne Village Fete Committee to try to provide a plastic-free fete. We have successfully arranged for those serving food at the fete to use Vegware bioplastic dishes and glasses and for Veolia to collect them after the fete and process them in their composter. PAWS have agreed to supervise the rubbish collection on the day and for this we will need lots of volunteers.

We are also planning the 2018 apple pressing day in Whitchurch Maze on 30 September, and a day out at a south coast seaside resort in October to do litter picking on the beach. Finally, we have a barn dance arranged for Saturday 13 October where we hope to raise money to provide the Pangbourne Community Toilets with a modern, outside water fountain to reduce the number of water bottles used in the village.

So this year we are encouraging residents to **Reduce** their plastic buying, to **Reuse** their plastic where possible, to **Recycle** as much plastic as possible, and to try out the compostable **alternatives**.

PCC (Parochial Church Council) (Sue Matthews)

In the last year the church has continued to provide varied forms of worship on Sundays, at St John's and at St Mary's, as well as sacred space for occasional visitors and people who value sitting quietly inside the church for moments of peace or when needing strength.

We installed a sound system at St John's with help from The Friends and this is particularly useful for big events such as funerals, weddings or christenings. It is also in use for the family communion and all age worship services. St John's also had its first jazz concert in September, kindly organized by The Friends.

In February we joined a process called *Partnership for Missional Church*, which seeks to help churches identify how they can serve their community by listening to the community, alongside listening to God's guidance in the Bible. We therefore welcome feedback from the community about how we can engage better with people on the fringes of church, and what events would be welcomed in addition to Sunday worship; for instance, a group for spiritual seekers to discuss topical issues relating to life and faith?

Lent saw our lunches at The Old Stables resume and we raised money for Water Aid.

Last year's Remembrance on the hill was very well attended as usual and we welcomed many visitors and occasional worshippers at our Christmas services, including the primary school, who sang at our December concert in St Mary's, and who once again join us this June alongside the Phoenix Choir.

We continue to partner with The Art Café by hosting the Saturday café event in The Old Stables and are grateful for all the support and hard work from local charities and Gill Williamson that makes this a successful community enhancer, bringing in a small but steady income stream for the church alongside the money raised for good causes.

We are grateful to all volunteers who have given to our church community in the last year by serving on the PCC and in the office holder positions of Treasurer and Secretary, plus of course the wardens and anyone else who has offered time and energy. We are always grateful for feedback about how to make our buildings fit for the 21st century and about how to be as inclusive as we can for all who live in the village. In a very real sense the church belongs to all.

Rev. Claire.

W&DAS (Whitchurch and District Allotment Society) (Bill Lewis)

I am pleased to report that 2017 was another successful year for the allotment society. All the plots were tenanted for the year and the society maintained its solvent financial position, so much so that it made no increase to its membership subscription, which remains at £24 per plot per annum. Eighteen of the thirty-plus members and their worker spouses attended the AGM on 19th January; a record number for recent years.

At the start of the year two new members took over vacant plots, which reduced the waiting list temporarily, but it is now back up to an all-time high of six. Turnover is at a low level and sadly some people could have a long wait for a plot. The creation of more half plots could help rectify this but it cannot be done overnight.

Members will be advised in the near future of the society's response to the EU-inspired General Data Protection Regulation, but members' data is already strictly controlled and is essentially used only for the purpose of communication between the committee and the membership.

I should mention that the society will hold an open day for visitors on Saturday 18th August as part of the National Allotment Association's annual national event that week.

At last year's Whitchurch Hill fete the society made a hard-won £100 from the sale of plants and vegetables and it is hoped to repeat this result at the forthcoming fair on Saturday. We hope you will all be there to buy your rhubarb!

Whitchurch and District Theatre Club (Chris Martin)

We have continued to be well supported in the past year. We have on average 230 paid-up members a year. In 2017, we had 16 outings which consisted of four musicals, three plays, one Shakespeare play, one carol concert, one classical concert, one trip away, one gardening show, one opera, two ballets and one art gallery. A highlight of the year was a visit to the Royal Opera House, where we were able to buy tickets at a greatly reduced price to see the ballet Mayerling. Another was our trip to Bologna and Ravenna in Northern Italy.

We visit theatres in the surrounding area and beyond. We go as far as Bristol, Brighton, Malvern, Salisbury and Stratford, as well as major venues and theatres in London. Our committee has until recently included Ian Bruce, Sally Trinder and Meryl Weir. Recently Sue Matthews and Jan Riddiford have joined us and Leslie Prater is our accountant.

Our membership is not only from Whitchurch and Pangbourne but also from a much wider area.

Our subscriptions are, at present, £10 but £8 if paid online.

Whitchurch and Goring Heath History Society (Vicky Jordan)

This has been a very successful year, which followed our usual pattern of lectures from September to May and two outings in the summer. Our most recent talks were on historical maps (John Leighfield), Reading in the Regency (Margaret Simons), Goring and Streatley's Hall of Fame (Janet Hurst) and lastly Peter Hawley's research about Frank Loughborough Pearson, the architect of many Whitchurch houses.

We have a new treasurer in Alan Nicholls, who has managed to increase paid membership to a record number.

We have also had a meeting with Simon Draper of the Victoria County History and produced material from our archives about Goring Heath. He will go on to write about Whitchurch parish, so we hold ourselves in readiness.

Subscriptions are £12 per person, but non-members are welcome to attend our meetings for £3.

Whitchurch and Goring Heath Twinning Association (Vicky Jordan)

Our major event this year has been the celebration of our 40 years of friendship with La Bouille, our twinned village on the Seine near Rouen in Normandy. Twenty-seven made the journey in delightful sunny weather to spend a long weekend with our French hosts.

We were treated to a champagne reception at the Town Hall with the Mayor, Joel Templeton, leading the speeches. The two presidents followed and remembered the many people who had taken part in our exchanges over the years. We had Peter and Tanya Hawley with us who were founder members. There was an exchange of gifts and then we were taken in a fleet of cars to the Hermitage restaurant, where candles on the two cakes were blown out to the singing of "Happy birthday" in two languages.

The Sunday visit was to Monet's house and garden for picnics and a memorable walk around the garden full of blooms. The wisteria on the Japanese bridge was fully out, but it was too early for water lilies. There are pictures on the website; follow the link from the Whitchurch-on-Thames website.

Twinning is open to all and there is no subscription.

Whitchurch Bridge Company (Geoff Weir)

1. Thank you for inviting me. We are not a village organization as such; we are a private company operating a toll bridge which is, of course, very important to the local residents.
2. It's now nearly 4 years since the bridge re-opened after reconstruction. It had its first general inspection last December by our engineering consultants Peter Brett Associates in Reading, and I'm pleased to say it is in very good condition with an expected life of at least 100 years. We see no major work being necessary until a repaint in about 15 years' time.
3. We don't foresee the need for any increase in the regulated cash tolls for at least 10 years. The bridge card toll of 40p is also safe for now.
4. As regards the Pangbourne approach road, we are not at this stage proceeding with any works to widen it because of cost and planning issues. West Berkshire Council have informed us that they regard the cluster of trees as important for the setting of the grade II-listed bridge, and any loss of trees would need to be justified by evidence of a highway safety problem – accidents or incidents – which our proposed works would fix. We would struggle to produce such evidence. However, we will keep this scheme under review and reconsider in the light of any change in circumstances.
5. Linked with this is our plan to implement a 20mph speed limit from the toll booth and over the bridge to meet up with the 20mph limit in Pangbourne. We have the support of both highways authorities; as well as reducing traffic speeds, the scheme will reduce signage clutter. We have consulted the PC on whether they wish to extend this 20mph up the High Street as part of the same Traffic Regulation Order and approval process, but I understand that this can't happen immediately as the PC needs to collect evidence to justify it. We should see the new 20mph limit in place over the bridge and in to Pangbourne within a few months.
6. Finally, we have let a contract to repaint the railings on the Pangbourne approach road, and this work should start within a few weeks.

Whitchurch Bulletin (Richard Williams)

Summary

Four editions of the Bulletin were produced at a net cost of £1,186 (see breakdown below), down 12% on last year (saving £155). Costs continue to fall as we attract more advertisers (currently 4 but with a 5th already promised). Hopefully, we will get more advertisers this year, although there will come a time when they will detract from the overall feel of the Bulletin.

	Last year 2016-17		This year 2017-18	
Edition	Pages	£ Cost	Pages	£ Cost
Spring (April)	16	£343-60	20	£343-75
Summer (July)	20	£343.75	20	£343.75
Autumn (Oct)	20	£343-75	16	£285
Winter (Dec)	16	£310	20	£343.75
GROSS COST		£1,341-10		£1,406-25
Less advertising income		(£70)		(£220)
NET COST		£1,271-10		£1,186.25

In terms of distributors, I am missing one for the West Hardwick Road area (28 properties).

All Bulletins have been printed and distributed on time (eg by the end of the featured month).

Whitchurch handbell ringers (Peter Ferguson)

Where the Handbells Toll at Whitchurch: Are you a Ringer?

A new handbell group has been formed in Whitchurch-on-Thames. We meet at 21 Swanston Field at 8pm on Friday evenings for about an hour and a half of practice. Our group is mostly enthusiastic beginners with some experienced ringers. We each play with two bells, one in each hand, reading musical scores. Do not worry if you do not read music. It also does not require previous musical experience because, through practice, we soon pick up tunes. We are inviting others to join us. At present we are practising carols to be ready for next Christmas! But we have other musical scores we can play. It matters not that mistakes are made and an ability to concentrate in counting the beat does help. But when it gels, there is a great sense of achievement and team spirit.

How were these bells acquired? When Peter Ferguson was working abroad he managed to allocate a sum towards the manufacture of a set of brand-new handbells, in three octaves in chromatic sequence. This allows for a great variety of tunes that can be played. The handbells were beautifully crafted by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry and perfectly pitched so that the bells could be played with other instruments.

When Peter visited the Whitechapel Foundry, the proprietor Kathryn Hughes showed a picture of Her Majesty the Queen visiting to purchase handbells for a church in Canada celebrating their centenary. The Queen loves handbells!

The Whitechapel foundry was formed in 1570, during the reign of Elizabeth 1. Situated in the East End of London it was the oldest bell foundry and made the famous Big Ben and the

Liberty Bell. Alas though, just after Peter purchased the handbells, this family business had to close in response to the changing realities of running a business in modern times. It no longer manufactures the big bells, although I believe handbells are still being fabricated somewhere in Kent.

But this is a very enjoyable and relaxing pastime. If you feel that you would like to join in and give it a try, you would be welcome. Please either email me at peterf@fergie.me.uk or telephone me on 07557 383634 for further information.

Whitchurch primary school (Dawn Chesters, Gavin Jones)

The last 12 months have seen Whitchurch Primary School continue to go from strength to strength. We'd like to share with you some of our highlights.

The academic year began with us receiving a letter from Nick Gibb, the Government's Minister for Schools, to congratulate us on our performance in the previous year's Year 6 SATS tests. Mr Gibb informed us that these results placed us in the top 1% of schools in the country.

If you follow us on Twitter, you will have seen that the children at Whitchurch receive a wide and varied curriculum, including weekly lessons on computer programming, reporting the news at the Guardian newspaper offices in London and being evacuated on a steam train to experience what it was like to be an evacuee in World War 2. At Whitchurch it's not about chalk and talk, it's about bringing the learning to life.

We have taken the children on residential trips to Yoolbury and Appledore in Devon, giving them a chance to take part in a range of educational activities away from the classroom.

The school choir (now a third of the school) has had to become a permanent fixture this year, performing not just at The Ferryboat Brass concert in December, but at a pop concert in Oxford in March with several other schools. We will be joining the Phoenix Choir for a concert back in the village in June.

Children in year 4 have had weekly ukulele lessons and can now play enough chords to accompany themselves singing or play along with some well-known tunes.

Our latest musical acquisition - a full set of samba percussion - was purchased with money from a successful grant bid to the EMI Foundation and money from the proceeds of the Christmas concert. The instruments will get their first official outing at sports day in July, with all year groups being able to try out the instruments next term, and the older children given the opportunity to form a band ready to play at any appropriate (e.g. outdoor!) event. May we take this opportunity to thank the Parish Council for allowing us to use the village green for sports day for the last few years.

We have been lucky enough to receive a grant from GADFAS to support the work we will be doing with Gill Williamson with the Equinox project, which will involve every child doing pottery during art week after half term.

Our annual mums, dads and grandparents to school days continued to be a success last year, with us welcoming many different generations in to school to see how their children learn.

On the sports field our pupils have continued to excel with our school being crowned Oxfordshire County champions in tennis, cross country, football and athletics. An incredible achievement when you consider our school is one of the smallest in Oxfordshire and is competing against schools two, three even four times its size.

Our pupils have enjoyed a wide range of sporting activities including football, gymnastics, netball, athletics, indoor volleyball, cross country, cricket, rugby and benchball.

We have increased our extra-curricular offering in the last year and the school now offers 12 different clubs for our pupils, including singing, art and drama as well as a range of sports.

We've worked with a number of charities; our harvest collection was donated to a local food bank, a sponsored event to support the NSPCC raised £905, and events were held for Sports Relief, Save the Children and Children in Need.

As you may be aware, following changes to the Government's funding formula for schools, we recently held a meeting to share with the community the challenges these changes raise for the school. We were overwhelmed by the number of people who turned out or responded to our questionnaires. To receive such positive comments, feedback and support meant a lot to everyone at the school, and we feel very blessed to be part of such a supportive community.

Whitchurch Tower Bell Ringers (Sue Matthews)

There are 6 bells but only 6 ringers, so new volunteers would be most welcome! Children from the age of 9 can take part.

Whitchurch website (Richard Wingfield)

Someone asked me the other day how long Whitchurch has had a village website. So I went online to the Wayback Machine, which stores earlier versions of websites, and found Whitchurch pages for every year going back to 2000, making it 18 years old.

It was Phil Weir, son of Geoff and Meryl, who put together the original site. He then moved to London to work in IT, but has continued to look after it ever since, developing and modifying it to suit the needs of our community, without cost to us. Last year he restructured the site to make it device-responsive. The columns on each page now adjust automatically to suit the width of the viewer's screen, which helps many people who now look at websites on their mobiles. Another improvement made by Phil in the last year has been to add a search function, which you may have seen at the foot of the front page. It is amazingly quick at tracking down a topic. Thank you, Phil.

Here in the village, we on the Whitchurch Web team continue to do our best to provide what we hope is a useful community service. Our **Events Editor** Pam Scott keeps the What's On page up-to-date, including vital information on which bins to put out, and she also looks after the message board. Our **Page Editor** Hilary Jensen makes any changes needed to the many pages on the site, ensuring they are up-to-date. And the **News Editor** - that's me - looks for and attempts to report on matters of interest to the community. Sometimes Hilary stands in as

news editor. We have noticed that the Henley Standard finds the Whitchurch Web a handy source of stories, and often improves on them.

We have recently found ourselves dealing with unexpected things like urban explorers at Coombe Park, accidental holes in brick walls and even an Academy award, as well as the usual village topics, and the photo gallery has included many recent community events such as jazz concerts, Art Cafés and bluebell walks. I would like to pay tribute to our **Principal Photographer** Nick Brazil, who has been recording Whitchurch life with dedication for decades.

Please do keep sending in messages, news, photos and suggestions.

WoTHabs (Sally Woolhouse)

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.

Over the past year, we have organized public events for the community, carried out environmental surveys and acted in an advisory role to the Parish Council on various matters.

Last July, a walk in the wonderful hay meadow at Hardwick was held in conjunction with the PAWS group. This event is being repeated again this year on **Sunday 3rd June** in the afternoon; a month earlier, which means that there will be different plants in flower. If you have never been on one of these walks before, I urge you to join us; this is a superb example of an old hay meadow right on our doorstep.

In August, we surveyed by boat another stretch of the river downstream of the bridge, continuing the work we did in August 2016. We recorded all the plants on, in or near the water, as well as birds and insects. Our results are sent off to the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre to add to their extensive databases. This summer, we hope to continue further downstream to our eastern parish boundary with Mapledurham.

Last October, we organized a family nature walk at Chalkhills. We are again very grateful to Sandra for allowing access and for guiding us round. It was a pleasure just to be there in the fields, woods and on the hillside. One of the highlights of the walk was a fascinating talk by Adam Howe. He showed us the interesting finds he had made using his metal detector at Chalkhills and along the Bozedown escarpment.

As well as running events, WoTHabs continues to provide advice and guidance to the Parish Council on the management of the green spaces in the parish. We are pleased to be consulted on the maintenance of the village green, the maze area and the Polish church site. Gill Goodwin is WoTHABS' representative on the Village Green Working Group.

One of the most visible projects that was carried out in February was of course the reduction in height of the beech trees along the southern edge of the village green. The decision to do this was made by the Parish Council after consultation with WoTHABS, who in turn had

consulted Oxfordshire's Forestry Officer. These works will allow the adjacent two mature lime trees and a smaller Indian horse chestnut the space they need in order to avoid the current serious overcrowding. Originally the line of nearly 100 beeches was planted as a hedge, and this work will get it back to a height which can be easily maintained. It is encouraging to see that there is already fresh new growth on most of the trunks.

We also liaised with a local member of Butterfly Conservation earlier this year when he requested permission to plant two elm saplings in the maze area to encourage the colony of the white letter hairstreak butterfly. If you spot one of these rare butterflies in the summer, please let us know!!

Finally, we continue to work on our long-term project for the restoration of the once flower-rich verges on Hardwick Road. The Parish Council has kindly authorized a grant towards the work needed to protect the verges from further erosion by vehicles. The plan is to restore and re-seed approx. 220 metres of damaged verges (on both sides of the road) as far as the Hardwick Estate gates. This should make it a safer and more pleasant walk out of the village for everyone.

WoTJam (Leslie Maynerd)

WoTJam was formed 3 years ago by myself and Jan Buhagier, who then also lived in the village. We both played at a jazz jam in Bracknell and thought it would be good to start something up in Whitchurch to save travelling that far. We soon had a group of about 10 people who are mostly still with us. We called ourselves WoTJam as it seemed to say exactly what we did, although rather than just jamming we also do a workshop slot and every so often we have a tutor who comes and takes a session with us.

We play every Friday morning at The Old Stables and have done a few gigs around the area and have also played at Folly Fest in Faringdon 2 years running.

WOTsing (Geraldine Witcher)

We are trying to get a new community choir for the village up and running. The first meeting of the choir will take place on Thursday May 31st at St John's Church, Whitchurch Hill, from 7.30 to 8.30 pm.

The idea for a choir grew out of the carol singing in The Ferryboat car park at Christmas. It is for everyone who would like to come; there will be no auditions and it is not necessary to be able to read music. It is intended that we meet once a month to sing and enjoy an evening together.

For any more details please contact us on the choir email address, which is wotsing2018@gmail.com.

Whitchurch United Charities (Sally Woolhouse)

The trustees of the charity have continued to provide valuable 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.

At present, the annual income of the charity is approximately £600. In the past financial year, the trustees have awarded just one grant of £350. The number of applications has been unusually and disappointingly low and the trustees will endeavour to reverse this trend in the coming year with better publicity in all the local channels.

A new appointment has been made to the trustee body. We are pleased to announce that Sarah Dragonetti became a trustee in October 2017.

Therefore, as at 24th May 2018, the ex-officio trustees are :

Rev. Claire Alcock, Sue Matthews and Ken Baker

and the representative trustees are :

Peter Hawley (Chairman), Sally Woolhouse (Secretary), Sarah Dixon (Grant Applications Secretary), Nick Leadbeater-Hart (Treasurer), Katherine Higley (Publicity Officer) and Sarah Dragonetti.