

Assembly where Jane has organised for use to approve our annual governance and financial statement.

- 2023/24 Financial Statement
- Jane also has been instrumental in organising royal celebrations such as the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June 2022 and the King's Coronation celebration almost exactly one year ago, both of which were very well attended and very enjoyable celebrations. Thank you Jane!
- Which brings us to the subject of the **annual Whitchurch Fete**. We haven't had one since before COVID. The pre-school bowed out of organising it due to COVID, but the two Royal events have filled the gap in the past two years. A pre-requisite for having community events like is having some basic facility for serving tea and hosting the event and the Pavilion and Tea Hut are both beyond use so getting the right facility in place is a priority. Frances will provide and update on this her Village Green Report.
- We did have a **Christmas Torch Procession** this year that was organised by Alistair Dunstan was a very festive and successful event, especially considering it was the first time. It included volunteer musicians leading Christmas Carols with at least 20-30 residents who gathered at the Greyhound, processed down Eastfield Lane with many residents waving and clapping along the way. It was a very festive atmosphere and hopefully the sign of more to come in the future! Again, this fills a gap that was previously done by Grahame at the ferryboat.
- This past year was also memorable for the **Flooding in January**. The most affected areas were the south side of Eastfield Lane, the Mill Pond area, and the Greyhound. Despite volunteers getting sandbags to barricade the Greyhound, the water levels were too much and water seeped through the floorboards and they needed to close the pub Saturday evening – the Swan in Pangbourne closed even earlier in the day. Fortunately, the Greyhound was able to open again few days later.
 - Many residents got involved to help those most affected, showing real community spirit I won't try to name all those involved here.
 - I would like to thank the member of our Flood Forum, Richard Wingfield, John Southey and Geoff Weir, who have been studying and working this for a number of years. The issue with the flooding this year seems to be a continued blockage of the village culvert that goes under the Greyhound, down Eastfield lane and to the river. OCC and SODC have agreed to take this on board as their responsibility as part of the Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010.
 - The team are now working with SODC drainage engineer Leigh Travers to investigate the root cause. SODC are planning a survey this summer of the downstream end of the village watercourse culvert. Meanwhile the owners of The Greyhound have had a low-level perimeter wall constructed to reduce their risk from future floods.
- Traffic and Parking - I would also like to thank Diana Smith and TAGWG volunteers for persevering for so long on the now **approved changes to High Street parking**. I will let Diana explain where we are on that in her update.

- There are a number of other activities that various Parish Councillors get involved in ranging from chasing OCC to fix faulty street lights, to marking the street for pothole repairs, to refurbishing benches on the playground and of course reviewing planning applications. All of our decisions and actions are documented in the meeting minutes that are available on our excellent website, and I strive to summarise the key activities in the quarterly Bulletin.
- Are there any general questions for the Parish Council before we continue?

2 District Councillor Report – Cllr Dragonetti

Cllr Dragonetti gave a short report on the District as well as the upcoming elections.

3 TAPWG – Cllr Diana Smith

Those of you who have lived in the Village for a while will know that residents have been concerned for many years about traffic speeds, parking and the safety of pedestrians. The Village Plans of 2009 and 2019 included resident surveys showing traffic congestion, speed and parking being top of the list of concerns.

A group of councillors and residents first met in 2017 to look at ways to improve the situation. After surveys in 2017 and 2021 and engagements with Traffic Consultants, residents and the County Highways Department, the Covid lockdown, a change of name of the group and many changes of members a Parking Plan was devised by TAPWG. We had been aided by the local authority taking over parking enforcement from the police and offering resident parking schemes, previously not possible. This Plan was presented to the Parish Council in November 2022. After a long discussion the Council voted to accept one of the four options which was then sent to the County.

The parish Council had already achieved a 20 mph speed limit for the Village from the county which was implemented in 2022.

In March 2023 the Parish Council paid the fee for the application for Road Traffic Regulation to go ahead and the County began the process of the Public Consultation as required by law. This consultation produced a favourable response for the Plan.

There were objections from a few residents so the County with agreement of the Parish Council and in the spirit of compromise, made some small changes to the location of parking bays and the number of spaces. On 25th January this year the Chair of the Parish Council and I attended the Public Meeting in County Hall, Oxford where the Plan was considered by the County Council Cabinet Decision Maker for Highways, Cllr. Gant. After listening carefully to our supporting statements and objections from two residents he passed our Plan. It will be reviewed a year after implementation.

The latest news is that the County implementation team will soon look at sites for the necessary notices. They will send letters to High Street residents in July inviting them to apply for permits and the Plan will be implemented in August.

4 Village Hall – Cllr Higley

It has been a busy and successful year for the village hall – we have hosted more activities than ever. A new dance class run by Rachel Griffin and Sarah Toms started last September with three classes on Saturdays for primary-school-age children. Anya Goldberg’s painting class is well established now. Earlier this month 9 people attended a drawing session with a live model. The Bridge Club has attracted more members – the club is friendly and caters for a range of abilities. Jean Cosham’s excellent Yoga class continues but we are sorry that the Photographic Society is folding at the end of this term. Alan Copeland and the others who run the club have kept it vibrant and interesting for 30 years but they found it hard to maintain numbers after the pandemic, partly due to the ease of use of mobile phones cameras.

We’ve also hosted a wide range of one-off events. We recently served locally-made venison sausages at an event for local landowners, something they appreciated as growing deer populations are increasingly damaging trees. Fewer children’s parties have been booked but those we’ve had have been very successful.

As far as the Village Hall committee is concerned, you might remember that the hall is run as a charity, set up to manage the hall when it was formally given to the village in 1970. When we advertised the AGM in January, we asked for new trustees and were very pleased that Adrian Dixon came forward as he is very helpful and knowledgeable.

Financially, the hall is in a sound position despite big increases in costs especially energy costs. We succeeded in reducing gas usage by 29% over the year by carefully tailoring the heating to each user’s needs. A Parish Council grant helps and this enables us not to charge for hiring for events like this Annual Assembly and the Arts and Craft exhibition.

We have recently upgraded the broadband to full fibre. Also, we maintain a generator and have bought more equipment this year so that, in the event of a long power cut, we can keep the boiler and modem operating and so provide phone-charging, broadband and hot drinks.

Our development plans include more events, better roof insulation to save more energy/Co2 and to improve accessibility to those with reduced mobility.

John Bradon, Treasurer, Whitchurch Village Hall

6 Village Green Working Group – Cllr Frances Parkes
Verbal report

7 Green Team report – Jill Bradon

Green Team report

Over the past year the Green Team have continued to help maintain and improve the green spaces around the village. Our aim is to have a balance between keeping these areas tidy and supporting habitats for wildflowers, insects, birds and mammals. There are monthly working groups to look after the maze and the village green, and a series of ad hoc working groups throughout the year, led by guardians who look after other green areas in the village.

We are very lucky to have a small group of knowledgeable and dedicated volunteers who regularly give their time and energy to help look after the village. A list of guardians can be found on the Green Team pages of the Whitchurch website. We are also very pleased to see people turn up and help, even if they don’t have time to come regularly. Many thanks to everyone who has helped this year.

Tasks carried out in the past year include the following:

- Working parties at the maze to mow and edge the grass around the bricks and mow around the picnic tables (led by Sally and Pete Woolhouse).
- Working parties at the Village Green to look after the areas that are not maintained by the external contractors (led by Gill Goodwin).
- Maintaining the Polish Memorial Garden; trimming of trees and shrubs; weeding and watering; bulb planting (led by Anna Szczeponek and Sally Woolhouse).
- Working parties to maintain the raised flower beds at the entrance to Walliscote drive. These beds were installed by the MOWS group (led by Leslie Maynerd).
- Maintenance of the area at the junction of Hardwick Road and the High Street (led by Tim Hardwick).
- Care of Muddy Lane (led by Neil Huntington).
- A litter picking day was held in March, as part of the annual Great British Spring Clean. This was very well supported this year with 18 helpers taking part.

Thanks also to:

- Martin Bengtzen and Frances Dixon who are guardians of the Manor Road verges on the north side
- Kitty Higley who looks after the new yew trees and the surrounding area.
- Richard Wingfield who is the guardian of the Jubilee path.
- Adrian and Sarah Dixon who are guardians of the embankment on the north side of Hardwick Road.

In addition, people have carried out individual tasks on their own initiative.

The Green Team depends entirely on volunteers, and it would be very nice to get more people involved. It needn't be a big commitment, and it is a good way to get to know people if you are relatively new to the village. Upcoming events are published in the What's On section of the village website, and contact details are given in the Green Team pages. If you would like to help, or have any ideas for improvements please just get in touch.

Jill Bradon

7 June 2024

7 Village Organisations Reports and Activities

7.1 AFC Whitchurch – Alex Hilton

AFC Whitchurch football has diminished over the last few years due to a lack of numbers and also our two older U18 teams now moving to adult football as boys move off to university or work. Hence we now have competitive U16 and U17 teams who will move up a year for the 24/25 season. The U16s (becoming U17s) is run by Alex Hilton and the U17s (becoming U18s) will enter their last season managed by Ren Bottini.

We also have a younger group, ranging from 4- 6 years (boys and girls) who meet on the Village Green on Saturday mornings with eight regular players. Their focus has been on playing fun PE style games while developing basic ball skills with a short match each week to learn the

rules. After three years, Phil is stepping down from next season and we welcome other willing parents who might be interested in becoming involved.

In reality we will only have 2 more years of competitive football for the two older age groups, both of whom have performed very well since they were 7/8 year olds; the U16s finishing third in their division and the U17s finishing mid-table in a very competitive division. Finances always remain tight for new kit and appropriate training facilities (the older groups train at Pangbourne College on Wednesday evenings) so a call for sponsors is always welcome.

7.2 Art Café – Geoff Weir

Over the last year our weekly Art Cafés, as well as being a regular social event for the village, have raised over £12,000 for local charities and groups. We are most grateful to the many different organisers who run our Art Cafes, and also to those who come along and support them by buying tea, coffee, homemade cakes and raffle tickets.

Geoff Weir
19th May 2023

7.3 The British Modern Military Society – Jerry Cockeram

5th Anniversary of South Oxfordshire History Society.

The British Modern Military History Society celebrated its 5th Anniversary in May 2024.

The society was formed following a chance meeting of brothers Andy and Jerry Cockeram, a Whitchurch resident of over 20 years, with Nigel and Linda Parker in late 2018 at a history talk in Sonning. Of like-mind with a deep interest in military history, BMMHS was formed and a schedule of talks was created with speakers being broadcasters, writers, historians and former military personnel. The span of our talk topics is the last 200 years with a strong emphasis on the events of the 20th century.

Zoom talks are on the first Tuesday of each month at 7.30pm, while the live meetings are at Woodcote on the second Wednesday of each month.

The first talk in May 2019 was by historian Bill King on The Real Dad's Army; British Auxiliary units in WW2 and the defences in place had the Germans invaded in 1940. About 25 people were crammed into Nigel and Linda's living room and from that point the society was born and has flourished.

Quickly moving to the excellent facilities at Woodcote village hall with the capacity of up to 100 people, the monthly talks attracted full houses with interesting talks, a raffle and free beer, wine and snacks included within the entry price. From each talk a donation is made to a military charity of the speaker's choice. The arrival of COVID put a hold on the live talks, but presented other opportunities, and monthly talks by Zoom were soon started allowing both a wider audience and a greater choice of speakers. In addition, Operation Bookworm was launched, with our supporters and others requested to send in their own memories or family members of wartime experiences. The first volume of *Glimpses of War* was born and published on Amazon April 2021. The charity Blind Veterans UK (formerly St Dunstan's) was selected as the charity to benefit from book sales. The response for articles and memories was overwhelming and volume 2 of *Glimpses of War* was published a few months later.

And perhaps being gluttons for punishment a third book in the series was published 6 months later in June 2022, *Glimpses of the Falklands War* to mark the 40th anniversary of the Falklands War. All three books have been very well received and considerable funds have been raised from book sales for Blind Veterans UK. Another highlight for BMMHS has been that *Glimpses*

of the Falklands War is available for sale at the Falkland Islands Museum in Stanley, and we are aware of sales across the globe.

Today, with things largely back to normal post COVID, BMMHS has recommenced its monthly live talks in Woodcote Village Hall, and on top has continued its monthly Zoom talks too.

BMMHS is a not-for-profit society and does not require a joining or membership fee. All talks are open to everyone to attend or join. All we ask is a small contribution to help us cover our costs and to enable us to keep making our charitable contributions.

We also run two active and interesting Facebook pages – British Modern Military History Society and Glimpses of the Falklands War - each with well over 1000 members, so do have a look.

In 5 years, the society, from a standing start, has organised over 75 live and Zoom talks, published 3 books, raised thousands of pound for military charities and entertained and informed audiences across the globe with high quality history talks in a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere.

An exciting and varied programme of talks for 2024 is in place, ranging from the Battle of Rorke's Drift (think of the film Zulu!), Women in Intelligence, the Battle of Britain, the Dieppe Raid, D-Day, the Falklands War and the first Gulf War. The majority of talks for 2025 have also already been booked.

For more details of our talks and what we do visit our website on www.bmmhs.org and to join our talks email us on info@bmmhs.org

Our chairman, Andy Cockeram, and his wife Jane attended the 80th D Day commemorations at the Ver sur Mer Memorial in Normandy as guests of the Royal British Legion. Andy gave a short emotional presentation at the last meeting of his reflections on their experiences amongst the veterans and other guests.

A big thank you to everyone who has supported us in the last five years and we look forward to seeing you all again and many new faces in 2024 and beyond. Everyone is welcome to join both our live and Zoom talks, so just turn up and join us.

Please contact Jerry Cockeram Secretary BMMHS on jerry.cockeram@bmmhs.org for further information.

7.4 MOWS – Leslie Maynerd

The MOWS beds are looking full of colour and I'm very happy with how they have developed. We have had a couple of working parties this year to keep them looking tidy and grateful to those who have helped with that – it's nice to work with a few other people and as they say, many hands make light work! It's usually the same few who offer help though so it would be good for others to get involved – it's not too onerous – taking about hour and half when there are 4 of us.

7.5 PAWS – Sally Woolhouse on behalf of Lady Hoskins (Chair)

PAWS has had a very interesting and successful year. Our regular meetings have all been well attended, especially the meeting we organised to help The Sulham Estates explain their exciting new proposals for increasing the biodiversity of their land.

Thanks to James Norman and Sally Woolhouse, the annual Meadow walk on James' land on Sheepwash Lane was a great success, including the weather. So was the annual Apple Pressing in the Maze. This was a good family event with all ages participating in the preparation of the apples and the pressing. Once again we had new people joining in the event.

We were very pleased when the Bishop of Reading agreed to attend our Film Night in November to lead a panel of local experts to discuss a film about Extinction Rebellion and why people join such groups that push the boundary of the law. It was followed by an interesting discussion led by the Bishop.

We finished the year with our usual Christmas drinks, and this year we added the Prize Awarding Ceremony and Rob Hill received the Cup for the Best Communicator of the Year award.

The frustration felt by those in Extinction Rebellion, was felt by many members in PAWS and so we arranged to meet with Alok Sharma (MP for Pangbourne and President of COP 26) in October. We discussed with him the frustration and anger we felt when the Government began back-tracking on their climate commitments. We had an honest, frank session with him and he understood our feelings. He said that PAWS was doing a very good job and must continue to work to encourage local residents to live a more sustainable, low-carbon life style.

The February meeting was about Asian hornets, and the March Meeting was on Engineering Net Zero. Both were very well attended. The Net Zero provided lots of discussion and the Hornets lots of volunteers for the monitoring.

We have worked this year with a number of different groups. We joined with ARK (Action for the River Kennet) to bash/kill the Himalayan Balsam that grows along the Pang and in the Thames-side Meadow. It is an invasive species that overwhelms the native plants and damages the banks of the rivers and ditches where it grows. It has to be removed before it seeds and stamped on to ensure that it doesn't regrow.

We have worked on several projects with Pangbourne Parish Council including the Spring Litter Pick that took place Sunday 28th April. There was a good turnout in spite of the drizzle and cold.

We have been able to provide a conduit for the Parish Council to fund the monitoring for Asian Hornets this coming season. John White, a local bee keeper, is organising and training volunteers to monitor traps. We suggested other villages that he could contact and he went on to do that. Here in Whitchurch he contacted Sally Woolhouse and WoTHabs and they have set up a similar monitoring network. We have managed to make a link with Dr. Chris Foster, Lecturer in Animal Ecology at the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Reading who will be using the data with his students from the Autumn term onwards.

In the Autumn Becky Elkin (Pangbourne Parish Clerk) contacted PAWS to see if we could help with a new venture the Pangbourne Parish Council were looking at. The Parish had been asked to apply for funds from Mend the Gap to improve the facilities and recreational activities of the Recreation ground and improve the biodiversity of the Thames side Meadow. We helped to get the planning application in on time and it has now become an ongoing project for the Parish. Thanks to Sally Woolhouse and the WoTHabs team for their help with this.

We have a very busy Active Travel group. This year their main areas of concern have been to increase the number of cycle parking possibilities in Pangbourne, improve the main roads for cycling and adding support to the Whitchurch project to improve the link from Whitchurch to the Railway Station. The group are working closely with Whitchurch and Pangbourne Parish Councils and West Berkshire. There are two problem areas, the lack of funds and a reluctance of the property owners to have bicycle racks outside their properties.

The Biodiversity group have been active this year and have agreed to update the PAWS Tree Walk Quiz around the two villages. The walk is designed to encourage families to look at and appreciate the amazing trees we have in our two villages.

The PAWS thermal Camera has been a great success and has been out on loan in both villages over the Winter months. It has been decided that we can now increase the number of villages eligible to join in the scheme to include all those in this area.

Jackie, The Chair of PAWS, met with a couple of 'Younger' people to discuss with them how PAWS can engage with a younger age range. It is interesting that both are very concerned by climate change, and both are very interested in projects that will provide clean energy and save money; so groupings that can supply clean, community energy would be winners for them. This is an idea I feel is worth thinking about for the future. There are too many Work/family demands on their time for monthly meetings.

We have continued to supply a report to the Pangbourne and to the Whitchurch Magazines. That is until March when the Pangbourne Magazine publishers and printers went out of business. The Pangbourne Club has agreed to expand their newsletter to take up the information from the whole of Pangbourne.. The first magazine will be published in June.

As a final plea we do need more members from Whitchurch and more volunteers for all our activities our events.

Please do come and not only join in our meetings but get stuck into our various activities.

Jackie Hoskins

Chair of PAWS

4th June 2024

7.6 St. Marys PCC – Rev James Leach, Team Minister

The last year has seen a mixture of old and new as the parish church seeks to serve and enrich the life of the community.

Regular activities include Sunday worship services, Tuesday Community Coffee, the Women's Bible Study group and the quarterly publication and distribution of the church magazine. The church continues to walk alongside people at some of the key moments of their lives with a wedding, baptisms and funerals all taking place in the last year. St. Mary's church, which is open every day of the week, together with the surrounding churchyard offers opportunities for communion with God and appreciation of our rich historical, aesthetic and natural heritage. This has been enhanced in the last year by the development of the area just inside the church to the right of the main doors as a prayer corner for visitors during the week, with comfortable seating and resources to help people to pray. The Old Rectory Stables provides a venue for several community activities and events, with the Saturday Art Cafés being probably the best known.

In addition to these regular activities, highlights and new initiatives in the past year have included the following:

- In June 2023 we started Come and Pray, a meeting to pray for church, community and the wider world. It is open to anyone and currently happens twice a month.

- In the summer of 2023, the PCC took on the running of Tots on the Hill, a weekly baby and toddler group. The group regularly has between four and eight families from the local area attending.
- Weekly bellringing practice at St. Mary's became well-established in 2023. Several people have taken the opportunity to take up the pastime and we were able to supply bellringers for a wedding for the first time in several years. We've also had visits from several bellringing bands from other churches.
- In September, 18 members of the congregation gathered in Aston Tirrold for a Parish Away Day which combined time for prayer and worship with an opportunity to look to the future, dream some dreams and identify possible next steps for the church.
- In November the church partnered with the school's Parents' Association in organising a lantern parade followed by refreshments in the Old Rectory Stables. More than 70 adults and children took part.
- In December the Christmas season provided several opportunities to welcome all ages into St. Mary's, including a Nativity service and the Primary School's Key Stage 2 Christmas Carol Concert. The Christmas Eve Christingle services once again were particularly popular, with over 200 people attending at St. Mary's and over 50 at St. John's Whitchurch Hill.
- The end of April 2024 saw the launch of St. Mary's Youth Club, a Friday night club in the Old Rectory Stables for young people in school years 6 to 8. It has proved to be highly popular, with over 45 young people having attended so far.
- Most recently, earlier in June we began Outdoor Church. This a short and informal service for all ages at the Whitchurch Maze. We're trialling it on Sunday afternoons once a month and hope it will provide an opportunity for people to engage with God together in nature.

None of the above would be possible without the commitment and hard work of a small army of people volunteering their time and energy. We are extremely grateful to all those in the congregation and beyond who have supported the life and ministry of the church over the past year. Special thanks also go to the Friends of St. Mary's and St. John's for their invaluable support and to the Whitchurch Parish Council for their ongoing contribution to the upkeep of the St. Mary's churchyard.

**The Rev'd Dr James Leach on behalf of the Whitchurch PCC
June 2024**

7.7

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

The Friends is an independent charity to which we welcome members from all faiths and none. A reminder that the Friends aim to :-

- Help preserve the heritage of our two historic buildings in this Parish.
- Support the use of the churches by the wider community.
- Help bring together people from Whitchurch on Thames and Whitchurch Hill.

Current trustees of The Friends : Paul Witcher (Chairman), Geoff Weir (Treasurer), Jill Bradon, Sarah Dragonetti, Graeme Pearce (PCC rep), Ken Baker (PCC rep), Rev James Leach (ex-officio), Sally Woolhouse (non-trustee Secretary)

There is currently a membership of The Friends of 68 plus 2 associate members.

Work parties with a number of volunteers in both our churchyards have been carried out over the last 12 months; general maintenance to both churchyards is essential to help to keep the grounds in a presentable condition. Many thanks to the volunteers who took part in these events. More work parties will be planned going forwards.

'The ArtCafé' coffee meetings are held on behalf of The Friends bi-monthly on Saturday mornings. Again, thanks to the team of volunteers who make these events possible. They are advertised on notice boards at the toll bridge and in the What's On section of the village website.

During the course of the year we were kindly donated a voucher for a luxury hotel stay in London for which we held a special fund raising raffle, we held a fund raising Musical Evening in St.Mary's Church in October, and a Plant Based Eating course was held in Goring Heath Parish Hall. We also had a successful bric a brac stall at the Whitchurch Hill Fete in May. These events all raised valuable funds for The Friends

Going forward, there are plans for another musical concert evening in St.Mary's in the Autumn on Saturday October 12th.

All money raised from social events, membership subscriptions and donations will be contributed towards the maintenance, preservation and improvement of the two church buildings in our Parish, and their churchyards.

When considering new projects to finance, The Friends work closely with the Parochial Church Council (PCC) as the two church buildings are, of course, their responsibility.

Projects which have been completed over the last 12 months which The Friends have contributed to include:-

- An upgrade to the heating at St.John's Church
- Replacement microphone for the audio at St.John's.

One major significant project which The Friends have committed to contribute to is the repair and replacement of the timber shingles to the spire at St.Mary's. This work is now considered urgent and preliminary work is currently being undertaken to ascertain approximate costings. The other projects which the trustees have already agreed to support in principle are a replacement path from the lych gate to the entrance of St.Mary's Church and the cleaning of the stained glass in St Mary's.

My sincere thanks goes to fellow Trustees and all members of The Friends and others for the excellent support both financially and with your time you have all given over the last 12 months.

Paul Witcher – Chairman. pvwitcher@aol.co.uk

June 2024

7.8 WOT Youth Club – Rev Leach on behalf of Debbie Leach

The WOT Youth Club has started off as a huge success with so many members of our community attending that attendance has been split into age groups.

7.9 Village Plan – John Bradon

When we completed the Village Plan in 2019 we were thinking it would cover the next 10 years. (The previous plan was done 10 years before in 2009). So, now we are half-way through the 10 year period how are we doing?

The plan began by saying “The three biggest challenges are to build a new sports pavilion on the Village Green, to rejuvenate the Village Hall and implement a plan to improve road safety and traffic flows”. The village hall is done (although we’ll keep improving it), good progress has been made on roads (That was an uncompleted action from the 2009 plan, so this really is an achievement!). Sadly, the Cricket Pavilion is largely as it was in 2019 although there is some progress in the last 12 months. Options are being explored as to whether we replace the tea hut or work with the Cricket Club on improving the existing Pavilion. Watch this space!

Useful actions from the plan completed in the last 12 months are:

- Completing the Polish Garden pretty much exactly as set out in the Village Plan. The Whitchurch Society update gives more details on this but the Heritage Lottery Fund’s comment when recently we submitted an end-of project report was “a really great community project”.
- Gaining a grant for Hardwick Road verges. Sally Woolhouse and I are finding it hard to get suitable contractors to quote to get the work done but we’ll continue to work on this.
- The community emergency plan has helped with this year’s floods. Neil Huntingdon helped residents on Eastfield Lane. Also Jim Donahue continues to coordinate, Geoff Weir and I have work on offsetting the impact of power cuts and Richard Wingfield and John Southey continue working to reduce flooding risks.
- The Green Team is well-established and continues to maintain the green spaces in the village with Jill Bradon taking over from Charles Cotgreave as its coordinator.

There are lots of community activities in the village with classes, societies, etc generally flourishing. The Village Plan noted that young people aged over 11 years have to look outside the village for activities but James and Debbie Leach’s new Youth Club has addressed this gap. Its popularity has grown rapidly and we are grateful for their hard work on this.

As a simple measure of progress, 5 out of 8 things on the action plan are done. On the remaining 3:

- Work continues on the pavilion on the village green.
- Very good progress is being made on parking and again Frances Parkes will give an update.
- The centre of Whitchurch is Conservation Area but, to make this effective it needs a formal Assessment. The PC funded the preparation of an initial document but this is with the County Council who presumably will eventually ask for residents input.

Finally, the Village Plan surveyed all residents who said they wanted to protect the rural feel of the village and keep it an active community. We should be grateful to all the volunteers who are certainly achieving this goal 5 years into the period of the plan.

John Bradon, Chairman Village Plan Committee

7.10 WDAS – Whitchurch and District allotment Society – John Coupland

1. Firstly the allotment members would like to thank the Parish Council for their contribution to the cost of the allotment entrance gate repair earlier this year. Following receipt of this funding the contractor successfully replaced the damaged gate post on 2 April.
2. All allotment plots remain occupied, and we have managed to locate plots to three new plot holders earlier this year which has reduced the waiting list to five. No one remaining on the waiting list has been waiting longer than January 2023.
3. The Whitchurch Pre-School are now sharing their plot with the reception class and with assistance from parents have installed raised bed along with other improvements.

John Coupland
WADAS Chairman

7.11 Whitchurch and Goring Heath History Society

There was a steady attendance at meetings this year, though our numbers are still low. Certain topics attracted non-members, though it was difficult to predict which these would be in advance. The programme covered local and national areas of interest.

Marie-Louise Kerr came in March to point out the Blue Plaques of South Oxfordshire – none yet in Whitchurch.

In April Dan Allen gave us a detailed account of the second Anglo Afghan War and the battle of Maiwand of 1880. The lion monument in the Forbury in Reading commemorates the fallen of the 66th Berkshire regiment.

In May Sue Smith explained the role of the Friends Ambulance Units in the First World War, where those whose consciences did not allow them to fight tended the wounded, often in dangerous circumstances.

Our June outing on a fine day took us to the Berkshire downs to see St Gregorys church at Welford with its unusual Norman round tower, rebuilt by the Victorians. Then on to St Swithins at Wickham with its Anglo Saxon tower incorporating Roman tiles. A good lunch was had at the Five Bells.

The sun also shone on our visit to Dorchester in July. We followed the leaflet “A Historic Dawdle Around Dorchester” which took us to see the hidden corners of the town with its many old houses. After a look at the Abbey and the Museum we took tea in the garden courtyard.

Another abbey in September, when Mike Cooper came to talk about mediaeval Reading Abbey and its place in the life of the town.

October saw Carolyn Maunder talking about her research for her novel “When We Fall”, based on women World War Two flyers.

Alastair Lack rounded off the season in November with his memoir “Travels With Auntie” an account of life as a BBC foreign correspondent, which brought back many memories in the audience too.

A good members evening was had in January this year when the group followed on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey map the route of the local Snare’s Tour. Published in 1843, the tour started in Caversham and took a route via Mapledurham, Hardwick and Whitchurch in search of “picturesque scenes and celebrated spots”. The Bridge House (now the Ferryboat)

was where the Annual Pink show was held in Whitchurch, the committee and members afterwards dined together and distributed prizes.

In other activities, the society hosted an Art Café in March, and had a stall at the Whitchurch Hill fete in May. By circulating the Oxfordshire Local History Association's monthly newsletter members have been kept informed of wider Oxfordshire events.

Our thanks are due to committee members and others who help at meetings. This year there will be a programme of interesting talks and outings, but of course we will feel the loss of two of our committee members, Theresa Elsome who died in June last year, and Doreen Godley who died in January this year. Both were longstanding and devoted members of the Society. It will be hard to replace them, but we must try!

Vicky Jordan, Chair

7.12 Whitchurch Primary School – Dawn Chesters

We are delighted to report on another happy and successful year at Whitchurch.

In November, we had our first inspection in 14 years. We were judged as “Outstanding” for personal development and “Good” for the other categories. In the categories in which we were awarded “Good”, we met the criteria for Outstanding in 5 of the 6 descriptors being evaluated. Whilst all other grades are best fit, the “Outstanding” grade in each category requires schools to meet every aspect of every grade descriptor to be judged “Outstanding”. The overall judgement given from Ofsted was a “Good”.

At Christmas, many of you may have joined us in St Mary's church for what is one of the highlights of the year, as our children performed their Carol Concert. Year 3 dressed up to perform the nativity and our eldest children gave a wonderful performance of a Christmas Cantata. We also enjoyed a range of solo singing and musical instrument performances.

For those of you who follow our X (formally 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 Didcot Railway Station to learn about the life of evacuees in the war, visiting Milestones museum to learn about the history of transport, alongside having visitors in school like a Rabbi from Reading Synagogue and First Class Falconry, who delighted our youngest pupils with their collection of owls.

As well as this, our pupils have been able to travel further afield on residential trips to Hooke Court in Dorset, Youlbury in Oxford and Bideford in Devon, giving the children chances to take part in a range of educational activities away from the classroom including: crate stacking, team building challenges and river study activities. You may have also encountered our younger pupils as they explored the village as part of their geography topic. Meanwhile, our youngest children in Willow continue to embrace outdoor learning with weekly visits to Forest School using both the local environment and the Preschool allotment where they learn about the environment we live in and enjoy activities such as fire building.

A working party of parents has been developing our pond area, and have put together a plan to enhance the biodiversity within other areas of the school grounds. This project will be

supported by Mend the Gap programme, a programme whose vision is that *“The outstanding landscape that links the Chilterns and the North Wessex Downs will be enhanced and enriched for wildlife, residents and visitors, helping to heal and soften the scars left by electrification of the Great Western main line.”*

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, science, Lego and drama as well as a range of sports.

Members of our school community have organised fundraising events for worthwhile charities including Red Nose Day and Cancer research, and recently took part in a sponsored triathlon to raise money for Restless Development, an organisation which raises money for young people to access education, get jobs and tackle climate change.

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 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.

Fundraising events organised by our Parents’ Association include the Colour Run on the village green, which took place alongside one of our parents running the London Marathon in aid of the school.

Our parent body also supports the school through voluntary donations which support our small class sizes 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.

Whitchurch Primary School June 2024

7.13 Whitchurch Society – John Bradon

It was shortly after the last Annual Assembly, that we held the Gardens Walk. The organisers - John Bradon, Laura Lucas and others in the Whitchurch Society - want to thank those who kindly opened their gardens, the other helpers on the day (Diana Smith, Jill Bradon, Adrian Dixon and Anna Szczeponek) and Neil and Matilda King who hosted the teas. We were pleased to see so many young families. Much use was made of the King’s pool and trampoline until, just after 5pm, a giant cloud appeared. Fortunately, everyone just had time to get home before the very heavy thunderstorm began.

As reported at last year’s assembly, John Bradon and Alexa Drummond-Briggs had successfully applied for a £3,400 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to complete work on the Polish

Garden. An Interpretation Board telling the history of the site and the community of refugees who came there after the war was created by John Bradon with help from Anna Szczeponek and Sally Woolhouse. Last month John and Pete Woolhouse installed and Sally Woolhouse plus others in the Green Team completed the planting, installed bat boxes and tree guards to protect the apple trees which Alistair Dunstan had planted a year ago. Finally, last month a very pleasant celebration was held. Polish snacks were provided by Jean Marc Grosfort, Anna and Doreen Gow. John thanked the many people and organisations involved in the project and James Leach helped us to reflect on the site and its history.

Laura Lucas has again organised the Whitchurch Award.

Finally I wish to mention Peter Smith who died in April. Always genial, entertaining and helpful, he ran the Whitchurch Society very effectively for 14 years and we will continue to miss him.

John Bradon, Treasurer, Chairman Whitchurch Society

7.14 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 April 2023, the trustees have met twice, in April and October 2023, to consider new grant applications.

In total, five applications were received in this period. These were considered and were all successful, resulting in a total of £780 being awarded. All of them were worthy of financial support and we spent a considerable time weighing up their cases and deciding on how much to award each one. It was very pleasing that we received more applications than in recent years. However, it is disappointing that there have been none received in this latest six-month period and we cancelled our planned meeting earlier this month.

The trustee body remains the same i.e. the ex-officio trustees currently are Rev James Leach, Paul Witcher and Ken Baker 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.

Sally Woolhouse (Chairman)

14th April 2024

7.15 St. Mary's Church Bellringers – Peter Ferguson

We continue to practise on Wednesdays from 19:30 until 21:00. We have 5 ringers plus 4 learners and each week we relay on our friends from Checkendon to help with our practices.

With the low numbers, we are unable to ring for Sunday Services, but with help from local towers we have managed to ring for Christingle and a wedding last year. It is hoped that Sunday ringing will commence in the future.

A big thanks to Richard and Chris Scarce for looking after the bells. They run on plain bearings and require greasing frequently. The last time any major work was done on the bells was in 1912.

7.16 WoTHABs – Sally Woolhouse, Treasurer

The Whitchurch-on-Thames Habitat Study Group (WoTHabs) aims 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.

In partnership with the PAWS group, on Sunday 30th June, we are repeating the annual popular Haymeadow Walk at Hardwick. It is always an enjoyable and very informative event, led by knowledgeable botanists and hosted by James Norman who manages this important and bio-diverse site.

Early this year, WoTHabs and PAWS were invited by John White, a local beekeeper, to help with a new initiative to monitor for Asian Hornets in our area. Our group bought 8 traps and has located them across our parish. We are only monitoring for queens this year, during the periods March to May and then again Sept & October. I am pleased to report that none have yet been trapped!

Our Hardwick Road project is still in hand but the main difficulty now is obtaining quotes for the work from contractors. We have the support of our parish council and the Mend The Gap team. As time goes by, the verges are getting more and more eroded. They are species-rich, with some uncommon species, and they should be restored and protected.

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.

Sally Woolhouse, Treasurer June 2024

7.17 WOTJam - Leslie Maynerd

The WOTJammers meet once a week in the old stables for a couple of hours to play jazz music. It's huge fun and whatever problems we come with, they disappear as soon as we start playing. We have an informal gig coming up on July 5th at 7pm in The Old Stables where we will be showcasing the numbers we've been working on. This will be to raise funds for the recently formed Goring and Sreatley Young Musicians Trust which is to enable free music lessons for youngsters in the area.

no need to book for this event – just turn up - £5 on the door includes a glass of wine or soft drink

7.18 WOTSing – Geraldine Witcher

It has been another good year for WOTSing. I am grateful for Tim Taylor who has provided excellent accompaniment over the year. I am also grateful to the PCC of St Mary's Church who give us free use of St John's church for our meetings. We have had another successful year with people coming from Tilehurst and Woodcote as well as Whitchurch and Whitchurch Hill. We are constantly extending our repertoire with songs from the shows, films, folksongs, the occasional well loved hymn and of course the pop songs of an era when they were musical and singalong with.

We meet once a month on the first Thursday for an hour and a half of singing favourite songs, interspersed with coffee and chat and lots of laughter. It is very informal and in no sense a performing choir, but provided for people of any age and ability and with a good voice or a croak, who just want to come and have an old fashioned 'sing around the piano'. Singing is very good for you both emotionally and physically and it is lovely to see people leaving happier than when they arrived. We average about 20 people and it is a very friendly group, so if you feel a desire to sing as if no one could hear you, this is the choir for you!

Geraldine Witcher

7.19 Whitchurch Bridge Club

Our Whitchurch Bridge Club is going from strength to strength with good numbers attending regularly which is encouraging, so much so that we now keep the meetings going through July and August whereas in the past we closed for the summer.

We all appreciate the good standard that the Hall and general facilities are maintained too plus the available parking and easy access means that our elderly members feel they can attend without worry.

Phillipa Turner

8.0 Whitchurch Award Presentation –5 minutes

I am pleased to award the Whitchurch Award to Richard and Susan Scearce!

Anyone who uses the Village Hall will likely know Richard often handles the bookings and has been responsible for maintaining the village hall for many years.

- Richard's Village Hall maintenance role is a paid position but he does so much more with Susan's help beyond this. He can usually be found "front of house" for the Afternoon Teas and many other events ensuring they are properly supported.

Richard and Susan are also instrumental in the running of the church.

- Richard has been a Bell Ringer at St. Mary's for many years he is responsible for maintaining the bell Tower.
- He is also the one that opens up the church to the public during the week.
- Susan is the main force behind the Community Coffees held on Tuesdays.
- They both work to keep the Old Stables clean.

They are truly amongst our village's "unsung heros" helping where they can in the village. You always see them together, supporting each other as well as members of the

community. In many ways they are a role model of a true partnership, so it is fitting that this be a joint award.

All of this has been particularly difficult for both of them in recent months due to Susan's health problems, so it is great that we can honour them with this award this year. I understand that Susan is recovering although is still waiting for an operation.

I believe that Rev James Leach would also like to say a few words.

9.0 Meeting Close – 9:30pm.