

The Mouthpiece

Culham's Newsletter

May 2021



Dates for your Diary

Tuesday 11th May

Parish Council meeting

Online – please contact for details:

s.caseyrerhaye@culham-pc.gov.uk

From Rev. Paul Wignall and the Dorchester Abbey Team



Talking point

Here's the first verse of my favourite Easter hymn (written by Michael Forster and sung to the Battle Hymn of the Republic):

From the very depths of darkness springs a bright and living light;
out of falsehood and deceit a greater truth is brought to sight;
in the halls of death, defiant, life is dancing with delight!
The Lord is risen indeed!

Of course, it's been a tough twelve months, and the hard times aren't really over yet. Many people have been in difficult places, a lot are still there. There's been denial and confusion, there's been amazing patience, skill and a great many people have had to work up to and beyond exhaustion. Dark times indeed - but shot through with light as families and strangers, friends and neighbours, expected and unexpected, have stepped forward and made a difference.

One thing that's struck me is just how creative individuals and communities have been, as though lockdown has unlocked imagination and social distance has revealed our common existence. One day we must find a way of saying thank you to the unsung heroes and the silent heroines, who weren't looking to make a fast buck or be the object of praise; they simply got on and made a difference.

So, I'm heartened by the creative imagination of so many, but I shouldn't really be surprised. It's how people are when they are given a chance to be their best. It's how human society works. It's how the world works. It's how (let me say it) God works: simply open up a space for things to happen, and they will – not all will be good things, but some will, and, in the long run, they will win out. If that wasn't true there wouldn't be a world, or a town, a field or a house, a book, painting or even a kiss. We sometimes talk about God making things, but that's not really how the Bible puts it. In the beginning God made a space and then said, "let there be..." light, dark, sun, moon, fishes, animals, birds, trees and humans. Or as a Jewish tradition has it, "God... made the world make itself."

We aren't the passive channels of creation, we are its instruments: making things happen in the great spaces of life where everything is possible. If we learn that from the past twelve months, then anything is possible – new ways of living in community, in family, on this beautiful blue-green planet. So just give life a chance – your life and the life of the world – then things will happen, and, one way or another, they will be, as the creative God pronounces, "good... good... very good."

Or as the poet e.e.cummings writes:

sing) for it's Spring....
you and i may not hurry it...
but nobody will stop it
With All The Policemen In The World

Services – further information from your vicars

Most parishes are sending a weekly email with service information; if you want to receive this email – and for up to date information about services - please call the Team Office on 01865340007 or email admin@dorchester-abbey.org.uk

Farewell

After 20 years dedicated service to the Dorchester Team, Hilarie Rogers is retiring from her post as Administrator at the end of June. I know that you will want to join me in saying thank you and goodbye and we will make an opportunity to do this properly.

– and a Job Opportunity!

We are looking actively for someone friendly, helpful and efficient to take on the role of Administrator from early July. This role involves working from the office in Dorchester at least two days per week – hours can be worked flexibly around an essential presence between 9am and 12noon and in consultation with your colleague Kate Herbert. As we are coming out of Lockdown we anticipate that the role will begin at 10-15 hours per week but with potential to increase. Training will be given. Whilst familiarity with and sympathy for the work of village

parish churches is not a requirement it would be a very desirable. Please contact the office for a role description. Jobshare proposals considered. Please contact the office for a role description.

Events in the Abbey

Sat 22nd May 6pm and 8pm Songs and Strings. Pre-booking essential. Tickets £5 to £15 www.osj.org.uk
Wagner's Siegfried Idyll was composed to celebrate the birth of his first son, Siegfried. We'll perform this joyous work alongside Glazunov's evocative Intermezzo Romantico, Coleridge-Taylor's lively Danse Nègre, and Fauré's Four Songs, sung by the arresting Ilona Domnich.

Sat 5th June 6pm and 8pm Violin and Voices . Pre-booking essential. Tickets £5 to £15 www.osj.org.uk
OSJ Oxford Voices will perform some of English choral music's greatest works, from Tallis to renowned film composer Harry Escott, alongside a choral arrangement of Vaughan Williams' sublime Lark Ascending with international violinist Johanna Roehrig.

VaccinAid This week UNICEF UK has launched VaccinAid, encouraging people to 'Give the World a Shot' by donating towards Covid-19 vaccinations for the most vulnerable communities around the world. The Archbishop of Canterbury has backed this initiative which offers a simple, practical way for people to give thanks for the vaccinations for themselves or a loved one. Please ask Rev Rachel if you want any further information. Here is the link: www.vaccinaid.org

Village News

Village website: www.culhamvillage.org.uk

Culham Science Centre Open Evening

Ever wondered what happens at Culham Science Centre? Come along to a virtual open evening on Wednesday 12 May (6 – 7.30 PM) dedicated to local communities, and learn more about the UK Atomic Energy Authority's ground-breaking work in bringing fusion (the power source of the Sun and stars) down to Earth to provide low carbon, abundant electricity in the future.

The evening will comprise an introduction to fusion, virtual tours of UKAEA's fascinating fusion experiments:

- The world's largest fusion machine – the Joint European Torus or JET – that UKAEA operates on behalf of the EU fusion research community.
- UKAEA's own innovative MAST Upgrade experiment – which explores a quicker and more compact route to fusion powerplants.

and a chance for you to ask questions of fusion scientists and engineers who work at Culham in virtual breakout rooms.

Please register for this event with this link <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/148742423593>

We will then contact you directly with a personal Zoom link to the event.

St Paul's Church

Messy Church – please see the StPaulsAndCulhamVillage facebook group for details.

https://www.facebook.com/stpaulsandculhamvillage/?ref=page_internal

Sunday 2nd May – “Team Church at Home” service is coming from St Paul's, Culham! Join the Zoom meeting <https://www.dorchester-abbey.org.uk/online/>



Charlotte Storrs Stoneware
Oxfordshire Artweeks 2021
15 to 23 May Site 181



By appointment only



Pots will be displayed in a large gazebo in our beautiful secret garden. Hand sanitizer and disposable gloves to handle pots are provided. Ample parking on the Green. Appointments, for one person, a couple, a family or small group of friends, are on the hour for 45 minutes giving plenty of time to wander around the garden, see the hydroponic greenhouse and raised veg beds, have a beaker of home pressed apple juice and look at pots!
Please send an email to make an appointment

The Pottery, 8 The Green, Culham, Abingdon OX14 4LZ

www.charlottestorrs-stoneware.co.uk
pots@charlottestorrs-stoneware.co.uk

Culham Parish Council (CPC) notes – April 2021

The April meeting was postponed until 27th April due to Prince Phillip's death and funeral. The minutes were not available at the time of going to press.

Next meeting

Please contact the CPC to check date/venue/format – expected to be Tues 11th May.

Village website address:

<https://www.culhamvillage.org.uk/>

The CPC website address:

<https://www.culham-pc.gov.uk/>

Update on Recreation Ground from Amy Sutcliffe

Many thanks to those of you who signed the petition to extend the lease on the Culham Recreation Ground so that plans for a new playground can go ahead. It now has 135 signatures and has been shared with the Diocese of Oxford to show the strength of feeling about this issue. The Parish Council shall be discussing the next step in their meeting on 27th April, but it has been suggested that a meeting should be organised between Culham Parish Council and the Bishop of Oxford or his office in order to discuss the lease on the Recreation Ground.

THANK YOU

A very big thank you to Mary Rickford and all the generous volunteers who have helped out Culham villagers throughout the lockdowns. Your kindnesses have been very much appreciated!

SOLAR PANELS

You may be interested in the idea of having **solar panels** installed on your roof. Andy Tunstall (Green Group Director) gives regular presentations about the system and installation procedures. Please look at:



<https://www.iddea.co.uk/what-is-solar-streets/> for more information.

The basic concept is that for a group of houses in a community (they like to work in batches of 10, but will go with 3-4), they will install 12 PV solar panels on a suitable roof, and they produce 4kW. They come with an inverter to convert from DC to AC current. There are optional extras such as battery storage. The basic cost is £4000.

If you are interested, please contact any Parish Councillor.

District Councillor's Report 2021

- Sam Casey-Rerhaye

Covid-19 – Councils leading the way

The Covid-19 crisis has dominated the Council's operations over the past 12 months with up to 40% of Council officers redeployed to the Covid response at any one time. Officers have distributed business grants, set up the Community Hub to support those in financial need (see more [here](#)) and have also been responsible for establishing the asymptomatic testing centre at the Beacon in Wantage.

In April 2020, we quickly decided to allocate a £2000 Covid grant for each Councillor to use in their ward to help community groups and parish Councils set up to coordinate Covid-related support locally (help with shopping, medicines, dog walks etc) for vulnerable residents. This support has been further topped up via the Emergency Food and Essentials grant.

The Council has also been responsible for making thousands of out-bound calls to people on the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable list (also known as Shielded list). In some cases these calls have resulted in providing further Council services (eg. Help with Council tax) or signposting to third party support (eg. adult social care) or, more usually, a referral to a local voluntary support group.

SODC has also played an important part in local track and trace. Where the national system has failed to make contact, the county and the district Councils have stepped in to ensure gaps have been filled by making calls and visiting residents who have been impacted and are having to isolate. The district has also been responsible for allocating the self-isolation grant for people on low incomes who have to self-isolate.

As part of the Community Hub, the Council has made Cornerstone in Didcot the home for the distribution of emergency food boxes for those unable to access food. This new function has been a vital safety net for many residents facing multiple challenges.

Council has successfully adapted to home-working and remote meetings for all Committees and formal Council meetings, which has enabled much greater participation by members of the public, in line with our focus on "Openness and Transparency" in our Corporate Plan. All Council functions have been maintained with officers working from home. Many officers, like many other people, faced the dual challenge of full-time work with home-schooling for children and it is to their credit that the Council has continued to operate so successfully.

The Council has also played a role in NHS vaccination roll-out. As part of a systems approach we provided logistical support and help with booking of appointments to aid health partners. The roll out locally has been a success story with above national average take-up rates.

The Economic Development team along with officers from the finance department took on the giant task of managing the multiple government grants available to businesses. To date, 11 schemes have paid out just short of £6million to business. Our businesses, to a large extent small and medium sized, with over half based outside towns, will be key to the recovery, and we will continue to do all we can to support them through this in the coming year. We continue to encourage businesses to sign up to updates from Business Support: www.svbs.co.uk for the latest news.

Other challenges have come from the closure of the District's leisure centres. Staff have been working closely with GLL, who run the centres for the Council, to ensure the continued operation of our leisure facilities for residents and the safe re-opening of all facilities when allowed.

Corporate Plan

The Council drafted and unveiled its new Corporate Plan 2020-24, following a hugely successful consultation exercise which attracted almost 1000 individual responses. The Corporate Plan will guide Council policy, projects and spending and defines the Council's priorities for the next four years. For the first time ever, the annual budget has been built to reflect the Corporate Plan priorities as endorsed by our residents.

See <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/corporateplan>

The key themes of the Corporate Plan are:

1. Protect and restore our natural world;
2. Openness and accountability;

3. Action on the climate emergency;
4. Improved economic and community wellbeing;
5. Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs;
6. Investment that rebuilds our financial viability.

The Corporate Plan now creates the strategic framework for the work of the Council over the coming four years, over and above all of the “business as usual” activities. Delivery plans for each Theme have been created and there will be regular performance reports to demonstrate progress made against each key project. The priority themes are often also reflected in the motions submitted to Council, which, if adopted, can lead to a change in Council policy or a specific plan of action.

For example, motions passed at the Full Council meeting on 25th March included ones to support the concept of “community wealth-building” in regeneration programmes (such as in Didcot or Berinsfield), to reduce light pollution from new developments, to seek the under-grounding of high voltage power lines, to support local pubs as community facilities and to work more closely with Clinical Commissioning Groups to ensure the adequate provision of health facilities in growing parts of the district.

New Office Accommodation – Didcot not Crowmarsh!

One project that is gathering pace is the new joint South and Vale offices at Didcot, opposite the railway station. Here we will work in partnership with Homes England, which owns most of the rest of the site, to redevelop this flagship location. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for flexible, sustainable, value-for-money offices that are accessible by public transport and so it was decided to locate SODC’s new main office hub at the Didcot Gateway, which is also on the border of the two Districts.

The building will be of the highest environmental standards (BREEAM Excellent) in line with our new DES10 building for carbon reduction policy in the Local Plan and may include space for other tenants such as Housing Associations, enabling a better return on investment (subject to viability assessments).

The move out of Milton Park will enable significant savings on rent and utilities and it is hoped we will be in the new premises in 2024.

Housing and Homelessness

SODC’s new Housing and Homelessness strategy was published and we are proud that SODC was the first Council in Oxfordshire to adopt the “Housing First” approach. Working with Aspire Oxfordshire and SOHA Housing, SODC has successfully placed 12 homeless households into permanent accommodation, enabling them to have a stable home while they get the health and social support they need to get their lives on track. We are delighted the Housing First scheme has now been rolled out across Oxfordshire.

Social Housing

We have ringfenced more than £4m of developer funds to provide affordable and social housing to help meet the District’s urgent need for affordable, sustainable homes for our key workers. A review of all SODC-owned property will enable us to identify potential sites for social housing across the District and we will also be working with partners on larger-scale projects, such as in Berinsfield.

Planning

Significant changes to the planning regime are being proposed by the government and last year, SODC filed a strong response to the “Planning for the Future” White Paper and the associated metrics for calculating housing need. We await the results of the consultation but have concerns that moves to “cut red tape” through the expansion of permitted development rights and the creation of planning “zones” could actually lead to a loss of local accountability and decision-making, even more centralisation and poor planning outcomes.

Local Plan 2035

After six years and much controversy, the Local Plan 2035 was adopted by Council in December. This followed the intervention of the Secretary of State, Robert Jenrick, in 2019, after the SODC Cabinet recommended withdrawal of the Plan from inspection and an order by Mr Jenrick to see the plan through inspection and adoption.

Following the first ever virtual inspection of a local plan, the independent inspector found the Plan sound, subject to main modifications including the addition of new policies we proposed on low-carbon housing (DES10 as mentioned above) and a policy on consultation with communities.

The Council has now agreed to develop a new joint Local Plan with the Vale of the White Horse Council (by law, Councils must have revised or new local development plans at least every 5 years and it takes 2-4 years usually to make a new one) with a view to sharing the costs of gathering evidence, drafting, inspection and adoption. This would also help to achieve uniformity across the two districts in terms of environmental and sustainability measures and would put climate, nature and affordability at the heart of planning across our two Districts. A new Plan would also enable the potential creation of new Green Belt to compensate for the loss of Green Belt in the ELP2035.

Enforcement

The Council has recruited an additional full-time staff member to the enforcement team alongside two new consultants to help build a more robust and responsive enforcement function at the Council as we recognise this is a crucial function of the Council and has had a backlog for too long.

Waste Management and Recycling

South Oxfordshire remains the 2nd best district at recycling, with 63% of waste being recycled thanks to our doorstep collection scheme and support for county-wide waste management. We have taken action on fly-tipping where possible and our Corporate Plan calls for more action to reduce waste, not just to recycle it (e.g. through Repair Cafés).

Oxford to Cambridge Arc and Expressway

The government has published plans to turn the Oxford-Cambridge Arc into a “world-leader” in “growth and sustainability.” In her capacity as Leader of the Council, Sue issued a response welcoming the focus on community wellbeing and improved prosperity and productivity through a stronger knowledge economy, but called for strong local accountability and a prioritisation of nature restoration and environmental enhancement. South Oxfordshire District Council policy remains against the building of an Expressway from Oxford to Cambridge and we will continue monitor the Arc activity from government very closely as we want to use all our influence to ensure it does not act as a means of requiring other new roads that would be the same or similar to an Expressway.

Budget

The last financial year saw the Council's finances adversely affected by loss of income (for example, from car parks) in addition to increased costs arising from the pandemic. Against this backdrop, we still made sure there were no service reductions in our 2021/2022 budget.

So the Council continues to face challenges in achieving a balanced budget over the medium term, as a result of long-term low Council Tax and lack of income diversification. However, we have decided to shore up revenue and reduce costs including increasing fees and charges (for example, planning pre-app fees, carpark charges), bringing grounds maintenance back in-house, continuing to extract ourselves from the Capita 5Cs outsourcing contract, taking the decision to locate the Council's new offices in Didcot (which will save significant rental and other costs in the long-term) and properly stewarding our property portfolio (we have completed a full survey of all Council-owned property - no such survey had been done in the recent past) as well as staffing for climate change, project and programme implementation.

The Council is working on delivering the objectives in its corporate plan as far as possible in the Covid-19 period, including the development of a new ‘delivery vehicle’ (a type of business unit) to enable the Council to build its own low-carbon affordable and social housing.

We need a proper, long-term financial framework from government. Uncertainty makes future financial planning extremely difficult. However, longer term, insourcing of services and investing to save, have set us up well for the future.

New Appointments: Cycling Champion, Thames Champion and Tree Champions

The Council has made a number of new appointments in line with its Corporate Plan priorities to protect and restore the natural world and protect and enhance the River Thames and its setting.

I was appointed South Oxfordshire's Cycling Champion in 2019 and have been working with other Cycle Champions in Oxfordshire councils to prioritise active travel and the good, safe infrastructure needed for this. Cllr Jo Robb was appointed River Thames Champion in June 2020. The Thames Champion is responsible for improving access to and promoting sustainable use of the river and for working with Councillors, Thames Water, the Environment Agency and other groups to improve the cleanliness and biodiversity of the Thames and its tributaries in South Oxfordshire.

Jo set up the Thames Valley Rivers Network, a collective of more than a dozen parish, town, district, county and borough Councillors from along the length of the river to call with a united voice for an end to sewage pollution and improved access to the river. She has been working towards obtaining bathing quality water status for a stretch of the river in Wallingford as well as working with the Rivers Trust to water quality monitoring projects. A community river clean-up day is also planned for later in the year (Covid permitting) alongside a range of projects to improve access to the river for all.

In February 2021, in recognition of the importance of trees to our District, Council appointed two new "Tree Champions", Cllr Peter Dragonetti and Cllr Ian Snowdon, who will work towards the protection of trees across the district. Both Tree Champions will work with officers on the drafting of a new tree planting policy and policies to ensure the protection of trees and ensuring that new planting projects see the right trees planted in the right places.

Community Grants

Despite financial pressures the Council has made the decision to retain all community grants (capital grants, Councillor grants, and revenue grants to voluntary sector organisations) at their current level for the 21/22 financial year. This decision was taken on the basis that these grants are vital for the recovery of our communities.

Recognising the pressures on the voluntary sector and the vital role VCSOs (Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations) play in the Covid response and the recovery, Cabinet decided to extend the revenue grant to recipients for an additional year. Current VCSOs funded include Citizen's advice Bureau, SOFEA and Didcot TRAIN.

The Councillor grant which provides support for small community-based projects has also been retained and a further scheme is expected later in the year. In the last financial year, I was really delighted to be able to support the establishment of a pear orchard in March Baldon, the planting of a hedgerow in Culham, new chairs for Sandford village hall, and a new picnic table in Long Wittenham.

County Councillor's Report 2021

- Lorraine Lindsay-Gayle

His Royal Highness Duke of Edinburgh

It is with great sadness that we heard of the death of Prince Phillip on April 9th.

Many of us will want to remember and recognise the service he gave to our country and to the Queen.

During the pandemic we cannot host and open physical books of condolence as it is not safe to do so. The County Council is encouraging those who would like to share a message to sign Buckingham Palace's online book at royal.uk This will close at 5pm on the day after the funeral – 18th April.

Outside of COVID-19 we would, at this time, be looking for suitable locations around the county for the laying of flowers. Unfortunately, we need to discourage this and suggest, as Buckingham Palace has already done, that people make a donation to one of the many charities or organisations that the Duke of Edinburgh supported.

A period of national mourning is being observed until after the funeral on 17th April.

All campaigning for the up-coming Local Elections is suspended until Tuesday 13th, and then on the day of the funeral at Windsor Castle.

Key dates for the 2021 elections are on the horizon

People in Oxfordshire are being reminded that a number of key dates relating to the May 6, 2021 local elections are getting ever closer.

The deadlines for registering to vote and for a postal vote are now less than a fortnight away with the county council holding elections for all 63 seats and 61 divisions and one-third of Cherwell District Council seats also up for election. There is also a Police and Crime Commissioner election for the Thames Valley and elections at Oxford City Council and West Oxfordshire District Council.

What are the key dates?

- Monday, 19 April (at 11:59 pm) is the deadline for people to [register to vote](#)
- Tuesday, April 20 (no later than 5pm) is the deadline for receiving new postal vote applications for all these elections. You can apply for a postal vote here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-a-postal-vote> .
- Anyone who wants to vote by proxy must apply by 5pm on Thursday 27th April

At the end of Friday, April 9 the list of candidates for the county council and district council elections was available.

The verification for all elections will take place on Friday 7th May and the counts for County, Districts and Parishes will take place on Sunday 9th May. The venue for South and Vale divisions will be the Abingdon White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre.

People are also being reminded that there are vacancies across Oxfordshire in paid roles such as poll clerks and presiding officers on election day. More detail can be found here for people who are interested in applying. <https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/be-at-the-heart-of-local-democracy/>

COVID-19

Testing

The number of new cases in Oxfordshire has now dropped to 33.1 per 100,000 of the population. From 9th April everyone in England can now access free, rapid lateral flow tests to use twice a week. Getting into the habit of twice-weekly testing will help us all to pave the way for businesses and society reopening.

If you don't have symptoms you can book free LFD tests at the Kings Centre in Oxford, or access tests through your workplace or school, or collect home test kits from any local testing site across the county or order them online for home delivery.

A new pharmacy collect service has also just been launched.

The Government confirmed that restrictions will ease on 12th April in line with the next phase of its Road Map out of lockdown. Shops can reopen, alongside outdoor attractions, libraries and personal care premises.

Vaccination programme

The NHS in Oxfordshire has now vaccinated more than 320,000 people, over 40,000 have had their second dose. Full details can be found in the attached Oxfordshire Update.

Libraries

31 of our libraries will open on 12th, taking every precaution to keep staff and visitors safe. This will include Abingdon, Berinsfield, Thame, Wallingford, Watlington and Wheatley. A further 9 will open on 19th April including Benson. The remaining four libraries cannot open just yet due to alterations and building works.

No library customers will be penalised as a result of having to self-isolate or being unable to travel to return library loans. Click and collect will continue to operate at the larger libraries.

Mental wellbeing hub for young people launched in Oxfordshire

Young people suffering psychological challenges, made worse by COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, will have access to an information hub giving contact details of local professional support services and resources, thanks to a new scheme from Oxfordshire County Council.

Teenagers face daunting choices, such as deciding between continuing in education or entering the workplace. Disruption caused by the pandemic has increased fears that some might fall between the cracks when it comes to assistance and support.

Three major challenges faced by our young people have been identified; isolation, next steps and anxiety. Many are struggling with loneliness, maintaining friendships and social circles, while often wrestling with themselves.

The county council believes that in many cases, parents and carers are also lacking the support they need to help young people manage stress and anxiety. Resources to help with this will be promoted to them in the coming weeks. The hub aims to help young people navigate a myriad of local and national services by conveniently signposting them to practical advice, resources and help tools. Social media and websites will be central to the initiative, designed to offer a one stop shop where advice is just a couple of clicks away. Further information is available from the county council's young people website: www.oxme.info/wellbeing

Councillor's Priority Fund

During the last year I have supported the following organisations through my Priority Fund:

Baldons & Nuneham Community Action Group - COVID	£1,000
Sandford Talking Shop – COVID	£1,000
Orchestra of St John's – music for autism on line	£2,000

Oxfordshire Victoria County History	£1,500
Baldons Parish Council, renovation of school parking	£2,000
Baldons Cricket Club	£700
Berin Centre, Childrens' Centre – COVID measures	£1,955
Life Education programme	£275
Warborough Parish Council, monument repair	£1,000
Dorchester Primary School, playground repairs	£1,000
Abbey Woods Primary School, eight laptops	£2,000

I have represented this Division for the past 12 years. I am standing for re-election, and if I'm successful, I look forward to working with you in the future.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S ANNUAL REPORT APRIL 2020 – APRIL 2021 BY COUNCILLOR LORRAINE LINDSAY-GALE (as amended)

COVID-19

The past year has seen us working, caring and coping with the impacts of COVID-19 on our lives. County Council staff have continued to work from home wherever possible, and the vast majority of meetings have been held online via TEAMS or Zoom. Throughout this awful time our officers and partner organisations have maintained the public services that we rely on, and in many cases have gone far beyond what was required of them to ensure that all our residents received the care and support they deserve.

Libraries

In my own Directorate, Cultural Services and Education, I was proud to hear of library staff directing traffic queues at waste recycling centres, helping man the phones for the Shielding Operation and driving vital legal documents around the county so that our registrars could register deaths. And now I'm delighted that all but a few of our 44 libraries that are undergoing alterations will be open on 12th April.

Schools

I have to pay a very special tribute to our teachers, who have coped with a hugely demanding situation of having to provide as virus free an environment for our children as possible, while dealing with the uncertainty of whether they would be open or have to close. They've been spectacular, and currently attendance levels are in the region of 95%, well above national averages.

In June the County Council stepped in and provided all schools with free PPE equipment worth £2million to help staff and parents feel more confident about levels of protection, and we have led a county-wide service providing free laptops to children who may have found online learning difficult because they hadn't got the equipment they needed. The Council has continued to provide school places and transport throughout lockdown. We were proud to announce that for entry next September over 90% of primary school children were offered their first preference school place and 89% of children making the move into secondary education.

BUDGET

Our reponse to COVID-19 has been costly, in the region of £60million to date, but the Government has remained true to its word and reimbursed the Council to a significant degree. To ensure our financial situation was secure, in September we announced an Extraordinary Budget, seeking to find an extra £15m of savings. This was achieved, and now the Council is in a firm financial situation. The budget we announced in February was balanced, and contained not only savings, but investments in some services such as our provision for young people.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Between April 2020 and March 2021, Oxfordshire County Council treated just under 1.5 million square metres of highway at more than 220 sites with works valued at over £20m. This included a significant amount of work in Garsington amounting to over £60K on resurfacing and drainage repairs. The Council will be investing £31.3 million in our highway repairs and improvements in the coming years.

Clifton Hampden Bypass

However the big news for this Division's highway network was the announcement of £218million for a new road north from Didcot and a river crossing that will join the A415 near Culham Station. A large roundabout outside the Science Centre will guide traffic around a bypass for Clifton Hampden that will join the A4074 at the Golden Balls roundabout. This area has suffered from traffic congestion for many years and the new scheme is seen as a vital element in improving our local infrastructure. It will be completed by 2024, and work has already begun.

Relief as OXCAM Expressway Cancelled

As County Councillor for a Division of the County that would have been cut in half by the proposed southern route of the Expressway, I would like to share my relief with all those communities who felt the threat of this awful plan.

I campaigned against the Expressway right from the start. That's about four years ago, when Community leaders discussed setting up a campaign, and I was delighted when Peter Rutt agreed to lead what became the Expressway Action Group. Under his expert direction the Group grew to include 43 Parishes along the proposed routes of the Expressway.

Over the years I have used every opportunity available to me to lobby against the Expressway, at the County Council, with John Howell MP and even the Prime Minister at an event in Abingdon.

Finally, the Transport Secretary, Grant Shapps MP has listened and has accepted the evidence provided by local communities who worked together to defend their precious and beautiful environment.

This is a significant victory, and I am pleased that my outspoken campaigning has led to a change in policy. Now I want to see more environmentally acceptable road schemes developed for our area that will provide better public transport, together with walking and cycling facilities.

New Bus Service - 45

I have campaigned for a long time to get transport links for Berinsfield. I was delighted that from 1st September Thames Travel began running the 45 service between Abingdon, Culham, Berinsfield, the Science Park and Cowley. A joint funding agreement between the County Council and the Science Centre has enabled this to happen.

When funding from OCC and involvement from Thames Travel failed to provide a school transport service for Berinsfield's secondary pupils to the three Abingdon secondary schools, Larkmead, Fitzharrises, and John Mason, I funded one from my Councillor's Priority Fund. OCC has since sourced funding to run the service for two years. This is not available to the public due to social distancing requirements, but it is hoped to offer these journeys to everyone in the future.

MINERALS AND WASTE PLAN

The County Council's Minerals & Waste Plan has been delayed yet again. This time it was due to Nuneham Courtenay and Sandford-on-Thames residents' successful challenge to the proposal put forward to identify a large area between the two villages as the sole new area to provide gravel from the South of the County up until 2031. They proved that the Council's consultants had got their figures wrong, and that the amount of gravel that could be expected to come out was half of what they had predicted. The Council has had no option but to go back to the beginning of this very lengthy process of identifying suitable sites. The focus could now fall upon the land between Stadhampton, Drayton St Leonard and Berinsfield. There is not likely to be an adopted plan much before 2023.

CLIMATE CHANGE

In 2019 the Council acknowledged there is a climate emergency. Since then we have been putting this issue at the centre of our activities - every purchase we make, every policy we consider and every strategy we plan. We have pledged to become a carbon neutral authority by 2030. We set ourselves a 6% target and smashed it achieving 8% up to the end of 2020. But we also want to make Oxfordshire a carbon neutral county by 2050 and are working with organisations across Oxfordshire to achieve this. Soon we will see Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and a Zero Emissions Zone for Oxford, plus congestion charging from the end of the year. The switch to electric vehicles will help, and we are planning a county-wide network of charging points. With improved public transport, cycleways and pedestrian routes we hope to encourage people to ditch their petrol and diesel cars.

In spite of all the challenges Oxfordshire County Council has had a positive 2020 – 2021.

What can we do individually to help stop climate change?

From The Grantham Institute, Imperial College London

<http://www.imperial.ac.uk/grantham/>

1. Make your voice heard by those in power. ...
2. Eat less meat and dairy. ...
3. Cut back on flying. ...
4. Leave the car at home. ...
5. **Reduce** your energy use, and bills. ...
6. Respect and protect green spaces. ...
7. Invest your money responsibly. ...
8. Cut consumption – and waste.
9. Talk about the changes you make.

See <http://www.imperial.ac.uk/stories/climate-action/> for more information

Other News

Artweeks in Abingdon

From Monday, 17th May to Sunday, 23rd May, 10:00am-4:00pm

In the three-week Artweeks period Abingdon-on-Thames and the towns and villages of the south of the county are the focus of 16th to 23rd May which of course includes the period in which we are expecting the lockdown to ease. Some places are open for part of this period or set days or hours. All through town, not only town centre.

Venues include Peachcroft Farm, St Ethelwold house, community centres and homes in private studios. Artweeks have five hundred online studios open as well as potters, artists, photographers, sculptors and graphic and many mixed media as well as those on the map of actual studios to visit (with your mask) which you can find with tour suggestions at www.artweeks.org

A separate event, after this in early June Abingdon Artists are holding their exhibition 7th to 12th June in the Parish Church of St Helen.



The Abbey Cinema

Book film tickets for screenings May and June

Opening on Monday, 17 May 2021 - 1:00pm

Our town's cinema on Abbey Close is sharing its new film programme with its list of customers and some good films are being announced from Monday 17th May on into Summer.

Look out for the latest new films, some classics, comedies, films for the kids, the natural world and its marvels on the big screen is amazing. There will be live entertainment as the season progresses and opens up. www.theabbey.ac



The cinema team also take bookings for rooms at Guildhall for your own event or meetings.

Wild Oxfordshire

Wild Oxfordshire is a local charity which provides a co-ordinated and strategic approach to nature conservation in Oxfordshire. Through providing support and encouraging individuals, communities and organisations to work together, Wild Oxfordshire is the catalyst for solutions that benefit people and wildlife within our rich and vibrant county. Together we will ensure Nature's Recovery in Oxfordshire.



We work in partnership with over 60 organisations. Current projects include:

Inspiring and empowering communities to bring the wild back into their neighbourhood

Delivering natural solutions for effective flood management

Putting nature at the heart of County strategy and planning

Stop Press: We've secured £2,500 of funding from the Big Give for the Community Ecology Project "Grassroots Action for Nature". To release it we need your help to raise £2,500 in match funds. To donate go to [Green Match Fund 22-29th April](#). THANK YOU!

Download our [Spring Newsletter](#) to read about the amazing work done by Oxfordshire's Community Groups. You can support us for FREE simply by doing your online shopping through Give As you Live – it's quick, easy, has all the shops and a small % goes to Wild Oxfordshire.

New Countryside Code launched to help people enjoy the outdoors

A new, refreshed Countryside Code was launched on April 1st by Natural England and Natural Resources Wales, coinciding with the 70th anniversary of the creation of the founding booklet.

With more people enjoying the outdoors than ever before, the code has been revised to help people enjoy countryside in a safe and respectful way.



The first Countryside Code booklet was published in 1951. This update - the first in over a decade - has been shaped by nearly 4,000 stakeholder responses to an online survey, which sought views on best practices for visiting the countryside and protecting the natural environment and saw a huge response.

Changes include advice on creating a welcoming environment, for example by saying hello to fellow visitors; clearer rules to underline the importance of clearing away dog poo; staying on footpaths; and not feeding livestock. It also provides advice on how to seek permissions for activities such as wild swimming.

Key changes to the Countryside Code include:

- New advice for people to 'be nice, say hello, share the space' as well as 'enjoy your visit, have fun, make a memory'.
- A reminder not to feed livestock, horses or wild animals.
- To stay on marked footpaths, even if they are muddy, to protect crops and wildlife.
- Information on permissions to do certain outdoor activities, such as wild swimming.
- Clearer rules for dog walkers to take home dog poo and use their own bin if there are no public waste bins.
- A refreshed tone of voice, creating a guide for the public rather than a list of rules – recognising the significant health and wellbeing benefits of spending time in nature.
- New wording to make clear that the code applies to all our natural places, including parks and waterways, coast and countryside.

As part of today's announcement, Natural England are also setting up a long-term Countryside Code campaign to increase awareness of the Code through 2021 and beyond. The campaign will focus on encouraging behavioural change amongst public audiences to act responsibly when visiting outdoors, by respecting those who manage the land and adhering to the Code.

[The updated Countryside Code can be viewed here.](#)

What to do in the garden this May bank holiday

Country Living Gardening Editor Paula McWaters shares her top tips on what we need to do in the garden every month. In May, with the extended Bank Holiday weekend ahead of us, it's all about pots, tomatoes and the clematis...

In the garden

Liquid feed young plants regularly to keep them growing strongly
Sow half-hardy annual seeds outdoors where they are to flower
Tidy up Clematis Montana once it has finished flowering
Clear pots and containers to make way for summer displays
Prune spring-flowering shrubs once they have finished flowering



In the greenhouse

Introduce biological controls at the first sign of problems
Move tender plants out of the greenhouse once the risk of frost has passed
Pot on seedlings as soon as they are big enough to handle
Sow French beans in individual pots for planting out next month
Take softwood cuttings of herbs



On the allotment/vegetable garden

Plant out tender vegetables once the frosts have passed
Tie in tomatoes and keep liquid feeding them
Put straw under strawberries to prevent young fruit rotting
Sow sweetcorn in blocks to aid pollination and sow root vegetables
Earth up potatoes once growth reaches about 25cm
Plant out dahlias at the end of the month

The Mouthpiece

Please note that any opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the editors. We accept contributions and advertisements in good faith and cannot be responsible for errors therein.

Please send contributions for the November issue of the Mouthpiece by October 15th to:

generalmouthpiece@gmail.com

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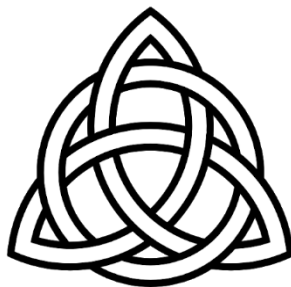
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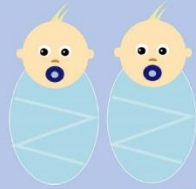
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