



The Mouthpiece

Culham's Newsletter
March 2025



Dates for your Diary

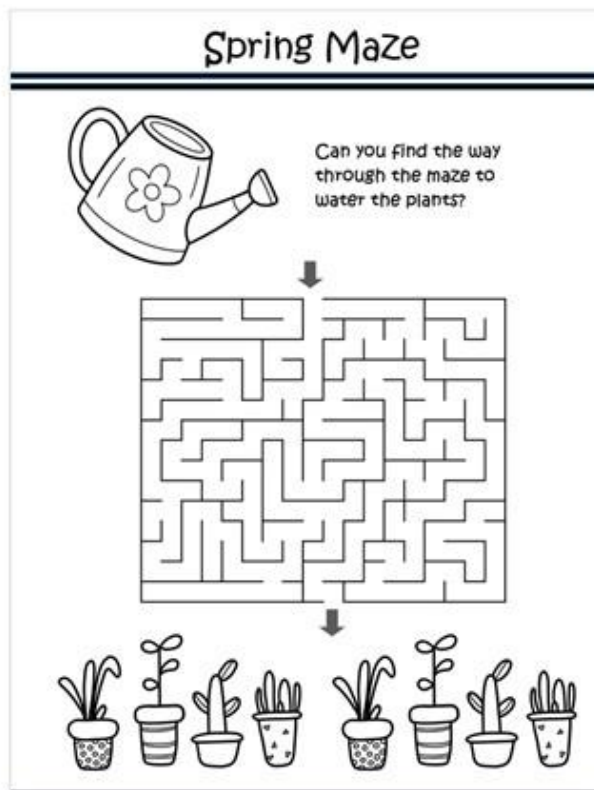
Sun 2 March	11am	Holy Communion	St Paul's Church
Fri 7 March	8pm	Ladies Of Culham – community singing!	St Paul's Church
Wed 12 March	7.30pm	Parish Council Meeting	Culham Village Pre-school and Nursery
Sat 3 May	Tba	 Culham Plant Sale 	The Green & St Paul's Church



Culham Kids



Here we are in March with Shrove
Tuesday/pancake day on the horizon on 4th.
Spring officially starts on 20th with flowers
blooming and longer daylight hours and don't
forget St Patrick's Day on 17th!



Why don't pancakes like horror
movies?
They give them the crêpes!



How do bees brush their hair?
With a honeycomb!



St Patrick's Day Cryptogram!



Enjoy colouring in this
page! 😊

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
S																		K						B	



"A A W"
S H S R P E W B

Hint: what kind of bow cannot be tied?

Talking point by Rev'd Mel Stanley

Lent is upon us... That 40-day period, or for some slightly longer if you include Sundays, when to some, it looks like we've gone on crash diets from all the things we love.



For decades now I've given up chocolate during Lent and I manage that very successfully each year. One year, I also tried to give up overthinking things...and as you might guess, I overthought overthinking things and wouldn't count it as a particular successful Lentern fast. During COVID, I decided not to give anything up for Lent but very quickly found that this somehow stripped my Lentern practice of fasting from *something* away and I had a very lost and bewildered Lent culminating in a Holy Week that was marred for me by the fact that I didn't feel I had managed to enter the wilderness of Lent.

So, this year, as I do most years, I will be giving up chocolate. I'll take up reading or studying something for Lent too, but for me it is so often simply fasting from something which I enjoy which has a profound effect on my journey though Lent.

Why do I bother, some might ask?

Lent can, if we let it, summon us from the safe harbours of our lives into a wide expanse of existence. Part of the point of deciding to lay things down or to take things up is that in doing so we make our lives unfamiliar, even if only in a small way. We check ourselves as we reach for those familiar safety devices like chocolate or alcohol, and challenge ourselves into a less familiar response.

Lent is a season that invites us to step into the wilderness with all its ambiguity.

There is no easy way through the wilderness; no shortcut route to take. I can resume eating chocolate part way through lent but it won't get me to Easter any quicker. The invitation of Lent is to fast from something in order to make more *space* for God.

Lent invites us to *spaciousness*; a spaciousness that summons us to lift our eyes from the humdrum constriction of everyday existence; that invites us to strip our cluttered existences back even by just a little, so that we can discern more fully what brings us life.

As we enter Lent, I pray that you will be able to discern what you might wish to fast from (or what you might like to take up) to allow the *spaciousness* of Lent in your life. And I pray that you find God in whatever spaciousness you manage to create in your life this Lent.

God bless,
Rev'd Mel

Events in the Abbey

Saturday 15th March 7:00 pm Orchestra of St John's presents RAVEL BOLERO

Sarasate Zigeunerweisen / Rodrigo concerto for Aranjuez / De Falla El amor brujo

Ravel Bolero / Poppy McGhee violin / Nathaniel Merkies guitar / Suzie Purkis soprano. Tickets £5 - £25 /

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

Free tickets available for NHS workers and for the disabled. Email admin@osj.org.uk

Saturday 05th April 7:30 pm – 9:30 pm Benson Choral Society: The Dream of Gerontius

Benson Choral Society's Spring concert will be a performance of Edward Elgar's powerful and emotional oratorio "The Dream of Gerontius." A world-class team of soloists: Robert Murray as Gerontius, James Atkinson as the Priest/Angel of the Agony and Frances Gregory as the Angel will be accompanied by the English Sinfonia.

Benson Choral Society will be joined by the Wooburn Consort and the ensemble will be conducted by Jonathon Cole-Swinard. Tickets £17 / £20 www.bensonchoralsociety.org.uk

Village News

Village website: www.culhamvillage.org.uk

Culham Plant Sale

Date for the diary – Saturday May 3rd 2025, timings to be confirmed



If you are able to help by growing plants to sell, running a kids' activity, baking a cake, helping with setting up, serving food and drinks or anything else please contact Jo Oughtred at 12 The Green, Culham (or any other member of the St Paul's PCC.)



Notes from Culham Parish Council February meeting

Feb 12th 2025 - Summary of Meeting

The meeting was attended by five councillors, the Parish Clerk, Rob Dalby (Sutton Courtenay PC), plus two members of the public. The meeting opened at 7:36PM and included the District Councillor's report, the County Councillor's report, public participation, the Clerk's report, discussions regarding the planned Abingdon reservoir and details regarding the location of village speed monitoring devices.

Summary of SODC Councillor's report

Local Government Reform: Proposals for a new strategic authority with an elected mayor and the abolition of district councils are being debated, with disagreements over boundaries and potential partners.

2025-26 Budget: First revenue surplus in years; key funding for community hubs, climate initiatives, and council housing; no service or staff cuts.

IT Services Insourcing: Transition from Capita to an in-house IT service is progressing, with full insourcing expected by September 2025, improving cost efficiencies.

Garden Waste Collection: New permit system starting April 2025; residents must purchase an annual permit and ensure a sticker is attached to their bin.

Oxfordshire Nature Recovery: Over 2,100 responses to consultation; final strategy to be published in autumn 2025.

Sports Opportunities: Better Leisure's Sports Foundation offering funding, gym access, and support for athletes (applications due by 20 Feb 2025).

Summary of County Councillors Report

Local Government Reform: Oxfordshire must submit a plan for a new unitary authority by March 2025, with full proposals by November, while discussions continue on a future mayoral authority.

County Budget & Key Investments: Despite financial pressures, a balanced budget is proposed, with £58.8m for highways, £3.6m for flood response, £1m for active travel, and £500k for nature recovery.

Culham Station Upgrade: OCC is collaborating with partners to improve station infrastructure with phased improvements to support future growth.

Community Projects : Public health grants are supporting local gardening initiatives to strengthen community resilience.

Public Participation:

Rob Dalby was invited to the PC meeting, to discuss if Culham PC would join forces with Sutton Courtenay and several other parishes, voicing concern regarding the Abingdon reservoir - Thames Water's South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO). The PC agreed that a joint approach was sensible, discussing flood concerns over the impact that an emergency let-down of water would have on the local communities.

During the public participation, a concern was raised regarding traffic speed on Thame Lane. With buses now being parked overnight at the school, concerns were raised about bus speeds, particularly when not transporting children. The public participation led to the Parish Council discussing the location of speed indicators around the village.

General meeting:

Speed Indicator Devices (SIDS)

The PC has consulted with a Senior Officer for Traffic and Road Safety, discussing the options for Speed Indicator Devices in the village. The officer recommended that a speed test is scheduled for Thame Lane and the High Street before the location is confirmed, but locations were identified for Tollgate Road and the A415. SIDS will be positioned on the pedestrian side of the road, facing traffic, with one unit located north of the bridge on Tollgate Road and one opposite the Waggon and Horses car park. Local residents will be consulted before installation.

Village Maintenance

February 13th saw the start of the Burycroft path being widened, with Tollgate Road due in the coming weeks. A new village grass cutting contractor is due to start in March and the PC has organised a village litter pick February 22nd. The more volunteers we have for the litter pick, the better. Please meet from 10AM on The Green.

The meeting ended at 9:15PM.

The next meeting of the PC is March 12th at 7:30PM.

Further details and links to documents referenced in these notes can be found on the Culham Parish Council website.

www.culham-pc.gov.uk



The RSPB Local Group (Vale of White Horse) will be returning to the River Room, by the church, Sutton Courtenay for the March meeting. We also do monthly wildlife walks.

We have opened up our photo competition, rules and an entry form are on the local group website www.rspb-vwh.org.uk

Entries should be emailed to Mike Haddrell (mikehaddrell@gmail.com) by 17 March. The images will be judged by Ben Andrew at the River Room meeting on 28 April, which is one of the upcoming events:

- * Talk 17th Mar: The Ridgeway (John Tyler, River Room & Zoom)
- * Walk 30th Mar: Farmoor
- * Walk 27th Apr: Greenham Common
- * Talk 28th Apr: Photographing Birds, Ben Andrew (River Room only)
- * 12th May: AGM and Members' Evening (River Room only)
- * Walk 25th May: Otmoor
- * Walk 22nd June: Greenham Common (evening, nightjars etc)

With not much of the 24/25 season left to go, we have now reduced new membership to £10 for adults (whether or not you are an RSPB member), and free for under-16s. This covers our programme of monthly talks and wildlife walks, and a quarterly e-Newsletter. If you prefer to attend an individual talk, you can do this as a non-member for £5 per talk. You can join using the form on our website (under "Contacts"): www.rspb-vwh.org.uk, or at a meeting (cash, cheque or bank transfer). For meetings with an option to join via Zoom, members receive the link via email a few days beforehand

District Councillor Report, February 2025 - Cllr Sam Casey-Rerhaye

Proposed Local Government Reform

While still at the White Paper stage, and so not yet even a draft law, local government reform is taking up a lot of time and energy across Oxfordshire and the wider area. The two proposals are for a new 'higher tier', a strategic authority with perhaps an elected Mayor heading this, covering an area with around 1.5 m inhabitants. Mayors could have some powers that currently sit with the Secretary of State. Also proposed is the abolishment of District councils and the bringing of all council services into 'unitary' councils with newly designated boundaries, not yet specified or agreed but with a minimum population (currently 500,000 but this already seems to be questioned).

Where the boundaries should go is already being hotly debated. As a Green party Councillor, I have always been of the view that considering we have the most centralised governing structure in all of Europe, further growth in the size of councils is not at all desirable and risks local people having even less say in what happens in their area than we have already. There is little to no evidence that people prefer unitary councils or that they offer any financial or other advantages. In my opinion, any changes should follow principles of 'subsidiarity' – i.e. every decision should be taken at the lowest possible level.

After the Libdem leader of Oxfordshire County Council (Cllr Liz Leffman) enthusiastically threw their hat in the ring for government to make our area one of the first to be considered for re-organisation, last week the leader of the South Oxfordshire, Cllr David Rouane, explained his view that Oxfordshire should "work together in a Strategic Authority with those councils in Berkshire and Buckinghamshire who wish to join with us.

"This is because these areas all have vibrant economies that will contribute to the sustainable growth the government is looking for; we have a record of working together in the police and health authorities; we have a shared identity as part of the South-East Region; and we have historical connections in that much of South Oxfordshire was in Berkshire prior to the previous local government reorganisation."

The Leader of Swindon Borough Council, Cllr Jim Robbins, has expressed a preference for the Wiltshire town to "look east" towards Oxfordshire for a possible Strategic Authority. Cllr Rouane has explained that, having listened to the arguments, he does not support this idea.

Cllr Rouane said that Swindon doesn't meet the relevant conditions for joining with parts of Oxfordshire as "they are in different health and police geographies, their long-term identity is one of being the 'Gateway to the West Country' not part of the South East, we have no historical ties, and they are at a very different stage in the economic cycle."

The debate over the boundaries of any unitary councils that sit under this strategic authority continues.

The local Green party has for many years advocated for unitaries about the size of South and Vale combined, rather than a whole Oxfordshire which has a population of about 740,000 and is predicted to grow to around 800,000 in the coming years – so extremely large for a unitary council.

2025-26 Budget

No matter what happens in the re-organisation of local government, we have to create a budget for our work next year. The budget has been approved by Cabinet and will be going to the full council meeting on 13th February. Some key highlights in the budget are:

- there is a revenue surplus for the first time in many years, helped by the windfall from interest earned on the reserves (not by any improvement in government grant to cover services; in fact, the increase in NI payments for employees has not been covered by government, despite what the Chancellor indicated and we need to cover around £100,000 of the increase, just under 50% of the total);
- the Community Hub continues to be funded, with its offer of guidance and support to residents;
- Everyone Active grants continue;
- Councillor community grants are increased by 50% and the new Performing Arts grants are funded;
- the Climate team continue to be funded
- there are no service or staff cuts
- further monies are put aside for council house build/purchase

Insourcing IT services from Capita

This programme is a key one for the Council and we continue to work towards the exit of the Capita contract. We've made significant changes this month with the launch of a new inhouse IT Service Desk for staff and councillors. The new service desk will initially only deal with certain things and will run alongside the usual Capita IT Helpdesk, with more and more services added as the weeks progress. The deadline for all IT to be insourced is September of this year, and we are on track for this date with the many smaller projects underlying the whole programme

Changes to our Garden waste Collection service

We are introducing a new permit scheme for garden waste collections this year.

This permit scheme is like the one successfully operated in West Oxon. It ensures that everyone who benefits from the service is paying the right amount at the right time. To receive garden waste collections from 1 April 2025, residents need to purchase an annual permit. This will replace direct debits system that currently runs.

So, residents who wish to carry on receiving the garden waste service from April 2025 need to: (From late February) visit www.southandvale.gov.uk/GardenWastePermit to make a one-off, annual payment for garden waste collections. When customers get the permit in the post, **they need to stick it to the lid of their brown bin.**

Garden waste customers can also sign up for an online account on our website to make things easier when they purchase the next permit in 2026. Anyone who cannot easily sign up for a permit online can call us on 01235 422422 for support.

Visit the New Garden Waste FAQ page for more information (South FAQ)

Oxfordshire Nature Recovery

More than 2,100 Oxfordshire residents, landowners and organisations took part in last year's public consultation on the county's draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Using an interactive map, people sent in comments on the nature areas already mapped and lots of suggestions for additional areas to be included.

The LNRS team (a partnership of organisations including South and Vale) now has the task of compiling the responses into a public report and the final version of the strategy is due to be published in autumn this year. For more information about the LNRS and the nature groups involved see the LNRS webpage

Opportunities in Sports

Our partners at Better Leisure who run South and Vale leisure centres are launching this year's Sports Foundation scheme and applications for this fund are now open.

The GLL Sports Foundation provides support to athletes across all ages, disciplines and backgrounds, providing access to free gym memberships, monetary funding and other athletes services including mental health support and physiotherapy.

More information including how to apply and eligibility can be found on the GLL Sports Foundation application page and applications must be submitted by **20 February 2025**

If you have any questions or issues you would like to contact me about:

Sam.casey-rerhaye@southoxon.gov.uk

Or leave a message for me on 01235 635566

Culham Village Community WhatsApp Group

Please scan the QR code below to join now!

To engage with your local community, please join the 'Culham Village Community' WhatsApp group.

To scan the QR code above simply open up your 'photo' app and hover it over the QR code and join the relevant group that interests you.



Matthew Barber
Your voice in
Thames Valley

Matthew Barber is Police & Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley, working with the police to help drive down crime locally.

STAY IN TOUCH
matthewbarber.co.uk
@matthewbarberpcc
@matthew_barber

JOIN THE WHATSAPP COMMUNITY

Promoted by Matthew Barber on his own behalf, of Waterloo House, 58-60 High Street, Witney, Oxfordshire, OX28 6HJ.

The importance of reporting

For many years the 101, non-emergency contact number for the police has suffered from a poor reputation. This has been an issue nationwide, but it matters not just for those trying to get through, but also for wider public confidence.

We all want to know that, if we need help, the police - and our other emergency services - will be there. That's why I've been so keen to see improvements to 101. The time taken to answer these non-emergency calls has been gradually coming down over the last year or so, and whilst they will still fluctuate at busy times the average for January was down to just 1 minute and 9 seconds.

By definition the 101 number is for non-emergency issues, for example reporting a crime that has happened earlier, suspects have left the scene or there's no current risk, but I'm constantly aware that no-one ever wants to contact the police unless something bad has happened. So, whilst it may not be an emergency, these calls continue to be treated with the seriousness they deserve.

One of the ways that we've reduced the call times is by providing better updates to victims. Until recently a large number of calls to 101 were from people who have already reported something to the police, but wanted to get an update. By asking officers to be more proactive in updating victims and by using a new online victims' portal for many crimes, victims are now getting more information, more swiftly and taking the pressure off of the phone lines.

More and more people are also choosing to report online. Whilst it's not for everyone, it can be much easier to report something non-urgent, perhaps if you've been a witness to something, on your phone or computer at thamesvalley.police.uk.

Of course, in an emergency always call 999. The calls are answered by the same team of staff, but the emergency calls are prioritised to ensure they're answered in around 10 seconds! Remember that a 999 call isn't only for when someone is in danger, but it might be about a crime that is happening right now and when an emergency response could make a real difference.

My plea is that whatever route you choose, 101, online or 999, please report any crime or concerns you have. Not every call can or should result in a blue-light response and not every crime can be solved, but I can guarantee that the incidents the police really will do nothing about, are those that are never reported to them!

www.thamesvalley-pcc.gov.uk

Local Information:

BUS INFORMATION www.mybusoxfordshire.org.uk

FLOODING <https://check-for-flooding.service.gov.uk/station/7083/downstream>

PARISH COUNCIL <https://culham-pc.gov.uk>

Cllr Robin Bennett, County Councillor Report, February 2025:

Local Government Reform

Just before Christmas, the Government published its proposals for reforming the structure and financing of local government, with a White Paper entitled “English Devolution”, requiring all areas to form combined “strategic authorities” with populations of 1.5 million, most likely with elected regional mayors. We are now told that Oxfordshire is not in the ‘priority programme’, which means that the May County elections are going ahead, but Oxfordshire councils do have to come up with an interim plan for a new unitary authority or authorities by 21st March 2025, with a full proposal by 28th November 2025. In parallel with this, discussions are continuing with neighbouring authorities across the Thames Valley about a future mayoral strategic authority. Needless to say, this is all going to take up a lot of time and energy for senior staff and councillors.

County Council Budget

By the time you read this, the council should have agreed a budget for 2025-6, the last budget of this council term. Even before considering the proposed reorganisation, funding continues to be tight for local councils.

Demand for services for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) continues to rise. Officers estimate that the deficit in the “High Needs Block” in 2025/26 will be at least £26.7million, bringing the cumulative deficit to over £100 million. As yet, the government has given no indication as to how they will tackle the rising deficits of this and every other council with responsibility for SEND.

The increase in Employers’ National Insurance will also cost Oxfordshire £3.9 million directly, plus the effect of this on providers and suppliers; in spite of these pressures, the administration is proposing a balanced budget that allows for investment in key areas of activity. This has been achieved through savings that total £30.1m million in 2025/26.

Key investments include £3.6 million to be spent on improving the council’s responsiveness to flooding, including £1.5 million for annual gully clearance, reversing the decision taken by the previous administration to reduce gully clearance to a four- year cycle.

The budget includes a very substantial total of £58.8 million for highways improvements. In last year’s budget £7 million was included for surface dressing; This year we are allocating £38.6 million to a two-year programme which will extend surface dressing, prevent potholes from occurring and improve drainage across the highways network. We are also allocating £16.2m for repairing and maintaining bridges and £4.0 million for improvements in road safety.

Active travel, and improvements to our market towns to promote better air quality and safer walking and cycling, are central to this administration’s priorities. We are allocating funding to projects that include better footpaths, more active travel in rural areas, and enhancements to the market squares. We are also including £1 million in our capital budget to kickstart initiatives at stations across the county to improve the rail customer experience and support sustainable travel plans.

OCC are also creating, in partnership with the Oxfordshire Nature Partnership and the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment, a funding pot for investment in nature recovery across the county. The council’s contribution to that fund is £500,000.

The budget also includes £4 million to “unlock” funding from Section 106 payments on a variety of schemes waiting to be delivered. My work with colleagues on Place Scrutiny committee identified this as a key way to get developer funds spent more quickly, so I’m glad to see this.

Culham Station

I’m told that OCC are working closely with GWR, South Oxfordshire District Council and key Science Vale partners – UKAEA and CEG – to deliver a phased upgrade of Culham station to ensure that it can fully support planned growth.

Public Health and Community Action Groups support local garden projects:

An Oxfordshire County public health grant has contributed to Berinsfield’s community garden projects at the church and the Berin Centre. In the words of Marta Lomza, Community Gardens Coordinator for CAG Oxfordshire:

“Community gardening is an act of resilience – bringing communities together to quite literally encourage and foster growth – of food, plants, and people. We believe community gardening can be a radical tool for building social infrastructure and developing more resilient communities.”

<https://www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk/post/a-new-community-gardening-project-takes-root-in-berinsfield>

Robin.bennett@Oxfordshire.gov.uk



An essential new reservoir for the South East

As we move into the Spring, our teams will be undertaking a range of environmental surveys to support the next steps in the reservoir design. This involves surveying the local trees and ecology. Additionally, we’ve started our archaeological assessments with oversight from technical experts, digging shallow trenches in nearby fields to explore any potential findings. These works are necessary to ensure we document and preserve anything of archaeological significance below the surface of the ground. All topsoil is being carefully stored and will be replaced once the surveys have been completed. You may notice our work from the public footpaths.

Our clay compaction trial at Hanney Road continues, and following the creation of the borrow pit, we are planning to test the clay in March 2025, when the weather is drier. For more details or questions, visit our website for updates: www.thames-sro.co.uk/sesro

Other News

ABINGDON OPERATIC SOCIETY PRESENTS

ROALD DAHL'S CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY

8 - 12 APRIL

7:30PM (SAT MATINEE 2:30PM)

AMEY THEATRE
ABINGDON SCHOOL, OX14 1DE

WWW.ABINGDONOPERATIC.CO.UK

TELEPHONE BOOKING
0333 666 3366

TICKETS

NODA For every stage

  @AbingdonOperaticSociety

 Abingdon Operatic Society



New music classes for ages 2 - 7 starting in April

Come and try our engaging music courses
on Sunday 23 March - book your session now!



Matrix Arts Centre
Sutton Courtenay OX14 4UA
www.matrixartscentre.org.uk



Mostly Books named as **Regional Finalist** for Independent Bookshop of the Year
at the British Book Awards

This is the eighth year in a row that the Stert Street bookshop has been named as a regional finalist for the award that recognises Independent Bookshops across the country. Regional winners will be announced on 11th March and the national award will be presented at an awards ceremony on 12th May.

Tel: 01235 525880 - www.mostly-book.co.uk - @mostlyreading - books@mostly-books.co.uk

Pen and ink illustration depicting a British officer reading a letter to a soldier with a bandaged head. Published in 'London Opinion' and 'Today' magazine on 22 May 1915. © The Shepard Trust, 2015, from The Shepard Trust Archive, University of Surrey (Ref No. 51/4/2).

E.H. Shepard: BEFORE & BEYOND WINNIE-THE-POOH

SEE THE EXHIBITION
18 January - 31 August 2025
www.sfofo.org.uk

 **Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum**

In collaboration with
 **ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS**
UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

Pen and ink portrait of E.H. Shepard seated in his WWI officer's uniform. © The Shepard Trust, c. 1915-1918, from the E.H. Shepard Archive, University of Surrey (Ref No. 51/4/2/103).

Spring Hedgerows and Gardens



Hedgerows in Spring

Spring is the season of growth, and our local hedgerows are no exception.

This season you can expect to see hedge species beginning to flower. Blackthorn will begin to flower from early spring, blossoming before its leaves even begin to show, into beautiful five petal white flowers strikingly similar to Hawthorn. Hawthorn, however, (like Buckthorn, Guelder Rose, Dogwood, Wayfaring, and Spindle) blossoms later in mid spring. Cherry Plum (which began to blossom in winter) will only continue flowering into early spring, preparing to bear berries in early summer.

All of these species are extremely beneficial to pollinators as well as other insects that feed on hedges (i.e., Chestnut moths and Brown hairstreak butterflies). Observe the wildlife benefits mature hedges offer this Spring and get ready to see it in your own local spaces once your newly planted hedgerows reach maturity!

Happy Earth Hour! (8:30 – 9:30pm on the 22nd March)

Join people around the globe in switching off all your lights for an hour, and while you're at it, why not check out whether your local nature group has organised any celebrations like an evening nature walk, or hot chocolate round a fire pit! Who needs TV?! Local nature groups are on our map here

<https://www.wildoxfordshire.org.uk/guidance/community-groups>

Great British Spring Clean

In the spirit of renewal and growth, get involved in the Great British Spring Clean organised by Keep Britain Tidy. Organise a clean-up in your local parish to allow wildlife to thrive free of litter. Report your results to become a 'Litter Hero' and consider joining the Big Bag Challenge! Come together to bring new life to your local green spaces.

A selection of Garden jobs to Help Wildlife this March

Everyone's waking up! But remember, it can still go below freezing in March...

- **Put out bird food** with high fat content to give extra energy when food is hard to come by. Suet treats like fat balls are ideal and sunflower hearts.
- **Feed hedgehogs** – more info below
- **Put in at least one hedgehog gap** – more info below
- **Have plants in your garden that offer winter/early spring nectar** – e.g. mahonia, ivy, willow, hellebores, crocuses and snowdrops to provide a boost for our pollinators after the dormant months. You can also start to think about sowing seeds. Have a look at the packets as many are now marked with a 'pollinator-friendly' symbol. Why not grow your own bird food this year and grow sunflowers?
- **Create a pond or improve yours for amphibians**
- **Leave perennials and herbaceous, hollow-stemmed plants unpruned until early April or late this month.** These will still be providing homes for overwintering invertebrates like ladybirds.
- **On freezing days, break the ice on bird baths and water bowls.** Refresh the water supply weekly.
- **Build a bug hotel**
- **Leave piles of leaves and logs undisturbed.** In mild weather, it can be tempting to get going in the garden but avoid the urge to tidy away leaf and log piles just yet. Wait until late this month or early April.
- **Avoid turning the compost heap until April,** even if conditions are mild. Frogs, small mammals, and insects may be hibernating, and any disturbance could harm them.
- **Check bonfires before they are lit** for sheltering and hibernating animals, such as hedgehogs, toads, frogs, and newts.

Ponds, amphibians and the garden ecosystem

March is the key month for breeding amphibians - first frogs, then toads and later, newts. Toads tend to use big ponds to breed in, laying their ribbons of spawn near stems of submerged plants. Newts use their back legs to wrap their eggs in the leaves of marginal plants like the water-forget-me-not and brooklime. You may be able to see these folded leaves in June. This month, you can shine a torch into the water at night to see

returning newts and you may even witness the male's courtship dance as they wiggle to show off their fabulous tails!

Ponds with fish aren't so good for our native wildlife as the fish will eat the eggs and young of amphibians as well as the invertebrates that the amphibians need to eat.

How to help:

- **Create a pond!** Ponds sustain two thirds of all of our freshwater life and improve the health of the entire garden ecosystem. If you don't have room for a big pond, why not put in a bucket pond? Go to the Wildlife Trust website for an easy how to guide.
- **Plant marginal plants** in the shallows and at the edge of your pond. PlantLife and Freshwater Habitats Trust have suggestions. Water-forget-me-not and brooklime are great for newts to lay their eggs and water mint is brilliant for insects. Brooklime is also used by dragonflies to lay their eggs on.
- **Make sure there is a way out** for amphibians and even hedgehogs that can end up drowned in ponds when they fall in after using it to drink from. You can use planks of wood, piles of stones or make your pond have a shallow and gradual gradient.

Hedgehogs

Our hedgehogs will be waking up this month. With the unpredictable weather, their hibernation patterns are less certain but usually they won't go back into hibernation now until the winter. This means they will be hungry and thirsty after a long dormant period and will need to build their fat reserves and energy ready for the breeding season.



Feeding

- You can put out meat-based cat food for hedgehogs (with meat not fish). Go Cat dried cat biscuits are recommended as an easy option by the Kirtlington Hedgehog Highway group.
- Put out the food at dusk and remove any that's left the following morning so it doesn't go bad
- You can use a hedgehog feeding station to prevent cats from eating all the food. These include a right angle that the hedgehog has to use as they can bend at this angle easily whereas a cat cannot.
- Put out shallow water dishes or accessible ponds for hedgehogs to drink from
- Natural food sources come from our slugs, snails and other invertebrates. Do not use slug pellets or insecticides as these will also harm hedgehogs that eat the infected 'pests'.
- Rats? I had rats come into my garden, so I didn't put out hedgehog food. I had to rely on the invertebrates to feed the hedgehogs. Fortunately, I had a hedgehog forage in my lettuce patch most nights and I ended up with very healthy, pest-free lettuce!

Breeding

- Not only will our hedgehogs be hungry, but they will also need to start roaming around to catch up with other hedgehogs and go to other foraging spots. Some hedgehogs roam up to a mile every night! We need to help them stay safe in their wanderings, off roads, and in gardens. This means we need to link our gardens together to make safe passageways!

Rhiannon Young – Wild Oxfordshire Nature Recovery Engagement Officer

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

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 **April 2025** issue of the Mouthpiece by **March 15th** to:
generalmouthpiece@gmail.com

The Mouthpiece Team

We always welcome new volunteers to join the team whether you enjoy editing, marketing or distribution – please contact Anne or Gordon or Laura directly if you are interested in joining us



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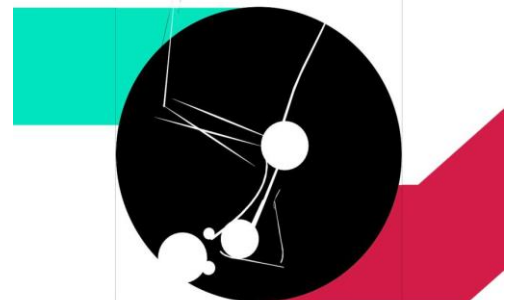
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Caroline Baird	c.baird@culham-pc.gov.uk		
Sam Casey-Rerhaye	s.caseyrerhaye@culham-pc.gov.uk	3 The Burycroft, Culham	01235 635566
Nacho Gimenez	n.gimenez@culham-pc.gov.uk		
Mike Richmond-Cooper	m.richmondcooper@culham-pc.gov.uk		
Siobhan Sargeant	s.sergeant@culham-pc.gov.uk	(Yes – the email is misspelled!)	
CLERK TO PARISH COUNCIL			
Denise Corney	clerk@culham-pc.gov.uk		
DISTRICT COUNCILLOR			
Sam Casey-Rerhaye	Sam.Casey-Rerhaye@southoxon.gov.uk	3 The Burycroft, Culham	01235 635566
COUNTY COUNCILLOR			
Robin Bennett	robin.bennett@oxfordshire.gov.uk	4 Meadside, Dorchester-on-Thames	07979 646815
ST PAUL'S CHURCH			
Associate Team Vicar:	Revd. Joanne Allen	revjoallen@gmail.com Dorchester Office: 01865 340007	
Ordained Local Minister	Revd. David Haylett	familyhaylett@yahoo.com	01865 407382
Hon. Treasurer:	Andrew Churchill Stone	churchillstone27@gmail.com	01235 533011
Churchwarden:	vacancy	stpaulsculham@gmail.com	
Hon. Secretary:	Ruth Ward	stpaulsculham@gmail.com 5 Thame Lane, Culham	
FRIENDS OF ST PAUL'S CHURCH			
Chairman:	Philip Owen	6 The Green, Culham	01235 555223
ST PAUL'S & CULHAM VILLAGE RE-ORDERING COMMTEE			
Philip Owen	stpaulsandculhamvillage@gmail.com	6 The Green, Culham	01235 555223
LADIES OF CULHAM (LOC)			
Laura Cooper	ladiesofculham@gmail.com	Also Jenny Williams, Jo Oughtred	
CULHAM POORS ALLOTMENT CHARITY			
Hon Secretary	Gordon Gibbs	32 High Street, Culham	01235 523679
POLICE			
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