

FOREST HILL WITH SHOTOVER PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

held on Thursday 7 April, 2022 at 7.00pm

Item 171.

REPORTS FROM THE GROUPS AND ORGANISATIONS WITHIN THE PARISH AND THE CHAIR OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

i) St. NICHOLAS' CHURCH – April 2021 – March 2022

The Reverend Anthea Beresford continues to minister to the Four Parishes Benefice of Beckley, Forest Hill, Horton-cum-Studley and Stanton St. John, with the help of a team of voluntary clergy and lay ministers including The Reverend Hugh Lee and Betty Dye LLM.

Due to continuing Covid-19 restrictions, church services remained on-line via Zoom throughout Easter and beyond, including a special service marking the death of His late Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke Of Edinburgh. Public worship re-started at St Nicolas on Sunday 23 May, but congregations still needed to wear face masks and congregational singing was not permitted indoors. After a gradual easing over the summer, we suffered another round of restrictions at the end of the 2021 due to the Omicron variant. Most of our Christmas services were held in church but with a restriction on numbers and no choir. Fortunately, we are now back to more or less normal.

During the year there have been two Baptisms, one Wedding, two Funerals and two Burials of Ashes. In January 2022 we introduced a new monthly Sunday afternoon Children's Service. The first three were via Zoom but the April service will be in St Nicolas.

Our regular fundraising activities have been adversely affected by Covid-19 and we had to accept loans from the Deanery in order to pay the Parish Share in full in 2020 and 2021 (both loans have now been repaid). We reintroduced Cream Teas in July, August and September 2021, and the weekly Plant and Produce Stall from April until October. In 2022 we invited The Maple Tree Children's Centre in Wheatley to share Daffodil Day at Shotover House in March and this was extraordinarily successful.

Some of the higher priority remedial work recommended by the Quinquennial (5 year) inspection in 2019 has been completed and we have had quotes for many of the remaining items. In February Storm Eunice dislodged a small number of the clear glass panels high up in the 15th century West Window, leaving the rest of the window vulnerable to further damage. Quotes for repairs have been received and we are hoping the work will take place soon.

The pandemic kept some people away from church and not all of them have returned. Our regular congregation is small but attendance at special events and services during the year has been encouraging. We hope that St Nicolas can continue to be a place of welcome and meaning.

Jane Walker, Churchwarden – March 2022

Read by Jane Walker

ii) MUSIC AT St. NICHOLAS' – April 2021 – March 2022

In April 2021, there was still no possibility of performing live music in church so we continued with our 'virtual choir' recordings, of which we have now done 99 altogether, together with well over 50 organ pieces.

In July 2022 we embarked on our first public concert since 2020, with informal music in the church garden during a 'Cream Teas' afternoon, followed by a short concert inside the church. The aim was to involve as many local musicians as possible, including children, and we did two similar concerts in August and September, each with a different programme and combination of performers. We hope to do the same again in 2022.

In November we held a well-attended Remembrance Sunday concert in aid of the British Legion Poppy Appeal, with music and readings reflecting on the impact of war throughout the ages. The rapid spread of the Omicron variant in December caused the last-minute withdrawal of the choir from all our Christmas Services, which was rather frustrating after all their rehearsing. However, we did manage to hold a Christmas celebration with carols and readings outside the village hall using our 'lockdown recordings' (the brass band having all tested positive for Covid a few days before).

With so much uncertainty about Covid at the beginning of 2022, we decided not to plan for a full series of concerts in March and April. Having already planned to do a concert on Saturday 19 March we decided to use it to raise funds for the DEC Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal and we have just sent off a cheque for £531.90.

We are grateful to all the talented local musicians who give so generously of their time and expertise, and to the audiences who support us. Information about the concerts, including some of the programmes can be viewed at <https://www.stnicolasforesthill.org/music-at-st-nicolas>. We very much hope that there will be plenty more music making at St Nicolas in 2022.

Julia Stutfield – 27 March 2022

Read by Julia Stutfield

iii) FOREST HILL BABY & TODDLER GROUP - April 2021 – March 2022

The Forest Hill Baby & Toddler Group (now known as The Maple Tree at Forest Hill) has done really well since it re-started in June and has already welcomed over 40 different families, including at least 12 with parents or grandparents in Forest Hill. The average weekly attendance is currently between 6 and 7.

The funding model is slightly different from the pre-pandemic arrangement, in that the Baby & Toddler Group pays for the hire of the village hall and provides the volunteers to set up, take down and help generally during the sessions, while The Maple Tree Children's Centre funds a professional member of staff to run the group. Because we are part of their official programme, The Maple Tree also publicises the group through their usual channels and we are covered by their specialist insurance. Both parties contribute equipment and resources but most of the equipment belongs to Baby & Toddler Group, with the occasional loan from The Maple Tree to keep things more interesting for the children. We usually have 2 or 3 volunteers at each session and a total of 5 people have volunteered so far. The regular volunteers are Julia Stutfield, Jane Walker and Anthea Beresford, and the sessions are run by Laura Spencer, the Manager of the Maple Tree.

The Baby & Toddler Group was given a one-off donation of £500 when the FHSSC folded in 2019 and this lasted until mid December 2021. In November 2021 Forest Hill Parish Council agreed a grant of £700 to cover running costs for a further year. This is split into two payments of £350, the first of which has already been received. In June, if the local attending numbers remain the same or indeed higher, the remaining £350 will be paid.

The Baby & Toddler Group has been invaluable in enabling parents and grandparents in Forest Hill and nearby to make new and lasting connections and friendships. We are grateful to The Maple Tree, Forest Village Hall, Forest Hill Parish Council and all our volunteers for supporting this worthwhile community initiative.

Julia Stutfield - 27 March 2022

Read by Julia Stutfield

iv) FOREST HILL VILLAGE MANAGING TRUSTEES – Report 21/22

Income and Expenditure – 3rd June '21 to 4th April '22

| | Receipts in | Payments out £ |
|---------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| TOTAL | 3,376.00 | 3,228.00 |
| Income | | |

Income in the past year has been depressed because of fears around Covid.

Fortunately rentals are now picking up and some regular users are back with us in addition to the new venture, Café on the Hill. This is open for two days a week.

Unfortunately the community lunches had to stop in 2020 and will not be re-instated in the near future.

It is a lot of pressure keeping up-to-date with health and safety regulations, plus of course, the responsibility to plan and produce the meals.

A big thank you to Dawn Dunbar for making the lunches so successful.

We also earned some extra funds of around £500 with a Sale of second-hand items at Stanton Shop and a 'Get-together tea' in the Hall.

Expenditure

Our main expenditure this year has been installation of new windows £560

and repainting the exterior of the building £1,390.00

Thank you to the Parish Council for giving us a 50% grant towards these costs.

The basic running costs for the Hall - electricity and water – have risen this year and will continue to rise.

The installation of a smart meter will stop past silly variations in estimated usage of electricity but we can't do the same for water usage. We have now had a proper reading and with the next bill will be able to gauge an accurate annual cost.

The allotment holders contribute around £100pa for their usage.

Linda Goffey, Secretary

Read by Malcolm Leeding

v) FOREST HILL GARDEN CLUB – April 2021 – March 2022

The garden club continues to be a very small village presence.

We hope to grow a little bigger one day!

This year we plan to take part in the celebrations for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, encouraging children to become interested in plants and wildlife.

We are also interested in tidying up the messy verge at the bottom of Church Hill, on the right as you drive out of the village. There is a line of dead trees and nothing growing up to take their place.

We have a Quiz ready to go, when fears of the virus are reduced, perhaps in the autumn.

In 2023 we hope to return to our annual plant sale and swap.

Prue Leeding – March 2022

Read by Malcolm Leeding

vi) FOREST HILL ALLOTMENTS

All the allotments are taken again for another year and all subs have been paid.

Bruce Davis – April 2022

Read by Bruce Davis

vii) OTMOOR FLYER ORGANISING GROUP (OFOG) – April 2021 – March 2022

Background

The organisation was set up in 2016 after subsidies to the existing bus service were withdrawn by the County Council.

A committee was set up with membership from Forest Hill with Shotover, Stanton St John, Beckley and Horton-cum-Studley which runs the Comet bus service. The County Council provide the bus and the driver and charge the committee a monthly rent. The committee are all volunteers.

To meet the costs the committee relies on 2 sources:

- a) Grants from the Parish Councils
- b) Receipts from fares.

This has proved adequate since 2016 and the service has proved popular with a number of regular users. Tickets are not limited by time.

For the future the committee has currently funds which would cover 5/6 months rent but as with many issues today, some uncertainties exist.

Malcolm Leeding, Parish transport representative

Read by

Malcolm Leeding

viii) DAME ELIZABETH HALFORD'S CHARITY – April 2021 – March 2022

The Charity has had a good twelve months, making grants in total of £36,986 to applicants across the area of benefit – Forest Hill with Shotover, Stanton St John, Beckley, Horton cum Studley and the ecclesiastical parish of Elsfeld.

Two of the Trustees are appointed by Forest Hill Parish Council, they are Malcolm Leeding and Gina Shepherd. Alison Finch, Chair of the Trustees is also from Forest Hill. Representatives of the other parishes make up the Board which currently stands at 9 Trustees.

We have filed our accounts with the Charity Commission and stand in good order. We are keen to get applications from a wider and more diverse representation of families in the area of benefit and would appreciate it if the Parish Council could spread the word about the work that we do.

Bursaries were awarded for tools for an apprentice electrician, laptop computers for secondary and university students, sporting equipment, residential science courses, assistance towards fees from students studying for Masters degrees in art, physiotherapy and teaching, music lessons, specialist equipment for an applicant with special educational needs.

Alison Finch, Chair of Trustees – March 2022
Read by Cllr. Malcolm Leeding

ix) OCC / SODC

Like the rest of the country the Big C is currently paying me a visit. I had a very uncomfortable few days with shortness of breath, sore throat, and general flu symptoms but happily the only thing holding me back now is the little red bar across the T part of the test strip!

Online meetings still play an important part in my working life, so I've been able to get most things done and here is a report back on some of the highlights.

Excellent news...

Oxford has been awarded the title of Zero Emission Transport City (ZETC)

In the Government's report "Gear Change: one year on" published in July last year, they identified the need for at least one small or medium sized city to be an exemplar to the rest of the country. We flagged our desire to be that City and worked tirelessly to demonstrate our commitment to deliver extensive bike lanes, an all-electric bus fleet, restrictions that discourage petrol and diesel vehicles, and initiatives that increase the use of electric cargo bikes (e-cargo) and vans to make deliveries.

We are delighted to have been chosen. It comes with a £500,000 pot of cash to do some planning and groundwork but the nationally recognised position given to us by a Conservative Government in support of a Lib Dem, Labour and Green-led Council means we should be able to take the politics out of this project and instead concentrate on doing everything we can to tackle climate change, help people lead a healthier, safer life and reduce the numbers of people killed or seriously injured on our roads.

The good news...

Oxfordshire County Council has been awarded £32.8 million from the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) scheme.

This means that a fleet of 159 state of the art electric buses will operate in the Oxford Travel area that stretches from Kidlington in the North to Kennington in the South and from Botley in the West to Wheatley in the East. All those buses that operate solely in that area wider Oxford area will be emissions free electric vehicles.

The council is putting in £6m and £43.7m will come from bus companies Stagecoach and the Go-Ahead Group, which includes the Oxford Bus Company, Thames Travel, and City Sightseeing Oxford.

The scheme will deliver the electric buses and the infrastructure to charge them in a package worth £82.5m.

I know that still leaves many of our smaller villages unconnected, but I am continuing to work on the long term sustainability of the 46 bus that currently just serves Horspath. I recognise that it is a vital link for the few that use it but could do so much more - watch this space.

Positive news...

Money for the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) has been announced. A mixed result for Oxfordshire – on the one hand, less than a quarter of what we asked for. On the other hand, Bucks, Gloucs, Warks and Northants all got nothing, so this is actually a relative success. The £12.7m does give us funding to do a few meaningful projects of which £8,743,028 is capital and £3,961,893 is revenue.

It is important to look at all these exciting funding pots and see how they create a series of complex interlocking parts. The money for ZEBRA is dependent on approval of Oxford Traffic filters that are required to provide at least 10% improved efficiency to the bus operators to make their investment stack up commercially. The lion's share of the capital provided in the BSIP is earmarked in the bid to pay for those traffic filters - which currently have no other upfront funding.

The bad news...

The Conservatives left the County Council with a deal signed with National Government to build a £300m network of major roads around Didcot called Housing Infrastructure 1 (HIF1). The deal they sign was at full risk to the council and sure enough it has overrun by £70m, and that is before a spade has even hit the ground. My concern is that this is just the tip of the iceberg and there will be massive future cost overruns, that it is impossible to build it all in the allotted four years given to us by Government and it will ultimately lead to an Expressway by stealth, joining up the A34 south of Abington with the M40 near Wheatley. We are picking over the deal to explore options with government and negotiations continue.

No news...

We await the outcome of our bid to Active Travel Tranche 3. One of the elements of that was work is to design an upgrade to the cycle path between Witney and Oxford. I hope we get that money because it will give us a much better negotiating platform with the Brookes developers when we are demanding local infrastructure contributions.

The best news (which as always is saved until last)

I have completed my allocation of the District Community Grants - thank you to all of you that applied. There was some cajoling, arm twisting and general persuasion to get to this point but I am glad that every penny is accounted for and working hard in our community. I have looked at the process and spoken to the cabinet member to discuss how it can be simplified, more reactive and quicker in future rounds but thanks to those that spent the time to put in your bids - I know it wasn't always a straightforward task.

| Organisation | Grant award |
|---|-------------|
| The Maple Tree (CGS21-22/114) Resources for Forest Hill play and learning | £522 |
| Waterstock Church (CGS21-22/195) Church chancel | £1,000 |
| Holton Parish Council (CG21-22/199) Orchard fending | £500 |
| Wheatley PCC (CGS21-22/203) Community larder | £500 |
| Stanton St John Village Hall (CGS21-22/240) Replacement chairs | £978 |

| | |
|---|---------------|
| Oxfordshire Play Association (CGS21-22/252) Wheatley & Holton Play & Activity Day 2022 | £500 |
| Beckley & Stowood Parish Council (CGS21-22/185) Concrete base for outdoor table tennis table | £1,000 |
| TOTAL awarded | £5,000 |

Tim Bearder
Previously circulated

x) CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022

I am pleased to report on the year 2021/22 for the Parish Council. Let me start with the closing sentence of my last report

"We look forward to calmer waters."

So who would have thought as I write this report that we are still in the midst of a pandemic, war has returned to Europe and we are at the start of a cost-of-living crisis. Certainly not me!

However, at a local level, we see life returning to some sense of normality. The council is now back to face-to-face meetings, village hall bookings are on the increase and the four-parishes funded bus service is back up and running. The downside of restrictions being eased is that traffic through Forest Hill has increased and with that so has speeding. We will continue to push for more measures to help reduce the problem across the parish.

So what else has been going on?

The allotments continue to bring joy to those that use them and also those (like me) that use them as a way of marking the passing of the season. The council would like to thank all those involved.

The opening of "Café on the Hill" by a local resident in the village hall is also another great example of how the community of this parish can come together and support each other. Nice cakes too!

In November we saw the planting of 200 saplings on the recreation ground as part of the "re-imagine the rec" project. We are now currently investigating the establishment of a wildflower area, the potential construction of a bike track and the re-instatement of the basketball net.

The council would like to thank all those that use the rec and it is so nice to see so many children and adults using it.

The Parish Council has continued to monitor and comment on planning applications and I would like to thank all the members for their contribution to the applications we have received. We continue to monitor and be part of the LnBB housing design process and also wait for further news on the proposed housing development south of Sandhills that falls within the parish boundary.

Once again I am pleased to report that the council has been able to keep its precept at the same level as the previous year and we continue to be vigilant in managing parish funds and bear in mind at all times that this money comes from your Council Tax, so needs to be spent and accounted for appropriately.

We have seen an increase in requests from local organisations and charities for funding to fill the gap from both local and central government funding and where possible we will provide as much as we can. One example being the Citizen Advice Bureau which we know provides such valuable help to residents.

This year we also see our Clerk, Helen retire at the end of May. I would, therefore, like to take this opportunity to thank her for all her hard work and the considerable contribution she has made to the smooth running of this council. I would like to wish her all the best in the future.

We have, I am pleased to say, found a replacement and I look forward to working with the new Clerk in the coming months and years.

This now seems a good time to end with thanks to all who have helped the Parish Council over the last year; those that organise clubs and groups, those that carry out their own rubbish picks, our County and City Councillor and my fellow Parish Councillors.

My last words go to the people of Ukraine. This council stands fully behind you and where possible will help and assist to ease your suffering and pain.

Cllr. Andrew Waite Brown, Chair