

WOOTTON PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES of the ANNUAL PARISH MEETING held on 27 May 2025

In the Chair: Cllr John Harwood (Chair, Wootton Parish Council)

Electors present: 22

C/Cllr Andy Graham, and D/Cllrs Genny Early & Tim Sumner

82/25 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

83/25 Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 May 2024 were received and approved.

84/25 Parish Council Report

The Chair of the Parish Council gave a report on behalf of the council; attached as Appendix 1

85/25 RFO Report

The RFO summarised her report; attached as Appendix 2

Reports from Village Organisations are detailed below:

APPENDIX 1

Chair's Report

I am pleased to submit this report on the work of the Parish Council during the year 2024-25. The Council's financial statements for the year are submitted by our Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer, Cathy Fleet.

In terms of the membership of the council, the other councillors elected in May 2024 (Frances Bates (Vice Chair), Pauline Briggs, Marcus Brown, David Knight, Fiona Mackinlay, and John Salter) served throughout the year. I am grateful to them all as a stable membership is important for the continuity of our work on behalf of the village. I should also record our thanks to our Parish Clerk and RFO, Cathy Fleet, who also served the parish through the year.

As I reported last year we continue to face significant challenges. Since then, however, we have been able to improve our financial position significantly. We have continued to replenish our reserves and over the year have been able to begin building up a reserve to fund necessary improvements in the village. The benefits of this we hope will become apparent this year with the restoration of the traditional signpost at the top of West End Hill. There are other projects we anticipate being able to fund in the coming years, especially those which may emerge from the Neighbourhood Plan and measures to improve road safety.

The Neighbourhood Plan steering group brings together village residents and council members and is chaired by Fiona Mackinlay. The group has worked throughout the year to design a survey to collect the information needed to work out the policies to be put into the Neighbourhood Plan document. Survey data will be collected over the next three months and everyone who lives in the parish will have an opportunity to put forward their views. The plan will then be written to reflect the priorities shown in the survey and to align with the aims and policies of the broader District Plan.

The Council continues to be involved with the Village Travel Network group, which is a local committee for Woodstock and surrounding villages focussed on improving connections between rural communities and encouraging active transport, cycling and walking in particular. The VTN works alongside a national body, the LCWIP, which promotes improved and healthy methods of transport, and encourages and enables more journeys made on foot or bike by improvements to paths, cycleways, road crossings and safety measures. LCWIPs are a policy requirement in Oxfordshire's new Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) and supporting Active Travel Strategy.

The Woodstock and Surrounding Areas LCWIP was developed in collaboration with stakeholders, to ensure local views are reflected. Department for Transport (DfT) technical guidance for producing LCWIPs and national and local policies were also followed. The priorities recommended by the LCWIP were agreed by Oxfordshire County Council on 25 April. Wootton, Woodstock and Stonesfield all have areas with priority actions for improvement.

These include a much-improved cycle route alongside the A44 between Wootton and Woodstock, and a safer crossing and revised road layout at the A44 junction at the Duke of Marlborough pub.

Over the past year, the Parish Council considered seven planning applications that were referred to us from WODC, six of which related to housing alterations, extensions and new constructions. Typically we provided comments at the first stage of the planning process rather than objecting or supporting an application. We are pleased to be able to report that WODC planners carefully considered our comments and suggestions, and almost all of them were included in their final planning decisions.

Considering the Woodleys House application (to convert the house and barns for private events such as weddings, conferences, exhibitions etc) took up a much time especially in regard to traffic issues. In particular, we asked WODC to consider road safety and sustainable traffic modes. The application was recently approved but with significant conditions which we will be monitoring closely.

The other major planning issue during the year has been the continuing progression of the Botley West solar farm proposal through the national planning system. We submitted our response in writing to both phase 1 and 2, concentrating on arguing for mitigation measures such as wider and larger buffer zones and for more information regarding construction and operational traffic. (We felt that we did not have anything like sufficient expertise to argue against the principle of the development and this should be left to those that do.) A small amount of local land originally proposed for solar panels was subsequently removed from the application. WPC councillors have also attended meetings relating to a potential "Community Fund" which could provide Wootton Parish with some "compensation funding" should Botley West be approved. The council will be monitoring and attending the next phase of the planning process.

We have continued to be able to give financial support to key village organisations such as WCAST, Outreach and the Conservation Trust and to ensure that the memorial garden in front of the church is maintained to a high standard.

Finally, I would like to express our thanks to our local county councillor, Andy Graham (especially for his help securing a county council grant towards a new bus shelter on the A44) and to our district cllrs, Tim Sumner and Genny Early (especially for help securing fly-tipping on Milford Lane). They have all been generous with their time and support for the village.

John Harwood

Chair, Wootton Parish Council

(johnharwood.wpc@gmail.com)

APPENDIX 2

RFO's Report

The accounts for the financial year are closed and have been audited by the Internal Auditor, Phil Parker to whom I would like to pass my thanks. Phil's audit includes ensuring that the accounts have been accurately kept and that the balances are correct, and additionally he ensures that correct processes and procedures have been followed throughout the year.

The next stage is that the accounts must be submitted to the External Auditor together with a Certificate of Exemption as the PC is below the financial threshold for a full audit. Accounts, Accounting Statement and Governance Statement were approved by the parish council at its last meeting and will be available to view on the website in due course.

The closing balance of the Bank account at 31st March 2025 was £18873, of which £16940.88 is in deposit accounts earning 2.25% interest. It is necessary to hold reserves as a contingency, and it is recommended that between 3-12 months expenditure is held in reserve.

The precept from WODC in 2024/25 was £16,320 and the PC also received a grant towards grass cutting of £524.64.

In the last financial year the parish council spent a total of £9561

Regular spending throughout the year is mostly on administrative functions, for example, Insurance, payroll and bank charges, fees for hiring the village hall, subscriptions to external organisations and the Clerk's salary. Grasscutting throughout the village is also a regular expenditure, offset by the grant from OCC which goes some way towards the total cost of the PC's grass cutting budget. Additionally there are costs associated with dog waste collection and general maintenance of the village and the Parish Council was pleased to be able to provide S137 grant funding to organisations within the village .

As a point of interest, the PC has the ability to reclaim VAT paid on good and services purchased.

Cathy Fleet

May 2025

County Councillor's Report

District Councillor's Report

Wootton Community Shop report (Pauline Briggs)

This report has to be of necessity only a brief outline of the current situation at the Community Shop. As all of us are aware, the retail trade generally is going through rather difficult times, and this inevitably has an impact on our shop. It is also the case that more people became used to online shopping during Covid, and retained the habit after the end of the pandemic. We have observed a drop in monthly footfall, although there is not always a direct equivalent drop in monthly takings – which would seem to indicate fewer people are spending more, in some months. We are therefore having to keep a very close eye on monthly expenditure in relation to monthly takings. On the positive side of things, we are fortunate in having an excellent Manager in Michele, who is constantly monitoring cost of products, available discounts and budgetary limits. She is also very good at seeking out new products, to enliven our stock.

We have recently carried out some improvements, such as a new awning over the front window, an installation of a better fire alarm system, and a new till/computer – which I think we have now got used to, and which gives us improved management information, and at what I think is called “the interface” for volunteer shop staff.

Another positive is that we have recruited several new volunteers who have been undergoing training. We now need to persuade them to volunteer as often as possible!

We are frequently receiving compliments from customers on the range of products in the shop, the friendliness of the staff and just the general appearance of the shop.

The shop remains an important hub for the village and it is noticeable that the presence of a village shop is always mentioned by estate agents in their advertising about properties for sale in Wootton. It is valuable as a source of information about local events, meetings, personal information such as births, deaths and marriages – and simply, gossip!

Wootton Relief in Need Report

Annual Report: May 2024-25 (Simon Heighes, Chair).

Once again, our headlines for the past year are all positive. In January we said a fond goodbye to our longstanding Trustee Jane Hoare, after 30 years on the committee, and we welcomed two new Trustees: one unanimously co-opted – with extensive, hands-on experience in the village – the other parachuted in *ex officio* – our new Rector, Esther Lay. I said last year that without the eyes, ears and second sense of a resident vicar, it’s much more difficult to identify those who may be in need and encourage them to make contact: so now we feel we are on much more solid ground. We’ve also had great success with the new email address we set up last year – infowrin@gmail.com – which is listed at the back of *Outreach*. It’s been working discreetly and is very much the most popular route for people to contact us.

Most importantly, we’ve been able to support *all* the applications we’ve received over the past 12 months: from modest sums to help meet higher than expected bills; a little extra assistance for village amenities; to a few more comprehensive rescues – which were actually less about financial assistance and more about committee members helping with short-term practicalities and essential longer-term planning. We are looking at ways in which we can offer a wider range of assistance – not just financial.

One of our main objectives over the last couple of years has been to modernise the operation of the Charity. In our last two reports to the Annual Parish Meeting, I've made the point that in committees with very long-serving members, *past* practice often becomes enshrined as *best* practice, and that making fundamental changes to the operation of an organisation can be challenging and alienating for some committee members. I'm pleased to report that WRIN has now weathered this particular storm, and having already addressed the key issues of governance, record keeping, confidentiality and banking, we are now turning our attention to the current funding model, in which our income is wholly derived from cautious investments. Although in the past financial gifts and legacies to the Charity were declined, we are open now for business.

sjh (29.iv.25)

Wootton Community and Sports Trust Report (Neil Pollard)

This was the third year of operation for Wootton Community and sports Trust (WCAST). As a reminder for anyone new, we are a charitable trust responsible for the provision and maintenance of the Burditch Hall, the Play corner and the Playing field.

WCAST Sports were sad to learn that the men's football team is unable to continue for the next season due to a lack of players able to commit. We are hoping to find ways in future to reinstate the team based in Wootton.

However, the Youth football teams known as Stonesfield Wootton Under 16s have continued to thrive. We are currently working on making two pitches available to cater for the different age groups, and hope to be able to host even more matches and training sessions in future. Our longer term goal is that by supporting youth football it may help us feed new players back in and get an adult team back up and running.

The Play Corner has required some repairs and actions following our ROSPA inspections. We also have some maintenance required on the zipwire which will be actioned over the summer.

Mowing costs throughout the year are one of our greatest expenses, totalling around £1700. WCAST would like to be considered for any precept funds from the Parish Council towards these costs please. The rest of the field maintenance is done by volunteers and trustees.

In the Burditch Hall the weekly coffee mornings held on Thursday mornings continues to be well attended. They are free and open to all, and we thank Caroline Bateman for running these on our behalf. A village book club and a knit and natter club also continue to run on a monthly basis, are open to all and free of charge. The hall is still available for private hire at very affordable rates. Apart from a regular cleaning contract, everything at the hall is run and maintained by volunteers.

The bridge bar continues to be open to the public every Friday and we are hugely grateful to all our volunteers for giving up their time to provide this community space for the village. On the first Friday of every month we run a bingo night and meat draw which is proving to be a highly popular event enjoyed by many. We thank our regular bingo caller, Pete Appleford for his services.

Other popular events run for the community at the bar include music quizzes, pizza nights, the Christmas sing along, and special nights such as the recent VE day celebrations. We also regularly open our doors for bigger televised sporting events, so everyone has the opportunity to watch on our big screen projector in the company of other fans. Sometimes with curry too!

Over the summer we again have a full programme of activities planned. There will be regular sport and dance classes for children of all ages – all free of charge and including free pizza slices and squash. Details of which sessions are planned with dates and times can be found on Wootton WhatsApp and the Wootton website.

Also for the summer we'll again be marking out rounders, badminton and tennis pitches for everyone to use, and will host regular family rounders games as weather allows – look out for details on the WhatsApp groups as usual. We also hope to see some teams forming to play Aunt Sally with our new equipment.

We have been pleased to collaborate again with other village organisations to provide joint events such as the outdoor Shakespeare performances and the Flower Show – and we look forward to those things happening again this year.

The Trustee group has largely remained the same, but we have welcomed some new faces. Matt Mead has taken on the role of Events Trustee, I (Neil Pollard) have joined the hall and bar trustees alongside Sarah Davies and Ian Hemmingway, and I have also been nominated as Vice Chair. Kelly Earle has joined the team as Bookings Trustee. Graham Lawrence continues to oversee the playing field and play corner. We were delighted that James Gray accepted the nomination to become the chair of Trustees in addition to his role in the sports, and Rachel Budge and Nat Mitchell-Boorne continue in their roles of Treasurer and Secretary respectively.

We are extremely grateful for all the support we receive from everyone who attends and helps out at events, to all our amazing volunteers and supporters, and to the community for helping us to ensure that the Burditch Hall and Playing Field are there for people of all ages to enjoy.

Tackley School Report

Report for Wootton Parish Council Annual Meeting

Tuesday 27th May 2025

Apologies for not being able to attend this meeting as I am currently on holiday. Please find below my report for the Annual Parish Council meeting for Wootton by Woodstock

The extremely ambitious target of £30,000 to build a cabin, due to lack of space, in the school grounds, was achieved in 5 months. On behalf of the school I would like to thank Tackley PTA, Tackley Village Shop, Tackley Parish Council, Tackley Pop-up pub, St. Nicholas's Church, Tackley Horse Show, Wootton Coffee Shop, Wootton Flower Show and the entire school community for supporting the fundraising campaign spearheaded by Sonya Barnett and Catherine Chaytor. A piece has been written in the Tackley newsletter about the various uses of the cabin and how it has created much needed space in school. We are now able to start lunchtime clubs!

The school continues to flourish and grow, we currently have 129 pupils on roll, including nursery, and are over-subscribed in some year groups. There have been new families moving into both Tackley and Wootton and these children, from both villages, have been welcomed into the school community.

We have had two inspections this year, firstly a SIAMS (Church of England) inspection in September 2024 a highlight from the report is “the school seeks to ensure that all are valued and included. Consequently, it is a united community that expertly serves those in its care irrespective of how they became part of it.”

Another highlight is school staff: “ know pupils and their families extremely well. They demonstrate diligent care and support beyond the confines of the classroom. In times of need, the vision to love and live well together is prioritised.”

In March this year the school had a two-day graded Ofsted inspection. The school was graded good in all 5 areas. “Parents and pupils describe Tackley as a place ‘where staff have unconditional positive regard for all pupils’. We are delighted that the report reflects the work of the school both through the curriculum, our approach to inclusion and wider enrichment activities we offer our pupils.

Trips and visits form an important part of school life, panto, swimming and Hillend trips funded by PTA. In addition, author visits and workshops are funded. We are so grateful for this support as we are in challenging financial times and tough decisions must be made due to increased energy costs and falling school budgets in real terms. We are working with charities such as the Windrush project to provide free cycling training to our Y5 & 6 pupils. We have close links with Oxford United and have had players visit to talk about healthy lifestyles and resilience. Our Year 6 pupils played for OUFC in the regional finals of a national competition. Two Year 6’s and their parents were funded to go to the final last year at Wembley. In these times, these links are vital to ensure our children get wider experiences. We have a team of volunteers who come into school to read with pupils, help us walk to church and the tractor run led by Mrs Guy is hopefully a new tradition. Holiday clubs in the school holidays to help working families.

Thank the governors and church and the entire school community for their ongoing support in ensuring the school remains at the centre of Tackley and Wootton communities for years to come.

Karen Ward

Headteacher of Tackley CE Primary School

We are currently recruiting for a community governor, please see the details below.

Dear All,

As you will know Wootton By Woodstock Primary School has now merged with Tackley Primary School. It has been a wonderful success and is working well.

Tackley is keen to continue their relationship not just with the children of Wootton but with the community as well.

We are looking for a Community Governor to join our Local Governing Board. (On this occasion it must not be a parent of a child at Tackley School). Might you be interested?

All training will be given (there isn't much and it is nearly always at a time to suit you) and no previous experience of education is required.

The Governing Board is made up of community governors, foundations governors (linked to the church), parent and staff governors so between us we have a wide skill set.

We meet 6 times a year for Full Governing Board meetings and then each Governor will support different committees depending on their skill set and availability.

Governors play a crucial role, working closely with the headteacher and the Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust on a day-to-day basis to support the leadership of the school and to ultimately have a positive effect on educational outcomes. Volunteering as a governor provides the opportunity to contribute to the local community, and we would particularly like to hear from individuals who could bring business skills to the Local Governing Body. In return we can offer the chance to:

- develop leadership and networking skills;
- support a local school and its wider community;
- work as part of a team who are passionate about providing the best possible opportunities for children and young people.

For further information please do get in touch via chair.3144@tackley.oxon.sch.uk

Alex Machin

Chair of Governors

Neighbourhood plan Report (Fiona Mackinlay)

Frances Bates spoke in place of Cllr Andy Grham outlining the purpose of the plan and the involvement of the district council.

Wootton Conservation Trust (Malcolm Barnicote)

Still working on the information board which will go up at Milford Lane. The new kids club hosted by Sarah Brown is thriving and 7-8 children regularly attend – Saturday mornings

Grazing – no sheep grazing this year but hoping sheep will return in the Autumn

Money set aside– fencing done, little bridge will be re built on 1st June -footpath will be restricted on that day. 8th June complete repairs on Monet Bridge which is structurally sound but some super structure needs replacing,

Rikde on mower was bought last year to keep paths in good order.

Funding – grant from DEFRA ending in 2 years. North East Farmers Cluster maybe a source of funding which will allow pollarding of willows on the river and survey some Ash trees.

Always looking for volunteers. Encourage people to pick up dog mess.

Village hall Andy Warner - moving towards arts & crafts - event on 3rd June – encourage people to attend – please buy tickets

Questions

Legally every household must receive a paper copy of the survey but can respond online which is encouraged. Everyone over 16 is encouraged to respond as soon as possible. There will be a tech cafe in the shop running on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the shop to assist with any tech related problems with completing the survey. The hard copy can be photocopied if more are required in a household.

Open Forum

War memorial needs some attention – requires cleaning

School building ? any update - in discussion with planners of WODC regarding change of use. The foundation tried to get it used as school with no success so looking t alternative use Foundation would liker to re-develop as small housing units.

Well cover - have got 1 quote which was very expensive – trying to get another quote, but there is concern over the condition of the woodwork inside.