

Annual Village Meeting Report 2024-25 – Parish Council Chair Diane Bohm April 22nd, 2025

I wrote this report with an outline of the Minutes from the report of last year. For several years in a row, the same topics have been on the list.

The issue of the Oak Tree concrete footpath has been ongoing for five years. Its construction was urban, and the fencing made visibility dangerous for North Lane drivers especially in the winter. Our lobbying to have it removed has been made difficult by the passing of the decision from person to person at OCC. The key driver of our insistence that the path be removed has been Roger Evans who not only designed the more rural pathway at the back of the tree, but also sourced a consultant who wrote a report that left no doubt that the path had been constructed without any consideration of the veteran oak tree which should have been protected by law. I'm fairly sure he has a flow chart of how to escalate our objection plus and a regular diary entry of who to send reminder emails to about remove the blot on our village. The conversation went on and on and as many of you will have experienced, the irritating bureaucratic delays in getting the problem solved. We were fortunate that our County Councillor Nigel Simpson was a tireless supporter of our cause. Actually, the lack of a solution became wearing on all of us. Finally, on Monday February 24th, 2025, the workforce arrived to begin the process of removing that path. There was a stop/start action over two weeks but by the end 35 tons of concrete had been removed including the bags of concrete and gravel dumped on the roots of the tree. The roots were treated, fed with nutrients and special soil put on and around them before the topsoil and grass seed was added.

The outcome of this work will be a relief to many and a source of curiosity to new villagers.

We've talked about the playground for several years and are pleased to report that new equipment was installed last spring which included new swings and frame plus a basket swing for younger children. A current challenge is managing the petty vandalism that is now occurring on the equipment. We need more support from parents keeping an eye on youngsters using both the spinney and the playground. We've reported the behaviour to the Neighbourhood Police. Councillor Ben Lanham led the work on both the spinney and the playground. Sadly, his job has taken him to another city. We'll miss his input on the Parish Council.

At the last AGM we had a presentation on Neighbourhood Watch. Unfortunately, we have not had a volunteer to lead this work in the village. It would be great if someone could step into this role as the programme does help keep the village secure.

We've recently celebrated the opening of the Weston Community Shop under the leadership of Sam Sharp and the SOS Committee. Fund raising, purchase and opening of the shop has occurred in excellent time. We are very grateful for the dedication and work that has gone into this project. We are also very grateful to Yasemin for her years of toil and dedication to the formation of a truly welcoming environment where laughter was frequently heard.

The Speedwatch programme carries on with a dedicated team of villagers supporting Graham Barnett in collecting statistics on Church Road/Lane and the B430. The hardest road to manage is Church Lane where drivers have been known to go well above the 20mph limit making walking or cycling down the lane quite dangerous. Looking forward, there is a plan in place to reduce the speed on the B430 to 30 mph during the course of the next few months. Again, a huge thanks to the Traffic Committee for their dogged determination to get the speed limit changed.

A great deal of time has been spent discussing and responding to consultations including the Cherwell Local Plan – twice as the CDC Policy team has had to respond to central government policies. Susan will be going over the key issue that we are dealing with.

Our Community Bus has had a busy and successful year. We were able to secure some grant money to keep it running – the cost for insurance, road tax, MOT and fuel is approximately £2,200 per year. A note for next year – we will not be allowed to apply for an OCC grant for a second year. That will be quite a challenge.

The Gigaclear project has brought a mixture of relief, annoyance and frustration to us. However, after a number of interventions and formal complaints most of the work was completed. Some additional funding was found for one house needing connection but there is still an issue on one of our privately owned lanes. We began the technology project during Covid with the help of James Henderson and Mark East and so it is great to see it completed. Thank you to our street leaders who helped with the early communication so we could have virtual street meetings!

A key concern for the Parish Council and for many long-term villagers has been the preservation of the School Field as a grassland meadow. Over the past few years the field was bought from a developer, and the PC has worked hard to make the land safe from development. It became clear that the developer wanted to either develop or sell the land. We were very pleased when four homeowners bought a strip of land protecting it for years to come from development. The current issue is that two plots of land have not sold, and we understand they will come up for auction this spring. Although not fit for development due to a lack of infrastructure, it would be great if the plots were bought and preserved as meadow into the future. This would keep the area as the historic spot where villagers walk across the field into the village far away from the noise of Northampton Rd. and walkers on the Oxfordshire Trail would get a sense of moving from the rural into the village setting.

It is seldom that I get an email advising me that a member of our community has been allocated 300 trees for Weston Wood. David Williams is our biodiversity hero! To top that off he has also 'found' 250 bushes to be planted in the autumn. Great thanks to David who is passionate about woodland and the benefit of trees. He has been working with a group of volunteers and some of the young people have enjoyed being involved as well.

It is a pleasure to mention the Village News which under the leadership of Alex Reid continues to be colourful, informative and very supportive of village projects. The delivery team is a group of nine who deliver your news in rain, snow and hail! Thank you to the volunteers!

There is glue that holds the work of the Parish Council together and that is our clerk, Jane Mullane. She has a special liking for ponds and drains. Jane never misses a deadline and is a delight to work with – thank you Jane.

Going forward, our work will focus on:

- Traffic issues
- Flooding
- Supporting the development at the north end of the village – Milestone Lane as there are ongoing issues
- The wider issue of development in the region and speculative development in the village
- Finding further funding for the Community Bus and looking into the future – replacing it.

In conclusion, I'd like to thank the Parish Councillors, Susan, John, Tracy and our new councillor Michael Aldridge for their energy and enthusiasm. Each one is a post holder and oversees a specific area of our work. The team has a development plan which you will find on the website.

In conclusion

“Are we a village or a suburb?” I ended last year’s report with this question and have recently written about this in the Village News. What is the role of the history of the village in any growth and in our policies. When I speak with newcomers to the village, most have made a choice to live away from the city - what does that entail?? It most certainly involves involvement with neighbours and the community. Bear in mind that it takes many hands to keep projects going. We’d like to encourage volunteers to support an area of interest. Please speak to any councillor and find out what is needed.

Finally, a word of support to Paula and Bob Hessian who recently lost most of their home in a fire. Updates are given on the village FB page including requests for help.

Thank you,

Diane Bohm\Chair