

Chair's report

Welcome everybody. It's good to see you.

Looking back, it's been an eventful year but perhaps our biggest task has been completing the Deddington Neighbourhood Plan. At around 10pm on Friday 3 May, we will know the result of the referendum on the plan which will take place at the same time and at the same polling stations (the Windmill and the Old School Room in Hempton), as the district council elections. So yes, parishioners will have the opportunity to vote yay or nay to the neighbourhood plan tomorrow.

This is the fruit of several years' work by a neighbourhood plan steering group set up by the parish council. Kudos to Cllr Alan Collins, chair of the group who steered us through to the end. We had a false start with our initial plan which was deemed by the government examiner to be offering too few houses, so we started again – this time allocating a site for new development, employing a planning consultant and undertaking yet more consultations with parishioners to guide us. I won't go into the detail of the plan which has been set out several times already but broadly speaking it allocates one site, north of the fire station, for 85–90 homes (as bumped up by the examiner) which comes with generous community benefits: a nursery, a car park which should enable the health centre to expand, an orchard and a biodiversity zone.

The plan's policies focus on the kind of housing people need, combatting climate change and trying to preserve Deddington as a vibrant, lively community for residents and businesses alike. This latter is difficult to legislate for – potentially we could lose three or even four pubs in the parish in the coming year whatever we say in the plan.

Generally we'll know whether, in the eyes of the parish, the plan has achieved the best possible options on Friday. The neighbourhood plan has cost a total of around £30,000 for consultant fees, printing and Survey Monkey and room hire – all of which was covered by grants from a government-backed agency, Locality, except for £1,000 which was donated by *Deddington News* and the odd £100 from the PC.

Money has been a dominant theme of the year elsewhere. After many years of make-do-and-mend, the parish council and the Windmill management team decided we had to install a new roof on the community centre to solve the problem of invasive damp. To cut a long story short we raised £83,000 in grants towards the total anticipated cost of around £90,000. Huge thanks are due to the Valencia Community Fund – which is affiliated to a local waste recycling centre – for £50,000, to Cherwell District Council for £25,000 and to the Garfield Weston Foundation for £8,000, plus contributions from civic-minded parishioners who are topping up the grants by 'buying a rivet'. We're grateful too to Cllrs Mark Swadling and Mary Robinson who handled the complicated contract for the work. The roof should be complete next month.

The other major projects of the year, mostly at the Windmill centre and park, such as the soon to be installed mini tennis courts, have been financed by S106 money – the contributions, Burrington Estates, the developers of Hempton Gate and Clifton Gate, are obliged to make towards education, the library, local infrastructure and facilities. So the residents of these estates, who perhaps paid high prices for their houses, can congratulate themselves for contributing to the wellbeing of the parish that is their new home.

We have other projects in mind for various parts of the parish for the coming year, so the financial health of the developers is of acute interest to us – hence our alarm when we heard that the local construction arm of Burrington was going out of business. So far we have been promised half of the amount of S106 due from Clifton Gate and we're hopeful we'll receive the rest eventually.

Of course as a parish council and hopefully as a community we welcome these new assets. There is however a flip side. We're given the capital to finance them, but we then have to pay for their maintenance and repairs from the parish precept – one reason, aside from inflation, that the precept has to rise, although it's still only a tiny proportion of council tax, something over a fiver a month.

The council itself has changed over the year. One much loved and valued councillor, Martin Ince, has died; others have left because of ill health or work commitments. We're very fortunate in this parish, which is blessed with a strong community spirit, to have found three new councillors to replace the ones we have lost.

Another change is the introduction of a 20mph speed limit in the three villages of the parish and 50mph on the roads connecting them. Collectively parishioners voted for this, with Clifton and Hempton residents particularly keen. Still, some are having second thoughts, a few even suggesting the 20mph limit goads people into driving even faster. I think this is alarmism and that traffic is moving perceptibly slower, but it's hard to be definitive. The council has renewed its lobbying for police enforcement of speed limits. And Cllr Swan in particular has mounted a campaign against the HGV lorries thundering through Hempton.

Turning from road safety to health matters, I wonder how many of you have been bitten by the notorious Blandford fly. Just in the last couple of months we have been invited by our county councillor Arash Fatemian and Steeple Aston Parish Council to contribute to a survey of the likely habitats of the larvae which develop into the fly in the River Cherwell.

We hesitated because the crucial season in April was nearly over by the time we received the request and we want to know more – whether the River Swere is another breeding ground, how much subsequent annual spraying of relevant areas would cost, and whether other affected councils, such as Banbury, CDC and OCC would contribute to what is a widespread problem. We'd like to know as well whether parishioners are so badly affected they would like us to sustain an annual cost.

Enough of that grim thought. I would like to turn to a happier consideration without, I hope, sounding too much like a speech at the Oscars. We all owe many thanks to councillors I haven't so far named who have also done sterling work for the parish, and to our amazing

clerk, Susan Fuller, who keeps us on the right track and manages our finances, to our excellent minutes clerk, Elen Squires, to the stewards, Richard Bannister and Gareth Smith, ably abetted by Cllr Terry Timms, who mow and mend, and collect rubbish and other unmentionables and keep the parish looking attractive, and to our county councillor Arash Fatemian and district councillor, Bryn Williams, who regularly fight our corner.

The Windmill management team do a fantastic job enhancing the community centre and encouraging more and more people to use it. Likewise we're lucky to have DEN, the Deddington Environment Network, with their eco initiatives and their regular organisation of litter picks with the help of stalwart councillors – and the Holly Tree Club for maintaining a meeting place and organising events for older parishioners – and the *Deddington News*, a first-rate parish magazine, which loyally covers all our meetings. The list could go on, so if I haven't mentioned you, don't think we're not grateful. You make Deddington what it is – a marvellous place to live.

Helen Oldfield
Chair

Finance & General Purposes Working Group report

Though F&GP's main concern is with the financial accounts and budget control, the working group considers every development in the parish and assesses its financial implications. As these are covered in other working groups' reports they will not be covered here. In addition, it deals with staff matters, including appropriate annual reviews and salary levels. The general income and expenditure on the revenue account shows a small excess of income over expenditure of £4,700. This is in part due to tree works being carried out in the 24/25 year, rather than 23/24.

Total funds held by the Council at the end of March are £511,743, much of which is allocated to known projects including the recent roof repairs for the Windmill, and future replacement of equipment in our various play areas.

The Council holds a capital fund of approximately £400,000. This is money which mainly came to the parish many years ago, and is ring fenced for spending on capital items. It cannot be used for routine expenditure, but the interest on the money invested can be used to provide services in the parish.

Interest on bonds this year at £7,650 was double than the previous year due to improved interest rates. We continue to search for good returns within the constraints of the Financial Services Compensation Scheme limit of £85,000 for any one institution.

The annual financial report will be published on the Parish Council website once it has been audited.

I would like to thank the Clerk for all her work on keeping the finances in order, and ensuring that we act within the law applying to local councils at all times.

Environment & Recreation working group report

2023 was another busy year working on projects to make the parish of Deddington an attractive place to live, while being conscious of promoting and supporting our environment and keeping an eye on the budget at the same time.

Parish wide:

Last year we ran a scheme to leave the grass in areas of the parish uncut during May and June to promote biodiversity and encourage wildflowers and pollinators for bees. It brought an avalanche of comments, equally balanced between good and bad. We've taken note of these and simplified the scheme, doing less but better. Maps of the eight areas are available to view on [Deddington Online](#).

We successfully finished off the project to provide new sponsored litter bins around the parish and worked with Deddington Environmental Network on the twice-yearly litter pick. Some of the dumped litter is commercial fly-tipping and we are actively working with Cherwell DC on this.

Our tree management programme continues, catching up after years of under-investment. This includes treating trees affected by ash dieback. We also work with the government's Community Payback scheme which provides workers free to the PC for work like clearing brambles, paths, etc.

Thanks to the community benefit that comes with new housing developments, this year we will be making substantial improvements to the children's play areas at Welford's Piece, Wimborn Close and the Windmill.

Windmill Centre:

This is the PC's biggest asset and work continues to maintain and improve the building and its facilities. Last year's major projects were: adding two new disabled loos, one internal and one external, the latter much used by visitors to the children's play areas and sports pitches. A new carpet was laid at the all-weather court and new cricket nets installed. And the long-awaited kitchen refurb was done, giving us a gleaming stainless-steel kitchen fit for professionals.

This year's big project is to install an insulated over-roof on the building which will solve the ongoing damp problems and also help with energy bills. This was done with grant aid from the Valencia Communities Fund, the CDC Village Hall Fund and the Garfield Weston Foundation, for which we are truly grateful. And the parish topped it up through our 'Buy a Rivet' scheme. Next up is to lay two mini tennis courts on derelict land next to the tennis courts for the budding stars of the future. The cctv cameras around the Windmill, both inside and out, will have an overhaul to get maximum coverage from them. And, looking further ahead, the showers in the changing rooms will be refurbished and the car park lighting upgraded.

Thanks to grants, donations and community benefit schemes, we are very fortunate in having leisure and play facilities of this standard in a parish our size. They need ongoing funds for their maintenance and ultimate replacement, and we have built this into our financial management.

Dog poo:

Dog poo left on the ground continues to be a concern, particularly on the sports fields where children play matches. It's disgusting, it's unhealthy and it's anti-social. We do provide dog poo bins: if the nearest one is full, please find another or take the bag home. We pay CDC around £2,500 a year for this service: dog lovers think it is essential and complain if bins are full; non-dog lovers complain about the cost. Please, everyone, do your bit by calling out the stubborn small minority of residents who think nothing of it – it's particularly upsetting when the only reply is verbal abuse.

Our thanks as always go to our overworked Clerk, Susan Fuller, the two parish stewards, Richard and Gareth, who keep the place in good nick, and to Cllr Terry Timms who is our eyes and ears around the parish. Thank you all.

*Mary Robinson
Chair*

Highways & Transport Working Group

We said goodbye to Cllr Janet Higham and hello to our new member Nick Mylne. We thank Janet for all her hard work over the years. We work closely with the Hempton and Clifton councillors on their village highway issues, and I would like to thank our working group for their continuing hard work.

As usual this group has been extremely busy. We have been successful in many areas, but several issues are still outstanding:

1. *VAS replacements*: we are still waiting for these following the introduction of our 20mph speed limit.
2. *Camera at the traffic lights*: TVP Community Officers asked to look into why our request to get this actioned has not been addressed since 2022.
3. *New 20mph speed enforcement*: unlikely, as TVP monitoring equipment in vehicles does not record speeds under 30mph. TVP view 20mph schemes as self-enforcing.
4. *Speedwatch*: the band of volunteers is growing and, when enough numbers are gathered together and a co-ordinator named, the group can go ahead. More volunteers still needed. This is an education tool for those who either knowingly or unknowingly do not stick to the speed limit. Speed monitoring documentation gathered by individuals not trained by TVP and using devices not approved by TVP will not be acknowledged.
5. *Fix-my-Street*: a quick way to deal with a variety of highway issues and get them resolved, used regularly by our group.

6. *EV Chargers:* Oxfordshire County Council's LEVI application has finally been approved for funding by the Department for Transport to include support for the creation of EV Microhubs. Formal EV Microhub applications are now scheduled for autumn 2024 following a summer tendering process for a charge point operator. The scheme will be promoted widely when launched, including a direct notification to all sites who originally expressed interest in the project. Deddington is on the list.
7. *Hempton pinchpoint:* RTA investigated; OCC plan will be put in place if the 20mph scheme does not reduce accidents and incidents.
8. *Weight restriction audit on HGV lorries:* not great news as no change in present situation. Our research has established that, due to the complexity of weight restrictions, it was not possible to identify proposals for county-wide restrictions. There are a number of challenges, e.g. enforcement, exemptions due to access requirements and the need to consider the potential impact on surrounding areas. Weight restrictions are only one potential solution and we need to fully understand problems before working with stakeholders to develop the appropriate solution. The study therefore developed an overarching process and set of criteria for how OCC assesses, prioritises and addresses the HGV issue. The B4031 is identified as an appropriate route for local access traffic. The A4260 and A361 are identified as appropriate routes for links to smaller towns.
9. *Road Traffic Closures:* we continue to report these – many thanks to Deddington OnLine and DN who give these publicity.
10. *Flood risk funding:* we have applied for funding for two areas: blocked drain in Clifton near Home Farm; and blocked drain on the Oxford Road near the traffic lights.
11. *School parking:* complaints around inconsiderate, dangerous and illegal parking around the school were passed on to the appropriate body. The yellow lines around this area have been reinstated and regular warden checks have been promised.
12. *Victoria Terrace road:* the group had site meetings with OCC re ownership and an enormous pothole, which was eventually rectified.
13. *School awareness sign:* requested Nov 2022. Cllr Fatemian reported in 2023 that it was going ahead but we have yet to see the installation.
14. *Air diffusion tube:* concerns around pollution from traffic waiting at the lights, so near to the primary school, particularly at commuter times. We requested monitoring and a tube has been installed.
15. *Parish planter:* we have been successful in getting funding for one of our planters – many thanks to the resident and businesses who have been tending these. We are looking for one more business to fund the last planter.
16. *Bollard outside Finishing Touch hairdresser:* has been knocked over several times by vehicles in this congested spot. We hope that the last cemented attempt stands up to knocks and bumps.

*Maureen Cox
Chair*