



# **CHARLBURY TOWN COUNCIL**

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

### **2021-2022**



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# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

It is a privilege, as Chair of Charlbury Town Council, to introduce this annual report. It introduces a new town council, a new approach, and changes that build on the past and usher in a new future.

What has changed since last year? In 2021's almost unprecedented election – with eighteen candidates for twelve seats – Charlbury elected seven new councillors to join five with long experience. This blend of the old and the new is proving transformative. We are building on past achievements – like the approval of the Neighbourhood Plan – and creating new ways of operating that allow us to respond to the climate and ecological emergencies that confront us.

As you will see below, our commitment to community is as strong as ever. We are upgrading and adding to community facilities, working with community-based organisations, and encouraging residents to join us in a wide range of activities that will improve the town and green the wider environment.

The council wishes to thank Roger Clarke, former town clerk, who served the town and the council loyally for 42 years. We are happy to welcome our new clerk, Lisa Wilkinson.

We look forward to working alongside Charlbury residents in the years to come. Please do take up opportunities to volunteer with one of the many strands of activity that are being developed, and do approach us with new ideas and proposals. We are ready and willing to listen.

*Cllr Liz Reason, April 2022*



# WHAT THE TOWN COUNCIL HAS BEEN UP TO OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS

## TOWN COUNCIL STRATEGY

Each new town council respects the policies and practices of the preceding town council, whilst also bringing fresh ideas to maintain and improve the town, and to respond to a changing political environment. New requirements and new opportunities arise. To capture these, Charlbury Town Council has prepared a strategy to guide us and the community over the next few years.

Our vision is for Charlbury and the surrounding area to become a zero-carbon community that is thriving, inclusive, beautiful, biodiverse and sustainable now and in the future.

Our aims are:

- to ensure that Charlbury Town Council services are delivered efficiently, sustainably and cost-effectively to meet the needs of Charlbury residents
- to deliver on our commitment to act on the climate and ecological emergencies by actively preparing Charlbury and its environment for a zero carbon, biodiverse and sustainable future, and
- to engage all of the community by providing appropriate leadership, governance and inspiration in an open and transparent way.

The full strategy document can be viewed or downloaded at <https://charlbury-tc.gov.uk/policies/>.

## WELCOME BACK FUND

A new £56 million Welcome Back Fund was set up by the government following the pandemic, to help councils boost tourism, improve green spaces and provide more outdoor seating areas, markets and food stall pop-ups – giving people more safer options to reunite with friends and relatives. Charlbury Town Council has received around £8,000 in funding from the Welcome Back Fund via West Oxfordshire District Council. This fund has covered:

- Repair, painting and staining of 41 benches
- Provision of nine new picnic benches, eight at Nine Acres and one at Ticknell Piece
- Repair and refurbishment of noticeboards at Enstone Road crossroads and Sturt Road
- Design of a new town map to be displayed at the top of Church Street



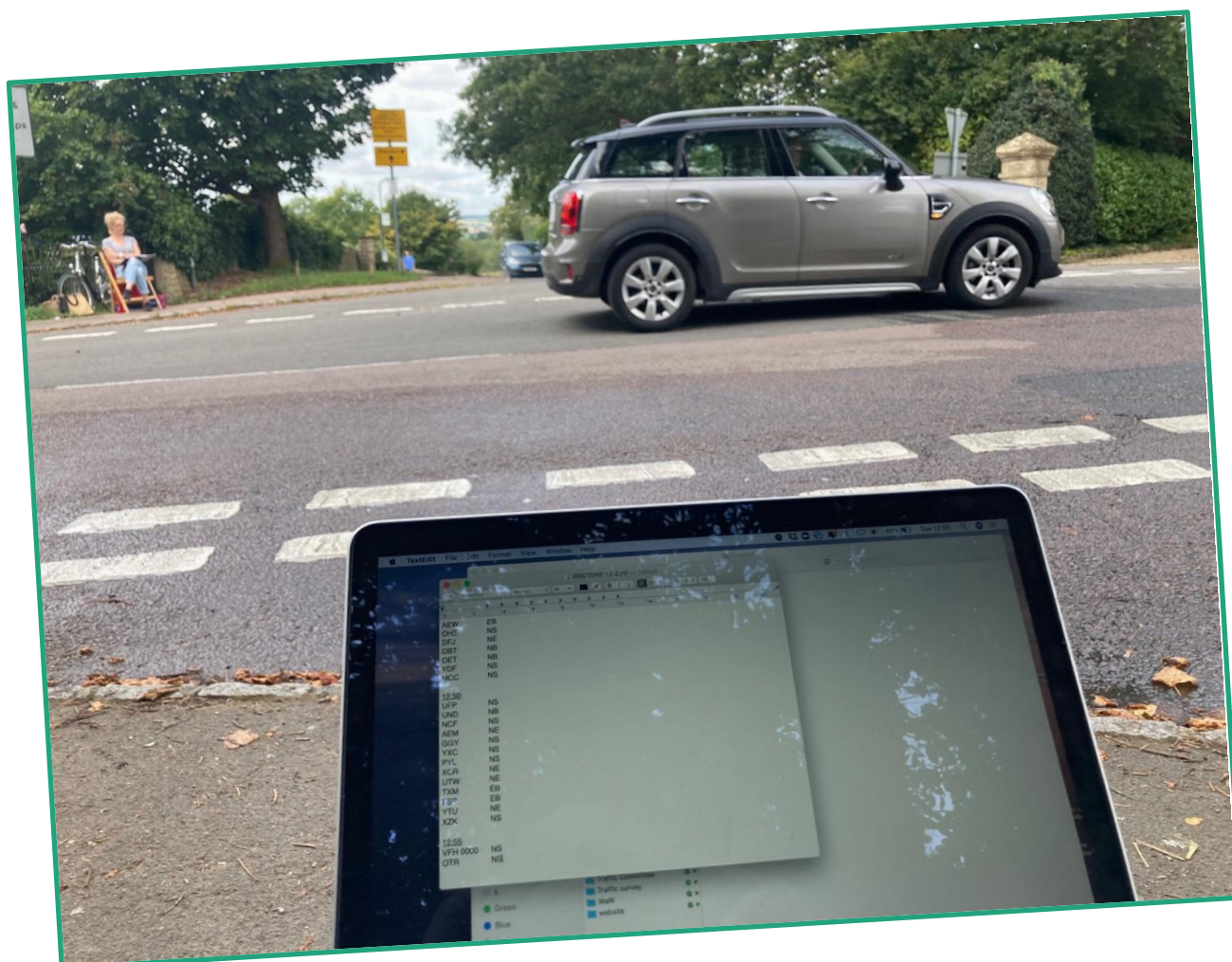
## TRAFFIC AND HIGHWAYS

Since the election of the new Town Council, we have taken forward a number of long talked-about traffic initiatives. Previous Town Councils had discussed the need to deal with problematic parking at locations such as the junction of Nine Acres Lane and Thames Street. Following a petition several years ago from residents of Spelsbury Road, the council had agreed to support an extension to the speed limit for safety reasons.

The process for changes to the law is a Traffic Regulation Order, and for some years the County Council has required town councils to bear the cost of bringing these forward. It has therefore been necessary to take these two schemes forward in one go. This process is now under way, and early drawings are on display at the Annual Parish Meeting.

However, we don't want to stop there.

In the autumn of 2021, we conducted a comprehensive traffic survey of the town, thanks to 28 volunteers who counted vehicles at critical times at the busiest points on the network. The data is considerable and full results are not quite ready, although it is clear how much the town is used by vehicles passing through Charlbury. We will be able to use this data as evidence if and when we choose to propose any changes to the traffic arrangements with the town.



Through the work of the Speedwatch volunteers, we have been able to confirm the locations of the worst speeding. We have been pressing the police to enforce speed limits at these locations, but the response to date has been disappointing. We can use the equipment at our disposal more flexibly and are supporting Speedwatch, who are seeking a co-ordinator to succeed Jim Holah, for whose work we are truly thankful.

In December, we agreed a policy statement prioritising access improvements and measures to physically reduce speed where other measures cannot be implemented. This, and the promotion of an active travel plan or 'LCWIP' (see page 12), will be the focus of our next work going forward.



What Banbury Hill will look like when traffic-calming 'Dragon's teeth' are installed later this year.

## PLANNING

### CHARLBURY NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN ADOPTED

Following an overwhelming 'Yes' vote at the referendum in June 2021 to adopt the Charlbury Neighbourhood Plan 2031, West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) formally 'made' the Plan (brought it into force). This means that the Neighbourhood Plan now forms part of the statutory development framework against which all planning applications in the parish of Charlbury are determined. The adoption of the plan marks an important milestone for the town because, for the first time, the wishes of the people of Charlbury have a legal voice within the planning system.



The Neighbourhood Plan expresses a vision of Charlbury as a thriving, active, welcoming and supportive community. Its policies support this vision by seeking to ensure that development:

- meets the town's identified housing need
- supports Charlbury's outstanding and thriving community, and role as a rural 'service centre'
- respects Charlbury's strong landscape setting within the Cotswolds AONB
- protects the natural environment and improves biodiversity
- preserves and enhances the historic environment and character of the town, and last – but certainly not least,
- addresses the challenge of climate change at the local level.

Development of the Neighbourhood Plan involved a lot of hard work by many members of the community over many years and we wish to thank everyone who assisted. As well as members of the steering group, this includes a large number of volunteers who helped with research, analysis and preparation of supporting information and evidence. To everyone who engaged with the various consultation processes in any way – thank you!

You can view or download a copy of the Plan at <https://charlbury-tc.gov.uk/neighbourhood-plan/>, and paper copies are also available for reference in Charlbury Library. Please do take a look if you are submitting or responding to a planning application within Charlbury.

## OTHER PLANNING MATTERS

As a consultee to West Oxfordshire District Council (the planning authority), Charlbury Town Council has considered and responded to over 60 planning applications within the parish of Charlbury. Since the adoption of the Charlbury Neighbourhood Plan, we have made particular efforts to refer in our responses to policies and objectives within the Plan. Where planning applications have made positive attempts to address the specific aims of the Plan, we have been pleased to acknowledge this.

Charlbury Town Council has also recognised the potential benefits for Charlbury of engaging with developers before planning applications are submitted, though care is needed to ensure that this kind of engagement does not jeopardise the council's role as a consultee. To facilitate this, the council has prepared a general preapplication engagement statement, available on the town council website, to enable representatives of the council to meet with developers transparently and "*without prejudice*" to explore expectations and aspirations at an early stage.



# GRASS-CUTTING MANAGEMENT PLAN

In the context of the climate and biodiversity emergency declared by Charlbury Town Council, a change in the management of grassy areas within the town is arguably the simplest opportunity to directly reduce carbon emissions, sequester carbon and improve biodiversity.

## AIMS

To ensure that the management of land under the control of Charlbury Town Council is sensitive to wildlife as well as people. In the longer-term, management should reduce any adverse impact on the environment and enhance the rural experience for the people of Charlbury.

## OBJECTIVES

- Provide appropriate amenity to the public – short grass for games, paths for dog walkers, wildflowers to enhance people's connection to the natural world.
- Reduce direct carbon emissions – reduce the number of mechanised cuts, reduce the use of trimmers (damaging to slow-worms, hedgehogs, invertebrates), avoid the use of leaf blowers (damaging to invertebrates).
- Increase carbon sequestration into the soil. Allow vegetation to grow for longer and increase the range of plants – this increases the depth of plant roots which in turn increases carbon dioxide uptake. There is a dilemma about the cuttings – if left on the surface they rot down into the soil, forming organic matter and fertilising the soil, which in turn encourages the grass to grow, which is to the detriment of the wildflowers which always grow best in impoverished soils. However, the increase in soil organic matter increases the carbon sequestered in the soil.
- Provide wildflowers for pollinators – local native flora is good for bees, hoverflies, etc. Allow flora in historic grass swards to flower – then we get to see what is already there and we can allow the flowers to spread. If necessary, introduce seeds from other local sites to maintain local genetic stock and yellow rattle to reduce vigour of the grasses. Note that perennial seeds take a while to establish until the plants are big enough to produce flowers within a grass sward.
- Provide year-round security of habitats for invertebrates – many butterflies and other invertebrates complete their life cycle and overwinter in amongst grassy vegetation so some areas need to be left uncut until the spring, otherwise invertebrates will be destroyed.

Read the full grass-cutting management plan at <https://charlbury-tc.gov.uk/land-and-nature-team/>.

## ACCOUNTS

Charlbury Town Council's budget has risen from £106,000 (2021–22) to £127,000 (2022–23). This increase accounts for inflation (4–5%), as well as increased spending on:

- reacting to residents' concerns about parking, traffic and speeding
- additional maintenance and improvement of community facilities
- grants to community organisations such as the Riverside Festival
- our local response to the climate and ecological emergencies that parishioners petitioned the council to undertake.

Charlbury Town Council's income for the financial year 2021–22 was £136,202.87. Most of the income came from the 'precept' (see below) supported by the usual income from the allotments and the cemetery, and a grant from County Councillor Liz Leffman. To fund the increased budget for 2022–23, this year's precept (the amount collected from residents to fund local projects) has risen by 19%. For a Band D



property, this means a rise of 29p a week (£14.99 a year). At a time of financial hardship for some around the parish, we recognise that an increase in bills (however small) is unwelcome. However, the council has approved this increase to ensure the continued good governance of the council's affairs and to enable it to address the initiatives outlined above. We hope you'll agree that we're planning to spend your money wisely.

Expenditure this year (2021–22) focused on grants to local groups, town maintenance, administration, grass cutting and loan repayments for Charlbury Town Football & Sports Club, and playground equipment. Total expenditure was £130,862.91 .

On 31st March 2022, Charlbury Town Council's bank accounts held £39,106.26 with allocated reserves of £17,756 leaving a total of £21,350.26. Full unaudited accounts are below:

<b>INCOME</b>	<b>2021–2022</b>
Precept	106,096
Allotment Rents	1,075
Bank Interest	36.47
Burial Fees	6,595
Rents	275
Grants	14,180
VAT repayment	7945.40
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>136,202.87</b>
 <b>EXPENDITURE</b>	
Council Administration	38,982.98
Town Maintenance (incl grass cutting)	25,178.81
Subscriptions/Memberships	1078.07
Cemetery	2,609.03
Grants awarded	18,106
Capital items	2850.16
Rents/leases	2045
Projects	2,934
Environmental work	3,560.73
Loan repayments	24,509.72
Misc	49.95
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>130,862.91</b>
<b>General Fund (April 2021)</b>	<b>33,766.30</b>
Add total Income	136,202.87
Less Total expenditure	130,862.91
<b>Balance at 31 March 2022</b>	<b>39,106.26</b>

# ONGOING AND FUTURE INITIATIVES

## HYDRO-TURBINE ON SLUICE AT MILL FIELD

Part of Charlbury Town Council's mission involves seeking to produce clean, local and sustainable energy for the people of Charlbury. To that end, a site on council-owned land has been identified as a potential location for a Micro-Hydro installation. This project, if we get the funds to finance it, will seek to utilise the existing Mill Race and Sluice Gate that diverts water from the River Evenlode to produce electricity using an Ultra-Low Head Micro-Hydro Turbine. The site is close to several places that could use the electricity, including potentially EV Charging points for community use.

The primary objectives of the project are to:

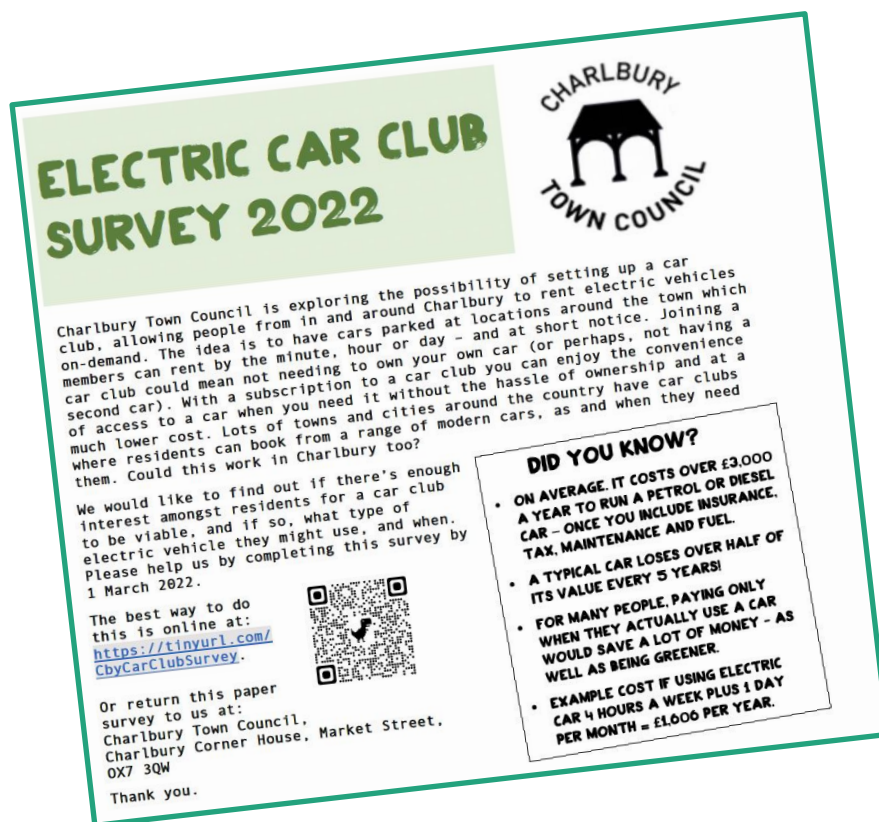
- provide cost-effective low carbon energy to satisfy a local electrical demand
- feed surplus electricity to the National Grid if required.

The Council has recently been given a grant by the Rural Community Energy Fund to cover the costs of a detailed feasibility study into this proposed project. If the early parts of the feasibility study show potential, we will then engage with the residents of Charlbury to measure the level of support for this project before proceeding.

## CAR CLUB

Charlbury Town Council received over 160 responses to its February 2022 Car Club survey. Of these, there was an overwhelmingly positive response: about 58% of respondents said, 'yes' they would join a car club, and 34% said "maybe".

The idea would be to have cars parked at locations around the town which members can rent by the minute, hour or day – and at short notice. The majority of respondents said they wanted to use cars for short periods of up to four hours, and the range of desired hire times is spread evenly over weekdays and weekends at all hours, which is encouraging because it suggests that cars would enjoy frequent use. A significant proportion would want car seats for carrying children (30%) and many would like to be able to transport dogs (20%).



Charlbury Town Council's Journeys team is going to assess the results in detail and will use them to assess which providers may wish to set up business in Charlbury. The Journeys team's aim is to reduce car ownership in the town, and in conjunction with wider measures to make walking and cycling more attractive, to reduce car journeys as well. The aspiration is that a successful hire car system would use electric vehicles, which corresponds with the Town Council's strategic aspiration to reduce the town's carbon footprint.

## PROMOTING E-BIKES

Charlbury Town Council's Journeys team has been promoting e-bikes as an alternative to cars for local journeys. The Journeys team has organised two successful e-bike try-out days in Charlbury, where residents could try riding different types of e-bike and talk to e-bike owners. Some people have been convinced to buy their own electric bike after trying one for 5 or 10 minutes at our try-out events. Others have told us that they would welcome the opportunity to try using a bike for a longer period and on real journeys before making up their mind, especially given the significant cost involved. Evidence suggests that people buying electric bikes tend to use them more and more over time, as they discover how useful and enjoyable they are to ride.

Partly using funds from the Councillor Priority Fund (from County Cllr Liz Leffman) Charlbury Town Council has purchased its own e-bike which it will soon be making available to residents to borrow for up to two weeks, upon payment of a deposit. The aim of the scheme is to reduce car use in the town by promoting the uptake of electric bike ownership by:

- having a visible Charlbury shared e-bike, and
- giving residents the opportunity to trial an e-bike in their everyday lives.



## EXTENSION OF 20MPH SPEED LIMITS

In 2021, Oxfordshire County Council launched a 3-year scheme to promote the extension of 20mph zones, subject to funding principally coming from town and parish councils. This initiative could allow more areas of Charlbury to benefit from the quietness, improved air quality and safety benefits afforded by 20mph limits. Charlbury Town Council will be discussing this scheme further within the next 12 months and if agreed, consulting on it throughout the town.



## MAKING IT EASIER TO CYCLE AND WALK AROUND TOWN

Charlbury Town Council has agreed to draw up a plan for improving walking and cycling opportunities in and around Charlbury, as a key part of our Highways and Transport Strategy. To do this, we are using the established framework of a **Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)**, which will help us to plan engagement, gathering information, network planning and prioritising improvements.

The LCWIP process ensures that all voices have an opportunity to be heard; that proper design guidance is followed; and that we learn from best practice as demonstrated in other towns' LCWIPs. Specific work will need to be undertaken to establish the needs of vulnerable road users such as disabled people and users of school and early years provision. We would then make this LCWIP available to OCC for future planning, to WODC for planning-funded improvements and constraints, and to the Town Council for our own planning.



## REPAIR OF WEIR AND POTENTIAL FISH PASS

Charlbury Town Council has recently been notified by the Environment Agency (EA) that the weir at the far end of the Mill Field needs extensive repair. The EA has also stated that any planned repair scheme should involve the provision of a Fish Pass to allow the migration of fish upstream and downstream of the weir. The Town Council is now looking at several alternatives schemes which may include river flow management along the length of the Mill Field.

## WIGWELL AND THE BEAVER DAM ANALOGUE PROJECT

Charlbury Town Council continues to support the Wychwood Forest Trust (WFT – formerly the Wychwood Project) in their ecological management of Wigwell Nature Reserve, assisted by local volunteers from the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens and the Wigwell Friends. This important site on the northern edge of Charlbury, designated as a local green space in the Neighbourhood Plan, includes areas of species-rich meadow and is crossed by a permissive path which is now part of a popular circular walk connecting the town with Banbury Hill Farm and the Old Shed café.

As part of their plans to improve biodiversity on Wigwell, the WFT has teamed up with the Evenlode Catchment Partnership (ECP) to create enhanced wetland habitats along the stream running through the site. Regrettably, it has not YET been deemed possible to introduce beavers to the site, so as an alternative we have a community project with volunteers pretending to be beavers! The project is now well underway to construct 'leaky' dams across the stream using natural wood materials cut and collected from the site. The first dam is now in place and has already created a sizable upstream pool which it is hoped will quickly

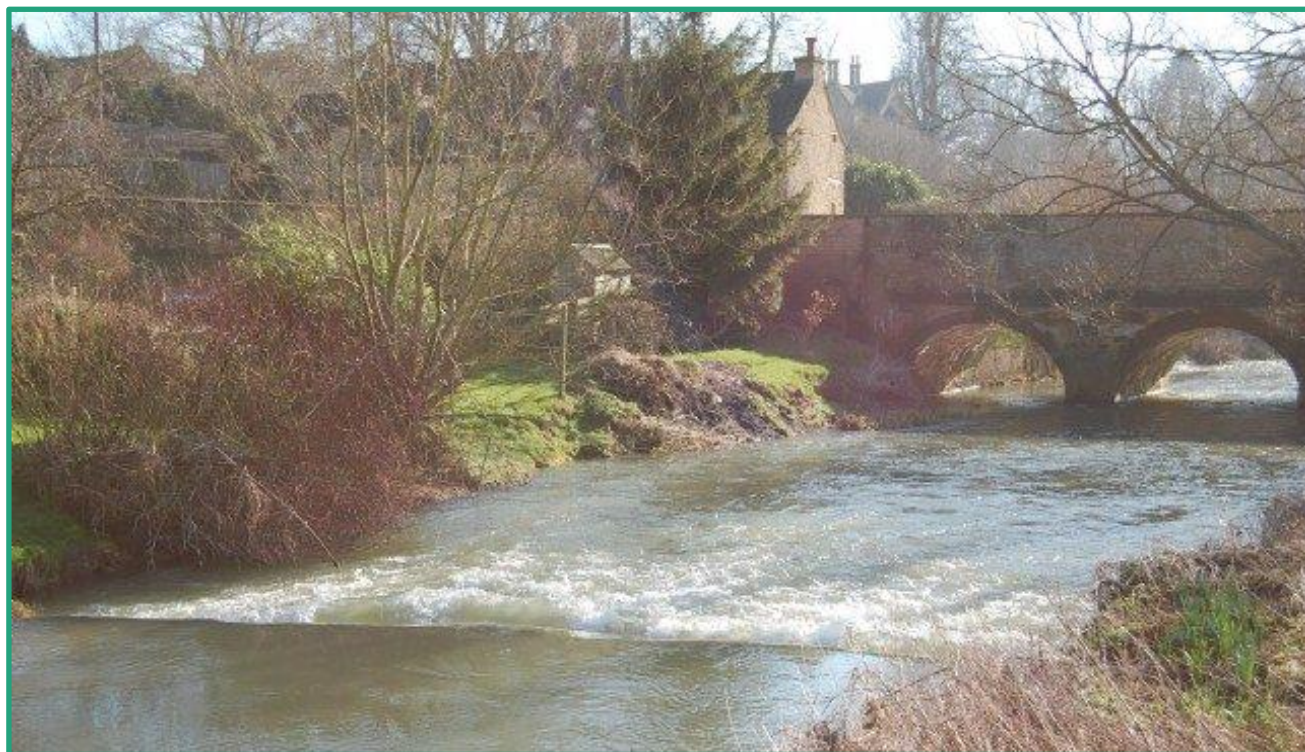
attract damselflies and dragonflies, amongst other wetland wildlife. This will be an ongoing project as its impact is monitored, the dams are maintained, and new dams are constructed. Many local volunteers have already been involved in this project including members of the Charlbury Scouts. If you want to know more and to get involved, please contact the Wigwell Friends at [wigwell.friends@gmail.com](mailto:wigwell.friends@gmail.com).

## COMMUNITY RIVER PROJECT

Representatives of Charlbury Town Council and its Land & Nature Group are actively working with the Evenlode Catchment Partnership (ECP) to establish a community river project within the parish of Charlbury. This will be a public outreach project and it reflects growing public concern over the poor condition of the river through sewage and agricultural pollution, and the potential impacts on public health, wildlife and biodiversity. Work is already underway on a related project installing Beaver Dam Analogues (BDAs) on Wigwell (as described below).

Other initiatives being explored for inclusion in the community river project include:

- citizen-scientist monitoring of water quality
- surveys of river wildlife (e.g. looking for evidence of water voles) and riparian vegetation along tributary streams
- an art and music participation event about the river at the Riverside Festival
- incorporation of a fish bypass at the Mil Field weir, and
- a review of hedgerows.



# CHARITIES AND TRUSTS

## NINE ACRES MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

### Pitches and Playing Field

During the last year the Football Clubs have secured funding of £26,000 for the upgrade of the two pitches and the 'hockey' pitch in the top corner. This will be spent over a six-year period of on-going improvements. Further grants for equipment are also being sought.

### Tennis Courts and Hard Surface

Nine Acres Management Committee (NAMC) undertook a major refurbishment of the tennis courts and hard surface area costing in excess of £10,000. The courts are much improved but do require annual maintenance to maintain their state. The reconfiguration of the footpaths to facilitate the Football & Sports Club caused flooding on the courts in periods of heavy rain and the path to the courts was improved with a drain included.

### Pavilion

In 2021, the Pavilion needed repairs to the cladding above the walkway. During this work there was found to be structural damage to the roof and this was also repaired. Charlbury Town Council paid for this work. In addition, there has been a major upgrade to the heating system and the showers have been improved. NAMC now works with the Thomas Gifford Trust on areas of maintenance to reduce costs.

### Play Areas

The play area has had general maintenance this year with some additions to improve the underfoot conditions. NAMC is actively pursuing grants to improve and add to the equipment of the play area. The committee has secured funding for eight new picnic benches from WODC to be placed near to the pavilion and playground area.

*Clarrie Haynes*

## THOMAS GIFFORD TRUST

The Thomas Gifford Trust is pleased to report that it has not suffered too many adverse effects from the pandemic over the last couple of years. This is largely because we were able to attract some grant funding to help with the loss of income. As soon as the first lockdown was announced we immediately offered to organise the Community Support for people who were isolating, and this was co-ordinated from the Community Centre by our staff and volunteers. Over the last 12 months we have gradually returned to normal activities. This winter (where restrictions permitted) the sports hall has been fully booked, especially at weekends, and many of our social activities such as Scrabble Club, Youth Club, Seniors' Coffee Club and under-fives activities have now resumed. The café and library are very well used, especially by families as well as by older people and those who have been playing sports.



In the summer we plan to hold an event to thank all the volunteers who offered their help to vulnerable people in Charlbury during the lockdowns (there were over 200 such volunteers). The provisional date for this is 2nd July.

Another plan for 2022 is an extension to the building to accommodate a permanent gym. The current gym is very popular, especially with the older age groups, but it has to be moved daily, and there is a limit on the



opening hours we can offer. It also limits the space we can offer for other sports. We are currently looking into the feasibility of such an extension at the front of the building and are in the process of obtaining detailed costings. This is likely to be the main focus of our energy over the next year or two.

*Tanya Stevenson – Trustee, Thomas Gifford Trust*

## **CORNER HOUSE AND WAR MEMORIAL HALL**

*Can you imagine the spirit of generosity that saw on the market a substantial house on the corner of Browns Lane and Market Street, deciding such a property should belong to the people of Charlbury, then buying the property and donating it to all the people of our town? To do such a thing you do need the financial resources to carry that through, but even so the purchase and gift of the property does require a great sense of giving for the Common Good. This story is of course exactly how the town comes to have since 1948 the Corner House and its garden, and later the Hall built on the garden in memory of the sacrifices of the second world war.*



The challenge facing the trustees of the charity that manages the buildings on behalf of the town is how best to honour the original generosity and make sure the buildings continue to help build the wellbeing of all the people of our town.

Concerts, meetings, talks, social contacts, meals on wheels, or exercise and fitness take place in our Memorial Hall most days of the week. Meanwhile the Corner House is largely full of community services including Cornerstone, the bookshop, the art room, and even a health care information network that reaches out across the planet.

Over the coming months, the new CHMH CIO will work with Sustainable Charlbury and others to see what can be done to bring the Corner House closer to modern standards further improving its contribution to the life of our town.

*Roy Scott – CHMH chairman*

## **FOOTBALL AND SPORTS CLUB**

Things are going well. Last year started very slowly owing to Covid, with volunteers working on the interior and exterior to get the new clubhouse ready for when we could open. We did manage to start a darts team and the club was used for small functions, and for Covid and flu vaccine by the Medical Centre.

This year the club is up and running with darts teams, Aunt Sally and pool teams all . We have live sports on TV, we are putting an honour board up with brick buyers contractors and volunteers names to show our appreciation.

Our membership is around 170 but we are always looking for more -it would be nice for all the users of Nine Acres to become members as the profit from the club goes back into Nine Acres. If you wish to see what functions are going on in the club you can go on our website <https://charlburytownfsc.co.uk/>.

*Keith Claridge*

## **CHARLBURY EXHIBITION FOUNDATION**

The purpose of this local charity is to promote education of younger residents of Charlbury (those aged under 25). We award grants to assist with the costs of education and training post school –

apprenticeships, further education courses and degree courses. The grants are sourced from income from our assets, with the Old Grammar School providing the majority of our income. Further income comes from Poor Boys Close, a field let for grazing, and from some modest investments.

The Old Grammar School is home to Charlbury Pre-School, whose activities are a good fit with the trust and with whom we have enjoyed a good relationship for many years.

2021 saw the number applications for educational grants (51) mirror applications in 2020. This was a significant increase on previous years where the applications averaged in their mid-thirties.

We were still able to award grants to applicants, but lower grants than previously. This was due in part to low interest rates and also to a need to build up a reserve for work that will be needed on the Old Grammar School and also to cover the costs of the lease renewal.

Looking forward to 2022/2023, we will be working on a plan to make improvements to the Old Grammar School, which is a listed building.

*Cllr Janet Burroughs*

## **CHARLBURY CONSERVATION AREA ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Charlbury Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CCAAC) was set up at the instigation of WODC to act as a local advisory committee to the Uplands Area Planning Sub-Committee on all planning applications which affect the Charlbury Conservation Area. Its purpose is not only to consider planning applications but also to advise on all steps to maintain, improve and enhance the character and appearance of the Charlbury Conservation Area. Present members of the committee are:

- Reg James (Chair) – co-opted
- Sarah Potter (Vice Chair) – Charlbury Society representative
- Juliet West (Secretary) – co-opted
- James Williams – co-opted
- Cllr Andrew Graham – WODC representative
- Cllr Liz Leffman – WODC/OCC representative
- Cllr Tony Merry – Charlbury Town Councillor
- Cllr Dan Raymond-Barker – Charlbury Town Councillor
- Nicolette Lethbridge – elected at the Parish Meeting
- Sue Wooley – Charlbury Art Society representative
- Diana Gold – co-opted
- Peter Smith – co-opted
- Phillipa Phelan – co-opted

The committee meets each month and in the last year, 82 planning applications in or relating to Charlbury were inspected and commented on to WODC, if thought necessary. Until June 2021, virtual meetings were held on Zoom with face-to-face meetings since July 2021 held in the Green Room. We had many discussions about the best way to study the applications after WODC ceased sending us paper plans. We would have liked to have Wi-Fi available so that we could all study the plans on individual devices but as this was not possible Councillor Merry kindly helped out with his laptop and a projector. We also commented on two applications for Certificates of Lawful Use; Newington House (former shop in Sheep Street as part of house) and Land off the Slade (Storage for building materials).

We have repeatedly tried to make sure that our comments are placed on the WODC website with the applications as this only seems to happen occasionally and haphazardly. The adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan in June 2021 has been of great value when considering the planning applications.

*Reg James – CCAAC Chair*

## **DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT**

Who would have thought we would have to be reporting yet another year of the Coronavirus, and now the war in Ukraine, as well as the usual important issues that impact on our locality? And yet our lives are intertwined and there is no ignoring the connection.

As one of your district councillors, I continued to headline and take action to support our local businesses in Charlbury ensuring the one-person businesses, the hairdressers, taxi drivers and other self-employed people were targeted for financial support through the discretionary grant scheme run by WODC. I had six such cases that came to me and I was pleased that five out of the six were successful. The work in the community with community groups and organisations were first class in their response to Covid – a real case of the community coming together.

The war in Ukraine has shattered the stark reality that help is needed in other countries where lives and livelihoods are lost or smashed and in the spirit of humanity we need to step up to the mark. Often that means sharing the burden and I have been working on the temporary accommodation sponsorship scheme to enable Ukrainian refugees to come and live in our district, supported by our community.

Due to extensive pressure to increase capacity in our planning department at West Oxfordshire District Council, we have worked to bring back a fuller complement of staff to ensure enforcement is given the importance it deserves and that planning applications are now not falling behind. It will take some time to bed in but we have now recruited new and younger planning staff on salaries equitable with other districts, as part of a reinvigorated retention policy.

The installation of EV charging points has been woefully slow and whilst work is ongoing, the lack of ambition in making a real difference in cutting our carbon footprint needs greater drive.

In addition, I have been raising the issue of keeping our rivers clean and calling Thames Water to account. Having proposed a motion to council as the beginning of a set of actions to ensure we use our powers of influence to ensure inward investment is brought to our area so pumping stations are brought up to date and sewage spillage is eliminated to protect our wildlife.

Review of the Local Plan going forward will be part of the trajectory to ensure housing need is reflected in neighbourhood plans and is proportional to sustaining our communities and ensuring our town centres retain their vibrancy and opportunities are created for small businesses and start-ups to assist our local economy.

I am proud to represent the Charlbury community and in partnership with Liz Leffman ensure your views are raised and action is taken to address the problems/issues you have raised. My kindest and peaceful greeting to you all.

*Cllr Andy Graham*

## **COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT**

The past 12 months have been particularly eventful. In May I was re-elected as the District Councillor for Charlbury, Finstock and Fawler, and as the County Councillor for the Charlbury and Wychwood division. The County Council election resulted in 21 Liberal Democrats, 21 Conservatives, 19 Labour and 3 Green party members being elected. The Liberal Democrats joined with the Green party and Labour to form the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance, or OFDA. I was elected Leader of the County Council and have held that role since then.



Although the role of leader is demanding and very busy, this has not stopped me from fulfilling my responsibilities as District Councillor in partnership with Andy Graham, or as the County Councillor for the division. Those include:

- *Dealing with concerns about the hedges that overhang Woodstock Road: I visited the site with an officer to see what can be done to make this safer for pedestrians as well as for traffic. Letters have been sent to the owners of the properties concerned asking them to cut back their hedges, as they are the responsibility of the resident.*
- *Getting the hedges and overhanging trees cut back on the footpath on Ditchley Road.*
- *Working with the Town Council to improve traffic flow and visibility at the Enstone crossroads: the planned improvements will make the crossing safer for both cars and pedestrians and hopefully avoid another lorry crashing into the Tollgate Cottage wall.*
- *Working with the Town Council to initiate a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) with OCC officers.*
- *Providing a sign at the top of Crawborough advising that the road is not suitable for HGVs, following an incident where one got stuck. This was paid for from my Councillor Priority Fund.*
- *Giving the Town Council a grant from my Councillor Priority Fund to help buy and maintain an electric bike for public use.*
- *Getting the containers on the field behind The Slade near to Graces Court removed: this is a work in progress and the WODC enforcement officer has this in hand.*

The County Council has published their 9 priorities which have informed our budget for the new financial year. At the heart of this is our commitment to combat climate change, and tackling inequalities, whether these are health and wellbeing related, transport related or educational inequalities. We have set aside £8million to introduce 20 mph speed limits across the county, and we will be enlarging the 20mph zone in Charlbury, to cover the roads into the town as well as the centre.

One of my roles as Leader is to sit on the North Cotswold Line Task Force. I am in a strong position to lobby for the line to be fully doubled and have agreed with the Task Force members that the current plans for the line will be reviewed to allow for this to be done. This could mean a significantly improved train service from Charlbury. Under the existing plans, there was no provision for doubling the line between Hanborough and Charlbury, meaning that we would have had to continue with just one train per hour, while stations further up the line would have had at least two per hour. If I can achieve the complete doubling then Charlbury can have at least two trains per hour in the future. The cost of doing this is considerable but we are looking at innovative ways of financing it. The only downside would be that we would probably have to close Finstock and Combe stations for this to be achievable. There will be consultation before any decisions are taken over this.

I am also working with the bus companies on a Bus Service Improvement Plan. This would include better information about bus services, as well as better ways to pay including inclusive tickets, allowing people to make a journey using more than one bus route. In the short term, we are working with the bus companies to encourage people back onto the bus following Covid, as usage is around 65–a70% of the pre-Covid rate and that is not sustainable. OCC won a bid for money to introduce electric buses in Oxford, one of only three cities that will benefit from this, the other two being Norwich and Bristol. We are also working with the City Council to introduce bus filters and ways of making the park and rides more attractive, thus reducing car journeys in the city.

We have an ambitious plan for the county, which will significantly benefit residents of Charlbury. Over the next three years we plan to make a big difference, which should be visible to everyone in the town.

*Cllr Liz Leffman*