

Steeple Aston Paris Council Report 2024 -25

It is time for a round-up of the activities of the Parish Council from the past year, so let's start by acknowledging the wider network of people who frankly make most of what we do possible.

Many thanks go to all the following: to Jenny Bell and her committee who keep villagers up to date through the website and social channels; to Helen White our internal auditor who diligently reviews the PC books; Nigel Prickett for grass cutting and weed-killing respectively; to Torquil McLusky and Barbara Brewer for their efforts looking after the Sports and Recreation Centre and the Village Hall respectively, and to the many other volunteers who help in looking after these assets that are so central to our village life. As she steps down, it seems only right at this point to acknowledge and thank Barbara for her many years chairing the Village Hall Committee. Her legendary ability to manage an agenda to time was much admired, and even more appreciated by her fellow committee members. At this stage no replacement has been found but we look forward to working with whoever picks up the reins. *(Note since presentation a replacement has been appointed.)*

Further thanks must go to Amanda Rodgers and the Allotments Association for keeping the allotments in such good shape and to Kay Francis and committee for being the guardians of our Community Orchard; to Carl Tomlinson for chairing the Environment & Sustainability Committee and to Graham Porcas who is back filling potholes on our roads; and to those occasional volunteers who have helped out with maintenance in the playground, village clean ups and other acts giving up time for their community.

This year also saw Steeplejack put down their pen. Fortunately, they were replaced by the equally witty wordsmith Mrs Miggins who continues to report from the parish council frontline for Steeple Aston Life.

My personal thanks, to Cathy Fleet, the Parish Clerk, who runs the administration of the Parish Council, dealing with finance, correspondence, meetings, agendas, minutes, and all the councillors. I'll end with an extra large thank you to all my fellow councillors. The Parish Council is very much a collective endeavour. All councillors give up their time, and contribute in many and varied ways, with practical help, suggestions, ideas, and support. Their contribution is immeasurable.

This year we were delighted to welcome Greg Elphick as councillor. He comes with experience, much enthusiasm and an extensive garage of tools which have already been put to use on council matters. Arash Fatemian, of Oxfordshire County Council, served our village for multiple years, attending, listening and supporting many of our projects. We are very grateful to him for his service. We look forward however to working with Gareth Epps as he steps into his new role as our Oxfordshire County Council rep. After many months of absence from Cherwell District Council, we were pleased to see David Rogers and Andrew McHugh attend meetings this year. As he

steps down we thank Andrew for his passionate work on flood prevention and we welcome the new elected Zoe McLernon.

Onto our activities over the past twelve months. The parish council year is a healthy mix of the new and the annual. Here is a summary of both.

Our environmental impact has been a theme this year. We began 2024 surveying our local Blandford fly population in collaboration with BUG (Bournemouth University Group). This led to a proposal for population management which is now under discussion with local and national environmental groups as well as other affected councils. The ongoing discussions will review the environmental impact versus public health benefit leading us to a final recommendation and way forward.

The Environment & Sustainability Committee enter the new financial year having surveyed village opinion in order to guide their future plans. Reflecting our village's desire to protect our natural spaces, the Community Orchard was submitted for green space designation under the Neighbourhood Plan. The Parish Council then identified and requested three further spaces also be explored for designation. In addition, the council have authorized the Environment & Sustainability Committee to explore opportunities for the installation of EV charge points within Robinsons Close car park.

The Orchard Committee continues to passionately care for the land bequest from Sarah Lucas. This year saw them gain their Community Action Group accreditation bringing them into a wider network of groups and organisations across Oxfordshire. They continue to enhance the diversity of the planting and have captured the attention, and hearts, of village families with their hugely successful events.

Planning is always a hot topic in the village but with delays to the Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan our focus has shifted this year towards how housing type reflects needs. Having digested the results of our 'Housing Needs' survey conducted by Community First Oxfordshire, the Parish Council proceeded to part fund set up costs for the Steeple and Middle Aston Community Land Trust. Now fully incorporated, registered with the FCA, and with a newly launched membership this Land Trust is starting its work in earnest and independent of the Parish Council. Thank you to Martin Lipson and the wider committee for all the time and energy put into this mammoth task.

As S106 funds continue to be released, we concentrate on the Millenium Park playground at Robinsons Close. After a competitive bid process, the council has appointed Kompan to undertake the following updates and repairs. The wooden boundary will be replaced by 100% recycled plastic sleepers, uneven surfacing will be updated with recycled rubber mulch where possible, with additional repairs and updates to equipment across the site where required.

Alongside these meatier issues, there will always be the day to day business of simply keeping the village running. Perhaps these actions feel less newsworthy, however they are central to parish council life.

As ever, there was ongoing maintenance at the playground: zipwire repairs, bench and table replacement as well as the annual renewal of bark and inevitable toilet maintenance. Our building inventory saw drain maintenance as well as roof and rainwater goods repairs to prevent water ingress. Even our longstanding parish noticeboard had a facelift in order to last a few more decades.

Maintenance of, and safety on, our highways is an on-going focus for the council. In early 2025 we were fortunate enough to take Oxfordshire Highways Community Engagement Officer for a half day tour of the village. The opportunity to discuss issues ranging from school crossing safety to everyday drainage and gutter clearance has given us the chance to focus and place some structure around what can often be a quite consuming element of our responsibilities.

And then there is the future for which we must plan. Following Storm Darragh's impact on the village in December, we sought advice from the Oxfordshire Community Resilience Team. The resulting revised Steeple Aston Community Emergency Plan will be released in coming weeks. There will no doubt continue to be major planning issues in which we must voice the village needs, of current note might be the Puy de Fou proposal at Bucknell or ongoing plans to expand London Oxford Airport facilities.

I look forward to reporting on these and more next year and that concludes my report.

Angharad Lloyd-Jones, Chair