

Upton News



Vol 5 No.47 June 2020

I am afraid it is another edition without any input from our village social groups but the latest relaxation gives us hope of better things just around the corner. Now that we can meet in groups of up to six in open spaces does it mean we can soon enjoy garden based mini 'Drop Ins' or might we soon see teams of six spread around the recreation ground competing to guess the type, origin and vintage of certain wines. At least the present weather will allow both.

In order to make your newsheet a more interesting read I would welcome any item that you think will be of interest to parishioners or if you are aware of the celebration of a big birthday or anniversary or a noteworthy achievement that we can publish please let me know. If any of you fancy writing an article about your hobby or information about the village or local area then please send it along, any item that will make future editions more interesting will be welcome.

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Astons Online

A free online discussion meeting for all Upton computer users will take place on Tuesday 16th June 10:00am to 12:00 noon. Join in to share digital experiences during lockdown so far. Register by emailing the address below. Free IT advice for computer users is available every Tuesday morning from 10:00am to 12:00 noon. Advice is provided remotely using telephone, Facetime, Skype, Zoom, Teams or WhatsApp. Book a 30 minute appointment by emailing theastononline@gmail.com or, if this is not possible, by phoning 07780 958249

Cycleways and Footpaths to be cleared.

Cyclists and walkers are set to benefit from a concerted plan of action to clear and prepare the Oxfordshire's network of cycleways and footpaths ready for the expected rises in demand as lockdown is very gradually relaxed.

As the people of Oxfordshire look to return to work and school during the Summer, cycling and walking will become more important than ever - both offer zero emission ways to travel which will improve health and wellbeing as well as helping to address the need to keep socially distant.

In each case, the work will pay particular attention to narrower areas that might be widened for greater access. Paths requiring surface improvement work will also be identified so that repairs can be made.

Parish Council

Upton Parish Council (UPC) held its first e-meeting on 21st May. This went well, thankfully, as all meetings will be held this way until further notice. Whilst no major decisions can be made during this time, UPC is keen to continue looking at how facilities can be improved in and around the recreation ground and UPC intends, in the not too distant future, to consult villagers for opinions, based on information gathered to date. UPC remains grateful to the village volunteer group for their work and suggestions for improvements.

UPC is also grateful to the village community support group looking after those in need during these times. .

There is much that could be done to look after your village assets. There is only so much UPC can do with two councillors short. We would still like to hear from enthusiastic villagers who can bring additional expertise, time and energy to the work of the PC. Please email parish.clerk@uptonvillage.co.uk to register an interest or obtain more information.

Really good news was received from the County Council during the meeting. With increased emphasis on walking and cycling (whether to work or otherwise), funding is being made available from central government to improve these facilities. For Upton, this potentially means attention to the use of Chilton Road, improved access to Blewbury and Didcot, and the potential for 20 mile an hour zones in villages.

It is distressing to hear reports on the misuse of the recreation ground. Although signage and bins exist to minimise this, some people who use this area clearly do not respect it. The council has already received some feedback, but welcomes any solid ideas from villagers for tackling the problem.

Please note that the play areas remain out of use at this time.

Please watch out for the minutes of the recent UPC meeting on the village web site in due course.

Liz - Clerk to Upton Parish Council

District Council

Although the lockdown restrictions have eased slightly since our last update, this means that it is more important than ever to take care when you are out and about, being mindful of keeping a safe distance from others and still staying home as much as possible. There is more specific guidance on what you can and cannot do on the government's Coronavirus FAQ webpage. As everyone adjusts to the "new normal", note that there is still support available for those who need it. We are currently helping our fantastic local community volunteer groups to investigate more longer-term funding for their activities, so that they can continue to provide help as required. The council's own Community Support Team continues to run their support line for anyone in need, call 01235 422 600 or email communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk.

Remember, for the most up-to-date coronavirus information relating to district council support and any changes to services, please take a look at the dedicated Vale webpage for updates: www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/covid19

Business Support

The new discretionary grants scheme recently announced by the government will only provide an extra five per cent of funding on top of the money received in the first round of COVID-19 business grants in April. This means that unfortunately it will not provide anywhere near enough cash to support the vast majority of businesses in southern Oxfordshire affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have received the details of the government's new discretionary business grants scheme and are currently pulling together a list of businesses that fit the detailed criteria. In line with government guidelines, we are aiming to release funds at the beginning of June and are working at pace to develop an online application based on the prescribed eligibility criteria. This may take a short while to set up, but will ensure the process is quicker and easier and speeds up decision making so we can make payments to successful applicants without delay. Our business support team will provide ongoing support and guidance to any businesses that aren't successful in applying for this scheme - this will include signposting them to the government's COVID-19 loan scheme, which can be processed and paid out very quickly.

If you have any questions, please email the Business Support team: business.support@southandvale.gov.uk

We have partnered with Graham Ballantyne, Director of the UK Business Mentoring Group, to deliver a free webinar on Thursday to help local businesses with their recovery plans. The webinar will include lots of tips and pointers, along with useful templates, and complementary mentoring sessions. You can find out more information on the [South and Vale Business Support website](#). We've also heard that the next Pop-Up business school for Oxfordshire is taking place online in June. There's more information [here](#).

The South & Vale Business Support team stays up-to-date on the latest government advice and support, and can advise on rates relief and business support grants. Visit their website for the latest info and to sign up for their e-newsletter: svbs.co.uk, and follow them on Twitter [@TeamSVBS](#).

Council Tax

There is no specific update on council tax this time. Where possible, you should continue to pay your bills as normal. Residents who are currently not being paid, and are struggling to pay their council tax bill, are encouraged to apply for Council Tax Reduction - their account will then be put on hold for 30 days while their application is processed: whitehorsedc.gov.uk/ctrs

Council Matters

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils have started holding council committee meetings online via video conferencing.

Councillors will use Microsoft Teams to take part in the meetings and members of the public will be able to watch online via a link which will be published alongside the meeting agenda on the councils' websites five

working days prior to the meeting. The councils will also publish the link to each meeting via their Facebook and Twitter pages. For details on how members of the public can submit statements or questions to be considered by a committee or council meeting please visit whitehorsedc.gov.uk/meetings.

Once councillors and officers have got used to the new process and are confident that meetings can be carried out effectively and within the guidelines, the councils will look to introduce online public participation by live video. Following the COVID-19 outbreak and the introduction of social distancing rules in March, the two councils cancelled all their official meetings and acted quickly to focus their efforts on supporting local communities and vulnerable individuals. While the focus remains predominantly on supporting vulnerable residents affected by COVID-19, it is still important to ensure the transparency of local democracy and so the councils have now put in place measures to ensure that meetings can take place again.

Cycle Projects

The County Council has launched a newsletter on its Science Vale Cycle Network Project (SVCN), which you can sign up to receive monthly updates about. The first of these projects is to construct a cycle route between Wantage and Harwell Campus, and this is now underway. This project will be featured in the newsletter, which will also provide updates on other routes as projects progress. To sign up to the newsletter go to the county council's transport bulletins page and chose Science Vale Cycle Network from the list - you can also sign up for updates on other transport projects too.

Take care, stay safe, stay home!

We will endeavour to keep you updated on the council's response to the Coronavirus COVID-19 through future newsletters and our dedicated councillor Facebook Page: [Cllrs Hayleigh Gascoigne & Sarah Medley](#). Please do not hesitate to get in touch with any issues or concerns - our email addresses are hayleigh.gascoigne@whitehorsedc.gov.uk and sarah.medley@whitehorsedc.gov.uk.

Sarah and Hayleigh

County Council

I hope everyone has kept safe during the lockdown and now enjoying the slight loosening of the controls, with the opportunity to spend more time outdoors.

Household Waste Recycling Centres

Since their re-opening on May 18th Oxfordshire's HWRC have seen regular long queues waiting to enter the sites, please consider whether you really need to make a visit The Government guidance states: *"It would be reasonable for residents to undertake a journey to a HWRC if the waste or recycling could not be stored safely at home or disposed of through other legitimate routes such as a dedicated collection. By this we mean that the*

waste/recycling could not be stored on their property without causing a risk of injury, health or harm to the resident or other members of their household or harm to public health and amenity.”

A list of FAQs as to whether you need to make a visit is now live at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/wastereopenquestions. If you have any questions about the re-opening of Oxfordshire’s HWRCs please contact the waste management team on wastemanagement@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Health Services in Oxfordshire

The A&E Departments at the John Radcliffe and Horton General Hospitals are still open 24/7 to anyone who becomes ill with serious health conditions including stroke, heart conditions, difficulty breathing, unconsciousness, or heavy bleeding. People should be reassured that systems are in place to triage patients with suspected COVID-19, so everyone who comes to hospital will be treated in a safe manner. For other worrying health concerns that are not an emergency please contact your GP practice; they are open and will be able to give advice and support over the phone in the first instance. The national advice for people who think they may have COVID-19 is to visit [NHS 111 online](https://www.nhs.uk/111) and self-isolate for seven days. Please seek help if you need it, avoiding medical care can lead to reduced recovery times, and even prove fatal.

While preventing the spread of COVID-19 is a public health priority, it is still vital that people go to scheduled vaccination appointments to stop outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases and to protect vulnerable groups including children, babies and pregnant women. All scheduled vaccination appointments such as baby and child immunisations should go ahead as normal as long as everyone attending is well and isn’t suffering from COVID-19 symptoms or is sharing a household with someone who is self-isolating because they are displaying symptoms. If you have any concerns about attending vaccination appointments because of the coronavirus please speak to your GP practice or Health Visitor.

Road repairs still rolling

Miles of Oxfordshire’s roads are getting a new lease of life as work to deliver the county council’s massive spring and summer list of repairs is continuing at pace. Having just completed 110 miles of surface dressing across the county, road crews are now turning their attention to structural patching projects, including A417 Challow Road, Wantage.

There is also a programme of safety schemes now underway to resurface roads including A4185 Rowstock Roundabout

Transport and Infrastructure work will be key to the country’s economic recovery and this work is all part of the county council’s promised £32m repair pledge. Although the use of the roads has fallen dramatically in recent weeks you can still report safety-related problems with public highways, such as potholes, directly to the county council via <https://fixmystreet.oxfordshire.gov.uk/>

Libraries open for online business

While library buildings may be closed, you are reminded that the digital

library service is very much open for business. They are offering 1000s of eBooks and eAudio newspapers and magazines to borrow for free and they have even got a music streaming service, with over 60,000 albums. Residents can get involved and discover everything on offer at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/libraries. You are also encouraged to head over to our Oxfordshire Libraries' Facebook page for our weekly Bloomin' good book club and songs and stories to entertain the younger members of the family from our fantastic library service team.

Emergency Active Travel Fund - For Cycling and Walking

You may be aware of the recent announcement by the Secretary of State for Transport for a £250 million emergency active travel fund for local authorities across England, alongside fast-tracked statutory guidance for managing road networks to encourage active travel (cycling and walking) and enable safe social distancing.

Although we are yet to know the exact funding allocation for Oxfordshire County Council, I am aware of the many ideas and proposals already being brought forward and the County Council will be collating proposals to consider the potential options across the County.

Enthusiastic responses were received from across Oxfordshire, and there was clear support for ;

- Wider roll out of 20 mph speed zones where supported by residents.

- The introduction of school streets to restrict motor vehicles at certain times of the day.

- Improved cycling infrastructure such as cycle only lanes in every town.

- Additional cycle facilities such as more secure cycle racks at rural bus stops.

I am supporting all the villages in my division and hope to see some investment in our area.

Work is still continuing separately with Sustrans and OCC to close off Chilton Road to through traffic to improve the safety of the cycleway users.

Scam awareness for business

At a time when Oxfordshire businesses are already facing challenges posed by COVID-19, the proliferation of related scams directly targeting business are adding further strain. OCC is supporting *Businesses Against Scams*, a new element of the successful Friends Against Scams initiative, run by National Trading Standards. They provide free online training to protect and prevent businesses, employees and customers from becoming victims of scams. For more information go to www.friendsagainstsams.org.uk/

Full Council

Democracy in Oxfordshire has passed a landmark moment with committee meetings being staged electronically for the first time ever and our first virtual Full Council meeting took place on Monday 4th May at 10:30.

Mike Fox-Davies

mike.fox-davies@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Rector's Note



A Saint from Somerset

Are you familiar with Somerset? Personally, I have a soft spot for Somerset - I was born there, in Frome, and although we moved from the county when I was very young, I still have a sense that I belong to Somerset. I'm thinking of Somerset because of St. Dunstan, who was born in the county back in the 10th century.

Why am I thinking of St Dunstan and who was he? Well, he was a nobleman who later became a monk and then Archbishop of Canterbury. He did much to further the spiritual and political well-being of England back in the 10th century. We know quite a lot about him from

various contemporary documents.

Dunstan enjoyed working with his hands. He practised painting, embroidery and metalwork. In the Bodleian Library, there is a manuscript from the time of Dunstan which includes a portrait of him, prostrate at the feet of Christ. This picture could well be Dunstan's own work.

Dunstan was committed to handicraft, and he encouraged every priest to have a handicraft. I can remember at primary school that we all had lessons in cookery and woodwork. I didn't understand at the time why we were doing this, as I thought school was all about reading and writing and maths. But I still remember making cheese straws and enjoying eating them! As I have got older, I have come to value the importance of the learning that can come through doing things, things as simple as making cheese straws and doing a straightforward piece of carpentry. With schools being shut and much learning of necessity having to be relocated to the home environment, I think it is re-assuring to know how much we learn simply by doing, especially under supervision. We can all learn by doing stuff on our own, but it's less messy and painful if we have a more experienced person to guide us on the way!

I wonder: is there a practical skill which we might learn? Is there a friend or a family member who might be only too happy to teach us? Is there a practical skill which we might teach to someone else?

After all, Jesus himself was a carpenter, and he must have spent much of his childhood watching Joseph at work. Perhaps Joseph had other pupils as well!

At present, various guidelines are being worked out at a national level to allow for the re-opening of places of worship. Once the guidelines have been published, we can then look to see how to apply them to the churches in the Churn Benefice. I very much hope that this will mean we will be able to re-open our church buildings sometime in July or August. In the meantime, our pattern of online worship continues (see page 8). In addition, I hope to record a short service of prayer from inside each church, which will then be available to view online.

Fr Jason

What's Happening at St Mary's

While the church buildings are still closed, the church community remains very active. Services and groups are continuing online and by telephone, and the clergy are available if people have questions, would like to talk, or to ask for prayer for themselves or someone they care about.

Full details were published in May's Upton News and here's a summary of activities:

Members of the clergy are available to respond to emails and phone calls. You can contact them through emails to the Benefice Team (office@churnchurches.co.uk) or by ringing the main parish number 850267.

On-line church services are held every Sunday at 10.30am and you can join from 10:00am onwards. Short evening prayers are held on-line Monday to Friday at 8pm. For details on how to join, please contact the Benefice office on the number above or look at the website.

The weekly Churn newsletter is circulated by email. To receive it, please contact the Benefice office, which can also help if you require a paper copy.

The Rector writes daily reflections which many find of comfort during these times. You can sign up to receive these, too, by contacting the Benefice Office.

All information is available on the benefice website www.churnchurches.co.uk.

Paul Batho

Village Produce Association

Well, has much changed since the last newsletter? Not a lot! A slight improvement on the lockdown, but I do find it strange why only one family member can make a visit! Let's hope everyone is still keeping well and safe and staying alert!

Nothing to do with the VPA - I'm Secretary to the Thames Ridge Scout District Executive Committee which covers Didcot and Abingdon. As a result of the lockdown we were unable to have the meeting planned for the 21st May, so in his wisdom the Chair decided to hold the meeting via 'Zoom'. Now I'm sure that many of you are totally conversant with this system and are using it regularly to contact family and friends. Unfortunately, my expertise relating to technology only goes as far as email. So, you can imagine, I'm not looking forward to this 'Zoom' thing. Will keep you posted on the outcome.

Back to gardening. The weather wasn't very kind in May, with a couple of nights of a minus 2 degree frost in Didcot. Fortunately I had fleeced my early potatoes and earthed up the main crop, so escaped damage. I did, however, have a good bit of damage to my borlotti beans which were doing really well, (I must admit I did plant them out a bit early), so I've just

planted some beans directly into the ground and hoping for the best. I love borlotti beans because I shell and freeze them and in the winter I add them to my vegetable casserole which gives it a bit of body.

On the allotment we all complained about the wet winter and now we're complaining about the lack of rain. I'm sure my arms have stretched 2" carrying watering cans, we're not allowed hosepipes on our plots. It will be nice to see some rain as it really does make the plants grow better than when watered with tap water that's full of chemicals.

DID YOU KNOW? An ingenious and handy way to preserve garden herbs such as basil, tarragon and chives is to freeze them, as soon after picking them as possible, in ice cubes. When they have frozen solid, transfer the cubes into bags and put them back in the freezer. Larger-leafed herbs like mint and parsley can be frozen in bags as they are.

Happy Gardening and Keep Safe

Eileen

Blewbury Post Office

Providing the refurbishment of the Blewbury Village Hall goes to the scheduled plan the Post Office will re-open on 25th June at 9.00am

The Coming and Going of the Railway

As far back as 1840 discussions were taking place to build a North/South railway line passing through Upton that would link Didcot with Southampton and a company DN&SR (Didcot, Newbury and Southampton Railway) were set up to take the idea forward. Various routes were proposed and discarded and by 1878 the company was on the verge of abandoning the idea but due to the exertions of Lord Carnarvon, a revised route was planned running through the GWR (Great Western Railway) station at Newbury. This route was authorised by an Act of Parliament on 9th July 1880, but Carnarvon's energy had already led to the first sod being cut on the Didcot to Newbury section on 26th August 1879 and by the time it was authorised construction work was well underway.

It was agreed to build the line as a single track with passing places at most stations but it was also decided that all bridges, cuttings and embankments were to be constructed such that a second line could be added as traffic increased. This decision was particularly significant in this area where approximately 400,000 cu. metres of chalk were excavated from Upton cutting and used to build the Hagbourne embankment.

According to the Newbury Weekly News of 4th August 1881:

In the Upton cutting that is some 2 miles long and up to 40 feet deep a steam "navvy" is being used to tear away at the chalk with its three steel teeth: the chalk is then scooped into a bucket capable of holding about a ton: when full, the bucket is swung round to dump its load into a waiting wagon. The wagons are then pulled back through the cutting to be emptied

further down the line where the Hagbourne embankment is being constructed. About 400 wagons are moved every day but the embankment is of such heavy nature that progress is only 30 yards per week. After the “navvy” has scooped out the cutting the walls stand almost perpendicular and have to be sloped by hand.

Up to 300 men worked on the construction of the line that took 2½ years to complete. In the census of 1881, 171 people including 110 railway workers residing in specially built huts situated along the Lynchway had joined the existing population of 241 in the parish of Upton.

The Didcot to Newbury section was opened to traffic on 12th April 1882. Whilst DN&SR owned the line it had junctions at the GWR stations at both Newbury and Didcot and GWR agreed to work the line providing both rolling stock and staff.

The Upton station comprised two platforms, with the ticket office and station buildings located on the southbound platform on a passing loop. The northbound platform, linked by two paths across the tracks at either end for access, had a small wooden shelter and a signal box at its northern end. To the North of the station were a shunting area and two sidings used for the loading and unloading of goods and horses and the unloading of coal. Originally named just Upton Station, Blewbury was added to the name in 1911. In later years the sidings were used extensively for unloading goods and materials for constructing the airfield and later still for the building and servicing of the Atomic Energy Research Establishment at Harwell.

During World War II the line was a crucial transport link as southern England saw huge movements of troops and military supplies with intensive use in the run-up to D-Day and the Normandy landings. In preparation the line was temporarily closed in the daytime between August 1942 and March 1943 to allow a second track to be laid between Didcot and Newbury and when completed, at its peak it was carrying over 100 trains every day.

Due to improved bus services and an increase in car ownership, passenger numbers slowly declined throughout the 1950s, although goods traffic remained healthy, especially chemical and oil traffic to and from Fawley Oil Refinery. In 1961 a decision was made to close the line for passenger traffic with the last passenger train running on 10th September 1962.

Goods trains continued but the goods facilities at the intermediate stations were gradually closed from 1962 leaving only the through goods services in operation until they also closed in August 1964. The line was closed completely in October 1967 the tracks were removed, the land sold off and the Upton skew bridge was blown up to allow the A417 to be re-aligned.

Submissions for *Upton News* should be sent to

kameki39@btinternet.com

Deadline for the July edition is

Saturday 27th June