



Upton News

March 2025

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The month ahead

Village calendar

Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
24	25	26	27	28	1	2
					●	△
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
●	● ●	▲	●	■	●	▲
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
●	● ●	●	●	■	●	▲
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
●	● ●	● ●	●	■	●	▲
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
●	● ● ●	●	●	■ ● ●	●	▲
31	1	2	3	4	5	6
●						

Village Hall

- Parish Council
- Village Fete
- Uptonogood
- Wine club
- Brownies
- Community coffee morning
- Upton Christmas Readers
- Dance & Fitness
- Karate
- Dog training
- Kinetic gymnastics
- Tea Birds WI

St Mary's Church

- ▲ Parish Eucharist
- △ Lay-led service
- ▲ Other service

Waste collection

- Black bin
- Green bin + Brown bin
- Green bin + Brown bin + extra garden waste

Other

- Weekend/public holiday
- Clocks change
- Upton News deadline

For details of events at the Village Hall please see [here](#):

For details of services at St Mary's Church, please see [here](#):

Sunrise, sunset & twilight



Village News

St Mary's Church

Service times

Date	Time	Type	Prayer focus
2 nd March	9:15 am	Lay-led service	Sidesmen, Those who help with hospitality & catering, Flower arrangers
5 th March	8:00 pm	Ash Wednesday Eucharist with Ashing	
9 th March	9:15 am	Parish Eucharist	Pastoral Care & Visiting
16 th March	3:00 pm	Service to celebrate St Patrick	Families, Family services, Mothers' Union
23 rd March	9:15 am	BCP Eucharist	Outreach, Parish magazines
30 th March	3:00 pm	Mothering Sunday	All the churches in our benefice, Our relationships together

The online services continue every Sunday at 10.30am. Login after 10.00 am to chat beforehand or to check your technology. Please click [here](#) to access log-in details on the Churn Churches website.

Note to contributors

Contributions to Upton News are always very welcome. Please include your name, address and contact details (email and/or phone number) in case clarification is needed: we will not be able to publish your contribution without these details. The editor reserves the right to place, edit, shorten or omit contributions as required.

Please send your contributions by email to uptonox11news@gmail.com

The deadline for the April 2025 issue is **29th March 2025**.

Father Jason writes ...

As you may or may not know, our group of churches has a commitment to celebrate the world of Science, and we do this in many different ways.

Every so often, we offer science-based holiday clubs for all the family. We also write and preach about Science, and hold services specifically to celebrate the work and role of Scientists in our modern world. Science is one of God's greatest gifts to humankind, and it is only right to celebrate all that Science contributes to our understanding of the world and our flourishing as human beings.

I am convinced that there is absolutely no conflict between good science and good religion. Unfortunately there is such a thing as bad science as well as bad religion, and misunderstandings and conflict can arise when bad science comes into contact with bad religion. But good science and good religion can and do get along very well together.

British
Science
Week



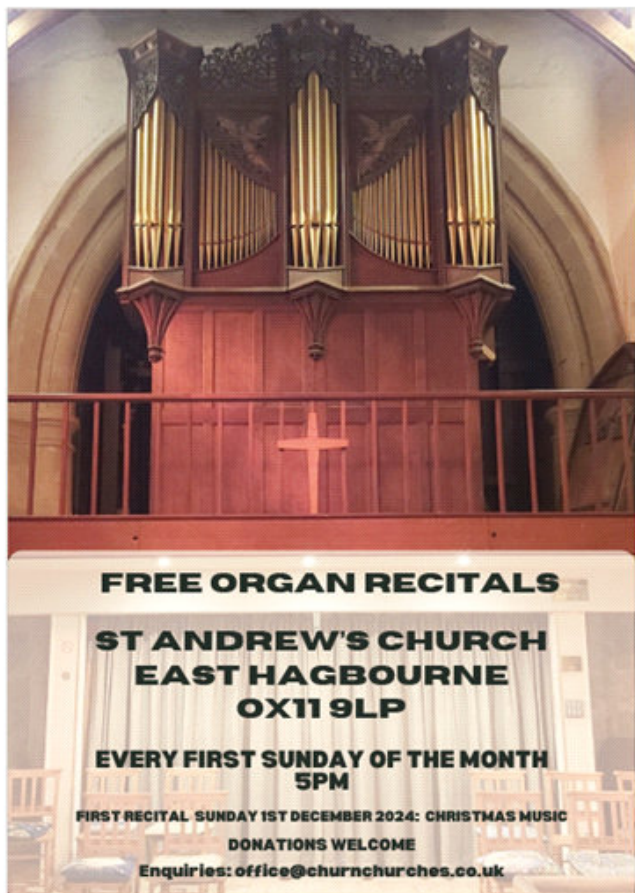
This month, we will be celebrating British Science Week (7th March – 16th March). As part of our celebrations, we will be marking Sunday 16th March as Science Sunday. In the informal 10.30am service at St Andrew's Hagbourne, Dr. Andrew Kaye will be giving a talk on "*Science, Astronomy and the Date of Easter*". In the informal 6pm service that evening, again at St Andrew's Hagbourne, I will be giving a short talk headed "*The Role of Science in the Modern World: Challenges and Possibilities*". During the week, I will also be writing a series of short reflections on how Science and Religion can work together to address and hopefully solve at least some of the pressing problems faced by our world today. The series will be entitled: "*Hope for the Future through the Partnership of Science and Religion*". I am convinced that an effective partnership of Science and Religion has the potential to give us real hope for the future. Yes, our world faces many serious problems, and at times it can be easy to feel a sense of despair. But there are still grounds for hope, and an effective partnership between Science and Religion can help to make these hopes a reality.

So do come and celebrate British Science Week with us – it is a celebration for everyone, scientist and non-scientist alike. All are welcome!

Upton Parish Council

Following the Parish Council Meeting held on the 26th February, the Council would like to advise villagers that the proposed closure of the Recreation Ground gates has been put on hold whilst further consultation takes place. This matter will be one of the elements on the forthcoming Village Questionnaire which the Council would like to urge all residents to respond to as and when it is released.

The County Council are encouraging all parishes to have an Emergency Plan. Whilst this is a relatively brief document for Upton, the Council believes it would be hugely advantageous to have two qualified First Aiders on the plan who would effectively be 'on-call' to residents in a moment of crisis. Accordingly the Council would like to invite application from residents who would be prepared to attend a First Aid Course, arranged and paid for



by the Council, who would then be prepared to assist in such events and have their names and telephone numbers included on the plan for a minimum of two years. If you would be interested and willing to participate, please contact the Clerk by email at parish.clerk@uptonvillage.co.uk.

One of the many costs of running the playground is a regular independent inspection which takes place every three months. Based on the ensuing report, the Council then makes arrangements for any necessary repairs to be undertaken prior to the following inspection. Accordingly, users of the facility may see some minor changes over the coming weeks but please note that these are all in the interests of safety.

The Council would like to draw your attention to the temporary closure of Hagbourne Hill “to facilitate surface dressing works” from 27th April up to and including 1st May 2025, between 09:30 and 15:30 hrs. The diversion route is shown below.



Oxfordshire County Council have re-tendered and awarded the contracts for a number of bus services. The new contracts begin on Sunday 30 March and timetables will be circulated as soon as the new schedules have been registered by operators. It is not clear at present whether these new contracts will affect Upton

Finally, there is welcome news about the construction of a new GP surgery at Great Western park – please see the VoWHDC Councillor’s report for further details.

Upton Wine Club

We all know wine can be an expensive business. The quality (or perceived quality) of a wine, it’s rarity and brand have all contributed to some wines demanding an exceptionally high price. However, a lucrative industry such as this one does attract attention from less scrupulous characters and encourages business and even countries to try some interesting things to protect their investments!

We obviously couldn’t try any illegal wines on the night but we did take some inspiration from some of the wines we tried! Take, for example, our first wine: a Masottina Contrada Prosecco Superiore from Veneto, just NW of Venice. This was a great Prosecco with a creamy, intense feeling in your mouth yet is a really crisp wine that was a little like tasting liquid Golden Delicious apples! We heard how Italy, in an attempt to protect their highly profitable cargo, tried to rename the Prosecco grape to Glera and make it only possible to produce wine from this grape in Italy, much like the Champagne region. Unfortunately they soon found out that several other countries had already been growing Prosecco vines for some time and were promptly told that wouldn’t be acceptable.

If you have ever tried wine from Austria, then you may have seen a red- and white-striped cap on the top, indicating that the wine has been tested for quality. This is a necessity given that, several years ago, New York Times reported that the Austrians had added “antifreeze” to their bottles in an attempt to sweeten wine during a poor harvest: they hadn’t (but had been up to no good adding some compounds that would allow them to sell their wine)! The result was they had to throw away several million litres of wine and the fallout was sufficient to cause sales of Austrian Riesling to plummet overnight and it took them over 15 years to recover!

We heard many other stories about people who drilled through concrete walls to get to cellars containing precious bottles of wine (just like a bank robbery), and a lady who ordered room service in a high end French hotel late at night, so her boyfriend could steal the wine cellar keys and get away with over £1.5m of wine!! Perhaps the scariest was when Romanee-Conti, a vineyard in

the French Burgundy region producing Pinot Noir that starts at around £1,800 per bottle, was sent a detailed map of their vineyard, with a note saying that unless they paid 1 million EUROS, each vine would be poisoned! The blackmailer was caught but it begs a question as to how you protect your land!

The Upton wine club is about wine but it is about so much more. Each month, a large proportion of the of 50+ members (mainly from the village), come together each month to learn a bit more about wine but also to have a great social time! If you are interested come and give it a try, details can be found on our [website](#). The meeting will be held on 19th March at 8pm – we hope to see you there!

Upton Photographic Competition

Just a brief reminder that the Upton Photographic competition is still running. This is open to all residents of Upton Village and there are two age categories: Under 16 and everybody else. The theme for this round is WINTER in

1. Upton And Surrounding Area
2. Any image from further afield that depicts winter.

Pictures can be sent to [this email address](#). I will accept digital photos in any format (as long as I can open them ...) from camera or smartphone. The closing date is Monday 31st March - Good luck!

Upton Nature Garden

The nature garden, if you haven't heard of it, is a small, natural oasis for people, animals and plants in the heart of the village, at the back of the Village Hall.

It's 3 years, give or take, since work began. Take a stroll around it now, and you'll see a decent hedgeline, flourishing ferns and shrubs, and at long last a good clutch of bulbs. The dogwoods, which haven't done much until now, are suddenly thick enough to add strong yellow and red to the muted winter tones. It's an encouraging glimpse

of what the garden will be like when it 'grows up'.

You may have noticed the woodchip at the bus stop gate. It was donated by a local tree surgeon a while back, but it's been too wet to shift much of it onto the paths where it'll help suppress the grass. If you have an hour spare (and a wheelbarrow) it'd be lovely to see the pile go down.

Last year we spread plenty of mulch on the woodland beds. This did a good job of keeping down the grass, especially on the mound, but elsewhere it's proving quite formidable. Again, if you have a spare moment to weed around a dozen or so plants it'll reduce competition for nutrients and moisture.

Plans for this coming year are deliberately low key: to make sure the plants we put in last spring get established. Occasional weeding, watering if dry. Feel free to fill up the can at the big butt and give any thirsty plants you see a drink!

On a financial note, the nature garden continues to be funded by grants we received from TOE and our county councillor, plus donations from local businesses. We hope you enjoy it!

Upton Neighbourhood Watch

There will be a meeting at the Village hall at 8pm on Tuesday 4th March to discuss how we might restart the Upton Neighbourhood Watch scheme. All are welcome to come along with your thoughts about how we might take this forward.

Obituaries

Jessie West

Jessie West

Was one of the best,

In many eyes

An angel in disguise.

For fifty-five years she was our neigh -

Bour across the way.

We saw each other's parents come and go;

We saw the children come and grow.

We both decided to expand

Our homes. We also planned

To improve our gard -

ens. That was hard.

Jessie proved she had the luck

With sheets of golden aconites; My raspberries
just ran amuck.

She crafted for our daughter Su

A most magnificent and snooty teddy, who

Years later was found about the house

After an encounter with a mouse.

So skilfully did Jessie manage the repair

Our grandson now exults in Edward Bear.

When Tony tragically died

We tried

To be

A bit more neighbourly.

From time to time therefore we

Persuaded Jess to come to tea,

Or supper, Sunday roast -

My trifle was the most

Likely attraction -

To get a positive reaction.

When we told her that we would be away,

I guarantee that she would say,

"I'll water in the greenhouse and the pots,

And maybe pick the beans if you have lots."

And yet when she decided on a holiday,

And I would say,

"What can I

Do?" She'd reply,

"Everything's arranged. The tortoise will be fed.

The bird seed's in the shed.

Oh - perhaps you could look in on the tomato
plants,

If you have a chance."

Those birds! To her feeders many flew -

And of course the squirrels, too.

They graced her garden for hours and hours.

Perhaps that's why they rarely come to ours.

But as an Upton -

Ian she was known.

For nearly sixty years she was a village fixture

Liberally giving of that amazing mixture

Of talents. So often she would be

In the Village Hall, cleaning, or serving tea.

In olden times she was the Booking Secretary

And kept the key.

She served also on every committee

Even if somewhat ruefully.

And at the Fete, so many made

A beeline to her stall for jams and marmalade.

And to her we turned when for the Christmas Read

-

Ing there was a need

For home-made cakes. While at St Mar -

Y's she'd be found removing flies and cleaning
there.

She served the Church so faithfully,

As warden, archivist, sacristan and e -

ven bell-ringer extraordinar-

Y. She'd take a service, Share a Prayer,

She'd loyally spend hours

Planning, buying and arranging flowers.

She generously supported Christan Aid,

Collected and delivered, and also made

Sure the banners were effectively displayed.

With that inimitable voice she'd lead

The hymns. Indeed,

She would do everything her heart and faith
decreed.

I never heard

Her say an unkind word

About another person.

"They've so much on,"

She'd say when something wasn't done.

If something was done badly -

"I think they must be ill," she'd comment sadly.

She seemed to know all residents, old and new,
Their worries and their problems, too.

She'd offer help that did them good -

As any saintly person would.

I'd made a longer list;
Some things I've missed –
I didn't have the time
To find a rhyme.
But you'll agree,
I think, with me
Dear Jessie West
Was one of the best.

'Faber'

Derek Whitmell (1940 – 2025)

Derek collapsed following a wonderful Christmas spent with family and passed away peacefully at the John Radcliffe Hospital on the 2nd January. A thanksgiving service was held at St Michael's Church, Blewbury on the 10th February this year.

Derek and his wife Charmian moved to Grahame Close, Blewbury, as a young married couple with their daughter Clare, in the autumn of 1965 and stayed there for the next 23 years raising their four young children, Clare, Nick, Anne and Andy. They moved to Pippins in Upton in 1988, where they both lived until Charmian passed away in 2019, followed by Derek's passing this year. Derek took a keen interest in village life: he was an original member of the Upton Village Wine Appreciation Society, always ready to share his passion for, and knowledge of, fine wine, which was quite extensive! He was a long-time member of the monthly Gentleman's Breakfast and also spent several happy years volunteering at the Style Acre Tea Rooms in Blewbury, helping to support and mentor young people with learning difficulties. He chaired a committee to produce a Parish Plan for Upton in 2005 and volunteered for a few years as an Ambulance Community First Responder. Outside of his commitment to the village he was known as an enthusiastic walker and could often be found striding up and down the embankment in Upton with various labradors in tow.

Derek grew up in Beckenham in South London and laid an early claim to fame when he was bowled out by a young Derek Underwood whilst at school! In 1959 he won a Major Scholarship to Trinity Hall, Cambridge where he read Maths, Physics and Metallurgy as an undergraduate. He then took up a research position at Cambridge, specialising in Field Ion Microscopy and earning his PhD in 1965. Charmian and Derek met at a

party hosted by friends in 1961 and were married in the summer of 1963. In 1965 Derek took up the offer of a job at the Atomic Energy Research Establishment in Harwell and the young family moved to Blewbury. Over the years he worked on various projects in his specialism of metallurgy including the use of ion beams to lay down metallic surface coatings and developing a completely new technique for the safe storage of radioactive gases. By the end of his time as a research scientist, Harwell held 14 patents listed under his name. In his later career he led Harwell's Programme and Planning Group and advised on the management of the Harwell and Culham sites, including the decommissioning of various research centres. He took his final retirement in 2003 having spent 38 years at Harwell.

Outside of his passion for the sciences Derek was an enthusiastic gardener, transforming the outdoor spaces at Pippins into a beautiful garden of vegetable beds, flowers and trees, many of which were grown from cuttings taken from his own father's garden. He is remembered as a sociable and outgoing individual with a great store of fascinating stories, a wicked sense of humour and a kind and courteous person who was curious about the world and everything in it. He will be greatly missed.

His children and the wider family would like to thank the many people who have sent cards and letters of condolence and shared their memories of Derek in the period since his death.

Local News

Blewbury Players

Thank you to everyone who came to a very successful weekend of audition workshops for *A Monster Calls*. Our director Sabina Netherclift was thrilled, and we are all excited to soon find out who will be in the cast. This promises to be a very special production and lots of wonderful and imaginative ideas abound. If you would like to get involved in the non-performing roles please [email](#) us. *A Monster Calls* will be playing 16th -19th July at the Orchard Dene Garden Theatre

For The Friends Evening this year, Linnet Theatre will perform a rehearsed reading version of their play *The Lost Art of Keeping a Secret*. Five university students move into their new home, each with the intention of leaving behind their troubled pasts towards a brighter future. However, unable to shake off their fears and self-destructive behaviours, they struggle to be open with themselves or others and very quickly find themselves in a melting pot of anger and desperation. (18+ with some bad language and references to violence and abuse).

Born and brought up in Blewbury and appearing in Blewbury Players' productions since the age of eight, George Brooks, a founding member of The Linnet Theatre, returns to Blewbury with fellow graduates of the Guildford School of Acting to tell a story about the existential questions facing Gen Z and young millennials in this day and age. The performance takes place in the village hall on Friday 14th March; Doors open at 7.30 pm for an 8.00 pm start. The performance is free for our current Friends or those enrolling now for membership next year and includes a complimentary glass of wine. Non-Friends are also welcome for a price of £10 on the door (or £20 to include a year's subscription to The Friends).

We are very grateful for the support that our Friends give the Players. They are given priority booking for productions, a free Friends social evening with a complimentary drink and a yearly newsletter. Their subscriptions help maintain the theatre at Orchard Dene and help us to buy equipment. We have not increased the fee since we relaunched The Friends in 2007 but have decided,

reluctantly, that we will be raising the cost of a Friend's subscription to £20 payable on 1st May. If you would like to become a Friend go to the Players [website](#).

Finally, we would like to say "Thank you" to everyone involved in *Puss In Boots* for your support and for creating an uplifting and joyous village event in what felt like a very long January. Blewbury Players were delighted by the superb audience feedback, both during the performances and from messages sent since. The audiences were amazing and provided the final magic! Once again, we have been amazed and grateful for the time, commitment and good humour given by so many people, seen and unseen, at every stage of this production, bringing it to life and our community together. It is such a privilege to have so many talented local people who turn out, collaborate and share their unique and varied skills.



The photo above shows the cast of *Puss In Boots* taking their curtain call. We have lots more photos of the show on our [website](#) where you can also join our mailing list to keep informed of how to join in with or watch future productions.

Blewbury WI

Blewbury WI's next main meeting is on Wednesday 26th March in the Vale room of the Village Hall at 7.30pm. Members only this time for the Annual Meeting. We will have opportunity to review the previous year's programme of activities, tie up any business from the last year and make plans for the future. It's when we vote in the new committee and vote the President into position. Plus we'll have refreshments, nibbles and some fun activities after the formal bit!

Blewbury WI is a happy band of friends who offer interesting talks, walks and events. They support each other through thick and thin. To find out more, ring our Secretary, Joy, on 850543 or contact us by [email](#).

Blewbury School Report

The pupils at Blewbury School are celebrating their new school cook, Mrs. Jacob, who has been making waves in the lunch hall with a fresh and exciting menu. Since taking over the role, Mrs. Jacob has introduced a variety of new dishes, inspiring pupils to try new flavours and explore different types of food.

"My favourite food is the couscous, pitta bread and humous," says Valentino (Y6). "It's so different from what we usually have, and I love it". Flynn (Y6), shared his enthusiasm for the changes: "It has been so much fun with Mrs. Jacob switching up the menu and helping us try new things – my favourite is the fruit crumble."

Mrs. Jacob, who has a passion for creating healthy and delicious meals, is delighted by the positive response. *"It's wonderful to see the children excited about food," she said. "I love introducing them to new tastes and encouraging them to explore different cultures through their meals."*

With new dishes becoming a hit and the school community embracing the changes, Mrs. Jacob is proving to be a welcome addition to Blewbury's culinary team.



Astons Online

Astons Online CIC supports people who want to be digitally confident on the Internet, with smartphone apps or online services like health and banking. Astons Online CIC events and support are free of charge and open to every everyone.

There are in-person one-to-one sessions in Astons Village Hall (OX119EQ) on Tuesday 18th March from 10:00 am to 12noon. It would help to know if you're coming. We're also available for one-to-one sessions on Tuesday mornings between 10:00 am and 12:00 using Zoom, Facetime, WhatsApp or telephone.

Our next Zoom webinar will be on Tuesday 15th April @ 10:00 am talking about AI. See [here](#) for details, click [here](#) to join the meeting or [email us](#) to find out more.

United Charities

At United Charities, we offer support to people of all ages living in Blewbury, the Astons and Upton, who may be struggling financially. If you need help with the weekly food shop, clothing, equipment, energy bills or other living costs, we can provide one off payments to help you, or someone you know is in need.

There is a short application form to complete which can be picked up from St Mary's Church porch, or requested by [email](#). We can help you fill in the form if needed. Please don't be reluctant to ask for help: all applications are dealt with confidentially.

Last year we received a steady flow of requests for financial help from local people and as we enter 2025 there is, unfortunately, no sign of economic improvement on the horizon. This may mean we will not be able to help as many individuals as we would like, unless we can generate more funds. If anyone out there in the community feels able to help by donating any amount, small or large, we would be extremely grateful. You can do this through our [Just Giving page](#)

Thank you very much in advance, and if you have any questions, please do get in touch with us by [email](#).

Vale News

VoWHDC News

“Hello” from Hayleigh and Debra



We hope you've had an excellent start to the year!

All the parishes will be happy to note that finally a new planning application has been submitted for the GP surgery on Great Western Park. Assuming planning permission is given, Woodlands (who are taking on this surgery) will be working with their chosen developer to build this.

Why has it taken so long to get to this point? The land and a lump sum of money was put aside for the GP surgery at the time that planning permission of Great Western Park was granted many, many years ago. The local NHS body (then Oxfordshire CCG, and now BOB Integrated Care Board) is responsible for the project of building and running a surgery but the business case for this surgery was only approved by them a year ago. Since then, the legal teams of Taylor Wimpey (who own the land now), the District Council (who will take ownership of the land), Woodlands (who will run the surgery) and their chosen developer (who will build it) have been working together to move the project forward.

This planning application represents a significant step in the project since the business case was approved. The eagle eyed among you will have noticed that this "new" application is an updated version of a planning application made in 2018, submitted before our time on the District Council, and addresses some of the issues with the original

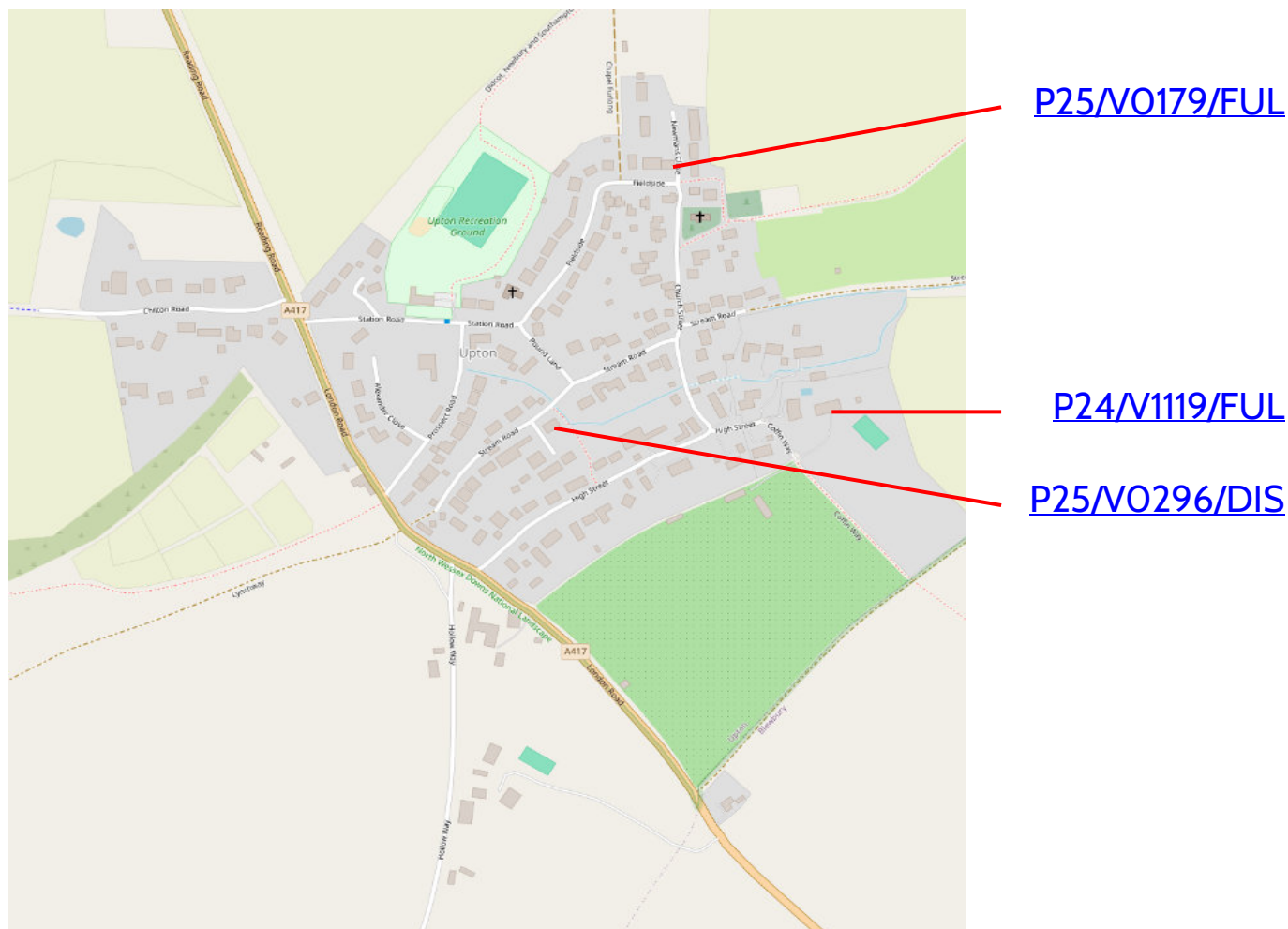
as well as being created by Woodlands' chosen developer off the back of the business case.

During the first week of February, the government announced which councils will have postponed elections and therefore be on a fast track to their new devolution deal. Oxfordshire was not one of them and so County Council elections will be going ahead this year. It is not clear what form a new unitary authority would take here as one encompassing the county would be larger than the government has recommended. There have been suggestions of two authorities in Oxfordshire: an enlarged Oxford and a doughnut around the outside. It will not be the current councils or the public who decide but it is important we make our views known. At the end of January, ahead of the announcement Cllr Bethia Thomas, leader of the Vale wrote to Cllr Liz Leffman, leader of Oxfordshire County Council with her views which you can see [here](#). When the government decides what new structure we will take, there will likely be more elections – expected in 2027.

As always, if you have any questions or suggestions for us as councillors, please do email us (email addresses [here](#) and [here](#)). We also post regular updates on our Facebook pages [here](#) and [here](#).

Current planning applications

The map below shows the location of all planning applications within the parish of Upton that are *Current* and were registered between 1st January 2021 and 28th February 2025. Details of each application can be obtained by following the hyperlinks on the right-hand side of the map.



Olly Glover, MP

With the awful weather we had in January, I was so sorry to see how some constituents suffered yet again with flooding, or threats of flooding. I have contacted our local councils to ensure the concerns of constituents who contact me are heard.

It has been a busy month in Parliament, with the opportunity to speak up and debate local, national and, indeed, international issues. I serve both urban and rural communities, but many of the topics debated affect constituents wherever they live. I voted in favour of support for the women affected by the changes to retirement in the WASPI Bill, in favour of the Climate and Nature Bill (which so many of you contacted me about), and the Sunshine bill that requires new homes to be fitted with solar panels at the outset. I have asked questions about the shortage of medication for those with epilepsy, ADHD and Parkinsons who need it. I was also able to applaud the work of small post offices, giving a special mention to Blewbury, whilst arguing they need more support.

Education has featured heavily this month with debates about the critical need to improve services for children and young people with special needs. I enjoyed my visits to local schools where I heard from the hard-working staff of their concerns and difficulties but also saw the difference they are making. The young women at Didcot Girls School gave myself and Councillor Gascoigne a grilling as challenging as any I have seen in parliament! I was also able to sing the praises of Bikeability this month; a scheme in many of our schools that teaches children to cycle safely.

While the work in Parliament is serious, there can be lighter moments, so I was pleased to squeeze in a mention of the divisive matter of mayonnaise on chips whilst discussing the merits of Belgium, Switzerland and Norway! Much closer to home, I have met constituents in my surgery as well as spending time in the constituency hearing of concerns, and more importantly trying to resolve them where I can. Affordable housing, challenges around the management of new housing estates and transport infrastructure feature heavily

Unsurprisingly, I have been contacted by many residents concerned about the Chancellor's recent statement and her very public support for the

planned reservoir at Steventon. I continue to push for a public inquiry – the anguish of those affected by flooding and the rise in water bills is a clear signal that Thames Water does not have the trust of those of us living locally.

My team and I continue to serve constituents in addressing a wide range of personal matters. Please contact me if you need support or would like to meet or wish to invite me to a local event: I can't make them all but try to fit in as many as I can! My parliamentary email address is olly.glover.mp@parliament.uk. If you use social media, you can follow me for more regular updates on [Facebook](#) and [Bluesky](#).

Didcot u3a

As the days stretch ever longer during these winter months what better time for all retired and semi-retired individuals to start new, or expand on existing, interests such as learning a second language, becoming a better photographer, playing the ukulele, walking with a friendly group. If you are interested then look no further than joining the Didcot & District U3A! Full details of all 30 plus groups can be found [here](#).

New members are always warmly welcomed to join and chat over tea and biscuits at the monthly meetings held on the third Tuesday of every month in the Didcot Civic Hall starting at 2:30pm. These meetings also include an interesting presentation by a Guest Speaker, and over the coming months we have the following Speakers and topics;

Upcoming topics include:

- 18 Mar The Shrunken Garden
Speaker: Timothy Walker
- 15 Apr Women and the Victorian Army
Speaker: Dan Allen
- 20 May AGM plus Be Free Young Carers
Speaker: Hannah Waugh

For more detailed information about this locally nationwide organisation for retired or semi-retired individuals still wishing to 'Learn, Laugh, Live' then go please contact us [here](#). We look forward to seeing you soon!

News from afar

Thames Valley Police Commissioner

For many years the 101 (non-emergency) contact number for the police has suffered from a poor reputation. This has been an issue nationwide, but it matters not just for those trying to get through, but also for wider public confidence.

We all want to know that if we need help the police - and our other emergency services - will be there. That's why I've been so keen to see improvements to 101. The time taken to answer these non-emergency calls has been gradually coming down over the last year or so, and whilst they will still fluctuate at busy times the average for January was down to just 1 minute and 9 seconds.

By definition the 101 number is for non-emergency issues, for example reporting a crime that has happened earlier, suspects have left the scene or there's no current risk, but I'm constantly aware that no-one ever wants to contact the police unless something bad has happened. So whilst it may not be an emergency, these calls continue to be treated with the seriousness they deserve.

One of the ways that we've reduced the call times is by providing better updates to victims. Until recently a large number of 101 calls were from people who wanted to get an update for something they already reported to the police. By asking officers to be more proactive in updating victims and by using a new online victims portal for many crimes, victims are now getting more information, more swiftly and taking the pressure off of the phone lines.

More and more people are also choosing to report online. Whilst it's not for everyone, it can be much easier to report something non-urgent, perhaps if you've been a witness to something, on your phone or computer via this [website](#).

Of course in an emergency always call 999. The calls are answered by the same team of staff, but the emergency calls are prioritised to ensure they're answered in around 10 seconds! Remember that a 999 call isn't only for when someone is in danger, but it might be about a crime that is happening right now and when an emergency response could make a real difference.

My plea is that whatever route you choose, 101, online or 999, please report any crime or concerns you have. Not every call can or should result in a blue-light response and not every crime can be solved, but I can guarantee that the incidents the police really will do nothing about, are those that are never reported to them!




Matthew Barber
Your voice in
Thames Valley

Matthew Barber is Police & Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley, working with the police to help drive down crime locally.

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Promoted by Matthew Barber on his own behalf, of Waterloo House, 58-60 High Street, Witney, Oxfordshire, OX28 6HJ.

Wild Oxfordshire

Hedgerows in Spring

Spring is the season of growth, and our local hedgerows are no exception. This month you can expect to see hedge species beginning to flower. Blackthorn will begin to flower from early spring, blossoming before its leaves even begin to show, into beautiful five petal white flowers strikingly similar to Hawthorn. Hawthorn, however, (like Buckthorn, Guelder Rose, Dogwood, Wayfaring, and Spindle) blossoms later in mid spring. Cherry Plum (which began to blossom in winter) will only continue flowering into early spring, preparing to bear berries in early summer.

All of these species are extremely beneficial to pollinators as well as other insects that feed on hedges (i.e., Chestnut moths and Brown hairstreak butterflies). Observe the wildlife benefits mature hedges offer this Spring and get ready to see it in your own local spaces once your newly planted hedgerows reach maturity!

Happy Earth Hour!

(Join people around the globe in switching off all your lights for an hour (8:30 – 9:30pm on 22nd March) and while you're at it, why not check out whether your local nature group has organised any celebrations like an evening nature walk, or hot chocolate round a fire pit! Who needs TV?! Local nature groups can be found on our map [here](#)

Great British Spring Clean

In the spirit of renewal and growth, get involved in the Great British Spring Clean organised by Keep Britain Tidy. Organise a clean-up in your local parish to allow wildlife to thrive free of litter. Report your results to become a 'Litter Hero' and consider joining the Big Bag Challenge! Come together to bring new life to your local green spaces.



Wildlife-friendly Garden jobs for March

Everyone's waking up! But remember, the temperature can still drop below freezing in March...

- Put out bird food with high fat content to give extra energy when food is hard to come by. Suet treats like fat balls are ideal and sunflower hearts;
- Feed hedgehogs – more info below
- Put in at least one hedgehog gap – more info below
- Have plants in your garden that offer winter/early spring nectar – e.g. mahonia, ivy, willow, hellebores, crocuses and snowdrops to provide a boost for our pollinators after the dormant months. You can also start to think about sowing seeds. Have a look at the packets as many are now marked with a 'pollinator-friendly' symbol. Why not grow your own bird food this year and grow sunflowers?
- Create a pond or improve yours for amphibians
- Leave perennials and herbaceous, hollow-stemmed plants unpruned until early April or late this month. These will still be providing homes for overwintering invertebrates like ladybirds.
- On freezing days, break the ice on bird baths and water bowls. Refresh the water supply weekly.
- Build a bug hotel
- Leave piles of leaves and logs undisturbed. In mild weather, it can be tempting to get going in the garden but avoid the urge to tidy away leaf and log piles just yet. Wait until late this month or early April.
- Avoid turning the compost heap until April, even if conditions are mild. Frogs, small mammals, and insects may be hibernating, and any disturbance could harm them.
- Check bonfires before they are lit for sheltering and hibernating animals, such as hedgehogs, toads, frogs, and newts.

Ponds, amphibians and the garden ecosystem

March is the key month for breeding amphibians: first frogs, then toads and later, newts. Toads tend to breed in big ponds, laying their ribbons of spawn near stems of submerged plants. Newts use their back legs to wrap their eggs in the leaves of marginal plants like the water-forget-me-not and brooklime; you may be able to see these folded leaves in June. This month, you can shine a torch into the water at night to see returning newts and you may even witness the male's courtship dance as they wiggle to show off their fabulous tails!

Ponds with fish aren't so good for our native wildlife as the fish will eat the eggs and young of amphibians as well as the invertebrates that the amphibians need to eat.

How to help:

- Create a pond! Ponds sustain two thirds of all of our freshwater life and improve the health of the entire garden ecosystem. If you don't have room for a big pond, why not put in a bucket pond? Go to the Wildlife Trust [website](#) for an easy how-to guide.
- Plant marginal plants in the shallows and at the edge of your pond. PlantLife and Freshwater Habitats Trust have suggestions. Water-forget-me-not and brooklime are great for newts to lay their eggs and water mint is brilliant for insects. Brooklime is also used by dragonflies to lay their eggs on.
- Make sure there is a way out for amphibians and even hedgehogs that can end up drowned in ponds when they fall in after using it to drink from. You can use planks of wood, piles of stones or make your pond have a shallow and gradual gradient.

Hedgehogs

Our hedgehogs will be waking up this month. With the unpredictable weather, their hibernation patterns are less certain but usually they won't go back into hibernation now until the winter. This means they will be hungry and thirsty after a long dormant period and will need to build their fat reserves and energy ready for the breeding season.

Feeding

- You can put out meat-based cat food for hedgehogs (with meat not fish). Go Cat dried cat biscuits are recommended as an easy option by the Kirtlington Hedgehog Highway group.
- Put out the food at dusk and remove any that's left the following morning so it doesn't go bad
- You can use a hedgehog feeding station to prevent cats from eating all the food. These include a right angle that the hedgehog has to use as they can bend at this angle easily whereas a cat cannot.
- Put out shallow water dishes or accessible ponds for hedgehogs to drink from
- Natural food sources come from our slugs, snails and other invertebrates. Do not use slug pellets or insecticides as these will also harm hedgehogs that eat the infected 'pests'.
- Rats? I had rats come into my garden, so I didn't put out hedgehog food. I had to rely on the invertebrates to feed the hedgehogs. Fortunately, I had a hedgehog forage in my lettuce patch most nights and I ended up with very healthy, pest-free lettuce!

Breeding

- Not only will our hedgehogs be hungry, but they will also need to start roaming around to catch up with other hedgehogs and go to other foraging spots. Some hedgehogs roam up to a mile every night! We need to help them stay safe in their wanderings, off roads, and in gardens. This means we need to link our gardens together to make safe passageways!



Local directory

What's On

Venue	Telephone	Website
Didcot		
Cornerstone	01235 515144	https://www.cornerstone-arts.org/whats-on
Cineworld	0871 2002000	https://www.cineworld.co.uk/cinemas/didcot/
Wallingford		
Corn Exchange	01491 825000	https://www.cornexchange.org.uk/whats-on/
Wantage		
The Beacon	01235 763456	https://www.beaconwantage.co.uk/whats-on/
Abingdon		
The Abbey Cinema	01235 616000	https://theabbey.ac/web

Service centre

If you are an Upton Village resident and have a skill or trade that other residents might find useful, please contact the editor with a short summary of your skill/trade and your contact details. We will include these in the next edition of Upton News, free of charge.

Listings will initially be restricted to Upton Village residents but if there are any skills or trades not covered, then we may include entries from residents of nearby villages.

Useful contacts

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