

Little Milton Parish Council
Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 10th May 2023
in the Pine Lodge, Little Milton

Present: Cllr Francois van der Merwe (Chairman)
Cllr Howard Harrison
Cllr Edward Horwell
Cllr Adam Sheppard
Cllr David Wakeling

Mrs Andrea Oughton (Parish Clerk)
15 members of the public

Apologies for Absence

County Councillor Freddie van Mierlo, District Councillor Georgina Heritage, Parish Councillor Giles Denby.

Introduction by Chairman

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Annual Parish Meeting.

01/05/23 Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 11th May 2022 were taken as read and approved as a true record of the meeting.

02/05/23 Report by Chairman of Parish Council

We are at the start of a new term for the newly appointed Parish Council. Over the last year the previous council saw out its final year of its elected term with a full complement of councillors. For the new term, Steve Sidhu, who held the position of vice-chair and responsible for communications, decided not to stand again, on behalf of the council and the parish I thank him for his hard work. The remaining councillors have decided to stand again, along with Ed Horwell. Given that exactly six candidates stood, they were elected without contest.

We also say goodbye to Caroline Newton as Haseley Brook District Councillor, who stood down at the local elections. As a council and parish, I thank Caroline for her effective and enthusiastic support and guidance over the last few years. Georgina Heritage has been elected Councillor for Haseley Brook Ward but cannot be here tonight. We look forward to working with her, as well as Freddie van Mierlo, our County Councillor, in the years ahead.

Notable points from last year

Cllr Wakeling responsible for planning and the play park reported the parish council had considered and made recommendations to South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) on seven planning applications during the year. SODC had refused the application for five dwellings on Haseley Road. The six-month period for the developer to submit an appeal had now passed. There have been lots of 'to-ing and fro-ing' regarding the Milton House application. The latest status is still not decided nor the date when the application will be considered by the District Planning Committee.

The play park continues to be extremely popular, a fault with the aerial runway meant it was out of action for a couple of months. The fully accessible picnic table was beyond repair and has been replaced.

Cllr Harrison responsible for the Recreation Ground and Public Open Green Spaces reported the recreation ground had been regularly mowed by the appointed contractor. Four new benches and three new picnic benches have been purchased and located around the ground. Around thirty bushes were added to the western boundary and wildflower seed sown along the western and southern boundaries.

Through liaison with BT the telephone box on Haseley Green was repaired and completely refurbished. Three planters were purchased and planted up; one on Haseley Green and two at the junction of the A329 and Haseley Road. Eleven verge markers have been installed on Gold Street slip road to protect

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the trees and prevent further encroachment by parked vehicles. Stone chippings have been spread along the edge of the slip road to minimise the muddy edge.

The Millennium flower beds are planted each year with seasonal planting and maintained by the parish council to improve the appearance of the village. The parish council also maintains and repairs the other benches around the village as necessary to encourage the use of these amenities.

The verges within the 30/20mph speed limits in the village are cut by the parish council's contractors as required for road safety. An effort is made to minimise and delay cuts to encourage biodiversity.

The parish council has applied for and received two grants from the District Councillor Community Grant scheme. The grants have allowed the purchase of two large oak trees planted at the southern end of the recreation ground and a new litter bin by the play park. A further sum will be applied to the improvement of the MUGA lights.

Cllr Sheppard responsible for Highways and Utilities reported he has had limited success, as a Fix My Street Superuser for the village, with some potholes being repaired. OCC has a huge backlog of repairs. Issues with the pumping station and the flood of effluent into the school playground have been raised with Thames Water. A programme to reline pipework is ongoing. Thames Water has admitted to releasing effluent into Haseley Brook over 50 times during the last year.

The main success has been the implementation of the 20mph speed limit. With the help of residents and councillors evidence was pulled together at the beginning of the year in support of the application. Dragon's teeth need painting on some entrances to the village and the parish council has requested that speed signs are moved back along the Haseley Road. The Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) has arranged for a mobile speed unit to visit the village, the first visit taking place a couple of weeks ago.

Cllr Denby sent his apologies, he is responsible for liaising with the village school, local businesses, the nursery, village hall, shop and the church and recently facilitated the first 'drop in' session with the local PCSO which was well attended.

From my point of view as Chair, a few things stood out during the last year:

- The positive feedback received following the implementation of the 20mph speed limit which has not only reduced speed but also road-noise, thank you Adam for spearheading this.
- I have a big smile every time I walk past the goal posts and see the worn-out patches of grass in front of them or see children (and adults!) using them, Giles and Howard are to thank for the initiative and effort of putting these up and moving them around (to save the grass!).
- The green spaces around the village continue to improve, Howard has put in most of the hard work on this. Howard, your boundless energy on this is an inspiration to all of us!
- Our play area remains a highly popular and well used facility – to keep it ticking over and ensuring it is safe takes significant time and effort, something David does most weeks, often in his weekend time.
- Who will forget the massive turnout we saw for the various discussions around the Milton House development? The application is still with the planning officer at SODC and will hopefully see a resolution in the new council year. I believe as a council we provided a valuable platform for this important debate and, despite this being a contentious issue for many, I believe we engaged in this in a constructive and balanced manner that will hopefully lead to a better overall outcome for the community.
- Giles' liaison work resulted in Little Milton being chosen as the venue for a regular Police liaison meeting with our local PCSO. I encourage everyone to make use of this fantastic resource to raise any crime related issues.
- Lastly, as a civic body, the council needs to run properly within the laws that govern it. Andrea has played a tireless role in ensuring everything runs properly and keeping us in line. Raymond Fergusson,

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as always, provided invaluable support and advice as well as continuing to produce the monthly village newsletter – something many of us enjoy and appreciate. And lastly, thanks to Barry Coward as head of the Neighbourhood Plan steering group for your valuable input with planning matters.

Looking ahead

The new council will be finalising our list of long-term priorities. I encourage everyone to let us know of any areas you would like us to focus on, the Village Forum at the end of this meeting, as well as the Village Forums at the start of every monthly council meeting, are perfect opportunities to engage with the parish council.

Particular areas of focus in addition to the day-to-day functions of the council that I believe will continue into the new council are:

- The ever-present threats of massive development in Chalgrove and potentially Harrington. As a council we will remain vigilant and fight our village's corner in every way we can. A particular concern is the impact any development will have on the traffic through the village, which as things stand has been a major issue for the village for many years. We will continue to liaise with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) as they develop their freight plan in the coming months.
- On the theme of traffic, this remains a major issue for the parish and will continue to be amongst the highest priorities for the council in the new year.
- Over the year, parts of the village received fibre-to-the-premise broadband connectivity, however there are various parts of the village still not connected to the new generation of broadband. The council has continuously engaged with OCC's Digital team on this with the aim to ensure all the village is connected. The new council will continue to keep this up and I hope to report a satisfactory conclusion in the following year or two.
- The MUGA and tennis court need resurfacing. We have made some good progress with putting together grant applications for most of the projected costs, some of which are about to be submitted – fingers crossed we are successful. Paul Connolly has been invaluable in pulling these together and working through the immense volumes of application documents.

Finally, I always say this, but as a small village we are blessed and fortunate to have such a range of facilities and community groups and events we have. You will hear from many of these momentarily when they present their reports. There are numerous individuals, many who are here tonight, without whom these things would not exist or thrive. On behalf of the council, and the whole parish, I would like to thank everyone involved in these activities, all the way from the Orchard on this end to the school on the other end of the village, and everyone in between, for their hard work and dedication in helping make Little Milton the place it is.

03/05/23 Financial report

Andrea Oughton presented the financial report as Clerk for the financial period being reported.

The council provides services and facilities to its parishioners and does so by managing the finances responsibly holding an appropriate level of reserves to meet future needs. As the income and expenditure for the year is below the £25k threshold it allows the council certify itself as exempt from an external audit. However, finances continue to be reviewed by our internal auditor Mr Ian Dennis who also reviews the council's internal control systems.

Not all services are funded through the Precept, which is the amount of income the council requests the District Council to include in the Council Tax that residents pay each year. For every £1k the council raised through the Precept it adds around £4.65 per annum to the Council Tax bill. The Precept of £13.5k costs a Band D equivalent property £62.70 annually.

The sources of income of £22,477 this year were: Precept £13.5k, newsletter advertising £5,477, other income £529 and bank interest £138. The Council received grants of £2,428 made up as follows: £528

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from OCC for verge cutting, £1,000 from SODC for refurbishment of the MUGA lights and £900 from SODC for new rubbish bins. The MUGA income has decreased to £378 from £1021 in 2021-22 due to a deteriorating facility. The village newsletter continues to be self-financing and in 2022-23 generated a net contribution of £839.

Total expenditure to 31st March 2022 was £20,241, the main headings being: newsletter £4,683, open green spaces £7,786, council administration £4,009, other expenditure £2,378, play area £1,076 and MUGA £309.

I highlighted at the last Annual Parish Meeting that the council were addressing the wider green issues and in 2022-23 it accounted for 39% of the Council's expenditure which included the purchase of four picnic benches, three planters and a replacement set of refuse bins in the recreation ground.

Reserves are what the council needs to manage the unevenness of its patterns of expenditure as well as to manage the cost of any planned or unexpected expenditure. Overall reserves of £27,097 showed an increase on last year of £2,206. The council recognises that reserves have increased over the last three years but has plans to improve the facilities of the MUGA by addressing the floodlights and surfaces as well as considering other community facilities to improve the welfare of the parish.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the Chairman and Councillors for their support during the year and to Raymond Fergusson for his excellent teaching skills and continued patience as I take over the financial reins.

04/05/23 District Councillor Report

Caroline Newton had stepped down as District Councillor at the recent elections and thanked members of the Parish Council, and Raymond Fergusson for their support over the years. Caroline highlighted the following from her report for the year 2022-23.

Planning - Harrington

In the last year the most consequential one has been the proposed new town of Harrington, at J7 of the M40 near Great Haseley. I have been (and remain) completely opposed to the concept of a town of 6,500 houses being built in that location - beautiful, open countryside far from jobs and sustainable transport hubs.

Solar Farms - Another issue that has been particularly pertinent in this ward (especially along the M40 corridor from Milton Common to Lewknor) has been the proliferation of proposals for solar farms. Two (Harlesford and Cornwell) have been approved and are going through the more detailed planning process before construction starts. These, together with proposals for solar farms at Milton Common and Lewknor represent over 330 hectares of open agricultural land.

I have worked with local communities to try to prevent such a massing of solar farms in a small area of valued landscape and productive farmland. I think most of us accept the need for solar power to contribute to our energy mix and wouldn't argue against the installation of some dispersed solar farms on agricultural land across South Oxfordshire. But like many residents, I would much rather see solar on roofs, and am concerned about the impact of the scale of this industrial development. I successfully made the case at SODC Full Council this spring for policies to address this - but I am worried that the new council will ignore the resolution. Residents in affected parishes will need to continue to make the case for the protection of their countryside.

Chalgrove - In March, Homes England (HE) confirmed that they are still determined to push ahead with the development of Chalgrove Airfield (which was allocated as a strategic development site in the current Local Plan). In light of opposition from the Civil Aviation Authority (and unflagging resistance from the residents of Chalgrove village), HE seem to have gone back to the drawing board and was able

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to give very little indication of their strategy, mitigation etc. HE said they would be bringing forward new plans in due course - though gave no indication of timescale.

Climate Change - SODC declared a climate emergency in 2019 and an ecological emergency 2021. The council has set targets to be carbon neutral within its own operations by 2025; and for us to be a carbon neutral district by 2030. I was keen to support SODC's own net-zero aspirations but remain sceptical about the council's capacity to set - and more importantly deliver - a target for the whole district.

With funding from central government, SODC has worked with other Oxfordshire councils on a strategy for creating a network of charging points for electric vehicles. This has included charging points in council car parks. I have been concerned that the focus of these strategies is the city of Oxford and the large towns in the county. It is essential that villages also receive EV charging capacity: they are often vibrant spots in our tourist economy and, just as in towns, many village-dwellers do not have access to their own charging points.

05/05/23 County Councillor Report

County Councillor Freddie van Mierlo had given his apologies and submitted his annual report for 2022-23 as follows:

Now 2-years into its first 4-year term, it is an opportune moment to reflect on the progress made by the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance administration since taking control. Its vision is laid out in the 9 priorities adopted, that includes 'putting climate at the heart of everything we do'.

The County Council is responsible for delivering a range of services to residents of Oxfordshire, including adult social care, children's services – including for children with special educational needs and disabilities, and of course, maintaining Oxfordshire's highways and transport infrastructure, and a range of other services, including libraries, fire and rescue, and coroners' services.

Adult social care is the largest responsibility of OCC in terms of spend. Demand is growing due to our ageing population and an increase in complexity of needs. In Oxfordshire, we are seeking to manage this demand with a pioneering 'Oxfordshire Way', that aims to keep people active and independent for as long as possible in their homes and communities. Children's services remain a challenge, particularly the area of SEND. The service receives this year an inflation busting boost to its budget of 12.3% (£18.8m), which will provide much needed funds.

In transport and highways, the county is leading the way by moving to 20mph as the speed limit for villages and towns. The newly adopted Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP5) is a radical change from the previous plan, and places an emphasis on active travel, public transport and reducing car journeys. Its ambitious targets to reduce car journeys by 25% by 2030 and 33% by 2040 will shape infrastructure decisions going forward, and be a powerful tool when developers seek massive car-centric developments (e.g., Chalgrove Airfield and Harrington). The freight strategy (which sits as part of LTCP5) is being developed further with inputs sought from communities on area weight restrictions and problem areas for HGVs. The strategy seeks to move non-local freight onto the strategic road network rather than use inappropriate local roads.

As ever, I continue to advocate for projects and issues important to local communities and individual residents. Issues have ranged from road agreements, active travel, trees, road markings, flooding, children's services, and much more!

Housing developments also remain a concern for residents. While strictly speaking a district matter, the major road developments associated with Chalgrove airfield development, and the potential Harrington development bring in County level concerns. I continue to oppose both schemes, which would have a deleterious impact on the local environment and climate due to their remote and rural locations.

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06/05/23 Report from Village Hall Management Committee

Mr Steve Willis gave the following report on behalf of the Village Hall Management Committee.

The year 2022-23 was the first year since 2019-20 that the Village Hall has not been impacted by the effect of Covid. Looking back it had a major impact on our working. I am pleased to say that the past year it has been business as usual.

Regretfully Paul Connolly who was our Secretary left the Committee in March 2023. Linda and Jim Lovegrove retired at the end of March after looking after the Hall for many years and kept it in great condition cleaning and maintaining it. A massive thank you to them both. The cleaning is now looked after by Wendy Stone. Also, a special thank you to Raymond Fergusson who looks after our books making sure hirers pay us and paying our suppliers/contractors on time. We are hugely grateful to our volunteers and the Committee who helped organise and run the year's events, and who keep the Hall functioning. Our thanks to the village for their continued support of the Hall and our activities.

The Hall continues to be used daily during the week with our regular users Yoga, Pilates, Keep Fit, Textile Workshop, WI, Craft Club as well a large jazz band that use the hall for weekly rehearsals.

In June 2022 the Hall hosted the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebration a village picnic for all residents with a free glass of Champagne, ice cream and cake for all attendees. We opened a Pop-Up Pub at the Hall to host several of the England matches for the World cup with hot pies and local draft beer. After a two year break the Lamb was able to once again host the Seniors Christmas lunch sponsored by the Hall with children from the school singing carols. As in previous years the Hall participated in the annual Christmas Fayre held in the Hall in December, and there were the ever-popular Quiz Nights held in the autumn, winter and spring. The annual village Fireworks Evening in November was a great success with a large turnout of about 350 attendees, with free tickets for children. This year we hosted the King's Coronation in May with a village picnic including a free glass of fizz for a royal toast.

The finances of the Village Hall are in a healthy position and one that the Committee are committed to maintain. The total income for 2022-23 was £17,616 which is significantly higher than the two Covid years and slightly less than 2019-20. We need to recognise that the hall received £30,574 in support from the Government that more than cushioned the lack of activity in the hall.

In 2022-23 the hall had a loss before depreciation of £370 and after depreciation charges a loss of £6,470. The Committee focus their attention on the financial outcome before depreciation. The cost base in 2022-23 was higher than in previous years due to the higher cost of electricity, water and waste collection an increase of around £3,000. The repairs and maintenance were higher due to replacement of roof tiles £540, creation of a path from ladies cloakroom £640, various plumbing matters £631 emergency light issues £709. The level of maintenance varies each year and therefore is viewed in a longer timescale than one year.

The Hall has closing reserves at 31st March 2023 of £ £35,468, compared with closing reserves at 31st March 2020 of £29,162.

The committee are reviewing the investment of their cash reserves to benefit from a higher interest but clearly balancing off the risk and accessibility to finance future projects. The Committee review the hire charges for the hall once a year.

The Committee are seeking to increase the booking of Weddings. Historically Weddings have been a significant cash generator for the Hall but these have dropped off significantly in the last few years. To address this we are partnering with a professional local Wedding organiser to help promote the venue more effectively and to coordinate with hirers in the future. This initiative was launched with a Wedding

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Open Day in May 2023. The Committee are very mindful that it needs to ensure that the needs of the adjacent neighbours are fully recognised.

The Committee would welcome everyone to attend the Annual General Meeting of Little Milton Village Hall in June where the Committee are elected and a fuller report of the present and future activities and finances are presented.

07/05/23 Report from Little Milton Shop

Mr Kevin Hunt presented the report from the Village Shop.

Firstly, as always, I want to thank and place on record my wholehearted thanks to the small number of resolute volunteers and shop staff who give their time and effort consistently every week on behalf of our community.

The Covid pandemic demonstrated the importance of having a Local Shop and Post Office, also recently the closure of bank branches places even more value on the provision of a local post office where every day banking can be conducted. Therefore, their existence should not be taken for granted and it would be remiss of me if I do not thank those within the village community who consistently support the Shop, Cafe, and Post Office with their patronage.

Although the accounts are still to be finalised for last trading period the shop performance is predicted to fall by 9.7% compared to 2022 which was a period influenced by Covid. Transactions for the same period also mirrored the fall in revenue but value of transaction indicate no discernible change at £5.67.

Looking forward it was the intention of the shop committee to continue improvements throughout the coming year by replacing outdoor furniture and updating shelving within the shop, unfortunately this is currently on hold and the outdoor furniture will be refurbished to extend its longevity.

The factors contributing to this situation are the overall inflationary pressure, increase in minimum wage cost circa. £2,500 but overwhelmingly the cost of energy which over the coming year could rise to £17,000 from £4,392. This is due to coming from an extremely low fixed rate of 14 .27p per kilowatt hour to 59p.

In simple terms if the current cost base continues at its present level the shop and post office in a worst-case scenario would have to contemplate cease trading in 18 months to 2 years' time when our current healthy bank position is no longer able to support the shop overheads. Of course, this is a worst-case scenario, and the committee will explore all avenues to negate this, detail of which I will share with the Parish council.

08/05/23 Report by Chair of Little Milton School Governors

Linda Longshaw resented the report.

Our school vision: Like mustard seeds, we aim to nurture our children to **grow and flourish** in the safety of our school. Underpinned by our Christian values, we are committed to seeing children achieve their **individual potential** and **develop their God-given talents** to blossom into **contributing members of society**.

Little Milton CE School and Nursery continues to serve the local community and beyond, offering high quality, personalised learning in small classes. A recent parent survey highlighted the school's supportive, inclusive and family-oriented setting:

'Little Milton School is like a family. I was apprehensive about my child starting formal education, however I couldn't have asked for more.'

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'On the days my child has not been in school due to illness he has been upset that he cannot attend.'
'Such a wonderful school setting for children, I know my daughter is the happiest she has been in a school.'

Our vision underpins all aspects of school life and is explored regularly with the children. Our school values form the basis of collective worship and are linked to day-to-day activities as well as events in the wider world. This term's value is Wisdom and is being linked to learning about the Coronation as well as how wisdom is expressed in a range of religions.

We are proud of the wide and exciting curriculum offered to our children which includes specialist teaching in Forest School, French, music and sport. We also offer a range of visits, activities with local schools and extra-curricular clubs.

Our well-established staff team provides inspiring high-quality teaching. Our co headteachers, Hannah Blest and James Bell, do an excellent job leading the school calmly and purposefully, whilst ensuring that well-being across the school community is a priority.

We are proud to welcome children from a wide range of backgrounds, including refugee children from Ukraine and Afghanistan. We are delighted that we will be welcoming eleven new Reception children in September, however, our roll continues to be lower than we would like it to be, and governors are working hard to ensure that the school is sustainable and forward looking.

Children share their work with parents and carers during termly class assemblies, Open Mornings and Good Work Assemblies which provide a weekly opportunity for families to celebrate their children's work in person or via Zoom.

Our school is very well supported by the parents' group, 'The Friends'. As villagers will know, they have organised wonderfully innovative fund-raising and social events for the school and village community including a Burn's Night supper, Oktoberfest and Maypole evening. We are extremely grateful to them. Our next event is A Midsummer Night's Dream Evening on 13th May at the Pine Lodge. Tickets are available from the shop.

Little Milton School is proud to be a vibrant part of the community, sharing regular updates via the village newsletter and the school website. We thank the parish council for its support.

09/05/23 Report from Orchard Pre-School

Apologies had been received from Jane Comyn and Grace Blackwell, joint Chairpersons who submitted the following report:

The Orchard Pre-School continues to provide a stable, caring and happy environment for all of the children. There are currently 23 children on roll and four members of teaching staff. In addition we currently have one staff member dedicated to one SEN child on a 1:1 basis who will move to Little Milton School in Sept.

Provision

The Orchard currently offers a day that is the length similar to that of a primary school, from 9am to 2.45pm. There are mornings and afternoon sessions, and younger children often start with just a few sessions a week and then build up to longer hours when they are ready. There is also a session on a Tuesday afternoon, called 'Big Club' aimed specifically at children of 4 years of age to help prepare them for the transition to primary school. With a focus on numeracy, literacy and social skills, this club has been very effective at developing confident, well-prepared young learners.

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Ofsted

On Monday 21st November 2022 we were visited by Ofsted and were delighted (but not surprised) to be rated GOOD. Although we did put in a case for parts of the report (particularly the behaviour and attitudes section) to show OUTSTANDING, sadly it was not upgraded. The full report is available on the Ofsted website.

Environment

Improvements continue to be made to ensure the wellbeing and safety of children and staff. The garden is regularly maintained by grandparent volunteers and we are extremely grateful for their help. Following a lightning strike back in September 2022, we have had a new alarm system installed and replaced our video doorbell, emergency lighting, telephone, broadband hub and office monitor.

Staff

The Orchard is very fortunate to have a strong, experienced and ambitious team. They undertake CPD regularly and all legally required training is up to date. Jess Ford has been the Supervisor for two years. Jess is supported by Clair West as Deputy Supervisor and Helen Stuart Lovegrove and Lauren Nelms as Early Year Educators. Julie Ashmore is currently acting as the One to One for a SEN child. Alison Vallance continues in the role of Office Manager, as well as taking charge of the finances.

Fundraising

Fundraising has been tricky with a very small committee. We held a fantastically successful sports day in July 2022 and raised: £500.00. A local event called The Big Bash generously donated £817.00 from their fundraiser in July 2022. We hold termly coffee mornings that raise average £60 each and plan for a fantastic Sports Day once again in July 2023. We are also extremely grateful to the Little Milton community for their hard work and generosity at the Christmas Fayre.

Committee

We have a small team on the committee and struggle to find sufficient support. For the past year Jane Comyn has been co-chair along with Grace Blackwell. Natasha Ellis has been a long-serving member of the Committee. Sophie Cobb, Rebecca Light and Laura Putt, are local residents and have played an active role on the committee. Emily Gresty remains as our bank signatory, having stepped down from chair last year, to whom we are most grateful. As always, we are very keen to recruit new members to the committee and would love to have members of the local community play more of an active role in the running of the pre-school.

Future vision

The team at The Orchard are keen to continue to improve and always provide the best childcare for the children. Staff are all undertaking CPD and preparing for more changes to the EYFS. We are also looking at ways to improve the outside provision for the children to ensure they have the best opportunities to develop, both indoors and outdoors.

Thank you very much to both the staff and the committee who work incredibly hard to ensure the children are well looked after and cared for in such a safe, positive environment. The parents are very supportive and we are very grateful for all the support and hard work that helps to make The Orchard successful.

10/05/23 Report on St James' Church

Reverend Simon Cronk gave a report on behalf of St James' Church.

When people think of the Church, it is inevitable that they think first of the building. The Church however is primarily not the building, and we don't actually need a building at all to be the Church! The Church is all about the people who belong, who come together to worship God through Jesus Christ. It is not though an inward-looking community, but extends outward with the invitation of God's love,

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grace and hope to all. At St James, the small but very committed congregation are not a 'holy huddle' but have good links with the rest of the village and community and are involved with serving the various activities and organisations across the Village. As a church community we regularly meet for worship both in the Church building and with other churches in the Benefice, the three parishes of Little Milton, Great Milton and Great Haseley.

The numbers who come to worship regularly are not large, usually in the middle teens, but we have seen good congregations at our festival services, notably in the last year at the Christmas Eve crib service and the Easter Day service and at the Remembrance Sunday service, a relatively new innovation to make sure that Little Milton gets a special service on Remembrance Sunday alongside Great Milton and Great Haseley. Our main challenge remains connecting with children and families. To this end St James joined with the other churches to host, in rotation, a monthly family gathering on a Sunday afternoon. Sadly, this has not taken off although one child from Little Milton has consistently come to most of them! As with anything to do with both children and vulnerable adults, the Church rigorously complies with all safeguarding guidance.

We have a very faithful and well working Parochial Church Council, who between them have taken on the roles traditionally associated with a Churchwarden. Ideally, the Church should have two churchwardens, we continue to live in hope! Remarkably, despite the challenges of the last few years our finances remain healthy.

And of course, we have the building and the Churchyard! In the winter of 2021-2022 we were completely without heating, but we have now installed under-pew heating. This does make the experience for those coming to a very cold building, with absolutely no effective insulation, a little more pleasant. The ongoing challenges of the building remain however with much of the stonework, particularly in the tower, in a degraded state. We are looking how to meet the challenge, but I do not believe that going forward, the work of conserving our beautiful church buildings can fall entirely on the shoulders of the few 'faithful', who happen to use them for worship.

We continue to be very grateful for all the help we have with flower arranging, cleaning the Church, cutting the grass and the huge efforts which result in the wonderful Church and Village Fete. Let us not forget the work of the Bell ringers, which I hope is appreciated locally. This year, in February, St James was blessed to host the annual service for the South Oxford Guild of Bell ringers, followed by an excellent tea before their AGM, in Pine Lodge. We are very thankful that the Christian Aid collections continue to be organised in all three villages, alongside the excellent Lent Lunches, which this year were very well attended. We also continue to have a very good relationship with the school with one of our Lay ministers, Toby Garfitt and me as Rector sharing school assemblies, and the school coming to use the Church for certain festival services.

This has not been an exhaustive report of course. We have many joys, alongside many challenges, as we look ahead. Nothing is guaranteed and all village churches like St James face an uncertain future, but faith was always meant to be about looking ahead in hope whatever the challenge.

11/05/23 Parish Forum

A parishioner asked if the parish council has considered the implementation of Speed Indicator Device signs (SIDs) to encourage vehicles to slow down. The Chairman replied the parish council was giving serious consideration to the possibility of purchasing and installing SID signs but they are expensive.

The meeting closed at 8.20 p.m.

Signed by:

Chairman.....Date.....