

West Ilsley News

JANUARY 2026

www.westilsley.org

Editors

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Deadline for the next publication is:

5 pm on Sunday 25th January

EDITORIAL POLICY

We are editors (though we don't edit unless we have to) – we are not reporters, so we only write something if we want to. We rely on villagers to contribute news and information and welcome updates from groups, committees and businesses to let the village know what is going on in their area of interest. We are always happy to receive feedback about WIN so please get in touch if you have anything to say.

DISTRIBUTION

If you have received a paper copy of this newsletter but have access to email, please join the email distribution list by contacting westilsleynews@westilsley.org – help to save paper and shoe leather!

What's on in West Ilsley

JANUARY

24th Village Hall Burns Night Supper

FUTURE PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS

Tuesday 10th February 2026 7:30 pm Full Council

Tuesday 19th May 2026 7:00 pm

Annual Meeting of the Parish Council

Tuesday 19th May 2026 8:15 pm

Annual Parish Meeting

JANUARY AT ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

Sunday 4th Family Service at 11.00am

Sunday 11th Communion at 8.30am

Sunday 18th Communion at 9.30am

Sunday 25th No service at All Saints'

Please look on the notice board in the lychgate or on the East Downland website:

<https://www.eastdownland.org.uk/news-and-notices/this-week> for other services in the benefice during January.

Café in All Saints' Church

Our next monthly cafe will be on Sunday 11th January at 10am when donations will go to the Children's Society towards buying warm winter coats. Our special

Christmas café in December saw donations go to the charity Bridge for Young People. This West Berkshire charity provides a home and support for young people aged between 16 and 25 who are leaving care or are homeless. Do join us for coffee, cake and a chat!

Christmas Services

It was good to see the church beautifully decorated and full at our Carol service in December, which was taken by our rector the Revd John Toogood, with readings by members of the community. We were fortunate to have Matt Foster to play the organ and his wife Emily who sang the traditional solo of Once in Royal David's City. The collection of £203.70 has been sent to the Newbury Soup Kitchen, so thank you for your generous donations.

Our usual Family Communion service on Christmas Day was taken by the Revd Canon Paul Cowan, the Associate Archdeacon of the Oxford Diocese. With nine churches in the benefice, it is impossible for our rector to be in more than one church at the same time during Christmas morning!

A Big Thank You

As always, we would like to thank all those who have contributed to All Saints' in any way this year, whether financially, in beautifully decorating or cleaning the church or keeping the churchyard tidy. Also, to our sidesmen, church wardens and organist who keep the services running smoothly and of course to our clergy who are happy to come in all weathers.

Private Prayer

All Saints' will continue to open on Saturdays and Sundays for private prayer between 9.30am and dusk.

Pastoral

If you would like prayer (or other support) for you or someone else, please get in touch. We are happy to be contacted by phone or email using the details of contacts shown below.

If anyone needs help, do contact the wardens or clergy who will do their best to help.

To subscribe to the weekly pew sheet, which contains readings, prayers and notices about church events in the benefice, please [go](#) to the East Downland website (see above).

Contacts:

Churchwardens: Ian – 01635 281625; Alexandra – 07769 645470

Rector: Revd John Toogood – 01635 247566 or 07748 822336 - edownlandrector@gmail.com

Associate Priest: Revd Douglas Dales – 01635 247404 – revdjdales@gmail.com

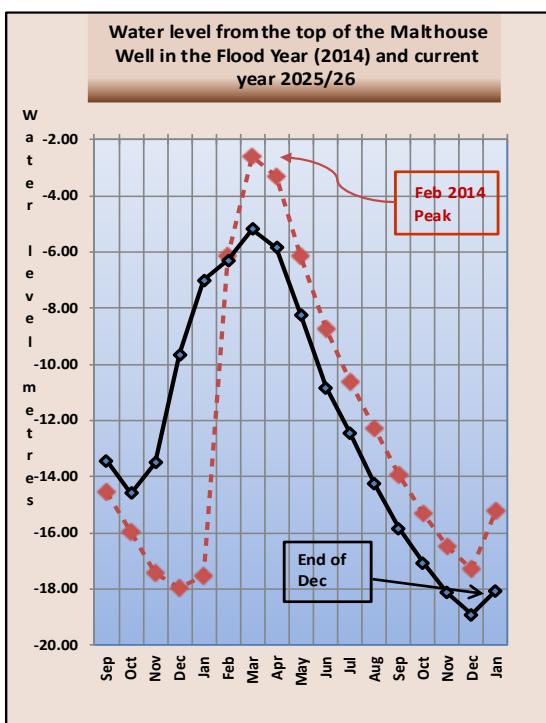
East Downland Benefice Office: 07957 458107 - edownland@btinternet.com – Usually manned on Thursday & Friday mornings between 9am and 1pm.

Kay and Ian Fewtrell-Smith

MALTHOUSE WELL – JANUARY 2026

The well water level, after reaching a high of 5.2 metres below ground level in March '25, fell steadily through the dry Spring, Summer and Autumn to bottom out at a level of just above 19 metres in December '25.

As the graph below shows the ground water level is at a comfortable low level at the beginning of the new year. Given that we had normal rainfall in the autumn, unless we have very heavy rainfall between now and the end of February, we should have enough headroom to prevent the ground water level hitting a critical level in the coming months.



THE ILSLEYS NEWSLETTER

On Thursday 27th November, Atlantic Class went to Hampstead Norreys to do a whole day about their topic, The Apprentice. At the start of their day, they did a workshop where they had to guess somebody's job. Only two groups managed to guess one of the volunteers' jobs! At the end of the workshop, they got to fill out a form about how much they enjoyed it. After that, they got to draw a picture of them doing their dream job. The next part of their day involved the groups designing their very own creation of a chocolate bar. They made their own pitch and proposed their ideas about the chocolate bars to Mrs Edwards and Miss Craik to try to convince them to buy them.

Recently, Arctic Class had their Curriculum Assembly about their two topics which were 'All About Me' and 'Celebrations'. They were very excited about sharing their learning with the rest of the school and their parents. They shared a cute Diwali dance that they did

for a workshop with West End. Pupils were very confident with speaking in front of the crowd!

On 3rd December, Atlantic Class also had their Curriculum Assembly and shared a lot of their work very happily. The students' topics were 'The Apprentice' and travelling back in time to 'Ancient Egypt'. The children have enjoyed learning about these two wonderful topics. They had so many pieces of work to present to the parents and wanted to share even more.

A few days ago, some Year 6s went to a French Challenge Day at Curridge. They learnt some French words such as Father Christmas and Merry Christmas. After that, they made some amazing Christmas cards with messages written inside of them that were in French. They had a lot of fun. They were all also very brave to go because the place was very unfamiliar.

Not long after that, Pacific Class performed their Curriculum Assembly. Their two topics were 'Hunter Gatherers' and 'London and New Delhi'. Because they were learning about London, they went on a trip to the London Eye and on a River Cruise!

Recently, the children had an assembly delivered by someone who works at The Bas to invite us to take part in a photography competition. The children got really excited about this and couldn't wait to tell their parents.

Also, the children had an assembly all about the birth of Jesus and what Christians believe happened. At the end, there was even a little quiz which they enjoyed very much. All of them were very interested what other people in the world (such as refugees) are facing in their life and how they feel about.

On Thursday 11th December, all of the students came to school in a Christmas jumper. They enjoyed coming to school wearing something that they don't usually wear every day. Some parents brought in their children's old Christmas jumpers to sell at a sale beforehand. All of the pupils were thrilled to go to school that day.

On Monday 15th December, the iRock members performed a concert to the rest of the school and some of their parents. Some of the songs included: Believer, Roar, Last Christmas, Counting Stars and Best Day of My Life. The audience enjoyed watching everything that the students have learnt. All of the members' hard work paid off for the concert.

The next day, Arctic Class pupils performed a nativity named 'Born in a Barn'. The whole school were involved in the production. We then had our Christmas Carousel Day on the Wednesday before we finished where we made some lovely wooden decorations and did some baking. Also, we had our Christmas lunch which we all enjoyed.

On the last day of term, we had our end of term Christmas Assembly at the start of the day. We sang

some Christmas songs from our Nativity production and each class made their own contribution too. We finished the day by watching Polar Express in the afternoon as this is what our Christmas Carousel Day was based on.

We hope you all had a lovely Christmas and send our best wishes for 2026 from everyone at The IIsleys.

Written by a Year 6 and a Year 5

DOWNLAND VOLUNTEER GROUP

40 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

The Downland Volunteer Group (DVG) is unique. It was founded by sixteen-year-olds. This statement was made by Mrs. Deb Jeffs, one of the founder members of the DVG. In 1984-85 pupils at The Downs School in Compton with their teacher, Steve Poole, conducted a social studies project on communities. They looked at the contribution of voluntary organisations. Many of The Downs School pupils came from the number of small villages situated just north of Newbury (the Downland area) and it was clear that each of these villages had groups and facilities that operated in isolation from other villages. The pupils decided to try and bring these various groups together, so a series of lunches were arranged. They invited parish councillors, scout and guide leaders, local clergy and social services to create a coordinating body to help link these various groups. So the Downland Volunteer Group was born, and the school catchment area became the area of operation.

In 1985 a management committee was appointed consisting of seven local volunteers, a teacher, two pupils from The Downs School along with representatives from Newbury Social Services and the Community Council of Berkshire. The chairman was a local councillor (Peter Robinson) which gave some authority to their efforts.

The DVG set up their office in a room in the Compton scout hut in which they managed to fit in a desk, a phone and later an answer phone machine.

Their phone number was Compton 394, which later became 578394 and is still the office phone number today. A Rota of office volunteers worked two hours every Monday, Wednesday and Friday morning. A prize from the Shell Village Venture competition and donations from Thames Valley Police and various parish councils helped get the Group started.

The Downland Volunteer Group officially started on the 9th January 1986. Initially it operated like a good neighbourhood scheme helping residents with gardening, DIY jobs and transport. Given the number of small villages spread across the area and the lack of regular public transport, helping residents attend their medical appointments became the main focus of their activities. Finding volunteers was a challenge. Alongside this service, with the help of The Downs

School, they also began creating a directory of services within the Downland area.

At the first AGM held in November 1986 Mrs Deb Jeffs became the Chairman supported by Sue Fletcher as Vice Chairman and Dave Morris, the local police officer, as the Treasurer. In the first year the DVG made 179 trips to surgeries, hospitals, dentists etc. At the time they were careful not to clash with the Hospital Car Service but to fill the gaps that service did not offer. They had 21 volunteers in this first year. Publicity was their big challenge, creating awareness of their service and recruiting volunteers to drive or manage the office. Their financial situation was good, any shortfall between what clients donated and what drivers claimed for their mileage was covered by donations from parish councils. Again, The Downs School continued to support the DVG efforts with students distributing leaflets in their villages and putting up posters promoting the service.

As the DVG grew it was decided to draw up a Constitution to enable the Group to achieve charitable status. It became a registered charity in 1989.

By 1990 the DVG car service was achieving over 500 trips a year. Also, in that year it became involved with the Handybus service. At that time the Handybus was owned by Newbury District Council and was used each morning to take patients to the Downland surgeries. In the afternoons the DVG could organise shopping trips for residents in various villages or allow other organisations to hire it.

The DVG has always worked closely with The Downland Practice and in 1995 one of their doctors was voted onto their committee. This close relationship still exists today.

After 11 years working out of the scout hut in Compton the DVG office moved into a room in the Compton surgery where it remains today.

In 1998 the DVG helped set up a monthly Lunch Club supported by a £100 donation from 'Help the Aged' for residents to attend on the last Friday of the month. Many of those involved in the organisation were also DVG volunteers, preparing a freshly cooked two course meal for mainly elderly residents, with DVG drivers offering transport for free. Twenty-seven years later it is still going strong and with two of the original volunteers still involved!

By the turn of the millennium, the DVG was exceeding 1,000 trips per annum. The office became computerised to cope with this growing demand for transport and the statistical data needed to support the grants they received.

By 2005 the DVG also became a limited company registered at Companies House.

In 2018 West Berkshire Council decided to 'gift' the Handybus to the DVG. Previously the DVG just

supplied the drivers and organised the trips. Now they had full responsibility for its upkeep.

The Covid crisis set back the DVG operation for over a year. With surgeries not seeing patients and hospitals tackling the covid pandemic their services were not required. When they restarted, some draconian measures were introduced. Clients had their temperature taken before starting their journey, masks were mandatory and they had to travel in the back seat with a window open. The car then had to be sanitised after each trip! Once the surgeries and hospitals returned to normal the DVG service began returning to pre-Covid levels.

It was decided to replace the ageing Handybus with an all-electric vehicle. The timing of this decision was important as West Berkshire Council and other organisations wanted to encourage environmentally friendly public transport. Thanks to many generous contributions, the new HandEbus, as it became known, was launched in February 2024. It was the first all-electric community transport vehicle in West Berkshire and one of only a handful in the country at that time. It has proved to be a great success both with residents and many environmentally conscious organisations in the area.

To help maximise the use of this new vehicle the DVG amended their Constitution. The focus is still on the 'elderly and those in need' for the car service, but they wanted the new HandEbus to benefit the whole Downland community, the young and the not so young.

In the last 40 years the Downland Volunteer Group has come a long way. So much has changed during that time, and yet certain things do not change. They are always looking for new volunteers; they still need to publicise the service to new residents in the area and there are still car parking issues at some hospitals. Nevertheless, the continued demand for this service, the gratitude shown by clients and the satisfaction the volunteers derive from knowing their efforts make such a positive contribution, proves that what began in January 1986 has been very beneficial to the Downland Community.



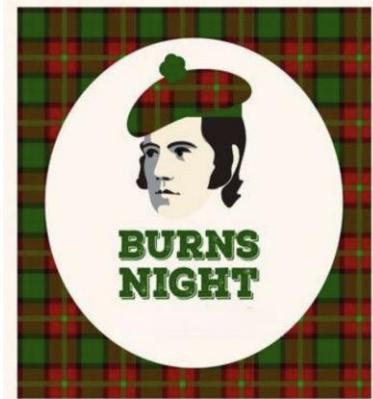
Mrs Deb Jeffs, co-founder and first Chairman of the DVG with the current chairman, alongside the all-electric HandEbus

Burns Night Reels Party

Saturday 24th January 2026

7-11pm

West Ilsley Village Hall



Licensed Bar

Tickets include supper and dancing

No prior reels experience necessary

£15 per person (£10 for Under 12s)

Please contact Juliet for tickets by 14th January

Email: juliet_lamb@hotmail.com

WHO TO CONTACT

DEFIBRILLATOR is outside the village hall - code: C159

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT Olivia Bailey MP

If you want to get in touch with me or book a surgery appointment you can email me at

olivia.bailey.mp@parliament.uk or write to me at the House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA. If you want to keep up to date with what I am doing in Parliament and in the

constituency, I send out a weekly email newsletter to constituents. If you would like to receive it, you can sign up at <https://shorturl.at/qgoHw>.

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR – Carolyne Culver 07976 374146
Carolyne.Culver1@westberks.gov.uk

PARISH COUNCIL

Council members are:

Alan Bloor alan.bloor@westilsley.org

Georgie Carlisle-Smith georgie.carlislesmith@westilsley.org

Katy Morris katy.morris@westilsley.org

Tim Pearey timothy.pearey@westilsley.org

Rachel Hudson rachel.hudson@westilsley.org

Johnny Rayfield jonny.rayfield@westilsley.org

Sarah Marshman – Clerk clerk@westilsley.org

PATIENT REPRESENTATION GROUP rep is Joe Clerkin
(01635) 281150 or joeclerkin@georgeweb.co.uk

PRESCRIPTIONS are delivered from Compton on Tuesday mornings at 8.30. Please collect yours from Ann Barnes, 3 Morland Close on **Tuesdays only between 2 pm and 4.30 pm**. Repeat forms can be posted through the letter box at any time before Monday evening for the following week's delivery.



TENNIS COURT "Pay & Play" is available to non-members for £10 per hour. Non-members can book up to 24 hours in advance. To book the court please use <https://westilsleytennis.jezzam.com> or scan the QR code!

For all enquiries, please contact the Tennis Committee via <https://westilsleytennis.jezzam.com/contact>

VILLAGE HALL

Bookings & enquiries:

Any new bookings should now be done via the village

Website: <https://www.westilsley.org/>

Any booking enquiries please contact Jo by email: village.hall@westilsley.org

Anyone without access to the internet can leave a message on: 07958 239891

Rates: £12/hour for villagers and £15/hour non villagers.

WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL – REPORT A PROBLEM:

<https://westberks.gov.uk/reportaproblem>

WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL – REPORT SPEEDING:

<https://www.westberks.gov.uk/speedingtraffic>

WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL – REPORT DOG FOULING:

<https://www.westberks.gov.uk/article/36781/Report-Dog-Fouling>

HOW TO CONTACT WEST BERKS COUNCIL REGARDING

EMERGENCIES 01635 551111

<https://westberks.gov.uk/emergency-contact#reporting%20outside%20office%20hours>