

## **Woodchester Annual Parish Meeting 2013**

**Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2013, 7pm  
The Village Hall, North Woodchester**

### **AGENDA**

- **Welcome.**
- **Receive apologies for absence.**
- **Approve the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012.**
- **To receive questions from the public and those attending in an official capacity.**
- **Presentation of the Village Annual Report.**
- **Village organisations asked to present any verbal reports.**
- **Thanks and close.**

*If you wish to address the meeting, please inform the clerk*

## Woodchester Village Report 2012/13

### Woodchester Parish Council – *Cllr. Dr. Gervase Hamilton, Chairman*

One of the great strengths of parish councils is that, of all the forms of local government, they are predominantly apolitical. While remaining one of the true exemplars of local democracy by local people for local people, they are however subject to ‘the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune’ in the way of central government legislation and financial control. Over the past year Woodchester Parish councillors and our clerk have had to deal with an exponential increase in the number of policies, strategies and proposals emanating from Whitehall. Reading through, analysing, discussing and responding to these documents, often given only short time scales for reply, takes up valuable time that could better be used dealing with long standing local issues. Things are made more difficult by a lack of consistency and changes of direction by government departments driven by central rather than local government imperatives. In so far as the coalition government is committed to devolving power down to local councils, ‘localism’ is seen as the way to go forward. However effective local planning is often inhibited by central government dictating over issues such as finance and the National Planning Framework. Much of the time of the Parish Council has been taken up over the past year with three areas of particular concern - council tax and the parish precept, neighbourhood planning and transport policy.

#### **1. The Parish precept.**

Our share of the council tax in the form of the parish precept has always been less than 2% of the total expenditure, coming to about £35 a household in Woodchester. Two thirds of our council tax goes to Gloucestershire County Council to fund social services, education and highways, with Stroud District Council taking about 15% for local services including housing and the police the remainder. Small though the burden of our share is, it is essential that the money spent reflects local needs.

Over the past twelve months the Department of Communities and Local Government has re-calculated the way in which council tax is raised and distributed. Woodchester, in common with most parish and town councils in the area, has always allocated our share of the resources in accordance with simple, well tried and traditional formula responsive to local needs. Under the provisions of the Parish and Town Councils Precept ( Referendums ) Bill 2012, the government proposed to change the rules by reducing the council tax base, creating a starting point for the calculation of the tax due (and hence the precept) whereby its overall cost is spread across fewer households. To compensate local councils for loss of central government top-up funding, a discretionary grant would be awarded for 2013/2014 though not in future years. At the same time it was proposed that if the council tax /precept increase exceeded 2% in any financial year, a local referendum on the increase would automatically be triggered.

Woodchester, in common with other smaller parish councils locally, opted to take the grant on offer this year and this resulted in our precept falling by £500. Good news for local residents, it might be thought! However if, as is currently proposed, the government does not pay the grant in future years the full burden of the increase of the precept will fall on our residents. If we keep our precept to the agreed level of £11,150 (the minimum we believe to be feasible for local needs) then this will constitute an increase of 6% of the precept level for the current financial year 2013/2014. Since this exceeds the 2% level for the increase set by the government this will result in an automatic referendum. Since we have relatively little in the way of reserves, this would result in the cost of the referendum falling on the Parish Council and ultimately on our local residents. The cost of the referendum might in fact exceed the sum that it was intended to raise in the precept in the first place - manifestly a complete nonsense! Alternatively we would have to make considerable cuts in our precept to the ultimate detriment of our local services. Earlier in the year, therefore, along with other Parish councils in Gloucestershire, we spelt out our concerns to The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles. Fortunately we have recently heard that the Bill failed to complete its progress through parliament by the end of the last session and has therefore been withdrawn. Thankfully we are spared the complexities of the new regime for now. However, watch this space - the Bill may be re-introduced in the current session. The issue hasn't gone away and may return to haunt us still...

## **2. The National Planning Policy Framework and Neighbourhood Planning.**

The government drew up a revised National Planning Policy Framework in 2011/2012 which came into force earlier this year. Under the NPPF there is to be a presumption in favour of planning applications as long as they are seen as 'sustainable' - that is in that they use local resources, look to the provision of local services such as education and training, minimise travel and unnecessary commuting, and provide local employment. However, we have previously expressed our concerns that too liberal an interpretation of 'sustainability' by developers in particular could result in Stroud District Council feeling obliged to approve housing schemes which conflict with the views of local residents. In this connection Woodchester residents had for some time been concerned over what appeared, at times, to be perverse and inconsistent planning decisions by Stroud District Council Planning Department. In March, Woodchester Parish Council invited the head of planning at SDC Philip Skill and his deputy John Longmuir to address our local concerns. In spelling out how SDC made its planning decisions, Mr Skill referred to the planning process often being seen as 'a game' played by architects, surveyors and developers against the planners by trying to push the boundaries of their applications. It was often a case of: 'the more you know, the more you gain' with some District Councillors being lobbied by developers to have schemes approved. Planners whose hands are tied by current legislation often find themselves having to make compromises over planning decisions to reduce the number of appeals. The latter can be costly and cause unacceptable planning delays, particularly if they require the opinion of a government inspector or, even more so, if they end up in a public enquiry. The pressure is therefore on district councils like Stroud to speed up planning applications in the name of sustainable development and avoid appeals. If more than 20% of cases locally end up by going to appeal then, in theory, the Secretary of State can step in and restrict the powers of local government.

As a result of the meeting it was agreed that revised guidelines should be drawn up to improve communications between Woodchester Parish Council and SDC planners with a greater effort being made to explain to local residents the rationale behind planning approvals particularly for larger and more potentially contentious schemes.

At this stage we are in early discussions with fellow parish and town councils about 'Neighbourhood Planning' covering an area greater than a single parish or town council and requiring a degree of involvement and consultation greater than we in Woodchester or, for that matter, the other parishes have either the time or the resources for. Adjacent parishes are still developing their own local plans and in view of the uncertainties surrounding neighbourhood plans, we have agreed to put their further development on hold till we get a clearer steer from government. In the meantime we will endeavour to ensure that SDC planners take on board in their decisions the provisions of Woodchester's Revised Parish Plan and Village Design Statement which has involved much work and effort on our part over the previous years.

### **New planning developments.**

Two new (and potentially exciting) developments are planned for Woodchester which could have a considerable impact on the life of the village and on improving employment prospects locally.

#### **(a) Rooksmoor Mills.**

Following the earlier failure, due to the recession, of a proposal drawn up in 2006/7 to redevelop the site at Rooksmoor Mills for housing and retail/workshop units, developers have now put forward new proposals to build sustainable housing on the site. It is proposed to erect, in stages over the next two to three years, 65 new residential units from one bedroom apartments to four bedroom houses plus a total of 1,300 square metres of floor space for new or established businesses. This would be combined with re-instating the existing Mill Pond and re-landscaping the banks of the Nailsworth Stream to improve the habitat for local wildlife. The proposed buildings are mainly of contemporary modern design.

The response from local people at a public exhibition held in the Village Hall in February was generally favourable but with some concerns expressed about the detailed designs. Further to feedback received at the exhibition, revised planning proposals are to be put to Stroud District Council. Woodchester Parish council will, of course, be involved in commenting on the plans. If the revised proposals are accepted by SDC then it is hoped that work on the site could start in the autumn of 2013.

#### **(b) The Old Convent.**

Residents have continued to be concerned about the continuing deterioration in the state of the (listed) buildings and chapel of the Convent of the Poor Clares in South Woodchester since the departure of the last of the nuns from the order

in 2011. The buildings have recently been purchased from Clifton RC Diocese. We understand that the purchaser and his family are living on site and are reviewing a number of options for future use of the chapel and convent buildings. This is good news and we await further developments with interest.

### **3. Roads and Transport Issues.**

#### **Road Repairs**

Last winter did a great deal of damage in the way of cracks, subsidence and pot holes to the surfaces of our local roads which had barely recovered from the damage they received in the winter of 2009/10. The poor state of repair of the village roads, in particular Cow Lane and Convent Lane remains of concern to both motorists and pedestrians. We continue to press Gloucestershire County Council Highways Department not just to repair existing damage but to prioritise, using government funds set aside for the purpose, the long overdue resurfacing of our village roads as well as those parts of the A46 through Woodchester which were only partly resurfaced a couple of years ago and have sustained fresh damage as a result of the winter frosts.

#### **Speeding on the A46**

The speed limit of 40mph on the A46 is often honoured more in the breach than in the observance. A survey undertaken last year by the Parish Council revealed that while the majority of users kept within 3 or 4mph of the legal limit, there was a significant minority of users who drove at 50mph or over. Besides being hazardous for other drivers on such a winding road, such speeding constitutes a real danger to pedestrians. There have been continuing concerns expressed to the Parish Council that school children and youngsters are exposed to particular risk crossing the road near bus stops and residential areas like Manor Gardens. Light controlled crossings like Scott's crossing at Rooksmoor are expensive and the council has been looking at alternative methods of speed control on the A46. Although some funds are available for increased signposting and hazard marking, it is felt that many drivers become habituated to these and ignore the messages they contain. Some alternative form of action is required to deter the minority of irresponsible drivers who persist in speeding.

At the end of April the clerk met with councillors from Rodborough and Nailsworth to consider the adoption of a proposal to implement a 'SafeZone' in four locations locally, one being along the A46 through Woodchester. Basically this is an average speed camera enforcement scheme which enable shoe box sized cameras to be fitted to existing lamp-posts. Funding for the scheme would come mainly from Parish Councils recouping some of the money from Speed Awareness Courses paid by drivers caught speeding by the scheme, as well as from grants. There are problems in so far as the stretch of road under surveillance (night as well as day) can only be short as cars must not be able to turn off the road between cameras. Speeding drivers number plates are regularly downloaded on a 24 hour basis back to a police computer. Account has to be taken of the police finding the staff and time to analyse the data and to issue issuing the necessary penalty notices to those caught speeding-which becomes even more costly and difficult if the driver decides to pursue the matter through the courts. The scheme could end up with Woodchester (and the other parishes) having to pay several thousand pounds per year to run the scheme even if a

substantial sum was reimbursed by offending drivers. Nevertheless this scheme and others like it have the support of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gloucestershire, the Road Partnership Scheme and Community Safety Department at SDC as well as the local police. While Woodchester PC supports the scheme in principle, we do have reservations about the cost. We need to review how well these schemes are working in practice in other areas like Poole in Dorset and Milton Ernest in Bedfordshire before we finally commit ourselves.

### **Planning** – *Cllr. Peter Lead, Vice Chairman*

It has been a relatively quiet year with fewer than usual applications. With our Village Design Statement adopted by Stroud District Council we were optimistic that localism would play a larger part in decision making. This did not seem always to be the case and so we asked to meet with Philip Skill the head of SDC Planning.

He attended one of our Parish meetings and offered his explanation as to how SDC arrive at their decisions. He described planning as a “game” where applicants play against the council.

We are now being asked to produce a Neighbourhood Plan indicating where future housing may be built. This is provoking discussion as it will entail yet further unpaid volunteer time to produce such a plan that will be yet another piece in the ‘game’ of planning.

It is important to be a player but as we are such a small parish maybe we should join forces with our neighbours, Nailsworth and Rodborough, to become a larger player?

Looking ahead we have some interesting projects that will be on the table for discussion, Rooksmoor Mill and the Convent as well as the usual smaller household applications.

I would remind you all to keep an eye out for notices of planning applications or register with SDC for electronic notification, as you may not always be made aware of proposed development that may affect you. You do have a voice, we do have a say, and sometimes we can play the game and win, but of course sometimes we lose. That is life!!

### **Footpaths** – *Cllr. Barbara Warnes*

It has been a difficult year for our footpaths. The excessive amounts of rain caused many of them to become difficult if not impassable with very few options other than just staying off them. The cycle track became an almost constant focus of attention as so many branches and trees were being brought down. Gloucestershire Highways do an excellent job of clearing them but it is important to remember that they will not deal with something they do not know about. Blockages should be reported to the parish clerk who will pass them on.

I should like to draw dog owners/walkers attention to Stroud District Council's Dog Control Order which came into effect on 1 December 2012. I do not intend to give full details here as it is available on their website. As far as we are concerned it requires clearing up after

your dog, keeping it on a lead on paths used to access the Primary Schools, which should be clearly marked, and also that 'Dogs shall be kept on leads on all allotments, cemeteries, car parks, canal towpaths and designated cycle paths'.

We are currently looking at siting a new 'dog bin' on Church Lane which will be of benefit to dog walkers on several footpaths.

On a positive note, following the recent dry weather, the footpaths have improved and are now in good condition. We are always grateful to the landowners for cutting back vegetation, especially nettles, to allow us to walk through.

Particular mention must be given to two footpaths which have had recent improvements. The path behind Little Britain leading up the hillside has been very difficult for many years where it crossed the stream at the parish boundary. In April, a Cotswold Voluntary Wardens working party, with support from Gloucestershire County Council, restored the stream to its correct route and provided a 'bridge' across the waterlogged ground. This is now a pleasure to walk and we are very appreciative.

The path from Park Lane, near the entrance to Woodchester Park, going down towards Crystal Fountain, was very slippery over the winter. The steps have now been replaced and some hardcore put down. I suspect this may also be the work of the Cotswold Wardens.

We have been adding some walks from Woodchester to the website, so please take a look and walk our footpaths.

### **Woodchester Endowed School** - *Mr. Gordon Soutar, Headteacher*

Woodchester Endowed School has continued to thrive during the past year. Most of our year groups are at full capacity with our number on roll currently at 134 children. We have been blessed with a long serving staff team with very little movement - we take this as a good example of what a happy place the school is to work and learn.

As ever, we have embraced a vast range of learning opportunities for the children throughout the year. Themes have included 'festivals from around the world', 'inventions and discoveries' and 'castles' to name just a few. Our pupils are hardworking and enjoy their learning which matches our vision statement of 'Learning for success; enjoying every day'.

As well as learning within school we try to find further opportunities to enhance it further out and about. This year we have taken part in the Gloucestershire Young Photographer of the year competition (achieving a 3<sup>rd</sup> placed entry), the Rotary Club writing competition (with winners from our school receiving prizes from Nailsworth Rotary Club) and the Gloucestershire wildlife quiz (where we are currently through to the next round and have been drawn against St. Dominic's!). We work very closely with our neighbouring schools in the area and often arrange activities where our pupils can work alongside others in a range of different curriculum areas.

Sport continues to focus heavily on our agenda and our pupils have performed exceptionally well in football leagues, rugby leagues, netball and indoor athletics during the winter season. As we head into summer, we will be playing cricket, rounders and athletics in a host of venues throughout the district and county. (We are just hoping for a little fine weather!)

As term moves rapidly on, we are getting ready to embark on another Shakespeare production. This year, the children will perform Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night' in front of parents and friends in early July. I have no doubt that the children will, once again, rise to the challenge and provide us with a performance to remember for many years to come. This certainly fits our theory that if you have high expectations of children, they rarely let you down.

As ever, we are keen to be involved with our local community in any way that we can. If anyone has an interesting story to tell or a skill that can be shared with the children please do let us know.

### **St. Dominic's School** – *Margaret Smith, Headteacher*

The last few months at St Dominic's School seem to have been dominated by OFSTED. In March we had the main OFSTED Inspection and at the end of April we had a two day RE inspection. I am pleased to report that both inspections went very well and we were delighted to be found 'good' with some 'outstanding' features. The full report can be found on our website at [www.st-dominics.gloucs.sch.uk](http://www.st-dominics.gloucs.sch.uk). The RE report is not yet published but will be available on the website in due course.

Our new extension has proved to be very successful, providing more space for teaching but also providing a meeting room. During this summer we will be reorganising the front of the school including the offices. This will improve security as well as providing more space. As always I am very grateful to the governing body that work tirelessly for the school and promote a strategic view.

We continue to have a healthy number of children in the school and we work very closely with the other small schools in our cluster as well as St Peter's High School in Gloucester. During the summer terms we are teaching a whole school topic on our immediate locality especially the Church. If anyone has any stories to share with us please do get in touch.

### **Woodchester Playgroup** – *Meryl Smith, Play Leader*

It has been a fantastic year for us from September 2012 when our building was cedar clad and took on a fantastic new look. It was hard to believe that we were not in Centre Parcs!! Our numbers are full to capacity and this seems to be the trend right up to September 2015!!!

Our new opening times of Monday to Thursday 9am till 3pm appear to have been a popular move with all our parents, and we have a very healthy waiting list.



We continue to pride ourselves on being a popular, friendly and safe setting. Long may this continue.

### **The Parish Church of St Mary** – *Andrew Pemberton*

Although the post of Rector of Woodchester has been vacant through the last year until Rev Peter Francis was licensed as our new priest-in-charge on April 8th, the parish church has had a busy year. We have been fortunate to have a team of ministers to take our services, led by Rev Mick Wright and Rev Josh Maynard, and supported by local retired clergy Rev John Cull and Rev Dr David Stoddart (and others).

The church continues to publicize its activities though the leaflets and cards at Christmas and Easter, in the monthly Apex newsletter and on its website:  
[www.stmaryswoodchester.org.uk](http://www.stmaryswoodchester.org.uk).

In addition to its regular services the Church has held a number of community and social events. We organised a day trip last summer to the Wintershall Passion Play in Surrey, and we held a harvest supper in the school hall and a New Year's Eve party in church. There have been concerts given by The Stuart Singers, The Capriol Chamber Orchestra and The Beacon Gospel Choir. The village carol singing organized by the Parish Council finished in church with mulled wine and mince pies.

The church building has been open every day of the year, for anyone wishing to look around, or use it for prayer or contemplation. The church's work with young people has continued to thrive. Messy Church, which is held monthly after school for children up to year 6, accompanied by a carer or parent, continues to attract many children and its team of helpers has expanded. The older children have especially enjoyed visits from Steve Hutchinson of Scripture Union who has taught them wood turning. Junior Church and crèche has taken place on Sunday mornings throughout the year. Youngsters have attended and served as leaders at x:site Glos, a children's event run by local churches in partnership with Scripture Union. Many have also attended Scripture Union Summer Camps. An Easter

Craft Workshop held in church was open to all. There has been provision for teenagers in the form of a Youth Group called "Reality".

In the last year a monthly Saturday coffee morning has been started as a social occasion, not only for the older church-goers but for anyone to enjoy some company.

St Mary's Church values its links with Christians in other countries. In October a group of church members visited our link parish of Näsby in Sweden, to join their celebration of harvest and their choir's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Plans are in place for a visit by the Ostrava TenSing choir, from the Czech Republic in July 2013.

The Woodchester Bell-ringing Team has been especially successful this year. It has been won the nomination as Stroud Branch "Tower of the Year". The team was nominated because of the way that ringing at Woodchester has been re-invigorated in the past couple of years.

A new and enthusiastic choir convened for the carol service and continues to meet, coached by our new organist Fiona Sampson.

We look forward to the coming months as Peter, our new parish priest, settles into the job.

### **The Priory Church of the Annunciation** – *Jenny Bailey*

A fund-raising weekend will take place between Friday 28th June and Sunday 30th June at the Priory Church and St. Dominic's School to raise match funding for repairs to the Wayside Cross on the A46. This is the earliest war memorial in the country, dedicated on 7th June 1917 and erected on land donated by the Dominicans, paid for by public subscription and containing 144 names of local men from all denominations. We are looking at a total cost of up to £6000 to re-cut names, repairs to the Cross and reinstatement of the original boundary with fencing of the same pattern and the lost steps up from the road. There will be an interpreted flower festival, exhibition, film, talk on the history of the Cross and tours of the church, with a concert, and refreshments throughout the weekend. Details of events, programme and tickets will follow. Stewards will also be needed for the weekend.

A plea to users of the Church compost bins - oasis, rubber bands and wrapping paper do not rot down, nor do woody tree and shrub clippings unless cut up into small pieces first. Thank you for your co-operation.

### **Woodchester W.I.** – *Gail Birch*

Looking back through the record and minute books shows how busy we have been in the WI. The year began with our Christmas celebratory meal at the Royal Oak and the hot topic of discussion was "is there or isn't there a Big Black cat living in the locality?" February's speaker brought some colour to the evening with a display of her machine knitted clothes and crafts which was in complete contrast to our talk in March on the work of Innishfree a local centre supporting people post addiction. Our speaker in April brought a touch of spring to the hall with his show of bonsai trees. At the May meeting Muriel presented the resolution "urging the government to train more midwives" and then members talked about their jubilee memorabilia and any items of clothing that they still wore and were many years old. In June our garden party was a repeat of the previous year and held indoors due to the unseasonable weather. July saw us trying our hand at origami with help from our speakers which was so much fun that members requested that we do it again. We enjoyed a fish and chip supper in August followed by our scaled down "Indoor Olympics" which provided much hilarity and showed a very competitive streak amongst members.

In September we had an interesting talk about a charity supporting schools in a very isolated region of Nepal with slides demonstrating the contrast between our school facilities and theirs. The dabble evening in October was enjoyed by all and we were joined by a trainee WI advisor who was keen to persuade her group to hold a similar event. Our AGM held in November was followed by a cookery quiz, and more importantly our thanks go to Muriel

for offering to be the president again thus allowing the WI to continue in Woodchester. The year ended with a party with hot food provided by the committee.

During the year members have attended various Federation activities such as New Speakers, walks around the county, the Annual Council Meeting and the Christmas concert in Cheltenham. Locally we had a stall at the village fete and provided refreshments at the local open garden with some members also providing cakes for the Village Jubilee Picnic. We also hosted the annual Christmas Concert with the retiring collection going to the Village playgroup. Our membership continues to grow and new people are always welcome so do not hesitate to come along if the talk/activity appeals when you read the notices posted around the village. Meetings are held on the third Thursday of the month at 7.30pm in the Village Hall.

### **Historical Society** - *Nigel Brooke-Smith*

Woodchester Historical Society meets approximately 4 times a year, mainly in the Undercroft of St Mary's Church.

We are a small group of people and would be happy to welcome new members. It is not necessary to know anything about the history of Woodchester to join us.

Our programme for the rest of this year consists of a walk around Stonehouse, a talk by Sarah Parker on Edward Jenner and the AGM with a talk by John Cull on '1973 and all that'.

We continue to work towards computerising village records, censuses, baptisms, marriages, burials etc., building up a database of village residents mainly in the nineteenth century and supporting the Village Archive.

We have prepared leaflets of self guided walks around both North and South Woodchester with an historical theme which can be purchased for a nominal sum.

For further information contact:- Jill Merriott-White 01453 872999 or Nigel Brooke-Smith 01453 872586 (or [nigelbs@mac.com](mailto:nigelbs@mac.com))

### **Girlguiding** – *Jackie Hayes*

Brownies and Guides in Woodchester have had a very busy fun-filled year.

Community events attended by Woodchester Brownies and Guides include the Remembrance Day parade and Church service in Nailsworth and the Woodchester WI Christmas concert. Girls also arranged flowers in Christ Church in Nailsworth.

Throughout our weekly meetings girls have achieved badges, worked on various crafts, learnt new songs, taken part in active games, done some cooking and various other activities and have fully participated in the Girlguiding programme. The last meeting of the

summer term was spent on Selsley common taking part in a variety of sports based on the Olympic Games and setting and following a trail through the woods.

The Brownies enjoyed a trip to the swimming pool where one girl made her Brownie Promise and the Guides went 10 pin bowling. Woodchester Brownies also joined Nailsworth Brownies for Pack Holiday.

District events Brownies and Guides from Woodchester have taken part in include the craft badge day, a fund-raising day in Nailsworth and most recently an amazing sleepover where a huge variety of outdoor activities were offered.

If you'd like to know more about Girlguiding in Woodchester please contact Jackie on 01453 821258 or look us up on our website, [www.ggwoodchester.wordpress.com](http://www.ggwoodchester.wordpress.com) or the District website, [www.girlguidingnailsworth.wordpress.com](http://www.girlguidingnailsworth.wordpress.com).

Woodchester Guides would like to thank St Mary's Church, North Woodchester for their support at the end of 2012.

### **Football Club** – *Stuart Harrison, Chairman*

At the end of last season we lost about 9 players who went to play in the higher divisions so this season was one of rebuilding and consolidation, with an eye for next season when we have a few senior players joining us again. The results were mixed but with a run of several wins at the end of the season our spirits are high.

We are also pleased to announce that our new away strip has been sponsored by The Ram Inn and Wickwar Brewery and the landlord Phil has been very supportive supplying food after each home game.

We are in the early stages of planning a summer football camp for the children of the village It will probably run for 3 days in July at the Woodchester pitch with a professional coach and we are asking for any Mums and Dads to volunteer to help out... WATCH THIS SPACE.

Please contact Stuart on 07977 455350.

Finally, Tom Bull our club secretary is stepping down at the end of this season and we would like to thank him very much for all his efforts over the last few years.

### **Stroud Beekeepers** – *Peter Lead*

Another year has begun and the bees are starting to buzz again. Sadly with last year being such poor weather the queens often were not mated properly, resulting in many colonies entering the winter with smaller than usual numbers. As the winter was so long many colonies have struggled to survive, add to this the extreme weather in the north, and the result is that many colonies have died.

Here at our apiary we did lose some colonies but we do have enough for our very active training programme and Junior Buzzclub. We have 21 trainees and an adult membership of some 70 people. Our Juniors who range from 5 to 12 year olds are 23 in number.

This year we have a portable observation hive and will be making several presentations to both young and old. *If anyone would like this at their school or club please contact me.*

### **Village Hall** – *Kath Gay*

The village hall continues to be popular for hire from within the village, surrounding areas and further afield. The private hall car park remains popular with non hall users which greatly inconvenience those who are paying rent and expect to be able to access all hall facilities.

Rent, our main source of income has fallen this year, due to a change of various hirers' requirements, but, it remains difficult to try and allocate regular daytime bookings. The hall averaged 20 hours per week of usage over the last financial year.

The past year saw expenses including the resurfacing of the car park, the purchase of new cups and saucers and cutlery, a replacement vacuum cleaner and a step ladder!

Rents have remained static since September 2007 for casual bookings, and September 2008 for regular users; with the increase of gas and electric bills especially rent increases are scheduled to be reviewed at the AGM in May.

The position of a new volunteer chairperson remains open, for more information please contact Bob Ludlow on 872340.

A guideline of weekly/monthly hall bookings can be found on village notice boards and the village website, it is impossible to keep these completely up-to-date, sorry! For accurate information on hall availability contact Kath Gay on 873348 or email [wvh888@btinternet.com](mailto:wvh888@btinternet.com).

### **South Woodchester Amenity Trust (SWALT)** – *Bert Cossins*

It is pleasing to report another busy twelve months on SWALT's Orchard Pastures; like many ground based projects. It was less productive than hoped due to the atrocious weather. Clearly our January '12 wassail was unsuccessful – too quiet our singing, too mean our toasting, too quiet our gun shoot and too meagre our offerings to the birds – in short our apples, mirabelles, blackberries and soft fruit were scarce. Regrettably the summer was too cold for the bees to lay in their winter-stocks and blight on both tomatoes and potatoes was endemic.

We started 2013 with a hearty wassail in the snow and we are now optimistic that our young trees, soft fruits and allotments are guaranteed a bumper harvest. This will be evident at the Village Produce Show in September when we hope to repeat our success in raising funds for local charities; September '12 was another undoubted success with our takings on the day going again to Inishfree.

Activities for this year include participating in Edible Open Gardens and apple pressing to acknowledge Apple Day in October. Please watch for notice of these events in the Woodchester Word, on the parish website and on the village notice boards.

Our access work is progressing; it is currently on hold to allow for consolidation. The final phase involving landscaping and completion of work off Station Road, will, it is anticipated, be completed shortly. Once achieved, proposals for the use of the final south facing bramble bank can be considered.

For further information about any of these matters contact by email: [swalt.org@gmail.com](mailto:swalt.org@gmail.com).

### **Seys & Bridges Educational Foundation** – *Diana Fowler, Trustee and Clerk*

#### **Meetings**

The trustees met twice last year. As is usual following the end of the financial year, the annual accounts were presented to the May meeting and subsequently reviewed by an outside examiner.

#### **Grants awarded**

The annual grant of £100 was made to the Governors of Woodchester Endowed School. A further sum was allocated to the Governors to help fund the cost of a new flat roof.

St Dominic's School were given £1,000 for the purpose of supporting curriculum-related activities, e.g. educational visits.

Fourteen grants were awarded to individuals for such items as PGL visits, music/drama lessons, school uniform and extra tutoring.

Applications from eligible individuals are welcomed at any time and should be sent to the Clerk.

I submit this report on behalf of Mrs Liz Ewart-James and myself, the two trustees appointed by the Parish Council.

### **St. Loe's Trust** - *George Bastin*

St Loe's School Exhibition Fund or St Loe's Trust, as it now known, was founded by Nathaniel Cambridge in 1697 to provide financial assistance to pupils attending the maintained primary schools in Woodchester and Amberley who seek further education. The trust now provides beneficiaries grants to assist funding students at universities, training colleges and those entering a trade or profession.

2012/2013 saw an encouraging increase in applications for funding at a time when our investment income has fallen slightly. Applicants have to demonstrate a financial need and this sometimes discourages some applicants. However the Trust awarded grants to 10 students. They also provided £300 each to the Woodchester and Amberley schools for books for their library and a book to each school leaver in both schools.

During the course of the year Mr Gordon Souter, Head of Woodchester Endowed was appointed a Trustee. He will bring to the position a great deal of knowledge of his pupils which will be invaluable in the decision making of the Trust.

If there any parishioners who wish to apply for grants they are urged to apply as early as possible after the award of a place at university and by 1<sup>st</sup> September at the latest to the Chairman or Secretary c/o. Goring House, North Woodchester, Stroud, Gloucestershire, GL5 5NG.

### **Woodchester Mansion Trust** – *Hannah MacCanlis*

Our visitor numbers increased in 2012 over previous years. Albeit, we are not yet a location that attracts large numbers but it was good to buck the trend: most attractions similar to ours suffered a reversal in visitor numbers. The Mansion received about 6,000 visitors over the year.

Roger Ransome sponsored a new Batcam camera in January, the old one having ceased to work. We use this on open days in The Bat Observatory and it is, in addition in constant use for monitoring the bats.

We have also embarked on more work to improve the comfort and safety of visitors by installing decking on the ground floor in the South Corridor, the Drawing Room and the Library. We financed this from cash reserves. We also improved the quality of the floor in the Drawing Room, through the good offices of a family holding a wedding in the Mansion. We renewed the floor in the kitchen to include new non-slip flooring here and in the tearoom.

In the Winter closed season we have advanced this work by installing similar floors in the Silver Safe (Butler's Pantry) and in the Dining Room. This work exposed the vaulting over the main cellars and was available to be seen by visitors over the Christmas and New Year open days.

In a precious historic building, such works have to be performed without injuring or altering the historic fabric building and the techniques we have used have achieved this. The safety and comfort of those treading the floors that were hitherto the rough earthen and rubble-rich ground floor have been much enhanced.

### **Special Events**

Special events for visitors have included a Hallowe'en Children's Activity Day and "Hallowe'en at the Mansion" and a three-day "Easter at the Mansion" event to open the season. A Birmingham Youth Group held a sponsored sleepover in the Mansion in February, there was a visit from The Morgan Motor Club and we held a private screening of "The Magic Mansion" by David Warwick.

An operatic showcase by Opera Sulis and the annual visit of the Festival Players playing Shakespeare in their lively style, this year in "Richard III" enlivened and decorated our season. We hosted a Hawk Walk at the end of the year and, earlier two Bat Walks for Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust: the bat colonies have continued to thrive.

The annual brewery weekend had a little extra this year with the opening to the public for the first time of the servants' quarters in the North Range. It happened at one of the seemingly scarce weekends of decent weather for the year, a golden early autumn glow that enhanced the atmosphere of the building and added to people's enjoyment. Fentimans, who have supplied soft drinks for sale in the Mansion throughout the season also supplied alcoholic ginger beer for this weekend, and Nigel Evans arranged a supply of local beers which were available in the North Range.

There were forty-five paranormal events, a slight increase on 2011 and bookings continue to show plenty of activity.

### **Income generation**

Our business of hosting weddings at Woodchester continues to grow. We hosted five in 2012 and took bookings for more in 2013 and viewings for 2014 and 2015. This is now a substantial constituent of our business and we have examined the prospect of taking on a wedding organiser so that the business of running the Mansion can receive the full attention of our site manager. We will need to renew the wedding licence in May 2013, at a cost of £2500.

We paid special attention to expanding and enriching the range of goods for sale in the shop and introduced new branded items created by local craftspeople. This has proved a successful initiative and we plan to build on it.

We appointed one of our Trustees to act as Licensee for the Mansion and now hold a licence to sell alcohol.

We inaugurated the sale of donated second-hand books, which has started well.



## **Conserving the Mansion**

With the very welcome and valuable financial help of the Country Houses Foundation and the Summerfield Trust we completed repairs to roof and chimney stacks of the South Range. We carried out work on the East and West ends of the North Range and through deploying masonry craft trainees we repaired some of the buttresses in the courtyard.

Our zeal was tested later in the year, when leaks opened up in the roof over the South Corridor and, for a few days we considered anxiously whether we could continue to plan for corporate and other events, given the risk of dampening the spirit of our guests on rainy days. Prompt and assured attention, funded from our reserves solved the problem. We also funded and proceeded with work to install more Perspex-type glazing to the void windows of the Mansion. We did so after much consideration and without compromising the historic structure and integrity. The result has met with acclaim from all who have commented: it both safeguards the building, adds slightly to the comfort of people inside and makes possible the holding of events that need protection from the weather.

We received funds from Natural England through its Conservation Enhancement Scheme and spent it on masonry repairs on the West gable end of the North range.

We have tried to continue discussions with English Heritage to advance the work that must be done on the Chapel, the piece de resistance of this magnificent building. The competing and pressing priorities bearing on English Heritage's hard-pressed budgets have meant progress has been negligible. We now believe we have to press for action if a much more costly solution in the Chapel than the one we are currently contemplating is to be avoided.

## **Volunteers**

Our enterprise at Woodchester started with volunteers offering their services to safeguard the building, prepare it for visitors and lead guided parties through its dark corners and stairways. Our reliance on the skill, enthusiasm and generosity of the large band of volunteers continues to form a real and substantial part of the success of managing Woodchester Mansion and keeping it in good heart. The thanks of the Trustees and all who care for Woodchester are due to the volunteers and are recorded here.

We held a volunteer recruitment drive in February with events in Stroud, Dursley and Nailsworth. That led to some 30 new signed-up volunteers, many of whom quickly went through training and joined the rota. We also have a workforce of 5-6 volunteers who work during the week with our full-time caretaker maintaining the Mansion and the grounds. We started to formulate a programme of training and other activity to build quality into everything we do at Woodchester including the services provided by the volunteers.

Volunteer highlights of the year included a Volunteer Recruitment Day, a Try Stone Carving event, four Children's Activity Days.

The Cotswold Voluntary Wardens assisted us by planting a number of trees, completing a hedge-laying task to front of the Mansion, rebuilding part of a Cotswold stone wall in the top field and installing a kissing gate.

The Council of Management elected Robert Evans and Doug Hulyer to its membership during the year.

In October, a move from Gloucestershire to the East of England meant that our long-serving Chairman, Stephen Davis had to bring to a close his distinguished service in leading the Woodchester Mansion Trust. Stephen continues as a Trustee and in October 2013 will have completed twenty years on the Council. He served as Chairman for well over a decade from September 1999, a period that saw a marked and significant improvement in the Trust's fortunes wholesale improvements in the quality of experience for visitors, including much improved measures to explain and celebrate the significance and historical place of the Mansion in the local context and in national history. Stephen also worked hard with his wife, Jane to make Woodchester a centre of excellence in the training of skilled craftsmen learning trades of value to the heritage sector and his achievements in this attained widespread and deserved renown and recognition. The Trust owes Stephen an enormous debt of gratitude.