

Woodchester Village Report
2019

The Parish Council - *Cllr. Dr. Gervase Hamilton, Chair*

1. INTRODUCTION.

In last year's report I noted that the Parish Council were half way towards bringing long standing planning, traffic and road safety and environmental issues to fruition. The winning post is at last in sight with much progress made in the past twelve months but such is the unpredictable nature of so much Parish Council work that we have been faced with a number of new and challenging problems requiring our attention.

I must once again pay tribute to the invaluable work carried out by our Clerk, Ann Bijkerk and my fellow Parish Councillors without whom it would not be possible to maintain the high standards which the Parish Council sets itself and frequently attains.

2. FINANCE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT ISSUES.

2.1 Finances - The Precept.

Our financial position remains sound, and during the past financial year, by carefully balancing costs against expenditure we have managed to maintain a healthy level of reserves as well as fund some essential projects within the Parish. Some of the reserves are necessary, being earmarked for our share of holding local government elections and for any unforeseen or necessary expenditure arising from developments within the Parish that fall to our specific remit.

The precept (that is our share of the District and County Council Tax) specifically allocated to Woodchester Parish during the past financial year was £11,500 (i.e. £21.31 for a Band D property). The shortfall between our total budget for 2019/20 of £13,360 and the predicted income from interest and VAT etc is £13,100. Parish Councillors therefore agreed a precept requirement of £12,000 for the next financial year to meet increased expenditure and inflation - an increase of 4.3% from 2018/19 with the shortfall to be drawn from reserves.

For the first time, in April of this year the Parish Council received funding through the Community Infrastructure Levy (the sum due to the Council from developers for specific local community needs), a sum of £732. This must be spent within five years and must fit within the usual Parish Council powers of competence, but it could be used to fund a variety of project works the Parish Council feels best addresses priorities expressed by local residents.

We have also held our grant for this year available for local residents and charities to apply for funding of community-based schemes in Woodchester at £500. The closing date for applications is 31st May.

2.2 Maintenance Costs.

The village is responsible for expenditure on bus shelters, a contribution towards the purchase of roadside waste disposal bins, clearance of roadside verges and hedges plus the provision and topping up of grit bins. Though much of the expenditure on highways comes from Gloucestershire County Council's Highways budget, GCC have found it increasingly difficult to carry out non-priority work (e.g. potholes/resurfacing) on their limited resources,

resulting in a greater burden falling on Parish Council budgets like ours. Hence we find ourselves in the position of having to take on more responsibility for the general upkeep of roadside verges, gullies, drains etc. with a concomitant increase in our maintenance costs.

The maintenance budget was increased by £450 in 2018 but was held at a low level to take account of the work carried out (gratis) by prisoners on the Leyhill Prison Community and Rehabilitation programme. For the next twelve months therefore, the maintenance budget will remain at the same level.

In addition the Parish Council is in receipt of part of the total allowance of £25,000 per County Councillor from the GCC budget, £15,000 of which is to be used for capital projects like signage and minor road improvements. Woodchester Parish Council has approved a priority list of such works for which we have put in a bid to our County Councillor Steve Robinson. Some of these works will be carried out by local lengthsman employed by GCC to carry out the works as agreed by each Town and Parish Council.

2.3 LIAISON WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT.

Stroud District Council (SDC) has recently appointed a new Chief Executive Kathy O’Leary who has now been in post for six months. At a meeting with Town and Parish Councillors on January 30th, she drew attention to a number of key issues likely to have an impact on the services provided by SDC in the near future, viz:

2.3.1 SDC’s budget and the likely impact on Town and Parish Councils.

Future funding at local authority level remains uncertain. Revenue from local business rates is likely to fall and is partially dependent on the outcome of Brexit. Funding from central government under the ‘New Homes Bonus’ scheme has been in decline since 2016/17 and is likely to continue falling, although this has not been confirmed. Central government austerity measures have adversely affected council services and continuing uncertainty as to future funding makes long term planning difficult. Medium term projections indicate a possible shortfall of at least £2million. SDC are currently in the position of having healthy reserves but these cannot be relied on to plug the gaps and so SDC needs to work with local Parish and Town Councils to ‘make the available money work’ to the maximum extent. This may result in some district services being passed down to Parish Councils with a concomitant increase in their precept.

2.3.2 The SDC Local Plan

SDC’s Local Plan outlining housing, employment and transport plans for Stroud District for the next 15 years was formally accepted by the Council in November 2015. The Local Plan is currently under review – a process that has to be carried out every five years and will result in the plan being rolled forward from 2020 to 2040. In addition a new National Planning Framework is to be introduced shortly which will affect the way Local (and Neighbourhood) Plans are carried out.

A second challenge has come about from a change to the method used to calculate housing need, which is no longer set locally. The revised growth figures will result in an increase in the requirement for 456 new housing units in Stroud District each year. The new

method of calculation will increase the requirement to 640 units per year. This will require new strategic sites to be released to meet the necessary target.

In Woodchester, aside from agreed development on the Rooksmoor Mills and the Old Piano Factory sites it is possible that notwithstanding the fact that the Parish Council has in the past brought forward reasoned arguments against further development, we may come under increasing pressure to release more infill land for housing to meet SDC targets. Residents will need to be vigilant that such proposals do not conflict with our own priorities for housing and employment as outlined in our Parish Plan.

2.3.3. Communications between SDC and Town and Parish Councils.

Liaison between SDC officers and councillors and their counterparts in Town and Parish Councils seems latterly to have been honoured more in the breach than the observance. In particular, poor liaison between the District Planning Department and the whole way in which local planning applications are dealt with, without due attention being paid to the views of Parish Councillors and local residents. In addition, the process by which contentious applications are referred to the Planning Development Control Committee needs clarification. Budgetary constraints and the resulting cuts in the number of planners SDC employs has resulted in increased workload and delays in decision making. This should not be seen as an excuse for poor or inadequate communications between the various authorities involved.

A renewed commitment to ensuring that the 2013 agreement on 'Working Together in Stroud District' needs to be made more effective with clear policies being implemented and more regular consultation between SDC, Town and Parish Councils, the Gloucestershire Association of Town and Parish Councils and The Gloucestershire Rural Community Council.

3. PLANNING ISSUES.

The Parish Council has dealt with a number of contentious planning proposals during the past year, in particular:

- i. At the Ram Inn, South Woodchester where a planning application to improve the kitchen and to extend and improve the facilities at the pub, combined with the erection of two new houses resulting in a contentious reduction in the number of car parking spaces was (ultimately) accepted by SDC's Development Control Committee.
- ii. At Hillgrove House where a plan to erect five houses on the grounds of the main house was rejected by the Parish Council (supported by Historic England) on grounds of visual intrusion and closeness to adjacent properties plus limited access. SDC's Planners are now considering a revised proposal for three houses, but our objections remain.
- iii. At Rooksmoor Mills where there has been some progress at last with the housing and associated development, the owners in conjunction with a Bristol based design and build company have commenced site clearance. The aim is to have the

housing on the entire site completed by mid 2021 subject to any minor changes to be approved by SDC's Planning Department.

(NB: A separate report from the Parish Council's Planning Committee is available on page 6).

4. THE ENVIRONMENT.

4.1 Gullies and Grit.

As previously mentioned, concerns have long been expressed by local residents about the poor state of the gullies and drains in the village leading to flooding and road surface damage. After pressure on GCC Highways over delay in any action being taken, the issue has now been addressed and with the additional assistance of the aforementioned Leyhill prisoners, much of the work has now been completed by GCC Highways lengthsman. The task now is to ensure that preventive work is undertaken in good time to prevent a recurrence of the problem.

Last year's bad winter revealed inadequacies in the number and state of repair of the grit and salt bins designed to keep our roads free of ice and snow. Following a survey, a rolling programme of replacement of damaged or missing grit bins has been carried out as well as implementing a regular top-up programme for the grit and salt contents. As GCC Highways snow ploughs and gritters only cover main roads and access routes, a priority list of roads to be cleared in the event of blockage by snow and ice will need to be agreed with our local snow plough operator (Peter Brown).

4.2 Wild Water Swimming.

The 'sport' of wild water swimming has become ever more popular due to publicity on the web. This has been causing particular problems in the National Trust's Woodchester Park site (which lies largely within our Parish) where the lakes, particularly the one closest to South Woodchester have become a favoured venue for outdoor swimmers. Swimming in the lakes is specifically forbidden by NT bye-laws, notwithstanding the risks to swimmers from under-water obstructions which, combined with limited access to the site and an absent mobile signal, could constitute a danger to life. Damage to plants and trees, wildlife habitats and flowers, waterfowl and bird life generally has been reported, as well as the destructive effect on fishing for approved local clubs. The situation has been aggravated by noisy parties on long summer evenings, with an increased risk of fire from barbecues, drinking and drug taking and anti-social behaviour generally. This causes gross inconvenience and disturbance to local residents, in particular from irregular and dangerous parking. This has unfortunately resulted in local roads and driveways being blocked by parked vehicles, aggravated by misuse of the Priory Church car park. Serious problems have been reported from the inability of emergency and service vehicles to reach the area.

The problem has become so acute that the National Trust, residents and regular park visitors met to agree future policy with particular reference to:

- i. Highlighting that swimming is not permitted in the lakes.
- ii. Re-erecting 'No swimming' signs around the lake' and reminders at the Park entrances.

- iii. Agreeing that gates should be erected by the Priory Church to prevent irregular access to its car park. Strengthening the security of the existing park gates at the south end of the park and making it clear there is no public access other than by permissive foot path and that parking is strictly not permitted on driveways/roads adjacent to the entrance to the park or on nearby village roads or driveways.
- iv. Increasing patrols in the area on summer evenings and weekends and notifying the Police, PCSOs and NT if anti-social or criminal behaviour is observed.
- v. Raising public awareness on leisure and other websites as well as in the local press and schools that wild water swimming is not permitted at any time in Woodchester Park.

4.3 The Lawns Park Pond and its surroundings.

The Lawns Park Estate, the parkland of which contained a number of protected trees and other ancient features including a fish pond (allegedly of Roman origin and associated with the adjacent Villa and its famous pavement) was sold for housing development by its owner Mrs. Ella Lamplugh in the 1970s to Savages the builders and developers. The development specifically excluded the pond and its surroundings to which Mrs. Lamplugh and the residents of the Lawns Park estate had private access (as reflected in their deeds).

On the death of Mrs. Lamplugh some four years ago, difficulties arose with her trustees over responsibility for the maintenance of the pond and its surroundings, including its listed trees and the boundary walls. It was always assumed that Mrs. Lamplugh owned the land on which the pond is situated. However it was not registered with the Land Registry in her name nor that of the developer Savage whose descendants also denied ownership.

Following damage to the access gate and subsequently collapse of a portion of the boundary wall earlier this year, efforts made by the local residents of Lawns Park and the Parish Council to determine responsibility for repairs fell on stony ground. To prevent further damage to the site the Parish Council stepped in to carry out immediate and necessary repairs at its own expense.

A detailed search of Land Registry records revealed the pond and its surroundings were not registered to the estate, its successors or the subsequent developers and so responsibility for it appeared to be in limbo. Mindful of the location of the pond and its surroundings in close proximity to the Grade 1 listed pavement site and Villa Field, the Parish Council sought the advice of Historic England. Their view was that although the site is of historic significance, it does not fall within their remit though they would expect to be consulted if any changes were made to the site which might impact on the preservation of the Villa site. Additional opinion is awaited from the Gloucestershire Rural Communities Council.

The Land Registry has pointed out that unregistered land can be registered as an exception site by means of an adverse possession order, but to do so is a complicated legal process and if the Parish Council were to take on responsibility for the site, bearing in mind the restrictive covenants over public access, the long term consequences in terms of maintenance could be costly. Therefore before making any final decision on the complex

issue of whether the Parish Council should claim ownership on behalf of local residents, their views as to the feasibility of doing so will be sought.

4.4 Defibrillators.

Following the successful installation of a defibrillator for use in cardiac emergencies in the old telephone box in North Woodchester, a request has been received to install a similar machine in the old telephone box in South Woodchester. The purchase of the machine and installation costs have been generously covered by local residents, Peter and Anita Brown.

The Parish Council has agreed to pay the annual maintenance charge for both machines of £200 but to review the charge annually. The situation has been made more complicated by the unofficial use of the North Woodchester box as a book exchange (a use originally suggested for the redundant box before the defibrillator was installed). While encouraging residents to make use of approved book exchanges there are concerns that the box could be used as dumping ground for unwanted books and interfere with access to the defibrillator.

5. TRAFFIC AND SAFETY.

Parking and traffic flow in our village and its environs have been a major headache for residents for some years as reflected in the need to address the issue in repeated editions of the Parish Plan and letters from residents to the Parish Council over road safety in particular.

Progress has always been bedevilled by divided responsibility for traffic, highways and road safety issues between a number of different local government agencies.

A traffic survey carried out in the Parish last year demonstrated the sheer volume of traffic on our local roads as well as the A46.

Cllr. Iain Dunbar was very active in facilitating a meeting in autumn of last year of all the parishes in Stroud District, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gloucestershire, our local MP and concerned district and county councillors plus representatives of local road safety groups. The outcome has been the setting up of the Stroud District Road Safety Group whose Chair is Cllr. Dunbar, which has set itself a series of priority tasks in selected parishes with particular attention to speed restrictions, speed cameras and easily implementable safety measures.

Planning – Cllr. Peter Lead

The Chairman's report gives information about the major applications in the Parish but we are involved in all minor applications as well. We meet within the prescribed period in order to submit our opinions on most applications. However, on those that are not considered at all contentious we will often pass no comment.

We would like to think that our opinions represent the majority, however as most meetings are only attended by a faithful three we cannot always guarantee this.

Applications to prune or fell trees are generally left for the SDC tree officer to decide upon, as none of us have sufficient knowledge to comment unless we feel strongly that the proposed action is wrong.

Notices of our meetings are always posted on the notice boards at least four days prior and all are welcome to attend.

Footpath Report – *Cllr. Barbara Warnes*

In Woodchester we are lucky with our footpaths, they are, in general, kept in good order. We don't usually suffer from them being 'ploughed up' as in some neighbouring parishes and landowners are usually prompt in responding to concerns. However, this season, one path has been ploughed and not immediately reinstated.

For the last few years I have reported on the status of the cycle track i.e. when it opened on the disused railway line, it was never officially designated. There was a proposal to rectify this matter and various designations were under consideration. This, we were told, would lead to a proper maintenance plan. The latest news is that it is intended to resurface the rough stretches when the money has been sourced and make it a bridleway. A start has been made by installing 'passing places' in the narrow stretch at Giddynapp. The bridleway aspect is supposedly going to consultation but it seems to me that there is nothing left to consult on and the decision has been made! The consequences of this may or may not impact most users. Horses would be permitted but we don't anticipate great numbers and we have already raised the issue of passing in the narrow stretch at Giddynapp. Cyclists' rights would change. Basically, a bridleway is "a way over which the public has a right of way on foot and a right of way on horseback or leading a horse, with or without a right to drive animals along the way." Although Section 30 of the Countryside Act 1968 permits the riding of bicycles on public bridleways, the act says that it "shall not create any obligation to facilitate the use of the bridleway by cyclists". Thus the right to cycle exists even though it may be difficult to exercise on occasion, especially in winter. Cyclists using a bridleway are obliged to give way to other users on foot or horseback. I don't anticipate any problems with cyclists being able to use the track all year round – it may even be better if the surface is improved – but I can see an issue with 'giving way'. We will all need to work together.

We usually have a very good response to fallen trees etc. on the cycle track but it is important to remember that the authorities will not deal with something they do not know about. Blockages should be reported to the parish clerk who will pass them on. The response to issues on footpaths is not so good and broken stiles are often reported several times with no improvement.

We are always grateful to landowners for cutting back vegetation on footpaths, especially nettles, to allow us to walk through and to the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens who quietly improve conditions for us. Please be aware that rights of way only have a right for their particular designation and the right only exists on the path i.e. bicycles and horses are not allowed on footpaths and there is no right of access to other parts of fields and woodland just because they look attractive!

Using Section 106 payments, we have a plan to replace several stiles with kissing gates. A new gate has been installed on Selsley Road next to Park View.

The new path through Rooksmoor Mill has been closed during the development, however the plans for the site include proper public paths to the cycle track.

Remember we have walks from Woodchester and a tree walk on the website, so please take a look and walk our footpaths.

Village Events Committee - Katharine McNealey, Chair

The role of the village events committee is to organise or support events or activities which bring the village together. We are self-funded through fundraising activities at events and small donations.

We ran the annual village fete and Produce Show in September 2018. The hot dry summer resulted in a decrease in the number of entries in fruit and vegetable classes, and there was a drop in the number of entries in children's classes. However we had some lovely entries. Harri Barnes won the adult trophy and the David Brown salver for the adult classes, and Maddy Bijkerk won the trophy for the children's classes. The fun dog show proved very enjoyable and thanks to Angela Morton for running this again. Everyone enjoyed the opportunity to have tea and cake on the village green and catch up with their neighbours. We had a new dimension to the day in the form of the 'Made in Woodchester' craft show, where residents with craft skills from pottery to book binding showed their talents. Thanks to Iain Dunbar for organising this.

Many thanks to everyone who helped to run the event on the day, and to the judges who willingly gave their time and expertise during the morning.

It poured with rain on the evening of the round the village carol singing in December and so Nailsworth Brass Band performed in St. Mary's Church. A lovely evening of traditional carols, mulled wine and mince pies was enjoyed by all. This year we hope to reinstate the living nativity, and include some real animals!

February saw a new event in the form of a 'Meet your Neighbours lunch', which was held in the Village Hall. Both new and well established residents met and enjoyed mingling over a glass of wine and a bread and soup lunch, generously provided by WI members Gail Birch, Sally Bull and Zillah Boulton. Huge thanks to relative newcomer Carolyn Dillingworth who organised the event.

We could do with some more helpful people on the events committee. So if you have a bit of time to spare, or have a good idea for an event or activity in the village please get in touch with Katharine McNealey at kathinwoodchester@gmail.com

Woodchester Endowed Church of England Primary School – Lynn Pennington, Headteacher

The new academic year began by welcoming our new Reception children and two new members of staff, Mr Smith and Mrs Loomes. The children loved being greeted and supported by their Year 6 'buddies'. Our two new teachers settled quickly into life at Woodchester, Mr Smith, the Willow class teacher and Deputy Headteacher and Mrs Loomes in Hawthorn Class (Y3/4) and both have become great members of the team. During this year we have also had a number of new Foundation and Parent governors who have taken up their posts with much enthusiasm and energy.

We are enormously fortunate to have a supportive PTA who are extremely dedicated. Last year they began a project to improve the outdoor space, consulting with children, parents and staff during the design process. In late September, following a successful grant

application of £9,990 to the Big Lottery Fund, the outdoor Early Years Play area was extended and renovated with new fencing and bespoke sand and water play areas. Throughout the year, parents busily fundraised, in total raising over £19,000 to support outdoor improvements. There were many enjoyable events and activities organised such as the Christmas Bazaar, Discos and Pamper Evenings. Grants from the Summerfield Trust, Midcounties Co-operative, Growing our Communities, Seys and Bridges Educational Foundation and local firms such as Uniwire enabled further improvements to the trim trail, the front playground, installation of new games tables and to the Forest School area. Parents have also generously given their time and skills to build seating for the outdoor classroom, install fencing, create a pond and set in posts to raise a parachute in the Forest School area. In October, the PTA organised a 'thank you' event to celebrate the completion of the Early Years Area and work on the Outdoor Space Project. We were delighted to be joined by children, parents, staff, and representatives from Midcounties Co-op and by Councillor Steve Robinson for tea, cake and an official opening. It was an extremely enjoyable and fitting celebration of everyone's hard work and support. The children of Ash Class have benefitted from these improvements every day since, and by the end of this academic year, all children will have had the joy of learning through Forest School experiences.

Community is very important to us here at Woodchester, community within the school, in the locality and beyond. Being a Church of England Primary school, we seek to make the most of our links with the Diocese. Earlier this year we took part in the 'Good Shepherd Project' during which the Diocese sent into our safe keeping a life sized model of a sheep. Our sheep was one of nine, visiting schools within the deanery. We had the honour of looking after the sheep and, over the course of a fortnight, introducing it to life at Woodchester Endowed. The sheep, whom we eventually named 'Baaaaartholomew', had a very varied visit, experiencing our Harvest Service, Communion, a visit from the tooth fairy and a councillor, an Open the Book collective worship, and a night with real sheep at the family farm of two of our children! Finally, the children created a beautiful mosaic decoration containing the Woodchester lion on his body as a reminder of his time with us. The whole community enjoyed taking part in this project the purpose of which was to create a shared sense of community, creativity and belonging. The Year 6 children are hoping to meet up with Baaaaartholomew again during the Leavers' Service at the Cathedral in June.

Woodchester Playgroup – Mrs. Bev Fowler, Playgroup Leader

At Woodchester playgroup we have had a year of fun, new experiences and lots of learning through play. The children have enjoyed learning our new song about road safety, they have decorated beautiful pots and planted flowers for Mother's Day, acted out the Gruffalo story along with many other exciting opportunities. We are currently having some improvements made to our garden area with some raised beds for lots more gardening and mud kitchen play. The fundraising committee have just organised a successful disco which was enjoyed by many families and raised funds for our indoor climbing frame. In a couple of weeks we are going to Cattle Country for our annual day trip, which we are all excited about. We look forward to making many more fun and happy memories at Playgroup.

Parish Church of St Mary, Woodchester – Andrew Pemberton, member of the
Parochial Church Council

St Mary's continues to be a lively and well-attended church. In addition to our regular services we have held extra services and events, most notably at Christmas and Easter, which were very well supported.

Concerts have been given in church by the Cappella Singers, The Eclectic String band and the Stuart Singers.

The church-based activities which welcome many people from the community have continued to thrive this year. Lunch-with-Friends, which is held monthly and provides an opportunity to share lunch and company mainly for those living alone, is full to capacity. Messy Church, held monthly after school, is enjoyed by children, parents and a team of helpers. A Light Party was held again this year to give children an alternative to Halloween. A new toddler group 'Little Stars' has been launched. The church building provided shelter from the inclement weather for the village carol-singing with the Nailsworth Silver Band.

A new venture this year has been the replacement of the *APEX* news sheet with a new monthly publication *Common Ground* which is distributed to all three parishes in our benefice (i.e. including Brimscombe and Rodborough) in both electronic and printed versions.

The Church has sought to engage with the community beyond our parish. One Sunday service last summer was hosted by Grace Ministries in Brimscombe Port, the base of operation of the Stroud Foodbank, Furniture Bank and Stroud Kids' Stuff. Church members from our benefice have served as Street Pastors in Stroud and as helpers with the Salvation Army emergency night-shelter for rough sleepers in Stroud.

We continue in our strong tradition of focus on children and young people. There is a crèche and Junior Church for school-age children on Sunday mornings. *Laser* and *PizzaChat*, the groups for young people in the benefice, have continued on Sunday evenings. The links with Woodchester Endowed School have also remained strong: clergy and lay members have led assemblies, the Open the Book team has presented a Bible Study each Monday morning and the school has held services in the Church for Harvest Festival and Christmas.

Helping others

The church has continued to support the mission societies CMS, Interserve, Tear Fund and Scripture Union. We have raised and/or given money to the following charities: Christian Aid (from The Big Breakfast held on the Green in May), The Poppy Appeal (from Remembrance Day), The Children's Society (from the Christingle Service), The Nelson Trust and Stroud Foodbank. The congregation also took part in the Teams4U shoebox project to send boxes filled with toys and other goods to children and families in Eastern Europe.

'A Building for Everyone'

We have continued to work over the last year, with the help of the church's surveyor David Newton, on our 'A Building for Everyone' project. The main aim of this project is to alter the interior of the building to provide a more flexible space not only for current activities such as

Messy Church and Lunch-with-Friends but for use by the community (including the school) for events such as drama, concerts and receptions for generations to come.

A fund-raising campaign for the project was launched in January 2018 with the aim of raising £200,000 for Phase 1 of the project. We are grateful for support in this campaign both by church-goers and by other members of the community. We have made various grant applications and have been successful in a number of them. We have run a series of fund-raising events including a Harvest Supper, Quiz Evenings, a Barn Dance in the local barn, an August Bank Holiday Garden Party and the "Spire Cinema" events showing films such as Mamma Mia and Paddington 2. As at the end of April 2019 £162,000 has been raised towards our target, enough – we expect - to cover the first two of the three stages in our Phase 1.

The scope of Phase 1 comprises a new kitchen and toilet facilities, relocation of the rood screen, draught-proofing, opening up the tower base and installing new audio-visual equipment. As I write this in early May, the first-stage work to construct the new open-plan kitchen is progressing well and we hope to have it completed by late June.

We have also started to consider the Phase 2 which will provide more flexible seating arrangements and will involve alterations to the heating system and flooring. We intend to run an event in the coming months to consult with the wider community on possible uses for the church in the scenario where it no longer has fixed pews. Not only do we want the building to be used more, but there is a correlation between the amount of occupancy the church has, and the optimum heating solution we should adopt! We will continue to publish updates in the Woodchester Word. You can also visit our church website www.stmaryswoodchester.org.uk.

The Priory Church – Jenny Bailey

The end of an era.

After many years of faithful service as Sacristan Josie Heffernan, or Jo Heff as she is otherwise known, has handed over her role to Annie Norris and Eileen Jay. Jo had also been our rep. on other organisations in Nailsworth, plus using her skills in needlework and liturgical embroidery by making new vestments for our church, and being a very talented flower arranger. She is surely enjoying her well-earned rest now.

Those using St. Mary's Hill will have noticed the demise of the large conifers behind the churchyard wall which have caused extensive damage to the boundary walls necessitating costly repairs. This is a timely reminder that even small trees should never be planted near walls, a mature tree's roots extend out as far as the canopy,

Problems are still occurring with the unauthorised use of our car park by visitors to Woodchester Mansion and Park, unfortunate given that William Leigh built both this and our church 50 years before the advent of motor vehicles. Problems continue with visitors to the Park using our car park, despite the large 'Private' notice; they also park both sides of the hill.

At long last we have a small area for native wild flowers, to be left uncut so they seed: pasque flower, viper's bugloss, bird's foot trefoil and red campion are amongst those included. Being in close proximity to unimproved pasture and the commons there are so many bee and butterfly food plants which thrive in 'Living Churchyards' with all their associated wild life, providing the grass is not close mown like a bowling green.

The WI in Woodchester – Sally Bull

2018 brought us another varied and enjoyable programme of speakers and plenty of other opportunities to join in with a wide range of activities at local, regional and national level. We have been delighted to see membership levels remain in the top twenties and are lucky to have, at present, enough volunteers to take on the all-important committee positions, securing the future of our group.

Entertainment at our meetings has ranged from opportunities to have a go – we attempted sugar paste flowers one month and produced our own posies in another, even the least creative of us finishing the session with something we didn't need to hide. We enjoyed talks about the life of a magistrate and the history of Morris Dancing and watched in admiration as Norah Kennedy turned willow into a basket while providing a history of the craft and its various applications. Social time remains a very important aspect of our meetings; the fish and chip supper and Christmas Party were as successful as always. Our monthly craft group and book club (both open to non-WI members) have attracted solid attendance.

In the summer a number of us headed off to Rodmarton to experience our own WI tour of Rodmarton Manor where we learned a great deal about the Arts and Crafts movement and about the distinguishing features of the furniture produced during this period. A wall hanging by Rodmarton Women's Guild of King George VI's coronation planted the seed of an idea for our own joint effort wall hanging to celebrate the Gloucester Federation's 100th birthday, a project which we are working on this year.

Members continued to take advantage of the many interesting experiences provided by the Gloucester Federation, including a walk at Dymock and craft days at WI House in Gloucester. As usual, some of our members sang in the Cheltenham Christmas Concert and others attended to enjoy an evening which included the group *Only Men Aloud*. Adam Henson was our engaging and thought-provoking speaker for the March AGM. Our President headed to Cardiff for the NFWI conference where the speakers included the broadcaster Huw Edwards and the novelist and former director of MI5, Stella Rimmington.

The group continues to enjoy opportunities to take part in village events, providing a stall on the green as part of the September produce show featuring little games for children and a selection of craft and food items made by members. Before Christmas we were delighted to be invited to provide refreshments for the new Made in Woodchester event and hope to be invited back.

New members are always welcome. As we meet in the evenings at 7.30 (usually the third Thursday of each month) those at work are not excluded. If you would like to try us out, feel free to come along to a meeting or two (in Woodchester Village Hall) before committing yourself to membership.

Historical Society – *Barbara Warnes*

Woodchester Historical Society meets approximately four 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.

In the last year, we have had a tour of Gloucester City and talks on The Monarch's Way, Stanley Mill and John Canton.

We had a display about a Woodchester house (Southfield) at Stroud Local History Society's Summer Exhibition, we had a 'picture quiz' with old photographs alongside the Produce Show in September and displays on 'The Allen Family' and 'The Winslow Boy' at SVGWR Exhibition on WW1 at the Museum in the Park in November.

This year has started with a talk on Gloucestershire Railways and will continue with 'People of the Stroud Valleys', a walk, talk and boat trip at Saul Junction, and talks on Stroud Workhouse and a Victorian Christmas.

We have prepared leaflets of self-guided walks around both North and South Woodchester with an historical theme (both general and WW1) which can be purchased for a nominal sum. These are available from the Society or the Village Shop.

We continue to write articles for Woodchester Word with the current emphasis on remembering our Great War fallen finally coming to an end as well as other topics of historical interest.

The parish registers and censuses are available on the village website. Other records will follow when time allows. The village site also has a link to our own website which contains several articles.

If anyone has old pictures of the village that they are happy for us to copy and preserve, please get in touch.

For further information contact Barbara Warnes:- barbara.warnes1@gmail.com or 01453 872181

Girlguiding, Woodchester – *Jackie Haynes*

Both Brownies and Guides have enjoyed regular weekly meetings with games, singing, craft, cooking and other activities including working on the new Girlguiding programme, in particular, towards the new staged skill builder badges. These are badges designed to improve certain skills throughout a girl's time in Girlguiding.

Last summer some Woodchester Brownies attended a County Brownie camp at Gloucestershire's Headquarters, Cowley where they experienced some of the activities available there, including tunnels and grass sledging. Woodchester Guides meanwhile joined Nailsworth Guides at a camp in Oxford, where they also experienced on-site activities such

as giant swing, archery, abseiling and aerial walk, along with swimming and a bit of retail therapy in the town. This camp encouraged some of our older Guides to join Nailsworth Rangers.

Brownies and Guides started the autumn term with two trips, one to Cattle Country at Berkeley and one to the Cotswold Wildlife Park at Burford.

As usual we took part in the Remembrance parade and service in Nailsworth. Before we did this however, we had to arrange to have our new unit colours (flags) blessed. We were very fortunate to have Rev. Peter Francis attend one of our Brownie meetings at which he retired the unit colours for all the Brownies and Guides in Nailsworth District (which includes Woodchester) and dedicated all the new colours for all the Rainbows, Brownies, Guides and Rangers. The term ended with the usual Christmas party.

At the end of February girls from both Units took part in the District World Thinking Day service and celebration and the term ended with an Easter themed evening for both Brownies and Guides. To complete her Baden-Powell Challenge Award, under the old Girlguiding programme, one Guide arranged for the Guides to meet up on a Sunday when we went litter picking along the cycle track and the Bath Road – thanks to all the parents who supported this activity. The two Guides who have been working towards the Baden-Powell Challenge Award also took part in a special adventure at a camp in Worcestershire, where they made some new friends and tried some new experiences.

This term both units are working towards another skill builders badge as well as the other usual Girlguiding activities. The Brownies hope to have a sports evening and a teddy bears picnic, while the Guides plan to go tracking and trailing, hold a barbecue and have a campfire.

Anyone who would like to get involved in Girlguiding, either as a Brownie, Guide or Leader should contact Jackie on 01453 821258 or through one of the following websites:

www.girlguiding.org.uk

www.ggwoodchester.wordpress.com

The South Woodchester Amenity Land Trust (SWALT) – Bert Cossins

2019 marks the tenth anniversary of SWALT's buying – much has been achieved but there remains much to do in completing the project and maintaining what has been created. We have yet to decide on the ultimate use of the south facing bramble patch adjacent to Station Road. We were favoured by a successful growing season; clearly the January '18 wassail fully achieved all requirements of that ceremony both for the orchard and the allotments. We were fortunate with a dry afternoon, around sixty participants, excellent musicians, enthusiastic singers, generous toasting, a cacophony of sound to scare off the sprites and generous bread portions to sustain the birds' interest in Orchard Pastures. We have our fingers crossed for yet another successful season generated by the success of this year's wassail.

The orchard continues to mature – undoubtedly the very dry summer reduced the amount of mature fruit. The spring water supply allowed the vegetable plots to flourish – we were fortunate that the spring didn't dry up given the 'drought'. Sadly we lost the original

'wassailing' apple tree; blown down in the autumn storms but the bees and chickens are thriving.

Our future events will be advertised locally; it is anticipated that Apple Day (mid October) will again be celebrated by a pressing – all interested villagers are welcome. SWALT will participate in the Village Produce Show, be holding the eleventh wassailing in mid January '20 and keep villagers informed of vacant plots etc. via Woodchester Word.

Stroud Beekeepers Report – Peter Lead

Stroud Beekeepers meet during the summer every Saturday morning at the training apiary. Each year a course is run for 25 potential beekeepers who attend five evening talks during the winter months and then have weekly access to the training apiary during the summer months. Following that they should then have sufficient knowledge to keep bees responsibly.

Some start beekeeping so as to be able to extract honey, but many more start so as to provide homes for bees, recognising their importance in pollination. To this end we will shortly start monthly meetings for those who just want bees in their garden to observe and not wanting to take honey.

We have been working with Beekindhives and Leyhill Prison to produce a Golden Hive that is much more environmentally friendly. Sales of this hive will not only benefit the bees and the prisoners in Leyhill but also BuzzClub Ghana, as part of the sale price will go to that charity.

Finally Stroud BuzzClub that started at St. Dominic's now meets at Stroud Museum and recently hoisted a log hive into a tree for a swarm to find. If you stand near the bandstand in Stratford Park and look up you will see the hive.



Woodchester Village Hall – Alan Boulton, Chairman

2018/2019 continued to be a busy year.

Many improvements have been made to the premises, especially in the form of lighting and heating. Ceiling fans have been installed and when fully functioning will allow warm air to be circulated back down to ground level. Likewise, in the event of a very hot summer, cool air can be generated. Hall users will be advised when the fans are able to be operated. A new heating programmer and some rewiring has enabled us to pre-heat the hall before people arrive. Most light fittings are now LED and more cost effective, for any of you passing the hall in the dark and see a green glow through the windows, don't panic, it is the updated emergency lighting. More improvements are on a "to do" list when time and funding allows. Our regular classes/courses and their leaders' details can be found on the village notice boards and Woodchester Parish website; a wide selection of interests for all ages is on offer. On average the hall is used for 29 hours each week. At the time of writing we can only offer regular slots on a Friday.

The hall is run by volunteers and we would gladly welcome anyone to come and join our committee, we aim to meet three or four times a year. Regular hall classes can nominate a member of their group to join our committee as a User Trustee. Those currently represented are The Parish Council, WI, Table Tennis and Tuesday Art Class.

All booking enquiries to Kath Gay on 01453 873348 or wvh888@btinternet.com

Woodchester Mansion Trust - Rhiannon Wigzell

There is a lot happening at Woodchester Mansion during 2019, the 30th Anniversary of the formation of the Woodchester Mansion Trust which came into being not long after Stroud District Council bought the building. There are supporters who were there from the beginning still actively involved. The unique Gothic Revival house in Woodchester Park is part of our village's history and heritage. It was the vision of William Leigh who also built the Priory Church in South Woodchester. The house survived, despite being incomplete, because it was made of stone, executed to a very high standard, and roofed. It was much of the inside that was left unfinished, so the architecture is visible. It is open on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays throughout the summer, and until 3rd November. It is anticipated that the café, run by Berry Blue, may be open at busy periods on days when the Mansion itself is closed. For information on prices, details of opening hours, and special events please see the website or phone the office on 01453 861541.

There have already been several special events and there are more to come. For the first time the Mansion hosted artists as part of the 2019 Site Festival open studios. The Stonemasons' Guild of St. Stephen and St. George has given demonstrations of stone carving, and there are more scheduled. On some days there will be opportunities for interested individuals to carve stone themselves.

In early June a peripatetic play, *Bastard Blood*, based on the Wars of the Roses will be performed in the Mansion. The audience will be split, choosing to follow either York or Lancaster, although the play can be viewed from both sides, as it will be performed twice each evening on two successive nights. The Festival Players are returning for their annual

visit in August with a production of *Much Ado About Nothing*, to be enacted outside against the backdrop of the Mansion.

ArtSparks are running children's workshops during the May half term and again in July and August. The Mansion is delighted to be hosting the *Made in Woodchester Craft Fair*, also in August. The season will end by being open for the whole of Halloween week for the popular *Spooky Cellars*. Last year some families enjoyed that event so much that they went twice.

The Mansion is considered a world class facility for viewing bats. The CCTV cameras capture the bats in such detail that last year a video was taken of a Lesser Horseshoe giving birth. At the popular bat walks participants can watch the mothers parking their babies before they go out to forage, then see the bats flying along the Mansion corridors, as well as use bat detectors to hear them. This is the sixtieth consecutive year that Dr. Roger Ransome has studied the Woodchester Mansion bats, the longest study in the world of any mammal by the same person.

The Mansion has recently become registered for Gift Aid and direct debiting. Anyone opting for the latter may become a Member at a special one-off rate of half the normal fee during 2019. Members may visit the Mansion as often as they wish during the open season, receive newsletters, are invited to Members' events and may vote at the Trust's Annual General Meetings.

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

Meetings

The trustees met twice last year. As 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.

Six grants were awarded to individuals to assist with music and drama lessons, after school activities and an educational visit to Kenya.

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 Exhibition Fund – *George Bastin, Chairman*

St Loe's School Exhibition Fund or St Loe's Trust 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. 2018/2019 saw support being given to a variety of young people studying mechanical engineering, the law, medicine, sport and drama. Applicants have to demonstrate a financial need and this sometimes discourages some possibilities. However the trustees are keen to encourage more applicants and have advertised more widely to local companies in the area in search of apprentices who might need financial support. The Trust 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. The Chairman and members of the committee attended the leavers' services at Woodchester and Amberley and presented prizes to all the leavers.

The Trust was delighted that Mrs Lynn Pennington, the Headteacher at Woodchester Endowed School is now a trustee. It is extremely helpful to have someone at the sharp end of local education to help steer the committee.

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 1st September at the latest to the Chairman or Secretary at the above address. However we are now considering grants throughout the year in special circumstances.

St. Loe's Exhibition Fund Charity No. 311753

c/o George Bastin, Goring House, North Woodchester, Stroud, GL5 5NG