

JUNE/JULY 2024

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So much safer ...
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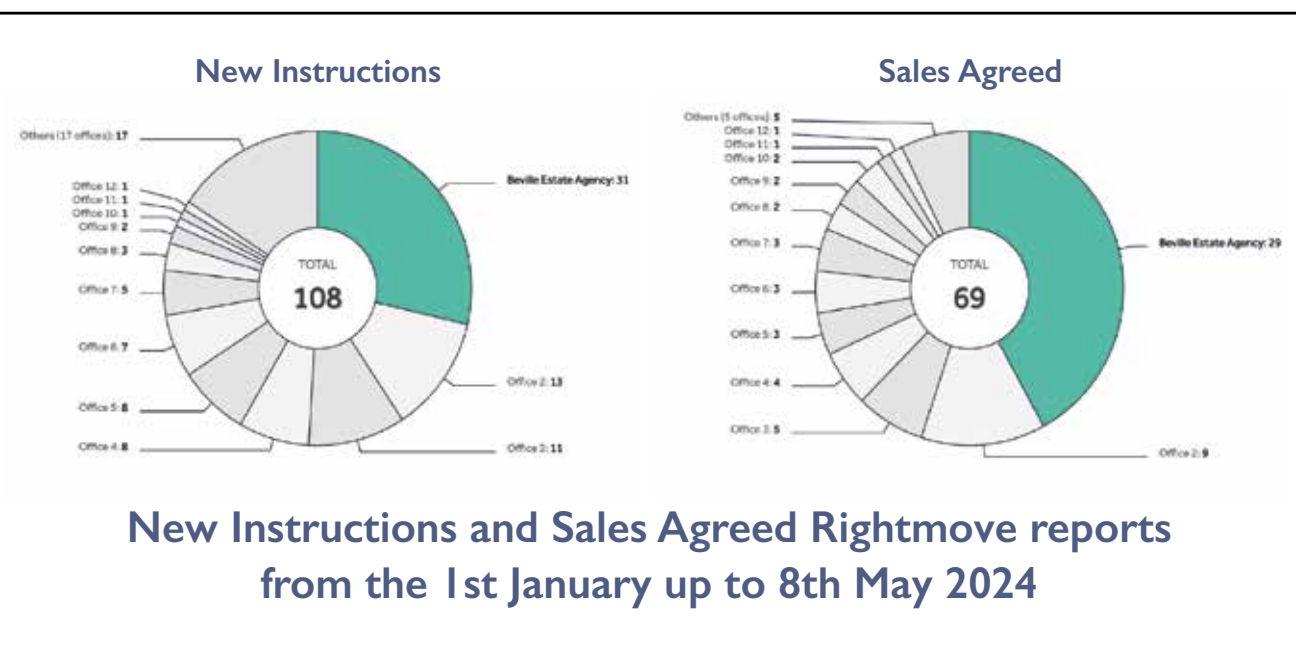
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Recently confirmed in Rightmove's annual statistics, Beville Estate Agency sold the most properties in Sonning Common in 2023.



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FROM THE EDITORIAL TEAM

A very successful Food Festival was held at Millennium Geen on 6 May. The first ever, it was very well attended by a large number of stall holders and many residents poured in especially before the rain arrived. There were dancers and singers to add to the entertainment organised by George King from Abbeycrest. He is hoping to make it a more frequent occurrence.

On Your Bike was a huge success and so good to see it return. The number of stewards was very impressive and helped the participants feel safe so a special thank you to them. There are also many adverts of 'things to do' in the next few summer months.

Looking forward, the Village Day will take place on Sunday 9 June at Memorial Park which is planned to be bigger and better than last year.

This issue the magazine has again developed its own theme. This time it is about volunteering, much to my delight as I really believe the person who gives their time is enriched and enthused as much or even more so than the recipient. In terms of our health there is a lot of evidence that illustrates the benefits of helping others.

Whatever the weather let us enjoy the next few months. ●

Diana Pearman

FUTURE DEADLINE DATES FOR MAGAZINE COPY

1 July, 1 September, 1 November, 1 January, 1 March

We would love to receive your articles! 😊

MEET THE EDITORIAL TEAM



Diana Pearman



Christine Atkinson



Joan Grummant

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Design & Artwork: Kevin Taplin
TenSevenNine.com
kevin@tensevennine.com
07887 902376

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R.J.Peedell
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ON YOUR BIKE 2024

While every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of information printed in this magazine, the editor and the publisher cannot accept any responsibility for the consequences of errors that occur.

SC SONNING COMMON
MAGAZINE

USEFUL CONTACTS:

Chair: Sue Rawlins
The Hoot 6 Woodlands Road Sonning Common RG4 9TE
chair.sonningcommonmagazine@gmail.com
Tel 0118 972 2565

Editor: Diana Pearman
editor.sonningcommonmagazine@gmail.com
Tel 07702 237956

Distribution: Helen Gavin
distrib.sonningcommonmagazine@gmail.com
Tel 0118 972 4680

Advertising: John Pearman
advert.sonningcommonmagazine@gmail.com
Tel 0118 972 2381

MECE NEWS



As the school year moves towards the summer here at MECE we are starting the GCSE examination period for our year 11 students – though I am still relatively new to the school it has been a real pleasure to get to know these young people and see their development and I know that those teachers who have seen them develop since year 7 are very proud of them and the progress which they have made.

At the other end of the age range I recently had my first visit to Sonning Common Primary School and had a tour of the school and an opportunity to get to know Mrs Salmons who will take over the role of Headteacher in September. It was a privilege to hear her talk so passionately about the school and the children in her care and I hope very much that we will form a strong partnership working together for the young people of Sonning

Common and the surrounding area.

Here are a few of the highlights of life at MECE since my last update: We celebrated the Great British Science week with a range of lunchtime activities which included students building their very own prototype roller coaster and Miss Sarpong took Science on the road with some outreach to local primary schools. Our team of geographers from years 7-9 took part in the Geography association quiz competing against schools across the Reading area and even though they were amongst the youngest teams they took on some very challenging questions and performed exceptionally well. Our extra-curricular offer has been further enhanced by a new Christian lunchtime club supported by the charity REACH.

Finally, Mr Caldwell Head of PE, is on a mission to bring every sport to MECE: our football and rugby boys' and girls' teams have been throwing themselves into every competition and a new contact at Henley Rowing club means that this summer we will have our first group of students heading out on the water. ●

Kind regards

BRIONY BOWERS
Headteacher Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge

ASIAN HORNETS

The British Beekeeping Association have asked if we could all watch and share this video widely, to help protect our honeybee population as Asian Hornet numbers grow just across the Channel. You may see traps in the countryside, which are all part of creating a national grid of trackers.

It will take less than two minutes to view. Thank you.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=5E_cU2eGjnw



SONNING COMMON PRIMARY SCHOOL NEWS



The school parent & teachers' group are holding their usual Summer Fair on Saturday 29 June. All are welcome to join in the fun, whether you attend the school or not! There will be food, drinks, stalls and entertainment from the children – and hopefully some sunshine!

Year 6 have been busy preparing for their end of school tests, but also practised hard for a very special evening performing for their parents and friends. Madame Baillie who teaches French in the school was very impressed and super proud of Year 6 pupils for putting on the most incredible plays, all performed in French!

On Thursday 25 April, the Y6 children performed four plays to their families, all modern day takes on traditional fairy tales. It was a fantastic evening, and the children did themselves proud. All their hard work and dedication paid off. An evening to remember. Formidable!

The school staff have also been working hard behind the scenes on a project to support parents with their children's maths. Maths Made Clear is the title of this project and the school are very proud that they have produced a series of videos (available on YouTube – search for Maths Made Clear SCPS) aimed at parents to help explain how they teach maths in the classroom, but in a reassuring and friendly way.

And finally, as Mr Hirst is retiring at the end of July, the school would like to wish him all the best and hope he doesn't miss them too much. Although he will certainly miss all the lovely lunches! Current deputy head Mrs Rachel Salmons will be taking over as Head in September and we will introduce her in the next issue – although most of the school and many ex pupils will already know her as she has been at the school for many years already and is no stranger to SCPS! ●



SONNING COMMON PRESCHOOL NEWS

The Preschool are very excited to be running their Summer Camp again this year for the first two and a half weeks of the holiday. It is open to all children under 5 and there are all sorts of activities planned to include, arts and crafts, painting, music, dance and outdoor games. All details are on the poster on the Noticeboard.

In the summer term there is lots to look forward to including, Father's Day stay and play, Sports Day, and the children will be visiting the primary school - our main feeder school for those children transitioning in September.

We are looking forward to the Village Day on Sunday 9 June where we will have a stall – come and say hello!

On 21 June we will be celebrating 'make music day' making our own musical instruments and enjoying playing them with lots of singing! ●



SONNING COMMON PRIMARY SCHOOL HOBBIES

Have you ever made a tree-house?

You might think it is hard but if you have wood, nails, a hammer, and the most important thing, a tree. In my garden, I have two, one that is hidden behind a trampoline which is really just a piece of wood that me and my sister sit on. The other one is just big pieces of wood nailed on by my dad on VE day a few years ago. But it was made by me. My mum and my sister my dad just supported it. It's probably the best thing I have in my garden because in

the summer, you can have a picnic. In the autumn, you can climb out onto the branches and pick the cooking apples. It's the perfect project for summer if you have a tree where you can climb out on a branch. It's a really fun and nice thing to do. My whole family help out and that is why I love making tree-houses. ●

By Olivia



Running

I love running because you can run any distance you like, anywhere you like on earth. The best thing is of all is that you don't need any equipment. You can do it with anyone you want, who knows, maybe you'll be at the 2032 Olympic Games! ●



Video Games

Video games are great because there is such a massive variety. The only equipment you need is a working console and a TV. With most games there is SO much to explore! Do you think you could become an E-sport champion instead of a boring job. ●

By Joe



SONNING COMMON GREEN GYM CELEBRATES 26 YEARS WORKING IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The idea of a Green Gym was originated by Dr William Bird over 26 years ago when he was a partner at the Sonning Common Health Centre. Since then, Green Gym organisations have been set up across the country under the umbrella of The Conservation Volunteer Group and to date, there are over 100 Green Gyms all over the country.

The purpose of the Green Gym is for volunteers to carry out nature conservation work in the local community, but only through using hand tools such as loppers, saws and shears. The benefits for the volunteers who participate have been the

subject of academic research at Oxford Brookes University but can be summarized as follows:

- a) Better physical health including improved cardiovascular fitness
- b) Better mental health through working alongside people with similar aims in the open air.
- c) The satisfaction of knowing your efforts are helping with biodiversity in the local area

It's a win-win situation!!

We are a friendly group and always welcome new volunteers. We meet every Thursday



and Saturday morning to carry out our work, not forgetting the all important break for coffee/tea and home made cake half way through the session. Our programme can be easily accessed via our website, cunningly titled "Sonning Common Green Gym".

Volunteers simply need to turn up at the work site on the day, then complete an initial registration form. We supply all of the tools and there is no membership fee.

If you are interested then simply phone the secretary, Martin Rhodes, on **0118 9724228** who will be happy to describe and explain about our organisation and its activities. ●

NEWS FROM THE LIBRARY

Hello from the Library! It's been lovely seeing regulars and meeting new joiners over the start of the year, some enjoying a sunny walk and some sheltering from the rain! And there is always something going on. Our latest addition is an electronic keyboard which we will have on loan for 3 months. You can pop round and play in the library although I am afraid you won't be able to serenade other library users as it comes with headphones rather than speakers!

But what if you can't make it to the Library itself for whatever reason but want to borrow some books (large or regular print) or audio CDs? Then we have a Home

Library Service and a volunteer can deliver them to your home. Volunteers are DBS checked and have identification and are super friendly and helpful. Your Library loans will be delivered and collected every 3 weeks and it's all free of charge. If you want to register for the Home Library Service, please telephone **01865 810259** or email homelibraryservice@oxfordshire.gov.uk or phone us at the Library on: **0118 972 2448** ●

Juliet Legg

YES WE'VE DONE IT

The cabins were delivered in May and our hard work of two and a half years has paid off thanks to the endurance of my wonderful team. The next phase starts now with the fitting out and organising of the day-to-day running of your shed. There are tools and equipment to be got there from various places stored around the village. Would you like to be involved in the fit out? ●

With kind regards to you all
Sheila Founder & Chair SHEDQUARTERS



HOBBIES ...

Guitar

Hey you! I have something that will make you jump out of your skin. Are you ready to read this? It's about my hobby, playing the guitar. I normally do it indoors, so that I don't lose the pick. I do it with my dad so that I can teach him a few songs that I learnt. Before you play you will need a few things. First you will need

a guitar, a pick (optional), a space where you can play it in and most importantly, hands. I like to play the guitar because it lets my creativity go wild. Sometimes I like to make my own music and teach my dad. ●

By Anushka



ACT OF KINDNESS

To whom it may concern - thank you, dear friend

A few weeks ago a lady brought two bunches of daffodils to our house for me. My husband received the flowers but being somewhat overcome by the gesture he promptly forgot the name of the donor.

I had no idea who it might have been but I want to offer my heartfelt thanks to the unknown donor - and hope that she is reading this. I have not been in good health for some time and the gift was so unexpected, so generous and thoughtful that it made, and continues to make, a real difference to how I am coping.

Having lived in the village for a number of decades, I have seen it grow from a rural backwater to the thriving bustling centre of activity it is now.

Progress brings both advantages and disadvantages. The traffic in the village can be overpowering and queues in shops daunting.

The advantages are perhaps less visible but clearly felt. The services on offer to us are many and varied and of high quality. In my experience, the village has developed and grown in kindness and support for its residents. I have personally benefitted from this, both from organisations and individuals - the latest example of which has been the flowers from my unknown friend.

Just before Easter, King Charles exhorted us to, "Extend the hand of friendship, especially in a time of need".

You need look no further, than Sonning Common. ●

ACTIVE LEADERS SUMMER FUN 2024 BOOKLET ...

See Noticeboard on p12 for more details



LITERATURE COURSES

Many decades ago, Margaret Warrick and Pauline Twyman, with the support of the WEA, set up classes for readers interested in studying a broad variety of literature and its contexts. They have flourished over the years, providing a friendly and welcoming environment for wide ranging discussions directed by tutor Dr Caroline Kanerick.

The group meets on Tuesday mornings from 10.30 - 12.30 at Christ the King Hall and our next course will begin in September 2024 when our theme is Theatre and the Novel with texts to include:

Mikhail Bulgakov Black Snow (1936)

Penelope Fitzgerald At Freddie's (1989)

Beryl Bainbridge An Awfully Big Adventure (1989)

Angela Carter Wise Children (1991)

Barry Unsworth Morality Play (1995)

The cost is £90.00 for ten two-hour sessions. If you are interested in joining a class which both stimulates and entertains within a friendly and supportive atmosphere, please do get in touch with either paulinetwyman@gmail.com or ckanerick@aol.com for further details. ●

VILLAGE QUIZ 2024

Many thanks to everyone who took part in this year's Village Quiz. It was great to have a full school hall and 16 teams taking part. The teams answered questions on subjects as diverse as 'The letter Q', 'City Nicknames' and 'The Masked Singer.' It was a very close run competition with only one point between the top 2 teams.

1st Two Hoots 118 points, 2nd Comets 117 points, 3rd Between The Covers 115 points, 4th Green's Gremlins 112 points 5th Wishful Thinkers (last year's winners) 111 points, 6th B.G.s - 110 points

Closely followed by: Mongooses, On the Tiles, Chris's Team (there's always next time!), The Book Group, Desperate not to be Last, Antipenultimates, Keeping up with the Joneses, Cathy's Team, Fairy Godmothers and Wimsys

Two Hoots (Leigh Rawlins, Sue Rawlins, Alison Smith, Jeremy Smith, Katherine Lamprell and Ashley Smith) took home the trophy and a 'quizzing winner' gnome each.

By supporting the quiz, the bar and the raffle over £450 was raised for school funds. ●

Mel White

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At Bridges, we love what we do and pride ourselves on delivering a highly professional service. From the little things that others miss to the neighbourhoods we know like the back of our hands, we're dedicated to giving you impartial, expert advice. Our reputation is built on good old-fashioned qualities like honesty and transparency. Today, as an independent Estate Agency, we know our business and our markets like no one else.



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Huge thanks to Andy and his team for all the support they gave us while selling our property. Their communication was excellent, and we felt fully informed at all times. Extremely professional without losing that personal touch. Special thanks to Liana who was always calm and reassuring.

SARAH KIDD-MAY
Horsepond Road, Gallowstree Common - March 2024



We used Bridges Estate Agents to assist with the selling of our property in Tokers Green. From the very 1st initial meeting with Rory to the final completion date we found Rory and all the staff at Bridges we came into contact, with extremely helpful and efficient. We were kept fully informed on the progress of the sale as it developed and would have no hesitation in recommending their services to both sellers and buyers.

GEORGE FLEMING
Rokeby Drive, Tokers Green - April 2024



We are incredibly happy with the service we have received from Andy and the team. We've really appreciated the positivity, diligence and patience. A big thank you to Liana who has really put in the hours to get us over the line! We highly recommend Bridges!

JAMES AND CHARLOTTE SMITH
Rokeby Drive, Tokers Green - March 2024



We would highly recommend Bridges Estate Agents who offered a first class service from conception to completion of selling our property in Sonning Common.

GILLY HARRIS
Kennylands Road, Sonning Common - March 2024



Andy and his team made the whole process from valuation, promotion, viewings, negotiations, right through to completion as stress free as is possible! We would highly recommend them. Thank you all.

ADELE KING
Kennylands Road, Sonning Common - December 2023



I had a great experience selling my mums house through Bridges. I wanted an agent that was able to sensitively bring people around knowing mum was elderly and on her own. The Bridges staff who handled the viewings were very caring to mum and it was always the same agent that came meaning mum felt safe with them. I would thoroughly recommend them.

CAROLINE JONES
Grove Road, Sonning Common - April 2024

GREEN MY VILLAGE



The dirty facts...the UK is one of the most nature-depleted nations in the world. Data shows that since 1970 UK species have declined by about 19% on average and nearly 1 in 6 is now threatened with extinction. Not great reading. Want to do something about it?

Change just one thing... by joining Eco SoCo you'll help make Sonning Common a greener place to live, for you, your families and the natural world around us...



- Apply for free native garden trees - 2 available for every household – first come first served!

- Plant trees this Autumn in SC's first Community Orchard

- Help us plant native trees and early pollinator plants on SC verges

- Join us for a fascinating talk on all things Hedgehog, including how to create your very own Hedgehog Highway, by retired vet and wildlife photographer extraordinaire, Stephen Powles, (photos will be available), on Wednesday June 5 @ SC Village Hall

- Volunteer at our up and coming monthly Repair Café! Use your repair skills, help in the café or be a general helper on the day

- Learn how to garden in a way that will produce great results AND be nature friendly, by joining us on Thursday 13 June @ 7pm, SC Village Hall, for an inspirational talk by expert Andre Tranquilini – see magazine noticeboard for details

We'll be at Village Day on Sunday 9 June, come say hello and find out more!

Look out for more information on the Eco SoCo Facebook page or Email me to register your interest: jules.shorter@gmail.com

And always remember... 'The Earth is what we all have in common.' Wendell Berry ●

Julie



HEDGEHOG HIGHWAYS

Following David Litchfield's article about hedgehogs in the last issue, I'd like to introduce you to the latest campaign by the local Eco SoCo group called Hedgehog Highways. We are aiming to reverse the decline of hedgehogs in the area by improving their habitat across the village. To do this we would like to link their gardens together by ensuring there are holes, gaps and tunnels in our fences. This will help our prickly friends to forage for food, find mates and seek shelter. We are aiming for 100 participants to create a network of Hedgehog Highways across the village. For more information and to join the scheme please email

Charles Smith at ecosococharles@gmail.com

Did you know?

1. It used to be a commonly held belief that hedgehogs stole milk from cows' udders,

which is why some people still put milk out for them. They are in fact lactose intolerant. The best way to feed them is with hedgehog food which is available online and at pet shops, and maybe put out with a dish of water. Pet Country Supplies in Sonning Common has hedgehog food in stock. I recommend Spikes Crunchy Dry food but any will do.

2. Hedgehogs are surprisingly good swimmers. However, if you have a garden pond with steep sides, do add a ramp so they can climb out.

3. Hedgehogs like quiet overgrown places. Consider making a wildlife area in a corner of your garden. It will attract other wildlife too. Before mowing or strimming long grass, take a moment to check for hedgehogs that could be sheltering there. Or better still, leave the grass long. ●

Charles Smith



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June

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in support of the
Parish Building Appeal

Sunday, 2nd June Concert: A Choral Bouquet, 3pm
St John the Baptist Choir with the
Kidmore End Primary School Choir
Saturday, 8th June Flower Festival: Colours of the
Rainbow, 10am-4pm
Sunday, 16th June Concert: A Variety of Folk Music,
3pm
Folk music from different cultures
Sunday, 23rd June Patronal Festival Evensong, 6pm
Sunday, 30th June Concert: A Garland of Solo and
Ensemble Music, 3pm

Free admission but donations to the Appeal
can be accepted at each of the events.
You can also donate by scanning the QR code below.



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Sonning Common Village Hall

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and

WEDNESDAY 3rd JULY

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for
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29th May 10:30 - 11:15am
Sonning Common Library
Tickets £5 in advance from the Library.

Organised by The Friends of Sonning Common Library



SONNING COMMON
PRIMARY SCHOOL
GROVE ROAD

Summer
Fair

29TH JUNE 2024

12.00pm till 3.00pm

PTA

GREAT BIG GREEN WEEK

The UK's biggest celebration of climate change action is
happening this summer and English Heritage is excited
to be involved. Great Big Green Week 2024 runs from
8-16 June and is a national festival of fun, practical
events organised by communities and organisations for
the good of everyone.

We're a proud
partner of

THE GREAT
BIG GREEN
WEEK

8th - 16th June 2024

Let's wrap together for good

Choral Society

Come & Sing with Bob Chilcott on Saturday 22 June! Join South Chiltern
Choral Society for a day of singing with an impromptu concert at the end
for family and friends.

The singing will be directed by Bob Chilcott and accompanied by Ian
Westley. Music will include Little Jazz Mass

Tea & coffee will be provided, please bring your own lunch.

Venue: Caversham Heights Methodist Church,
Highmoor Road, Caversham RG4 7BG

Tickets £20 per person. For more information go to www.southchilternchoralsociety.org.uk

HENLEY AND DISTRICT STAMP CLUB

Have you considered starting a new hobby -
could it be Stamp collecting?

The Henley Stamp Club is a friendly group and we
would be delighted to see new visitors or members.
If you are interested in facts concerning stamps or
postal history, why not come along and explore how
you can promote your interest?

We are trying to widen the age span of our
membership as a lot of us are in the grey hair era.

I only started stamp collecting when I was
approaching retirement as I needed a hobby to get
my teeth into. I now regret leaving it so late. It has
given me an opportunity to investigate periods of
history and to tie them to a picture on a stamp or to
find out what may have caused a variation.

To learn more about stamps and postal history
why not visit us at Bix one Wednesday evening on a
2nd or 4th? You can then meet other people
who find postal history and the story of stamps
fascinating too.

Further details can be obtained by phoning
Steve on 07767 251670 or on our website: -
www.henleyphilatelic.org.uk

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Off Horsepond Road

For more details see:

www.sonningcommontennisclub.org
or email
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Health Walks

The Health Walks continue into the Summer.
With the arrival of warmer weather (we
hope!) it's good to enjoy a walk in our
beautiful local countryside, and if you need
company then come and join us!

Health walking is for fitness – and it's
friendly, fun and free! The walks are for
everyone, whatever their age and ability, and
are graded accordingly. Not all of them are
fast walks: contact us (see website address
below) for advice about which one is best for
you. If you want to speak to someone about
any aspect of the Health Walks, phone Chris
Brook on 0118 972 2609

There are no walk timetables in paper form
at the moment, so you will have to check the
website for days/starting places/distances:
www.sonningcommonhealthwalks.co.uk/
timetable

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ROTHERFIELD UNITED FC

NEWS UPDATE - SUMMER 2024



As some of you will know Rotherfield United FC is transitioning to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) following a vote at the AGM. This charitable status benefits the club in all sorts of ways now and in the future.

As part of the transition to CIO, Andy Tidswell has become one of 7 Trustees of the Organisation and so steps down from his day-to-day role as Chair. Andy has been part of the club for 20 years and steered the club impeccably well over the last 8 years as Chairman. He will remain part of the club as a Trustee and is playing a big part in helping the club with its ambitions for the new 3G pitch and pavilion.

The new Chair is Matt Beech who has been a coach for many years and helped with the ongoing projects, and his Under 18 team have just completed their last season as 'junior' players. It is a great achievement for a team to stay together all the way to 18 years old, and some will now be continuing to play as a new men's team, starting in September.

Alan Noble has taken on the role of Deputy Chair, along with being involved in all funding initiatives. The club said thank you to Paul Collier, who stepped down as Club Secretary to become one of the club Trustees. Paul has been a committee member for the last 6 years and has devoted a huge amount of time to the club and was instrumental in securing CIO status for the club.

Rotherfield has been hugely successful in growing the club with membership increasing from 260 in 2020 to almost 550 in 2024. They now have ladies' teams, walking football, girls and boys teams, and the new men's team for September.

Chair, Matt Beech said 'as you may know we have for some time had ambitions to build a 3G pitch with floodlights and to replace our ageing facilities. A 3G pitch would allow us to play a combination of different size games: 11v11, 9v9, 2 x 7v7, or 4 x 5v5 games.

In conjunction with partners across a number of organisations, including the Football Foundation, Sport England and SODC, our club has been identified as being ideally placed to develop our facilities to include a new 3G with

floodlighting. We have taken a big step towards achieving that this week by submitting an application for pre-planning advice from SODC.

The club are looking forward to a bigger and brighter 2025 season.'

As part of ongoing fundraising efforts, Rotherfield held a tournament for the very first time over the weekend of 18th/19th May – unfortunately too late for this issue. A huge undertaking – a great team of volunteers organised it with other volunteers from all aspects of the club helping out in the car park, tuck shop and fun zone. It was an enormous success for all! Photos and write up to follow in the next issue.

Another fundraiser, in a small but no less important way, is the Boot Room. There is a donation box for players/parents to leave boots or clothing, which is then available to 'buy' in the Boot Room. There are no prices, but you pay what you feel is appropriate and every purchase directly supports the ongoing initiative to improve our club facilities. The Boot Room will be open at the Village day on 9 June when Rotherfield will also host their season presentations. ●



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ON YOUR BIKE 2024



On Sunday 21st April, On Your Bike returned for the first time since 2022. Although there was a bit of a biting wind, the sun shone, it was dry (most importantly) and we were delighted to see 300 people participated. It was really wonderful to see so many happy faces, some new to the ride and many that have supported it for years.

We also enjoyed having the playground ride back for the first time in many years. This is for the younger children that can't quite manage the roads or are learning to ride a bike.

On Your Bike was first held in 2007, with the idea to create a local event the whole community could get involved in to explore the local countryside, have fun and promote the benefits of a healthy activity.

It is open to all ages and level of ability. It is a ride, not a race!

There is a choice of 3 distances, 20 miles going out via Ipsden and Nuffield, 12

miles via Stoke Row, and 6 miles via Gallowstree.

One hundred percent of all entry fees are shared between Sonning Common Primary School PTA and chosen local charities (Sport in Mind, and Sonning Common Community First Responders)

A total of over £2,300 was raised. Riders taking part gathered in the school's playground.

Penny Snowden, who has been involved with On Your Bike since it began, gave the safety briefing to the cyclists and started the ride.

We were so grateful to the 33 volunteer marshals that were along the 3 routes and the break area where cyclist could stop and have a drink.

Our PTA team did a sterling job of providing tea, coffee, hotdogs and bacon rolls, which also helped raise funds for the school.

AW Cycles were present in the playground to help with any last-minute bike emergencies and to ensure they were road worthy, as well as Sonning Common Community first responders in case of anyone in need of medical attention.

At Sonning Common Primary School, we are always keen to encourage the children to be involved in the community and find ways they enjoy to keep fit and healthy.

With thanks to our sponsors for their support for our event.

AW Cycles from Caversham who kindly donated a bike and voucher to be exchanged for a cycle helmet, Beville Estate Agency (Sonning Common) for providing the riders numbers and doing an amazing job of putting up all the boards to advertise the event and more importantly doing a great job of taking them back down, so promptly afterwards, and to Peppard Building supplies.

It was a great team effort pulling it all together, with thanks to Geoff Davis, Caroline Conway, Richard Beville, Claire Birkett and Cate Sturgess.

We have had a lot of great feedback, and we look forward to planning next year and announcing the date in due course. ●

KATHRYN FELL WILLIS
(Sonning Common OYB Committee)



TALKING ABOUT THE WORLD'S LARGEST MINORITY OF PEOPLE WHY ARE WE STILL AFRAID?

By GLENN BRYANT



I have a question. It's simply a, 'Did you know?'

Did you know that, from 1941-45, the government of Germany murdered some six million members of Europe's Jewish community? Yes.

A second question. Did you know that, from 1939-41, the perpetrators of the above were effectively in training? As a commentator of the time described, they 'made murder their profession', killing an estimated 300,000 people with growing efficiency. Yes? No?

Hopefully, some of you are still answering, 'Yes,' but, from experience, I expect that there will be many more answers, 'No.'

Today, 85 years on, perhaps the real question should be, 'Why don't

we know?' The answer is that it's because those 300,000 victims had a mental or a physical impairment. For the purposes of this piece, they were 'disabled'.

Disability has not been a topic which has been discussed as frequently, for example, as women's rights, or civil rights, or gay rights, which, thank goodness, are happily debated more openly today. And yet disability rights have always lagged behind those movements. Why?

Honestly, I don't have an answer, or certainly not an easy one.

It's very easy to think 'disability' will never happen to us. And absolutely, it may not, but in countries where life expectancy tops 70 years, each of us, on average, can expect to spend eight years as 'disabled', or 12% of our life.

'Disabled' people today form the largest minority globally, 15% of us, or one in six, some one billion people. Today in the UK, it's one in four. We can look in the mirror and ask, 'What kind of world together do we want to live in?'

The way my brain has always been wired, in search of a big answer, is to distil it down to the simplest terms. The world I want to live in is one of happy acceptance. A world of inclusion. Where everyone can get involved, or not. It's their choice. But, I don't want the world, in any way, to take that choice away from the individual.

From 1933-45, Hitler and his government wanted to remove that choice so entirely from Germany's 'disabled' community, that he wanted to remove them entirely from this world. From 1939-41, he was very successful. He oversaw the murder of 300,000 people from within that community. We will never know the precise number.

Today, people with an impairment can expect to have 'poorer' outcomes in life, next to somebody without an impairment, in key areas: health, education, work, prosperity. In August 2023, a UK report by the House of Commons found that 'disabled' people scored themselves 6 out of 10 for 'Happiness', next to 8 out of 10 for people who identified as able-bodied. They regularly felt lonely, 13% next to 3%. And they were far less likely to be in employment, 54% next to 83%.

Attitudes have improved in the past 20 years, and I wonder how vital the London 2012 Paralympics were, even if only subconsciously, in helping change attitudes. But ignorance, even if polite, and misapprehension can still be commonplace, so breaking that vicious circle through the continued sharing of knowledge and understanding remains so important.

Let's end with a personal experience. Some 20 years ago. I went for a working pub lunch with my then boss. And he was more than my boss. We were friends and we spoke a lot.

I told him I had started seeing someone, a girl. Maybe she wasn't quite yet my girlfriend, but it felt she one day might be. I liked her. I hoped she liked me.

I added that she used a wheelchair. I wasn't really sure why she used a wheelchair. We hadn't talked about it. After all, at that point, we were only dating.

'Well...' my boss said, searching in his face for a reply. 'She's like half a girlfriend.'

What? Is he joking?

Tell me you're joking?

He's not joking, I realised troublingly.

I only ever saw him once after that.

And by the way, the girl did happily become 'my girlfriend' and today super happily remains my wife. The world I want to live in is one where she's free to shine. ●

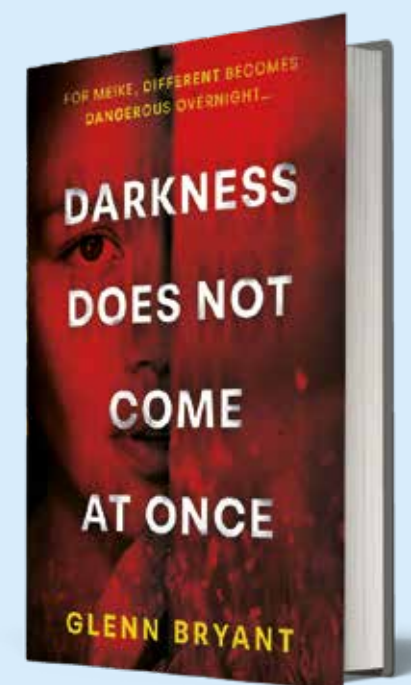
Darkness Does Not Come at Once -

Registered carer Glenn Bryant explores 'freedom' in a time in history where it was impossible to find. Glenn is a former daily news journalist who today works as a senior copywriter for a financial technology company.

Darkness Does Not Come at Once is his second novel, following *A Quiet Genocide*, published in 2018. He is a registered carer for his wife, Juliet, who has a spinal cord injury. They live happily in South Oxfordshire. Glenn can be found on social media @ glennmbryant. The book is available now on Amazon.co.uk and Waterstones.com

Meike is seventeen and she uses a wheelchair. Already in life she's accepted that she'll always somehow be 'different'. But overnight, 'different' becomes dangerous after the government announces disabled youngsters under the age of eighteen must spend the war in specially

designated institutions. Suddenly Meike is on the run in the rural lanes she calls home, bordering Berlin. It is 1939 and the whole of Germany, it seems, wants to fight the world. Quietly, members of Meike's family distance themselves, but two unlikely allies stand by her. One is an elderly woman and a lifelong Catholic, forced to question her faith; the other is a fifteen-year-old boy Meike hardly knows. They begin a search for answers as they scramble to find Meike and, in a country they no longer recognise, themselves. ●



PARISH NEWS

The content of this page is the sole responsibility of, and is paid for by, Sonning Common Parish Council

Jess Moss

We would very much like to welcome Jess Moss who has joined the team as an Administrator working in the Parish Office. Jess will be helping to support the Parish Clerk and Deputy Clerk in the day to day running of the Parish along with having responsibility for Planning, Allotments and Grant Applications.

Jess has lived locally in the village all her life and as a mum of two young children she would like to give something back so that her children can enjoy the life that she has experienced living here and is very much looking forward to working for the Council. •



Holiday activities

Sonning Common Youth Club will be running a week full of events commencing the week of the 19 August from Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge above the sports hall. The sessions will run from 11am -1.30pm roughly and TBC. We asked the young people from youth club what they would like to do and we came up with this list; zorbing, bell boating, a bouncy obstacle course, crafts, sports, film night, and a possible trip to Lagoon Park.

Sessions are free and ANYONE aged between 10-16 is welcome. Book on email. youthleader@sonningcommonparishcouncil.gov.uk •



Comments on Playing Pitch Strategy

We support SODC's vision statement but would ask for sight of the Pitch Audit which was undertaken and the data on participation trends which has informed the strategy. For example, we consider reference to age groups is needed to inform facility need. There should be clear metrics by reference to population or sub-sets of population to indicate levels of need and there should then be adjustment to recognise existing provision so as to identify gaps in provision. There are references to EXISTING teams and needs; in some cases if suitable provision is missing then teams will be inhibited from forming or continuing? Hence the importance of metrics and transparent evaluation. We do not believe it is accurate to rely solely on the number of teams in an area to identify demand as we believe the teams may not exist because of the lack of facility, thereby reflecting a latent potential demand which is not suggested in the report.

Weather is a big factor in the use of grass pitches especially for their maintenance and availability. The quality of existing provision is also a relevant consideration – in addition to the pitches themselves this also relates to supporting facilities.

Catch 22 situation Sonning Common has very few teams due to recreation area only opened in 2022, therefore disadvantaged.

We are in support of the 9-a-side pitch pipeline commitment at Memorial Park but we need information as to how this will be funded and maintained, together with the additional parking plus toilets, changing and storage which will be required if the pitch is to be used by local clubs and leagues. This pitch could also be used for other sports as well as 5-a-side football and to enable tennis on the MUGA in main summer outside the football season. We support the need for better provision for

women and girls, note the references to this at page 34, but believe that future demand must be mapped by use of expected metric of potential demand.

Funding needed for 9-a-side pitch

We support the principle of community use agreements but these need to be fully thought through and managed so there is genuine community access at reasonable and various times. There is no comment on safety for participants which is a major consideration in rural dark sky areas, requiring wayfaring lighting and safe parking/access. Girls and women are particularly vulnerable and this has led to the installation of LED lighting over the MUGA and solar powered wayfaring lights at Memorial Park. Carefully chosen due to the context of the AONB setting.

Focus on girls/women and to encourage park visiting •



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SONNING COMMON HEALTH CENTRE



Congratulations to Dr Sam Muncey, his wife and family who recently welcomed a beautiful baby girl into their family. She is already adored and getting lots of cuddles from her 2 older siblings.

The Hive

Our amazing Social Prescribers, Rachel and Abbie, have been working for some time to set up a monthly community coffee morning for people with Dementia and their carers. We are delighted to announce that our first coffee morning will be taking place on Thursday 4 July 2024. This is a great opportunity for those affected by Dementia to come together and feel supported. Thank you to Rachel and Abbie for all their hard work.




The Hive

Community Coffee Morning



All welcome for refreshments and a friendly chat. A great social morning with a chance to meet your local Community Link worker, along with our colleagues at **Dementia Oxfordshire** and **Carers Oxfordshire**.

We'll also be supported by your local Social Prescribers, our Digital Support Volunteer, and different local services in your community.

When: First Thursday of the month, 10am-12pm - **Starting 4th July 2024**
Where: Sonning Common Village Hall, Wood Lane, Sonning Common, RG4 9SL
Cost: FREE - with support from Farrans Construction

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disabled, elderly or vulnerable have missed appointments because they have been unable to park so please do not park in the health centre car-park unless you are visiting the Health Centre. Please be mindful of the needs of others and help us to serve the community. Patient and staff numbers have increased; this exacerbates the problem.

Lyme disease It's that time of year again!

It's hard to overstate the impact Lyme disease can have on a person's life

Lyme disease is spread by ticks and can be a serious and life changing condition. It is believed that some 10% of ticks in the UK carry the disease. However the prevalence of ticks and the disease is increasing. There are other less common diseases such as tick borne encephalitis which are also spread by ticks. If travelling abroad you may encounter different species of tick and different diseases. Lyme disease is an infection caught from the bite of an infected tick and is caused by a bacterium called Borrelia.

Ticks are small spider like creatures which move slowly they grow in stages and change their skin as their size increases. In the first stage they are initially less than 2mm across but when fully grown they can be about 8mm across. You may find a tick adhering to your skin or clothing following a spell in the countryside or even in the garden. They feed on the blood of animals usually mammals or birds which can be anything in the range from mouse up to horse or cattle. The tick climbs on to vegetation and may join its host animal, perhaps you, as it brushes past. The tick may spend time in your clothing or on your skin before sinking its feeding mouth parts into you. If the tick is infected then you might be at risk of catching the disease.

You can protect yourself by avoiding brushing past vegetation, wearing suitable clothing to cover arms and legs. Tuck trousers into your socks (or use gaiters) wearing clothing that covers you. Brush off your dog and your clothing before going inside.

Additionally you can use repellents that contain Icaridin or 50% DEET (diethyltoluamide) are most effective. Recent tests by Which? Magazine showed that plant based alternatives are less effective.

When you return inspect yourself (and/or your partner) for ticks concentrating on less accessible areas like under arm, back, back of legs and groin. Get a tick remover and carry it with you, the metal ones are better for removing the smaller ticks. You may obtain one on-line or from a chemist or outdoor shop. Your dog might pick up a tick which could detach itself and you could find it on the floor.

More on Lyme Disease

Official estimates say there are 3,000-4,000 cases of Lyme disease in England and Wales annually. Real numbers could be "at least three times higher".

Lyme disease can cause a circular rash around a tick bite; it may become clear in the centre and look like a target or bull's-eye and might gradually spread. It's not usually hot or itchy.

It can cause flu-like symptoms a few days or weeks after being bitten by an infected tick, such as: a high temperature, or feeling hot and shivery, headache, tiredness and loss of energy and possibly a rash. The rash can appear up to 3 months after being bitten by an infected tick, but usually appears within 1 to 4 weeks and can last for several weeks.

The rash may be flat, or slightly raised, and look pink, red, or purple when it appears on white skin. It can be harder to see



the rash on brown and black skin and it may look like a bruise.

Lyme disease is treated with antibiotics from a GP. The sooner you start treatment, the better your chance of a full recovery.

Tick Removal

DO NOT squash the tick (if you put a tick under pressure, you may pump its saliva and stomach contents into you!) Use a tick removal tool to ensure you remove all the tick or fine-tipped tweezers.

Dispose of the tick down the sink, avoiding getting any tick fluids on bare skin

Clean the bite site with soap & water or antiseptic. If you develop a rash or symptoms, see your doctor and tell them you were bitten.



Medical Treatments

The antibiotics you're given will depend on your symptoms, but you may need to take them for up to 28 days. It's important to finish the course, even if you start to feel better.

Some people with severe symptoms will be referred to a specialist in hospital so antibiotics can be given directly into a vein.

Most people with Lyme disease get better after antibiotic treatment. This can take months for some people, but the symptoms should improve over time.

People with symptoms of Lyme disease that last a long time after treatment may be referred to a specialist in hospital for advice and more blood tests.

Important:

Speak to a doctor for advice before buying tests or treatment online. ●

SUE LITCHFIELD
Health Champion for SCHC

CHURCH NEWS

HOPE

Apparently, for some poor souls in the concentration camps, the difference between survival and death was hope. Remove hope, and you have nothing left to live for.

Hopelessness is horrible. We are devastated when life and things and people fail us.

For hope to be true, it has to be comprehensive (include all the most important things), and sure (not a make-believe fantasy).

Christian hope is comprehensive: It promises us a new body that will never die, and a perfected spirit (the essential me). It promises a glorious new heaven and new earth in which to live for eternity. It promises that this new creation will be exactly as God intended it to be, exactly as we need. And it promises the permanent absence of frustration, boredom, pain, disease, death, and sorrow.

Christian hope is sure: It is promised by the God who is reliable (He has never broken a promise), and powerful (He created all things from nothing). And it is guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Who possesses this hope? Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ, who will Himself be in the new creation, and its crowning pleasure.

Do you have this hope? ●

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Patient parking

We are finding that our patients are having an ever-increasing problem when parking to attend their Health Centre appointment. Some of our patients, many of whom might be

CHURCH NEWS



St Michael's Catholic Church

Like many other churches St Michael's saw increased numbers this year participating on our liturgies during Holy Week and Easter. On Maundy Thursday twelve members of the community comprising women, men and children had their feet washed representing the twelve apostles at the Last Supper. Since the clocks changed on Easter Sunday morning, we began our Easter Vigil on Saturday evening in complete darkness with the Easter fire outside the church. It was very effective as we proclaimed, "The Light of Christ" and all present lit their candle from the Easter Candle to gradually illuminate the dark church. We were able to welcome many visitors and old friends as well as the regular parish community. Many people worked hard to prepare for this special feast including the flower arrangers and choir members.

Fr Michael our parish priest celebrated his 50th anniversary of ordination on 20th April. Being a Saturday, we commemorated the event with an Afternoon Tea in the parish hall. A huge collection of sandwiches, cakes and scones were provided so that no one went home hungry. It was a very enjoyable event and we were able to thank Fr Michael for his service to the Church over 50 years and particularly for his time with us in Sonning Common.

Teenage members of our community

came together for the first time to take on key roles in one of our recent 10.30am Sunday Masses. It brought great hope and joy to see our young people using their gifts and talents for the good of the wider parish community. Hopefully this was the first of many such Masses to come.

As summer approaches we look forward to younger members of the parish receiving their first Holy Communion and those slightly older being Confirmed.

You might not know that we have a well-equipped hall available for hire for parties and family gatherings. Take a look on our website. If you want to find out more about the Catholic faith or re-engage with your faith but are unsure where to start, simply ring the parish office and talk to Fr Michael. See our website for contact information: www.saintmichaelsonningcommon.org.uk

St John the Baptist and Christ the King

June brings with it the promise of warmer weather and also a whole month of concerts and special events within the Parish to support the Parish Fundraising Appeal to fund extensions and improvements to both Parish churches, St John the Baptist in Kidmore End and Christ the King in Sonning Common.

A reminder and some information of the events planned:

Sunday 2 June – 'A Choral Banquet' concert 3pm, St John's Church.

The Parish Choir and the choir from Kidmore End Primary School singing light-hearted music together, with some separate choir items.

Saturday 8 June – 'A Flower Festival' 10am–4pm, St John's Church and churchyard.

Come along and see the church and churchyard beautifully decorated with floral displays.

Sunday 16 June – 'A Variety of Folk Music' concert 3pm, St John's Church.

A mix of groups and individuals performing different styles of folk music from around the world.

Sunday 23 June – Patronal Festival Evensong, 6pm, St John's Church.

A special Evensong to celebrate St John's Day. There will be an augmented choir and guest organist.

Sunday 30 June – 'A Garland of Solo and Ensemble Music' concert 3pm, St John's Church.

Talented and enthusiastic Parish musicians will be performing a wide variety of solos, duets and trios, both vocal and instrumental.

Refreshments will be available following each of the concerts as well as throughout the day of the Flower Festival. All the events are free to attend, but audiences are invited to give generously towards the Appeal in the retiring collections. Donations to the Parish Fundraising Appeal can also be made via the Parish website:

<https://givealittle.co/campaigns/80b9b652-122d-4cb3-b09c-be2147340d13>.

Please do make a note of these dates and come along to enjoy some very special music and floral decorations.

Services at both churches will continue throughout June and July – all welcome!

Full details of service dates and times can be found at www.achurchnearyou.com

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THE VOLUNTEERING BUZZ

I don't know about you, but I never thought I'd be one for volunteering. I guess I always assumed that if I had the time and energy to be doing something, then it might as well be something I got paid for. Why else would I bother? The revelation that giving my time for free is actually more rewarding still mystifies me, but it's true!

I started during the pandemic. Covid threw everyone a curve ball: those of us who were used to rushing off to the office in the morning, were suddenly working from home; and out of the blue some residents were shielding in their homes instead of being able to get out to volunteer. I had been a regular library user since moving to the village in 1996, so when the doors re-opened I decided I'd step up and do my bit. And take advantage of the opportunity to see people - it turns out, working from home can be quite lonely.

Library volunteers are organised through the Friends of Sonning Common Library (FoSCL). There are various roles. I am on the rota to go in for two hours every two weeks to do standard library tasks which include finding, shelving and sorting books. However, there are loads of different ways you can get involved. For example, Oxfordshire Libraries offer a Home Library Service for those who are not able to go in to collect their books themselves. A volunteer calls round every 3 weeks to deliver

books, music CDs and/or audio books. In an ideal world, this is the same person every time. They then get to know what the other person likes and, if they find a requested book isn't available, they can have a go at finding a suitable replacement. This is a free service which Sonning Common Library is proud to be able to offer residents. However, it is only possible if people like you and me come forward and volunteer. What a great way to get to know somebody and what a wonderful use of your time!

As well as organising the volunteers, the FoSCL committee also arranges and subsidises visits of authors for adults, various events for children, book purchases, and fund-raising events. Part of the FoSCL constitution states that a committee member can only sit for 5 consecutive years. Come this November, the current treasurer will need to step down. If you think you might be interested in taking over from him, why not drop a line to treasurer@friendsofsonningcommonlibrary.org.uk to find out more? He is not planning to move away in the near future so will be around to give guidance, if necessary, even after the new person has taken over the role. If you are even half considering this, please take the plunge and make contact. It is not a particularly onerous role but it is a vital one. FoSCL cannot function without a treasurer and our village deserves to have a library enhanced by The Friends.

The FoSCL committee is a friendly bunch of people. A list of the committee members is on display in



FRIENDS of Sonning Common Library

the library foyer. If you want to know more about becoming a Friend of the library or about volunteering, visit friendsofsonningcommonlibrary.org.uk or email Juliet Legg, the Library Manager, at sonningcommon.library@oxfordshire.gov.uk. Alternatively, call in to the library for a chat about it.

What is it they say? Don't ask what your library can do for you, as what you can do for your library! ●

ALISON SMITH
(FoSCL)



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Reclaim your identity in retirement

Meet Anne – a sudden change in life circumstances meant she found herself alone with no family nearby. Taking her future into her own hands, she made the move to a retirement village and has never looked back. Here, Anne and her daughter Sally share their story of reclaiming identity and relationships.



Sally and Anne

Inspired Villages resident and her daughter.

Anne's situation is all too common: her husband died and the house she called home suddenly felt too big for just her. And with no family nearby, it felt even bigger and impossible to maintain alone. She felt disconnected from everyone and the life she knew.

Anne tells us she wasn't ready for retirement, but her husband being sick meant she wanted the time to look after him. When he passed, she found herself isolated from the social and active life she once had and unsure of who she was and what made Anne, Anne.

"I liked having my own house and garden, then I realised everything was getting too much for me."

She took action to reclaim her life and reached out to Inspired Villages. She soon found an apartment that was near her daughter and afforded her a safe space to find herself again.

Her friends were sceptical. They thought Anne was sending herself off to a care home and advised against. But Anne, having experienced care homes first hand when looking after her husband, wasn't worried one bit:

"My husband was in a care home, Inspired Villages is nothing like one. You have your own lovely apartment and the place has life and soul!"

Leaving old friends behind and the thought of making new ones was both exciting and nerve-racking for Anne – she didn't want to trade one lonely place for another. But she needn't have worried as she found everyone speaks to everyone and felt at home the second she arrived. Sally likens it to everyone's first days of university: you're nervous, pacing but also excited, wondering if anyone is going to talk to you. Only to find that everyone is in the same boat and wanting to make friends with like-minded people.

Anne received the warmest of Inspired Villages welcomes and has

never looked back.

And it's not just Anne who is reaping the benefits of the retirement village. Sally feels like she can rest a little easier, knowing that when she's away her mum is never lonely – far from it!

Because life at Ledian Gardens comes complete with on-site wellness spa, swimming pool and restaurant – where residents love to come together. Not to mention the social clubs: Book Club, Gardening Club and Wild Swimming Club – you name it, the residents have made a club out of it. There's a real sense of community between both residents and staff too, with everyone chipping in for a Prostate Cancer fundraiser to support a friend of senior management, recently. There's something for everyone, but it's Chess Club that has Anne's heart. Something she races back for so she doesn't miss out, which is music to Sally's ears knowing her mum has a community she loves returning home to.

"We see each other so much more, we have so much more to talk about and so much more to do. Sometimes we're racing back in time for Chess Club!"

Having their own lives but living so close means more quality time together.



On-site facilities

Inspired Villages has a wide range of facilities across their communities. Their restaurants provide great food, impeccable service and a selection of fine wines. Additionally, their cafés offer coffees, homemade cakes, and fresh, light, nutritious meals.

Residents experience ultimate relaxation in quaint pools and spas and make use of arts and crafts rooms, cinemas, and libraries, among numerous other facilities.

The village transport services allow residents to explore nearby towns and cities or can be utilised for their weekly shop at their convenience.



Sally doesn't spend her time worrying about her mum's future and whether she's ok. She can enjoy her own life knowing that her mum is in a safe and secure environment, indulging old hobbies and pursuing new passions, surrounded by like-minded people who look out for each other.

Without a long M25 journey separating them, the pair often find they see each other multiple times a day. Anne says with all the activities on offer, they do a lot more exciting things together and the days they see each other seem less forced with new hobbies to explore.

Anne is happy in her new setting, living her best later life. She's thriving and living in the moment with new friends (and old ones when they come to visit), at a place she can now call home and feel 100% herself.



"We've gone from seeing one another four times a year to four times a day sometimes!"



Ready to find your community?

Find out more by calling **0808 301 9849** or visit inspiredvillages.co.uk

Scan the QR code below to find out more about Inspired Villages.



Inspired
Villages

BECOMING A FISH VOLUNTEER

There are 4 different ways in which you can become a FISH volunteer. Each has their own special attraction, but all are considered very worthwhile by the people who are already involved as volunteers. Please call the FISH Office on Monday to Friday from 9.30 am - 12 noon to leave your name and phone number and someone will return your call to answer any further questions you may have - no obligation assumed.

I have been a volunteer driver for FISH for two years, and thoroughly enjoy it! I was aware of the vital role the service provides in getting local residents to appointments and functions, and wanted to support the community in a way that could fit around my other commitments. I have got to know some lovely, interesting people as I often see the same clients more than once.

Mary, who coordinates the drivers, provided me with a thorough introduction and answered all my questions. The majority of the journeys are local and you can opt out of doing longer trips such as to Oxford or Bracknell if you would rather not travel that far. You are able to claim for mileage which covers cost of additional petrol used.

I receive a list of bookings every day from the FISH office which I survey at my leisure, and choose the ones which I am able to help. Once I have accepted a booking I receive confirmation via email. The system is easy to use and well organised. Everyone who is involved with the FISH service are very friendly, helpful and welcoming. So come and join us. Even if you only have an odd hour to spare every couple of weeks, driving people to appointments is a worthwhile way to get involved with our community, and it's fun! ●

ALYSON



Why volunteer for FISH? It's a fantastic way of meeting new people and being involved in the village. I moved here ten years ago and was new to the area. I had just retired so had a bit of time on my hands and wondered how I could meet new people.

I had worked in an office so I volunteered, doing one morning a week answering the phone and taking bookings then entering whatever was needed onto the computer. Having been a carer I know how hard it is getting people to appointments if they are unable to drive themselves and need help getting to the right place, especially if the family live a distance away.

FISH does many things but mainly it is getting people to medical appointments. We also take bookings for shopping and leisure trips on the FISH bus. Sometimes it's very busy with phone calls and visitors but it is very rewarding helping people who need it. We are always keen to hear from new people who would like to help.

FISH is a very kind and friendly organisation. You get to socialise with the other helpers, at meetings and the occasional lunch.

Our clients are always very grateful and are a pleasure to talk to and arrange drivers for them.

I'm so glad I joined FISH as a volunteer and now I never go up to the village without meeting someone I know. ●

VAL



I have been a FISH home visitor since 2017. I cannot believe it has been that long. Obviously during Lockdown I could not visit but I used to keep in touch regularly by phone.

I visit my client once a week for one and a half hours to two hours each time. I know she looks forward to me coming and nearly always has the kettle on ready for a cup of tea.

We chat about all sorts of things, look at old photographs, discuss the television programmes, she like me likes quizzes,

I look forward to visiting, it gets me out of the house and I feel I am appreciated. My client uses FISH a lot for appointments, doctors, dentist, hospital as she is more or less housebound. All of this is much valued by her.

If you have a spare couple of hours a week why not consider becoming a FISH visitor. It is very rewarding and worthwhile, not only for the client but also the visitor. ●

ANON



After retirement, I was keen to do something with a genuine purpose – that got me out of the house! Also, if possible, something to help me get to know the local area better – but only if I enjoyed it. A positive contribution to the local community would be a plus, too, and a special bonus would be to learn a new skill. Very thorough training was given by Bus Manager (another volunteer) and other experienced drivers: soon I became satisfyingly familiar with all the roads, lanes and hamlets in the Sonning Common area and surrounding villages.

First and foremost, I enjoy driving the minibus! There is great satisfaction in confidently handling a modern 24-foot-long vehicle, capable of carrying 16 people. Dealing with occasionally challenging driving, parking and navigation situations gives a profound sense of achievement. A genuine pleasure, too, is getting to know our regular FISH passengers, whose company and conversation is always fun, and intriguing! Importantly, being part of a friendly, varied and supportive team of specialist drivers is very rewarding too.

The FISH Bus runs regular shopping trips to Reading and Henley, as well as to garden centres, IKEA and Dunelm, Sonning Common Library and the monthly FISH Tea Party and Lunch Club, Henley Farmers' Market – all picking clients up from their doorstep – as well as monthly special leisure trips to fascinating, further-flung destinations. As a driver, I provide my available dates in advance and am assigned to two or three trips each month.

It feels good to be a FISH Bus driver! ●

STEPHEN

(Additional note from the Bus Manager - To volunteer as a FISH minibus driver you need to have passed your driving test before 1 January 1997 and have a D1 category on your driving licence.)



TOM FORT WORDS AND LETTERS

The question troubling me at the moment is: why am I so bad at Scrabble? Everyone thinks I should be good at the game because I write, but it doesn't work that way and it's most distressing.

On holiday with my first wife more than forty years ago, we played Scrabble the first evening and she started by using all seven letters – with a bonus of 50 – to make the word 'dovecot.' Even now I can remember staring incredulously at the board and trying to suppress my feelings of rage and frustration.

Matters have not improved much since then. Recently we have had a couple of Scrabble evenings with some friends from Peppard, and each time I have felt humiliated. The thing is,

they both have a memory store of little two letter words – with meanings like 'ancient Maori digging stick' – which no one would ever use in normal conversation, but which enable them to complete multiple words at the same time, stacking up indecently large scores.

For instance, last night one of them used the word 'robe' vertically to complete three other words left to right. Outrageous! The other did something very similar with 'kit'. I ask you – is that fair?

Well, of course it is. The rules are skewed in favour of that kind of gap-filling and against the kind of verbal elegance that I like. We were playing recently with one of my brothers and his wife, and I came up

with a delicious word – 'ogee' (it's a decorative architectural feature, in case you wondered). I hugged myself at my cleverness, until it was pointed out that it scored a measly 10 even on a double word score. Even if you put 'AP' in front to make 'apogee' (meaning 'climax') it would be pathetic.

I do try not to be a bad loser, but sometimes the fact that I never win and am almost always last or second last makes me want to weep. That's WEEP – that's nine, or twenty-seven on a triple word. ●



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