



Parish Council Newsletter - April 2022

View from the Chair

Spring is in the air and bulbs and blossoms are showing themselves with intimations of the warmer weather to come. Life is getting back to normal with the lifting of Covid restrictions and members of our Parish can once again enjoy those day-to-day social interactions that have been missing or strained over the last couple of years.

The Parish Council has spent the winter planning work for the coming year and developing the budget to fund our projects and activities. There is more information on the new budget in this edition of the newsletter which should provide some insight into the calculation of the precept, that is, the portion of your council tax that is allocated to the Parish Council.

We are very pleased that we have been able to fill the two vacancies on the council and we are now back to a full complement of councillors. Thank you to all those that expressed an interest in these roles and to those who are getting involved in the development of a Neighbourhood Plan.

I am personally looking forward to the Park Road playground refurbishment and I hope you will be patient with any short-lived disruption caused by the work. To any budding photographers out there, I would draw your attention to the photographic competition, we are looking for photographs that really show off the beauty and character of North Leigh parish and community. Any that are used on the website will be fully credited.

While Spring brings generally warmer weather, it also brings the rain and showers that make this a such a green and pleasant land. This means that our rural footpaths can become muddy and slippery. Don't let this stop you from enjoying our beautiful countryside, as Ranulph Fiennes alleged, "There's no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing."

Greg Matthews

Chair

North Leigh Parish Council



Grass Verges, Hedges and Footways in The Parish.

As you may be aware, last year the Council made the decision to follow Plantlife's 'No Mow May' campaign to help our Bees, Butterflies, Wildlife, and us! Since the 1930's 97% of wildlife meadows has been lost, however grassy road verges and patches provide crucial havens for wild plants and wildlife. It is estimated that there are 238,000 hectares of Road verges compared to 85.000 hectares of surviving wildflower rich grasslands in the UK. By not mowing in May and mowing less often we can improve biodiversity, have positive outcomes for nature, reduce carbon emissions and provide our Bees and Butterflies with nectar rich wildflowers when there are fewer flowers in our garden in May. This year, we are again supporting the Bee and Butterfly population by not mowing grass verges and green spaces during May. This allows the wildflowers to thrive and provide Bees and other insects with their favourite 'Nectar Stops'. Bees are a valuable part of our food chain, pollinating flowers for fruit, vegetables, and trees. Blossom is used by the Bees for nectar and leaves are used by some bees for making "homes".

The Council would ask residents to try to refrain from cutting their hedges from February through to June/July if possible as many species of birds are nesting between these months. However, if a footway runs past your property, the council would request that the hedges, shrubs, or trees do not grow to the extent that the path is obstructed.


Although the hedges and grass verges may look a bit wild/ untidy towards the end of June/July, please be patient as they provide more protection for nesting birds and other wildlife.

If you are interested in learning more about Plantlife and their work, the website address is below:
www.plantlife.org.uk/uk

Precept 2022 /2023

Each year in December and January the Parish Council undertakes the task of creating the budget for the forthcoming financial year. This budget, which is based on the council's running costs and new projects that will be undertaken, is used by the council to determine the precept for the coming year. For the 2022 /2023 financial year there are several projects the council will be undertaking based on your feedback from the Village Questionnaire. These projects include:

- A new website that is focused on increasing communication between the council and the village. The Parish Council website will continue to have a sign-up area on the site where people may subscribe to the mailing list from which many news updates are sent.
- Speed equipment: The Parish Council has a vibrant and evolving speedwatch programme and is intending to purchase equipment to enhance this activity.
- A detailed map of the cemetery linking to a database all the graves for the running and maintenance of the cemetery and the Parish Council's record keeping.
- Flower containers at the entrances to North Leigh at Park Road and Common Road
- The exciting refurbishment of the Children's Playground



Based on the increased expenditure of the coming financial year, residents will notice an increase in their precept. The Parish Council works hard to deliver value to residents based on your feedback. The council appreciates any feedback and comments that will assist us in continuing to evolve and deliver services and facilities that are important to our residents.

Speedwatch

In the last issue of the parish newsletter, it was reported that we had signed up to the Thames Valley Police Community Speedwatch scheme. As a result of this there is now an active North Leigh group established and Speedwatch surveys will be recommencing in March. As ever we would welcome new members and so, if you would like to take part in the activities of the group, please go to the communityspeedwatch.org website and follow the joining instructions. Alternatively, if you would like further information, contact Councillor Andy Clements via the Parish Clerk or directly by email to andyc.nlpc@gmail.com

In February Oxfordshire County Council approved £8 million of funding to promote the rollout of their 20 MPH project across Oxfordshire. This will help support the 20 MPH policy which was approved by OCC in October 2021. The aims of the policy include helping to make our towns and villages safer, happier, and less polluted places in which to live. The scheme is free to town and parish councils and the county council will be funding sign-only changes for areas wishing to be part of the project if the locations meet the agreed criteria for 20 MPH restrictions.

If you would like to know more about OCC's proposals, please visit the relevant pages on their website. Our County Councillor, Liam Walker, recently encouraged residents to take part in an online survey to try and determine local support for 20 MPH zones in his ward. The resulting data for North Leigh will be made available to the Parish Council and once we have considered it, we will be able to decide on the best way forward.

Independently of OCC's strategy the Parish Council is still investigating the possible introduction of Radar Activated Speed Signs at a number of sites in the parish as a way of influencing driver behaviour and improving road safety.

Photo Competition

The Parish Council is launching a new village website to improve upon the current site. The Council is looking for photos taken in the parish be placed on the home page and to use in the body of the village pages. Photos need to be high resolution and the best three will be awarded prizes!

If you have any photos for submission, please contact the clerk at northleighparishclerk@gmail.com

The deadline for the competition is 30th April 2022.



Library

As a parish we are extremely fortunate to have an active library at the heart of our community. In common with other libraries in the county, North Leigh library is run and managed by the Oxfordshire Library Service. The Parish Council, recognising the importance of this facility to the parishioners, contributes directly to the running costs via a Partnership Working Group.

The library opening times are:

Monday: 2:00 to 4:30

Wednesday: 3:00 to 7:00

Friday: 2:00 to 4:30

Saturday: 10:00 to 12:00

Alongside the conventional services such as the lending of books, audio books, e-books and e-audio, our library is also able to provide free Wi Fi, computer and internet facilities, local studies collection, printing and copying and access to e-newspapers and e-magazines. It is also well used by North Leigh Primary School and hosts visiting classes on a regular basis. In addition, and thanks to help provided by volunteers, a number of activity groups also take place, and these are detailed below:

Children's Groups:

Monday: Story Time - 3:15 to 3:30 (term time only)

Wednesday: Code Club - 5:00 to 6:00 (8-11 yrs. starting 2nd March for six weeks. Booking essential)

Saturday: Lego Club - 10:30 to 12:00 (children must be accompanied by an adult)

Adult Groups:

Reading Group: - Last Tuesday in the month at 2.00

Craft Morning: - First Wednesday in the month at 10:00

Digital help on basic skills like email, surfing the net etc – pre-booking required.

The library is also considering creating a Scrabble club and would be interested in talking to anyone who would like to be involved in this or who has ideas for other activities that could be supported by the library.

Finally, **The Friends of North Leigh Library (FONLL)** are a group of volunteers who support the library. As well as raising the profile of the library, they help to raise funding for events such as author talks and children's activities.

If you would like to become involved with FONLL or if you would like details on any of the activities listed above, please contact the library on 01993 882935.

Children's Playground Refurbishment Project

The Parish Council is delighted to report that the company Proludic are due to start refurbishing the children's playground in Park Road from 21st March 2022. The playground will be closed during this time and the work should take between 3-4 weeks. If all goes to plan it may possibly allow the playground to be reopened by late April but certainly should be in use by the summer months.

The new equipment has been chosen with inclusivity in mind and will have a basket swing, playhouse, springers, playboards and a wheelchair accessible roundabout amongst even more exciting equipment suitable for children from ages 1 - 12 years old. We very much hope this refurbishment and upgrade will provide a fun and stimulating environment to be enjoyed by all the children of North Leigh for many years to come

Updates as to how the work is progressing will be available on the Parish Council website - <https://www.northleigh.org>

Neighbourhood Plan Update

In the previous newsletter we outlined the process required to develop a Neighbourhood Plan and asked those villagers who were interested in being involved to contact us. We have had an encouraging response and have enough volunteers to create a steering committee. The initial first meeting is likely to have taken place by the time the newsletter is distributed. An update on the progress will be given in the next newsletter and on the Parish website.

We continue to look for volunteers – if you are interested in participating, please contact the Parish Clerk:

northleighparishclerk@gmail.com

District Councillor report

Since the previous newsletter, the key event that has taken place was the voting through of the Council's budget for 2022/3. Whilst the Council will be increasing Council Tax (on Band D properties by £5pa or about 10 p per week) WODC tax charges remain one of the lowest for a District Council in England – WODC does seek to provide value for money and efficient services for all its residents. WODC charges are approximately 7% of one's total Council Tax bill – Oxford County Council's charge and the Thames Valley Police precept account for the largest percentages - a minute proportion is the Parish precept.

I would like to reiterate how much hard work the Council staff have put in over the last two years during the pandemic when delivering services has not been easy for many obvious reasons. Over and above their normal workload, many have helped to distribute large sums of pandemic related Government grants to local businesses and assisted numerous vulnerable folk whose situation was exacerbated by the various lockdown restrictions. Many staff were reallocated to completely new roles/tasks and adapted very well despite everything. **Well done to all of them** and I am sure a vast majority of our residents will join me in those sentiments.

One recent change has been the renaming of one of the Scrutiny Committees, whose role it is to call the Cabinet to account over all policy and decisions. As the Climate Change working group had effectively completed the initial tasks set it, their focus has now been handed back to the renamed Climate and Environment Overview Scrutiny committee, and it will now pick up where the working group left off. I am glad to be a member of this Committee and believe I have much value to contribute to its work. Climate Change remains a core pillar of Council policy and a golden thread through every policy and decision we take on your behalf. We now have a full-time officer, Ness Scott, for Climate Change matters and a Cabinet member responsible for Climate Change, Cllr David Harvey.

I should point out for those who are not already aware, that I am now an Independent member for North Leigh, having resigned the Conservative Party whip. I have stated that I will return to the Conservative Party when Boris Johnson is no longer PM. I will continue to do my best for all the residents of North Leigh as I have tried to do, since becoming your Ward member in 2016. I endeavour to hold monthly Surgeries in the committee room of the Memorial Hall – do come along and have a chat. **I will be holding one on April 22nd between 2pm and 3 pm.**

Obviously, the latest events in Ukraine are top of everyone's minds as I write this – the shadow of war hangs over Europe once again and let us hope the conflict can be resolved before it spreads further.

If any resident has any queries or issues with which I might be able to assist you, just email me on

harry.stjohn@westoxon.gov.uk or ring me on 881529.

Harry St John, Ward Member for North Leigh

LASTLY - A REQUEST FROM THE PARISH COUNCIL: It is important that the Parish is a clean and pleasant place for everyone to enjoy **PLEASE PLEASE** take your litter home or put it in the bin. Importantly please pick up behind your dog and put the proceeds in a bag in the dog poo bin – but **DON'T** leave the bag on the ground or worse hung on a bush as some folk do.

