



# North Hinksey Parish Council

## 2021 Newsletter



### 2021 Chairman's Report

Looking back on last year's newsletter, with its mentions of hundreds of people attending our 'Big Green Day' and the new Seacourt Hall Open Day it all seems like a very different world from the one we are currently inhabiting.

With the initial lockdown we had the additional shock of no longer being able to hold meetings. When new legislation finally allowed us to meet online we were one of the first Councils out of the blocks, holding 7 meetings in April 2020 alone, with many other Councils not even starting before May, or even later. These have proved a great success, and we currently hope to continue with Zoom meetings for the foreseeable future pending further Government legislation to allow this option after May, possibly moving to hybrid meetings when conditions allow us to do so safely.

We also had further complications last year with our Clerk moving on to pastures new. After several months of temporary cover we were very glad to welcome Sharon Henley, our new Clerk, to the fold in August. She has already had a massive impact on general Council efficiency, although unfortunately she has not yet been available to meet parishioners face to face in the Parish Council Office because of Covid-19 restrictions.

Let us hope for further improvements in the months to come, but for the meantime, as you will see in this newsletter, we are as busy as ever, and we will make every effort to continue providing our services as usual.

**Councillor David Kay, Parish Council Chairman**

### Annual Parish Meeting

In 2020 we were unable to hold our APM because of the outbreak of Covid-19. This year the Hall is currently still closed, but thanks to the wonders of Zoom we are now able to hold our meeting online.

**2021 APM online on Zoom, 7.30pm, Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> March.**

See [www.northhinksey-pc.gov.uk](http://www.northhinksey-pc.gov.uk) for the agenda, with links for access & documents on Dropbox.

The meeting will include updates on our response to Covid-19 and Climate Emergency actions, plus our plans for a new pavilion and other future improvements to the Louie Memorial Playing Fields. As usual there will be open sessions for questions on any local issues.

Please send any questions by noon on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> March to Sharon Henley, our Parish Clerk via [clerk@northhinksey-pc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@northhinksey-pc.gov.uk) along with suggestions for other topics that you would like us to cover during the meeting.

We hope to see many of you online on the 18th.

### Allotments

2020 saw a national upsurge in allotment gardening, and North Hinksey was no exception. We decided to waive the fees in a bid to help people struggling to feed their families, or simply needing productive exercise during the Covid crisis. It was a pleasure to see such a positive response. We now have a (short) waiting list, for the first time in years.

In the autumn an NHPC Tree Survey was carried out that showed work was needed on a few allotment trees. It will be carried out over the coming twelve months. In the absence of our annual tenants' meeting, it was decided to hold one by Zoom in November, which enabled a brief exchange of ideas. A therapeutic allotment for the benefit of recovering patients is under discussion, as is the reinstatement of the hardstanding at the main entrance to the NHL Allotments. In 2021 the rents for our plots will rise to £2.50 per pole, meaning that the biggest plots will now cost £25 a year. Bills will go out at the end of March, and for the first time it will be possible to pay online.

The Allotments Committee is also responsible for the nature reserve which includes the community orchard and memorial garden (see photo). Work was halted on the garden during the pandemic, and it became the haunt of some unruly individuals. As part of the refurbishment, we removed the benches for restoration, and this seems to have solved the problem for the time being. We are now getting on with planting flowers and shrubs which will make it a pleasant place all the year round. The Oxford Conservation volunteers attended in February to do further hedge work, and Yellow Rattle was sown to inhibit the grass and encourage wild flowers.



**Councillor Ag MacKeith, Allotments Committee Chairman**

## Environment & Wellbeing

### Towards a greener, healthier Botley and North Hinksey

Our local environment is unique and changes across the parish – from the flood plains on the edge of Oxford to farmland up on Hinksey Heights. In 2019 North Hinksey Parish Council set up our Environment and Wellbeing Committee. This followed our agreeing a 'Climate Emergency' statement (we were one of the very first Parish Councils in the UK to do so).

As part of that work in 2020 we agreed our Climate and Ecology plan, which sets out how we will play our part in tackling the environmental problems we face. We are only a small body with limited powers so working with our community is important. To help do that we ran the 'Leap into action' Botley Big Green Day last February 29<sup>th</sup>. Over 400 people took part in the various activities from climate discussions to a 'bring and take' day.

Three weeks after that everything changed with the first 'lockdown'. Our plans for follow-up were slowed right down. However we have kept moving: in December we organised two tree planting days at Tilbury Fields and the Rugby Club, and we are currently running a survey and a workshop on our green spaces.

We've been active on other issues: at the start of 2020 there was still concern about the impact of the proposed Oxford-Cambridge Expressway. This plan has been 'paused' by the government but we are keeping watch on this. Our Parish has some of the worst air pollution in the county, affecting homes and the two schools along the A34. It's a tough issue but we have been exploring possible ways to limit the impacts. We are looking at the possibility of setting a 20mph speed limit for our residential roads and are pleased that the County Council seems to be supporting this type of move. Hopefully it will also prove popular with residents when we start consultations.

We will continue to work to help people act on the climate crisis. Our Botley 'green guide' will be out shortly, and we will hold further workshops around that. We welcome ideas from people in the Parish, and hope that once we can meet together again, we can help form a Community Action Group to implement many of the plans we are currently developing.

**Councillor Chris Church, Environment & Wellbeing Committee Chairman**

## Remembrance Day Service 2020

Despite the prevailing government COVID-19 restrictions, which placed significant constraints on the numbers able to attend the 2020 North Hinksey Parish Council Remembrance Day Service, we managed to organise a highly successful event to commemorate those from the Parish who gave their lives in defence of their country. With the event being one of only four that was held in the county, it was a great honour to host both the Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire and Oxfordshire County Council's Deputy Leader, alongside representatives of the Armed Forces and local community groups including the Girl Guides and Scouts, all of whom played a full part in the morning's event.



Once again, the Service was officiated by the Rev Richard Budgen and Jon Rowland, assisted by a pupil from Matthew Arnold School who read *For the Fallen*, and the names of the local war dead. Chairman of the Parish Council, Councillor David Kay gave the *Kohima Epitaph* following the



Last Post and Reveille performed by a member of the Oxfordshire Youth Brass Ensemble.

With members of the public being unable to join us because of the restrictions the service was not only broadcast on radio, but also made available on video on the Parish Council's Facebook page, which proved a very popular innovation.

As Chairman of the Remembrance Day Committee, I would like to thank all of those involved in the organisation and running of this year's event in difficult circumstances and I look forward to holding a much bigger Service in 2021.

**Councillor Graham Fairclough, Remembrance Day Committee Chairman**

## Planning

North Hinksey Parish Council's Planning Committee continue to receive over 50 planning applications to consider throughout the year. These vary from advertising hoardings and small change of uses right through to the consideration of major developments.

We have seen several applications for land to be developed in less densely populated parts of North Hinksey including Yarnells Hill, where there is particular sensitivity around Raleigh Park and the Fen. Preservation of local ecology systems is critical, especially around the Fen, and we continue to oppose development that would jeopardise wildlife in this unique habitat. We have also seen applications on Harcourt Hill for a second property on plots. NHPC are not opposed to appropriate developments, but we support local residents' wishes to see the character of this area maintained.

An application to increase the height of the last remaining block to be built in the West Way Square development was objected to by NHPC, in line with a large amount of public opinion, on the grounds that the scale of this final block is already very large and the plans go against the Botley Centre Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

We have seen less applications to change housing to apartments or houses of multiple occupation with most applications being for smaller extensions and modifications to family homes. NHPC understand the need for a mixture of housing types, but all applications should be sympathetic to the immediate surroundings, with good design character and sufficient amenity area and parking arrangements. The Parish Council have often made representations at Vale Planning Meetings to defend the character of North Hinksey as it is an issue we feel strongly about.

Our Planning Committee usually meets every 3 weeks, on Thursdays at 8:00 p.m.. Parishioners are always welcome to attend and make representations on applications that concern them.

**Councillor Adam Rankin, Planning Committee Chairman**

## Recreation & Amenities



This year's unexpected disruption from the Covid-19 pandemic created some new challenges for the R&A Committee, which manages the parish's main leisure space at the Louie Memorial Playing Fields. On short notice we made our play spaces secure during the first lockdown, then safely re-opened the facilities as restrictions eased across the summer. We've had feedback that the playing fields were valued more than ever this year as a space to move, socialise (to the extent that government regulations allowed), and enjoy some fresh air. We were particularly pleased to support a group of local basketball enthusiasts in improving the hoops at the MUGA, and to enable an outdoor community fundraiser for bowel cancer research in the summer.

The management plan for the playing fields and surrounding woodlands is overdue for review, so we set up a working group including parishioners with expertise in ecology to take this forward. A tree survey was carried out in the summer, resulting in needed works such as pollarding overgrown willows by the concrete path (check out the magnificent log piles). Protecting the rare calcareous fen in the lower field is a priority; Oxford Conservation Volunteers were commissioned to do two work days there in the autumn. We are now monitoring the peat and water levels to assess the health of the fen and to plan further restoration works. We are also looking to expand wildflower areas at the borders of the woods and to install bird boxes to encourage nesting.



This time last year we were planning our fundraising for a new pavilion building, but the pandemic put our applications on hold. As the spring brings renewed optimism, we are now re-activating our efforts towards building the new pavilion in 2022. At the same time we are moving towards the long-awaited replacement of a wheeled sports facility (skatepark) in the upper playing field, one of this council's key objectives for the remainder of its term. A new skatepark will require community input on the design and an application for planning permission – if you want to help us make the skatepark happen, now is the time to get in touch! We'll be presenting the latest plans for the playing fields redevelopment projects at the Annual Parish Meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> March. Please come along and shape our future facilities.

**Councillor Caroline Potter, R & A Committee Chairman**

## Parish Councillors 2021

### **Cllr Pauline Allen**

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### **Cllr Adam Rankin**

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## Parish Clerk

### **Sharon Henley**

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## District Councillors

**Cllr Debby Hallett** Tel. 07545 241013

**Cllr Emily Smith** Tel. 07879 640645

## County Councillor

**Cllr Judy Roberts** Tel. 07534 784144

## Seacourt Hall Bookings

**Hall Manager** Tel. 07452 960100

E-mail admin@seacourthall.org.uk

[www.seacourthall.org.uk](http://www.seacourthall.org.uk)

[www.facebook.com/seacourthall](https://www.facebook.com/seacourthall)

## Parish Council Responsibilities:

- Allotments, community orchard, and nature reserve
- Consideration/comments to the District Council on Planning matters
- Playing Fields, including the football pitch, MUGA, Trim Trail and children's play area
- Copse & concrete path from Cedar & Hurst Rise Roads
- Maintenance/upkeep of parish owned land & assets including Louie Memorial Pavilion, Parish owned bus shelters, and noticeboards

## Parish Council Committees:

- Planning
- Finance and General Purposes
- Environment & Wellbeing
- Allotments (including the North Hinksey Nature Reserve and the Community Orchard)
- Recreation and Amenities
- Remembrance Day
- Communications

You can find news, policies, meetings diary, agendas and minutes on our website:

[www.norththinksey-pc.gov.uk](http://www.norththinksey-pc.gov.uk)

For the latest news and updates follow:

[www.facebook.com/norththinkseypc](https://www.facebook.com/norththinkseypc)

## COVID support/Botley Responders

At the start of the pandemic we set up a COVID hub page on the NHPC website to provide information and links for parishioners. At the same time individual street support groups were being set up using leaflets, email and WhatsApp.

NHPC Communications Committee Chairman Cllr Berrett met online with members of these groups, and from there the Botley Responders were created to co-ordinate all of the street groups in their efforts to respond to urgent needs, and to share ideas, news, and advice.

That group continues to support local residents with shopping, Community Larder referrals, prescription pick-ups, and friendly phone calls or information for those isolating at home. The group have delivered of 1000+ leaflets to households not online in the Spring and Autumn and put up around 100 posters. Thank you to all these local volunteers for your amazing support.

Find your nearest Botley Responder, and more advice and support on our website at: [norththinksey-pc.gov.uk/covid-19-community-hub/](http://norththinksey-pc.gov.uk/covid-19-community-hub/) or email [BotleyResponders@gmail.com](mailto:BotleyResponders@gmail.com)