

Letter - Brian Yoxall - June 2022

Dear Editor,

Thank you for your heartwarming announcement at the end of an otherwise disappointing Town Meeting on 26th April that you are prepared to take over the editor's role for Woodstock & Bladon News I am sure that it is not only previous editors who are pleased that you are willing to continue their good work. I myself have been a regular reader and occasional contributor since moving from Stonesfield to Woodstock in 1999 and it has always made for interesting reading as many others will testify.

It was in the December 2019 edition that the then editor, Peter Jay, invited me to challenge our M.P's (Robert Courts) claim that the A40 was a success story for the County Council and the Conservative Government. I argued that there should be more emphasis on a public transport solution. Since then the County Council has undergone a change of leadership and there have been fresh ideas on how to progress this project. In the 4.5.22. edition of the Witney Gazette the present council's cabinet member for highway management is quoted as saying " the A40 is utterly broken and something needs to be done, but doing more road building simply isn't the solution." However, the way forward is by no means clear as the latest proposals for a Smart Corridor do not have unqualified backing. Another councillor quoted in the Witney Gazette, Dan Levy, says " the only thing that will make traffic better on the A40 is getting people out of their motor cars, which is a policy of the council."

The previous leader of the County Council, Ian Hudspeth, had argued that the problems of the A40 would be mitigated by encouraging more use of the A4095 and the use of Long Hanborough station as a railhead, but I doubt if even he had bargained for the phenomenal growth of new house building which has materialised in recent times along the route of the A4095 between Witney and Hanborough.

Another local highways issue yet to be resolved is the pinch points on the A44 between Old Woodstock and the centre of town which makes life so dangerous particularly for school children and their parents. The recent Town Meeting discussed this but to my mind ignored the most sensible solution (advocated by Woodstock Action Group) to resurrect a bus service between Old Woodstock and the Shipton Road schools, This used to be the case until a few years ago when the County Council withdrew funding. So, who would fund such a service now? Step forward please, Blenheim's Chief Executive Officer, Dominic Hare, since it is Blenheim's obsession with more house building at Hill Rise, which is exacerbating the problem.

Yours sincerely,
Brian Yoxall

Letter - Stan Scott - June 2022

Dear Editor

I have seen the contribution of Brian Yoxall, a former Town Mayor to whom Old Woodstock has a lot to be grateful for when he saved our play area from closure. He now suggests a school bus, paid for by Blenheim, to get the schoolchildren off the dangerous A44, and that would be more generous of the developers than their persistent attempts to persuade the Town Council to allow an unsafe path across the field and along the river in the watermeadows, in support of their planning application for 180 houses in Old Woodstock.

Stan Scott

Letter - Peter Jay - July 2022

Dear Madam,

I write to convey my delight and warm support for the OCC decision to liberate our town from the insanity of the 'free parking' dogma imposed by the former WODC council, which meant that we suffered 'light touch' free-for-all, all-day parking, enforced by Witney on the wholly different circumstances of Woodstock.

For many years our town was suffocated of visitors and normal shopping business by this economically illiterate exercise in government by slogan, in flagrant disregard of the evident needs of our community. Road space belongs to the community; and, if it is pre-empted by selfish individuals parking all day, the whole community suffers, visitors are deterred and the town centre dies.

We need strict enforcement of sensible parking restrictions, making parkers pay for their use of a valuable public amenity, not to raise revenue, but to deter thoughtless prolonged use of spaces which need to enjoy steady turnover in order to be usable by as many people as possible. The inability of past WODC councillors to understand this elementary economic principle has saddled us for years with a stupid regime wholly unfit for purpose.

I am therefore delighted that the greater wisdom of OCC planners has now prevailed and that they have put into effect the scheme which was devised by our Town Council a few years ago after intensive consultation with all directly concerned parties for strict enforcement of timelimited charged-for parking bays with parking permits for 1 vehicle per household for those town centre residents who have no other reasonable place to park.

I hope the County Council will not be deflected from their enlightened policies by the childish objections of local sloganeers whose idea of public policy seems to start and finish with how it will affect their personal pockets.

Yours, Peter Jay

Letter - Stan Scott - July 2022

Dear Editor and your delivery team,

When delivering the Woodstock and Bladon News, it was always wise to mind your fingers at the home of Gruber, a lovely old dog, now sadly departed, with a mind of his own and a fearsome bark at the letterbox.

Then his owner said he would not bark any more, as he had gone completely deaf and would not hear the delivery. The next time I delivered, he barked like mad, an angry and irritated bark from the other side of the door. 'But you said'... I asked his owner. 'He was asleep against the door, under the letterbox', she said, 'it fell on him'.

I wish you were still there to bark, dear Gruber.

Stan Scott

Letter - Linda Gleees - Sept 2022

Dear Editor,

In August yet another election for a local council was held in Woodstock for yet another Woodstock Town Councillor. Why? Because the last resignation from the council and the one before that and many others have been due to a toxic culture of bullying. Councillors who had joined the council with the intention of performing useful public services end up leaving to protect themselves. Likewise, many Town Clerks have come and got for the very same reason. These departures are not just painful for the individuals concerned but also cost local residents considerable sums in constantly running elections, and maybe also compensating departed clerks. The issue needs to be aired in public, and all councils and candidates should commit to taking identifiable steps to improve standards of behaviour. It should not need saying, but it does!

Linda Gleees, Woodstock

Letter - Oli Lanestead - Sept 2022

Dear Editor,

The easy wins for improving the links between Old Woodstock and the rest of the town.

I'm the father of two young boys (aged 3 and 1) and live in Old Woodstock. Like all the residents in this part of town, my choices to get there are either a walk down the A44 or to take a car. In November 2010 a road safety audit was carried out, concluding that no section of this road is safe for unaccompanied children, and only sections of it are suitable for children accompanied by adults. These conclusions are intuitive, but I'd add to them that also dog walkers, wheelchair users and cyclists, all find the section that joins Old Woodstock to the town centre to be unsafe and unpleasant.

This review was carried out in 2010 (after some significant pressure from locals and in response to a school bus being cancelled). It is now 2022. Twelve years is a long time to make no progress. A whole generation of children have been failed by our collective inability to act on this issue. There are a range of trivial solutions that could be implemented in weeks or months.

Every single one of these solutions has flaws, but the goal cannot be to make a "completely safe" route. Completely safe is not a state that can ever really exist. What is simple, and pressing, is to make the journey "safer".

1) Change the kissing gate into Blenheim to be a wider opening. This will allow buggies to get through. This is the easiest change and immediately provides an alternative (already favoured by dog walkers) to the most treacherous part of the main road. It is however unlikely to help wheelchair or mobility scooter users and there is no pedestrian crossing there.

2) Build a short bridge across the Glyme. The newly planted forest next to the wetland area already has a gate in the deer fence where it would be a simple affair to install a bridge. This would give Old Woodstock access to the beautiful water meadows, which currently are cut off from this edge of town. It would immediately provide a far safer route for everyone to get to town. For those with children, walking them to school would suddenly become palatable.

3) Improve the existing footpaths. Widening and paving the footpaths that feed this bridge would finally also make town accessible to those with mobility challenges and potentially for cyclists too.

In the time that I have been in Woodstock (and especially during my efforts to be elected to the Town Council in August), many arguments for and against each of these improvements have been made to me. One thing that has struck me very clearly though, is that the opponents to these improvements are not the ones who have to live with the struggles of navigating the existing routes on a daily basis.

I, and all the others like me who have dogs, children or a basic sense of self-preservation are tired of being told that we don't know what's good for us. We're bored of being told "It's a bit more complicated than that". Instead, please listen to us. The route into town is not acceptable and this has been known for at least 12 years. There are easy solutions that will make a material improvement to our daily lives from the instant they become available. Please let's just get on and fix this, so another generation doesn't have to grow up isolated from nature, and the town that we're all so proud of.

Oli Lanestead, and the residents of 300+ homes in Old Woodstock

Letter - Tim Massey - Sept 2022

Dear Editor,

Like others both in Bladon and Woodstock who I have heard speaking of the proposed development of land for housing East of Park View I believed the scheme entirely unsuitable and unacceptable. It is a development step too far! Others will correctly speak of the nightmare impact this would have by increasing traffic on the A4095 and of the lack of infrastructure and that this is not the way to address the shortage of housing. I focus here on the environment.

If it were to proceed it would have a severe detrimental impact on the environment for a number of reasons. It would remove all the rural agricultural land on the route between the village of Bladon and the small town of Woodstock. Changing the environment in this way changes the character and identity of these two settlements. By merging the housing of Bladon and Woodstock the new and current residents lose their place identity. This is significant for the inhabitants would be in danger of losing their sense of place ownership and loyalty. Like individuals, places including Bladon and Woodstock are unique, perhaps proud for example of their history, their church, their school, their pub or how they celebrate special occasions. These distinct settlements are communities that help to give a foundation to everyday life and so a sense of security. An awareness of belonging can be an important factor for our health. The land East of Park View is neither Bladon nor Woodstock but rather an important rural break between these wonderful places.

The countryside around Woodstock and Bladon has evolved over thousands of years. It could be quickly harmed with the removal of hedges etc and landscaping of this agricultural land, even in the hands of sympathetic developers such as Blenheim Estate, would be to the detriment of the blend of humanity and nature. This impacts on the quality of our lives. Governments of every political persuasion have stressed 'the importance of preserving the rural environment for the benefit of physical and mental health'. So not only do we need these spaces between settlements for aesthetic reasons but also to maintain and enhance the biodiverse natural environment. We need them for all our senses including to allow us to breath clean air.

As a resident in the village of Bladon for over forty two years, perhaps a relative new comer by comparison with some, I have a loyalty to Blenheim Estate. The Palace and grounds are magnificent and I admired those who work hard to maintain its beauty. I appreciate that as developers they have created attractive and quality clusters of buildings within our local villages to enrich vibrant small growth but I suggest that this proposal for East of Park View is unsuitable for the character and presentation of the Blenheim Estate as it most certainly is for the well being environment of the residents of Bladon. It is a development step too far.

Tim Massey Bladon

Letter - Andy Graham - Sept 2022

Dear All,

Some of you may have not been aware of my major heart surgery which took place over 10 days ago at the Heart Centre in Oxford following an angiogram the week prior which gave little options but for an open heart option but for an open heart bypass intervention.

It has been an extremely difficult time for my closest dearest friends, family and close ones.

I have been out a week and on a road to recovery and though I should not be working at all, I thought you needed to know the reason for my not responding to you of late.

I am not therefore likely to be at parish meetings until at least October and there is unlikely to be a report either but you know I will be there supporting your causes in the background. The road to recovery is under way.

Kindest regards, Cllr Andy Graham

Letter - John Bleakley - Oct 2022

Dear Editor

You are right to say the social demographics of Woodstock has changed, they have significantly changed over the last 10 years but the voting demographics have not. You need to vote to make a difference.

Regards, John Bleakley Woodstock resident

Letter - Linda Addis - Oct 2022

Dear Editor

I would like to thank the 430 residents that voted for me on the 25th August. Its nice to know there are alot of residents that have faith in me. I will do my best for you.

Can I please ask though don't all come to the post office with any questions as that is my place of work.

Thank you Linda Addis

Letter - Stan Scott - Oct 2022

Dear Editor

I liked Oli's piece in the last issue about better links from Old Woodstock to the town and the schools, particularly with 180 extra houses proposed here. I see that the gate to Blenheim has already been changed, and would provide a much safer route to the town if the steep muddy path towards the town could be improved. And some improvement to the A44 east pavement could easily be possible, if the County Council could be persuaded to spend the money. A new barrier at the Black Prince has been on the cards for some time, thanks to good old Colin Carritt, but has been delayed.

But a bridge across the fields and the Glyme river? Three times Blenheim have tried to persuade the Town Council to allow a bridge to the watermeadows, no doubt to support their planning application for lots of houses. Apart from spoiling the watermeadows, their proposal was for a 4' wide path, bordered by the river one side and a deep ditch the other, to cater for groups of unaccompanied children, parents with children, parents with pushchairs, and youngsters on cycles, and could hardly be seen as safe. It might be seen as a bit safer if it was very wide, securely fenced, well lit and well surfaced, all unlikely to be approved or funded, and our Council are not keen for the area to be urbanised.

Everyone will have different ideas about what is safe for their child and what might not be. But any local authority would surely hesitate to recommend a narrow, unfenced, unlit and loosley-made path passing close to a river, intended mainly for use by unsupervised schoolchildren. There are dangers of drowning, and 'stranger danger'. The trouble with tragedies and fatalities. as well I know, is that they keep happening.

Parents could of course use such a path to walk their children by the hand to school (even then, a bit tricky in Green Lane - narrow, lots of traffic but no pavement) and of course collect them every day, but what about older pupils returning home alone, on dark afternoons in the winter, a path could not be closed off and some would be likely to choose to use it anyway, regardless of possible dangers.

And of course the proposed path would pass the scene of one of the worst tragedies seen in this town, the drowning of a youngster. Time to move on? (one remark made). It was a long time ago now, but many of us still respect and share the grief. I guess most parents will continue to take their very young children to school, by car or on foot. We have asked Blenheim about a school bus, but they thought it too expensive.

A new link road, connecting the A44 north of the town to the A4260 Banbury Road, could take in Blenheim's two new developments and cater for increasing traffic currently blocking Stratford Lane, as well as providing completely safe, well designed pedestrian and cycle routes to the schools. Too expensive? Never be passed? Huge amounts are being spent elsewhere on road improvements and connectivity. One day, someone might say "Old Stan used to suggest something like this!"

Stan Scott

Letter - Zandra Houston - Oct 2022

Dear Editor

I would love to hear from anyone interested in helping with the church flowers at St Mary Magdalene Church in Woodstock, particularly if they may also be willing to organise the group of volunteers by preparing the rota each year, buying the flowers for festivals, ordering the floristry materials, communicating with wedding organisers, and so on. It is not essential for the organiser to be one of the people doing the actual arrangements, although obviously it would be good if that person also wants to help with the floristry work and has experience or wants to learn how to do beautiful pedestal and other flower arrangements.

If you would like to find out more please contact me on 07850 298340 or by email zandra.houston@gmail.com.

It is not a difficult skill to pick up, it is fun to do, and you certainly do not need to be a church goer. You will make new friends, and the commitment is only to deal with the administrative side of things if that is your choice, and to help with decorating the church by rota four or five times a year, and for important festivals such as Christmas and Easter. Access to a garden with greenery would be an added bonus!

Zandra Houston

Letter - Jo Lamb - Oct 2022

Dear Editor

Many of your readers will wish to receive news of the current position on the County Council's proposals for the parking changes scheduled for Woodstock. I enquired of County Officers and received an update on this yesterday. This is happening.

It is still the case that many people in Woodstock believe that 'Parking' is a Town Council matter. It is very important to understand that this is not the case. Town Council influence is minimal. The main 'players' in this long running saga have been and continue to be, West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) and Oxfordshire County Council (OCC).

Currently, parking enforcement (sporadic at best), is in the hands of WODC. However, OCC have served Notice on WODC which terminates this arrangement at the end of March next year. As a result, OCC expect to be taking over enforcement for the whole of Oxfordshire (not just Woodstock), as from 1st April 2023 at the latest. The expectation is that there will be more enforcement of parking restrictions in our town once the County assumes responsibility for it.

County Officers still plan to undertake their 'mini review and consult' with some of the hotels and others etc, in order to 'tweak' their original proposals. These were issues which arose out of the original parking Consultation process with the town. They plan to do the mini review towards the end of October/early November this year, before taking their recommendations on these aspects back to Cabinet in January or February of 2023. This won't affect the outcome of the scheme as a whole, incidentally.

Parking 'terminals' are now at procurement stage. These are run by solar energy and therefore need to be placed in sunnier spots. There are 11 of them for Woodstock; 3 on High Street (including the triangle parking), 3 on Oxford Street, 2 on Market Street, 2 on Park Street and 1 on Park Lane. They are expected to be much less bulky than the blue bins which are often left out on our pavements by residents.

Re the terminals, users do not need a smart phone in order to operate them. However, users will need to tap in their car registration and will then select the amount of time they want to park for; the one hour free option will appear at this point. If payment is required, then customers can pay by coin as well as card.

It follows that the maximum time you can park in the immediate town centre is 4 hours (including the 1 hour free option in every 24 hours). However, it is important to remember that there is no enforcement at all in the evenings.

I hope this helps by way of update for readers.

Jo Lamb

Letter - Colin Carritt - Nov 2022

Dear Editor

May I appeal to your readers to help the Village Travel Network (VTN) identify safety concerns for pedestrians and cyclists in Woodstock. The VTN was set up at the end of 2020 and comprises Woodstock, Bladon, Hanborough, Combe, Stonesfield and Fowler, Wootton and Glympton and Blenheim. Our aim is bring together the villages, Woodstock town and the Blenheim Estate, to enable sustainable travel, connectivity and networking that enhances community safety, wellbeing, social opportunities and longer term environmental and low carbon benefits. The group comprises parish and town councillors and other interested residents and we are working with Oxfordshire County and West Oxfordshire District Councils. Our website is at www.vtn.org.uk

We have already achieved a safe 'Bike to School' route through Blenheim Park for pupils from Stonesfield and Combe. And Oxfordshire County Council have doubled the width of the pavement alongside the busy A4095 between Bladon and Hanborough Station.

The VTN is now preparing an Active Travel Plan to submit to the County Council for consideration as part of the Council's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). We are making progress with our Plan but we would like input and ideas from Woodstock residents. In particular we would like views on safety issues within the built up area of Woodstock, be it inadequate or non-existent pavements, narrow carriageways and fast traffic, difficult junctions or dodgy pedestrian crossing points. You can send your ideas to me at info@vtn.org.uk or to the VTN's sister organisation Sustainable Woodstock at sustainablewoodstockuk@gmail.com , but no later than mid-November please. We will do our best to include as much as possible and our final plan will be posted on the VTN website.

Thanks in advance for your thoughts and ideas.

Colin Carritt

Letter - Sharone Parnes - Nov 2022

Dear Editor

It's not entirely clear to me whether your October edition's letter from Jo Lamb was written in a capacity of town centre parking-chargeexemption 'permit holder in waiting' or Deputy Mayor. She certainly hadn't shared with the full Town Council membership the updates in her published letter, during the approximately 10 days between your deadline and publication; but that letter did refer to the Town Council (and in a way that seems notably in contrast with the Council's own depiction of its role):

Mrs Lamb's letter contends in relation to parking, 'Town Council influence is minimal'. Yet the Town Council's own website explains: 'Of all local government bodies, it is town councils that are closest to the electorate and, therefore, have the greatest interest in local concerns. Although they have modest influence over district or county council decisions on issues such as planning, traffic problems or local public transport, they are able to pass on the opinions of their electorate and these can sometimes influence the decision-makers at a higher level. '

Ms Lamb's letter also asserts, 'it is very important to understand' that ''Parking' is not a Town Council matter'. In reality, and in contrast, when a proposed scheme involving installation of pay-and-display machines in the town centre becomes one of the most divisive and potentially damaging programmes in the modern history of a historic market town, the outcome does very much become the business of the Town Council. Especially after the Town Council unleashed the County's consultation, on the proposed parking scheme, which had been said to be contingent upon Town Council support. The decision was put to Town Councillors for a vote on commencing the consultation at a meeting a few hours after being assured in writing they would not be asked to make a decision on the night, and around a half hour after being diverted to kitchen side room away from the public eye to receive details.

The Town Council therefore cannot escape its association with the introduction of pay and display charges in West Oxfordshire and bears some degree of responsibility for the outcome and, moreover, the impact. It is very worrying and disappointing that at times of such great uncertainty from effects of the pandemic, and geopolitical events including war in Ukraine, volatility in international energy markets, and rising inflation, Mrs Lamb and her friends at the County Council's Administration seem determined to press ahead on a plan that will add parking charges to the worries and costs faced by our constituents. The Town Council has already raised it's precept of Council Tax by 14.5% - one of the highest increases in the District.

Sharone Parnes
Town Councillor for Woodstock

Letter - Tony McHugh - Feb 2023

Dear Editor,

In response to the article in the November WOBL headed 'Why is there a campaign afoot to deny the people of Old Woodstock a safe route to town, and a safe route to school?', I have to point out that many of us residents of Old Woodstock assert that the route apparently now proposed by Blenheim, in a very late revision to its current Planning Application, is not a 'safe' route.

We have explained many times that a route across the fields now planted with saplings, soon to become trees and bushes, and on across the Glyme, will not be a safe route for children of a certain age, and also for elderly pedestrians. I say 'of a certain age' because, whereas the children of some of the co-signatories of the article are so young as to need to be accompanied to school by a parent, older children will be walking to and from school alone, just like the solitary children one sees walking up the hill from school and from town now. I see them every day, aged from about ten years and upwards, and I can say that I would not want one of my children to be coming over the Glyme and across the growing woodland on a dark winter's afternoon, possibly in inauspicious weather. It has been put to me by one of the signatories that one cannot plan a route of the kind now proposed on the basis of just one tragic accident, such as the one in which a young girl drowned in the Glyme some years ago. But one such incident is one too many, and I would not want to be the parent of a child - or the relative of an elderly person - who became the victim of an attack. It is not as if we do not see such attacks all too often in the country as a whole.

It also needs to be said that cyclists may well wish to have such a route to town, as they would probably feel safe enough when cycling through the woodland and over the river. But they have to bear in mind the needs of pedestrians and wheelchair users.

I'm afraid that the planting of the new woodland, and the obstacle of the river where it all too frequently floods, together render such a path, as is currently proposed, unsafe.

Finally, the article highlights the problem of the A44 with 'Try walking it ... Try it as a slightly wobbly pensioner, one who, perhaps, does not hear so well or whose sight is failing'. Well, let those folk try as well walking down the Community Orchard and Woodland, parallel to the A44 in Old Woodstock, in the dark, or in bad weather ... Will they feel safe?

(Meant for the December issue)

Tony McHugh
42, Westland Way, Old Woodstock

Letter - Stan Scott - Feb 2023

Dear Editor,

Who better than our excellent Editor to express an opinion, as in previous issues including the last, that contributions should be made with good grace and respect for differing opinions. Our Parish magazine should surely be informative and pleasant, as well as it's stated aims of being a 'forum for discussion' and 'part of local conversations'?

We did not all understand the prominent apology to the many writers of the article urging a muddy path for schoolchildren across the fields river and watermeadows, which seems rather unsafe to some, but the apology was apparently because of the inclusion of notes in brackets which should have been left out. A minor matter, not spoiling the content we might think.

But there was also an apology which seemed a bit odd, to an elected Town Councillor who had written in and had then been answered in a subsequent published letter. We surely can comment on the performance of our elected representatives, particularly when they are individually urging a particular point of view upon us? I'm all for different, interesting points of view expressed in the Letters page, including criticism sometimes.

Stan Scott

Letter - Ann Grant - Feb 2023

Dear Editor,

Grave concerns of desecration by defecation in Woodstock Cemeteries.

It is policy that dogs are not permitted in Council owned cemeteries. This policy serves to protect something very special; our loved one's final resting place. It was prompted many years ago by high levels of excrement in the Hensington Cemetery, as it had become a convenient place for Rover to relieve himself after a trip to the vet.

At a Town Council meeting last year, a motion was tabled that dogs on leads should be permitted, no supporting evidence for the change was supplied. However, there are several compelling reasons against this change:

Graves become the property of the purchaser; these plots were purchased under Ts&Cs which clearly state dogs are not permitted. Many people are incredibly fearful of dogs, thus selected a dogfree cemetery, therefore to permit dogs is very unfair to those who purchased plots under these conditions and contractually dubious.

Dogs poop and whilst many owners' pick-up, many do not. Even when picked up, it is incredibly difficult to fully remove all traces of faeces, it's unacceptable to permit graves to be desecrated by defecation

Some owner's pick- up and hang the full bags on trees, the disgusting spectacle of dangling poop, is not something that anyone should ever have to face in a cemetery.

Dog urine is incredibly damaging to plants, grass, floral tributes etc. A dog on a lead, being held by an owner on the path can and will reach the graves. Dogs don't understand that the plant they are about to cock their leg up, discolour and potentially kill, is in fact a loving tribute. Dogs bark at all manner of things, people, shadows, other dogs, the peace and quiet of this place of reflection should not be broken by doggy chatter.

Woodstock is incredibly lucky with the number of suitable green space options where dogs can be walked; defiling our cemeteries in this manner is neither necessary nor desirable.

If you'd like to have your say on this subject, Please contact the Town Clerk by Phone 01993811216; Letter; Town Hall Woodstock OX20 1SL Email info@woodstock-tc.gov.uk Councillors contact details available on the Woodstock Council Website

Ann Grant

Letter - Stan Scott - Mar 2023

Dear Editor,

Parking in Woodstock

At the Woodstock Traffic Advisory Committee on 9 January I asked the Chairman, Councillor Andy Graham about the huge number of cheap all day parking permits to be made available to town centre residents, several Town Councillors who have voted for their own permits, and all businesses including hotels, guest houses and b&bs.

Suppose this privileged parking fills the town with static vehicles when the new parking scheme is imposed upon us (the majority voted against it) in March or April, and there are no paid spaces left for shoppers, visitors or elderly residents from the outskirts of the town or surrounding villages who need access to the churches, doctors, dentist, optician, library etc.?

If there are too many permits to make the scheme work properly, I asked, who will be asked to give theirs up? If it begins to affect trade in the town and businesses suffer, what is the Plan B? Mr Dennis Allen, for 'Wake up to Woodstock' said that he and his members were also worried. No answer has been forthcoming as yet, and the scheme goes ahead. It seems a huge gamble with the success or otherwise of the town centre in the future, as a money making scheme for the County Council.

Stan Scott

Cllr Graham has been invited to respond

Letter - Anthony Glees - Mar 2023

Dear Editor,

Cllr Ann Grant is absolutely right to object to dog-owners allowing their dogs to foul cemeteries in Woodstock (Feb 2023). All responsible dog-owners will concur with this. Whether the dogs are on a lead is beside the point.

Actually, no dog-owner should allow their dogs to foul any public space, full stop.

But Woodstock Town Council has made fouling much more likely than it used to be by tacitly agreeing to WODC's ill-conceived 2020 plan via 'Publica', to reduce the number of litter and dog waste bins in Woodstock (49 bins sited at strategic locations throughout the Town were removed without notice, and then 'replaced' in April 2022 with only 28). Three of the remaining bins are to be found right next to the Town Hall, within about ten feet of each other. This suits only those whose task it is to empty the contents. It is hard evidence of the lack of thought that has been given to this matter.

Other, key bins (outside the Rectory in Rectory Lane and outside what used to be Barclays Bank in Park Street) have gone. The bin that used to be visible from the Rectory Lane churchyard entrance has been moved to a hidden, side position which is no longer visible either to those walking through the churchyard or to car park users in the Rectory Lane carpark.

I think many dog owners would agree that yet again Woodstock Town Council has taken its eye off actual balls, to focus on imaginary ones. It was quite wrong to let a new official from Publica decide where to remove bins in Woodstock without any public consultation and without a discussion in the Town Council.

This matters not only because the amount of dog poo left around the Town has not only increased but an absence of visible bins encourages some irresponsible dog owners to believe that they can get away with fouling the neighbourhood. There is an abundance of evidence of this all round the Town.

We should restore the missing 21 bins, even increase the number where needed. There should be zero tolerance of fouling by dogs and Woodstock Town Council must now show they take this matter seriously.

Yours,
Anthony Glees

Letter - Tony Gardiner - Apr 2023

Dear Editor,

May I, through WOBL express my thanks to a very kind group of people who came to my aid on Friday 3rd March in Blenheim Park.

After what is now assumed to be an adverse reaction to medication, I fainted whilst walking and was ÒoutÓ on the ground for around 10 seconds. When I Òcame aroundÓ I was encircled by a group of caring and concerned strangers. After the most gentle of instruction not to move and sympathetic questioning to establish if I had sustained any injury and test for lucidity they ultimately helped me to my feet.

The spirit of care was further extended when one of the group, a charming lady named Karen (the only name I know) insisted she drive me home. She went to the car park, returned with her car and not only took me home but came in and explained what had happened to my wife.

It is reassuring and refreshing to know that the spirit of community and concern for others is, despite sentiment in some quarters to the contrary, alive and flourishing in Woodstock.

My sincere and grateful thanks to all those who stopped and gave me support and assistance on Friday.

Yours faithfully

Tony Gardiner

open letter sent 12 March 2023

Letter - Robert McGurrian - Apr 2023

Dear Dominic Hare, of Blenheim Palace,

Objection to Botley West Proposed Solar Farm

Although we are aware that the Blenheim Estate is a large profit making business and as such needs to find new ways to continue to profit in order to continue to maintain the palace. Nevertheless, this proposed project covering 3,500 acres in VWHDC, WODC, and Cherwell DC is beyond the pale, overpowering, antienvironmental and the supposed benefits will never match the cost of building this monstrosity, maintaining it, and protecting it from vandalism.

Locally, Woodstock will definitely be among the areas to be negatively impacted as well as all these councils, Bladon, Begbroke, Cassington, Cumnor, Eynsham, Hanborough, Yarnton and Woodstock.

Your Prime Minister's reaction to solar farms is, 'On my watch we will not lose swathes of our best farmland to solar farms. Instead, we should be making sure that solar panels are installed on commercial buildings, on sheds and properties. With the hundreds of houses that you and Pye are building many solar panels should be erected on the roofs, instead, acres of needed farmland will be wasted in a time of high food prices and scarcity. It is incomprehensible until one realises what a magnet money is to some people. It will be a shining monument to Blenheim for the next 40 years and when it has served its purpose, this enormous glass menagerie will most likely become a huge housing development. People come and go but the Blenheim Estate lives on forever.

75% of this prohibitive project will be on green belt land and impacts UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Oxford, Blenheim itself and even Churchill cannot sleep in peace. WAG supports STOP BOTLEY WEST Campaign.

Sincerely yours,

Dr Robert W. McGurrian

Chair of Woodstock Action Group (WAG)

Letter - Stan Scott - Apr 2023

Dear Editor,

Without notice or consultation, huge changes have been made to the Stagecoach buses in Woodstock. The 7 and 233 services have been combined into the S7, a double decker bus now travelling from Witney to Bladon roundabout, up into Woodstock and turning in the town, occasionally visiting the school and Hensington before returning to Bladon roundabout and on into Oxford via Parkway and Summertown. Fewer buses come to Old Woodstock, and the bus turnaround at the first Wootton turn is now just an expensive eyesore, a real mess.

Oxfordshire County Council seem not to have kept our County Councillor or Town Councillor informed, but now say: "Stagecoach have registered a route to use public roads around Woodstock town centre and we are not able to prevent them from doing so. A key part of ensuring commercial viability is to generate additional trips which would not have been made on the 7 and 233, for example Hanborough to Oxford. Diverting to Old Woodstock would take longer and put people off, travelling on a longer section of road twice on each journey." My thanks to my near neighbour Mick Onions for getting this statement by writing in. Other Old Woodstock neighbours wonder how to get to hospital appointments by bus, a taxi can cost £40.

I have been told we can make our views known at the Town Meeting on 18th April. or bus users and other affected could have their own mass meeting at the Town Hall or the Youth Club?

Stan Scott

Letter - Graham Brown - May 2023

Dear Readers,

Continuity, Advice and Progress

As you may be aware, I have been asked by the editor to report on Woodstock Town Council meetings for the readers of this magazine. I try to report in an unbiased way with the information I have available but I wanted to add my own opinions of the recent meeting this time, here in the letters section.

I noticed in this meeting in particular a lack of continuity leading to a lack of progress over a number of matters. It seems if there is no councillor driving the discussion then there is a real possibility of it being lost over time. Regarding my own submission in the public speaking session, I think to say the project for solar panels on the Community Centre is 'on hold' is rather missing the point of the Climate Emergency. I was hoping the council would lead the way on 'solar for roofs not farmland' campaign bearing in mind their support of the Stop Botley West Solar. Solar panels for the Community Centre have been discussed at council for over 10 years, when government support would have meant the panels would have been paid for by now. If the council wishes to include a section on its website entitled Climate Emergency, I believe they should act on their words.

The lack of both a permanent town clerk and the acknowledgement of previous council meetings decisions has meant many projects are being delayed including action on bus shelters, a 20mph limit through town and Community Centre solar.

One other thing that other members of the public commented to me about in this meeting was the council's unwillingness to ask for help or advice on subjects they have little or no experience. The Risk Register was an example where the ability to carry out a risk assessment was lacking but only after much discussion a councillor suggested getting help from outside of the council. To me it is perfectly reasonable to seek advice or training to acquire the skills for council business - after all our councillors are volunteers and cannot know everything. It would save so much time.

Graham Brown

Letter - Tom Wiater - May 2023

Dear Readers,

Amidst a time of environmental crisis, I was elated to hear that Europe's biggest solar farm was being planned not far from my house in Woodstock.

Although we are a long way forward to zero carbon production, it's indisputable that Botley West will make a profound impact on the world's attitude to climate change. It will create a domino effect of action against climate change. There will be more solar farms, more offshore wind turbines and more eco-friendly travel.

I was appalled and frustrated by the many signs I have seen rejecting the Botley West plan, how can these individuals be so egocentrically bullheaded? We need to act now! It's completely beside the point whether or not we will be the ones reaping the energy from the solar panels. There's a Greek proverb which sums up this situation perfectly: 'A society grows great when old men plant trees, the shade of which they know they will never sit in'.

Whether we will be around to see the progress that has been made, we owe it to the planet. It's our moral responsibility whether we like it or not. The longer we delay action, the more severe and irreversible the consequences will be.

Climate change is causing irreversible damage to our ecosystems, species, and communities. The melting of glaciers and ice caps, rising sea levels, and increased frequency of extreme weather events are all leading to the loss of biodiversity, displacement of people, and destruction of coastal infrastructure. It's time for such large scale action to justifiably be our number one priority.

Please, we need a greener future for our greatgrandchildren's grandchildren.

Tom Wiater, aged 17

Letter - Robert Edwards - May 2023

Dear Readers,

In recent years Woodstock Town Council has paid for the streets to be sprayed with weed killer twice a year . This is no longer possible since the chemicals are now considered to be harmful to insect life and consequently to pollination. Grass and weeds are sprouting enthusiastically on Woodstock's streets.

His Majesty King Charles has invited us to support voluntary projects on Bank Holiday Monday 8th May following the Coronation. May I suggest that we all weed our streets for thirty minutes on that day? The central area is in particular need of love and attention

Robert Edwards

Letter - Andy Graham - June 2023

Dear Editor,

Three issues pertinent to Woodstock and Bladon have arisen over recent months and longer. By the time you read this the new parking arrangement will have been operating a short while and of course we are hoping to see improvements in terms of business churn and less illegal parking and proper enforcement undertaken on our streets in the centre of Woodstock. Remember free parking continues in the main car parks operated by West Oxfordshire District Council and there is the first hour in the on street parking zones in the centre of the town but don't forget to get your ticket and display it clearly. I know how controversial this has been but on balance this should work better for most people and residents too who have the option of applying for a residents parking permit.

It will take a little while to bed in and we will be monitoring how all the scheme work and will make some adjustments if necessary.

The bus turning in the centre of the town is considered by many a pedestrian safety issue and I couldn't agree more but we need to see the results of the safety audit which has been done together with evidence accumulated by residents before a final decision is made. Pleased to see the petition and I support that being presented to Council in Oxford demonstrating the strength of feeling on the matter.

Speed limit reductions from 30mph to 20 mph has been out to consultation and I am pleased with the response to date and feel pleased the town council has undertaken this exercise and this will be considered at OCC. Once again , pedestrian safety and that means children walking to school safely is of paramount importance. The results of the consultation and the scheme will be considered by the cabinet member for highways in due course for determination and if approved scheduled to be done.

Kind regards to all of you who I represent.

Cllr Andy Graham

Letter - Bob McGurkin - June 2023

Dear Editor,

There has been a lot of talk recently, most of it negative, concerning the Blenheim Estate's and Merton College's proposal to build a supergigantic solar farm: deceptively called Botley West. I gave a talk, representing WAG, at the Woodstock Annual Town Meeting on 18 April 2023.

But first, let me shine a bright light upon a new unexpected twist in the testing tale of the industrialised Botley West.

I was advised by the 'Stop Botley West' group to get a copy of the May 2023 issue of 'Private Eye'. But the newsagent was sold out and it wasn't until later that I found out why. There is an article in it called Marlborough light about the Botley West Solar Farm, and those associated with it: the Blenheim Estate (the Spencer -Churchill Family), Merton College, and Photovolt Development Partners. The latter company is accused of being 'backed by some seriously dubious Russian money'.

Naturally, the entire article cannot be reprinted here but the gist is that it exposes Photovolt Partners as being among a number of companies, in a New York court case last year, and that a Russian company, GK Amazarkan, was said to conceal money and be syphoning off assets to lo and behold, Photovolt Development Partners GmbH and Cransetta Investments. This is the company, in partnership with Blenheim Estate and Merton College, that is expected to build a sprawling Solar farm on 3,500 acres of land including Woodstock when, although it claims scores of solar developments, it only refers to just one such in Japan, still not finished and of which, Photovolt sold out in 2018.

I read each copy of Private Eye and can attest that their reporters certainly do their homework. Let's face it, in my opinion, Photovolt Partners are not fit for purpose and have cast a shadow of complicity and associative contamination upon their cohorts in this preposterous proposal by the Blenheim Estate and Merton College. How will they react to these incriminating statements? To be continued.

Bob McGurkin
WAG (Woodstock Action Group)

In response, here is a statement from Photovolt Development Partners, sent from the CEO of Blenheim:

The proposals for Botley West Solar Farm - a nationally significant renewable energy scheme - are being progressed in compliance with relevant UK legislation and guidance. This includes undertaking thorough consultation and environmental impact assessment.

SolarFive Ltd, the owner of Botley West Solar Farm, is licensed by Ofgem as an electricity generator and due diligence was undertaken on all individuals involved when the decision to grant this license was being considered. Accounts and shareholders for PVDP's five UK limited companies are available for all to view on the Companies House website.

Botley West Solar Farm is being funded by the proceeds of the sale of PVDP's projects in Japan. Robust checks and balances are in place throughout the Development Consent Order process, including the requirement to provide a Funding Statement with our DCO application, detailing the corporate and financial arrangements of the Applicant.'

Letter - Themis Avraamides - June 2023

Dear Editor,

I would like to provide an update on the ludicrous situation with regard to the double decker Stagecoach buses using the town centre as a roundabout.

First, a huge thank you to the almost 500 people who kindly signed the petition to restrict the buses in the town centre - it demonstrates the breadth and depth of anger and indignation understandably felt about the decision by Stagecoach to ignore the purpose built (tax payer funded) Wootton turning point down the road, purely to save them 3 minutes each way (thereby also depriving Old Woodstock of a much needed service).

Armed with this hefty petition, we spoke to Andy Graham who agreed with our view having witnessed the situation first hand, and a process was set in motion to request the OCC to impose a TRO (traffic regulatory order) to restrict the buses from using the town centre as a roundabout. Stagecoach head office have been extremely belligerent and have been looking for ways to force their route through the town centre.

On Tuesday 16th May, I presented the petition and made a presentation to the full OCC annual council meeting at Oxford County Hall, where I made the relevant points, focusing particularly on the health and safety dangers due to the inappropriate size of the buses, getting regularly stuck in the square (and illegally reversing) due to normal traffic, as well as the legally parked and necessary delivery vans serving half a dozen businesses in the square, and the dangers posed by bus wing mirrors overhanging the pavement - in brief, they are a danger and a nuisance on many levels.

The presentation was well received and consequently an independent health and safety audit was commissioned by the OCC - they attended on Friday 19th and 20th May. Several of us spoke to them on these days, and it became very evident to them on both days that there is indeed a problem posed by the buses - the buses obliged by getting stuck, reversing and generally causing mayhem in the square in full view of the safety auditors. Indeed, one took a bus ride to see for himself and found himself duly stuck on the bus which then had to reverse (illegally) in the square and off load passengers. One of the officials also personally timed the drive to the Wootton turning point at 3 minutes each way - we are very grateful to the independent health and safety auditors who were observant and diligent.

We now wait for their report to be sent to the OCC, whose decision we expect towards the mid / end of June.

Themis Avraamides, LLB, MBA

Letter - Bob McGurkin - Aug 2023

Dear Editor,

In last month's issue, I cited an article in the May 2023 issue of Private Eye, 'Marlborough Light' which claimed that the company in charge of running the proposed preposterous Botley West Solar Farm, Photovolt Development Partners, 'is backed by some seriously dubious Russian money.'

The Blenheim Estate and Merton College, Oxford are partners with this shady company-based in Germany but the owner of it, a Yulia Lezhen is also known as Julia LeJeune, a Russian who lives in Cyprus. She is the wife of Dmitry Glukhov, who is allegedly accused, in a N.Y. court case, of borrowing money for a goldfield in Russia which, apparently never was developed and using money 'sifted' from Photovolt Partners Ltd. and Solar Five Ltd., whose ownership was transferred from a Cyprus Company, Cransetta Investments Ltd. (Y. Lezhen boss) to Peter Gertsman, Director, a German and a Julia LeJeune, an alternate name of Y. Lezhen. Photovolt would not explain the reason for the name switch. Mr. Gertsman lives in the U.K. He is also Director of 5 other companies dealing with Solar Energy.

Well, Private Eye has continued its assault on the bamboozled Botley West Solar farm fiasco in its 30June/13July issue (no.1601) in an article, 'Light and shady' in which it reiterated that Solar Five Ltd., the company associated with Photovolt 'is backed by dubious Russian money.' It has filed a 140 page 'scoping report'. What is a 'scoping report'? Succinctly put, it is a statement that defines all the elements of the project scope as well as all of the assumptions, project requirements and acceptance. The length of this report is 140 pages when a scope statement does not have to be to be long -most can be done well in a page or two. (google) It's my experience that some companies present voluminous scoping reports hoping to deter as many people from reading them!

It seems, according to Private Eye, that the Blenheim Finance Ltd.'s Company borrowings are in a perilous state of affairs: hence the pressing need for much profit from the Botley West Solar Farm project.

The government regulator Ofgem has been notified by MP Robert Courts of the Solar Five and Photovolts's finances marked by dubious transactions. WAG plans to do the same. Stay tuned

Bob McGurkin

Letter - Linda Addis - Aug 2023

Dear Editor,

On the New parking restrictions

Since the new system has been in place there has been a lot of comments. I know we all have our own opinion on this subject but as I work in the post office and am also a representative on the WTC I feel I should pass on their comments.

Some of the comments as follows

1. Why is it when business owners are unloading their vehicles they get parking tickets?
2. There is still not a turn around.
3. Footfall has gone down for a lot only a few has increased.
4. People from outside the town do not come to town because they don't want to pay for parking.
5. Where do employees park? Some have to pay for parking when doing voluntary work.
6. Business owners were not asked about the new parking system.
7. Why don't we have a one way system round the town?

I feel a lot of residents have said the same. Woodstock Town Centre will not be the same in one year's time because shops will be closed and it will all be residential.

This is very sad. The reason why I have written in to the Woodstock and Bladon News is because I have listened and thought I would pass people's comments on.

A lot of residents have also said that whatever the council decide it gets turned the other way.

Linda Addis

Letter - Carolyn Quincey - Sept 2023

Dear Editor,

We enjoy all the articles and information. Your food editor's columns are always good reading and we love to try the venues out for ourselves! Last Friday we had the pleasure of going to Brothertons. It was a beautiful evening so we sat at a table on the cobbles and decided to copy Dai Roberts and have the same menu (even down to the wine). What a great choice! We remarked that it felt like being on holiday. Oh, and we got the 10% discount which went straight back to them as part of the reward for an excellent meal and service.

Best wishes, Carolyn Quincey

Letter - Sharone Parnes - Sept 2023

Dear Editor,

Woodstock Town Council has formally resolved to become a signatory of a petition by Woodstock's parliamentary representative, Mr Robert Courts, MP. The petition 'declares that the large scale solar farm application known as 'Botley West Solar Farm' is detrimental to the local community, notes that its scale and design are incompatible with the current infrastructure of the area; further declares that preservation of farmland for food security, local amenity, rural character and green belt preservation must take precedence when considering solar farm applications.'

It is anticipated that the petition will be presented at proceedings in the House of Commons after the summer recess, to be formally put on record and require a Government response.

Full wording of the petition, with further explanation of the reason for it, is available online at: <https://www.robertcourts.co.uk/botleysolarfarmpetition> . It can be signed online. Woodstock Town Council's decision, to sign it, was determined by named vote at its extraordinary town council meeting on August 8th .

The petition is said to be intended to help our MP 'reflect the scale of opinion to the Government, thereby ensuring they take this into consideration when the final decision is made by the Secretary of State.'

I very much hope the town council's decision will be helpful in encouraging individuals and other councils to consider signing it, too.

Sharone Parnes
Town Councillor for Woodstock

Letter - Gwyn Bevan - Sept 2023

Dear Editor,

Is Botley West Solar the best option for our climate crisis?

What has been happening this summer makes previous discussions of the 'threats' of 'global warming' or 'climate change', and a net-zero target for 2050 look as out of date as a pony and trap. We are experiencing 'global boiling'. As the letter in the August edition of Woodstock & Bladon News from the Sustainable Woodstock steering group rightly pointed out 'the climate crisis is the defining crisis of our time'. An article by Peter and Susanne Ditlevsen published this July modelled the threat of the gulf stream collapsing[1]. That would mean that our climate would be like Canada's, and bring catastrophic consequences for India, South America and West Africa; and further endanger the Amazon rainforest and Antarctic ice sheets. The gloomiest prediction of the collapse of the gulf stream was just two years away. So, is the proposed development of the Botley West solar farm needed more than when we first learnt of that in the Autumn of last year? For me, that proposal, raises three questions.

First, is solar the best choice given the immediate impact of manufacturing the technology needed is to add greenhouse gases (GHGs) to the atmosphere? To answer that question we need to know the GHG emissions generated per kilowatt-hour for each technology over its total life cycle that includes production, installation, operation and decommissioning. The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (of the US Department of Energy Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy) undertook a systematic review of 3,000 published life cycle assessment studies of various forms of electricity generation. They found 'from cradle to grave, coal-fired electricity releases about 20 times more GHGs than solar, wind, or nuclear electricity'. But they also found that land and off-shore wind produce much fewer GHGs than Photovoltaic per kilowatt-hour.[2]

Second, why develop one of the biggest solar farms in the world in one of the countries that is the least propitious for the generation of solar energy? The World Bank shows Britain's relative lack of sunshine means that it is one of the worst places in the world for Solar Photovoltaic Power Potential.[3] Britain is a great place for generating green energy powered by wind.

Third, why is the government looking to private finance of green technology when the government can always borrow more cheaply than any private investor? Regulating privatised green energy generation looks more problematic than regulation of privatised water and sewage, and we know how that has turned out.

Gwyn Bevan

[1] Ditlevsen, P., Ditlevsen, S. Warning of a forthcoming collapse of the Atlantic meridional overturning circulation. Nature Communication 14, 4254 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-023-39810-w>

[2] National Renewable Energy Laboratory Life Cycle Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Electricity Generation: Update. <https://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy21osti/80580.pdf>

[3] World Bank (2020) Solar Photovoltaic Power Potential by Country.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/energy/publication/solar-photovoltaic-powerpotential-by-country>

Letter - Graham Brown - Oct 2023

Dear Editor

In response to Mr Bevan's letter in your September issue, 'Is Botley West Solar the best option for our climate crisis?' I would like to add a few points for thought and hopefully balance. As Mr Bevan rightly says, we are now experiencing 'global boiling' and the climate crisis is suddenly looking very immediate and very real. He then raises three questions.

Firstly, is solar the best choice given the greenhouse gases emitted on manufacture? I just wanted to give the figures from the report that was cited (1). Most of the fossil fuel now used in our power stations is gas, which from the National Renewable Energy Report has a value of 486 - total life cycle greenhouse gas units. In comparison solar is 43 and wind (the figure used land-based and offshore combined) is 13. I absolutely support offshore (and onshore) wind but due to the emergency we are now facing, I and others suggest we need both wind and solar in our energy mix, these are the main tools we have to generate renewable energy. Furthermore, there are a number of reports about the National Grid struggling to incorporate offshore wind energy and that many of the best sites for offshore wind (shallow water) are already being used. Floating wind turbines for use in deeper water are still being developed. Also, government policy regarding licensing offshore windfarms has not helped. A Guardian article from 8th September reports 'no new offshore wind farms were secured in the government's latest clean energy auction'. This was due to the pricing level set too low and no doubt will be negotiated but it provides further delay and highlights the need for multiple approaches to address the need to generate renewable energy to reduce carbon emissions. Wind and solar are currently our best way to generate renewable energy and the figures from the NREL report are still over 10x less for solar compared to gas.

Secondly, regarding the World Bank report (2), this is a long and detailed report (and actually quite interesting) that attempts to shed light for policymakers and businesses on whether a specific country meets the right criteria to take advantage of solar power. Yes, the UK is second from bottom on the ranking of the potential of countries to generate solar power but the report later states 'even in countries with lower solar resource availability, the potential is not dramatically lower compared to the top-performing group.' It continues, 'the results presented in this report show that the global range of photovoltaic electricity potential is not as wide as might be expected. The difference between the countries with the highest and lowest average potential is only slightly higher than a factor of 2.' Furthermore, the high relative price of electricity in the UK coupled with the dramatic fall in cost of PV panels over the last 10 years, makes solar PV economically competitive, this is why we see solar farms and panels on roofs in this country. The report continues 'despite higher seasonability and lower PV potential, solar PV may still be a profitable option, playing an important role in the energy mix along with other energy sources'.

As an aside, from a global climate crisis viewpoint the report finishes 'there is a unique opportunity for solar PV to provide affordable, reliable and sustainable electricity to a large share of humanity where improved economic opportunities and quality of life are most needed'. For example, Mexico would need to dedicate only around 0.1% of its territory to large scale solar PV power plants to cover its entire yearly electricity consumption. Let us hope world leaders respond to the opportunity.

Mr Bevan's third point I absolutely agree with, the generation of green energy should be government led (if not a non-political group) and in fairness it is trying with a number of initiatives, such as green guilts and bonds to fund green energy development. Why the majority of the new houses being built around the country do not have solar panels continues to amaze me. If the government could achieve large renewable energy projects quickly, efficiently and to budget then great, but as first alluded at the start of his letter, this is a real emergency and we need to reduce our carbon emissions now, be it with public or private finance. We cannot afford to wait.

Graham Brown

Letter - Jo Lamb - Oct 2023

Dear Editor

Your readers may have noticed that Stagecoach's buses are no longer using Woodstock town centre as a turning point. There used to be some 66 buses undertaking this unsafe manoeuvre every day, starting from about 5am and ending in the early hours of the following morning.

As a result of local opposition, over 500 signatories to a local Petition, as well as pressure being exerted by our local County Councillor Andy Graham, the County Council arranged for an independent Safety Report on the bus turning route to be obtained. This duly reported back to the County Council that it was dangerous to public safety at all times, for buses to be turning in Market Square. The Report also recommended that buses should revert to using Wootton Turn to do this throughout the entire day.

Stagecoach then argued that for some reason, it was merely more dangerous between 9am and 5pm but that before and after these times, the town centre bus turnaround was somehow 'safe'.

It was obvious to many of us that commercial considerations were being used by Stagecoach as its argument to trump the needs of public safety here. This surely could never be allowed by the Authorities? Considerations of public safety had to be made paramount.

However, both unfortunately but also fortuitously, there was a bus accident within Woodstock. A Stagecoach bus late one evening, ran into the former Nat' West Bank building in Market Square, narrowly missing several people who had been enjoying their weekend pints outside the Star. This was also a scary experience for passengers inside the bus, who sustained minor cuts and bruises and who were tearful and shaken by the incident. Matters could have been so much worse. Someone could have been seriously injured or even killed.

At last, Stagecoach conceded to common sense as well as local public and County Council pressure. This is where we now are. The bus company has voluntarily agreed to revert to turning buses slightly further along the A44 and using the purpose built Wootton Turn as it had previously done. An added bonus of this arrangement is that Old Woodstock should no longer miss out on its S7 service altogether.

So far, so good! However, we only have a voluntary agreement in place at this point. Stagecoach could change the arrangement whenever it wishes to. This is why legislative backing has to be obtained next, by means of a TRO (Traffic Regulation Order), prohibiting Stagecoach from turning buses within Woodstock. This TRO it would seem, can only be made by the Traffic Commissioner at Ministry of Transport level. This will be a complicated procedure which will take time. There is every likelihood that Stagecoach will challenge the need for the TRO, which will then involve Tribunal proceedings, presided over by a Traffic Commissioner. Our County and District Councils will also be involved (and probably also Estelle Manor), because of the S106 subsidies to the new route.

The current saga will continue until such time that the recent voluntary arrangement with Stagecoach becomes mandatory. This is the next critical stage. This must be the aim and the County Council's next battle.

In the meantime we can all enjoy the absence of large buses turning around in Market Square, as well as the reinstatement of the S7 service for Old Woodstock residents. Happily this is a victory for common sense and public safety.

Kind regards,

Jo Lamb

(Please note: I write this in my personal capacity and not as a local Town Councillor).

Letter - Stan Scott - Nov 2023

Dear Editor,

A battle lost

The battle to stop the building of 180 houses to the north of Woodstock is lost. The Planning Inspectorate has granted Blenheim's appeal against the District Council's refusal of planning permission to build on an open field behind Hill Rise in Old Woodstock.

The only way to town from there is by the busy A44 main road, for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists. Hundreds more family members will have to walk on the dangerous A44 pavements, with 'pinch points' where heavy vehicles and buses pass very close to each other and to pedestrians.

In addition, there is the despoiling of a splendid area of countryside with views over towards Wootton, Sturdy's Castle and Rousham in one direction, and towards Blenheim Palace and Park and the church tower in the other. The Campaign for the Protection of Old Woodstock (C-POW), a group of Old Woodstock residents, has worked tirelessly for several years to put forward the objections to this unwanted development and have been congratulated by the Town Council who also made strong objection.

The expensive King's Counsel and planning experts lined up by Blenheim can seldom have faced such well-researched, detailed and measured reasoning from the C-POW team. Blenheim's application for costs has only partly been met.

Woodstock will be a mess, it seems, with this and the other large development off Banbury Road making a tangle for traffic looking for ways to get around: Shipton Road, the Hensington estate and through the narrow lane adjacent to The Punchbowl.

Thank goodness that the buses no longer turn in the town. Incidentally, we hear that the Town Council is considering asking the County Council to make a traffic regulation order, banning buses for all time. Of course, occasional tourist buses bring trade, so we only want to ban 'service' buses on a regular route from the town, and Stagecoach will see this as a direct attack when it has already done what we asked and sent the buses up to the Wootton turn. We need the buses in Old Woodstock, and the County Council needs the co-operation and goodwill of Stagecoach. I do hope that buses do not go into the new Hill Rise estate, another potential source of danger.

Stan Scott

Letter - Bob McGurrian - Nov 2023

Dear Editor,

Why I strongly object to the proposed preposterous Botley West Solar Farm (BWSF) First of all, it is obvious to all that solar farms do not operate on a continual basis, i.e., at night, during overcast, rainy, snowy, stormy, misty, and foggy days. E.g., in Oxford, Clouds- from the 14 October until about the 8th of April are the cloudier months of the year. So, BWSF would be generating less energy during these darker months. Rainfall-From 27 May to 3 February are the wettest months. November, with a chance of 32%, is the month with the most rain. So, BWSF would experience still less generative days or none at all. However, climate change may exacerbate these conditions for the worse.

But looking on the bright side, we see that sunlight, i.e., the length of a day, is, throughout the year, variable with the longest day in Oxford in June and the shortest in December. BWSF would generate variably also.

Solar Energy: From 26 October to 26 February is the darker period of the year when average solar energy is less than 1.8 kilowatts per square meter. Thus, negatively affecting electricity generation from BWSF, if ever built. Severe named winter storms of amber or red warnings, average 7.3 per year since 1916. So, it is quite evident that solar farms produce electricity at the whim of weather.

No matter what the developers claim that BWSF will produce enough electricity for 300,000 homes, BWSF will not produce 840 megawatts of energy for 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In fact, it will, according to electrical engineers, remain dormant most of the day and rarely reach full generation. (Dan Way, 'Solar Energy output ratings misleading if not deceptive', critics say) So I ask that government officials who stand to approve or disapprove BWSF, realise that the 840 megawatts claimed will not be a steady flow of electricity.

Although rather easy to maintain and clean, BWSF will need an expensive back up system, probably electric, to click in instantly when power is interrupted by clouds, rainfall or other weather phenomena Then there are thieves and vandals about. Based in rural areas and unmanned, BWSF will be an easy target for thieves dealing in valuable solar panels, copper wiring and cables.

Vandalism, either of protest or boys throwing rocks to break panels will take place on this vast BSSF, and will need very expensive security systems to cover 3,400 acres of solar panels. Costs will certainly keep mounting. But what about profits for the instigators of this momentous plan?

Dr Bob McGurrian

Letter - Hilary Brown - Dec 2023

Dear Editor,

Keeping positive and hopeful as climate change knocks on our door

If you missed the recent event Clean Energy, Why Here & Why Now É co-hosted by Sustainable Woodstock and Sian Godwin (the editor of this magazine) I really recommend you view it on YouTube (subtitles included). <https://youtu.be/ULkyDLThKQE?t=242> or search Woodstock Energy Event.

The proposal for such a large solar farm in our area came as a complete surprise to everyone É but should it really have been such a surprise? The world is trying to lower greenhouse gases to safe levels as quickly as possible but sadly, the recent progress report showed just how far behind we are in our ambitions.

By the time you read this, the COP28 will be in session in UAE, where representatives from nearly 200 countries attempt to coordinate global climate action for the next year. The panellists who gave their support to the 'Clean Energy, Why Here & Why Now' event work in different aspects of climate science with a knowledge base that is both global and local. They were there to help us better understand the science and the facts by answering questions posed by the audience related to the proposed Botley West Solar Farm.

Listening to their answers and comments on 'why here and why now' was clear, comprehensive and helpful and it seems clear that we should direct our questions, suggestions or requests for community benefits, biodiversity gain, local amenity and much more to the developers and landowners during the next phase of the consultation which runs from December through to February.

Whether you agree or disagree with the proposal you are still able to put pressure on the developers to create a solar farm with the best possible outcome, and it should include a significant community benefit package as seen in other solar/wind projects. If we don't engage then we will lose an important opportunity. Yes, the proposal is big and needs all stakeholders to work together and not be so polarised (as one audience-member put it), to achieve a WIN-WIN for the planet, people and nature.

Sustainable Woodstock have been consistent in our message. We recognise that the UK is way behind where we should be in renewable energy generation and in the development of an effective national and local grid. The climate crisis is now so severe and the consequences expected to be so catastrophic that we feel obliged to support, in principle, the planning application for Botley West Solar Farm.

We hope you'll be at the Festive Fayre at St Mary Magdalene's ,sharing your ideas on community benefits and protecting nature with us. We need to be sure we include community benefits in the plans, as well ideas to mitigate the effects of climate warming. If the proposal doesn't go ahead É what have you lost? If the proposal does go ahead, let's make sure our voices are heard.

Hilary Brown

Letter - Ann Leggett - Dec 2023

Dear Editor,

I just would like to thank the organisers of the excellent meeting last Thursday on 'Clean Energy - Why Here? Why Now?'

Each of the experts was articulate and knowledgeable and I learned so much from them all. Although they were well received by many who were there, I only wish I thought that more people in the audience were persuaded by what they heard.

Many thanks, Ann Leggett

Letter - Richard Tyler - Feb 2024

Dear Editor,

Keeping positive and hopeful as the loss of our countryside knocks on the door

Community has been an excellent initiative to bring together those living in the Woodstock and Bladon area, and I am proud to say that I am a subscriber.

As such, I am disappointed that the Editor has added further fuel to the already heated debate over the merits of the Botley West solar power station.

In the last edition of Community, the Editor made the serious allegation that the local volunteers trying to mitigate what they see as the negative impact of the project in its current form were spreading 'misinformation'. 'It smacks of blatant propaganda of the lowest sort to me!' the Editor wrote, accusing neighbours of Putin-like manipulation.

Community's Editor asks for the provenance of the statistic appearing on the flyers distributed by local volunteers that '80%' of local people oppose the power station. The statistic comes from the first official consultation by the developers of the power station and is available on their website. The developer asked the questions and reported the findings.

Some more facts: the idealistic portrayal of what the proposed solar power station will look like on p.21 of the last edition of Community skirted over the developer's plans to install 2 million panels, 156 three-metre-high secondary electricity transformers, and 6 six-metre high main transformers. This imagined rural idyll will be enclosed with 2 meter high security fencing, CCTV and infrared sensors.

All this information is publicly available in the developer's plan, and reiterated in the recent public consultation where its representatives made very clear that the choice of land to be developed for the power station was entirely down to the discretion of Blenheim Palace.

The power station will take two years to build, with a provisional start date of the autumn of 2025, with contractors working six days a week, from 7am to 7pm, with some night time drilling. During this two-year period there will be heavy HGV traffic, and some local lanes will be temporarily closed, as will public footpaths across the site, which is larger in size than Heathrow Airport and includes areas of land that are classed as the highest quality agricultural grade.

The power station will emit the equivalent of 1.9 million tonnes of CO₂ to construct (the average person in Britain creates around 10 tonnes of CO₂ emissions each year). The developer estimates that operating the panels for c.40 years will save between 617,826 tonnes and 5.7 million tonnes of CO₂ (compared with carrying on as we are).

The developer's report also highlights how our area has seen above average increases in population growth over the last ten years as people are drawn to live and work here in our beautiful town and rural communities (12.7% growth compared with 7.5% for the south east of England as a whole in the same period). The rural landscape is a valuable amenity; it is short sighted to replace it with an industrial landscape.

As Hilary Brown from Sustainable Woodstock notes in her letter published in the same edition of Community there is still time to influence the developer's plans. Making our feelings known makes a difference: one of the land owners in the consortium, Merton College, has abandoned the power station project after deciding it can improve the biodiversity of its land in a more effective way.

Vague talk in the consultation of discounted electricity for affected communities needs to be clarified (a miserly 10% discount was mentioned by one of the developer's representatives at the public consultation event in Woodstock before Christmas). Communities in other countries living close to energy assets of national significance are compensated with far more generous discounts than that.

As with all issues, the debate for and against the power station is more nuanced than the Editor suggests. I am against the scheme as proposed as I feel strongly that it needs to be scaled back to something more proportionate, given the density of people living in our area.

However, our planning system forces people to choose sides, in an all or nothing battle. It ignores wishful thinking,

uttered on the side lines.

So we should have an open debate, as friends and neighbours. And we should avoid the careless spread of misinformation, as expressed by the Editor, which only helps to shut down debate. Many thanks for publishing my letter.

Richard Tyler, Bladon

Letter - Hilary Brown - Feb 2024

Dear Editor,

In December's issue of this magazine, I couldn't help but notice your editorial where you boldly questioned the flyer posted to every household. The red flyer stated '80% of local people oppose Botley West'. I had read the developer's report sometime before and couldn't remember the 80% figure, and like you, I was also taken aback by the claim ... and so prompted to revisit the report.

Out of 22,000 documents delivered to homes in our area, the developers received just over 1000 responses. Of these 1000 responses, 80% opposed Botley West. In effect, this represented opposition from less than 4% of the homes contacted (assuming there was 1 reply per household).

I'm not a marketing specialist but know that numbers work very well with our brains ... and headline numbers work even better. Our brains are wired instinctively to understand that 'more' usually equals 'better'. So, numbers quickly and very effectively influence our thinking and can lead to instant engagement ... but when we don't have context or further information, numbers can be also misleading and lead to inaccurate and sometimes a wrong conclusion. In my opinion, given the context and the very low response ... the numbers on this flyer were not as clearly presented as they might have been ... were misleading and unfairly trying to influence residents' opinion on the proposed Botley West Solar Farm.

Hilary Brown

Letter - Professor Alex Rogers - Feb 2024

Dear Editor,

We, like many of your readers, were taken aback by your editorial in the December issue in which you insinuated that the Stop Botley West campaign had fabricated data on the level of local opposition to the Botley West Solar Farm proposal. You said the statistic quoted in our leaflet (80% of local people are opposed) 'seems to be ... misinformation' and 'It smacks of blatant propaganda of the lowest sort to me'

In fact the data was taken from the solar farm developer's consultation report which said 71% of respondents were strongly opposed and 9% were opposed (page 7, Botley West Phase One Consultation Summary Report https://botleywest.co.uk/files/cto_layout/img/documents/Botley%20West%20Solar%20Farm%20CSR.pdf)

We wrote to you to point this out about this and you replied 'I can see that I perhaps owe you an apology' and 'I will mention this lack of understanding on my part in my next editorial'. We have not had sight of your February issue at the time of writing of course but trust it will include an apology from you.

The figure of 80% of people opposed refers to those who responded to the developer's consultation. You and your friends at Sustainable Woodstock have since suggested that the 4.94% of households that responded are too small a sample to respect local opinion and that it could be assumed that the 95% of people who did not respond are happy with the solar farm proposal.

Unfortunately this is another misunderstanding, this time of survey methodology and statistics. Firstly the 1,083 responses submitted to the first Botley West consultation in fact constitute an excellent sample; secondly it is very unwise to make any assumptions about the views of people who do not respond to a survey.

It is often said that the first casualty of war is the truth. Sadly the Botley West proposal has ignited conflict in our community. There are strong feelings on all sides but we should nonetheless try to have a respectful, evidence-based debate.

Professor Alex Rogers
Chair, Stop Botley West Campaign

Letter - Dominic Hare - Apr 2024

Dear Editor,

Thank you to everyone who took part in both consultations for the proposed Botley West project. Every piece of feedback you provided is recorded and forms a vital part of shaping the proposal as it moves towards a DCO submission later this year. If you didn't get the chance to look at the proposal during the consultation period, please take a look on the Botley West website where the documents are, or keep an eye on how you can take part in the examination stages of the process.

The Development Consent process might seem cumbersome to those of us who do not interact with it every day but it is designed to mean that every project which makes it through is subject to the highest level of scrutiny with representations both for and against coming from both professionals and communities who would like to have their say

For that reason, it is disappointing to continue seeing misguided narratives around the project and we encourage anyone to refer to latest data as it emerges from the process - this includes the latest Agricultural Land Classification.

Some of you will know that the only land data available prior to the extensive ground surveys which are now underway is that held by Natural England and that dataset is largely desktop based, dating back some decades. It's a good yardstick for all early stage projects until more detailed surveys are completed and based on that data the majority of the land promoted for Botley West fell outside of Best and Most Versatile (3b or lower). This aligns totally with knowledge from people who have cared for the land over decades.

As the ground is surveyed you would expect that some of the land is higher classification, some lower, and the developer is making no secret about that through the emerging documents and the emerging shape of the scheme. Where pockets of different soil type exist, you have to take a practical approach to designing a scheme and this is consistent with other consented schemes across the UK, some of which are on higher quality land than exists here in West Oxfordshire.

The developer is also gaining greater understanding of the soil quality where, in the most recent harvest, almost all the crops grown on the land were at least 10% lower than national averages, in some areas significantly less than that, despite the very best care and inputs from farmers. It's also helpful to know that the vast majority of these crops were destined for animal feed or energy generation. This is the case with most UK Agriculture and reflects the asks we all make of our food chain today.

There is absolutely no question that, once rested under panels, the ground will immediately begin to recover. The concept of setting land aside and rotating crops for soil health in farming are something which date back centuries. Once rested and not disturbed the soil begins rapidly to lock up carbon from the atmosphere and, after the life of the project, will come back into use totally regenerated and in doing so will have contributed our most critical need to decarbonise the energy we all rely on today. The positive impact on our biodiverse ecosystem from this project will also be very positive indeed.

Please keep an eye on the website as the shape of the proposal continues to emerge - particularly some of the very significant community benefits which you have all contributed to shaping.

Kind regards

Dominic Hare CEO, Blenheim

Letter - Aidan Salter - May 2024

Dear Editor,

Thank you for your support by making people aware of our last talk to raise funds for the Woodstock Exhibition Foundation. That talk and our coffee morning plus the investments we have, enabled us to provide 16 grants to local young people attending further education or apprenticeships totalling nearly £9600.

The next talk for fundraising is 'Man not the myth: Aspects of Churchill's character and personality on 8th July 2024 in St Mary Magdalene at 7.30 pm being given by Ashley Jackson who lives in Woodstock and is Professor of Imperial and Military History, Defence Studies Department, King's College London and also Visiting Fellow, Kellogg College Oxford

Kind regards Aidan Salter

Letter - Stan Scott - May 2024

Dear Editor,

A new Town Council

We will soon have a new Woodstock Town Council. No election is needed, as only 11 people put up for the council this time, someone else can join later to complete the 12 people needed.

Big changes will come about, with some old faces, some new, some unexpected. A full list (still called nominations until all is official) can be seen at: www.westoxon.gov.uk/media/iwam0q2r/statement-ofpersons-nominatedparish-council-elections-2024.pdf A few are returnees, either from the existing Council or from recent years, another from many years gone by, and several brand new. This should provide a very promising mix of experience and knowledge, particularly about rules, policies and past mistakes, and a fresh perspective of a kind, caring representation of local people.

There will be no place, we hope, for part-political interests and ambitions to impress elsewhere than in Woodstock. Personally, I have never quite understood those who can wholeheartedly serve on our Town Council, where there is no place whatsoever for partypolitical influences, and also serve on the District or County Council where party politics are everything. Such a councillor recently said at one of the meetings: 'The trouble is, you've asked a question of me as a County Councillor when I am here at your Town Council as a District Councillor.' I laughed at how ridiculous that sounded, but no one else did. This is a tricky division of loyalties which I hope that our political councillors can meet.

We really hope, do we not, for a return to the outlook of town councillors from years past, interested in what local people think, interested in finding out and representing local feeling, standing up for us all and fighting our corner if needs be. Could we ever again see our councillors out and about at weekends, asking folk what they think and what worries them? Alternatively, does something happen to appointed councillors as they walk through the Town Hall doors, that they now know what is best for us and can decide for us without needing to talk to us?

Now, the Town Hall could again become a civilised debating chamber, well-managed and productive. We hope for a chairperson (always the Mayor, whoever that is voted to be by colleagues) who does not tell fellow councillors (and sometimes members of the public) to shut up or be quiet, but who can pick up and enlarge upon any point being made by any councillor, even if disagreeing with it, share it briefly and fairly with others, and invite further comment and call a vote if necessary.

Anyway, good luck to them all, from 7 May onwards, and a word for those who have now left. Some appeared to have party-political and personal motivations that interfered with their job of representation. However, others worked extremely hard during their period of office and had real potential for sound and long-serving public office, had infighting and cliques not got in the way. Our thanks and good wishes must go to them.

Our Town Council is a proud institution, and all we have by way of local democracy. I think that councillors deserve our interest, support and occasional comment to remind them that we are there.

Stan Scott

Letter - Anthony Glees - May 2024

Dear Editor,

It would be a shame if the regrettable decision of our best Town Councillors not to seek re-election in May were to pass by without comment. The outgoing Mayor, Nick Manby-Brown, Jo Lamb and 'the happy few' who supported their leadership over the past four years, gifted Woodstock its best Town Council in two decades.

They reformed the finances, the admin structure and attempted (ultimately unsuccessfully) to introduce into Council business high standards of decency and appropriate behaviour. They brought WiFi, recorders and a mike system to the Town Hall, along with new accounts software. They supported the 'no' to Botley West, the smart parking scheme and set up direct access to the WTC website for our thriving local societies to create an online local events diary which is highly valued by them. In an attempt to heal the time-wasting bitter feuds of the past, Nick's first act was to nominate, as his deputy, someone from the opposing side.

As council tax payers await a 'new' Council which includes, unfortunately, many of those who did so much to obstruct the serious work of the outgoing Councillors, and some of whom have spent what seems like a lifetime in office, now is the time to respect on what still needs to be done.

Major unresolved internal issues remain. We need to be told why four Town Clerks have left the employment of WTC in about as many years, some with expensive non-disclosure or other leaving agreements. It is said this is because one or two Councillors behaved towards them in an impossible manner but we do not know, even though we should. Why is one Councillor even suing his own Council? Why should Woodstock residents not be allowed to know what has gone on behind closed doors, especially as it is our money that has been spent. There should be no place for NDAs nor secret deals in public life.

Turning to the world outside the Town Hall, WTC has two major inter-connected issues to address. First, the so-called Solar Farm which are being pushed remorselessly (and shamelessly) by Blenheim. Russian cash and Chinese plastic should not be allowed to destroy the fine historic farmlands and fields that grace our north Oxfordshire environment. And secondly, Blenheim is now seemingly intent on turning Woodstock into its client cash-cow (and cats-paw), whether to build new homes (Blenheim won't allow solar panels to be fitted on them, they presumably want to sell purchasers their own Blenheim electricity), or by encroaching on the life of the Town by use of the Town Gate and clogging up the A44 with very noisy 'Disney' events. Nor should we forget that the two last WTC's took their eye off the ball in failing to demand Section 106 funding from developers to compensate local residents for years of serious disturbance and damage to roads, including the five year new and rebuilding project that is Woodstock House.

These matters need a functioning Council machine. Will we get one? The Mayor and his team steadfastly attended 95% of Council meetings. Yet some of the most obstructive and cash-wasting Councillors will remain on the Council, and some of them have the appalling attendance records. One persistent 'point of order' enthusiast attended only 55% of meetings, a supporter of his just one for the whole of the last year! As a former Councillor myself, I am only too aware of the hard graft required.

Anthony Glees

Letter - Nick Stewart - May 2024

Dear Editor,

Being a regular reader of The Week, the following caught my eye in 13 April issue:

'A town council in Norfolk has introduced a system that allows councillors to raise a card if they want to leave a meeting because they're in distress. The system was set up after a Tory councillor accused fellow members of 'achieving nothing', causing a Green councillor to experience a brief 'psychiatric emergency'. Councillors who raise a card can take time out in a room where they can be advised on 'grounding techniques.'

Given the reported behaviour of some of our Woodstock Town councillors perhaps it is high time to introduce a similar card system? Or, alternatively, the yellow/red card system used in football matches!

Nick Stewart

Letter - Linda Glees - June 2024

Dear Editor,

In your May edition it was stated in an obituary that the funds for the refurbishment of the Woodstock Community Centre were raised by the celebrations for 'Woodstock at 900'.

In fact, I'm afraid that this is inaccurate, and as WOBL is a local paper of record (deposited as such in the archives of the Bodleian Library) it is important to set the record straight.

The funds needed for the long overdue refurbishment were the result of serious fund-raising work undertaken by Victoria Edwards, Deputy Mayor at the time, and myself. Woodstock Town Council contributed a sum of £60,000 which had been raised by the sale of a council property. We then applied widely for grants and sought private donations. West Oxfordshire District Council allocated a grant of £35,000 and the balance came from generous residents and charitable trusts. It would be a shame if this successful community effort were to be misremembered and mis-recorded

Yours sincerely, Linda Glees

Letter - Nick Manby-Brown - June 2024

I would like to comment on Stan Scott's letter in May's issue. I was very happy and proud to become the Town Mayor, and I enjoyed my time in office. The chairing of meetings was just one of the Mayor's roles, and I took 21 out of 22 meetings. I tried to chair as fairly as I could, and I concentrated on getting the Council business done first. During my year, not one person queried the way I conducted meetings to my face. The Council has a chequered and difficult history of meetings, as can be seen by past Minutes, and I feel my term was a good year for the Council. The new way of filming and recording meetings helped with both conduct and transparency. I wish the New Council every success.

Nick Manby-Brown

Letter - Alison Foster - June 2024

Dear Editor,

I just want to mention what a lovely time we had visiting Bridewell Gardens on their recent Open Day in May! I read about it in your magazine (in the March issue) and decided to go along.

It was surprisingly located in Wilcote (a nearby village we had not heard of), and we approached it by driving through Finstock. You wouldn't know it was there unless you went looking for it! We were ushered into a parking space in the adjacent field and were warmly greeted at their makeshift 'reception tent' with offerings of their own packets of flower seeds and information about what we'd find there. It was a wonderfully sunny Sunday and we saw England at its very best!

So, I do encourage others to go as they do wonderful work there helping people to recover from bouts of severe depression and mental illness..giving them much needed companionship, gentle and rewarding tasks, interesting knowledge and experience that lasts a lifetime, and a lot of hope for their future.

We looked around the potting sheds and greenhouses; strolled along the avenue, through the topiaries and the kitchen garden enjoying the herbs and flowers; then strolled past the olive trees on the other side of the walled garden to admire their vineyards beyond and to learn about their different compost heaps. We then sat down for a cup of tea and home-made cake in their pop-up cafe complete with bunting, enjoying the gentle hum of civilised chat and conversation.

They still have Open days you can go to: on Sundays 9 June; 14 July and 15 September, so do go and visit this special place while you can!

Alison Foster

Letter - Kevin Markey - Sept 2024

Dear Sirs

Mrs Lesley Seligman: can anyone help?

I am seeking memories of Lesley Seligman, a former resident of Woodstock House.

Lesley was the wife of Henry Seligman, a German Jew who was interned on the Isle of Man and later was involved with atomic research. Lesley also had a brother Michael Gordon Bradley (1923--1998).

My link is tenuous! Their daughter Gisela lived with my great grand parents, one of three to live with relatives of mine and the final one to complete my research.

I am hoping to get more information to lead me to Gisela and/or her brothers who I now know were called Andrew and Paul.They were both born in Oxford and one or both may still be alive.

I am happy for my email to be given out: kevmarkey08@aol.com.

Kevin Markey

Letter - Stan Scott - Sept 2024

Dear Editor

Can there be any doubt that our doctors are the most hard working, respected and valuable people in Woodstock and the whole area? Odd then that the future of our health care is on their shoulders, with not much help so far from the NHS, Blenheim as developers or the County and District councils?

Blenheim have apparently offered to build something on the Banbury Road site, well out of town and no buses. Nothing is guaranteed and might not happen for many years, if at all. The old police station, which they also own, stands empty, and is large, central, close to the shops, near the buses and has lots of parking. Even on a temporary rented basis it would be ideal for doctors and patients.

Doctors have said they will listen to patients, and our town council is considering ways in which we can all be consulted.

Stan Scott

Letter - Jo Lamb - Sept 2024

Dear Editor,

The word 'Democracy', according to my Collins Thesaurus, is taken from the Greek word 'demos', meaning people and 'kratos', meaning strength. In current political terms a democracy is a system of self government by the people; or at least, it should be. Again, according to my thesaurus, a democratic system of government is one which is self governing, egalitarian and representative of the populist view.

So how does this apply to our system of local government and in particular to the recent operations of Woodstock Town Council (WTC), granted that our current Councillors did not even have to submit to an electoral Parish Council vote last May because alas, there were insufficient Town Council candidates prepared to stand?

It seems to me that an invaluable tool available to current Councillors is actually to listen to and to hear what the local electorate might wish to communicate to them; common sense and common courtesy surely? It is for this reason that each WTC agenda provides for a 'public participation' section at the beginning of each meeting. It is a massive aid to communication between the electorate and the Council.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the Council's current Standing Orders provide that matters raised in public participation can only be those relating to items on the Agenda for that specific meeting nevertheless, the Agenda content itself is ultimately controlled by the Mayor and/or Deputy Mayor alone (in conjunction with the Town Clerk). Arguably therefore, the Agenda itself might not necessarily reflect all the concerns of the local electorate or indeed sometimes, all the concerns of individual Councillors.

In recognition of this apparent constraint on the principles of democracy, WTC's website provides unambiguously within its rules on Public Participation that: "The Town Council has changed its standing orders on the rights of residents to address the Council. Now, the public can speak on any topic relevant to the affairs of the Council whether or not it is on the agenda. The Council hopes that this will encourage people to air their views on matters of local interest"

This much is clear. So far so good! Participation by the public at Council meetings upon matters of concern to them, is an essential component of democracy and communication between the electors and our Councillors.

What a shocking surprise that it was then, to those of us who attended the WTC meeting on Tuesday 10th September, when the Mayor (who was audibly and insistent prompted by the Deputy Mayor in this respect), announced that only topics related directly to items on the agenda for that meeting, could be raised in public participation by the members of the public. As I was told subsequently, one of the items which would have been raised by one public speaker was to have been the state and condition of some of the town's bus shelters. The opportunity to raise this directly through public participation was vetoed purely because the topic of bus shelters was not on the agenda for that day. As a result of this unilateral and narrow interpretation of Standing Orders, there was absolutely no public speaking at the WTC meeting on 10th September. Many of those present concluded that this was an appalling turn of events.

How undemocratic was this outcome? Highly, I would suggest. Is the proverbial 'tail' (ie certain Councillors) now trying to 'wag the dog' (ie, the populace)? Is there an intention emerging from within the Council which is to restrict the content of free speech by the electorate? It would seem so. It is a great shame that neither of the (only) three other Councillors present at this meeting raised any objection to the evident erosion of democratic representation in this instance. There was a deafening silence in the Mayor's Parlour at this moment !

This was not a good day for the electorate in Woodstock. It was a dreadful day for democracy within this town, which many will hope will never occur again. Come on Town Council! Kindly correct your interpretation of what should be democracy enabling rules..... "kratos" to the "demos" one could say?! Councillors might begin by sorting out the current Standing Orders which could be aligned say, to those of West Oxfordshire District Council which allow for proper participation in Council meetings. After all, we are meant to be living in a democracy and this is the twenty-first century.

Yours, Jo Lamb

Letter - Michael Farley - Sept 2024

Sir

Residents' Parking: In the first year of residential parking in Woodstock the County Council raised just over £250k. Interestingly 62% of the income came from pay and display. I make no comment on the rights or wrongs of this policy, readers can come to their own conclusions from the breakdown of income in the table below.

June 2023 to July 2024

Residents permits £28,535

Visitor permits £925

Hotel permits £27,000

Business permits £4,920

Pay and Display income £155,119

Penalty Charge Notice £33,710

Currently residents' permits at £65.00 are the lowest in Oxfordshire, they rise to £110 in many other towns/areas. What chance OCC exploit this cash cow in our town in the years to come?

Michael Farley

Letter - Christopher Donald - Sept 2024

Dear Sir

Some of your readers will already know that on 12th August there was a court case in Oxford which was brought by Mr Sharone Parnes against Woodstock Town Council (case ref. 355MC672). It was a public hearing before Judge Lumb, several of our community being present. Mr Parnes has been a councillor on Woodstock Town Council for over ten years.

Councillor Parnes' case involving personal damages against the Town Council was struck out by the judge for a whole series of reasons and accordingly costs of £1168.50 were awarded against Councillor Parnes.

This is a most unusual case both as to parties, claim, possible conflict of interest, judgement and award of costs against plaintiff as well as the long duration of proceedings. Now that the case has been struck out the electors of Woodstock must feel entitled to some public disclosures.

The Judges strictures speak for themselves but such disclosures are the least the electors should expect. Specifically the Mayor should require Councillor Parnes to account for his conduct which can be seen as most unbecoming of a councillor. In the context of an elected councillor it would be entirely reasonable to expect a public personal statement in the absence of which electors will like me be left with an uncomfortable feeling undermining respect for and confidence in Woodstock Town Council.

Yours faithfully, Christopher Donald

Letter - Anthony Glees - Oct 2024

Dear Editor

The September edition of your excellent news magazine has much of great interest to everyone in Woodstock. To those of us with a particular concern for the future of our lovely Town, two major long-term issues in particular jump out of your pages.

The first comes from the report of the Probus Club. We learn that "Further capital investment has been going into 'London-Oxford Airport' to support expansion. [There is] a new three hanger facility built for the helicopter part of Airbus at a cost of £50m...Flight control has also benefitted with a new upgrade in the Radar system. This means they are able to land a greater variety of aircraft including small [sic] commercial aircraft, the sort that you see at London City Airport".

"All this has led to the Airspace-Public Consultation which is currently underway. In the next phase of the Consultation, the proposed take-off and landing utilisation of airspace and flightpaths will be put forward. This should include both fixed wing and rotary aircraft and is the phase Woodstock and surrounding villages need to consider very carefully in providing comment".

How many of us were aware we had been 'consulted'? We must wonder how we can ensure we are properly protected for aircraft noise pollution (which is already clearly on the increase) and the dangerous dumping of fuel in our area. We are already suffering from increased helicopter and fixed wing flights over Woodstock, some (allegedly) taking so-called A Listers to Estelle Manor and the Soho Farmhouse.

Secondly, we read, yet again that the Blenheim managers continue to relentlessly press forward not simply with the so-called Solar Farm project but also with changes to the use of the Estate, with ever more weekend events which impact directly on the life of Woodstock. There is also an ongoing traffic issue which must be addressed. On Saturday 31 August, for example, when as far as one could tell there was nothing special going on, the tail-back of traffic on the A44 at 1100 reached as far as Yarnton. Everyone was inconvenienced by this including those on the buses.

London-Oxford Airport (what a silly name, to be honest, 'Kidlington' would be just fine and rather more accurate) and Blenheim should feel that it is being very carefully monitored by the representatives of Woodstock's citizenry and be made to understand that it cannot ride roughshod over us with impunity.

To this end, I have written to the new Mayor of Woodstock and Councillors to ask for that a single Councillor be designated to keep an eagle eye on both these issues, as was the case in the past and report fully to all of us. This would, in my opinion, be a vital step to ensuring that this generation passes on the unique heritage of Woodstock and to future generations.

Yours, Anthony Glees

Letter - Bob Pomfret - Oct 2024

Dear Editor

I seem to spend a lot of time thinking about the proposal for the Botley West solar farm and I'd appreciate it if you would allow me to share my thoughts in the Woodstock and Bladon News.

I've been walking, running and enjoying the wildlife on the fields around Woodstock for more than sixty years and if I'm entirely honest I'd really rather they were not covered with solar panels. Trouble is, I also know that the climate is changing and the world is becoming a more difficult place for many people, not to mention other species, to live in. I'm also not proud of the legacy that me and my generation are leaving for those that follow us and, although I hate putting my head up over the parapet on a controversial subject, I'd like to explain why I feel we should engage with and probably support the Botley West project.

1. Solar is clean sustainable energy. It is quiet energy, it does not smell and does not have polluting waste products. Nobody is drilling or digging up anything and it won't run out as long as we need it.
2. It's local energy, made in the UK and not affected by international politics and incidents.
3. It can be a short term solution. If something better comes along in the next few years, the infrastructure is relatively easy to decommission and the land returned to agricultural use.

I'm not pretending to be an expert, but I've read a lot of angry headline grabbing stuff from people against the project and my gut feeling is that they are wrong; that fundamentally large scale solar is a sensible way forward to supply us with the electricity we need and edge us towards a net zero future.

I hate it when people say 'what's the point?'. This project is just a drop in the ocean and won't make a significant difference'. I don't believe in giving up. I'd like to think that I am an optimist about the future and part of the reason is that schemes like this are starting to be built.

My last thought is a question I ask myself. If this project were 20 miles away would I think it was a good idea? And, the truth is, I would. And, for me, that kind of seals it. Even though it actually hurts me to think that the landscape around me, my landscape, would be changed for the rest of my life. I refuse to be a 'not in my backyard' person. We owe it to our children and grandchildren and the generations to follow.

Thank you, with Regards, Bob Pomfret

Letter - Jo Lamb - Oct 2024

Dear Editor,

The urgent need for a new surgery for Woodstock has been an ongoing subject for local discussion for years. The subject is not rocket science but it is made more complicated by the numbers of participants involved in the discussions and the often conflicting commercial interests of the parties involved.

It would be wrong to think that our local government leaders (eg, the County, District or Town Councils) are directly involved in the provision of a new surgery. They are not prime movers in this instance. Our local representatives are at best merely facilitators, trying to get the parties around the negotiating table.

Personally, I don't think our local Town Council is of much significance in this issue at all. The main players are the GPs themselves, (some of whom own the current inadequate site and are likely to want to access their capital investment for their personal need), the NHS (which stipulates what is required for the site and the building but doesn't have funding available to pay to build it) and the Blenheim Estates Trust (which own the land and whose S106 statutory capital obligations are dependent upon more house building). The Government pays the GPs for some of their business activities but they seem to stand back from taking responsibility for injecting capital into a new surgery building.

Slightly more on the fringe of these discussions, I would suggest, is the Bus Company because if it transpires that the surgery has to be built outside the immediate town centre, the new building must be made regularly and easily accessible by local transport for people who are likely to be pretty unwell. Without easy access to it, the new building would merely be a "white elephant".

So please can we lock representatives from each of these prime movers into a room and throw away the key, until a viable and sensible agreement as to the new surgery building is reached by them? Only then should these individuals be let out of detention! The discussion around this critical need for Woodstock has gone on long enough. The losers are local patients who are losing patience.

Pardon the pun!

Yours, Jo Lamb

Letter - Hilary Brown - Oct 2024

Dear Editor,

I was hoping to inform readers that our council agreed to take action on bus shelters ... a positive story. Not to be, sadly. Despite being contrary to practice, the council announced without warning that the public could not speak, unless it was a subject on their agenda. They read Standing Order 3e but offered no further explanation. However, they did, omit to read the additional text 'to encourage people to air their views on matters of local interest, now the public can speak on any topic relevant to the affairs of the Council whether or not it is on the agenda'. A few made an attempt to question the sudden change of practice but the response was uncompromising, disappointing and frankly unfriendly... their response ... an emphatic "NO". Consequently – no public participated, even though before the meeting, at least 3 residents planned to speak. Although thwarted, I did write to the Town Clerk asking if he would submit the subject of repairing the shelters to the councillors and asked him to confirm the procedure for us to follow. We really would like 'a little help from our friends' ... in the council.

Hilary Brown

Letter - Anthony Glees - Nov 2024

Dear Editor

Last month you were kind enough to publish a letter from me, asking that Woodstock Town Council (WTC) appoint a councillor to monitor the expansion of two major enterprises, Blenheim and 'London-Kidlington' Airport. I mentioned that I put this proposal to WTC directly on 2 September.

Whilst I have had no official answer from WTC, off the record I'm told WTC has now appointed two councillors to address these key issues, and that Cllr the Duke of Marlborough will monitor Blenheim and Cllr Parnes the Airport. The former is a prized, if rare, attendee at WTC and the latter recently failed in his attempt to sue WTC for thousands of pounds of damages.

Whether WTC considered any possible conflicts of interest in making these two appointments (the clue to the former is in the name, and to the latter his failed court action) we do not, of course know and recent rule changes to the making of public representations to WTC meetings mean we may never to know.

Please forgive me for writing to you again this month but about another issue altogether, the latest so-called 'WTC Parking Survey'.

Anyone with even a nodding acquaintance of how to conduct a survey scientifically will raise an eyebrow at the scrap of paper recently posted through our letter-boxes, containing 14 questions. Respondents are not asked for their names or addresses and that the 'survey' can be completed online as well as on paper - so there's no way, it seems, of preventing multiple responses by using both paper and online to give them (twice over for couples).

As you peruse the questions on the 'survey', you can only smile. They are aimed at those who 'have a connection with the Town', and Q. 10 is addressed specifically to those who 'live outside' it, without defining what this means (in the Shire? In England? Overseas?) - or what the locus standi of such folk should be in evaluating their responses.

But it gets worse. Every single question asking respondents for an opinion on the Scheme leads with a hostile or negative prompt. To the first question, about shopping in Woodstock, the 'survey' asks if the Scheme has 'strongly discouraged' respondents from shopping in Woodstock, or 'somewhat discouraged' them. Ditto the question of how the Scheme has impacted on their businesses (the prompt is for 'strongly discouraged'). Question 8 requires a 'yes' or 'no' answer to whether the Scheme has stopped us attending functions in Town Hall or Community centre (not whether it has facilitated attendance). The 'survey' concludes with a hotchpotch of questions including whether respondents would like to 'increase the fee parking period' (surely they mean 'free') and whether the scheme 'should be removed altogether' (we imagine they hoped for answer is 'yes').

Who devised the 'survey'? How will we get to learn the total number of respondents? Not revealing the number of respondents is a well-tried way of foxing the public.

Candidly, it does seem that the aim of this 'survey' is to attempt, yet again, to re-open and discredit the parking Scheme, despite the District Council election where the pro-Scheme candidate won 51% of the vote and the anti-Scheme person just 28% and the fact that the Scheme works so well.

Councillors' wily strategies are often good for a laugh. But bearing in mind that it is our money that is being wasted on this 'survey' and that so many serious problems in our Town are not being addressed, it seems fair to wonder if it is not WTC who is having the last laugh - on us, at our expense. Literally.

Anthony Glees

Letter - Sue McGlynn - Nov 2024

Dear Editor

I returned to Woodstock after a short period away and was horrified to see the condition of the once beautiful, mature trees within the Woodstock Conservation Area. Their value to the town centre environment is incalculable - now nearly every tree has been severely pollarded, leaving just a stump.

Trees are an essential element of the street scene and experience of the Conservation Area. They provide multiple benefits beyond the visual and aesthetic. There are probably many more but these are just a few of the benefits:

- * Modify climate in urban settings
- * Help to clean the air
- * Provide habitat for birds and insects
- * Increase well being by bringing greenery into built up areas
- * Reduce vehicle speeds in the carriageway through 'side friction'
- * Soften the visual impact of car parking in streets

Clearly, trees need to be managed carefully to remain healthy and safe. It is evident that the trees have been pollarded previously and that this was a standard practice in tree surgery. However, there must be less brutal methods of managing trees within such a significant streetscape, such as more limited thinning and lopping or pollarding more gradually over a period of time so that the impact is lessened.

A representative of Oxfordshire County Council Countryside and Tree Service has agreed to meet me to explain their approach to tree maintenance and I hope this may prompt a review of methods for the care of street trees in the future.

For now, the damage is done and for a considerable time the centre of Woodstock will be a degraded experience for all - residents, tourists, business owners and visitors alike. There will be no trees marking the seasons, no bird song, nowhere to hang the Christmas lights and nothing but tree stumps and overflowing bins in the streets.

Who, if anyone, is actively protecting and conserving our beautiful town?

Susan McGlynn

Please see pictures of the pollarded trees on the inside back cover

Letter - Giles Lewis - Nov 2024

Dear Editor,

Bob Pomfret is right when he refers in his letter (WOBL, October ed.) to the Botley West project being controversial.

Just one of the reasons for this is that large scale solar is very inefficient when compared to other sources of renewable energy. As little as 11% efficient, it is approximately half as efficient as onshore – and one quarter as efficient as offshore – wind. The UK is very nearly the least suitable country for solar power in all of Europe due to those characteristics of its weather that have been only too obvious this summer. Its delivery of energy can only be termed `clean` if the highly carbon-intensive process of manufacturing its panels and shipping them from China is conveniently ignored; as also the use of elemental and metal materials that are dug up, using fossil-fuelled mining plant to do so.

As with electric cars, China will inevitably tighten its current grip on the source of these materials, thereby undoubtedly leading to `international politics and incidents`.

Eleven-mile long Botley West will be the biggest solar development in Europe if it goes ahead. The infrastructure required for two million solar panels on this huge 3,200-acre project includes concrete posts and blockhouses – one in every field-sized area – plus the cabling, 110 km of fencing and security lighting required. Rapid obsolescence in solar panel technology will shorten its life to much less than the putative 40 years. It is debateable as to who will pick up a half billion-pound tab for decommissioning the development. More likely this mainly Green Belt land - much of it BMV farmland

As for our legacy left to future generations, our concern should lie with the current 'net zero or bust' policy pursued by our government. It will impoverish our country, render us uncompetitive and insecure in a geo-politically dangerous world, and leave a landscape degraded by rusting panels on our once-cherished countryside.

Giles Lewis

Letter - Arron Bowman-Smith - Nov 2024

Dear Editor,

Having missed out on the opportunity to add my signature to the 28 residents who wrote to the Town Council before Wednesday's meeting, I am writing to express my deep dissatisfaction with the recent actions taken by Woodstock Town Council, actions that I and many other residents see as a gross display of disregard for transparent governance and respect for the community.

The resignation of Mayor John Banbury, after a brief five months, left residents in the dark and raised many questions. Instead of responding openly, the Council hastily convened a meeting, at which only six councillors were present. To choose Ann Grant as Mayor under such dubious circumstances, without even a clear explanation for the urgency or need, is an affront to fair governance. To proceed with such a significant decision, particularly in a way that undermines public input and bypasses established protocols, is nothing short of a bold overreach.

Additionally, recent changes to public participation procedures making it nearly impossible for residents to address the Council without prior councillor approval are nothing less than an attempt to silence the very voices the Council is elected to serve. This shift flies in the face of the Local Government Transparency Code (2014), a clear violation of the public's right to contribute to local decision-making.

Further concerns include the questionable handling of grant allocations, with critical meetings rescheduled at the last minute, causing some Councillors to miss them entirely. The lack of transparency in these decisions, coupled with potential conflicts of interest, seriously undermines trust in the Council's motives.

The Town Clerk's recent conflicting statements around procedural changes have only added to the confusion. Woodstock residents deserve a clear, honest explanation, not contradictory statements and haphazard decision-making. Additionally, the ongoing issue with Councillor Parnes' legal dispute with WTC has cast a long shadow over the Council's integrity, a situation that demands thorough public disclosure and accountability.

The WTC exists to serve the interests of Woodstock's residents, not to advance individual agendas or circumvent established democratic processes. The recent conduct has been a stark reminder that this Council seems to have lost sight of its purpose, forgetting the duty it has to the public.

In light of these issues, I urge the WTC to restore trust by holding an Extraordinary Town Meeting, allowing Councillors to address the community directly, answer the questions and account for recent actions. Our town deserves leadership that upholds transparency, respect for procedure, and accountability to the public. This standard must be met, anything less is a disservice to us all.

Mr Bowman-Smith

Oxfordshire County Council being the local authority for Oxfordshire is supposedly committed to delivering top quality services and value for money on behalf of the county's 600,000+ residents. However, having run a business in Woodstock since 1996 as well as living in town, I have witnessed a deterioration in the service levels that are available to Woodstock residents.

New housing has dramatically increased the town's population without any thought or mitigation given to how already overstretched essential services such as school places and GP appointment availability at the Woodstock Surgery are increased. The pavements are cracked with loose paving which is hazardous especially for elderly people, there is an abundance of litter strewn around town, weeds are allowed to grow unchecked with deep roots establishing themselves at the base of stone walls which will eventually cause structural damage to properties many of which are Listed buildings, just to name a few areas of concern.

A lack of funding seems to be the common excuse and reason given for service levels having deteriorated, so imagine my surprise to learn that 'cash-strapped' Oxfordshire County Council had £278 million stashed away in its bank accounts in May 2024 which had been received as compulsory payments by housing developers under rules contained within Section 106 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990.

These compulsory payments are made by housing developers to Oxfordshire County Council which must be used to mitigate any negative effect that new houses being built will have on the essential services such as schools, pavements, footpaths Etc. Sensible one would have thought, as an increase of residents living in an area will of course put pressure on already over-stretched essential services and the infrastructure in general.

It appears as if Oxfordshire County Council had however 'banked' the £278 million of money paid across to them by the aforementioned housing developers under Section 106 and they have not used that money for the purposes that it was intended. To make matters worse, there's the possibility that housing developers might seek to claw back the unspent money after five years of it not having been used.

Looking at the situation further, it appears as if Oxfordshire County Council had collected, received and 'banked' £16.1 million by May 2024 from Section 106 payments which should have been used to improve services in Woodstock and Chipping Norton combined.

The £278 million and the Woodstock/Chipping Norton £16.1 million is not the definitive figure and the end of this 'banked' money scandal, because each time a housing developer receives planning permission to build new houses in our area, they are obligated to pay additional monies across to Oxfordshire County Council under Section 106, so the aforementioned 'banked' figures will surely rise as time passes.

All towns must be fit for purpose and be able to support the needs of residents. There are a number of services in Woodstock which fall outside of an acceptable standard that need to be addressed.

May I suggest that Woodstock Town Council challenges Oxfordshire County Council and insists that the Section 106 money that should have been used to benefit Woodstock and improve services that has been 'banked', is immediately released and used for the purpose that it was intended which in turn will benefit all Woodstock residents.

Andrew Hennell, Antiques Of Woodstock

Letter - Colin Baldwin - Dec 2024

Pollarded Trees and Christmas Lights*I write to support the views of the letter in your last issue from Susan McGlynn. I don't live in any of the streets in which the trees have been pollarded, so I can't comment on the birdsong etc but I do think that Woodstock looks a worse place for the work done.

I moved to Woodstock twelve or so years ago and when I got a chance to have a clear look at the place I thought how lucky we are to live in such a beautiful town. My friends that visit from Oxford and further afield also comment with the same view.

I am no arboriculturist but I do know that one can pollard trees any time within their dormancy period, which can be as late as May in some years but can be safely treated up to the end of March in all years.

So why do so shortly after the Christmas lights are placed on them? The lights in Woodstock are always something to look forward to. I realise there are still some lights on the smaller trees but the larger trees when lit are so much more impressive during the festive period. I was pleased to see the lights going up earlier this year only to find a week or so later they weren't there and the trees had been butchered.

I assume that there is a chargeable cost to the work of erection of the lighting, when I asked who was responsible I was told there are two councils involved. The Town Council and Oxfordshire County Council. When I asked who on earth was responsible for the extra cost, I was told that it was us, apparently. It is clear to me that neither of the two councils consult with one another.

I assume that when asked each council would blame the other. Is this due to petty rivalry or just total incompetence? I do notice from the WOBL that there seems to be a lot of unrest within the Town Council. A lot of questions were asked in the last issue and perhaps when this issue comes out we may have some clearer answers given. It does look, reading the last WOBL, as though someone needs to grab the subject by the scruff of the neck and sort the trouble out.

C.W.Baldwin

Letter - Graham Brown - Dec 2024

Solar Power

I wrote to this magazine just over a year ago about solar power, trying to balance some issues arising from the Botley West project and would like to do this again.

It is widely accepted now that there is a critical need to generate clean energy to reduce carbon emissions to fight climate change. To this end, solar and wind are relatively quick, easy and cheap ways to do this. Yes, they are not perfect but they are currently the best tools we have. The comprehensive report from the World Bank from 2020 (Solar Power Potential by Country) states that the UK is second from bottom on the ranking of the potential of countries to generate solar power but it also states that even here in the UK it is a worthwhile exercise. That is the reason we see solar farms and solar panels all around us. Oxfordshire needs energy and our area is considered unsuitable for onshore wind which therefore leaves solar. The under investment in the National Grid means there are only certain areas where large scale solar can be installed and connected, Botley West has that connection. The Government is desperately trying to catch up on a lack of action in the last 20 years and solar is a relatively fast way to do this. Studies show that solar installations, depending on their location, become carbon neutral after 2-6 years. The website of the Low Carbon Hub, a social enterprise based in Oxford which develops community-owned renewable energy installations, has an excellent Q & A section on Botley West which debunks myths and misinformation about solar power. We need to instal solar on roofs and in fields, as quickly as possible, this is an emergency.

So what can we do? Wait, leave it to others, hope for the best? Engaging in the process will help. Push for more and push hard. Push for more tree planting, better hedges, more wildlife reserves, more public footpaths, more biodiversity, more community benefit. If this project does go ahead then the community benefit fund of £50K a year offered by the developers to the local communities is insulting for a project of this size. A similar project in Nottingham is offering £1million a year, other renewable projects far more...

Graham Brown

Letter - Arron Bowman-Smith - Dec 2024

Woodstock Town Council (WTC)

I am writing in to raise serious concerns about what appears to be gross failings in governance and transparency at Woodstock Town Council (WTC). These alleged failures have left many in the community disillusioned and questioning whether this council is fit to serve.

As a result, I have formally requested that West Oxfordshire District Council investigate WTC's conduct and consider disbanding the current council, paving the way for fresh elections. While this is a drastic step, I believe it is necessary given the weight of the allegations and the damage already done to public confidence.

The following key issues warrant immediate attention:

1. **Leadership Failures*** Mayor John Banbury's abrupt resignation has yet to be fully explained, leaving the community in the dark. What followed was a hastily arranged meeting where Cllr Ann Grant was appointed as the new Mayor, with what appears to be little to no transparency or public engagement in the process.
2. **Suppression of Public Voices*** The recently implemented Public Participation Protocol has, in effect, stripped residents of meaningful opportunities to engage with their elected representatives. It grants the Chair unchecked power to silence speakers and even allows for the use of police to remove individuals - policies that appear to contravene Article 10 of the Human Rights Act 1998 and stifle democratic freedoms.
3. **Censorship Through Policies*** The Notice Board and Entrance Halls Policy actively bans materials critical of the council, suppressing dissenting voices and undermining accountability. This attempt to control criticism and stifle public discourse is alarming and raises serious questions about the council's commitment to openness and transparency.
4. **Mismanagement and Confusion*** Poorly scheduled meetings and conflicting procedural statements have created unnecessary confusion among both Councillors and residents. Meanwhile, ongoing legal disputes involving a sitting Councillor cast a further shadow over the council's integrity, leaving the community in doubt about its ability to manage itself effectively.

The people of Woodstock deserve a council that upholds democratic principles, values public participation, and operates with integrity. Instead, the current WTC has allegedly demonstrated incompetence, disregard for transparency, and an apparent lack of accountability to its constituents.

By calling for a thorough investigation and the potential disbandment of the Council, I aim to restore trust in our local governance and ensure that Woodstock is represented by leaders who respect and prioritise their community.

I strongly encourage the residents of Woodstock to stand together, demand better from their elected representatives, and push for leadership that values transparency, accountability, and the rights of its constituents. To those sitting on the current Council, I urge you to reflect on your actions and remember your responsibility is to serve the public, not silence them.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Mr Bowman-Smith

Editor Comment: The retiring Mayor and the three resigning Councillors were contacted to ask whether they wanted to submit a letter

Letter - Nick Stewart - Jan 2025

Letters to the Editor

I like Christmas

In fact, it's one of my favourite times of the year. However, I was shocked to read the Woodstock Town Council (WTC) minutes of the 12 November meeting when "the Clerk reported that to enhance Woodstock's Christmas lights, five fully decorated 7 foot Christmas trees will be delivered, at a cost of around £4,500".

WTC has bags of money but to spend this amount of money on five Christmas trees is outrageous and a waste of public money. Judging by the number of comments on 'We Love Woodstock', there are many other people who share my point of view.

It would be fascinating to know more about the buying decision process carried out by WTC including how many quotes were obtained (three is standard practice), testimonials from satisfied customers and whether the chosen supplier is local and environmentally friendly.

At the same meeting on 12 November, another decision was made by WTC that also shocked me. This time it wasn't about how much money was spent for so little, but how little WTC donated to a charitable cause. A request from the North Oxfordshire Food Bank for support for Christmas parcels for Woodstock had been received. The total cost would be £250 and the Council proposal was to provide £115. After discussion it was decided that £100 would be donated. I find it hard to believe that a discussion was even needed; surely £250 should have been proposed and seconded without further ado – perhaps double the original request. It's good to know that the Christmas spirit is alive and well amongst the current WTC councillors!

Yet again at the 12 November meeting, the subject of the much needed repair and replacement of the town's bus shelters was discussed. It was acknowledged that waiting for S106 money from the development of Hill Rise would take many years. The possibility of asking Blenheim to contribute to the Hensington shelter was also discussed. As I mentioned above, WTC has bags of money so why is it even considering asking Blenheim for a contribution or mentioning S106 money? In my view, it could easily afford to pay for the bus shelters out of its own money.

And when I say bags of money, as at 31 March 2014 WTC had £363,000 in its bank account. By 31 October 2014, this amount had risen to £464,000! So, in just seven months, an increase of £122,000 or over £17,000 per month. I appreciate that WTC needs to keep something in reserve, but it needs to get its priorities right and start spending for the good of the Woodstock community.

Nick Stewart

Letter - Giles - Jan 2025

Botley West

It's the final straight for the Botley West Solar Farm.

On Friday last, 13 December, the Planning Inspectorate formally accepted their Application for an `array and connector structure` from Photovolt Development Partners (PVDP) on behalf of SolarFive Ltd. In doing so, the Inspectorate thereby declined to uphold claims, including one in admirable detail from Stop Botley West, that PVDP's public consultation was faulty.

The Pre-examination stage for this Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project has therefore begun during which you will be able to have your (further) say. You will, though, need to register as an `interested party` within 28 days after the invitation to do so appears on the Inspectorate's website. With your registration, you will need to include your summary comments on what main issues and impacts of the project you wish to challenge.

Once the registration period closes the examination proper begins. If you have registered, you will then be able to submit more information in support of your summary comments.

The full Examination period can last no longer than six months and is therefore likely to close by the end of August this year. The Inspectorate's recommendations then go direct to Secretary of State, Ed Milliband, for a final decision.

For further information and updates go to the Planning Inspectorate website; then click on `Find a National Infrastructure Project`; click on `English Projects`; then search for `Botley West`.

The Application consists of about 250 documents and thousands of pages of sometimes technical detail. A comprehensible way into it, and into writing your summary as an interested party, is to read – and in my opinion to challenge – PVDP's arguments in support of their Application as seen in their Planning Supporting Statement. Follow this link to it in the `Other Documents` section of the Application: <https://search.app/ozynMu6FWLsRCXQv6>

Stop Botley West will also be setting a lead on issues arising from the Inspectorate's examination of this project on <https://stopbotleywest.com>

Giles Lewis

Letter - Sophy Clough - Jan 2025

Christmas Lights

It was hugely disappointing to return from New Zealand in December, anticipating all the beauty and style of the Christmas season in Woodstock, to find the trees had been butchered – there is no other word for it – and our lovely Christmas lights had been replaced by gaudy trees in pots. The RHS suggests late winter/early spring as the best time to pollard trees, and advises not to pollard in autumn as this increases the risk of decay fungi entering pruning cuts. If this brutal approach to Woodstock's trees must be taken in preference to regular, more subtle tree maintenance, surely it could wait until after Christmas.

Sophy Clough

Letter - Ed King - FebMar 2025

The Black Prince

I pass the now closed Black Prince pub every day and every day it looks more neglected and run down. It would be wonderful if WOBL could contact the owner and ask what the plan for reopening the pub is? A cynic might suggest a falling down pub in a prime location would be ripe for redevelopment as houses which would make a lot on the market - but I'm no cynic.

I have every faith the new owner plans to redevelop this local gem - but it would be wonderful if whoever they are could explain perhaps here in March) what their plan is?

Ed King

Letter - Sue Blackshaw - FebMar 2025

Bus Shelters

As a frequent user of the buses locally, I am confused about the messages given over for the use of public transport.

If bus use is to be encouraged then bus shelters must be part of that provision. At many stops in Woodstock there is no shelter or seat, and the condition of existing shelters is bleak. I see that some shelters are to be given attention, very sad that it has taken so long to get this done.

Many times I pass people waiting at Hensington Gate stop and the current shelter is not big enough for the numbers there at prime time; the Perspex is very shabby and damaged. What view do visitors take away of our town, but also how does this encourage use by local residents.

The number 7 service is extremely useful but a further downside is the lack of bus shelters in Kidlington for the homeward wait. There is no shelter centrally for those coming north, and it seems very remiss that there are none in either direction at the Exeter Hall information hub. No seat and no shelter. Electronic time display would be of huge benefit at every bus-stop; not everyone has access to smart phone apps.

A joined-up plan should be expected - shame on those who are not supportive or pro-active in working towards clean and useable and effective public transport and waiting areas.

On a recent trip to Queensland, I used the vast array of buses which served the suburbs and beyond - fares were 50c (25p) for ALL journeys within the State, for all distances. Virtually all stops had shelters and seats, even in rural areas; they want people to use buses and give a high standard and safe experience. Yes - Australia has more space - but it is very doable to improve matters here; why isn't public transport given a higher priority?

Sue Blackshaw

Letter - Gwyn Bevan - FebMar 2025

The proposed development of Botley West Solar Farm: unanswered questions of uncertainty, food security and environmental impact*The scale of the proposed development of Botley West Solar Farm means that it escapes scrutiny by our local councils and is a matter for the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. If that development were publicly-financed the Treasury would require it to be justified by social cost benefit analysis of the Green Book. Private finance of Botley West means there has been exploration neither of optimism bias, given a radically uncertain future, nor comparison of costs and benefits with other sites. These fundamental requirements of the Green Book ought to be crucial in assessing that proposal.

An example of optimism bias in the face of uncertainty is that, in 2024, we paid over £300m to windfarms in Scotland not to generate electricity (because the grid could not cope with excess supply). Given the scale of the proposed developments of wind farms across the UK, will we end up paying them not to generate electricity in summer heatwaves? These are increasing in intensity as one consequence of climate change. The Botley West Acceptance Stage Glossary does not explore such future uncertainties. Our recent floods mean that its assessments of flood Risk are now out of date. Unprecedented gales can destroy solar farms. Storm Daragh destroyed the 190-acre solar farm built in Anglesey in 2022: 'hundreds of panels were shredded and torn off their fixings ... and residents living nearby now fear land contamination from shattered solar panels'.

The Botley West proposal reports that, of the land surveyed, 95% is at least of moderate agricultural quality, and 36% of good, very good or excellent quality. Climate change is reducing the productive potential of agricultural land across the world: from changes in temperature, precipitation, wind speed, crop growth cycles, frequency of extreme weather events, and patterns of pests and diseases. Another known unknown are the impacts of wars on global food supplies, e.g., in Ukraine.

The justifications for choosing the Botley West site are: that it delivers a solar farm at scale to meet increasing demand for electricity from Oxfordshire's fast-growing economy; and its proximity to the Cowley substation minimises energy lost in transmission to the grid. But that criterion ought not be given overriding importance: it needs to be set against its losses in food security and environmental damage. The environmental damage caused by the development of Botley West is keenly felt by those living nearby. One way of estimating that damage as set out in the Green Book is that of 'hedonic pricing', e.g., the depreciation from the impact of a solar farm on the prices of the 10,000 houses within 1km of Botley West, which may outweigh greater losses in energy in transmission from other sites that have few houses near them.

If Botley West were publicly-financed, then the Green Book would apply and require a comparison across sites in their capabilities to secure our future supplies of both green energy and food, and environmental impacts. Does private finance mean these comparisons are not required?

Gwyn Bevan

Editors Comment: The author has provided references for this letter and is happy to share them.

Letter - Hilary Brown - FebMar 2025

All act now or we could lose millions in community benefit from Botley West Solar Farm

During the past 2 years, whether for, against or something in between, much has been said and written on the developer's proposal (PVDP) for Botley West Solar Farm ... there's been much to say. We're now at the next stage of the National Infrastructure Planning process, called 'pre-examination' and we've learnt that the suggested community benefit by PVDP has improved since the 2nd consultation from £50K to £200K per annum for the lifetime of the project. (Community benefits are financial payments which can be made by developers of energy infrastructure to local communities that will be impacted by the development and currently paid on a voluntary basis in England). It is highly likely that the proposal will be approved by the Government in one form or another and the suggested £200K has been highlighted as totally inadequate, and should be £4.2million per annum. Space here doesn't allow me to go into detail but a figure of £5K per MW per year should be considered (£5K x 840 MW = £4.2million). This amount can be referenced and viewed – 'the briefings and the debate on community benefits at the Houses of Parliament (October 2024)'.

I encourage all your readers, Woodstock and beyond to feedback on the derisory level of community benefit suggested. If the proposal is agreed as it stands, communities throughout our area will miss out on millions of £s over the lifetime of the project. Don't let this be another water company story. Everyone can help this cause – search for - National Infrastructure project – then select Botley West - 'Register an Interest' . No need to give your view in detail at the point of registration but please register your concern over the level of community benefit ... whether you agree or disagree with Botley West. You just need to give a brief summary of your opinion and the detail you can submit later. There is more detail in Sustainable Woodstock's February newsletter.

Hilary Brown

Letter - Blenheim Hi-Viz - FebMar 2025

Ensuring Safety in Blenheim Parkland During Dark Hours*As we transition from winter to spring, the days are gradually getting longer, but it remains dark from 17:00 until around 08:00. During these hours, Blenheim Parkland experiences increased contractor vehicle movements due to ongoing renovations, including a large roof project. Unfortunately, the limited lighting makes it difficult for drivers to see pedestrians, especially those wearing dark clothing.

Blenheim Parkland is a cherished space for fitness, mental well-being, and safe routes to school. To maintain its safety, we kindly ask all park users to take precautions during dark hours. Please wear high-visibility clothing and head torches, ensure your dogs are visible and on leads, and if cycling, use front and rear lights and wear helmets. Additionally, walking/running towards oncoming vehicles and avoiding headphones can help you stay aware of your surroundings.

By taking these simple steps, we can all contribute to keeping Blenheim Parkland a safe and welcoming place for everyone. Thank you.

Gavin Donnelly - Security Manager, Blenheim Palace.

Letter - Dave Carrington - Feb Mar 2025

Town Council Christmas Expenditure

I would like to share with you the text of a letter which I hand delivered to the Town Council today.

I am writing as a concerned resident of Woodstock to seek clarity on the expenditure allocated for Christmas trees and Christmas lights this year. While I appreciate the effort to create a festive atmosphere for our community, I am curious about the costs involved, particularly in light of current economic challenges. Specifically, I would like to understand:

1. The total spent on five standalone Christmas trees – can you confirm it was £4,5000 please?
2. How these costs were justified in the council's budget, and who negotiated with the supplier?
3. The Minutes show that £11,500 was approved for the original lights - can you confirm how much the Council actually paid the contractor?
4. Please can you explain the lack of adequate communication between two Councils about the pollarding, and what steps you are both making to make sure that this doesn't happen again?

I fully support initiatives that bring joy and community spirit, but I believe transparency and responsible spending are equally important, especially when other essential services might be under pressure. I would greatly appreciate it if you could provide details or direct me to where this information is available. I look forward to your response.

Dave Carrington

Letter - Themis - Feb/Mar 2025

Botley West

I have registered with the planning inspectorate to have a say on the 'Botley West Solar' proposal and have made the following comments - I am happy for you to reproduce this in the next Woodstock and Bladon News edition to encourage more to object in this way:

Dear Sirs,

I object most strenuously to this proposal which, through the heinous and liberal use of greenwashing, would trash our environment (already the most depleted natural environment in Europe) purportedly to save it. Our decreasing natural environment belongs to all of us, not a handful of avaricious and greedy individuals who simply wish to take advantage of ill thought out politically expedient and dangerous policies.

I object to this for the following key reasons:

1. The sheer scale of this proposal is testament to the fact that this is no altruistic exercise by the landowners but a money grab which would benefit a handful of individuals, mainly senior directors and beneficiaries of Blenheim. The millions of ordinary residents and visitors to what was once a green and pleasant land would be faced with a vast industrialised Oxfordshire landscape bereft of any nature.
2. Tenant farmers have already been evicted by the Blenheim landowners in anticipation of the green light to this industrialisation of vast swathes of the countryside - farming land is being given over to the unnecessary industrialisation of valuable and needed farm land: we cannot concrete our farms in order to import our food: food security is paramount, let alone the lunacy of the environmental footprint of importing food from abroad.
3. The environmental impact of manufacturing, transporting (from China) and eventually disposing of this type of solar panel equipment is hugely destructive - it is environmentally absurd and unsound.
4. New solar panel technology is advancing rapidly - the type of solar panel proposed here, in their millions, is already obsolete: ultra thin (2 - 3 mm) solar panels are already in development and will have the capacity to be practically invisible and cover roofs and windows with minimal visual or environmental impact. This technology is already proven and in development.
5. There would be no impact on consumer energy prices should this power plant be built - electricity is sold to the grid and will have no impact on prices.
6. It has been shown scientifically that bats cannot fly over solar covered fields - the consequences of this are severe from an ecological standpoint; it is also noteworthy that individuals are prohibited from obtaining planning permission of any homes or extensions that have any impact on bats: this would be a glaring 'them and us' situation where one rule applies to 'them' and one to 'us'.
7. The glare from such enormous swathes of glass would interfere with flights to and from Oxford airport, and interfere with our views and mental health.
8. It has been shown repeatedly that we, as human beings, need the natural world around us and it is imperative for our health and mental well being - this county in particular, appears to have been earmarked for concretisation: housing, college scientific parks, reservoirs, football stadiums, electricity pylons, wind 'farms', and now what is left of any green grass appears to be targeted with insidious solar 'farms' (ie power stations) which would unacceptably deplete what is left of our natural habitat and that of all the wildlife that would be exterminated.
9. Even if solar was the way forward (which is extremely debatable in this country), then solar panels can be placed on millions of acres of industrial, office and retail roof spaces: warehouses, office buildings, petrol stations, industrial and scientific parks etc would all benefit first for their own use and sell the surplus to the grid, all leased by the government's 'GB Energy'. This model has already been started by eg Plymouth Council with solar panels on petrol stations. It is a 'no brainer' solution to the solar panel question without the industrialisation of our countryside with the permanent and catastrophic effects that would have - it would be criminally irresponsible of the government to trash what is left of our depleted natural world when an obvious solution is glaringly in front of them, and has been suggested to them.

For the above and other reasons, it is imperative for this proposal to be stopped in its entirety and a rethink along the lines mentioned above be done before our beautiful countryside is irreversibly and unnecessarily damaged beyond repair, all for the avaricious benefit of one landowner and politically irresponsible politicians who will long be out of office when such damage is done.

Thank you.

Themis Avraamides

Letter - Jo Lamb - FebMar 2025

“Why on earth should anyone care about what is going on within Woodstock Town Council?”

After all, surely it is so much easier to let ‘them’ just get on with it, leaving the rest of ‘us’ to get on with our lives undisturbed by local politics.

But should it be like this; with the division of the ‘them’ and ‘us’?

Local government has always encouraged a level of participation by its electors by allowing a section within Council meetings for members of the public to express any concerns they may have to Councillors at that meeting. This public participation is an essential component of democracy, being the means of communication between a Council and the public it is meant to represent.

Another benefit of public participation is that it aids the transparency and openness which all local councils, Woodstock included, both profess to follow and aim to foster.

Since Woodstock’s new representatives took office in May 2024, the Standing Orders governing Council procedure have been altered stage by stage, the end result being a virtual airbrushing of the significance of public participation.

We now have a new ‘Protocol’ for public participation, which was quietly voted through by a mere 6 Councillors during an ETC (Extraordinary Town Council) meeting, last November.

The current position in Woodstock is that the public participation session is only permitted once the Mayor has suspended the Council meeting. The public’s session is now considered as extraneous to the meeting itself. Therefore, the Minutes of the Council meeting no longer contain any detail of what concerns are expressed by the public, nor do they name the speaker; and hence the airbrushing to which I refer.

Councillors are now being muffled too. They are no longer allowed to seek any clarification from the speaker on a concern raised by him/her in public participation.

Added to these limitations, Woodstock’s town council meetings are not filmed nor recorded on line, to enable both easier accessibility to its meetings by the public, as well as the transparency and accountability of Council to its local community. The facilities already exist within the Town Council to enable these modern communication methods. There is an ‘Owl’ device, perched in the centre of the Councillors during meetings, which was purchased by the previous Administration precisely to enable such recording and filming. Sadly, the Owl has been both gagged and blindfolded over recent months.

Contrast Woodstock Town Council (WTC), with West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC).

WODC allows a full 30 minutes for its public sessions (ie, double the amount of time allowed by Woodstock). Each WODC speaker is given a maximum of 5 minutes in which to speak (cf 3 minutes in Woodstock). WODC’s participation sessions also take place within its meetings. They are not suspended. WODC meetings are also filmed, recorded and made openly available for all to see. WODC Councillors are allowed to seek clarification of any matter raised by a speaker during public participation. Public submissions are fully minuted in WODC Minutes. All this is considered “best practice” for local parishes to follow. Most (if not all), do. Woodstock falls short. It does not adhere to best practice as so defined. Why not?

Woodstock needs to facilitate true transparency, accessibility and accountability to its electorate. It cannot continue to exclude its voters from raising concerns within Council meetings. What does it have to fear by its imposition of these controls? Surely there can be no justification for this within modern democracy.

I very much hope that our 3 newly elected town councillors are able to make a difference to the future workings of our Town Council. I fear they may have a long and uphill battle. Let’s hope they have the requisite stamina!

Jo Lamb

Letter - Stephen Westaby - April 2025

Botley West and aircraft safety

I am pleased that Oxford Airport and RAF Brize Norton have expressed concerns about a solar industrial site in proximity to their runways. I have a different but complementary perspective having been on site at two fatal air crashes on Bladon Heath. One followed an aborted landing, whilst the other occurred soon after takeoff. On the first occasion I attempted to enter the aircraft amidst a sea of leaking fuel but was advised to step away when the airport fire truck arrived. When safety was established the Ambulance Officer asked me to determine whether the pilot or passengers could be resuscitated. Sadly they had already succumbed to chest and head injuries though I doubt the deaths were immediate.

When I reached the second crash in a field close to my home the cockpit was ablaze and it was clear that there were no survivors. Such events are rare but when they do occur the emergency services need rapid access to the site. Oxford Airport has one of the busiest flight schools in the country whilst Brize Norton may one day be involved in conflict. If so, damaged military aircraft may attempt to land safely. Thus my point is rather simple. Should aircraft crash land in a sea of solar panels, timely rescue will not be possible. Nor can misjudged or aborted landings be made safely in a conglomerate of metal and glass. I suspect the airports would rather not express these dismal concerns but who in their right minds would create additional danger.

There is only one answer to that question!

Professor Stephen Westaby, Bladon.

PS: Since submitting this letter there has been news that Schiphol, Holland's principal commercial airport, has been forced to shut down a main runway at certain times of the day when the sun is shining, through glare from nearby solar panels.

Obviously this is to avoid danger to approaching aircraft which may also accrue from heat and air turbulence. These risks have been known about for some time, so as a bioengineer(PhD) as well as a surgeon, I am dismayed that it has not been raised by Botley West in their consultation process. Why risk a civil disaster for yet more solar panels?

Should we accept the consultation process as valid, and do we have a government prepared to take these aspects seriously? They acknowledge that only one percent of UK land needs to be committed to solar so why devastate a huge area of agricultural and green belt land between two busy airports?

Editors Note: Professor Westaby performed more than 12,000 heart operations on both adults and children and achieved the world's longest survivor with any type of artificial heart. He published 350 scientific papers and 14 textbooks, three of which were on major injuries. From Oxford he promoted the development of regional trauma centres for the UK with air ambulance retrieval. His books for the public, 'Fragile Lives, The Knife's Edge, The Trauma Chronicles and Surgeons, Saints and Psychopaths', have been translated into many languages.

Letter - Helen Stephenson - May 2025

Dear Editor

Emma Parkin (nee Pollock)

In 2022 my friend, Emma, suffered the most unimaginable tragedy when her nine year old son, Sam, died suddenly from a rare stomach disorder.

Sam was a very creative boy - talented at art - and soon after his death, his mother instinctively started doing what he'd loved to do; forage in nature to create pictures and models. It became Emma's therapy and made her feel closer to Sam.

Taking inspiration and materials from things she'd grown, found or foraged, she began to make original, imaginative and eco-friendly gifts, using sustainable materials wherever possible, which she now sells on Etsy.

Emma was brought up in Bladon and we first met when she was at the village playgroup in the late 1970's with my daughter. Our families became good friends, and remain so to this day, which is why I'd like to help her by spreading the word.

Please look at her website:

<https://www.etsy.com/shop/littlefacecreations/>

£1 from every sale goes to a fund that supports charities and causes that Sam cared about.

Helen Stevenson

Letter - Hilary Brown - May 2025

Dear Editor

A petition for the benefit of communities in which we all live

I spoke at the recent Woodstock Annual Town Meeting and encouraged residents to better understand community benefits* related to the Botley West Solar Farm. A comment made at the meeting and on social media since (We Love Woodstock) suggests a few are still unaware that community benefit has no bearing at all on the Government's decision. Whether you welcome the Botley West Solar Farm, have serious concerns about it, or want to STOP it - one thing is certain: IF the Government does give approval, it will generate clean energy ... and huge profits for the investors and developers. And yet local people are being offered so little despite this enormous and profitable scheme. We were shocked to learn that there is no legal requirement yet for a community benefit fund for these schemes in England. By any comparison, the £200K per annum suggested by the developers is wholly inadequate given its size, proximity to communities and the reasons listed by STOP BotleyWest campaigners. We think 2% of the project's revenue (approximately £1-2 million each year) should be invested directly in local communities. This will be for the lifetime of the proposal (35-40 years) and that would mean more where it's most needed.

We are calling on everyone including those who want to stop the development to sign the petition in the event the proposal is approved. The petition calls on Blenheim to do what they can to influence the developers so local people have a fairer share of the profits. The petition is NOT anti-Blenheim, but evidence is needed that you care about the community benefit. You do not have to live in Woodstock to sign, as we hope that speaking out can lead to a national policy for these schemes up and down the country. So, please feel free to share the petition far-and-wide ... please take a moment, read the petition and hopefully sign it:

<https://www.lowcarbonhub.org/make-botley-westfair/>

* Renewable energy companies often establish funds that provide financial support to local communities. These funds can be used for a variety of purposes, such as funding local projects, supporting community groups, or improving local infrastructure.

Hilary Brown, Sustainable Woodstock

Letter - Jane Askam

Dear Editor,

Electrical Infrastructure or Farmland?

As you know, I recently re-visited Woodstock and we met for a catch-up. I was interested to see your impressive local magazine but very upset to learn about the threat to Blenheim's beautiful and historic surroundings posed by the 4,000 acre Botley West Solar Farm project. Is nowhere sacred?

We face the same issues in Lincolnshire where I live, actually far worse. Not only do we have to contend with the 2,000 acre Heckington Fen Solar Park, owned by Dale Vince's Ecotricity - this is going ahead despite strong local opposition, including from the County Council, and despite the recent discovery of decades worth of gas fields in the county. We are also fighting against the construction of 140km of 50 metre high pylons between Grimsby and Walpole, which would decimate our beautiful countryside.

My heart goes out to you all. Good luck in the fight!

Jane Askam

Letter - Naomi Richards

Dear Editor,

The Black Prince

It is said that Oxford is a summer city; brickwork and the greenery shine brightly in the sun and create a magical atmosphere. I think the same can be said of Woodstock; and the recent VE Day celebrations saw Woodstock at its best. The atmosphere was one of geniality, and there was a real sense of togetherness. There was only one thing missing: the chance to celebrate sitting at familiar wooden tables next to the Glyme or inside the ever-welcoming bar at the Black Prince.

I often pass the Black Prince and see that someone has put a Union Jack flag in one of the upper windows - perhaps a makeshift curtain? I wonder what it hides. The Black Prince was a focal point for the community for years, and then suddenly it went dark. Rumours still circulate - the new owner wants to turn it into flats or there has been some sort of financial wrongdoing. Nobody seems to know.

So my questions are simple: when are we getting our beloved pub back? Can someone actually tell us what is going on?

Naomi Richards

Letter - Giles Lewis - AugSept 2025

Dear Editor,

Climate Alarmsim

In the last issue of this magazine an article from Sustainable Woodstock (Page 15, July 2025 issue) opened with quotes on climate change from Calum Miller MP and Prof. Alex Rogers respectively, which included the following:

'I regard it as probably the greatest generational challenge that our generation faces' (CM), and 'Climate change is a global emergency and the results of ignoring it will be nothing short of a calamity on the scale of a world war for humanity and for the environment' (AR).

I am no longer surprised by wild overstatements of this kind on this subject. Climate alarmism has become an ideology, fervid and brooking no discussion, let alone dissent. But in my opinion, and the opinion of many more scientists than is generally acknowledged, statements such as these are not founded in science. They carry national economic risk and need to be challenged.

When I wrote an article for your magazine criticising Botley West in this vein (Follow the Money, Page 7, May 2023 Issue) I was requested by the previous Editor to supply all my supporting sources, which I did.

Perhaps this admirable rigour should equally be applied to expressions of climate alarmism?

Giles Lewis

Letter - Gwyn Bevan - AugSept 2025

Dear Editor

Yes to solar energy, but no to Botley West Solar Farm

The Woodstock and Bladon News has fulfilled a vital role in the debate over Botley West Solar Farm. Given the scale and frequency of catastrophic floods and fires caused by changes in the climate, virtually all those who oppose Botley West Solar Farm recognise the urgency of changing to green energy. The grounds for our opposition are that we have not seen a convincing case for destruction of the land we cherish around our homes. In July 2025, the excellent article by Professor Stephen Westaby focused on the risk that development poses to safe use of our local airport. But for me, what was most troubling, was this reported exchange:

Question to a representative of the Photovolta Development Partners (PVDP) at a village consultation event: 'Why cover thousands of acres of Oxfordshire green belt and agricultural land with solar panels given that there are abundant sites elsewhere?'

Answer: 'Because that's what Blenheim gave us'.

The private finance of Botley West Solar Farm means that the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero has not been required to undertake option appraisal as required for public capital by the Treasury's Green Book (1). There has been no development of a long list, evaluation of to determine a short list, and evaluation of the short list to justify the recommended option. The Green Book requires these evaluations to identify constraints and dependencies and critical success factors and undertake social cost benefit analysis. That begins by evaluating options of criteria that can be quantified and given monetary values (e.g. costs of construction). But Green Book emphasises the importance of evaluation options of criteria where quantification is problematic and there are no direct way of giving them a monetary value: e.g., impact on enjoyment of the countryside. I could not find in the Green Book any recommendation for choosing a site because it was offered by a large local landowner.

Gwyn Bevan

Reference: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-green-book-appraisal-and-evaluation-in-central-government>

Letter - Anonymous - AugSept 2025

Dear Editor

Mock Mayor

Nothing could ever put a dampener on Mock Mayor celebrations, held this year on 19th July. Callum Miller, our local MP, was put into the dock of the mock court, where he dealt with good-natured charges with charm and humour. This, however, was not the highlight of the mock court proceedings.

The last defendant in the dock was a rather desperate-looking Christmas tree. It was accused and found guilty of extorting £5000 from Woodstock Town Council. What was most notable was not the tree as such, but the absence of a single member of Woodstock Town Council to speak on the matter. Despite a request sent in advance, no councillors volunteered to attend the mock court, even though at least one member was seen by many to be enjoying the proceedings. In the Town Council meeting held three days later the mayor said that she had messaged organisers of the Mock Mayor and expressed a hope that it wouldn't rain.

It didn't rain; and in fact the sunshine got stronger throughout the afternoon. Perhaps a sign that in matters of council spending and Christmas trees, more light should be shone on the issue.

Yours sincerely, Anonymous

Letter - Chris Coe - AugSept 2025

Dear Editor,

Doctors Surgery

I assume that all residents have received a letter from Councillor Grant about the Doctors' surgery and asking us for our thoughts on locating it at the old Thames Valley Police (TVP) site.

I replied by receipt (2 August) about the content which, in my view, didn't disclose all the information needed for residents to provide a considered response. Here are my thoughts:

You acknowledge that the landowner (Blenheim) does not support the use of this location following advice from a specialist consulting architect. What you failed to mention is that the TVP location isn't supported by the Doctors either - 'A further meeting with Dr Becker noted that he was strongly against this site' (as reported on page 14 of Woodstock and Bladon News July 2025). The TVP site was also ruled out at the first Town Meeting about the surgery held at the church in November 2024'.

Another key fact, missing from your letter, is that the currently refused planning application for the TVP site is being appealed to The Planning Inspectorate. Coincidentally I received a detailed letter today about the appeal from McCarthy & Stone's advisors which anyone commenting on the plan will also have received. I opposed the original application and I will consider, with interest, the revised plans and the approach that is being taken to the appeal by McCarthy & Stone.

Some of the points raised in your letter under 'Motion 1 a) to g)' have no supporting evidence and point d) ['the site is already on a bus route to accommodate the 60% of patients living outside the Town'] implies that all the outlying villages in the surgery's catchment are served by a bus to Woodstock. Even if they are, and many are not, getting a bus at a suitable time for an appointment can be very difficult as anyone living in a village can testify. Driving is already a necessity for many patients.

It appears that despite the Town Council either not understanding or explaining why the landowner, the Doctors and the wider 'Stakeholder Steering Group' are all opposed to the TVP site, the Town Council want to spend time (and presumably taxpayers' money) opposing it and encouraging us to do likewise. As noted above, there is also an appeal underway which, whether we like it or not, could be successfully determined in a matter of months making residents opinions irrelevant should it be successful for the Appellant.

I would personally love to be able to continue to walk to a surgery but, if the combined expertise of the Doctors, the Integrated Care Board, OCC, and WODC are opposed to the TVP site, then they have my support in finding somewhere suitable for all the patients not just the 40% who live in Woodstock.

I very much look forward to the next Town Meeting (November 2025?) and to be able to hear from the Steering Group on what progress is being made.

Chris Coe

Letter - Anonymous pilot

Dear Editor,

London Kidlington Airport close to Solar Panels

I am a Flying Instructor who has taught trainee pilots from Oxford Airport at Kidlington - an excellent training centre for novice pilots, many of whom go on to careers in commercial aviation. During my time instructing there, I was in no doubt that it is one of the safest learning environments for many reasons, not least the surrounding countryside that offers a reassuring choice of emergency landing areas in the event of any technical issues.

With safety in mind, I am dismayed to see that the Botley West developer proposes to install thousands of solar panels so close to an exceptionally active airfield with mixed traffic, from learner pilots in single engine aircraft to helicopters and the largest of private jets.

In response to a recent engine-related emergency landing in a field just beyond the end of the southerly runway, the developers have removed a 'wedge' of the proposed solar panels roughly in the direction that an aircraft would be pointing, with the aim of making any engine failure after take-off safer. While this is obviously a positive move, it unfortunately assumes that all such engine failure incidents happen in the textbook fashion, which unfortunately they don't.

The standard departure procedure for single-engined light aircraft is to climb to 1000 feet above sea level before a right turn along the railway line and continuing to climb to no higher than 2000 feet until the aircraft is at least 5 miles from the airport. During this take-off phase the pilot has to be aware of potential engine failure and be prepared to take very decisive action.

Most training aircraft can glide without the engine with a descent rate of approximately 500 feet per minute, giving a maximum time of approximately 3.5 minutes for the pilot to identify a suitable field, manoeuvre the aircraft safely towards the field, carry out essential security drills, potentially deal with passengers, and make Air Traffic Control aware of the situation.

This routine is practiced many times during training until it becomes instinctive, however the one thing the pilot has no control over, no matter how good the training, is the choice of available landing sites. To cover so many fields close to the airport and the pilot training area with solar panels would severely restrict the options available in this situation.

I don't wish to overstate the risks of an engine failure as it is fortunately a rare event. However, options need to be available and should the unthinkable happen, I have always been satisfied as a Flying Instructor that those options exist at Oxford Airport.

Another important consideration - the physical effects of large numbers of solar panels close to the landing/take-off areas cannot be understated. In hot weather they can create serious turbulence and glare which can very easily upset the approach of a light aircraft, particularly for a student or low-hours pilot. I have instructed at other airfields close to solar farms, much smaller than the proposed Botley West plans, and have had to take emergency control from a student pilot as the invisible thermals suddenly disrupt a nice approach.

One final point: I have previously worked as a member of the emergency services and the thought of a rescue operation to retrieve injured people from the midst of a solar farm fills me with dread. I struggle to think of how it could be achieved without severe risk to all concerned, including the emergency responders.

Anonymous

Editor's Note: The identity of the anonymous letters, both local residents who wish to remain anonymous, have been validated by the Editor.

Letter - Steve Westaby

Dear Editor,

Clear and present danger: A sequel to 'Lives before loot.'

I am grateful to the veteran flight instructor for sharing his personal experiences of the danger of solar panels in proximity to airports.

At the same time a 'battle royal' has erupted in the Dutch aviation industry which has clear implications for West Oxfordshire. The controversy is even more relevant now that British Airways will soon relocate their pilot training to Oxford Airport.

In spring this year Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport was forced to close two of its main runways between 10am and noon through intense glare from nearby solar panels. As you will see from the illustration the 100 hectare site is some distance from the airport perimeter and diminutive in comparison with the proposed 1000 hectare Botley West development. Yet it has created havoc. As well as causing severe air traffic disruption it has impacted the local community through noise pollution when aircraft are diverted over residential areas. When the costs to Schiphol exceeded €330 million and further closures were predicted for the autumn, the solar developer was taken to court.

It transpired that the local municipality Haarlemmermeer had been warned in advance that glare posed risks for both pilots and control tower before planning permission was granted. So now they were also in the firing line. The court's judgement was that the developer, De Groene Energie Corridor had caused a situation that, to quote, "is a severe threat to flight safety". Accordingly the judge ordered the company to immediately remove 78,000 of the offending panels by September 1st. A penalty of €1 million will be inflicted if the work is not completed by that time with a further €500,000 for each day that the panels remain afterwards. The developer made clear that this would bankrupt them but the National airline KLM entered the debate stating that the disruption had cost them many millions so they would sue if all the panels were not dismantled immediately. The Dutch Airline Authority is now overseeing the deconstruction of the whole site and insisting that the original permit be revoked.

Whether our own Government Planning Inspectorate wants to take the same risks remains to be seen. West Oxfordshire District Council clearly don't. The Schiphol experience now sets an important legal precedent. Discarding the warnings has been financially catastrophic for both airport and developer. So are we on the same planet? What are the differences between Amsterdam and Oxford?

Firstly the Dutch site is a fraction of the size of the Botley West proposal. We are anticipating 1000 hectares of metal, glass and high wire fences between Oxford Airport and Brize Norton, one of the UK's principle RAF bases. Second, the pilots flying commercial jets into Schiphol are experienced and assisted by co-pilots. In stark contrast, Oxford Airport is an exceptionally busy training school with novices flying small, and in some cases, aging, single engine aircraft on the same runway day and night. The flight instructor outlined the multiple dangers including blinding glare, bird displacement from Bladon Heath with the risk of engine strike, thermal currents from hot panels and potential disruption of radar systems at the RAF base. And it goes without saying, the vast expanse of panels would severely restrict emergency landing options and access for the emergency services.

In April 2024 well in advance of the Photovolt Development Partners submission for government approval, an article entitled 'Balancing solar energy generation and pilot safety at airports' was published in the scientific press. This contains the statement "solar reflections can impact pilots and cause safety concerns through glint and glare". The research employed a Solar Glare Hazard Analysis Tool (SGHAT) widely used in the air industry and formally endorsed by the US Federal Aviation Administration. Given that the Botley West site abuts closely upon Oxford Airport should these important issues not have been shared by Photovolt Development Partners with interested parties? Similarly the World Health Organisation has advised a 1.2 mile (2 km) gap between residential buildings and solar panels.

As a result of the airport's concerns a derisory 10 hectare wedge of panels was removed at the end of the runway. The purpose was to mitigate against emergency landings in the event of engine failure but this fails to address the multitude of other potential hazards. The 'Schiphol precedent' would see all panels removed from proximity to both Oxford Airport and Brize Norton which probably means the development in its entirety.

It's time to 'get real.' The UK contributes just 1% to global emissions so what does the widespread decimation of rural Britain achieve? Solar sites are proliferating rapidly in an unregulated manner driven by the uncertain future for

farmers. For sub-50-megawatt developments (less than 100 hectares) national planning permission is not required. Landowners benefit from £1,200/acre/year whilst the operator sells electricity at prices indexed to gas generation irrespective of solar's negligible input costs. A 100 hectare, 50 megawatt site can generate £3 million annually with profit over 40 years reaching £120 million. Multiply that by 10 for Botley West's earnings and you will have little doubt about their motivation. In the meantime consumers see their energy bills rise not fall. The National Grid warns of oversupply where producers have to be paid not to generate power so this is not about 'saving the planet'. Only this week, Nikkei Asia reported that major Chinese solar panel makers have posted huge losses in the first half of the year due to production overcapacity so the industry faces mounting pressure to cut output.

The time to address these issues is now, not when solar panels already cover West Oxfordshire. One solar related aviation event could have huge financial implications given the Schiphol experience. Should you consider these to be singular and radical views I can tell you that there are four other Professors of Medicine or Surgery in Bladon, all of whom share the same concerns.

Professor Stephen Westaby

Letter - Sam Dawson

Dear Editor

Woodstock Town Council

I note with regret on Woodstock Town Council website the resignation of Nicholas Melliss, formerly a Town Councillor. This is particularly disappointing as he was only elected to the Council on 1st May 2025 - a very short tenure. He may, of course, have entirely unanticipated and personal reasons for resigning; in which case, I wish him well.

The turnover of Town Councillors at Woodstock seems to be a matter of grave concern however, if for no other reason than the cost of holding by-elections. It does cause one to wonder whether there is something else that triggered his resignation. I understand that now 4 Councillors have resigned in the last 18 months (3 of them at the same time and only 2 months after being elected), and 1 Mayor left after only 6 months in position. What is going on? Why do new Councillors leave so quickly, after only a few meetings rather than staying on the Town Council?

Why is the Town Council not doing more to flag this vacancy and encourage a by-election to bring new blood on board? I understand that if no by-election is called for the position will either remain vacant, or someone will be co-opted on by existing Councillors - neither of these is particularly democratic!

The Council have posted about the vacancy on their website and, no doubt, have put up a notice in the Town Hall. Whilst meeting minimum requirements, it brings to mind the search for information from his council by Arthur Dent of "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" - he found it "on display in the bottom of a locked filing cabinet stuck in a disused lavatory with a sign on the door saying "Beware of the Leopard".

The Town Council recently saw fit to pay to put leaflets through everyone's door to highlight their concern regarding the Doctors' Surgery - they can promote something when they want to. I don't think they have even flagged the Councillor vacancy on Facebook - which is free!

I would be interested to hear what others think about what is happening at the Town Council.

Sam Dawson, by email

Letter - Jonathan Ford - Oct 2025

Dear Editor,

Is climate change the greatest issue our generation faces?

I refer to Giles Lewis' letter in the August/September edition of WOBL.

The second quote he uses is from Prof. Alex Rogers' excellent autobiography 'The deep' in which he describes his remarkable work protecting our oceans. I recommend it. The quote is part of a paragraph explaining a key reason for writing the book. The full paragraph is as follows:

'I sincerely hope that by reading this book and seeing the damage being done to our oceans by warming, acidification and deoxygenation that you will support any efforts to reduce our dependence on hydrocarbons. Whether it be through switching off the lights when a room is not in use, cycling to work or writing to your political representative, any action we take is significant. Climate change is a global emergency and the results of ignoring it will be nothing short of a calamity on the scale of a world war for humanity and for the environment. The warnings from our geological history are clear and mass extinction will be knocking on the door of the ocean very soon unless we can get carbon emissions under control quickly.'

Whilst I agree that these words are alarming, they are not wild overstatements as Giles suggests. Year on year scientists are providing more evidence and speaking with more clarity. In terms of sources, I refer Giles and your other readers to the following:

- * University of Reading's Climate Stripes - a simple graphic showing the rise in temperatures year on year since 185.
- * The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's turgid document written by leading climate scientists from around the world - 'Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report.'
- * If your readers are looking for empirical evidence of the impact of climate change, I suggest typing 'climate change and the insurance industry' into a search engine.

While I do think that Alex Rogers has been alarmist regarding BotleyWest I do not believe this is the case in this quote. Climate change mitigation is urgent and deeply important. Well done Alex for joining others in sounding the alarm.

I would be pleased to discuss these issues with Giles (and others). It is essential that decisions about climate change mitigation is based on as full an understanding of the facts as possible. Whether these facts are comfortable or not we should embrace them and make any necessary decisions and proportional actions. Based on the information available it is reasonable to say that significant sacrifices will be needed if we are going to pass on to future generations as wonderful a world as we have received from those who have gone before us. If any of your readers would like to meet to discuss these issues and how we could best respond to them, I would like to hear from them. I feel called by God to get involved in responding to climate change, and perhaps this is true for you too. My telephone number is 01993 898880.

I wish Giles and all your readers well.

Jonathan Ford

Letter - Nick Melliss resignation

Dear Editor

And another one bites the dust...

With apologies to Queen, the rock group who wrote the song, not the monarch.

Why is it that - out of the four new Town Councillors elected in 2025 - two have already resigned? And in 2024, the three Town Councillors that were new in that year also resigned. Why can't Woodstock Town Council retain its Councillors? Is it something in the Town Hall water? The Oxford Mail reported last year of a "sinister culture", (OM 22/11/2024).

Obviously, I cannot speak for any of the others, but as one of the Councillors who resigned I can perhaps give a few answers. I think everyone in the town would like to know why their new councillors don't seem to last more than a few months.

* The Town Council has no system or method for listening and responding to residents' concerns. Council meetings work from an agenda which is drawn up by the Mayor and the Town Clerk. Residents and Councillors actually make no impact on that agenda. I set up fortnightly Councillor surgeries in Woodstock Library so anyone could come along and raise issues with me. After three or four surgeries I felt a fraud because I couldn't respond to those issues, not meaningfully anyway.

* The Town Council has no system for self-assessment or self-improvement. When things go wrong, and they are going wrong, no Councillor says "Hey, wait a minute, this shouldn't happen, we were wrong here." So it isn't possible to put things right when they do go wrong.

* Financial incompetence. The Council is wealthy. It owns several properties in Woodstock worth about £9million overall and has about £400,000 in its current bank account. Yet it refuses to spend money where it should. So, for instance, there is no disabled access to the Town Hall. It could also, years ago, have financed a new Health Centre but that would have required more skill and know-how than the Council possesses or cares to bring in.

If you are still in doubt about whether the Council is dysfunctional, think of the Woodstock Surgery. At the moment new Health Centres are being built across the UK. It is bonanza time for Health Centres. Wallingford have submitted plans to their District Council for a new Health Centre, though their existing one looks much better than Woodstock's and is more recent. It will be built and financed by Berkeley Homes, perhaps not the most generous of developers, who will sell it back to the doctors in Wallingford for a nominal £1.

There are companies out there who will build a new health centre for you; they'll finance it, plan it, build it and probably run it with the NHS. But not in Woodstock. OK, it now looks as if we'll have a new Health Centre, possibly on the Owen Mumford site, but not because of the Town Council.

The problem is that if the Town Council is dysfunctional then things don't get done. Woodstock Surgery is a good example of this. If things don't get done then people suffer. As I'm disabled, I am sorry I couldn't do more for disabled people.

Woodstock needs good Councillors. They do matter and they can make a difference, but not the current lot, with admittedly a few exceptions, and not how they are set up at the moment.

Nick Melliss

Letter - Gwen Mason - Nov 2025

Dear Editor,

Woodstock Town Council

The letter from former Town Councillor Nick Melliss in the last magazine has prompted me to write to you.

On 15th September 2004 I resigned from Woodstock Town Council and I give you a quote from my letter.

"For the last twelve years I have always been referred to as a Councillor and Mayor for the people of Woodstock. On Monday evening the people of Woodstock voted overwhelmingly for four motions put to them at the Town Meeting. Last night the Council ignored all the motions thereby treating the electorate with contempt. Therefore I feel I can no longer carry on as a member of a Council that is failing to carry out the wishes of the people."

I believe after twenty one years nothing has changed on the Town Council, and I can see why so many new councillors have resigned.

Gwen Mason, Former Councillor and Mayor

Letter - Giles Lewis - Nov 2025

Dear Editor,

Climate Change

I refer to Jonathan Ford's letter in the October edition of WOBL, which was in turn a response to mine in the August/September edition.

I note that Jonathan feels 'called by God to get involved in responding to climate change'. It is therefore possible that I might face the same difficulties as did Charles Darwin in deploying rational and scientific arguments, particularly as climate alarmism often assumes some unwelcome aspects of religiosity. For many, it is a moral issue, described in appropriate terms: 'sacrifices' must be made; a 'climate denier' is 'evil' and a 'heretic' and should 'recant'. The language used is eerily reminiscent of witch hunting in the sixteenth and seventeenth century when crop failures caused by climate cooling following the Medieval Warm period were blamed on malign human intent.

Jonathan assumes that his God wants us to fight climate change when the world's climate has been changing since He first made it. After the Medieval Warm, temperatures fell far enough in the 17th and 18th centuries for frost fairs to be held on the frozen Thames in London.

We must, of course, look to science not religion to try and understand climate change. But by its very nature, science - particularly climate science - is not settled. I can point to many eminent scientists, including Nobel prize winners and those from disciplines as varied and relevant as meteorology, physics, atmospheric physics, geology, palaeontology and oceanography, who do not think that warming attributable to anthropogenic CO2 is anywhere near apocalyptic.

Some serious scientists think that the demonising of CO2 is delusional. The world has undoubtedly and significantly greened recently due to rising levels of CO2. Some think that in fact we are heading for a cooling cycle. [This recalls those scientists in the 1980s who warned of imminent catastrophe due to the dawn of a new ice age!] These 'dissident' scientists may be breaking with consensus but the greatest scientists are great because they broke with consensus. "There is no such thing as consensus science. If it's consensus, it isn't science. If it's science, it isn't consensus." [Michael Crichton, CALTEC lecture, Jan 2003.]

Climate change is a very big subject; it's almost absurd to even consider arguing parts of it in the Letters pages. What I intended in the letter that provoked Jonathan's response was to try to cool the alarmism which is currently bringing damaging consequences. Look beyond the environmental harm that would stem from the Botley West Solar Farm at the broad insanity of the UK's net zero targets which are driving that development. They came out of institutional and governmental panic and virtue signalling rather than rational debate and careful planning.

Giles Lewis

Letter - Sam Dawson - Dec 2025

Dear Editor,

Public Toilets

I attended the Town Council meeting on 11 November and spoke at the start about the item on public toilets, asking that the Town Council:

1. Consider asking WODC for funds to rectify the long-term neglect of their properties before WTC takes ongoing responsibility.
2. Consult with local people and businesses to ask for feedback regarding possible closure of Brown's Lane.

Ultimately, the issue was discussed and the Town Council ignored both suggestions and has declined to take on the toilets. This means Hensington Road will continue in a poor condition and Brown's Lane will close.

According to the stats, both sets of toilets are visited on average 7 times a day. There is well-founded speculation that this could be low due to toilets available elsewhere (museum, hospitality venues etc). In my brief speech at the start, I suggested it could also be because people (such as myself and visitors to the town) are unaware of their existence, and also that they have a track record of being 'broken' - if you've been let down once in an emergency, you are more likely to seek guaranteed relief elsewhere?

The condition of both sets of toilets is poor after years of neglect by WODC. The cost to upgrade both sets over 10 years is estimated at c. £100k - it would seem fair for WODC to contribute some or all of the money required to rectify problems in return for WTC taking responsibility for ongoing costs, but this was not considered.

The annual income from each toilet is c. £500, whereas running costs are c. £16,500. It was interesting to note that the Mayor expressed shock that the toilets run at a loss. I am unclear why toilets should break even or run at a profit - they are an essential public service.

In my opinion, the provision of public toilets in a town is a mark of a civilised society. 14 million people in the UK have incontinence issues, 15 million menstruate, and 16 million have some kind of disability. Then there are small children who simply cannot wait.

The British Toilet Association has a campaign running to make toilet provision a legal requirement. A Royal Society for Public Health report (2019) stated: "Public toilets should be considered as essential as streetlights, roads and waste collection."

What might be the impact of closing the Brown's Lane toilets on local businesses? I hear anecdotally that when they are temporarily out-of-order this causes a significant increase in people going into at least one pub in town, purely to use their toilet facilities.

In Northern Ireland, the Derry City and Strabane District Council's Community Toilet Scheme pays local cafes, restaurants and other businesses £300 - £800 pa to allow members of the public to use their facilities for free. This is a cost-effective way for the City to offer a much needed public service, and gives local businesses the opportunity to support the community and increase their footfall whilst their basic costs (water, electricity, toilet paper, cleaning products, staff) are covered. Why could Woodstock not investigate something similar?

I am deeply frustrated that the first residents knew that an essential public service was at risk was when the agenda was published a few days before the meeting took place. Neither research into alternative ideas nor consultation with residents or businesses happened before the Town Council took a decision. They did not even pause to think, to defer the decision, in the light of my request and suggestions at the start of the meeting.

Do the Town Councillors really claim to represent residents?

Sam Dawson

Letter - Suzy Pearce - Dec 2025

Dear Editor,

An Editorial Visitor

My dear friend Nick - of more than fifty years and living proof that long friendships survive oceans, airlines, and questionable pub choices - arrived in Perth, Western Australia, where he set up office in heritage-listed South Fremantle. Not quite as ancient as the UK of course, but we're trying our best down here with what little history we've got!

In true sporting spirit, we made a beeline for The Camfield to join the Barmy Army. Nick was absolutely thrilled (not) to witness the Poms being comprehensively massacred - his words, not mine - though I'll be politely reserving bragging rights until further notice. (Don't worry, they're tucked safely away for deployment at an appropriate moment.)

Since the Ashes outing was cut short, I've taken it upon myself to show Nick the finer points of Fremantle life: the markets, the pubs, the speakeasy, and every quirky corner in between. For a supposedly 'most remote city', we're doing our part to keep visitors entertained... even those from across the ditch. Or the hemisphere. Or... well, you know.

So if you find yourself anywhere near Perth, please do come and say hi. If it was good enough for the pommy convicts, it's certainly good enough for you.

Suzy Pearce

Letter - Dec 2025 - Steve Westably

Dear Editor,

Proposed new GP surgery

I regularly walked through the Accident and Emergency Department of the John Radcliffe Hospital to review cardiac emergencies. One issue was apparent both day and night. The waiting area was crammed with patients who should have been assessed and treated in GP surgeries. Some were genuinely sick, others certainly were not, and some decided to leave through frustration at the inordinate waiting times. How did the NHS reach this nightmare situation? It undoubtedly followed the Department of Health's decision that GPs need not cover their patients out of hours or at weekends. That heralded the end game for the much valued family doctor on which the NHS was originally based.

Our health care system is unable to respond appropriately in too many respects. First and foremost, no condition benefits from waiting and our hospitals are currently overwhelmed. This introduces the issue of the Woodstock Surgery which everyone agrees is unable to meet requirements. Options for a new site are on the table but what should primary care look like for the future. Before Covid I talked with the local practice about an ambitious project that we hoped might be built on the corner of Oxford Airport (where the 'park and ride' is proposed) This would have provided acute care for illness or minor injuries on a 24 hour basis. An investigations department with an X-ray, ultrasound and ECG machines was included together with a pharmacy. Physiotherapy, dieticians and mental health workers were to be an integral part of the development as was a gymnasium with fitness trainers. The plans also included an outpatients department for hospital consultants to conduct appointments on a local basis and help manage chronic illness without multiple hospital visits. That said we lost the private finance group who were prepared to fund the development in the wake of the Covid debacle.

The Labour government have recently announced that they will use private monies to expand GP hubs throughout the UK. Ministers have proposed a new network of 250 'one stop shops' bringing together family doctors, dentists and pharmacies in a single location. The programme, appropriately called NHS Neighbourhood Rebuild is promised to involve innovative public and private sector partnerships. The Health Secretary now supports private companies to play a role in primary care in partnership with the fact that private hospitals treat a million surgical patients per year in an effort to meet cancer targets. Karin Smith, the Health Minister stated "Our new NHS Rebuild approach will give local health care the investment it needs, repurposing and building a new generation of Neighbourhood Health Centres across the country. It will go hand in hand with reform and efficiency, ensuring proper value for money for taxpayers". Noble sentiments indeed when GPs are asked to do ever more without increase in practice funding or the ability to hire more staff.

With both access and parking becoming ever more taxing for the John Radcliffe I would suggest that this policy provides the perfect opportunity for Woodstock to upgrade and transform its primary care. We need substantially more ambitious facilities which our doctors and patients surely deserve. More of the same in a new building is not in anyone's interest.

Professor Stephen Westably

Letter - Pauline Jerrams - Jan 2026

Dear Editor,

Woodstock Public Toilets*How thrilled I was to see my maiden name in print in the November 2025 issue, in the article by Robert Edwards - Pauline Jerrams is a name I am proud to own. I will continue the story that Robert started.

On my part it took a lot of courage. After taking it through 3 Council meetings I was getting almost 100% support from the men. Not so the women - I was a single divorced woman. Albeit I had lots of support, I took a lot of flack especially from the local Catholic residents who were quite hostile.

Letters arrived, including one from a resident in Burford who was far from pleased and they were not needed in Burford! I must say it gave me great pleasure in my reply to report that throughout West Oxfordshire the most condoms sold were in Burford!

At that time the Public Health Officer for the WODC was Fred Swinson; he was being inundated with Parker Pens, a thank you from the condom company for achieving the most sales. Needless to say a pen never came in my direction. Would I do it again? Yes I would it was the right thing to do.

This wasn't the only achievement while I was your Town and District Councillor. The Tourist Office was another example. Both of these are no longer around sadly.

It was a great honour and privilege to serve you for many years as your Councillor, for which I treasure.

Life goes on - I now live on the Algarve in Portugal, and I am as well known here as I was in Woodstock and Oxfordshire. It's just the same - if someone wants to know anything they are told to ask Pauline - "she will know".

To those who remember me, Best Regards

Pauline Jerrams

Letter - Sam Dawson - Jan 2026

Dear Editor,

Where's all the money going? I attended the Town Council meetings in both November and December. The budget for 26/27 was discussed on both occasions but could not be agreed as the numbers were so unclear.

The numbers presented in November were simply wrong - the Expenditure and Income totals did not even balance.

Those presented at the December meeting balanced - but it looked as if they had been made to do so by randomly removing spend from budget codes with no clear rationale behind it!

A more than doubling of staffing costs received no explanation or justification whatsoever. To the end of March 2024 the actuals incurred were £43,178. To the end of March 2025 this was £71,348 – a 65% increase. Why is the proposed budget to the end of March 27 a whopping £144,600? There may be a good explanation for this, but given that this amount is almost the entire precept for the town I think it bears further scrutiny.

The Internal Audit report from 12th November highlighted that WTC has no Reserves Policy (contrary to best practice) – this may be why, unless current expenditure is reviewed, the town will have spent all its reserves within the next two years.

In terms of income, despite the number of houses in the town increasing significantly over the past few years the precept has not increased. Why has WTC not asked for more money from WODC during each budget round to reflect these new houses?

There is over £200k being held by WTC in non-interest paying accounts - why? This should be producing additional income.

With a healthy precept (that should be increasing) and over £8m of property producing a regular income, WTC should be in a comfortable financial position. It feels more like a leaky bucket that is not being topped up by cash that is readily available to it!

I was relieved to note that Councillors Connolly and Poskitt refused to agree the proposed budget in December as they had some very significant questions about how it was put together. I hope they will continue to ask questions like mine above, until they get acceptable answers on our behalf.

Sam Dawson

Letter - Chris Coe - Jan 2026

Dear Editor,

Council planning to double spending on itself whilst cutting services*Those residents receiving information from Woodstock Town Council will today (Tuesday 6 January) have received the proposed budget for 2026/27 to be discussed at the Council meeting on Tuesday 13 January.

The 2026/27 proposal is to spend £207,000 on Staff and Administration (57% of the total spend) and £156,000 (43%) on the environment, property, grants etc. In the last financial year (2024/25) the equivalent figures were £101,000 (34%) and £193,000 (66%) respectively. At no time in the previous four years did the Council spend more than 36% of its expenditure on itself.

In comparison to 2024/25 the Council proposes to double the spend on itself (£207,000 v £101,000) whilst cutting 'services' by £37,000 (£156,000 v £193,000). In addition to this flagrant breach of trust in what taxpayers would expect from their Council, reserves built up over many years are being spent (£109,000 is the projected deficit this financial year) without, as noted by the Auditor, a reserves policy being in place.

I am sure that attending Council Meetings is not high on most people's list of New Year Resolutions but please do try to give some time to hold your Council to account for what they are spending your taxes on.

Chris Coe

Letter - Chris Coe - FebMar 2026

Dear Editor

Woodstock Council votes to more than double the spend on itself!

I have recently witnessed some unusual and sometimes disturbing discussions at Woodstock Town Council but the 20 January meeting was the most remarkable.

Three Councillors variously commented that the budget process was not transparent, that the independent auditors should be asked to review the budget process and that the statutory rules were not followed but despite this, at the third attempt, the budget was agreed.

What this means for Woodstock residents / taxpayers, is that the Council will spend £210,500 on itself (that's £3,500 more than the last budget iteration and £109,500 more than last financial year) whilst simultaneously removing the mere £5,000 previously allocated for Town Projects.

In the last financial year and the previous four years the Council has never spent more than 36% of total expenditure on itself but the £210,500 Staff and Administration budget for 2026/27 will be 55% of the total. Conversely, the proportion of expenditure spent on services will reduce from the average of 64% to less than half (45%). All this without, as one Councillor commented, no robustly assessed reasoning.

Chris Coe

Letter - Sam Dawson - FebMar 2026

Dear Editor,

Update on the new houses proposed for east of Park View

Hanlon's Razor says: "Never attribute to malice that which is adequately explained by stupidity."

I recently checked Cherwell's website regarding this planning application and had to remind myself of this. They don't mean to get it wrong, they are just human. And make mistakes. BIG ONES.

At the time of writing, the Parish impacted by this development is still showing as Kidlington. This is wrong. I have pointed this out to the Cherwell planning department, and asked them to rectify it.

The correct parish is in fact Shipton-on-Cherwell & Thrupp. No-one from Cherwell has consulted them regarding the sudden arrival of 500 houses in their parish, and what they think that community might need! As they were unaware, the parish could not engage with Blenheim at an early stage to see what might be offered.

The consultation window is now officially closed.

After pointing the error out to Cherwell, I made the Chair of the relevant Parish Council aware - he has asked for extra time so that they can consider what they need and ask for an allocation of S106 funds and/or land to provide it.

The Chair also recognises that his parishioners (both current and future) use the facilities of Woodstock. I have suggested that he reach out to Woodstock Town Council to ask for their views and advice on what might be required. Woodstock might not benefit directly from the council tax receipts for those properties, but it would be nice if our facilities could be improved in some way to support them and mitigate the impact of their arrival right next to our town

Who knows what might be achieved at this late stage in the day - but if you don't ask, you certainly won't get anything.

What a missed opportunity - it shouldn't take a member of the public to spot such a glaring error. One which could cost the residents of both Shipton-on-Cherwell & Thrupp and Woodstock dearly for years to come.

Sam Dawson

Letter - Linda Glees - FebMar 2026

Dear Editor,

Empty Retail Space

In the very heart of Woodstock, the building which houses both the Sue Ryder charity shop and the Chef Imperial Chinese restaurant is currently on the market. It is more than likely that the current owner or a new purchaser will apply to our local planning authorities for a permission for change of use. If granted, then yet another commercial site in the town centre will be turned into private housing, possibly for the benefit of Airbnb landlords or remote second home owners or holiday rental companies. This would serve to worsen a situation where town centre properties have over the past few years been gradually emptying of full time residents.

Apart from looking lifeless such 'dead centres' in towns throughout the country depress local businesses and permanent residents alike.

May I therefore raise the profile of this long-term issue and ask our Woodstock Town Councillors to scrutinise, and if needs be oppose, any future 'change of use' planning applications? The Town Council could be overturned at the next level of planning, but at least local views will have been officially expressed and noted. And while considering the future of town centre properties, perhaps WTC could find a new tenant quickly for their own property which until recently housed the Zuleika Gallery? If a tenant cannot be found, then maybe the Oxfordshire Museum could be invited to use the space for temporary exhibitions, at least in the shop window area. This would add interest and colour to this corner of the town.

Woodstock has many highly successful businesses - the Cotswold Tailor, the Woodstock Butcher and Woodstock Greengrocer, the Back Lane Tavern, Alfonso's Icecream, the Woodstock Coffee Shop, Brothertons, two excellent bookshops, two busy hairdressers, and many, many more - who thrive (yes, indeed, this is not the narrative of decline voiced by long-term opponents of the new parking regime) in the current arrangements for parking and general traffic control. They need however the level of commercial activity to remain as it is rather than diminishing under the shadow of the increasing suburbanisation of the town centre.

Yours sincerely,

Linda Glees

Letter - Sam Dawson - Apr 2026

Dear Editor,

Maths and Money

Two topics have riled me in recent weeks regarding the management of Woodstock Town Council - as is often the way, related to their finances. Or, more accurately, our finances - as the cash comes from us, council tax payers.

Firstly, accuracy of information provided to Councillors and the Public. It's not clear who puts the agenda pack together for meetings, but more attention to detail is required. Councillors are regularly presented with information that is not mathematically correct and asked to vote it through. Sometimes this is spotted and pointed out at meetings by Councillors or even members of the Public:

- * The first 27/28 Budget presented 25th Nov 2025 had items that did not add up or make sense; the budget had to be reworked several times before it could be approved.

- * The Asset Register presented 20th Jan 2026 stated that the Town Hall was valued for insurance purposes at £440,000 - a massive undervaluation. This was acknowledged 2 months later to be an error, but the Asset Register has not yet been corrected.

- * The recommendation for Payroll Costs presented 10th Mar 2026 did not add up correctly.

These inaccuracies are not isolated examples.

It's not always the maths that is wrong. Frequent spelling errors and mistyping to one side, other errors arise. For example, the new Policies and Protocols presented for sign-off on 10th Feb 2026 were checked, for a fee, by two external companies before they were presented to Councillors. Despite this, errors occurred: the Electrical Safety & PAT testing policy referred to buildings managed by 'AUKCAP' - an organisation the Town Council does not use.

Therefore the question has to be asked: how often is information submitted for Councillors to vote on that is not mathematically correct, accurately costed, and properly thought through? Councillors are untrained volunteers, who have to be able to trust that the information they are given is accurate - and should not be obliged to get out a calculator every time to make sure!

Secondly - VAT. WTC is not registered to reclaim this - which means the people of Woodstock are losing tens of thousands of pounds every year. If WTC registers, they will be eligible to reclaim VAT going back for 4 years - so all is not lost!

The subject of VAT registration was discussed at the Council Meeting on 11th November 2025, with a written recommendation from the Clerk that they get on with it. I can see no reference to the discussion or ultimate decision in the approved minutes - odd? I am not aware that the subject has been discussed in recent meetings, and we are nearly at the end of a tax year.

If WTC does not register and reclaim by 5th April 2026 an entire year's worth of VAT payments will be permanently lost

Surely 'easy money' such as this should be a priority for our Town Council?

Sam Dawson

Letter - Anthony Glees - Apr 2026

Dear Editor

Churchyard Upkeep

Graham Brown tells us (WOBL Feb/March 2026) that on 1 Jan 2026 the 'Parochial Council of St Mary Magdalene Church', Woodstock, wrote to Woodstock Town Council (WTC) asking it to agree to a transfer of its responsibility for the upkeep of the Churchyard to WTC and that (on 20 Jan 2026) WTC voted to reject this request, and pass the care of the Churchyard to West Oxford District Council (WODC).

This looks like a disastrous move by WTC, one which should have been subject to public approval before being taken, and one that should be reconsidered immediately and then reversed.

It is an insult not to have consulted the public because as everyone knows, whether resident or visitor, the Churchyard is a glittering jewel in the heart of Woodstock. Home to hundreds of different (and appropriate) plants, shrub cooing pigeons and nimble squirrels, it is a sanctuary for the odd pheasant and us, not least thanks to the new benches. We can all draw breath in the Churchyard's natural beauty, a real joy to behold not least in this early Spring.

What's more, over many years, it has been uniquely tended with knowledgeable and loving care by Jenny Atkinson (a Woodstock legend) and her dedicated team of Town volunteers. Any decent Town Council should be cherishing the Churchyard as a core duty and honouring those who curate it rather than trying to offload it and doubtless offending the volunteers into the bargain.

What makes WTC's shirking of responsibility even more horrifying is not only that it can easily afford the upkeep but that the planned reform of local government may well mean WODC will soon be abolished, with responsibility for upkeep passing to Oxfordshire County Council (OCC). This is the same OCC that has for years failed to mend potholes, has reduced the number of dog waste bins as the number of dogs has increased, arranged the ill-planned and crude pollarding of Woodstock's town centre trees just before Christmas, shows it is incapable of removing the plethora of flags on lampposts. It is self-evident that Woodstock cannot trust OCC with the upkeep of the Churchyard or preventing it from going to rack and ruin.

WTC may well plead it can no longer afford the cost of the upkeep. This is, of course, complete nonsense. It has property assets of £8.2m, runs a surplus of many thousands of pounds and boasts an income in excess of £94k. As Chris Coe points out in his letter to WOBL, WTC spends £210,500 on itself with 'staff and admin costs 55% of the total' (which is a vast increase on previous years) whilst cutting back on its grants and services.

WTC members presumably believe in the basic principle (set out by the UK government) that 'local issues should be decided, managed and resolved at the lowest practical level, close to the people who are affected by those decisions'. Could there be a better example of such an issue than the care of one of Woodstock's very few green public spaces? It must remain a local responsibility and WTC's sorry attempt to cast it aside really does make one wonder what WTC is actually there for.

Anthony Glees

Letter - Jo Lamb - June 2026

Dear Editor,

Politics

We seem to be living in a period of electoral turbulence at all levels of government in this country, the result of which is a general political uncertainty throughout our nation, let alone in Oxfordshire. This has led many people to a feeling of cynicism with politicians and organisations at all levels, irrespective of party affiliations. It has also resulted in a noticeable lack of respect being shown both to the institutions of government and to those serving within them.

'Change' seems to be the new buzzword in politics which is defined as 'to make or to become different'. We need change to happen.

At local government level within Woodstock and Bladon, we do have a change in representation. Congratulations and good wishes are due to our newly elected District Councillor, Hannah Stephanie Massey, who replaces Cllr Julian Cooper after many long years of his serving our local community. Thank you Julian.

Within Woodstock Town Council, we also have a change in leadership. We have a new Mayor, Cllr Sarah Williams. We also have a new Deputy Mayor, Cllr Barry Wheatley. I wish them well in their endeavours to serve our town and to effect some positive changes, both internally and externally, to benefit the lives of those who live here.

Why do we need significant change here in Woodstock?

The answer I submit, would be not only to benefit the lives of our electorate but also, in order to increase the level of respect due our town council and to individual town councillors, some (not all) of whom are hard working and none of whom are paid financially in their roles. They are volunteers seeking to represent us.

Respect, in the sense of 'thinking highly of' and 'valuing' someone or something, is an attribute most individuals and organisations seek but which has to be earned by the openness, transparency, conduct and integrity of individual Councillors as well as of the Town Council as a whole.

Within Woodstock, 11 local Councillors took office unopposed in May 2024. Their number was subsequently increased to 12. I am sure all our new councillors took office with the best of intentions to make a difference to the town. However, since that time, we have evidenced what can only be described as 'a merry go round' of councillor turnover.

My calculations, indicate that since May 2024, there have been no fewer than 7 Councillor resignations. I believe that in several cases, these resignations were due to new members feeling their good intentions to contribute to Council were being thwarted by the existing powers of a few longer term Councillors, whose prior knowledge of procedures enabled the control of processes and decisions. This is unfortunate.

The high turnover of new Councillors discourages the introduction of fresh ideas in the management of town affairs, because power in decision making is retained by the few longer serving members.

'Knowledge is power', as the well quoted adage states. In my view though, there is a need for fresh thinking and a greater transparency and openness in the conduct of Council matters. This would increase the amount of respect shown to local government by an increasingly disillusioned electorate.

Within the membership, respect for the Council is also diminished by the activities of some individual town councillors. So for example, where an individual Councillor decides to take legal action for damages against his/her own Council, would it not have been appropriate for that Councillor to step down from Council affairs pending the outcome of that litigation with the Council? Would there not have been a conflict of interest here? Many would think so.

Similarly, where an individual Councillor is accused of significant criminal offences and is bailed pending a Court hearing, surely decency would dictate to him/her that the individual Councillor step back from Council affairs pending the outcome of the Court case?

To continue as a member in such instances can surely do little to enhance the respect shown to fellow council representatives, nor to our town council as a whole?

There is also a glaring need for greater transparency, openness and accountability within Council. This is an essential requirement of democracy. The electorate should feel included and not disregarded by those purporting to represent it. For example, public participation should be properly reported within Council Minutes (as I believe is the case at District Council level), so that those not present at a meeting can read what matters have been raised by members of the public. Council should respond openly to any such concerns, rather than remain silent and muzzled at the time, which is currently the case.

In addition, to enable greater transparency, every effort should be made to publish all Council meetings well in advance. ETCs should indeed only be reserved for 'extraordinary' council meetings. The public should receive advance information of all such meetings at the same time as Councillors themselves. Most interested people are every bit as busy as Councillors are. This is merely a matter of courtesy and mutual respect and indicative of a desire by the Council to include the public within its affairs.

To conclude therefore, I hope there will also be some positive changes within our Woodstock Town Council, to bring about greater inclusion and interaction with the electorate. Several Councillors work so hard on our behalf and to them we owe true thanks. However, with greater inclusivity, integrity and openness, our Town Council and particularly its individual councillors, will undoubtedly regain the respect which, to some extent, has been diminished by the recent conduct of one or two individuals and of recent Council affairs.

Jo Lamb

Editors Note: Jo was a Town Councillor from 2021 until 2024, and was Deputy Mayor for two of those years.

Letter - Sam Dawson - June 2026

Dear Editor,

Land east of Perdiswell Farm 25/01510/OUT: East of Park View, between the A44 and A4095, is a large field. A proposal for a development of 500 houses there, with 1254 residents forecast by Oxfordshire County Council, is under consideration.

Somewhat surprisingly, this land is not in Woodstock. It is actually in the parish of Shipton-on-Cherwell & Thrupp. This presents a number of challenges. The residents on that estate are likely to use facilities within the town, but their council tax to support those facilities will not come to the area.

These are some of the elements that may be of interest to local residents:

Where will the S106 money go? Legally, any S106 contribution as mitigation for the additional development will go to Cherwell District Council. Active discussions are underway to try to establish that some of that money should come to Woodstock (e.g. to provide new sports provision at The Marlborough School, support the new GP surgery, enhance current library facilities).

Education: OCC policy is that the children from this development will be taken out of the catchment area for Woodstock Primary School. It is also anticipated that there will not be capacity for secondary school-aged children to go to The Marlborough School. OCC policy is unclear exactly where the children from this development will go to school in the short term.

Parking: On street parking will be controlled by a Residents Parking Scheme. Park View is already seeing increased on street parking with recent changes in Woodstock, will this lead to even more overflow parking?

Traffic: OCC recognizes a significant likely impact on traffic on the A44/A4095. New speed restrictions will be imposed on roads around the area, with other measures to mitigate/manage traffic. For example, a new traffic-light controlled junction is requested by OCC on the A44 where Cowells Road joins from Park View.

Affordable homes: It is currently proposed that these are allocated to Cherwell residents (who could currently live as far away as Banbury).

This proposal is likely to come to Cherwell Planning Committee sometime from July 2026 onwards.

Sam Dawson

Editors Note: Sam is a Parish Councillor for Shipton-On-Cherwell & Thrupp

Letter - Melanie King - Jul 2026

Dear Editor,

Woodstock Post Office

I remain deeply concerned by the actions of Woodstock Town Council, whose role is to represent the interests of the people of Woodstock.

As many of you will now be aware, a resolution of sorts has been reached regarding the Post Office. Rana and Swarn Lally have been allowed to continue running the Post Office, with a rent increase of £2,000, which appears reasonable. However, they have been required to vacate the flat above the premises, for which they currently pay a separate annual. The Council intends to re-let the flat at a higher market rate.

In practical terms, this means that Rana and Swarn will have to commute daily from Slough in order to open and operate the Post Office. I have spoken regularly with Rana throughout this process and he is understandably upset by the situation. He has told me that they intend to continue until their lease expires in 2028, after which they will leave.

Rana has also informed me that one councillor told him that if he was unhappy with the situation, he should simply walk away, and that a 'community shop' would replace the Post Office. What exactly a community shop is, and whether it could provide the same services, is an open question.

It is important to remember that the Lally family are not living in the flat rent-free. While the rent may be below full market value, this arrangement helps support the operation of a vital community service. Post Offices are not highly profitable businesses, and their value to a town extends far beyond financial return.

There are a number of concerns surrounding this decision, and I believe we need greater transparency and public discussion. Most importantly, we need to ensure that the flat remains affordable for whoever operates the Post Office in the future. If we fail to do so, there is a real risk that Woodstock could lose this essential service when the current lease ends in 2028.

I would therefore like to propose the formation of an action group to discuss and coordinate our response. We collected more than 250 signatures in just a few hours - imagine what could be achieved with an organised team of volunteers.

Some points for discussion include:

1. Attendance and Decision-Making: Only five of the eleven councillors were present to vote on this matter at the meeting on 16 June. Given the significance of the decision, many residents may wish to understand how such an important issue was determined by less than half the Council.

2. Lack of Public Transparency: Decisions were made behind closed doors, meaning that neither the public nor the Lally family had the opportunity to present their views. While some financial matters understandably require confidentiality, many residents will question whether this issue warranted such secrecy when so much is at stake for the community. The Council should openly explain the reasoning behind its decision in a calm and transparent manner so that residents can properly understand and discuss it.

3. The Future of the Post Office: The flat should form part of the overall Post Office package in order to make the role attractive and sustainable for future operators. This does not mean providing accommodation free of charge, but rather recognising it as a community asset and pricing it accordingly. Without such support, it may prove extremely difficult to attract future operators, and Woodstock could permanently lose its Post Office after 2028.

4. Community Action" We should organise a carefully planned petition and make it available in public locations throughout the town. This could be supported by a door-to-door campaign to ensure that as many residents as possible have the opportunity to express their views.

5. A Volunteer Committee" Finally, I propose establishing a committee of volunteers to coordinate efforts, share information, and engage constructively with the Council. I would be more than willing to be involved. I propose we

have a meeting to discuss action. Please reply to melanieking62@gmail.com if you would like to be involved in the action group or just want to express support.

Please take this opportunity to express your concerns to Woodstock Town Council in writing and ask for a clear explanation of the decisions that have been made. There may be valid reasons why an emergency meeting was called when six members of the council were absent, why discussions took place behind closed doors, and why the public was not consulted on such an important matter. However, these reasons should be openly explained to the residents whom the council serves.

Transparency and accountability are fundamental principles of local government. As a resident, you have every right to understand how decisions are being made, particularly when they affect valued community services.

Make your voice heard. Ask questions, seek clarification, and request openness from those elected to represent the people of Woodstock. Transparency is not a privilege - it is a right.

Melanie King

Letter - Chris Coe - July 2026

Dear Editor,

Woodstock Council votes to more than double the spend on itself!

WOBL readers may remember this headline from the letter I wrote for the February/March 2026 edition. The headline was based on the Town Council Staff and Administration budget for 2026/27 being agreed at £210,500 (mainly increasing staff payroll) versus the 2024/25 actual of £101,000, whilst cutting the mere £5,000 previously allocated for Town Projects together with reductions to other services.

What Council taxpayers might not know is that our precept was increased and the budget also presented rent increases on Council owned properties of £37,000 (+25%). Without these increases in income, it would not have been possible for the Council to come close to a balanced budget.

It now appears that proposed rent increases were not agreed with all the tenants. As WOBL readers may be aware, the owners of Woodstock Post Office (a Council owned property) have, they say, received a letter proposing to put up their rent from the current '£20,500 to approximately £38,700'. Not surprisingly, they are challenging the reasonableness of a £18,200 increase, and their letter to Councillors has been circulated on Facebook.

It is beyond comprehension that our Council would assume, with as I understand it no prior discussion, that a Post Office could ever afford such an increase regardless of the market valuation provided by the Council's Agent. As the letter from Rana and Swarn (the owners of the Post office) makes clear, it puts the business at risk of closure and a valuable asset to our community could be gone for ever. What is equally incomprehensible to me is that having presented and agreed a budget to spend an additional £109,500 on Staff and Administration, the same Council would risk the closure of a Post office by proposing an additional rent of £18,200 from the owners.

For me, it is yet another example of a Council which prioritises spending on itself and not the residents it serves. Please readers, if you can, attend Council meetings to see for yourself how our representatives act on our behalf.

Chris Coe

Letter - Graham and Jennie Candy - July 202

Dear Editor,

The Church Clock

What is happening to the St Mary Magdalene Church Tower Clock which appears to have stopped at 11.10 for a very long time and is no longer striking the hour?

We are particularly concerned to find that this historic clock has not been in working order for many months. It is an important part of the Town's heritage yet appears neglected. When living nearby we so enjoyed the chimes and the catchy musical tunes that could be heard throughout the Town. Something must be done to restore this historic asset.

Graham and Jennie Candy

Letter - Linda Gleees - AugSept 2026

Dear Editor,

Town Diary

On Saturday 11 July, the Woodstock Music Society was obliged to cancel its long-awaited summer evening concert due to a clash with the Mock Mayor event. This had moved to the town centre following the closure of the Black Price pub where it had taken place in earlier years.

The amplified sound of live music in the town square would have interfered too much with the concert in the church. So, however many people enjoyed the Mock Mayor event, a considerable number of others lost the anticipated pleasure of their evening concert. This was not even the only clash on that date as a professional repertory theatre company offered an evening performance of A Midsummer Night's Dream in the garden of the Oxfordshire Museum.

So, it is with heartfelt gratitude that I can now say that in response to my concerns about this problem the editor of this magazine has launched an interactive 'What's On' calendar via the WOBL website. This will enable anyone organising an event to enter the relevant details, and even more importantly to double-check for clashes with other events on the same date. Those societies which organise an annual calendar of events will be able to enter a full year's events together. This umbrella framework will greatly improve the efficiency of the town as a cultural and social hub.

Woodstock is a vibrant and busy town, and the first thought any organiser of any type of event should be about the other likely events on any day or evening. This welcome overarching structure will be an invaluable addition to the websites of all the main Woodstock societies which provide more detailed accounts of their activities. The Music Society, the Woodstock Literature Society, the Woodstock Society and now also the Woodstock Bookshop, have all extended to each other the courtesy of checking their future events to avoid competing for audiences, many of whose members would like to support all of these events and not be forced to choose between them.

The new WOBL facility will supplement these websites and facilitate the process of diary management for all local events organisers. Now it is over to all of you who run events to check the diary and make your entries!

Many congratulations and thanks to our WOBL editor, Nick Manby-Brown, for setting up this important community facility, a new era successor to the late physical Town Diary which disappeared some years ago.

Linda Gleees

Letter - Paul du Plessis - AugSept 2026

Dear Editor,

An unexpected turn of events

We're on our way from Orpington to a family wedding in the Cotswolds. Halfway up the M25 I realise I've left the suit carrier for tomorrow's event at home. Half out of embarrassment, but especially knowing that anxiety can be infectious, I decided to keep quiet until after an unscheduled but delightful visit en route with a grandson in Woodstock

So then straight into town looking for charity shops. Most are closed. "Sorry too hot, we're closed". A man in his mid-thirties is killing time waiting for schools to finish; he needs to pick up his eight-year-old daughter.

He bumps into us again and asks what's happening. He hears the story. "You know what, something like that once happened to me. I think I can help. I have a suit at home which should fit."

Initially he asked us to come to his home that evening; instead, four hours later, he arrives at the hotel with it, recently dry-cleaned complete with shirt and tie. I offer profuse thanks and ask how to return it.

"Just leave it at hotel reception. I think they may know me. I'm sure they won't mind." He's assistant manager at a nearby hotel.

It's indeed a perfect fit and evokes plenty of complimentary comments next day.

There is still something called kindness around!

Paul du Plessis, Orpington

Letter - Zandra Houston - AugSept 2026

Dear Editor

Woodstock Town Council

Last night's Town Council meeting was a shambles! The venue had to be moved upstairs due to lack of space, because of the large public presence (which I am sure was expected). Once the meeting was in progress it was extremely hard for the public to hear what was being said by councillors, and there was totally ineffective control from the chair.

The presentation of a petition signed by a huge number of Woodstock residents (including me) concerning the future of the Post Office showed great support for our present postmaster and an admirable concern and willingness to roll up sleeves and get something done by those volunteers who orchestrated it, but the future of the Post Office was never going to be influenced by such action. The Post Office itself will no doubt decide whether there is a business case to have a presence in Woodstock in future or not, and if the answer to that is yes (which is by no means certain) then where it should be located. In light of the recent history of the Post Office nationally it may be difficult to find a suitable postmaster or postmistress willing to take it on, but that is not the concern of the Town Council as landlords for the current building housing the Post Office.

The real reason why so many people turned up to the meeting on 21 July was the frustration and despair felt by so many at the secretiveness, non-transparency and unwillingness to answer perfectly legitimate questions from council tax payers on the part of the Council. Councillors are democratically elected to represent our interests and to manage the town on our behalf but it appears that they will not engage or explain their actions, nor properly account for how they are spending money raised primarily through council tax and rent receipts from properties belonging to the town.

Woodstock Town Council has been nothing short of dysfunctional for many years, and it is high time it faced up to its responsibilities and accounted for its actions and expenditure in a proper fashion. Goodwill from the public will not last indefinitely if the council continues to be self protective, secretive and downright antagonistic towards the council tax payers who elect it. It is admirable to stand for election to public office, but having made that commitment councillors must be willing to answer for their actions and must be seen to listen to the public and to act in the best interests of the town. Failure to do so will eventually result in far worse disruption than was in evidence at last night's meeting.

We can only hope the next Town Council meeting is better prepared for and chaired in a more orderly fashion, and the perfectly legitimate concerns of the public are handled sensitively and sensibly at the meeting rather than being kicked down the line to another time yet again.

Zandra Houston

Letter - Dr Farzin Rahmani-Shirazi - AugSept

Dear Editor,

The Post Office

I attended the recent Town Hall meeting to discuss the future of Woodstock's Post Office, and what I witnessed left a lasting impression on me.

The meeting was attended by a remarkable cross-section of our community. Young and old, local residents, business owners and families came together because they understood the importance of preserving this vital service. What moved me most, however, was seeing people who clearly faced significant physical challenges making every effort to be there. Some struggled to walk, others arrived in wheelchairs, and several were in poor health. Yet they felt so strongly about the future of our Post Office that they made the journey to lend their support.

Their presence spoke louder than any speech. It was a powerful reminder that the Post Office is far more than a place to post letters or collect parcels. For many, it is a lifeline: a place to access banking services, collect pensions, seek advice, meet familiar faces and maintain a sense of independence and dignity.

A community should be judged not only by the beauty of its buildings, but also by how it cares for those who are most vulnerable. If people with limited mobility and poor health are willing to leave the comfort of their homes to defend this service, surely that alone tells us how essential it is.

The future of our Post Office should not be viewed simply as a commercial decision. It is about protecting the heart of our community. Once such a service is lost, it is rarely restored, and the people who suffer most are often those with the fewest alternatives.

I sincerely hope that those responsible will listen to the clear message from the people of Woodstock and the surrounding villages. The extraordinary attendance at the Town Hall meeting demonstrated not only the value of the Post Office, but also the strength, compassion and unity of our community.

Let us work together to ensure that this invaluable service remains at the heart of Woodstock for generations to come.

Dr Farzin Rahmani-Shirazi

Letter - Sam Dawson - AugSept 2026

Dear Editor,

How safe are Woodstock Town Council finances?

How can we know? We only know what they choose to share with us.

However, every year residents of a parish have a legal right to inspect documents relating to the finances of the town or parish council to satisfy themselves of the accuracy of what is reported. Concerns can be raised with an external auditor for independent review.

The public right to review the unaudited AGAR (Annual Governance & Accountability Return) is laid out in a couple of legal rulings and lasts for a specified 6-week period - for WTC, this was 11th June to 23rd July 2026.

I exercised my rights to see certain documents this year.

1. The public is required to give reasonable notice to exercise this legal right. I gave notice of more than 3 weeks to Woodstock Town Council and offered 5 possible dates. Not a single one of my dates was accepted. Alternatives offered were too short, gave notice of only 6 working hours, or were on dates when the Clerk had already been told in writing I would be out of the country. Only one date offered to me was possible - a 30min appointment that was clearly going to be too short. My offer to come in early or stay later was ignored.

2. Many of the documents are missing. It is concerning to learn that WTC does not have copies of legal documents - such as leases on some properties that it owns. This has been known for some years, but is not logged in the 53 page Risk Register or minuted as an action to follow up following the review on 20th Jan 2026. How many key contracts cannot be found? Does WTC have a list that all Councillors are aware of, and what has it done over the past few years to rectify the situation?

Despite giving Woodstock Town Council the reasonable notice required, I was unable to see all the documents which are available within the formal review period. I have asked if I can see the missing documents when they are found - this has not been agreed.

I have flagged both these concerns to the External Auditor for their review.

Sam Dawson

Letter - Nina Becket - AugSept 2026

Dear Editor,

A New Budgens approved for Park View

I am reporting on the outcome of the meeting to discuss the application for a licence to sell alcohol at the new Budgens to be sited at Park View on the afternoon of 30 July at the Council Chambers in Witney. The licence has been approved for 6am-9pm on a daily basis. The new owner is currently jointly running a similar successful store in North Leigh.

Much of the objections discussed were unsurprisingly concerned with potential nuisance to Park View residents. The new owner stated that he wants to serve and work with the community of Park View. Staff will be trained on licensing requirements and there will be CCTV in operation.

Given concerns over the length of the opening hours it was reassuring to be told that deliveries should not be expected at unreasonable times of the day.

Nina Becket, Park View Residents Group

Letter - Jude Awdry - AugSept 2026

Dear Editor,

Woodstock Post Office

A friend has kindly forwarded part of the Woodstock & Bladon News which includes items about Woodstock Post Office. I find it personally ironic that I was born on 25th March 1952 and the flat over the Post Office was my first home. In your piece about possible closure you mention a date of 25th March 2028, 76 years to the day I arrived there.

During my father's time as Sub-Postmaster there were two counter staff, five postmen with bicycles and one mail van, covering Woodstock, five villages and several hamlets. My mother was the first to run the stationery and gift shop adjacent to the Post Office.

My brother, Graham, and I left Woodstock when our parents, Stanley and Hilda Jones, moved back to Oxford and a Mr Coates took over as Sub-Postmaster. We actually swapped homes as we moved into Mr & Mrs Coates' house and they moved into the Post Office flat.

My father was also involved with Woodstock Town Council during his time as Sub-Postmaster and, as the saying goes, would be turning in his grave to know what is being proposed.

In your News there is also a letter from Graham and Jennie Candy regarding St Mary Magdalene Church Tower clock which we could see from the flat windows. My mother was very involved with the Church and I was baptised there.

Although I doubt there is anyone in Woodstock now who would remember the Jones family from the 50s and 60s I truly hope that the Town Council will have a complete rethink. The Post Office is an essential community asset to the people of Woodstock and the flat above is essential to the Sub-Postmaster or PostMistress.

I now live in a small village which has been able to retain Post Office services in the village shop. This is invaluable to the village residents, as it offers banking services together with numerous courier despatch and collection points.

I sincerely hope that Woodstock can retain its Post Office and Rana and Swarn Lally can continue to live in the flat above.

Jude Awdry
