

Contents

Editorial	2
Dani Brown 1959-2025	3-4
Parish Council News	4
Village Stores & Post Office	5-7
Stewart Village Hall	7-9
Community Association	9-10
KMTC members' subscription reminder	10
Meet Jim Sanger, the man who forgot to retire	11-13
Brightwell Supporting Refugees	13-14
St Agatha's & St James'	14-15
Summer Concert	16
Brightwell Primary School	16-17
Brightwell Preschool	17-18
Brightwell Toddlers	18-19
Brightwell WI	19
Save the Children	19-20
The Red Lion / Brightfest	20
BcS Environment Group	21-22
Swan Allotments	22
Book review	22
Water Water everywhere	23
Update from Olly Glover MP	23
Village Diary	24

Flower and Produce Show information, schedule & entry form Insert

Editor: Alison Leigh 07983 752 454 (thevillagerbcs@gmail.com)

Chairman: Anne Brooker 835109 **Secretary:** Angela Lewis

Treasurer: Tony Guntrip **Advertising:** Martin Dix 07767 864735

Assembly: Shena Luck 834543 **Distribution:** Tony Guntrip 07754 690264

Production: Anne Brooker, Angela Lewis, Steve Luck, Jim Sanger, Susanne Tuffrey

Items for the next edition should be sent to the Editor by 10 July 2026. *The Villager* is published every other month and delivered free to all households in the village.

Editorial

What could be prettier than a babbling brook running through the centre of your village, how pastoral, how quintessentially English - but not when its actually running in the gutter and across half the road. Residents of Brightwell Street, Church Lane and West End are fed up with donning welly boots just to go from the front door to the car. This has been going on for months. Thanks to super sleuth Steve Colam and his wife Andrea we now know that it's all to do with a drainage system that has partially collapsed through old age and lack of maintenance. The challenge now is to persuade the District Council to do something about it. See page 23. Watch this space.

2026 is almost at the half way point already. How many of the New Year Resolutions that we shared with The Red Box Gallery have progressed? Do please email thevillagerbcs@gmail.com with stories of your achievements and failures.

Your editor resolved to galvanise a new wave of volunteers to keep the many village organisations going. Shout out to Matt Freeman, the latest recruit to the Parish Council, see page 4, and to the new team running the Flower and Produce Tent for the village fete, headed by Christopher and Harriet Ellis, see insert; we are looking forward to featuring the winners of the Creative Writing Competition later this year. In this edition the focus is the Village Stores. See pages 5-7. Just as 'it takes a village to raise a child', it takes an army to run a village shop. In the absence of conscription we need a new band of volunteers to join up. And we all need to shop there regularly. I can recommend the frozen fish cakes.

I must admit that bricks are not normally a priority on my weekly shopping list, but that could change now that I know that if I buy a brick I could help to save the village hall. See page 7-9. Alternatively I could contribute to the charity auction and bid for a helicopter ride, a holiday or even just a round of golf. I could get quite carried away

It is always sad when people we love pass away, but when they die suddenly and unexpectedly it is intolerable. On page 3-4 we pay tribute to Dani Brown, a woman with a passion for music and drama and poetry who with her husband Jonathan shared that passion with the village, providing their beautiful barn and garden as a venue for many memorable performances. In a future edition we will remember Chris Benarr who died at the beginning of April aged only 46.

Alison Leigh

Dani Brown 1959-2025

Those of us who were lucky to know Dani were very sad to learn of her sudden death in November last year at the age of 65.

Dani grew up in Cheshire, next door to one of three city centre hotels owned by her parents. Her Serbian father had a passion for football and was also the owner of Stockport County football team. George Best was a friend and would often hide from the press in one of their hotels; towards the very end of his career he even played a handful of games for Stockport County. From her Belgian mother, Dani inherited a strong eye for presentation and detail.



Following her education at Cheltenham, Dani trained as a stage manager at Central School of Speech and Drama. At the time, Rupert Everett was training as an actor, and Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders were on the teaching course. Dani's first job was for a Steven Berkoff play, sharing stage management duties with the future director Deborah Warner.

Theatre was her passion, and for over twenty years she worked as a highly respected theatrical agent. Known for her dedication and encouragement, every client was important to her, and she would travel the country to watch performances and nurture careers. She also set up a company with a friend at Pinewood Studios, producing short films, one of which included a performance by the young John Hannah.

Dani had a dedicated group of friends who loved her for her loyalty and sense of fun. She took great pleasure in fashion and design, admiring the bold clothing of Vivienne Westwood. Her fantastic visual memory allowed her to recall easily what someone had been wearing 40 years ago.

On the steps of the London Stock Exchange, Dani met her future husband, Jonathan, who was working for the American investment company J. P. Morgan. At first they became firm friends, before enjoying a marriage of over thirty-five years. Their son James was born in 1995.

Jonathan and Dani moved to Small's House, Mackney, in 2010. Dani had not been well when they arrived, but she gradually developed friendships in the village. They generously shared their beautiful garden and barn for village theatrical events, including Wassail plays, the music and cabaret evening *Midsummer in the Barn* and poetry readings with Robert Seatter. Inspired by a visit to the barn, Mike Bartlett's play *Barndance* was specially written for the

village and performed by a group of local actors. Those of us who worked on the play were swept up by Dani's enthusiasm. She came to rehearsals every evening, and it was a privilege to share her excitement and professional approach.

We last saw Dani in her wonderful garden, where she was eagerly discussing future projects. She will be greatly missed.

Chris and Helen Baines

Parish Council News

We are pleased to report that we have recently recruited Matt Freeman to the council. His main role will be to assist with organising the ongoing maintenance for the playgrounds, tennis courts and parks and he will also be assisting in a variety of other general matters. When asked why he put himself forward for the Parish Council Matt said "I see it as a great opportunity to represent the community and help contribute to make a difference. I am keen to ensure that the great village amenities that we have are well supported and retained. Brightwell is a fantastic place to live with a strong community spirit and I believe the work of the Parish Council plays a vital part in helping to maintain this". Our sentiments exactly, we are very pleased to welcome Matt to the team.

There are likely to be traffic lights on Sires Hill over the next few months. Work has started on the new access road to Earth Trust and is scheduled from now until September. There is also culvert clearance scheduled in this area which is likely to lead to a full road closure for a day (date to be confirmed).

Could we please ask residents of the village to be mindful of their neighbours when lighting bonfires. We must not interfere unreasonably with our neighbours' enjoyment of their property eg. stopping them from opening windows or hanging washing.

Now that the weather seems to be improving and there are generally more people out and about, may we remind people who have hedges which are along roadsides or paths and pavements to keep them trimmed appropriately so that public footpaths can be enjoyed by all. Anyone who notices a blocked drain, pothole, overgrown hedge etc can report these matters easily on the SODC FixMyStreet website @ www.fixmystreet.com. It is a very simple process to follow. The more times a particular issue is reported, the quicker it will get fixed. The Parish Council does bring these matters to the attention of OCC but FixMyStreet remains the best way for reporting.

Karen Sherman, Councillor

The Village Stores and Post Office

Brightwell's Community Shop - The Village Stores, will celebrate its 17th birthday on 2 August and the Post Office was 10 years old on 16 May. Those of us involved from the start have overcome challenges and learnt many lessons over the years to become stronger. However, time does not stand still and we have to continue to adapt to thrive in difficult economic times. It is a good time to consider what the risks are and how these community services will survive. And also to ask: does the Community continue to value the shop and the Post Office? To help us all understand the complexities of running a Community Shop and Post Office I want to share the human resource it takes to maintain the enterprise, so that as a village, we can make informed decisions about the future of these services.

It takes an army

The business model consists of the following:

Shop Chair & Postmaster/Postmistress – Celia Collett
Shop Vice Chair & Bookkeeper – Anna Bartlett
Treasurer – John Reynolds (new member also new resident)
Company Secretary – VACANT
Minute Secretary – Sarah Angill
Marketing – Alison Wood
Website – Debbie Gair
Volunteer co-ordinator VACANT – currently covered by Celia

Shop Volunteers - currently a team of around 30 active volunteers cover the 24 weekly shifts in the shop

Post Office trained - currently a team of 14 (6 x part-time paid plus 8 x volunteers) cover the 22 weekly shifts between them.

Maintenance volunteers - currently 2
Technical support volunteers - 3
Electrical volunteer – 1
Cyber security – currently VACANT

We also regularly have Duke of Edinburgh students doing voluntary work for their bronze, silver and gold awards, along with annual work experience by young people from the local schools. Some young members of our community volunteer prior to finding work or before they go off to university.

From the above you can see, simply for day-to-day running, an army of committed people is required. Volunteer recruitment is an ongoing process to

ensure holidays, illness and other changes of volunteer circumstances are covered.

The decision from the Community to take the Post Office into the shop involved a lot of hard work a decade ago and at times it was painful and difficult. But the efforts of volunteers then have meant that the Post Office commission has taken the shop from a break-even position to making a small profit which has been ploughed back into the business to renew equipment and make improvements. A healthy bank balance allows us better buying power for stock so we can carry a wider variety of goods at competitive prices. Alongside everyday essentials, we strive to offer personal service and local and ethically sourced goods. Additionally, the Community Shop supports local suppliers and local talent through stocking artists' cards and authors' books. Village organisations also use the shop to sell tickets for local events.

Over the last five years we have saved money for a much-needed new stock room as part of the Village Hall renovation project.

Managing risks ahead

You may feel this all sounds pretty positive. However, the risks are high and the Management Committee has areas of concern. We have decided to undertake a 'Business Risk Assessment' over the next six months and we would welcome input from the community.

Human resource is our biggest risk. Currently there is too much pressure on too few people.

All the above is only possible with a large team of volunteers willing to give their time, knowledge and expertise free to the community enterprise. There are many benefits to volunteering. As well as keeping body and mind active, it is good for wellbeing to be part of a big team that values community providing services that would otherwise be lost.

*Rota slots on the shop counter are often covered at short notice by a small group of people, even with over 30 active volunteers, circumstances (particularly over peak summer holiday periods) mean no one signs up for some slots.

*There are vacancies on the Management Committee and succession planning for key roles is also vital.

*Part-time staff – retention and increases in costs of employment are having an impact.

*Customers – let us not forget this other vital part of the equation! The shop has a loyal customer base (footfall has remained constant at between 500-600

people a week for the last three years) but we need to keep attracting new customers as, when we account for inflation, takings remain static and so far during 2026 appear to be declining slightly.

What can you do?

Some questions to help us with this task:

- *Do you value having a shop and Post Office in the village?
- *Do you use the shop and/or the Post Office?
- *Are you a regular customer?
- *Are you a volunteer?
- *Have you bought tickets here for another village event?
- *Would you miss having the services in the village?

If you answer 'yes' to some of the above please help us identify and mitigate the risks of losing the facilities we have. If any of your answers are 'no', for the benefit of the whole community, we'd also like to know why, and what could change your mind? We hope some of you manage to come to our AGM on 1 June, 8pm; look out for the posters around the village with further details. We will be giving updates of our progress with the 'Business Risk Assessment' through our website and on our Facebook page. In the meantime, if you would like to help and or have more information, please email me at brightwellshop@btconnect.com.

Celia Collett

Stewart Village Hall

We've had a busy and successful few weeks at Stewart Village Hall raising money to support the future restoration of our much-loved hall.

Our recent Pre-Loved Fashion Pop-Up Sale was a huge success, raising almost £2,000. Led by Amanda Hedley and a brilliant team of volunteers, the event proved just how generous and supportive our community can be. Some remaining items are still available via Vinted ([stewartvillagehall](#)). Congratulations to Amanda and everyone involved.

Amanda also organised an inspiring and informative wellbeing talk by Maz Packham of Nourishful Nutrition. Maz shared practical advice on improving wellbeing through healthy nutrition and kindly offered free one-to-one follow-up consultations - an opportunity many attendees have already taken up.

At the Spring Fair on 9 May we ran a fun "Guess the Number of Lego Bricks" competition. Guesses ranged from 115 to 643, while the correct answer was 364! On this occasion the funds raised from the game were donated to the Church as part of the wider Spring Fair event.

Our next fundraiser promises to be one of our biggest yet.....

Save Our Village Hall Charity Auction – Saturday 13 June

Join us for a spectacular evening of fun, food, music and fundraising at our auction at 7pm on Saturday 13 June, with some incredible prizes and experiences up for grabs. We've gathered an amazing selection of auction prizes with something for every budget, including meals out, beauty treatments, helicopter rides, holidays, spa and golf days, hampers, garden vouchers, wines, beers, champagne and even a vintage wheelbarrow planted as a herb garden — plus many more unique experiences and treats. The full list of auction lots can be viewed at www.givewheel.com/fundraising/15042/save-our-village-hall-charity-auction. Come along for a wonderful evening of community spirit — and perhaps go home with something rather special!

Your £50 ticket includes canapés on arrival, beer, wine, fizz and soft drinks throughout the evening, a buffet supper, live music and entry into a £200 cash raffle drawn on the night. Every ticket sold helps support and protect our much-loved village hall for future generations. Tickets are limited, so to reserve your place please contact Karen Sherman on 07939 570201 or Amanda Hedley on 07557 436774.

And last but not least

Save Our Village Hall - One Brick at a Time

For generations, Stewart Village Hall has been at the heart of our community. Originally built in 1870 as a Victorian school and serving as the village hall since 1976, it has hosted celebrations, clubs, meetings and local services for decades. Today, however, as you are aware, Stewart Village Hall urgently needs significant restoration and improvement work. The building faces serious challenges including roof deterioration, damp, outdated electrics and limited space for growing community needs. Over recent years the Trustees have worked hard to build up funds in preparation for major grant applications, but we still need to demonstrate strong local support to secure the larger funding needed to begin the project

To help secure the hall's future, and to give residents, families, local groups and businesses the chance to become part of that future, the Trustees are launching the **Buy a Brick Campaign** - a chance for the whole community to play a direct role in restoring and modernising the building. Funds raised will support essential repairs, improved accessibility, flexible multi-use spaces and a warm, energy-efficient environment that can be enjoyed by everyone. Every donation, large or small, brings the project closer to reality.

Supporters can choose from two donation options:

- A £100 Supporters' Pledge, recognised through a special community artwork display
- A £500 Founders' Brick, with permanent engraved recognition in the hall

Details of how supporters will be recognised within the finished project will evolve as plans progress. Please watch out for more information as the campaign launches across the village This is more than a fundraising appeal - it is an investment in the future of our community. Together, one brick at a time, we can help rebuild the heart of our village.

Annette Kilworth

Community Association

Open Gardens - 17 May 2026

A big thank you to everyone who made this such a wonderful village event! We were very fortunate to have so many kind people who were prepared to open their beautiful gardens to so many visitors. Everyone was so impressed with all the dedication and hard work that went into the presentation of such a magnificent horticultural display. The Committee extends our sincere gratitude to them and their helpers.

An event like this could not take place without all the organisation, planning and hard work of the Community Association Committee and all the volunteers who helped to prepare and run the occasion – well done to everyone and, once again, so many thanks!

Village Fete - Saturday 4 July

Have you ever hooked a duck or thrown a quoit? Are you looking for that vintage bargain or retro relic on the White Elephant Stall? Maybe you would like to buy that perfect painting or a pottery plate made by local artists. As ever you will be able to enjoy a Pimm's or tea, cake or ice cream whilst listening to the Silver Band.

There will be an Aladdin's Cave of hundreds of children's toys and books as well as the Curiosity Corner which will have the most bewildering array of sports equipment, small furniture, mirrors, paintings, birdbaths, cushions, rugs, plant pots, chairs, walking sticks and there is bound to be an exercise bike (bought with misplaced enthusiasm).

This year the Village Fete will be held in the lovely gardens of Sotwell House, kindly hosted by Jenny and David Dobbin. The Fete works as a collaboration between groups in the village. Each activity is managed by a separate group or individual (the PCC run the teas, for example). The Community Association

(CA) collects the funds from each activity, then invites interested groups and societies to submit requests for grants from the money which has been raised.

We are always looking for volunteers to help with the set up before this event - one of the highpoints in our village calendar. You will find the schedule and entry forms for the Flower and Produce Show is inserted in the centre pages. Each year villagers of all ages and abilities compete in different classes to win the coveted first, second and third prizes for their effort. Hotly contested are the vegetable categories, the flowers, cakes, produce, craft, photography, creative writing and children's art.

Committee members will be collecting for contributions to the white elephant, book and bottle stalls during the week before the Fete. In a change of plans this year, we will all be collecting on Thursday 2 July between 6 and 8pm. So now is a good time to start thinking about what treasures you are planning to discard! We would like to make the book stall more manageable this year, so we would prefer donations of paperback fiction and children's books only please. **Please leave any donations outside your front door on 2 July before 6pm.**

Please remember that **we cannot accept any electrical goods to sell**, because of liability in case of accidents. All donations (especially toys) must be in good working order - they simply won't sell otherwise. Thank you!

Address: Sotwell House, Bell Lane OX10 0RW or what 3 words:

[///intend.courtyard.panoramic](http://intend.courtyard.panoramic)

Entrance: £2 adults; 50p under 12s; under 5s free. More information email bcscommunityassoc@gmail.com, or check the village website

<https://www.brightwellcumsotwell.co.uk/events/events/village-fete>.

Considerate street parking only or take the number 33/33A bus and walk down Bell Lane. Well-behaved dogs on a short lead are welcome (with poo bags).

Jumble Sale - 3 October 2026 - Pavilion, Mackney Lane

Following the success of last year's event, we are in the early stages of planning our annual jumble sale - full details will appear in the next Villager.

James Davys, Chairman & Alison Bloomfield

Reminder for KMTC subscriptions please

Subscriptions for all tennis and pickle ball members became due on 1 April; check on Tony Windsor's email reminders 31 March & 18 May for details.

Meet Jim Sanger, the man who forgot to retire...

How best to describe Jim Sanger's contributions to the village... Godfather to the Village Stores and Jubilee Pavilion, surely our most important new build projects of the century? Host of the village fete, keeping children and their



parents entertained for 30 years? Mowing czar for St James's churchyard, clearing the way for generations of mourners and congregations? Or more prosaically, auditor of Community Association accounts, Brightwell's travel agent for Mary Acton's amazing tours to Europe's cultural capitals, founder of the infamous Highballs tennis group...?

Jim doesn't help. He's too self-effacing to take credit for any of his achievements, let alone rank them. He's also good at diverting intrusive

enquiries. He simply asks his own questions back, so you forget the whole point of the interview. Interest in other people's lives is part of Jim's heritage. For 25 years his father Gerald Sanger was Executive Editor of British Movietone News, a global newsreel and a major source of national and international news on camera in pretelevision years. Jim might have inherited other family traits. His second cousin Fred Sanger won two Nobel Prizes for science after all. But it was his father's world of public affairs and news events that lured him when he graduated from Oxford in 1961.

Jim had a lucky break. His father's World War 1 colleague was Esmond Harmsworth, whose own father, Lord Rothermere, owned *The Daily Mail*. A first meeting in *The Crown and Cushion* pub in Chipping Norton led to an exciting job offer and an extraordinary proposition. "Esmond Harmsworth said *we'll send you to Harvard first*," says Jim.

With an MBA from Harvard Business School, and after completing his accountancy exams, Jim Sanger joined Associated Newspapers as Personal Assistant to the Group Chairman. He was told that Lord Rothermere's secretary had also just joined the firm after working in New York and Switzerland. Her name was Madeline, and the partnership (and later marriage, with children Christopher and Katherine) is going strong after 57 years.

Jim's business career reflects his appetite for new challenges. From the media world he moved into investment management. Then he joined James

Burrough (distillers of Beefeater Gin since 1862) as its first director from outside the family. Finally he became finance and corporate development director at Peek plc, which designed road traffic control systems.

And so to Brightwell cum Sotwell. Peek plc was based in Abingdon, too long a commute from Jim and Madeline's home in World's End, Chelsea. They looked at two houses in South Oxfordshire and chose Moreton House, now familiar to anyone attending the village fete. "It has a wonderful garden and a tennis court," says Madeline. "We just loved it."

Before the Sangers moved to Brightwell in 1990, the venue for the Community Association fete each year was Sotwell House, the beautiful, moated home of Jenny and David Dobbin. Mutual friends brought the Dobbins and Sangers together, and a happy arrangement for hosting the fete on alternate years was agreed. So every other July for more than three decades, Jim donned his bushman's hat to play Master of Ceremonies at Moreton House fete, while Madeline managed the White Elephant marquee.

After retirement in 1997, Jim continued a long association with the Hurlingham Club in London as chairman, and served as governor of Benenden School, Shrewsbury School, and Wellington College. He also turned his attention to village affairs. Jim's way is, and always was, simple: spot a need, propose a solution, and make it work. St James's Churchyard mowing project was typical. Attending Sunday morning services, Jim and Madeline noticed the grass was growing long and the churchyard ill kempt. There was no money for a gardener, so Jim organised a team of volunteers, applied for grants to buy a mower and strimmer, arranged maintenance, and provided fuel and instructions to keep the system working well.

St James's churchyard volunteer mowing began in 1995 (with many of the original team still under harness today). But Jim was moving onto bigger things. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a number of buildings in the village (including the Red Lion pub) were seriously damaged by fire. On Christmas Day 1997, the old wooden pavilion that had stood at the end of the recreation ground since the war burnt to the ground. It was a devastating loss to the village, particularly to the sports teams that used the Rec, and the Scouts and other groups that regularly met in the pavilion and used its storage.

Jim played a major role in sorting out legacy, contractual and lease issues with the groups involved and headed a mammoth fundraising campaign with grant awarding bodies and villagers. After four years, a new robust and secure Jubilee Pavilion was completed, in time to celebrate the Queen's Golden

Jubilee in 2002. “At least we had a site to build the Pavilion,” Jim says, as we move on to the next major project, the Village Stores. Not long after losing its pavilion, the community faced an even bigger blow. In 2002 the last shop and Post Office closed, and there were no premises to replace it. Today’s Village Stores was made possible through an extraordinary combination of villager talents, dogged commitment, and generosity; Jim’s leadership in negotiating complex legal matters, planning applications, and building works was indispensable to the team. (Jim highlights villager Phil Jones’s contribution as an example of expertise, resolving significant building issues with both the Village Stores and the Jubilee Pavilion.)

Through seven long years of hope and heartache, the village was never allowed to believe that the project could fail. And it didn’t.

Jim’s achievements are testimony to his practical skills, but he is also a lifelong poetry lover. In his reminder emails each year, he rallies volunteer mowers with a different verse to herald the grass growing season. Here’s one:

*Indeed, indeed Repentance oft before
I swore - but was I sober when I swore?
And then and then came Spring and rose-in-hand
My thread bare Penitence apieces tore*

“And then and then came Spring! Edward FitzGerald always had a verse for it, didn’t he?” Jim continued in this thoughtful message from 2022. “So much better than the better known ‘Spring is sprung, the grass is riz ...’”

Hugh Roderick

Brightwell Supporting Refugees

Just over ten years ago Helen Connor and Ann Linton organised a group of trustees to form Brightwell Supporting Refugees – a charity that has been generously supported by the village. It was originally formed in response to the civil war in Syria to help educate refugee children in Jordan, but its remit widened to help refugee children in Uganda and families from Ukraine. As joint chairs of BSR Helen and Ann have been passionate advocates for the charity and have used their complimentary skills to create this highly successful village organisation. But after ten years they have decided to stand down, along with Anthony Finn, our brilliant treasurer and Sarah Metcalf, one of the original trustees. We are extremely grateful for the love and dedication they have given this cause.

But BSR lives on. We are very pleased to announce that Luke Clancy has agreed to become treasurer for the charity, and Alison Leigh and I will co-chair BSR. We will be continuing our commitment to funding refugee education and looking at new ways of supporting children fleeing conflict.

We will also continue BSR’s tradition of staging popular events from talks to films to jazz nights and other treats. After the success of our screening of *Mr Nobody Against Putin* last year, we decided to have a Chernobyl film night on the 40th anniversary of the world’s worst nuclear accident. On 1 May series director, Tom Cook, showed highlights from the National Geographic series, *Chernobyl: Inside the Meltdown*. We also screened the award-winning short film *Chernobyl: My Promised Land* – a masterpiece of storytelling with an unexpected twist at the end.

Coming up next on 22 May: River by Robert Seatter – a collection of poems and music inspired by the River Thames from source to the sea.

David Dugan, Co-Chair BSR

St Agatha’s and St James’

I have just been clearing out some paperwork and found a letter, dated 2003, from the mother of the boys we had to stay under the Medicine and Chernobyl scheme. It read “Life is hard, we have had no wages from our collective farm for 6 months, we live off what we grow in our ground.” Things are still difficult, the current world situation is making life hard for many everywhere in the world. Here we are lucky that those most in need are often able to get help with food and other items from local Food Banks and similar organisations. There is a collection box for our local food bank in the porch at St Agatha’s. They do a wonderful job locally but donations are always needed, so please help if you can.

The Spring Fair on 9 May raised £4251. A magnificent village achievement. Huge thanks to all those who donated, volunteered and attended the fair, helping us raise critical funds to support the running costs of the churches.

As you read this *Villager*, the May half-term holiday is over, and the summer months stretch ahead, hopefully with the right mix of weather to keep everyone happy. Enough rain for the farmers and enough sunshine and warm weather too. You will read below the news about the appointment of a new Team Vicar, and we are really looking forward to Father Andreas Wenzel joining the Team. In the meantime the pattern of services for June will remain

as they usually are, with the addition of a Summer Concert in St Agatha's at 6pm on 7 June. We anticipate another great evening of singing, poetry and laughter, suitable for all ages.

There are some changes to the services in July. On 4 July, Sarah Farrington, who has been training for ministry with the team, is to be ordained. The really good news is that Sarah will be serving her curacy with the Wallingford Team, so to welcome her to this position there will be a special Team Service 10am at St Mary's, Wallingford on 5 July. Our family service will then move to 12 July and this will be our Pet Service at 9.30am outside at St Agatha's, weather permitting. Do remember, if you are bringing small creatures, that they need to be safely caged!

On 19 July the villages will have a joint service at 11am in St Mary Magdalene's, Crowmarsh to celebrate their Patronal Festival, and the following week Crowmarsh will join us at 9.30am for a service at St James' to celebrate that church's Patronal Festival. Our Family Service on 2 August will be Picnic Praise, another outdoor service. As always all details and times of services in the village or across the Team are on the notice board at Sotwell, on the church gate and the board at 2 Fairthorne Memorial, next to the Village Hall. We look forward to seeing you at some of our services, or at our Community Coffee morning 10am-12 noon every Wednesday morning.

Rev Janice

New Team Vicar - Rev Andreas Wenzel

We are very pleased to announce that with effect from September a new Vicar will take up position within the Wallingford team with special responsibility for our village (and Crowmarsh Gifford). He is Andreas Wenzel, who originally hails from Germany where he taught. He then came to England and was ordained in Leeds in 2015. He has lately been the Vice-Principal & Director of Pastoral Studies at St Stephen's theological college in Oxford. Some may already have seen Andreas with his two children at the St Agatha's Spring Fair recently.

We are excited to yet again have a team vicar with direct ties to this village, wonderful though Sarah Nesbitt and incredible though Janice Chilton have both been during the so-called 'interregnum'. We continue to owe them both a great debt. We are very much looking forward to having Andreas with us and working with him and to having many of you join us in St Agatha's and St James's to welcome him in late summer.

Margot Shawyer and Michael Drury - Churchwardens

Summer Concert 2026

The 2026 Summer concert will be held at St Agatha's on 7 June at 6pm. It's a lineup of collaborations this year as we welcome new performers as well as enjoying the return of seasoned favourites. Our performers range in age from primary school children to octogenarians and we have some extraordinarily beautiful pieces that will delight and amaze - who would have thought that jazz saxophone and renaissance church music would work so deliciously together!

The first Summer Concert was held in 2009 to raise funds for a church extension with a loo. Initially planned as a one-off, it was so popular that it became an annual event. It was soon clear that "Brightwell's got talent" – not to mention the X factor. Especially musical talent; a new instrument was introduced each year – including guitar, flute, harp and mouth organ, and also including a much expanded and high-quality Village Choir. Since the building was completed, the funds have been divided between the church and Brightwell Supporting Refugees.

After producing 12 concerts Alec McGivan is standing down due to ill health, but he is delighted that the show will go on with Maddy Lowe at the helm. And Maddy would love to see as many people there as possible "to smooth the transition from Alec's capable hands".

Tickets are available through the village shop or via zeffy QR code on posters around the village.

Alec McGivan and Madeleine Lowe

Brightwell Primary School

Another term has raced by here at Brightwell, and we are fast approaching the end of the school year. It has certainly been a busy term, filled with enthusiasm, creativity and community spirit. Alongside the usual learning, there has been a real focus on giving pupils' opportunities to show us what else they can do, as well as strengthening our links with the local community.

Recently, our Year 5 pupils took part in an exciting enterprise challenge. They were each given a £5 start-up budget and tasked with designing a business, creating their products, and selling them to the rest of the school. The children embraced the challenge with enthusiasm—developing creative ideas, learning valuable teamwork and financial skills, and thoroughly enjoying the experience. Impressively, they also raised £170 for charity in the process.

Hot on the heels of that success, one of our eco-captains from the school council took it upon herself to organise an after-school cake and drinks sale. Her aim was to raise funds for the school gardening club so that we can continue the excellent work started last year in revitalising our flower and vegetable patches. Thanks to her initiative, and the support of the community, a whole host of new plants are now in place—ready for harvesting before the summer.

The school council have also been playing an important role beyond the school gates. They were delighted to take part in helping to choose a new Team Vicar for Brightwell. The children devised a range of thoughtful and insightful questions, and gave the candidates a real grilling! They worked brilliantly together as a team, and their feedback formed a vital part of the final decision-making process.

And if that wasn't enough, we have also been proud to support our friends at the Village Hall by designing posters for their fundraising banners and taking part in pupil voice interviews. We have even lent a helping hand in the churchyard, assisting with cob wall repairs—certainly a memorable way to learn new skills and give back to the community.

We are incredibly proud of all that our pupils have achieved and look forward to finishing the school year on a high.

Get Involved – Join Our Governing Body - Brightwell School is currently looking for new members to join its governing body. This is a rewarding opportunity to support the school, contribute to its continued success, and play a key role in shaping its future. If you are interested, or would like to find out more about what the role involves, please do get in touch with the school—we would be delighted to hear from you.

Sue Potts | Headteacher

Brightwell Preschool

Whilst we were out walking in the bushes next to the tennis courts recently, a child declared "We are lost far away!" A reminder that excitement, awe and wonder can be had in the smallest of green spaces for our little ones.

The children have continued to amaze us with their knowledge and confidence exploring nature around the village. The connection between children's confidence to explore nature and their general wellbeing is always apparent to us. We see a direct correlation between growing confidence in the natural environment and progress in children's speech, language, physical strength, social and emotional development. We explore the village, but the school field

can be just as beneficial for some and our own little garden. All can provide amazing moments if the experience is new. We have enjoyed sharing our adventures around the village with you in our Red Box Art Gallery display during May; we hope you have enjoyed it too.

Our garden project has gained momentum thanks to free digger hire from AGM Construction and Groundworks Ltd, time and skills offered by the staff and their families, volunteers and the continued commitment from Kit who is forever driving the project forward. Now that the area is clear we need all hands on deck to finish the base of the garden before we can make it pretty. A "Love Your Preschool" day is planned for **28 June**, open to all families and members of the village to help to do gardening, painting and the odd job here and there. Money is short for everyone, but if you could spare some of your free time to support the littlest ones in our village it would make a huge difference. Children are welcome of course, after all it is their preschool or future preschool.

We also have our annual *Welly Walk* and family fun day on **6 June** from 11.30am in Kings Orchard park, all are welcome. You couldn't ask for a better start to the Brightfest festivities than to begin with a short wander around our beautiful village with other families, followed by fun activities and refreshments at the park.

This summer we have our own festivities to celebrate the achievements of those moving up to school this year and our own fun time during the summer terms. We are continually outside, with water, bubbles, sand, shady nooks to read books, and picnics in the shade. I don't think we will ever want to break up for the holidays...

Natasha Hillier, Manager

Brightwell Toddlers

Spring has brought some wonderful energy to our Toddler sessions and the children have enjoyed creating colourful Easter eggs, assembling and decorating boats and colouring in trees to celebrate Earth Day. We've enjoyed seeing friends and welcoming new families.

Thank you to all of the volunteers who keep the sessions running each week. We're looking for additional volunteers to join the team and help us out. If you would like to find out more or get more involved then please do talk to us on a Thursday morning or email us using the address below.

Our sessions run during term time at the Village Hall on Thursday mornings from 9.15–11.15am. The cost is £3.50 (cash) or £4 (online) per session. We

can be contacted at brightwelltoddlers@gmail.com or via our Facebook page @[brightwelltoddlers](https://www.facebook.com/brightwelltoddlers).

The Toddlers Team

Brightwell cum Sotwell WI

In April we began a new season of speakers and events for the Brightwell Branch. Bob Brewer gave an entertaining and lively talk on how he became a Film Extra, illustrated with many photos of well-known films and places where he provided a 'face in the crowd' or made an 'entrance'. Continuing the entertainment theme, at our May meeting Liz Woolley presented the history of the 'Ultimate Picture Palace' and early cinema in Oxford.

May is also the month for all WI branches to cast a final vote on this year's campaign topic to be adopted at the National Annual Meeting on 4 June. Community support and the education of women have always been the core messages of the WI. Two years ago, the NFWI introduced a digital 'Open Learning' system free to all members. It now covers a wide variety of topics from crafts, science, art, music to 'Well Being' sessions. A good reason to join.

Looking ahead, our program for the summer and autumn reads as follows:

9 June - our Garden Party which this year Jenny Pozzoni has very kindly offered to host at Coombe House, from 3 pm-5 pm

14 July - Jim Mac Leod will tell us about life as a 'Toastmaster' and 'Master of Ceremonies'

August - Summer Break - no meeting

8 September - a 'Fun and Games' evening.

Our meetings are held every second Tuesday in the month at 7.30 pm in the Village Hall. We are quite a friendly bunch, whether you would just like to pop in or join, you will be warmly welcomed. For any questions, please contact us on: brightwellcumstowellwi@gmail.com.

Karin Matthews

Save the Children

The Dog Show on 25 April was a brilliant success on a lovely sunny afternoon. A special thanks must go to our sponsors who were so generous in their support. Also to our team of wonderful 'dog show volunteers' which came together again and provide a very enjoyable afternoon for everyone, especially the very well-behaved dogs, there was no shortage of 'waggy tails'

and treats. This even extended to tea and cakes for the owners and supporters who were also very well behaved! So much so that we raised £1,148.00. (*Many thanks to Sue Butt for the front cover pics*).

Our Annual Plant Sale on 9 May raised over £800 on the day, all from donated plants from our green fingered supporters who never cease to surprise us every year with what they grow and donate to us. We raised another £108.50 selling the rest of the plants at the Open Gardens on 17 May.

The above funds have gone straight to Save the Children to help continue the work in the UK and around the World to give a little hope for a better future in the chaotic times we are living in. We are so grateful to our supporters for making this possible.

Celia & the local Save the Children team

The Red Lion

We hope to see you on 6 June for a 'one off' tribute to Brightfest, here at the Red Lion. A much smaller version of the Brightfest we all know and love, but still with great music, drinks (outdoor bar) and food. Tea and cake at the front of the pub in aid of Save the Children. Five live bands in the Courtyard. Music begins at 3pm. DJ till midnight.

Please leave your dogs at home as we expect it to be very busy and space is limited. Children are very welcome but we kindly request that they are supervised at all times. Come and support our local pub. Let's make it special.

Other pub dates for the diary:

21 June – Red Lion Jazz Jam

27 June – Courtyard closed for private party

5 July – Live music from The Soul Seniors - they are going to be amazing so if you're about that night, come on down (as they normally play larger venues)

9 August -Live music from the Tub Thumpers

Corinne, Mouse and Ruby

Brightfest

This year Brightfest is smaller, but it matters more. The coffers need to be replenished after bad weather last year so Brightfest can return in full force in 2027. We are in urgent need of volunteers and fundraisers, and we are also offering sponsorship opportunities. Please contact us if you have time to help. info@brightfest.org.uk; [facebook.com/brightfestoxon](https://www.facebook.com/brightfestoxon).

BcS Environment Group

Work to keep the dominant species under control alongside the Swan Stream and in areas of the Swan Wood, as reported in the last copy of *The Villager*, has continued with selective cutting back. When we cleared the comfry it was very apparent how much it spread last year and kept the ground relatively barren under its extensive shade. Adopting the above approach has kept areas relatively clear of comfry and in time we hope that other, less vigorous, wildflowers will be able to become established. Indeed, we replanted an area of the woodland with a meadow/wildflower mix at the end of April. We will need to wait to see how it develops.

We have done some clearing in the Millennium Wood, mainly of hemlock. Fortunately it was not as prevalent as a few years ago when it was visible all over the wood and across many of the verges around the village. As the UK's most poisonous plant it is best removed (where safe to do so) before it goes to seed. It looks like a rather large cow parsley but the stem has various blotches or streaks of purple in addition to the green. All parts of the plant are highly poisonous (even when dried) and it should not be touched without wearing gloves and protective clothing. It should not be burnt as the smoke is also toxic. For further advice it is best to look on-line.

Weather

The rainfall recorded at Highlands Farm for March was 21.2 mm and for April 9.8 mm representing only 58% and 19% respectively of the averages for 1999 – 2012 at Highlands Farm. Although not as dry as this time last year, the rainfall is starting to reflect the general pattern of 2025 when we had a very wet winter followed by a very dry spring and summer. For comparison a total of 17.9mm of rain was recorded for March and April 2025 compared with 33 mm this year against an average of 88.3mm.

The Met Office records show that the rainfall was similarly reduced over most of southern England for March and April with some areas, particularly in the east, recording their driest April on record. The mean daily temperature was around 1deg C higher than the 1991 – 2020 long term average for both months.

Flows in the upper River Thames are generally classified as 'normal' in the Environment Agency records for mid-April. The groundwater level at Stonor Park is 'normal' while Farmoor reservoir at the end of March was 99% full which is above average for the time of year. Let us hope it stays that way

although, if we do follow last year's rainfall pattern, we need to be prepared for restrictions later in the summer.

Steve Capel-Davies

Swan Allotments.

We expressed relief in March that a wet winter had replenished reservoir and groundwater levels, reducing the risk of a summer hosepipe ban. However, April arrived with bright sunshine, a chill drying wind, and just a fifth of the average monthly rainfall. Hence it was a case of watering cans instead of April showers! Also, with clear skies came cold nights and a touch of frost affecting unprotected plants.

Water, and the increasing cost of providing it to the allotments was an issue raised at the Allotment Club AGM in March. To help meet this cost, it was decided to raise annual rents from £15 to £20.

Despite the vagaries and unpredictability of the weather, allotmenters have stayed busy. Newly acquired plots have been cleared and planted, while on the more established ground, seed is poking through, young plants are coming on, bean sticks are up, and perennial crops are in flower. Weeding of course – continues unabated.

Villagers might have noticed that additional fencing has been added to the Mackney Lane boundary, thanks to Paul Copley and a very willing band of volunteers.

Phil Skipp

Book Review

My favourite childhood book was "Hairy McClary from Donaldson's Dairy" by Linley Dodd. It's about a group of dogs that all have fantastic names that rhyme. The story is about their adventures in the park and how they get scared away by a tomcat called Scarface Claw.

Reading about the adventures that Hairy McClary went on, encouraged me to go on adventures with my friends, to try things out, to do different things, and to build a good friendship group around me. The book encouraged me to say yes to new things and to keep opening all doors. This is what influenced me to join a rowing team and to keep training hard, which ultimately led to me becoming a Paralympic champion.

So, say yes to everything and keep going on adventures. You never know what you'll come across and what you might achieve!

Frankie Allen MBE talking to Alexandra de Yong

Water Water everywhere

Over recent months, I have been investigating the causes of flooding within the village and have identified a number of issues affecting the drainage system, particularly around West End and Brightwell Street.

Several of the underground culverts that carry streams beneath the roads appear to be partially obstructed. Many of these brick-built structures are believed to date back to the 1890s and are now beginning to collapse internally restricting water flow. As a result, during periods of heavy rain, water backs up and re-emerges onto the roads as it attempts to bypass the underground blockages. In addition, many surface water drains throughout the village are either blocked or have partially collapsed. Drain clearance by the council has been infrequent, with some drains reportedly not cleaned for more than three years prior to the recent Summer 2025 works. Unfortunately, the clearance took place without prior notice to residents, meaning some drains remained obstructed by parked vehicles and inaccessible for cleaning. The blocked drainage causes water to run down Church Lane, where it regularly pools near the War Memorial and across West End. During winter, this can freeze and create dangerous conditions for pedestrians.

My wife Andrea and I have been working to engage with South Oxfordshire District Council to address the root causes of these issues. We are pleased that our councillor James Barlow, has agreed to meet with us later this month so we can highlight the areas of concern and discuss potential long-term solutions for the village.

Steve Colam

Update from Olly Glover MP, May 2026

I challenged Keir Starmer on social and affordable housing, as new developments in the constituency continue to price out local people and young first-time buyers; and brought the concerns of local businesses about rates, soaring energy costs and changes to employment legislation to the Treasury minister. I represented the Wantage-based charity SUDEP Action in the debate on sudden and unexpected death in epilepsy (SUDEP) prevention. The minister responded by promising to meet with me, and I look forward to discussing the next steps the Government needs to take.

This month, my hardworking team and I passed the milestone of 15,000 individual cases handled since I was elected. As always, if there is anything you feel I can help with, please do not hesitate to contact me and my team at olly.glover.mp@parliament.uk or leave a voice message on 0207 219 7657.

VILLAGE DIARY

June

1	Village Stores AGM	VH	8pm
2	Village Lunch Club	VH	12.15
6	Preschool's.Welly walk in Kings Orchard		11.30
6	Brightfest at the Red Lion	RL	11-7
7	Summer concert	St Ag	6pm
9	WI Garden party at Jennie Pozzoni's		3-5
13	Charity auction	VH	7pm
21	Jazz Jam	RL	6pm
28	'Love your Preschool' work party day	PS	10am

July

4	Village Fete at Sotwell House		2-4
5	Live music from The Soul Seniors	RL	6pm
12	Pet service outside St Agatha's	St Ag	9.30am
14	WI talk by Jim MacLoed on life as a Toastmaster and Master of Ceremonies	VH	7.30pm
18	South Oxon Choir – part of Festival of Music - St Mary's Cholsey (www.southoxonchoir.com)		7.30pm
26	St James' Patronal Festival service	St J	9.30am

Advance Notice

2 August	Picnic Praise outdoor service
9 August	Live music from The Tub Thumpers, Red Lion
3 October	Community Association Jumble Sale, Pavillion

Refuse Collection (Food waste each week)

Grey bins	Thursdays 4 & 18 June
	Thursdays 2, 16 & 30 July
Green (& brown) bins	Thursdays 11 & 25 June
	Thursdays 9 & 23 July

Village website

For more information about Brightwell-cum-Sotwell visit the village website: www.brightwellcumshotwell.co.uk.