**The Goring Heath Annual Parish Meeting was held at Goring Heath Parish Hall**

**on Tuesday April 11th 2023 at 8.00pm.**

1. **Apologies** for Absence were received from Nick Elsome, Mr Mike Ward, Mrs Vicky Jordan.
2. **The Minutes** of the previous meeting Thursday 12th April 2022 were read and signed as correct.
3. **Chairman’s Report**. Councillor Liz Collas reported the following. “Welcome to the annual Parish meeting. It’s good to see so many familiar faces. Our small team on the council has been busy as usual, with familiar tasks and general upkeep of facilities, and a few new initiatives.

Over the past twelve months we have celebrated two anniversaries, one very close to home and one national one. The national one was, of course, the platinum anniversary of Queen Elizabeth, which we celebrated in style with a beacon and bonfire. It was a very special evening, and thanks to all the organisers for making it happen, and for Jon Hatt for letting us use his field. The other anniversary was very parochial. The doggedness of Martin Wise sitting as a Councillor at Goring Heath for forty years. I wonder how many other Parish Councils in the country can be such fun that a Councillor cannot bear to leave the action!

The pond at Cray’s Pond is owned and managed by the Parish, and we have been managing it on a low intervention policy for many years. This has allowed wildlife to enjoy the pond undisturbed, but it has meant that silt and plant material have built up in the pond. We commissioned a comprehensive survey of the pond last year, and following its recommendations, have decided to carry out some remedial action- mainly dredging and some tree works. We have applied for a grant to cover most of the costs and are awaiting the outcome. If you would like to know more about this project please talk to Martin afterwards.

Our other project which we hope, finally, to implement this year is the revamp of the playground in Whitchurch Hill. We are going to rebuild the climbing frame/ slide and introduce a basket swing. It will hopefully be ready for use later on this summer.

Financially, we remain in the black and have kept the precept at the same level as last year. The accounts can be viewed on our website. The balance will allow us to fund any payments on both the pond work and the playground which are not covered by grants.

The Council are a small part of the volunteer force which helps to look after and provide activities for the parish. I would like to thank the outgoing committee of the village fete for all their hard work over the years, and to thank Peter Burdon for taking this on. Please speak to him later if you are able to offer him any help.

I would also like to thank my fellow councillors for all their hard work, to Lucy Turner for running the Newsletter so efficiently for several years and to Louise Shearer for taking on this task as of March 2023. And, of course, none of this would happen without the tireless efforts of our clerk in keeping us all in order. So, a big thank you to Amanda. Before I hand over to the reports from the various clubs, a reminder that the coronation is fast approaching. We are running a competition for the best coronation themed front garden – crowns galore…or maybe some wildflowers in keeping with the ethos of the King. For more inspiration, please talk to Amanda.

1. **County Councillors Report. Cllr Kevin Bulmer.**
2. **District Councillors Report. Cllr Peter Dragonetti**
3. **Community Speed Watch Report.** Mr Ian Reynolds reported that since its establishment in 2022 the Crays Pond Goring Heath Community Speedwatch (CSW) Group has undertaken thirty-seven Speedwatch sessions in our local community. The Group was set up by the Parish Council in collaboration with Thames Valley Police It is organised by the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner, via the local police. They currently have seven approved sites. Volunteers are deployed at regular intervals to monitor speeding in our local roads—there are three sites in Whitchurch Hill and four in Crays Pond. Since August 2022, 312 offenders have been reported to TVP for speeding. 4 of these are repeat offenders and will be contacted by a home visit by Thames Valley Police.

The main problem site is outside St Johns Church on the B471. A motor bike was observed at 66mph. The Philosophy of the group is to be highly visible as a reminder to drive considerately rather than to ‘catch' speeders. Drivers will receive a letter from the police specifying location/speed and reminder to observe speed limits. Repeat offenders may get a visit. Before community teams are deployed to the roadside, operatives undergo a number of training sessions online. Risk assessments are completed by police to ensure safety at the roadside. Thames Valley Police approve each site. An online platform allows group-related activities to be self- regulated via an online calendar, and also provides vehicle make recognition training. DVLA pre- checks logged registration numbers for authenticity before automatically passing data on to the police for further processing. The group currently has seven volunteers and need more to continue successfully. If anyone in our community wishes to help make our rural roads safer, they are welcome to join the CSW Group. A CPGH CSW WhatsApp Group has been set up for trained operatives and we also have a Twitter account @crayspondcsw which is a useful tool for communicating with other CSW groups. When a volunteer first registers, they complete an online training course which is quite simple and straightforward—usually completed in one evening session. After completion there is further on-the- job training; new operatives will attend the first CSW session as an observer to ‘look and learn’. The group welcomes more volunteer’s participation to send out the signal that we are serious about road safety. Mr Reynolds outlined the group’s Road Safety Objectives Going Forward as follows:

•  Seek the introduction of fixed speed cameras in troublesome hot spots for speeding—Garton End and Goffs Hill in Crays Pond in particular.

•  Seek the introduction of a 20 MPH speed limit in all built up areas—within Whitchurch Hill for example.

•  Seek a reduction in the speed limit on the B471 through Whitchurch Hill from 40mph to 30mph.

•  Place Community Speedwatch signs at gates on the B4526 and B471.

1. **Whitchurch and Goring Heath History Society. Mrs Vicky Jordan reported as follows “**Last year saw the gradual increase in members returning to our meetings, though at a lower level than pre-pandemic. Stephen Barker addressed our AGM in February on the Soldiers, Saints and Sinners of the British Civil War while Marie-Louise Kerr made the first of two visits in March with her much appreciated presentation of Oxfordshire on Canvas. At April’s meeting Mark Davies gave a talk on Oxford Castle, especially its use as a Prison in the Eighteenth Century, where some of our local miscreants landed up, and the place where Mary Blandy, among many others, was hanged. On a happier note in May, Nick Brazil pointed us to the Literary and Artistic Footprints to be found in the Thames Valley. The outing in June was arranged by Martin Wise, who found us a delightful Downland tour, taking in Farnborough, with its association with John Betjeman and John Piper and also Fawley – in Jude the Obscure by Thomas Hardy youcould see Oxford from there, but the trees have now grown up. A sustaining pub lunch and a beautiful summer’s day made us very happy. The Autumn season started with the return of Marie-Louise Kerr, curator without museum, with the Romans of Oxfordshire. We discussed local excavations, and examined the artefacts which she had brought along. In October Derek Turner gave a well-documented history of milestones in Oxfordshire and explained the details, and dangers, of their conservation. November’s meeting was the best attended of the year. Alastair Lack spoke about the Oxford of Inspector Morse – a fictional detective, but the programmes showed an Oxford of the recent past, which many people related to. Lastly, after the Christmas break, the usual Members’ Evening was held in January in Whitchurch Village Hall. A small group heard about the Grotto house at Lower Basildon, and the Swing Riots of 1830. We debated the reasons why Whitchurch was not involved, though an ancestor of a resident was deported as a result. Through circulating the Oxfordshire Local History Association monthly newsletter we kept members informed of wider Oxfordshire events. We have answered enquiries from family historians as well as an author seeking information about the real tennis courts at Hardwick.

We have all been saddened by the death of Sue Matthews, in October last year. She was our chairman for many years, and I hope that we can make the Society flourish again, as she wished.”

**6. Whitchurch Hill Women’s Institute . Mrs Frances Strange reported as follows “**Whitchurch Hill WI currently have 27 members and meet on the third Tuesday of the month, here in the hall. 2022 saw a varied programme of activities and speakers as usual. In fulfilling our obligation to “educate and inform”, we covered topics such as, Life as a midwife, Gardening, Poetry, King Arthur, 3D Art, the Suffragette Movement and a floral demonstration. We had two speaker postponements – one because of the 40 degree heat and another because the roads were so flooded she couldn’t get to us, a third ended up at Whitchurch Village Hall instead of Goring Heath Parish Hall but found us eventually. Our WI has been actively fundraising throughout the year to support local charities aswell as the Association of Country Women around the World and we thank you forvisiting us at the Art Café and buying tea and cake at the fete. We continue to supply the Royal Berkshire Hospital with emergency toiletry bags for some of the 1000 emergency admissions a week.The WI National Resolution last year was to promote the initiative to support women and young girls with ADHD and AHD. Each year a new resolution is voted in but all those of past years are still active and helping to improve the lives of all women. Last summer we knitted bunting to adorn the village well for the Queen’s Jubilee and now our Knit and Natter group are busy knitting chains to decorate the railings opposite the hall in celebration of the King’s coronation – people driving through will see that there is no humbug here at Whitchurch Hill. We enjoyed a trip to Waterperry Gardens and another to the Textile Museum at Greenham Common where the amazing Country Wife Mural, which was created for the Festival of Britain, is housed for renovation work to be carried out. We also hosted a “Bring a Friend to WI” morning which resulted in some lovely new members and the year ended with our usual loud, but very enjoyable, Christmas lunch at the Highwayman at Exlade Street. In April we will be celebrating our 70 th year as Whitchurch Hill WI and look forward tothe next 70. New members and visitors are always welcome.”

**7. Scouts, Guides and Brownies. Mrs Doreen Pechey was not available to report this year.**

**8. The White Lion at Crays Pond. Mr Bill Pechey was not available to report this year.**

**9. The 143 Bus Service.** Mr Mike Ward sent in the following report. Our timetable was revised in November 2022 so that it can be operated with just one bus,although the number of services has not changed and the most popular journeys running through the Goring Heath parish area had only minor timing changes. Unfortunately we

have still not seen a return to the passenger numbers we used to get before the pandemic, except for the 09.08 ‘express’ bus from Goring which runs direct between Goring and Cray’s Pond – this service has become something of a success and is regularly two-thirds or more full. We may be making a few changes from the end of May; we’d like to try attracting a few more passengers to the route by running a better service from Reading to Beale and Basildon Parks. However the response to our proposal from Beale Park has so far been silence, which is somewhat disappointing. If we do decide to make changes we will give plenty of notice and we certainly aim to make nothing more than minor changes to your most popular morning service to Reading and the lunchtime return. As always, we are hoping for some funding for our services from Oxfordshire County Council. They continue to show an interest in supporting our Goring to Wallingford service, which hopefully will include a contribution towards our overheads, thereby helping us to run services on our other routes. The current grant ended on March 31st and we are currently in the process of putting together a justification for continued support from April 1st 2023.

We are very thankful for the support we have received from Goring Heath Parish Council, and we really appreciate you increasing this to £200 a month from April. What we really want to see now is a similar increase in passenger numbers! Our regular driver for the whole six years Going Forward Buses has existed very sadly had to retire suddenly at the end of January due to ill health. He is very much missed both by the company and the passengers. It was touch and go as to how we would cover him at such short notice but we have a marvellous team of four volunteers who between them and our two part time drivers managed to keep everything going, without a single cancellation being necessary! The pressure has now eased somewhat as we have been able to recruit a new

driver for mornings, and a second driver covering some afternoons who also helps with minor maintenance of the buses. We are still on the lookout for more drivers, and it’s definitely time we had some lady drivers! You just need 'D1' on your licence to drive our 14 seater minibuses.

Do let us know if you have any questions or comments about our services - please send an email to littlebluebus@yahoo.com. We do appreciate your feedback.

Mike Ward

Managing Director Goring Forward Buses CIC

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**10. Whitchurch and Goring Heath Twinning Association.** A report was given to the meeting by Mrs Sarah Dragonetti on behalf of the society. She told us that a party of several members had been over to La Bouille and that this had been very enjoyable. Secondly, she reported that a party of 25 members from France would be returning the visit on the last weekend of April 2023, when a visit to Blenheim Palace and an evening reception of the Saturday night had been organised for them.

**12. The Parish Hall**

Mr Chris Whatmore, chair of the Parish Hall Management Committee and interim Hall Manager **gave the following report.** “This time last year when I was reporting on the hall, all was looking rosy as we returned to normal and the bookings were very much on the increase. Over the year we have unfortunately see this demand level off and in particular the parties over the last few months have tailed away.

However it is great news that Tots are starting up again next month, now on a Thursday as Wednesday mornings are one of two weekly sessions booked by another new regular Blue Lemon Dog Training. Another new hirer, since last summer, is Ridgeway Yoga who run a monthly session at our hall when their regular venue is not available.

Kinecroft Dance are continuing with their two dance classes a week and the WI, Scottish Dancing and History Society have held their usual sessions in the hall. This time last year parties had been happening most week-ends but this year since Christmas this has not been the case and the committee are considering how we can attract custom from further afield. In February we hosted another Mike Holland Quiz night, which was its usual great success. Not only was it a really excellent fun evening for the community but also a successful fund raiser for the hall. Thank you all that came and thank you Mike for another great show.

Despite booking levels finances are still in reasonable shape, thanks to grants applied for and received by the hall from SODC. These more than covered our expenses for the periods where we had no bookings income. However as we return to a new normal and with the bookings at their current level we will find it difficult this year to avoid drawing down on these grants for BAU expenses. We are currently reviewing our charges but to give an idea of the scale of the problem, if we are able to attract another party per month we would be balancing running expenses against income. So although not serious yet we need to address this and get back on course to breaking even.

The size of our hall and its well-presented condition are perhaps our differentiating selling points and what we judge attracts our hirers. The kind of place that breaks the stereotype village hall and is somewhere attractive and charming for people to host their event. We want to maintain this and it is for this reason that, as you can see, we have replaced the old curtains that were beginning to show their 25 years of use and now have new ones courtesy of some of the grant money received during covid. As previously mentioned last year we were considering equipping the hall with screen and audio system. This has not progressed yet owing to other priorities but is still being investigated. Our current thoughts are to not try to recreate a cinema experience in the hall but to provide a projector, screen and discreet audio system. We as a committee are very keen to keep the ambience and feel of the hall as it is currently so any installation would have to be sympathetic. However we do recognise the benefit an AV system would be to some existing and potential new users. To close, if you would like to make a booking please contact the hall through our email address: bookings@goringheathparishhall.uk

**13. The Fete. A report was given to the meeting by Councillor Peter Burdon.** Cllr Burdon agreed to take over the organisation of the fete in a moment of madness, he said he did not realise how much work it would be! He thanked again Theresa and The Elsomes for all their hard work over the years, and hoped that he would be able to repeat the success that they had so consistently achieved. He stated that he would be keeping true to the main objective of having some fun, making money was not important as all proceeds would be put back into the event or donated locally. It is a beautiful fete, “ a glimpse of England as it used to be”. He wishes to repeat everything that has been done before. Sadly, there will not be any ferret racing this year, but all the other favourite attractions had mostly agreed to attend. He was warmly thanked for his hard work to date.

**14. The meeting was then opened for questions.**

**The meeting finished at 9.30pm**