**The Goring Heath Annual Parish Meeting was held on Thursday April 15th 2021 7.30pm**

**Due to Covid Restrictions the meeting was held via Zoom.**

1. **Apologies** for Absence were received from Cllr Nick Elsome, Cllr Tarek Moghul .
2. **The Minutes** of the previous meeting Thursday 11th April 2019 were read and signed as correct. It was noted that there had not been a meeting in April 2020 due to the Pandemic.
3. **Chairman’s Report**. Cllr Chris Jessop reported on the previous year, dominated by Covid. He noted that although the Parish Council only have limited powers vs SODC and OCC, we still have considerable influence. He noted that valid arguments, persistence and pressure can often pay considerable dividends. GHPC continues to persist in our areas of focus – all to ensure we protect the wellbeing of our parishioners and the beauty/amenities of the community we live in. He found it truly remarkable, in these difficult times, the spirit within the community and the support available. The Goring Heath Volunteer Response Team has been formed to support vulnerable and older people during Covid. They have done absolutely sterling work: special thanks were noted to Chris and Sally Bergmann and Chris Uden, Sue Whitehead and all the volunteers. The effects of the Covid pandemic have not all been negative. It has been interesting to see increased use of the community by walkers and cyclists’; the reconnection with nature; less litter and traffic and speeding. Other key initiatives have been The Crays Pond speed reduction Campaign (Mr Fred Rutherford ) ; car park resurfacing with an SODC grant, (Cllr Peter Dragonetti ); Grass cutting and maintenance contract supervision, and the provision of bat boxes at Crays Pond (Cllr Martin Wise); Pond maintenance and bench overhaul ( Jessop family ) ; Crays Pond telephone box Library ( Mrs Beryl Rutherford) ; Whitchurch Hill telephone Box library ( Mrs Amanda Holland). GHPC has continued to support the bus service run by Going Forward, and is also fully supportive of the bimonthly newsletter delivered by volunteers to all parishioners. Our two playgrounds have had ongoing Health and Safety checks and maintenance and continue to be popular. GHPC has continued to rigorously review and scrutinise planning applications, and all our footpaths and Rights of Way have been monitored and maintained (Cllr Liz Collas). GHPC are also painfully aware of wider wellbeing responsibilities: the upkeep of the defibrillator at the Parish Hall for example, and trying to mitigate and monitor the excessive cycling speeds down the hill.

Financially, GHPC continue to control things very tightly. Cllr Jessop said “We budget carefully, debate any spend fully, always explore the opportunity for grants and ensure more than one quote for higher spend items. Our income last year was £31,000 primarily made up of the Precept of £26,000 and a grant of £5,000. Our spend was £26,000. At the end of the year we had £26,500 in the bank. We decided not to increase the Precept for the coming year, so will have income for the year of £26,000, exc. any grants.” He noted that more should be reported on speed throughout the Parish. Crays Pond, Goring Heath Road and the B471 main road through Whitchurch Hill are all areas of concern. Furthermore, the Bus shelters are in need of repair; Shirvells Hill path surface could be improved, and the facilities on the recreation ground are under constant review. As regards the Council itself, it currently has two vacancies. A long term councillor, Mr Nick Henry, sadly stood down recently due to moving out of the area. He noted that GHPC were hugely grateful for all the great work he did for us over many years. Finally, he noted some further special thanks: “To my fellow Councillors for their time and wisdom, and to Lucy who runs our newsletter and Facebook page. They are volunteers who give their time willingly for the community and who ask for nothing in return, and also to our long suffering Clerk, Amanda, for all her hard work keeping things running smoothly.”

**4. District Councillors Report.** Cllr Peter Dragonetti reported on a difficult year, where services have been curtailed or closed due to the pandemic. He reported on the consolidation of our two District Councils, South Oxfordshire and The Vale of the White Horse. Creating a single plan made for a dynamic and creative partnership regarding common policies. Development sites and Planning will stay local. Cllr Jessop thanked him for his hard work over the last year.

**5. Whitchurch and Goring Heath History Society.** Mrs Sue Matthews reported that the History Society had had a good year, with many excellent speakers. The society answers a variety of local history enquiries, and will be selling their range of books and publications at the fete as usual.

**6. Whitchurch Hill Women’s Institute .** Mrs Frances Le Strange reported that Whitchurch Hill WI’s last meeting in the hall was in March 2020. Only seven members attended as the rest were in isolation. She said:

“Once in lockdown we busied ourselves with spring cleaning and gardening and getting used to the novelty of not having to go anywhere. But it soon became apparent that we were in for more than a few weeks and the WI swung into action. As president I emailed our members offering help in any area that it was required. We telephoned ladies living alone and made sure that everyone had food, medication and company. One member was a first responder another shopped and delivered groceries and treats. Another lady made oh so many masks which could be collected from her doorstep. Items were delivered in a “knock down ginger” manner, ringing the doorbell and hurrying back to the gate, waiting to have a chat when the door was answered and making sure that all was well. On our daily exercise walks we might see another member and news was passed on. We ran a Flower of the Month photograph competition, a Christmas photograph competition, we sent birthday cards, Christmas cards containing raffle tickets, we have a Jigsaw exchange, rose plants were delivered to four ladies having 80th birthdays, we have a Grow the Tallest Sunflower competition and a Word Search. I do not need to tell you that we made cakes and jam galore. I opened the door one day to see a Sourdough Starter standing on top on my wheeley bin! We collected and delivered food to the Wallingford Foodbank and toiletries to the RBH. We sewed, we knitted and then we discovered Zoom. We held our committee and monthly meetings on Zoom and managed to hold our AGM via email. The WI constitution has since been changed to accommodate any future emergency when we may be unable to meet for our AGM.

When the Rule of Six came into being we met in groups, one on the Whitchurch Hill Village Green and one on Whitchurch on Thames Cricket Green. The rest of our members chose not to mix at all and here we are back with the Rule of Six and making the same arrangements for this month. It will be a while yet before our members are comfortable about meeting in the hall and I continue to telephone our speakers each month and re-book them for next year. As soon as possible though we will be back doing what the WI do, in our village hall, albeit with social distancing and masks. To sum up, we have gone from 35 members to 25 this last year but not all due to Covid. Four have moved away, two have health issues, one cannot manage the day that we meet and three friends decided not to renew their membership, possibly because they see it as a health risk or they have just got used to not coming, they didn’t say. We were given three months free membership by the National Federation of Women’s Institutes and Whitchurch Hill WI reduced their subscription by £7 for this coming year. We look forward to welcoming new members at any time.”

**7. Scouts, Guides and Brownies.**

**Guides and Brownies**. Mrs Doreen Pechey reported that the Guides and Brownies have met at every opportunity during the Covid19 pandemic with a mixture of mostly online and some face to face meetings where allowed and under strict risk assessments.They have coped remarkably well with this change and have joined all meetings with great enthusiasm. Brownie zoom highlights are playing “Guess Who” wearing lots of props and with much laughter, making a cake in a mug, visiting an animal centre and a reptile centre, learning to draw characters, origami, learning decoupage, baking lemonade scones, having a virtual sleepover and a virtual camp, doing scavenger hunts and playing lots of games online, duck racing being a favourite. Guide zoom highlights include playing Easter bingo and winning lots of chocolate, doing a Harry Potter escape room, taking part in the Science Careers Challenge badge, visiting Mars on this challenge and learning how to land a planet rover, visiting an animal centre and taking part in an Oxfordshire wide virtual camp, celebrating international women's day, discussing gender stereotypes, making a pizza in a mug, toasting marshmallows and making s'mores and a virtual camp fire which was so out of sync it was hilarious. They are looking forward to seeing each other face to face when they return to the Scout hut in May. Mrs Pechey went on to ask for some new Brownie leaders. The Brownies came up with a job description personal specification as follows “A Brownie leader needs to be fun, caring, patient, kind, calm, helpful and on time.” If anyone is interested or wants to find out more please email goringheathguiding@gmail.com.

**Scouts.** Mrs Pechey reported that during the last year the Scouts have been using their initiative to keep their troop going. 10 scouts did their best and raised £1408.00 for their troop. To raise funds they came up with their own projects. One scout decided to improve the environment by picking up litter every-day in Woodcote, another scout delivered emergency parcels to those in need. One entrepreneurial scout set up an online candle business with profits going to the troop, others walked, kayaked, roller bladed, baked and held sales to raise funds. You can see all the fundraising initiatives on Go Fund Me, Scouts Do Their Best. At the beginning of the pandemic scouts made natural hand sanitiser to take home, it was very hard to source at the time.During the pandemic scouts have been meeting every week on Zoom. They have been talking to American scouts from Long Island and scouts from the Czech Republic discussing cultural differences and current issues. They have made their own videos and skits to educate others and provide entertainment. Activities ranged from metal work, constructing tipi tapis (hands free washing contraptions) to Morse code to Pilates. They have earned over 100 badges, which is quite incredible under the circumstances (as scout badges are not so easy to attain).She summed up her report with the hope that they are planning to return to face to face activities. They will be outdoors working towards the Expedition Challenge Badge and the Outdoor Challenge Badge, making the most of the fresh air!

**Cubs.** They’ve had a year of zoom, origami, knots, scavenger hunts, quizzes, photo contests and games.

**Beavers.** Mrs Pechey reported that theydidn’t do anything during the first lockdown; the parents agreed that six- to eight-year-olds would not take well to Zoom. In September they had half meeting F2F, and the other half on Zoom, and then swapped over. Beavers have been on evening hikes (in the dark!!!) with the other group learning how to read maps and use a compass. By this time, the Beavers were more used to Zoom, and the Leaders soon discovered what was needed – more cooking and crafts than usual worked well. From January it has been just Zooming, but looking forward to meeting outside after Easter.They had a Birds evening and made fat balls, and of course, made mug cakes. For Burns’ Night they made shortbread and learned The Highland Fling. St Patrick’s Day saw them earning map reading and learning an Irish Jig. They made boxes and cards for Mothering Sunday, and ended the term with an Easter Egg hunt.

**8. The White Lion at Crays Pond.** Mr Bill Pechey updated the meeting on the situation regarding The White Lion. South Oxfordshire District Council have instigated legal proceedings, and subsequently there have been negotiations from the Crays Pond Action Group with the owner with a view to what could happen next. He thanked SODC and GHPC for their support in this matter.

**9. The 143 Bus Service.** Mr Mike Ward reported as follows. “The past year has been a very strange experience for everyone, and for Going Forward Buses it’s been no exception! Two days after the initial lockdown at the end of March 2020 all our services were suspended. Unfortunately we didn’t really have the option of ‘working from home’ or running the bus using Zoom for the three months before we could start operating again on 6th July 2020! We’ve kept running ever since, with a Tuesday morning service through Whitchurch Hill. Crays Pond and Goring Heath to Reading and back. There has also been a Thursday morning (Market Day) service from Crays Pond to Henley. Numbers in general have been very low, until this week when the bus to Reading was almost full. It seems many of our former regular passengers are starting to venture out again, as they have had their jabs, the weather is improving and all the shops have reopened.Despite the lockdowns and lack of passenger numbers, key support given by Oxfordshire County Council for the concessionary pass journeys has enabled us to keep going. Up until the end of March they have been reimbursing us at the same rate as before the pandemic, as if passenger numbers have remained the same. We are very grateful for this support. However we knew that it could not continue for ever, and from April 1st the rate now depends on the mileage we operate compared to what we were operating before the pandemic. We are still trying to work out whether we will be able to cover our costs under this new arrangement, and have already looked at ways to increase our mileage in an attempt to make ends meet. One thing we are looking at is whether we could run a second bus providing a second journey to and from Reading on Tuesday mornings; this would help increase our mileage and also increase capacity on the route which could become a problem if even more people want to use the service. This all depends on being able to find drivers. If volunteers were available that would be ideal! In order to drive our 14 seater minibuses all you need is ‘D1’ on your licence – if you passed your test before January 1997 you should have ‘inherited’ it, so long as you’re under 70 years (after which you need to undertake a medical to retain it). The current draft timetable envisages a bus starting from Goring at 09.00 and finishing there at 14.20, although this could easily be shortened to just 10.00 to 13.20. If anyone is interested in finding out more, please do get in touch. Any ladies particularly welcome as so far we only have male drivers!As always, we are very grateful for the support Goring Heath Parish Council has continued to give us during this difficult period, and also the contributions we have received from Goring Heath Almshouses over the past year. ‘Every little helps’, as they say! We look forward to things returning to something a bit more like ‘normality’ over the next year, and hope to welcome you on board soon!

**10. Whitchurch and Goring Heath Twinning Association.** Mrs Vicki Jordan reported as follows. **“**On our visit to La Bouille in 2016, the year of the Brexit referendum, we assured our French twinners that whatever the outcome our friendship would continue. We indeed weathered that storm, continuing our visits, and we celebrated forty years of our connection. The pandemic however succeeded in putting a stop to our activities. Last May we were due to visit La Bouille and the only problem we saw was the moving of the traditional May Day bank holiday to May 8th, to celebrate VE Day. We had decided to stick to our original date when it became apparent that neither we nor the French could risk infecting each other! In the year that has passed we have kept up communication, but do not expect an exchange to take place, except possibly private visits. We received condolences on the death of Tanya Hawley, a founder member, and Pam Wilkinson. Two other active members have moved away, so it will be necessary to recruit new members if the Association is to survive. New officers will also be needed as the current holders will be retiring, and they will no doubt call on the Parish Council, which has been so supportive in the past.

**11. OWL (Our Woodcote Library).** Mrs Vicki Jordan reported as follows. “At the time of the last AGM of OWL in March last year there were about 25 volunteers who supported library staff during public opening, and ran Storytime and Book Club sessions. When the library reopens on April 13th 2021 there will be less than a dozen, and the library will be open for only two days a week. In between, there has been an on/off situation, with new Covid rules applying. Many volunteers felt unable to continue in light of the possible dangers to health. OWL funds the employment of a Saturday assistant, but this post has been vacant for a year. It is hoped that Oxfordshire County Council will shortly find a replacement so that the library can open on Saturdays again. Volunteering at the library is a pleasant task, and it is hoped to recruit new people to cover the extended hours as things return to normal. Please let everyone know how grateful we have been for the work of Amanda Holland and the Goring Heath Volunteers for their support during the last year. We’ve had to call on them more than once, and their efficiency and good humour was inspirational”.

**12. The Parish Hall and St Johns Church.** Mr Chris Whatmore reported that as the hall manager role has not been filled he will be taking bookings for the time being. There have been two attempts to re-open the hall, but restrictions and the virus have not allowed this to happen. He reported that two cycle events will hopefully be able to confirm their bookings for late May, and that regular hall users were hoping to come back as soon as practicable. Maintenance tasks continue to take priority, re-felting of the rear roof, a screen and audio system for films and meetings, were just two of the items that have been identified for action. He reported that the finances for the Hall were healthy and straightforward for this year and next.

**13.The Fete.** It was hoped that the Fete would be able to take place next year.

**14. The meeting was then opened for questions.** Mr Chris Bergmann asked a question about possibletree planting in the Parish, Cllr Wise observed that although we do not own much land suitable for more trees, it would be discussed at the next parish council meeting. Mr Bill Pechey asked a question about the new signage for speed limits at Crays Pond, and was referred to a map of the new scheme on the SODC website. Mrs Theresa Elsome raised the need for 20mph zones on Goring Heath Road and Hill Bottom, Cllr Dragonetti responded that this had been adopted as policy and that it was hoped that we would see the effects of this in the coming year. There being no more questions from the floor, Cllr Jessop thanked everyone for their contributions and the meeting was closed.

**The meeting finished at 9.30pm**