

The
Wootton
P A R I S H N E W S

WINTER EDITION

DECEMBER 2024



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Marston Vale Middle: 768 224

Wootton Lower: 768 239

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Non Emergency: 101 **Anti-Social Behaviour:** 276 037

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Wootton Community Nursery - Kayleigh: 07534 308 632

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Church Hall: 767 158

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Rev Michael Giles: 930 882

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Doctor's Surgeries

Wootton Vale: 762 500

Cranfield, High St: 750 234

Kempston, Cater St: 849 090

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Kempston, St John St: 851 323

NHS111: Online www.111.nhs.uk or **Freephone** 111

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Pharmacy: 765 166 **Post Office:** 768 368

Library: 766 061

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Alive and Singing Choir - Barbara: 07710 007 572

1st Wootton Rainbows - Naomi: 07722 876 252

1st Wootton Boys Brigade - Allan: 07866 924 934

1st Wootton Girls Brigade - Nicola: 07480 746 101

Acorn Quilters - Dorothy: 409 566

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Badminton Thursday - Freda: 270 638

Badminton Juniors - Colin: 270 283

Beavers Leader required call Mark: 07772 330 169

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Bowls Thursday - Rena: 768 012

Brennan School of Dance: 822 831

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Marston Vale Forest School: 07811 087 322

Royal British Legion Wootton Poppy Appeal

Organiser - Chris: 07865 051 453

Scouts - Jake: 07808 077 027

Stewartby Operatic Society - 01908 616213

Tang Soo Do - Pat: 07917 805 863

Wootton Golf Society - Pete: 07975 596 164

Women's Institute - Kath: 765 333

Wootton Rangers FC - Jeremy: 07446 770193

Wootton Blue Cross: 767 662



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The Wootton News can be read online at:
www.wootton-pc.gov.uk

If you have any comments or opinions on how to improve the Wootton News, please send them to Sue Edgar Playford (Clerk to the Council):

clerk@wootton-pc.gov.uk
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Editorial Notes:

Wootton News is overseen by an editorial sub group of the parish council. While every effort has been made to ensure that information in this newsletter is accurate, the parish council accept no responsibility for any errors or omissions. It should be noted that articles written by individuals do not necessarily represent the views of the council. Please send all articles to the Wootton News editor Gareth Lloyd at wootton_news@wootton-pc.gov.uk (please also send a copy to clerk@wootton-pc.gov.uk) by the copydate. Advertisements are usually half page (£30 for black and white, or colour). If you wish to advertise then please send your details to the editor. The advertisements are taken in good faith and we cannot accept any responsibility for bad service or workmanship received.

Chairman's Report *Gareth Lloyd*

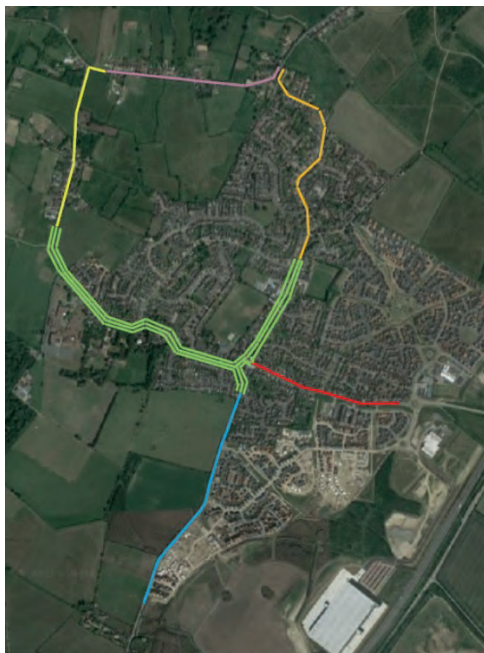


Gareth Lloyd

I start my report with sad news of the passing of Judith Cunningham. Judith was a parish councillor, a Borough Councillor and Bedford Borough Mayor. When I first became a parish councillor I had the privilege of working with Judith. She was an extremely hard-working and well respected councillor, who always put the needs of Wootton ahead of politics. My thoughts go out to her family.

More bad news for those drivers with a heavy right foot who like to speed through Wootton. The last of the average speed cameras should be installed in the coming weeks. The parish council has been pushing for these cameras since 2019 and the hope is that no one gets caught speeding and everyone adheres to the correct speed limits. Unfortunately, over 1,200 tickets have been issued between 2020 and 2023, with 300 tickets this year up to and including October.

They say bad news comes in threes – the third issue is the delay in producing and delivering this edition of the Wootton Newsletter. Unfortunately, my laptop decided to stop functioning and given this is my personal laptop (all councillors have their own laptops), there was a delay in getting it repaired.



Once completed, all colour sections in the diagram will be covered by average speed cameras.

Finally, I hope you like the new lights and I would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Clerk to the Council's Report *Sue Edgar Playford*



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07531 930 788

I would like to begin by thanking all who attended this year's Remembrance a Parade, which took place on Sunday 10th November. Special thanks go to all who were involved in the planning. We Will Remember Them.

By the time this newsletter is delivered, the annual Bob Lunniss Christmas lunch will have taken place. This is an event always well attended and looked forward to by so many in the village. Well done to all involved in putting that event together also.

Our Christmas tree is in place once more – we purchased new lights this year as the ones we had were fading. I hope it provides some cheer during the dark evenings and cold morning starts! I have also received some lovely comments in relation to the new Christmas street lighting scheme – I am glad they have been so well received.

As we approach the festive season, do please make use of the glass recycling facility at Church Road (Recreation Ground car park). I pass on 100% of this revenue to the Wootton

Poor's Land Charity. This charity continues to offer financial help to anyone within the civil parishes of Wootton and Stewartby who might be in need. Your actions really do help change lives and I suspect over the festive period, there will be more glass than usual.

I was saddened to learn recently of the passing of Judith Cunningham, who for a number of years was both a Parish Councillor and Borough Councillor for Wootton. Judith was also the last ceremonial Mayor of Bedford, before the introduction of the Elected Mayor. Judith formed part of the interview panel when I applied for the position of Clerk to the Council and was horrified at how cold my hands were when we shook hands as an introduction, asking if I was sure I was warm enough! Her kindness didn't stop there and I remember her fondly and with laughter – not least the time she regaled me with the story of her being asked to serve the tea when she first joined the Parish Council. She politely but firmly managed all expectations and stood firm – there was no tea served for some time she informed me! My thoughts are with her family, friends and loved ones at this time.

Merry Christmas and a Happy, Peaceful New Year to you all.

Outstanding Parish Council Issues & Projects

Item	Location	Deadline	Any other information
Average Speed Cameras	All major routes within the village	Ongoing	WPC ¹ has now been informed by BBC ² that the remaining cameras for Bedford Road, Church Road, Hall End Road and Keeley Lane will be installed imminently. All electrical works have been completed. https://wootton-pc.gov.uk/average-speed-cameras/
Changing Rooms renovations	Church Road	2024/5	WPC intends to demolish the old toilet block and renovate the changing rooms, providing toilets and a small kitchen. A dedicated storage area will provide space for the football teams, WPC and Wootton Country Players. Coloini & Lane Architecture Ltd have been appointed to assist with project management. Planning permission has been granted by BBC and WPC has finalised specifications with Coloini & Lane Architecture Ltd.
Covanta (now Encyclis) Incinerator	Stewartby parish	Ongoing	Visit the following links for fuller information: BACI ⁴ 's website: https://bedsagainstincinerator.wordpress.com/ ; BACI's Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/groups/residentsagainstcovanta/?ref=bookmarks ; WPC's website: https://wootton-pc.gov.uk/
Lecterns	Various sites within the village	Ongoing	To date, lecterns detailing historic information have been sited at: • Keeley End Pond (Bedford Road/Hollies Walk); • Lorraine Road Cemetery (in recognition of The Queen's Green Canopy Tree Planting Event which took place in January 2022); • Memorial Hall (Bedford Road); • The Pound (Bedford Road – opposite The Cock Inn PH). WPC had hoped to site a lectern in the general vicinity of The Gaol, adjacent to St. Mary's Churchyard on Church Road, but a licence from BBC proved too problematical and the hope is now to site the lectern within the Churchyard. This will require the permission of St. Mary's and the Diocese of St. Albans by way of a faculty
Local Plan 2040	Throughout the village	Ongoing	Public Hearings in relation to the examination of BBC's Local Plan 2040 have recently concluded and the Planning Inspectorate has raised concerns that it cannot be currently found to be sound. Fuller information can be found here: Local Plan 2040 Examination Bedford Borough Council
Lorraine Road Cemetery extension	Lorraine Road cemetery	Ongoing	WPC is ringfencing money annually and will approach the Crown Estate (adjoining landowners) to request it be permitted to purchase an area of land adjacent to the existing cemetery in order to extend it

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Neighbourhood Development Plan	The whole civil parish of Wootton	2024	The referendum saw a majority vote in favour of Bedford Borough Council using the Neighbourhood Plan for Wootton to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area. The plan will next be reviewed after the adoption of BBC's Local Plan 2040 – to ensure policies are up to date
Real Time Passenger Information (bus stops)	Four bus stop sites within the village	2024	The four new units have now been installed
Roads and Pavements	Throughout the village	Ongoing	The Roads and Pavements Safety Steering Group meets every other month and residents are welcome to attend these meetings. Minutes can be viewed via this link: https://wootton-pc.gov.uk/parish-council/minutes/ (A hard copy can be requested from the Clerk to the Council)
Village Entrance Sign	Keeley Lane	2024	Works to install the brick-built sign at the entrance to Wootton along Keeley Lane are now complete

Please note this is a brief overview of ongoing/proposed projects and the list is not exhaustive as changes can occur before the next newsletter edition goes to print. For fuller information on these or other projects, please contact the Clerk to the Council.

1. Wootton Parish Council 2. Bedford Borough Council 3. Bedfordshire Against Covanta Incinerator

Crystal Care Pet Grooming

by Louise Hughes



Tel: 01234 768303 lou@crystalcarepetgrooming.co.uk
 23 Fields Road, Wootton, Bedford MK43 9JJ
www.crystalcarepetgrooming.co.uk

All breeds of dog, cats and small pets catered and well cared for.



Email: sue.abood@outlook.com

Phone: 07968 792862

Before I start, I'd like to wish everyone a healthy, peaceful and blessed festive season to come. Whatever and however you celebrate, I wish you joy in all things.

Once again, another year seems to have flown past, and we approach the end of 2024. It really does seem like yesterday that we were celebrating the New Year and the start of 2024. From a personal point of view it has been a year of milestones as my eldest son turned 18 and left college to start higher education, and my youngest turned 16, took his GCSEs, left school and headed to college. I'm sure there are many others in the village who have had milestones and big events over the last year, both happy and sad. I hope that 2025 will be a year of good fortune for us all.

I know that for some however, winter, with the colder and wetter weather and the drawing in of the evenings can often create a feeling of loneliness and sadness. If you do find yourself feeling this way or struggling, please do reach out to someone. If you know someone may be struggling, please do reach in.

Back in October we were sad to learn that Judith Cunningham, a former Wootton Borough Councillor and the last ceremonial Mayor of Bedford had died. She was a Liberal Democrat Borough Councillor for Wootton from 1996 to 2011 and the final ceremonial Mayor Bedford in 2022. While I was never fortunate enough to meet Judith, many local people and colleagues of mine speak of her with much fondness. As

one of my colleagues, Cllr David Sawyer, said in a recent tribute at a full council meeting, "Judith had a real sense of community and commitment to residents, always responding with care and compassion to issues that were raised with her.... Judith also served on Wootton Parish Council, and the story goes that when she started, she was asked to make the tea. She said she was very happy to make the tea, but only as part of a rota, she didn't want to be the permanent tea lady. So the Parish Council met without tea for a full year. Judith may not have been an ardent feminist by today's standards, but she always stood up for equal rights." My thoughts remain with Judith's family and friends as they mourn her loss.

The Neighbourhood Chat Group held on Wednesday mornings has now been running for a year. It's remarkable how much it's grown from the original idea to the vibrant and valuable community get together that it is today. This is down to the dedication and care of Kath Pearce and her team of volunteers who run the session each week, baking amazing cakes and making the teas and coffees, and I'd like to express my thanks for all those who have helped to bring the community together in this way. If you haven't been able to pop along yet, please do go along. You'll be assured of a warm welcome and good conversation, and for a £1 donation be provided with a cuppa and cake. Sessions are on a Wednesday morning, 11am – 1pm at the Methodist Hub on Cause End Road.

The Neighbourhood Chat Group hasn't stopped there as they have started memory gym sessions once a month for those suffering from memory loss, and their carers. Another brainchild of Kath Pearce and supported by Kath's team of volunteers, the Methodist Church and Tibbs Dementia, the first session held in October was a huge success and I hope it continues to grow. These sessions are on the first Monday of the month, 2.30 – 4pm, at the Methodist hub on Cause End Road. Huge thanks to all involved in these valuable sessions.

It's also been lovely to see locals getting involved with the Bedfordshire Happy Hookers crochet group, both on social media and coming along to the monthly crochet sessions.

I'd like to thank all residents for their patience and resilience during the flooding at the end of September, which probably feels like some time ago now. With the A421 closed and many motorists coming through Wootton, hampered by the Cadent works on Bedford Road, it was an unhappy time for many on the road, and even more so for those who were dealing with the flooding directly in their own homes. This recent flooding was worse than that of January 2024 and caused serious disruption around the borough. Though a small way of trying to mitigate future issues, if you see any drains that are blocked, please do use the 'Report It' function on the council website to report drains that need clearing, or let me know and I'd be happy to do it for you.

I'd also like to thank all those who supported Chris Ashpole's poppy stall this year on Fields Road. I had a lovely afternoon helping to look after the stall in October and it was good to see it so busy with young and old alike coming along from near and far. Huge thanks to Chris as she really does a wonderful job and regularly raises one of the highest total donation amounts in Bedfordshire. With her merry band of volunteers, the stall really is a community asset.

I was really proud to attend the Remembrance parade and service on 10th November and lay a wreath as Borough Councillor. I am always heartened to see so many children involved in the event ensuring that the sacrifices of our injured and fallen are not forgotten. I also attended the Kempston Remembrance event in the afternoon as I did last year, laying a wreath as Borough Councillor and as a member of Kempston Rural Parish Council. It is always humbling to see so many organisations and communities come together for the act of remembrance. 'At the going down of the sun, and in the morning, we will remember them.'

Within the council it's been a busy few months with Full Council meeting, along with the Licensing Committee and Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education which I also sit on, and meeting with Universal. The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) that I sit on recently discussed the Denny Review, which you may have heard of. It is a community led engagement programme that started during the pandemic in July 2020 to understand what health inequalities were experienced in Bedfordshire, Luton, and Milton Keynes, and why. We spoke with Revd Lloyd Denny, the author of the report and members of the Bedford, Luton and Milton Keynes (BLMK) Integrated Care Board (the NHS board) to discuss what they have done to address the health inequalities found during the review. Four areas for action were highlighted – Language and Communication, Access, Representation, and Cultural Competency. The ICB have been asked to return to the HOSC in the Spring to update us on progress.

The HOSC also heard about the worrying decline in the number of children who are vaccinated against Measles, Mumps and Rubella. Children routinely have an MMR at about a year old and then another at 3yrs 4 months. In order for herd immunity to work, it's essential to have 95% coverage of two doses in the population. You may have seen in the press that there have been measles outbreaks in certain areas over the last year. In England, the coverage of children with two doses of the vaccine at age five has fallen to 83.9%. Coverage in Bedford Borough is slightly higher at 87.5% but take up of the vaccines has been declining of late. Coverage does vary across the borough though and between GP practices. If your child has not been vaccinated and you'd like to catch up on any missed vaccinations, please do contact the GP surgery. They will also be able to answer any concerns you may have.

Whilst on the subject of vaccinations, the council would like us to encourage anyone eligible for a flu or covid jab (or child's nasal spray) to take up the offer of vaccination if you have not done so already. Vaccination is one of the most effective ways to reduce illness and

protect vulnerable members of our community, young and old. You can check your eligibility on the NHS website and also make an appointment for a vaccination. If you can't get online, you can call 119. 119 is also available by text relay on 18001 119 and the NHS 119 BSL interpreter service at www.signvideo.co.uk/nhs119. There are also some pharmacies offering a walk in service. Children's vaccinations can be booked with the GP surgery.

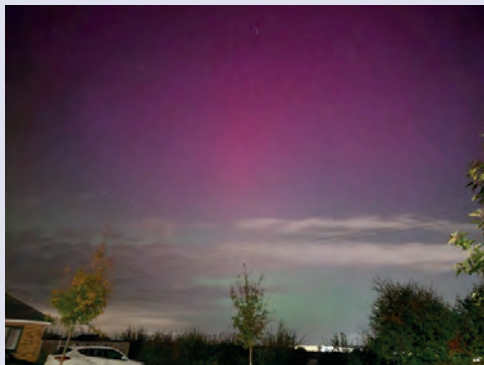
The HOSC also continues its work on looking into GP Access for all residents of the Borough, both from an appointment availability perspective, but also the digital access requirements, service availability and other barriers to access, with its next workshop taking place in early December when I have asked that the availability of blood tests also be discussed.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank those local residents who alerted me earlier in the year to the proposed charging for the Telecare service by the council for users without a social care plan. My colleagues and I successfully 'called in' the decision to start charging and the decision has now been withdrawn - for now. It took two months after the meeting where the call in was argued and referred back to the council's executive, which was coincidentally the same day the winter fuel allowance cut was announced, for the executive to withdraw the decision. This is a success which shows the power of local voices - so thank you.

On the Council we have also been pushing hard for a more responsible approach to council finances - with debt forecast to reach £153m in 2027. The interest-payments alone will be eye-watering - approximately £100,000 for every million pounds borrowed, which will come out of council finances meaning less money for vital services. This is on top of a smaller number of roads being resurfaced this year and a recent crisis in the emptying of overflowing dog-waste bins.

I have also been busy with casework for residents right across the ward along with answering residents' queries. Please do get in touch if I can help.

On a final lighter final note, I hope that some of you managed to capture a picture of the northern lights over Wootton back in October. I had never been able to catch them myself, so was very pleased to have caught them this time around.



If you'd like to get in touch, details of my councillor sessions are below along with my email address and phone number.

May I wish you all a happy and peaceful end to the year and a joyful New Year.

Councillor Surgeries and getting in touch

I continue to hold two Wootton Councillor Surgeries and two Kempston Rural Surgeries each month, in all weathers. All residents are welcome to any of the sessions.

- The sessions in Wootton are on the 1st Saturday of the month, 9.30 - 10.30am by the library, and 10.45 - 11.45am on the seating area between Ashpole Avenue and Folkes Road, opposite the lower school.
- Kempston Rural surgeries are on the 3rd Saturday of the month, 10 - 11am opposite the Cross Keys pub in Wood End and 11.15am - 12pm at Gibraltar Corner.

Updates will be shown on my Facebook page www.facebook.com/WoottonLibDems.

As always, if you can't attend a surgery or wish to contact me for any other reason, please feel free to get in touch by phone (07968 792862) or email - sue.abood@outlook.com.

Sundays



10am Morning Service

Join us on Sunday mornings!

You'll be sure of a warm welcome.

In person Children's groups available for ages 0-14. Tea and coffee served afterwards.

Online Services are live-streamed and available on our YouTube channel.



CHRISTMAS AT ST MARY'S

Sunday 15 December
4pm **Christingle**

Sunday 22 December
10am **Nativity**
6pm **Carols by Candlelight**

Christmas Eve
4pm **Family Carols**
9pm **Christmas Communion**

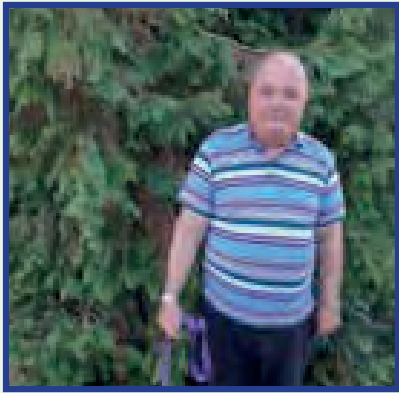
Christmas Day
10am **Family Service**

**Come and
join us!**



stmaryswootton.org.uk

st mary's
wootton



Email: john.wheeler@bedford.gov.uk

Phone: 07913 409 433

Facebook: search Cllr john wheeler

Christmas is just round the corner once more; it does not seem that long ago I was putting the decorations away and the year seems to have just flown past. On the theme of Christmas, thank you to the Parish Council for overseeing both the Christmas tree and Christmas lighting on the street light columns once again. There is a lot going on in the village this Christmas from club events to church services, so please look out for these on their relevant social pages. The annual Bob Lunniss Christmas lunch was once again a success and I would like to thank both Wootton Blue Cross and The Cross Keys at Wood End, whose generosity made this possible. I must also thank both schools for their musical contributions and of course the Bob Lunniss Trustees. This year (as in previous years), the Wootton Church and Poor's Land Charity will give out around 60 hampers to families in Wootton and Stewartby to help them out with the cost of Christmas. A significant amount of funding for this comes from recycling credits generated by the use of the bottle bank at the car park behind the village hall on Church Road. The Parish Council kindly donates all revenue raised to the charity, so please keep taking your glass to this facility.

On a different note, I would like to thank the Parish Council for organising this year's Remembrance Sunday parade which was very well attended as always. My thanks also go to Canon Peter Ackroyd, Steve Rowse, Gareth Lloyd, members of the Royal British Legion, plus the schools, clubs and individuals who helped on the day.

Turning to Bedford Borough Council Highways matters, this year's projects (end of March 2025) are still going ahead, and we are now planning ahead for the 2025/2026 projects to improve pavements, roads and crossings around the village. Both the Parish Council and I were made aware of the poor state of the pavement adjacent to Tesco on Cause End Road and the borough Council's Highways team have marked a large area for resurfacing works. Prior to those works, a temporary repair has been scheduled. The Parish Council has also asked Highways to consider dropped kerbs on the Fields Road/Summerfield Drive junction, as it will make crossings safer in this area. I have met with the Highways team, and they are considering the possibility of installing a crossing in this area.

The Real Time Passenger Information Units have now been installed at the four bus shelters owned by the Parish Council. Two new shelters and RTPI units are still planned for Burgoyne Avenue. These are being funded either by developer funding or Bedford Borough Council.

The temporary bus stop near the Innovation Park will become a permanent stop and a dropped kerb to facilitate crossing is also planned – this is a popular stop.

We are still having issues with the management companies on both Berry Woods and Berryfields sites in trying to remedy a number of issues, however I am now having regular meetings with Remus Management Ltd) Berry Woods and I am

hopeful some issues at least, can be resolved. Some of you may have noticed areas in Berry Woods have been cleared and clearance works have started inside the woods. The bridge leading from the car park is still on a to-do list as is cutting the hedgerows along Cranfield Road.

On the issue of flooding, you may have noticed surveys being carried out on drains around the village. This is to locate the cause of some of the flooding issues, believed to be due to pipe blockages. I have yet to see the report(s) but am hopeful some issues can be rectified soon.

Turning to schools, Wootton Lower School has now joined the Chiltern Learning Academy Trust. As an academy, this will benefit the children and the village and the two-tier building works are well underway, remaining on schedule for the opening in September 2025. Wootton Upper School's two-tier plans have been finalised and work is scheduled to commence next year for completion by September 2026. The new synthetic pitch is up and running, I went and had a look a few weeks back, it is very impressive and a great asset to the school and village.

With my speakers hat on, I have had a busy few months attending various civic events representing Bedford Borough Council in the community and have attended a number of Remembrance/Armistice Day events, plus Lord Lieutenant and High Sheriff services and Cultural events in Bedfordshire. I also opened a new school at Wixams and participated in a steel signing ceremony at Bedford Academy with students for their new school extension - first time I have done graffiti! It is always so lovely to hear the positive comments made about Wootton.

Bedford Borough Issues

East West Rail (EWR) update

In the autumn budget (30th October 2024) the chancellor confirmed the Government's commitment to the East West Rail (EWR) project signalling their route will include

plans for a partial electrification of the route with hybrid battery electric trains. In response to the budget announcement EWR Co has announced that there will be a 10-week non-statutory public consultation that will begin on the 14th November 2024.

Dates and venues in and around Bedford Borough include:

- 30 November (12pm-5pm) – The Grand Hall, The Sixth Form, Bromham Road, Bedford
- 6 December (2pm-7pm) – Lidlington Village Hall, High Street, Lidlington
- 9 December (2pm-7pm) – Bedford Swan Hotel and Thermal Spa, The Embankment, Bedford
- 11 December (2pm-7pm) – Wilden Village Hall, High Street, Wilden
- 13 December (2pm-7pm) – Stuart Memorial Hall, Church Street, Tempsford
- 7 January (2pm-7pm) – St Neots Town Football Club, Kester Way, St Neots
- 17 January (2pm-7pm) – The Summerlin Centre, Woburn Sands Station Road, Woburn Sands

Emergency Accommodation Units at Charis House

To address the urgent need for emergency accommodation, the Council put together an £18 million capital programme to expand its emergency housing stock to ensure support is always available for residents who need it.

On the 21st October 2024, the Mayor and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Regulatory Services officially opened 8 new emergency housing units at Charis House on Ashburnham Road. The units feature their own Kitchen, lounge area and bedroom space.

Town Update

The Council has made the decision to purchase the former Lloyds building to aid the Mayes Yard regeneration project.

The Mayes Yard project aims to turn this area into a vibrant, mixed-use space that combines residential, retail, hospitality, and cultural elements. Additionally, the purchase of Lloyds specifically facilitates the provision of a public square and can potentially provide other benefits such as increasing seating capacity for the Corn Exchange or potentially redeveloping the nearby library.

Previously the wider area was home to a number of anchor stores (Debenhams, Beals, M&S, Next) which vacated in the last few years, turning what was a prime shopping pitch into an area of large, unused empty shops that negatively impacted shopping and footfall.

The Council conducted an independent valuation of the property before purchase to ensure a fair price was paid – Council officers had negotiated the price down from its original asking price.

Council Invests in School Improvement

To address the previous decade or more of low educational attainment in our schools the Council agreed to bolster the School Improvement Team from 2024/2025 onwards with a significant £200,000 of investment every year.

The boost will aim to increase standards in early years from KS1 to KS5 and SATS.

Bedford Borough's SEND provision and Key Stage 2

A new report has highlighted, despite increasing demand and financial pressures, many positives in the Council's provision for students who have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

For example, Bedford Borough Council manages 2,080 EHCPs (Education, Health and Care Plans), there has been a 46% increase EHCPs over the past 4 years. Yet the Council finalised 90% of EHCP's within the 20-week timescale, significantly outperforming both regional and national averages.

Bedford Borough's Key Stage 2 (KS2) performance has historically been below the national average, with the borough being among the bottom five performing Local Authorities (LAs) for a decade.

To combat this the Education Improvement Governance Group (EIGG) was established in Autumn 2022 to address low attainment, with focus on reading, writing, and maths. The Council also produced a new long-term education strategy aimed at continuing improvements across all key stages over the next decade.

These have led to recent improvements which have moved Bedford out of the bottom five, ranking 135th out of 152.

Damp and Mould partnership

The Council is the lead partner in an innovative Health and Housing Partnership for 2024-2025 – collaborating with housing providers Grand Union, Peabody, and recently joined partner, BPHA Ltd.

This is a 3 year programme that is designed to establish housing as a fundamental component of health, focusing on critical issues like the impact of damp and mould. Key actions would include supporting housing association tenants with respiratory conditions who may be living with a cold or damp home. There is also an action called Project 'ADaM' (Asthma, damp and mould) looking at how we can join up data and insights to support improvements in housing association processes to tackle damp and mould and support vulnerable residents.

I wish you all a lovely Christmas and a Happy New Year, be it with family, friends or just putting your feet up by the fire.

Take care



Cllr. John Wheeler

Pension Credit and Winter Fuel Payment

As you may have seen in the media recently the importance of claiming Pension Credit has been heavily discussed due to changes in the criteria to claim Winter Fuel Payment. We want to highlight what pension credit is and why it is important to claim when entitled to do so.

Pension credit is a means-tested benefit for people over state retirement age and is designed to provide a minimum level income in retirement. Some people may be in receipt state pension, a personal pension or occupational pension and they may not qualify for Pension Credit, but unless they check their entitlement they will not know for certain if they would qualify for Pension Credit. Following the cost-of-living crisis it is even more important for those on a low income to maximise the income that they are entitled to and for pensioners this often means claiming Pension Credit.

According to Gov.uk, it is estimated that as many as 850,000 people that are eligible for Pension Credit are not claiming it. The reasons for this include that people are unaware that they are entitled or check their entitlement and deem that as they may be on the cusp of being entitled, they will only receive a small amount. We are, therefore, encouraging people to check their entitlement to address the first of these reasons. As for the second common reason for Pension Credit being unclaimed, we want to raise awareness of the additional support people may become entitled to as a result of claiming Pension Credit, even if their entitlement is only a few pounds per week.

Another benefit that some people above state retirement age may be eligible for is Attendance Allowance. Attendance Allowance is a benefit to help if you have a disability or health condition that makes it hard to look after yourself and need additional support. If you are in receipt of Attendance

Allowance, then the amount of Pension Credit that you receive may be increased.

So going back to the opening sentence of this article and the WINTER FUEL PAYMENT, this is now a prodigious reason for people to check their entitlement and claim Pension Credit sooner rather than later. Winter Fuel Payment will be dependent on people being in receipt of certain benefits and for people above state retirement age this is Pension Credit. If you are in receipt of pension credit then you will receive the Winter Fuel Payment, however, you must act quickly. The qualifying week for Winter Fuel Payment is 16th – 22nd September, meaning that you must be eligible for Pension Credit during this period. If you apply for Pension Credit after this period, then you will need to ensure that you ask for your claim to be backdated. This can be backdated for up to 3 months, meaning that you have until the 21st December 2024 to make a claim for Pension Credit if you want to claim the Winter Fuel Payment this winter season.

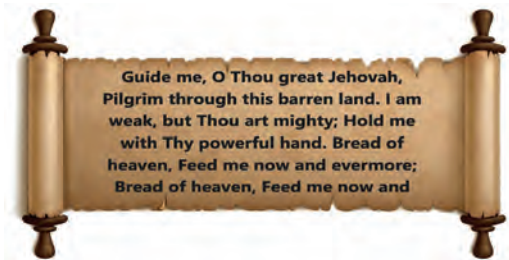
If you need to check your entitlement to pension credit or need any benefits advice, contact your local Citizens Advice. If you live in Bedford then you can contact us on 01234 867944 or visit our office at, 8 Harpur Centre, Bedford MK40 1TP. Our office opening hours are Monday –Thursday 9:30am – 4:00pm. You can also visit our website: www.bedfordcab.org.uk.

Alternatively, if you would like to apply for Pension Credit you can visit <https://www.gov.uk/pension-credit/how-to-claim> or call 0800 99 1234

Go It Alone

The autumn term is a scary time for a lot of people. Many children are starting school for the first time, this can be a worrying time for them and their parents. Teenagers are venturing out into the big wide world, going off to college or university. Then there is that new job, am I up for the task? Will I be accepted? Whether you are just starting off alone or find yourself suddenly alone due to divorce or bereavement it is a very scary and sometimes a very sad time.

When I went to school in the sixties we had an assembly every day. I can remember singing this song:



At the time I didn't have a clue what it meant but throughout my life I've found myself repeating these words many times. The word Jehovah means God. He created this world and you and I. God wants us to love him, yes as Jehovah God but also as a loving father who can guide us through life. Life can be very scary and tough at times but you don't have to "Go it Alone" God has a plan for your life if you are 5 or 95!

God says to you from his word the bible:

For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. God promises to never leave you or forsake you, trust him today.

We are also here for you at Wootton Baptist Church, hopefully we can help you in times of need and share in your times of joy.

Linda Bowler

*On behalf of Wootton
Baptist Fellowship*

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3rd Sunday Evening

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Adventurers

school years 2- 4

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School years 5-9

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*For more information call Gary on
01234 315350*

A Winter's Tale - *By Colin Zardin*

The four ex-cons laughed to themselves. It had been less than ten years since the robbery at 88 Hatton Gardens had been carried out, over the four-day Easter weekend. It had been one of the biggest thefts of its kind in the history of the City of London.

The perpetrators of that heist had been arrested some six weeks after the robbery, and received prison sentences. However, the estimated value of the theft had been £14 million, and only about £4.3 million had been recovered.

And now, here they were, the four of them, inside the very same building, at the start of the four-day Christmas weekend.

But things were going to be very different for them, and they weren't going to get caught.

That previous theft had been hugely documented. Most of the coverage was almost affectionate - after all, no person had been hurt or threatened. It was not a private house that had been robbed, but commercial premises.

Many people had thought that much of the jewellery taken hadn't been legitimately acquired in the first place, so it was poetic justice if it was stolen from the people who had placed it in the vaults.

And the robbers themselves had been almost laughable, in the mistakes they had made. They had even been given affectionate nicknames by the public, like "Mr Ginger", "Mr Strong", and "the Old Man".

All of these factors had led to so much publicity about the robbery itself, the equipment used, which walls had to be breached, and which vaults had been broken into. It was like having a workshop manual detailing exactly how to do it again!

The difference was, these four were not going to become almost like family members to the public, who would laugh at their cheek, and their hilarious mistakes.

None of what they stole would ever be recovered, and the prospect of a life of undreamed-of luxury loomed ahead of them.

They had brought all the right equipment to

carry out the heist with them. Their actions had been planned with military precision. Several getaway vehicles were in place, at different locations.

Fences had found customers to move the jewellery on to as soon as the goods were out of Hatton Garden.

Absolutely every aspect of their activity had been meticulously covered. Nothing could go wrong.

And so, over that weekend, they worked tirelessly, and achieved all that they had planned.

They couldn't spend time assessing the value of their haul whilst they were still on site, but they knew it would be much bigger than the previous robbery. They were experienced enough, and had sufficient time, to ensure that they took all the highest value items, and all four were amazed at the amount of cash that was stashed away down there.

Some people would do anything to avoid paying tax to the Inland Revenue, or declaring their true wealth! How dishonest of them!

Their final task was to bring their haul up to the ground floor gallery. From there, they just had to bring the two vans round to the door, manoeuvre the wheelie bins out, and make their getaway.

Everything planned, everything done.

Except - they couldn't open the door. It was jammed, stuck fast.

Try as they might, they just could not get out of the building. Even when they drilled through the door, all they could see was - snow!

There must have been many feet of the white stuff, because even their power tools couldn't enable them to get out!

Well - how were they to know that, during that very weekend, and totally unplanned, London would suffer the heaviest snowfalls ever recorded in its history.

So they sat there, shivering, wondering which would come first.

The thaw, or the police.

Wootton Vale and Shortstown Surgeries



Surgery website:

Please check our Surgery website for all updates and practice information:
www.woottonvale.co.uk

Revised Practice Door Opening Times:

Please note that as from 4th November 2024 our practice doors will open at 08.15hrs and will close at 13.00hrs. They will then reopen at 14.00hrs and will close at 18.15hrs. Practice staff can be contacted during the hours of 08.00hrs until 18.30hrs by one of the following methods - System Connect Online Consultation (via our website) or telephone (01234 762500). Prescriptions can be dropped into the post boxes at the surgery when the doors are closed.

Patient Participation Group:

Are you interested in joining our Patient Participation Group? If you are please let our reception team know and we will be in touch with more information.

Appointments:

Please let our practice know if you are unable to attend your appointment so that we may be able to offer the appointment slot to another patient.

When you have made the appointment online, please ensure that you check at which surgery your appointment will take place.

Medication requests:

Please remember that we require 3 working days for repeat medication requests (excluding Bank Holidays)

Advanced Notice of Surgery closing dates for training:

Wednesday 20th November 2024

Wednesday 22nd January 2025

Wednesday 19th February 2025

Wednesday 19th March 2025

During this time, if you need medical help, please call 111 and if you need emergency assistance, please call 999. If you need to order your medication you can do this by using our online services.

If you run out of your medication and urgently need a small supply, you can contact 111 who will arrange for a supply to be sent to your pharmacy.

Protected Learning Time (PLT) is an opportunity for practice staff to address their own learning and professional development needs.



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GET IN TOUCH
If you would like to make an appointment to visit and view the building, contact our Booking Team:
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Email: bookings@wootton.cc
Website: www.wootton.cc

CONTACT US:
01235 810000
bookings@wootton.cc
www.wootton.cc

ABOUT OUR CENTRE
Very proud of our purpose built Community Centre, just over 5 years old, the Centre is a big part of the village and made by many different faith and ethnic community groups as well as private hire and social occasions.
The two spaces the hall are both great spaces in their own right, the main hall is a large airy open space, the other space directly from the kitchen is on the top level. Fully fitted, ground floor, and a working bar area for bar hire and the bar.

LOCATION
Wootton is a large village, southwest of Bedford, in the north of Bedfordshire.

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A1000, from A1 Junction 13

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Can I decorate the room?
Only free standing decorations can be used no blue tac or tape on walls.

Can I hire my own catering suppliers?
Yes, you may make your own arrangement for catering.
Can I serve alcohol?
Yes, you may hire a bar service by applying for a FENS with the local council or serve alcohol for free to your guests.

Is there a corkage fee?
We do not apply a corkage fee.

Do you have sound limiter?
The sound limiter is set at 95 decibels.

Do I need to take away my rubbish?
Yes, you will need to take away your rubbish after the event or pay the waste charge to use our bins on site.



Wootton Neighbourhood Chat Group started at The Hub, Methodist Church in Cause End Road, last December. The aim of the group was to reach out to residents in Wootton and offer conversation, friendship, homemade cakes, and hot drinks for a donation of a £1.

The Wootton Methodist Church has been so supportive of the group throughout the year. Wednesday mornings are busy, and we have had up to 47 people, young and the more mature joining us for coffee.

In addition to the coffee morning we have run messy play sessions, in the school holidays for families with children under the age of six.



In July we opened the Hub for a coffee morning with classic cars, Ferraris, and minis in the carpark. It was a fund raiser to thank the Methodist Church for supporting our group.

Over the summer we trained with Tibbs Dementia Trust so that we could meet the needs of people in Wootton with memory issues, through injury, stroke, or dementia. We opened the Memory Gym on the 7th of October, from 2.30-4.00pm. It provides a fun, social afternoon for people with memory loss and their carers. It was a great success; 35 people came in total - 10 lovely helpers and 25 people with memory loss and their carers. Everyone had a great time. The men's group worked tremendously well, thanks to Gary, Tony, and Simon.

Future dates for the Memory Gym:

Monday 6th January, Monday 3rd February, Monday 3rd March.

On the 19th of October we brought an 'Afternoon of Songs from Musicals'. It was a fantastic Saturday afternoon, an inclusive event, for the community to enjoy songs from the musicals at The Hub. A sell-out performance, we were lucky to have two very talented singers, Saul and Coren who gave their time to perform to a brilliant crowd. With singing along, some dancing and seeing everyone light up as they remembered each song, it was beautiful to see. We hope to have another performance in June 2025. The event raised £400 to be shared between The Methodist Church and Tibbs Dementia Trust.

Wednesday 1st January 2025

We will be open on New Years Day, from 11.00am.

If you would like some company, please bring some Christmas leftovers to share.



Forest of Marston Vale

Bringing Life Back to Woodlands: Forest of Marston Vale's Plan to Restore Holcot and Reynolds Woods (Part 1)

Woodlands require active management to truly thrive. While they can grow without intervention, only careful stewardship allows them to provide the myriad benefits that healthy woodlands offer.

A new chapter for Holcot and Reynolds Woods



After years without active management, the Forest of Marston Vale Trust are implementing a 10-year plan that aligns with UK Forestry Standards and has received approval from the Forestry Commission. Their goal is to enhance the resilience of these woodlands against pests, diseases, and climate change while promoting biodiversity. Located near Brogborough and Cranfield, Holcot and Reynolds Woods cover 97 hectares, including 30 hectares of ancient woodland, meadows, ponds, and open spaces.

Sharing sustainable practices

One of the Forest of Marston Vale Trust's main objectives is to showcase sustainable forestry practices. By sharing their methodologies and challenges, they hope to inspire other woodland owners. As of 2019, only 59% of woodlands in England were actively managed, leading to missed opportunities for economic benefits and increased biodiversity. Luke Quenby, Community Forester at the Forest of Marston Vale,

emphasises, "We're excited to restore this locally important woodland, showcasing management practices, increasing biodiversity, and providing training and recreation opportunities."

Funding the restoration

The Forest of Marston Vale Trust are thrilled to announce funding support for the first five years of this project from Rebel Restoration. This charity focuses on removing carbon from the atmosphere, enhancing natural ecosystems, and empowering local communities in the UK, making them an ideal partner for this initiative. Claire Jenkin, COO of Rebel Restoration, stated, "We are looking forward to seeing the biodiversity flourish as these valuable woodlands are restored."

The first phase: coppicing hazel

The restoration of Holcot and Reynolds Woods began in September 2024 with the traditional technique of coppicing hazel. This involves cutting trees to ground level, allowing them to regrow with multiple stems for sustainable harvesting every 7-8 years. The benefits of coppicing include:

- **Sustainable Raw Materials:** By providing local sources for canes, charcoal, and firewood, Forest of Marston Vale Trust will help reduce the carbon footprint of importing these materials.
- **Enhancing Biodiversity:** Opening the woodland allows light to filter through, creating diverse habitats that attract a variety of insects and birds.
- **Supporting the Local Economy:** Forest of Marston Vale Trust are collaborating with local businesses to promote traditional coppicing skills and rural employment.

Browsing challenges

To mitigate browsing from non-native deer, the Forest of Marston Vale Trust are conducting a trial: half of the coppiced area will be fenced, while the other half will use Trico, a cost-effective spray that deters browsing. The fencing will be temporary and moved as needed to protect new growth. After 2 or 3 years they will be able to decide which method is most effective or continue to use a mixture of both.

Essential tree surgery and thinning

Thw Forest of Marston Vale Trust are also conducting essential tree surgery to address unsafe trees affected by Ash Dieback disease (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*). This includes managing rideside ash trees (those next to tracks or areas of open space) to ensure safe access while preserving standing deadwood as habitat. They'll coppice ash trees before they succumb to the disease and replant with native broadleaf species to enhance diversity.

Thinning will also take place throughout the woodland, with up to 30% of the canopy being removed, allowing remaining trees to mature and increasing light to the woodland floor, thereby boosting biodiversity.

Revitalising ponds for wildlife

Ponds and surrounding areas will be cleared to improve their health, ensuring sufficient light and a varied vegetation mosaic to support diverse wildlife.

Training future woodland managers

Recognising a skills shortage in traditional woodland management, the Forest of Marston Vale Trust are partnering with The Nature Recovery Project to offer training opportunities. A trainee scheme will launch in early 2025, teaching traditional methods through our restoration project.

Throughout this initiative, the Forest of Marston Vale will host open days, guided walks, and volunteering opportunities to engage local communities. They'll keep everyone updated on their progress, and for any questions, please contact Luke Quenby at luke.quenby@marstonvale.org.

Find out more about the Forest of Marston Vale Trust at www.marstonvale.org

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A photograph showing a hand holding a small, yellow house model with a grey roof and blue windows. The model is positioned over a laptop keyboard. In the background, a laptop screen displays a property listing. A yellow diagonal swoosh graphic cuts across the lower right portion of the image.

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Dates for your Diary 2024/25

DECEMBER

11th	Planning & Environment Committee	7.00pm
11th	Full Council inc payments & precept	7.15pm

JANUARY

8th	Planning & Environment Committee	7.00pm
8th	Full Council inc precept sign off	7.15pm
15th	Roads & Pavements Safety Steering Group	7.00pm
29th	Planning & Environment Committee	7.00pm
29th	Finance & General Purposes Committee	7.15pm
29th	Leisure & Amenities Committee	7.30pm

FEBRUARY

12th	Planning & Environment Committee	7.00pm
12th	Full Council	7.15pm
26th	Planning & Environment Committee	7.00pm
26th	Finance & General Purposes Committee	7.15pm
26th	Leisure & Amenities Committee	7.30pm

MARCH

12th	Planning & Environment Committee	7.00pm
12th	Full Council	7.15pm
19th	Roads & Pavements Safety Steering Group	7.00pm
26th	Planning & Environment Committee	7.00pm
26th	Finance & General Purposes Committee	7.15pm
26th	Leisure & Amenities Committee	7.30pm

APRIL

9th	Planning & Environment Committee	7.00pm
9th	Full Council	7.15pm
16th	Annual Parish Meeting	7.00pm
30th	Planning & Environment Committee	7.00pm
30th	Finance & General Purposes Committee	7.15pm
30th	Leisure & Amenities Committee	7.30pm

MAY

14th	Planning & Environment Committee	7.00pm
14th	Annual Council Meeting	7.15pm
14th	Full Council	to follow ACM

Please contact the Clerk to the Council if you would like to attend any meeting, to ensure the meeting room is configured to accommodate the numbers required.

Noticeboards are located at the following locations:

Outside Wootton Lower School
Outside the Manor Road flats
Outside the Memorial Hall
Adjacent to the post box

Bedford Road
Bedford Road
Bedford Road
Hall End Road

(The noticeboard opposite the Cock Inn PH carries a list of upcoming meetings but not agendas as its size is restrictive).

DISCLAIMER: Please check with the Clerk to the Council, noticeboards or the parish council website as meetings may be subject to cancellations or changes to timings and/or venue:

<https://wootton-pc.gov.uk/parish-council/meeting-dates/>



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