



2023-24 Annual Report

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**Thatcham Town Council
Annual Report 2023-24**

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MAYOR'S REPORT

Mayor of Thatcham 2023-24

Cllr Mark Lillycrop



It has been a pleasure and an honour to serve as Mayor of Thatcham for the year 2023/24.

Since taking on the role last May, I've had the opportunity to attend a great variety of events across the Thatcham area – well over 100 at the time of writing. Meeting representatives of local charities, businesses, schools, religious & military groups and clubs, I've gained a real insight into what makes our town such a great place to live.



We have an excellent programme of civic events in the town, and I've thoroughly enjoyed taking part in every one of them this year – from the Fun Day in June in glorious sunshine, to the October Festival (where Jenny and I attended over 30 events in a whirlwind week), the Remembrance parade and Armistice ceremony, and of course our Warming up for Christmas weekend and other seasonal festivities throughout December.

None of these events would have been possible without our exceptional events team, and without the enthusiastic support of local people, so thank you to you all.

We've also aimed this year to improve the cultural diversity of our civic events, working with Communities United and local ethnic groups and with Newbury Pride to make our activities as inclusive as possible. This year, following the election, we welcomed 9 (now 10) new members to Thatcham Town Council, bringing fresh ideas and a tidal wave of enthusiasm to the Chamber. Among new projects coming down the pipe are plans for a Thatcham in Bloom scheme, a much-improved Kids Fest for the summer holidays, and the first ever Thatcham 10K (which hopefully will have taken place by the time you read this). Our new funding scheme for Thatcham Library has also kicked in, with a £2.7k contribution towards improving the building and facilities; and we introduced our first Christmas market in the Broadway to tempt the present hunters with local confections and crafts.



London Road Cemetery is undergoing some improvements, with a new Children's Garden being planned to provide a peaceful retreat for bereaved visitors, and a dedicated postbox to 'post' personal notes to loved ones who are no longer with us. And we've been out planting trees and bushes around the Henley's Allotments and play areas to improve our local environment. Our new Jubilee Sensory Garden in Brownfield Road has also gone from strength to strength, with our gardener Sally on hand to provide expert tips for those looking to make the most of their own gardening experiences.

A recent achievement for the town is the decision to sign the Plastic Free Charter, working towards the eradication of single-use plastic in all civic activities. And this year also marked the start of the final stage of Thatcham's flood alleviation scheme, the culmination of over 15 years' effort to protect the residents of Thatcham from a repeat of the inundation of 2007. For those of us who lived through that devastating event this milestone is worth celebrating, despite the significant challenges along the way.



One sad event in the year was that we had to say goodbye to many of the VIAN community of refugees based at the Regency Hotel, who had become such a friendly and supportive part of our community. Some of the members have been able to settle locally (thanks in no small part to Karen Reeve and her team of

volunteers) while others have now been moved to other areas. I wish them all the very best for the future. Last year I chose Sport in Mind and PALS West Berks as my Mayor's Charities. It hasn't just been about raising funds for these great local causes, although that is important; it's also a chance to find out more about what they do within the community and raise their profile by involving them in our civic events wherever possible. I'm delighted that the profits from the Thatcham 10K will also be going to the Mayor's Charities, further supporting the great work undertaken by both organisations.



This is an exciting time to be part of Thatcham Council, and there are so many interesting projects on the horizon to improve the town for those who live here. I'm pleased to report that we have recruited several excellent new staff team members who, I am very confident, will provide a much needed boost to our current resources and help us to fulfil our plans and commitments. The Mayor is the front man (or woman) of the Council, but it is the Council staff who work so diligently to develop our events and deliver our services to the people of Thatcham. They are a pleasure to work with and I take great pride in their efforts and achievements, led by our excellent Town Clerk, Mel Taylor. I must say a special thank you to Hayley Scard, the civic officer, who has had the unenviable task of organising the Mayor's Diary and making sure that we turn up in the right place at the right time.



A big thank you too to all our Councillors, who give so much of their time and energy to help improve the town. I'm particularly grateful to Council Leader Mike Cole and to Deputy Mayor Suzanne Adamantos, both of whom have been a great support this year; and – of course – to my Mayoress, escort, organiser, driver, photographer and wife Jenny, who has undertaken this unique Mayoral adventure with me.

Councillor Mark Lillycrop
Town Mayor 2023-24

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Cllr Mike Cole



In May 2023 we were delighted to welcome 9 new Councillors to the Town Council bringing a wealth of new ideas and priorities to the table, a number of which are in course of planning or coming to fruition to bring improvements to the town including the new £10k run which was at the instigation of Councillor Ben Schiffer-Hart and which has already attracted the maximum number of runners which can be accommodated.

One of the major issues currently facing the town is the potential new housing development to the north-east where a minimum of 1,500 houses was proposed under the Local Plan. It is the firm opinion of the Council that Thatcham cannot accommodate such a large number of houses, especially as it is generally acknowledged that our infrastructure has not kept pace with the growth of the town in the last few decades.

We need new housing, especially for first time buyers, but without major improvements in roads, medical facilities, secondary education provisions and a raft of other necessities a development of this size is, in our view, untenable and we intend to continue to object to such a large addition to the town. A public hearing will be undertaken by a government Planning Inspector, in May/June.

For some time, we have been concerned at the increasing workloads being placed on our staff and we have therefore commissioned an independent report from the Local Council Consultancy which made numerous recommendations to deal with current and projected workloads. While some of the recommendations have had to be pared back, we have taken on board the need for additional staff and some changes in the structure, hours of working etc and we are currently recruiting to fill the positions to allow us to continue to serve our community.

It has been a delight (and a challenge) to be Leader for the first year of such a new Council and I would like to thank Mel Taylor, our Town Clerk, and all of the staff for the huge levels of commitment they have shown and also all of the Councillors who have similarly demonstrated their desire to continually improve the service we give to our residents.

Councillor Mike Cole
Leader

RECREATION & AMENITIES COMMITTEE

Cllr Tom McCann, Chairman



The Recreation & Amenities Committee is responsible for the Town Council's public buildings and community centres, open spaces, play areas, London Road Cemetery and St. Mary's Churchyard, as well as Henleys Allotments, the weekly market and a variety of street furniture around the town.

The Committee also oversees the Town Council's joint partnerships with West Berkshire Council, which provides funding of c.£40,000 to Henwick Worthy Sports Ground and c.£22,000 to Kennet Leisure Centre. The following provides just a snapshot of our actions over the past year.



London Road Cemetery

This year we've had 55 burials and processed 54 memorial applications at London Road Cemetery.

We unveiled a new 'Letters to Loved Ones' post box to provide a dedicated space to send cards, letters and messages to lost loved ones. This initiative provides a meaningful way for people to connect with their departed family and friends throughout the year, not just during December when the Memory Tree is available. Offering a permanent space for these messages can bring comfort to those who find solace in expressing their thoughts and memories.





London Road Cemetery

In addition to the many areas we now leave to grow during the summer months to increase biodiversity, a new wildflower area was created thanks to a grant from the Veolia Sustainability Fund. This year saw the area flourishing with a beautiful selection of wildflowers attracting many insects, bees and butterflies.

Our 19th Century Chapel continues to provide a place for private, intimate services, or somewhere to sit in peace to remember loved ones.

The Cemetery hosted the poignant Annual Service of Remembrance in July. You can read more about this on page 27.

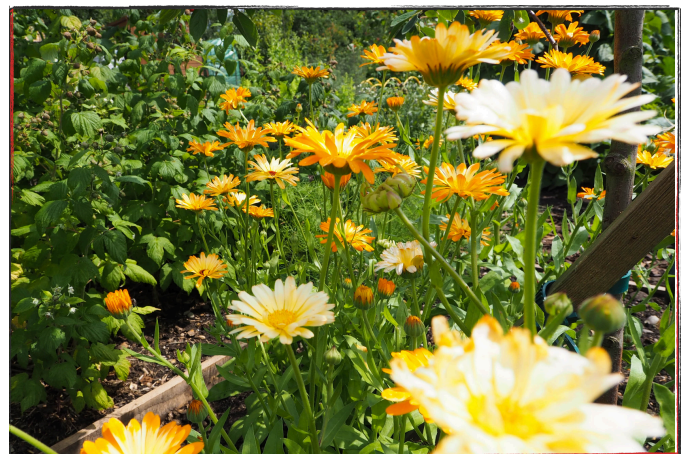
Find more information about the Cemetery on our website at <https://thatchamtowncouncil.gov.uk/london-road-cemetery>

Henleys Allotments

Allotments continue to be a very popular pastime and Henleys Allotments prove no exception, providing 180 tenants with the opportunity to grow their own fresh produce.

We have a strong working relationship with Thatcham Allotment Gardening Club who are a great support to the allotment community. We thank our Allotment Steward, Jackie, for her hard work and support.

We currently operate a [short] waiting list, find a tenancy application form on our website at <https://thatchamtowncouncil.gov.uk/henleys-allotments>



Community Buildings

The Town Council's community halls host a variety of activities and classes throughout the year, for the benefit of the local community.

Both of our community halls offer fitness and exercise classes, a range of dance classes, martial arts, slimming club, dog training, arts and crafts, baby sensory classes, sport classes, adult leisure activities and social clubs, to name just a few.

Burdwood Community Centre is home to Thatcham Pre-school five days a week, and during the evenings the hall is used for regular classes and a range of activities, details of which can be found on our website <https://thatchamtowncouncil.gov.uk/burdwood-community-centre>

We were pleased to welcome two new regular hirers this year; Little Kickers football group started in April, providing football classes for little ones and Fitsteps with Dawn started in September offering dance classes.



Frank Hutchings Hall



Frank Hutchings Hall



Burdwood Community Centre

Frank Hutchings Community Hall provides a base for the West Berkshire Therapy Centre who have exclusive use of one of the halls, offering a specialised therapy gym facility for people with disabilities. See <https://www.westberkshiretherapycentre.org.uk> for details of this amazing local service.

Similar to Burdwood, we were delighted to welcome two new regular hirers to join all the other classes at the Frank Hutchings Hall; Musical Theatre Show Choir joined us in September performing musical theatre shows and we welcomed Footie Champs in November, providing football lessons for little ones.

In 2023 we unveiled the Thatcham Jubilee Tableau in what is now the Jubilee Room at the Frank Hutchings Community Hall. The tableau was the vision of the then Mayor, Councillor Jeff Brooks. Inspired by Her Majesty the late Queen Elizabeth II's 70-year reign and the Platinum Jubilee celebrations. The Tableau, measures 6 metres long and 3 metres high, and consists of 45 individual panels, developed by over 50 locally-based crafters. Find out more on our website <https://thatchamtowncouncil.gov.uk/thatcham-jubilee-legacy-tableau> and viewings, for individuals or groups, can be arranged via the Town Council office.

Thatcham Town Council also proudly provide space for Thatcham Community Larder, who offer a valuable low-cost community food scheme, a variety of support networks and a social gathering space at Frank Hutchings Community Hall each Wednesday. Find out more about the Larder at: [Body](#) or pop along between 1.30pm and 5.30pm on Wednesdays.

Both halls have spaces available for private events and parties, as well as regular bookings. Booking is easy via the online booking platform on our website, where you can also see availability and get details of all our regular hirers and their classes.

Thatcham Market

Thatcham's weekly Friday Market in The Broadway complements the town centre retail offer, and continued to be as popular as ever, with many regular shoppers. The popular stalls include fruit and vegetables, butcher, fishmonger, sweet and savoury bakes, books, a household refillable station, pet food, as well as gifts and promotional stalls for local business and charities.

Sadly the regular floral stall left the market in 2023 and we are on the lookout for a replacement floral / garden trader. We're also particularly looking for a bakery stall.

It's easy to have a stall at our market, either as a regular or casual trader, and we welcome all enquiries. Find an application form on our website at: <https://thatchamtowncouncil.gov.uk/thatcham-market>

We thank our Market Manager, Chris (from the pet food stall) for his valuable support on market days.



In April 2023 the French market returned to The Broadway on a glorious sunny day, attracting lots of happy customers with stalls selling authentic French cheese, sausages, jewellery, olives, honey, onions and sweet treats. We will hopefully be welcoming the market back in 2024.

Over the summer we introduced a new fortnightly Saturday market on the Broadway Green, which proved popular, with stalls selling homemade items, beauty products, sweet and savoury treats, jewellery, home décor and more. We're excited for the Saturday market to return in 2024!

We also held our first Christmas market in 2023, which was a great success with stalls selling a wide range of Christmas gifts and goodies. Along with the added festive feel of Carol singers from Thatcham Baptist Church and music from Cold Ash Brass. We're looking forward to expanding the Christmas market further in 2024.



Play Areas and Public Open Spaces

Thatcham benefits from 16 children's play areas, 12 of which are managed by Thatcham Town Council. You can find a handy map of all the play areas on our website <https://thatchamtowncouncil.gov.uk/play-areas-map>

During May half term and the August school holiday we welcomed back Newbury Bouncy Castle, providing lots of inflatable fun for families to enjoy, including bouncy castles, slides, fun fair attractions and sweet treat vans. Families really appreciated such fun activities which provided great value entertainment during the school holidays.

We were also delighted to welcome Craig from Footie Camps in August, whose school holiday football sessions proved a great success with local football enthusiasts of all ages.

Meetings of the Recreation and Amenities Committee are held quarterly and we welcome residents' attendance, but if you can't attend in person, you can watch recordings of our meetings on our YouTube channel, search Thatcham Town Council and subscribe to keep up to date.

See the Town Council's website, Facebook page, newsletters, and public noticeboards for details of future meetings.

Councillor Tom McCann
Committee Chairman



PLANNING AND HIGHWAYS COMMITTEE

Cllr Simon Pike, Chairman



The Planning & Highways Committee considers a range of planning and highways related matters, almost all of which involve some engagement with West Berkshire Council.

Planning

Thatcham Town Council is an advisory consultee to West Berkshire Council for planning applications. The final decisions are made by West Berkshire Council, as the Local Planning Authority. During 2023-24 the Committee considered 65 applications – on par with 2022-23, when 64 applications were considered.

Over the last year, the Committee has considered a wide range of planning applications, including major developments, commercial developments, flood prevention schemes, new dwellings, substantial house extensions, changes of use, and new premises licence applications. The Committee considers all aspects of an application, including its scale and appropriateness for its location, its impact on neighbours, and parking provision. We have been pleased to note that, in most cases when we have objected to a planning application, West Berkshire Council has reached the same conclusion - but they also make objections on legal grounds that are outside our remit.

Under the Council's policy, minor impact planning applications - such as conservatories, garage conversions and

single-storey constructions - are not considered by the Committee, unless they are subject to representations (i.e. letters of objection from neighbouring properties) or if requested by a member of the Committee.

This year, three major applications have come before Committee; a proposal to construct holiday chalets at Hambridge Lake, and development of land West of Heath Lane (& North of Bowling Green Road), both of which we objected to, and a logistics hub for Thames Valley Police to the east of the Colthrop industrial estate, which we supported. We also considered plans for construction of a flood defence scheme at the Memorial Playing Field, which we supported and the application was approved by West Berkshire Council on 6th March 2024.

The Committee also considers applications for alcohol licensing and tree preservation orders and this year we've also responded to the following consultations:

- Cold Ash Neighbourhood Development Plan Pre-submission
- GWR changes to ticket retailing
- WBC Draft Licensing Policy 2023-2028 Consultation
- WBC Draft Parking Strategy
- WBC Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan
- WBC consultation on spending proposals for 24/25

The Town Council's responses to these and other consultations can be viewed on our website

<https://thatchamtowncouncil.gov.uk/consultation-responses>

The Committee continued to spend a considerable amount of time actively engaged in responding to the West Berkshire Draft Local Plan 2022-2039. Most recently responding to questions raised by the Inspector in the document Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions and Written Statements. The Council responded to 7 out of 16 questions on 'Legal and procedural requirements and other general matters' and 19 out of 23 questions on 'North East Thatcham strategic site (policy SP17)', and other questions that are relevant to Thatcham. In 2023 West Berkshire Council sought to withdraw the Draft Plan but this was prevented by the government minister for Housing, Planning and Building Safety, Lee Rowley MP. More information can be found on West Berkshire Council's website at <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/article/42606/Council-responds-to-Secretary-of-State-s-intervention-on-Local-Plan>

Highways

As well as planning, the Committee considers matters regarding highways and road safety.

The Committee has addressed various questions and concerns from residents regarding the condition of roads, signage, cycleways, visibility and obstructions by highlighting them to West Berkshire Council, and we encourage residents to do the same through the West Berkshire Council 'Report a problem' page at <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/reportaproblem>

Finally, a reminder that we have a Planning Tracker link on our website to provide residents with an easy means of viewing

planning applications in Thatcham and their status. This makes the planning process more accessible to our residents. The 'Planning Tracker' can be accessed at <https://www.hugofox.com/community/thatcham-town-council-19988/planning-tracker/>

Councillor Simon Pike
Committee Chairman

FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Cllr Mike Cole, Chairman



The primary role of the Finance & General Purposes Committee is to manage and monitor the Town Council's budget. The Committee reviews the Council's actual and projected income and expenditure at each of its quarterly meetings, whilst also monitoring the use of Earmarked funding, the level of Reserves held and the Council's long-term financial investments.

For 2023/24 we had a total budgeted expenditure of £1,090,520, with £885,361 of that raised through Council Tax and the difference (£205,159) raised through services provided, sponsorship, grants and the use of reserves.

This year has required the council to substantially invest in the maintenance of the town's assets. This has included commissioning Building Condition Surveys for our community buildings, an appraisal of St Mary's Churchyard boundary wall, a water pipe spur repair, along with a much needed upgrade of the Council's IT equipment.

Income from services we provide to the community has increased over the last year, although we are still slightly under the pre-Covid income, as the pandemic sadly forced the closure of many organisations and activities.

Additionally, with inflationary pressures, the cost of our routine expenditure has increased significantly. However, careful management throughout the Council has meant the overall effect has been controlled through careful assessment of expenditure and use of reserves.

Despite having to cautiously manage our own budgets, we were pleased to still be able to provide valuable financial assistance to many organisations that support our local community. More information can be found in the Grants report on page 19.

Citizen's Advice West Berkshire

Our funding commitment to Citizen's Advice West Berkshire continued with funding of £4,785 to facilitate regular outreach Citizen's Advice sessions in Thatcham, that we know are essential to our residents. These sessions are held at Burdwood Surgery and Thatcham Medical Practice. Visit <https://citizensadvicewestberkshire.org.uk/getting-advice/face-to-face-at-other-locations/> for details of how to book an appointment.

Thatcham Youth

We continued to provide valuable funding to Thatcham Youth with an annual grant of £7,000 to support Vision Youth Club for 7-11 year olds, The Zone Youth Club for 11-14 year olds and the monthly family Roller Disco.

Details about the fantastic activities Thatcham Youth provide in our town for children, young people and their families can be found on their website: www.thatchamyouth.org.uk

The Thatcham (Old Bluecoat School) Charity

In 2013 the Town Council entered into a Service Level Agreement with The Thatcham (Old Bluecoat School) Charity to provide an annual grant of £1,000. This agreement allows the Town Council use of the Old Bluecoat School for up to fifteen days per annum which is mostly utilised during the annual Thatcham Festival when the much-loved local landmark provides the perfect venue for local exhibitions and other Festival events.

We encourage residents to come along to our meetings, to understand what the Town Council does and how decisions are made. All Committee meetings are held in the Council Chamber at the Council Office in Brownsfield Road and are open to Members of the public. See the Town Council's Website, Facebook page, Newsletters and public Noticeboards for details of future meetings, we welcome your engagement.

If you can't make it to our meetings, you'll find recordings of them on our YouTube channel www.youtube.com search Thatcham Town Council and subscribe to keep up to date.

Councillor Mike Cole
Committee Chairman

GRANTS SUB COMMITTEE

Cllr Mike Cole, Chairman



Thatcham Town Council appreciates the value of supporting local organisations and the difference this funding makes. In 2023/24 the Town Council provided £92,720.96 of funding to support the local community.

Community Grant Awards

The Grants Sub Committee oversees the allocation of our Community Grants. This is done through bi-annual funding awards in January/February and June/July. We have a matched funding agreement with Greenham Trust where every £1 awarded by the Town Council has the potential to be matched by Greenham Trust. Applications are administered through The Good Exchange, this ensures recipients receive the matched funding.

The Sub Committee considers applications that serve the Thatcham community, to ensure residents of Thatcham benefit from the grant awarded. Applicants are often invited to attend a meeting to present their project and take questions.

During 2023/24 Thatcham Town Council awarded the following grants, all of which were doubled up with valuable matched funding from Greenham Trust:

ORGANISATION	PROJECT	AMOUNT
Time to Talk West Berkshire	Thatcham Outreach	£2,722.25
St Mary's Church	Thatcham Baby Café	£67.35
West Berks Action For Refugees	Case worker for asylum seekers and refugees	£2,000
Thatcham Rugby Club	Community Kitchen	£2,500
BBOWT (Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust)	Nature Memories Cafe	£2,000
TOTAL		£9,289.60

Committed Community Support grants

Thatcham Town Council has a number of funding agreements with organisations, providing funding to support these organisations to commit to serving the Thatcham community. This year we've provided the following funding:

ORGANISATION	PROJECT	AMOUNT
Friends of Thatcham Library	Garden maintenance costs	£416.84
Friends of Thatcham Library	Lawnmower & dyslexia friendly books	£339.13
Friends of Thatcham Library	Children's sofa, tables & cupboard	£1,569.20
Friends of Thatcham Library	Storage cabinet & bench	£459.00
Old Bluecoat School	Service Level Agreement	£1,000.00
Cold Ash Brass	Annual retainer	£800.00
Citizens Advice West Berkshire	Thatcham outreach service	£4,785.00
Thatcham Youth	Provision of youth activities	£7,000.00
RMD Adventure Learning	Youth Work	£2,475.28
Thatcham Flood Forum	Website maintenance	£50.00
Thatcham Litter Pickers	Public Liability Insurance	£161.41
Thatcham Memorial Foundation	War Memorial Insurance	£844.75
TOTAL		£19,900.61

Community Projects Fund

As well as the Community Grants, the Town Council also has a mechanism for distribution of smaller grants of up to £300. The Community Project Fund is administered directly by the Town Council and is in place to support organisations where a smaller amount is sought, but will make a big difference. When an application is made by an organisation to the Community Project Fund, it is considered by the next appropriate Council meeting, thus allowing these awards to be considered swiftly throughout the year rather than on the bi-annual basis of our larger grant scheme.

Beneficiaries of this fund during 2023/24 are:

Organisation	Project	Amount
Dementia Friendly West Berkshire	Thatcham Garden Party	£250.00
Royal Air Force Cadets	Navigational Compasses	£210.00
Thatcham Baptist Church	Welcoming Asylum Seekers	£299.75
West Berks Action for Refugees	Art Classes	£300.00
Greenham Control Tower	Moving Forward with Purpose Project	£250.00
Thatcham Repair Cafe	Start-up funding 2024	£250.00
Kennet Amateur Theatrical Society	Assist with prop hire	£240.00
TOTAL		£1,799.75

Partnership Contributions

Thatcham Town Council has formal agreements with West Berkshire Council to provide partnership contributions towards the running costs of two significant local services, Kennet Leisure Centre and Henwick Worthy Sports Ground.

Our contributions for 2023/24 were:

Kennet Leisure Centre	£21,731
Henwick Worthy Sports Ground	£40,000

Councillor Mike Cole

EVENTS COMMITTEE

Cllr Mark Lillycrop, Chairman



Coronation Celebrations, 6th May

Close to 400 people enjoyed sunshine, a jazz band, dancing stilt walkers and free cake, cookies, teas and coffees to celebrate the Kings' Coronation bank holiday weekend.

With the Palace household calling for communities to get together on the Sunday and celebrate with local parties, the then Mayor of Thatcham, Councillor Jeff Brooks, hosted an outdoor event at Thatcham Town Cricket Club. Jazz Band, The Instruments of Jazz, and regally attired stilt walkers greeted visitors throughout the afternoon.

Families, the elderly and isolated members of the community were invited to the occasion and were treated to a rich assortment of cake, some donated by individual volunteers as well as a giant centrepiece cake, commissioned from Creative Cakes of Thatcham, complete with a picture of HM King Charles in his finery, on the cake face. Thanks also for cake donations from new Thatcham retailer Vanillo and The Chequers Pub. Through their community fund, Thatcham Co-Op donated refreshments, whilst a generous grant was also supplied by The National Lottery Community Awards for helping with the costs of the event.

Volunteers from 1st and 3rd Thatcham Guides helped show visitors to the serving Marquee as well as providing a table service and clearing tables.





Family Fun Day, 25th June

The 23rd edition of our Thatcham Family Fun Day was bigger and better than ever as a record number of attractions and stallholders made their way to Henwick Worthy Sports Field on a scorchingly hot Sunday.

We were joined by 24 street food and refreshment outlets (double 2022 numbers), so visitors were spoilt for choice with everything from fish & chips and burgers to Caribbean, Indian and Mexican food and plenty of sweet treats (including plenty of gluten free and vegan options). The rest of the field was packed with 81 charity, community, and gift stalls.

The music stage returned, sponsored by Image Box and Shades of Siam, and featured jazz music, a 'Thatcham Introducing' section

featuring local musicians and rock music in the form of Thatcham's own teenage rock band sensation 'Beyond the Sons' and a finale from West Berks Rock Choir. The Dance Zone played host to local dance schools and proved to be a popular reason for attendance for those coming for the first time. Family attractions included: Punch and Judy, Circus Skills workshops and performances, a Petting Farm and Street Theatre a Fun Fair and Fun Inflatables, whilst a number of local Sports Clubs provided sports taster session from Rugby to Bowls.

Although the popular dog show was planned, due to the heat we unfortunately took the responsible decision to cancel this element of the day.

United Service of Remembrance, 16th July

The United Service of Remembrance took place on Sunday 16th July and was again well attended. Cold Ash Brass played at the service which took place under gazebos in London Road Cemetery. This special service, held in collaboration with Churches Together in Thatcham, provides a poignant occasion for members of the public who had experienced the loss of a loved one within the year to honour their memory through a solemn ceremony. 48 people attended, taking great comfort from the occasion.

Following a review of the event with members of Portsmouth Churches Together it was decided that this event would be bi-annually with the next service taking place in 2025.

Thatcham Festival, 6th – 15th October

The annual 10-day Festival comprised 42 separate events compared with 43 in 2022. Feedback suggested it was one of the most successful Festivals ever, when judged on number and diversity of events, attendances and responding to Town Council objectives. The redesigned printed programme received positive feedback.

There was again a strong number of presentations from Thatcham based organisations but there was greater diversity from both local organisations and new activity curated carefully from the Festival organisers. This was typified by Newbury & Thatcham Hackspace whose retro computer event not only attracted a record audience of over 100 people, but a younger audience than previous years. The Big Thatcham Fest-Off, an event in its third year, profiled the Town's High Street by closing the street and attracting an older teenage/young adult demographic to its artisan style market offering and stage of



diverse entertainment, which included the headline act 'Beyond the Sons' who consisted of 13–16-year-old boys many from Thatcham. A second acoustic stage proved a successful way to encourage audiences to the A4 end of the High Street, complemented by local craft beer and gin traders.



The Festival used Eventbrite as its booking system for many of its events this year, both paying and free, and the process proved popular with the public as well as providing helpful intelligence for the Festival organisers in their promotion processes. There was feedback from audiences that having an offline option for buying tickets would be useful for some audiences which will be implemented in 2024.

The Leisure and Craft Fair held more stalls than previous years with its largest attendance figures yet. Many local community and charity groups benefited from space on the Broadway Green to advertise their services or fundraise for their causes. The Women's Institute proved particularly popular with over 100 raffle prizes won in just a couple of hours.

24 of the events were free to attend, with no ticket for any event costing more than £6, and 22 events were able to book in advance.



Remembrance Sunday, 12th November

A 700-strong parade and over 2000 onlookers lined the streets of Thatcham on Sunday 12th November to honour those who had lost their lives during past wars, as part of Remembrance Sunday. Lead by the Mayor of Thatcham, Councillor Mark Lillycrop, civic and military dignitaries, representatives from the Thatcham Branch of the Royal British Legion, a contingent from the Military Intelligence 67 Coy, representatives from Albert Austin Lodge, Lions Club of Newbury, Thatcham Lodge, the WI and Thatcham Tornadoes, and over 300 children from Kennet Vale Guiding and Thatcham Scouts and Cubs took part in the parade and services held at Thatcham War Memorial and St Mary's Church.

The contingents marched from Kingsland Centre Car Park, along The Broadway and High Street to the War Memorial accompanied by Cold Ash Brass, who were joined at the Parade Ground by St Mary's Church Choir. Revd Mark Bennet lead the Act of Remembrance at the War Memorial before its completion at St Mary's Church.

On Saturday 11th November, Armistice Day, a service was held in the War Memorial Garden, which was attended by retired service personnel, Council dignitaries and members of the public.



Warming Up for Christmas, Christmas Lights Switch-On, 1st December

As with previous years, both sides of The Broadway were closed to traffic and the stage positioned on the eastern side, with The Stage Bus Company supplying the same solar supported stage, stage screen and public address system as in 2021. Stage content included the choir of Whitelands Park School, dance from Dance Fusion, 'Dance with Sonia Brown', West Berks Rock Choir and Jamie Read Theatre School, whilst KATS (Kennet Amateur Theatrical Society) supplied an extract from their forthcoming production, 'Fiddler on the Roof'. Confetti Magic supplied special effects including a very realistic snow shower, with pyros and streamers in time with the light's countdown.

There was a good turnout of community, charity and refreshment stalls with feedback from stallholders stating that they had a successful evening. 32 stalls operated, compared with 25 in 2022. There were improvements made to the layout of stalls and this included providing more options for refreshments on the western side of The Broadway. Estimates on an extremely cold but dry night indicate that the event attendance may be one of the busiest ever with an estimated 4000 persons representing a 10% increase from 2022's attendance figures.

Festivities also included a petting farm, a treasure trail and a best dressed sustainable-themed window display competition, won by Thatcham Funeralcare. The public could also vote for their own favourite through the Newbury Weekly News and 'The People's Vote' which was won by House of Cards for a third year running. Thatcham Town Council was grateful for sponsorship from Elysium Healthcare and Newbury Building Society.

Warming Up for Christmas, Christmas Market, 2nd December

A new Christmas artisan craft market displayed local market traders and proved popular with visitors. The shopping was complemented by music from Cold Ash Brass and Thatcham Baptist Church. It is the intention that this event will be developed in 2024.



Civic Carol Service, 10th December

Presented by the Mayor of Thatcham, Councillor Mark Lillycrop, the Civic Carol Service took place on a very frosty evening at St Mary's Church. Music was provided by St Mary's Church Choir and The Barfield Handbell Ringers, with readings from Kennet School & Trinity School and seasonal refreshments served afterwards. Over £200 was collected in donations for the Mayor's chosen charities, PALS (West Berkshire) and Sport in Mind.

Councillor Mark Lillycrop
Committee Chairman



ENVIRONMENTAL WORKING PARTY

Cllr Justin Pemberton, Chairman



During 2023, the Environmental Working Party ('EWP') has continued to deliver on the action plan "Towards Net Zero Carbon Emissions by 2030", viewable on the Town Council website.

A review during 2023 of the greenhouse gas emissions directly under the control of the Council in 2022 found that its carbon footprint would be higher than that for 2021, most likely due to services recovering from the impact of the Coronavirus. There is potential scope for the Council to reduce its energy consumption more generally and this will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

For the emissions of the wider community, the Working Party has now completed its draft Climate Action Plan, which sets out the action the Council will continue to take when putting the climate at the heart of decision making (report also viewable on the Council website).

We urge all those who live or work in Thatcham to look at their personal carbon emissions, work out how to reduce them to zero, and put their personal plan into practice. The Town Council recently adopted a Plastic Free Charter, prepared in partnership with Eco Friends (West Berkshire) and Plastic Free Thatcham. This Charter formally commits the council to recognising the pledge from Plastic Free to reduce the impact of single use plastic on the environment.



The Working Party is looking to collaborate with West Berkshire Council to gather data which will assist the Council understand its Biodiversity challenges on land which it controls. It also continues to work with West Berkshire Council to find ways to improve walking or cycling in the town.

Councillor Justin Pemberton
Chairman, Environmental Working Party



HERITAGE WORKING PARTY

Nathan Gregory, Chairman



The Heritage Working Party is dedicated to raising public awareness of the history of the Thatcham area, and to maintaining the town's blue plaque scheme celebrating local figures and buildings of historical significance.

The Working Party can, at its discretion, co-opt members of the community as it deems appropriate to assist and offer advice. All co-opted members have the right to vote within the Working Party, which meets quarterly and members of the community are welcome to attend.

In 2018, the Heritage Working Party devised and tested its commemorative blue plaque scheme and the inaugural blue plaque in the new circular style was erected on the Kings Head Public House, celebrating its role in Britain's first mail coach run. Since 2018 the Heritage Working Party has unveiled a new blue plaque annually. In 2019 Thatcham Parish Hall was the chosen location, to commemorate the first ladies elected to Thatcham Parish Council.

The 2020 plaque celebrated the life of colourful innovator Harry Lester and his famous Lester MGs; and in 2021 the Working Party unveiled a plaque on Thatcham Garden Centre commemorating the long history of horticulture associated with that site, once the home of a school for lady gardeners which embraced pioneering French cultivation methods.

In 2022, the Working Party launched a public consultation to receive ideas from the public for the subject matter of its 2022 blue plaque and created a shortlist to work from for the next 3 to 6 years. The winner for 2022 was a plaque commemorating the site where Lieutenant-Colonel Vernon Watkins Urquhart, the Commanding Officer of Thatcham Army Ordnance Depot G45, was sadly killed in the bombing raid of 1940. The plaque is situated as near to 141 Station Road as possible, and the Working Party were lucky to be joined by Urquhart's Granddaughter who travelled from Norfolk for the unveiling ceremony.

In 2022 the Heritage Working Party also arranged for the restoration and re-painting of the 5 Georgian water pumps situated within the parish. These are found dotted along the A4 and now look very smart in black with silver finals. You can read more about these pumps here: www.nickbits.co.uk/blog/2020/11/thatcham-roadside-pumps

In 2023, in commemoration of the 18th century manor house Dunston House, a blue plaque was unveiled during Thatcham Festival near the entrance to London Road Cemetery, at the end of the original driveway to the house.

<https://nickbits.co.uk/blog/2023/10/the-dunston-estate/>

The Heritage Working Party also provides advice and support on matters of historic interest in connection with Thatcham. Further information on the richness of Thatcham's history can be found on the Council's website here:

www.thatchamtowncouncil.gov.uk/history

If you would like to join the Heritage Working Party or even just sit in on a meeting, please email enquiries@thatchamtowncouncil.gov.uk

Nathan Gregory
Chairman, Heritage Working Party



OUTSIDE BODIES

Each year the Town Council appoints Councillors to the committees of a variety of local organisations, providing a valuable partnership for information sharing between the council and the wider community. Councillors attend the organisations' meetings and report on activities to meetings of the Full Council. Here you'll find reports from some of our representatives.

The Flood Forum & Surface Water Management Plan Funding Committee

The Flood Forum and Surface Water Management (SWMP) Funding Committee were formed in the wake of the devastating floods that affected hundreds of households across the town in 2007.

The SWMP continues to oversee the delivery of the flood alleviation scheme, working with West Berks Council, the Environment Agency and the Town Council to bring protection to all areas that are potentially vulnerable to flooding. Schemes at Dunston Park, Dunstan Green, Siege Cross, Cold Ash Hill and Tull Way now protect around 85% of Thatcham's residents from the effects of surface water flooding.

Of the remaining three schemes, those at North and East Thatcham are now nearing completion ahead of schedule, and work has just started on the final scheme at Thatcham Memorial Field.

With this final project underway, the work of the SWMP Funding Committee will soon come to an end. However, the Flood Forum as a whole has an ongoing role to provide advice and education around local flooding issues and to lobby those in government regarding sections 3 and 42 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, full implementation of which would require local authorities to adopt drainage systems and sewers in new developments, a much-needed safeguard for residents across the country.

A big thank you to the whole Thatcham Flood Forum team who have worked so hard to see our flood alleviation scheme reach this stage. When the final section is in place, it will be one of the very few schemes of its kind to have been completed nationwide.

Councillor Mark Lillycrop

The Greenham and Crookham Commons Commission

The Greenham and Crookham Commons Commission is established under the Greenham and Crookham Commons Act 2002, which restored the commons to public access. The Town Council has the right to nominate one of the twenty Commissioners. The duties of the Commission are defined in the Act, and include:

- conserving the Common as a peaceful place of natural beauty.
- conserving its flora and fauna, especially the parts that are Sites of Special Scientific Interest.
- promoting and improving grazing on the Common, including the rights of commoners.
- managing the Common as a public open place open to the public for recreation.

The Commons are managed for West Berkshire Council by Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT).

An important role for the Commission is managing the balance between conservation, public access (especially for large organised events) and grazing.

The Regulations for the Commons are being updated and should be approved soon, after lengthy correspondence with Government (DEFRA).

The Crookham pools were omitted from the provisions of the Act because of the conservation work needed. This has now been carried out, and the Commission is progressing the legal measures needed for them to be included.

Councillor Simon Pike

Thatcham Welfare and Support Society

Until the latter part of 2022 this charity was better known as the Thatcham Nursing Society. The new name reflects the increasing demands of the current cost-of-living crisis and increasingly diverse and complex requests for support.

The charity's remit is to 'assist, in cases of financial need, persons resident in Thatcham and around who have health needs of any kind by providing or paying for items, services or facilities which help and assist the recovery of such persons, but which are not readily available to them from other sources and, where funds allow, in cases of financial need alone.'

The latter part of that statement, around cases of financial need alone, has been more relevant in recent months as requests for support have increased. In previous years, the charity often found itself actively seeking out valid requests and grant applications. But the financial backdrop for many people has become more challenging, as a result of which the charity is seeing increased requests, which now need to be prioritised and assessed against its remit. This has in turn led to increased collaboration and cooperation with other Thatcham and Newbury based charities, to try and accommodate and manage this growing demand.

In the past year the charity has provided for items such as carpets, washing machines, air fryers, and curtains for individuals struggling to furnish their accommodation and feed themselves and their families. It has also seen some more 'creative' funding requests; for example, support with the cost of public transport to school and college, garden and home clearances, and the cost of applicants' professional qualification courses – amongst other things.

Councillor Justin Pemberton



Home-Start West Berkshire

Home-Start West Berkshire (HSWB) provides a voluntary service to parents of young children who need support, who have at least one child under five. HSWB is part of a national charity, Home-Start UK. They provide a family with emotional and practical support and friendship. HSWB's motto is – 'There for parents when they need us most, because childhood can't wait.' It is a simple yet effective way of helping families to get back on track.

HSWB carefully match volunteers with an appropriate family. The volunteers visit families within their own home and provide support in times of need. They also organise group meetings and provides a Baby Bank service.

In Thatcham the number of families supported remains at about 40, but that number as a fraction of the total has risen over the last few years from a quarter to a third.

The demand for this work continues to increase, while resources at professional levels are reducing, putting more pressure on the voluntary sector. HSWB's highly valued work is limited only by funding and the availability of volunteers.

There are multiple ways that you can help Home-Start West Berkshire in a voluntary capacity. If anybody wishes to volunteer, please get in touch with the charity.

<https://home-startwestberks.org.uk/volunteering/>

Councillor Petra Pemberton

Thatcham Parochial Charities

Thatcham Parochial Charities Report

There are two principal charities – Thatcham Parochial Almshouse Charity and Thatcham Relief in Need. The Board of Trustees comprises representatives from Thatcham Town Council and the Parish Councils of Cold Ash, Midgham and Greenham, with the Rector and three churchwardens as ex-officio members. Thatcham Town Council is currently represented by Cllr. Mike Cole and Chris Druce. The Trustees normally meet four times per year.

Both charities are assisted by ancient endowments granted over many centuries, the first recorded one being in 1594.

Thatcham Parochial Almshouse Charity

The object of the Charity is to provide almshouse accommodation for elderly people in need within the parishes of Thatcham, Cold Ash, Greenham and Midgham (the ancient Parish of Thatcham). There are 14 almshouse flats in Thatcham.

Maintenance works highlighted in the Quinquennial report continue alongside general maintenance and improvement.

The latter half of 2023 saw 2 almshouse flats become available which is quite rare.

The Trustees sanctioned some remedial work on both flats before the vacancies are advertised locally. Any new applicants must meet the charity qualifying criteria to be considered.

Thatcham Relief in Need

The object of the Charity is to relieve, either generally or individually, persons resident in the Ancient Parish of Thatcham, who are in conditions of need, hardship or distress, by making grants of money or providing items or services to reduce that need. The Trustees have a wide discretion regarding the allocation of those funds.

During 2023 the charity made grants amounting to £15,033 for a variety of requests including: 2 wheelchair upgrades; flooring and bedding (especially for those moving into Housing Association properties); financial support to enable some children to attend their school residential trip; furniture items and a contribution to BBOWT to support the re-opening of the dementia café at the Nature Discovery Centre.

Chris Druce and Councillor Mike Cole



Thatcham Youth Club

The abundance of activities offered by Thatcham Youth Club ranges from Magic Shows to Reptile Handling to Paddling (at the Waterside Centre in Newbury), Summer Family Fun Day, Sports Morning, and Craft Morning, Halloween Party, Christmas Family Fun Day.

October saw the start of the immensely popular Roller Disco (supported by Roller Kings) at Kennet Leisure Centre. Many people travel from across West Berkshire and beyond to attend, which is a testament to the hard work involved in planning and marketing the event.

A fundraising initiative took place at local Tesco's, linked to their token scheme. In total it helped raise over £1000. Thank you to Greenham Trust as well for match funding the residential trip for The Zone Youth Club attendees.

Lady Francis of Winchcombe Charity

The committee have met to discuss the distribution of fund to students attending the local Secondary Schools Kennet and Trinity, Applications are handled on an individual basis and members of the committee include teachers who are able to provide an insight into what each student would require the money for.

We are actively seeking extra income from grants to allow a mix of more donations or higher amounts given per donation.

West Berkshire Therapy Centre

Representatives: Cllr Jeff Brooks, Cllr Owen Jeffery, Cllr Stephanie Steevenson

West Berkshire Therapy Centre continues to go from strength to strength. The Council's representatives have attended three meetings over the year and are discussing with Trustees the future pathway for the Centre. By the time of our next Annual Report we hope there will be something exciting to announce about how the Therapy Centre will develop over the next few years.

Councillor Stephanie Steevenson

Thatcham Allotments

The site is managed by Thatcham Town Council. We currently have around 160 plots. Allotments are very popular and if a plot is not immediately available, there is a waiting list that your details can be added to.

The allotments are used by a wide variety of people covering all ages and backgrounds. They have seasonal coffee mornings, where delicious homemade cake is also on offer. This is a really great way to meet friendly, like-minded gardeners and get tips and advice for advancing your plot. As a plot holder you are also enrolled to the Thatcham Allotment Gardening Club, who produces seasonal newsletters and arranges social activities.

To apply for an allotment, please contact Thatcham Town Council on 01635 863592 or email: enquiries@thatchamtowncouncil.co.uk

Councillor Petra Pemberton



Dementia Friendly West Berkshire

Representatives are: Cllr Owen Jeffery, Cllr Petra Pemberton, Cllr Stephanie Steevenson. This is a very active, friendly committee of people who strive to make West Berkshire 'Dementia friendly'. We have met regularly over the past year, both online and face-to-face. We were pleased to be able to offer the Town Council chamber as a meeting venue for one of our face-to-face gatherings. Thatcham and our surrounding area are remarkably well resourced with groups specialising in making life more agreeable for those residents with dementia and importantly too for their Carers.

Councillor Stephanie Steevenson

Friends of Thatcham Library

This year has seen many internal and external work done to the library and its facilities. There is now an accessible toilet in place for users who would otherwise have needed to make a short trip to the Broadway. This will encourage longer stays to the library and enable a wider community use.

Outside in the garden, a working party made light work of erecting fencing, trimming bushes and creating an inviting space for community events which will allow for a range of activities.

Louise and her team have been hard at work putting together games to be housed in a new cupboard due to the increased awareness of their new games club. There has been an Art Workshop for Adults led by local artist Simon Jardine; craft sessions, Lego fun, Christmas Crafts and Carols, a Seasonal Art Workshop.

There are many future events planned including; a Treasure Hunt on April 4th, an Easter Art Workshop for Children on April 9th during the school holidays.

Highlight of the year was organising the hugely successful BIG PICTURE event as part of Thatcham Family Festival.

Councillor Ben Schiffer-Harte





The Jubilee Sensory Garden - Turnfields Charity

Located in front of the Council Offices in Brownsfield Road, Thatcham Town Council manages the area on behalf of Turnfields Recreation Ground Charity, as Trustee of the charity. In 2021 work began to enhance the garden in Brownsfield Road to create a Sensory Garden, following a request from West Berkshire Dementia Friendly Forum and Age UK. The total infrastructure cost £33,191 + VAT plus ancillary costs for signage etc, and was funded from a £15,000 Community Infrastructure Levy grant from West Berkshire Council, £18,600 from the Charity's funds, with incidental costs from Thatcham Town Council.

The garden was completed in 2022 and officially named Jubilee Sensory Garden in recognition of 2022 being HM Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee year.

The Jubilee Sensory Garden has provided a tranquil space for the entire community to enjoy. Local residents are welcome to help themselves to produce from the garden all year-round. The space plays host to a monthly social group where gardening related activities or crafting is done amongst cups of tea and slices of cake. This group has received a £1000 grant as part of Sovereign Network Group's World Mental Health Day Fund and continues to grow. We are hoping to run more community activities in the coming months and we are currently looking for volunteers to help maintain the beautiful space. To find out more information about The Jubilee Sensory Garden please visit <https://thatchamtowncouncil.gov.uk/jubilee-sensory-garden>



Thatcham Town Council Community Awards

Every year the Town Council seeks nominations from members of the public for individuals, groups, organisations and businesses who have demonstrated outstanding service to the community, made a significant contribution to public life in Thatcham and have shown real dedication in helping local residents.

A panel of Councillors met on the 25th of March to consider all of the nominations and the winners are announced as follows:

- Community Contributor Award to Anne Dibble in recognition of her outstanding service in the local Thatcham community via the Girlguiding Association.
- Community Contributor Award to Alice Cole in recognition of her key work as a Youth Leader at her Cadet Unit.
- Community Contributor Award to Thatcham Refillable in recognition of providing a vital refillable service for the people of Thatcham and helping others to become more sustainable.
- Environmental Champion Award to Parson's Down School Eco-Committee in recognition of their on-going work achieving various awards through both eco-schools and plastic free communities.
- Inspiring Young Person Awards to Sophia McKay, Callum Harrison and Max Danskin in recognition of exceptional effort at Kennet School.
- Lifetime achievement Award to Sue Dillon in recognition of her long and dedicated career as a teacher.

WELL DONE!

Mayor's Awards

The Mayor typically meets a large number of people over their Mayoral Year. The Mayor's Awards are the perfect chance for the Mayor to recognise and thank those people in the local community who go above and beyond. Mayor of Thatcham 2023-24, Councillor Mark Lillycrop chose to present his Mayor's Awards to the following people:

- Brian Woodham, for his commitment over the many years to Thatcham's SWMP and Flood Alleviation Scheme.
- Sally Mitchell, for her ongoing commitment to the Thatcham Jubilee Garden and Community.
- Community United, for supporting and championing local ethnic communities.
- Newbury Pride in Thatcham, for promoting diversity and inclusion in the local community.





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2023-24