

Chair's Annual Report

AGM: January 2025

Another year passes, and our AGM is the traditional time to reflect on the activities and achievements of the Village Society over the last 12 months and to look ahead at our aims and planned programme of meetings for 2025.

Firstly, though, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to our committee members, who offer their time and talents as enthusiastic volunteers, in order to keep the Society running and offering a service to HVS members and to the wider Haddenham community.

I am delighted to say that, in recent times, we have managed to recruit a more gender-balanced group of folk to lead the Society, so our committee meetings are no longer dominated by grey-haired and increasingly wrinkly old fellas! The committee now comprises five men and four women (indeed, I could have highlighted a 50-50 split were it not for the recent retirement of Alison Watt).

All committee members are greatly valued and, in no particular order, I would like to acknowledge the specific roles and contributions of each.

Richard Hirst is our primary lead on planning issues, and, for reasons we all know, this focus keeps him very busy in monitoring and crafting our commentaries on new planning applications (with kind assistance from Roz Owens, Michael Stubbs, Judy Brandis and others). We see the monitoring of new property developments and other planning matters as one of the key roles of the Village Society, even though we have to accept that we have limited powers of influence given that Haddenham has been designated a 'Strategic Settlement' as a consequence of its good rail and road links. Nevertheless, in collaboration with the parish council, we do our best to shape elements of housing design, site layouts and the integration of new estates with the rest of the village - not least in relation to traffic flows and the incorporation of walking and cycling routes. In this latter respect we also embrace HaddSWAC (Haddenham Safe Walking & Cycling) under the HVS umbrella, with the very active and valued leadership of Alan Thawley.

Mike Cottrell is our Honorary Treasurer - a role that is often very difficult to recruit to, as few of us have the discipline to pull together even hand-written domestic accounts, let alone compiling computerised spreadsheets and balance sheets to satisfy the Charity Commission. Mike does this with considerable care and attention to detail, and I, for one, am extremely grateful to him for his dedication to the role.

Teresa Roberts is our Minutes Secretary - another role that requires attention to detail and an ability to capture a written record of our committee meetings in a succinct and unambiguous manner. Teresa is extremely capable and I appreciate her helpful nudges which keep me on my admin toes - never a great strength of mine, sadly.

Juanita Hughes is the person from whom you receive the most frequent contact. As our Membership Secretary, she generates all the emails that keep you, our members, updated on the meetings programme and all other matters that we feel you need to know about. Over the last 18 months, Juanita has extended her role

considerably in helping to organise the most recent Community Fair and compiling our programme of public meetings - both of these taking lots of time and effort well beyond the secretarial role to which she signed up ... and at the same time, coping in good spirit following serious surgery and her related mobility challenges. We take our hats off to her.

Jim Robins serves as our Vice Chair and, despite his frequent international travels, he has continued to play an important part in keeping our committee discussions focused on the key issues, largely through his project management skills. We will miss Jim and those skills as he retires from the committee which, sadly, he has flagged up as an intention for this New Year.

Robyn Cooke joined the HVS committee in the last year, adding yet another facet to her many community-minded activities in Haddenham. Many will know Robyn through her busy involvement in the Community Library and these links have benefitted us greatly as we continue to utilise the Library for most of our public meetings. Together with Loraine, Robyn has been a regular coordinator and provider of refreshments for HVS meetings. Having reliable help with such matters is so important and, as Chair, I am extremely grateful for input in this regard.

Roderick Floud was our former Chair for nearly ten years, of course, and his continued involvement in HVS has been much appreciated. As the current Chair, I continue to bounce ideas off him and his experience and political sensitivity is a most welcome asset. We hope he will feel able to continue as a committee member in 2025 despite his desire to spend more time writing.

Brian Bowman is our time-served and much respected President and his mature wisdom continues to provide valuable checks and balances during our committee conversations. Brian is a keen walker and historian and combines these interests in leading the annual HVS ramble in the Summer each year, such that fellow walkers gain fascinating insights into the historical significance of the areas in which they walk. The guided walk planned for this coming Summer will include parts of Oxford - more details to follow. Brian also keeps a keen eye on the duck population on the pond at Church End and arranges to replenish white ducks when deemed necessary. Also, with help from wife Zoe, he was responsible for securing the etched glass bowl that was presented to Irene Sisson on the event of her retirement from Ivor Miles in the Autumn.

The two newest recruits to the HVS committee in 2024 are Loraine Milmer and Sarah Heydon. Loraine is my long-suffering wife, of course, and given her prominent role in helping to coordinate and cater for the committee meetings held in our home, it was a natural step to ask her to join the committee. She is also very skilful in 'encouraging and reminding me' when HVS deadlines are looming - see reference to my Admin skills above!

Sarah Heydon has brought additional tact and empathy to the committee - a set of skills that underpin her professional role as a counsellor and which I first admired when we were both on a board of Governors for a local school. Sarah is a very welcome addition to the committee.

Alison Watt decided to retire from the committee and did so in the latter part of 2024, having been a prominent advocate of the need to reach out to newly arrived village residents and helping to take forward the "Haddenham of the Future" discussions. She was also a key link person supporting the practical, financial and social needs of the Syrian family that HVS helped to settle in Haddenham in 2019. Alison's strong moral compass has been a great asset and we miss her input on the committee.

Primary Activities in 2024

Planning Issues

During the past year the Village Society submitted numerous written comments via the online Bucks Planning Portal in relation to planning applications by Redrow, Richborough, Rectory, Land Improvements and other developers. We also encouraged residents, as concerned individuals, to do likewise.

The Village Society also made in-person representations at the Planning Appeal in relation to the proposed Richborough development held by a Government-appointed Planning Inspector in June.

Public Meetings & Events

The Society has continued to offer members a varied programme of public meetings over the last year, covering a broad spectrum of interests.

Speakers and Themes have included:

Paul Wilkinson - Portrait Photography

Keith Milmer - Identifying and Avoiding Scams

Brian Bowman - Led our annual country ramble

Andy Greenacre - The role of a Picture Editor for a National Newspaper

Jane Robinson - The Researching and writing of her latest historical book: "Trailblazer"

The Village Society hosted hustings in the Junior School in June, providing a public platform for each of the candidates standing in the UK General Election for our constituency (Mid Bucks). The meeting was ably chaired by Brian Bowman and we streamed the event live via YouTube, with thanks to Jim Robins. Alison and Roderick helped to filter questions from the audience.

Also in June we supported the Family Bike Ride that Alan Thawley and HaddSWAC organised to draw attention to the need for a Greenway route between Haddenham and Thame.

We also hosted a Cheese and Wine evening in the Library in September, when we thanked Irene Sisson for her dedicated service to the community through her management of Ivor Miles garage and presented her with an etched glass bowl.

The year concluded with another delightful concert by Witchert Chorale, hosted in St Mary's Church by the Village Society.

Committee Vacancies

Vice Chair

As mentioned above, we are likely to see Jim Robins retire from his Vice Chair role in the near future, and the continuity of Haddenham Village Society will very much depend on our having a logical succession plan in place. Jim has declined the Chair role and always made this decision clear to the committee. If duly elected at the AGM, I would be honoured to continue in the role as Chair, but it is very important that we can identify or (if necessary) recruit a new committee member as a potential Vice Chair as soon as possible.

As many will recognise, I continue to wear several hats in Haddenham, especially in relation to editing the community website and co-moderating its linked Facebook page. In these roles, I deal with well over 100 emails and Facebook interactions every day. I also collaborate with Bucks & Surrey Trading Standards, to represent them in their efforts to raise public awareness of telephone and online scams. So it is essential that we secure the support of a Vice Chair for the Village Society. Please consider volunteering or suggesting someone whom we might approach.

Meetings Secretary

We also need to recruit an individual who can help us to compile our public meetings programme, and to communicate with the presenters, so that all the practical and logistical details are in place.

This is an important role but not an arduous one. The wider committee will help generate ideas for themes and suitable speakers and we would estimate that an hour or two of admin time per week would be all the commitment required - plus attending our committee meetings about once every six weeks. Again, please consider volunteering or suggesting a suitable person. Thank you.

Keith Milmer

January 2025