

Garsington Neighbourhood Plan – 2022 to 2035

Annex D - Community Facilities and Social Groups

Garsington has many community facilities and social groups that make a major contribution to village life and its social cohesion. Some of these have been, and remain, under threat and any significant development within the village that would support or could enhance these assets would be welcomed.

Garsington Primary School (Church of England), part of the River Learning Trust

Located in a modern (c1982) building in the centre of the village, the school is very popular and fully subscribed. There is a high proportion of non-Garsington children at the school which has some impact on the involvement of pupils and parents in village life, as well as contributing to considerable traffic congestion at peak 'school-run' times. The school is a major attraction for the village, therefore new housing that enabled more young families to live in the village would be of benefit. At present there is no threat to the school's future.

As well as the usual school events, there is a strong link with the vicar of Garsington and St Mary's. This largely revolves around the traditional stage-posts in the Christian calendar of Christmas, Easter and Harvest time. Villagers are welcome to attend school events such the International Evening, school productions and May Day. A recent innovation has been 'Full Circle' - a weekly inter-generational group that brings older and younger generations together for lunch and activities, to the great benefit of both age-groups. Non-school related events are also occasionally held in the school hall.

St Mary's Parish Church (Church of England)

The only remaining parts of the late twelfth century original church are the Norman tower and parts of the wall of the nave. The north aisle was built at the end of the thirteenth century, and the south aisle in the early fourteenth century: the body of the church was extensively restored around 1849, with fine carved woodwork in the chancel, and it has been little altered since then. The church occupies an imposing site at the edge of the original village centre on a raised hilltop, the site of a Saxon look-out post, with superb views towards the Baldons and across the Thames valley to Wittenham Clumps, with the Chilterns just visible. The picturesque building and attractive views are not only a benefit for the villagers but also attract a large number of visitors, both casual and in groups, such as bell-ringers. There is a small regular congregation for Sunday services (generally 9.30 each Sunday), and the venue is valued as their parish church by many villagers for baptisms, weddings and funerals. It is also used for other village events, such as a regular coffee morning, and concerts. Other events supported by the Church community in the village include the annual Summer Fete (held alternate years in the Vicarage or Manor Grounds), a Safari Supper and an Apple Fayre.

Extensive repairs were carried out to the church tower and roofing in 2008, and a few years later further work was done, restoring eroded window tracery, rehanging and refurbishing the church bells, and installing a fine oak servery at the rear of the church: it is hoped that a WC can be installed in the base of the tower. A number of pews which were in poor condition have been removed and replaced by stacking chairs, so creating a flexible space at the back of the nave for gatherings and occasions, so encouraging more events and performances for the benefit of the village community. Parking space near to the church is very limited, but work is being undertaken in 2019 to improve the main path to the church. The attractive churchyard is planted with many yews, and gives access to the adjacent burial ground, owned by Garsington Parish Council, where burials take place: an additional area of land has recently been donated to the village to give additional space for the interment of ashes.

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Improvements to the planting in the churchyard and the established and new parts of the burial ground, to add to the attraction of the site, which is much used by walkers and dog-owners.

Garsington Sports and Social Club

The S&SC has a club-house with 2 function rooms and bars located on Denton Lane. This is also in a prime location towards the edge of the centre of the village on the hill-top. The site has grand views across Cuddesdon and the Miltons to the Ridgeway. There is a well-maintained cricket square and football pitch. The Club is home to the Garsington Darts and Aunt Sally teams, two Pool teams and a Table Tennis club, as well as hosting the Senior Citizens twice a month plus regular social events (Quiz evening, Music nights, Private Functions etc). The Club facilities are regularly used by Garsington School.

Core supporters are drawn from within and outside the village (approx. 50/50). There are active football and cricket teams for different age groups, though the number of youth teams has reduced in recent years. As with the school this may be linked to the lower number of young families living in the village, an issue the Neighbourhood Plan hopes to address.

The Manor Bar and Restaurant (previously the Three Horseshoes)

This is Garsington's only remaining pub, 2 others having closed in the last 8 years (The Plough and The Red Lion). It occupies a prime site in the heart of the village being on the Green and in the conservation area. From what was once a thriving focal point for much of the village's social life, the Manor Bar and Restaurant suffered in common with many village pubs in recent years. The local situation was not helped by a tie to Green King as the landlord and, over the last decade, a succession of over 20 changes in licensee. The pub has been registered as a Community Asset and at the present time (June 2024) a process of re-registration is being pursued. This is a major concern for all the village, as the Pub remains the default meeting point, start or end-point for many formal and informal gatherings. Any opportunities to extend the scope of the services and increase the viability of the pub as a business are strongly supported within the Neighbourhood Plan.

Garsington's Shops

There is one shop that remains open in the village, located in the Elm Drive development just off the Oxford Road. This is a very long-established hair salon. A convenience store next to the hair salon has recently re-opened, this shop once held a post-office.

Bus Service

The 11 bus currently operated by Thames Travel provides a broadly hourly service between Garsington and Oxford (originating in Watlington) on weekdays with a reduced service on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays.

Garsington Village Hall

The village hall is located, almost literally, in the bosom of the village, sitting on a tight site in the crook of the 'swiss bend', a steep hairpin at the junction of the Oxford Road and The Hill. Built in 1911. it was extensively refurbished and extended in 2011, with support from the Parish Council, SODC, WREN and local fundraising. It is owned by the village and run by a committee of committed villagers who maintain the high standard of the facility, which includes a modern kitchen, flexible staging and a meeting room. It is heavily used for private

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functions, public events such as music evenings and drama productions, and regular village bookings such as Parish Council Meetings, the WI, the Village Choir, Exercise Classes and the monthly Lunch Club, to name a few.

The site relies on an arrangement with The Three Horseshoes for parking as there is one disabled-parking bay at the hall. Prior to the refurbishment there was extensive debate and negotiation regarding moving the hall to a new, larger site, but planning, cost and land ownership issues prevented this from progressing. In the long-term, relocation may become a possibility, potentially combined with a new village pub.

Village Playgrounds

There is a well-equipped childrens' playground in the village, supported and maintained by the Parish Council. This is located on Denton Lane above the S&SC playing fields. It consists of a fenced area containing many pieces of playground equipment including climbing frames, swings, zip-wire and a new wood/rope climbing-frame and bucket swing, recently purchased with the aid of a grant from SODC. The playground commands wonderful views over to the Chilterns and is extensively used by villagers and visitors from afar. The playground and equipment are maintained to ROSPA standards. Adjacent to the fenced area we have a 'kick-about' football pitch that is maintained by the Parish Council.

There are two other 'green areas' in the village, although not formally described as 'playgrounds' and without playground equipment, that are frequently used by young people as play areas. These are the green in Poplar Close and a field to the south of Oxford Road, Parsler's Piece. These are both appreciated by parents (and grandparents!) as well as local children. The green in Poplar close is owned and maintained by SOHA and Parsler's Piece by the Parish Council.

The Green & other Village Green Spaces

The actual Green remaining in Garsington is a small area adjacent to the Old Stone Cross (an ancient monument) and outside the Three Horseshoes. However, it remains at the heart of the village and centre of the conservation area. The war memorial is close by but across the main road. There is scope to refurbish this area with imaginative traffic management and re-location of the war memorial that could greatly enhance the public utility and use of this space. In addition, a small area along Pettiwell and on The Hill adjacent to the junction with The Green are officially registered as 'village greens'.

In addition to the Green, there are a number of Parish-owned green spaces in the village, one piece of 'Common Land' (The Gizzel) and ancient Highways. Some sit alongside the village's roads and others, such as Parsler's Piece, are open pasture spaces, much used by walkers and dog owners. Connecting many of these spaces are the very many public footpaths that criss-cross the village, well-used by residents and visitors. Some of these in the village form part of the Oxford Greenbelt Way, a 50-mile, way-marked series of paths maintained by CPRE, that connect all the way around the City.

The Garsington Society

The Society was formed in 1988 as a result of concerns over development of the Green Belt land. It remains an active social and campaigning group supporting village causes. It currently has 62 members and organises an event approximately every month. These are one-off talks/visits/events, plus regular annual events such as the Quiz (held in the school) and

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Barn Dance (held in the Manor Barn). The Society supports a very active and well-directed ‘working party’ of volunteers that mend fences, build footpaths etc around the village. Monthly committee meetings are held in the pub (at present).

The Women’s Institute

The Garsington WI remains an active group in the village with 29 members. Formed in 1929, it has been a constant in the community since then, new members being always welcome. It meets monthly when there is usually a speaker, and members of the WI also arrange craft evenings, theatre and cinema visits and social events.

Lunch Club & St Mary’s Café

A group of volunteers run a café in the church one Friday morning a month, which offers (for donations) hot drinks and cakes for all age-groups, including young children who can use the play-area. Transport can be arranged if required and this is very popular. The Garsington Society working party often works the same day! The Lunch Club provides (for £5) a full hot lunch once a month in the village hall. This is again run by volunteers and is very well supported.

Other Groups / Events

- Good Neighbours group - provides a tea every second Tuesday of the month, run by a predominantly elderly group. Any age welcomed though in reality attendees tend to be the more elderly. Several regulars are only able to come because transport is provided.
- Volunteer Drivers group - open to anyone that requires the service to attend appointments or village events, volunteers tend to be retired and the users drawn from a diverse range of residents from across the whole village, though again generally the very elderly.
- Senior Citizens group - meets in the S&SC twice a month and organises occasional outings for members drawn from within and beyond the village (approx. 50/50).
- Full Circle - a weekly shared lunch between elderly from the community and school children, which has proved very popular with both groups.

There are a number of other activities that take place in the community, both open and large (Village Fete, School Fete, Village Choir, Exercise classes) and smaller private groups largely attended by residents such as book clubs, theatre performances, walking groups, soup lunches etc. These also tend to be most popular with older residents, stemming from the current demographic of the village. Affordable accommodation that encouraged a greater diversity of residents and therefore participants in events to suit all tastes would be welcomed by the majority of residents.

Garsington Newsletter

This is a high-quality A5 booklet of about 20 pages that is hand-delivered to every dwelling in the village, free of charge, every 2 months. It contains articles and news from the Parish Council (who fund it) and all groups in the village as well as adverts for local businesses. It is edited and distributed by volunteers.

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