

NEWSLETTER

March 2020, issue 37

Parish Council matters

What very strange times we are in! The Parish Council will be doing business as usual ... but in a different way. There are no public opening hours at our office for the foreseeable future but you can contact us via phone, e-mail or post.

This year's Annual Parish Meeting is currently scheduled for Thursday 16 April but, in view of the current situation is most unlikely to go ahead. There's more information about why we aren't yet able to officially cancel the meeting below in "News from the Parish Office".

The second half of the meeting on 16 April was to have been the time to decide whether the Community Shop/Post Office goes ahead. Regardless of any decision about the Annual Parish Meeting, that discussion will have to be deferred until things settle down and public gatherings are, once again, permitted. Meanwhile, to help you make up your mind about the shop, you can read about the research done by the Community Shop Steering Group, proposed plans and costings [here](#).

A positive of the current crisis is that it's really highlighting what a great community Purley is! Purley Residents Support Committee has organised volunteers to help local people who are housebound or in isolation. This is an essential initiative and we are really grateful to everyone who has volunteered. See the "Community Support" item later in this Newsletter for more information.

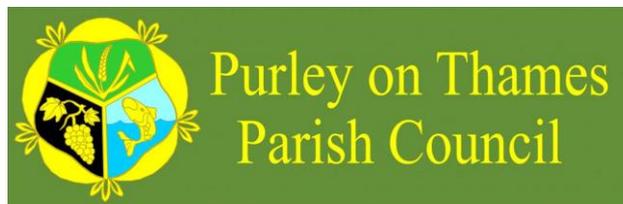
There's also good news for those living in lower Purley as the river level is now back to "normal" for the time of year, and the risk of flooding has passed for now. If you do venture out for a walk you will find that the willows are already 'greening-up' and the water birds already think it is Spring! Hope for the future!



Tree pruning at Mapledurham – the muddy "tide-mark" shows just how high the water was

If you also receive the Purley Parish News you will see that there is similar Parish Council information there. However, Government guidance has changed since I wrote that and so this newsletter is the more up to date version! Do also keep an eye on our website for any changing information. As we go into a period like none of us has ever experienced, take care and stay well!

Sue Briscoe
Chair of the Parish Council



News from the Parish Office

As for so many others, the biggest challenge we've faced over the past few weeks has resulted from Coronavirus (Covid-19) and its impact on society. Much of our time as a council has been spent deciding how best to continue operating while waiting to find out what happens next.

Rather sadly, the office is now closed to the public. This was a difficult decision to make as we all enjoy meeting parishioners and, hopefully, being able to help them but, in the circumstances, it was the only sensible and responsible thing to do to protect officers, councillors and the public.

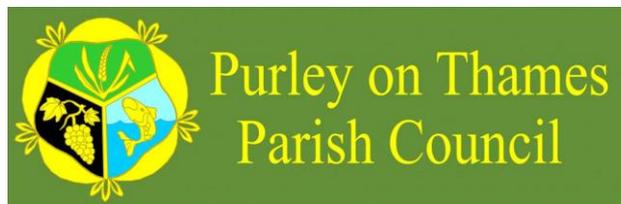
Officers will continue to go in (but not together), for as long as possible to pick up telephone messages and check the letterbox. The best form of contact, however, is e-mail as it can be accessed remotely. For details, see the contact information at the end of this newsletter.

Meetings are more complicated, and we had to cancel the Highways and Footpaths meeting earlier this month. Planning meetings are usually scheduled twice a month but as face-to-face meetings are not permitted, it's hoped councillors will be able to access applications online and agree their comments by e-mail.

One very important meeting is the Annual Parish Meeting, at which residents can meet and ask question of councillors, particularly in regard to the Annual Report. All parish councils are legally required to hold this meeting before June each year but, as a result of the current situation, the legislation covering this is under review. Until the law is revised to allow councils to defer Annual Parish Meetings until public gatherings are again permitted, we have to hold the date open for the meeting despite the fact it's most unlikely to go ahead in April. When more is known, an update will be sent to recipients of this newsletter and will also be posted on the web site.

Otherwise, a great deal of our work this month has been cancelling Barn bookings. Understandably, most clubs and organisations started cancelling their sessions from mid-March and, when there was really only one weekly booking left, we decided the best thing would be to close the Barn completely for the time being. It will be checked and cleaned regularly, but there will be no bookings until at least 30 April when the situation will be reviewed. In the circumstances, there was no charge for cancellations which does, of course, affect Parish Council income, particularly if the Barn remains closed for any significant length of time.

As and when the situation changes, updates will be put on the home page of the Parish Council web site. Although we will always do this as soon as we can, in the circumstances, we might not be able to react immediately and hope you will understand if there are any delays.



Recreation areas and allotments

Following the government announcement on 23 March, which requires closure of communal spaces within parks, such as playgrounds, sports courts and outdoor gyms, the Parish Council has locked the gates to Bucknell's Meadow and the playground at Goosecroft, and closed the tennis courts. These facilities will be closed to the public until further notice.

The allotments are still open to allotment holders, although the National Allotment Society is currently consulting with the government over whether this is still permitted. It is vitally important that all allotment holders follow the guidance given [here](#) about social distancing and hygiene while on the allotments. No plot holder who is self-isolating because a household member has coronavirus should visit the site.

Postponements

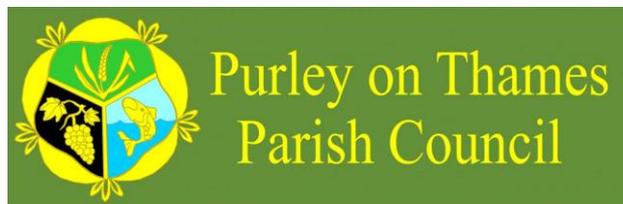
So far, planned pieces of work and events which have had to be postponed because of the coronavirus crisis include:

- The Spring Clean scheduled for the end of this month. Members of Purley Residents Support Committee were to participate in the national Great British Spring Clean initiative. It's hoped this will be reorganised later in the year, possibly in September.
- The large Suez bin on Mapledurham Drive. For the past couple of years, the Parish Council has arranged for the extra bin from spring to autumn to help keep the meadows clear of rubbish. This year, it was to have been installed earlier than usual, in March, so as to be available for the spring clean. The need for the extra bin will be reviewed regularly.
- Mapledurham Fish Pass. The Environment Agency was due to start work on this in the next month, on the water meadows near the lock, but has decided to defer the project until a later time.
- Public meeting in regard to footpaths at Springs Farm. This will have to be put off until such time as meetings and assemblies are permitted.

Annual Report

The Annual Report is issued each year at this time. This year, although all members of the delivery team were able to pick up their batches of reports to deliver, not everyone was able to put the reports through doors before lockdown started. Deliveries have had to be put on hold for now but will be resumed as soon as possible. In the meantime, a PDF of the 2019-20 is available on the [Parish Council web site](#).

We would like to say a particularly big "thank you" to Richard McDonald, who took on the role of delivery co-ordinator this year, as well as the whole team of volunteers who undertook to make the deliveries at a particularly difficult time. The ongoing support of so many local residents has been a huge help and is greatly appreciated.



Activities web page

In these unprecedented and worrying times, many people feel 'at a loss'. Whether you are self-isolating or have children at home for the foreseeable future, life may seem bleak at times.

The Parish Council is going to use its website – www.purleyonthames-pc.gov.uk – which is intended to be a resource for parishioners, to provide a little community support, enabling us to help each other to deal constructively with new-found time, maintain mental health and perhaps give a little cheer! Social media may also be doing that but not everyone wants to use social media!

This week we are going to make a start by putting up some ideas for people to try. These will be things that you could do at home and, if you want, share by sending a photo, scans of pictures or by writing a piece. You could do book or film reviews, or share handy tips and any other ideas you may have. We will put up a weekly post with the contributions from other local people. Please join in and tell others!

We hope to have the new page up and running from early April.

West Berkshire Council

The government is guiding local authorities to become a "Fourth Emergency Service" in the current crisis, and a Major Incident has been declared across the Thames Valley. West Berkshire Council (WBC) has set up emergency incident rooms and is moving staff from services where the crisis will reduce workload to frontline community support roles. WBC perceives the following as the top three priorities for supporting residents:

1. Continuity of adult and child social care
2. Supporting vulnerable people and community groups who want to help
3. Reducing the economic impact on residents and small businesses

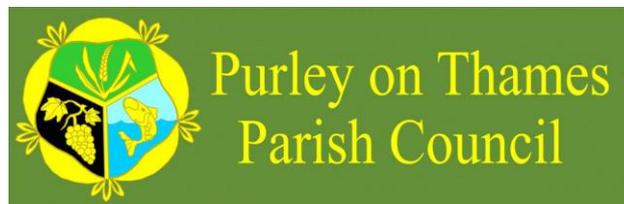
With the second priority in mind, WBC has joined forces with the Volunteer Centre West Berkshire and Greenham Common Trust to form a Community Support Hub, which will be the central point for all parish councils and voluntary groups helping the community. The Hub will meet regularly to monitor needs across the district and to ensure they are understood and met.

Leaflets giving information on all emergency measures locally are to be delivered to each household in the next few days.

For more information about WBC's Community Support Hub and for useful links to web sites giving national advice and guidance, please see [here](#)



Please see WBC's Coronavirus (Covid-19) information for residents page for details as to changes to services the council offers - info.westberks.gov.uk/coronavirus-residents



Royal Berkshire Hospital

A news release from Royal Berkshire Hospital (RBH) released on 25 March gives updated information on a major action plan to deal with the Coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak. The plan is aimed at ensuring local patients, staff and communities are guaranteed first class healthcare and support. It builds on work already in place at RBH and aims to give reassurance that everything possible is being done to keep people safe and well. The plan's four main strands are:

- to reduce the number of people – patients, visitors and staff – on hospital sites
- to increase and enhance the RBH's capacity to treat patients
- to reduce demand so focus is on patients in greatest need of help
- to look after hard-working staff and ensure they have equipment and facilities they need

Measures have already been put in place to increase virtual outpatient appointments, to restrict visitors to one per patient per day, to establish separate zones in the hospital, to increase intensive care capacity from 14 to 34 beds, and to suspend elective surgery so that key staff retrain in other, more urgent areas of work.

The next phase means implementing further changes.

In a bid to reduce the number of people on site further, some services may be deferred and others may be moved to private hospital settings. Children under the age of 12 will no longer be able to go to the RBH as visitors.

To increase capacity to deal with Covid-19 patients, there are plans to increase intensive care beds to 56. There are talks about moving urgent surgery to private hospitals.

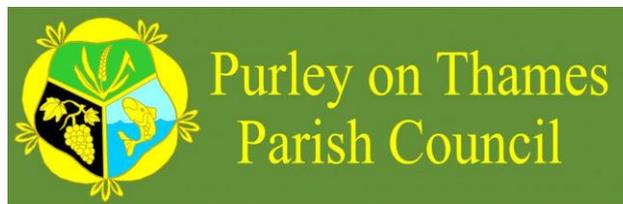
Demand in A&E has fallen recently, and an "ask A&E" online services is now being looked into.

Welfare of staff is paramount and senior management teams are looking into more ways of easing the unprecedented demands facing everyone working in the hospital – the clinicians and vital back up, as well as support teams such as cleaners, porters and admin employees.



Trust Chief Executive Steve McManus, said: "We all know now that this is a marathon, not a sprint, and it's crucial we plan and operate in a careful, measured way over the next few weeks and months so our resources, both staff, equipment and facilities, are able to continue providing exceptional standards of care.

"With this in mind, I really do hope people will appreciate why we've had to take some of the decisions we have taken, for example around visiting family and loved ones in hospital. I know this will be extremely hard for some people but we can't say it enough - If we are to successfully deal with this virus, stop its spread, treat those affected and free up the hospital's resources to do so, then we have to take these sort of serious steps now."



Purley Residents Support Committee

Purley Residents Support Committee (PRSC) has organised a network of 53 volunteers across Purley on Thames. They will work together to make help available where it is needed as the Coronavirus crisis continues.

So far, PRSC has delivered notes to households giving contact details of local volunteers, and vulnerable residents have been helped with shopping, medical appointments and post. As well as giving physical help, calls have been made simply to make contact and to show support.

PRSC is working with the Boathouse Surgery in Pangbourne to help patients with their prescriptions. It has also been contacted by "Reading Mutual Care for the Coronavirus" and West Berkshire's Voluntary Service, who have referred both volunteers and those needing support, whether for themselves or for relatives living locally.

For general information, please see Facebook page: Purley Residents Support Committee. To contact PRSC, please e-mail prscpurley@aol.com or call 07803 346552.

Thames Valley Police

This week, the police have had to spend time at Sulham Woods, sending people home because they've ignored government guidance on exercising and social distancing.

Everyone is allowed to exercise once each day, in a group of not more than two people, and only with those they live with. Permitted exercise – walking, running, cycling, etc – must be started from home in order to comply with the instruction to avoid all unnecessary travel.

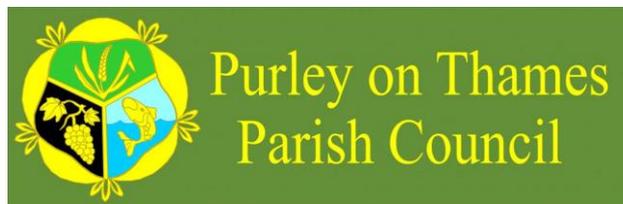
If in doubt as to what is currently permitted, you should check the current government guidance on social distancing which can be found [here](#).

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Although the current crisis has brought out the good in so many people, it has also given rise to a wave of [coronavirus-themed scams](#), with people and organisations receiving e-mails, texts and phone calls. The majority of reported cases have been related to online purchases of protective face masks, hand sanitiser, and other products which are never received. Fraudsters have also exploited people's concerns and fears by setting up web sites asking for donations to help others, claiming to promote awareness, or offering fake cures or prevention tips.

The advice is to be skeptical if you receive a message you're not expecting, and never click on any links or attachments. Do not give out personal data or allow yourself to be pressured into giving money. Anyone who thinks they might have fallen victim to a scam should contact their bank immediately.

Please report any fraud to Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040 and see the [web site](#) for the latest information on new scams.



Coronavirus (Covid-19)

Although there are far better sources of information about coronavirus symptoms and what to do, we felt a quick overview should be included here.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the most common symptoms are fever, tiredness and a dry cough, although some patients may also have a runny nose, sore throat, nasal congestion, aches and pains, or diarrhoea. Most of the people – around 80% – who get coronavirus will have it mildly; it's similar to a normal cold, and no special treatment is needed to recover.

However, about one in six people do become seriously ill. The elderly and those with existing health problems such as high blood pressure, heart problems, diabetes, or chronic respiratory conditions are at greater risk. Antibiotics are of no use and there is currently no vaccine, so recovery depends on the strength of the immune system.

In the UK, the NHS has identified specific symptoms to look for:

- high temperature – feeling hot to touch on the chest or back
- a new continuous cough – ie, the person has started coughing repeatedly.

Anyone displaying symptoms of coronavirus should stay at home for at least seven days. They should not go to the GP, pharmacy or hospital. Those living alone should contact friends, family, employer or one of the local support groups for help.

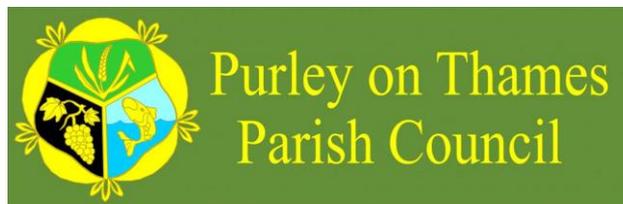
Anyone living with someone who has symptoms should stay at home for at least 14 days to avoid spreading the infection further.

Advice for looking after a coronavirus patient at home is that they should:

- drink plenty of fluids, especially water, and avoid alcohol;
- have plenty of rest and avoid any strenuous activity; and
- use over-the-counter medicines such as paracetamol and cough mixture to treat symptoms. As with other viruses, taking it easy is crucial to recovery.

If symptoms worsen during isolation or are no better after seven days, the NHS should be contacted either via the dedicated [coronavirus NHS 111 website](#) or, for those with no internet access, by calling 111.

Medical emergencies should still be reported by calling 999.



Village matters

Volunteering opportunities

Purley Residents Support Committee – see “Community Support” item above. For more information, please see the Facebook page, or to volunteer e-mail prscpurley@aol.com



The NHS is building a team of volunteers to help vulnerable people stay safe and well at home. There are three categories including a telephone chat service for anyone who would prefer not to leave home.

For further information and to sign up, please see [here](#)



Reading Mutual Aid is a group which has been set up for people who want to help each other. Those with something to offer may tell others on the group’s Facebook page. Help may be in the form of somewhere to sleep, sharing food, donating clothes, giving a lift, helping with petcare, or many other offerings.

The group is registered with the Boathouse Surgery and can pick up prescriptions from the pharmacy in Pangbourne and deliver them to residents in Purley – if you need this service, please call 07380 248606.

For other information, please see the Reading Mutual Aid Facebook page.

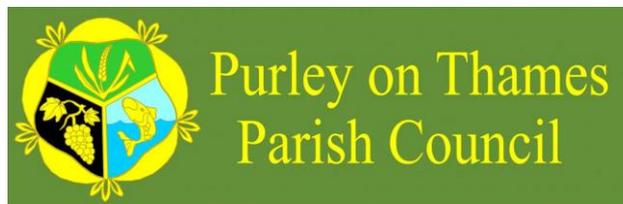
Access to countryside and public rights of way

Although the National Trust closed all of its houses, shops and cafés on 17 March, it had hoped to open many of its gardens and parks to the public for free. Sadly, as a result of good weather over the Mother’s Day weekend, all gated gardens and parks had to be closed from midnight on 21 March in order to help encourage social distancing.

From Tuesday 24 March, the National Trust took the further step of closing its car parks to try to help restrict the spread of Coronavirus, and to encourage the public to not to travel and to observe social distancing.

For further information and updates, please see www.nationaltrust.org.uk/





The restrictions on movement announced by the government now also apply to public rights of way and the countryside access network. Although the outdoors is a great place for exercise, everyone must adhere to the following rules and advice.

1. Use local public rights of way only for lawful access, ie to exercise once a day, for routes to food shops, or when essential for work.
2. Don't travel to "honeypot" sites with large car parks or where there are residential moorings.
3. Keep around two metres (six feet) between your household group and others you meet.
4. Don't arrange to meet other families or form groups larger than two.
5. Carry, use and take home your tissues and other health products.
6. Where routes use canal towpaths or riverbanks, respect residents who have limited space and may be in self-isolation due to illness and other vulnerabilities. Consider using other routes.
7. Although there's no evidence of human-animal transference of coronavirus, it is sensible to limit contact with other families' dogs and farm livestock as part of social distancing

It is also important to be aware that some people live very close to public rights of way – for example farmers and residential moorings – and their social distancing must also be remembered; some of these people may be in self-isolation because they are vulnerable or ill.

Local news and events

As we are now in a period of lockdown, there are no events to include here or on the web site, but an increasing number of ways to fill time at home is becoming available online.



Some fitness groups have set up online classes so, if you usually attend regular classes, it might be worth contacting the organiser to find out if they're offering something to join from home. Otherwise, online classes and videos range from Yoga, Pilates and home workouts, to apps for indoor running and cycling training.

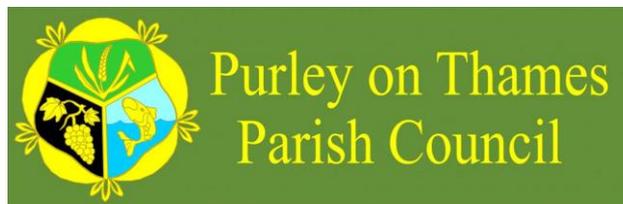
The NHS has six equipment-free workouts to try on its [web site](#).



Or perhaps you'd like to expand your learning but don't usually have time – if so, this could be a golden opportunity to learn a new language or perhaps study for a qualification.

OpenLearn is a part of the Open University and offers nearly 1,000 free courses which can be found [here](#).

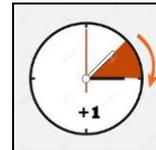




If you have ideas or activities you'd like to share with others, please see the item above about the Activities web page.



Don't forget to put your clocks forward by one hour on Sunday 29 March when we move from Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) to British Summer Time (BST).



Contact

The Parish Office is now closed to the public but, if you would like to contact us, please call 0118 984 4507 and leave a message or you may deliver things using the letterbox outside the office. We will also be accessing our e-mails, and you are welcome to contact us on:

Claire Thompson, Clerk – clerk@purleyonthames.net

Sarah Williams, Assistant Clerk – asstclerk@purleyonthames.net

Colin Moses, Amenities Officer – amenities@purleyonthames.net

Please see the the Parish Council web site – www.purleyonthames-pc.gov.uk – for further information, activities and updates.

If you know of anyone who might like to receive this Parish Council Newsletter, please ask them to e-mail the Assistant Clerk giving the e-mail address they'd like us to use.