

Wonersh Parish Council

Blackheath, Shamley Green and Wonersh

Winter Newsletter 2025

Introduction

Welcome to our end of year newsletter. Winter is well underway and our ditch clearance, hedge cut back and final mowing is mostly complete. Our Volunteer Groups continue to be fantastic with loads of work completed in Wonersh and Shamley Green, and the chainsaw team thinning and coppicing in Healy's Wood, in accordance with the Woodland Management Plan agreed with the Forestry Commission. The donated trees also look great in Barnett Fields along with newly donated benches with memorial plaques. The Arbuthnot Hall redevelopment has applied to the Waverley CIL fund to cover their remaining funding gap, so will hopefully get the go-ahead next year. There are updates below on the creation of the new Unitary Council to cover West Surrey along with the demise of Waverley Borough Council; the latest on the St John's Church walls; the possible introduction of sheep for a few weeks each year in Barnett Fields; the long-awaited possibility that Wonersh Village will get a 20mph zone, and news of the St John's Seminary development.

Seasonal Greetings to you all.

Anthony Shutes, Chair

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR): How it will impact Wonersh Parish?

What we know so far: Surrey County Council and the 11 Borough Councils, including Waverley, will be abolished by April 2027 and nearly all activities centralised into two Unitary Councils: West and East Surrey. West Surrey will include Waverley, Guildford, Woking, Runnymede, as well as the debt laden Woking and Spelthorne. A debt relief package for Woking has been announced by Central Government. Elections will be held in May 2026 for West Surrey's 90 new Unitary Councillors, who will shadow the current County Councillors for one year until April 2027, when the transition to the new Councils will go live. Some 70% of West Surrey is covered by Town and Parish Councils. To ensure full engagement the Government is proposing all areas are covered by Neighbourhood Area Committees (NAC) to include local organisations, businesses, emergency services, Town and Parish Councils etc. The details, responsibilities and governance are not yet clear and Surrey is piloting 4 NACs including Farnham.

What it might mean for Wonersh: This will not be known for some time and we await the recommendations from the pilot NACs. While most of Surrey's and Waverley's responsibilities will be taken over by West Surrey, we may have the opportunity to take on either assets or services that are currently within the Parish boundaries, subject to resources, competency and funding. This could include land we do not already lease and some emergency resilience (e.g. warm hubs in the event of power failure). There may also be opportunities to work with adjacent parishes to share contractors or undertake minor maintenance and repairs. Wonersh Parish is well positioned as we have recently signed 125-year leases on some 50 acres of land owned by Waverley. Of this, the Parish is responsible for the c.10 acres of 'open areas' including the Shamley Green Duck Pond, whilst the 'wooded areas' are currently managed by Waverley. We expect these woods, along with the Blackheath ranger and management responsibilities, will likely be taken on by West Surrey. The Parish Council may use this opportunity to evaluate the option of changing the lease to acquire the freehold.

The Parish Council will also need to respond to new legislation covering:

- Remote meetings, at last allowing Parish Meetings to be hybrid with Councillors and residents able to attend online
- Compliance with the New Employment bill
- Compliance with Martyn's Law for larger public events
- Compliance with updated standards
- Introduction of website accessibility and gov.uk email addresses for Councillors and Officers. We are already working on a new website and email address updates for completion early 2026.

St John's Closed Burial Ground: Wall Update

By way of background, the Church is the owner of the Closed Burial Ground, including the walls, whilst the Parish Council is responsible for their decent maintenance. For over 10 years the Council and Church have commissioned regular condition surveys of the walls, with the most recent survey in 2022 concluding that:

- the northern and western wall (which are not listed) were leaning inwards, were unsafe, and needed to be cordoned off
- critical repairs were needed to the southern wall (which is listed).

The Church accepted that their trees were largely responsible for the **northern** wall lean and received Church Diocese (Faculty) approval to replace the wall, at their full cost, with a heritage metal fence; this work was completed last year.

The **southern** wall repairs have recently been completed and were funded by the Council using public funding of some £10,000, with the Church agreeing to fund the remaining £5,000 (a third of the overall cost).

Following many discussions and concern as to funding, a detailed design from specialist engineering consultants was secured, followed by three quotes sought for buttressing the severely leaning **western** wall. Two companies provided quotes of £90,000 and £135,000 respectively, while the third company declined to quote due to the instability of the wall. Both the Church and Council do not have the funds to repair or replace the western wall; indeed the higher quote is equivalent to c.100% of the annual council tax precept. After considerable discussion the Church and Council decided to replace the wall with either a heritage metal fence or native hedge.

The Diocese of Guildford, as the approving authority, sought the advice of Historic England and, following a public notice seeking comments, agreed in June 2025 for the western wall to be removed and replaced with a heritage metal fence, similar to that installed along the northern wall. Waverley Planning also agreed approval for the wall removal but require planning permission to install a fence. The wall removal was completed mid-October 2025. Funding for this was split 50:50 by the Council and Church.

Both the Church and Council would clearly have preferred to keep the western wall. However, the Church do not have the funds and the Council decided that it was not appropriate to use significant public funds or take a loan for a wall that is not owned by the Parish Council.

St John's Seminary Redevelopment

Marstead Living has taken over as lead developer and have held preliminary discussions with Waverley Planning. They propose to submit an amended plan in the first quarter of 2026 for the buildings to be converted into 85 units for 'Senior Independent Living'. This is welcome news as the plans still include a permissive foot/cycle path through the grounds, and will unlock the S106 funds of £235,000 (agreed as condition of the original planning approval) to upgrade footpaths and introduce pedestrian safety improvements in Wonersh Village centre. These funds will be payable on first occupation, which is currently estimated to be in 2028. The new developer is keen to consult with the local community and will be holding open sessions in the new year.

Allotments

The demand for allotments in Wonersh is consistent and most plots are fully utilised. We are pleased that holders had a successful summer of growing and there is an increasingly social element with plot holders meeting for drinks, barbecues etc. We are delighted to be able to reassure the community that, although rumours of the land being sold are true, this will not impact the use of the land and the new owners are very committed to retaining the allotments for the future. If you are interested in taking over a vacant plot as they become available, please contact the Clerk in the first instance at: clerk@wonershparish.org.

WEAG, including the Barnett Field Group (BFG)



Where to start - so much is happening! The old falling down fence has been removed between the two Barnett fields and a new hedge planted by volunteers (below), along with deer fencing and a temporary solar powered electric fence, all installed by the BFG. 14 new native trees (all donated by residents) with deer fencing have been planted in Barnett Fields and 2 replacement trees along the commons sports ground (left). The wooden posts are all sourced from the thinning of Healy's Wood and installed by our volunteers. Plans for the new year are focussed on thinning/coppicing and fence post preparation in Healy's Wood, as well as installing drop down metal posts at the entrance to Barnett Fields to discourage unwanted access. We also have two new gates to install: one between the larger field and Healy's Wood and one for pedestrian access between the two fields (and so close the vehicle gate which becomes very muddy!).

Other winter activities include litter picking, clearing paths and repairing the gate in Gerald's Wood, and managing the now not-so-new hedging planted near the playground. If you wish to volunteer, please contact clerk@wonershparish.org.

The removal of ragwort has been excessively hard work for volunteers, so BFG, with the support of the Parish Council, is investigating the introduction of Surrey Wildlife Trust owned sheep to graze for a few weeks in the spring and possibly the autumn. This has already been successfully trialled on adjacent fields and would help control ragwort at spring rosette stage, as well as improving the botanical diversity and health of the fields in general, and also providing improved pollinator and small mammal habitats by maintaining varied sward heights. The Council is keen to ensure walkers can still access the field margins, so additional fencing and signage will be needed for sheep to safely graze. Dogs will be required to be on leads whilst the sheep are present; this is of course already expected in the bird nesting season from 1st March to 31st July.



Shamley Green Environment Group Update



Highlights of the last few months: Regena Coult won the BBC 2025 Make A Difference Green Award for her work helping amphibians in Shamley Green (below). And the statistics (<https://www.shamleygreenenvironment.co.uk>) show that 2025 was a record year for animals helped. A successful October Day with lots of new volunteers was spent scrub clearing and dead hedging on Lords Hill (left), guided by our friends at the Wonersh Environment Advisory Group. Our SGEg tree monitoring group has proposed a work programme for tree health on Common Land in the village to the Parish Council whose contractors will take it forward.

Much of the winter work on the ditches and ponds has already been done with reed mace clearance on the Bricklayers Pond nearing completion.

Things to look out for in 2026:

- Toad Patrol - The amphibian migration season starts around the end of January and continues until April. The toad fences will be installed in January. If you can help, please contact Regena on toads@surrey-arg.org.uk.
- More scrub clearing and dead hedging (plans being discussed with the Councils and will be advertised).
- Recommendations to the PC on Duck Pond management, based on four years of monitoring water levels and expert advice (will be put on the SGEg website).
- Shamley Green Spring Litter Pick in March (date to be confirmed) to smarten up the village for the summer.
- Surrey Botanical Society survey the plants of Shamley Green in July 2026. This will build up the increasing body of evidence to be found on the website



Playgrounds

Wonersh Playground has now been extensively refurbished and is being very well used by residents and those further afield. We would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this work and particularly Kevin Deanus, our Surrey County Councillor. There is still more to do - refurbishing the table tennis tables, mending benches and cutting back undergrowth - but we are nearly there.

It has been brilliant to see so many families and young people enjoying the new play equipment in Lords Hill Playground which was installed just in time for Summer. This has breathed a new lease of life into the play park and we hope will continue to serve as a focal place for families to meet. We are working towards fundraising for one final piece of equipment to replace the play tower. Please do get in touch with the Clerk via clerk@wonershparish.org if you would like to contribute towards this - any donations are greatly appreciated.



Speedwatch

Members of the Speedwatch team continue to be active in Wonersh and Shamley Green. Speeding is a constant issue through both villages and the Speedwatch initiative helps reduce speed by issuing letters to speeding drivers warning them of a potential police visit if they are caught again. Both villages desperately need more people to help support Speedwatch. The commitment is not onerous and can be as little as one hour per month. Please support us by contacting the Clerk for a discussion at clerk@wonershparish.org.

20 mph Update

Everyone will have noticed that Shalford is becoming a completely 20mph speed zone. It is helping keep villagers safe and making life for people who live in the 20mph areas more pleasant.

Surrey County Council has now agreed to consider a 20 mph zone through Wonersh village and The Street onwards into Bramley, and will be consulting early next year on any proposals. The Parish Council will hold open meetings for residents to hear more about this when we have some firm news. Extensive research shows that the key benefits of 20mph are:

- **Road Safety:**
 - Substantially reduces road traffic casualties, particularly for pedestrians and children.
 - Lowers the severity of injuries when collisions do occur.
- **Health & Environment:**
 - Encourages walking, scooting, and cycling by making streets feel safer.
 - Reduces noise pollution, improving the quality of life for residents.
 - No significant negative impact on air quality; some studies suggest smoother driving reduces brake/tyre wear emissions.
- **Community & Economy:**
 - Fosters stronger community feel and social cohesion.
 - Supports local businesses by making areas more attractive for people to spend time.
 - Decreases demand and costs for emergency services like police and ambulances.
- **Traffic Flow:**
 - Leads to smoother, more consistent driving with less harsh braking and accelerating.
 - Journey time impacts are minimal, often just minor delays during off-peak hours, which are outweighed by daytime benefits.

For Wonersh, there is one additional rationale for having a 20 mph zone. At the current speed limit of 30 mph, Surrey CC policy does not allow the introduction of safe pedestrian crossing points or mid-carriageway refuges *without* the installation of street lights, which would be prohibitively expensive. At 20 mph street lighting is not required.

We hope that residents will agree that these benefits would outweigh any potential issues. Watch this space!

Football On Wonersh Common

The Parish Council, together with Wonersh Cricket Club, are keen to establish junior football team(s) on the common during the winter months. In order to progress this, we are looking for a 'football champion' to take this forward with support from our two organisations. If you are at all interested in discussing this then please get in touch with the Clerk at clerk@wonershparish.org.

Road Closures and Diversions

We have heard and shared residents' frustrations with road closures and unsuitable diversions in the Parish in recent months. The December closure of the main road through Shamley Green, and subsequent diversion round Norley Lane / Lordshill, once again caused a lot of disruption for residents and drivers. The ensuing traffic on Norley Lane is extremely damaging, with drainage ditches, verges and the underlying road structure all affected. We have previously raised concerns with our Borough and County Councillors, who have all worked hard to try to find a solution to the problem. This included putting a restriction on the use of Norley Lane as a diversionary route on the Highways system. Unfortunately, on this occasion this was ignored by the utilities company in question. We continue to work with our Borough and County Councillors to hold the relevant parties accountable and push for a permanent solution.

Shamley Green Village Hall Update

The Hall is expected to close for the major redevelopment in June 2026 and reopen about a year later. But a lot must happen before that. The architects, Lytle Associates, are completing the detailed designs working with the Hall Management Committee and consulting the main Hall users. Then four local contractors will be invited to bid in January with the winner appointed in March, provided we can complete our fundraising.

Steady progress continues to be made with that: we have donations and pledges totalling about £1.42m. In recent months the Garfield Weston Foundation has pledged £30,000 and the Bernard Sunley Foundation £15,000. The Hall's excellent Events Team has run well attended fundraising quiz, bingo night, film nights, Brocante, concerts and the Christmas Carols on the Green. And people in the community have made further generous donations.

But we still need more. Estimates are being revised as the detailed design is completed. We are hoping that Waverley Community Infrastructure Levy will contribute, but we still need help from the community to get this over the line. So if you would like to make a donation or have ideas for how the gap could be filled, please contact Jon Watson (chair@arbutnothall.org) or Jim Drummond (jim.drummond2000@gmail.com).

Parish Councillor Vacancy

We are looking for a new Parish Councillor to help represent Wonersh village. No special qualifications are required to be a councillor, indeed it is important that all sorts of people serve as councillors to give good representation of the community. Training for new councillors is available and we are supported by our Clerk and team of paid staff.

If you would like to put yourself forward as a Wonersh Parish Councillor for the Wonersh Ward please get in touch with the clerk (clerk@wonershparish.org) and / or download the application forms from our website (www.wonershparish.org). If a number of people indicate their interest in the role, by 4 February, candidates will be asked to give a short verbal statement about why they are interested in the role, at the Council Meeting in February.

Upcoming Meetings

Our full Council meetings are usually held on the third Thursday of each month, with the next meeting on Thursday 15th January 2026. Please note the February meeting will take place on Thursday 12th February 2026.

Our Planning Committee meetings are held on a rolling 3 weekly basis, with the next Planning meeting being on Thursday 29th January 2026

Full details of all our meetings can be found on our website: <https://wonershparish.org>.