

newt

schools community faith



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Being good

Citizens

HARVEST 2023

St John & St Stephen's Community Magazine

stjohnandststephen.org.uk

A HARVEST... *of Citizenship*

Welcome to NEWT 41

BRITISH PASSPORT



Valuing Citizenship

In the Spring, St. John and St. Stephen's church hosted another *Welcome Course* to help about 30 recent arrivals from Hong Kong settle into life in the UK. One of the topics covered on the course was 'Valuing Citizenship'. We asked what people thought it meant to be a good citizen. Responses included paying taxes, using the right to vote, and obeying the law.

A quiz gave us the opportunity to discuss some of the requirements and expectations of being a UK citizen, and included "true or false" questions like:

- The UK has a written constitution.
- Britain was one of the first countries to sign the European Convention of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.
- It is illegal to treat people unfairly because of age, gender, disability, race, religion or belief, sexuality or marital status.
- Arranged marriages are legally unacceptable in the UK.

(The answers to the "true or false" questions are false, true, true, false.)

Another aspect of being a citizen is volunteering, so we thought together about ways that our Hong Kong friends could get involved. They were keen to contribute to our society and become good citizens in this welcoming country that has given them refuge.

By contrast, back in the first century

Christians in the Roman Empire found themselves living on the fringes of an authoritarian, brutal and materialistic culture. They didn't feel like true citizens of that empire. Instead, they described themselves as 'resident aliens' and as a 'colony of heaven' trying to pioneer a better way of living – a new 'citizenship' they had gained through an encounter with the good news of Jesus.

Nevertheless, they still paid their taxes to Rome and even prayed for the civil authorities; and they tried to do much better than just keeping the Roman law – so long as that law didn't require them to betray their faith! By setting an example of generous, inclusive and truly good community life, they exerted a strong but gentle spiritual influence, and slowly they changed the wider society they lived in. Their legacy is the culture and the values that we widely share today.

As you read through the pages of this edition of NEWT, we hope you will find many encouraging examples of people working locally to change our community for the better, and also see ways in which you too could join in and make your voice and your specific concerns heard. An exciting new opportunity for this will be the upcoming launch of *Citizens UK* in Reading on 22nd November – see our centre pages,

*Don Barwick,
organiser of our
Welcome Course with
the editor, Chris Meunier*



Copy date for NEWT's Christmas edition will be 24th November 2023

Please send contributions to the Parish Office office@stjohnandstephen.org.uk or directly to the editor at chris@meunier.org.uk

Future Good Citizens at St John's CE School



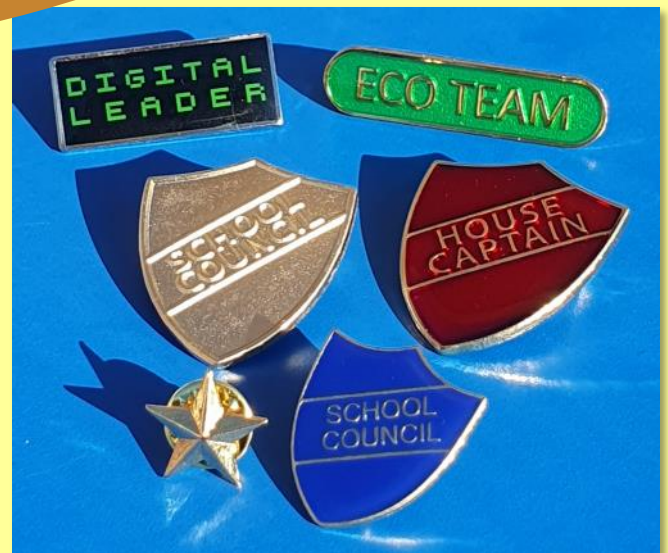
St John's values

Forming the next generation of good citizens is a responsibility all schools across the county hold, and one we take pride in at St John's School. By teaching and following our school values of 'Hope, Empathy, Respect, Kindness and Trust', we help to lay the foundations of the crucial components that it takes to become a good citizen of the future. Our children focus on these values throughout the school year and develop a deep understanding of how these values are shown to other people and greatly valued in everyday life.

Friendship groups



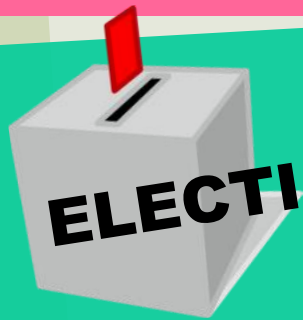
St John's warmly welcomes new pupils to our school family every year; all of whom are received into the school with love, care and support from both the staff and children alike. Our children demonstrate their kindness, empathy and care effortlessly in welcoming their new friends into the school and supporting them to feel comfortable and at ease, allowing them to enjoy their time at school. It is always heart-warming to see this happen whenever we welcome new pupils each year, and in turn encourages our faith in that we have been successful in forming these future citizens who will one day go out in to the world and care for their communities.



Team roles and responsibilities

Each new year also allows us to form new councils within the school, ranging from our School Councillors, to House Captains, to our Eco Team and Digital Leaders. These opportunities allow our children to develop what is known as their 'cultural capital' where they are being given the opportunity to take on responsibilities that they may not normally get to experience. This in turn prepares them for a life of responsibility and commitment to develop our future citizens and leaders. We are so excited to see what our new teams and councils will achieve this year!

Good **CITIZENS**



ELECTION TIME

at New Town Primary School

All the pupils and staff have returned to New Town Primary School after a wonderful summer break. Our focus this term is Kindness and Thinking of Others. This topic is allowing us all to think about our role as good citizens.

One way that this is shown is through our Student Leaders. We have a thriving School Council with an active Student Leadership team.

Our Student Leaders were very active last academic year. They planted trees around the school, helped and independently ran stalls at the Summer and Christmas Fayres, ran cake sales and helped maintain our lovely planters around the school. For the British Heart Foundation month, we ran a 'Healthy Heart week with the year six leaders producing a five minute exercise video. Pupils and staff enjoyed their action-packed start to every day with over 1500 workouts taking place over the week. Student Leaders also helped make fruit kebabs, fruit smoothies and soup with their respective classes. This encouraged 144 children in school to try something they had never tried before.

Student Leaders are elected every year and it is now time for the children who would like to represent their new classes to think about what is important to them **and** how they can improve New Town for the children today and in the future. Each candidate will prepare an election speech for their class before the class votes in their two new Student Leader representatives.



A new initiative this year at New Town is the opening of 'The Little Library' in our school playground. We are passionate about books and reading and this will allow our pupils and families to have access to even more books.



Miss Geary has spent lots of time over the summer collecting numerous donations of high-quality books along with some good old-fashioned classics. All our Families will have the opportunity to peruse the books within the playground and to take them home to enjoy at leisure, returning them for others to enjoy.

Sue, pictured at her favourite beach, Achmelvich, near Loch Inver in Sutherland, Scotland.



Sue, and Hamish playing at an Open Mic night at Tutu's Ethiopian Table in Palmer Park



Sue Bruce – Our new churchwarden

When it's her turn and the other warden, Ian Maynard, is not on duty, Sue now gets to St John & St Stephen's church early on a Sunday to unlock and switch off the alarm. Before anyone else arrives, furniture must be moved, the bread and wine put in place, the Bible readings bookmarked, the collection plate put out, water provided for anyone leading, and any visiting clergy must be taken through 'how we do it here'. The arrivals of prayer leaders, Bible readers and communion helpers must be checked and, if any are unable to make it, stand-ins need to be found and clued up, often at the last minute!

Sue then joins the musicians to rehearse before the service starts. Sue, and husband Hamish, have led the music group since joining St John's not long after the family's arrival in Reading in 2000 from London's East End where their two boys were born and she and Hamish had taught, at least for some of the time, in the same primary school. 'It was a really hard to leave the parish in Hoxton' where, for a few years, Sue had also been a churchwarden. She says, 'In Reading, we were keen to find a church with a similarly diverse congregation so we settled at St John & St Stephen's. We were welcomed, particularly by the Russells and the Cobbolds, and liked the informality of the services and the fact that the music group seemed to have space for some more people to come and help lead them. We've stayed because we have made some wonderful friends and have felt very loved and supported. We've enjoyed the teaching. It's been very much our style of worship and we've enjoyed being able to do the music for all these years. That's been the big reason for us staying. We felt that we've had a ministry here.'

In Reading, Sue taught at Loddon, Alfred Sutton and Ridgeway primary schools and, although she has now retired, she still helps with assemblies and shows at Ridgeway, runs the choir at Alfred Sutton, and helps to lead REinspired sessions in local schools. She and Hamish also volunteer with a local befriending charity. Musically, as well as helping to lead worship, Sue still acts as caller at The Scamping Rogues country dances and she and Hamish perform in care homes with The Twangers ukulele group, and at Open Mic nights at Tutu's in Palmer Park. Sue has recently taken up the harp, following in Hamish's footsteps, and both have joined a local choir.

At home, Sue cooks, cleans and tends her garden. She says, 'If I'm short of time, the garden comes first. Cleaning can wait; the beans, lawn and flowers won't.' To relax she takes Cassie for a walk, meets with friends, or goes for a swim at Loddon Valley Leisure Centre.

And, at the end of the service, everything has to be put away, the alarm set and the door locked.

The Little library



THE KHALSA

Good Citizenship

from a Sikh perspective

Being a good citizen is a fundamental principle in Sikhism, as we not only consider it our duty but also our responsibility to serve humanity for the greater good. The term 'good citizen' can be interpreted in many different ways, but generally for Sikhs, a good citizen is someone who helps others, actively volunteers in the local community, protects the vulnerable from danger, looks after the environment and is always honest and trustworthy. In essence, we believe a good citizen helps strengthen community cohesion and improves the quality of life for others.

Anyone can be a good citizen, regardless of your age, gender, religion, background or abilities. You don't even need special skills or qualifications. Being a good citizen simply involves doing what is right and bringing peace and harmony to the local community. In fact, being a good citizen can bring many advantages, and often people will benefit from what you do.

The formation of the Khalsa:

From a young age, Sikhs are taught the value of being a good citizen and are often encouraged to take responsibility for looking after their community and environment. In 1699, our 10th Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, formalised the Khalsa (the pure ones) by baptising 5 Sikhs known as the Panj Pyare (Beloved Five). The Khalsa are baptised Sikhs who are recognised for conquering their ego, being liberated from fear, compassionate and always remembering God through their actions.



A Khalsa Sikh feeding Langar (a free vegetarian warm meal prepared at the Gurdwara) to a Muslim brother who has no arms.

Guru Gobind Singh Ji instructed the Khalsa that they have a duty to be good citizens and stand up to injustice and oppression and be "muzluma de rakhai", meaning protectors of the weak and vulnerable irrespective of their backgrounds or beliefs. As good citizens, the Khalsa must radiate God's light and bring heaven to earth while remaining humble. The Khalsa are also encouraged to share their earnings with those less fortunate. No job is too big or too difficult for the Khalsa. Guru Gobind Singh Ji themselves also joined the Khalsa and ordered all his Sikhs to get baptised, join the Khalsa and try to be good citizens as well.

Today, you will see the Khalsa fulfilling their good citizen responsibilities by feeding the homeless, fundraising for charitable causes, cleaning the streets, helping the elderly, or by being active volunteers in the community.



The Panj Pyare getting baptised by our 10th Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji. The Panj Pyare were the first Sikhs to join the Khalsa.

How can one become a good citizen?

There are many ways you can be a good citizen. Firstly, you can give back to the local community by volunteering at a community group or in a senior centre, fundraising for charitable causes, or even litter picking. I began by volunteering at my local Gurdwara (Sikh temple), where I regularly spent many hours in the community kitchen. Getting involved at my local Gurdwara allowed me to connect with my community, learn new skills and most importantly, gave me a fulfilling satisfaction, all whilst having fun. Anyone can give back to their community. It won't cost anything, and you can easily fit time around your work and school hours.

Another way to be a good citizen is to be respectful. Not only as good citizens but as human beings, it is very important to treat everyone with respect and consider all as our own brothers and sisters, no matter who they are or where they come from. NEWT, in particular, is really fortunate to have such a diverse local community, with people from different countries, religions and cultures all living together as one coherent community. So, we should embrace each other's cultures and treat everyone with respect, empathy, and compassion.

Lastly, as good citizens, we all have a community responsibility to stand up and tackle unjust and wrongful behaviour regardless of which community or organisation we belong to. Every day, many will experience some form of discrimination or anti-social behaviour, whether that is harassment, sexual violence or even verbal assault. Yet, only a handful will have the courage to report it. If we continue turning a blind eye, there will be no change and this sort of behaviour will continue poisoning our beautifully well-established NEWT community. As good citizens, we all have a collective community responsibility not only to protect but also to support and listen to those experiencing wrongful behaviour irrespective of their backgrounds or beliefs.

Article written by Navjit Kaur Gill
- Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara,
Reading



Making **STONE** sculptures

British Islamic Gardens (BIG) at the Aisha Masjid near Newtown, has a Sculptor in Residence.

mcalistairhood.artweb.com

This collaboration with stone sculptor Andrew Hood has given birth to the UK's first permanent stone carving workshop that is focused mainly upon Islamic Art. And everyone is welcome to join in !

Islamic Art has influenced mainstream British artists for generations, going right back to Victorians, like William Morris, for example. But while other media for this genre, such as paint, ceramics, and textiles have long been a favoured in the UK, it is comparatively rare for artists to express the art form in stone. Here at BIG we love stone, and we want to spread the love for it far and wide.

We began in June 2022, carving Islamic patterns into stone, and making benches and ornaments for the Aisha Masjid gardens. Some students have come and gone, but several are now permanent fixtures, and their creative ambitions have grown and grown.

"And the mix of religions, and cultures here is very friendly and mutually supportive. Lots of sharing of ideas - and FOOD !!"

Everyone is welcome to visit the workshop, to see what we are doing, and all will be offered a few free lessons at stone carving too ! The very keen can enrol upon one of the stone carving courses available. There are even courses that cater specifically for families.

We are open on

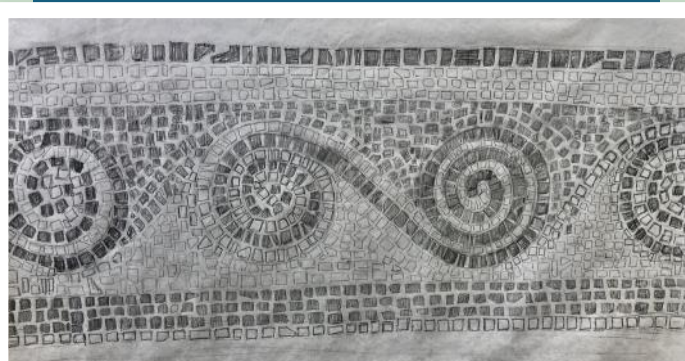
- **Wednesdays midday - 6pm**
- **Thursdays 10am - 6pm ;**
- **Saturdays 11am - 6pm.**

Best to call Andrew on [07576 451844](tel:07576451844) before you arrive.

To help reduce our harm to the environment, we don't use newly quarried or mined stone. All stone is saved from stone yard waste, or salvaged from demolition sites. This does not mean to say that the stone used is of inferior quality.

Did you know that the act of carving stone is so good for your health and well-being, we now feature as one of the activities offered by Reading Green Wellbeing Network? rgwn.org.uk Come and find out why.

Andrew says, "I give heartfelt thanks to sister Shaheen for inviting me to work with BIG. Also to our funders at Earley Charity, Reading Borough Council, RISC, and the generous private donors for making our unique facility possible."



Thames Valley **citizens** launches in Reading

Citizens UK uses the method of community organising.

Community organising is about bringing people together to win change. This means building community-led solutions to big and small problems, that work for everyone.

Already there have been major successes in other parts of the UK. Now it's getting going in the Thames Valley - specifically in Milton Keynes, Oxford and Reading.

'Reading Citizens is a people-powered alliance of organisations from across the town including churches, charities, education and trade unions working together to tackle local systemic issues and win meaningful change for Reading', says Jess Maddocks.

*'We are officially launching our alliance at our **Founding Assembly on the evening of 22nd November at Reading University Great Hall** where we will bring together hundreds of members of civil society institutions in Reading to celebrate working together for the common good, and negotiate with power holders on local issues that matter to us.'*

'Register your interest here: <https://actionnetwork.org/events/reading-citizens-founding-assembly/> and mark the date in your diary now!'

**NOV
22**



SAFE

Safer Streets is a government initiative aimed at reducing crime and tackling Violence Against Women and Girls. In last year's fourth round of funding, Reading was allocated over £400,000 to help the Borough Council create safe and inclusive spaces in the town centre and improving night-time safety for people working and socialising in the town.

Reading *Street Pastors* regularly provide a friendly, caring



Jess Maddocks is a community organiser working with Thames Valley Citizens



'From my recent conversations with local residents, I feel certain that choice was spot-on. Drug-dealing and acts of vandalism leave many feeling anxious. It shouldn't be like that and we need to work

ER Streets

presence in the town centre between 9 p.m. and 3 a.m. looking after the young, intoxicated and homeless.

Sometimes they take those in need of a safe place or the services of a paramedic to *First Stop* in the Minster Church.

Both groups are mostly staffed by volunteers. Now, thanks to *Safer Streets* funding, they will be able to share a base at St Mary's House. *First Stop* will have a waiting room and treatment room downstairs and Reading Street Pastors will use the first floor as their base. The Mayor will cut the ribbon on October 5th and next year a grander ceremony will celebrate ten years of *First Stop*. Sensors have also been placed all around the town centre so that young people can use the *MyWay* app on their phones to help them choose the safest route home at night.



Claire Alcock, vicar at St John & St Stephen's church, has been representing both her church and our local area at the preparatory meetings for *Reading Citizens* earlier this year.

'We chose one local and one national issue to focus on first. The local one was 'Safer Streets'.'

together to find new solutions and make real change. Do join us on 22nd November and make sure that many local voices are heard on East Reading's need.

'Migration Justice' was the national priority we

voted to support and take action on. It's very tough for migrants, but also often the wider community feels impacted too. Working together for real justice with compassion is the way forward I believe.'



Drop-in for a relaxing tea or coffee and chat with other parents after drop-off
Mon - Thurs 8.45-10
All are welcome!



Term time timetable:

Monday 10 - 11.30 - Kids' Café

for pre-schoolers & their carers - toys, crafts and company

Tuesday 10.30 - 12.30 - Craft Café

knit and natter, bring your sewing projects, learn something new or just chat

Wednesday 1.30 - 3.30 Oasis - Women only

soup lunch followed by study group on Women of the Bible

Thursday 10.30 - 12 - Informal Café Communion

or *Lectio Divina* - chat over coffee afterwards

Films on Fridays - watch this space for this term's schedule

Please check noticeboard for changes

At St John and St Stephen's Church, Orts Road

stjohnandststephen.org.uk



Know your Newts

meeting the people in our community

JAMES COUNTER

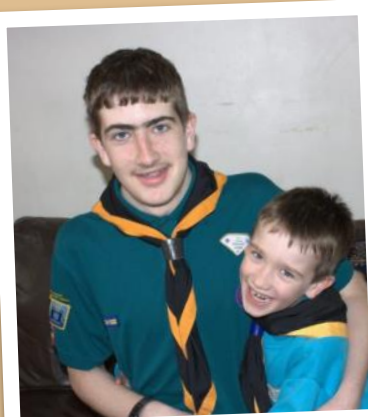
James (and his fiancée, Ellie) are two of the newest members of our community in East Reading. You could easily picture James on University Challenge or Mastermind; his specialist subject could vary from science, engineering or history (particularly London) to endurance motor-racing, such as The Le Mans 24 Hour race, or sci-fi novels by, for example, Nathan Lowell.

You obviously enjoy learning!

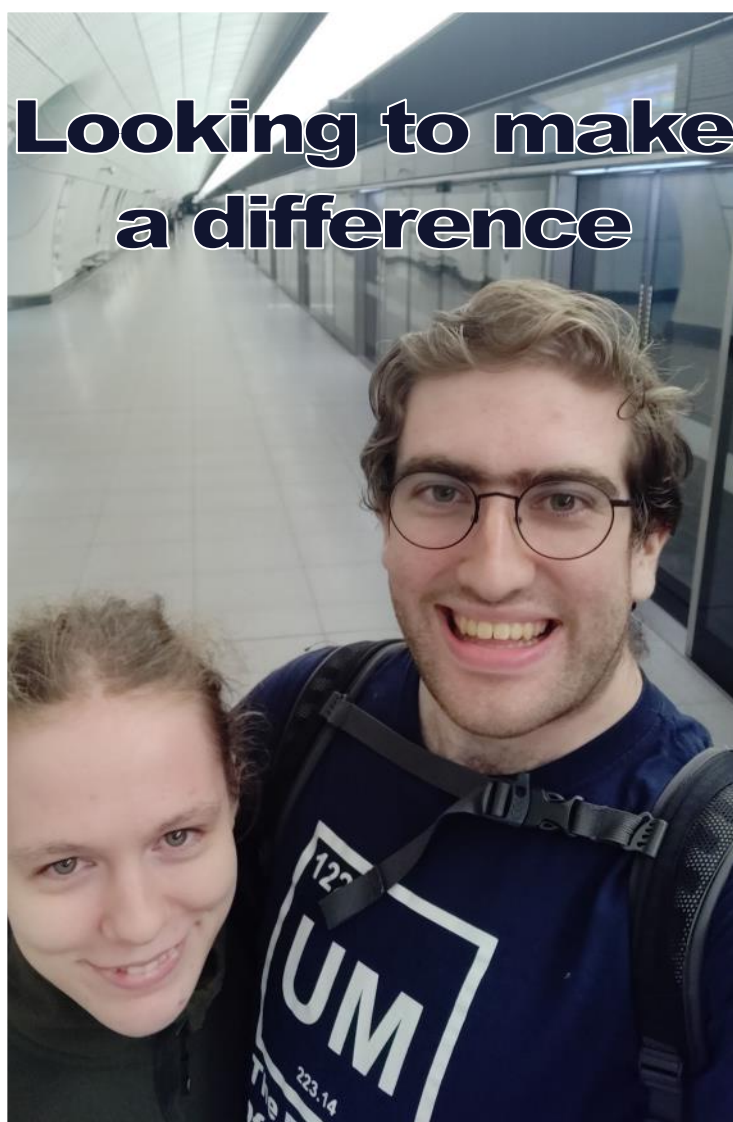
Yes! After getting my MChem in 2021, I'm now studying for a PhD, looking into and analysing the steps involved in using electricity to break water down into hydrogen and oxygen. I'm sponsored by Diamond Light Source at the Harwell Science & Innovation Campus in Oxfordshire, and Johnson Matthey, a London-based multinational company leading in chemical and sustainable technologies. However, when I have finished my degree, we'll be looking for jobs and joining all the other young people trying to find somewhere affordable to live. At the moment we're in a small one-bedroom flat and only just scraping by. Ellie's housemates headed home just before the Covid lockdown so we spent those five months together, studying online, and later decided that we want to build a life together.

Did you manage to do anything else during Covid apart from studying?

At 15 I was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes, so I had to stay at home like old and pregnant people, and those with underlying health problems did. I have a sensor on my arm, linked to an app on my phone, to check my blood sugar level, and a canula in my side through which I can pump insulin when necessary several times a day. However, I was able to help my 29th Purley Scout troop in Croydon by leading craft activities and a session on semaphore on Zoom. I joined the Scouts as a ten year-old. Our mums colluded to encourage my friend Luke and I to join up together. I was an OK swimmer but not a big sports



Looking to make a difference



player really so it was good to go out on a Friday and some weekends to do activities with others. After moving up to Explorer Scouts for a year, I went back to the younger ones as a helper until I was invested as a 'proper' leader at 18.

What appealed to you about scouting? And bog-snorkelling???

I liked the challenges to make and build things, like rubber band powered gliders and beanie hats to dress up as Minions from *Despicable Me*, as well as going camping, either locally or far away. My first summer camp at the age of 12 was in a farmer's field in Wales with nothing but grass. We had to dig our own loos and firepits. It helped turn me into an outdoors person. I used to go mountain-biking in the Surrey Hills with Dad most Saturdays. It was on a summer camp that I entered the Junior Mountain-Bike Bog-Snorkelling Competition. I was proclaimed junior world champion because I

"Camping ... helped turn me into an outdoors person"

was the only entrant under 18!!

As a Scout leader I have helped take young people caving, climbing and abseiling. Later, as a student, I became the equipment officer

for The Reading University Mountaineering Club. A minibus load of us would go to Snowdonia, the Peak District or South Wales and even The Pyrenees in 2018. I looked after all the kit.

After Covid, I got involved with the 73rd Reading Scouts at Park U.R.C. Ellie and I also joined St John's church.

So you're a Christian?

Yes. My parents are Christian. I got a place in the Parish Church School in Croydon.

As a teenager, I gradually started to form my own faith.

I joined Purley Baptist church where the leaders of the 11-14 age group were really influential; they, and the leaders of the Scout Group, were talented at leading discussions in a way that a younger teenager could understand. One day, when I was 14, Mum asked, 'What do *you* believe? You don't have to go to church if you don't want to...' so it was up to me and what made sense to me. Mr Archer, my GCSE R.E. teacher, knew his way around different faiths and churches. He helped us explore Bible stories and ideas and how different churches understood them in different ways. At no point would he tell you what to believe.

At Reading University, I joined the Christian Union. In Freshers Week, I went to a tea, coffee and toast breakfast where students would turn up and talk about different churches they had attended in the town. Freshers would then be encouraged to do a church search for about four weeks. On a Sunday I would attend up to three services at different churches to find somewhere which would be a good fit for me. The C. U. tries to be an evangelistic voice on campus, organising events in halls of residence. I helped put on a concert in *The Ice House Bar* and was part of *Dial a Doughnut*. If a student texted us a question about faith, we would take a doughnut to their room and try to answer it.



Mum asked, "What do you believe? You don't have to go to church if you don't want to ..."

I met Ellie at the beginning of my second year when, as part of her church search, she came to St Laurence's where I was a member.

How did you come to join St John's?

We were looking for a church that we could walk to and the Uni chaplain, Mark Laynesmith, suggested we give St John's a try so in August last year we did. We enjoy it because it's friendly and engaged with the local community. There are plenty of things happening that we can get involved with and now I've joined the P.C.C. (Parochial Church Council)! I've only been to one meeting, and was the youngest person in the room by quite some way, but I'm excited to be in a situation where I might be able to make a difference. It wasn't all about a leak in the roof or anything. We were talking about employing a part-time youth worker and how we can make the most of our relationship with Reading College.

And do you manage to squeeze in anything else between your research and church? Are you musical?

I tried the guitar and later the trumpet but neither lasted. In my later teenage, my dad got back into Dungeons & Dragons and board games so I joined a group of his friends and played in different pubs around Croydon. It was good fun and an introduction to nerd culture, something which I've found suits me.



These days it's mostly research, cooking, reading and T.V!

**Thank you
James for
sharing your life
with our readers**



Every vote should count

says Andrew Taylor

"I believe that all 'Good Citizens' have the right and the responsibility to engage effectively in the democratic processes by which our country is governed, and that the least this requires is to vote in elections. However, many people are disengaged from politics, believing that their vote makes no difference and that they are not properly represented.

I have sympathy with these feelings and have been campaigning for a change in our voting system since the 1980s. We need a change from our current 'First Past the Post' system under which the candidate who receives at least one more vote than the next highest is elected, usually leaving a majority of voters unrepresented; at the 2019 General Election, the Conservatives received 44%, a minority, of the votes but won 56%, a majority, of the seats in Parliament.



I believe we need Proportional Representation under which the share of seats a party wins matches the share of votes it receives, and the vast majority of voters are represented by an MP for whom they voted. I am a member of a Reading group of Make Votes Matter, a campaign for Proportional Representation, and attended *Reading Pride* as part of that campaign."

Campaigning at Reading Pride for electoral reform



Park ward councillors:

Don't **- work** *say all o*

Making the world a better place, starting right here

I'm Dave McElroy, one of the Green councillors for Redlands ward – along with Councillor Kathryn McCann. You'll often see me on my bike; that's me with the big Green logo on my back.

I'm a scientist by trade, working on the big environmental challenges of our time. In the UK we think of ourselves as the good guys, right? Well, it's easy to do your bit. Download the *Love Clean Streets* smart phone app to report fly tipping or graffiti. Or dog poo. Reporting that before someone slips and breaks a hip is everyone's civic duty...

Or you can just contact us and we'll work with you to fix stuff - dave@readinggreenparty.org.uk or **07557 987 710**. Recently for example people have raised concerns about road safety on Kings Road and we are lobbying for improvements!

The Green Party now has the second most councillors, which means Reading has finally got a real opposition. We take this duty very seriously and we would love your support in holding the council to account. Together we can make sure that Reading has a safe and secure future.



Redlands ward : Kathryn



Thames ward : Richard



Josh Williams, Sarah Magon and Rob White

just vote
with us too!
our local councillors



McCann, Dave McElroy and Will Cross



Davies, Ama Asare and Adele Barnett-Ward

Finding an NHS Dentist

Make a difference by signing [this Green petition](https://bit.ly/dentistpetition)

Hi, my name is Sarah Magon and I am the newly elected Green Party councillor in Park Ward alongside Councillor Rob White and Councillor Josh Williams. I live locally, my children have all gone through the local school system. I have a background in health, education and a passion for the benefits of outdoor learning.

I think it is important for people to feel part of the community and I aim to work with residents to improve the area in ways that have a positive impact for all.

In Park we have been working with residents to tackle fly-tipping, standing up for public services and protecting our green spaces. Recently after campaigning on dumped bin bags we got some extra bins for residents living above shops.

Residents have helped by letting us know what is going on, raising issues with the council and signing petitions.

We are currently running a campaign on the shortage of NHS dentists locally. As I write this it is impossible to get registered with an NHS dentist. If you have a spare minute sign our petition here:

<https://bit.ly/dentistpetition>

As Green Party councillors we will keep working with residents for a fairer, greener and cleaner town.

Get involved

We can all probably agree that a good citizen is someone who lives their life respecting themselves and those around them. That might not sound like much but for many people, with the pressures of work, caring responsibilities, and the cost-of-living crisis, that can be extremely challenging. Being a considerate neighbour, looking after your home and family, that's all part of being a good citizen.

If it feels like the people around you aren't interested in being good citizens, aren't making an effort to be considerate neighbours and fulfil their responsibilities, it can make you feel disheartened. That's why, if you can spare the time and energy, it's great to get involved in local action groups, where people join together to tackle specific problems like litter, or anti-social behaviour.

We know from talking to people in Thames and Redlands Wards that there are plenty of people who want to be good citizens and improve their area. Some residents have asked us to help set up a Safer Neighbourhood Forum for the Orts Road and Kennet Walk areas, and perhaps a litter-picking group as well. If you would like to meet other good citizens in the area and work together to improve the community then contact Ama.Asare@reading.gov.uk, Adele.Barnett-Ward@reading.gov.uk or Richard.Davies@reading.gov.uk if you live in Thames Ward or Will.Cross@reading.gov.uk if you live in Redlands.

Ama, Adele, Richard and Will, Thames and Redlands Ward Labour Councillors

Why is it so difficult to rent a home in Reading?

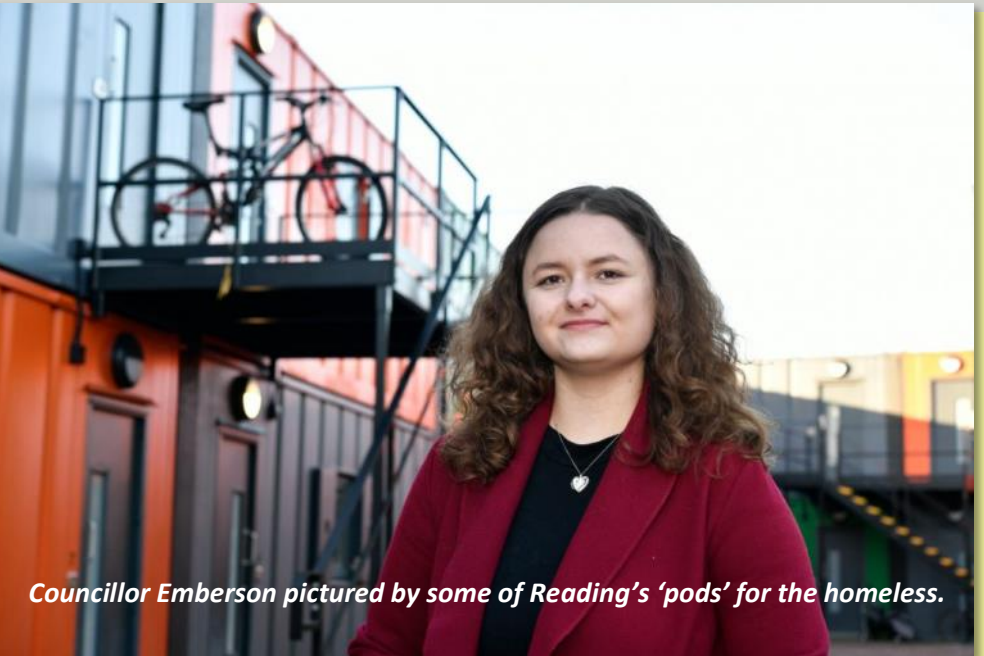
Ellie Emberson, Lead Councillor for Housing, and Micky Leng, Lead Councillor for Planning & Assets, recently came to answer the questions of a group of twenty or so church members after a Sunday service. We asked them to outline the situation facing those trying to find somewhere to rent in Reading, including a number of those present.

Ellie told us that one in ten homes in the Borough is owned by and rented from the Council with the latest census confirming 16.1% in social tenancy. There are, however, still around 4000 people on the housing register seeking a new home. The Local Housing Allowance (set by national government) for people on benefits is nearly always beneath the rent level from private landlords, many of whom are evicting their tenants and selling up because the increase in the cost of mortgages and the cost of living means that they're unable to make a living from letting. So the number of properties to rent is going down while the number of those looking for somewhere to live is going up.

Families often need more than two bedrooms but many landlords can make more money by dividing up larger properties into smaller flats or bedsits to rent to individuals or couples. This means that there are fewer family homes with three, four or five bedrooms available.

So what is the Council doing?

To reduce the number of shoddy lets and to help would-be renters, the Borough is offering landlords accreditation with its Reading *Rent With Confidence* scheme, after their



Councillor Emberson pictured by some of Reading's 'pods' for the homeless.

property has been inspected and has passed a whole list of standards. The Council is also in discussions with the university to understand their strategy for housing as they too want to ensure the highest quality of housing available to their students.

The money which the council receives in rents from its tenants is put into a Housing Revenue Account, which can then be used to buy or build properties which can be added to council stock e.g. the new key-worker flats on the old Arthur Hill Pool site and 46 new homes in Coley, while 67 of the 223 homes being built on the old Emmer Green Golf Course will be allocated as affordable housing for local people through *Reading Affordable* rent or shared ownership.

The council is also intending to increase the number of council homes by buying back some that have previously been sold under Right to Buy.

Whereas Reading has very little available land, it does have ability through the Housing Revenue Account to build. By contrast, neighbouring authority West Berkshire has no council homes of its own, so no revenue, but has plenty of land. Wokingham has only around 500

council houses but again is less landlocked than Reading. So, the three councils are beginning to discuss strategically ways they might work together to match land to funds and build affordable homes to rent.

Our Local Plan, agreed with the government, requires 30% of a new development in Reading to be 'affordable' but developers may say it's not feasible because of viability i.e. profit margins will be low, so only 20% of Huntley Wharf, for example, will be affordable. However, the council may be able to claw back a financial contribution after completion if profits turn out higher.

What can we do to try to support the Council?

Micky Leng said that the council tries to object to planning applications that include insufficient affordable homes but developers can appeal to the Planning Inspectorate. We, for our part, can keep abreast of planning applications here:

http://planning.reading.gov.uk/fastweb_PL/welcome.asp and lobby the minister and our M.P.s by post or email or fill in online objections on this site when housing developments don't include 30% affordable properties. Your individual objections can add up and make a difference.

On the last day of October the Superhero's party is back again at the Warehouse. It's open to all primary age children from 3 year olds up to those in school year 6.

After 22 years' continuous presence on the 31st October, NEWT thought it was time to find out a bit more about the origins of a Newtown institution!

Current organiser Stewart Johnston takes up the story.

The idea for the Superhero's party came from Fiona Monger, the first community worker employed by the Warehouse after Wycliffe Baptist Church opened the facility in September 2000.

Fiona saw that Halloween was growing in popularity and she was determined to provide a really positive alternative for New Town parents. And so it was that in 2001 the first Superhero's party was held in the sports hall. The early parties were traditional with various games, ducking for apples and judging the Superhero fancy dress.

The Superheros story

Creating a Newtown legend

Fiona kept putting on the party, year after year and steadily numbers attending grew. Eventually she handed over running the party to Stewart and the format slowly changed, driven mainly by more and more people coming. As Stewart says 'One of my jobs was to judge the superhero costumes and one year I looked around the circle to see 5 spidermen, 6 supermen, a cat and 3 or 4 superb home made costumes, all with parents hovering behind their children. How on earth could I judge that and pick one winner - something had to change!'

The following year the party shifted format to the current offering of multiple inflatables of different sorts, various games and some brilliant craft activities - children were encouraged to try all of them to earn their Superhero Certificate as they left. It's a great night of fun, fuelled by popcorn, candy floss, hot dogs and drinks. Roughly 220 children attend every year.



Around 50 volunteers make the party happen, and for young people attending the many youth activities at Wycliffe it has become a bit of a rite of passage to attend the party as a child and then volunteer to help as a teen. As Stewart says, 'We are true to our original aim of offering a really positive alternative to Halloween. Jesus loved a party and we honour him by throwing a really good one! Parents can be under a lot of pressure to do something on the 31st and if we can offer something their children really want to go to then its job done!'

And Stewarts favourite memory? There are many, but last year, 2022 was a highlight -

'I met a local mother at the party who had attended the party herself many times as a child and who was now bringing her own daughter - that was brilliant to hear - we must be doing something right!'

MORE TREATS FROM OUR LOCAL SINGERS

Chorate Chamber Choir



The of the Glory Baroque

Glorious music by
Buxtehude,
Purcell,
Charpentier, and
Vivaldi's
Gloria

at Christ Church

Reading RG2 7AR

Sat 18th Nov at 7pm

Free entry, with refreshments &
retiring collection in aid of
Readifood (Faith Christian Group)

Also appearing Sat 9th Dec 7pm
St William of York Church, RG1 5JP
'Christmas Cheese and Crackers'



ReadiFood
Reading's Food Bank

SUPERHERO PARTY

Tuesday 31st October

sees the return of the Superheroes party

at The Warehouse

in Cumberland Road

Everyone is welcome, 3-7 year olds 5pm to 6.45pm and
8 year olds up to school year 6 from 7pm to 9pm.

Come and
join us for
incredible
inflatables,
games and
food.
£3 per child.
Parents stay.



**Superheroes
costumes
only please**

Celebrating Harvest in Newtown



It's that time of year again when we traditionally remember the goodness of creation and how fortunate we are if we have food to eat and to share.

Church home groups came together on Thursdays through September to get creative with textiles, graphics, songs, prayer and creative writing, preparing for the Harvest service on October 1st, with our schools again having their own celebrations later in that week.

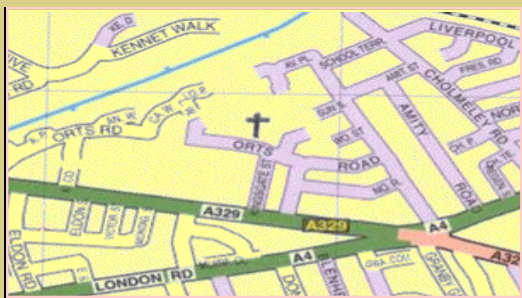
Once more, its been an opportunity to boost our local Foodbank, *ReadiFood*, with much needed supplies. The cost of living crisis has been putting increased demands on them and stocks have been at a low. If you've missed that opportunity to give, please look out for collection points in the supermarkets you shop in.



Church Contacts



Vicar
**Rev Claire
Alcock**



**Sunday worship 10:30 am
- everyone welcome**



Parish Centre
Administrator
Jo Laynesmith



Churchwardens
**Ian Maynard
& Sue Bruce**



Assoc. Priest
**Christine
Bainbridge**

please phone the Parish Office 0118 926 3633
or email: office@stjohnandstephen.org.uk



School Contacts



Head Teacher
**Polly
Cornish**



Deputy
Head Teacher
**Kate
Hawkins**



Assistant
Head Teacher
**Hollie
Appleton**

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Head Teacher
**Martina
Parsons**



Deputy
Head
**Cameron
Purvis**

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