

Simpson Village Hall

February freshen-up

Simpson Village Hall has undergone a makeover. The interior has been completely redecorated and the external entrance area, including the railings, have been repainted. Inside, the aging window blinds have been replaced with a blackout fabric, which will be of benefit to summertime hirers in need of a darkened space. All of this, combined, contributes to the attractiveness of the hall for users and a more pleasing aspect from the street – including the refurbished Book Exchange.

Thanks to Bowdler Contractors Ltd, who carried out all the decoration to a high standard, and to Furzton-based Dave's Binds for the supply and installation of the blinds.



Simpson Book Exchange

So excited to see the refurbished Book Exchange outside Simpson Village Hall, with its brand new and very smart bookcases. Many thanks to everyone who made this happen and to West Hill Joinery for excellent craftsmanship. For the benefit of newcomers to Simpson, a little background. We set up the Book Exchange during lockdown to help cope with the boredom and isolation. The idea is to borrow a book at a time and then swap it for another. Similar schemes have been established around the country, some in disused bus shelters, telephone boxes and post offices. As space at the Village Hall is limited, we cannot cope with any large donations of books – apart from children's books, which are in generally short supply.



Would anyone be interested in the Book Exchange having an online presence – maybe a WhatsApp group for people to share comments on the books they have borrowed? It's just an idea but please contact me if you are interested.



Simpson Village Hall

AVAILABLE TO HIRE
FOR REGULAR CLASSES TO ONE OFF EVENTS

We offer a bright space for up to 50 people.
With a fully equipped kitchen.
Wifi.
Accessible toilet and baby changing facility.

Hourly Hire Rate
£25 Standard Hire Charge
£15 for Charitable Organisations
£12.50 for Residents of Simpson and Ashland

Further info & online booking is available at:
<https://www.simpsonandashland.co.uk/simpson-village-hall.html>

● Gill Needham gillneedham3317@gmail.com

New Faces...

Welcome to Colin Harmsworth



In March, the Parish Council appointed Colin Harmsworth as Facilities Manager, following the resignation of Natasha Cheriyan. Colin takes over responsibility for the management and smooth running of Simpson Village Hall and Ashland Lakeside. As the following introduction demonstrates, he brings a wealth of experience to this important role.

Colin writes *My early life was dedicated to music, serving as a musician and State Trumpeter with the Blues and Royals, Household Cavalry. After eight years in the regular army, I left to run the family business. I then served in the Territorial Army, where I established the Waterloo Band of the 5th (Volunteer) Battalion of the Royal Green Jackets. My musical interest continued as a bandmaster and later as Musical Director of various amateur bands.*

After attending university as a mature student, I worked as a General Manager and Development Director in the UK and California. On moving to Milton Keynes, I joined Network Rail, where I spent 13 years as a senior operational planner.

I left Network Rail to concentrate on my major passion - Civil Defence (Emergency Support). I am the founder and Chief Officer of the Joint Civil Aid Corps (the Corps) – National Civil Defence. I have spent many years developing the Corps, researching the elements necessary to bring Civil Defence, as a voluntary emergency support asset, back to the British Isles. The Corps aims to emulate the service of the original Civil Defence services. I am currently Chair of the Civil Defence Association and the Council of Civil Defence.

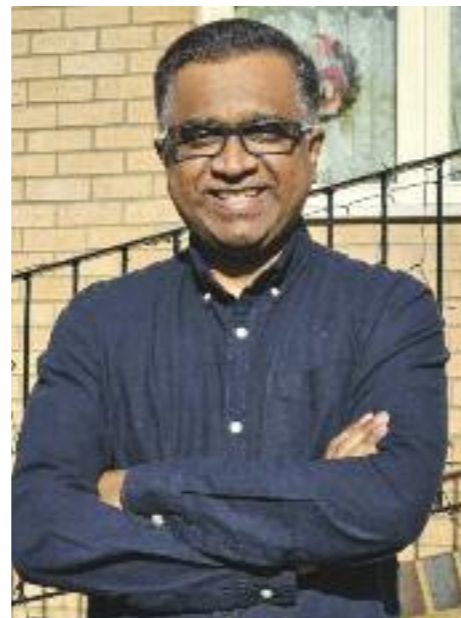
Introducing Vincent Biswas

Hello, everyone. I have been a resident of Ashland since February 2020. I have recently joined Simpson and Ashland Parish Council as a councillor, representing Ashland.

I am passionate about working with the community, sharing experiences, and engaging in social activities that bring people together. Being a part of the Ashland community has been a rewarding experience, and I saw an opportunity to contribute further by joining the Parish Council. I am eager to work alongside others to improve and support our community.

We are fortunate to have such a wonderful neighbourhood in both Simpson and Ashland. To help support and strengthen it, I will collaborate with my fellow Parish Councillors.

I welcome any ideas or concerns from residents that could help make our community even better. Please feel free to reach out with any issues you'd like to



discuss, any improvement ideas and community activities, so that we can continue building strong, friendly connections and ensure our social needs are met. Looking forward to hearing from you!

● Vincent Biswas

vincent.biswas@simpsonashland-pc.gov.uk

Annual Parish Meeting

By law, the Parish Council is required to hold an annual Parish Meeting. This is in addition to the six Parish Council meetings through the year, all of which are open to the public.

This year, the Annual Meeting will be on **Monday 12 May in Simpson Village Hall, starting at 8.00**, and is open to all residents of Simpson and Ashland. The meeting provides an opportunity to review and reflect on the life of the parish and the work of the Parish Council, and to recognise and thank members of our community who contribute in so many ways to making Simpson and Ashland such good places in which to live. It's also an opportunity to ask questions and to suggest things that might warrant attention in the future.

The Parish Meeting will be followed by a formal meeting of the Parish Council.

£££ Money Matters £££

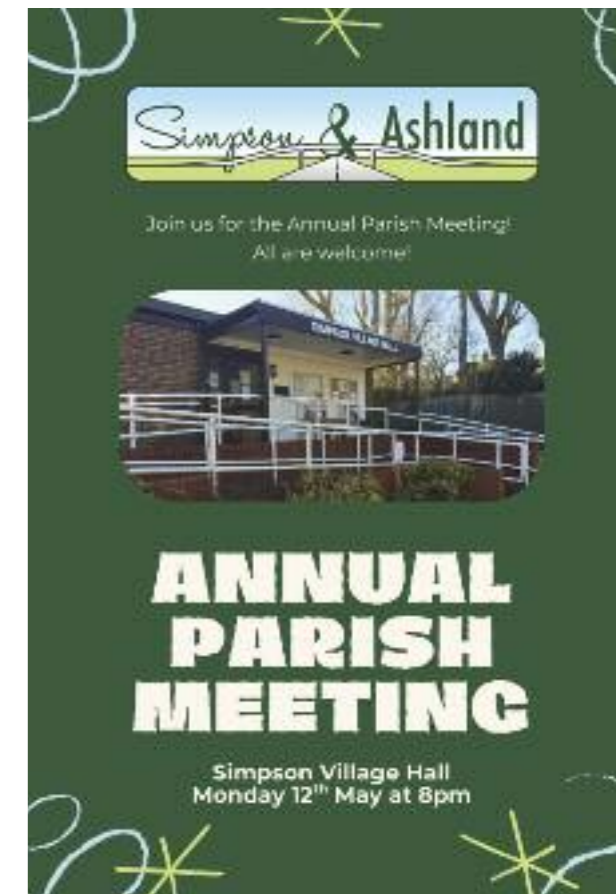
When you received your Council Tax Notice 2025/26 from Milton Keynes City Council, last month, your eyes may not have strayed far from the total amount that you need to pay for the year ahead. You will doubtless have logged that it's more than you have been paying for the past year. We are all aware that the demands on local government are ever increasing.

However, if you refer to the box at the bottom of the form which details

the percentage changes since the preceding financial year for the components that make up the total, you will see that the precept for Simpson and Ashland Parish Council has reduced by 10.4%. This follows an 8.0% reduction in 2024/25 and 5.6% reduction in 2023/24. In setting the annual precept, your Parish Council is very conscious of the increasing

demands on personal finances, and we strive to soften the blow while continuing to manage the business of the parish.

● Peter Barnes



Saturday Skills Sessions

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to and supported our Skills on Saturday sessions in Simpson Village Hall, last year. We learned a great deal about the knowledge, skills and interests in our community and maybe came away inspired to try some new things. This year's programme, supported by the Parish Council, focuses on 'Skills for healthy living', sharing ideas and expertise in the four areas that influence our health - food, exercise, healthy minds and social interaction. As always, these free sessions will be informal, with lots of time for discussion. Please put these dates in your diaries.

● The Friends of Simpson Village Hall

SKILLS
for **Healthy Living**

Simpson Village Hall, 2 - 4pm

Saturday April 12th
Cooking and Eating for Health

Saturday June 14th
Exercise for Health

Saturday September 20th
Healthy Mind, Healthy Body

Saturday October 18th
Keeping Connected

FREE including light refreshment
Dates for September & October are provisional
For further information email:
gillneedham3317@gmail.com

MOVE AND IMPROVE EXERCISE TO MUSIC FOR EVERYONE

COME ALONG TO HAVE SOME FUN,
GET FITTER AND FEEL HEALTHIER
EVERY WEDNESDAY - 10.30 AM TO 11.30AM
AT SIMPSON VILLAGE HALL, MK6 3AD

£5 PER SESSION
FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL
SHAKILA ON 07388 023175

Yogalates
with Shakila
Every Tuesday
at 5.30pm to 6.30pm
Simpson Village Hall, MK6 6AD

£6 drop in
£7 for 4 weeks block booking

Move your body,
calm your mind and
feed your soul

For more information call Shakila on 07388 023175

After the flood



Following the extensive flooding in September and October last year, the area around Ashland Lakes is taking time to recover. Milton Keynes Parks Trust, which manages the land, has provided an update on the work that they have done – and plan to do.

This includes overseeding the grass areas around the lake in the coming weeks, with a species that is less palatable to grazing geese. The aim is to reduce the problem of fouling on the paths and footbridges. It's an experimental move, so we will have to wait to see whether or not it is effective. Wildflowers will also be sown on the grass area at the far side of the lake and adjacent to the Ashland Lakeside building, so this should add some welcome colour as the weather warms up.

Dead shrubs will be cleared in the coming months, with a view to replanting the banks in the autumn. Ahead of that, the Parks Trust have replaced the laurels around the perimeter of Ashland Lakeside.

The electricity supply to the fountain has been reconnected and a new control box is due to be fitted soon. Once completed, the fountain will be operational again.



Meanwhile, Anglian Water have been engaging in a programme of reinstatement work to prevent a repeat of the serious flooding. Initial repairs around the dam were carried out last December and there was a subsequent operation in March to ensure that the reconstruction of the dam face fully meets the required specifications.

Anglian Water has assured us that all of their reservoirs in Milton Keynes undergo monthly inspections to ensure compliance with the Reservoir Act. Each reservoir has an onsite plan outlining escalation procedures in the event of any structural concerns. Anglian Water continues to collaborate with The Parks Trust to implement measures aimed at reducing the likelihood of recurrence, though they cannot completely eliminate this risk.

● Peter Barnes



ASHLAND LAKESIDE COMMUNITY CENTRE

Available To Hire

Facilities include an accessible toilet, wifi, kitchenette and free parking.

HOURLY HIRE RATE

- £25 standard rate
- £15 for charities
- £12.50 for residents of Simpson and Ashland

For more information and online booking:

www.simpsonashland-pc.gov.uk/ashland-lakeside

simpsonashlandhalls@gmail.com

Ashland Lakeside, Penshurst Crescent, Ashland, MK6 4AJ

News from St Thomas' Church

We have just had a successful Annual Church Meeting; I am delighted to say that our membership is growing.

Our architect visited the church in February. He was very pleased to note that the size of the historic cracks in the chancel had reduced in size. We will be having these measured regularly, now.

The architect also walked round the churchyard and was pleased to note that some of the dead trees have been removed and the hedges trimmed. The hard work in the churchyard has been carried out by our volunteer gardener. The large area by the gate should soon be green - grass seed has been sown! The churchyard is now full of spring flowers and is a delight to visit.

Members of the congregation visit the Simpson Day Care Service each month, to sing hymns. Some of their attendees and staff have asked if they could visit the church for a short service. This is happening in April.

Sunday 21 April is Easter Day. Our service starts at 11.15 – be there by 11.00 to be sure of a seat!

The Salvation Army have agreed to play for an afternoon garden party on 29 June. Look out for other summer activities.

● **Iola Samuels - Church Warden**



On the roads



As those who use Simpson Drive and H9 Groveway will know, the junction has been extensively reconfigured in response to long-term concerns about the high incidence of collisions, backed up by a survey of driver behaviour carried out by Milton Keynes City Council in March and April 2024 (see Parish Newsletter, December 2024, p.7). The new layout appears to be working satisfactorily.

In a related measure, MKCC has been consulting on a proposal to apply a 40 mph limit on H9 Groveway between the Simpson roundabout (at the junction of H9 Groveway and V8 Marlborough Street) and close to the Walton roundabout (at the junction of H9 Groveway and V10 Brickhill Street). The Parish Council supports that proposal. Reduced speed along this stretch of Groveway will improve safety not only at the Simpson Drive junction but also the junctions with Newport Road, Marshworth and Old Groveway, together with the (already rather tricky) Walton Drive roundabout which serves the Open University and, in due course, will be the main access to the Walton Manor development.

● **Peter Barnes**

Raise a glass



On Friday 14 March the Friends of Simpson Village Hall organised a wine tasting. 43 people attended the evening, hosted by Henry of Wisson Hill Wines. We were offered six superior wines from around the world: France, Italy, South Africa, Spain and Australia. Six delicious cheeses complemented the wines. While we were sampling the wines we benefited from Henry's extensive knowledge of the world's grape varieties and vineyards.

We all had our favourites and it was surprising how our tastes differed.

It was good to see some new faces evening and most agreed it was a successful event.

● **Sian Lewis**

Simpson Garden Birdwatch

Every January since 2021 a loyal band of Simpson residents have pooled sightings of birds in their gardens, following the guidelines of the RSPB's national Great Garden Birdwatch.

This year, records came from one-hour slots across fifteen gardens. A total of 27 species made the list. The most frequently noted were blackbirds, robins, great tits, blue tits and magpies. Goldfinches brought a splash of colour to four gardens – one of which attracted ten of these delightful birds to the feeders. Their greenfinch cousins have suffered a serious decline in numbers in recent years, due to a disease, but there remains a robust colony around Lissel Road, where one garden attracted fifteen of them during the observation period.

Among the more exotic sightings were a blackcap, a coal tit and a little egret – the latter in a garden bordering Simpson brook. Also putting in an appearance, in a single garden, was a ring-necked parakeet (photo), one of the posse that has been seen (and heard) around the village since mid-December.

It is good to be aware of the variety



of birdlife in Simpson, a tribute to both the greenness of garden environments and public spaces, and the willingness of residents to provide supplementary food over the winter. It is noteworthy that the Abbey Road garden which offered eight different types of food, from fat balls to meal worms, attracted a staggering 55 different birds in the course of one hour.

● Peter Barnes

Pat Hodges writes...

Many thanks to all concerned for supporting the quiz nights and concerts held mainly in St Thomas's Church and Simpson Village Hall during 2024. Together we have been able to help a variety of charities, many of which are local, supported the MK Food Bank and supplied scarves for the Night Shelter.

A total of £14,111 was raised over the year, including the proceeds of the Christmas Fayre.

Please pass on thanks to friends and family who also came along and please continue supporting these events whenever you can. See What's On (final page) for forthcoming dates.

Spring Clean

Saturday 22 March saw a litter-picking 'blitz' in Simpson and Ashland, as a contribution to the national Great British Spring Clean.

In Simpson, Parish Councillor Ross Eatwell led eight residents (and a visitor from Cardiff!), ranging in age from seven to seventy-eight, covering much of the village, armed with grabbers and black sacks. The canal towpath and the stretch of Old Groveway from Bowlers Bridge to Marlborough Street generated



particularly high volumes of discarded drink cans, glass and plastic bottles and food wrappers. The blue-topped bin back at Simpson Village Hall was later filled to overflowing.

In Ashland, Parish Councillors Chichi Ezeh and Vincent Biswas were joined by local residents. Together, they

filled five bags with litter from around the estate, making a noticeable difference to the local environment. A generous donation of snacks and drinks from Premier Stores provided well-earned refreshments for those taking part.

Many thanks to all who participated to make the day a success.

Thanks also, to those who pick up and dispose of litter at other times, to the Parks Trust for their regular sweeps around Ashland Lakes, and to Milton Keynes Council's street cleansing team.



GREAT BENEFITS FOR VOLUNTEERING:

- * **FREE** quality sublimation event t-shirt
- * **FREE** Sandwich Shack packed lunch
- * **FREE** commemorative pin badge
- * **Celebratory drinks** at Weatherspoon's after the main event

The MK Marathon Weekend in May will welcome thousands of runners from across the UK and around the world who are coming to Milton Keynes to experience the best the city has to offer.

Since its inception in 2010, the MK Marathon has quickly become one of the top 10 UK Marathons and has won dozens of awards! The routes offer a mix of new and old, including the original Milton Keynes Village, beautiful lakes, picturesque parks, and the meandering Grand Union Canal.

On Bank Holiday Monday, 5 May the route comes through Simpson and Ashland – both around the midway point and the final aching stretch to the finish line at Stadium MK.

As a consequence, several roads will be closed to safeguard participants, and restrictions will be in place on the day of the event. Visit

www.mkmarathon.com/road-closures in the lead-up to the event for the most up-to-date information and detailed area maps. There will be regular event updates on race day on MKFM. Alternatively, call the Traffic Hotline before/during/after 0845 387 1685 or Email questions to Traffic@event-people.co.uk

PLEASE HELP SUPPORT OUR EVENT VOLUNTEER

We would love you to join our team on Bank Holiday Monday 5 May and make this prestigious running event a massive success for Milton Keynes.

If you are not planning on running, the next best thing to do is to volunteer. Without your support and effort, the MK Marathon would not be possible. There are many different and fun opportunities for you to be part of Milton Keynes' best running race.

* **BALLOT.** Three places are up for grabs in next year's 5k, half marathon, or full marathon.

You will also enjoy a sense of satisfaction that you are helping us stage the best event possible for Milton Keynes and the gratitude of thousands of participants.

Please visit www.mkmarathon.com/eventcrew to register.

The course is divided into 15 sections, Simpson and Ashland is section 14 if you want to stay local but you can choose any that are available. I will be looking after section 14, and it would be great to see you.

● Gary Howard



What's On...



An overview of upcoming events around the parish...

PLEASE NOTE: Quizzes in Simpson Village Hall **MUST** be booked with missquiz@sky.com or 01908 644785. Veggie options for the food.

APRIL


- **Saturday 12th** Skills for Healthy Living – Cooking and eating for health. Simpson Village Hall, 2.00 – 4.00. Free.
- **Sunday 20th** Easter Day service at St Thomas' Church. 11.00 for 11.15.
- **Saturday 26th** Quiz in Simpson Village Hall at 7.00 p.m. for Travis Cat Rescue. Fish & Chip Supper. Maximum of 8 on a table.

MAY

- **Monday 5th** BANK HOLIDAY – MK Marathon.
- **Saturday 10th** Concert in St Thomas' Church, Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of V.E. Day at 7.00 p.m. Bring & Share Food. No need to book.
- **Monday 12th** Annual Parish Meeting at Simpson Village Hall at 8.00 p.m.
- **Saturday 24th** Quiz in St Thomas' Church for Willen Hospice, in memory of Shirley, at 7.00 p.m. Curry Supper.

JUNE

- **Saturday 7th** Quiz in St Thomas' Church at 7.00 p.m. for Church Funds.
- **Saturday 14th** Skills for Healthy Living – Exercise for health. Simpson Village Hall, 2.00 – 4.00. Free.
- **Saturday 21st** Quiz in St Thomas' Church at 7.00 p.m. for Wader Quest.
- **Sunday 29th** Salvation Army band in the St Thomas' Church Gardens – afternoon – all welcome.



Yoga classes

There are regular Yoga classes at **Ashland Lakeside** on **Mondays at 18:15**.
For further information and to book, go to www.beingwellholistichealth.com/book-online



Simpson & Ashland Parish Council on Facebook

Are you a Facebook user? Become a friend of **Simpson & Ashland** on Facebook. Stay in touch, comment on and ask questions about what is going on in your neighbourhood. We also tweet! **SimpsonAshland**



www.simpsonashland-pc.gov.uk
clerk@simpsonashland-pc.gov.uk
07597 304 054 Twitter: @SimpsonAshland

This issue of the parish newsletter has been edited by: Peter Barnes and Dylan Jeavons. With thanks to the following contributors: Vincent Biswas, Chichi Ezeh, Colin Harmsworth, Pat Hodges, Gary Howard, Sian Lewis, Gill Needham, and Iola Samuels.

Delivered to your letterbox by: Ruth Aguilar, Jane Anderson, Jane Ashby, Peter Barnes, Pete and Lynne Brazier, Rachelle Dalgarno, Julie Jones, Sian Lewis, Helen Morland, Cathy Pope, Catherine Scanlon, Caroline Vooght and Amanda Weaver.

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