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July 2019

Bishop's Waltham - Village of the Year

A Great Place to Live, Work and Visit

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nestling in the southern Hampshire hills, Bishop's Waltham is a vibrant, resilient and thriving community. Our village has a long and fascinating history of which its current population is both proud and protective, but it also has a promising future to which we look forward with relish and excitement. Evolving as it has through the centuries, what makes Bishop's Waltham so special now are the people who live here and how they have created a wonderful place to live. The village is imbued with a sense of community spirit that is second to none.

Once a medieval market town favoured by kings, queens and bishops (hence our name!), it is now a very lively village that has also become an important hub for outlying smaller communities. It is a sought-after place to live. It is not just its location (equidistant from Winchester, Southampton and Portsmouth) that makes it so attractive; newcomers are immediately struck by the friendliness of the village, the variety of activities that take place throughout the year, the lively High Street of independent shops and the extent of its facilities, all so evidently supported by its residents.

Self-help is a large part of Bishop's Waltham's character. Our rural setting is a great bonus, of course, but it means we have limited access to some common services and facilities found in larger conurbations. Over the years we have worked hard to establish important facilities for our village and these continue to be well supported by volunteer effort. We create our own entertainment and run events to invest in our future as well as to celebrate our past. We showcase the wonderful things our High Street and our rural surrounds have to offer and again, through volunteer effort, we provide important services to people who need them.

Community engagement is high. Participation in helping shape the future of the village is actively encouraged and examples abound of how residents have worked together to create plans for the future. There are over 70 community organisations in Bishop's Waltham and we have a great track record of them coming together to work on common themes or to run events jointly for the benefit of everyone. We have actively embraced the benefits of technology to enable us to communicate widely, to create communities of interest and to share information and ideas with residents and visitors alike.

There follows a little more detail of Bishop's Waltham's particular features that contribute to its unique vitality and warmth ...

OUR HERITAGE

Bishop's Waltham's heritage runs deep. An early Saxon settlement, it remained a royal estate until after the time of King Alfred. It was William the Conqueror's grandson, Bishop Henry of Blois, then Bishop of Winchester, who set the scene for the town's heyday when, in the mid-12th century, he built a palace at Waltham. Over the next 450 years, no less than fifteen Kings and Queens (from Henry II to Elizabeth I) visited Waltham and stayed at the Palace (many of them several times over).

Although the Palace was destroyed during the Civil War, Bishop's Waltham continues to celebrate this rich heritage. We did so in 2015 when the Palace grounds were brought back to life with a two day medieval festival on the 600th anniversary of Henry V's stay at the Palace on the road to Agincourt. No less than 22 local community groups participated in putting on this event (a brief film of the event is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c70iaS0mTqs>). A similar pageant is now being planned for 2022 on the 500th anniversary of Henry VIII and the Holy Roman Emperor signing the "Treaty of Waltham" at the Palace in 1522.



Reconstruction of The Palace in the 16th Century

This long and significant heritage is marked in many other ways. For example, the North Pond Conservation Group have revived large parts of the Bishop's fish ponds and made them into a great local wild life asset and a part of the Palace now houses the Bishop's Waltham Museum which works closely with local schools and history societies.



The Palace Ruins as the back drop to the Road to Agincourt Festival

OUR COUNTRYSIDE

Our village has a remarkable geological and ecological diversity in a very small area due to our location on a spring line where the chalk downlands meet the clay lowlands of mixed farmland and woodlands. Bishop's Waltham adjoins the South Downs National Park and there are four Local Nature Reserves each within 500 metres of the village centre and each with its own distinctive character.

Residents recognise their good fortune in living in such an area and many are tireless in looking after it and promoting its access for others. The 54 public rights of way are maintained by a group of volunteers and the Parish Council has published a very popular series of walks leaflets. The local branch of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust organises nature walks around the reserves and every week, 'Walking for Health' leads walks around the countryside. Future plans, led by the Parish Council, are to open up the Bishop's Waltham to Botley disused rail track for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders while, in the meantime, local cycle routes are published on the web. A meadow, purchased by the Parish Council as an informal recreational area has been planted with a community orchard and a stunning wild flower area. Other areas, a roundabout and road-side verges have also been planted with wild-flowers by Bishop's Waltham in Bloom.



The winner of the monthly Bishop's Waltham - What's On Facebook Page Photographic Competition May 2019.

OUR HIGH STREET

While Bishop's Waltham parish is home to just over 100 businesses employing over 2,000 people, the heart of the village is its High Street. The community is very proud of its independent retailers and works hard to support them. With an independent butcher, baker, fishmonger and greengrocer, together with 2 small supermarkets, residents can acquire all their daily food needs. Fashion retailers, gift shops, cafes, restaurants and pubs make Bishop's Waltham an extremely attractive centre for both residents and visitors. Our local traders actively recognise and commit to their crucial role in maintaining the wellbeing of not only their customers, but the community as a whole. Their enthusiastic involvement with the community events that frequently take place in the High Street has been and continues to be fundamental to their success. The High Street is often pedestrianised on a Sunday to host events organised by the Chamber of Trade, the Town Team and Parish Council. Some examples of these events are farmers' and brocante markets, a two-wheel extravaganza, street parties, KidSTreat and the Carnival Procession to name but a few. It is also the home to Bishop's Waltham Bites twice a year, Pumpkins on Parade, Yarn Bombing, Murder Mysteries and of course the hugely popular Christmas Fayre. In this way, Bishop's Waltham residents and visitors are welcomed every day to our High Street whether to shop or to browse or simply meet and socialise.



A Sunday Market in the High Street - attracting local residents and visitors

OUR DEVELOPMENTS

The population of our village, currently 6,700 people, has grown substantially over the years and will continue to do so in the future. Residents welcome this as a positive influence for the longer-term prosperity of Bishop's Waltham.

With the recent District Council Local Plan requiring Bishop's Waltham to accept another 500 dwellings, the local community actively set about planning their location and design. Remarkably, nearly fifty volunteers worked with the Parish Council to produce the Bishop's Waltham Development Plan and the Design Statement, both of which were adopted in full by Winchester City

All the new housing developments are now being built strictly in accordance with the policies drawn up by local residents.

Our vision for the future is that all new developments should be situated as closely as possible to the village centre to maintain its vibrancy and vitality.

OUR FACILITIES

As a hub for a number of smaller surrounding villages Bishop's Waltham provides facilities not only for its residents but also for a wider population in rural south Hampshire. In this respect the Parish Council is very proactive. Three sports fields are maintained to a high standard and eight children's play areas are well equipped with play items chosen largely by the children themselves. Open spaces continue to be maintained and there are plans to acquire more. Priors Meadow has become established as a major recreational area and there are plans to create a further small recreational area much closer to village by the Station Roundabout.

The community halls are in constant use. The larger Jubilee Hall for lunch clubs, indoor markets, sports and private functions, and smaller clubhouses and halls for community events, fitness classes and meetings.

While Bishop's Waltham may lack some of the facilities of larger urban areas, volunteers compensate for this by hosting regular cinema shows in the junior school and public swimming sessions in the swimming pool at the same location.

As everywhere, the library and the recycling centre are under continual threat of closure, but our residents defend their continued presence and have fought hard to ensure they remain open and well used, albeit with reduced opening hours.

"A lovely friendly village where you feel safe"

OUR COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

Today there are about seventy five community groups in Bishop's Waltham.

A large number of clubs and societies serve the special interests of their members, as well as volunteer groups fostering a community spirit for our many residents.

Young people are very well catered for in the Guides, Brownies, Rainbows, Scouts, Beavers, St John Ambulance Cadets, the Army Cadets, Sports Groups and the Youth Club. The Churches in our village offer a very effective support network for people who, for whatever reason, may need it.

Perhaps the most important of all however, are those organisations that serve the wider community beyond their own membership (see right). These volunteers make Bishop's Waltham a better place to live, by helping others who need support or a service.

Bishop's Waltham Rotary is the major community-based grant giver to these local organisations, contributing up to £20,000 each year to local charities and needy causes. These funds are raised through the Annual Carnival and Show and the Christmas Carol collection.



The Gateway Club receiving a donation from the Bishop's Waltham Town Team from money raised through ticket sales to the hugely popular bi-annual Bishop's Waltham Bites event.

- The **Community First Responders**, who won a national award two years ago and are on call 24 hours a day to provide emergency medical care and support until the arrival of the ambulance.
- **Meon Valley Heartstart**, founded and based in Bishop's Waltham, who also won a national award 2 years ago, and trained over 4,600 adults and children in emergency life-saving skills last year.
- The **Gateway Club**, (pictured) who provide events and outings for adults with learning difficulties.
- The **Lunch Clubs** who not only cook meals for elderly residents on Mondays and Thursdays, but also provide a social gathering in the Jubilee Hall.
- The **Bishop's Waltham Minibus Group**, who provide the transport for the Lunch Clubs and the Dial-a-Ride service as well as shopping trips and outings for residential care homes and others.
- The **Care Group Drivers** who take patients to hospitals for appointments and wait with them before returning them home.
- **Bishop's Waltham in Bloom**, another award-winning group, who for 20 years have planted out our flower beds and provided the hanging baskets throughout the village.
- **Citizens Advice** who provide free, confidential and impartial advice on issues affecting people's lives.
- **Bishop's Waltham Festival** who bring family friendly entertainment to the community through musical and artistic cultural events in the Palace Grounds and elsewhere through out the village.

It is not so much the place, but the people, who give us our identity; the hundreds of volunteers who give up their time for the benefit of others. That is what makes our village so special.

OUR COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES



Bishop's Waltham has developed a well deserved reputation for its extensive range of community activities and events. These continue to grow in number so that the annual "What's on Guide", distributed by the Parish Council in March every year to every house in the village, takes much coordination to avoid clashes of dates.

Many are annual events such as the carnival, the hidden gardens, the Bishop's Waltham Festival, the community fireworks event and the Christmas Fayre. Each month there are events or meetings organised by the very many thriving clubs and societies. Twice a year more than 40 volunteers come together to litter pick the approaches to the village.

Recent very popular community events have included KidSTreat and Party in the Park. Both were free in order that they should be accessible to all of the community, KidSTreat took place in the High Street and was organised by the Town Team. It was aimed at children aged 3—11 years old and comprised over 30 activities, each organised by a local community group, for children to make things, learn and participate. Party in the Park was jointly organised by the Parish Council and the Town Team and was designed for the whole family to enjoy. It took place on one of the village's recreational grounds, offering live music, as well as many other activities and entertainment. Both attracted many hundreds of people and by popular demand each will be repeated in the future.



"There was a real feel of community about the day, the kids loved all of the activities and so did we. It was a lovely village day out."
 (Feedback from participants at KidSTreat 2018)



OUR COMMUNICATIONS

Both the Parish Council and the Bishop's Waltham Town Team play a very important role in ensuring that information about our village is widely available. The Parish Council works hard to ensure that the voice of parishioners is heard and that they have the opportunity to participate in decision-making about the village. Some examples of communications to residents are:

- The regular Parish Council Newsletter which is delivered by mail to every household and contains important information about what the Council is doing and other issues that affect local residents.
- Two websites. The first is the Parish Council Website (www.bishopswaltham-pc.gov.uk) which contains information about the council, its members and its operations. The second is the website produced and managed by the Bishop's Waltham Town Team (www.lovebishopswaltham.com) which is more community based. It offers a host of information about community organisations, local businesses, events and what is happening in and around the village. A recent successful innovation is the monthly Photographic Competition where anyone can submit a photo for judging by an independent panel, with the winning photo being showcased for the next month.
- A Facebook Page called Bishops Waltham What's On (<https://www.facebook.com/BishopsWalthamwhatson/>) run jointly by the Bishop's Waltham Town Team and the Bishop's Waltham Chamber of Trade. This has very strong engagement with nearly 3,000 followers and has very quickly become the "go to" source of information about what is going on in and around the village.
- The Annual Parish Meeting in which the Parish Council and other community organisations present information to attendees. Recently revamped, these meetings now attract around 200 people and are further evidence of how engaged residents are in the life of their village.
- The local Parish News, produced by The Parish of Bishop's Waltham & Upham, is a monthly hardcopy publication available for residents to purchase.

IN CONCLUSION

We are lucky to have our heritage, natural environment and attractive village architecture. However our village's true worth as a great place is our community, those wonderful people who work, play and live here and the hundreds of volunteers who keep the village vibrant and a place for all.



This submission has been prepared jointly by representatives from the Bishop's Waltham Parish Council and the Bishop's Waltham Town Team. The latter is a partnership organisation made up of local community organisations and individuals. They work together to help make Bishop's Waltham a great place to live and visit, put on events for the benefit of residents and visitors to Bishop's Waltham and provide a one stop shop of information about our village.