

# Healthy Bicester newsletter

Updates for Bicester's communities and partners

Issue 5, January 2021

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# Listening and learning helps Healthy Bicester to grow

Healthy Bicester is a partnership between many organisations in Bicester. It is driven by a desire to make it easy to be healthy, with an equal importance placed on physical and mental wellbeing and a particular emphasis on reducing social isolation.

For us, COVID has thrown up some interesting issues. How do we tackle loneliness when we are telling people to socially distance?

How do we communicate with our most vulnerable residents when everything is being taken online?

But there were certain areas where COVID actually helped. Cycling has increased, significantly more people are using our Blue Lines and we strengthened our partnership work by developing new programmes and increasing our Facebook followers.

We are aware the post COVID landscape will be different and we wanted to ask residents how their attitudes towards health and wellbeing changed during the first lockdown, to help shape our evolving programme. The results are very interesting. As with all surveys, the devil is in the detail and we are working hard to delve into this to understand the specifics.



Speaking more generally, we found there is an appetite for walking and cycling more – more of our respondents went into town by bike or on foot than by car – and residents are interested in reducing the speed limit around Bicester to 20 mph, especially around schools. We also found that before COVID around half of those questioned had never worked from home, but most of these had managed to do so during lockdown and the majority would now like some sort of homeworking arrangement to continue. In fact, only 20 per cent said they'd return to their workplace full time.

By knowing these results, we can work with colleagues at Town, District and County Council level to emphasise what Bicester people really want and need. We are also helping the Bicester Garden Town team by demonstrating the key areas which need to be worked on to help provide the thriving, sociable neighbourhoods they plan to develop.







## Dr Bike delivers the goods with record number of patients

Cycling has become an important tonic during 2020. More people have taken to two-wheels to get around, reducing their reliance on public transport, building exercise into their daily routines and having fun while they're at it.

This increase in popularity has been seen by community action group Bicester Green, operators of our free bicycle maintenance service, Dr Bike. Over the last 12 months the team has fixed 139 bikes, ranging from children's BMXs to racing bicycles - that's 33 more than in the previous year.

A huge amount of credit needs to go to Celia and the team at Bicester Green for managing to adapt the service to make it COVID-secure, ensuring they were still able to operate. They are continuing to offer Dr Bike over the coming months with funding received from Cycling UK.



## Adapting to make a difference to those who need it most

The Healthy Bicester project is a 'whole town' approach, which means it looks to offer benefits to the entire town rather than specific areas. But the results from our COVID study, combined with our most recent Healthy Life survey, suggest there are certain groups in Bicester who may need more help than others.



At our annual conference, due to be held in April, we will be looking at ways we can adapt our programme to help better target these groups, including new home workers; younger women (between 18 and 25 years old); and women aged over 55 from low socio-economic backgrounds. We'd love to see you there and to hear your views.

If you'd like to take a look at the summary report from the Healthy Life Survey, it's hosted on Cherwell District Council's website: [cherwell.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/9825/bicester-survey-summary-report.pdf](https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/9825/bicester-survey-summary-report.pdf)

Whilst you're there, why don't you take a look at our health section on the Garden Town webpages, here?

[cherwell.gov.uk/info/260/bicester-garden-town/711/bicester-garden-town---health](https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/info/260/bicester-garden-town/711/bicester-garden-town---health)



## Bicester volunteers network still thriving

Volunteer groups are essential to the creation of sociable, resilient, caring communities. They are a key factor in why Bicester is a happy and healthy place to live and we are eager to support these groups whenever we can. The number of volunteer organisations in Bicester continues to grow and we have taken great pleasure in being involved in two events this autumn, designed to promote the work they do, as well as offer an opportunity for the groups to network and learn from each other.

September saw Volunteer Connect provide an online webinar, highlighting opportunities for people to get involved in organisations in Bicester, as well as further afield. Then, in November, we joined Bicester Town Council to host an online Voluntary Organisation Network meeting - a chance for groups to get together and hear more about the financial and training opportunities available to them. This event was particularly helpful for us to check in with organisations and further understand the challenges they are still facing as a result of COVID-19.

If you'd like to know more about volunteering opportunities in Bicester head to [ocva.org.uk/volunteer-centre-oxfordshire/](https://ocva.org.uk/volunteer-centre-oxfordshire/)

If you're involved in a volunteer organisation and would like to join us for our Bicester forum, email [gillian.munday@cherwell-dc.gov.uk](mailto:gillian.munday@cherwell-dc.gov.uk)

## Wheels in motion for improved sustainable travel routes into town

A £3 million fund, secured by Oxfordshire County Council to boost walking and cycling after COVID-19, includes plans for the development of a high-quality walking and cycling route connecting the Kingsmere area of Bicester to the town centre. A stakeholder consultation in December is being followed up with a broader survey with residents and we'll be working closely with the county council as they finalise their plans.

[consultations.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consult/ti/BicAT2/consultationHome](https://consultations.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consult/ti/BicAT2/consultationHome)



# Graven Hill Community House helps neighbours come together

Village halls are often the centre of community. Whether it's play groups, yoga or weight loss groups, chances are it's going on there! For Healthy Bicester, these venues play an important part in our fight against social isolation. The activities are inclusive, accessible and encourage genuine social interaction. Of course COVID has had a big impact on the ability of these halls to operate, but it's been impressive to see how community volunteers, who run these facilities, have taken it upon themselves to put in place all the measures to try and reopen where possible.



meet and socialise. The plan is for the facility to be available until a larger community centre is established.

The pilot at Elmsbrook was so successful that the Healthy Bicester and Garden Town team worked with Graven Hill to take the same approach there, with the new facility at 103 Graven Hill Road opened last August. The two-storey, end of terrace home has been provided by Bromford Housing Association in partnership with Cherwell District Council and Graven Hill Village Development Company. Community First Oxfordshire has

also employed a new community liaison officer for the site, to help new residents settle into their new surroundings. Contact: Lesley Montague [Lesley.Montague@communityfirstoxon.org](mailto:Lesley.Montague@communityfirstoxon.org) for further details.

But what happens when new developments are built? Well, all too often these community centres are one of the last things to be built. There generally needs to be a certain proportion of houses sold before attention turns to a community hall. But Bicester has started doing things differently. A2 Dominion, who are developing the Elmsbrook community as part of the Eco Town development in North West Bicester, provided a community house in the first phase of building. From the outside, the building looks like a regular home, but inside it is kitted out as a place for neighbours to







## Bicester youngsters in the mix to be crowned Oxfordshire Street Tag champions!

Street Tag is a new app which, when downloaded, turns neighbourhoods into a virtual treasure hunt, displaying hidden markers for the player to collect on their phone. It's designed to help people get out and about, exploring their local area by bike and on foot.

First trialled in Cherwell, the pilot was so successful that we helped to roll it out across Oxfordshire with the creation of a county schools league.

Cherwell topped the autumn table with Bicester's Kings Meadow Primary School coming third, collecting more than three million points! PE coordinator at Kings Meadow, Steve Roberts, said: **"I hope all those who have signed up are enjoying themselves. It's great to hear so much excitement in the school about how many steps the children have done and how many tags they have found!"**

For more information about Street Tag, including how to join, head to [cherwell.gov.uk/street-tag](https://cherwell.gov.uk/street-tag). Other COVID-secure sport and wellbeing initiatives from Cherwell District Council, including the latest FAST offers, can be found at [cherwell.gov.uk/activity-and-wellbeing-hub](https://cherwell.gov.uk/activity-and-wellbeing-hub)



## 5k Health Routes – more than just a blue line!

We're very proud of our blue lines. During the COVID spring lockdown we've seen the number of people using them double and communities have started adopting them to keep spirits up with treasure hunts throughout the year. And this autumn we've been lucky enough to have a Bicester resident use them to inspire others on a journey to better health.

Gill Power answered a post on the Healthy Bicester Facebook page ([@HealthyBicester](https://www.facebook.com/HealthyBicester)), looking for a volunteer to use the NHS Couch to 5K app alongside our health routes, showing how they can be used in tandem to get fit. Gill admitted to not being a 'runner' and that gyms and online training just weren't for her, but having looked at the Couch to 5K plan found it structured



to keep her on track but flexible enough to fit into her daily schedule.

We followed Gill over the nine-week programme, from jogging for one minute to getting around the full 5k Langford blue line. She blogged and vlogged about her experiences on our Healthy Bicester Facebook page and has inspired others to follow in her footsteps. We are so grateful to Gill for giving us this unique access and showing other Bicester residents how effective our blue lines can be if you want to up your fitness levels.

Downloadable maps for our 5K health routes, cycle routes and green spaces can be found at [cherwell.gov.uk/downloads/download/1154/health-routes-in-bicester](https://cherwell.gov.uk/downloads/download/1154/health-routes-in-bicester)



# A word from one of our partners – Bicester Town Council

Bicester Town Council is urging residents to get outside and enjoy the town's green spaces.

It's a well-known fact that being outside is good for your health and wellbeing and Bicester has some glorious green spaces for people to get some peace and quiet, and fresh air.

Green space is very important for all ages. Children can have fun in one of the town's play areas, which have been made COVID-secure and include hand sanitiser stations. Find out more about them at [www.bicester.gov.uk/services/open-spaces-play-areas-and-sports-pitches/](http://www.bicester.gov.uk/services/open-spaces-play-areas-and-sports-pitches/) Or why not visit the council's flagship park - Garth Park - a perfect place to walk around and enjoy the formal gardens or just sit and take in the beautiful views.

Over the past few months, the council's grounds maintenance team has been busy sprucing it up. Thousands of shrubs, bulbs and herbaceous plants have been planted, from Asters to Veronica, to give a beautiful display of flowers all year. As well as creating a stunning, scented park, the new plants will encourage more wildlife and help the local bee population by providing a constant supply of food.



And it's not just the gardens that have been given a makeover, the pond and fountain have been tidied up. Silt and debris have been removed along with shoes, clothes, bike parts, a hammer and even a pair of handcuffs!

Bicester's green space is not limited to Garth Park, there are many areas in the town where people can take time out of their daily routine, to just stand surrounded by nature and breathe deeply for a few minutes. Find out more about the town [bicester.gov.uk](http://bicester.gov.uk)

Looking ahead to 2021, the Healthy Bicester and Garden Town team will be working closely with Bicester Town Council and BBOWT (the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust) to increase the opportunities for residents to access the health and wellbeing benefits that come from the natural world. Look out for an update in the next issue of our newsletter in 2021!

