



July 2017

Copy Deadline for next issue October 10 2017

IT'S HERE AT LAST



*Splat the Rat at Letwell Street Fayre
See Full Report Inside*

It's finally going to happen! FLAG has learned from BT that the high speed broadband age is heading our way at long long last.

That spinning circle on our laptop screens should be a thing of the past once our villages are upgraded this autumn.

BT has told FLAG that work has started on the project - which is part of the wider Superfast South Yorkshire programme.

Some specific engineering work has already begun at Firbeck with BT predicting that the upgrade should be complete by the end of September.

Villagers at Letwell will have to wait a little longer. Surveys there are complete with engineering work set to start this month. The installation should be complete by the end of October with householders at Gildingwells benefitting at just about the same time.

BT admits that all the timescales are subject to the civil engineering going to plan, and warns: "There can sometimes be unforeseen issues which can cause delays, but hopefully not in this case."

Questioned about broadband speeds the company said: "Once the upgrades are complete individuals can contact their chosen service provider to check availability and speeds.

"Broadband speeds on this type of fibre technology (fibre-to-the-cabinet) are up to 80Mbps, but this will vary depending on a number of factors. Service providers will be able to give an estimate of achievable speeds during the order process."

NEW HOMES FOR HALL SITE

A planning application has been submitted to develop Firbeck Hall - with a total of 33 apartments and new dwellings earmarked for the site.

Concern was expressed at a parish meeting about the volume of extra traffic which would be generated and the lack of detail about the proposed biomass boiler and hopper.

The meeting ended with a show of hands suggesting that those present generally supported the application or were likely to do so if outstanding issues were resolved to their satisfaction.

There's more detail inside this edition of FLAG.

A HOBBY FLIES INTO FIRBECK

David Wright delivers the latest edition of Nature Report, and tells all about the new arrivals in our neighbourhood...

A very nice bird for me on May 12th was a Hobby chasing through the sky near my home, sending small birds in the area scattering. This falcon is a summer visitor from Africa, feeding on insects and small birds which it catches in flight. It is a very fast flyer, with long pointed wings, resembling a large Swift.

My street was also home to a pair of nesting Nuthatches, using a next box to raise two broods of chicks. The Nuthatch is a small woodpecker-type woodland bird. Unlike the Treecreeper which picks insects off tree trunks whilst gradually spiralling upwards, the Nuthatch always works in downwards fashion. The birds have now left Kingswood Close, returning to their woodland habitat. We were very fortunate to have them select a nest site on our street.

In last October's Flag I said that the highlight of the summer came in the form of two Lesser Whitethroats which appeared in my back garden on August 1st and stayed for several days, showing brilliantly. This was extremely unusual, as this summer visitor is rarely seen in the open, other than on migration.

The birds usually confine themselves to thick cover, and their presence is only indicated by their harsh rattling song. Well, in late May we were again privileged to have at least one of these charming birds with us again. And, once again, feeding, singing and showing openly. The bird, or birds, were with us for a couple of weeks before disappearing. I assume we had a solitary bird unsuccessfully looking for a mate. A great treat though, all the same.

Great to report that, for the first time in a few years, Mallards and Moorhens have successfully bred along Lamb Lane Dyke. Not many chicks, but it's a lot better than none. Grey Wagtails have again successfully bred.

I've previously mentioned appeals by the British Trust for Ornithology into various aspects of birdlife. A new, and very worthy appeal, is into the massive decline in the Cuckoo and Nightingale population. Just go to the Trust's website where you can read about this and other current appeals.

David Wright

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Hobby flies into Firbeck

FIRBECK SCARECROWS SEPTEMBER 23RD AND 24TH



Scarecrow time last year

It will be September before you know it!

Have you started planning your scarecrow yet? Yours can be as elaborate or as minimalistic as you like. It can be a joint project for all the family. The theme this year is musicals and there are countless to choose from. Please let one of the team know if you are going to take part in order that your scarecrow will be shown on the trail. There will be displays, various activities and musical performances in the church and village hall during the weekend and a selection of delicious homemade cakes and sandwiches.

A programme of events will be posted nearer the time.

Have fun!

Sharon Collins 817327 Anita Stanton 818927 Lisa Shiel 818540

Pat Robinson 813593 Sarah Ansley 818232

ART SHOW AT LETWELL

Those talented amateur artists, who meet every Wednesday morning at Letwell Village Hall, are staging a display and sale of their original art works at the hall on Saturday and Sunday October 7th and 8th from 10 am to 3 pm.

Entrance is free, and there will be cakes and refreshments available on the day.

Tutor Ann Vinney Swan will happily welcome any new recruits to the group. Just call in at the hall any Wednesday morning.

FIRBECK HALL - NEW HOMES AND RESTORATION MOVES CLOSER

A Parish Meeting took place at Firbeck on Friday 7th July at the Village Hall. Residents shared their thoughts regarding the recent planning applications for the restoration of Firbeck Hall together with enabling development.



The application is for 33 dwellings – 21 apartments in the hall, three apartments in the stable block, eight new build houses to replace the twentieth century annexe to the hall and one house in the walled garden.

Various concerns emerged of which the most common were the, as yet unquantified, volume of extra traffic resulting from the development and the lack of detailed information

about the biomass boiler and hopper. Other aspects which arose were to do with the adequacy of existing infrastructure, notably water pressure and broadband, and assurances were sought that adequate work on the hall itself would be done before new build houses were built.

The developers, who live quite locally, were present at the meeting, answered questions and agreed to provide information about the biomass plant as soon as possible.

At the end of the meeting a show of hands revealed that almost everybody present either already supported the application or was likely to do so if the two key issues were resolved to their satisfaction.

THE HOGLETS ARE HERE

Three baby hedgehogs - or hoglets as they're properly known - have taken up residence in Lia Emmerson-Boot's garden at Letwell arriving suddenly out of the blue one day a couple of weeks ago.

Lia's been feeding resident hedgehog Maxwell for some time. Living happily in his woven plastic hedgehog house, Max dines each day on a diet of wet cat food and mealworms. He usually pops out to take the air around 8 pm, roams round the garden for a while and then returns home to bed down in the early hours.

Lia believes the hoglets are eight or nine weeks old. "They're super cute little things," she says.

The babies will be moving away, Lia thinks, before too long, and "finding their own places to live independently."

Max and the hoglets have got company for the time being. Out watching the little prickly ones at play the other night Lia spied another two big hedgehogs tucking into a meal at the feeding station. Sounds like they've chanced upon hedgehog heaven.....



Maxwell and a hoglet

CHARITY FUND RAISING

A coffee morning held in June at Firbeck Village Hall raised £1400 to help support the work of an orphanage in Ethiopia. Congratulations to the charity group at the Yorkshire Countrywomen's Association.

The charity ladies are hosting a "posh" afternoon tea at Letwell Village Hall on Friday September 8th. Proceeds will go to Rotherham Holiday Aid which provides disadvantaged families with short holiday breaks. Tickets for the event are available from 01709 816358.

NEWS FROM FIRBECK PARISH COUNCIL

At the Annual Parish Council meeting in May Cllr. Caroline Jopling stood down as chair and Cllr. Chris Stanton was elected as the new chair. Cllr. Julie Dunker is to continue as vice chair. Chris thanked Caroline for her work as chair over the last two years.

As many will know a planning application for Firbeck Hall has been submitted to RMBC. The Parish Council have obtained information about the application

and a series of opportunities have been set up to allow residents the opportunity to see these plans, alongside looking on the RMBC website. As this goes to press a meeting will have been held on Friday, July 7th to give residents a chance to discuss the application and voice any concerns they may have.

Cllr. Chris Stanton has asked for an extension to the current deadline to give as many people as possible the chance to make their responses to the council. The response from the Parish Council will only count as one opinion so it is important for people to send their own responses as well. At the last meeting it was reported that RMBC have reaffirmed their position about Firbeck Hall saying that the developer would be required to repair the structure of the main hall and the outer buildings before any building on housing could commence.

Cllrs. Chris Stanton and Caroline Jopling recently undertook a walk to try and identify a possible footpath route around the Firbeck Hall area which they hope to discuss with RMBC and the developer.

Cllr. Wendy Hamilton attended a meeting organised by the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England and Friends of the Earth to discuss local concerns about fracking. Both these organisations offer their assistance in helping to respond to any fracking planning applications that may occur in this area. One development of note was that an application for a drilling rig in the Harthill area did not require an environmental impact statement.

In other news Cllr. Caroline Jopling is working with the owner to try and achieve restoration of the ha ha. Cllrs. Shiel and Hamilton are working with other residents to produce an information pack for the village. The draft of this has been circulated to other cllrs. and will hopefully be ready for printing in the near future. Cllr. Jopling has also been looking at options to alleviate the problems at the junction of Kidd Lane and New Road. RMBC were unable to improve this junction due to financial constraints but were content for the Parish Council to install a plastic grid and reseed the area subject to RMBC approval. RMBC have refused to put up any kind of 'Children Crossing' road signs at the bend near the Village Hall and the pub as there is no designated play area.

Parents in Firbeck are encouraged to petition RMBC.

Cllr. Wendy Hamilton

IN MEMORY OF MARY

The memory of former Letwell resident Mary Webster was honoured at a recent James Bond themed event which raised £11,882 for charity.

The 'Diamond Are Forever' ball was staged at the Old Bell at Barnby Moor in aid of the Maimie Jane charity which helps provide care, education and medical support for children in Kenya and the Yorkshire Air Ambulance.

Mary Webster died last year after weeks in intensive care following a road accident at Stone.

Through her church, she was already involved in charity work in Africa and on her death her family decided to set up a trust in her name to continue the good work in her memory.

Widower Mike Webster told FLAG he was overwhelmed and delighted by the amount raised, and one of several Letwell residents who went to the black-tie event said: "It was a hugely enjoyable evening, buzzing with different entertaining ways to help raise money for the two charities."

These ranged from dinner in a jewel-encrusted marquee and photo opportunities with an 007 registration Aston Martin and a Jaws lookalike to an auction and mini casino, followed by dancing to Motown, soul and pop funksters The Manhattans, who were Mary's favourite band.

The fund-raising was enhanced by sponsorship from local businesses, proceeds from more than a dozen auction items and many further prize draw goodies including a weekend for two in Edinburgh, a Skyfall print signed by Adele, a day trip to the Aston Martin factory, a signed Manchester United shirt, a week's golfing holiday in a Cornish villa, a poker lesson with the world No. 1 Sam Trickett (who attended the event) and an autographed boxing glove from new World Heavyweight champ Anthony Joshua.

"The support we received from everyone was amazing and Mary would have been both humble and proud to have been the catalyst for such an outpouring of generosity and hard work," said Mike.

The event was so successful that Mike and the Maimie Jane team plan to repeat it next year. Meanwhile they have also arranged, with a Lord of the Dance event in November and a Christmas Ball in December.

For more details about the charity contact www.maimiejane.com

QUILT SHOW

The Dovecote Quilters - regular visitors to Letwell Village Hall - are hosting a day of coffee, cakes and quilts at the hall.

The event takes place on Friday October 27th, and a display of unique handmade quilts and novelties will be on sale from 11 am to 3 pm.

Entrance costs £2, and refreshments will be served throughout the day.

Profits will go to the Samaritans Purse charity which provides children's shoe boxes.

FRIENDS OF FIRBECK HALL

Friends of Firbeck Hall are celebrating the submission of planning applications to RMBC for the restoration of Firbeck Hall and the associated enabling development.

This is the culmination of some eight years of campaigning from a time when the future of the Hall was in jeopardy. The theft of roof lead had resulted in serious internal damage and at that time it appeared that there was no intention, by either the then owner or by RMBC, to instigate the necessary repairs.

Plans for the proposed redevelopment include the formation of 21 apartments in Firbeck Hall itself, 8 luxury homes on the original brown-field area to the rear of the Hall, a new house within the original walled garden and the stable block transformed into 3 dwellings.

This new development will have a significant impact on the village of Firbeck and the Parish Council are taking a close interest. They arranged a presentation in the Village Hall of all the main facts and features and invited residents to attend the July parish council meeting when the redevelopment will be discussed.

The development is dependent and guarantees the restoration of Firbeck Hall in accordance with its grade 2 listing status and Friends of Firbeck Hall are proud of their invaluable contribution to the process of returning the Hall and it's surroundings to their former glory.

From an original group of 10 enthusiasts who first met in 2009, 'Friends' now number over 350.

Sid Ellis.

A SMOOTH ROAD AHEAD

Encouraging signs are coming from the town hall at Rotherham - suggesting that the final section of Lamb Lane will be re-surfaced before the end of the financial year.

Streetpride and their contractors began work at Throapham around five years ago, and have been re-laying the road bit by bit each year ever since.

A spokesman for the authority told FLAG last week that the last section of highway - from Salt Hill to the county boundary at Haven Farm - remains in the programme to be re-surfaced before the end of the current financial year next spring.

No start date has yet been confirmed, but the spokesman said: "We are aiming to go ahead with the scheme, and we have substantial funds in the programme to do it. We haven't got a start date as yet, but the scheme's in the design stage ready to be done."

Meanwhile, the council says that sections of the B6463 - which have deteriorated on the way out of Throapham towards Firbeck and Letwell - will be repaired in the near future sometime between now and September.

TWO GREAT NIGHTS

Lots of great music heads for Letwell in the next few months - with a return visit from old favourites John Reilly and Lewis Nitikman plus a long-awaited debut appearance from dazzling BBC Folk Award winners Chris While and Julie Matthews.

John and Lewis - accomplished songwriters themselves - will be celebrating the work of Billy Joel and Sir Elton John on the night of Saturday September 30th.

Great tracks from the pair's back catalogue will fill the evening from beginning to end.

John, fresh from two nights at Letwell with Boy On A Dolphin, is looking forward to the night. "It's a great chance to celebrate two of the finest songwriters in recent memory. It's a challenge as well, but I'm sure we'll enjoy ourselves, just like we always do at Letwell."



Chris and Julie

Chris and Julie are legendary figures in the folk world - now acknowledged as two of the greatest songwriters in the land. Artists ranging from Barbara Dickson to Mary Black and Fairport Convention have recorded their work over the years, and the pair have been nominated as finalists in the BBC Folk Awards on nine separate occasions.

Together since they were members of the renowned Albion Band in the early 90s, Chris and Julie have recorded eight studio and two live albums in all. They come to Letwell after a busy year which has seen them perform at the Royal Albert Hall and in front of 20,000 fans at the Cropredy folk festival in Oxfordshire.

Musically, the pair overflow with talent. Julie plays guitar, piano, violin and mandolin, and she's fine vocalist too. Chris, equally talented as a vocalist, plays guitar, bodhran, banjo and percussion.

Tickets for the show on Thursday October 19th are priced £12, and are available from Martyn and Andy on 01909 731626 or 540694.

Tickets for the Billy and Elton show are on the sale via the same numbers.

WELL OVER 60 YEARS OLD AND STILL GOING STRONG

A warm summer's afternoon brought the crowds flocking to Letwell street fayre - providing the organisers with a healthy profit at the end of the day.



Street Fayre

much of the afternoon. The racing snails, a popular attraction last year, flew up and down the track as well as ever.

The WI, busy in the kitchen at the village hall, deserve a word of thanks for keeping everyone fed and watered.

The day ended with a buffet meal for volunteers and their families on the village street. Real ale left over from two nights with Boy On A Dolphin at the village hall brightened the occasion at a knock-down £1.50 a pint.

Profits from the event - which amounted to around £3000 - will go to support St. Peter's Church and its continuing maintenance.

Months of preparation, countless meetings and oodles of enthusiasm paid off with the annual event - now well over 60 years old - running smoothly or at least relatively so.

The parking problems, which had blighted the Ramper in past years, were largely eradicated with visitors directed to the yard at South Farm - generously thrown upon for the occasion by John Hollingworth.

The generosity of villagers, who had donated lots of home-made cakes and a mountain of bottles, helped fund proceeds at the cake and bottle stalls, and the local produce, jams, chutneys, fruit and veg, was all but sold out. Volunteers from Sitwell Rotary earned over £110 with their novel Pull-A-String game, and kindly handed over all their profit to the street fayre committee.

The coconut shy was so busy it ran out of coconuts while the snail racing, pot smashing, splat the rat and roll a coin attractions were thronged throughout

KEEPING TRACK OF THE BRIDLEWAY

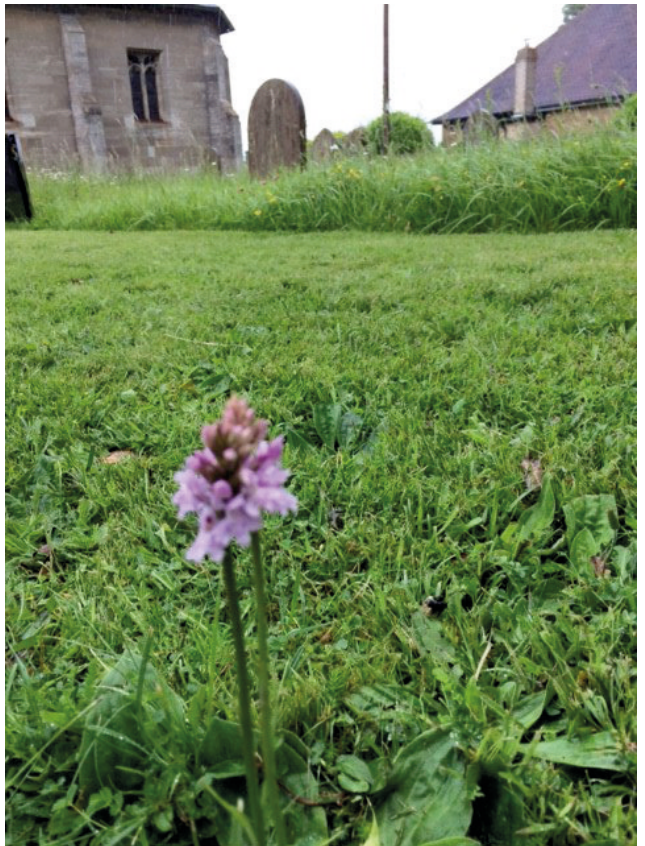
An extraordinary list of plant life has been uncovered by a detailed survey of the bridleway running for a mile from St Peter's Church at Letwell towards Dinnington. Firbeck's Val Oxley and Letwell's Nicky Blyth spent eight weeks searching high and low among the hedgerows and verges

FLAG put the kettle on and took a long deep breath before setting forth on the task of re-writing the handwritten list of their findings. Apologies in advance for any spelling mistakes, but here goes....

White violets, dandelion, celandine, bluebell, blue bugle, cow parsley, ribwort plantash, stinging, white, yellow and red nettle, daisy, wood vetch, crow garlic, dogs mercury, speedwell, old man's beard, bryony, dock, chickweed, ragged robin, pink campion, buttercup, shepherd's purse, garlic mustard, lady's mantle, rose, bramble, vetch, white and red clover, herb Robert, cranesbill, rosebay willow herb, bindweed (larger), cleavers, forget-me-not, greater plantain, colts foot, ragwort, poppy, groundsel, burdock, thistle, knapweed, Lords and Ladies, stitchwort, hogweed, Scarlet pimpernel, ground ivy, wood avens, Yellow archangel, creeping cinquefort, hedge woundwort, bracken and cut-leaved cranesbill.

The survey - carried out on June 20th - also identified many other species of shrubs and trees.

The researchers found chestnut, yew, dogwood, crab apple, alder, sycamore, ash, sloe and blackthorn, hawthorn, field maple, elder, ivy and holly all growing beside the track.



*Bee Orchid at St. Peter's Church
Photo by Kath Woodward*

PLAN FOR THE FUTURE - WITH A FREE SNACK

The powers that be at Rotherham council have come up with a new scheme aimed, they say, at putting "communities at the heart of everything..."

Each of the council's 21 wards have been tasked to create their own plan with £10,000 worth funds available to community groups and residents wanting to resolve known issues.

Firbeck and Letwell ward councillors - Simon Tweed, Jeanette Mallinder and John Vjestica - have thrown out an open invitation to the launch event at Dinnington Resource Centre on Tuesday July 25th.

The meeting starts at 5.30 pm with a 7.30 finish.

The council say that residents will have the opportunity to shape ward plans, "and to make bids for funding local projects you may be involved with...."

In case you're peckish pie, peas and chips will be served free of charge at the end of the event.

NEWS FROM FIRBECK-CUM-LETWELL WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

Hurrah! Summer has arrived at last (at least it has whilst writing this report) with wall-to-wall glorious sunshine. And our summer programme has started with a few trips out. Some of our members went on a trip to Helmsley Walled Garden in North Yorkshire and we will all be going to the Harley Gallery for a tour of the Portland Collection and then afternoon tea in August. We are also going on a trip to Denby Pottery in September So plenty to stop the grass from growing under our feet!

We begin our Autumn programme at our September meeting with Katherine Round telling us all about Appleton Therapies with Neal's Yard products for sale afterwards. And we will be hearing "What Funny thing happened on the way".... with Jane Price - very intriguing! – in October.

We have a chance to show off our arty skills with Silk Painting in November and we will hopefully carry on those skills at our Craft Workshop at the end of that month.

If you are interested in any of the above and would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact the Secretary on 01909 540751.

OFF ROAD BIKERS BEWARE

Noticing the off road biker notices posted around the airfield at Firbeck, Letwell Parish Council launched a copycat exercise in and around the village. Cynics might say that the numpties screaming up and down the lanes and tracks won't take any heed of the warning signs from South Yorkshire Police, but they're certainly better than nothing. Difficult to tell if there's been a reduction in the numpty traffic since the signs went up, but any kind of deterrent is worth a try.