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## Creativity, flexibility and working together at the heart of Bicester's COVID community response

"Unprecedented times demand an extraordinary response and never has this been more evident than in the last few months as Bicester has risen to the coronavirus challenge. We continue to be hugely impressed by the myriad ways in which partners in the Healthy Bicester programme have worked together to support residents and key workers during the lockdown.

Ahead of producing this newsletter, we felt it was important to engage with partners to ask how COVID-19 has affected the way you carry out your business and whether there were any lessons learnt which could be shared for the benefit of all.

Given Healthy Bicester has such a wide range of partners, we heard about a variety of different challenges and solutions, but flexibility was at the heart of every response. The ability to understand the problem, adapt and move on is clearly a key strength of our partners and we congratulate you on meeting the challenge head on. Many of you have turned to online meeting options, such as Zoom, whilst others have got the trusted pen and paper out and kept in touch with a personal letter!

That said, there are clearly concerns about funding, especially for community sports and wellbeing clubs, as well as a need for training volunteers in how to work in a new and difficult environment. Some organisations have needed to furlough staff to protect their future, whilst others who were forced to close are now preparing to reopen.

Whichever position you find yourself in, please keep us updated. As a partnership, one of our main strengths is the ability to help support each other during tough times (whilst celebrating together when the going's good!). We will get through this together."

**Rosie Rowe**  
Healthy Bicester Programme Director

*Here's just a few examples of what you've been up to in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:*



### **Elaine Whittaker, Yoga Being**

*"I have been able to move teaching of Yoga, Qigong, Meditation and Pilates together with Gong Sound Baths online. As the majority of customers are mature, I don't envisage being able to get back to group classes until autumn – and even then, making classes financially viable with social distancing is going to be a challenge."*

### **Lynne Hooper Bicester Camera Club**

*"The camera club have carried on meeting by using Zoom. This has proved very useful and we have completely adapted our programme to suit the lockdown. Fortunately, one member has used Zoom extensively and has assisted the other members in its use, so most members that are interested have been able to take part. This is of course a perfect platform for showing photographs!"*

### **Ben Jackson Bicester Chamber of Commerce**

*"We have held executive meetings via ZOOM, but have also collated and created a 'virtual high street' on our website to boost the local economy: [www.bicesterchamber.co.uk/bicester-online/](http://www.bicesterchamber.co.uk/bicester-online/)*

*"Those participating have fed back how much the regular contact and being able to actually see the people they know has helped with their mental and physical wellbeing. The actual act of taking part has also helped to create a positive 'feeling' and offers something to be looked forward to."*

### **Mechelle Harris, Hummingbird Centre**

*"We have adapted services to keep in touch with supporting those affected by cancer either by telephone, emails, social media and writing. We have still been able to provide counselling via Zoom and What's App and have produced instructions on how to do this as well as download instructions if needed."*

## Celebrating our resilience as a community

– it's all about partnership working

## Alchester Running Club put in the miles to help self-isolating residents

Alchester Running Club members have covered more than **650 miles**, delivering medication to those unable to leave their homes during the coronavirus pandemic.

Cherwell District Council's Healthy Place Shaping team (..that's us..!) devised the 'Oxfordshire Supply Runs' service, using local athletes as the go-between for pharmacies and patients.

In Bicester, Alchester Running Club stepped up, taking 150 prescriptions to patients across Bicester. They've even reached as far as Brill!

**Chairman of Alchester Running Club, Robert Kerr** said: *"I am delighted that we as a local running club are able to help in some small way to contribute to the overall wellbeing of some of those patients that are unable to collect their medicines in person."*

*"The system we have set up works well and I know the individuals making the "drops" have been pleased to be able to help. So far we have covered 650 miles all on foot so double benefit, no pollution and some training as well!"*

## Healthy Bicester Stakeholder Conference 2020

A big thank you to everyone who joined us for our annual Healthy Bicester Stakeholder Conference. Members from a variety of different organisations took part in the event at the John Paul II Centre in Bicester in March (just prior to lockdown). The meeting was an opportunity for partners to network and give updates about their organisations. The subject of loneliness and accessibility was also discussed, looking at ways groups can encourage people from a wider variety of different backgrounds into their fold. We will be taking all the ideas presented at the meeting and reviewing how they can help us to respond to the health and wellbeing challenges that we are facing as lockdown eases.

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## Some extra help when you need it

Bicester's Community Connect social prescribing service is now available for self referrals. The free scheme offers residents access to non-medical support mechanisms within the town, with a variety of options available.

Call the team on **0300 004 04 01** or email [community.connect@nhs.net](mailto:community.connect@nhs.net)

Oxfordshire  
 All In

## A new wave of volunteers put their hands up to help

Bicester's COVID-19 community response has been nothing short of exceptional. A quick glance at [www.oxfordshireallin.org](http://www.oxfordshireallin.org) shows that 16 support groups or organisations have sprung up aimed at helping the more vulnerable members of the town during this pandemic. From small good neighbour schemes to the large, well organised meals service Salute the NHS at Bicester Heritage, the speed at which these groups have formed and responded to the crisis is outstanding.

Thanks must also go to Bicester Town Council for providing Community Grants to many of these new organisations to help them operate so successfully.

# Healthy Bicester helping other communities

**An NHS study, guiding how future developments should be built with wellbeing at their heart, has praised the Healthy Bicester partnership.**

'Healthy New Towns, Putting Health into Place' was released in September by the NHS, detailing ten principles which should be adopted, to encourage wellbeing to be planned for and built into new developments.

Several Healthy Bicester initiatives were highlighted in the report, including the **5k health routes**, noting how for every £1 invested in creating the blue-lined walks, £2.10 would be saved over 25 years. The addition of the outdoor gyms, bike repair workshops and effective social media campaigns were also credited with amplifying the project.

**Rosie Rowe**, Bicester Healthy New Town Director, said: *"We were very fortunate to be named one of the NHS Healthy New Towns back in 2016. Three years of hard work have produced some wonderful results for the people who live and work in Bicester, but we are by no means finished. We know how long it takes to change behaviour and to make healthy living a habit, so we are keen to continue the programme in Bicester and really achieve long-term improvements in health and wellbeing."*

The experiences from the Bicester project are already being shared with residents in Kidlington and the surrounding villages. The **K5 Better Together** programme was launched in January 2020 after a consultation with stakeholders last autumn. The key priorities of the project have been identified as: encouraging healthy living by being active and eating well; to promote mental wellbeing; to tackle loneliness and to increase community cohesion.

Potential plans include: 5k health routes; the launch of a heritage trail and the provision of workplace wellbeing schemes to help small and medium sized businesses better support their staff.

Residents and workers in Kidlington and the surrounding area are being encouraged to keep up-to-date on all the latest developments of the project by following [@K5BetterTogether](#) on Facebook and [@K5Better](#) on Twitter.

More information on the NHS study, 'Healthy New Towns, Putting Health into Place' can be found at: [www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/innovation/healthy-new-towns/](http://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/innovation/healthy-new-towns/)



## BLUE LINES SPRUCED UP READY FOR EVEN MORE USERS

**Hundreds of residents have been lacing up their trainers and heading to Healthy Bicester's blue line health routes for their dose of daily exercise during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

The three 5k routes, painted onto pavements in Langford, Bicester West and North East Bicester, have seen a surge in use since the start of lockdown. In Langford, pedestrian counters indicate that almost 500 people walked the line each day over the Easter period, up 104 per cent on the previous year. Meanwhile, the data collected from Bure Park, part of the Bicester

West route, showed almost 900 daily users over Easter, up from around 670 people during the same holiday period in 2019.

Work has recently been completed to spruce up the 5k health routes, ready for even more residents to use them over the coming months, with a large stretch of the Bicester West route being reinstated.

There are also some new signs to look out for, reminding users to socially distance whilst out on their daily exercise. The guidance is located at each of the kilometre markers along the health routes, reading **"Protect yourself and others. Practice social distancing by keeping 2 metres apart"**.



# ON YER BIKE!



## Dr Bike goes district wide!

**Healthy Bicester's popular free bicycle servicing scheme, Dr Bike, is now available in Banbury and Kidlington, as well as Bicester.**

The first district-wide appointments took place at the end of May with all the slots reserved within hours of going live. Due to COVID-19, an online bookings system is now in place, giving people an allocated time to drop off and pick up their bikes, ensuring social distancing guidelines are followed. Personal protection equipment (PPE) is also provided to everyone working on the scheme.

**Celia Cornforth, centre manager for Bicester Green** said: *"Over the last few weeks, there's been a surge in people digging out their older bikes, looking to use them as an everyday form of transport. Unfortunately, they might not always be in tip-top condition. That's where Dr Bike comes in. Our trained mechanics will give each bike a service as well as providing basic repairs for free!"*

Celia continued: *"We have been running Dr Bike for the last year but COVID-19 has given us a new set of challenges to deal with. The team have worked extremely hard to put in place new measures, ensuring social distancing can take place and I am particularly grateful to our mechanic, Jim Tanner, without whom Dr Bike Bicester wouldn't be possible."*

Healthy Bicester is funding additional sessions over the summer to try to meet the increase in demand for bike repairs. Keep following [@HealthyBicester](#) and [@BicesterGreen](#) for updates and the latest available spaces.



## Cherwell residents donating bikes to care givers

Unused bikes are being tuned-up and handed out free of charge to NHS and social care staff living and working in Cherwell.

The Bikes for Key Workers scheme aims to help Oxfordshire hospital and care staff off public transport and onto bicycles for their daily commute during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Set up by Active Oxfordshire, the initiative is now being rolled out through the Dr Bike programme.

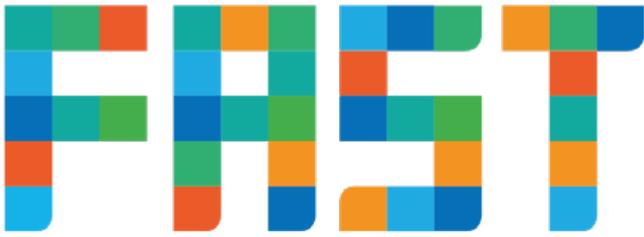
The programme works by asking residents and businesses to donate their unused bicycles to the scheme. Cherwell District Council then arranges and pays for any repairs needed through the Dr Bike programme, whilst a qualified mechanic ensures they are roadworthy. The bikes are then handed onto Active Oxfordshire to partner up with a suitable new owner.

Cherwell has already provided seven bikes to the programme but several more are needed. To offer a bicycle to the scheme, please email [keyworkerbike@cherwell-dc.gov.uk](mailto:keyworkerbike@cherwell-dc.gov.uk). Care staff requesting a free bicycle are being asked to email [keyworkers@activeoxfordshire.org](mailto:keyworkers@activeoxfordshire.org)

## Women's Tour Update

Unfortunately, we've had to put the breaks on plans for Bicester to host the Grand Depart of the Women's Tour bike race this year, with COVID-19 forcing organisers to cancel the event. But we're pleased to be able to tell you that plans are underway to reschedule the event for next year, with Bicester already in gear to start the 2021 race!

# 2021



## Families Active, Sporting Together



### Bicester families flock to FAST

A project, led by Cherwell's Sport and Leisure team, is helping hundreds of families to get active together.

FAST, standing for Families Active Sporting Together, has been running in four wards in Banbury for more than a year. Funded by a £215,000 grant from Sports England, the programme offers free after school activities and money-off sports deals for families living in areas with low recorded levels of physical activity. The scheme has proved so popular that Cherwell District Council has received a further £375,000 from Sport England, to broaden the scheme to include Bicester and Kidlington.

Offers in Bicester include: a family swim at Bicester Leisure Centre for £3 instead of £13; 15 per cent off Clip 'n Climb Bicester for Monday to Friday 'open' sessions; and free, after school, family sports sessions. There are also savings on healthy meals at selected food outlets.



**Councillor George Reynolds**, Cherwell's lead member for leisure and sport said: *"The roll out of FAST to Bicester and Kidlington is extremely exciting news. For those taking part, it offers a variety of fun activities for children, parents and grandparents to enjoy together, inspiring each other to commit to healthier lifestyles."*

*"But more than that, research shows that sharing time together and improving activity levels has positive effects on both mental and physical health. The FAST programme therefore not only benefits the participants, but by improving their general wellbeing, it reduces the need for doctors' appointments and helps to alleviate some of the pressure on our existing health services."*

In line with the offer in Banbury, the project is available to residents living in wards with higher recorded levels of inactivity, including families living in Bicester East, Bicester West and Bicester Town.

Although some activities were temporarily suspended during lockdown, Cherwell's Youth Activators have been producing bespoke guides for FAST families, giving tailor made ideas for staying fit together. Cherwell's sport and leisure team are also working closely with partner organisations, forming plans to reinstate the FAST deals once the venues can reopen.

For more information on how to sign up for a FAST card, the special offers available and the terms and conditions, go to: [www.cherwell.gov.uk/FAST](http://www.cherwell.gov.uk/FAST)



## Schools play their part in Healthy Bicester partnership

Lower sixth form students from across Bicester have taken part in a fair designed to match-make new volunteers with community organisations.

Arranged by [Volunteer Connect](#) in association with Cherwell District Council and the Healthy Bicester partnership, around 180 students from Bicester Technology Studio, The Cooper School and The Bicester School attended the event. They met representatives from 18 organisations, offering the youngsters opportunities to expand their CV and gain new experiences in roles which help the community.



**Jan Robins**, a volunteer at The Hummingbird Centre, which offers support for families affected

## Inspiring activities to help Bicester's older residents

One of the key objectives of our recent Healthy Bicester stakeholder day was to challenge organisations to consider ways they might better connect with people who feel socially isolated. Although we recognise we can always do more, the Healthy Bicester Team has worked hard to support events which encourage the older generations to feel better engage with the local community.

During the [Bicester Festival](#), we supported a pop-up event at Bicester Library, encouraging older people to take part in creative activities. The Healthy Bicester Team were also involved in a day at OYAP's StudiO2, designed to help retired residents understand more about the range of different community groups on offer to them in Bicester.

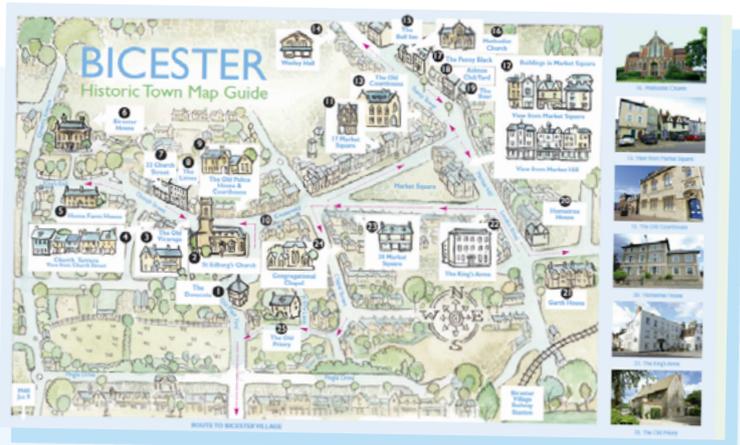


by cancer, said: *"This is the third time I've done this volunteers fair and we get quite a few people signing up as they might've been affected by cancer. Some people have a specific skill they can offer, others are just good at talking to people. A lot of the older volunteers really like the youngsters as it keeps everything fresh."*

Meanwhile, Bure Park Primary School and Chesterton Church of England school have benefited from Healthy Bicester funding, with the second instalment of our outdoor learning course. Headed up by [Muddy Feet](#), the sessions are designed to give teachers the skills to take curriculum-based subjects, including maths, English and science, out to the natural environment.

The project supports new additions to the Ofsted framework, giving greater focus on personal development, behaviour, welfare and mental health.

Previous schools who have taken advantage of the programme include: Bardwell School; Gagle Brook Primary School; St Edburg's School; Finmere Church of England Primary School; Fringford Primary School; Heyford Park Free School and Southwold Primary and Nursery School.



The launch of the town's Heritage Guide, created in partnership with Bicester Local History Society and Bicester Village, has also proved popular with young and old alike. An information leaflet, detailing Bicester's historic hot-spots on a map of the town, can be picked up at the library, Garth Park or the visitor's centre at Bicester Village. A leisurely walk takes around an hour, but it is possible to complete in around 30 minutes.



## Bicester businesses put staff wellbeing first with Thrive

Bicester businesses are being invited to take part in a pioneering new project, enabling them to provide better health and wellbeing support for their staff. 'Thrive' offers an easy to use framework, introducing small and medium sized businesses to the most up-to-date practices on workplace wellbeing, helping them to look after their employees' mental and physical health.

The free programme has been developed by the West Midlands Combined Authority and adopted by Cherwell District Council. Bicester has been selected for the initial pilot in Cherwell, in line with the Healthy Bicester programme.

Among the first cohort to sign up to the programme is print management company, Webmart, who currently employ 38 staff in Bicester. Helen Greener, Finance Manager at Webmart said: *"The wellbeing of our staff is our number one priority, so when we heard about Thrive it was an easy decision to sign up."*

*"The programme is free, easy to adopt and offers excellent advice on how we can support the mental and physical health of our employees. It has been designed to put us in control, so we can implement it gradually without it taking up huge amounts of time."*

*"Once we have fully achieved the targets, we will even be presented with a wellbeing award, showing potential employees the importance we put on their welfare."*

Thrive is designed for companies with 10 or more staff and offers a variety of different levels to suit the individual needs of each business. The free programme assumes no prior understanding of workplace wellbeing techniques, taking participants on a step-by-step journey of best practice guidelines.

For more information about the scheme, contact [Jane.McDonald@Cherwell-DC.gov.uk](mailto:Jane.McDonald@Cherwell-DC.gov.uk) or [Fiona.Ruck@Cherwell-DC.gov.uk](mailto:Fiona.Ruck@Cherwell-DC.gov.uk)



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