Sonning Deanery Branch, Business Meeting,
14th November 2026 at 16.00
Binfield Parish Council Offices, Binfield,

DRAFT Minutes

Present:, Vikki Bullbeck (Branch Spokesperson (Shottesbrooke& WSL)), Ken Davenport (St Paul Wokingham), Sue Davenport (Treasurer), Jan Glen (Secretary (Binfield)), John Harrison (Chairman), Nicola Lee (Arborfield and Barkham). Jane Mellor (Training Officer), Nigel Mellor (Ringing Master), Simon & Chantal Roberts (Hurst), Mike Sherrin (Sandhurst), Becki Shuttleworth (Deputy Ringing Master) Sonning), Steve Smith (All Saints, Wokingham), Steve Wells (Easthampstead), Judith Witting (Finchampstead), Peter Robson (ODG Steward), (12 towers and 7 Officers)

Apologies: John Coombes (Wargrave), Lesley Graves (White Waltham), Jennifer Moynihan (Newsletter), Kate Titford (WSL), Claire Shuttleworth (Youth Officer), Graham Slade (Hurst), Heather Browning (ODG Secretary)

Matters arising from the 2026 AGM:
Safeguarding follow up – separate agenda item.
Gaps in the mid-week schedule – done.

Financial Update: s
The Treasurer, Sue Davenport, reported finances are in a good position. General Fund - £3.7k, Bell fund - £4.0k, Total - £7.7k. There is a £200 grant pending a vote at the AGM for clapper bushes for St Pauls.
The grant to Sandhurst was discussed and it was confirmed that both the Guild and Branch grants would be for work on the bells only. The Chairman (JH) advised that that Sandhurst have a £6,000 deficit for the bells and would welcome any grant offered. £700 had been approved by Officers (the maximum without a vote). Now the work is complete, the Officers are recommending a grant of £1,500 to be put to the AGM. Meeting attendees were all in favour.

Payments to Branch Towers
SD suggested we do not go ahead with the additional subs next year as we have sufficient funds. SD added that she feels that £15 is too much to ask people to pay and she is against the increase.
JH summarised that SD is proposing reversing the AGM decision. Vikki Bulbeck asked if it was a reversal or a delay? It was confirmed that members voted (22 to 1) to approve the increase at the February 2026 AGM. Nigel Mellor (NM) felt that we should not be going back on a decision already made as the amount in question is relatively small. Chantal Roberts (CR) highlighted that the increase is £0.09 pence a week and £15 subs is very good value.
In response to a question from (CR), JH confirmed that the General Fund can be used to pay for anything, but the Bell fund can only be used for bell related payments and grants.
Jan Glen (JG) clarified that the additional subs money will be paid to the tower when used for branch practices. Steve Smith confirmed that was what was discussed and agreed at the AGM. *

SD asked for each tower to provide their details for Sue to pay the money to. Several people said that their tower or PCC account no longer accepts cheques and it was asked if the payments would be online. NM proposed moving to an account that allows online banking if the current one doesn't.
Action: SD to arrange for online banking for the existing account.
Action: JG to send message requesting tower details for payment.

Payment of Subs
JG provided an update on the payment of subs for 2027: The Guild are fully introducing and encouraging the payment of subs online on by each member on Membermojo (MM). Online payments significantly reduce the workload of Guild and Branch volunteers. For those who don't wish to pay online, they can still pay directly to the Guild via Bank Transfer. The details will be available on MM.

There is also an online payment option for where a Tower or PCC pays the subs on behalf of members or some of their members, such as junior members.
A communication will be sent to all members in early December with details.
SD clarified that she will not be sending out member lists to towers this year.
JG summarised the new member process: once the member is elected at a branch meeting or practice, the member is provided with details of how to apply on MM. They apply and pay online. The Branch Secretary informs the Guild Membership Secretary of the election, so the members application is approved once they have applied. The Branch Secretary also notifies the Branch Treasurer of the new members, so the Treasurer knows to expect the Branch element of the subs from the Guild Treasurer.
Clarification from the Guild of when the Branch element payments will be made is required.

Practices
Nigel Mellor reported that there have been a number of Elementary and Advanced practices cancelled this year. Ringers at the elementary standard have moved on, so he is proposing that there will only be the Focussed practice next year. Another suggestion is to sometimes hold it at an 8-bell tower. It has also been suggested that the Binfield afternoon practice moves to the first Tuesday of the month, so it is not so close to the Branch Saturday practice. (It was originally moved to accommodate the elementary practice).
NM feels that there are likely to be more elementary ringers in the branch, but they are not currently coming forward to the practices.
Midweek practices have been limited to Tuesdays and Wednesdays due to NM's availability, so he is now considering scheduling the focussed practices on other nights if other people would be available and willing to run those evenings. The aim would still be to hold them on the tower practice night which has worked well for some towers, including Finchampstead and St Pauls (advanced).
Peter Robson asked about people in other branches getting our branch practice information. There was a general discussion about how to notify people of practices, such as by ticking the appropriate box on MM.
JG suggested looking at ODD Bob as the branch practice dates were provided for each edition, however the SDB website would be more up to date.
Becki Shuttleworth asked about the time of daytime practice as some people can't make it due to doing the school run. Could it be run at a different time? NM said that it would be dependent who available to run it as he was not usually available earlier.

Branch training
Jane Mellor (JM) reported that a very successful Kent to Cambridge training day was held which included quarter peals afterwards. Many people attended a successful and fun Outing day which culminated in joining in the 6-bell striking competition.
JH offered to run more simulator sessions.
This time last year JM was encouraging elementary ringers to come forward and join the elementary practices. There are many elementary ringers in the branch judging by the number of bands at the striking competition only ringing rounds or call changes. JM plans to run an elementary training morning next year and see who comes. The approach would be for TCs to suggest who would benefit from attending and then JM would talk to them individually. The practice would be at elementary level to meet the needs of those attending. NM commented that he always gears the practice to the people who attend.
Nicola Lee commented that it would work well as she has a number of learners coming through. All adults. They are all very keen and unlikely to drop out.
JM will also ask TCs if there is any interest in an M1 course – learning how to teach bell handing.
Simon Roberts reported that at Hurst they had 3 people go through the M1, and it has really helped their learners having different people with different styles teaching. It's also more social and less scary to have a group of learners together.
Nicola Lee is also thinking about having a teaching night for the learners with a rotor of teachers on a Tuesday or Wednesday and run weekly whilst they are at the handling stage, one on one.
JM – having run the M2 course a couple of years ago, we have increased the number of teachers although not all are ART teachers.

Youth Ringing
Beck Shuttleworth (on behalf of Claire Shuttleworth) reported that all the YR practices were with the Bucks and Berks YR. There are a large number of young ringers in the branch, so looking to target them again

and run some Branch events. Hopefully information is being passed on to the young ringers in your tower. If you have any, please encourage them so a SDB YR practice would be viable.
NM comment that the Bucks&Berks practices run by Peter Jasper are outside of the ODG, so the communications are not getting to all. It would be better if he used the Guild mailing system and he would like to see it become part of an ODG group activity. Vikki clarified that it started as an out of school group, and they have 20 odd young ringers at each practice plus helpers including YR ringers from Surrey.

Update on Guild Matters
The Branch Spokesperson, Vikki Bulbeck (VB) reported that it's been a transitional year from the slow and cumbersome general committee to the now fast-moving exec group. The Scrutiny committee consists of Branch representatives and Vice Presidents. A total of 22 on the committee now. They had their first general committee meeting with focus on role of the committee which is to provide checks and balances to the exec committee rather than to feedback to branches.

SD asked how do branches get anything to the Guild? VB responded via the Guild Stewards. Peter Robson added that with the new structure they need to see where the Guild Stewards fit in. VB - Guild Stewards are to represent the Guild to the branches, but this is influx. JH added that role was created because the Master couldn't get round all the branches. SD – feels as if the branches are being ignored, but it's the branches that do all the work – eg organising and hosting competitions etc.
JH concluded - feed any issues you have with the Guild to JH or VB, or directly to the Guild Master or Guild Secretary.

Branch 8-bell Striking Competition
NM – The 6-bell competitions are quite well supported but the 8-bell is not. A suggestion, from Katie Thomas, is to have mixed teams, drawn randomly from those putting their names forward and then have the competition.
JH has taken part in a competition organised this way and it's quite fun but relies on people wanting to take part and put themselves forward.
JM – if more practices are at 8 bell towers, more people will feel confident at having a go.
NM will put forward as a suggestion.

Safeguarding
Steve Wells (SW) – attended the Leadership Course and an action was for him to ensure all SDB towers ringing members do the awareness course.
JH – the branch will contact all Towers to remind people that this needs to be down.
Ken Davenport (KD) reported that the rules for DBS have changed and you only need to do it if you deal with vulnerable people.
Mike Sherren suggested there could be a tick box on MM for the awareness course.
JM reminded that the branch has no authority to police what goes on in Towers. It is down to PCC and Tower. We can only remind and then it's up to each Tower.
SW – his PCC didn't include Bell Ringing, so he asked Safeguarding Officer to say this is what we do as Bell Ringers.
KD – the Dioceses all have different policies and there is a conversation going on at the CCCBR to try and get consensus.
JH mentioned 'The Voice of the Church' as a good source for clergy and PCCs needing to understand how ringing works. https://ringingworld.co.uk/product/the-voice-of-the-church/

Officer Vacancies
John reminded that all Officers are up for re-election at the AGM and encouraged people with ideas to come forward. The following officers will not be seeking re-election at the AGM:
Branch Secretary, Deputy Ringing Master, Newsletter Editor

Any thoughts as to people in your towers? Names you could put forward?

Suggestion that Secretary role is split in to – General Secretary and Practices Secretary, which some other Branches do. Please discuss and motivate your members.

2026 – 2027 draft calendar
JG - The draft calendar is available on the website and will be distributed following this meeting. Please respond as soon as possible as to whether you can accommodate the date and practices assigned to your tower.
Mike Sherren acknowledged the 6-bell Striking Competition date and said he will check but it will probably clash with another event. JG to suggest another month to hold it if April doesn't work.

Business Meeting 2027 – the date and venue was discussed and there was consensus for holding it on the same week in November 2027 and that the Binfield Parish Council office had worked very well.

AOB:
2026 Ringing Census
JH summarised the Census. Every ringer is encouraged to fill it in and that the tower surveys are complementary. All Towers are also encouraged to fill it in. I t would be great if every SDB Tower could do this. JH will send details out and confirmed the dates it will take place on as 16th – 23rd.
There was some discussion about seeing the questions and more notice being preferred.

ODG Structure and Stewards – Peter Robson
This topic was largely covered above under the Update on Guild matters. Peter has had one direct email in the last two years of doing this role.
There was some discussion regarding the role - eyes and ears to feed back to the Master, the Guild Executive is now reactive. As all activities are organised by a Branch, the Branches should be involved at Guild level.
Peter will feed this back.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their time.

The meeting ended at 17.38

Actions
SD to arrange for online banking for the existing account.
JG to send message requesting tower details for payment
JG to circulate details of online payments etc for 2027subs together with the new member procedures.
JH to send out details of the Ringing Census *(Done – post meeting).*

*** Post Meeting Notes**

Agreed at the February 2026 AGM:
Branch to pay £15 for 6-bell towers and £20 for 8 or 10 bell towers when used for Branch practices.
Members to pay additional £5 subs to the Branch from January 2027 to cover the cost of the above.

SD's figure of 16 cancellation over this year so far was correct at 16. Half of these were Elementary practices which are being discontinued next year, so we can expect lower cancellations next year.
The cancellation breakdown was: 8 elementary, 3 advanced, 2 Saturday, 1 daytime, 1 focused, 1 striking competition.
The number of events that were held (confirmed practices, AGM and striking competition) was 33 so far (17 six bell towers and 16 eight/ten bell towers). There are 8 more practices planned this year (5 sixes, 3 eights/tens)
If remaining practices in November and December go ahead there will be a total of 52 ringing events (26 sixes, 26 eights/tens). The total cost will be £910.
If the remaining Elementary practice is cancelled that will save £15, and if one of the others is also cancelled that will save a bit more.

Looking ahead to 2027, the estimated cost is just over 50 planned events, with a potential cost approaching £900. Assuming some are cancelled (but far fewer than this year because we have removed Elementary practices) then the likely cost will be between £700 & £800, ie approximately £5 per member.