

Blossom Wheel update

Background:

1. Linking in with the Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan and the meeting last night, it was clear that the major impact of development around us is likely to be on Middleton Stoney because all the traffic has to come through the roads that cross in our centre. So we have to think not just of mitigating the effects of the traffic with strategies such as speed reduction; but also how to make Middleton Stoney the best environment we can to live in – and conducive for people to move into as houses are built and bought and sold, so that the community continues to thrive in the years ahead.
2. The Blossom Wheel has an important part to play in that, creating more safe and enjoyable outdoor spaces. The busy roads and narrow pavements mean there's nowhere to walk easily at the moment, so the initial idea was to join up fragments of footpaths around the village. Plant blossom trees around the circular walk – the rim of the wheel; along the roads that dissect the village – the spokes; and in the churchyard – the hub. The project will also bring greater outdoor opportunities, including education – eg information boards on the farmers' land, about what they've planted and why; and school visits inside the church and out. Can't emphasise enough that it shouldn't be driven by the church. It's very much about the whole community, working with other village groups such as the village hall committee and the parish council to make the most of the opportunities for everyone.
3. So, the Valencia award is just for Stage 1, the hub, and will make the church and churchyard more useful and more usable by the community. It's a question of 'How do you preserve an important listed building?' Looking ahead, it's not going to be through church collections. And we don't want the building to fall into disrepair. It's also about how we make best use of it to improve the environment and wellbeing for the village, churchgoers or not.
4. The Valencia competition then came up, with restrictions that meant our entry had to come just from the church and had all to be spent within the curtilage of the churchyard. The whole £300,000 had to be spent on the project, or we would forfeit the whole lot.
5. As part of Valencia's conditions, we have to contribute an additional £30,000, plus pay for architects' fees and other sundries - so approximately a total of £60,000 on top of the prize money has to be raised.

The bid

1. The bid itself focused on building a servery and loo so that the church could become another resource for the village, alongside the village hall and playground (and occasionally the cricket club). Its purpose is to maximise the usability of an important ancient monument in the village – for education and concerts, for example – as well as its uniquely peaceful and serene setting. Hence planting blossom trees and wild flowers.

To update you so far:

Phase 1 of the Blossom Wheel is almost complete:

1. 15 trees have been planted and wildflowers are due to be sown.
2. The interior of the church has been reconfigured to accommodate the servery and loo, removing the organ and so allowing light into the chancel. The organ, which is an important Nicholson's organ, will be re-sited at the back. It is currently in Nottinghamshire, where it will be refurbished and restored. The church has been painted, the servery and loo built and the vestry reconfigured and upgraded. Hoping it will all be finished, bar the organ, by Easter. Planning an opening service.

Looking ahead

Now very keen to get on with the rest of the Blossom Wheel project. Important to see this as a project driven by the village, not the church. The church was simply a necessary focus of stage 1.

Going forward, we need to make a plan on how to engage villagers in the Blossom Wheel project and how we can work together with the village hall and others to benefit each other.

Publicity: leaflet/ get together in the village hall/church. Followed by entertainment?

Your thoughts?