



**MINUTES OF THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION
OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY CONFERENCE
HELD ON 04 FEB AT 1000hrs.
EYNHAM VILLAGE HALL**

Present:

Guests:

Lynda Atkins – Deputy Lieutenant of Oxfordshire representing HM.
Steven Lee – Board of Trustees Royal British Legion – guest Speaker
Air Chief Marshal Sir John Allison KCB CBE

Committee:

Anne Midwinter	County President	Y
Peter Eldridge	County Chairman	Y
Fiona Lovesey	County Vice Chairman	Y
Tjark Andrews	County Committee Member/County Standard Bearer	Y
Andrew Bowes	County Treasurer/Committee Member	Y
Derek Bradshaw	County Committee Member	Y
Mark Garwood	County Parade Marshall	Y
Peter Clarke	County Dep Parade Marshall/Committee Member	N
Brian Leach	County Committee Member	Y
Rob Lovesey	County Minute Taker/Committee Member	Y
Hugh Ashton Moore	Membership Council Representative	Y
Chris Jones	Membership Engagement Manager (Central)	N
Lebo Nyoni	Membership Engagement Officer	N
Yanto Evans	Community Fundraiser	Y
Nicole Mayall	Community Fundraising Manager, SE&SW Midlands	N
Pat Chadwick	Casework Services Manager- SE Midlands	N

Standard Bearers:

Steve Holland	Chipping Norton
John Green	Henley on Thames
Natalie Buxton	Bampton
Jackie Friend	Stanton Harcourt

Branch Delegates/Visitors:

Thomas Buxton	Bampton	John Pearson	Deddington
Steve Radband	Bampton	Vic Antoia	Bampton
Yona Barrett	Carterton	Richard Nall	Bix
Brian Barrett	Carterton	Cary Elphinstine	Stanton Harcourt
Clive Cantwell	Carterton	Jean Eldridge	Benson
Nick Porter	Charlbury	Maz Holland	Chipping Norton
Roger Mackriell	Thame	Chris Benjamin	Carterton
Graham Moore	Bicester	Mike Henderson	
Rob Forsyth	Deddington		
Tony Long	Deddington		

Item	Discussion/Decision	Action
1.	Prayers	
2.	<p>Meeting Opened</p> <p>The Chair opened the meeting at 1000hrs. The Exhortation was spoken by the President.</p>	
3.	<p>Lord Lieutenants Representative Address – Lynda Atkins DL</p> <p>Lynda Atkins DL representing the Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire and His Majesty the King thanked the Chair and the County Committee for their kind invitation to attend the County Conference. Ms Atkins read in full the statement from his Majesty King Charles III thanking the Royal British Legion for the Loyal Greeting (see Attachment where this is reproduced in full). The Deputy Lieutenant informed Conference that HM Patronship for the Royal British Legion is still to be resolved and it is hoped to have details of this later this year. Further, the Deputy Lieutenant said that His Majesty had agreed for the music sales to the Coronation is to be donated to two charities; the Royal British Legion being one of those charities.</p>	Attachment to these minutes
4.	<p>President’s Welcome</p> <p>The County President Ann Midwinter welcomed the Deputy Lieutenant, Guest Speakers, the Committee and Branch Delegates to this the 99th Annual County Conference for Oxfordshire. She went on to mention all the hard work that the Chair and the Committee had put in over the previous year, with the highlight being the Oxfordshire County Poppy Appeal launch at Blenheim Palace involving a parade by the Chinnor War Horse, Oxfordshire Home Guard and Branch Standards with the salute taken by the Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire Mrs Marjorie Glasow BEM. The unique parade saw the Lord Lieutenant receiving the parade on horseback. Mrs Midwinter went on to invite all present to the 2024 Oxfordshire Poppy Appeal launch, preparations for which were already underway. Mrs Midwinter was particularly heartened by the high number of ladies taking Officer Roles across the Country and thanked the families of County and Branch Officers for their support of the Officer and the Royal British Legion in Oxfordshire. In discussing the hard work of the County Branches the President specifically mentioned the resurrection of the Carterton Branch which was facing certain closure a year ago to become a vibrant and active County Branch – singling out Yona and Brian Barrett for thanks for their excellent work and enthusiasm.</p>	All
5.	<p>Apologies</p> <p>a. Peter Clarke</p> <p>b. Lebo Nebo</p> <p>c. Chris Jones</p>	
6.	<p>Minutes of Previous RBL County Conference 2023– circulated prior to meeting.</p> <p>The minutes of the previous meeting held on 09 Jul 23 were reviewed by the members of the Committee; passed as a true copy and signed by the Chair and Minuting Secretary.</p> <p>Proposed: Fiona Lovesey</p> <p>Seconded: Yona Barrett</p> <p>The vote was carried unanimously</p>	
7.	<p>Matters Arising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County Newsletter 	Chair
8.	<p>County Chair Report</p> <p>The County Chairs Report is replicated in full as an attachment to this report.</p>	Attachment to these minutes
9.	<p>Oxfordshire County Plan</p>	Chair/MEO

	<p>The Chair stated that the County Plan was still in draft format for 2024 and still undergoing production. It was announced that once completed the Chair will arrange for the Plan to be sent to all Branches and CSBs</p>	
10.	<p>Elections for County Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County Chair – Peter Eldridge • County Vice Chair – Fiona Lovesey • County Treasurer – Andrew Bowes • County Minuting Secretary – Rob Lovesey • County Parade Marshal – Mark Garwood • County Standard Bearer – Tjark Andrews • County Deputy Parade Marshal and Ceremonial Member – Peter Clarke • County Training Officer – Derek Bradshaw • County Committee Member – Brian Leach <p>The Chair proposed Derek Bradshaw to be appointed to the role of County Training Officer on the Committee. Proposed: Pete Eldridge Seconded: Brian Leach The vote was carried unanimously.</p> <p>The County Committee Members elected were: Proposed: Pete Eldridge Seconded: Fiona Lovesey The vote was carried unanimously.</p>	
11.	<p>Election of County Delegate to National Conference The County Vice Chair proposed that the Chair Pete Eldridge be nominated as the County Representative at the forthcoming Annual Conference. Proposed: Fiona Lovesey Seconded: Maz Holland The vote was carried unanimously.</p>	
12.	<p>County Treasurers Report – circulated prior to meeting.</p> <p>The Treasurer summarised his written report; the expenditure incurred by County since the previous Conference was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard Bearer Training Hall hire costs. • County Parade Marshall Expenses • County Conference expenses • Purchase of racking for the County storage unit • New County Standard <p>The Treasurer summarised his written report stating that there are discrepancies with the Earmarked Funds which despite reaching out the Haig House Branch Accounts has elicited no response. These being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bloxham – Funds for this CSB Branch have not yet been credited to BFI. Value of funds not known Query outstanding with Branch Accounts. • Carterton – BFI funds received without warning June 2022 – Earmarked Fund does not reflect the BFI value, although BFI interest is being posted to Earmarked Fund – Query outstanding with Branch Accounts. • Ramsden – Funds with County pending decision on CSB status. • Request made to Branch accounts to document a method to initiate a transfer between BFI accounts within BFI module - Request outstanding. 	

- Hire of Standard Bearer Training Hall costs have still not been invoiced.

	General	Benevolent	Other	TOTAL
Balances as per copy statements	7,559.77	10,705.11	78,846.49	97,111.37
Deduct: Un-presented payments	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Add: Un-presented receipts	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Balances	7,559.77	10,705.11	78,846.49	97,111.37

EARMARKED FUNDS SUMMARY (2024)

County: Oxfordshire

County Number: CN014

Earmarked Fund Name	B/F Balance	Total Income	Total Expenditure	C/F Balance
Recruiting	450.85	0.00	0.00	450.85
Training	218.23	0.00	0.00	218.23
BR 0736 Burford Branch	1,794.44	68.78	55.00	1,808.22
BR0734 Bloxham Branch	-79.99	0.00	0.00	-79.99
BR0767 Ramsden	1,168.12	3,029.05	1,168.12	3,029.05
BR0737 Carterton Branch	40.21	28.47	0.00	68.68
BR0749 Eynsham Branch	1,917.61	339.36	325.12	1,931.85
BR0752 Headington Branch	19,015.06	144.05	0.00	19,159.11
BR0764 North Leigh Branch	358.23	2.71	0.00	360.94
BR0780 Yarnton Branch	38,516.35	341.73	100.00	38,758.08
BR0756 Kidlington Branch	7,876.10	59.67	0.00	7,935.77
BR0771 Standlake & Northmoor Branch	1,478.77	11.20	0.00	1,489.97
TOTALS	72,753.98	4,025.02	1,648.24	75,130.76

The Treasurer continued by expressing some concern that again despite reaching out to Haig House Branch Accounts there is no documented method to enable the movement of monies from Branch BFIs to County. He announced that he will keep pursuing this requirement and his concerns with the discrepancies with the LOMAS System.

The County Accounts were reviewed by the members of the committee; passed as a true copy.

Proposed: Andrew Bowes

Seconded: Derek Bradshaw

The vote was carried unanimously.

13. **Membership Engagement Officers Report** – circulated prior to the meeting.
The Membership Engagement Officer was not able to attend the County Conference.

14. **Casework Services Manager Report** – circulated before the meeting.
The Casework Service Manager was not able to attend the County Conference.

15. **County Poppy Appeal Manager Report** - circulated before the meeting.
The County Chair enhanced the report submitted by the County PAM in stating that:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nationally: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2022 - £47.7m was raised by the Poppy Appeal ○ 2023 - £47.2m has been raised to date however monies from supermarkets are still be accounted. • Oxfordshire: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2022 – Oxfordshire raised £569k ○ 2023 – Oxfordshire raised £597k which is an increase of 4% <p>Yanto mentioned that he had several awards and certificates to present however if none being present, he will be making his way around the Branches.</p>	
16.	<p>Address by National Trustee Steven Lee and Corporate Statement</p> <p>The County Chair welcomed Mr Steven Lee the Conference guest speaker from the RBL National Board of Trustees. Mr Lee welcomed all to the Conference and thanked that splendid turn out by the County Standard Bearers and the hard work of the County Ceremonial Team. Mr Lee explained to the Conference that following a 20-year career in the Royal Marines and subsequently in the financial sector, joined the Board of Trustees in May of 2023. He reflected on the relevance of the Royal British Legion and demonstrated our utility that benefits our members. He stated that this is particularly as important today as it has ever been. The King’s Coronation was a particular milestone and expressed his and the National pride shown and the Royal British Legions role in the proceedings which demonstrated the strong and loyal connection with the Royal Family, reaffirming the RBL in the national consciousness. The economic climate has impacted heavily on the membership of the RBL, with the support to members with hardship grants being distributed which has had a significant impact on the RBLs costs. The Royal British Legion is financially stable and in a strong position despite the increase on requests for support. The corporate governance and tight financial controls have enhanced and sustain the string financial position.</p> <p>The plastic free Poppy exhibited the Legions drive to a more sustainable environmental future, he did however, acknowledge that improvements still needed to be undertaken with work still on-going. Staying with the Poppy Appeal accentuated the 4% increase in donations when compared with the previous year and exhibits the remarkable effort by RBL Poppy Appeal Collectors and the strength that the RBL holds national importance and is still sustainable and relevant. In addition, the RBL achieved £56m income from other activities, from events, Just Giving and beneficiaries.</p> <p>Remembrance remains at the forefront of the Legion, with 4 important National Events in the offing for 2024:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Service 60 - Royal British Legion will be holding a special event on Tuesday 16 May 2023 at the National Memorial Arboretum to mark the service and sacrifice of this generation. • Windrush 75 - 2024 marks the 75th anniversary of the arrival of the ship Empire Windrush at Tilbury Docks, Essex. The ship has become symbolic of the generation who travelled from the Caribbean to settle in, and help rebuild, Britain in the decades after the Second World War. • Korea 70 – this event will focus on telling the story of the Korean War through the testimony and memories of the conflict from those who were there, as well as looking to inform and engage the wider audience and attendees about a war which never truly ended. • Remembering D-Day, the Battle of Normandy and Arnhem. <p>In 2023 the National Remembrance Sunday Parade had 9800 marching past the Cenotaph and revealed the significant diversity of those taking part and was very striking.</p>	

The support of beneficiaries remains the principle of the Royal British Legion, the number of cases requiring support has increased by 30% over 2022, with 27,000 cases, resulting in in £18m grants awarded. For the first time in recent history the RBL has issued £5m in grants due to the cost-of-living crises and these have not necessarily been to the traditional recipients. This is defining the RBLs proposed expansion of support portfolios. 7600 cases were subject to cost-of-living hardship grants.

The Royal British Legion Compensation Team now supports service personnel leaving or recently left through the compensation process. The Legion can now help to lodge an appeal and represent you at the appeal tribunal if you wish, all free of charge.

The Legion is working in partnership with Dementia UK to provide Admiral Nurses – a specialist service helping the Armed Forces community and their families living with dementia. 1700 beneficiaries are being supported.

Recovery – the Legion fund and support recovery centres across the country helping wounded, injured and sick personnel return to duty or make a smooth transition to civilian life. The Battle Back Recovery Centre is supporting the Invictus GB Team championing 59 participants.

Membership is it widely acknowledged that membership is declining nationally and stands at 194k which is down 8k over 2022. This is driving the new membership proposals under the membership programme especially Digital Membership to make it more appealing to a relevant audience.

Mr Lee then described the campaigns and National Strategic Position influencing Government, these included:

- **The Etherton Review** - examined the experience of people in the Armed Forces who are LGBT+ and served under the ban when it was illegal to serve as a homosexual, exposing some of the terrible prejudice and mistreatment many faced.
- **Count Them In Campaign - together** with Poppy Scotland, we launched our Count Them In campaign calling on government to include a question on the Armed Forces community in the 2021 Census. On 23 Jun 2020, legislation was finalised by the UK Government and Parliament to amend the census in England and Wales so that, for the first time, it will provide information on whether someone has served in HM Armed Forces.
- **General Election Manifesto** – the RBL Manifesto highlights its top five priorities for the UK government to better support our Armed Forces community.

The National Strategic role drives what the RBL does more effectively and directs a more cohesive direction especially at the higher RBL Executive. There are to be Leadership changes, with the New National Chair, Membership Council Chair, and new Director General. The Legion has also recently welcomed a new Interim Chief Finance Officer which has enhanced the impact to our future. These changes should improve confidence in the Leadership and provide a better membership journey.

Finally, Mr Lee encouraged everyone present to support and attend the Annual Conference this year on 1-2 Mar 24. The event although being held at Newport Monmouthshire will also embrace technology and enable delegates to join remotely. He thanked everyone for his invitation to the 99th Oxfordshire County Conference and to engage with the membership to discuss the RBL.

Questions for the Speaker:

- The Bix Branch delegate asked Mr Lee how the RBL Leadership were differentiating the membership being distinct from the Poppy Appeal? Mr Lee responded that the RBL is the only military charity that has a unique National position and is working

	<p>hard passively and actively to influence government policy to support our Armed Forces and veterans. The efforts being undertaken to bring together the various areas of the RBL to identify as a Charity of national importance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bix Branch delegate also questioned the recruitment of Executive and Leadership Membership from outside of membership proposition that are not from a military background? The Speaker stated that the value of membership is key and difficult to sustain to support the concept of the RBL without embracing specialist in Charity organisation and management that fully support the ethos of the RBL. • Concern was expressed regarding the move to the Digital Membership format; communication would be lost and involvement at Branch and County level. Lynda Atkins as the National Membership Chair stated that the Membership Council support this initiative and propositions. She mentioned that the concerns are being reviewed and addressed nationally. She went on to ask for feedback from the membership to help improve the future and make it more effective. Hugh Ashton-Moore Membership Council Member said that the Membership Council are looking at the Membership Offer and are hoping to present the proposal to the next Annual Conference. • The Carterton delegate raised concerns that people only hear of the RBL once a year through the Poppy Appeal or Remembrance and with the decline of membership asked what steps are being undertaken to improve communications with the younger populace and service personnel; there seems to be a lack of service participation in membership and awareness whilst in the service. The Chair endorse these sentiments, and a general open discussion suggested that targeting pre-release courses for personnel should be looked at. 	
17.	<p>County Presentations and Awards</p> <p>There were no County Presentations and awards.</p>	
18.	<p>Presentation of County Standard</p> <p>The County President Ann Midwinter presented the County Standard to Tjark Andrews following the taking of the County Standard Bearers oath.</p>	
19.	<p>Date and Venue for 100th Oxfordshire Conference 2025:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saturday 01 Feb 25 – venue to be confirmed 	
20.	<p>Closure of Conference</p> <p>The Conference closed at 1115hrs, with the National Anthem.</p>	

P ELDRIDGE
County Chair
Date:

R Lovesey
County Minuting Secretary
Date:

Attachment:

1. The Royal Greeting

2. The County Chairs Report 2024



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

Vice Admiral Sir Clive Johnstone K.B.E., C.B.,
National President,
The Royal British Legion.

Please convey my warmest thanks to the Members of The Royal British Legion for their loyal greetings, sent on the occasion of their Annual General Meetings at County Conferences which are being held throughout January and February 2024.

I much appreciate your extremely kind message and value your continued support. In return, I send my warmest good wishes to you all, along with my hopes for a series of most successful meetings.

CHARLES R.

1 st January 2024.

County Chairs Report 2024

General:

Last year, 2023 has proved to have highs and lows. As examples, high the 2023 Poppy Launch Event with the Oxfordshire Lord Lieutenant accepting the 1st poppy in full uniform and on horseback was a sight to behold and the event ran to perfection. My thanks go to Oxfordshire Minuting Secretary (OMS), Rob Lovesey, a new County post due to a change of job specification for the new role of Membership Engagement Officer (MEO). Rob was supported by a strong Team of helpers, both RBL, including members of the local branches and many other organisations.

A major low prompted another major high, the low was the resignation of our MEO Tom Coen right at the time the branch accounts were due. During 2022 Oxfordshire was poor in processing these reports, this due mainly to the absence of the Membership Support Officer (MSO), the forerunner of the new MEO post. Another issue was the lack of experience and communications with Branches, stifled by GDPR regulations, of members of the County Committee. When, in 2023, once again we had no local dedicated staff to process the Branch Accounts submissions those involved in the previous year were able to step in and support Branches with their account's submission. I am pleased to report that this led to an 89% of reports submitted. It has also opened up better communications for the County with Branches. My thanks to Chris Jones MEM, Rob Lovesey OMS, Andrew Bowes Oxfordshire Treasurer for this excellent result.

A final low has been the potential closing of one of the County Branches due to sanctions imposed by RBL Auditors in the mishandling of a large non RBL permitted donation to a non RBL Charity. Initially I was not in much of a position to understand the role the County was required to do about the sanction. With help and support we are now much better organised and have an action plan to deal with the situation. One part of the plan involves action by the County Committee to ensure that Branches have a Finance Guide to help with Branch deliberations on making donations. This will be sent to Branches before the County Conference.

Finally in this section my thanks to all those who have wished me well and supported me, particularly Jean my wife, both in my role as County Chair and on a personal basis during my knee surgery and recovery in 2023. I had the left one replaced in March 2023 and the right one replaced in October 2023. All is going well for my full recovery.

Oxfordshire Poppy Appeal:

It has been a very good year for the Oxfordshire Poppy Appeal the latest results of which are in the Poppy Appeal Managers (PAM) report circulated in the Delegates Pack. Mine and the County Committee's appreciation and thanks go to the Oxfordshire PAM and all of those groups and individuals, many of which are not RBL Members, who volunteer to be Poppy Appeal Organisers (PAO) and those who in anyway support the appeal.

There will be an Oxfordshire Poppy Appeal Launch in 2024 with details to follow.

Oxfordshire Branch Plans:

One of our County Branches (Benson) has adopted the use of a Branch Plan aligned to the County Plan; with the National Vice Chair as their Branch President, it was agreed that Oxfordshire should lead the way in having County Branches produce a Branch Plan. This will aid cohesion between Branch and County moreover, it will enhance Branch governance and due diligence. In order to support Branches County Minuting Secretary has produced a format for branches to use. This document will be filled in with basic plan requirements so that Branches will all be using the same format and main plan requirements to which they can add their own sections. I am expecting the role out of this documentation to coincide with the County Conference

The County Plan is being reformatted to align with the new format for Branch Plans and I am expecting that this task will be completed ready for County Conference.

Appointment of a New County Engagement Officer (MEO):

Oxfordshire County has a new MEO Lebo Nyoni shared with Northamptonshire. Lebo will be working her way around Branches to get to know you all over the next few months.

Main Events 2023:

On Saturday 11th February 2023 I chaired the Oxfordshire County Conference in the Eynsham Village Hall.

I attended the March 2023 County Chairs Seminar in London and the Chairs Seminar in September 2023 in Birmingham. These events always prove to be interesting, revealing new innovations and changes such as County and Branch Training, changes to Royal Charter and the latest plan to introduce Digital Membership. I have included some very short notes on these under separate headings below.

As the year progressed, I was able to attend RAF Benson for their annual Family Day event and RAF Brize Norton for their Enterprise Display Event.

On Sunday 17th September 2023 I attended and marched for the Banbury Battle of Britain Parade. This was a big event with a large number of RBL Standard Bearers performing ceremonial duties.

In October, and as a spectator I attended the Oxfordshire Poppy Appeal Launch, once again at Blenheim Palace. This proved to be a truly remarkable event with the Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire, on horseback, receiving the 1st Poppy from the Oxfordshire Home Guard, who in turn had received the Poppy from the Chinnor War Horses, a truly excellent memorable event.

My role as Oxfordshire Chair is supported by many individuals and groups so my thanks to:

Lynda Atkins and Fiona Lovesey, (Previous County Chairs).

Our President Ann Midwinter.

Lebo Nyoni MEO.

Chris Jones, our new MEM.

Nicole Mayall, Community Fundraising Manager.

Yanto Evans, Our new CFR.

Patricia Chadwick, Casework Services Manager.

County Treasurer, Andrew Bowes.

Rob Lovesey County Minuting Secretary.

Oxfordshire County Ceremonial Team Mark Garwood, County Parade Marshal, Peter Clarke County Deputy Parade Marshal, and Tjark Andrews County Standard Bearer.

Colleagues and RBL Staff at Area Office and Haig House.

Other serving Members of the County Committee

Our Patron.

And of course, all of you.

County and Branch Training:

I am assured by the RBL Head Office Training Team that County and Branch Training will be taking off in early 2024. I am expecting enough information to be released during the March 2024 Chairmans Seminar to be able to start processing the requirements for County Committee Training, once I and the other members of the County Committee have attended Training, I will then work with Branches to roll out the Training Program to Oxfordshire Branches. I am aware that Branch Training is controversial in some Branches and that the Oxfordshire County Committee will need to make Training easy to access for the Counties Branches.

Continuing National Changes to RBL Royal Charter:

This is another controversial issue for many National RBL Branches! As far as I am aware the latest information on changes to the structure of National Chairman Vice Chairman and Trustees etc. has been put on hold for further review. There will be no motions at the 2024 National Conference on changes to governing structure so as to give ample time for examination and consultation with Counties and Branches.

Digital Membership

There is a national Team working on the implementation of an RBL Digital Membership. This is primarily for younger individuals to be able to be a member of the RBL without having an affiliation to a branch. I am advised that there is unlikely to be an implementation of digital members during 2024 as the scope and set up for it are in the early stages of development. Personally, although I am not necessarily against the plan as it is logical for a younger generation who run their lives over the internet and social media. I have a major concern over interaction with digital membership members which I firmly believe needs to be accessible by County Officer's so that local events and information can be directed to them.