



## Secret Gardens of Oxton 2023

It was another bumper year for the annual Secret Gardens of Oxton with more than 5,000 visitors enjoying the village's showcase event.

Nineteen gardens opened to the public on May 14th and with an array of food and craft stalls, musical entertainment and a children's treasure hunt, there was plenty for families to enjoy.

New additions this year included 'street café' style seating outside local eateries, a Farmers' Market in Christchurch Road, and official merchandise to mark the occasion.

Kirsty Cotton, joint coordinator alongside Lisa Stafford, said: "We've had some really positive feedback and thankfully the weather was kind to us again.

"There was a real buzz around the village and I'm sure the



previous night's Eurovision Song Contest Final in Liverpool helped put everyone in a good mood! I'm told a few Eurovision fans from different countries were staying near Oxton and also enjoyed the occasion.

"The Secret Gardens is one of the largest public events in Wirral and really showcases what Oxton village is all about. More importantly though, it raises much-needed money for local good causes.

"An event like this wouldn't be possible without the residents who open their gardens or the hundreds of volunteers who give up their time to do various tasks. A massive thank you to everyone who played a part in making this such a wonderful event."

Merseyside's Lord Lieutenant Mr Mark Blundell and his



## Secret Gardens



wife, Suzanne, returned as special guests after thoroughly enjoying their visit last year, and they were joined by Wirral's Mayor and Mayoress, Cllr Jeff Green and his wife Carol.

Jeff Willis, Vice Chair of the Oxton Society, said: "Secret Gardens is a real community event; hundreds of volunteers give their time to make it happen and thousands of visitors dig deep to support the Society,

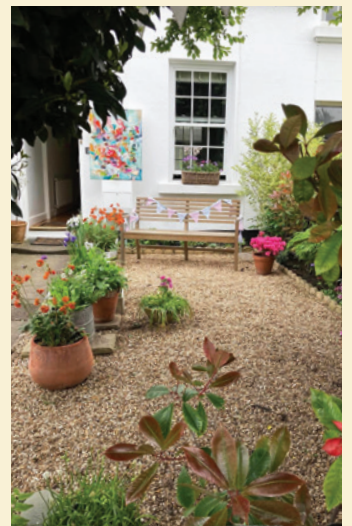


partner charities and village businesses.

"The event was another great success, raising over £36,000 which will be shared between the Society, the Terral Morgan Memorial Fund, Sundowns, and Birkenhead Youth Club.

"This money helps fund our community and conservation work including the Christmas Lights Switch-on event, the summer hanging baskets, newsletters, history group work and admin costs.

"Thanks go to the main organisers Kirsty and Lisa and their team of volunteers, and a special thank you to Monica Toosey who was involved in the very first Secret





## Secret Gardens



Gardens event and is bowing out after many years of invaluable service.

“We also say goodbye to Kate Wyness who has done a fantastic job looking after the artisan stalls in the village.

“Finally, a huge thank you to our very special garden owners who provide the core attraction for a great day out. The work involved in getting their gardens ready for showtime should not be underestimated and then they give a warm welcome to thousands of strangers – incredible.”

Keep up to date with all the reaction from this year’s event and news of next year’s at [facebook.com/secretgardensofoxton](https://facebook.com/secretgardensofoxton)



*From left to right: Suzanne Blundell, Lord Lieutenant of Merseyside Mr Mark Blundell, garden owner and co-organiser of Secret Gardens Lisa Stafford, Wirral Mayor Jeff Green, Chair of the Oxton Society Chris Jarrey and Wirral Mayoress Carol Green*



### Sponsors

Thank you to this year’s main sponsors:

**Bogans Carpet & Flooring Superstores** – An Oxton family-owned company

**Revive Stone Walls** – Qualified SCQF Level 5 Conservation Masonry

**Brennan Ayre O’Neill** – Independent local estate agent

**Kumon Bebington** – Effective maths and English programme

**The Queens Arms, Oxton** – Local community pub and kitchen

The gala raffle also featured dozens of prizes donated by local businesses and a big thank you goes to them for their support.

The top prize was a £300 voucher for Bogans Carpets & Flooring Superstores.



## Secret Gardens Interview – Opening for the first time

It was a neighbour who persuaded Ian and Andrea Dixon to showcase their garden for the first time at this year's Secret Gardens of Oxton – and the couple are delighted they took the plunge!

For not only did they receive heaps of praise for all their hard work from dozens of visitors, they also learned a lot about the history of their bungalow from people who used to live near-by.

The couple, who moved to Newburns Lane three years ago, described their garden as 'work in progress', and didn't believe it was good enough to show to the public.



Ian, who describes himself as an 'enthusiastic but amateur gardener', said: "When we moved here the bungalow and the garden needed a lot of work doing.

"Nothing had been done for several years and the garden itself was overgrown with Ivy and Buddleia and had a dead cherry tree. It was also on a steep slope so not your average garden.

"We had to dig it all out and create a terrace from the bottom to the top using railway sleepers.

"Our new look garden was only 20 months old when a neighbour encouraged us to open – but we only had six weeks to prepare!

"It gave us the nudge we needed though to get all the unfinished bits done and we worked hard every weekend for six weeks getting it straight and picking plants that we knew would be starting to flower.

"Opening helped speed up the process and it was nice to have the garden ready earlier than we would



have done. We've now been able to relax and enjoy it during the summer.

"John Heathman from the Oxton Society was very helpful and offered great advice, encouraging us not to go too over the top. He did a health & safety check and everything was fine.

"We were nervous about opening the garden up to scrutiny, but we needn't have worried.

"We really enjoyed the day and we had three offers to buy our bungalow – the first before the event even started at 10am!



"People said it was just what they'd been looking for but we definitely don't want to sell.

"Five people asked for the name of our landscape gardener which was very complimentary because we did it all ourselves.

"Then there was a family that used to live in Hughes Lane overlooking our house 50 years ago and they wanted to see their old house from our angle.

"They said they remember the bungalow being built in 1967 and told us some of the history.

"Some really knowledgeable gardeners were asking us questions that we couldn't answer about the plants and flowers, but they told us we had chosen the right style of plants for the vista.

"Everyone said we'd done an amazing job and that made us feel very proud. We'll definitely consider opening again.

"The volunteers who helped greet the visitors were great and at one stage in the afternoon we had the 12-piece Chorley Cakes band playing and people we didn't know were dancing in our garden – that was my eureka moment!"

**If you haven't opened your garden before and would like more information, call 07968 848564.**



## Conservation Matters

### Planning Report

#### APPH/23/00699 20 KYLEMORE ROAD

Proposal: Loft conversion with side and rear dormers

*Oxton Society comment:*

We are happy to support this application as the proposed dormer windows do not front the highway.

#### LBC/23/00426

##### OXTON LODGE, TALBOT ROAD

Proposal: Single-storey rear extension, excavation of rear garden to extend sunken patio and replacement of one tree. (Oxton Lodge is not itself listed but attached to Grade II Listed Oxton Old Hall)

*Oxton Society comment:*

No comment as not visible from public domain

#### APPH/23/00432 50 WELLINGTON ROAD

Proposal: Demolition of existing rear conservatory; single storey rear extension; and alterations to existing ground floor side window/door (amended description)

*Oxton Society comment:*

No comment as not visible from public domain

#### APPH/23/00539 13 VICTORIA MOUNT

Proposal: Single storey rear extension

*Oxton Society comment:*

No comment as not visible from public domain

## Tree planning applications

#### CA/23/00681

##### 33 BIRCH ROAD

Application to fell tree of unspecified species in garden.

*Oxton Society comment:* This is a mature and established tree. Its removal would have a definite effect on the tree vista.

#### T23/000786

##### 10 Talbot Road

Chamaecyparis conifer to be felled. Bay tree and yew tree to be reduced by pruning.

*Oxton Society comment:*

The Society would not object to the application.

## Hanging baskets

Oxton Village wouldn't be the same during the summer months without the wonderful floral displays, courtesy of the Oxton Society.

This year there are 56 hanging baskets and special thanks to John Booth, his son Philip, and Ian Garland for taking care of the watering systems and dead heading.



Pictures courtesy of Alla Barkova and Sebastian Cowden



## Oxton People – Duane Chong

**Toxteth-born Duane Chong moved to Oxton with his partner, Angela, 16 years ago.**

The couple, who have four grown up children between them, fell in love with the village's 'fabulous architecture and buildings' and they've tried to retain all of the original features of their three-storey home.

"It has a cellar and all the other things that come from living in a 130-year-old house, like creaking floorboards and draughts, but we love living here!" said Duane.

Duane is founder and programme director of Grow-Wellbeing CIC, a Birkenhead-based not-for-profit social enterprise that supports diverse communities to access the natural environment.

He is also a Forest School Level 3 Qualified Practitioner and Therapeutic Forest CIC Approved Practitioner.

The Oxton Society Newsletter asks Duane why his work is so important to him...

### **Tell us about your early career**

I worked in community education for a number of years, such as at Sure Start and the Children First Forum at National Museums Liverpool, and then lectured in early years education across Merseyside and North Wales for 10 years. I also collaborated with Natural Resources Wales to provide Forest School training for trainee teachers.



### **Why did you decide to set up Grow-Wellbeing CIC in 2017?**

I've always been well-connected to the natural environment; it makes a difference to my own wellbeing and I wanted to teach what I'd learned to others. The outdoors provides opportunities to engage in all aspects of the curriculum but also enhances individuals' health, social and emotional wellbeing.

### **What activities do you offer?**

We take lead groups of young people into the woodland activities, mainly at Bidston Hill, so they have the opportunity to engage with the natural environment.

Forest schools build confidence and resilience in young people and teaches them about taking and managing risks, such as fire lighting for example. Managing risks is a life skill that all children used to learn naturally, but not so much these days. Forty years ago the 'radius of play' was about two miles – now it's about 25 yards to the bottom of the drive!

We also talk to young people about safety issues, such as tripping over roots or getting stung by nettles, and how falling over and getting back up is all part of character building.

We have Forest Tots, which is where pre-school children come along with their parents, and we also deliver Forest School programmes in primary and early years settings, working with children with additional learning needs and children who have experienced trauma.

We've seen a big increase in young people feeling depressed, anxious and isolated since the Pandemic and we have been working with Wirral CAMHS which helps children and young people with their mental health issues.

### **Can you see a tangible difference in the children?**

It's very rewarding to watch how the children develop from when they first join us. One parent recently told me that the difference in her son had been 'transformational' and how he and his siblings got on so much better when they did activities together in the woods.

We also offer 'Forest Bathing' too



which has been especially good for long covid sufferers. Forest Bathing is a mindful walk in the woods – observing wildlife, listening to birds and benefitting from the chemical emissions from trees that can improve your mood.

### **What other community work are you involved in?**

I've always had an interest in trees and their importance in terms of climate change so I am a member of the Wirral Tree Wardens which supports the council's Tree Strategy and helps to plant and protect trees.

Oxton is a great area for trees and lots of them are meaningful and important to residents; they have sentimental value as they've been there since people's childhoods.

Our office is based near Hamilton Square and there was a well-known tree in the park that people called The Wishing Tree. It isn't there anymore and that's such a shame.

I'm also a Community and Voluntary Sector Representative for Wirral Health and Wellbeing Board and Wirral Place Board which means I'm involved at a strategic level discussing Wirral's health provision and how access to green spaces can support people's health and wellbeing.

### **Finally, if you could improve Oxton in any way, what would you do?**

Oxton is a great place to live and I love the atmosphere in the village, especially on Secret Gardens day.

I'd like to see a solution to the traffic and parking issues though – maybe introduce a one-way system, and/or more occasional traffic closures?



## New businesses

### Hellas Bakery & Coffee

Hellas Bakery & Coffee at Unit 1, The Willows opened its doors in April and offers an array of authentic pastries, pies, biscuits, cakes and coffee from Greece.

Managed by Aourel Kypi, who is originally from Athens, the shop also sells exquisite birthday cakes.

“We’ve had some really good feedback from customers and have a 4.8★ customer rating which we’re really pleased about,” said Aourel.

“I live in Birkenhead and have always liked Oxton so wanted to open the shop here.

“I have friends in London who own similar Greek-style coffee shops and that is why I wanted to open one in the village.

“This year was our first Secret Gardens event and it was very busy, it was great.”

Hellas is open seven days a week – 7.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday and 8am to 5pm at weekends.



### Forget Me Not

A Wirral couple whose baby son Thomas passed away 18 months ago have opened a play cafe in his memory in the hope of connecting and supporting others.

Alice and Sam Taylor, who also have a three-year-old son called Jack, were devastated to lose Thomas and it inspired them to create Forget Me Not in The Willows.

Alice, a former teacher, said: “Forget Me Not is a play cafe for all families – but we also wanted it to be a warm, welcoming place for people who have suffered loss, so they know they’re not alone and always have somewhere to go.

“We wanted to create a place where people are sensitive and supportive and where parents can enjoy good quality coffee and a locally-baked cakes while they watch their children play in a safe environment.

“Reading books about child loss helped me deal with my grief so there are a number of books on display which may help other parents.

“We have lots of ideas for the future including Butterfly sessions specifically for bereaved families, craft days and special events such as birthday parties.

“I also plan to offer support groups, hypnobirthing sessions and perinatal support groups, and I will make sure they are accessible and affordable to all.”

Open 9.30am to 3.30pm, Monday to Saturday, for children up to the age of four, parents can walk-in and book a 90-minute play pass. Forget Me Not can cater for up to 12 children at a time and children’s lunch packages are also available.

Alice said: “I was brought up in and around Oxton and love the village so wanted to open the business here. We’ve been really busy since we opened three months ago and everyone seems to love it.

“Doing it in Thomas’ name and memory and reaching out to others walking the same path, makes it feel really worthwhile.”





## New businesses

### OXA

Fraiche may have closed its doors in Rose Mount earlier this year – but it reopened in May when another well known local chef moved in – Andrew Sheridan.

Andrew, who has several restaurants around the country and featured in BBC's Great British Menu, moved into the former Michelin starred restaurant with business partners Sam and Emma Morgan and renamed it OXA.

OXA takes its name from the old Norse word Oxa-tun, which means Oxton, and the restaurant has a big emphasis on locally-sourced produce, including British wines.

General manager Alex Awdry said: "Our chefs are really passionate about serving good quality food that they make from scratch.

"OXA is for people who enjoy relaxed, social dining and we offer a range of small sharing plates, or larger plates such as tomahawk steak or whole plaice for two, as well as chef's choice lunches and banquets."

OXA is open Wednesday to Saturday from noon to 2.30pm and 5pm to 9pm and Sunday from noon to 6pm. Reservations are recommended but walk-ins are welcome too.



### Low, Slow & Dough

A love of food led Oxton's Ian Marray to establish the Low, Slow & Dough brand six years ago – and now he's finally opened his first restaurant in the heart of the village.

The Tex-Mex-themed eatery is a far cry from Ian's 'bread & butter' business which is manufacturing products for the petrochemical industry.

But having enjoyed successful franchises and pop-ups in Woodside Ferry Village, Liverpool's Baltic Triangle, Habibi in New Brighton and Franklyn's in Heswall, Ian decided it was time to open a restaurant of his own.

Ian said: "When I sold one of my industrial businesses I decided to use some of the money to set up Low, Slow & Dough, because food and cooking is a passion of mine, especially Tex-Mex, and the brand has snowballed from there.

"One of my chefs, Alex Warrington, has been with me from the start and we've progressed the menu into what it is today, along with my new kitchen team, headed by Steve Charlton – offering Tex-Mex

dishes, burgers and side plates and with plenty of vegan and vegetarian options too.

"I've lived in Oxton for over 20 years and when Sabrosa closed, I enquired about the premises because it's in a great position in the village and I thought it would be perfect for Low, Slow & Dough. We redecorated and opened just in time for Secret Gardens which was great."

Ian has created 10 new full and part time jobs as part of his new 'foodie' venture and is exploring fresh ideas for the restaurant, including bottomless brunches and a home delivery service.

"Low, Slow & Dough is not just about the food; it's about the atmosphere, the music and the cocktails," said Ian.

"Oxton is in its own little bubble and is once again becoming an attraction for visitors from all over the Wirral and beyond. I love everything it has to offer. It's like Wirral's equivalent of London's Notting Hill."

Low, Slow & Dough is open 4pm to 9pm on Wednesdays; midday to 9pm Thursdays; midday to 10.30pm Friday and Saturdays and midday to 8pm on Sundays.





## New businesses

### Ciccio

Ciccio opened its doors in Christchurch Road in June in a new family venture that spans three generations.

Nana Sophia and daughter Angela – who grew up in South Africa before moving to Wirral – along with grandson Caleb, all share a passion for food and Ciccio offers home-made pizzas, pastas, salads and gelato, using only the finest Italian ingredients.

Angela said: “We live in the village and when we saw that Liverno had closed we thought it would be a perfect location for our own restaurant. We decided to stick to Italian because it already had a pizza oven and, let’s face it, who doesn’t love Italian!”

“Nana is an amazing cook and Caleb persuaded her to join us. Nana makes the pasta, salads and desserts and Caleb, who was trained in pizza making, by Marco Fusco, looks after the pizzas – although they are all to Nana’s specific recipes. My daughter Lily-Mae also works here too so it’s a real family affair.”

Currently open during the evenings, the family plan to extend their hours over the coming weeks to include brunch and home delivery.

Caleb, who is also a university student, and his partner Liv, came up with the name Ciccio because it means ‘chubby boy’ in Italian and reminded them of their four-month old son Monty.

“Since Monty came along my future plans have changed,” he said.



“I will finish my degree but I also want to put my heart and soul into Ciccio. Nana was key to us opening because her food is amazing!”

“For example, she insists on making pesto with a pestle and mortar and we tried to persuade her that there was a quicker way but when we taste it, we have to admit she is right!”

“Ciccio is relaxed, friendly and homely and we want people to come here and chill out and enjoy some amazing Italian food.”



### Hubbub

Since completing her degree in environmental science in the 1990s, Berry D’Arcy has been passionate about sustainable living practices – and she has opened her own refill station from her garage at 23 Shrewsbury Road.

Hubbub Oxtown offers a wide range of household cleaning and beauty products where people take their own bottles and fill up with what they need – reducing the use of plastic.

Berry, who worked in marketing and fundraising before having children, said: “Plastic production is responsible for more carbon emissions than aviation. And regrettably, the Mersey River watershed is the most plastic polluted in the world, according to Nature Geoscience. Not only is that a huge problem for nature, but humans ingest micro plastics too.”

Berry and her family lived in Bermuda before moving to Oxtown four years ago when her husband got a job in Liverpool.

She said: “I wanted to show my children that we can all

*Continued on next page ►*



### Gardening in a Time of Drought

The last few months have been a busy time for the Friends, what with preparing for the Plant Stall at the Secret Gardens event, tidying up the long and top borders, and weeding the rose beds.

The long period without rain in May and early June meant we had to spend many hours watering the roses with the trusty bowser we inherited from the Oxtan Society.

We have continued underplanting the rose beds with lavenders, which provide more interest, are popular with the bees and give off a lovely scent.

Other plants such as *Erigeron Karvinskianus* (Mexican Fleabane), *Ajuga Reptans* (Bugle) and different types of Geranium will be used for underplanting elsewhere.

Meanwhile we have been trialling a new technique for replanting rose bushes. This is to counter the problem of rose sickness that has previously occurred when replacing old roses that have come to the end of their lives with new ones.

The technique involves digging out a large hole in the bed and planting the rose in a cardboard box with new soil around the roots and immediately outside the box. So far the test is going well, with the six shrub roses, *Rosa*



*Volunteers water the roses*

Penelope, that we planted in February flowering well in their first year.

### Big Help Out Litter Pick

On the May 8th Bank Holiday Monday, we joined the King's Coronation Big Help Out by organising a litter pick across The Arno and the Oxtan Fields. It was well attended by the local community and a lot of litter was collected. It was good to see our three Oxtan councillors supporting us that day.



*Volunteers at the litter pick*

#### ► *Hubbub: continued from page 9*

do something positive for the environment, and the local community, and decided to open a refill station because we're in a good spot.

"We do sell some bottles but the idea is that people bring their own and just pay for the products they fill up with.

"It's self-service and is based on trust. This was very important to me because we've got to work together as a community to make the transition to low impact living.

"There have been no issues so far and the concept has been well received. Around 70 people subscribe to my monthly newsletter where I let them know what new products I have coming in.

"I sell environmentally-friendly cleaning and household products from Miniml in the Yorkshire Dales and premium personal care products from Faith In Nature, which supply high end supermarkets.

"I do cost comparisons and it's a lot cheaper to buy these products from me – for comparable products.

"I try to stay very competitive because I want to pass savings on to the consumer, especially in the current climate, as that helps people decide to make the switch to refilling. This is very much a community project rather than a business."

Hubbub Oxtan, which is open 8am to 8pm seven days a week, also has a free children's clothing exchange rail where parents can bring and swap items.



## Tree strategy

The Oxton Society Committee has been discussing how we might review the conservation area's tree canopy for several reasons:

- 1 looking at the scale of Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) and the possible need for more designations
- 2 reviewing the tree canopy and classifying it on a range of criteria e.g. species, scale, health, safety/vulnerability etc;
- 3 identifying trees that might be the source of damage to houses and walls and methods of protecting both
- 4 engaging a qualified arborist to assist with this process.

We are conscious that whatever the Society sets in train it will need to synchronise with the Council's policy framework and associated priorities.

Hence, we have looked at the Council's Wirral Tree Strategy and the conversations from various groups and individuals on its content.

We were particularly seized by the Council's response to the public comments on TPOs and Conservation Areas which reads:

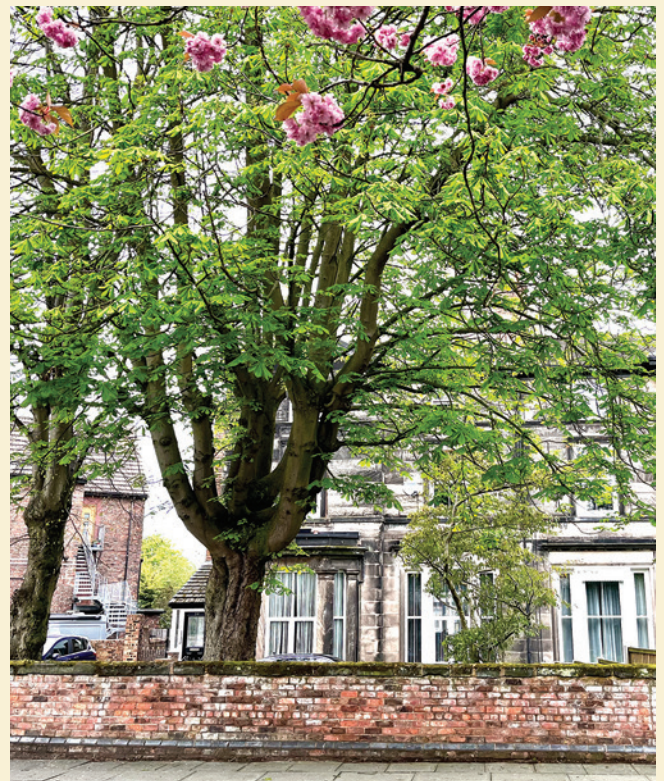
*"Wirral Council is committed to vigorously enforcing all infringements of TPOs and Conservation Area (CAs) protections, and, as part of the Tree Strategy, will perform a comprehensive review of existing TPOs to reassess historical orders and potentially implement new TPOs deemed necessary to protect trees which are not already covered under CAs..."*

*"We are hoping to start this process in the Autumn, once we have sorted out various software issues."*

*"The review process will hopefully streamline our TPO's, and make them more enforceable by removing old area orders and identifying individual trees and groups of trees. I would be happy to discuss the review process once we have outlined a more concrete strategy/process."*

In the light of the above, we have asked for a further discussion with Council officers on the detailed content and timetable for this comprehensive review. They agreed to discuss further in September. We will report back on these discussions.

*Alan Chape, Oxton Society*





## Volunteers needed to help run our events

Putting on a Secret Gardens or Christmas Lights event takes careful planning and requires the formulation of an events team.

On the day of the event we also need many people to offer usually just a couple of hours of their time to help the event run smoothly.

We have been fortunate to rely on a core group of individuals who have been the mainstay to our volunteer workforce for nearly 20 years, but several of these key

people have decided it is time to let someone else have a go.

If we are to continue with these great community events we must recruit more people in assisting us to help run things. Please will you consider offering a little bit of your spare time? If not enough people come forward, we may need to consider cutting back on what we do, which would be a great shame. Please can you email [info@theoxtonsociety.co.uk](mailto:info@theoxtonsociety.co.uk) to offer your services. Thank you.

## A sad goodbye to Fraiche and Greens of Oxton

Sadly, the village lost two well-established businesses this year.

Michelin star restaurant Fraiche closed after 19 years with chef Marc Wilkinson deciding to relocate to Shropshire.

In a message on Facebook, Marc said: "I leave Oxton filled with many memories and pride of what I have achieved so far with Fraiche and not forgetting the wonderful people I have met along the way."

Meanwhile, this month Greens of Oxton closed its doors. A message to customers read: "It is with a heavy heart



that we announce the permanent closure of Greens of Oxton.

"Due to the present economic climate and decreases in footfall it is not viable for us to continue.

"We understand that this will be a loss to the community and we are deeply saddened that this is the decision that we have had to make as this was our dream that has now come to end.

"It has been a privilege to serve you and we will cherish the memories we have created together."

## Oxton Society AGM

This year's AGM will take place on Thursday 2nd November at St Saviour's Parish Centre.

The agenda and supporting documentation will be distributed to all members as usual, several weeks before the event.



## Contact us

If you have any comments you can contact the Newsletter team via email at [info@theoxtonsociety.co.uk](mailto:info@theoxtonsociety.co.uk) or post to the Secretary, 7 Kylemore Road, CH43 2HA. You can also contact the Society about any other matter using the above address or via the website [www.theoxtonsociety.co.uk](http://www.theoxtonsociety.co.uk)

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