



## **Acting Chair's report to the 2024 Annual General Meeting**

I come to the end of my second – and, I am rather relieved to say, final - year as 'Acting Chair'. Once again it has been a busy and fulfilling time.

My Chair activities have been many and varied: the highlight has to have been attending the World Parkinson's Congress in Barcelona in July. I have initiated a major review and re-build of the Branch website, using the services of Iteracy Website Design: we should have something to show in March. Most importantly, we should be able to relieve Jonathan of much of the time-consuming editing and updating which currently is down to him alone.

We have just had sight of an excellent video produced by PUK in conjunction with DPAG which includes footage of the photo-shoot in February 2023 and involving a number of Branch members: It was very encouraging to have such positive comments about collaboration with the Branch

<https://www.dpag.ox.ac.uk/news/new-parkinsons-uk-video-features-dpag-research>

In response to concerns about holding our Branch Meetings on dark winter evenings, and having addressed the major challenges of finding a venue and agreeing a day/time, we have experimented with a migration to Kidlington and daytime gatherings. We will return to Cherwell for the Spring and summer but will be seeking feedback and views on what we should do in future. I continue also as trustee of Parkinsons.Me, our fellow charity. In addition I was very pleased to respond to an invitation to meet Felix Bloomfield, Chair of Oxon County Council, who has chosen our branch as one of his charities: Sally joined me for this and we had a splendid meeting. On March 15<sup>th</sup> there is a Charity Fundraiser hosted by Felix : we will attend that also to continue to raise awareness.

Wearing my Visits Co-ordinator hat, I have been pleased to arrange a successful Spring Branch Lunch at The Greyhound; two Coffee Mornings at The Eden Café in Witney; and the enjoyable Branch Holiday at Warners at Heythrop Park. I had to miss it, alas, but Sally's brilliant idea for the Big Cream Tea worked wonderfully, and will be repeated in April. Our attendance at two Craft & Produce stalls in Summertown was very successful and a good flag-waver (albeit relying rather too heavily on the efforts of our locally-based members).

Throughout the year I have been pleased to join several of the meetings of OxWAG, the working-age group, now ably led by Trina after Alison's departure. Thank you Trina.

I must finish by saying how grateful I am for the ready and sustained help of the committee in seeing through our programme of Branch meetings and activities. I want to thank in particular Steve, who has again been a tireless and meticulous Treasurer, making sure that we keep on the straight and narrow. In the background Carys, our former treasurer, has continued to lend expertise and experience – both of them ensuring that we do things as our charitable status as a branch of PUK requires.

Josey took over this year in the role of Communications Secretary, splendidly managing our contact with Branch members, existing and new, and supporting me in myriad ways. Barbara joined as Committee Secretary to record and minute our sometimes wide-ranging deliberations: she has now so mastered the art that I believe she is using a new AI tool that will transform our recording effortlessly into words!

Respite Care continues under the wing of Pamela who has worked diligently to ensure that applicants may take advantage of the support that we offer. She has also taken great care to listen, and to understand the individual circumstances behind each request.

Nigel, with the invaluable help of Debbie, took over as Membership Secretary, has continued to keep our database up to date, and to welcome new members. Peter took over the creation of a regular programme of speakers for Branch Meetings: we have had a varied and interesting schedule. Wonderful speakers, including Michele Hu and, recently, Jonny Acheson, have entertained and informed us.

Kevin remains as our Research Officer. We really are most fortunate to have him as a key member of the branch, and for keeping us so clearly and comprehensively up-to-date with all that is going on in the world of research into Parkinson's.

Kit, another long-standing member of the committee, ensures that we keep our eye on the funding ball, and leading – with the great support of the Appleton family – on or most enjoyable annual BBQ at Wytham. The Oxford Walk is, of course, the main fundraiser of the year (albeit that funds go direct to PUK): the move away from Oxford last October to Culden Faw, near Henley, was a huge success – aided by a glorious weather, we managed to bring in the magnificent sum of over £40,000.

Nick, as well as being the first point of contact for the newly- and recently-diagnosed, has led on the new initiative of Parky Pals, which he was finally able to present at the January Branch. He has been ably supported by Pamela, and together they also oversaw the food-service operation at our Christmas Party – thank you!

Pen once more drew on her years of experience and her innate good sense to offer sage advice on all matters. We were very sorry to hear that her personal circumstances meant that she has had to resign from the Committee.

Mark, and Paul (Latham) have offered staunch support as Committee members, with Paul also leading on the important role of re-establishing the First Steps programme for Oxfordshire. As well as always directing our focus towards our members, the 'other Paul' ('Head of Humour' as Mark designated him) ensures we always see the funny side. Geoff Woodruff joined the Committee this year and has happily taken up the challenge of trying to help keep PUK's training requirements – a key part of our responsibilities – to a manageable degree. Our other 'new recruits' during the year were Lona, who brings a wealth of hospitality and fund-raising experience – she and Kit will be working closely together; and of course Rebecca, who delighted us all, and me in particular, when she stepped forward to offer herself as Chair as of today's meeting: THANK YOU, Rebecca!

I mention them all by name to underline what a valuable contribution they make – as volunteers, of course – to the running of our Branch. But hang on – there are two others for me to thank. Sally, PUK Trustee and our Branch Ambassador, has always offered me her unswerving support, both personally and during my time as Chair; and of course Jonathan is ever there to assist both with a whole myriad of administrative issues and on the technical front (not least in making our Branch meetings work so successfully). We still rely on them both overly much and I am particularly grateful to them.

So I hand over to Rebecca, to whom once again my deepest thanks and very best wishes – as Vice-Chair I will continue to offer my support in the year ahead. My gratitude also to all of you for YOUR support and goodwill: THANK YOU

**Martin Cowell**  
**February 2024**