

Cherhill Parish Council – Chairman’s Annual Report

21st May 2024

I would like to begin the annual report by thanking Jackie Day for her time and commitment to the parish council. Prior to standing down in October 2023, Jackie had represented the parish council at the Local Highways and Footpaths Improvement Group, led the production of the newsletter and commenced the work to have a new defibrillator fitted at Quemerford Gate, as well as playing an active part in parish council meetings. The vacancy created has been filled by Richard Catt who I also thank for joining the council and in doing so giving up his time to serve the community.

Since joining earlier this year Richard has attended a training session for new councillors funded by the parish council. This course was also attended by Councillor Sadler-Smith who joined last year.

Council funded training has also been provided for our clerk Peter Johnson who has completed the Introduction to Local Council Administration (ILCA) course. As well as providing essential knowledge to support Peter in his role as parish clerk, the course provides sound preparation for the CiLCA (Certificate in Local Council Administration), which we hope Peter will choose to undertake in the future.

During the year past year, the parish council has been active in maintaining assets and infrastructure in the villages including new fencing around the memorial bench in Cherhill.

Recent years have seen an increase of flooding incidents within the parish, The Street, Mill Lane and Marsh Lane in Cherhill being particularly affected. The parish council has liaised with Wiltshire Council to facilitate maintenance of drainage gulleys and culverts, and with the assistance of some hard-working residents carried out our own maintenance and clearance of the drainage ditches within the village.

The community emergency plan is being updated and will provide information and support contacts for any future flooding events. This was put into practise earlier this year when sandbags and digging equipment were deployed to help prevent flooding to a number of properties in Mill Lane and Marsh Lane in Cherhill.

The parish council works closely with the Calne LHFIFG (Local Highways and Footpath Improvement Group) attending the quarterly meetings during which it is able to raise issues within the parish for consideration. Items that have been, or are currently on the agenda are;

- Provision of dropped kerbs along the A4 through Cherhill.
- Closure of the layby outside the Police House in Cherhill (Work for both projects us due to start in July this year).
- Diversion of Sustrans route 403 east of Yatesbury including provision of new signage.
- Associated improvements to the surface of the byway (Barrow Lane) to make it a suitable cycle route all year round.
- Reinstatement of the bus stop on the A4 adjacent to the Yatesbury turn.

The parish council is liable for 30% of all costs associated with undertaking these projects.

The Parish Council continues to support the Tommy Croker Memorial Playing Fields, a much loved and much used facility within the Parish. As well as covering the costs for mowing and general ground maintenance, the parish council is building up a funding reserve for future maintenance works such as resistograph inspection of the timbers, painting/wood preservation and providing pine nuggets when required.

Not everyone is aware that the Cherhill White Horse is owned by the Parish Council. It’s maintenance is looked after by a sub-committee of the Parish council. In the past 12 months the White Horse has been weeded and cleaned in October 2023 and re-chalked in May 2024.

Both tasks are very physically demanding and our thanks goes to the Cherhill Scout Group for their hard work in bagging the chalk in preparation for the chalking, and to all the volunteers that helped out on both occasions. Particular thanks go to Rob Pickford and Councillor Grafton for sourcing the chalk and transporting it to the White Horse.

The Parish Council continues to take a major interest in our extensive network of paths, byways and bridleways, liaising with landowners and Wiltshire Council regarding required repairs and in some instances carrying out repairs and clearance work ourselves. Routes that have had vegetation cut back to improve access within the last 12 months include,

- Broth Lane in Cherhill (footpath between the A4 and The Street).
- The permissive bridlepaths and footpaths from the A4 to the downs.
- The bridlepath behind The Lymers in Yatesbury.

Recently the decision has been made to form a separate working group within the parish council with the focus on identifying, reporting, and where appropriate repairing damaged assets and rights of way. By working as part of the Combined Parishes Right of Way Group, set up by Wiltshire CPRE, and utilising software provided by Wiltshire Council the council intends to regularly monitor and inspect all rights of way within the parish. I would like to thank Councillor Page and Councillor Purslow for volunteering to set up and lead the working group, and Councillor Grafton for his work in clearing and maintaining the rights of way.

One subject that is often raised by residents is the Lansdowne Monument and the timeline for its repair. Since joining the parish council last year Councillor Sadler-Smith has made regular contact with the National Trust requesting updates on this matter. This has culminated in representatives from the National Trust joining us this evening to provide an update following the recent surveys undertaken. Thank you to all involved in bringing this about.

The parish council currently owns and maintains three defibrillators. These are routinely inspected by councillors who undertake monthly checks. As previously mentioned, the parish council are hopeful that a fourth unit can be procured and installed at Quemerford. In addition, the council hopes to run a training course for any interested residents that will provide basic guidance in the collection and deployment of these units prior to the emergency services arriving at the scene of an incident.

The Black Horse pub plays a pivotal role within our community providing a place where we can socialise with friends and family. Five years ago, the parish council applied to have the Black Horse listed as an Asset of Community Value. Once listed as an Asset of Community Value, the local community would be informed if the pub is listed for sale within the five year listing period. The community can then enact the Community Right to Bid, which gives a moratorium period of six months to determine if we can raise the finance to purchase the asset. The council is pleased to announce that following an application to have the listing renewed, the Black Horse has been re-listed for a further 5 years.

The primary source of income for the Parish is the precept – levied on all households as part of the council tax. Having been maintained at £15,000 for the last 3 years, the parish council has taken the decision this year to increase the precept to £20,000. This will provide the funds required to undertake the regular and necessary maintenance and improvement within our community.

Following the completion of the Community Governance Review and the adoption of the resulting proposals, changes will be made to the parish boundaries in May 2025. This will see Blacklands, Calstone and Lower Compton become part of the parish, at which point the parish council will increase

from 7 to 12 councillors. Work is still underway to finalise the arrangements, and I look forward to working with councillors from these villages in the future.

Finally, I would like to thank a number of people for their efforts over the last year.

Paul Ricketts for the time he gives looking after various assets in Yatesbury including the pond and its environs and Martin Willis for voluntarily taking care of the mowing around the memorial bench in Cherhill.

Thank you to the Parish Clerk, Peter Johnson. The Parish clerk is responsible for managing the Parish Council finances, including submitting end of year reports, carrying out a wide range of administrative tasks and keeping the activities of the Parish Council compliant with the wide range of regularly changing legislation.

Thank you also to Councillor Carter for supporting Peter concerning the preparation of the quarterly and annual accounts.

Thank you to Ashley O'Neil for his support as our representative at Wiltshire Council. His insight into the operations of the County Council and advice on many matters has been invaluable over the past 12 months.

I would like to thank my fellow councillors who continue to donate their free time towards the betterment of our community.

Occasionally, the parish council are approached by members of the public who are concerned or impacted by the actions of other members of our community. Examples include inconsiderate parking, dog fouling and over-grown vegetation from gardens. In all most all cases these have been resolved by either a polite conversation or a letter and I am thankful that the people in our villages are so friendly and community minded.

Nick White

Chair, Cherhill Parish Council, May 2024