



Chairman's Report to the Annual Parish Meeting – 26 May 2021

Thank you everyone for coming along this evening – if you don't know me, I am David Walker and I'm the Chair of the Parish Council.

Today's meeting is important for the Parish Council as it allows us to meet and discuss with parishioners the work of the Parish Council and to celebrate our lives in Holcot. In the next few minutes I will outline what has happened in Holcot since the last Annual Parish Meeting (in May 2019), our successes and challenges, as well as provide a summary of what else has happened in Holcot that is outside the Parish Council's direct control but contributes to the quality of life that we hopefully all enjoy. I've chosen to avoid any discussion of the pandemic, other than it was amazing to see how the community came together and people offered support for one another.

I will also endeavour to dust down my crystal ball again and suggest what I expect to be the top challenges over the next 12 months. There is a written report which will be available on the parish website, so I will talk to the main points rather than read verbatim.

The new Parish Council met for the first time earlier this month, with three councillors who had not served in the previous Council. At this point I would like to introduce the Parish Councillors to the meeting;

Councillor	Sector responsibility
Trudi Townsend	Main St/Farm Close/Walgarth Ct
David Walker	Back Lane/Brittens View
Caroline Ferguson	Moulton Rd/Tithe Close
Sian Stone	Sywell Rd/Ivy Farm/Sunny Bank
Kathryn Bourner	All outlying properties
Phil Scordellis	Rectory Lane/Beelhook/Walgrave Rd
Martin Baldwin	Brixworth Rd/Glebe Close
James Bonsor	Poplars Lane/Winsland Court

Each of the Councillors has a "sector responsibility" for part of the Parish, with the Councillor for your sector being your principal point of contact. As far as possible the sectors are aligned to the Councillor's own home.

Councillors also have a portfolio responsibility for taking the lead on a number of subjects – for instance Phil is responsible for road safety, Kathryn for Police Matters, Caroline for playing field and so on. The full list of portfolio responsibilities is on the Parish Council page on the website.

Since the last Annual Parish Meeting Jackie Fountain, Martin Wilson, and Ralph Hawkins have all retired as Councillors – thank you all for your service to the community, and thanks to the members of the current Council too.

The last person to mention in relation to the Parish Council is our Parish Clerk, Ruby Cole. Ruby's job is to manage the activities of the Parish Council on a day-to-day basis. It is a role that is far beyond that of an employee as I am sure that you appreciate. Thank you Ruby for your service over the last few months, and to Lisa Callan who held the role until October 2020.

When we look at the activities over the last year, I will draw a distinction between the activities of the Parish Council itself and of the Parish as a whole. I haven't listed everything, but here goes.

Some particular projects – as always, a real variety

- ***Northampton North Orbital Route, Northampton North SUE (Overstone Leys/Overstone Green) and Moulton Heights*** – The work on Northampton North SUE has commenced as you know. Eventually it will be 3500 houses stretching to the Holcot roundabout. There is a long-term objective of dualling the A43 from Round Spinney to the A14. This will rely on funding, as will any hint of the NNOR coming to the fore.
- ***Crossroads and gardens*** – the Parish Council has had a long-term aspiration to improve the look of the crossroads green as a centrepiece to the village. Heather Wilson and her team of volunteers have done a great job, with new planting and the new beds – thank you!

Supported by The Friends of Holcot and other volunteers, Heather has also been leading the gardening work in the churchyard and old school site. We are very fortunate to have people who will help improve the Parish environment in this way.

- ***Playing Field Development*** – “The Friends of Holcot Playing Field Group” with the Parish Council have modernised the play equipment over the last three years. The Group have now disbanded. There is more to do however, and the Parish Council will continue to maintain and improve the playing field as funding allows.

Sincere thanks on behalf of the Parish to everyone involved.

- ***Road safety*** - The Community Speedwatch programme and the data from the VASID have proven to the authorities (again!) that we have a speed problem through the Parish. 2018's Annual Parish Meeting proposed that we should put into abeyance our desire to extend the 30 mph zone and make the village itself a 20 mph zone, until the local government structures are resolved. We will pick this up again at the appropriate juncture, now that the West Northamptonshire Council is finally in place.

As part of our work, we have now been able to fund (using 'section 106' monies from the developers of the SUE) improved speed signage and control features – as you will know from my updates in Parish Newsletters these have been a long time coming. They will be installed over the next few weeks.

The final design and costings for a new chicane on Sywell Road (similar to that on Kettering Road in Walgrave) is ongoing and expected soon. We will make a decision based on the outcomes of that work.

Over recent years the Parish Council have asked for help from the authorities to control large HGVs flouting the 7.5t limit of movements through the Parish. Last summer we tried again – with the help of data provided by Parishioners and Gary Gallagher at the Oasis site, we now have a clear case which is supported by the Police and authorities. The Police and Parish Council are working together to monitor HGV movements as far as is practicable, with a joint letter being sent from the Council and Police whenever a potentially illegal movement is reported.

You will know that recently there have been issues of parking on Brixworth Road, caused in particular by overflow from the reservoir parking. Work is being undertaken by Northamptonshire Highways to install posts along the affected verges, partly funded by the Parish.

Lastly, how the Parish Council impacts local activity – an example. A national air show planned for July at Sywell where the Parish Council's investigations discovered that several of the planned routes for spectators (and also for HGVs) came through Holcot. Timely intervention challenged this with constructive alternative proposals - all of which were eventually accepted by the organisers.

Our thanks go to the Cllr Scordellis who continues to work hard, with others, on road safety matters. You will know that this is a continual activity.

Some of the routine but important stuff

- Lighting – We have continued to control the costs of lighting the Parish through gradually modernising lights as they fail, and managing the costs associated with electricity metering. In May 2021, the Parish Council approved an upgrade to all of the remaining 15 unreliable (and obsolete) Mercury lights to LED. This will leave just 9 of our 32 lights as non-LED, and is projected to save around £800 on energy each year.

If you see any light that has failed, please contact the Clerk.

- The website – we continue to promote the use of the website as the best source of information about what is happening in the Parish, and during the pandemic it was the primary effective communication tool. It is updated regularly so ***please*** subscribe to the site to receive email notifications of news items, and don't forget to email to editor@holcotvillage.co.uk your news items or ideas of how the site could be improved or extended.
- The newsletter – Jenny Davis of Glebe Close has taken over as Editor - please continue to use it. Thanks to Jackie and Naomi Fountain who were editors for a number of years.

- Parish maintenance – the ‘Friends of Holcot’ group of parishioners continue to support the Parish by doing all of the essential maintenance tasks that helps keep our parish looking in such great condition. Last year saw the replacement of the verge protection posts around the village for instance. Thanks to Roger Gunnnett for coordinating, and the whole team for everything you do for us.

Governance and Financial Performance

I can report that the Parish Council have met formally 20 times since the last Annual Parish Meeting in May 2019. We missed a couple of months due to the pandemic, but dealt with issues via email approvals etc until online meetings were approved by central government. Our governance conforms to the statutory requirements, and transparency is achieved through every meeting being a public forum and the website in particular.

Ruby will show to this meeting a summary of the financial performance of the Council for Financial Year 2020/21. For those that follow the budgetary and reforecast process on the website, you will have noticed that we spent around £12k less than the original budget. This is due to the budget process being one of “best estimates”, some savings/non-spends, inclusion of ringfences, and timing differences (expenses occurring in FY2021/22 rather than FY2020/21). In 2020/21 our income was just short of £22.5k. Expenditure of £28.5k was accounted for in particular by the playing field improvement, mowing and lighting as well as the routine items. I have abbreviated these below and would just like to draw your attention to some of the key numbers. You can monitor financial performance on the website during the year.

Financial year 2019/20 (no Annual Parish Meeting, shown for completeness) – see website for details

Balance brought forward from 31 March 2019	£26,314
<u>Income</u>	
Precept	£17,500
Other income	£7,760
Total Income	£25,260
Total Expenditure	(£26,444)
Total Balances and reserves at 31 March 2020	<u>£25,130</u>

Financial year 2020/21

Balance brought forward from 31 March 2020 **£25,130**

(rounded £)

Income

Precept £17,500

Other income £4,697

Total Income £22,197

Expenditure

Admin and communications (*Website/Newsletter/Audit/* £1,637

Memberships/Training/General Admin)

Maintenance (*Mowing/Maintenance*) £5,408

Projects £7,526

Lighting £4,734

Grants & Contributions (*Church/Village Hall/Clock*) £2,400

Other (*Insurance/Allotment/Clerk Salary/VAT*) £6,773

Total Expenditure (£28,478)

Total Balances and reserves at 31 March 2021 £18,849

Other Community activity

I promised that I would mention some of the other things that are not within the control of the Parish Council, but have contributed massively to the community over the last couple of years. Let's hope these all return with vigour post-pandemic.

- The Village Hall and Church Room are fantastic facilities – we are very lucky, and a huge amount of effort goes into looking after these amenities for the Parish;
- A group of Parishioners look after the defibrillator;
- The various clubs and societies that use the village hall and church room and local facilities – we are fortunate to have active groups using them. These groups are always looking for new members, so please don't hesitate to get involved;

- We are also fortunate to have the allotments which are used by many parishioners, and the Flower and Vegetable Show organised by the Village Hall is an important annual event, maintaining fantastic traditions;
- The Church organises events through the year, ranging from services to the annual carol singing.
- The annual Christmas dinner for our more senior citizens is another important annual event;
- The White Swan as a social hub, with music, open mics, quiz nights and other events; as well as charity and entertainment events organised by other groups.

Thank you again to everyone that has in any way supported these and of course all of the other activities not mentioned.

Back to the Parish Council - What are some of the likely priorities of Parish Council over the next year or so?

With a new Council forming this will be guided by Councillors, but I suggest...

- We will continue to work through the various road safety issues.
- Continuing to maintain the parish.
- We will continue to improve the playing field.
- We will continue to manage planning activities, and the impacts of already approved plans (in particular the building along the A43).
- Continuing to work on community cohesion.
- Building working relationships with West Northamptonshire Council.

There are lots of other things that the Parish Council will have to deal with of course - some we can foresee, but some we can't. Parishioners are invited to every Parish Council meeting, so if you have ideas please don't hesitate to come along.

And finally...some last thankyou's

As I've talked I have thanked a lot of people, and there are loads more I probably should have thanked including officers and members at DDC and NCC (and now WNC), the emergency services and community organisations that support the Parish as well as other individuals and organisations. There are too many to mention specifically, and some we probably don't realise how much they do for us!

Thank you everyone for listening.

David Walker

26 May 2021