



## Chair's Report to the Annual Parish Meeting – 30 April 2024

Thank you everyone for coming along this evening – if you don't know me, I am David Walker and I'm the current 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, some of 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 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. I have kept the format as previous years.

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At this point I would like to introduce the Parish Councillors to the meeting;

<b>Councillor</b>	<b>Sector responsibility</b>
Peter Matthews	Main St/Farm Close/Walgarth Court
David Walker	Back Lane/Brittens View
Marie Dunkley	Moulton Rd/Tithe Close
Chris Bailey	Sywell Rd/Ivy Farm/Sunny Bank
Charlie Heasman	All outlying properties
Vacancy	Rectory Lane/Beelhook/Walgrave Rd
Tony Hewitt	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. Contact details for Councillors are on the Parish Council page on the website.

Councillors also have a portfolio responsibility for taking the lead on a number of subjects – for instance Pete leads on parish maintenance, Chris for Police Matters, Tony on footpaths and so on. The full list of portfolio responsibilities is on the [Parish Council page](#) on the website.

I would like to thank Caroline Ferguson and Phil Scordellis, both of whom have resigned recently, for their service, and of course all Councillors for everything they do on behalf of the Parish. We have welcomed Marie Dunkley as a Councillor just a few weeks ago, and have a vacant seat that we hope to co-opt in May. Details of how to put yourself forward will be on the website after 7 May.

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. During the year we congratulated Ruby on completion of her CiLCA qualification, which means she is now a fully-qualified clerk. The clerk's role is far beyond that of an employee as I am sure that you appreciate. Thank you, Ruby, for your service over the last year. If you ever want to get in touch with the Parish Council, Ruby is first point of contact [clerk@holcotvillage.co.uk](mailto:clerk@holcotvillage.co.uk).

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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 key activities***

- **Road safety** – I make no apology for dwelling on road safety in this report. We continue to hold road safety as our number 1 priority and it is a continual focus of the Parish Council, appearing on every agenda. Phil Scordellis has led on this activity, and I and the Parish Council are hugely grateful for his diligence and the massive effort that we know this has taken.

Of tangible activity, over the last year we have;

- Procured a third VASID, grant-funded by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. This will be semi-permanently installed on the Brixworth Road.
  - Had repaired/reinstated various footpaths and white lines.
  - Had ditches, grips etc cleared.
  - Put up advisory 20mph signs.
  - Set-up a road safety working group from the Parish Council.
  - Undertaken 2023 speedwatch campaign.
  - Earmarked £10k as a contribution to funding of road safety activity.
- **Road safety - where are we now?**

The dualling of the A43 to the Holcot roundabout was announced a year ago – we are still to be consulted, but have found a copy of a plan and raised a number of issues with the WNC Executive Director responsible for Highways. We are yet to receive a response to our comments, and we will need to chase I suspect.

The transit of HGVs exceeding 7.5t through Holcot continues. One of the tasks for WNC Highways is better signage – alas, that has not been completed. Following a recent meeting (more on this below), WNC Cabinet Member Cllr Larratt has been tasked to get the signs, which are available, installed. At the same time, he is requesting acceleration of the ANPR HGV monitoring installation on Brixworth and Sywell Roads. This has awaited installation of pilot technologies around Northampton, but we need action now. Additionally, the Parish Council will be running a project, supported by the Police, to write

to local hauliers and similar organisations reminding them of the 7.5t restriction and pointing out the impacts of overweight vehicles. The Police will then contact vehicle owners where contraventions are suspected.

#### Overview - VASID results

Road	Location, facing	Direction	Dates	V85	Speed violations%	Max speed		
Brixworth Road	Opposite Glebe Close, facing crossroads	Arriving	7/9-18/10/23	30	11	74		
		Departing		30	13	67		
		Arriving	13/4-23/5/23	30	14	76		
		Departing		30	13	97		
Brixworth Road	Opposite Glebe Close, facing causeway	Arriving	4-14/10/22	35	35	78		
		Departing		41	81	85		
		Arriving	21/9-26/9/22	35	33	79		
		Departing		40	77	86		
Main Street	Outside Church Room, facing crossroads	Arriving	21/10-6/12/22	22	0.2	41	post 20mph advisory signs	
		Departing		24	0.7	43		
		Arriving	1-15/11/23	22	0.3	52		
		Departing		24	1	55		
Moulton Road	Next to footpath, facing MOULTON	Arriving	18-25/10/23	30	15	76		post 20mph advisory signs
		Departing		40	47	78		
		Arriving	25/10-1/11/23	31	17	73		
		Departing		40	50	76		
Moulton Road	Next to footpath, facing CROSSROADS	Arriving	6/2-9/3/20	28	4	48		
		Departing		27	4	55		
		Arriving	31/5/21-26/8/21	28	5	57		
		Departing		28	5	59		
Moulton Road (new VASID)	Opposite allotments facing Moulton	Arriving	25/1-11/3/24	42	61	79		
		Departing		45	89	91		
		Arriving	9/4-23/5/23	43	65	80		
		Departing		48	91	95		
Sywell Road	Opposite Back Lane, facing Sywell	Arriving	22/1-11/3/24	31	18	55	Pre-chicane	
		Departing		34	45	87		
		Arriving	11/3-3/4/24	31	18	54	Pre-chicane	
		Departing		35	48	63		
Walgrave Road	Half-way along on northern side, facing Walgrave	Arriving	6/12/2022-9/1/2023	24	0	38		
		Departing		24	1	38		
		Arriving	15-29/11/23	25	0.6	40		
		Departing		24	0.6	43		

V85 = 85% of traffic is travelling under/at this speed  
 Arriving = heading toward front of VASID  
 Departing = heading away from VASID

Driver behaviour in terms of driving to road conditions and speeding is poor through Holcot - to give an indication of the scale of the speeding problem we use the VASIDs. They record data as vehicles approach (and the message is displayed) but also as vehicles travel away from the display. The table above is the summary of the most recent results at each location.

You will notice that there are some roads where there are severe speed violations. This information is a major contributor to the focus of our road safety and speed-related decisions. The VASID results show that the advisory 20 mph signs made no apparent difference to driver behaviour.

- **Road safety – where is the chicane?**

In my report last year I wrote that we had escalated Highways inactivity within WNC in respect of the Sywell Road chicane and a number of smaller initiatives. I won't go into the story of why there was no progress on the chicane build or HGV signage improvements, but needless to say the Parish Council has been immensely frustrated by the continuing lack of progress and poor communication from Highways. In March 2024, the Parish Council passed a symbolic motion of "no confidence in the Highways Service" and wrote to Ward Councillor Mike Warren to reiterate why and ask for his help making progress. Even allowing for the pandemic, it should not take 5 years to install a small road safety feature.

The chicane build is now scheduled to commence 7 May. We will see.

- **Road safety – doing something different**

You will appreciate that the Parish Council has had road safety as top priority for many years, driven by the very apparent road safety issues, and the views of Parishioners at every Annual Parish Meeting and other events. We have striven to make changes, always constrained by funding and Highways resourcing. Late last year we decided that we need to do something differently, as waiting for 'Section 106' funding (a financial contribution from the developers along the A43) before any design and implementation work can commence is not a tenable position when we know that the problems are here now.

To address this we set up a working group of the Parish Council to look at how we can break out of the loop of funding and Highways work constraining one another. The Working Group is required to develop a plan to address this conundrum, looking at funding opportunities – including grants and treasury loans – as well as dealing with the constraints within the remit of WNC and helping build advocacy and support from the myriad of stakeholders that might help us.

We have a very long list of possible actions we could take to improve road safety if we can remove the funding/Highways constraints, though realistically we have to prioritise the list. I have attached the full approved list of proposals at Attachment A – we are focusing on the 'Must' priority items in the immediate term, viz;

- The ANPR HGV monitoring referred to above.
- A chicane for Brixworth Road
- 20mph limit for the centre of the village

- A 'Holcot Cottages' zone on Moulton Road near the Hospital Bungalows allowing reduction in speed limits and behaviour-influencing infrastructure.

They will require in the region of £100k of funding based on estimates, which is in-line with the next tranche of Section 106 funding expected. As proposals they need detailed engineering design before firm financial estimates can be made, and all of the implications of the proposals assessed. Improving road safety is not a short-term undertaking, so priorities will change over the lifetimes of successive Parish Councils.

I am pleased to report that the working group recently held a meeting with WNC Cabinet Member for Highways Cllr Phil Larratt and Ward Councillor Mike Warren. At the meeting Cllrs Larratt and Warren took away several actions around funding and Highways design activity in order to help us move forward. We need to collaborate with WNC to improve our road safety and this was a good first step. We made the point to WNC that they have to be accountable for road safety, and that they should be 'pushing' for action, rather than relying on us and other Parish Council's to do the pushing. Currently there is no apparent proactivity, nor do WNC have a formal road safety strategy.

We will report in future newsletters and website posts how progress is being made. We will not fail to continue to apply pressure to WNC where there are issues requiring an extra push.

To financially support this activity the Parish Council have earmarked £10k, funded by the precept and the remnants of historic fundraising.

- **Road safety – it is for everyone** – an interesting project that WNC are running is the LCWIP (Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan). Whilst Northampton-centric, the strategy development does take in the surrounding rural parishes. We have always focused on road safety being for all road users, not just powered vehicles, and this project sets out to address the strategic need for safe cycling and walking routes and related infrastructure. Data shows that Holcot is a hotspot for cycling activities – we have all seen the pelotons – the Parish Council have made representations to get routes around Holcot included in the strategy. The benefit would be that the strategy can help drive focus and funding on road safety in particular.
- **Holcot Parish Plan** – thank you everyone that responded to the recent questionnaire concerning the draft Holcot Parish Plan – we had an 8%+ response rate which is apparently good for a survey of this type. Taking comments into account, the now approved Parish Plan will help guide the priorities and activities of the Parish Council over the next few years. We will review it occasionally.

### ***Some of the routine but important stuff***

- **The website** – we continue to promote the use of the website as the best source of information about what is happening in the Parish. It is updated regularly so **please** subscribe to the site to receive email notifications of news items, and don't forget to email [editor@holcotvillage.co.uk](mailto:editor@holcotvillage.co.uk) your news items or ideas of how the site could be improved or extended.
- **The newsletter** – Jenny Davis is Editor - please continue to use it.

- **Parish maintenance** – groups of parishioners, “The friends of Holcot”, continue to help with Parish maintenance activities. If you would like to get involved with the gardening or other maintenance activities on an occasional basis contact Ruby who will direct you to the organisers.
- **Lighting** – we have recently finished upgrading our lighting to LED – as well as being environmentally friendly an LED lighting stock is considerably cheaper to run and is more reliable. This will become increasingly important next year when our long-term cheap electricity contract comes to an end.

### ***Some of the less routine, but no less important***

- **WNC local plan through to 2041** – this is just going through consultation of the draft. In my view it is probably the most important strategic activity that WNC are undertaking, and the impacts will be felt for the next couple of decades and beyond. For instance, the draft local plan includes, subject to some controls, another 2000 house zone to the north of Moulton on the A43 (similar to what we knew as ‘Moulton Heights’). It also includes the resurrection of a northern ‘ring-road’ from the west through to the A43.

The Parish Council will have to spend time understanding the draft plan and consider its implications for the Parish. Please see the website for details, and let us and/or WNC have your ideas and opinions.

- **Green Hill Solar Farm** – you will have seen [via the website](#) the nationally-significant proposal for a 500MW solar farm based on a hub at Grendon fed by solar arrays around the county totalling nearly 2400 acres (950 hectares). One array is proposed to be on fields to the south of the Parish. It is early days, with the developer providing little concrete information whilst seeking early opinions from Parishes and elsewhere. A group to oppose the solar farm is currently forming locally.

The statutory consultation is due to be in the autumn 2024, with build towards the end of the decade. The Parish Council will have to form an opinion on the proposals when they come forward, or perhaps sooner.

### ***Governance and Financial Performance***

I can report that the Parish Council have met formally 10 times since the last Annual Parish Meeting. Our governance conforms to the statutory requirements, and transparency is achieved through every meeting being a public forum, and in particular items being posted on the Parish website and Parish noticeboard.

Ruby will show to this meeting a summary of the financial performance of the Council for Financial Year 2023/24 – this information is on the Parish Council page on the website. For those that follow the budgetary and reforecast process on the website, you will have noticed that the financial result for the year was a surplus of £1.1k versus a budgeted deficit of £5.2k. This is due to the budget process being one of “best estimates”, some savings/non-spends, additional grant/donation-funded expenditure, and the earmarked reserve for road safety carried forward to this financial year.

Of note last year, major unplanned items of expenditure were the final lighting upgrade, a grant-funded 3<sup>rd</sup> VASID and an additional bench funded by a donation which has recently been installed on the Old School site. A warm wet summer led to £1k of additional mowing.

Having held the precept constant at £17.5k for 6 years, the last two years have seen increases of £2k to fund inflation and build an earmarked reserve of £10k for road safety. Last year I reported that we expected to have to increase our contribution to the Sywell Road chicane – the good news is that WNC have funded the shortfall above the remainder of our original Overstone Leys section 106 funds.

Key budget items for 2024/25, excepting inflationary pressures and road safety, include £500 to repair or replace the Christmas tree lights, £500 to clean the war memorial and £360 to fund the first-year village hall fees of the Holcot Hotspot. We have also earmarked £600 as a c50% contribution to next year’s Parish Council election.

### **Financial year 2023/24**

**Balance brought forward from 31 March 2023** **£18,225**

*(rounded £)*

#### **Income**

Precept	£19,500
Other income- grant and donation	£7,065
VAT reclaimed	£2,866
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>£29,431</b>

#### **Expenditure (excl VAT)**

Admin and communications ( <i>Website/Newsletter/Audit/ Memberships/Training/General Admin</i> )	£2,360
Maintenance ( <i>Mowing/Maintenance</i> )	£7,049
Projects ( <i>VASID #3</i> )	£4,343
Lighting ( <i>including LED upgrade</i> )	£2,262
Grants & Contributions ( <i>Church/Village Hall/Holcot Hub</i> )	£2,750
Other ( <i>Insurance/Allotment/Clerk Salary/Bench</i> )	£6,597
VAT paid	£2,883
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>(£28,244)</b>

**Total Balances and reserves at 31 March 2024** **£19,412**

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#### **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. It was pleasing to note in the forms returned from the Holcot Parish Plan survey that people value their community, local activities and friendships.

- 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 defibrillators;
- The various clubs and societies that use the village hall and church room and local facilities.
- 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 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;
- 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 the other activities not mentioned.

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

This is guided by the Parish as a whole and the Holcot Parish Plan, but I suggest...

- We will continue to work through the various **road safety issues**. This is perennial. We will need to maintain our resolve to accelerate the road safety infrastructure.
- **WNC local plan** through to 2041 – in my view it is probably the most important strategic activity that WNC are undertaking, and the impacts must be considered in detail and representations made.
- **Green Hill Solar Farm** – what are the impacts and opportunities with this project? This is a substantial regional project and we will need to take an active part.
- **Devolution** of services from WNC may come forward. I said that last year, and we still have no concept of what this might be.
- **May 2025 elections for the next Parish Council** – would you like to represent your community as a Parish Councillor?

There are lots of other things that the Parish Council will have to deal with of course – most of which we can't foresee. Parishioners are invited to every Parish Council meeting, so if you have ideas please don't hesitate to come along. It is positive that, over the last year similarly to the previous years, more people are attending meetings, making use of their '3 minutes' to speak to the Council and express opinions.

### **And finally...some last thank you'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 West Northamptonshire Council, 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

24 April 2024



## Attachment A – Prioritised road safety measures – approved February 2024

List of possible road safety measures identified for Holcot Parish. Updated February 2024 -					
Location	Zone	Measure	MoSCoW Rating#	Rationale	Forecast* (Feb 24) cost £k
Sywell Road, Brixworth Road	60mph	Use ANPR to monitor HGV traffic - implementation by WNC.	M	HGVs flout the regulations.	0
Brixworth Road	30mph	Add chicane priority-working feature NB may need to relocate speedlimit-change - so requiring a traffic order, unless linkable to next item	M	VASID data shows substantial violations of the 30mph limit, with maximum speeds of up to 85mph	50
Areas selected by mtg with Matt O'C	30mph	20mph limit or zone	M	Change driver behaviour. Traffic order £6k, Signs £10k	16
Moulton Rd	60mph	Implementation of the 'Holcot Cottages' signage with 40/50mph speed limit & fixed solar-VASID proposed by Matt O'C	M	Traffic order £6k (if not combined with above), Signs £5k, VASID £6k	17
<b>Sub-total "Must"</b>					<b>83</b>
Junction of Poplars Lane & Walgrave Rd	30mph	Realign junction (design already created, and approved, by HW)	S	Reduce entry and exit speeds of rat-runners using Poplars Lane to avoid crossroad congestion	27
Junction of Back Lane & Moulton Rd	30mph	Realign junction (design already created, and approved, by HW)	S	Reduce entry and exit speeds of rat-runners using Back Lane to avoid crossroad congestion	27
Hannington Road	60mph	Narrow road signs on bridge	S	Insufficient width for 2 large vehicles	2
<b>Sub-total "Should"</b>					<b>55</b>
Sywell Road	30mph	Construct c100m of footway from Sunny Bank to Wychwood	C	Residents of 4 houses - and visitors to the carboot sale and riding school - currently have to walk in the carriageway on a blind bend, due to muddy surface of grass verge caused by a dip	36
Walgrave Road	60mph	Construct c170m of footway from village gateway to start of new right-of-way; cost includes £10k for construction of wooden pedestrian bridge over stream	C	New right-of-way was intended to give Holcot residents and ramblers safer access to the wider footpath system north of Holcot, but current pedestrian access to its start is a verge surfaced with coarse grass with hidden trip-hazards, and requires walking in the carriageway to cross the only bridge	110
Sywell Road	30mph	Permanent solar-powered VASID (MUST if no chicane)	W	VASID data has shown a reduction in speeds when VASID is switched on to show a message to drivers, compared with speeds in 'stealth mode'	6
Moulton Road	30mph	Replace existing pinch-point priority-working feature with chicane priority-working feature	W	Existing feature is earlier technology which only slows traffic when vehicles simultaneously approach from both directions	40
Moulton Road	60mph	Extend footway by c450m to reach junction with lane accessing cricket and tennis facilities	W	Current pedestrian access to these facilities <b>and the several adjacent homes</b> is a verge surfaced with coarse grass with hidden trip-hazard deep gulleys	160
<b>Sub-total "Could" and "Would"</b>					<b>352</b>
Total of above list for illustrative purposes only (now excl Sywell Rd chicane)					<b>490</b>
*Values updated from 2020 Overstone Green submission (which was based on Ian Boyes' estimates at that time) to reflect recent extreme inflation in construction costs					
#MoSCoW Ratings: Must, Should, Could, Would (if unlimited budget, no constraints)					
					Totals
M					83
S					55
C					146
W					206
<b>Grand Total</b>					<b>490</b>