



Chair's Report to the Annual Parish Meeting – 8 April 2025

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 will be a new Parish Council from May, so inevitably I am making assumptions about their priorities.

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.

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

Councillor	Sector responsibility
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
Bill Coles	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. Of course, from May there will be changes to this list and responsibilities.

Councillors also have a portfolio responsibility for taking the lead on several 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.

During the year we have welcomed Bill Coles to the Parish Council, and would like to thank him and all Councillors for everything they do on behalf of the Parish. Several Councillors have stood down at this election – thank you for your service.

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. 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.

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 - where are we now?***

I make no apology for dwelling first on road safety in this report. Over the 4-year term of this Parish Council we have made a great deal of progress – new VASIDs, the Sywell Road chicane, general improvements to white-lining and so on.

There is much more to do. I imagine that the new Parish Council will continue with road safety being a high priority.

The transit of HGVs exceeding 7.5t through Holcot continues. We still need action from the authorities – Highways have recently started investigations into the possible deployment of ANPR technologies on Brixworth Road/Sywell Road. This would deter HGVs from using the route and ultimately lead to fines and other sanctions to drivers and their companies.

Driver behaviour in terms of driving to road conditions and speeding is poor through Holcot. The VASIDs record data as vehicles approach (and the message is displayed) but also as vehicles travel away from the display. Needless to say, the results demonstrate that drivers don't always pay attention to speed limits and road conditions. The chicane has had some small success in reducing speeds on Sywell Road however.

You will appreciate that we have striven to make changes, always constrained by funding and Highways resourcing. Our highest priorities remain;

- 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.

We have investigated funding routes, and for a small Parish we will have to await the commitment to the £100k of funding we expect from next tranche of Section 106 funding expected. As proposals they need detailed engineering design before firm financial estimates can be made, and all the implications of the proposals assessed. Once final legal commitment to the s106 funding is available Highways have committed to developing the plans. You will be painfully aware that improving road safety is not a short-term undertaking.

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

- **Green Hill Solar Farm** – you will know about proposals to build a distributed solar farm of 2400 acres across (mostly) Northamptonshire. This is about the same area as four times Pitsford Reservoir. One array is proposed to be on fields to the south of the Parish.

The statutory consultation was held in the autumn 2024. We provided all of the information to Parishioners via the website, and held a community meeting to hear from the opposition group (the developers declined our offer of a similar meeting). To inform our views on the proposals we held a Parish Council meeting in the village hall where parishioners were able to present their views and discuss the proposals. Ultimately the Parish Council provided a long and detailed response to the consultation, stating our fundamental opposition to proposals that remove so much farmland from productive use for the next 60 years, not to the concept of solar energy at scale itself. We also wrote to the Secretary of State saying the same thing – as a huge scale project of national significance it is for the Secretary of State to make the final decision in this case.

The developer is expecting to submit their draft Development Consent Order to the national planning inspectorate soon. If accepted there will be more consultations and opportunity to oppose the scheme. I am sure that the Parish Council will continue to contribute to the opposition pressure.

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 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 now have a fully LED lighting stock, which has made a substantial difference to operating costs. Our electricity contract expires in 2025, and it is unlikely that such a good deal will be available, but with LED increased costs will be minimised.

Some of the less routine, but no less important

- **WNC Local Plan through to 2041** – we commented at length on the draft Local Plan – even more houses locally without infrastructure coming first, the lack of infrastructure plans and the Northampton

North Orbital Route in particular, not consulting Parishes and taking notice, and road safety in general were our principal themes. The response was published on the website. However, with the change in government and the ramping up of housing priorities the Local Plan process has stalled. I imagine it will have to be re-consulted.

- **WNC Local Transport Plan through to 2045** – we commented (again at length and published on the website) on the draft Local Transport Plan. In our view it was misaligned strategically with the draft Local Plan, did not cover road safety adequately, is underfunded, and did not determine the approach to the Northampton North Orbital Route (which would reduce our road safety issues massively). WNC have recently approved the Local Transport Plan, with few tangible changes from the draft.

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 2024/25 – this information will also be 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 £4.5k versus a budgeted deficit of £8.2k. This is due to the budget process being one of “best estimates”, some savings/non-spends, additional grant/donation-funded expenditure, and in particular the earmarked reserve for road safety being carried forward to this financial year.

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. For this financial year we have increased the precept by £750 (c3.5%) and retained an £8k deficit budget, in effect ‘standing still’ in real terms.

Key budget items for 2025/26, excepting inflationary pressures and road safety, reflect that in election year the Parish Council has budgeted a general fund for projects (as new councillors will have new ideas) and avoided specific projects and investments.

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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.

- 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;
- 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.
- 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.

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, but I suggest...

- The Parish Council will continue to work through the various **road safety issues**. This is perennial. The Council will need to maintain our resolve.
- **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.
- Dealing with the impacts of WNC's proposed **Local Plan** when it comes forward again.

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!

This is my final report as Chair of the Parish Council – I have decided not to stand for election this time. Thank you for your support of me and the Council over the last 11 years.

Thank you for listening.

David Walker

6 April 2025