

St. Mary Bourne Parish Council

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Chair's Report for Annual Parish Assembly 7th May 2024

Good evening and a very warm welcome to all you, whether attending simply as parishioners, local councillors or representatives of organisations amongst us.

I am glad to see Tom Thacker our county councillor (and to welcome and congratulations to Jo Perry on winning her seat against the tide as borough councillor)...good to have all our local councillors, Sam Carr as well, living in the parish.

Some of you may have been aware that Oliver Madge resigned from the council in December, having devoted an enormous amount of time and energy over the previous 18 months in guiding us back onto an even keel after a somewhat rocky period. We owe him a great deal of gratitude and wish him and Lara the best of luck and happiness in Cornwall where they have started a new chapter in their lives,

As Oli's deputy, I automatically became acting chairman and in the five months since then I have been very grateful for the support I have received from my fellow councillors and I am proud to be part of a proactive and cooperative team of individuals all of whom bring strengths and experience for the benefit of us all.

But WE are all superbly well supported by our clerk Maxine whose efficiency, competence and good nature ensures that we amateurs are kept on the straight and narrow and are as effective as we can be, and I am sure all my colleagues will share my thanks to her.

Inevitably in such a wet year too much of our time since the autumn has been devoted to water and I am grateful for the energy and doggedness of our Flood and Emergency Group members, both councillors and external experts who have been tireless in trying to ensure that Southern Water and their sub-contractors do all they can to at least ensure that all parishioners can use their facilities and try to contain the escape of sewage when it has beaten the systems. Many of you will be aware that there have been plans apparently agreed and put in place with Southern Water many times over the past twenty odd years for work to be done to avoid this recurring cycle of the main sewer getting overwhelmed. It is highly frustrating for us and some many other similarly placed communities to be depending on emergency measures like the tankering we currently face.

We will be having a meeting shortly with Kit Malthouse our MP, local councillors and Southern Water representatives to start to bring pressure to bear for longer term solutions rather than short term fixes and will report to the parish on this when we have some progress to show.

Other areas that are occupying much council time have been the Lake, which after a period when its management didn't make anyone happy we are now working with a strategy that we hope will be better balanced and will suit the fishermen who provide our income, those who are primarily interested in its wildlife conservation potential and villagers who get great pleasure from its beauty throughout the year.

There has already been some tree management carried out and in due course and with lower water levels there will be more but all this, and work on trees around the Rec is essential but expensive so will be phased and done as and when it is necessary.

The Rec has been and will continue to be a major focus for the council over the next year. Everyone will be aware that the great success of the Boundary, the strong growth within the Cricket Club, lettings in the Village Centre, the current presence of Ninny's House nursery in the pavilion, quite apart from long distance walkers and cyclists all put pressure on car parking in a village where there is little if any alternative space. While these are good problems to have, we realise we must try to look for ways of reusing the limited space we have more efficiently if we can.

A small group has been looking at possibly moving the playground to an alternative space (and upgrading the equipment) which might release space for parking and we are also looking to see if we could slightly reposition the MUGA (tennis courts) without losing their purpose but enable more parking space without affecting the ability of the Bowling Club and Cricket Club (and Football Club) from enjoying their facilities as usual...and of course we also know that the pavilion was cited for replacement several years ago and the current great success and enthusiasm generated by the Cricket Club makes that more pressing.

So it is complex, and needs careful thought and planning and of course it will need funding at a level well beyond our regular means so fund raising from various sources is under investigation. When we believe we have a viable plan we shall of course consult with the community.

Two other things that we plan to look at carefully in the coming year are worth mentioning, I think.

Although the presence of tankers has undoubtedly helped to temporarily reduce it there is far too much speeding dangerous speeding by drivers along the valley, and we will be looking at possibly installing anti-speeding devices to discourage and reduce this. These devices are relatively expensive and will need attachment to fixed poles so we may well be asking for help with this from suitably placed landowners and homeowners in due course.

Lastly for now, we have been advised by our borough councillors that we should be looking to update our current village plan, on which much valuable time and effort was expended by our predecessors some years ago. While technically still in date, we are told we could be more vulnerable to pressure from unwelcome development if we have not kept up to date so we would be pleased to hear from parishioners with an interest and /or expertise in helping with this.

Lastly, we would always be happy to hear from parishioners who feel there are areas that they would like our involvement in. Our powers are limited but I hope we remain receptive to ideas and want to do our best for the communities we are here to serve.