

Chairman's Annual Report

Annual Report 2023/2024

I am pleased to report that there has been a reassuring period of administrative stability over the last year, with an unchanged full complement of Parish Councillors and, with the help of our outgoing Parish Clerk Jack Turner, a smooth handover to our new Clerk Richard Cole who joined us in March. Following his departure I would like to say a huge thank you to Jack, not only for his service as Parish Clerk over the last four years, but also for helping us through some difficult times with his expert advice and resolve.

So, the same as every year, I am going to summarise what I see as key the points which have crossed the Parish Council's desk over the last 12 months. This is not meant to be an exhaustive essay on my part, and the details behind these and other topics that the Parish Council have been dealing with can be found on the Parish Council website. So...

Traffic issues have, as always, topped the list of concerns that we've received from residents over the last year. Whether about vehicles speeding through the village and our two dangerous crossroads, inconsiderate or downright dangerous parking in the village and layby on the Acton Turville Road, cavernous potholes in West Littleton, or the sheer weight of traffic along Norley lane at travel peak times, there is no doubt that for a small parish we have more than our fair share of traffic related issues. So much so that we have a permanent agenda item entitled 'Traffic and road issues within the Parish', where the Parish Councillors receive and provide updates on the status of known black spots and problems. On a positive note, you will have no doubt seen the Vehicle Activated Road (VAR) signs appearing at various locations in the Parish which, as well as warning motorists of their speed, are also collecting data on the number of cars and the speeds at which they are travelling. The data that these signs collect is helping the Parish Council lobby SGC, Avon and Somerset Constabulary, and our local MP, to make improvements that will hopefully mitigate for these dangers. Of course, just because we can now prove that the level of speeding in the Parish is unacceptable, it doesn't mean SGC will listen to us. However, it will hopefully make our shouting louder and harder to ignore in the future. As well as purchasing the signs, the Parish Council have also secured grant funding of £5,000 to convert these new VAR signs to solar power, which will save residents thousands of pounds a year in maintenance charges that SGC want to charge us. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our Parish Councillor Katy Pool for all her hard work in making the winning of that grant possible.

Financially the council remains in a sound position, with a balanced budget and a healthy reserve account. So much so, that this year we were actually able to reduce the Parish Council tax precept for our residents by just over 10% (based on the Band D Equivalent). I would like to note though, that with SGC budget cuts, and the onus falling more on Parish Councils to fund services and projects in their local areas, it may be necessary for the Parish Council to look at innovative ways to increase our income in the future.

Since I joined the Parish in 2018, dealing with 'planning issues' has produced some of the most emotive and difficult items that myself and my fellow councillors have had to deal with. No more so than now, when we have a number of proposed developments in and around

Tormarton which have raised concerns amongst residents. As a Parish Council it is important that we both represent the feelings of our residents towards planning applications, whilst making sure the existing planning laws are being applied appropriately and fairly to each and every application that SGC ask the Parish Council to comment on. One of the tools that will help the Parish Council make sure that residents' views and expectations for the future of our villages are considered by SGC and potential developers is the proposed 'Neighbourhood Plan'. The first steps towards the creation of a Neighbourhood Plan for Tormarton Parish are now well underway, with the designation of the area complete, and a steering group well on the way to starting the consultation process with residents. I would like to thank Katy Pool, Rebecca Derry-Evans, Chris Plamer, Ranald Crook, and Harry Lawrence, who have blazed the trail and have got the steering group off the ground, with a number of new members about to join them. Please remember that creating and getting a 'Neighbourhood Plan' to fruition will be a team effort, so please help wherever you can. It could be something as simple as individuals delivering questionnaires or helping set up for a meeting, and it will definitely take the opinions of everyone in the Parish to help make sure that we have a statutory document that truly represents how our community views its future.

As far as the social wellbeing of the villages are concerned, I am seeing lots of positive activity in and around our communities, mainly driven by the residents themselves. West Littleton hosts numerous events throughout the year, including on regular occasions such as the 'Open Gardens' and 'Madrigals', as well as one off events, such as their 2023 'Coronation Party'. In Tormarton, organisations such as the 'Village Hall Committee' have organised a number of family events for residents and their children, and the 'Cricket Team' held a fabulous race night in the village hall. Whilst 'The Compass Inn' has continued to perform an incredible job filling the gap left by the closure of the Majors Retreat in 2022. The Sports Field continues to be used by multiple football and cricket teams, and will be the site of this year's 'Tormarton D-Day 80 Celebration' in June. We have regular free Coffee Mornings for local residents, courtesy of Penny and Rupert Monyard at The Compass Inn, and our local church 'St Mary Magdalen' is soon to start offering facilities with a kitchenette for local clubs and organisations to meet up in the village.

I think that I can confidently say that our Parish has had a good year, and it looks like we are on track for another good year ahead.

Finally, I would like to thank our SGC Council representatives, Ben Stokes and Marilyn Palmer for their work supporting us as a Parish Council, my Parish Council colleagues, Katy Pool, Janet Wells, Sue Giles, and Rebecca Derry-Evans for giving their time freely to help make the Parish a better place, and of course our Parish Clerks (past and present) for keeping us on the right path.

Simon Stevens

Chairman Tormarton Parish Council