

CARDINGTON PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2024-2025

This is my 12th Chairman's report and marks the end of another 4 year term. The 3 terms have been impacted by the the period of Austerity following the financial crisis, Brexit, Covid, the Ukraine war and the current global uncertainties with the USA's disruptive activities. All these major challenges have impacted all of us as individuals and as a community. Despite the highest overall levels of taxation since the war our public services continue to be stretched to breaking point and Shropshire Council has been facing bankruptcy for many months.

Parish Councils have limited powers and most is gained for the community by influencing and persuading SCllrs and their Operational managers to act to resolve our problems even when they are overwhelmed by similar difficulties impacting the whole county. SC's financial woes manifest themselves to each of us every day as we use local roads. The period of austerity resulted in total neglect and SC has been failing to catch-up ever since. Our lanes and culverts emerged from a different era and are unsuitable for the high volumes of traffic and the weight and width of many vehicles. Traffic moves grass verges and other debris on to the highway and is then washed into the drainage system which becomes blocked. Gullies are no longer routinely cleared leaving flood water and at times ice to create and worsen potholes.

A disproportionate time of the PC, individual PCllrs and other residents is spent endlessly reporting Highways issues on FixMyStreet and making representations to the SCllr for Highways and SC operational management. Last autumn's storms caused 2 culverts to collapse within the Parish leading to road closures. Delayed replacement and resulting diverted traffic on the totally unsuitable Gillberies Lane have caused further disruption to road users and some damage to their vehicles. Extra costs and loss of customers has affected local businesses.

The PC organised a meeting with the Assn Director of Highways and the SCllr with cabinet responsibility for Highways. The meeting was well attended by residents and was reported on BBC News as was a subsequent mini- demonstration at the Grove Farm culvert. As a result SC improved signage to avoid wasted journeys that had even delayed a blue light ambulance, installed a temporary fix to partially reopen the road to Lea Hills and cleared debris from a ditch which had risked even more serious flash flooding should another storm have occurred. More importantly the meeting was promised that the budget would be flexed and culverts would be replaced in early Summer and autumn respectively. More recently a resident was interviewed by Shropshire radio and SC confirmed their commitment and targeted the end of July and September respectively for the completion of the replacements.

These culvert replacements could have been achieved by any landowner or local contractor with readily available equipment in a couple of weeks but SC is bound by processes and legal limitations that seem to require a myriad of specialist experts and sub-contractors to work sequentially. In the meantime substantial sums of money have been spent by un-managed sub-contractors checking and surveying the damage, erecting signs and barriers, and repeatedly rearranging them. Much of this ongoing cost and that caused to businesses and residents was avoidable.

Last summer and at long last the road from the village through Gretton to the Longville crossroads was redressed. Parts of this road had been subject to inadequate and repeated repairs and sadly merely redressing those same areas is already indicating more repairs will be required. More avoidable cost! has and will be incurred!

The PC employed a local contractor to repoint and where necessary repair a length of church wall surrounding the area owned by the community. The PC will be considering when to undertake further work to ensure the wall remains attractive and does not need major repairs at some future date.

Internet communication has been further improved with the completion of the Fibre network to Gretton, but following the merger of SWS with Voneus issues arose when routine maintenance was not communicated to customers. Inevitably there will be occasional unplanned outages and some residents have adopted an alternative back-up service. The PC does not now enjoy the same level of customer service and reaction as was developed with SWS.

The local WhatsApp group set up and operated by PCllr Boulton continues as an invaluable method for alerting each other to any suspicious activity. We are grateful to Alison Biddulph for her efforts to revitalise the Parish Magazine and more recently to set up a Community WhatsApp group for residents to share important information of general interest to the community. Sadly the base station proposed for erection at Enchmarsh to improve the mobile signal was dropped by the installation company.

The increasing frequency of storms turning our roads into rivers, causing flash flooding to roads and property and having caused the collapse of 2 culverts prompts the need to consider preventative action. Other communities who perhaps have suffered more often have set up "Flood Protection Forums". These community led groups engage with all interested parties and have taken various actions to "Slow the Flow" in order to reduce and delay water levels from peaking at pinch points thereby minimising disruption. I recently attended a multi-agency flood protection forum in Culmington and I have circulated my notes ahead of a PC agenda item.

In conclusion of this PC term I again thank my fellow PCllrs for all the time and effort they give to represent our wonderful community and to our clerk, Jennie Griffiths, whose professional commitment ensures we all act legitimately and the PC works as effectively as possible.

Given the boundary changes and forthcoming elections we also offer our best wishes to our SCllr., Dan Morris who has rarely missed a PC meeting and been available to support us whenever requested.

Clive E Tonks March 6th 2025