

Reference 3.3

Minsterworth Parish Council - Chairman's Report May 2024

Another year has passed which means its time to look back on our achievements (or lack of!) over the past 12 months. Progress does remain frustrating slow, but it's nice to be able to report some positive steps.

Our white Village entry gates have been installed, and the planting of our 'coronation daffodils' (and other flowers) certainly makes the start of our Village a bit more impressive. While there is no evidence that this results in any reduction in speeding, at least its now obvious where our village starts and ends. We are still hoping to get improved speed limit signage, plus an overall reduction in the permitted speed limit at the west end of the village. The Parish Council have installed a solar powered speed camera, and those recorded as travelling above the speed limit are reported to the police, who then follow this up with a warning letter. Unfortunately, the camera is not sufficiently accurate to enable a prosecution, but we hope that the receipt of a warning letter will act as a deterrent. Those who persistently offend should receive a visit from the police. What has become apparent is the number of speeding drivers who do not have tax and/or insurance – and that is something where the Police certainly can act.

With the opening of the kindergarten at the Harvey Centre, Highways agreed to re-install the 'wig-wag' warning lights during drop off and collection times, which is another feature to improve road safety. In January we had a meeting with Highways, chaired by MP Mark Harper. There was lots of positive rhetoric, and we hope to see this translated into action in the coming year, although the promised second meeting for May has yet to be fixed. We would like to see more central reservations (for traffic calming and improved road crossing safety), and improved road markings. Other jobs that require attention include improved drainage in Watery Lane, sorting the flooding in Starcroft lane (= outside of the Redlands), improving the road surfaces outside of the Church, in Bury Lane and in Pound Lane, and 'turning back' (= returning the footpath to its original width) from Severn Bank dual carriageway to Oakle Street. The Parish Council will again fund at least one grass cutting of the footpath in early summer, to make the path more accessible, because Highways do not carry out their verge cut until August. The poor state of the road outside of the Church is especially frustrating. Highways have said that they will meet me there to discuss, but I have yet to be given a date, despite several repeat requests.

We are all aware of the increase in population nationally. The net migration figure (the difference between those entering and those leaving the country) reached 700,000 last year, and if everyone of those people need a house, the nation has to build more than one house every minute to keep pace with the demand! Unfortunately, Minsterworth is not immune from this requirement, and so the number of properties increases. Although there have been no new planning applications for new sites for several months now, there remain a number of sites within the village where planning permission has been granted and further building is likely to take place.

Forward planning for the next 20 – 30 years is obviously important, and our opportunity to comment on this came with the new Strategic and Local Plan, SLP, announced by TBC. The Parish Council considered that some of the most important points to consider in Minsterworth were improving traffic flow into Gloucester on the A40 (eg by a new Severn Crossing or a dual carriageway between the Over and Longford roundabouts); improved drainage to reduce our flood risk; installation of a mains sewage system for Minsterworth; and improvements to A48 safety through our village. The prospect of the 4000 houses straddling the Highnam/Churcham boundary has again been raised, and we are actively involved in rejecting this. We hope that as many residents as possible submitted their own opinions to the on-line opinion survey, although it was not an easy survey to complete!

Unfortunately, Jo Badham, our clerk who joined us in 2022 replacing Paul Bell, has been tempted elsewhere by an attractive alternative job offer, and so we have been interviewing again – many thanks to the ‘team ‘from within P Council who have guided me through the process. We are delighted to introduce the successful applicant, Kate Wilks from Quedgeley, who is here with us this evening.

As in previous years the Parish Council remain very grateful for those who keep our village attractive and tidy, by mowing verges outside of houses, keeping hedges trimmed, planting flowers, and litter picking. We are aware that some residents put huge efforts into litter picking, including picking up the large metal nitrous oxide containers that continue to plague us. The playground at The Park below the Harvey Centre continues to be well used, and recently we have installed a picnic table at the site to make it more enjoyable for families. Unfortunately, we still have been unable to extend our lease on the playground, so have been unable to obtain grants to improve the play equipment, although a further request has been made. We hope to make improved access for walkers on our Village Greens this summer. There have been improvements in both the Village Hall and Harvey Centre, making our village more attractive. These things do not happen without effort, and we are grateful to those who give up their time planning, applying for grants and organising (or doing!) the work. Social events at both the Harvey Centre and Village Hall provide an extremely important social focal point for residents, with the coffee and cake sometimes being as important as the meeting itself. We are also very grateful to Paula Ruffley and her team whose considerable efforts produce and distribute the Villager magazine, and to those who financially support us by advertising. It’s a big task every month. Communication is important however, and we are grateful to Stuart Irving who has recently taken over the village email distribution.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow Parish Councillors, and TBC Borough and County Councillors for their input into the running of the Parish Council. It is a huge time commitment, and we hope that residents are reasonably satisfied with the work done, although I suspect that we all agree that it could be better!

Roger Blowey, April 2024