

## BURGHCLERE PARISH COUNCIL

### Notes of the Annual Parish Assembly

Held in the Portal Hall, Burghclere on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> May at 7pm

**Present:**

Parish Councillors: Andrew Crowley, Sandra Whiting, Geoff Morton, Ian Collins, Alex Patrick-Smith, Amanda Harvey and Julian Parkes

Richard Carrow (former Chairman)

County Cllr Tom Thacker

Approximately 30 Parishioners (including representatives of reporting groups and organisations)

Alison Zarecky, Climate Change Emergency Project Officer and Michelle Chandler, Sustainability Advisor (to item 4)

**1. Apologies**

Borough Cllr John Izett and Neill Bruce.

**2. Welcome - Introduction of Speakers and Councillors**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Councillors and the Clerk.

**3. To receive and note any Matters Arising from the minutes of the previous Annual Assembly held on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023.**

These had been circulated prior to the meeting and with no matters arising were accepted as a true record.

**4. Presentation by** Presentation on Basingstoke Green Team by Alison Zarecky, Climate Change Emergency Project Officer and Michelle Chandler, Sustainability Advisor

Attendees were interested to receive a presentation covering the work of the Basingstoke and Deane Green Team, and some new energy and biodiversity initiatives that the team are running to help decarbonise the borough.

**5. County and Borough Councillor Reports**

**County Councillor Tom Thacker** spoke to a report attached as Appendix A. He received and responded to questions raised.

The Chairman read a report submitted by **Borough Councillor John Izett** and as attached at Appendix B.

## **6. Parish Council Report – Richard Carrow, former Chair of Burghclere Parish Council**

Richard Carrow read the following report:

Within the parish council, we are delighted that Cllr Amanda Harvey has joined us and her expertise in public consultation and IT matters has been and continues to be invaluable. With my departure we will be looking for another Cllr so please encourage volunteers!

We've had another very busy year as you will hear. Before doing so I'd like to make some initial remarks.

1. Thanks again to our County and Borough Councillors, Tom Thacker and John Izett for their considerable and valuable support. I extend massive thanks to your parish Cllrs and the parish clerk for their excellent work too.
2. We've updated our Action Plan's Strategic Objectives.
  - First, review the Neighbourhood Plan. This is now done; Basingstoke and Deane Council 'made' the revised Plan last May. But we've included the need to oversee the Orchard Homes development.
  - Replace Portal Hall windows. As you look around you can see this is well underway and should be completed during the summer school holidays. We also added:
    - o Replace the gutters;
    - o Replace roof tiles on the North side;
    - o Replace stackable chairs with a more comfortable model;
    - o Improve the Portal Cottage – this comprises a number of key work strands to address insulation and damp.
  - Footpath stile replacement. Due to changes in funding I have decided to remove this. We hope to complete the paperwork but accessing money against other, higher priorities, is more difficult.
  - Enhance community engagement.
  - Install EV chargers in the village car park.
  - And most recently, with the Sports Club, develop a new community and leisure centre (or Hub) for the community.

Turning now to routine matters:

Issues we've considered or addressed during the year include:

- o Potholes & road conditions
- o Fly-tipping & litter
- o Tree pruning around the Sports field and Millennium Garden
- o Roads, in particular and with Newtown PC setting up a speed check on the B4640 and repairing the spring leak on Newtown Hill.

- Flooding. On this topic, we've finally lost patience with TW regarding flooding in Harts Hollow and have written to Kit Malthouse who has intervened on our behalf with the EA and TW. This is helpful but lack of funds may mean little concrete can be achieved in the short term.

Last year we asked the question: how to improve community engagement. This year we've launched the Burghclere Bulletin, which aims to pull together a lot of information from disparate sources and present it in an easy to read, succinct format. With over 100 subscribers already we are pleased it has been well received and aim to continue this initiative. If not already a subscriber, we'd encourage you to do so!

Other matters undertaken include:

- Play area. All the major works are complete but improvements and repairs are ongoing.
- Millennium garden improvement. We decided to run a path across the garden to improve wheelchair and pushchair access between Church Lane and the Village Car Park. Now complete, we think this was a positive step.
- We've replaced one parish noticeboard and added a new public wastebin, with others due replacement soon.

A significant proportion of our time is devoted to planning. 27 applications have been looked at in the last year (as against 40 last year). Among these were two applications that were considered by B&DBC's Development Control Committee and a Hearing was held in the Council Offices by the Planning Inspectorate in respect of a grain dryer in Old Burghclere. We consider these through the prism of national and local planning policies and our own (now modified) neighbourhood plan. We always welcome residents and other interested parties to these discussions.

The Orchard Homes development has been through the Development Control Committee but has not been quite finalized by the Local Planning Authority. However, Orchard Homes has put the site up for sale. We understand a number of buyers have expressed interest and due diligence checks are being undertaken. We will engage with the new owners once complete.

Policies. We've reviewed, approved and introduced 15 policies and procedures, which can be found on our website.

Finance. We've continued to meet our financial responsibilities, including setting the annual precept and ensuring the audit requirements are met. Thanks to Jacqui's excellent housekeeping we again got a very good report from our auditor. I'm happy to say that in terms of grants we've donated £800 to the church, £500 to Burghclere Primary School Band for music lessons and £50 to Victim Support.

## **7. Pinder Recreational Report**

Cllr Crowley delivered a report on the Pinder Recreational Trust covering three main areas:

1. The Portal Hall including bookings and management
2. The list of projects completed and being considered
3. Summary of Financial Position

#### Portal Hall –

- The Parish Council acts as the Trustee of the Pinder Recreational Trust and in this capacity, a committee, made up of the councillors, takes care of the day-to-day running of the Portal Hall, as well as the upkeep of the Recreation Ground and Millennium Garden in the village. The Parish Council, as the sole trustee of the Pinder Recreational Trust charity, has a lease in place with Burghclere Sports Club who also manage the upkeep of the Sports ground
- The management and support of the Portal Hall is all done voluntarily, and I would like to thank all the people who have helped manage and maintain the Hall, especially to Sandra. Thank you. Also to Alex, Ian, Richard and other councilors whom have again worked tirelessly throughout the year taking bookings, organising, cleaning, with a fantastic can-do spirit and attitude that reflects the great work done in the village.
- Portal Hall and Portal Cottage
- One of the main sources of income for the Portal Hall is the Pre-school which operates Mon- Friday term times, using the main hall and surrounding play areas. Pre-school has and continues to play an important part of the Portal Hall and the Village providing learning and care to the children aged 2-5.
- Bookings continue to be healthy with a variety of clubs and organization both local and from outside the village. This includes local village societies, WI, Aerobics, Horticultural Society, Parties and Weddings, Newbury Rotary Quiz, the AA, and VoxFresh to name a few. And now on Fridays Gong Bath.
- We will also see filming for the new Downtown Abbey film take place here at the end of the month.
- We also receive income from the Portal Cottage which is rented out.
- The cottage has just been vacated with our tenants of 3 three years moving on. For our new tenants we are looking for them to also take on the role of caretaker.

#### Current projects –

- Maintaining the Portal Hall is an all-year-round activity, again with a lot of support by councilors and parishioners. Richard is our regular gutter clearer, Ian Collins, for electrical works. Alex our new councilor this year helping with the new windows installation and roofing matters and Geoff Morton with the Portal Cottage.
- You can see the first 5 of 8 windows already installed with the others scheduled for completion this summer during school holidays.

- Further work will start on the roof and external decoration later this year including brand new guttering.
- Playground
- Work continues to improve the playground with significant improvements made this year to cater for a wider age group at both ends of the age spectrum.
- EV Chargers with Basingstoke & Dean
- Contracts are in the process of being signed, finally, and the hope is that work will start soon. No exact date has been agreed yet.
- Funding is provided primarily through the infrastructure fund under S106 monies.
- Installation should begin in the Autumn.

#### Accounts

- The financial accounts for the year are positive and continue to balance the income with the work to maintain and improve the Portal Hall.
- Income from hall and cottage rental, has been steady and has allowed us to fund the projects described previously.
- Income is also derived from interest payments which increased by 7.7% for the year ending 31s March 2024.
- Costs for running the hall have increased slightly but we have, as reported last year, avoided the high electricity costs as we were able to fix our contract before the price rises.
- As ever the costs to fix and upgrade the hall is an ongoing task and includes maintenance costs to repair various external problems including some small leaks and damp plus the need to cap some chimneys, guttering, tiles, etc.
- The largest current outgoing is for the windows but a significant portion of this is provided through a grant from Basingstoke and Deane Rural England Prosperity Fund.
- The business case submitted to qualify for the grant included a business case that estimated a reduction of 20% saving in heating fuel use and a reduction of the building's carbon footprint by 2.0 tonnes CO2 per annum.
- We continually seek ways to fund projects either directly from our own income or through organisations such as the Greenham Trust with match funding as we have done in the past, and other grants available. Most of the income is spent on maintaining and upgrading facilities of the Hall, but one of the future goals of the Pinder Trust is to eventually look to support other initiatives in the village. This will be weighed against the list of priority projects for the maintenance and improvement of the Hall.

In summary – I would like to thank everyone both on the Parish Council and members of the community for their continued patronage and support.

## **8. Burghclere Sports Club Report**

Two representatives of the club were in attendance and delivered a report and answered questions covering:

- The club's future, including the recently launched consultation which was aiming to engage with the community on plans to develop and improve the existing facilities.
- An update on football teams using the facilities.

They responded to a concern raised about parking during events and explained the steps taken to alleviate the problem.

## 9. Commons Reports

The following reports were given:

### **Herbert Plantation. Neill Bruce (read by Richard Carrow):**

“This last winter (1st September to end March) Team 1 with Harry Dove and volunteers have spent some time thinning out birch and other ‘infiles’ that were bashing the veteran oak trees in Cpt 5B & 5C, in strong winds, at the Eastern end of Herbert Plantation. They then moved to do some opening up of the Northern end of FP6, then remove dead and leaning trees that were near the big lime tree in 2A. There are still some possibly dangerous ‘chalara infected’ ash trees, which are being monitored, as the species is very late to leaf this year.

Team 2 have also done some opening up of the sides of the northern end of FP6. The volunteers are Harry Dove, Simon Melville, Samir Hilali, Nick Selsey, Ian Findlay, Toby Tucker, Simon Smith, and myself Neill Bruce.

At an onsite meeting with the HCC ranger and area manager, a week ago, it was agreed that the main winter '24-'25 work was to create a large glade in 3A, widen both the main track and path 11 verges with scalloped edges, and to remove many of the ‘pole stage’ sycamore seedlings in 2A that are shading the ground flora.

### **Burghclere Common: Simon Melville**

**June** While taking part in the local Nightjar survey organised by the Greenham Common Rangers, a male Nightjar was seen ‘commuting’ between the south end of Newtown Common and Burghclere Common, suggesting that there may have been a pair nesting on Burghclere Common again this year. Nightjars were heard on Burghclere Common on several evenings during the summer.

**July** I spent a morning spraying scrub regrowth on open areas of the Common, using c2 litres of Glyphosate.

**August** No work on the Common.

**September** I spent 2 mornings felling Sallows from the old pond area in Cpt 10. Sue and I had 3 sessions of chain-sawing young Holly and herbicide-painting the cut stumps, mostly in Cpts 2 and 8.

**October** Sue and I had a bonfire to clear up all of the Sallow that I'd cut previously in Cpt 10. Days for bonfires are carefully chosen for suitable weather (preferably damp and not too windy), and the fire brigade always informed before a fire is started. I spent another morning felling more Sallows. Good news came from the Rural Payments Agency, offering Burghclere Parish Council a Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship agreement for the management of the Common, paying £1,174 per year for a 5 year period. This should enable the PC to employ contractors for Bracken spraying work and for mowing/flailing areas of heathland and small scrub - work that can be timed to be co-ordinated with work on Newtown Common. I attended a First Aid and Forestry Course (funded by HCC as a volunteer in the Herbert Plantation).

**November** I spent a morning thinning some of the vegetation in the 'dip' near the Public Footpath gate into the Herbert Plantation where the path gets very wet and muddy and is very over-shaded. I had a bonfire of the Sallow cut towards the end of the previous month in Cpt 10.

**December** Taking advantage of contractor's machinery working on Newtown Common, a morning was spent using a mulch-flail to clear (mainly) young Holly and Bramble from Cpt 1. The machine then went on to flail some small patches toward the south end of Cpt 7 as a prelude for work to be undertaken by Countryside Management students from Sparsholt College.

**January** I spent a morning felling more Sallows from Cpt 10. Sparsholt College students spent 2 days felling and clearing scrub from the southern end of Cpt 7. I pulled 35 Pine seedlings from the Common. Just a few years ago we would be pulling Pine seedlings by the hundreds – so to find and pull just 35 shows what an improvement there has been in controlling this invasive species.

**February** The intended visit by the students had to be cancelled (by the College). I spent a morning 'prepping' felled Sallow ready for a future bonfire.

**March** Sparsholt students spent a final day felling some Birch trees beside the path between Cpts 7 and 8. Unfortunately, the weather was unsuitable for a bonfire and I had to spend 2 mornings later in the month to clear and burn up all that they had cut. I also burnt up the Sallow prepped the previous month and spent a further morning clearing and prepping more for a future bonfire.

I worked on the Common on 21 days (April-March). There were c20 days help from Countryside Management students from Sparsholt College. There was co.25 days mulch flailing by Heathland Management Services (specialist contractor) It should be noted that the majority of practical management work takes place on the Common during the winter months so as not to cause disturbance to wildlife. However, there are some activities such as spotspraying of scrub regrowth (or Bracken spraying), that have to take place during the summer period when plants are in growth and when the weather is suitable. The work described above is all related to implementation of the Management Plan agreed by the Parish Council in 2022.

**Earlstone Common: Denis Mathews (read by Richard Carrow)**

On behalf of The Trustees, Adam Hyde produced a consultation document explaining what restoration work the Trustees intended to carry out, (See attached). This document was made available through both the Parish Magazine and posted individually to the properties immediately surrounding the common. A majority of the Trustees are in favour of the proposals, a position reflected in the general response from Burghclere Inhabitants.

The Rural Payments Agency were approached in order to seek funding to undertake the required work, with Simon Melville making the necessary applications. This application was successful, providing funding for annual general maintenance, plus an initial one-off grant to allow for a very limited number of tall Pine trees to be removed, ( about 40 trees from the more than 2000 that cover the common). The Trustees are in the process of engaging a contractor to undertake this work at an appropriate time. Once having seen the effect of this small scale removal and having gained overall general approval from Burghclere Inhabitants, the Trustees would continue to seek further funding to allow for continued reduction of the large Pine trees, but again only done annually on a small scale to allow for all affected to offer their opinions on the effect of the removals. Once the initial tree removals have been completed, the Trustees will ask for a response from the Burghclere Inhabitants on ascertain if there is overall agreement that the work has/has not been successful.

Simon Melville continues to carry out maintenance work on the common, assisted by Green Gym and students.

The trustees were approached by one Burghclere Resident who was questioning if it was appropriate for her son and his friends to ride their motorised bicycles along the pathways within the common. It had been noticed that, during the very wet winter, the tracks were becoming rutted as a result of this activity. The general view of the Trustees is that the common is not a suitable location for this type of activity and would respectfully ask that it is used only by pedestrians/dog walkers. This ensures that the tracks are not being turned into rutted unnavigable paths and minimises the safety issues of relatively high speed electric bikes coming into contact with pedestrians.

## **10. Footpaths – Richard Carrow**

Richard Carrow read the following:

The parish footpaths remain in good – if still rather wet in places – condition. We are aware that the boardwalk in the Alders Wood just to the East of West Street is deteriorating. This will be the next big project over the next couple of years. Very many thanks to landowners, farmers and residents whose properties abut footpaths for their help in clearing paths and fallen trees, and to walkers who help snip back the odd twig or bramble. If you see something amiss e.g. a broken sign or stile, please report it on HCC's website and inform Amanda, the new Footpaths Officer.

Again, the usual reminder: please maintain your hedges where they might impede vehicles or pedestrians. You are under a legal obligation to do so and this is permissible even during the nesting season. Guidance can be found on B&DBC or WBC's websites.



## **11. Planning – Richard Carrow**

Richard Carrow read the following:

The good news is that our revised Neighbourhood Plan was ‘made’ by full Council on 18 May last year. Furthermore, the changes to the National Planning Policy Framework announced last Dec now mean NPs need only be reviewed every 5 years, meaning helps us against speculative developers up to 2028. Frustratingly, we do still have to shout hard to ensure planners take it into account. We were very disappointed that the Planning Inspectorate itself failed to do so with one recent application.

B&DBC launched their Regulation 18 consultation on the Local Plan earlier this year on which we commented. Broadly supportive, they have added a Valued Landscape designation. We want this to include the area between the Church and St Michael’s School as it incorporates 3 Key Views. At present the VLD Western edge runs along the Burghclere Road and then down ‘Crash Alley’. If accepted this should further help arguments against any more planning applications on that site or in that area.

I said last year we were conscious of the politics of housing. This is getting more acute as an election draws closer. The current draft Local Plan does not envisage any housing for Burghclere for the first 5 years. And when the Local Plan is made around end 2025, the protection against speculative development will be further extended to 2030. While this is good news, I am uncertain how sustainable this is and, notwithstanding a very good briefing from the Council Leader in January, we can expect a new Government to apply greater pressure on local councils to build more houses. I think we might then become vulnerable. My view is that we should be proactive, monitor closely what the government plans are, and be prepared in a few years’ time to run – from scratch – another NP exercise, looking specifically to add more houses to the village. It would need a new team, developing their own assumptions, but building on our previous work. I recognize this might not be popular among some residents, but I think it realistic. As I step aside, I leave you with that thought and I’m happy to answer any questions on this topic.

While I still have the floor I want as a valediction to show more appreciation to parish council members for their work and support. In response to a letter from Kit Malthouse, I said the following: they are a diverse, well-motivated and talented group, who have dealt with and continue to manage a wide range of projects for the benefit of the local community. We don’t get everything right. We can’t do everything. But we are focused on getting things done. The parish (you and me) is fortunate in having such high-calibre local volunteers representing this tier of local government, and I am sure they will be very successful in the future.

## **12. Presentation to Richard Carrow**

Cllr Crowley led a presentation of gifts to Richard Carrow with the following tribute:

Richard was co-opted as Parish Chairman exactly 7 years ago on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2017. Time flies and it’s with some sadness but a lot of thanks we say farewell from the Council and

Pinder. Something tells me that Richard will still find it difficult to stay away from supporting the village in some shape or form as is already the case.

Richard has been a very visible and approachable face of the Parish Council and Pinder Trust these 7 years.

A few examples of the work that Richard has led and contributed to:

- Working with many neighbouring Parish Councils to share our experiences and learn from theirs fostering an excellent collaborative environment.
- Leading the work on the development of the Neighbourhood plan and its ongoing revisions. An immense effort on design, communication and community team building.
- Planning with all its myriad details and peculiarities intricacies
  - Active representation of Village position on planning applications at B&DC planning reviews
- Engaging at many levels with the County and Borough on a wide-ranging number of topics including
- Highways and
- His personal favourite, Thames Water
- Contributions to Local projects including.
  - Improvements to the Play Area
  - New paths (such as the new one in the Millennium Garden).
- Trimming and hedge-cutting of footpaths
- Practical support on the upkeep of the Portal Hall
  - Windows
  - Cleaning Gutters
  - .... even built a trolley for the hall tables.
- Only on Saturday he put down some tarmac outside the entrance to the Portal Hall

The list goes on.

These are just a few of the examples of Richards fantastic support and effort in support of the village.

So, you can understand when we say thank you Richard for your support and efforts these years. We say farewell but not goodbye and would like to present this small token of our appreciation. We hope you enjoy its use on your many outings out walking throughout the village.

### **13. Open Forum**

**Questions raised during the evening included the following:**

- Hants CC’s response to water quality.
- Progress on B&DBC’s proposed placement of “community skips”
- Parking in the village.

There being no further questions, the meeting closed to enable attendees to engage in informal discussions over refreshments.

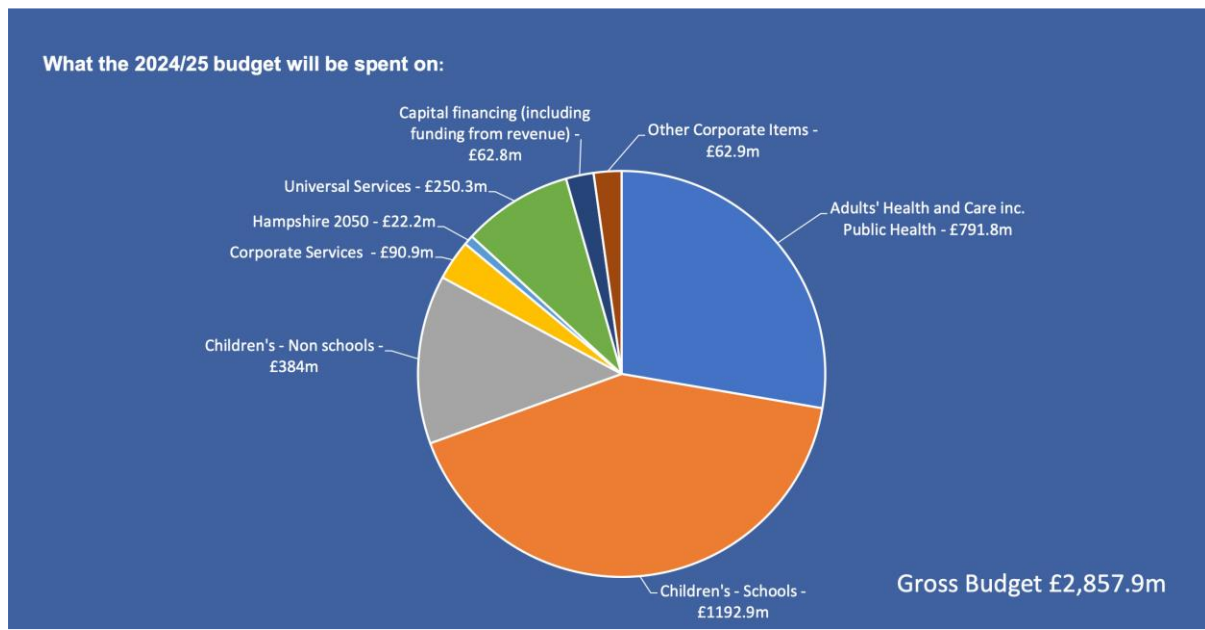
## Appendix A

### County Councillor Thacker Report

#### HCC budget 2024-25/2025-26

##### Revenue budget

The County Council’s budget for the next financial year has been approved by the council. This budget covers £2.6 billion of public spending on the ongoing delivery of important local services to Hampshire’s 1.4 million residents.



Our projections show that while we will be able to balance our budget for the next two years, by 2026 there will be an anticipated shortfall of £132 million. We therefore are looking to find ways to bridge that gap should support from Government not be forthcoming.

HCC has consulted over proposals covering how we would deliver:

1. **Adult social care charges**
2. **Adult social care grant schemes**
3. **Competitive (one-off) grant schemes**

4. Hampshire Cultural Trust grant
5. Highways maintenance
6. Highways winter service
7. Homelessness Support Services:
8. Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs)
9. Library stock
10. Passenger transport
11. Rural countryside parking
12. School Crossing Patrols
13. Street lighting

#### **Timeline:**

January – March 2024 Consultation

June 2024 Select Committee Scrutiny

July 2024 Consultation

From April 2025 Implementation

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/aboutthecouncil/haveyoursay/consultations/future-services-consultation>

#### Capital programme

The County Council also approved the spending of £880.6 million over the next three years on capital programs, to help boost jobs and the local economy, the quality of the environment and contribute towards the County Council's commitment to tackling climate change. This brings the County Council's four-year total investment in the fabric of Hampshire to £1.4 billion.

**Transforming in-house care for older people** The County Council operates in-house care homes for older people and will invest **£173m** on new specialist nursing and complex dementia care, as well as short term pre-and post-hospital support, to better meet the needs of the county's ageing population. It will increase the overall number of beds available to local people from 900 to 1,000, within a network of 13 homes. Approving these plans secures the long-term future of our in-house homes ensuring they remain in the council's ownership.

#### Local matters 2023/2024

##### Highways

Lots of potholes had to be filled.

Surface repairs and patching (as at 12 April 2024)

- **A343, north of Highclere – completed**
- **Whitchurch Town approaches to the railway station - completed**
- **Tufton Lane - patched**
- **Kingclere – planned/in progress**
- **Foxs Lane, Highclere - planned/ in progress**
- **Harroway – planned/ in progress**
- 

**Major road degradation issue on the roads in and around St Mary Bourne** because of the tankers – raised with HCC, whose management have responded that legislation allows a Highway Authority to recharge any costs incurred to repair damage caused as a result of works undertaken by a utility company. Southern Water are aware of this legislation and do

worked with the County Council on covering the costs of highway repairs that can be attributed to their actions. Highway officers will be inspecting the roads in the vicinity and the process outlined used as and when appropriate.

**The Drove, Crux Easton** – repairs have been delayed due to adverse weather. Update requested.

**Carriageway water issues on Harts Lane** – jetting planned for end of May.

**Carriageway water issue on Well St** - further structural work planned for autumn 2024.

#### County Councillor Grants

My annual devolved Councillor Grant pot is for projects or events across the Whitchurch and the Cleres Division. Please contact me if you have a project or event that will benefit residents. In the meantime, please see the list of projects that benefitted from my grant funding last year:

My £8000 Councillor Devolved Grant Budget for the financial year 23/2024 was shared amongst the following 12 projects.

Applicant	Project
Burghclere Parish Council	Coronation party
Whitchurch parish fete	Whitchurch Parish Fete
Whitchurch In Bloom	Whitchurch In Bloom Infrastructure Upgrade
Whitchurch Conservation Group	Whitchurch Children's Festival 2023 - places for free school meal children
Busy Bees Preschool (Kingsclere)	Busy Bees Recovery and Sustainability Project
North Hampshire Cruse Bereavement Support	Providing specialist 1:1 Bereavement Support to reduce waiting list
Kingsclere Village Club	Updated Electrical Infrastructure Project
Whitchurch In Bloom	Whitchurch in Bloom - Workhorse Truck
Whitchurch Conservation Group	Whitchurch Arts and Crafts Festival website
St Mary Bourne Bowling Club	Training for new Green Maintenance Team
Newtown Parish Council	Jonathan Hill car park repairs
The Westridge Trust	To replace a broken Memorial Bench & install a new Westridge Studio sign

Tom Thacker  
Hampshire County Councillor  
Whitchurch and the Cleres Division

## **Appendix B**

### **Borough Councillor Izett Report**

Dear Councillors and Burghclere parish residents, I am sorry not to be with you tonight for this annual assembly meeting. My report on my work for you as your borough cllr over the past year is as follows:-

The first matter I would highlight is the recent borough elections held on 2nd May. In the case of Evingar Ward, in which this parish sits, Conservative candidate Johanna Perry was elected to represent you. She joins Cllr Sam Carr and myself as your united team of borough cllrs. She won with over 50 per cent of the vote and now succeeds Cllr Graham Falconer who retired and stood down at this election. She lives in Egbury, near St Mary Bourne and will focus on that area of Evingar in particular. Although all 3 cllrs are of course elected to represent Evingar as a whole, I will continue to lead on Burghclere.

The overall position on Basingstoke Council is as follows-

Conservatives 16

Labour 11

Liberal Democrats 11

Basingstoke Independents 10

Independents 3

Greens 2

Women's Equality Party 1

The effect of this is that the current coalition of Lib Dems and all of the Independents will continue to form the administration, supported when required on key votes, by the Labour group.

As is usually the case, planning matters and in particular housing applications have loomed large over the year. Many are relatively uncontentious, such as house extensions, and gain parish council and my support. Speculative development proposals in conflict with the Local Borough Plan and the Burghclere Neighbourhood Plan are often unwelcome and challenged. As one of the most attractive places to live in the borough, Burghclere inevitably is a target for developers especially at a time when the borough is unable to demonstrate its govt set pipeline of new housing. Another attempt was made to secure consent for 25 homes on the Harts Lane site opposite Breachfield. Previously another similar scheme had been turned down both at both the borough and Inspector levels. This latest one was again disallowed by the borough largely on grounds of being in conflict with the Local and Neighbourhood Plans, again demonstrating the importance of having an up-to-date Neighbourhood Plan, something Richard Carrow and your parish council worked so hard to get approved officially by the borough in May 2023. In general, your parish council and borough cllrs work together by

engaging early with the borough's planning team to ensure that our case is effectively made to planning officers when undesirable planning applications arrive.

It is important nevertheless that a new up-to-date borough Local Plan is brought forward as soon as possible to extend the protection provided by our Neighbourhood Plan. The Conservative group in the Council does have concerns about the approach being taken by the administration, particularly on high annual housing numbers of around 850 new homes per year, because we believe there are good planning grounds to contend for lower numbers. However the key priority must be to obtain as soon as possible the added defence of a completed Local Plan for our rural areas and therefore we will of course adopt a constructive approach as an opposition party.

In September last year Orchard Homes obtained permission from the borough for 17 dwellings on Harts Lane as supported by the Neighbourhood Plan in meeting the parish's Local Plan housing allocation. It is disappointing that Orchard decided to sell the site but at some point these new homes, including Affordable homes, will be built and help to meet local housing need.

Other recurring issues have been problems of localised flooding outside Breachfield, failures connected with the Thames Water pumping station near the Clere, speeding through the village and on the B4060. I acknowledge the efforts made by your chairman and the parish council in pressing the relevant statutory bodies to take action. The responses from these bodies have often been slow and inadequate. I know also that our MP, Kit Malthouse has given his support and continues to do so. These remain ongoing challenges but as your representatives I'm sure we will carry on the good fight.

I take this opportunity of congratulating all those volunteers involved in the Burghclere Miniature Railway which has proved to be such a wonderful attraction and which gives so much pleasure to families from near and far. I am ready to give what help and influence I can bring to any plans that emerge for the Sports Club.

In closing, I would like to express my appreciation of the tremendous contribution to the parish of your chairman, Richard Carrow, who is standing down. His achievements especially in leading the complicated process of making a Neighbourhood Plan means that he leaves a lasting legacy in preserving and maintaining the character of Burghclere. Without his command of the intricacies of planning law it is doubtful we would have kept at bay some of the speculative developments that have threatened this community and continue to do so. It has been a privilege to work closely with the parish council during this time under the wise and energetic leadership of Richard. As someone who has worked with many parish chairs over the last 12 years he has set the standard.

I hope the meeting goes well and I apologise I'm not around to answer any questions or points from residents but if there are any I would be grateful if the Clerk would take a note and allow me to respond.