

CHARLTON HORETHORNE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 26TH APRIL 2025

ATTENDANCE: Cllr Archer, Cllr Lynch, Cllr McHugh, Cllr Pipe, Cllr Thornham and 9 members of the public.

Chair's Report:

- **PC:** The middle-year-of-five has been largely routine business for the Parish Council (PC) with a couple of exceptions as detailed below. To pick up on some issues from last year's report, the extreme rainfall appears finally to have normalised and long may this continue however the same might not yet be said for Somerset Council.
- **PC Grants** approved this year include:
 - **PCC £600:** for renovation works to the Lych Gate; a grant has been approved in principle, subject to the eventual costs. The PC took this unusual approach ('pre-approval' with caveats) given the difficulty in establishing a firm figure for repair to listed buildings and in order to assist the PCC in moving the matter forward.
 - **Millenium Green £750:** The continues to support the Millenium Green, which is a fantastic resource for the village and unable to raise sufficient funds on its own for the maintenance required (which is largely carried out by the Trustees at their own cost).
 - **Bonfire Night / Fireworks £200:** The village fireworks were extraordinarily well attended this year, in the absence of other local events.
 - **Village Hall £500:** Repair to neighbouring boundary wall
 - **Primary School Parents Association £400** Mathematic learning station
 - **Parish Newsletter £75:** further comment below
- **Planning:**
 - Harvest Lane remains as yet unresolved, with a number of amendments being made to the proposals over the course of the year; on those occasions that the PC has been required to submit further comment this has not altered the overall objection to the application and so, as last year, we await further developments with interest.
 - The redevelopment of Golden Valley Farm yards into four houses, if approved, would represent another relatively large project within the village. The PC supported this application with a number of caveats or observations.
 - Likewise the proposed renovation and redevelopment of the Kings Arms (forming two single storey flats using existing buildings, and erecting a new house on the pub garden) would represent a significant change within the community; the PC objected to these proposals, largely due to reservations about the impact with respect to access and safety and the long-term business impact the loss of the garden might entail.
 - Other applications for the PC's consideration over the year have largely been smaller scale alterations or extensions, though it is also notable that there have been a number of Class Q applications (for which the PC is not required to submit comments) to take advantage of the opportunity to re-purpose agricultural buildings.
- **Abri sale of Social Housing stock:** Following the of a social housing property under its management, the PC wrote to Abri in July 2024 expressing our regret that this should have happened. The explanation (that a sale was sought in the context of the likely high cost of refurbishment to an appropriate standard, and with the expectation that the funds

would be better re-invested elsewhere within their portfolio) was not unexpected but is all the more disappointing given the apparent recent marketing for sale of another Abri managed property in Manor Close (on which the PC has once again asked for a detailed explanation and expressed disappointment). Any reduction in social housing provision within the Parish is highly regrettable, and the PC will continue to do what it can to prevent any further sales.

- **Village Green:** As mentioned in last year's report, the cost of replacement of the Village Green posts in Charlton Horethorne looked to be a significant challenge due to significant cost. However, following Cllr McHugh's fundraising initiative the generosity of a large number of donors, in combination with Cllr Lynch's effective haggling for a deal and the project management and hard work of Simon Purcell the whole operation has been completed early and under-budget with surplus funds to be put towards the refurbishment of the village noticeboard. Sadly the Weeping Ash on the green, which had been taken by Ash Dieback, had to be removed – but on a positive note the stump that remains has become a feature in its own right; we look forward to hearing any further suggestions for making the most of the stump, and / or ideas for a replacement tree.
- **Parish Newsletter:** it is a delight to report that the Parish Magazine has been skilfully adapted into a newsletter, in a format that suits all: the majority being distributed by email but with a printed version available to any who would not be able to access otherwise. Dorian and John Evered have done a fantastic job and we are most grateful for their ongoing efforts.
- **Access to Charwell Fields** is possibly the most 'left-field' agenda item of the year. The Public Access Forum committee raised with the PC the possibility of accessing an area of publicly owned land at Charwell Fields (lying to the north of Sigwells). An ongoing matter, this would require either creating new public rights of way or adapting existing (or both) and it is therefore hard to predict the likely outcome as it will need detailed involvement from the private landowners, the Footpaths Officer and the Public Access Forum committee.

As ever, I would like to take the opportunity to thank my fellow Parish Councillors for their input and support over the last year; I remain grateful that there is often a difference of opinion on the matters that come before us, and hope that this will continue: I reiterate that if we were all to agree on everything, we would be failing in our duty to represent the myriad views of the Parish properly. And last but by no means least, I would like to thank our clerk, Ann, for her diligent support throughout the year both between meetings and for keeping us all in line on the night.

Village Hall: Cllr Pat Lynch

2024 was another solid year, with a number of regular hirers continuing to use the Hall (pilates, fitness, arts and crafts, bowls, country dancing, Scottish dancing, band rehearsals, Gardening Club talks etc), alongside a steady stream of individual private hirings. Evolve (fitness training) had cut back their hours, which was a slight concern, but an additional Pilates class was taking place on Friday mornings. Four events are worthy of mention (in chronological order):

- The celebration of the 80th anniversary of D-Day on 8 June. A fun, action-packed

evening which was very well attended (70+). Many thanks to Jenny Biggs and Greg Warwick for all their work beforehand and on the night.

- The Village Summer Show on 3 August, wonderful as ever.
- The 'Would I Lie to You' event in December, which was very amusing (if at times, slightly bemusing!). So much so that we may ask them to return in February next year.
- The Village Pantomime Society's (CHAPS) four performances of Mother Goose in January to great critical acclaim. Many congratulations to Brian Matthews and the rest of the team. The panto society appears to be thriving at the moment, which is excellent news for them and the village.

Our running costs remain high, in particular due to the electricity, broadband and cleaning costs. But we are pleased that we managed to negotiate a reasonable electricity contract and – looking ahead – we have just secured a cheaper 3-year deal from February 2026, which would give us a degree of certainty for the next four years. The Committee had therefore decided to keep our hire charges the same for the next 12 months, having increased them by 5% at this stage last year (private hire from £10/hour to £10.50; commercial hire from £12/hour to £12.60), which had been the first increase in 11 years. Given the cost pressures, it was likely that charges would have to be raised again next year. In terms of refurbishments, we had repaired the wall on the western edge of the garden, adjoining Milden Cottage. The bill (£2720) was shared with the owners of Milden Cottage, and we are grateful for the grant from the PC. In addition, we installed new entry gates to the garden, principally to ensure hirers can keep their children reasonably safe. Looking ahead, a major refurbishment will be needed in the kitchen this year. Unfortunately, the kitchen floor was beginning to give way, so it would have to be rebuilt. Costs were likely to be high - perhaps as much as £10k - which would include some new kitchen units and redecoration. Because of this, we would be looking to secure a grant before we carry out the repairs. The work was planned for early September, and the kitchen would be out of commission for at least 3 weeks.

The Hall is always looking for volunteers; there are eight trustees, with room for 12, so four vacancies are available.

Finally, everyone was encouraged to attend a party in the Hall on Saturday 10 May to celebrate the 80th Anniversary of VE-Day, with music (from 'The Originals'), dancing, fun and food. Tickets were now on sale from the Village Shop.

Millenium Green: (Richard Terry)

Another year which has seen good use of the Millenium Green, and a on the back of a well-attended November 5th Bonfire and Fireworks night, a generous donation to match. As ever the Millenium Green's maintenance relied on the dedication and voluntary graft of members of the Parish – and any offer of assistance would be greatly appreciated.

PCC: (Charlie Beney)

This report is made by me in my capacity as the now ex Church Warden and ex chairman of the PCC in light of my having decided not to seek re-election to these positions at the recent Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM) held on April 6th. It is important to point out that the church is now without a Church Warden as no-one stepped forward to seek election at the recent APCM Meeting. While the lack of a Church Warden is a matter of regret, it is not in and of itself something that can't be managed, and members of the newly elected PCC have between them assumed responsibility for most of the activities undertaken by the outgoing Warden. Turning to the church year, the routine of 3 services per month has been maintained along with various additional events including 3 weddings, a number of funerals and thanks-giving services, as well as marking the festivals in traditional style - Harvest, Advent, Christmas, Easter, etc. Looking ahead, the big change is that this Parish as part of what was known as the Milborne Port Benefice, now finds itself with effect from the beginning of April this year, as part of an enlarged Benefice of 8 parishes having been joined by Maperton, Blackford, and Compton Pauncefoot. This is a challenge for our vicar Rev. Rona, and as a consequence, we in Charlton Horethorne are losing the regular 9am Holy Communion service held on the first Sunday of each month. This measure will allow Rona to ensure she can take a Communion at least once a month in each of the 8 parishes now making up the Benefice - newly renamed as the "Milborne benefice". The changes to the Benefice reflect the ever-growing stress on rural parishes and on the Church of England's ability to offer meaningful ministry in rural areas. There is an ever increasing shortage of everything needed for a thriving rural church scene; vicars, parishioners - especially younger people, money, volunteers, etc. In short, our Parish and our church building face a bleak future unless these key ingredients start to become more widely available again in the next 3, 5, 10 years. Sadly it is my responsibility to alert those of you present at this meeting, as well as the wider community, that our church faces a real danger of having to close its doors unless we see a significant change in numbers attending on a regular basis. The bottom line is that an ever dwindling congregation that averages 14-15 at most with an average age the far side of 80 is not going to be able to sustain the church in the form that it is today. As I say, the "nuclear" option for lack of a better word, will be closure and possible deconsecration. I am saying this tonight to ask that we all reflect on this situation and ask ourselves if this is really what we want, and what can we do to ensure such a sad turn of events doesn't become a reality.

CLT: (Charlie Beney on behalf of the CLT Chair & Board)

I am reading the following statement as a board member of the CLT on behalf of our Chairman Mark Hughes who is on holiday, and the wider board.

As in previous years, the CLT has continued patient efforts to seek a viable way to provide the village with the 6-10 low cost affordable homes that the Community Plans identify as required. Hitherto these efforts have yet to result in meaningful progress. One potential avenue being pursued relates to the church Glebe field adjacent to the Village Primary School. This pursuit has thus far proved fruitless, facing a number of challenges; these include access, ownership and highways issues as well as engagement with the Church. The CLT Board is aware that a rumour for lack of a better term has emerged of "positive

momentum”; in relation to this land - this is something of an exaggeration even if the door to the Diocese still remains open. At the recent AGM of the CLT, members were advised that the Board was and is working on another approach to trying to trigger progress. This approach is being put together with the expert input of a leading member of Middlemarch – a well known and respected group advising CLTs throughout the South West. This approach is currently still being finalised and as such has not been fully signed off by the CLT board and consequently cannot be shared beyond the confines of those working on it at present. As and when the approach is finalised and approved by the board, all relevant parties will be notified of the salient points.