

Bourtons Parish Council - Chairmans Report April 2026

Once again we've had a busy year in the Bourtons. Most of our time is taken up with planning applications and enforcement issues. Our assistance clerk, Steve Bowen monitors and responds to planning applications and we are grateful to him for all that he does to liaise with planning officers and make our voice heard on behalf of our residents. Steve has a wealth of experience in planning matters and we have benefitted from his diligence over the last few years. I have been dealing with most of the enforcement issues in the parish and speak to the enforcement team weekly to update them on activities.

Our Clerk and Financial officer, Rachel Pheasey, keeps a close eye on everything and her management of our financial situation is exemplary. She has also successfully transferred our banking arrangements with Unity Bank which allows us to manage everything on line rather than using a cheque book system to pay our suppliers.

With only six parish councillors there is a lot to cover but each councillor takes responsibility for the tasks we need to manage.

Councillor Andrew Johnson, vice chair and governor at Cropredy school, reports on local health care issues and keeps in regular touch with the surgery in Cropredy as well as monitoring the situation at the Horton Hospital. As you may be aware, services provided by the Horton have been reduced over the last few years but we have been supporting any efforts made to maintain or even increase the services which can be provided locally. We are also supporting any options to provide a bigger surgery in Cropredy to meet the needs of local residents.

Councillor Jo Beales, one of our Little Bourton councillors, in conjunction with Councillor Steve Martin, oversees everything in connection with the allotments as well as being our 'Fix my Street Super User' managing the identification and notification of highways problems in Little Bourton. Jo's daytime job with the NHS based in Warwick also provides us with some useful insights when we are discussing the local health care situation.

Councillor Gilly Duckworth, also based in Little Bourton, has a wealth of management experience which was more than useful when she oversaw the Little Bourton improvement programme. Gilly and her husband have also agreed to provide a location for a second defibrillator in Little Bourton.

Councillor Gill Brooks is our representative on the Bourtons Community Hall committee. Since this is one of the parish council's most significant past projects, her involvement gives us the opportunity to support the Community Hall management committee more fully.

Last but not least, our Councillor Steve Martin has proved to be a brilliant addition to the team – he has taken on so many of the practical tasks which we would otherwise have had to pay contractors to carry out. He's dealt with the condensation issues we had at the village hall; supported the work needed at the allotments; sorted out the new dog bin installations and always makes himself available for the myriad of tasks which come up throughout the year. He is also a member of the Community Speedwatch team and reports on their activities each month.

Overall, together we work over 100 hours each month to manage our responsibilities and I am so grateful to my fellow councillors and clerks who continue to keep the council running and dare I say much better than many local parish councils. Whilst our clerks are paid officers, our councillors of course, give their time on a voluntary basis and for this I am more than grateful because it makes my job as chairman so much easier than it would otherwise be.

To keep the parish running on all cylinders, we also rely on the services generously given by many of our residents: Ian Cooper co-ordinates the Community Speedwatch team as well as the Neighbourhood Watch scheme; Jane Foster Smith keeps an eye on the maintenance of our defibrillators; Martin Damen looks after our parish clock in the bell tower; Jon Pheasey is the 'FixmyStreet Super User' for Great Bourton; Pete Haynes works quietly in the back ground to provide water at the Burial Ground; Maurice Prew and Simon Bull undertake tasks from time to time; many residents report problems with the public footpaths and also join in our efforts to keep the parish free from litter. Forgive me if I have left anyone off the list.

Both the Community Hall and Village Hall each have a committee who make sure that we have community venues which add to the parish's social needs and provide community spaces where folks can get together.

This thought then brings me to thank the 'Save the Bell Group' (STBG) who have worked tirelessly to prevent the Bell Inn becoming a residence. You will know that the application lodged by the owner was rejected unanimously by the Planning Committee and subsequently rejected by the Appeal Inspector. I have to say that our involvement in this was minimal other than listing the Bell as a Community Asset but we were happy to support their efforts because they were diligent and professional in their endeavours and their submission was supported by so many of our residents.

This particular event leads me to remind us all as councillors: we are here to represent our residents in all matters which affect our community, whether they be planning issues; potholes or anything else which may prevent us from enjoying all the things which we cherish here in the Bourtons.

We liaise with the County Council and District Council on a regular basis – this includes the planning officers, the enforcement team, the Highways department, the Transport department and the Footpath Officer as well as the County and District councillors.

So often we have to rely on them, since we have very little authority on anything outside of our parish but we continue to keep a good working relationship with those who have the power to do what is needed on our behalf.

Going forward, we expect to see further planning applications from developers who will no doubt respond to the government's latest mission to 'Build, Build, Build'. To support their aim, under the new rules now in force, local councils will no longer have their say on large housing developments if they have a mind to refuse them. If the Planning Committee votes to refuse a scheme of 150+ homes, they are now legally required to notify the Secretary of State. The Government can then 'call in' the application and make the final decision themselves which is in direct conflict with the promise they made to encourage local decision-making.

Not only that, the government's aim to provide greener energy will bring further applications for solar installations and we are currently working the Hanwell Parish Council to monitor the situation with the Vistry application, which is expected to be brought before the planning Committee on April 16th.

In conclusion, may I sincerely thank all those who support the Parish Council's endeavours to take care of our two villages.

Sue Upton - Chairman