

## Annual Parish Meeting - May 2025

### REPORT FROM THE CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL

I'd like to begin by expressing sincere thanks to our Councillors, clerks, and grounds staff for their hard work and dedication throughout the year. A heartfelt thank you also goes to the many volunteer groups across the Parish. The commitment and effort of all these individuals play an essential role in making Chalford the vibrant and welcoming community we are proud to call home. As in previous years my report touches on just a few examples of what we have been able to achieve together over the past 12 months.

#### Representing the Views of the Community

This year the Parish Council continued to support the Community Business Group in their efforts to retain the **Old Neighbourhood Inn** as a community pub. This included successfully opposing a planning application to change the use of the building to a house. Although a community owned pub was not the ultimate outcome, without the Community Business Group's efforts, we would not have retained this important asset of community value, so a big thank you to them. We are delighted that Wes and Rosie have now taken on the pub, and we wish them continued success.

We know how popular **Chalfest** is for many local people and are keen for it to flourish. But we also recognise that Chalfest is not welcomed by everyone, particularly those living near the event. So, as part of our discussions with the Chalfest organisers on a new three-year contract, we are introducing new measures dealing with noise and vibration, traffic and parking and anti-social behaviour to ensure that we protect residents' interests.

This year, we intend to consider whether to move forward with a **Neighbourhood Development Plan**. The plan would help guide the future development and planning of the Parish, aiming to respond to change while preserving the distinctive character of our area. Should we decide to proceed, we will establish a Steering Group that includes residents, and there will be plenty of opportunities for everyone in the Parish to contribute, helping to shape a plan that truly reflects the views and aspirations of our community.

#### Looking after the Parish and our Environment

Our Works Committee has a large workload managing all parish, charity, and wood land. This includes responsibility for the upkeep and safety of all the pleasure grounds and play areas.

We are delighted to have recently completed the new fenced **Toddlers' Play Area at Bussage Pleasure Ground**. After nine months of planning with significant input from the working group the play area opened during Easter weekend and appears to be very well used. We are very grateful to Enovert for the grant they gave us to support this project. The Works Committee are now starting to prepare proposals for new equipment at Valley Pleasure Ground and will be seeking additional grant funding.

We continue to discuss the feasibility of setting up a composting scheme in Chalford with the **Community Composting Group**. This initiative has a lot of support, but it needs a suitable location to be a success, so we are appealing to landowners for a piece of land to accommodate the scheme. Please do contact the clerks if you own some land or are aware of a potentially suitable site.

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Members of the **Footpath Volunteers Group** have continued their fabulous work. This year they have installed a safety fence alongside the footpath at Rack Hill and repaired the wall along France Lynch Pleasure Ground. They've also cleared the Public Right of Way from Old Bussage along the side of Toadsmoor valley to Blackness Banks Nature Reserve and installed a pedestrian gate to improve access to the Reserve.

#### Looking after the Needs of Parishioners

The Parish Council continues to provide support to the **Friday Lunch Club**. This is a volunteer led event that takes place at Frith Youth Centre every Friday, providing a warm space, light lunch, and company.

Our **Mini Food Bank** at the Parish Centre is a life line for many parishioners. At last year's annual meeting of the parish, we made a call for donations to help support this important service. We were overjoyed to receive a large financial contribution from one of our parishioners, which has made a significant impact.

Speeding and road safety continue to be major concerns in the Parish. I'm sure you will be aware of the horrible accident at **Fourways Crossroads** late last year. This has given us new impetus to work with local District and County councillors and residents to lobby for improvements to the safety of this junction, and we have recently asked Gloucestershire County Council for a traffic order to implement a reduced speed limit on the approach to the junction.

Following a call for volunteers, the **Community Speedwatch Group** now has six active members and is carrying out weekly speed checks at various locations across the parish. The mobile Vehicle Activated Sign is also back in use, and a fixed speed camera has been installed on The Ridge. Early indications suggest it is having a positive impact on driver behaviour. While too many motorists are still exceeding the speed limit, overall speeds have decreased since the camera was introduced. We are now exploring the feasibility of installing additional cameras in other parts of the parish to further improve road safety.

#### Budget

The final position for the year to the end of March 2025 was a slight **underspend of around £7,000** compared with budget. There were some savings on our ash die back spending, but the underspend was mostly due to higher than budgeted income from bank interest, allotments and EV chargers. The surplus has been transferred to General Reserves in accordance with our financial policy.

The approved total **spending budget for 2025/26 is £236,346**. This represents an increase of £5,317 compared with last year. The largest additional expenses are staff costs (which have risen due to the national pay award and increased national insurance contributions) and greatly increased utility costs. Allowing for budgeted income and a transfer from this year's surplus via General Reserves, the **precept requirement was £225,711**. In practice this has led to your Council Tax rising by 4.8% compared to the year which has just ended.

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#### **Changes to the Parish Council**

Finally, I'd like to reflect on some of the changes that have occurred at the Parish Council over the past year.

Sadly, following a short illness one of our councillors, David Wood, passed away in January. David was a highly respected, active and dedicated Parish Councillor for over 20 years, and he is greatly missed by us all. A plaque in David's memory is now in place at Bussage Pleasure Ground at the new toddlers play area, as this was a project that he was particularly passionate about.

Chalford is a large parish, and for many years we have faced challenges in attracting new councillors and keeping all positions filled. So I'm very pleased to report that this year we welcomed three new councillors: Linda Golding, Sharon Humberstone, and Tim Woodfine. With their arrival, all 15 councillor seats are now filled – a great achievement for the Parish Council!

Some of you may have noticed that we have recently said goodbye to the Parish Council Land Rover - Vera! After over 20 years of service Vera has retired and we have a new Daihatsu Hijet Tipper, which has much lower emissions and running costs!

At a broader level, many of you will be aware of the government's devolution proposals. Whatever the final outcome, these changes will affect how services are delivered across Gloucestershire. We are engaging in discussions with other councils to ensure we have a voice in shaping the government's decisions and we hope that, through this process, the vital role that town and parish councils play in their communities will be recognised in any future reorganisation.