

Barrington Parish Council Chairman's Report March 2025

The year 2024-5 has been to a great degree one of continuance rather than of any great change in the parish. That is not to say, of course, that there have been no changes at all. Within the council itself, Cllr Jan de Haldevang stepped down as Chair, after a long and effective term of office, and I took on the position. It is worth, at this point, to thank Cllr de Haldevang for his tireless and effective work, including, in my own time as a resident, in leading us through the Covid pandemic, and in his notably successful efforts as one of the leading figures of WIVTAG in its campaign against the unilaterally imposed Burford traffic restrictions of 2021.

Overall, the overarching issues facing us all have remained much the same. This is not due to any lack of effort on the part of the parish and its residents: far from it. But rather due to their being part of wider regional, or even national, problems over which we have little control. These, it seems to me, are – in no particular order:

- Traffic
- Water Pollution
- Rural Crime and Littering

The question of traffic volume and behaviour has been of particular local concern for two reasons: firstly, the regional issue raised by the volume of HGV traffic through Burford. As already mentioned, the crisis created by Burford's 2021 ban was successfully diffused, but the underlying problem remains. But at least Burford Town and Oxford County Councils seem to have accepted that this must be tackled by a regional plan reached through a much broader consensus. This is ongoing and there is no news to report, but WIVTAG remains active in representing our interests.

The more immediately local issue of traffic focuses primarily on the increasingly busy rat run from the Rissingtons to the A40. The speed cameras installed on the road have shown the scale of the problem, and the police are aware not only of the figures, but also of the deplorable vandalization of the cameras. The question remains one that we are actively monitoring (and we are all deeply grateful to Cllr Jan de Haldevang for his Herculean labour on this project) and egregious offenders are being reported to the police, but we realise that the ongoing development in the Rissingtons means that this is not going to disappear by itself; furthermore, the National Trust's proposals for the Sherborne estate might exacerbate the issue. We are in contact with Sherborne Parish Council and are pleased that CDC have accepted representation by neighbouring parishes at the first Policy EN18 Community Consultation Group meeting on 8 May. We also remain in discussions over the lowering of the speed limit through the villages to 20mph.

Regarding water pollution, the health of the Windrush is a disgrace that has received national attention as part of a major national issue. The WASP action group is at the forefront of activist efforts here which we are involved in, and Cllr Alex Pierre-Traves has my considerable thanks for his work with them. But sadly, there is little at a local level that can be done (although what is possible, we are doing and shall continue to do), including writing, along with other councils, an open letter protesting against the proposed Thames Water restructuring. Local voices were sadly ignored in the High Court's ruling, but the case is now (at time of writing) being reviewed at the Court of Appeal.

Crime and littering (including fly tipping) remain similarly ongoing and unhappily show little sign of abating. We continue to encourage residents to participate actively in the villages' Neighbourhood Watch schemes and WhatsApp groups, and I'm hugely grateful to Cllr Sue

Cleal and to Helen Lord for their great help in running these groups, which are having a real and valuable effect in fostering a sense of community in our villages. I do also strongly recommend that all residents join Gloucestershire Constabulary's online Community Alerts Scheme.

At this wider regional level, it is worth noting the December 2024 publication of the Government's White Paper on local government reform. This proposes to replace county and district/city councils (for the Barringtons these are of course Gloucestershire and Cotswold respectively) with unitary councils, as well as establishing wider Strategic Authorities led by directly-elected mayors. This is likely to happen over the life of this Parliament, rather than immediately, and we will have to see what implications this has for the Barringtons.

2024 may have seen little immediate change in these broad issues, despite ongoing developments, and one feels at times like falling back on Voltaire's celebrated conclusion from *Candide* that 'il faut cultiver notre jardin'. In this, I feel, we can be proud of what that our villages have achieved this year.

Our annual round of events began with the Spring Litter Pick in April, and it was extremely heartening to see the turnouts for this and the later Autumn Pick. The rising levels of litter in the parish are undoubtedly linked to the rising traffic levels mentioned earlier, and our consequent switch from one to two such annual events makes a huge difference in doing what we can to alleviate the unsightliness inflicted on us all by a few selfish offenders. I'm personally very thankful to all our volunteers, and also to Terence and everyone at The Fox for their hospitality, fortifying us with breakfast and coffee.

This was followed on 6 June by the celebratory lighting of a Beacon in Barrington Park to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of the D-Day landings. I and everyone who attended are enormously grateful to Richard and Catherine Wingfield for so generously allowing this to be held in such a spectacular location and to them and their team for looking after us so well. This memorable event was followed by a remarkable Flower show in July where happily, after the drenching in 2023, the weather turned out fair enough for the spectacular display put on by the Red Devils who jumped into the arena and turned what is always a very happy and special day into one so remarkable that our villages even went viral on TikTok and Instagram in what I suspect may be a first for the Barringtons. I am again thankful to Cllr de Haldevang for his remarkable work in this, and to the sponsors of the jump. I would also at this point like to thank Minkie Puddick for all her unstinting work over the years in the fete and so many other ways in the Parish and wish her and H all the very best in their move: our loss is Wales's gain!

After another (and happily alliterative) successful September Strim, Stream and Soup in Little Barrington, the year ended with the very well-attended and greatly enjoyed Advent Drinks in the Little Barrington Reading Room, a memorable occasion that showed once again how lucky we are that even in challenging times we are able to enjoy such a strong, supportive and vibrant little community.



Chairman