

Chairman's Report 2024/25

Another year has slipped by and village life carries on as normal. There have been various comings and goings over the year and there are a number of new faces around the village. Some are permanent, some are property owners but periodic occupiers, others are renters here for a limited time only and there are, of course, short term holiday visitors from time to time. But all are very welcome and the only thing we would hope is that they come with a positive attitude to try and help maintain the reputation that Evenlode quite rightly has as being a friendly village.

It has been a good year for village social activities. The stand out event was probably the village fete, the first one held since 2019. As is ever the way, the success of the fete was very much due to the collective efforts of many people. However, a special mention must go to Penny who was very much the driving force both behind it being held and also the overall organisation to the fete itself. The fete proved to be a success in terms of raising funds for the church and the village hall but, more importantly, it was an excellent community event both in the build up and also the day itself. Unfortunately, the attendance numbers were possibly stymied slightly by the somewhat inclement weather which, although not wholly disastrous, didn't totally cooperate. But it was a good event nonetheless.

November saw the usual bonfire party which was very successful. It didn't rain on us and I think it was generally agreed that the firework display was of an excellent standard for such a small village. Other events included a most enjoyable Call My Wine Bluff evening, more recently, a very excellent Quiz Night. It is great to see the village coming together for events like these and considerable thanks are due to the many people who were involved in making them such a success. Not only are they useful fundraisers but they help keep a vibrant community feel within the village. Apart from the one off events, the usual informal village drinks evenings have been held periodically through the year and have generally been well attended, even on the darkest winter nights. These events are often attended by a number of 'regulars' but they are, of course, open to all, everyone is welcome and it's always nice to see new faces. Lastly, on this topic, the village hall committee is always keen to hear about any ideas for further uses for the hall so if anyone has any flashes of inspiration in this regard please have a chat with one of the committee members.

Although this report strictly covers the period to the 31st March I did want to comment on the recent improvements to the hall as by this time next year it will be old news. It is now looking a lot smarter having been completely redecorated externally together with the provision of new gutters and downpipes. There has also been internal upgrading with the fitting of new cisterns and floor coverings in the toilets together with some other minor items. Many thanks go to Penny and Shrimp for all the organisation that was involved, including a lot of liaising between the various contractors.

Other works recently carried out in the village include substantial improvements to the drainage in the bridleway beside the church. Those that use this on a regular basis will know that faulty land drainage has meant that sections of it have been virtually impassable during the winter months. Hopefully, this will now be a thing of the past and thanks should go to Jamie for instigating this work and seeing it through to a conclusion. The cost was in part met by the PC but we also had a kind contribution from a fund which the then GCC councillor Mark M-C held for community based projects such as this and together with a generous donation from Evenlode Investments. Apart from the drainage works, the bridleway has also been improved by the recent addition of a new gate at the top which is considerably easier to negotiate than the old one. Minor items also attended to over the course of the year included having a number of the overgrown trees on the green cut back together with the removal of a small number of stiles to make some of the paths around the village easier to negotiate for the less agile amongst us. Thanks are due to Julia who arranged for a gate to be fitted at the end of the path by Rose Terrace where one of the stiles had been removed. The cost of replacing the damaged bench in Green Lane was met by the Coal Charity and many thanks to Tim who both sourced and installed it.

This time last year Evenlode Investments were in the early stages of their development at Home Farm Barns. Work has proceeded steadily and should now be entering its final phase. A few months ago Evenlode Investments were kind enough to arrange a site visit for any villagers who were keen to see the works in progress. It was a most interesting visit and it was good to see how they put their ESG principles into practice in terms of trying to carry out the development in the most sustainable and energy efficient way possible. Although they are not yet operating from the site as a company, they have made a great effort to engage with the local community. Apart from being keen to make sure the village was aware of their proposals for the site right from the initial stages and inviting residents to view the work in progress they have also been very generous. As already mentioned, they made a significant contribution towards the cost of upgrading the damaged drainage in the bridleway beside the church and they were also one of the sponsors of the village fete. I know that some residents had or have reservations about their presence in the village but I remain optimistic that they will prove to be good neighbours.

Elsewhere in the village, there is inevitably building work being undertaken at various properties and it is undoubtedly the case that as some projects finish others will be started. Probably the most prominent of these will be the development of the Little orchard site once planning consent is eventually forthcoming. This has been pending for some considerable time but hopefully it will be possible for work to start relatively shortly .

Looking outside the parish, this time last year we were pleased that the proposed development behind Tescos at Stow had been 'knocked back' but were concerned about the prospect of the development of around an extra 1500 houses being built in Moreton. A lot has changed in the intervening period with a new government apparently committed to building more houses more

quickly and the way things are shaping up, it could be that if we get away with only an extra 1500 properties in the coming years we will have done well. With the impending local government reorganisation and the shifting planning rules and regulations the whole thing is in a state of flux and it is impossible to know how it will be resolved. However, it seems apparent that there will be considerably more development in Moreton and that this will probably take place over many years. Most concern locally seems to centre around the risk of yet more houses being built without proper upgrading to the local infrastructure. In particular, concerns revolve around increased flooding risks, further pollution of the Evenlode river, additional traffic congestion and more strain on schools and health services. As residents all we can do is try to be aware of matters as they progress and object to proposals when we have the opportunity to do so and we feel that there are valid grounds. Supporting organizations like Moreton Against Overdevelopment will also help.

Evenlode continues as a 'dark skies' village and the PC appreciates the efforts of all those residents who do what they can to support this objective, even if sometimes it is something which they themselves may not feel particularly strongly about.

Mark M-C stood down as our local GCC councillor at the recent local elections and I would like to thank him for all his support over the years in trying to safeguard the interests of the parish. I would also like to welcome his replacement Daryl Corps, and I am sure I speak for all my fellow councillors in saying we look forward to working with him. A note of thanks is also due to David Cunningham, our CDC councillor, for all the help and assistance he has given over the past year.

Lastly, and perhaps it should have been first, I would like to thank Jan once again for all the excellent work she does as clerk to the PC. She devotes a lot of time and effort on this and the healthy state of the PC finances is due in no small part to the fact that she does so without any form of remuneration.

Chris Johnston