

Thorp Arch Annual Parish Meeting 2024 – Chairman’s report

It’s a role I definitely didn’t want initially and one that I thought I would give 3 years at the most. Whilst it’s a demanding role there is a certain level of satisfaction when plans eventually come to fruition. I am prepared to continue fulfilling this role for now despite the continuing frustrations this year. Yet again work we wish to carry out or be carried out has been delayed by external factors, most of which are related to cost cutting and the pressures city councils are under.

The areas I cover will be similar to last year and in some cases little has changed but I will summarise the work we have undertaken and try to explain where things have not progressed as we would have wished.

Councillors and Clerk

I say this every year but will say again; we could do nothing without the support of residents who put themselves forward to be councillors and without the expertise of our Officer to the Council - Tina. She provides the support and guidance we need to function lawfully and I’m always amazed at how much she accomplishes in the fairly small number of hours we pay her for. I will say again I could not and would not take on the role of chair without her.

This is a repeat of last year but I’d also like to thank our councillors for giving their time, energies and expertise to make Thorp Arch a pleasant place to live. Please remember that (apart from Tina) we are all volunteers who choose to spend a lot of our time working on your behalf. We may not always make decisions you agree with but we have tried our best and Tina always ensures we follow the relevant legislation and make decisions together that are lawful. If you have an issue with work we have done please make sure you read agendas, minutes and sign up for the newsletter so you can see how and why decisions have been made. Following the uncontested elections in May we had 5 residents volunteer for six vacancies and shortly after co-opted our sixth councillor, as were able to increase the number of Councillors we have in Thorp Arch. We now have a full complement and for that I am very grateful. Each councillor brings different skills to the role and I think we have an excellent mix of abilities and ages. It is so good to have some younger members on the team now. Whilst I wouldn’t wish to particularly single any one out we are very grateful for Cllr Ernest Sugier joining us who is a resident on Chartford development. It is always good to have a representative from what is now the larger part of Thorp Arch

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

The introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is really a double-edged sword. Whilst it brings significant sums to small parish councils to be spent on infrastructure it significantly increases the workload of councillors including ensuring all relevant legislation and reporting are adhered to and, for example, putting contracts out to tender. I remind

you that whilst legislation does not mandate it we surveyed all existing residents in February 2022 and used the results of that survey to identify project priorities.

Having started work on the most popular project (a footpath up Wood Lane) in May 2022, we now have a specification and have finally received an agreement in principle with LCC to proceed. Once some final details are confirmed the next step will be putting the work out to tender. Cllr Edward Harrowsmith has been extremely helpful in ensuring we proceed with this project in the correct way and in interpreting specification documents.

Another project identified in the survey was the continuation of the cycle path Lovell have now completed down Grange Avenue and past the prison. Whilst this was “on the back burner” due to the cost Cllr Steve O’Loughlin has now started to look at other funding options with the assistance of our Ward Councillors. This is no mean feat as despite the move to greener methods of transport there is less external funding than there used to be, so Steve is to be congratulated on his perseverance. Unfortunately there has been no progress whatsoever on the cycle path crossing near Station House which can be quite dangerous. It is another area where we will need to continue to chase relevant parties. Also related to cycle paths is the replacement of all the information boards. Whilst the new artwork was agreed nearly a year ago we still have no date for the replacements.

Community Space

We announced last year that the school hall is now available for community use outside of school hours. Despite there being a supposed identified need from local groups and the church we are very disappointed that apart from two bookings last year only the Parish Council has used the hall.

Highways and Speeding

This is still the issue we continue to have the most complaints about. As I said last year we are beholden to LCC highways to take action on the main areas we have identified. Unfortunately there is currently a 15 year backlog of highways work in this ward although other parts of Leeds are even worse. We do, however, now have yellow lines on The Village and at the end of Thorp Arch Park which has been a huge help in stopping dangerous parking. We also have dropped kerbs in all the areas we identified nearly 3 years ago. Going forward Ward Councillors will be arranging a quarterly meeting for residents to bring any highways related concerns.

We have two speed indicator devices (financed by the parish council) one located on Church Causeway and the other on Walton Rd. The one on Church Causeway was finally moved last July to catch vehicles travelling downhill. Unfortunately nearly 88% now exceed the 20 mph speed limit with over 45% exceeding 30mph. We have recorded a top speed of 77 and vehicles regularly exceed 60 and even 70mph. The device on Walton Rd shows speeding has decreased somewhat from an average of around 45% breaking the 30mph limit to around 33%. We are not sure why this is other than the fairly regular roadworks that seem to have

been on that stretch. Again top speeds are over 60 and 70mph. This is one area that Cllr David Hartley has been “driving” (haha) forward. He and I have analysed speeding by time of day so that this can be passed to the police for more regular monitoring. He has also been looking at how we can best monitor other “hot spots” and we are exploring methods of doing this whether it is by moving the existing devices or making use of a mobile device.

In September the children from LEH School were involved in a road safety day using a mobile device to monitor speeds on The Village and Bridge Foot. This was organised by David in conjunction with the school. They really enjoyed catching speeders and vehicles definitely slowed down when they saw what the children were doing. Shockingly they observed 12 drivers not wearing seat belts. Thanks to David another day will be arranged soon.

We continue to have issues with HGVs illegally using the Thorp Arch Bridge. There is some more signage at the Boston Spa side but we still need more signage on our access routes. Efforts to get the weight limit on google maps and HGV sat navs have all failed so we would encourage everyone to take photos if possible and report these online at West Yorkshire safer roads.

Lovell development

This is now complete although there are still outstanding issues with the open space. Ernest has been working tirelessly to help ensure both new housing developments have open spaces that comply with the planning obligations. The Parish Council have yet to take ownership of the allotment land and will need to undertake extensive work to prepare the land and fence it in, so unfortunately there will be a further delay in allocating allotment’s for which we already have a full waiting list. Cllr Gaby Morrison has been undertaking training in allotment management so she can guide a new committee once we are up and running.

There have been many complaints about inconsiderate, dangerous and illegal parking from those attending the LUFC training ground for events. There is a lack of parking onsite so visitors often park on Grange Avenue or Walton Rd. We along with Ward Councillor Penny Stables have been working with LUFC to try to solve this. HMP Wealstun has now offered use of their staff car park at weekends and we hope this will solve the parking issues.

Green matters

Thanks to Ernest we now have “litter pick” stations in the Lovell estate and at LEH School. These have purple bags and litter pickers. Any purple bags can be left by a litter bin and LCC will pick them up. We particularly thank the Village Society for arranging litter picks and to those residents who litter pick on a regular basis. We know that there is a need for further litter bins in and around the Lovell site. We have been pursuing this with LCC for nearly a year but hopefully with the help of the Ward Councillors some additional bins will soon be in place.

We now have 4 new planters – 2 on Church Causeway, one by the War Memorial and one on Walton Rd. These were planted for the winter back in October and will be refreshed for the summer shortly. This is one of the things we get the most compliments about including from residents in other parishes who are walking through. It is very satisfying that a simple and cost effective display can make a real difference to our environment.

The hanging baskets for the lamp posts were planted with winter foliage which has made for a much better and simpler display this year.

Finance

The council continues to have a healthy bank balance helped mainly by the receipt of CIL monies. Whilst we halved the precept for last year this financial year we are returning to a similar levy to that in 2021/2022 and so residents will see a 57% increase in the Thorp Arch portion of their council tax bill. As we have received questions about this we need to look back at the precept requested in previous years.

Year	Total precept	Band D per year	Increase/decrease
2021/2022	£20000	£50.40	
2022/2023	£21600	£49.64	-1.5%
2023/2024	£12100	£24.97	-50%
2024/2025	£20000	£39.37	+57.6%

The Parish Council must maintain a "buffer" of money known as reserves in case of unexpected spend. In previous years this reserve had grown and for 2023/2024 it was felt prudent to reduce the reserve by significantly decreasing the precept. This meant we did not request from residents the full amount of our forecasted budget spend. So in 2023/2024 the precept per household decreased by 50%. For 2024/2025 having now reduced our reserves to a reasonable level we are returning the precept to the level of 2021/2022. As there are now more homes the amount per household is less than in 2021/2022. So whilst the percentage increase looks large the actual monetary increase is £14.40 for the year for a Band D house and in total the precept costs £3.28 per month.

Any CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) money we receive from house building can only be used for infrastructure and so cannot be used for day to day running.

We have a finance sub group where we draft our budget and precept before it goes to the full council for approval. Steve and Gaby are members of this group along with me and their background in finance and business is invaluable.

Community

We had a similar Christmas light display this year as residents appreciated the display last year. We have had request for more lights this year but we are restricted to certain lampposts which means we cannot put any in Woodlands or currently on the Lovell estate.

In conjunction with the Pax we started a “pay as you can” Wednesday coffee morning. We are pleased this is still well attended and is now from 11am.

Thanks to David and Ed we have worked with the children from LEH School on their “school council”. We have looked at a number of issues together including road safety, travel to school and have taken on board their suggestions for future projects. The children are a delight to work with and are a real credit to the school.

I’d again like to thank our local community groups for all they do. They have been invited along this evening to give us an update and those that are here will talk to us later. We were very pleased to help fund the big tea for the King’s coronation – an event that was really appreciated by all and made use of the school and playing field. We’d like to thank the Village Society for the huge amount of work they put into arranging and managing this event. We have also given a grant to the tennis club for the court refurbishment. All local community groups are welcome to apply to us for funding for events and capital projects.

We produced a leaflet highlighting all the local community groups and the work they do which was delivered to all homes. This was particularly useful for the residents in the new estates in the North.

We thank the Ward Councillors for all they do to help the Parish Councils efforts. They can often expedite our requests to LCC and manage to get action where we have only experienced inaction.

Communication

The council continues to use noticeboards, its website and newsletter to communicate with residents so we would urge you to sign up for our newsletter at the council website if you have not already done so. For those on social media we now have a page the Thorp Archway so I’d encourage you to follow us.

Conclusion

I’d like to finish by paying tribute to all those who give up their time to help make our village what it is today. This includes our councillors, residents, Ward Councillors and community groups. We could not do anything without you.