



Girton Parish Council:

2024 Annual Meeting - Chair's report

Cllr Daniel Carney, May 2024

2023-24 has been a busy year for Girton Parish Council (GPC), with a lot of emphasis on catching up with overdue jobs and significant behind the scenes work to try and improve the council's flexibility, responsiveness, and financial practices. More prominent have been actions to try and improve life for Girton's residents, within the modest remit that the council has. In this report, I intend to elaborate slightly on the one presented at the Annual Parish Meeting on May 15th, 2024, to give a little extra detail on what I think the key activities that GPC have undertaken this year have been.

I was delighted that GPC's application to extend the 20mph zone from the A14 bridge through to Huntingdon Road was successful. This is a scheme that has been requested by residents for a number of years, but a previous application was unsuccessful. A key part of the success was being able to show Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) that the scheme had good public support by means of a survey. We await further information on when this scheme will actually be implemented, much as we are always awaiting a timeline on the Oakington Rd 30mph scheme that will be discussed in this year's AGM. It has also been pleasing to see that other schemes requested by residents, and supported by GPC, have been approved by CCC, namely a pedestrian and cycle crossing at the southernmost end of Girton Rd and the addition of cycle wands to the southbound cycle path on Huntingdon Rd. I hope and expect that next year's annual report will cover their completion.

The dire state of many of Girton's footways has been improved in part, following the filling and slurring of the eastern side of Cambridge Rd. The finish of this job leaves something to be desired, but is a vast improvement for those residents with mobility issues, etc. This too is work that has been requested for a long time, and we will continue to point out to CCC Highways that there are still a number of footways problems to resolve. Potholes in the road are also an issue, as is the case across most of the country, and GPC continues to report these to CCC. We believe this has helped with working on the backlog, but CCC Highways is clearly stretched, and the process has not been smooth. Cooperation with Madingley Parish Council helped to ensure that the wrecked road signs at the dangerous A1307/The Avenue junction were finally replaced. Without this organised effort it is likely the wait would have been even longer.

I hope that GPC will be able to have continued success in Highways applications, and we await the outcome of our most recent Local Highways Initiative application, for double yellow lines at a number of key junctions. Further feasible schemes must be assessed in order that further applications of good quality can be made.

Through considered cooperation between GPC, Girton Town Charity (GTC), and local residents, the issue of safety bollards at the Rec car park has now been resolved. This should now make the path that links Cambridge Rd to the playground, pavilion, and back entrance to Girton Glebe much safer, especially for children.

The children of Girton Glebe have made sure that GPC took action in an area very important to them. I would like to thank them again for their organised campaign to have the Rec basketball court improved. The work they requested has now been carried out, along with additional expansion of the playing area. Next to the court are two brand new outdoor table tennis tables, their appearance being thanks to feedback from children of the village and assistance from Table Tennis England. I believe that this will be a valuable addition to the sporting facilities available to residents. A further addition will be the field behind Girton Glebe, which GPC are in the process of making usable as a sports field.



that is available to be hired outside of school hours. Much work has been carried out already by the GPC staff to allow this to happen.

Recreational facilities at Wellbrook Way have been significantly added to with the recent construction of a clubhouse and toilet facilities at the bowling green. This work was only made feasible by hard work and cooperation between GPC, GTC, and Girton Bowls Club. The village now has an excellent new facility that will support and expand the playing of bowls, and allow for other community usage outside of matches, with an additional bonus of the availability of public toilets whilst being used for bowls. The adjacent playground should now be fit for purpose for many years, with a complete resurfacing of the damaged areas of matting.

Following their successful introduction at the Cotton Hall, GPC have been hosting a number of food trucks on Saturday evenings, which have been very popular thus far. It was important for this scheme that GPC worked together with the Cotton Hall Foundation to ensure that we were complementing, and not detracting from, their initiative.

Though it was started in 2022-23, it has been this year that the Local Nature Recovery Plan has really come to life. The group has put in a lot of hard work into improving biodiversity in the village and has held a number of varied outreach events, with the highlight being the re-opening of the Hibbert-Ware garden. The transformation of this space over the last 12 months has been impressive, and the opening event was really well attended.

The Neighbourhood Plan group has also been extremely productive, undertaking a significant chunk of research on land use and ownership across the entire village. Alongside this they have created, distributed, and publicised the Neighbourhood Plan survey which, at time of writing, is still gathering results. I hope that the information gathered will not only be of use for the development of the plan itself, but that there will be key data that helps the Parish Council to better understand the needs and wishes of residents and provides clear evidence to support actions and policy.

From an operational and administrative perspective, a number of important pieces of work have taken place. A Master Planner has now been appointed to help GPC plan more holistically the refurbishment and ongoing improvement for all the council's assets. It is intended that that will restart the overdue work on refurbishing the pavilion but will ensure that this is all be as a part of a systematic approach rather than a discreet task. Greatly improved budgeting, along with some modest changes to the financial regulations, now mean that the GPC team have the autonomy they need to be able to respond to needs much more quickly, particularly with respect to repairs and maintenance. The trial of a Parish Ranger has been very successful, with repairs and general maintenance around the village being enacted much more rapidly than before and offering a greater sense of ownership and community-mindedness. We look forward to being able to appoint a permanent member of staff to this role in the near future. The trial of a new online reporting system, linked to a Kanban work process has, thus far, helped to organise tasks for the council and I anticipate that it will enable better planning and prioritisation through its continued usage. The adoption of additional policies by the council will start to make the council's work more efficient by clearly setting rules in place and speeding up decision-making for both councillors and staff.

Assorted other items that I would like to note include the gradual improvement of public waste bins. A number of extra bins have been placed in the village, including updates of general waste bins to now be joint general and dog waste bins. I was very pleased that South Cambridgeshire District Council, who are responsible for rubbish collection, have trialled both public recycling and small electrical item bins in Girton. I hope that this trial is a success and will be asking for a return of the temporary small electrical item bin on a permanent basis. I am also very pleased that we have been able to do a small bit to support the volunteer-run food bank in Girton. That food banks should be necessary in this country at all is a national disgrace, but it is heartily reassuring this scheme can be well supported by



council and residents alike. We are also trying to make better use of council money by moving some of the monies held in reserve into a much higher interest rate account in order to arrest the current real terms fall in its value whilst held in accounts with near-zero rates of return.

The last item I would like to note for 2023-24's activities has been the adoption of our fantastic new logo. It has been wonderful for documents and so forth coming from GPC being given a little burst of life thanks to this bold and playful motif. Congratulations again to Alicia Travieso for her simple but effective design, which was the clear winner of the competition held last year.

Finally, I would like to reflect in order to consider work going forward. Much of the success that I have written about has either been led, or shown to be strongly supported, by residents. The bowls green facilities, Local Highways Initiative applications, safety bollards, Local Nature Recovery Plan and the basketball court are some excellent examples of these. Parish Councils have limited power, budget and focus, and are slow-moving. Yet, they have many, often disparate, functions to fulfil. In order to enact further change and progress I believe that it is key to become enablers of residents. Where groups come together with direction and passion for projects and campaigns it is collective action that is likely to yield the greatest results in the shortest time. I hope that as a Parish Council we can support community-led actions and can also help bring together like-minded individuals to make effective groups.