

# Chairman's Report

## for the Annual Parish Meeting

### of Thorner Parish Council

on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2025



*This report concludes another 12-month period for the Parish Council. It also marked the end of my 2<sup>nd</sup> period as Chair, since being appointed on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023 and Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2024.*

*This report was prepared ahead of the Annual Parish Council meeting scheduled for Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2025. I pressed for an additional meeting this year – a meeting for electors.*

*The Annual Meeting of Electors was held on May 7, 2025. This meeting should be essence of what democracy represents, a means for members of the Parish to gather and discuss what is important to the community at large. It should be all inclusive and not simply a means for a minority of the residents to look at achieving their own personal objectives.*

*I would encourage all residents to think and consider what is important to them and their neighbours. There will be a similar meeting called in a further 12 months. I look ahead to hearing any proposals from that meeting and representations at future Parish Council meetings.*

*I take this opportunity to acknowledge the support and participation of Councillor Angela Wallis, in the role of Vice Chair, over the previous year.*

*The Council has been operating below full numbers for the prior year. We still have one vacancy for a member of the Parish to join the council. Since last year we have been advertising details of the process for applicants on the Parish Council Website <http://www.thorner-parish-council.org.uk/> and via the Thorner Facebook page and newly constructed Thorner Parish Council Facebook page.*

*As a reminder to all, the Parish Council now meets on the **Second Tuesday of each month**, usually within the Over 60's bungalow on Main Street. Meetings commence at 19:00hr. We continue to welcome residents to discuss issues important to them. Ideally, we ask that the Clerk be informed in advance of the meeting of items for the agenda (including correspondence). The deadline for items to be received for the agenda is Friday 4.30 pm, ten days prior to the day of the meeting. Our meetings are also open to attendance by Harewood Ward Councillors. Guidance for*

*participation is published on the Thorner Parish Council website, and we have a note for reference on expected standards of conduct for reference at each meeting.*

*The Parish Council has continued to make good on its commitment to better inform the village of Parish Council meetings and outcomes via its new updated website. Please remember to update any 'bookmarks' that you may have on devices. We also have a Thorner Parish Council Facebook page that is outward facing only – the site does not allow posts to be made/received. Post made by the Council, for information purposes, are then shared to the Thorner Facebook Page. **The Council does not monitor Facebook for related posts by members of the public.***

***There are a number of routes that members of the Thorner Parish can use to communicate with the Parish Council:***

- i) Attendance at the monthly meeting in person*
- ii) Emails to the Clerk to the Parish Council via [thornerparishcouncil@gmail.com](mailto:thornerparishcouncil@gmail.com)*
- iii) In writing, letters to be addressed to The Clerk, Thorner Parish Council, Substation Premises, 1 Butts Garth Walk, Thorner, LS14 3BT.*

*These are the official routes and are preferred, since this ensures that all correspondence and communications can be routed to the Council, and importantly specifically to those with specific responsibilities to ensure any response or actions are performed expeditiously.*

*I would like to place on the record, my thanks and appreciation to our Ward Councillor Sam Firth for his support to the village.*

*My thanks to the Councillors for their collective input and decision making over the prior 12 months.*

### **Ongoing Work and related Activities**

*The Council continues to track required work through the agenda and a Task log. This is published with other supporting information prior to each meeting.*

### **Financial Matters**

*The Council, under the guidance of the Clerk, had been able to manage its budget successfully over previous years. **Last year** with increased costs the Parish Council Precept (money requested by Thorner Parish Council from Leeds City Council via Council Taxpayers in the parish) saw an **increase of £1,430 (4.9%) up on the previous year.***

*I wrote last year that to support new and/or larger projects there will be a need consider increasing the amount of future precept requests. With regret and in order to ensure that current responsibilities and the needs of the Parish could be met in the financial year 2025-26, the Parish Council has been forced to raise the precept.*

***This year, the precept has increased by £3763 (11.8%) which equates to a £4.87 increase for a Band D property for the year (around 9p per week).***

*There are 8 cost centres for the Parish Council Budget. These are published in the monthly accounts.*

*The most significant changes occurred in Administration Costs and Maintenance/Annual Costs.*

### ***Administration***

*An increase of £2656 due to an increase in Employers NI (a government directive, increase in grant provision for Community Groups (such as Thorner Footpath Volunteers, Thorner Produce Show, and others) plus provision for any elections.*

### ***Maintenance/Annual Costs.***

*An increase in the Grounds Maintenance contract from £5,000 to £10,000.*

***Diligent management by making savings elsewhere has enabled the precept request to remain at a minimum. It should be noted that the increased costs listed above are actually in excess of the precept request.***

### ***Maintenance Contractors***

*We have engaged the services of two local contractors, **Sean Brittain**, a resident in the village to cut grass, trim shrubbery, hedging and maintain flower borders on Millennium Green and at the Boules area. You may already have seen the impact of some of this work on the appearance around the seating areas on the green. He will be working in other areas throughout the village as well.*

*In addition, **Parks Services Ltd**, based in Scarcroft, is providing additional capability to reinstate and maintain Ramsay's Fold, thereby opening up easier access for residents to enjoy this tranquil space by Thorner Beck and the Ford. This contractor has also cut the areas around the playground equipment and grass adjacent to the Victory Hall.*

***J&D Groundworks***, based in Thorner has continued to provide shrub and hedge trimming, most notably alongside the footpath adjacent to the children's play area on Millennium Green.

*The above work is directed and managed through the **Grounds Maintenance Contract**.*

### **Community Public Access Defibrillators**

*The Council continues to perform regular checks on the two defibrillators that we are custodians of (located outside the Fox Public House and in the retired telephone box at the top of Church Hill).*

*As someone accountable for checking the units through the year, I am acutely aware that one of the units has been retrieved on many occasions in the past 12 months, but thankfully not actually used, but nonetheless provided a potential life-saving support to members of my community.*

*(The Parish Council also remains responsible for the purchase and replacement of any defibrillator pads after use, or due to expiry dates being approached, as well as replacement batteries).*

### **Millennium Green**

*This portion of land, under ownership of the Parish Council on behalf of the village, is our largest asset. It continues to be a focal point for all to enjoy. The Green has seen use for village events, as well as the informal use and enjoyment of everyone fortunate to be in Thorner during this period. We have amended arrangements, engaging new contractors to restore the borders with shrubs and trees, as well as arranging for regular grass mowing during the growing season.*

*The Council has ensured that there is provision for people to sit on the numerous benches throughout the village, to pause, rest, and enjoy our village.*

### **Playground and Fitness Equipment**

*These areas continue to be monitored and maintained by the Parish Council.*

*The fitness equipment was provided to allow our adult residents to access a means of exercising, free of charge and without the need to travel outside of the village. The equipment continues to be used. We continue to remind parents, each year, that this equipment is not for children to play on, and any use (or misuse!) is at your own risk.*

*The Parish Council continues to ensure that periodic safety inspections are performed (by independent qualified inspectors) and regular maintenance checks are carried out by members of the Council.*

### **Public Benches**

*We also have taken on the responsibility to maintain several public benches, both inside and outside the village confines. We continue to follow a Bench Policy, to register those benches that we look after on behalf of the village, but also to stipulate how “memorial benches” are managed.*

*Details are on the Parish Council website. All related costs are paid from Parish Council funds, derived from the previously mentioned precept from Leeds City Council, for the benefit of the Parish.*

*The repainting of the existing benches was approved, and many were repainted in 2024. The budget also has capacity for additional painting and maintenance in the period 2025-26.*

*Aside from the public benches throughout the village, the Council provides picnic benches with disability access on the Millenium Green (2), and one at the Boules Area, and one with disability access in Ramsay’s Fold.*

*We continue to seek remedial work to the steps, at the road edge on Milner Lane are required as these have collapsed over time. This makes it difficult to access a bench on this route to a popular PROW. **The assistance of the Ward Councillor is required to expedite this matter.***

### **Ramsay’s Fold**

*The Council continues to maintain the area known as Ramsay’s Fold, to ensure that this wild area remains accessible to our community. We have begun a programme to keep the vegetation under control and allow people to stop and relax in one of the quietist spots in the village. This is covered in the Village Maintenance Schedule.*

*We will continue to review and consider this area, and how to allow better access and use of this resource.*

### **Boules Terrain**

*This facility has been enjoyed by many individuals and teams over the previous year, including a majority from outside of the village. This is undoubtedly because of the level of support by players in the village, whose competitive spirit is often displayed!*

*We are responsible for maintenance of the Boules shelter, including electrical safety testing.*

*The area continues to be an amenity, open to all, with **no charge to the public.***



### **Village Flagpole**

*The Parish Council has continued to have the flagpole serviced/inspected by the manufacturer and supplier, and in 2024 the annual renewal of the halyard was performed. The flagpole continues to be in good condition and is covered by Insurance, from the Parish Council budget.*

*Related costs to all of the above are paid from Parish Council funds, derived from the previously mentioned precept from Leeds City Council, for the benefit and enjoyment of the Parish and its visitors*

### **Footpaths, in and around the village.**

*Thorner Parish Council has had a history of encouraging residents to use our local network of public rights of way. We continue to uphold our arrangement with Leeds City Council Public Rights of Way team, to clear two footpaths and one bridleway in the immediate village vicinity (Footpath/Bridleway numbers 7, 14 and 17).*

*Twelve months on from my second Chairpersons report, I have been disappointed that my own survey of the 3 Public Rights of Way, and surveys of other routes (suggested by the Thorner Footpath Volunteers) has not seen any activity by Leeds City Council. The Parish Council does not have sufficient funds alone, to contract the clearance of these routes. The funding from Leeds City Council has not increased in over 10 years, as it appears they are trying to push their responsibilities out to local Parishes. Thorner Parish Council has made efforts to obtain quotations from the few contractors that expressed interest. At this point the Council does not have sufficient funds to take on, solely, any costs for clearing the PROW. Only limited representation has been made from within the entire community to take on the cost (which would lead to further increase of the precept) by the parish.*

*Nonetheless I have personally renewed contact on behalf of the Parish Council and have discussed the matter with Bob Buckingham LCC PROW Manager, and the new Community Access and Engagement Officer PROW, Emma Towers, I anticipate that we will see one or both of them at an upcoming Parish Council meeting. I will be pressing for them to walk the local network with Parish Councillors and also to consider potential funding to support the network.*

*This does come with a note of caution – the funding provided from Leeds City Council, is unlikely to cover the cost of maintaining the cuts to the surface required to keep them open fully all year and will certainly not allow for additional maintenance activity by the Parish Council. This could require the village to add to the finances to get the work completed during the growing season, when vegetation “takes over”.*

*In the event that Leeds City Council stops providing funding, since it is on public record that Councils are facing financial shortfalls, the cost could fall to Thorner entirely. I would be keen to hear all views across the village on this, potential impact to the incurred costs and likely addition to the precept.*

### **Vegetable Garden Plots**

*The Parish Council continued to manage this land, owned by Mexborough estates, and has rented out plots to residents for the growing of flowers and vegetables. The rentals remained at a modest level to cover basic services and maintenance of the facilities.*

*This area is for the sole access and use of the tenants. It is not a public area. This is not a Community Garden. Plants and produce grown (flowers, vegetables, herbs etc.) are the personal/private property of each tenant.*

*The Parish Council will continue to close the water off, during the cold winter months to prevent burst pipes or damage to other fittings such as taps. As a note, water will be inaccessible from November to March.*

*We continue to manage a waiting list for residents wishing to make use of this resource*

*All related costs are paid from funds, derived from the Rental Agreements of the tenants of each plot.*

### **Dog Waste Bags**

*The Parish Council has provided four dog waste bag dispensers in prominent locations, where it has been reported that a fouling issue exists. In previous newsletters, I have identified that these are not to replace the need for dog owners to purchase their own. (A legal requirement under local council and national legislation is that owners have a suitable means to clean up after their animal whilst out walking) as there is an associated cost in provision of this equipment to the community.*

*All related costs are paid from Parish Council funds, derived from the previously mentioned precept from Leeds City Council, for the safety of the Parish and its visitors.*

### **Planning Matters**

*LCC no longer provide details for applications to trim or remove trees, as Parish Councils are no longer involved in commenting on such work. The previous Leeds*

*City Council Tree Officer has retired. We await news of his replacement, and we should all be vigilant and take care of the natural amenities in Thorner.*

*Planning applications can be difficult and open to interpretation. Thorner Parish Council members continue to have access to training from Leeds City Council to raise and maintain our awareness of the current planning legislation.*

*The importance of the scale and appearance of new developments and changes to existing buildings remains important to ensure that the character of the village is maintained and that any changes are not detrimental to the community around the proposal. The Parish Council continues to provide comments in relation to new applications in the Parish.*

*Reference must also be made to the Neighbourhood Plan section below under **Outside Bodies**.*

## **Outside Bodies**

### **Neighbourhood Plan**

*Members of the Parish Council have continued to sit on the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. This group has spent the previous 13 plus years working on the Thorner Neighbourhood Plan, in liaison with the City Council to devise and design a blueprint for the future planning and development of Thorner. I talked about the fact that a document was eventually drafted and reviewed by the Steering Group and approved by the full Parish Council on 13Feb2024. Thereafter was a letter, signed by the Chair, was sent to with the final document to LCC on 27March2024. The document continues to be under review.*

*I find it extraordinary that we are still awaiting finalisation of this key document to protect the appearance, heritage and village environments, as we continue to face the highest pressures on the village for development.*

### **Leeds Festival**

*The Parish Council has had reduced engagement with Festival Republic (FR), which is of concern to me and other Councillors as we seek to ensure the village remains a safe area prior to and during the festival with some measures to reduce traffic. Once again, the Parish Council rejected an approach from Leeds Taxi Association to open your village to all taxis.*

*We continue with the aim that any concerns from local residents (where the Council had been contacted directly), are raised in the appropriate forum for discussion. Two members of the Council team are engaged with this activity. Note: All ticketing activities remain in the capable hands of the Thorner Community Find team and their volunteers*



## **Publication Scheme**

*Communication and engagement with the public by the Parish Council, remain an important matter to me. We have made progress over the prior year, as observed by more frequent (but small!) attendance at our meetings. We know that we continue to have work to do.*

*The content of the website continues to be updated. We also facilitate access to documents, relevant to members of the public, ahead of Parish Council Meetings.*

## **The Flag and Flagpole Policy**

*We continue to be considerate that individuals have concerns about the type of flags being flown and their condition. The policy determines which flags will be flown and the process for requesting any changes, outside of the usual flags being flown.*

## **Millennium Green**

*Last year we announced that a new policy was produced to detail the requirements for allowing permissions to be granted for use of the Millennium Green for public/private events. This was as a result of increasing requests in recent years and also restriction to activities that are “not for profit” or other financial gain. Reference must be made to the Millennium Green tab on the website and the document ‘Procedure and Conditions of Use Application Form’.*

## **Biodiversity**

*The Parish Council continues to follow a Biodiversity Policy in response to the biodiversity duty placed on local authorities by the Environment Act 2021 and also as part of its commitment to the environment and sustainability. Where trees have been felled/removed, we should seek to replace each with one or more trees.*

## **Newsletter**

*Previous Meeting Minutes have identified the intent to publish a Newsletter in 2025. We hope to have sufficient submissions to make this worthwhile! The aim is to provide a more environmentally friendly option, available electronically with a limited hardcopy print run.*

## **Action Plan**

*Looking ahead we continue to work on the Action Plan, which has been introduced to enable us to adapt to the changing needs of the Village and enable tracking of tasks and required work projects. This is published on the website with meetings, agenda and associated documents, each month. We try to reflect Village needs and*

*remain open to suggestions to improve the area. If we think a plan is feasible then we can try and develop that further, with the support and appropriate participation of our community.*

*Two Trees had been removed in the village in the prior year.*

*One at the lower end of Kirkhills, due to excessive lean*

*One on the Millennium Green due to damage to the footpath by the playground*

***These remain to be replaced when the tree planting season occurs towards the end of this year.***

### **Other Matters**

#### **Flooding**

*The Parish Council raised the community's concerns with Leeds Council, regarding drain clearance and road sweeping, to alleviate risk of flooding and to maintain the appearance of the village last year.*

*With pressure and support from the Parish Council, joined by affected residents, Leeds City Council undertook surveys of the drainage system. This has recently seen new installations at the entrance to Mexborough Court, aligning drains to the lowest points in the road surface. Additionally, a local landowner was requested, by LCC, to excavate the culvert at the junctions of Stead Lane and Kirkhill. Separately a dropped kerb was raised on Main Street. A brief period of heavy rain after this work had a more positive outcome for residents!*

#### **Parking**

*This continues to be an issue for many in the village, and more new developments will continue to contribute to the problem. The growing number of multi-car households continues to pressure a village created in past times with limited space for modern vehicles. The Parish Council has no powers to address dangerous or inconsiderate road users. This is a matter for Police and LCC parking enforcement respectively. For those living in the village, we need to be considerate to others and to comply with the road markings/Highway Code. Please report all issues to LCC using the links contained on our website.*

#### **Mobile Phone Signal**

*Again, a long-standing issue, identified in the Annual Parish Meeting of 2007! The planned relocation of a mobile telephone mast from Coal Road, to the new ELOR was supposedly to solve the problem. So far this remains unresolved and there has been little to no action by the local MP.*

***In 2025, this situation is not acceptable.***

### Road Markings/Highways

*In excess of twelve months elapsed, since the Parish Council raised the issue of safety concerns at the junction of Thorner Lane and Skeltons Lane, due to worn road markings that meant that priorities were unclear. These **markings were finally replaced a few months ago.***

*There has been no response to requests for information as to what Leeds City Council has decided to do, in response to any data obtained from previously completed traffic surveys on Lower Sandhills and Carr Lane.*

*There has been no further movement to have Thorner removed from the list of training routes for HGV/Commercial Vehicle Learner training.*

### Highway Conditions

*The Parish Council continues to raise the issue of **potholes** and other failure of the road surface. Unfortunately, LCC are slow to respond/act, and report that they are hampered by a lack of funding.*

*The **footpath along Butts Garth**, towards the junction with The Paddock and Littlemoor Lane, is still in a poor condition. This is the responsibility of LCC for upkeep. LCC had stated there are insufficient funds available, despite our protestations. We are aware that a visitor to a local property, sustained an injury in the area of the footpath. We will continue to press for repairs in the coming financial year*

### “Beehive Field”

*Since August 2023, the Parish Council were aware of the **hole in the wall**, possibly sustained by vehicle damage. Despite lengthy and repeated enquiries by the Parish Council, with the local landowner, LCC and the Tenant for the field, no progress has been made.*

*This blights the entrance to the village. There is a concern is the risk of further collapse, blocking of the stream with potential associated flooding. Of more importance is the risk of injury through accidental falling from the roadside, down a 12-foot drop to the stream and field below.*

***The Parish Council will continue with monitoring the condition of the wall. The task of identifying ownership and seeking a repair via owners of the adjacent land – Mexborough Estates and Leeds City Council had not succeeded.***

## **Reflection**

*The Council has worked hard towards the future of the village over the prior Council year and will continue to do so, and I want to thank all current Councillors, for their contributions.*

*On behalf of the whole Parish Council, I want to acknowledge the Clerk for his counsel and guidance, enabling the Parish Council to operate over the past year and prepare for the upcoming new council year.*

***Many aspects of the work of the Parish Council are unseen but they are a part of our responsibilities to the village and our community.***

*I remind everyone that all members of the Parish Council are **volunteers** and work throughout the year, in their personal time (outside of Parish Council Meetings). They use their own resources such as computers and stationery free of charge, for the benefit of the Parish and its visitors.*

*Despite this dedication, we continue to face generally negative and disrespectful comments on social media and occasionally in person. This is not acceptable.*

*The Parish Council will not monitor social media, it does not have any obligation or responsibility to do so.*

*My advice is that individuals should use the routes previously outlined to engage with your representatives, the Parish Council. Collectively and in alignment we could achieve more!*

***In the previous period the Parish Council has supported the following:***

- *Replacement of the dilapidated Parish Council noticeboard, with a new design, of a high quality and befitting a village of the status of Thorner*
- *Hosted Bob Buckingham LCC PROW Manager, online at the July PC Meeting to discuss the role of LCC related to PROW and also the limitations of the Parish Paths Partnership funding. This was with the aim to better inform the Council and members of the community in attendance.*
- *Adopted a revised Volunteer Policy, protecting the rights of volunteers and ensuring that the Council fulfilled its obligations to volunteers working on behalf of the Parish Council*
- *Supported the progression of the Neighbourhood Plan, through reviews and submission to Leeds City Council.*
- *Represented the village at the Leeds Festival Working Group.*
- *Provided “Flood Sax” to one resident of Butts Garth, in response to an offer by the Parish Council to support residents in an area subject to regular run-off from neighbouring fields.*

- *Purchased new Christmas Lights to adorn a tree on Millennium Green. Arranged the annual “switch on”. Additional personal donations by two Councillors of chocolate oranges to children of the village attending this event.*
- *Supported use of the Boules area, allowing the Over 60’s Association to utilise the extra space for a function celebrating the Christmas Lights switch on.*
- *Replaced the defibrillator cabinet with a new more compact model on The Fox public house.*
- *Donated 10 Litter Pickers for use by Thorner Beavers and Scouts in their efforts to keep the village tidy.*
- *Support to the Thorner and Scarcroft Branch of the Royal British Legion for the annual parade, through **completion of necessary applications and insurance provision**, including liaison with Leeds City Council and West Yorkshire Police to allow a road closure. In addition, **contacting a local volunteer to provide First Aid cover** for the parade.*
- *Purchased a new LED Christmas Tree for Millennium Green as the existing tree height and nature of the ground meant that there was increasing difficulty and risk to volunteers decorating this specific tree. The new light will allow a more prominent feature to be added to the village during the Christmas period and also for safe installation and retrieval.*
- *Funding provision and arrangement of printing for a new Thorner Footpaths notice, in support of the aims of the Thorner Footpath Volunteer Group.*
- *Supported the recent commemoration of V.E. day, and Thorner and Scarcroft Branch of the Royal British Legion, by provision of the beacon. With thanks and appreciation to Mr John Wilson for its repair and restoration and members of the public who assisted with its installation and removal.*
- *Supported the Thorner and Scarcroft Branch of the Royal British Legion, by the purchase and flying of a commemorative VE 80 flag.*
- *The Parish Council is still awaiting permission to install two additional dog waste bag dispensers in the Stead Lane/Kirkfield and Ellerker Lane areas. Since this is on Leeds City Council property permission is necessary.*

*The Parish Council has supported, **with financial provision** the following:*

- *Donation of **£1,000** to the Over 60’s Bungalow to support the provision of this resource to the village.*
- ***Financial support** to the “Tree Elves” to allow purchase of the Christmas Trees that line Main Street during the Festive period. **Noting that the amount was repaid at no cost to the village.***

*I ask for your support and hope that people will acknowledge the work and collective efforts of the current Parish Councillors.*

*Alistair Scott, Chairman, Thorner Parish Council.*