

Chairman's Report
for the Annual Parish Meeting
of Thorner Parish Council



on Wednesday 29th May 2024

This report concludes another 12-month period for the Parish Council. It also marked the end of my period as Chair, since being appointed on Tuesday 3rd May 2023.

I feel privileged that members of the council have re-appointed me as Chair, during the Annual Parish Council meeting conducted on Tuesday 8th May 2024. I welcome the show of confidence in my abilities.

I was previously appointed as Vice-Chair on Tuesday 8th May 2022, before handing over to Councillor Sheila Llewellyn. It is timely that I mention the work of Councillor Lewellyn, who held the Vice-Chair role and I acknowledge her continued support and participation as a Councillor. I now welcome Councillor Angela Wallis, to the role of Vice Chair, also nominated at this months meeting.

The Council had, over the year, returned to the maximum number of Councillors – 9 (as permitted by local Government regulation). Details of the names and email addresses of our Councillors, and the Clerk to the Council, are published on the Parish Council Website <http://www.thorner-parish-council.org.uk/>. In the event that vacancies arise, details of the process for application will continue to be advertised on this website and via the Thorner Facebook page and newly constructed Thorner Parish Council Facebook page.

I would like to thank former Councillor Sally Dixon, who submitted her resignation on Thursday 9th May.

*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. The

Council has also transferred details from prior years (2022-2023) for reference and transparency. We have also published details of how to contact the various departments in LCC, for individual members of the public to raise issues directly. We continue to use an external provider website technical support, and maintenance of the Parish Council domain emails for use by Councillors.

This supports my personal goal, of the Parish Council becoming more visible and accessible to make the voice of the village and parish heard, raising concerns and questions to Leeds City Council (LCC).

We would like to place on the record, our thanks and appreciation to all our Ward Councillors for their continued support to the village.

Note on Working Parties

At the Annual Parish Meeting on Tuesday 16th May 2023 due to a lack of resources (only 6 Councillors were elected) it was agreed that no working parties were to be appointed. The Council continues to track required work through the agenda and a Task log.

Financial Matters

The Council, under the guidance of the Clerk, has been able to manage its budget successfully over the past year, despite cost-of-living increases that affect the purchases and amenities that we support for the use and benefit of the village.

*We continue to retain the services of a local contractor, **J&D Groundworks**, to cut the grass under our responsibility, throughout the village. They also trim shrubbery and hedging and maintain flower borders on Millennium Green and at the Boules area. The work is directed and managed through the **Village Maintenance Plan**.*

With the budget being identified for the upcoming year, 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 last year. The drive down on costs by careful management has limited funds available for spending in the current financial year. To support new and/or larger projects there will be a need consider increasing the amount of future precept requests.

Community Public Access Defibrillators

The Council has purchased new defibrillator pads, for two units that we are custodians of (located outside the Fox Public House and in the retired telephone box at the top of Church Hill).

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 continue with plans 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

The repainting of the existing benches has been approved.

Two new picnic benches were purchased manufactured from recycled plastic, in consideration of the need to use sustainable. There is one standard bench in the Boules Area, and one with disability access in Ramsay's Fold.

*Replacement steps, at the road edge on Milner Lane are required as these have collapsed over time. **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 quietest spots in the village. This is covered in the Village Maintenance Schedule.

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

Boules Terrain

This facility has been enjoyed by many individuals and teams over the previous year, including many 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 continue to monitor and re-apply grit to the playing surface as required.

Repairs were completed to the tiled roof of the Boules shelter following storm damage.

Note: At time of report, an electrical safety review had been undertaken and quotations were being obtained in consideration of the findings of the inspector.

*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 2023 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.

Replacement Union Flag and the Ukraine flag were fitted in May 2024. Although only flown for one year, both flags had become faded and worn – not unsurprising for flags flown in all weathers! The Ukraine flag had sustained some damage and out of respect to that nation and our residents from the country, the Council agreed to continue to fly this flag.

*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 upheld 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).

*During March 2024, these three routes were thoroughly surveyed and documented by the Parish Council (**at no cost for the survey**). The reports are in the process of being completed and submitted to the LCC Public Rights of Way Officer as part of a long-standing arrangement under the Parish Paths Partnership scheme. A small contribution is made by LCC, to cut these routes. This covered the cost of a single cut to Footpath 7, a much-used route leading from alongside the Victory Hall. A small remainder of the fund will be retained to supplement costs to other paths in the village network.*

This network includes several pathways within the confines of the village. Over the years, these have not received attention from LCC. The Parish Council has notified LCC, that we will take a lead role in supporting them by adding them to the Village Maintenance Schedule.

*Related costs 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**. A modest supplement is provided by LCC for the surface cutting of the existing 3 routes in the Parish Paths Partnership.*

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. It is not acceptable, as has occurred in a few cases, for members of the public to pick/eat produce unless expressly granted permission. Theft is theft, however large the scale of produce or property removed.

A new gate and fencing were installed at the Butts Garth entrance, followed by the replacement of the gate on the Heathcote Avenue access point.

There was a modification, securing access to the water shutoff valves. 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.

A small number of taps have been replaced.

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

*All related costs were paid from funds, **derived from the Rental Agreements of the tenants of each plot, with a small supplement from overall Parish Council funding in this period to cover additional maintenance of the boundary fence and gates.***

Dog Waste Bags

Over recent years, there has been a well-known issue with fouling. 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 there 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. I believe that, whilst Leeds City Council has an excellent Tree Officer, this is disappointing. It reminds all of us to be vigilant and take care of the natural amenities in Thorner, its surrounds. This is not aligned with the voice of our village through the Neighbourhood Plan.

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.

Increasingly I have seen that cases raised for enforcement, such as non-compliance with specification of materials, boundary extension issues, are not dealt with by LCC, either due to lack of resources (staff/finance) and possible action being described invariably as not in the public interest due to costs involved, accompanied by the statement that “enforcement action is not mandatory”.

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 12 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. 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, sent to with the final document to LCC on 27March2024. The document is under review. If

approved by LCC, this will result in a referendum for members of the Parish to vote on its adoption. Costs for this will be incurred.

Leeds Festival:

The Parish Council continues its engagement with Festival Republic (FR), to ensure 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

Community Public Access Defibrillators (CPADs)

In relation to the two CPADs, maintained in the village the Parish Council, we listened to the requests from several members of the village and acted. We arranged for a representative from Yorkshire Ambulance Service and a Community First Responder (volunteer) to provide a briefing and overview of the means to obtain access vital life-saving equipment.

(It should be noted that the CPAD at the rear of the Victory Hall is maintained by the Victory Hall Committee). We are grateful the Victory Hall Committee for providing free use of the hall to hold the meeting to the wider benefit of Community.

The Parish Council made a modest donation to the charitable side of the Ambulance Trust from Parish Council funds, derived from the previously mentioned precept from Leeds City Council for the benefit of the Parish and its visitors.

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

As mentioned above, we also have a responsibility to provide and 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. This policy is currently under review with two new picnic bench acquisitions.

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 Flag and Flagpole Policy

We are ever mindful 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

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 has adopted 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.

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 planters at the junction of Kirkfield Avenue and the Bramham Road, are rotting/falling apart. These are under the **ownership of LCC. Thorner Parish Council determined that in order to improve the appearance for local residents, that these should be replaced.** Work will be undertaken in late Spring 2024 to install new planters (already purchased).*

Bee Pollinators

*Funding was obtained for re-planting of the bee pollinators last year. Work was completed to replace compost where required in the existing planters and there are **plans to replant as required.***

The whole village was able to benefit from this initiative, since the planters were able to be placed on land owned by Leeds City Council, rather than the limited options under Parish Council ownership or lease.

Two Trees have been removed in the village

*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 are planned to be replaced when the tree planting season occurs towards the end of the year.*

Other Matters

Flooding

Back on May 2023, concerns were identified about land drainage measures down Littlemoor Lane/Butts Garth/Stead Lane, with the Ward Councillor (Cllr. Sam Firth). LCC has stated at the time that because the water originated from non-LCC owned land that they would not act. However, as it flowed onto LCC land (the highway) and thereafter impacted private properties that this would be considered for action.

The Parish Council has 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.

*Recent flooding in May 2024, has raised the issue again. The Ward Councillor has committed to making enquiries about obtaining sandbags. A local resident has offered to send information and pricing on a modern alternative, using absorbent material in lightweight bags, that expands. **This will be discussed in upcoming meetings.***

Thorner Parish Council will support the idea of a community communication group to be set up, to alert residents as situations arise. The council will support residents by the storage of materials and distribution.

Parking

This continues to be an issue for many in the village, and new developments have been forced to address this and have done so. 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. In respect to Stead Lane, excepting the modified parking restriction by yellow lines, LCC has confirmed that they will not implement any changes.

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 a standing item agenda, although an outreach has been made this month to the local MP.

Our concern is simple. British Telecommunications PLC decided in 2023 to no longer support the provision of electricity to telephone lines. The new digital system required the use of routers for internet access. In the event of a power failure in the village, the telephone will not function. Mobile phone signals are largely intermittent in Thorner and the surrounding area. Therefore, in the event of an emergency or illness requiring assistance, it is possible/quire likely that assistance cannot be obtained.

In 2024, this situation is not acceptable. The Parish Council has contacted the local MP for assistance (May2024) and it remains an agenda item.

Road Markings/Highways

Inadequate double yellow lines at the Stead Lane/Main Street/Carr Lane Junction were finally replaced in recent months.

*A full twelve months have 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. **This continues to be an agenda item for the Ward Councillor to escalate with LCC.***

The Parish Council has continued to press for the proposed 20 mph speed limit to be implemented and extended across the village and its approach roads, following several representations from residents young and old.

*In June 2023, the Parish Council formally accepted the new Harewood Ward Traffic Regulation Order 2023, relating to Thorner, that would see a 20mph limited being implemented. Road markings were applied several months ago, but the absence of signs, has delayed the implementation. **The Senior Traffic Engineer at Leeds City Council Traffic Engineering has so far not responded to requests to attend a Parish Council meeting.** The Parish Council will continue to push for a widening of the area within this limit, along our village.*

*The Parish Council has consistently asked the Ward Councillors to act to get LCC to replace **lost and damaged signage on Skeltons Lane** and the nearby **ELOR roundabout.** **No action at time of this report.***

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. The Council continues to raise concerns with the Ward Councillors for escalation to LCC. LCC has stated there are insufficient funds available, despite our protestations. We will continue to press for repairs in the coming financial year.

*Members of the public took to Facebook to complain about the **condition of the footpath leading from the village, up through Sandhills** to The Arium. Years of poor weather, coupled with neglect, has led to much of the upper reached of the path to become inaccessible due to overgrowth and muddy conditions.*

The Parish Council requested LCC to act. LCC has stated there are insufficient funds available, despite our protestations. The Parish Council sought out other options and continued to consult with LCC to obtain a possible solution. A quotation was received by an outside volunteer group – The Conservation Volunteers (£1,425 excl. VAT), which is outside of the Parish Council budget. Additional information via Leeds City Council, indicated that the route covered land in various ownership, and permissions would have to be sought. LCC will not proceed with authorising any work due to the above issues. Authorisation would be required to work in the area.

*The Council has received a request, in consideration of **extending the Parish Paths Partnership**. It has agreed to consider the proposal, once all surveys were completed, reviews performed by LCC to determine any funding and appropriate quotations obtained by contractors. All paths were surveyed in March (**at no cost**) and reports will be submitted to LCC. This will allow costing to be completed. The Parish Council will determine the feasibility of the project, notably in relation to cost/benefit to the whole community.*

“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 to the task of identifying ownership and seeking a repair.

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 Councillors past and current, 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 preparing for the upcoming months.

Throughout the document, I have referred to funding. This remains a significant concern, as costs for goods and services rise for everyone. The precept has remained modest in recent years, but basic maintenance costs increase. There is a limited budget, following completion of the activities and costs already outlined to support other work. Looking ahead, as we respond to requests for action in the village supporting the needs of the community, an increase may need to be made.

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.

*Do not forget 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 stationary free of charge, for the benefit of the Parish and its visitors.*

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

- *Support to My Leeds Summer Festival (My LEEDS 2023 delivered by Neighbourhood Hosts) – 09 July – Victory Hall. The Parish Council **allowed access to and use of the land** (leased to the Parish Council) alongside the Victory Hall.*
- *Use of Boules area and provision of water at **no cost**, to the “Thorner Apple Pressing Society”.*
- *Support to Festival Republic – **free distribution** of vehicle passes throughout the village. Councillors volunteering to support residents.*
- *Support to the Annual Royal British Legion 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.*

*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.**
- ***Provision of Coronation Mugs*** personalised to Thorner Parish School, celebrating the Coronation of King Charles III.
- ***Purchase of replacement Laptop*** for the Clerk to use in conjunction with Thorner Parish Council business.
- ***A cut of the field*** (leased to the Parish Council) alongside the Victory Hall, was arranged, ***to facilitate use by the Beer Festival.***
- ***Allocating of £1,000*** to Victory Hall Centenary Event Committee, to celebrate 100 years of the Victory Hall being founded.

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.