

CHAIR'S REPORT TO THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING MAY 2026

Parish Council Personnel

Over the past year, there have been several changes to the composition of the Parish Council. I am pleased to report that we now have a full complement of serving councillors.

In August 2025, Mark Smith stepped down from the Council. As no election was requested by the parish to fill the vacancy, the Council was required by law to co-opt a replacement. We were therefore pleased to receive an application from Claire Yates, who has since joined the Council. We extend our thanks to Mark for his contribution during his time in office and wish him well for the future.

Claire brings enthusiasm, a strong commitment to the village, and a proactive approach to getting things done, together with more than 25 years of management consulting experience.

In December 2025, Chris Kearns also stepped down. Many parishioners will be aware that Chris and Sonia are now enjoying their retirement, and Chris felt unable to continue giving the role of councillor the time and commitment it deserves. As with the previous vacancy, no election was requested, and the Council co-opted Karen Bennett following her application.

Karen brings a wealth of commercial experience and a clear desire to contribute positively to our community.

Continuing in their roles are Mark Harris and Andrew Clemmons ("Clemmy"), along with our Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer, Caroline Parsons. Mark's knowledge of the planning system continues to be of immense value to the Council. A key strength of any Parish Council is strong local knowledge, and Clemmy provides this in abundance. Caroline ensures the smooth running of the Council and keeps us compliant with the considerable administrative requirements placed upon us. It is worth noting that the administrative burden on Parish Councils is often disproportionate to their size.

Our priorities over the past year

As with 24/25, our priorities over the past year have been dominated by the Langford Community Land Project – The Vineyard. The Parish Council are very pleased that the complex application process to register a Charity (a Foundation Charitable Incorporated Organisation) was successful – mainly due to the persistence and attention to detail of Mark Skinner. This makes the Charity financially independent from the PC and also ensures that PC have little influence over the Charity – as required by the Charity Commission, to ensure that charities remain focused on their Charitable Objectives. The PC are freeholders to the land and to ensure that the PC and the Charity bear their appropriate responsibilities over time, we developed and agreed a non-binding Management Agreement that basically defines who does what. The Management Agreement is not confidential to either party and any Parishioner is welcome to a copy.

For further details regarding the Langford Community Land Charity refer the Charity Commission's website via this link - [Langford Community Land Charity](#)

Council finances

During FY25/26 the Parish Council incurred a number of unexpected costs associated with The Vineyard project, particularly in relation to obtaining the various permissions and approvals required to progress the scheme. In addition, the Council undertook a review of its Reserves Policy to ensure that it accords with current guidance and good practice.

Taken together, these factors necessitated a significant increase in the annual precept. The forecast expenditure for FY26/27 was estimated at approximately £17,000. However, the village was very fortunate in being offered a grant of £3,000 to help offset part of the one-off costs associated with The Vineyard project, thereby reducing the required precept to £14,000.

A copy of the Council's Reserves Policy is available on langfordgl7.co.uk.

Looking ahead

Parish Councils now have a clear statutory responsibility relating to biodiversity. We must now publish a biodiversity report at least every 5 years covering:

1. Actions taken to comply with the biodiversity duty
2. Biodiversity enhancements achieved
3. Future plans for biodiversity improvement

Karen Bennett has taken the lead in this area and will be developing plans and initiatives to help fulfil the Council's responsibilities.

We also inhabit a village with a number of significant environmental constraints arising from:

- the absence of mains gas infrastructure;
- the absence of mains foul drainage;
- high groundwater levels; and
- the sensitivity of local watercourses, particularly the Broadwell Brook.

In addition, Parish Councils now carry statutory responsibilities to ensure that their websites comply with new accessibility and content regulations. During the coming year we will work to address these obligations. Although we are a small Parish Council, the legal requirements placed upon us are often comparable to those faced by councils many times our size.

Your Parish Council strongly supports infrastructure improvements, natural flood management measures, and groundwater protection initiatives and most anything that enhances the long-term environmental sustainability and resilience of the village.

However now may be the time to develop village specific policy and proposals relating to:

1. Surface water discharge onto the public highway to insure it is minimised and does not increase flood risk, freezing risk, erosion, or pressure on existing historic culverts and drainage infrastructure.

2. The protection, inspection, maintenance, and enhancement of the village drainage network, including pipes, culverts, ditches, watercourses, road gullies, and associated infrastructure, with the aim of improving resilience to flooding and climate change.

Developing such policies would first require us to better understand the existing system through a programme of investigation and mapping. This would include identifying pipe runs, inspection chambers, road gullies, headwalls, culverts, and other access points in order to establish a base infrastructure plan for the village. We would also seek to engage constructively with Oxfordshire County Council Highways wherever possible.

As an initial step towards a village-specific environmental policy, the Parish Council intends to undertake this discovery and investigative work during the coming year and, resources permitting, move towards the preparation of a broader environmental policy.

The longer-term benefit of a Langford-specific Biodiversity and Environmental Policy is that, once properly developed and adopted, elements of it may become material considerations in future planning applications.

In Summary

Looking ahead to FY26/27, the Parish Council will be focusing on three principal areas:

- biodiversity responsibilities placed upon us by statute;
- website accessibility and governance requirements; and
- the development of village-specific environmental understanding and policy to address local priorities.

These in addition to our more “business-as-usual” responsibilities of:

- Representing our Parishioners interests and advocating for services
- Supporting events and initiatives that enhance community life or strengthen community resilience
- Making grants to projects with local benefits (via the Activities Fund)
- Maintaining village assets such as the playground

Ian Burton

Chair. Langford Parish Council FY25-26

