

## **Ackworth Parish Council - Chair's Report 2023/2024**

In May 2023 we saw a new Full Council be elected under the new 3 wards for the Ackworth Parish. I welcome this new council and thank them for all the work that we will do until the term ends in May 2027.

The new Councillor's who were elected in May 2023 and they are:

Carolyn Hall – Ackworth East Ward (Elects 2)

Sharon Maiden and Andy Sherratt - High and Low Ackworth Ward (Elects 3)

Suzy Sherratt and Nathan Bland (Returning) – Ackworth West Ward (Elects 7)

We bid a fond farewell to long standing Councillor's Sue and Terry Hollyhead who have served a very long time on Ackworth Parish Council, and I understand Sue served consecutively for 25 years. They both were instrumental for seeing the Parish Council deliver events every year and they have certainly left a long standing legacy which we continue to follow today.

We also say a farewell to Councillor Allan Garbutt who has also served for a long time and previously served as Chair of the Council. Allan, has been an excellent bridge between the Parish Council and WMDC and in his time seen many projects completed such as Carr Bridge Pavilion.

Those that were re-elected are as follows:

Stephen Parker – Ackworth East Ward

Amanda Cook – High and Low Ackworth Ward

Sarah Balfour, John Bell, Mike Galvin, Gwen Marshall and Martin Roberts – Ackworth West Ward

Finally, we thank Councillor's Sean Richmond and Tony Hames for serving the last term of 2019 to 2023 and putting in good efforts for the best of our village. I personally thank all Councillors for their hard work and efforts.

Ackworth Parish Council has also seen our long-standing Clerk Sue Templeman retire after 30 years' service and which saw her achieve a long service award from the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC). We will miss Sue Templeman and all her knowledge and experience that has led the Council through three decades and is very different today to when she started. I am sure the neighbouring Parish Council clerks will miss Sue as many of them asked her for advice and she helped to get many of them started too.

With all the thank you and farewell comments made, I can say a warm welcome to our new Clerk Jemma Noland. Jemma has settled in her new role and hit the ground running and has already made many changes to systems to help things move

smoother as the Council takes on new challenges. I look forward to working with Jemma and moving the Council forward.

I will also take this opportunity to thank our Events and Projects Manager, who is overseeing many different projects and continues to oversee our Events calendar, keeping it organized and efficient. I can also confirm that our Admin Assistant has agreed to become Deputy Clerk, which will ensure good operations for the Parish Council and allow greater capacity for the many demands we face. I thank all Ackworth Parish Council employees for their fantastic work.

Other things in general, over the last year the Council has adopted new policies, continues to push forward with previous projects and takes on new ones and has continued to balance things in these difficult times post covid. The council is seeing investment to generate new income and to manage projects to see things going forward. A key aim of the Council has been to minimise precept rises due to various costs of living issues affecting our residents. The Parish Council aims to keep the precept as low as possible and is investing in the amenities of the village to increase other revenue streams and provide more services and support of community groups.

### **Amenities**

The Council is still working on the **Quarries Community Centre** project and deals with many different obstacles which we overcome to ensure the Centre is ready for our village. This has meant that there will be a phased handover. The Centre will be phase 1, some of the immediate land will be handed over in a second phase and the final phase will be the land to the rear of the building beyond the car park. The reason for this is to accept things being handed over from Stratta in a good state which will mean reduced costs, good maintenance and everything being ready for use.

In addition to the Quarries Community Centre there will be a large piece of open land being handed over as part of this project and there are various ideas being suggested about how best to use it. Some of the ideas are using a small part of it for a playground, wild meadow, parkland, nature reserve and there are many more.

**Brackenhill Community Centre** is an ongoing project of which we are making extra efforts to see this better used and delivering for the community. Recent suggestions have been for potential use by the police, local school and the allotments next door, however these are in early stages and further development of these ideas is needed.

The **Allotments** is another fantastic amenity and is largely run by the Brackenhill Allotments Association, who Ackworth Parish Council work collaboratively with. There are (number) of plots, over a hundred tenants and we offer very competitive rates comparing with WMDC of which Ackworth residents if they wish to take up this activity benefit from. The Brackenhill Allotments Association also host an open day and take part in the Ackworth Gala, some would argue they do have the best or certainly one of the best stalls every year.

The **Bell Lane Centre** continues to host many community groups, our local Library and is the main hub for Parish Council employees to operate. There is a project

looking at ways to maximise this building to be better suited to the needs of the community.

Ackworth Library continues to serve the community with many local events and often joins in with Ackworth Parish Council for some seasonal offerings such as at Christmas, Ackworth Gala and other times where we work together. Ackworth Parish Council charges what is known as a peppercorn rent to help the Library function and provide a superb service for our village. I personally thank them for everything they do from events and clubs and the fantastic amenity they keep going for us all.

**Carr Bridge Pavilion** continues to host local sport teams and is the main centre for the Ackworth Gala. Like other facilities we are looking at trying to have more groups use the building and sports fields, to better serve the community. Some of the groups that currently use the facility are Ackworth Jaguars Juniors, Ackworth Juniors FC and Ackworth Girls FC.

**Ackworth Cemetery** has undergone recent maintenance upgrades to the main building which were overdue and continues to keep the Cemetery grounds peaceful and respectful. The cemetery has subsidised rates for residents of Ackworth and has a full time employee who keeps the site in an excellent condition.

I'd like to mention a key part of all the Amenities and Facilities being operational is largely down to the caretaking team who open and close them and make sure they are maintained and ready for use. Many of the buildings run from 9am to 9pm weekdays and this includes most weekends too. I'd like to thank all the Caretaking Team for the work they do in keeping everything maintained and running.

## **Events**

We hosted several events throughout 2023 and have a full calendar again for 2024.

The **Sunflower and Pumpkin Seeds** event took place as it has done for over decade now, however there will be a slight change for 2024. Both will be combined this year and an event with the Allotments Association is being planned which is really exciting and shows Ackworth Parish Council continue to review its Events Calendar every year.

This pumpkin and sunflower seeds are provided by the Parish Council and gives children in our village the opportunity to grow plants and learn something new. In 2023 we improved this offering with the thanks to our Projects and Events Manager, by adding some small craft activities. It was a pleasure to work alongside the Allotments Association again this year, who always host us and look after everyone and most importantly provide the scales for the pumpkin weigh in. One thing that does need improving is the Chair's horticulture abilities to actually grow something, so here is to a renewed effort in 2024.

2023 saw the Parish Council take a more active role in assisting with the **Scarecrow Festival** that started during the Covid-19 lockdown and this is planned to continue in 2024. This event started by the local community, started during the Covid-19 lockdown and has really engaged the village and so the Parish Council are happy

and excited to help support where it can, in seeing this continue. Thank you to the organisers and we hope this will build going forward.

The 2023 **Ackworth Gala** saw more community groups and stalls in place, live music from local musicians, as always our host was John Atha and this year it was a very sunny day. There were a few mishaps on the day such as the bouncy castles not being fully prepared and so work arounds were done and refunds sought. The importance of the Ackworth Gala provides an opportunity for local groups to raise funds for the fantastic services and clubs they provide in our village. This was a great day and showcased what Ackworth was all about. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for attending and for the Town Mayors of Featherstone and Hemsworth for joining us.

The **Christmas Lights** switch on again was a tremendous success and continues the collaboration between the churches together in Ackworth and the Parish Council. The Parish Council are 100% behind this event, however we are reviewing and trying to get better value for money with the costs of this event and pushing for better terms.

The **Christmas Grotto 2023** was a great success and we sought to deliver this over two days instead of just the one. We felt this widened the opportunity for kids to see Santa for free. This year we had activities throughout the whole Community Centre and was joined by Ackworth Library, as well as additional Christmas stalls upstairs. I certainly feel this has expanded and made an already action-packed event even better.

### **Other things Ackworth Parish Council supports**

A big part of Ackworth Parish Council is perhaps not as obvious however none-the-less plays a big part of what is offered in our community. This is in the form of grants given to Community Organisations and Groups to deliver events and services in our village.

The biggest is the **Senior Citizens Christmas Tea Fund** which is £2500 which provides a Christmas meal to all senior citizens of the village that attend. This is a fantastic event of which the Chair and Clerk of Ackworth Parish Council are generously invited every year too. I am personally glad that the Parish Council supports this event and thank the volunteers for their hard work in putting this on every year.

Another big event in Ackworth is of course the **Ackworth Pram Race** which supports the Prince of Wales Hospice and again is run by volunteers. Ackworth Parish Council has given £500 in support of this event which takes place every year and is a fun day that brings the whole community together and others to attend from outside of Ackworth too.

The **Ackworth Drop-In** is a monthly event which provides a social afternoon for residents to attend and have some refreshments. This is largely organised by retired Parish Councillor Joyce Evans and Ackworth Parish Council provides a room at the Bell Lane Centre for free and some funds to run this monthly meet-up.

As well as providing free rooms for the Ackworth Drop-In we also provide free rooms for the Wakefield Carers monthly meeting and West Yorkshire Police to hold their PACT meetings.

New procedures and policies have been brought into place to ensure the efficiency of the Parish Council and to deliver to a high standard.

The website has had an overhaul and is easier to navigate. This is ongoing because we want this to provide as much information as possible.

The Low Ackworth Community building which is currently out of action is being investigated as a possible future project and is in its early stages. We continue to work with Low Ackworth Community Association to move things forward. I can confirm as things move forward liaising with residents of Low Ackworth and the whole village is a priority for this to be right and meet the needs of everyone.

I'd personally like to thank the many litter pickers across the village, they are often nicknamed the "Ackworth Litter Picking Fairies." These volunteers keep our village looking clean and amazing.

Another thank you goes to Alyson Barker, who gardens the front of the Bell Lane Community Centre and this area is looking perfect and more established every year.

I am sure knowing what is happening in our village can be confusing or sometimes difficult to find out. That is why our Clerk and supported by the whole Council are fully behind the "Ask the Clerk" initiative. This is to provide information and communicate what Ackworth Parish Council does.

I would like to thank our Office Team at Ackworth Parish Council for all the work they do. They like the Caretaking team keep community buildings running from admin, operational tasks and sorting enquiries with the community. They are largely behind every project that Ackworth Parish Council undertakes, they prepare and support all Parish Councillors and are the main point of contact for the Parish Council.

We have recently had two Councillor resignations and the process for filling these vacancies has taken begun.

Ackworth Parish Council continues to deliver for the community with its facilities and amenities being maintained, keeping rates and prices low for things like the allotments and its community rooms and making Ackworth residents the priority too.

I thank all employees, councillors, volunteers and residents for a fantastic year.

Thank you

Martin Roberts  
Chair Ackworth Parish Council