CHAIRMAN'S REPORT APRIL 2025

In April 2024 following the resignation of Bob Mizen, we had nine councillors against a complement of eleven. Since then, we have coopted one new councillor, Stevie Upton. I am now happy to report that in May this year we will have a full complement following the election of all the current councillors plus one new member, Chris Bertholle. I am also pleased to note that the average age of councillors has been dropping over the last few years. Bob had served on the Council for a continuous forty three years which, as far as we know, was a record. We have formally created the status of "Freeman of Holt" which will be awarded in future for exceptional long-term service to this community. Bob became the first recipient of the honour earlier this year with an illuminated scroll presented to mark the occasion.

The major events of the past twelve months have been dominated by the two unplanned developments on the eastern edge of the village. A huge effort has been made by the planning team, particularly Lisa Wickes and Kate Learoyd which resulted in the Western Area Planning Committee refusing Bewley Homes inappropriate reserved matters application. We objected strongly to the poor quality of submitted design. Bewley are now appealing that decision but there remains the possibility of an alternative, better designed proposal. The Redcliffe proposal for 55 homes on the North side of the road is now approved in outline and we will be working to get the best possible design for the village and the future residents. There are significant highways issues with both proposals which we have been unable to resolve due to intransigence of Wiltshire Council Highways officers.

A success has been the completion and occupation of the ten affordable homes in Star Ground. These properties are built to the highest sustainability Passivhaus standards making them almost energy independent. They were permitted under Exception Site policies which are designed to meet the specific identified needs of the community. Sadly, the Wiltshire Council Housing Allocations Policy was not aligned with its Core Plan and the Housing Department were determined to allocate the homes to whoever they deemed fit. A major battle ensued which ended in allocations being made to those who met the village connection criteria which was the correct outcome.

We have been attempting to take ownership of the green space at Little Parks from Wiltshire Council. Our aim was to properly maintain the site and to develop it as a better community asset. Sadly, we have not been successful due to legal complications. The ground "two spits down" belongs to Barratt Homes but it was "adopted" by Wiltshire Council. We have not given up.

The Facilities Management Group under John Fletcher remain busy as ever. Repairs have been done to play equipment. Amongst many other tasks, all our metal has been re-painted by a volunteer including the Recreation Ground gates, the Ham Green Posts and the war memorial railings. Trees have been planted following a grant from the Safari Supper. Dog fouling of the Recreation Ground remains a problem despite the fitting of bag dispensers and more bins. The re-birth of the ancient Holt Football Club and its entry in the League led to the need to restore the showers in the pavilion. This work was completed with the help of a Football Association grant in time for the 2024 season. More improvements are planned as the team goes from strength to strength.

Work has continued to keep the Bowls Club in existence. The club has faced difficulties with escalating costs and problems with their building against declining membership. We will continue to support the club for as long as we can.

The Council has been ably supported throughout the year by our Clerk, Georgina Berry. Sadly, Georgina has had to resign due to moving with her family to York. We welcome our new Clerk, Charlotte Chappel who has lived in Holt for several years.

The Council remains in a sound financial position with income from the precept and the Cock Hill Solar Farm. There will be significant income from the two developments in the form of s106 contributions and Community Infrastructure Levy which should fund some fairly major improvements to the village over the next 3 or 4 years.

Steve Siddall
Chairman

16 April 2025