

Annual Report of the Parish Council written by the Vice-Chair, Cllr Wrettham Ladbrooke-Chartres and presented by Cllr Janet Wallace

Introduction & Council Changes Good evening, everyone. It is my pleasure to present the annual report for what has been an active year for our Parish Council.

We began our civic year in May with the appointment of Guy Reynolds as our Chair. I would like to extend our sincere thanks to Jonathan Cutts for his dedicated service in that role over the previous two years. All Parish Councillors are of course volunteers so I would like to thank my fellow councillors for their time and hard work throughout the year, and without which none of what I am going to report would have been possible. We were also pleased to welcome Sue Barnes to the Council in May 2025, representing the ward of Furzehill; she has already made a significant impact, joining the Highway Working Group alongside Jonathan Cutts, Peter Finney, and Geoff Pike.

It is heartening to see such strong community engagement: we have welcomed 111 visitors to our meetings this year. A large portion of this attendance related to the Shady Glades planning application and, crucially, our ongoing concerns regarding fire safety.

Public Safety & Highways Community safety has been a dominant theme this year. The Holt Heath Fire was an alarming and distressing time for many of us. Following the fire, we had a number of visitors to our subsequent Council meetings and also held a well-attended meeting on August 20th with 38 residents, followed by a collaborative session in Holtwood with the Commoners Association. Guy was expertly placed as Parish Council Chairman and Secretary of the Commoners Association, bringing his thoughtfulness and experience to guide us through a very difficult time. We heard very movingly the thoughts and concerns of the resident and these meetings resulted in practical outcomes, including a new WhatsApp group for the swift sharing of emergency information. We also worked closely with experts, inviting the Dorset Heaths Partnership in April and Stuart Tucker, the Wimborne Station Commander, in June to advise on the Firewise project.

On our roads, we continue to address speeding. Our SIDS (Speed Indicator Devices) programme now includes Lodge Road, and I am pleased to report that all poles are now solar-powered. While Dorset Council manages deployment, our own Community Speedwatch is active, including a new location at Smugglers Lane, with sessions set to resume this Spring, when hopefully there will be less fog. Most significantly, we expect the new speed limits in the three agreed areas to be in place by Easter. We have one of the best relationships possible with the Highways Department and the Parish Council and its Highways Working Group continue to make improvements whilst working within the constraints of the established systems.

If there are any problems on the highways, from potholes to near-misses and crashes we encourage every resident to report what has happened on the Dorset website on the roads and highways tab. We are always looking for new members of the Speedwatch Team; if that could be you then please talk to any of us afterwards or email the Clerk.

Planning, Land & Environment The Council remains the voice of the parish in the planning system. This year, we commented on 58 planning and tree applications and submitted a formal response to the Dorset Local Plan Options Consultation in August. We also held a meeting in February with Councillor Will Chakawhata and Council officers to address security concerns at the former Council Offices which have caused concern to many of us.

Closer to home, we take great pride in maintaining our local assets. We have planted a new hedge at Holt Cemetery and continue to look after the Village Green, which now boasts a beautiful new Millennium Sign crafted by a local contractor. Our traditional Dorset fingerposts at Broomhill and Higher Row have also been refurbished in their original style, supported by grants from the CPRE.

Grants & Community Celebrations Supporting local causes remains a priority. This year, the Council awarded grants to the Chained Library (£250), the Reef Youth Club (£500), and the Citizens Advice Bureau (£500). We were also delighted to provide £500 to St James School for their peace garden and outdoor seating. Our community spirit was on full display on May 8th, 2025, when we celebrated VE Day by lighting the Lamp of Peace on the village green—a poignant event that was very well attended.

Finance To fund these essential services and maintain our local infrastructure, the Parish Council has increased the precept from £27.00 to £28.00 per Band D household for the 2026/27 financial year. This will raise a total of £23,881.20, ensuring we remain financially resilient while keeping the increase to just £1 per year for the average household.

Acknowledgements Finally, I must offer our thanks to the many individuals who keep our parish running:

- **To our representatives:** Jackie, for her work on the Parish Hall Committee; Jonathan, on the St Margarets & Stones Almshouses Charity; Jonathan, Peter, Geoff and Sue on the Highways Working Group; and Sarah for her diligent reporting on our footpaths.
 - **To our local 'doers':** Richard Lonsdale, for his work on the Furzehill BT Box and our new nameplate for the noticeboard; and Bill Warren for organising the vital Holt Neighbourcare Scheme.
 - **To our maintenance team:** Charlie Hiscock, Mike Clifford, and Ian Mulliner for their work at the cemetery, and Limecove for the Village Green.
 - **To the gardeners:** Everyone who has helped plant and maintain our three BT boxes, and Stewarts Garden Centre for their generous donation of plants.
 - **To Cllr Will Chakawhata:** For his dedicated hard work at the (County) Council and his continued support and liaison with the parish.
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- **To our Clerk:** Without Lisa the cogs of this machine would not run smoothly or quietly. It is due to her hard work, expertise, and careful stewardship of all of us, that we are able to work on your behalf to make sure that Holt Parish remains a lovely place to live and work.

Thank you all for your time this evening and for your continued commitment to our parish.