



Itchen Valley Parish Council

Serving the Communities of Avington, Easton, Itchen Abbas & Martyr Worthy

Annual Parish Meeting 23rd April 2026.

Chairman's Report for 2025/26.

The past year has seen the Parish Council involved in a wide range of issues, projects and tasks. All are related to the Valley, some have been completed, some are current and ongoing, others more long term and in many cases all three of those descriptions could be used. This report endeavours to cover in summary as many as possible of our activities over the past year.

Transport issues have been a big feature and had considerable input from some council members. The M3 Junction Nine Improvement Project has been underway all year. The contractors Volker Fitzpatrick and Balfour Beatty have made an outstanding effort to keep the Parish Council and local residents informed. Council representatives are invited to fortnightly meetings on line with them and we have had two excellent tours round the site. We are given regular information regarding road closures and diversions, all of which are put on our Website. Their Customer and Communications Manager Kathryn Boyce is to be congratulated and thanked for the efforts she has made to keep us informed. As many are aware there have been congestion problems especially in the lanes through and around Easton. This is both a serious safety and inconvenience issue. Unfortunately measures to reduce these problems come under Hampshire County Council (HCC) Highways who appear to be reluctant to discuss them with us and so far are not willing to adopt any of the actions we have put forward to improve the situation. Our Transport Lead Cllr David Wolfe and County Cllr Jackie Porter together with your chairman have been pursuing this issue for almost a year and we do not intend to give up. At the County Council Meeting in May there will be a delegation of residents raising this issue. Depending on the response we will if necessary take further action to get a workable solution.

Another major transport concern has been and still is the 67 bus service which needs to be improved. Again we have raised this issue with HCC and have received a minimal response. Cllr David Wolfe has made strenuous effort on this. When speaking with representatives from other rural parishes it is clear we are not alone in needing improvements to our bus services and will continue to push for them. To that end please support the campaign and survey that will be shortly going into full swing and Cllr David Wolfe will be speaking about at the Annual Parish Meeting.

A major project for the Itchen Valley has been the improvement of the playing fields at Couch Green. Plans for level pitches and improved parking have been drawn up together with a DDA compliant link to the Watercress Way. That has allowed cost estimates to be prepared and applications for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding submitted separately for both aspects of the project. Thanks go to Cllr John Beresford who has master minded the project and to County Councillor Jackie Porter and our Clerk Victoria Richardson for their work with the CIL applications. A start, with a topographical survey, has been made into looking how to integrate the Old School Field in Easton with the small triangle of land (known as The Ransom Strip). Thanks again to Cllr John Beresford for arranging this work. Both the Old School Field and Couch Green have had problems with trees becoming dangerous. Necessary remedial work has been carried out. The cost of this work has meant drawing on some of our reserves which in turn has been one of the factors necessitating an increase in the precept for 2026/27. To reduce playground running costs a change has been made from monthly to quarterly inspections of play equipment. A watching eye will be kept on equipment in between inspections by Cllr Scot Johnston at Couch Green and Cllr David Swinstead at the Old School Field in Easton.

Footpaths and bridle ways are a major and well used feature of the Valley. We have continued to use the Lengthsman's visit in the summer to help with this work which Cllr Scot Johnston arranges for the Parish. However, the majority of the work of keeping the paths open for the past year has been done by Cllr Chris Jeffes using the ride on brush cutter. Earlier this year Chris received the Mayors Award for Service to the Community for this work and all walkers in the Valley owe him a big thank you. Two paths in the past year have given specific problems. The steps at



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the west end of the path from Itchen Abbas to Chilland Lane (footpath 31) became unsafe. Cllrs Scot Johnston, Chris Jeffes and one other rebuilt them and they should last for some years to come. The path across the Valley from the bottom of Chilland Lane (footpath 48) floods and becomes muddy in places during wet weather. The Environment Agency is unlikely to agree to a raised surface any time soon. Therefore a number of scaffold boards have been obtained (thanks to Cllr John Beresford and Justin from NJS Group Ltd). These will be made into duck boards with a wire mesh top for grip and will be put down in places where mud causes difficulties for walkers. With the aid of the Ramblers a kissing gate has been installed on the footpath from the bottom of Church Lane, Martyr Worthy, to Easton (footpath 25). Other locations for kissing gates are also being considered. The aim, where possible, is to improve access for wheelchair users and those using children's buggies.

Commenting on planning continues led by Cllr Christopher Langford. Probably the most difficult questions have been concerning Boomtown. Consensus cannot always be reached where there is a wide range of strong opinions. The majority view has therefore been to take the centre course and ask for time limited permission which is most likely to get accepted and gives the best chance of some level of control. Where traffic was concerned with last year's festival this worked well with the organisers providing good supervision and responding when needed. This was despite having to cope with the added problems caused by the M3 Junction 9 Improvement project.

The longstanding saga of the Avington sewage pumping station continues with very little evidence of real progress. At a site meeting last autumn we were told that work would begin this spring. Since then there has been no sign of any real work on site. Cllr Christopher Langford has worked hard to keep the pressure on Southern Water to get this project completed. A letter was sent to the Chairman of Southern Water which did receive a limited response. A further email has been sent and very recently we have had an email from a new communications manager blaming the delay on planning difficulties. What the details of this and when they are likely to be sorted out to allow the project to be completed is still to be found out.

As was seen on the cover of a recent edition of Itchen Valley News the bus shelter opposite the Martyr Worthy War Memorial, with a telescopic loader complete with driver provided by one of the Valley farmers, and a support team of Cllrs Moffatt, Langford, Johnston and Swinstead, was picked up and taken to the Men's Shed in Alresford. There it has undergone a major rebuild. Meanwhile Cllrs Langford, Swinstead and one other have laid down a new concrete base for the shelter to be relocated on the South side of the road where it hoped to be of more use to those waiting for the bus. Our thanks are due to the Mens Shed for this work and to the owners of the land for agreeing to have the shelter in its new location.

The telephone boxes in Easton and at Couch Green were once again in danger of being removed but thanks to prompt action by Cllr David Swinstead they have been kept in place and remain operative.

Once again we have held a spring Litter Pick. The turnout was excellent. Litter dropped on Rights of Way in the Valley seems to have reduced but unfortunately roadside litter has increased. Thank you to all who took part and especially to Cllr Paul Moffatt for efficiently organising the event and to Jill Croft with her team who provided tea, coffee and cakes for all at the end. An application was made to have six more multipurpose bins with the aim of reducing litter further. Unfortunately after a long wait a site visit was arranged but the outcome was that application for all six bins was turned down on the grounds that there was insufficient evidence of litter to justify the cost.

On the junction close to The Plough in Itchen Abbas replacement of two items has become necessary. The traditional fingerpost was destroyed by a car running into it. A replacement is on order and will be installed complete with a refurbished finial, hopefully in the next month. The other replacement needed is the dead walnut tree on the opposite of the road. This tree was itself a replacement for the original walnut tree planted in 1977 to commemorate the late Queen's Silver Jubilee. A whitebeam will be planted in the autumn as a more resilient replacement. We owe a big thank you to the residents who not only advised us on the choice of tree but have generously offered to fund it.



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As will be understood all this activity does come at a cost. After five years of no increase in the precept the time has come to make an increase. The reasons for this are given in more detail in the financial report. Our thanks go to Cllrs Scot Johnston and Steve Andrews and to Victoria Richardson, our Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer for this report and their work keeping our finances in order.

Looking to the immediate future may I draw your attention to the next event which will be on 18th May in Martyr Worthy Village Hall starting at 7pm, when we will have the opportunity to meet and hear from our local Police Officer and the PCSO. Looking further ahead everyone needs to be aware of the forthcoming changes resulting from Local Government Reform (LGR). There will be an elected mayor for the Strategic Authority covering all of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. The District Authorities will be replaced by larger Unitary Authorities. In the case of Winchester District, the new Unitary Authority will be made up of the former Districts of; East Hampshire, Winchester, Test Valley and the New Forest. Some parishes on the borders of these Districts will be moved into neighbouring Unitary Authorities. How this will work in detail and how the role of Parishes may change is still not known.

And finally, may I thank all my fellow Councillors, our County and City Councillors, our Clerk and RFO, and all the residents who have given us support and help over the past year. In the words of our Internal Auditor we are "a very active Parish Council". Long may it continue.

Patrick Appleby, IVPC Chairman.