

Walkern Parish Council Chairs report for the meeting to be held on
Thursday 7th May 2026

Good Evening All

As Chair I am pleased to say that I believe that parish councillors have given their all again this last year. Time and effort have produced results, and these have been evidenced either in write ups of monthly minutes, articles in the Walkern Journal, visual results or on our website.

As a small parish council, we are always willing to have others join us either as a councillor or to offer assistance e.g., our volunteer litter pickers that just get on with the job.

We understand that many people have a lot on with running a home and young families as well as going to work, but we ask that people just put in the time and effort that they think they can offer.

Our group are dedicated volunteers who bring their strengths and weaknesses to our monthly meetings. Between us we try and sort out issues that arise, in the best interests of the village and villagers, e.g. anti-social issues, parking, planning, dog bin emptying, litter picking, lighting issues and anything else that we may offer advice with or point people in the right direction to get matters resolved. This is as well as our monthly parish council meeting dealing with our obligations as councillors.

After a very long-drawn-out term, we have at last taken ownership of the Burial site in Froghall lane. This solves the probable future situation of having it built on. The parish council has already been keeping the site mowed, and gravestones cleaned of ivy etc. At times visitors do ask to visit a relative who was and still is buried at this site. Hopefully, they will see that we care about and respect this site. In the near future we hope to add a few items where we can, to make this into a peace garden. It is not for playing on as people's remains are still here. There is no dedicated parking here, which does make it difficult and as Froghall Lane is narrow, care needs to be taken when visiting either walking or by vehicle.

The children's playground in the High Street was completed at great cost. This shows though this year how people think of the area by the number of visitors. Some are adults who sit and have a hot drink or read a book/ paper. Young children with parents/carers visit to play on a variety of equipment that is also educational. The book exchange has worked reasonably well, although it is noticed that the children's books are not being bought back for others to enjoy. This exchange requires more updating as water has gotten into the roof again. Teenagers also use the area to socialise. It is hoped that those that use the site in an evening learn to put their bottles and other rubbish in the bins provided.

A recent addition on the site are bird boxes which were kindly donated and then put up by Michelle and Jim Wakely. The mowing to keep the ground looking tidy works well and planting of wildflowers is ongoing, and we hope that this following year will be more visible. This is alongside further planting of native bushes for pollinators and planting of species that require dryer soil to grow as there is no water available on site.

The Aubries play area has had repairs and the hard standing for the bench added. Although it is a small site, it is used and the bench enables those that require a rest from the shop to home can sit.

The play area at WSCC has undergone repairs to the fencing and again is mown to make the site pleasant to be in for younger children. The planting of trees and hedges around the site has

taken but requires some attention. Further attention will be around the tug of war area to ensure this is safe but also left as a wildlife site.

The Walkern Sports and Community Centre and outlying field have shown a significant improvement, with boundaries tidied, the fenced area updated to make it a comfortable and safe space for young children and dogs as well as watching a cricket match or sitting outside for a drink in the summer evenings. The inside has had a face lift and painted, along with new doors and windows and of course any upgrade of internal works found necessary. Again, the committee running this for the village are small and they put in a lot of time and effort for all of us. The inside of the building is kept in a clean and tidy manor for anyone wishing to hire it. Planting and shrubbery are kept clipped and the outside flower boxes are planted up. This is also the same with the War Memorial being kept clean and tidy not just for Remembrance Day.

Lighting – We have found that the parish council own more lights than thought. So, this has been quite an expensive experience. The lighting along the footpath to the sports club is a constant thorn as often one or more goes out. One recent example was a lamp top replacement which was quite farcical to see two workmen with a rope trying to pull it down for replacement. This was at an eye watering cost to the parish council.

Allotments – These are well tended and thanks to Elaine Cook and her committee are overseen and run well. The parish councillors keep an eye on the river boundary/bank as this has previously been eroded.

Horse field – this is still used for livery and exercising horses. The fencing and field are kept in decent order, and the removal of manure is kept up to date by Tracy.

Water – councillors have had to keep a close watch on the water being used and the meter. The water company has been lax in sending bills, updating a broken meter and indeed joining it to the supply. As all our water bills have risen, councillors are looking at this area closely.

General appearance of the village – The grass cutting, hedge trimming, stone washing, leaf clearing, gutter cleaning as well as the playgrounds general maintenance, some bin emptying that the county council cannot manage to take on are all overseen by our two employees Michelle Wakeley and Michael Daley.

Financial gifts – this last year the parish council was able to give sums to each group that asked for help to purchase or pay for an item. Unfortunately, this is not to say that we may manage this every year.

Pigeon Hut – the history society have made this an interesting area to visit, with lots of donations, sorting, displaying, writing up and now a wonderful timeline to follow the progress of Walkern.

It is most certainly worth a visit.

Walkern Journal – 10 months a year residents can read the latest information about ongoing happenings within the village, either by hand delivered paper copies or online. This is run and delivered by a small group of volunteers, who I am sure have room for more people to come and help.

Planning – over the past year despite our updated Neighbourhood Plan there has still been large planning applications put in, as well as smaller and individual ones. Each application is looked at and commented on by our councillors, who try to be fair and assess if it is in the best interests of the village or has any detrimental effect on neighbours or the village as a whole. We try to use policies from our NP or the council's NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework document) written for East Herts to help us formulate a response.

In the meantime, the councillors are not just sitting still, there are monthly financial items that require paying, insurance to pay, forms that are required to be completed and sent off by a designated date and the precept we have per annum to keep an eye on. We still require more

updates on policies, procedures and risk assessments which are a work in progress. Contracts need to be renewed and/or updated. All these things take time and energy. We also ensure that twice a year we do a village walkabout talking to residents and checking that there are no hazards or problems that we have not been made aware of.

Crime thankfully is low in the village. The police do inform us of any situations in and around Walkern that they have dealt with or with information they wish us to be aware of. Graffiti can be a problem which we try and deal with straight away. Litter left from visiting the sports field and returning to the village, or litter left on the play areas are dealt with as swiftly as we can. Deliberate acts of anti-social behaviour are disappointing as it is the residents who pay indirectly for equipment and enhancement of our village. This again is dealt with as soon as we can. Other types of anti-social behaviour encourage residents to report themselves.

St. Mary's Church and the United Reformed Church – both run for the benefit of villagers and supporters by a small hardworking group of volunteers.

Councillors try to support both our village churches either as individuals or as part of our grant gift group.

This may include attending services for departed villagers, services during the year Christmas Fayre, attending clubs held on their premises or food bank donations as an example.

Our latest project which you will hear more of is Wilder Walkern – We would like Walkern to be an example of showing how we care about the green spaces and green corridors within our boundary, the wildlife that lives and breeds here now and has done for many years, and the diversity of flora and fauna that we have growing. We would like to expand on this and are hoping that villagers within their own gardens and landowners will enhance on all that we already have.

Thankyous

A thank you to Councillors -- Tom Deffley and Tony Stowe for advice and sitting in to support councillors when they can.

A thank you to our employees Michelle and Michael for helping to keep our village an area to be proud of.

A thank you to those of you who volunteer picking up litter in and around the boundary of Walkern.

A Thank you to those that support the running of the Food Bank at St. Mary's church.

A thank you to the small committee who keep the WSCC running and enable others to hire out the building and the sports field.

A thank you to Janet Woodall and her committee who have made the history of Walkern available to us all.

A thank you to the small group of volunteers who run URC for the village and to the small group of volunteers who ensure our historic St. Marys church is kept open.

Finally, a big thank you to all my councillors and parish clerk, your efforts and time have greatly been appreciated. Going forward, I believe we are growing into being an updated and very effectual parish council.

Thank you.