

# **THORP ARCH PARISH COUNCIL**

## **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

### **JOHN RICHARDSON**

The Annual Report from the Chairman of Thorp Arch Parish Council 26th April 2021  
My Report is given normally at the Annual Parish Meeting. The APM did not take place last year due to pandemic conditions and restricted activity affecting local government. The APM is taking place today, 26th April, albeit on line.

The recent death of HRH The Prince Philip has been a sad loss and its impact on all communities throughout the country has been deeply felt. The Parish Council on your behalf has issued its own tribute and message of condolence. During the period of mourning up to the day of the funeral, Notice Boards featured only a portrait photograph of the Prince together with the message of condolence.

The Covid pandemic remains with us and I trust this Report will be of interest in the midst of the understandable restraints imposed on us by the Government. We are all looking forward to the return of normality in the way we live. At the time of issuing this Report, there is some optimism that the end of restrictions will be realised in early summer.

In my Report last year, there was little expectation that the restrictions on our lives would persist for 12 months and more. It has been a difficult time for all residents, young and old and all in between, to come to terms with the impact.

I believe that the residents of Thorp Arch have shown great resilience during this time and demonstrated kindness to neighbours and the broader community in many ways. I hope later this year that there will be an opportunity for the whole of the Parish to come together to celebrate the return to "normality" ...fingers crossed!

#### **The Past Year- in Summary**

1. Councillors: There has been one more change to the team of Councillors largely due to constraints of time available to Andrew Peacock. I should like to thank him for his contribution to TAPC and we wish him and his family well in the future. We have been fortunate in co-opting Charlotte Dyson as a new Councillor. Charlotte has been a resident for over 20 years in Thorp Arch and is already having significant influence on the activities of TAPC. The team of Councillors - Cllrs Steve O'Loughlin, Nicola Midgley, Ian Grainger, Charlotte and myself - work well together on your behalf, complemented by a hard- working and very effective Clerk, Tina Wormley, who is much valued as she strives to ensure compliance by all of us with the statutory duties of the Council. My thanks to all the team.
2. Coronavirus Pandemic: TAPC has sought to comply fully with all directives introduced to assist in the fight against COVID 19. The main impact on activities has

been the use of Zoom Meetings with which there is now more familiarity than at the outset. Meetings have been carried out with due respect and harmony, unlike some other Councils which have attracted unwelcome publicity!!

TAPC wishes to place on record its appreciation for the efforts of Leeds City Council, its Leader Cllr Dame Judith Blake and its Chief Executive, Tom Riordan in the way they have put in place effective measures throughout the region to combat the pandemic and importantly communicated progress throughout. The absence of local political rancour has been very welcome.

The forthcoming election for the new West Yorkshire Mayor will no doubt bring a return of political partisanship but this perhaps will be another sign of a return to normal life.

3. Neighbourhood Plan: TAPC continues to keep the NP under constant review, especially the Projects identified within it. The most active current project, albeit delayed in its progression by the impact of the pandemic, is the cycle path from Walton through to Dowkell Lane. It is hoped that discussions with MoJ Estates (acting for HMP Wealstun) and Leeds Highways will resume shortly.

The maintenance of the greenspace in front of Thorp Arch Grange is becoming more certain as we understand Leeds CC is close to reaching agreement on the protection of its ownership from the threat made by a third party. TAPC anticipates working with Leeds CC to ensure this land becomes a real benefit to the Parish community.

TAPC has received its first CIL contribution of £17,000 from the development by Chartford Homes and further CIL contributions will be forthcoming from Chartford and from Lovell Homes as the latter embarks on the building out of that development over the next three years, having finally achieved detailed consent. As mentioned in previous Reports, TAPC expects in aggregate to be in receipt of CIL monies in the region of £300,000 over the next three to four years. Consultation on the major Projects within the NP will be given by TAPC in considering how and when such CIL monies are utilised on major Projects within the scope of the rules governing such spending.

TAPC welcomes the continuing interest and offers of help regarding these Projects from residents. Indeed, new ideas of Projects to enhance the appeal, heritage and future viability of the Parish are also welcome. The NP should be an evolving reference for the community, now and in the future.

4. Planning Matters: The review of the Leeds Site Allocation Plan will be getting underway in 2021/22 and which may again result in more uncertainty for the Outer North East Area of Leeds. Wetherby Town Council continues to have its planning concerns and the Better Wetherby Partnership remains alert to new development proposals.  
For TAPC's part, the Application by Lovell Homes for 119 residential units has now received detailed consent very. TAPC has worked hard to mitigate the impact of this development with both Lovell's management and with Leeds Planners and with some success. The highways infrastructure, the greenspace within the development,

the provision of allotment space, environmental protection and improved parking provision are envisaged to enhance the attractiveness of the overall development. Additionally, confirmed installation of the cycle path route from the corner of Walton Road/ Wighill Lane to the main entrance to HMP Wealstun is a welcome first part of the route which is hoped eventually to extend to Dowkell Lane.

TAPC is pleased with the outcome of the Chartford Homes development which is all but complete.

A concern for TAPC is the flow of construction traffic whilst the Lovell Homes development is underway. This concern has been further raised on recently being alerted to the otherwise welcome proposals from The British Library for the upgrading of its property in Thorp Arch. These proposals are the subject of current consultation with local communities but it is understood that the £95m project which is being funded by Government will be built over the next three years, exactly the same time as the Lovells development is under construction. TAPC along with Boston Spa PC and Walton PC are determined that construction traffic is routed away from the through routes that link the communities, including the bridge over the River Wharfe.

The usual regular flow of individual applications for home improvement/extensions/tree lopping, etc continue and the Council keeps such matters under regular observation for comment, especially so for the maintenance of the conservation status of much of the Parish.

TAPC continues to develop its relationship with LUFC and maintains a regular dialogue on a number of issues, including its continued occupation of the training facilities based in Thorp Arch. It is also beginning to build a similar relationship with the British Library who are by far the biggest employer in the area but tend to go under the radar, so to speak.

5. Finance: The healthy financial position of TAPC continues, supplemented by the first instalment of £17,000 of CIL monies received. Balances in excess of £60,000 are held with HSBC and these funds will be very much needed as the NP Projects previously referred to are pursued in the future. The policy pursued by TAPC has been to avoid reliance on future borrowing but to have confidence that it has the resources to fund projects with significant capital expenditure attached.

The Precept has been marginally increased this year to £20,000 from £19,200 to meet current annual expenditure, although as the number of properties has increased, individual household bills may show a slight decline. The additional new homes in the Parish will in future years will mean more residents contributing through the Precept levy. Expenditure planned over and above the Precept will come from Reserves.

The Council has made a number of community donations in the last financial year, one of which was towards the very successful first Christmas Trail organised by the Thorp Arch Mamas.

Internal and external audit procedures have been fully satisfactory.

6. Highways and infrastructure: Cllr Nicola Midgley has been very active and successful in the way she tackles these matters. Very often it is the concerns over safety of our roads that take most interest from residents. The speed with which these are addressed and the good responses generally from Leeds Highways are a credit to the hard work that Nicola put in on your behalf.

Analysis of data from SIDs installed, road repairs, actions to improve the newly opened Sustrans route across the River Wharfe, parking restraints by the school, speeding over the bridge, etc. All and more have benefitted from Nicola's input and influence. The latest news is that TAPC is shortly expecting the construction by Leeds CC Highways of a new footpath by Lady Hastings School, extending on the School side of Dowkell Lane from the double gates to the car park, as a safety measure called for by residents and parents. TAPC is grateful to Ward Councillors for their help on this matter.

The maintenance of our Greens has been carried out this year by contractors, following the retirement of Colin Sanderson. He is a stalwart of the village having lived in Thorp Arch for many years, and serving both All Saints Church and TAPC for much of that time. I should like to extend thanks and appreciation for all his hard work in ensuring that Thorp Arch looks its best.

7. Community Assets: Improvements at North Lodge Gate (including a new Notice Board for TABS), a new bench ("Audrey's Bench") by the bus stop on The Village and a new TAPC Notice Board at Woodlands are all evidence of the efforts to keep improving the feel and look of the Parish. Much of this work has been led by Councillor Steve O'Loughlin, Vice Chairman. Steve's business experience and counsel have been and will be of much benefit now and in the future. TAPC has commissioned a new "Thorp Arch" Sign to be erected on the Walton Road entrance to the Parish and this will be constructed in the next few months following consultation with Highways on licensing its location.

These efforts extend to activity on the environmental matters. Community bulb planting is regarded as increasingly important, complemented on the other hand by the equally important community litter picking. Both of these efforts are led by the Village Society and TAPC extends its appreciation to Gill Johnson, Chairman of the VS and her team of volunteers. The recent turnout by residents on litter picking was an impressive record and resulted in over 20 bags of rubbish being collected. The disfigurement of our environment in this way is a disgrace to society in general and it is to be hoped that those responsible can be deterred in some way in the future. In the meantime, the community spirit of residents is all important in maintaining the attractive appearance of the Parish.

8. The Environment: Climate Change issues are not lost on TAPC. On the initiative of Cllr Grainger, who has drawn up a draft of a Thorp Arch Green Plan, contact has been established with the Boston Spa Green Group with whom TAPC is seeking to encourage co-operation throughout the area, irrespective of parish boundaries, on matters of practical relevance to the protection of our green environment. These issues are important and will become increasingly so for the Parish and its residents, who are encouraged to get involved in these local activities.
  
9. Community activities: The pandemic has regretfully curtailed most of the community activity of the past 12 months. Remembrance Sunday was commemorated in an abbreviated manner, the Christmas tree was there on the Lower Green, festooned with lights but no singing of carols this year.  
No VE Day 75th Anniversary celebrated. Post pandemic, let us hope that the promised "Thorp Arch Party" materialises to help us make up for lost time!!  
All of us will look forward to the time when those established community bodies like the Village Society, YCA, TABS, TA Tennis Club, All Saints Church, Lady Elizabeth Hastings School, the Pax Inn and newer ones such as Leeds United FC, HMP Wealstun, the British Library and TA Mamas can all take a prominent place in regenerating the shared life of this community.

A continuing problem hindering such regeneration may well be the availability of a venue for social gatherings or for regular meetings of committees and indeed for TAPC. In the past, the School has been available for such gatherings and the Church has been an alternative venue. Post pandemic, it is not clear what options there will be for TAPC and other groups to meet.

The contribution and help given by Ward Councillors over the past year has been much appreciated. Our thanks for their ongoing support go to Ward Councillors Alan Lamb, Norma Harrington and Linda Richards.

10. Communication: 'Causeway' continues to be published in difficult times and has maintained a very high standard of both editorial contribution and advertising commitment. Its future once again remains under review by the Causeway team and TAPC have sought to engage with the team to understand more about its future plans.  
There is confidence that support, financial and otherwise, will be forthcoming to maintain its place in our community and indeed be a part of the legacy of its recently retired Chairman, Ian Hall, whose efforts over many years have been so important.

The TAPC continues to develop its website communication ([www.thorp-arch.org.uk](http://www.thorp-arch.org.uk)) and it is increasingly becoming the means of communications to residents on matters of interest through its Newsletter.

The homepage of the Website now incorporates an easy sign up to the Newsletter for residents and which then enables the Council to communicate online with them, increasingly the norm.

The "Village Diary" continues to be a valuable means of messaging the community and has proved essential through the current pandemic. For more information on this, please contact the Clerk.

Notice Boards will always be the means of placing hard copy information on Council matters and the new additional location at Woodlands Drive has certainly helped in getting communication with all residents throughout the Parish.

11. Future Challenges: There are a number of broad issues on which TAPC can lead or encourage action by others:

- i). The INTEGRATION into community life of the new residents at the developments by Chartford Homes and later from the development by Lovell Homes. In total that will be 145 new households, a significant increase to the size of the existing community;
- ii). The implementation and possible addition of new PROJECTS in the TA Neighbourhood Plan requiring further resident consultation;
- iii). The development of a shared GREEN PLAN with Boston Spa and Walton communities to address locally determined actions for environmental protection and enhancement;
- iv). The development of DIGITAL COMMUNICATION between residents and TAPC and vice versa, complementing traditional methods such as Causeway. The use of social media has to be embraced as a user-friendly means of engaging with residents and the general public and not perceived as a threat;
- v). The PARTICIPATION of residents of all ages in community life. Volunteers, the creation of new initiatives and groups alongside existing ones - these are important to the positive evolution of a healthy village life from whichever part of the Parish a resident may live.

This is my last year as both a Councillor and as Chairman of TAPC, having served in both roles for the last 6 years. Many residents will know that after 36 happy and eventful years in Thorp Arch, Liz and I recently moved to our new home in Wetherby. In these circumstances, I have considered it inappropriate to continue in my position on TAPC and accordingly, I have tendered my resignation effective from the start of the new electoral year in May 2021. The new Chairman will be elected at the Annual Meeting of TAPC scheduled for early May 2021. The vacancy for a new Councillor will be advertised in the normal way by the Clerk.

It has been an honour and a privilege for me to serve you on TAPC. I was elected in April 2015 at a rather turbulent time in Thorp Arch, principally because of the impact of the proposed development of 2000 houses on Thorp Arch Trading Estate. Thankfully, the community eventually defeated that proposal and TAPC has since settled down to a rather more normal existence, not however without further trials and tribulations but also with much pleasure at the various changes and improvements achieved.

During the last 6 years, I have shared office with a number of Councillors all of whom brought something valuable to the role. With respect to all past Councillors, I honestly believe that the current incumbents are as individually talented and committed as any, and together they make for an exceptional team to represent Thorp Arch. It has been an

enjoyable experience to bring them together and to lead them through the last 12 months. I consider them the best legacy of my term as Chairman. I wish them every success under whoever is the new Chairman.

One consistent presence throughout my time as Chairman and Councillor on TAPC has been the Clerk, Tina Wormley. She has been very effective and reliable throughout, bringing valuable experience to bear. She has helped me enormously as I quickly learned that there were rules and regulations to observe as I sought to bring about change. Tina has embraced these changes; she is practical and has much knowledge of the systems and the people within the local government body in Leeds. We have shared pride in the way that TAPC has evolved since 2015. I am sure she will continue to be highly valued under the new Chairman as she has been throughout by me. I thank her for the support she has given me and she has my best wishes for the future.

I mentioned last year what a difficult time the community faced in the evolving Covid crisis, never imagining what the next twelve months had in store for us. Each of us has their own experience of these life changing events and times.

As a community, I am confident that the residents of Thorp Arch will emerge with strengthened resolve to come together and help regenerate and revitalize the prized and historic heritage of Thorp Arch. My hope is that the new generation of families coming into the parish will embrace village life and help Thorp Arch to continue to thrive as a vibrant place to live.

The present Council is in good shape for the future and it will be determined to ensure that it serves all residents well.

Thank you for all your support in the past year and over the last six eventful years. Liz and I expect to be returning frequently to Thorp Arch where we have many friends. I shall look forward to learning of the continued success of the Parish Council.

John Richardson  
Chairman  
Thorp Arch Parish Council  
26th April 2020