

Quainton Rural Community Council

Chairmans Annual Report

I write this Annual Report at a rather unusual time. It has been two years since a Chairman's Report was last published, and I felt it important that 2025 should not pass without one. With that in mind, I am proud to present to Council, our community, and our partners the Chairman's Annual Report for 2025.

In my time as Chairman, I have found much to reflect on. This report is not only a look back at where we stand, but also a chance to share Quainton Rural Community Council's plans for the years ahead.

I am pleased to report that QRCC returned all councillors apart from one. Former Councillor Lee Whitlock, who worked tirelessly for Quainton and our community, has stepped down, and it is only right that we mark his departure with significance. We are undoubtedly poorer as a council without him.

Six councillors were returned uncontested under the description 'Working for Quainton.' It is important to reflect on what this means: to step forward in service to one's community, with no pretence or self-interest, is one of the highest callings of public service, and I am proud to work alongside them. Although we remain one councillor short, I am confident that in time a determined public servant will step into the role. What is particularly encouraging is that we now have the highest number of councillors since 2021, a milestone worth celebrating.

Councillor Sarah Smith is also resigned as a councillor in December as she takes on new roles and responsibilities. And I would like to take this time to thank her for her service to Quainton and all she did and continues to do so for this community.

I would also like to thank Councillor Sue Weldon, who stepped down as Chairman after nearly two years in the role. She continues to serve as Vice Chair and remains a voice of reason and wise counsel when needed. I am truly grateful for her continued commitment.

We are fortunate to have a talented and hardworking cohort of councillors, and our community can be reassured that we have a capable and dedicated council working on its behalf.

I would like to also like to thank Katherine Richardson who stepped down as Clerk to the Community Council in June 2025. She has been a stalwart of the community and has worked hard to deliver for the residents of Quainton. She has been replaced by the very able, Helen Hudson Butler who has hit the ground running and has made remarkable improvements to the community council as it begins to transition to a more digitally apt and inclusive institution.

Quainton stands at a crossroads. We can either stand still and simply maintain what we have, or we can move forward embracing progress and creating space for Quainton's continued growth and vitality.

With the adoption of our four-year plan, “Preserving What Matters, Planning for Tomorrow,” formally implemented on Wednesday 10th December 2025, we have chosen to move confidently toward the future.

During the past year, the Council agreed to adopt the name Quainton Rural Community Council, replacing Quainton Parish Council. This change reflects not a departure from our statutory responsibilities, but a clearer expression of how we see our role and how we wish to work with our residents.

While the term “Parish Council” remains our legal status for the time being, the new name better represents the reality of Quainton as a rural community with diverse needs, interests, and voices. It signals our commitment to being more accessible, more outward-looking, and more actively engaged with everyone who lives and works in the village, regardless of whether they traditionally interact with local government.

The adoption of “Rural Community Council” underlines our intention to move beyond a narrow administrative focus and to act as a convenor, advocate, and champion for community wellbeing, sustainability, and local initiative. It reflects our ambition to strengthen partnership working with residents, voluntary groups, neighbouring councils, and principal authorities, and to ensure that local concerns are heard clearly at every level.

Importantly, this change does not alter the Council’s legal powers or duties. Instead, it is a statement of values: that this Council exists to serve the whole community, to listen, and to work constructively for the long-term benefit of Quainton.

We have already pushed ahead with our strategic goals. At our October meeting, we launched our Community Group Grants Fund, which will come into effect in the 2026/27 financial year. The fund totals £7,000 and will be available to all community groups in the Community of Quainton, with a maximum allocation of £1,400 per group.

Community groups will be invited to apply at the start of the next financial year through our applications process, which has been designed to be easier and more straightforward. The fund policy and application process will be launched in the new year to help community groups prepare for applying.

With an 80% cut to community boards by Buckinghamshire County Council, it is vital that we provide additional funding wherever we can to ensure that communities like ours do not suffer. This fund represents a practical step in supporting our local groups and making sure that residents continue to benefit from a vibrant and active community.

We haven’t stopped there; we have also invested in our play park facilities. During September, we invested around £20,000 into the Upper Street Play Park, supported by a generous £10,000 donation from our esteemed friends at the Fireworks Committee. Their contribution has helped us enhance this much loved community asset even further.

We continue to review and improve all our facilities to ensure that our children and young people can enjoy them for years to come. We are also moving forward with plans to build a new Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) for local young people, while exploring opportunities to use

our S106 funding to create additional recreational spaces, including areas designed for skaters and bikers, with soil and materials available for young people to help build their own BMX track.

We are continuing our transition from a paper heavy system to a digitally robust and modern community council. Before the start of the next financial year, we will be launching our new refreshed website, designed to be accessible, easy to navigate, and to make contacting your local Community council simpler and more efficient.

We have also moved to Google Drive to streamline document management and improve collaboration. Alongside this, we have introduced new digital policies to ensure transparency, security, and compliance, including our updated WhatsApp Communication Policy, which helps protect both the council and the community.

The council has also focused on a range of other activities and projects. I met with our policy and crime prevention officers to raise concerns about recent break ins and thefts from local farms, ensuring that action is being taken to protect our community and its wellbeing.

Alongside addressing these policing and criminal issues, we continue to focus on speeding. We are in the process of setting up our own Speed Watch awareness group to help tackle the ongoing speeding problem that affects our community. We remain committed to pushing for road safety across our community.

In the nature of protecting councillors, staff and residents wellbeing, we passed a formal motion to adopt the civility and respect pledge as a community council - The Civility and Respect Pledge is a national initiative supported by National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC), promoting professionalism, respect, and positive working relationships within local councils. By signing the pledge, councils commit to treating councillors, staff, and residents with civility, rejecting bullying and harassment, supporting staff wellbeing, and upholding high standards of conduct. This helps create a respectful, safe, and effective environment for everyone involved in local governance.

As a Community Council, let me make it clear that all stakeholders, whether within or outside the council, will be expected to uphold these standards when engaging with the business of the community council. There will be no tolerance for behaviour that falls short of these principles.

We continue to contend with the challenges posed by High-Speed Rail 2. These works have affected not only local infrastructure but also the health and wellbeing of our community, as well as local businesses, which have carried the heavy burden of reduced passing trade. The Community Council remains committed to representing the concerns of residents and businesses alike when it comes to HS2.

At the same time, we recognise the importance of working constructively with HS2 to mitigate disruption wherever possible. As Chairman, I will continue to foster open dialogue with HS2 and our immediate stakeholders, ensuring that communication is clear and timely. Though we all look forward to the completion of these works, it is crucial that the impact on our community is managed responsibly and with care something which, regrettably, has not been evident so far.

We have achieved so much already within 8 months of this new council with projects being pushed forward and the council delivering quality outcomes at a realistic and acceptable pace. To

do that we have had to have a strong and organised team with councillors now taking on delegated roles to champion and lead their areas within our community. I can now give an updated list of portfolio holders and a blurb of what they do:

- **Cllr Benjamin Harris** | Chairman, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Environment, Community & Wellbeing *The Portfolio Holder for Environment, Community and Wellbeing will oversee initiatives and policies that enhance the quality of life across the community. This role combines responsibility for maintaining and improving public spaces, supporting community development and engagement, and promoting health and wellbeing among residents.*
- **Cllr Sue Weldon** | Deputy Chairman and Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Education Liaison *The Portfolio Holder for Transport, Highways and Education Liaison will oversee initiatives that ensure safe, efficient travel and road use within the community, while maintaining strong communication and collaboration with the local primary school.*
- **Cllr Nick Butler** | Portfolio Holder for Planning & Development *The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development oversees the management, consultation, and strategic input on all planning matters affecting the community. This includes development proposals, land use, and ensuring that growth and changes align with the community's needs and vision.*
- **Cllr Peter Woodliffe-Thomas** | Portfolio Holder for Finance *The Portfolio Holder for Finance oversees the financial management of the community council, ensuring transparency, accountability, and effective use of public funds. This role includes budgeting, monitoring expenditure, and supporting strategic financial planning.*
- **Cllr Martin Pacetti** | Portfolio Holder for Governance, Infrastructure and Community Land *The Portfolio Holder for Governance, Infrastructure and Community Land oversees the community council's internal governance, monitors infrastructure projects such as HS2, and manages community land assets including allotments. This role ensures that council operations are transparent, compliant, and responsive to the needs of the community.*

Due to Cllr Sarah Smith, her role of Public Services and Facilities has now been passed over to Cllr Martin Pacetti.

In closing, despite the ongoing HS2 works and other major infrastructure projects that continue to disrupt our community, there is so much to be proud of and so much to look forward to. This new community council remains resilient, determined, and committed to delivering real results for our residents, without hesitation or compromise. I ask you to judge us not by words, but by our actions and the tangible difference we make in the life of our community.

Given all that we have achieved together, and all that lies ahead, it is with pride and gratitude that I present this annual report to the council, our community, and our partners. Let it stand as a testament to what we can accomplish when we work together, remain determined, and put the needs of our community at the heart of everything we do.

With pride in our community,

Cllr Benjamin Harris

Chairman & Leader of Quainton Rural Community Council

Portfolio Holder Environment, Community & Wellbeing