



# HELMDON PARISH COUNCIL

## ANNUAL VILLAGE MEETING



Notes of the Annual Village Meeting of Helmdon Parish held at **Helmdon Reading Room**, at **7:30pm** on **Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2026**

Cllr Moody, Plunkett, Hart, Sparrow, Minshall, Shepherd, Marchant, Mark Morrell (Mr Pothole), Cllr Fitzroy-Ezzy, and 17 members of the public,

1. Welcome from the Chair, and apologies – Apologies were received from Cllr Tracey Fitton, and Unitary Cllr Alison Eastwood.

### **Summary of report provided by Cllr Liz Hart – Parish Council Chair**

#### **Council Administration & Personnel**

- **Full Membership:** Following uncontested elections in May 2025 and subsequent co-options, the Council now has a full complement of **nine volunteer Councillors**.
- **Staffing:** Gratitude was expressed to Clerk **Kirsty Buttle** for her work on policy reviews and asset registers.
- **Committees:** The Council operates through three dedicated committees: **Planning, Finance, and HR**.

#### **Financial Overview**

- **Budget:** The precept for the year was set at **£32,618**, representing a modest **2.2% increase** from the previous year.
- **Cost to Residents:** For a Band D property, this equates to **£81.55 per year** (an increase of approximately 3p per week).
- **Grants:** A total of **£2,540** is available for village organizations. Applications are open from **June 1st to June 23rd**.

#### **Planning & Development**

- **Housing Strategy:** While West Northants Council (WNC) has not allocated a specific housing target for Helmdon (as it isn't a "service village"), development is still possible.
- **Priory Fields:** The Midlands Rural Housing Association may choose to represent their proposal following changes to the planned housing mix and quantity.

#### **Community & Environment Projects**

- **Biodiversity:** A wildflower planting trial has begun on Station Road Green. The Council is seeking further ideas for nature-based initiatives.
- **Traffic & Speeding:** Helmdon has joined **Community Speed Watch**. The Council is currently deciding whether to replace the aging speed indicator device on Station Road or install a second device at the other end of the village.
- **Village Shop:** A working party is actively researching the feasibility of re-establishing a community shop; a survey will be released soon.

### **Infrastructure & Transport**

- **Bus Services:** Following the closure of the Ability bus scheme, a new weekly service to Brackley is being proposed by *CommMiniBus* (pending Department of Transport registration).
- **Great Central Railway Footpath:** WNC must decide by September whether to proceed with a Definitive Map Modification Order for a claimed footpath.
- **HS2 & Roads:** Radstone Road has officially reopened.

## **2. Speaker – Mr Pothole (Mark Morrell) – Summary of report provided by Mark Morrell.**

### **The National & Local Funding Gap**

- **Revenue vs. Spending:** There is a significant disparity in funding; of the **£50 billion** collected from Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) and related taxes, only **£1.6 billion** is allocated to local councils for road repairs.
- **The Backlog:** Nationally, there is a **£30 billion backlog** for comprehensive road and drainage repairs. Locally, the repair backlog stands at **£390 million**.
- **Sustainability:** While the average road life is 20 years, current funding levels mean roads are only likely to be replaced every **97 years**.

### **Safety & Legal Obligations**

- **Human Cost:** Potholes and road debris are linked to the deaths of approximately **one cyclist per week** and **70 motorcyclists per year**.
- **Legal Duty:** Under **Section 41 of the Highways Act**, authorities have a legal obligation to keep roads safe. Mark argues many authorities are failing this duty.
- **Claims:** Mark is assisting individuals whose claims for vehicle damage have been rejected by authorities, using specific case law to challenge these refusals.

### **Technology & Innovation**

- **Detection:** New tools are being used to identify issues, including **Stan the app**, which scans for defects while driving.

- **AI Integration:** AI programs are currently being developed to improve defect detection and ensure repair quality.

#### **Local Concerns: The B4525**

- **Speed & Damage:** Residents raised concerns regarding the B4525. Mark noted that high speeds and heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) exacerbate road damage.
- **Mitigation:** Lowering speed limits (noting HGVs are restricted to 40mph on single-track roads) and installing speed cameras were suggested as ways to reduce the physical impact on the road surface and improve safety.

#### 3. Feedback re grants received from the Parish Council (PC)

- **Helmdon Larder** – The Larder runs from 2-3:30pm on a Friday. They are a charity to help avoid food poverty which is not just about the cost of food, but about access to it, which can be difficult for people to get to shops from a village. They save 150kg of food going into landfill per week. When shops such as Tesco, M&S, Fortnum & Mason, Waitrose, and Aldi over order, their excess is bought by the charity and sold at less than half of retail price. Bread, fruit, and veg are free. West Northants Council (WNC) have been providing a grant and the PC have given a grant to the Larder. £9,500 was spent on food last year. 58 households are supported in the village. 23 volunteers support the Larder. The Larder is technically only open for 1 ½ hours per week but it takes 40 hours a week of work to run. A freezer and a couple of sack barrows were purchased from the funding provided by the PC. They also operate a café which is also great to help combat loneliness.
- **Helmdon Community Foundation** – In June 2025, the Helmdon Community Foundation, who are the charitable body that oversees the running and maintenance of the Reading Room, applied for a Parish Council Grant of £280 to provide funds to purchase a new 43” LCD television and wall mounting bracket for the Committee room. This has allowed us to further extend the I.T. and entertainment facilities within the building, increasing its appeal to renters and local users. We are extremely grateful for the award are really pleased with the improvement it has made to the space. Our sincere thanks to the Parish Council.

#### 4. **To receive the report provided by the Unitary Councillor** – Report can be found on website.

## 5. Q&A

- Q. Will we get a replacement for Ability? A. The window for applications to take on the service is still open so we won't know until WNC make a decision on the applications.
- Q. There are not not enough dog waste bins in the parish and the environment agency don't suggest using normal bins for dog waste. If we can't have more bins can the existing ones have lids put on them? A. The council is of the understanding that there is no law or environmental reason not to use litter bins for dog waste and will check this out.
- Comments were made in relation to speeding on Station Road with concerns about the VAS not recording the data. The resident stated their opinion that three people standing doing speedwatch is not going to actually show what speeds people are doing as drivers slow down when they see them and that a lot of speeding occurs early in the morning at around 6:30am. The Chair advised that the Community Speedwatch Group could possibly arrange a session to take place around that time of day to try to pick that up.
- Q. When will the barriers on the bridge be repaired? A. WNC say they are repairing it on Friday.
- Q. Lots of bin lorries come through the village at once on a Thursday/Friday. Isn't there an agreement with Blackpits that everything should go on the Welsh Lane rather than through the village? A. Cllr Marchant agreed to ask Blackpits about this.
- Q. Could the village meeting be advertised in more places so more people attend? A. The meeting was advertised in a number of places but the council could consider advertising the meeting on a Village WhatsApp group next year.

Meeting closed @ 9:05pm.

\*Clerk's note: Subsequent questions were received from a resident. Full details of the questions and responses provided can be found as a separate document under the 2026 Annual Village Meeting section of the PC website.