

Holmes Chapel Partnership Chair's Report 2022-23

This last year has been quite eventful. With the threat of covid still present, we held our AGM in person last year to try and connect again with people after the various lockdowns. This year, thankfully, socializing seems to have resumed its normal course and some of the damage done to the fabric of society is being mended.

During the pandemic HCP worked with the Parish Council to produce a list of volunteers to help people who were confined to home to get the necessities of life: shopping, medication and human contact. On the back of this, Cheshire East Council asked us to become a Volunteer Co-ordination Point (VCP) as part of their programme to capitalize on the goodwill shown by so many during lockdown by establishing a network of volunteers. Cheshire East Council adopted a computer programme called AMI, to which volunteers signed up and Cheshire East put them in touch with people in their area who needed assistance. Although Peter, Richard and I participated in the early training sessions, no cases were ever referred to us by this system.

At the AGM in April 2022 Peter Whiers gave notice that he would step back from the position of Project Officer, so the search was on for a replacement. Having been awarded a one-off payment of £12,500 to act as a VCP we decided to try and appoint two people, as we were unsure how much work the VCP would involve but knew for a fact that the Christmas Market involves a great deal of work! We were most fortunate in being able, in May, to appoint Gail Griggs to run the website, distribute the newsletter and help with the administration of the Christmas Market. Then in July, Debra Cummins took over responsibility for organizing the VCP side of things as well as event management. They have both done/are doing great things! Fortunately for the Partnership Peter Whiers agreed to stay on as Vice Chair and, as from this AGM, will take over from me as Chair. I will stay on as Vice Chair. We believe changing roles and seeking different perspectives is what makes for a healthy organisation.

We have continued to publish our monthly Community Newsletter which we circulate to individuals and local organisations via email, with hard copies going to places in the village where people have the leisure to peruse it – like the library, the cafes and pubs and the hairdressers. The readership continues to increase, as does the content offered for inclusion. We have re-introduced a monthly What's On section which appears on our website and in the Newsletter so that people looking to get involved / diverted / entertained can see at a glance what each day has to offer.

Without doubt HCP's busiest time of year is the period running up to Christmas. The Christmas Market and Fair has become a fixture in the Holmes Chapel social calendar – December 3rd is the date for 2023. Almost straight away after the 2022 event we had stallholders asking if they could book for the following year. It is also a boon for the local hostellers who see their footfall multiply. Santa's Sleigh does its rounds in December which is also a masterpiece of logistics. December 2022 saw a newly rebuilt sleigh take to the roads. It looked resplendent after many volunteer-hours of work by Will Burnham and his Shed Crew, Peter Whiers and Richard Garton, and thanks to some funding from Anwyl Homes. Local organisations benefited from the £4000 collected.

We are still running our Safe Walking Routes to School campaign and had a successful Walk to School event again last May – this time inviting the Police and Crime Commissioner, John Dwyer, to walk with us and see the difficulties encountered by families who try to do the right thing by leaving their car at home and walking to school. We have worked alongside the Parish Council too but sadly have had very little success, as Cheshire East Council seems to want to concentrate its Active Travel funding on the towns. We put in a bid for a school-crossing patrol across Macclesfield Road, which failed. We then invited the Leader of

the Road Safety team to experience walking along Macclesfield Road at school time. He had loads of ideas and sympathy - but no money at his disposal. He did, however, oblige Anwyl Homes to improve the footpath at the entrance to the Victoria Mills estate. We might even get the missing school sign replaced one day – who knows? Our Speedwatch group regularly records drivers exceeding the speed limit along there, so it is definitely needed.

Our latest Safe Walking Route is of course not to school but to “Harry’s Wall” – i.e. a pillar of the Twemlow Viaduct where Harry Styles once wrote his name. This even attracted interest from the mainstream media which resulted in a spot on the evening news. Gail has subsequently created a map to help Harry’s young fans find their way safely to the viaduct along the Dane Valley Way instead of along the A535. The map is available on our website and paper copies have been produced by the Print Room.

The biggest challenge of the year was, however, the announcement by Cheshire East Council in mid-January that they would no longer be funding the Local Town Partnerships – as of April 2023. From its inception well over a decade ago, HCP has received £8000 per year which it has used to fund its administration. This was our sole source of core funding – unlike neighbouring Partnerships which receive money from the Town Councils. We have since secured £3000 from HC Parish Council - which will give us the financial security to run the Christmas Market - and we would like to thank them for their support. We have always been fortunate enough to secure sponsorship from local firms to balance the Christmas Market books but there is no guarantee that we will always be able to do this. The team is looking for ways to generate alternative income as we move forward, including becoming a charity. If anyone thinks they could help please come and talk to us!

We have been active in other ways too – helping with the Platinum Jubilee celebrations, working with the Social Prescriber from HC Health Centre to help vulnerable residents, running a stall and a competition at the Village Fair, carrying out various work sessions in the Dane Meadow, liaising with Dorothy Davidson and the wonderful work she does at Memory Café, and supporting Bridge the Gap. I would like to thank everyone involved for their time, commitment and good humour – good things don’t just happen in a community, they have to be made to happen! Let’s hope we can carry on making things happen together.

Hazel Sutcliffe

Chair, Holmes Chapel Partnership

April 2023