

## **Chairmans Report, April 2024.**

At the start of the year replacing our core funding was our main focus, as Cheshire East Council had said it could no longer afford to pay out the £8,000 per annum to the Partnerships. This sum paid for our administration, which included our website, the printing and distribution of our Newsletter, and the administrative tasks of running the Christmas Market. Thankfully, through a combination of funding from our Parish Council, Massey Feeds, Hurstwood Holdings, Duttons & Bayfields Opticians, we were able to continue to plan for our 2023 Christmas Market & Fair.

Early in 2023 we developed the Harry Styles Map. Our initial involvement was related to our Safe Walking Routes to School campaign as so many Harry Styles fans were visiting 'Harry's Wall' under the Twemlow viaduct, but were getting there by walking down the A535, which requires fans to cross the road just after the road bridge. If you have ever walked this route, you will know how dangerous this can be. Our idea was to create a route map from the station that featured the obvious Harry Styles Tourist attractions of Mandeville's, Fortune City and the Twemlow Viaduct, whilst guiding our visitors down Hermitage Lane, across the Hermitage Bridge.

The Print Room initially printed 100 maps, but within a few weeks of its launch, the BBC decided to do a short item in March which was broadcast on Northwest Tonight. What happened next is what I can only describe, as a whirlwind of TV and press interest over the next 6 months which included articles and features on ITV This Morning, BBC News, Channel 5, The New York Times, The Mirror, Secret Manchester, Cheshire Live, National World, BBC Radio Manchester, Stoke Sentinel, Congleton Chronicle, and the Knutsford Guardian. As we approach the end of March this year over 1,700 maps have been distributed and we estimate that we could have seen over 5,000 visitors over a 12-month period.

Hazel as Vice Chair has continued to edit our Newsletter and is greatly assisted by Marie & David from 'The Print Room', who together produce a printed version that is distributed to over 30 locations across the village. I would like to thank them for their sterling efforts which I know is appreciated by all. The distribution of our newsletter via e-mail is looked after by Gail Griggs who does a fantastic job developing the website – and keeping it up to date, which is no mean feat!

In May we ran what has become our annual 'Walk to School' event in support of our Safe Walking Routes to School campaign. There was a good turnout including the newly elected Dane Valley Ward Councillor Russell Chadwick. Sadly, there is very little positive to report on making Holmes Chapel a more pedestrian and cyclist friendly place. We carried out many SpeedWatch sessions until the Police called a halt to this activity in July. We also campaigned through the Newsletter to try and stop HGVs travelling past the Church and westwards along Macclesfield Road.

We also collaborated with the Villages Mag to get a Safe Spaces scheme up and running. Gail worked very hard visiting local businesses, many of which now display the Safe Spaces logo and provide a retreat for anyone who feels they need help when out and about.

An appetite for road closures having been established by the success of the Christmas Market, the Parish Council, with support from the Partnership, organised the Big Lunch to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III. Our historic village centre was decorated

magnificently by the Yarn Bombers for the occasion and a good time was had by all as they sat in the sunshine at tables set up in the road or picnicked in the churchyard.

Not content with one road closure, Cllr Diane Tams, Vice-Chairman for Holmes Chapel Parish Council came up with the idea for a 3 day Summer Celebration which started off on a Friday evening in July when people gathered in the village centre once again to meet friends, drink, eat and dance – and visit the church tower! This was followed by a sell-out Holmes Chapel Chorus concert on the Saturday and the Village Fair at the Victoria Club on the Sunday. A successful summer festival is not only a fun-filled event but also a testament to the hard work and dedication of the organisers. Thanks also go to my own team of volunteers within the Partnership who contributed to the weekend's festivities.

December 3rd 2023 was the third time that we had closed the main road through our village and held our Holmes Chapel Christmas Market and Fair. It was, however, the first time in 11 years that the weather was not kind to us. But the snow was cleared, pavements gritted, and the show went on. Looking back, it's incredible we were able to pull it off, when many other events in the area had to be cancelled. We then moved on seamlessly to Santa's Sleigh Runs which took place most evenings in December, where we raised just short of £4,000 which was distributed to local groups and charities. My thanks go to our Treasurer Richard Garton for organising the schedule and dealing with the money collected, and Will Burnham for assisting me to keep the sleigh running smoothly throughout December.

As we moved into 2024, Harry Styles was again on our agenda. Harries continued to come to Holmes Chapel, and between Christmas and New Year, many visitors who had come to the UK for Christmas, then did a day trip to Holmes Chapel. We were however getting increasingly concerned about the safety of our visiting Harries who were walking to Twemlow Viaduct on the Dane Valley Way where our grass fields had turned into mud slopes.

Keeping with the Harry Styles theme, Graham Blake our Station supervisor asked for our support regarding some new Harry Styles based artwork at the station. This is to be a life-size image of Harry facing on to the Station car park, that will greet people when they arrive by car and will no doubt become another Holmes Chapel selfie location. We have still to confirm the final design of the image, but a computer-generated image of Harry made up of thousands of smaller images is currently the favourite.

And then we come to our April Newsletter, which started with me telling our subscribers about our plans to run an official Harry's Home Village Tour and recruit local tour guides. Little did we know that we now have journalists around the world subscribed to our newsletter, so before we could discuss our plans with the wider community, and the many businesses owners that will benefit from this initiative, the worlds press descended upon us. As a result of over 60 requests for interviews and comments, we were somewhat rescued by a local marketing company "Calvin Marketing", who agreed to help us deal with the media frenzy. At the time of writing this update, we have had over 150 applications, with 30+ coming from overseas.

We see the prospect of running tours as a partial solution to addressing our concerns about the route Harries continue to take down the A535. The tour will guide them down Hermitage Lane and along the Dane Valley Way, equipped with walkers poles to navigate the mud slopes, and suitably dressed in Hi-Viz Tour bibs to aid road safety. Additionally, we intend to ensure that our visitors follow the country code, respecting landowners' property and keeping our countryside litter free. We are also working on an alternative to writing on the

viaduct wall by allowing our guests to decorate brick slips which can be used at alternative locations to decorate walls and new street furniture.

Another ambition is to try to assist the retailers across the village by encouraging our visitors to sample the delights of what our village can offer. To do this, we plan to create a Tourist Map of the village, which the Village Mag have already agreed to assist us with. The plan is to advertise all the places you can buy a drink, some food or Holmes Chapel memorabilia on the map. Over the next month we will be communicating with our retailers to encourage them to get involved. Our visitors always comment on the welcome assistance they receive from our local shopkeepers and the many villagers who are happy to point them in the right direction, and we would very much like this to continue.

We will be making a charge for the tour, which will allow us to cover our admin costs, the cost of employing the tour guides, printing tour maps and buying the equipment that I have outlined. Any profits we make after we have covered these costs will be used by the Partnership for the benefit of the village.

And finally, if think you can help the Partnership in anyway, for as little as a few hours a month, please speak to me after this meeting or e-mail me and I would be very happy to meet you for a chat in any one of the eight locations in the village where you can buy a coffee.

Peter Whiers  
Chairman  
Holmes Chapel Partnership