

Chairmans Report, April 2025

This AGM marks the end of my second year as Chairman of the Partnership, it's been a very busy year, with Mr Styles featuring quite significantly in my diary throughout the spring and summer of 2024. My continuing theme has been to try to steer the Partnership into safer financial waters, and when David gives his report, you will see that we are going in the right direction. But this has only been possible through the continued support from our sponsors the Holmes Chapel Parish Council, Massey Feeds, Hurstwood Holdings, Duttons ,TMC and all our Christmas Market sponsors.

Around the time of our last AGM, we had already received a global media interest in our plans to run the Harry's Home Village Tours but had still to recruit any tours guides. However, within a week we held auditions and recruited 10 tours guides ranging in age from 16 through to 25, which with our own Jill Booth as another addition, gave us a team of 11.

Our PR was looked after by Karoline Peach with support from the Calvin Marketing team (now TMC), who arranged all our TV and print media interviews through a very generous pro bono offer from her employers Calvin Marketing. After a couple of training sessions for our guides, we held two media tours, the first being a worldwide exclusive with the BBC and the second with media from the rest of the world. The madness continued, a few days later we watched Karoline accompanied by Ben and Gill appear in a 10-minute feature on the BBC Breakfast. What followed was a worldwide campaign over 6 weeks that reached 1.9 billion people, with the key messaging around safe walking routes and stopping graffiti on Twemlow Viaduct. It turned out to be the most successful media relations campaign Calvin has ever run.

I should say at this point, that although this sounds like a lot of fun, it also demanded a great deal from the Partnership team. By starting the Harry Home Village Tours, and employing 11 people, we had effectively started a new business in 6 weeks. In my own career I had done this many times, but not as quickly, and in those days, I had employees to assist me, this was different as we were all volunteers!

To get the tours going we needed to buy Hi viz vests and caps for our guides, Hi Viz for those on the tour, first aid kits, rucksacks, hiking sticks (to navigate the muddy slopes) and slate hearts that those on the tour could write messages on and leave at the viaduct.

It was around this time that we were made aware by the landowners that there was no longer a right of way that followed the north bank of the River Dane from the Hermitage Bridge to Twemlow Viaduct. Evidently, the riverbank has eroded, and the right of way now goes through the river. This route has now become a permissive right of way, where the landowner allows public access, but could revoke this permission and even close the path if they choose. This aspect came as a complete surprise to those of us that had lived in the village for many years and continued to

be a cause of concern to us as we tried to get the Harry's Home Village Tours off the ground.

On 8th June 2024 we held our first public tour and over a period of 5 months conducted over 50 tours taking just over 400 Harries around our lovely village and down to the Twemlow Viaduct, now known as Harry's Wall (it's on google maps). During those 5 months we had a visit from Harry to Mandevilles, but sadly it was just the waxwork on its way to Tussauds at Blackpool and then the erection of a new fence under the viaduct by Network Rail which provided fans with boards that they could use to leave messages on.

I should also mention, the key role that Sam Dales played in making the Harry's Home Village Tours happen. Mandie, Joe and Sue were more than happy to support us, and Sam Dales became the HQ for our tours and continues to be a must visit location for our visiting Harries. In 2023 we estimated that our visitor numbers were 5,000+ and in 2024 the numbers continued to increase. Its very difficult to put a number on it for 2024, but from talking to businesses across the village, our tours had a very positive effect, and I do believe that we may have reached 10,000 visitors in 2024.

Again, this last year Hazel our 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. I would also like to thank Martin Cummins who now distributes our printed version. The distribution of our newsletter via e-mail is looked after by Gail Griggs who does a fantastic job developing the website too. An additional role for Gail this year, effectively done on a voluntary basis is to answer the numerous queries we receive from those around the world who are planning to visit Holmes Chapel.

On the subject of attracting visitors to Holmes Chapel, this year Hazel and Gail worked with Philippa Meachin from Marketing Cheshire to help her put together a section called 'Like a local' that includes local guides to Holmes Chapel.

In May we ran our annual 'Walk to School' event in support of our Safe Walking Routes to School campaign. Sadly, there is very little positive to report on making Holmes Chapel a more pedestrian and cyclist friendly place. We continue to carry out many Speed Watch sessions, which are focussed on Macclesfield Road, where we desperately need a pedestrian crossing.

In July we again attended the Village Fair at the Vic Club, which is always a highlight of the village year, were we tested our locals with obscure photos of the village, to see how well they could recognise locations around our village. And regarding the Village Fair, I would remind you that it's on the 6th July this year, and you still have some time to book a stall if you have not already done so.

1st December 2024 was the fourth time that we had closed the main road through our village and held our Holmes Chapel Christmas Market and Fair. It was, however, much warmer than the previous year with not a snowflake in sight. Mulled wine sales were down, but sales across the market stalls were better than ever, as people stayed out on the market much longer than we had experienced previously.

We then moved on seamlessly to Santa's Sleigh Runs which took place most evenings in December, where we raised over £4,600 which was distributed to local groups and charities. My thanks go to Richard Garton for organising the schedule and dealing with the money collected, and Will Burnham and the Shed Crew for assisting me to keep the sleigh running smoothly throughout December.

As we moved into 2025, Harry Styles was again on our agenda, Graham Blake our Station supervisor asked for our support regarding some new Harry Styles based artwork at the station. This was 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. The Partnership worked with local artists Eamonn Murphy and Victoria Turner to produce suitable artwork and encourage the Friends of the Station to apply for a grant. The artwork was funded by the Cross Rail Community Engagement Fund together with a contribution from the recently closed community cinema HC3.

For 2025 we have decided to move to a self-guided Harry's Home Village Tours and ably assisted by Matt O'Regan from the Village Mag we are now in the advanced stages of producing a mobile phone focussed guide that can be used by Harries when they visit Holmes Chapel and make their homage to Harry's Wall.

As I close, I would just like to mention our Dane Meadow Fun run, that will be held on the 11th May at 9.30am, which is open to those aged 4 to 16. Parents are of course very welcome to accompany their children and its not too late to enter by going to the Holmes Chapel Partnership Website.

And finally, if you 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