

# OTTERFORD PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24



Our Coronation (indoor) street party



The new climbing Frame in the Playing Fields

**This report by the Parish Council was presented to the Annual Parish Meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2024 by Councillor Mike Canham.**



The 'old guard'! (taken on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2022): we still don't have a photograph of the new Council.

<b>Cllr Mike Canham</b> (Chairman)	Trustee – Otterford Parish Hall Committee Trustee – Otterford Charity <b>Lead Councillor for links with Somerset Council; Local Community Network, &amp; BHPN; and Otterford Parish Hall</b>	01460 234639
<b>Cllr Charlie Field</b> (Vice Chairman)	Chairman, Parish Council Personnel Sub Cttee <b>Lead Councillor for Human Resources; Planning; and Highways &amp; Rights of Way</b>	01460 234336
<b>Cllr Simon MacLead</b>	Member, Parish Council Personnel Sub Cttee <b>Lead Councillor for Climate; and the Culmhead Orchard</b>	01460 234476
<b>Cllr John Marsden</b>	Member, Parish Council Personnel Sub Cttee <b>Lead Councillor for the Holman Clavel</b>	01460 234568
<b>Cllr Lucy Montgomery</b>	Member, Parish Council Personnel Sub Cttee Trustee – Otterford Charity <b>Lead Councillor for Otterford Playing Fields; and the Otterford Charity</b>	01460 234561
<b>Parish Clerk – Penny Hart</b>		01460 234639

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Welcome to our Annual Parish Council Report 2023/24, which summarises our activity during the year. The report includes – as ever - financial information, details of the main parish assets, our priorities for other organisations, and summarised annual reports (where available) from the parish organisations. There was no changes in Parish Council membership tis year.

As the newish Somerset Council (SC) beds in we saw the launch of Local Community Networks - in practice Area Committees charged with strengthening relationships with SC and taking forward cross-Parish local initiatives. Otterford is a member of the Chard & Blackdowns LCN. It has been a slow start – lots of discussion (quite often it seems about favourite pet themes and issues), but very little real action. We will continue to support the LCN and participate in the core meetings when we can (and with only five Councillors that hasn't proved easy to date).

Throughout the report Somerset Council is abbreviated to SC, and the Charity for the Allotments for the Labouring Poor (Otterford) is abbreviated to 'the Otterford Charity'.

## WHAT HAVE WE BEEN DOING IN 2023/4

### 1. Climate & The Environment

**'Otterford Parish Council recognises the need to reduce the current level of carbon emissions, and – acknowledging our rural location in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – has agreed to take a range of practical steps to assist this'** February 2020

Another fairly quiet year after the major burst of activity in 2020-2022. Nevertheless, we have undertaken the following:

- Continued to hold paper-lite Council meetings,
- Recycled as much as possible from our three Parish Litter Picks, and other events organised by the Council.
- Undertaken three Parish Litter Picks (see separate section)
- Borrowed the Blackdown Hills Parish Network's thermal imaging camera and surveyed 15 properties for heat loss (see separate section). Our thanks to Richard Smith for undertaking the surveys.,
- given out a few more free compost bins to parishioners (we still have a handful left)
- continued to support the Otterford Parish Biodiversity Diary

### 2. Highways, & Road Safety

We are delighted that, finally, our continual lobbying of Somerset County Council/SC (as the Highways Authority) has achieved some success.

Corfe Hill crossroads (also known by SC as Chillander Cross) is a much safer place following works to re-sign, re-line and extend road markings, and cut back trees and roadside vegetation. SC's decision to extend the 40mph speed limit from Corfe village to beyond the crossroads was not one of our requests but is much welcomed. The slower speed limit on the B3170 approaching the crossroads should help to further reduce accidents. We still believe the side roads should have 'Stop' rather than 'Give Way' signs and will continue to press for this.

During the year SC agreed to our request to reduce the speed limit in Bishopswood village to 20mph. As the year ended statutory consultation was in progress. All being well the work will be undertaken in August or September 2024. The Parish Council is fully funding this work.

And, after 12+ years of lobbying, in late Autumn we were advised that SC has agreed part of our request to improve road safety at Culmhead. Two of the three crossroads in the area will have 'Give Way' signs replaced by 'Stop' signs and additional road surface markings provided – the work due to be carried out in 2024/25. We are not sure why the third crossroads is not included but will continue to lobby for this. Again, the Parish Council is fully funding this work.

### 3. Celebrating the Coronation of King Charles III

We celebrated the King's Coronation with a range of activities over the weekend of 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> May. For the first time in many years this was an Otterford event, not combined with Buckland St Mary PC.

On Coronation Day itself a lot of parishioners had told us they planned to watch the main event, so our **Bring & Share Street Party** (but held in the Hall because it was raining) was held in the afternoon. We had provided some food and soft drinks and parishioners who attended brought more. Entertainment was provided by our wandering magician.



Without doubt some people ate too much, but we had the cure for that .....

On to the evening, and time for another Otterford **Barn Dance**. Music and calling was again provided by Fresh Aire (who played at our 2012 Diamond Jubilee and 2018 End of WW1 Centenary Barn Dances), and the after-effects of the Street Party were danced off.

There was no service at St Leonard's, on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup>, but a **Coronation Celebration Service** was held at St Mary's in Buckland St Mary.

**On Monday 7<sup>th</sup> May** our Parish Footpath Officers organized a **Coronation Parish Walk**. Starting from the Parish Hall car park, this provided a gentle amble out and back along the Yarty valley. Walkers had a chance to see the repair and restoration work on the boardwalk (Footpath T20/6 below Griggs Farm) carried out by our Wednesday Volunteers the previous summer.

And, finally, we gave all children in the Parish a **Commemoration Coronation mug**: we still have some for sale!

#### **4 High Speed Broadband (or the continuing lack of it!)**

There is, sadly, little to say! Airband's programmed dates have slipped again, and with the company in apparent serious financial difficulties it is very unclear what and when anything will be done. CDS performance remained poor – not briefing communities, and sometimes (as for much of the last 10+ years) simply not responding to correspondence. The 'sponsoring local authorities' (in Otterford now just SC) haven't done any better.

Separately, it was a huge disappointment to hear that SC and Devon County Council had chosen to absorb into general funds 'clawback money' from the CDS Phase 1 contract with BT.

#### **5. Our Wednesday Volunteers' Work**

In 25 weekly sessions plus a few odd hours here and there (together totalling over 200 hours yet again), our four regular volunteers (Mike Canham, John Marsden, Ron Montgomery and Roger Poland) supplemented by Simon Shovelton on a few occasions this year:

- cleared the edge of the highway along the stretch of Whatley Road between Little Whatley and Otterford Mill, and checked all drains and pipes (clearing a major blockage just above the Mill). The aim of this is to allow surface water to flow more freely and avoid flooding and

ice on the highway. The Parish Council is currently in discussion with SC about installing an extra road drain and pipe run near the Mill.

- Demolished and removed some of the old play equipment in the Playing Fields and cleared the area ready for the installation of the new climbing frame and swing.
- Cleared all vegetation on and around the bridge at the bottom of Bishopswood.



- Repaired and re-treated a stile at Fyfett; and repaired, rubbed down, and re-treated an adjacent off-road footpath sign.
- Cleaned various fingerposts, mileposts, and footpath posts around the parish.

As ever, the Team was assisted by Phil Wright and his digger for the heavy lifting.

## **6. Parish Litter Picks**

Three more Parish Litter Picks again this year – in July, November, and March.

During the year we collected 97 sacks of litter, plus an awful lot else – including car body parts, plasterboard, tyres, a gas bottle, and wood – which wouldn't fit in the sacks. After sorting we recycled 1307 drinks cans, 573 plastic bottles and 149 glass bottles and jars. We also recycled all metal, foil, paper/cardboard, plastic food containers, and wood.

A total of 32 volunteers joined us on at least one Pick during the year – Mike Canham, Mary Gusterson, Penny Hart, Tim Hooper (Churchstanton), John Marsden, Nicky Needham, Philip Needham, Peter Southcott, Victoria Southcott, Alun Tarr (Churchstanton), George Wakley, and Edwina Wakley on all three.

## **7. Otterford Playing Fields**

During the year we purchased and installed a new large climbing frame (see front cover) and large swing. This was partly funded by a s106 (planning gain) grant from SC, and a grant from the Otterford Charity.



During the coming year we plan to purchase two picnic benches.

Our thanks to Fran Hobbs, Gina King, Tracy Rendell and Becca Royce who – on a rota - continue to visit the field weekly to carry out a safety check. This is an insurance requirement – without them we couldn't keep the playground open.

#### **8. Remembrance Sunday**

Eighteen people attended the Remembrance Sunday service in St Leonard's Church. Councillor Mike Canham laid the Parish wreath on behalf of the Parish Council and all parishioners. Now a regular part of the service we heard a little more detail about the lives of two of the men commemorated on the memorial plaque and included in the 'Otterford Remembered' book.

#### **9. Parish Council Grants**

Grants were paid to three organisations this year - £100 to the Blackdown Support Group; and £150 to each of St Margaret's Hospice and the Dorset & Somerset Air Ambulance. We also paid for the grass-cutting at St Leonard's Church. No other grant applications were received this year. Not quite a grant, but we are delighted to have become the first Corporate Member of Friends of Otterhead Estate Trust.

**TRANSPARENCY CODE FOR SMALLER AUTHORITIES,  
& SUMMARY OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITY 2023/24**

Our current account with Unity Trust Bank has operated well throughout the year. We also have two interest-paying term Deposit Accounts (one each with Cambridge & Counties Bank and Nationwide Building Society): a separate account with Santander currently holds the Holman Clavel rent deposit. During the year we closed the Nationwide account, transferring the money to the Cambridge & Counties.

**Income**

Our regular income - £17,846.74 in 2023/214 - comes from the lease of the Holman Clavel Inn which is owned by the parish. In addition, we received a s106 payment of £14,909.90, a VAT refund of £6,447.28, a grant of £485, interest of £464.46, income from events of £144, and miscellaneous income of £351.39 Our total income was £40,650.77. We did not raise a precept.

**Expenditure, including all Items of Expenditure above £100**

Our total expenditure in 2023/24 was £45,844.41 (£41,448.33 net of recoverable VAT) – substantially higher than usual because of the £22,625.00 spent on new play equipment.

Items of Expenditure over £100

Darren Greenslade (multiple)	Play Equipment	22625.00
P Hart (multiple payments)	Salary & Expenses	6064.28
OMC Axminster	HC Electrics	4462.77
P Wright	Hedging: & Heavy lifting	1968.00`
P J Holness (multiple)	Parish Handyman services	1312.88
Towergate Insurance	Holman Clavel Prop Owner's Insurance	1241.96
Community Heartbeat Trust (multiple)	Replacement batteries/pads – defibs	714.00
SWATDC (multiple)	Dog Bin emptying	686.08
Marie Mahoney/Holna Clavel	Electrics	537.23
Gallagher Insurance	Parish Council Insurance	501.31
Somerset Council Insurance	Bishopswood 20mph project – deposit	50000
R Leitch	Coronation expenses	411.21
J Marsden	Coronation expenses	361.22
Otterford Charity	Otterford Playing Fields lease payment	352.50
Parish Hall Committee (multiple)	Room Hire	156.00
Dorset & Somerset Air Ambulance	Grant	150.00
St Margaret's Hospice	Grant	150.00
PATA (multiple)	Payroll Services	134.20
A Matthews	Coronation expenses	133.53
R Poland	Coronation expenses	125.00
Community Heartbeat Trust	PETS Annual Membership	120.00
SALC	Membership	106.78
Alvian Ltd	Play equipment statutory inspection	102.00
Blackdown Support Group	Grant	100.00

*All expenditure in this list includes VAT where levied – eligible VAT will be reclaimed by the Parish Council.*

As ever, our accounts are audited: a copy of the key documentation will be posted on the website once this process is completed. Fuller financial information is available from the Parish Clerk.

## Location of Public Land and Building Assets

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| a. Holman Clavel Inn, and attached meadow<br>Holman Clavel Road, Culmhead<br>Public House                        | Freehold – owned since 1800s<br>Insurance Valuation: £900,000  |
| b. Village Green (opposite Holman Clavel)<br>Holman Clavel Road, Culmhead<br>Field                               | Freehold – owned since the 1990s.<br>Estimated Value: £10,000  |
| c. Otterford Parish Hall<br>Whatley Lane, Bishopswood TA20 3RS<br>Community Hall and car park                    | Freehold – owned in trust for OPHC since 1997<br>(And the old hall before then, no date known).<br>Insurance Valuation: £642,000 |
| d. Otterford Playing Fields<br>Royston Road, Bishopswood TA20 3RS<br>2 Fields – play equipment, and conservation | 20 Year Lease from Otterford Charity<br>– 2023 to 2043<br>Lease Payment £355.41 in 2022/23,<br>(3-yearly review with RPI uplift) |

## Other Parish Assets

The full Asset Register is displayed on the Parish website: hard copies are available at the Annual Parish and Annual Parish Council Meetings and, separately, from the Clerk at any time.

## Looking Forward

During 2024/25 our priorities will, we hope, be to:

- continue to lobby CDS and SC to provide superfast broadband throughout the parish.
- Work with SC to ensure that the highways projects in Bishopswood (20mph) and Culmhead (new 'Stop' signs) go ahead. (The Parish Council is funding both of these projects).
- Work with SC to ensure the additional road drain and additional piping are installed in Whatley Road. (The Parish Council is funding this project).
- Continue to lobby SC to undertake further road safety improvements – at Chillander Cross, the crossroads adjacent to the Holman Clavel Inn, and the Holman Clavel Road. (See later Section 'Policies – Our Position Statement').
- keep drains/pipes/ditches under review – clearing where required and possible – and liaising with SC to undertake other necessary work.
- undertake a further three litter picks.
- continue to monitor climate and environmental concerns and take further local actions as necessary and practical – including borrowing the BHPN's thermal-imaging camera again.



**In conclusion**, I would like to thank the following for their help and assistance during 2023/24 :

- all parishioners, and those from further afield, who volunteered to pick up litter, participated in the Parish Emergency Telephone Scheme, monitored the playing fields, restored fingerposts and footpath posts and undertook other maintenance work around the Parish (our Wednesday Volunteers), were available as first aiders, helped organise the Coronation celebrations, and volunteered assistance for the Climate & The Environment Project.
- our voluntary 'Parish Officers' – John Godsmark (Otterhead Estate Trust), Damian Pryce (defibrillators local co-ordinator); Niki Pryce (Otterford Charity); and Richard Lupton and Dr Roger Poland our Parish Paths Liaison Officers.
- SC Councillors Ross Henley and Sarah Wakefield for their support.
- Penny Hart, our Clerk, for her continuing hard work and support
- Martyn Powe our internal auditor.

Mike Canham  
31<sup>st</sup> March 2024

## OTTERFORD PARISH COUNCIL POLICIES – OUR POSITION STATEMENT

The Parish Council would like other statutory and quasi-statutory authorities to:

### ROADS

- \* Not dual the A303 through the Blackdown Hills, but carry out minor junction and passing improvements where necessary on safety grounds **(National Highways)**
- \* Introduce a mandatory 'no right turn' from Royston Road onto A303 **(National Highways/SC)**
- \* Extend and realign the slip road to allow traffic to turn left from Royston Road on to the A303 **(National Highways/SC)**
- \* Extend the controlled speed limit zone in Bishopswood to the other side of the bridge, and beyond Westfield. **(SC)**  
**The Parish Council is prepared to contribute to the cost of this work.**
- \* Ban through HGV traffic from Bishopswood **(SC)**
- \* Introduce a 40mph zone from the Culmhead crossroads to just beyond the two crossroads above the Holman Clavel **(SC)**  
**The Parish Council is prepared to contribute to the cost of this work.**
- \* Replace the existing 'Give Way' signs with 'Stop' signs at the Chillander Crossroads (at the top of Corfe Hill), and the crossroads immediately above the Holman Clavel. **(SC)**  
**The Parish Council is prepared to contribute to the cost of this work.**
- \* Give further consideration to reducing speed limits throughout the Parish **(SC)**
- \* Improve gully and pipe clearing/cleaning **(SC)**
- \* Maintain, and where necessary, increase verge cutting to ensure safe sight lines **(SC)**
- \* Establish a manned SC Highways 24/7 emergency telephone number **(SC)**

### RAIL

- \* Reopen Chard Junction and Wellington stations **(Network Rail)**
- \* Dual the whole length of the Salisbury to Exeter rail line **(Network Rail)**

### BROADBAND

- \* Bring superfast broadband to the whole of the Parish without further delay **(SC/DCC/CDS)**

### MAIL

- \* Provide an additional post-box at the bottom of Bishopswood **(Royal Mail)**  
**The Parish Council is prepared to purchase, install and maintain the post-box.**

**REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF  
THE CHARITY FOR THE ALLOTMENTS FOR THE LABOURING POOR (OTTERFORD)  
(THE OTTERFORD CHARITY)**

Niki Pryce – Chairman of Trustees

Trustees: Mike Canham, John Crabb, Lucy Montgomery, Niki Pryce, and Karen White.  
No report received this year.

**REPORT FROM THE PARISH PATHS LIAISON OFFICERS**

Richard Lupton / Roger Poland

No report received this year.

**REPORT FROM THE PARISH TREE WARDEN**

*Martin Hill*

WE are delighted that, during the year, Martin agreed to take on this role.  
No report this year, but Martin has already undertaken some tree-tidying work in the Playing Fields.

**REPORT FROM OTTERFORD PARISH HALL COMMITTEE**

Mike Canham - Chairman

Membership of the Hall Committee changed considerably in March when we said goodbye to Julie Campbell following her resignation and welcomed Kirti Leitch and Tracy Rendell. And at the very end of that month Ruth Marshalsay offered to join the Committee and was hastily welcomed!

Use of the hall for regular bookings has increased twice during 2023/24, with a Skittles Group starting in April and a Harp Group later in the year. And, as the year ended, we were looking forward to a Pilates class starting in April 2024. The hall has never been used by as many regular groups!

During the year we organised just two fundraising events - the New Year Quiz (yet again our thanks to Derek Tucker for both setting the questions and acting as our quizmaster on the evening), and the Big Breakfast. Attendance at both was higher than in recent years (perhaps we can at last say goodbye to the effect of COVID on attendances), and we banked a surplus of c£1200 in hall funds.

We have carried out a range of work on the hall during the year - including replacing the electrical supply board and associated works, installing a new water heater in the kitchen, fitting handrails to the stage stairs, and stripping and resealing the floor in the main hall.

Looking forward, in 2024/25 we hope to renew the stage curtains, and (if money permits) to upgrade all lighting to LED. We have already agreed to organise additional fundraising events to help pay for this - in October we will organise an Autumn Quiz (our thanks to Sue Marsden who has offered to set and ask the questions), and in December we will revive the Christmas Turkey Bingo. Other events may also be organised.

And, finally, my thanks to all Committee members old and new, and to those volunteers who help set up and run our fundraising events. The hall is a wonderful community asset - we simply couldn't run it without you.

## REPORT FROM THE OTTERHEAD ESTATE TRUST COMPANY REPRESENTATIVE

John Godsmark – Director

It's been a busy year for the Otterhead Estate Trust and a lot of work has been done at Otterhead Lakes.

We have held four Management meetings and Board meetings since May 2023, and an AGM Sept 2023. A lot of communication takes place by email particularly in relation to grant applications and projects. During the year approaches were made to contacts to increase the number of Directors to share the workload but to no avail and there is a definite need.

It was with sadness that Jackie Gage died last August having stepped back in April from her voluntary role of co-ordination of the "Friends of Otterhead" group, organising work parties, producing Newsletters and assisting with the web site. She is greatly missed. Mal Squance also stepped back in April from her role as Fund-raiser.

Valerie Godsmark has been covering their tasks including overseeing installation of the six new information boards last July with Grant funding from Nineveh Trust match-funded by Wessex Water. She has taken over compilation of the seasonal newsletters & Eugenio has volunteered to publish them.

Valerie & John have taken on arranging the monthly work parties which re-commenced in September and are now attracting more participants always including Tim Hooper.

Neroche Conservation Volunteers installed easy rise steps up the slope from Royston Lake.

Forestry England clear- felled all the Larch trees on their leased land and will be re-planting possibly next Winter.

The large footbridge over the river was replaced in November and more stones put on the path between the two lakes to improve the surface for walking. Mostly funded by FIPL & Defra grants via BHAONB. Further work may be needed on the slope from the road bridge as the surface is steep & slippery.

The hydro-electric turbine is now producing electricity for the Coach House. Forest School who use the property in term time are really pleased with no longer having to use a petrol generator. Nigel Griffiths dealt with all grant applications and was project manager for the installation. David Jackson managed much of the work clearing the leat.

Due to Ash dieback some of the Ash trees along the paths have had to be felled for safety & others are monitored. Felling has been done by some of Forest School staff who are qualified Chainsaw operators.

Beavers at Otterhead are causing problems felling trees and damming the leat which supplies the water for the Hydro thus stopping the electricity supply. A team of volunteers & Forest school monitor these impacts on a daily basis. Several meetings have been held with Devon Wildlife Trust.

Annual costs for Otterhead Estate Trust to manage the Local Nature Reserve at Otterhead Lakes are currently £2 500 to cover Insurance, accountants, emptying the dog bin, and the website. Grants now have to be sought for any future projects: eg possibly improving the car park, re-instating the Nature Trail, improving the surface of the path along the leat.

Our coins "fund-raiser" has brought in £550 to date; and BSM coffee morning in December 2023, Snowdrop walk, Hydro tours, and other donations from "Friends" have been significant.