

# Chairman's Annual Report

Annual Parish Report for the Period 01/05/2025 – 31/03/2026

## Introduction

I am delighted to have taken on the role of Chairman of the Harston Parish Council. My tenure began on 1st May 2025, just after Tesco's demolished a bus shelter on the High Street — a clear reminder of the dynamic environment in which we serve. I am pleased to say it has now been restored.

I am grateful for the guidance and support of my experienced colleagues: Steve Wilson, Vice Chairman, and Paul Holdom, Chair of the Finance Committee. Our council consists of eight other councillors, including two new members this year, all of whom have supported our activities. I wish to extend my thanks to Dom Bellamy and Mike Luffman for their longstanding contributions, which have provided a strong foundation for our council's progress.

## Neighbourhood Plan

We have now successfully completed and filed our neighbourhood plan, which was agreed upon with your support and has introduced robust new planning policies. These policies will shape future developments in Harston and stand us in good stead. Special thanks go to Dom Bellamy, Paru Naik, and Hilary Roadley for their efforts in establishing these benchmarks, enabling us to assess future projects with greater clarity.

## East West Railway

The East West Railway remains a significant ongoing issue for Harston; after four and a half years it still takes up much effort by our working group. We continue to collaborate closely with Newton and other neighbouring communities (including Haslingfield and Gt Shelford) to address the issues that we hope will be debated at the Development Consent Order (DCO), expected in 2027 or possibly 2028. From our perspective, the East West Railway does not offer any clear benefits for Harston and itself faces

challenges between Bletchley and Bedford (the area of the Universal Theme Park) as well as its connection to the new town at Tempsford on the East Coast Main Line.

Harston is significant as the junction where the EWR proposed line meets the Shepreth Branch Line (also known as the Kings Cross Main Line), forming one of the most intricate and expensive sections of the route. This interchange will involve four EWR lines (including two passing loops) joining two SBR lines, one of which will need to be elevated. In addition the A10 will also need to be elevated for EWR to go under.

The project will have a profound impact on our village, affecting its topography, environment, services and school. We are committed to mitigating these effects, with the ideal solution being to reroute the new line north of Cambridge. Our local mitigation efforts focus on two main objectives:

1. Moving the line further from the village to minimise disruption to housing, businesses and the school. Also causing less disruption in the village during the build phase (could be 5 years); and
2. Maintaining an active route on Station Road, avoiding the need for traffic to divert via London Road, the A10, or the relief road along the old railway line when built (again c 5 years away from the start date).

During construction, Station Road is expected to be closed for at least five years without a relief road, forcing all traffic onto London Road and the A10; and causing considerable congestion, especially during peak hours. We regularly raise these concerns with district and county councillors, as well as East West Railway representatives.

## Greener and Healthier Harston

On a brighter note community activities remain vibrant, including the Greener Harston group, previously led by Dr Becky Korb, and litter picking initiatives managed by Chinu Alexander under the guidance of the Harston Residents Group. Many thanks to Hilary Roadley and all involved for their dedication. We are looking at our trees and hedges on our property and have taken the first steps of documenting the issues; we are aiming to set up an action plan for a sustainable multiyear maintenance programme.

## Roads and Active Travel

We have managed after several applications to secure 20 mph speed limits for both Station Road and Church Street (inc feeder roads). There has also been positive feedback regarding extending the 20 mph limit on Station Road over the railway crossing, with a 40 mph buffer zone up the hill to Newton. These changes are expected to improve safety, enhance the connectivity and support the development of an active travel plan in the next session.

## The Future for Planning

With the neighbourhood plan approved, our focus now shifts to two key objectives: establishing a community centre in the heart of the village and increasing affordable housing options beyond small flats with limited parking. Both projects depend on identifying suitable sites, so we welcome any suggestions from the community.

We have also responded on both the Local Plan and the Consultation regarding the proposed Cambridge Development Corporation – the expansion of Cambridge will increase the pressure on our feeder roads and also the A10 and we look forward to working with them to find solutions.

The idea of developing the Pavilion area remains alive and we are still looking for new users and ideas. We recognise the need for enabling works and improved maintenance, particularly regarding the car park, trees, and hedgerows. The site is widely used for sports, community events, apple picking for our Community Apple Juice (thanks to Andy), dog walking, and children's play.

Last year, the Pavilion hosted the school's firework display, managed by the PTFA, which was a great success. We look forward to its potential return and appreciate the patience of residents living nearby for this annual event.

We are eager to see the Pavilion used for an even wider range of activities. Suggestions for new events are encouraged, and we are exploring additional sporting opportunities while continuing to support football and scouting. The success of these activities relies on an enthusiastic core team for promotion and management.

## Shops, Services and Roads

We are excited to welcome Fitz Billy's to Harston and are strengthening relationships with other local businesses. All commercial sites in the village are now occupied, reinforcing our belief that local employment is essential for rural communities, reducing travel distances and providing opportunities for young people.

Road maintenance is an ongoing concern. I thank the County Council for addressing potholes, but more work is needed, and we continue to press the highways department to complete repairs.

## Staff

As we approach new elections, eight councillors are continuing but Irene Richards, Paul Holdom and Paru Naik are leaving us. This leaves room for 3 new members. Anyone interested in joining as a councillor or working party member is encouraged to contact us. There are various roles and support needed and its a rewarding activity so please do consider it as you read this annual report.

The Clerk is indispensable to the Parish Council, ensuring efficient and high-quality services – such roles as dealing with a car left abandoned on the Recreation car park. And we thank her for her continuing dedication.

Our aim is to cultivate a village in which residents are involved , part of the decision making and proud to live, to work, to grow, to play, and to retire — in essence a thriving community and blended economy.

I close by saying how much we as a Council look forward to seeing all of you in Harston and we aim to be more visible; not just in 2026 but for many years.

Yours

Rupert Pearce Gould

Chairman

16<sup>th</sup> April 2026