

WHITE COLNE PARISH COUNCIL

Chair's Annual Report. April 2025 – March 2026. Presented by Cllr Jane Taylor, Chair

Annual Parish Meeting – April 2026

It is a real pleasure to present this Annual Report, covering the work of the Parish Council from April 2025 to March 2026. It has been a busy, productive, and very positive year, and one of which we are extremely proud.

Firstly, we begin with a highlight for the whole village—White Colne being named RCCE Essex Village of the Year 2025. This is a wonderful achievement and a reflection of the strength, spirit, and community life we enjoy here.

The Council has continued to serve the parish with commitment throughout the year. We were pleased to welcome three new councillors—Jason Pryke, Michael Field, and Paula Bull—whose enthusiasm has already made a valuable contribution. I would also like to thank all councillors for the time and care they give—whether attending meetings, dealing with planning matters, liaising with contractors, or responding to residents. My thanks also go to our Parish Clerk, Jim Morris, for his professionalism and support throughout the year.

Financially, the Council remains in a sound and stable position. A modest increase in the precept was agreed to meet rising costs and new requirements; while ensuring we can continue to maintain and improve local services. We continue to manage reserves carefully so that we can invest in community assets and respond when needed.

The Village Hall continues to sit at the heart of community life and has had a strong year. The solar installation has performed well in its first full year, generating enough electricity for the Hall and exporting surplus energy. The Winter Hub has once again provided a welcoming space for residents over the colder months, and we are looking to secure further funding to continue this important initiative. The not-for-profit community café has continued to meet twice a month, and we are indebted to the Black Horse café who support us with the supply of their delicious scones. We have also reviewed Hall pricing, addressed maintenance issues, and are beginning to look ahead to future improvements, including the Hall floor and the car park.

The Meadows remains a much-loved and well-used space. We have continued to invest in its upkeep, with play equipment inspections and maintenance carried out during the year. Alongside this, we are working towards improving provision for younger children, with plans for early years play equipment, and we are developing a longer-term management plan for the site. In addition, we have secured funding for a new outdoor gym, which will be installed near the Village Hall to ensure it is easily accessible for residents and complements existing activities there.

Our allotments continue to be a valued resource for residents. We have held a plot holders' event and are working through practical matters such as unworked plots and fencing improvements, alongside a review of the allotment agreement for the coming years.

Planning has been a significant area of work this year, with important implications for the future of the village and the wider Colne Valley. The Regulation 18 consultation on the Braintree Local Plan closed on 17th April, and the Parish Council has submitted its response. This includes strong support for the designation of Local Green Space on the shrub land to the rear of the Village Hall, recognising its importance to the community, its ecological value, and its role as part of a wider green corridor. We have also continued to work with neighbouring parishes on wider development concerns.

Road safety and highways continue to be priorities raised by residents. We have worked with Essex County Council on a range of issues and will continue to press for improvements where needed. This year also saw significant disruption caused by the A1124 road closure. The impact on residents was considerable, particularly in terms of access and day-to-day travel. The Parish Council engaged actively with the relevant authorities and contractors, raising concerns, seeking clear communication, and pressing for better coordination.

Following this, Cadent has offered the Parish Council a £1,000 donation in recognition of the disruption experienced by the community. This will be used as match funding towards new early years play equipment at the Meadows, helping to turn a difficult situation into a positive outcome for the village.

Alongside this, the Council has devoted time to strengthening its governance, updating policies and procedures to ensure we remain effective and well prepared for future challenges.

Looking ahead, there is much to look forward to. The new outdoor gym will be installed week commencing May 5th, and we will be celebrating both the 50th anniversary of the Village Hall and the 21st anniversary of the Meadows, including a Midsummer party on June 20th. We will also be recognising the contribution of local residents through our Village Awards.

Finally, I would like to thank our District and County Councillors for their support, including through community grants—Cllr George Courtauld for the Christmas light installation on the Village Green, Cllr Gabrielle Spray for matched funding for play equipment, and Cllr Chris Siddall for supporting a new post for the SID. Most importantly, thank you to the residents of White Colne for your continued support, interest, and involvement in village life. It is a privilege to serve as your Chair.
