

# Penkridge Parish Council

## Chairman's Annual Report 2023/24

Chairman Cllr Helen Adams

I would like to start by thanking Councillors for their support during this past year and Lesley Hough who has supported me greatly throughout my year as Chair. Lesley and her team, comprising of her assistant, Debbie Turton, Ann Raby and Emma Ram, who are responsible for the administration of the Parish Council, Haling Dene Centre, Burial Ground and Open Spaces. Julie Rathbone, our Caretaker is supported by Caroline Draper and Steve Taylor undertakes the maintenance of the Centre in addition to looking after the open spaces and parks and Jo Briscoe looks after the Village Toilets and litter picks our Parks and Burial Ground. These are the people who work in the background unnoticed but are responsible for the smooth running of the Council's work.

The Haling Dene is not only the Parish Council's headquarters but is also a base for our exclusive users who are St John Ambulance, Brownies and Rainbows, Biochemit Environmental, Chilli Peppers, three Psychologists and Age UK, who will now use the Centre as their main administrative base.

The Haling Dene continues to be used by groups such as PACE, Phoenix Art, Phoenix Bridge, Natural Healers, Mother and Baby Group, Penkridge Walk and Talk, Penkridge Widows Club and Dene Dance. The Centre has a Wedding Licence, a dedicated Mobile Bar and holds many family functions, weddings and children's parties together with corporate events.

This has been a busy year which started with both District and Parish elections. Eleven Councillors were elected unopposed which left vacancies in four seats. All four were filled by co-option but one Councillor resigned which has created a vacant seat for Penkridge North East and is being advertised with a closing date of 15<sup>th</sup> March.

The Parish Council have held many events since last May; the first being King Charles III Coronation on 7<sup>th</sup> May with a Family Fun Day at the Haling Dene Centre. Luckily the weather was very warm and sunny and many people attended and enjoyed the day.

This was followed by the Round Table Fun Run in June and another Parish Council Family Fun Day in August. In September the Parish Council hosted Penkridge Volunteers Day which showcased opportunities for volunteers together with our locally run voluntary groups. The Council's held its Civic Service in September and we were pleased to announce the winners of the three Civic Service Awards. The winners were Jackie Davies was awarded the Civic Award, Andrew Hughes was awarded the Good Neighbour/Community Spirit Award and we were pleased to award Rebecca Palmer the Young Achiever Award.

In November we held a Psychic evening and three sessions of a fully booked Pantomime. Our last event of 2023 was a Christmas Fayre at the Haling Dene Centre, this was a move from Market Street but proved to be very popular and successful and enjoyed by many people of all ages. It is our intention to continue holding the Christmas Fayre in this way.

The Christmas Fayre was followed by the Penkridge Christmas Light Festival co-ordinated by Penkridge Open Air which also proved to be very popular.

Our last event of the Parish Year will be an Easter Fun Day on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> April.

The Council has had several new initiatives this year. The first is the Haling Dene Community Café which opened on 17<sup>th</sup> August last year and is open every Thursday between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. We provide free hot drinks and biscuits and a small team of volunteers also make cakes, snacks and light lunches for a small cost which is all donated to charity. This has gone from strength to strength and welcomes new people on a weekly basis. This is attended by staff from various agencies dealing with issues such as Welfare Benefits, Jobs advice, Alzheimer's.

We are also pleased to say that the Parents and Toddler group which commenced in January is doing very well and has been exceptionally well attended.

Lastly, on a Wednesday afternoon there is Dominoes/Crib in addition to a Knit and Natter.

The Parish Council has been very fortunate to receive some grants this year which has enabled us to refurbish the Heron Park Play area, purchase a new dishwasher for Haling Dene to assist with the running of the café as well as improve the offering to other individuals/groups who wish to hire the kitchen for functions. We were also lucky to receive resources from Staffordshire County Council to assist with the running of the Parents and Toddlers group.

The Haling Dene Centre Planned Maintenance Programme continues and recently saw the refurbishment of both ground floor ladies and gents toilets.

The Council continues to support local organisations with the consideration of Grants in accordance with the Council's Grant Awards Policy. The Council's aim is to distribute grants in a way that is fair and accountable to enable many groups to benefit.

The Penkridge Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group is progressing well with its work and the group are currently collating the results of the survey which was circulated in December. These results will form the basis of a report which will be prepared in the coming months in readiness for the Independent Examination followed by the Referendum which will be circulated to all residents in Penkridge and will establish the level of community support for the Plan.

Penkridge Library is very well used by the Community and we would like to thank all our dedicated Volunteers for making it such a success. The Volunteers have also developed a Tolkien Garden at the front of the library. It is nearly five years since the Parish Council went into partnership with Staffordshire County Council and we are looking forward to renewing this contract for a further five years.

The Council have many plans for the forthcoming year but for now, I'm going to finish my report here and thank you once again for taking the time to come along tonight.

Cllr Helen Adams  
Chair Penkridge Parish Council