

Riston Parish Council – Chair’s Report (2024–2025)

Presented: 14 May 2025

This year has been one of significant progress, reflection, and resilience for Riston Parish Council. Despite facing a number of challenges, we remained focused on strengthening governance, engaging with the community, and delivering on our priorities.

- Over **20 new policies** were introduced to improve governance and accountability.
- A thorough **Internal Audit (2023/24)** led to clear action points, all of which we addressed. This resulted in a much-improved audit for 2024/25.
- We appointed a **qualified Clerk/RFO and Caretaker**, both now on national pay scales and with formal contracts – a first for the Council.
- A new **Grants Policy Scheme** was introduced to ensure transparency and fairness in community funding.

Challenges and Key Responses:

- We handled a **high volume of planning applications**, including proposals for a **solar farm, dog kennels, and a poultry farm**, always seeking to represent community interests. While our influence over the solar farm application is limited, we ensured residents' views were communicated ahead of the Planning Inspectorate's recommendation to the Secretary of State.
- **Vexatious communications** and a **disproportionate number of complaints** from a small group of individuals placed pressure on Council resources. This included referrals to the **Information Commissioner’s Office** and formal objections during the audit process. Managing these issues demanded significant time and effort, though we remain committed to transparency and await the outcome of the audit review by **PFK Littlejohn LLP**.
- We also experienced **membership changes**, with four councillors stepping down. We responded promptly and positively, **co-opting five new members**, bringing both continuity and fresh ideas to the Council.

Engagement and Community Initiatives:

- We successfully delivered a **Community Questionnaire**, helping define our future priorities.
- Our new **Council-owned website** is now live and will also serve as a repository for the *Riston Remembers* video.
- We introduced **Council-controlled email accounts**, aligning with best practices from ERNLLCA and PKF Littlejohn.

- A new **Parish and Village logo** has been launched and now features prominently on our Website.
- **Two Councillor's undertook training** to support good governance and capability-building.
- Our **Christmas celebrations**, held in partnership with **Riston Primary School** and the **PTFA**, brought joy to the community through decorated wooden stars and a festive lights switch-on.

Despite challenges, this year reflects a Council determined to raise standards, strengthen community links, and deliver on its responsibilities with integrity.

Riston Parish Council Plans for 2025–2026

The Parish Council aims to improve safety, community involvement, and the village environment. Key focus areas include:

- **Traffic & Speed Control:** Explore a 20mph limit for Main Street and Arnold, launch a parish-led Speed Watch, and implement calming measures like signage and visual cues.
- **Green Spaces & Aesthetics:** Enhance public areas with planting and planters, improve verge maintenance, and encourage volunteer involvement.
- **Communication & Inclusivity:** Improve newsletters and social media use, increase transparency, and ensure better representation for Arnold residents.
- **Safety & Infrastructure:** Tackle parking issues, especially near schools, and publish the Parish Emergency Plan.
- **Community Support:** Promote access to grants for local groups with a fair and open process.

This plan reflects the Council's commitment to a safer, greener, and more inclusive village.

Chair, Riston Parish Council

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