

Yarlington Annual Parish Report April 2023-2024 – Councillor Maria Viney

Introduction

Who could have envisaged the last year? While we had cause for celebrations, we soon became aware of the well-worn phrase climate change and its impact on our environment. For this and other reasons we have been acutely aware this year more than ever of the need to respect and care for our environment and to value the role that we each can play in our community.

A Snap Shot of the Year

- How quickly things move on, last year we celebrated the achievements of our Saga Community in a post covid world. Now we welcome new families into the village, and staff from our neighbours Emily Estates into our community at Manor Farm and Yarlington Lodge. We look forward to when the Village Hall is fully open and live in hope that our village pub will be resurrected. In close proximity to the pub, we should not forget the beauty of our parish church. This has been our meeting place over the last year and also needs our support not least to maintain the fabric of the building for future generations.
- Two Canadian Geese, joined our community a year ago making the village pond and its island their home, building their nest on higher ground. Despite the flood the young were hatched and thrived for a time. They have returned again this year and we will see what follows. Such an event deserves further acknowledgement when you explore the view of the Canadian First Nation Indians and note the symbolism of the geese:
 - Known for their beauty and bounty of nature
 - Bravery and loyalty never leaving one behind, part of the reason they are believed to fly in formation
 - Respectful, lifelong commitment to each other
 - They work together showing teamwork and the need for communication

They are worthy neighbours in our community, is it just a coincidence they joined us when they did?

- The return of the Fringe with its food and beverages, live music, drama and even an opera. We hosted an Art Exhibition and throughout lots of fun was had by many.
- Saturday 6th May 2024 we embraced the Coronation of King Charles III as a village community, coming together sharing food and drink, telling stories, a happy time full of laughter and toasting our King and Queen.
- Within days, as the marquee was being taken down, the very one that had played its part in creating these lasting memories, the heavens opened. A torrential downpour of hail and rain accompanied by thunder and lightning locked over the hills and neighbouring parishes. This led to flooding throughout the Cam Valley a very different picture, memorable for different reasons. Roads became rivers, hillsides became waterfalls and devastation ripped through our friends and neighbours' homes. But once again an event that brought the best out in our community. We worked together, supporting one another then and for the long haul.
- This year unlike any other has seen Parishioners and residents from different parishes coming together, taking an interest in the broader community particularly with regard to Flood Prevention and Planning Applications. It is worth remembering this is not just the remit of Parish Councillors but the wider community, we ALL need to work together in the broadest sense to play our part in shaping our environment for the future.

- This year has seen the closure of the Stags Head Inn. Recent years have proved difficult for the hospitality industry, North Cadbury and Yarlington Parish Council supported the village by completing the application to list the Stag's Head Inn as an Asset of Community Value. We hope that in the future the pub will reopen and thrive once more.
- Sadly, this year as is so often the case the community has seen the passing of some of its parishioners including Denise Dally, Mary Clothier and Bridget West. Our thoughts are with their families and friends, we share in their loss at this time and similarly are thoughts are with all who may have endured losses in their lives this year.

Infrastructure

The limitation of the road networks that flow through the village continues to be a source of concern and angst for the majority of the village residents. We are not alone, a problem shared by all our neighbouring parishes. Following on from last year, the increase in agricultural and construction traffic has continued, the width and weight of these vehicles continues to erode the road surfaces creating gullies in the verges and potholes of a magnitude not seen before. The verges decimated by large weighted tyre tracks, the narrow lanes cannot facilitate two large vehicles passing and this impacts on the broader habitat and vegetation. The excessive rainfall we have experienced this year has played its part with the raised water table, surface runoff at a high and springs running freely adding to the problem on the roads.

The Somerset Unitary Authority has been found wanting as far villages like Yarlington are concerned. Despite monthly dialogue with the Highways Department by our hardworking Councillor John Rundle and my attempt to support his efforts with emails, meetings on site have amounted to very little. The promises made on more than two occasions by John Nicholson@ Highways have resulted in no real progress. At best superficial drain clearance took place on selected drains in the centre of the village following the floods, drains that had not been cleared as they should as part of a rolling programme, years of neglect. Over the last year the Highways Department have used an array of different coloured paints to highlighting the pot holes to be filled. But the paint faded with time and the continued traffic flow has meant the problems have just grown and the pot holes remain, growing in number and depth.

Little or no work took place on the Lodge Hill, West Street, Pound Lane, God's Lane or Stoke Lane including the bridge by Yarlington Mill which has cracks and broken stonework, a cause for real concern that appear to be ignored in Taunton. The damage caused by the state of the road infrastructure (which has been reported repeatedly) to cars and vehicles on the one hand but we should also remember the danger posed to pedestrians and cyclists. Ultimately these could lead to injuries or potentially a fatality in the future and a lawsuit would then follow. Somerset Unitary Authority has a financial short fall but the lack of maintenance goes back beyond the last year, the problem in part can be seen as the priority given to more major routes forgetting villages like Yarlington with no alternative transport systems to call upon and the additional exposure of these lanes to larger vehicles and volume of traffic which go unmonitored.

Following the floods on the 9th May 2023 and compounded by the significant rainfall that has continued through the seasons, the road surfaces throughout the village have pooled water and in many cases mud. In the case of West Street, the landslides that occurred at this time and the thick set mud that covered the road was finally cleared April 2024. This process exposed the road surface

further leading to the most treacherous potholes and a road surface that in places goes below the hardcore foundation.

Planning Developments

This year farming continues on the existing site at Manor Farm and following the Consultation we await to see the latest proposed plans for Manor Farm. The adaptation of Yarlington Lodge into luxury holiday lets continues, and the Trout Ponds Development in the Meadow beyond the village pond commenced in the Autumn and will be completed by the summer.

In each case, in the short term an array of construction traffic flows in and out of the village, mud has been prolific and measures put in place by the respective developers to try and mitigate the problems by sweeping some but not all of the roads. While this traffic has a finite life, the subsequent traffic that will then come must be considered, particularly in the centre of the village and access to the wider communities. While it is right to expect the authorities to step up, in these difficult economic times, we cannot be complacent and where possible we need to support the Highways and help ourselves for example where possible clear debris from drain covers near our homes, remove the vegetation from the hedge cutting and dig small gullies to enable the surface runoff on the roads to enter the ditches and fields where feasible.

Planning Applications

The village has seen two Planning Applications processed this year:

1. Yarlington Mill: Old Derelict Farm which is now in the early stages of being developed. The application saw a change from five to three detached houses that will provide housing for three families who will be able to contribute to our community in the future.
2. Wheelwrights Studio which came up for review following the floods when the premises, in close proximity to the river Cam flooded. The final decision was taken by Emily Estates to apply for permission to carry out a minor extension with a view to making the property a studio suitable for art/craft business rather than residential due to proximity to the stream and its location in general. Both applications were endorsed by North Cadbury and Yarlington Parish Council and consent given at county level.

Events

Once again throughout the calendar year, despite adversity, Yarlington Village has found the energy and appetite to continue many events that help to define this unique community alongside national celebrations.

The list includes

- Fringe Celebrations
- Coronation Celebrations
- Plant Fair
- In the church Harvest Festival celebrations, Carol Service and Bach's St Matthew's Passion.
- When access to the Village Hall allowed 'The Nog and Natter' and Molly's Breakfasts. We now look forward to the reopening of the Hall and the events that will follow in due course.
- Life Drawing Classes continued throughout the year following the closure of the Village Hall thanks to the kindness of the Count and Countess De Salis who opened their home to the group.

On behalf of the village thank you to everybody concerned for their hard work and endeavour and we extend our thanks to Emily Estates for their support at many of these events. In addition, I would like to thank Hilary Parry for her work on the parish website, keeping us all informed about current events.

Church Report Written By Mary-Clare Leavold

Village Hall Report Written By Andy Keeley

Emily Estates

If you go to any of the surrounding parishes, you will probably hear the same tale, Emily Estates ensure that there is always something to talk about and this year has been no different!

As a village, Emily Estates are a part of our community, indeed our neighbours and during this year they have played a significant role in helping the community as a whole in the aftermath of the floods. They experienced the power of the storm with many of their properties flooded and the dangers and demands of access in the face of rising river levels. At this time, they were very much present in our community, helping to evacuate if necessary and/or help residents to reach their homes. Similarly, it was the Emily Estates who were in the heart of the village early the following morning removing the debris from the roads and the culverts that were blocked. While we were accepting of the enormity of the situation in a number of villages, Yarlington received no quantifiable support from Somerset Unitary Authority in the early days that followed. It was community based, neighbours supporting one another.

As I have already indicated the problems of the traffic on the narrow lanes this is heavily linked to the ongoing work of the Emily Estates. But it is also appropriate to acknowledge the positive role they played in our Parish in the months that followed the floods. While the storm was deemed to be an extraordinary event, beyond the initial clear up, Emily Estates have worked with other external organisations as well as the community to try and reduce the risks to residents and properties in the future. This includes monitoring and clearing debris from the river Cam as it flows through the centre of the village, including the collection of debris from gardens.

In the months that followed, we were told that the Trout Pond Design had been under review in the light of the flood. Similarly, they have worked with the different authorities and neighbours to try and reduce the risk by keeping the ditches clear of debris, changing the profile of the ditches and taking part in the Pilot Flood Gauge Scheme. Most recently they are working with Highways to agree the work on Pound Lane and the area by the Finger posts, offering to pay for the work providing the work is carried out by the Somerset Unitary Authority team in order to preserve the guarantees on the work.

Emily Estates currently have a number of projects underway in the relatively small acreage of the village of Yarlington:

1. Trout Ponds

When the weather and ground condition permit, work will resume on the trout ponds, much of the vegetation clearance took place outside the nesting season and the project would have been completed had it not been for the extraordinary weather. It is anticipated that once work commences, this process will be completed relatively quickly 6-8 weeks including the bridge structures that will facilitate access across the land, the culverts and potentially play a part in the Flood Monitoring. We look forward to being allowed to access this walk once more it has been closed to the community for the last six months and we look forward to the replanting

with indigenous plants sympathetic to the location and once again the free movement of our local wildlife.

2. Manor Farm Proposal

Following the initial Consultation Presentations that took place over two days in February 2023 at the Stags Head, Yarlinton, Emily Estates agreed to host two further meetings in the village. These were attended by Koos Bekker, Paul Rawson and Cameron Knee. These meetings were open to Yarlinton residents and small groups were encouraged to attend each meeting at Manor Barn, Yarlinton on Friday 4 August and Monday 7 August 2023. The numbers were limited to approximately 15 at each to facilitate open conversation between all parties.

However, the second meeting the number of people totalled 26, as a number of residents had not confirmed their attendance

Some of the main points that arose from each meeting but not a definitive list:

Pro's	Con's
Current site not appropriate with its slope with regard to moving the animals and machinery.	Concern about using a green field site over a brown field site
Eliminate the run off from the tanks, down the slopes and contaminating the streams	Perceived loss of biodiversity
A new access to the farm instead of Pound Lane taking account of the larger vehicles, number of journeys, the constraint of the narrow lanes, the age and construction of the cottages.	Concern for the protected view from Yarlinton Sleights and in reverse form Corton Denham Ridge
The height of the existing site as a starting point was prohibitive	Concern that the size and scale of the farm was simply too large for such a site: BWC and buffalo
The new site was away from the village and this was seen as a benefit to all; noise, farming debris, traffic etc	The number of farms purchased by Emily Estates but not considered for this development.
The new site had been selected as it was not in view of residential housing	The lack of flexibility to use more than one of their sites for a new farm model.
The need for housing linked to the Yarlinton Lodge application and the view that we do not need further holiday lets	
Etc	etc

The majority of people at each meeting were in favour of exploring the proposed new site further and the opportunity it provided for building a small residential development. A smaller number of people expressed their objection to the concept of moving the farm but supported the idea of the residential housing. All residents were in agreement, the village could not cope with further holiday lets.

The size and scale of the proposed site in its new location was a point of debate and this led to the Site Meetings that took place in September 2023, these were open to the wider community and were well attended.

Emily Estates have been looking at their plans since the Autumn and we await an update and potentially further consultation.

3. Appointment of the Liaison Officer and Steward @ the Newt

Following on from the dialogue that took place in meetings across this and neighbouring parishes two members of staff were appointed by Emily Estates. Their role to work with local communities, amongst other things to strive to ensure greater transparency and improve communication for all parties and the hope that Emily Estates would listen, understand and consider the impact of their actions on these communities and their environments.

While it is early days, Zoe Young and Rob Askew only took up their respective positions in February 2024, the learning curve is in place, some challenges have already been faced and the impact to date has been positive and watch this space.

4. Stag's Head Inn

Following two meetings in Yarlington Parish Church, each well attended by over 30 residents representing most households in the village, Emily Estates agreed to explore a proposal to buy the premises and, in the event, this was successful, indicate a willingness to work with the village to appoint proprietors and discuss any other input, sharing the common goal of helping the pub to succeed once more for local people and visitors alike.

5. Yarlington Lodge

Finally work has commenced on the site, with huge implications on the road network as I have already outlined and the village landscape. In addition, such an undertaking cannot take place without noise and the mud associated with such a build. We look forward to when the work is completed as per the Planning Application and trust the landscape will then return to its norm; indigenous planting, green paths and hedgerows, in keeping with the integrity of the village.

6. Wheelwrights Studio

Planning has been granted and we await progress.

Future Challenges in the Year Ahead

Many challenges lie ahead that will impact and shape the future of this community, for example the plans for Manor Farm. It is easy to identify these major issues and rally. However, it is equally important that we all play our part and do not leave it to a few but step up and share the workload. Repeatedly I have asked for your support at Parish Council meetings, thank you to the same few who have provided this when they can. Once again and possibly the last time of asking, please support the work of your Parish Council, now more than in the recent past when the workload looks likely to increase due to the financial problems of our Somerset Unitary Authority, we need you to take an interest and to help.

In the immediate future we need to come together as a community and create our Emergency Plan, this is not just for flooding but covers a host of possible emergency situations. This is not the first time of asking, Yarlington needs to create a working party to make this happen, please step up.