

BARNWELL PARISH COUNCIL

Annual Chairman's Report

Council Year: May 2025 – May 2026

Tim Herring, Chairman

Introduction

It has been an eventful and rewarding first year as Chairman, and I am pleased to present this annual report covering the council year May 2025 to May 2026.

When I took on the role of Chairman at our first meeting on 20 May 2025, I spoke about continuing the good work of my predecessor David Brown and building on the strong foundations left by our retiring councillors. With the help of a dedicated team of councillors, the diligent support of our Clerk Nicki Phillips, and many willing volunteers across the village, I believe we have made real progress.

Council Membership

At our Annual Parish Council Meeting, I was elected Chairman and Cllr Chris Soans elected Vice-Chairman. Rachel Dunn was co-opted to fill a remaining vacancy, proposed by Cllr Brown and seconded by Cllr Forrest. Councillor responsibilities were allocated as follows:

- Flood Warden, Mowing and Assets Inspection – Cllr Brown
- Trees – Cllr Forrest
- Community Orchard Liaison, Internal Finance Controls & Noticeboard – Cllr de Bock
- Highways & Street Lighting – Cllr Dunn
- Police Liaison, Neighbourhood Watch, Facebook & Funding/Grants – Cllr Herring
- Public Rights of Way, Litter & Recreation Field – Cllr Soans
- Children's Play Area & Traffic Calming – Cllr Mailey

Governance & Administration

Six bi-monthly meetings were held at the Village Hall throughout the year, plus the Annual Parish Council Meeting in May 2025. At our inaugural meeting, the Council reviewed and approved a comprehensive suite of policies, including Finance Regulations, Standing Orders, Code of Conduct, all risk assessments, data protection policies, and safeguarding and health and safety documents. The Council was declared exempt from external audit for 2024/25 and the internal audit raised no issues.

A new online inspection recording system for the Recreation Field and children's play area was developed by Cllr Mailey. A WhatsApp group was established for urgent Council communications, and an IT Policy was approved and adopted in September 2025. The Council also submitted a 'no change' response to the North Northamptonshire Community Governance Review.

Our Clerk Nicki Phillips attended Public Rights of Way training, the NCALC BIG50 initiative and the Town and Parish Council Forum in October 2025. At that Forum, presentations were received on policing, the BIG50, and verges mowing.

Cllr Soans was appointed as the Council's Climate and Nature Champion in July 2025.

Environment, Recreation & Biodiversity

Recreation Field

The new mowing regime has been well received, with the football pitch seeing noticeably more use. An online inspection recording system was developed and put in place by Cllr Mailey. In March 2026, the Council formally approved a grant application for additional play equipment, and we are delighted that lottery funding has been secured for a new addition to the climbing wall — great news for younger residents.

We would kindly ask all dog owners to please ensure that dog mess is cleared up promptly — it makes a real difference to everyone who enjoys the Recreation Field.

Community Orchard

The Community Orchard has had a busy year. Several trees were lost during the dry spell, and the September 2025 work party removed the dead trees. In January 2026, the Council resolved to purchase six heritage plum trees from Tom Adams, which were planted in March 2026. A budget was agreed for mulch to protect the new trees, and a grant application for an orchard mower remains outstanding. Thanks to Rupert Paul for donating an apple tree to the orchard.

Village Trees

Tree management has continued throughout the year. Cllr Forrest has taken on responsibility for tree monitoring, logging fallen branches on FixMyStreet and arranging removal of storm debris from brookside willows. An ongoing challenge has been securing NNC's compliance with their responsibility for the lime trees on the Green — despite extensive correspondence, progress has been slow. NNC contractors were seen trimming lime boles but this did not address the Council's broader concerns. In January 2026, Cllr Forrest was tasked with building a case for pollarding of the willows.

Flooding & Brook

We are pleased to confirm that the Environment Agency cleared the brook before winter 2025, following sustained community pressure and letters from residents. The EA has also agreed to clear silt for 25 metres each side of the bridge later this year — a direct and welcome result of that community effort. We continue to press for further silt removal, and Cllr Brown is exploring a flood survey. Residents are reminded that flood water contains hazards and to follow EA guidance if flooding occurs.

Community Spirit & Volunteering

Volunteer effort has again been the backbone of much of what we have achieved. In September 2025, a well-attended village work party cleaned and painted the footbridges, carried out wildflower meadow maintenance at the Recreation Field, replaced dead trees in the Community Orchard, and re-erected a fallen Nene Valley footpath sign — with Cllr Herring providing a barbecue for those who turned out. A litter pick was also held on 19 April 2026, a fine way to close the council year.

Ted Croft continues to keep the village green in wonderful condition entirely voluntarily, and the noticeboard door was repaired by Cllr de Bock after being wrenched off in gales. Many thanks to everyone who contributes their time.

Planning & Campaigns

Planning Applications

The Council considered a number of planning applications during the year, endeavouring to approach each carefully, without bias, and informed by the Barnwell Neighbourhood Plan and Design Code. We encourage all applicants to review and align their proposals with the

Neighbourhood Plan and Design Code, both of which exist to help ensure that development in Barnwell reflects the character and needs of the village.

The Council registered as an interested party and made a financial contribution toward the STAUNCH campaign against the proposed warehousing development at Castle Manor Farm near Titchmarsh and Thrapston, with Cllr Brown speaking at the planning hearing. At the November 2025 meeting, Cllr Soans drafted a further letter to NNC requesting clarity on the long-term management of the 'Functionally Linked Land' associated with that application.

Road Safety & Speed Indicator Sign

After considerable effort, we are delighted to confirm that a new visual speed display sign has been installed on the road into the village from Hemington. The Section 50 licence was obtained in January 2026, and the equipment was installed in the first quarter of 2026, funded through a combination of a Members Empowerment Fund grant and other reserves. This has been a long-running campaign and it is very satisfying to see it delivered.

The Bridge

The road bridge suffered a vehicle strike during the year, with stones removed by NNC for safe storage. Progress on repairs has been slow; the Council has been in contact with Kier, who are aiming for late summer/early autumn 2026 for the repair works. Planning permission has been confirmed as not required. We will keep residents informed as plans are confirmed.

Mobile Connectivity

Mobile signal remains a persistent problem for Barnwell and the surrounding area. A representative from MP Lee Barron's office attended the September 2025 meeting to discuss the issue. The Council has been pressing for a 'reality map' of signal coverage and continues to correspond with the MP's office. In March 2026, it was noted that a mast site appears to be under construction on the Oundle Road — positive news that we will monitor closely. The Council also attended an A605 safety meeting called by Oundle Town Council.

Footpaths & Connectivity

The Council submitted a request to the NNC Local Transport Scheme consultation for a safe cycle path to Oundle and an improved A605 junction with a safe crossing place. The idea of a footpath and cycleway to Oundle was also raised at Oundle Town Council's Annual Meeting. This remains a longer-term aspiration.

Asset of Community Value

Applications for Asset of Community Value status for both the village shop and the pub have been progressed by Cllr Brown during the year, with the application for the shop submitted by March 2026 and the pub application to follow. Cllr Brown has spoken with the shop owner about ways the Council can support the business.

Other Matters

The Council approved a grant toward maintenance of the public right of way through the Chancel burial ground, and resolved to make a contribution toward the costs incurred by Oundle First Responders for checking and maintaining the Barnwell defibrillators. A new LED streetlight replacement was installed on Church Hill. The Council also explored streetlighting energy provider options but resolved to remain on a pay-as-you-go service for now.

In March 2026, the Council agreed to attend a site meeting with the owner of 40 acres of riverside land to be developed as a nature reserve — an exciting potential opportunity for the village.

Looking Ahead

There is much still to do. Some of these are ongoing priorities; some remain longer-term aspirations:

- Continued pressure on the Environment Agency for further silt removal from the brook, and progress on a flood survey.
- A footpath or cycleway to Oundle — ideally within the hedgerow, or at least a properly cleared and safe route.
- Improved mobile signal across Barnwell and the surrounding area.
- Installation of the new Recreation Field play equipment, supported by the lottery funding grant.
- Completion of the bridge repair works, expected late summer/autumn 2026.
- Further progress on the Nature Reserve on the riverside.

The Parish Council is being asked to do ever more, and we are increasingly reliant on voluntary effort, grants and community support to get things done. I am glad our new MP is showing interest in rural issues and I hope we can continue to get these practical, day-to-day challenges across to him effectively.

Thank You

To end on a positive note: we have wonderful local facilities, great businesses and a thriving village hall. Talking to people about where you come from — or to visitors to Barnwell — quickly makes you appreciate how fortunate we are to live in such a beautiful place.

This year marks the retirement of our Clerk, Nicki Phillips, after many years of dedicated and exceptional service to Barnwell Parish Council. Nicki has been the backbone of the Council's administration — always reliable, knowledgeable and supportive, and a steady guide to councillors new and experienced alike. We owe her a very great deal, and we wish her a thoroughly well-earned and happy retirement.

We are delighted to welcome Ginny Pledger as our incoming Clerk and look forward to working with her in the year ahead. Nicki has kindly agreed to support the handover, and we are very grateful for that generosity.

My sincere thanks go to all Parish Council members and volunteers for your support, patience and good humour throughout this year. The Council is only as effective as the people who give their time so willingly, and Barnwell is very lucky indeed.

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the Annual Parish Meeting on 19 May 2026, when we will formally close this council year and welcome the next. Wishing you all a happy summer.

Tim Herring

Chairman, Barnwell Parish Council

May 2026