

Chairs report – Castle Cary Annual Town Forum May 2026

Firstly, I feel it necessary to explain what are the main drivers that bring so many people to this hall tonight and continue to unite our community.

I cannot deny the declared facts that we are a council with a very high percept. There are factors which make this so and factors which we are trying to manage in order for the parishioners to feel they are getting value for money.

Firstly, we are fortunate to have an abundance of assets. These come with a cost of maintenance and renewal which have a consequence however this does allow us to utilise them for the benefit of our community. The use of the Market House, it is a wonderful sight and acts as the centre piece of the High Street. Nothing nicer than to see the Christmas lights shining bright and flanked by the trees gives the town a great atmosphere on a cold winters night, and is the focal point of the council business.

It is this image which sets Castle Cary up as a council willing to give as much as possible back as we can. The ongoing events either provided by us or supported by via our numerous donations throughout the year enabled by your contributions. It would be remiss of me not to highlight the effort and eventual outcome of the Cary in Bloom group that did so well and generated even more tourist footfall by its success. However, this is one group of so many, and the eager and willing volunteers which contribute so much is just incredible, thank you all so very much. Those who are here and those who aren't.

So, this disproportionate number of buildings and premises do give us costs which are normally associated with councils of a much higher population and gives us a higher burden for fewer to manage.

My predecessors have been prudent and managed the accounts to a position where no increase in the precept was required this year, which was most welcome.

So, this investment not only in the physical but the community welfare is the most important aspect that I feel we can all contribute to our community.

Some have made reference to what appears to be an excessive number of staff but they often miss the fact that one part time Marketing and Communications Administrator responsible for marketing and lettings generates more income than expenditure and when this is removed from the figures it is hard to see where this overspend is seen.

My colleagues will give a fuller explanation of the respective committees later but they all share a similar approach of continued support for the wider community. In the planning department there are new local plans and our own neighbourhood plan to renew and refresh by 2027. The latest numbers from Somerset Council says

we (Ansford and Castle Cary) only have to produce 106 houses in order to fulfil our quotas up to 2045, bearing in mind they said we only had to produce 20 houses per year up to 2028 in the last plan. With the latest development behind this hall it would mean only a further 30 would be needed. We are yet to see the outcome of how virtual unregulated development will affect our town.

Projects; our main goal is to find funding for a new pavilion and the money from the developers should see a start in a couple of years. A state of the art new facility for our two main sporting clubs would be fantastic and allow the development of so many more interested groups and clubs to flourish and provide a much needed community facility for our growing population.

The joining of the councils after a consultation; the respondents although in favour were not numerous enough to have the deciding voice. From the outset our position was that whatever the outcome it is the voice of the parishioner's and as such it is the way we will reflect our decisions and manage our direction. It has been made abundantly clear that our neighbours wish to be clear and free from any influence either perceived or actual from CCTC and I will see that this is achievable. We will wherever possible continue to act supportively and professionally where dialogue is needed between the councils.

Our other main function is to provide a communication channel to Somerset Council and this is carried out via direct notification from our clerk or distribution of whom to contact. It should not be underestimated how direct contact from residents carries potentially as much kudos as the Town Council's expressions of interests or concern.

It now is time to give some thanks to our members who are no longer going to be part of our team and so I would like to thank Tom who will be leaving the council and vacates the Deputy Chair position Frances also departs and her wise words will be missed

Philippa is stepping down from Chair of Properties and Infrastructure and will be the new Deputy Chair of Council. Angela who leaves the position of Chair of Marketing and will be replaced by Margret. Both Ange and Pip send their apologies but are on holiday in Bulgaria celebrating. Judi is also stepping down as Chair of Finance to be replaced by Gavin Crisp. David Gill will be stepping into the shoes of Phillipa as Chair of Properties and Infrastructure which will be a fantastic opportunity to contribute to the council.

It would be great to hear from our parishioners who wish to join the council. We often do not share the same vision but the depth of discussion I feel is a strength of the representation. Please consider joining the council and make our community stronger. The next few years are vital for our development and bringing our existing communities together with the new developments whilst keeping the feel of the traditional Castle Cary which is why we have such a vibrant town.

The last point to raise is the impact that our neighbours on the hill bring to the town centre, whatever your thoughts one thing is that the buildings will be beautiful and enhance the centre and this will create a superb nest of historical buildings.

Lastly I would like to thank our resident team of clerks and support staff who continue to do a wonderful job.

Thank you all for coming, and please feel free to come to our meetings and voice your support or concern. It would be pleasant if every now and again someone would recognise that we give of our time freely and endeavour to create an atmosphere we are all proud to be part of.

Please don't forget to book the Billiard Room and new kitchen area for private functions and events.