

Rock Parish Council Chairman's Report for 2025-2026

The end of April 2026 draws my first year as Chair to a close, and I am pleased to present my report.

The UK 2021 Census recorded Rock having a population of 2677 people: and at this time, we had 416 under 18-year-olds, 1405 people aged 18 to 64, and some 841 over 65-year-olds – in comparison to many other areas we have a relatively mature demographic.

The Parish Council consists of 12 elected councillors, with diverse backgrounds in both the commercial world and public sector. We currently have a single vacancy, but I am pleased to report that in the past year we have recruited two Councillors who better represent the young adult demographic – enabling the Council to better reflect all that live and work in our Parish.

Significant national changes in the structure and organisation of local government are underway. The existing Worcestershire arrangements with both a County (Worcestershire County Council (WCC)) and District council (Wyre Forest District Council (WFDC)) is almost certainly being altered within the next few years.

It remains to be seen whether our new arrangements consist of a new single Worcestershire wide unitary council or two separate unitary authorities: one for North Worcestershire and one for the South of the county – but whatever new position emerges – there will be a significant impact on town and parish councils including Rock. New responsibilities and new ways of working will be required, and we need start preparing for these changes now.

Against this backdrop the council took the decision to re-join the Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils (CALC). CALC is a not-for-profit, voluntary organisation that supports, informs, and trains parish and town councils within Worcestershire, offering services such as legal advice, training for clerks, and liaison with principal councils. The Council believe it is wise for us to have access to such support as we navigate the new local government landscape.

When setting the annual budget for the Parish Council this current year, we agreed that there should be no increase in the precept as our spending plan was consistent with anticipated income. As the forementioned changes to local government mature there will be an impact on our future role, and this will be reflected in our future precept decisions.

I am pleased to report that many residents have attended our meetings (on the last Monday of the month) at The Sports Pavilion in Callow Hill. We welcome community involvement and any expressions of interest in our Councillor vacancy would be warmly received.

Rock Parish Council continues to thank all our public service workers including our local policing team, especially CSO Jeni Bray and PC Marc Ginder, who we know are there if required.

We would also like to thank our Worcestershire County Councillor, Dan Morehead and our Wyre Forest District Councillors, Dan (again), Emily Bourne (also a Parish Councillor) and Nick Wilson, who continue to give support to the Parish. Dan's wider range of involvement in Highways issues and grant support for road safety is particularly appreciated.

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Our Vehicle Activated Speed (VAS) signs are in operation at key locations where speeding traffic is an issue. My thanks to Stephen Clee (our Clerk) and Dan Johnson (our Lengthsman) who maintain the VAS signs on our behalf.

Throughout 2025-26 we have discussed, agreed to support, or recommended refusal a significant number of planning applications. We are not the ultimate decision maker on applications but an important consultee for the Planning process currently owned by WFDC.

The Parish of Rock continues to be an attractive area for potential developers. We note the increased central government targets / demands placed on local areas to increase housing provision across the whole country, including Rock. We note the on-going revision to the WFDC Local Plan, which reflects these increased pressures, but as a Council we believe that our local housing needs have largely been met and so we will exercise robust scrutiny on future applications. We will consider the Housing Needs report in our considerations.

As in previous years there remains a strong resistance in the Parish for any further development of, or expansion of, caravan, camping, glamping, shepherd huts and other leisure parks as it is considered that there is already sufficient supply of such amenities.

The work of our lengthsman has continued throughout the year with tasks including grass cutting, drain clearance, road sign maintenance, grit bin top-ups, litter removal, fly-tipping removal, and other appropriate tasks. Thank you.

Our thanks, must also be given to a host of volunteers, who continue to devote their time to improving our community. From running our precious village halls, our faith groups, organising social groups and those that tackle the litter problem in the Parish. Their work is very much appreciated.

This year we awarded grants totalling £6000 to charitable associations within the Parish. We received applications for support and in a change to previous years we varied the amount given – largely based on the size of articulated need and how the grant reflected the Councils strategic ambitions. We will continue to use the grant scheme as a method to support and develop the community infrastructure of our parish.

The following local organisations were supported: Far Forest Village Hall, Heightington Village Hall, Clows Top Victory Hall, Forest School PTA, Far Forest Scouts, Rock and Far Forest Nursing Charity, Far Forest Baptist Church, Wyre Forest Nightstop, We Are Men United (Rock), Bliss Gate Village Fields and the SociABLES Hub. We hope that these grants will help to continue the valued work they do for our residents.

I would like to publicly thank our Parish Clerk, Stephen Clee, who has the unenviable task of managing the Council and its members. We regularly rely on his knowledge and counsel.

Finally, I want to say a public 'thank you' to all our councillors who devote so much time to the parish representing all areas within the Parish of Rock: we will continue to work to ensure Rock remains a safe, caring community that we can all be proud of.

Cllr. James Baker

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Chairman

Rock Parish Council, 30 April 2026