

CLEE ST MARGARET ANNUAL CHAIRS REPORT 2026

Prepared by
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Clee St Margaret Parish
Council

Firstly may I welcome all of you to the Annual Parish Meeting of 2026 and for those of you who can not attend, my chairs report below.

The end of April 2026 brings to the close my first term (all be it of only six months and by default) as Parish Council chair.

My report is fairly detailed to avoid speculation and dispel many rumours that have filtered back to the PC.

As it is my report and reflection, it is how I honestly perceive the past six months as Chair, seemingly candid at times admittedly, but I have also included my six months prior to this position on the PC for the full picture!

In May 2025 our current parish council was formed predominantly of councillors new to the role, inheriting a chaotic state of affairs. We were on our second locum clerk who described our situation as shambolic.

Finances, governance and the general day to day running of the council was most unsatisfactory and the enormity of the task ahead began to unfold.

Before being elected as chair I was able to pursue some matters but without a fully functioning clerk this was incredibly limited.

I contacted SALC (Shropshire's Association of Local Councils), and spoke to them about the difficulties we were having and the need for a permanent clerk. They contacted those they thought could handle the division and conflict that infamously resides in and amongst the parish.

As the reputation of the village preceded us, they could not find a clerk willing to take us on.

Upon speaking to a parishioner who was a clerk for many years for our pc, she identified someone who she thought would have the capability and equally as important, the resilience for the role. I approached the individual who finally conceded and the position was advertised with SALC and posted on the CSM website to offer the job to a wider audience.

We set up a staffing committee and the two candidates we had gave excellent interviews but Emma Penhaligon presented with a CV that elevated her with respect to marketing techniques, a proven record in resilience, raising charitable funds, handling large budgets, matters of confidentiality and a proven knowledge of GDPR.

The members of the parish who urgently wanted to see the position of a permanent clerk filled, then gave push back on the seemingly hurried appointment of the current clerk.

Rest assured the appointment was made working alongside SALC following their guidelines of employment.

Delaying this for another couple of months would push us into arrears when dealing with the 25/26 accounts not withstanding the inherited 24/25 accounts which urgently needed correction and reconciliation from a governance stand point but also to move us forward with the outstanding complaints we had received.

On the very snowy 9th of January an extraordinary meeting went ahead to ratify not only the appointment of an internal auditor from outside of the parish (as advised as best practice during training), but also that of the appointment of our new clerk to enable us to continue pursuing access to the bank accounts. After raising several complaints with Lloyds bank and tracking down all of the signatories on the account, some dating back more than a decade, this protracted exercise was completed on the 13th of February.

The task of constructing the accounts went back as far as June 2024 with invoices, receipts and cheque stubs piled rather than filed in boxes.

With over 100 emails from a parishioner regarding the accounts, the delay in progressing the accounts and other council matters due to using up clerks time and funding her hours did not help the process.

It became obvious that such an inexperienced council would need training in order to rectify and move matters forward as quickly as possible and (with some degree of aptitude!) so in October 2025 I initiated training for all counsellors with only one not attending, and specific counselling for the position of Chair and vice Chair.

November saw the resignation of Cllr Richard Morgan as Chair who I would like to thank for his time in that role and I was elected in his place. I asked him what his reflection was for his term as Chair, and what stood out for him was the need for a permanent and fastidious clerk.

The last six months has presented with many challenges regarding the position and the state that the Parish Council has been in, with complaints reflecting the circumstances we found ourselves amongst. However, in spite of all of this I do feel we have had a certain degree of success and a summary of our productivity is listed below.

The welcomed appointment of our new clerk.

Training of the majority of the council for their specific duties (to be an annually reviewed)

The heart of the village has seen the paving slabs along the Ford repaired in a sensitive way and the pothole at the end of the Ford also repaired. Although this is not the responsibility of the Parish Council, myself and counsellor Fisher drove to the highways department in Shrewsbury to explain and present the dangers that the broken paving slabs presented to the community.

The village has also seen a new bench installed by counsellors Bagshaw and Fisher laid on a new gravel base.

The grade 2 listed phone kiosk has now been adopted by the PC and I would like to thank Paul Armour for his help in facilitating this outside of the consultation period.

As the defibrillator at Cockshutford is to be relocated to outside The Brums, we welcome a consultation during this annual parish meeting on the potential that can be realised from both of these kiosks.

Pond maintenance by Burnt House and its restoration as a wildlife habitat will now be an ongoing scheme which I am sure (as the only water supply for the sheep on the Yeld) will be most welcome.

The planning issue of the re-sighting of Dumblelow farm that was not in line with it's planning consent has been resolved with a successful retrospective planning application.

Sadly we had the resignation of the defibrillator guardian in 2025 due to her feeling unsupported by the locum clerk after five years of commitment. She remained as a consultant to Liz Heighway initially who now checks the status of the defibrillators bi weekly instead of six weekly.

I initiated their first service to which we are now going to commit to on an annual basis.

To ensure the AED's are no longer compromised by the doors to the safes being left open in the winter and with parts going missing, we have purchased the first lockable safe which we showcased at the last PC meeting. The one in the heart of the village will be replaced by a new safe mostly red in colour as it is situated in the conservation area of the village being placed next to the phone box. It's colour is the preferred choice of the conservation officer of whom I have been in consultation with.

All new three defibrillator safes will also house bleed kits, this will be clearly stated on the front of all of the safes.

We have appointed a staffing committee

We have appointed a complaints committee, however if you feel that there is a PC member you feel uncomfortable with in dealing with your complaint then we will of course accommodate for that.

Following advice from SALC, I identified and appointed an independent internal auditor from their recommended list of auditors, Mr Bernard Townson from Oswestry. Our clerk has now been working closely with him.

Councillor Bagshaw has finally had some success in identifying a post locker company willing to furnish our village with such a postal system, however this provider has probably out priced itself beyond plausability. This topic remains worthy of ongoing exploration and consultation.

Recently the residents of Marshgates suffered a terrible blow as a very large limb from a tree on the common boundary fell on the majority of the vehicles in their parking area. I would like to thank all the residents there for their decorum and efforts in clearing the site promptly. The knock on effect to their everyday lives must have been felt for weeks after the event.

I would also like to thank the clerk for her constructive actions appearing on site as swiftly as possible to discuss this most unfortunate incident with those affected on how to move forward.

We have had two complaints sent to the monitoring officer, one with regards to the previous chair and one for myself, both now resolved and in both cases, no evidence of misconduct was found.

We have had two complaints from the same complainants regarding previous staffing issues and outstanding accounts. One complaint was found in favour of the complainant in the main and the other is still outstanding as we are waiting for a mutually agreeable date when the village hall can accommodate a hearing.

I would like to apologise for us having to have held a few meetings at Abdon village hall.

For obvious reasons this was less than ideal but we were rather mislead and misled in that we were told we could not hold our PC meetings in the large room of our village hall due to acoustic problems. The increase in the level of attendance of our meetings at the time meant that the committee room would be too small to accommodate us.

It transpired however, that I spotted in previous minutes it was deemed acceptable to fluctuate between the use of our two rooms in the VH according to appropriateness, so this whole episode could have been avoided.

For the sake of inclusiveness, it did raise the question as to why we did not have a hearing loop system for our meetings, it is a legal requirement. After extensive research in finding the most appropriate system for our use and that of the VH, I was just about to order when on an unrelated matter, I happened to look on a previous asset register and found, rather incredulously, that we already have the very same system I about to order. Its whereabouts however has not yet been confirmed so hopefully we should have resolved this problem for our annual parish council meeting later on this month. I am still unsure how it's existence was unknown and why it was not in already in use.

Thank you for bearing with us on this issue and a big thank you to Abdon VH who have been most accommodating and welcoming.

Hill matters are of a concern to the PC for many reasons, most resulting from poor communication and the refusal of the Commoners Association to share information. This must look to the parish as rather farcical and frustrating as we have two members of the CA and the secretary of the CA on the PC.

We are now at a stage where we have passed a council resolution to employ a third party to assist us in gathering the information we require as the land owners from the CA, or should I say more appropriately the Commoners Committee, to complete part of our obligations to governance and ensure fair representation of all graziers, non graziers and parishioners.

I have contacted Balfours and we are to discuss with them the terms on how we feel they may be able to assist.

We have valuable assets recorded on our asset register regarding machinery for the hill maintenance that we are responsible and accountable for as the PC. We have no knowledge or sighting of these to assess their state of repair, neither have we seen any record of services for our insurance purposes.

There is an outstanding issue in that allegedly there is part of the hill wrongly registered as being common land where in-fact it belongs to Mr Coopers estate. We were asked to pursue this matter with a sense of urgency so we requested an on site meeting last December to which we have not received a response to and will be chasing this shortly.

The implementation and management of the Stewardship scheme has caused major concern, notably extensive damage to the hill with very heavy plant machinery across the common with no permissions sought from the PC, no notification of works being done publicised, no consultation with the PC or the wider community with the style of fencing chosen for our AONB, the cutting down of the ancient boundary hedge at The Yeld and the excavation of a track along the buffer strip at Pole Gutter to create access for heavy plant.

This has created a lot of work for myself in following the claims that permissions/ laws have been broken with multi agencies involved and this is still on going.

We have no sight, even as the landowners of the common, of a management plan for the scheme which has been requested by the PC and minuted, apologies to those parishioners who have enquired about wishing to see this.

I have ordered the materials for the remainder of the fencing that falls within the responsibility of the PC for the common and work will commence shortly after its delivery date of the 12th of this month. It will be traditional in style but using creosoted posts for longevity maximising the benefits of the contribution from the scheme.

Finances

Please refer to the clerks accompanying report

Plans for the future

Well the clerk and I recently sat together to list outstanding issues for the PC, 72 items were identified ranging in areas such as updating all our policies and procedures, designing a parish logo (a topic to discuss at this meeting as a must), looking at charitable and fundraising endeavours to forming a biodiversity and habitat restoration committee.

I am hoping that during this meeting, you can feel this will be an appropriate platform to air your suggestions, ideas, or concerns but if you are like myself and wish to avoid public speaking, then please talk to us after any meeting or contact the clerk at clee.org.uk@gmail.com and she can then direct you accordingly.

During training, a member of another Shropshire pc stated that it is a sign of a well functioning PC when the public do not attend the PC meetings. I can not bolster this opinion, and I know I speak for the majority of our PC that we feel to the contrary of this and hope that our meetings continue to be well attended and do not appear overtly autocratic, rather more informative.

Strong attendance avoids misconceptions, prevents divisiveness and gives direction to us from the parishioners we represent.

Upon reflection, this first year for council has had its challenges, not just because the majority of us were new to it, but the inherited state of affairs we found ourselves in which was quite remarkable and we are not there yet.

Sadly we have encountered, from a few, many unsavoury and absurd communications, accusations, assumptions and a plethora of rumours and conjecture.

All council members are volunteers, with an expected 3 hours a week to dedicate to the task, a most conservative estimate, and our clerk is employed for 7 hours per week.

We are trying to level the playing fields in our community and build a robust parish council to make it more attractive for the filling of the role in the future and a smoother and complete handover for any future clerk and / or responsible financial officer.

The reputation of our parish has not been a positive one and it has implications when appointing staff and auditors.

We all have a duty of care to ensure that our microcosm is no reflection or part of the disturbing macrocosm we hear about daily.

It was a privilege to host the orienteering recently, which was an opportunity to show case our stunning hill and village and are happy to report it was a success.

Please be respectful to the hard working Parish Council and clerk. We do hear your frustrations and we have gone at a pace dictated by matters beyond our control, not because of time limitations which has meant a great deal of sacrifice start to put things right.

We should count our blessings, our pot holes and internet access issues do not compare with the global issues and we can not begin to relate to the 'third world'.

I would like to thank all our community volunteers, on the hill, the village hall committee or on the council and in the wider community.

A difference of opinion is no reason for division between the sectors of our small and beautiful village.

All of our PC offers a warm welcome and we look forward to hearing your voices on promoting a sense of wellbeing and feeling of community at your meeting.

Cllr Suzanne Willis

Chair Clee St Margaret Parish Council



Clee St Margaret Finance report

Prepared by
Emma Penhaligon

[Clee St Margaret Parish Council](#)

Financial Overview 2024 – 2025 Summary for Chair 's Annual Report

1. Introduction

The annual finance report would not normally focus on the previous set of accounts; however, the 2024/25 financial year was one of significant transition for the Parish Council. The accounts show a year of normal operational activity alongside substantial investment income movements and several one-off payments. The internal audit identified extensive weaknesses in historic financial management, and the Council has already begun corrective action to restore compliance and transparency.

We will be providing an additional finance report covering 2025/2026 once we have completed the AGAR for this period

2. Income Summary

Total income recorded for the year was £30,073.98

The majority of receipts came from:

Investment income from the Council's long-standing Hargreaves Lansdown portfolio

Bank transfers into the Lloyds current account, from our savings account (£14,250.00)

Miscellaneous small receipts, including refunds from the website provider HugoFox

Wayleave and other minor income, as shown in the receipt's ledger.

3. Expenditure Summary

Total expenditure recorded for the year was £ 28,521.78

Key areas of spend included:

- Staff costs, including salary payments and PAYE remittances
- Insurance
- Website costs, with monthly HugoFox
- Grants and community support, to the village hall
- Grounds and village maintenance, including small contractor payments
- Payments to the Commoner Association
- One-off items, such as a bench purchase and hearing-related equipment
- Bank service charges

The payments ledger shows missing VAT treatment, which is reflected in the internal audit's conclusion that "payments were not supported by invoices, expenditure was not consistently approved, and VAT was not appropriately accounted for"

4. Year-End Position

The Council ended the financial year 2025 with a combined closing balance of £157,703.99 across its accounts and investments

The R&P summaries attached confirm the detail behind this.

5. Internal Audit Findings

The Internal Audit Report (28 March 2026) recorded "No" against every applicable control objective, including:

- A. Appropriate accounting records kept – *No*
- B. Compliance with financial regulations – *No*
- D. Adequate budgetary process and monitoring – *No*
- I. Bank reconciliations properly carried out – *No*
- J. Accounting statements prepared correctly – *No*
- L–N. Publication and public rights requirements met – *No*

The auditor's report details that all significant control areas failed during the year, with the exception of petty cash (not applicable) and trustee responsibilities (not applicable)

These findings confirm the Council's own assessment that historic financial management had broken down and that substantial corrective work is required. The negative impact of this mismanagement will also reflect in the Agar covering 2025/2026.

6. Governance and Improvement Actions

The Council has already acknowledged the seriousness of the audit findings and is taking steps to restore compliance, including:

Reconstructing accurate accounting records for 2024/25

Preparing the 2025/26 AGAR with full transparency, noting that several assertions will necessarily be answered "No" due to missing records. This piece will be completed in line with the approval

and publication deadline, approval by council being the 30th June 2026 and publication by the 1st of July 2026.

Reviewing the accuracy of the 2023/24 accounts, as stated in the Council's communication to auditors:

"We believe it is both appropriate and necessary to review the 2023/2024 accounts to ensure their accuracy."

Re-establishing proper financial controls, approvals, and reconciliations, this will ensure statutory publication and public-rights requirements are met going forward

Enclosures (available on website)

Auditors report

Completed AGAR 2024/2025

PKF Littlejohn Cover letter

Receipts & Payments Ledger for accounts 8266 & 7846