

SOMERFORD PARISH COUNCIL



Business Plan 2020 – 2025

VISION 2025

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SOMERFORD PARISH COUNCIL

Business Plan 2020 – 2025

Vision 2025

1. Mission Statement

To promote the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the parish and to contribute to a sustainable and inclusive community.

2. Strategic Objectives

2.1 To assist in the creation of a socially inclusive and economically viable community embracing all residents irrespective of age, culture, income, race or religion and which seeks to develop their well-being, knowledge, understanding and mutual co-operation.

2.2 To provide high quality, efficient, cost effective and sustainable services.

2.3 To promote and encourage the provision of a range of leisure, social, recreational and community educational facilities in the parish appropriate to the normal activities of a rural parish.

2.4 To provide a channel for the views and expressions of the local community and to be responsive to its needs and aspirations.

2.5 To develop partnership and agency working with the public and private sectors in terms of resources and finance for the benefit of the community.

2.6 To develop the role of the council under the principal policies and rulings of the Local Council Awards scheme and to achieve appropriate levels.

2.7 To liaise with and support local community associations.

3. Principles

In all its actions the council will take into account and, where appropriate, act in accordance with the principles enshrined in relevant legislation and best practice for:

- Health and Safety
- Equal Opportunities
- Best Value
- Crime and Disorder Act
- Disability Discrimination Act
- Age Discrimination Act
- Local Council Awards Scheme
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- Environmental, Heritage and Planning Legislation

4. Five Year Plan

The Key Objectives for the five years April 2020 – April 2025 are:

4.1 The Parish and its Boundaries

4.1.1 The Community Governance Review

Cheshire East Borough Council is the Unitary Authority responsible for the governance and electoral arrangements for the 186 town and parish council wards in 142 towns and parishes, which cover the whole borough and which includes the parish of Somerford.

In February 2019, Cheshire East Borough Council (CEBC) announced its intention to undertake a review of the governance arrangements for all town and parishes in the borough. Government guidance advises that it is good practice to hold such a review every 10-15 years. The last review was carried out shortly before Cheshire East Borough Council was created in 2009.

The review will include:

- Town and parish boundaries;
- Numbers of town and parish councillors;
- Grouping of parishes; and
- Warding.

The review is a complex task and any changes proposed would follow extensive public consultation – including with town and parish councils. The review, which began after the May 2019 local elections, is expected to be completed well before the scheduled local elections in May 2023.

There have been many changes affecting the parishes surrounding the town of Congleton, not least of all in the parish of Somerford, a parish which, some 5 years ago, had approximately 150 dwellings within its boundary but which, over the next 5 – 10 years, is anticipated to rise to approximately 1200 dwellings. It is inevitable that the review will take into account the resultant population changes and it may be argued by others that the Congleton Town boundary should be extended to include all that area of land up to and including the new Congleton Link Road (CLR). This would mean that the new housing developments of Loachbrook 1 (the Bovis estate), Loachbrook 2 (the Anwyl estate), Somerford Triangle (the DWH/Barratt's estates), Somerford Gate (the Bellway estate), Somerford Green (the Storey Homes estate), the extension of the Radnor Park Industrial Estate and the properties on Blackfirs Lane, Chelford Road and Holmes Chapel Road would all be subsumed into the town boundary of Congleton. The net effect of such a change would leave approximately 50 dwellings within the existing parish of Somerford. Since this would be too small a number to justify a parish council in its own right, the likelihood is that the remainder of the parish would either be joined with a neighbouring parish or the parish of Somerford would simply cease to exist as an entity.

The Somerford Parish Council have already debated the proposed Community Governance Review (CGR) and resolved to resist such a change with all power within its means. We will seek to sustain an interactive relationship with all parishioners which will encourage them to vote to keep Somerford as an independent parish within its existing boundaries.

As part of this debate, it was recognised that there are neighbouring developments which geographically and aspirationally would be well suited to being included within the parish of Somerford but which currently sit within a neighbouring council area. One such development is the Miller Homes site named Somerford Grove. This development neighbours the soon to be developed estate to its immediate north and which will be largely indistinguishable one from the other. A second such development is that which has taken place along the parish boundary where it runs adjacent to the western side of Holmes Chapel Road from a point just north of Keeper's Cottage to the parish boundary at Davenport. Many of the properties along this line, both old and new, are believed by the residents to be in Somerford whereas only a handful are actually within the parish and consideration has been given to addressing this anomaly.

The parish council has agreed that representations should be made during the review to include these two areas within the Somerford Parish boundary and to this end a pre-consultation submission has been made to the review team at Cheshire East.

In March 2010 the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England published a Guidance on community governance reviews which can be viewed at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/8312/1527635.pdf

August 2021 – Update: *The CGR Sub-Committee produced a report in February 2021 which completely ignored the pre-consultation submissions made by several parish councils including those made by Somerford. In April 2021 this report was considered by the Constitution Committee which made two significant changes thereto, one concerning the consultation voting method and the second adding a requirement to respect the result of any such voting. However, when the matter came before the full Council, these amendments were rejected and the original report confirmed. It is understood that the public consultation will now commence in September 2021.*

4.1.2 Engagement with Parishioners and Neighbours

The success or otherwise of a parish may be judged by the extent to which it engages with its parishioners, neighbouring parishes, the unitary authority and others. The aim of the parish council will be to establish excellent communication with all in a variety of ways:

1. Through the council's website, ensuring it is kept up-to-date and relevant and covers all local issues and concerns;
2. By creating and maintaining an email group of those parishioners who have elected to join;

3. By delivering, either by post or by hand, a newsletter to every household in the parish twice yearly;
4. By encouraging attendance at the Annual Parish Meeting, Parish Council Meetings and other events organised by the council for parishioners and others to inform on and discuss local issues;
5. By ensuring that vacancies on the parish council are advertised as widely as possible and by trying to ensure that all areas of the parish are well represented.
6. By directly engaging with neighbouring parishes with a view to agreeing and supporting jointly delivered ventures and services for the benefit of our respective parishioners;
7. By establishing clear lines of communication with the unitary authority both directly with officers and through regular contact with the ward representative.

4.1.3 Representation

The parish council currently has an allocation of seven councillors. This number is decided by the unitary authority and it will be one of the matters under consideration as part of the Community Governance Review. The population of the parish will increase considerably over the next few years within its existing boundaries and further still if the Review decides to expand these boundaries. It is also the case that the demographic of the parish has changed in the last five years with the development that has taken place already and will change further over the next five years. The population of the parish has evolved in that time with a younger, more mobile group, often with young children. Both these factors are recognised by the parish council as ones which ideally would be reflected in representation on the parish council.

4.1.4 Personal safety and well-being

Statistics generally support the view that the parish enjoys a very low rate of crime and a high sense of well-being amongst its growing population. As the population of the parish continues to increase over the next few years these views will be monitored to detect any significant change. In order to try to ensure maintenance of the current levels, the parish council will seek to work closely with the police and other relevant agencies, including fire and health authorities. Currently the parish council joins with neighbouring parishes in meeting with local police personnel on a regular basis.

The Vision for 2025 – Somerford to be thriving as an active, viable and safe parish within expanded boundaries, serving and protecting its community and the environment.

4.2 Planning and Development

4.2.1 The Neighbourhood Plan

The Somerford Neighbourhood Plan was deemed “made” following a public referendum on the 15th February 2018 in which 88.8% of the votes counted were in favour of the

proposition that the Cheshire East Borough Council “... *should use the Neighbourhood Plan for Somerford to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area*”.

The Plan sits alongside the Cheshire East Local Plan and is intended to cover the period up until 2030 but is kept under constant review by a parish council working party which will make recommendations to the full council if it is felt that amendments or additions are needed. It is regularly referred to in planning applications by both applicants and the planning authorities.

The Referendum Version January 2018 of the plan is available on both the parish council and Cheshire East Borough Council websites.

August 2021 – Update: *A working party of the parish council has been appointed to review the Neighbourhood Plan and it is expected that this review will be completed*

NB *We need to clarify our objectives regarding the NP.*

The Vision for 2025 - For the Neighbourhood Plan to have been reviewed, updated and delivered fit for its principal purpose of helping the planning authority to decide planning applications.

4.2.2. The Local Plan and Strategic Location CS44

The Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy was approved by the appointed Inspector in a report dated the 20th June 2017 subject to a number of Main Modifications being made to the Plan. The document, now referred to as the Local Plan Strategy 2010 – 2030, was adopted on the 27th July 2017 and can be accessed here:

<https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/planning/local-plan/local-plan-strategy-web-version-1.pdf>

It is now going through various stages of updating/development and the SADPD (Site Allocations and Development Policies Document), which is a crucial part of the planning process, is currently under review. It is expected that this current process will result in very little change within the parish, principally because so much of it has already been allocated for development.

A substantial component of the Local Plan is the building of the Congleton Link Road (CLR) which is referred to in more detail under the Transport Issues section below. A direct result of the CLR proposal, or perhaps a cause of it, is the plan to develop a large area of the parish. A considerable number of housing development proposals have already received full or outline planning permission in the parish which will most likely lead to the number of houses in the parish increasing from about 150 just a few years ago to over 1200 in the next few years.

The Vision for 2025 – For the parish council to have engaged with the Borough Council regarding any review of the Local Plan and representations made to try to ensure it reflects the aims and objectives of the parish.

4.2.3 Planning Applications

Somerford Parish Council receives notification from the Cheshire East Borough Council (CEBC) of any planning applications submitted in respect of properties located in the parish and those in adjoining towns and parishes which may directly impact upon the parish. These notifications are circulated to parish councillors by email and the applications themselves are available for all to view online. The SPC will respond to each one of these applications as appropriate and wherever time permits they will be discussed at the next available PC meeting prior to such response.

In responding to the applications, the PC will have regard to the Neighbourhood Plan and any representations made to it by parishioners.

The number of planning applications submitted for the consideration of the parish council, which reached unprecedented levels over the last 3 – 4 years, has now somewhat abated. However, the parish council expects further major applications following completion of the CLR. Upon consideration of these applications and representations thereon the council will, amongst other things, consider:

1. The design and build quality of the houses;
2. The provision of gardens commensurate to the size of the house;
3. The provision of sufficient car parking spaces to reduce the incidence of vehicles parked on roads;
4. The width of roads to allow for parked cars;
5. The imposition of speed limits both on the development itself and on adjacent roads;
6. The necessity of street lighting, and, where considered necessary, the provision of low level, both in height and intensity, lighting;
7. The provision of dog waste bins;
8. The provision of Broadband Connectivity and mobile phone signals;
9. The provision of charging points for electrically powered vehicles;
10. The provision of infrastructure to enable connection to renewable energy sources;
11. That management companies should either be handed over to residents on completion of the estate or at least have resident representation thereon;
12. A contribution to parish infrastructure.

The parish council will also engage with local builders/developers and the planning authority to ensure that conditions are fully adhered to in a timely manner.

The Vision for 2025 - Much of the large site development will have been completed to a high design and build standard, incorporating most if not all of the issues outlined above and that any future large development within the parish will be contained within the area south of the Congleton Link Road.

4.3. Open Spaces, Community Buildings and Infrastructure

4.3.1 The Blackfirs Lane & Chelford Road Verge

Blackfirs Lane and Chelford Road both enjoy a wide verge which runs along one side of the respective carriageways for a substantial distance. This verge has been long been cherished by the residents of Somerford who have assiduously resisted any attempts at infringements. Over the years it has been variously used by local people for myriad purposes, including growing crops, making hay, riding and exercising horses, playing games and simply walking. In the early 1970's local volunteers from the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) took it upon themselves to plant numerous trees along its length many of which have developed into the mature specimens which now adorn the area. The parish council has for many years looked after these verges – seeing that the grass was mown, the trees cared for and the hedges cut. More recently the parish council have planted two blue cedar trees at the apex of “the triangle” which are decked with lights at Christmas time.

The parish council have quite recently agreed a policy which will see two strips of grass mown along this verge, one adjacent to the hedge and the other bordering the road. The centre section will then be left to grow more naturally, ideally with more trees being planted and the introduction of wildflowers and bulbs. The parish council has been engaged in a conversation with Cheshire East Borough Council for some time to try to agree provision of a more formal arrangement for the parish council to carry out this policy.

August 2021 – Update: *The parish council has been advised informally that section 106 monies held by the borough council might well be made available for the planting of further trees, improving the hedges and seeding/planting of wildflowers along the Blackfirs Lane and Chelford Road verges. The parish council will be looking to obtain quotations for this work to be carried out for the autumn/winter of 2021.*

4.3.2 Other road verges and open spaces

There are numerous other areas of land which the parish council currently care for and it is hoped that, once the Congleton Link Road is completed, more will follow. Currently the parish council cares for the two verges at the junctions of Blackfirs Lane and Chelford Road with Holmes Chapel Road and at which points two benches have been sited. Other areas might well include Sandy Lane, where daffodil bulbs have been planted in the past but which is now closed to traffic. When it is re-opened it will only be generally accessible by cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians.

August 2021 – Update: *Sandy Lane was re-opened for cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians in April 2021 and the parish council will consider ways in which this route, linking with the Sandy Lane Community Park as it does, can be improved with planting and general maintenance.*

4.3.3 Rhead's Meadows

The Somerford Parish Council now own the freehold of about 9 acres of land in the parish of Somerford which lies to the rear of houses on Blackfirs Lane and those on Longdown Road, West Heath, Congleton. The land was formerly owned by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) following a generous bequest made by Mrs Lavinia Rhead who was a local resident. Mrs Rhead, in making her bequest, expressed a wish that the land should be used for the benefit of wildlife without creating a binding obligation.

The land had been identified by Cheshire East Borough Council (CEBC) as being within a proposed economic growth area and was identified in the draft Local Plan Strategy as being a housing development site within area CS44. CEBC had been actively encouraging the development of this site as well as others in this part of the parish.

Much community concern was expressed that this land would be developed for housing and the proceeds, likely to be several million pounds, used by the RSPB to develop land for the benefit of wildlife in other parts of the country. It was felt that Mrs Rhead had principally wished to see this area of Somerford protected and used for wildlife.

The Somerford Parish Council (SPC) met with representatives of the RSPB in 2015 and were very happy to reach an agreement in principle with them that about half the land bequeathed to them by Mrs Rhead would be sold to the SPC for a nominal amount (£1) and that the rest of Mrs Rhead's bequeathed land would be developed to raise funds for the RSPB, out of which they would allocate £75,000 toward the establishment and maintenance of a publicly accessible wildlife area on the land. The RSPB would also provide advice and assistance toward ensuring a firm basis upon which the management of the land would be ensured.

On the 24th February 2017 the CEBC Strategic Planning Committee granted planning permission under planning reference 16/1921C to the Somerford Parish Council and the RSPB jointly for the development of a community nature park on the land.

The land was transferred to the ownership of the SPC on the 20th December 2019. The SPC is committed to protecting this land and promoting its use for the mutual benefit of both wildlife and the community at large. We will have a continuing meaningful engagement with both residents of the parish and the wider community to ensure the Mrs Rhead's wishes are fulfilled.

August 2021 – Update: *Since the parish council took ownership of the Meadows, a substantial amount of work has been carried out. This work included installing approximately 350 metres of fencing and hedging along Rhead's Lane and around the perimeter of Blackfirs Farm; the installation of two multi-user, two-way, access gates; construction of approximately 600 metres of surfaced pathway; installation of four handmade oak benches, three of which were donated; landscaping to form soil bunds*

alongside the paths and a viewing mound; laying 1,500 sq. metres of turf; deep ploughing of two substantial areas in the North Meadow and the sowing of wildflower seeds thereon; planting of approximately two thousand trees and shrubs; planting of a 50 tree orchard in concentric circles; creation of stoned parking/working area; planting of approximately 15,000 narcissus and bluebell bulbs; installation of two owl boxes. There have been some difficulties, including severe flooding in the north meadow, and the failure of a small number of trees and shrubs. The flooding is the subject of discussion with adjacent landowners to try to find a mutually agreeable, and affordable, solution and the failed planting will be replaced. It was also disappointing that the wildflower meadows seeding was not as successful as hoped but this is currently being addressed and will be supplemented with some plug planting. Further infra-structure, such as information boards and natural play equipment, is under consideration.

The Vision for 2025 – The Rhead’s Meadows Community Nature Park will be well established providing a natural environment for native species of flora and fauna and one which will enhance the quality of life, health and well-being of the local community. The road verges, whilst remaining wilded, will be cared for to promote a natural but tidy appearance, with trees, shrubs and wildflowers/daffodils in abundance as appropriate to their location.

4.3.4 Blackfirs Wood

The parish does have within its boundaries another valuable asset in the form of a woodland of about 1.8 acres off Blackfirs Lane bequeathed to the Cheshire Wildlife Trust (CWT), again by Mrs. Lavinia Rhead. The parish council has been concerned regarding the care and maintenance of this resource and as a result made contact with the CWT with a view to discussing their plans for its future. Discussions are currently underway and CWT has recently had drafted a Heads of Terms document which, if agreed, would see the parish council take a 99 year lease on the site. If that comes to fruition, the Wood will be managed in conjunction with the nearby Rhead’s Meadows Community Nature Park. Details of the wood can be found here:

<https://www.cheshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves/black-firs-wood>

August 2021 – Update: *The terms of the lease having been agreed, we now await the conclusion of the signing thereof. Thereafter there are well-advanced plans to improve the two ponds in the wood and we hope to find funds to begin an improvement of the main paths.*

The Vision for 2025 – Blackfirs Wood will be in the day-to-day control and management of the parish council providing a green oasis for wildlife with opportunity for community involvement in its care and protection.

4.3.5 All Saints Chapel of Ease

All Saints' Chapel of Ease is Grade II* Listed, having been built in 1725 as a domestic chapel to Somerford Hall by Peter Shakerley. Since 1943 it has been a Chapel of Ease. It is situated in the former parkland and the only access is from the A54 via a single track road. It is beautifully preserved: all the fittings are of oak, with oak panelling to the internal walls. Of note also is the stained glass window by Irene Shakerley from the 1920s.

The parish is fortunate to have such a treasure within its bounds and SPC will continue to support the church authorities in their responsibility to maintain the chapel, its contents and surrounds.

The Vision for 2025 – The Chapel is maintained to an excellent standard with access to all.

4.3.6 Somerford Primary School

The Cheshire East Borough Council Local Plan Strategy envisages the possibility of the establishment of a primary school within the parish close to Back Lane. The plan could include a shared use community hall. The Somerford Parish Council would encourage and look forward to further discussion regarding what would be the first community owned and run building of any sort to be located within the parish. The primary school provision for the parish is currently all located within neighbouring towns and parishes.

The Vision for 2025 – Plans for the provision of a Somerford Primary School including a shared use community hall are brought forward for public consultation.

4.3.7 Infrastructure

The parish boasts other items of infrastructure which are all too easily overlooked but which play an essential role in setting the character and history of the parish. Some of these are everyday items which can easily be overlooked, such as the black and white railings which adorn many of our road junctions and which are often referred to as Cheshire railings; the stone wall which once marked the boundary of Somerford Hall which lines much of Holmes Chapel Road and Chelford Road; and minor items such as post-boxes. The parish council is committed to maintaining these character items in the best possible condition, ensuring their retention wherever threatened. There are other items which are in private ownership but which tell of the rich heritage of the area, such as the neglected former ice-house to Somerford Hall and the remnants of the walled garden thereto. The parish council would like to see these preserved and, if possible, restored and will commit to work with the current owners to achieve that objective. The land to the south of Sandy Lane is also an area of some concern to the council. Planning permission granted in 2013 for the

development of 200 houses, sometimes referred to as Loachbrook 1 (the Bovis development), required the establishment and maintenance of the Sandy Lane Community Park on this land and the council is committed to see this requirement fulfilled and become an asset to the community, leading as it does to the planned Sandy Lane bridleway to be created once the Congleton Link Road is completed.

August 2021 – Update: *The post-box which was removed from Sandy Lane at the commencement of the Congleton Link Road construction has now been replaced with one on the Loachbrook estate following much lobbying by the parish council. The parish bench located at the junction of Chelford Road and Holmes Chapel Road has also had a considerable quantity of soil and debris removed from around its base to improve the setting thereof.*

The Vision for 2025 – To ensure that all items of infrastructure representing the character, history and amenity of the parish are preserved, restored and maintained to the best achievable standard.

4.4 Transport Issues

4.4.1 The A54 corridor

The A54 runs the length of the parish and this stretch is known as Holmes Chapel Road. It is a single carriageway country road with many sharp bends and junctions. It is variously subject to 60, 50 mph and 40 mph speed limits which are considered to be too high given the amount of new housing development which taken place along this section in the last few years.

A route review consultation was held in February 2015 with Local Ward Members and Parish Councils when there was a consensus for a speed limit reduction through Somerford and, following some prevarication by Cheshire East, a further review took place. As a result, another section of the A54 through Somerford Parish was made subject to a 40-mph speed limit, effective from the 30th April 2018. The limit begins at the parish boundary, close to the Davenport Chapel, and continues south, past Somerford Park Farm almost to the junction with Mill Lane, a distance of some 1247 metres. The parish council has also purchased an electronic Speed Indicator Device, powered by a solar panel, which is currently located on a post adjacent to the Anwyl site (Loachbrook 2). We are looking for possible sites for further posts in order that the device might be moved about the parish.

The SPC will continue to monitor traffic speed on this road and will continue to press for a significant reduction in the speed limit through the parish where it can be justified – ideally a maximum of 30 mph in more heavily populated sections and 40 mph elsewhere.

The Vision for 2025 – For traffic to flow smoothly and safely along the road, with the 40 mph speed limit extended and, in areas with many residential properties and other hazards, reduced to 30 mph.

4.4.2 The Congleton Link Road

The Congleton Link Road (CLR) is a scheme which has been planned by CEBC for some years, the intention being primarily to take traffic from the A536 Macclesfield Road and the A34 Manchester Road headed for the M6 motorway around the town of Congleton and distributing that traffic to the A54 Holmes Chapel Road (for M6 North) and the A534 Sandbach Road (for M6 South) and vice versa whilst leaving A34 traffic travelling between Manchester and Stoke on Trent to travel along the Clayton Bypass through Congleton town.

Concern has been voiced to the effect that Wallhill Lane in the neighbouring parish of Astbury will be extensively used by traffic leaving the CLR at its junction with Sandbach Road and wishing to travel south on the A34. The Somerford Parish Council is persuaded by the CEBC Highways Department argument that in fact traffic wishing to traverse Congleton on a north/south axis will use the existing A34 route, the Clayton Bypass, rather than the CLR since that route will be the shortest and quickest route following the opening of the CLR which will take the bulk of the M6 to Macclesfield/Manchester traffic. The closure of Wallhill Lane before the effect of opening the CLR is known would be unacceptable and the implementation of traffic calming measures in the interim would be the preferred option.

The planning application for the CLR (15/4480C) was finally approved by the CEBC on the 28th July 2016 following much local opposition and in July 2018 the contract to build the road was awarded to the Northern Ireland based engineering firm – GRAHAM. Preparatory construction work started in November 2018 and continues apace. Sandy Lane was closed from the 28th May 2019 but it has been promised that the route should be open again for use by pedestrians, equestrians and cyclists by April 2020. It is also hoped that the section of the CLR referred to as Mainline 1, between Sandbach Road and Holmes Chapel Road, will be opened in the summer of 2020, prior to the completion of the whole route. Back Lane was closed as a through route in February 2019 and is unlikely to open again until completion of the road.

The Somerford Parish Council and the Hulme Walfield and Somerford Booths Parish Council meet with representatives of GRAHAM on a monthly basis to discuss progress and issues.

August 2021 – Update: *The road opened to traffic on Monday the 19th April 2021 and it was generally agreed that work had been carried out to a high standard. However, there were early concerns regarding safety when the existence of the road became a venue for some motorcycle riders and car drivers who saw it as an opportunity to drive their vehicles at a grossly excessive speed on the smooth and contoured surface. The racing of such vehicles between the various roundabouts, and particularly around the long-bend beneath Chelford*

Road resulted in the route becoming known as the Somerford Speedway, with the noise of these vehicles echoing around the countryside far and wide, especially on warm and sunny summer evenings. The parish council is liaising with the local police to try to address this issue, particularly given that one contributor to an online motorcycle chat-group claimed to have reached a speed of 160 m.p.h. under Chelford Road Overbridge.

The Vision for 2025 – The Congleton Link Road will be open for traffic and providing a safe route through the parish, taking much of the “commuter” traffic off local roads.

4.4.3 Blackfirs Lane, Back Lane and Chelford Road

These roads are subject to varying speed restrictions currently – Blackfirs Lane being subject to a 40 mph speed limit and other roads being subject to the national speed limit of 60 mph. It is the view of the parish council that these roads, each of which pass through residential areas, should be restricted to 30 mph and we will continue to press for this to be the case at each and every opportunity.

August 2021 – Update: *We were pleased to be able to influence the highway authority to the extent that both Blackfirs Lane and Chelford Road, each from Holmes Chapel Road to a point about 150 metres beyond the Chelford Road Overbridge, are now both entirely subject to a 40 m.p.h. speed limit. The “new Back Lane” road, from the roundabout adjacent to the Back Lane Village Green Playing Fields to its junction with Blackfirs Lane, has been named, at the suggestion of the parish council, Somerford Lane and is designated as a 30 m.p.h. limited road with a 7.5 tonne weight restriction. It is difficult to see the justification for this road, with no houses directly onto it and only one side-road, from the Somerford Gate (Bellway) estate, being designated with a 30 limit whereas the same limit is not applied to Blackfirs Lane and Chelford Road, each with multiple residential accesses and junctions. We will therefore continue to press for these 40-limits to be reduced to 30 at the earliest opportunity.*

The Vision for 2025 – Each of these roads will be subject to a 30 mph speed limit.

4.4.4 Speed limits on residential developments

These roads present users with innumerable dangers and hazards, such as parked vehicles, delivery vehicles, vehicles reversing from driveways, street furniture, pedestrians, children on bicycles and playing, domestic animals and the like. It is the view of the parish council that therefore most, if not all, these roads should be subject to a maximum 20 mph speed limit.

The Vision for 2025 – All roads on housing developments, which themselves are not through routes, are subject to a maximum speed limit of 20 mph.

4.4.5 Radnor Bridge

Chelford Road runs from its junction with Holmes Chapel Road in the south to the parish boundary with Hulme Walfield and Somerford Booths Parish. As the road approaches the River Dane it drops sharply and crosses the river at Radnor Bridge, the River Dane being the boundary line. Radnor Bridge is the only road crossing point between the A34 at Congleton and the A535 at Holmes Chapel until the Congleton Link Road is completed. The bridge has in the past had a weight limit of 10 tons applied to it but in 2019 CE Highways arranged for the bridge to be resurveyed with the result that it was approved to take road vehicles with a maximum vehicle weight of 44 tonnes spread over six axles. It was pointed out to them that the bridge capacity should not be the deciding factor for vehicle weight on this section of road but that they should impose an Environmental Weight Restriction of 10 tonnes considering the very restricted width of the approach roads on both sides of the bridge. It is a frequent occurrence for large vehicles of all descriptions (heavy goods vehicles, farm vehicles with trailers and horseboxes) to use this hazardous section of road and to meet other large vehicles and cars on the steep and winding approach roads. As a result it is a frequent occurrence for a blockage of the road to be created, causing vehicles to have to reverse on these hazardous sections and often causing damage to retaining walls. Furthermore, the road is part of the National Cycle Network and thus frequently used by both cyclists and equestrians. We will continue to argue this case.

A further concern is the action of the river at this point. The River Dane is a spate river and, at times of heavy rainfall in its catchment area, the height and flow of the river can be considerably increased. As a result of heavy rainfall during recent years, particularly in 2019, the northern sandy bank of the river immediately upstream of the bridge has been eroded to such an extent that there is a danger that the river will soon reach the rear of the bridge abutments thus threatening the viability of the structure. If this were to happen, then it is almost inevitable that the bridge would be closed to traffic until repairs were made. The parish council and local residents have been expressing their concerns to the highway authority, the Environmental Agency and the landowner concerned for many years but it is only in late 2019 that the threat has been acknowledged.

August 2021 – Update: *There is no progress to date regarding the lobbying for a 10-tonne environmental weight restriction. As regards the bank erosion at the bridge, the up-stream, northern, riverbank has been the subject of some temporary protective works by the placement of 54 AquaRockbags to protect the bridge foundations. However, there are signs that this temporary fix has merely moved the bank erosion further upstream and there is still a threat to the long-term viability of the bridge unless further, more permanent works, are carried out.*

The Vision for 2025 – The river’s approach to Radnor Bridge has been controlled by secure earthworks and the road remains open but with an Environmental Weight Restriction of 10 tonnes in place to prevent use by large/heavy vehicles.

4.4.6 Footways, Cycleways and Bridleways

There are two metalled public footways adjacent to roads within the parish, these being

- (i) a footpath running the full length of the eastern side of the A54 Holmes Chapel Road from the boundary with Congleton town to the south to the boundary with Brereton parish to the north, and
- (ii) a footpath running along the northern side of Chelford Road from its junction with Holmes Chapel Road almost to its junction with Blackfirs Lane.

Responsibility for maintaining these footpaths lies with the CEBC as the highway authority. Neither of them is well maintained with the Chelford Road footway in particular being neglected. It has been substantially damaged over recent years by the persistent and increasing habit of drivers parking two wheels of their vehicles, often heavy goods vehicles, on the footway which is particularly affected where there have been repairs carried out following utility excavations. This footpath is much affected by fallen leaves during the autumn and winter.

The footway adjacent to Holmes Chapel Road will be diverted to take it under the new Loachbrook Bridge which will carry the Congleton Link Road, thus obviating the need for pedestrians to cross this road at what is likely to be a busy intersection.

The parish council will continue to actively and persistently remind the highway authority of its responsibility for the maintenance of these footways.

The A54 footway persistently suffers from the encroachment of soil and debris from the hedgerow banks thus much reducing the walkable width whilst the Chelford Road footway is extremely uneven and damaged. The parish council is committed to working with the Highway Authority to ensure that both routes remain open, accessible and safe for pedestrians.

A further concern, especially along Chelford Road, is the habit of many vehicle drivers to park with two wheels on the pavement thus blocking access for pedestrians and forcing them to walk on the road in order to get around the obstruction. This presents a danger for all, not least parents with children, some in prams or pushchairs, wheelchair users and others who may be elderly and/or visually impaired. Measures aimed at discouraging this unacceptable disregard for foot passengers will be considered.

Blackfirs Lane is extensively used by pedestrians both as a leisure route and as an access route for those, especially children, travelling from the Blackfirs Park estate to schools and retail premises in the West Heath area. This usage is likely to increase. At present these pedestrians either have to walk in the road or on the grass verges, the latter usage being evidenced by the heavily worn and muddy tracks along these verges. As such, there is a footway off the road surface but this is impracticable for safe use, especially when wet. It had been expected that a metalled footpath would be constructed as a condition of the planning permission granted for the Blackfirs Park development but, despite the provision being welcomed by the planning officer in his report, no such condition was actually imposed. There are mixed feelings amongst residents in the area as to the desirability of a metalled footpath and to date the parish council has not adopted a policy thereon. It is, however, a concern that there is no safe route provided for pedestrians on Blackfirs Lane and the issue is something that is likely to be the subject of further debate.

The parish council also now owns the single track metalled road which runs from Blackfirs Lane to Blackfirs Farm, for the most part alongside the Rhead's Meadows Nature Park also owned by the council. This track is a public right of way and the sole vehicular access road to Blackfirs Farm. The track is in a reasonable state of repair for a road of its nature, pot-holes having been repaired during 2019. It is expected that this track will be a popular route for both pedestrians and cyclists once the housing development currently planned by Bellway is completed. In order to accommodate both pedestrians and wheeled traffic, the fence separating the track from the adjacent Nature Park has been set approximately a metre back from the track. Subject to any existing agreements or obligations, this track will be maintained by the parish council in a manner appropriate to its current use.

The parish council also proposes to establish public footways through the Rhead's Meadows Nature Park which will be suitable for the use by wheelchairs, pushchairs and perambulators. Again, these paths will be maintained by the parish council in a manner appropriate to their intended use.

The parish council intends to continue to maintain or assist with the maintenance of all footpaths, cycleways and bridleways through the parish to ensure safe connectivity and thus encourage the use of non-motorised transport with a view to reducing the carbon footprint. The parish council intends to monitor all such routes in and through the parish to ensure clear and safe access and well-maintained signage.

August 2021 – Update: *The parish council has had some major successes regarding footpaths in the last 12/18 months, which have included persuading the borough council to continue the footpath along the side of what is now Somerford Lane as far as the entrance to the playing fields, the removal of newly installed kissing gates from each end of Sandy Lane and at other locations within the parish and the extension of the footpath along*

Holmes Chapel Road so that is now, as an alternative, passes underneath Loachbrook Bridge and thus avoiding the junction with the Congleton Link Road altogether.

As noted elsewhere in this document, the parish council has completed approximately 600 metres of hard-surfaced pathways within the perimeter of Rhead's Meadows and these are currently being well-used by local residents. We have also liaised with the landowner of the path which links Rhead's Lane with the playing fields to improve that route by the removal of the chicane bars which prevented the use of the route by everyone except the agile and able bodied. The path has been slightly widened; a new wooden fence installed together with the stoning of the path which previously had been described as a mud-bath in wet weather.

The Vision for 2025 – For all footways, cycleways and bridleways within the parish to be well-maintained, safe and convenient for pedestrians and way users of all types to use and for there to be a consequential reduction in the carbon footprint of the parish.

4.4.7 Traffic and other signs

There are generally two types of signs which come to the attention of the parish council, traffic signs which are lawfully placed for the information and safety of all road users and those which are unlawfully placed and which sometimes present a danger to drivers and pedestrians alike. The parish council is committed to ensuring that the authorised traffic signs are maintained in a clean, visible and safe condition and the unauthorised signs are removed at the earliest opportunity.

The Vision for 2025 –For all traffic signs which are necessarily and lawfully placed to serve the purpose for which they are intended and for all unlawfully placed signs to be removed at the earliest opportunity.

4.5 Quality Status

The Local Council Award Scheme has been designed to celebrate the successes of the very best local councils, and to provide a framework to support all local councils to improve and develop to meet their full potential. The scheme offers councils the opportunity to show that they meet the standards set by the sector, assessed by their peers, and to put in place the conditions for continued improvement.

The Award Scheme has been designed to provide the tools and encouragement to those councils at the beginning of their improvement journeys, as well as promoting and recognising councils that are at the cutting edge of the sector. It is only through the sector working together, to share best practice, drive up standards and supporting those who are

committed to improving their offer to their communities that individual councils and the sector as a whole will reach its full potential.

[Download the Local Council Award Scheme 2016 guidance \(pdf\)](#)
[Download the Local Council Award Scheme 2016 guidance \(doc\)](#)

The Local Council Award Scheme undergoes a review every year and new guidance is issued in January each year. Councils must meet the criteria of the guidance that is in place at the date they submit their completed application form to their local accreditation panel.

In the summer of 2016, the SPC achieved Quality Gold Award standard, only the 3rd such award in Cheshire and 19th in the whole of England. We intend to work hard to ensure we maintain that very high standard.

August 2021 – Update: *The parish council was very pleased and proud to learn on the 1st June 2021 that it had once again secured the NALC Quality Gold Award. It was acknowledged that this considerable achievement for a small, but intensely busy, parish such as Somerford owed much to the hard-work and dedication of its clerk of 12 years, Julie Mason.*

The Vision for 2025 – To maintain the Quality Gold Award standard presently held by the Somerford Parish Council

4.6 Training of Councillors and Clerk

All councillors to attend the ‘Induction to Clerks and Councillors Course’ within 6 months of appointment. All Register of Interests to be completed within 28 days of appointment. Each councillor to take responsibility for keeping up to date on changes in procedure and legislation by reading or attending training courses.

The clerk to attain a minimum of 12 CPD points each year and ensure he/she attends the regular SLCC meetings and the conference. He/she again to attend the appropriate training courses when there is a change in legislation and procedure.

The Vision for 2025 – For the Parish Council to be an effective and knowledgeable team, guided and advised by their clerk, well versed in the due practice and procedure of the Local Government Act 1972 and able to decide and put into effect best practice.

4.7 The Parish Clerk

The role of the parish clerk is one that has increased considerably in the recent past. From humble beginnings as a “keeper of records” to the current role of effectively being a chief executive or business manager of the council. In smaller parishes such as Somerford, the clerk is very much the “glue” which holds the council together. The role encompasses not

only the original purpose of taking notes, keeping records and arranging meetings but also extends to being the legal and financial advisor, publicity officer, event's organiser, liaison officer for residents and outside agencies, confidant, etc.

The current Clerk to the Somerford Parish Council, Julie Mason, carries out the role on a part-time basis and also clerks the neighbouring parishes of Cranage and Newbold Astbury cum Moreton. This combination of roles benefits each of the parishes considerably since the experience gleaned by one council can be shared with others and this can often lead to costs saving.

The parish is fortunate in having such a dedicated individual and we are determined that her role continues to enjoy the respect earned over several years.

August 2021 – Update: *It was with much sadness for the parish, but a great accolade for the individual, that our Clerk of 12 years, Julie Mason, decided that it was time for her to move on. In March 2021 she learnt that she had been successful in her application to become the next Town Clerk of Bollington. She had, indeed, left us a treasured present with the securing of our second Quality Gold Award. We held interviews and in May 2021 we appointed our new clerk, Carlton Evans, to the post Clerk of Somerford Parish Council. Carlton was also appointed as clerk to the Newbold Astbury cum Moreton Parish Council. We welcome Carlton and wish him every success in his joint roles and a long and happy time with Somerford Parish Council.*

The Vision for 2025 – For Carlton **to be CiLCA qualified and enjoying his role as Clerk of the enlarged and thriving parish of Somerford.**