

Chairman's Report 2022/24

1. This AGM marks the conclusion of the 2022/24 Carnival season, which, I believe, was a resounding success despite the challenging weather conditions on the Saturday morning.
2. For those who may not recall, the weather that Saturday saw heavy rain and strong winds creating significant challenges for those in the parade and setting up the fete. At one stage it was touch and go as to whether it was safe to continue with the setting up. At least one domestic style gazebo was lost, and I don't think I will forget the sight of a double commercial style gazebo going up and spinning over thankfully to fall on an empty grass bank. That day we put our stock of large tent pegs to good use and it became evident that there were several stallholders who had no idea how to secure their structures – “what are guy ropes” was heard several times as much needed help was offered!
3. Thankfully, the afternoon weather improved and by the time the parade got to the high street the blue sky above looked down as if to say “what's the fuss all about!” The parade entrants did a great job as all the smiles told. Seeing 3 lorries was unexpected, so well done to those responsible; they make such a difference. The level of participation was better last season, but there is still room for more!
4. Looking back, this past year is the period of the actual Carnival Parade and the week that follows and is the busiest time for the Committee. During this period we have had a few additional challenges especially when it came to the budget and Carnival Fete.
 - The Carnival's financial reserves were still low at the start of the season due to Covid-related cancellations in the 2020/22 season. However, the generous support from Wellington College, combined with our fundraising efforts and grants from Parish Councils, allowed us to cover all core costs.
 - The new track on the Morgan Recreation meant it was no longer possible to have the funfair and the way that we could use the field had to change. This presented an unexpected fiscal and operational risk but the fete team rose to the challenge. Working with the Parish it was possible to have a layout that worked both fiscally and operationally as a fete.
5. Whilst the grants and sponsorship help cover the core costs, the Committee still needed to be effective in its own fund-raising efforts. The support of local councils and businesses can never be taken for granted. Traditional fund-raising activities involved lotteries, the street collection during the Parade, income from events, advertising, stall hire, sales of merchandise etc. However, this season the level of fund-raising has been exceptional due in particular, to the efforts of Mike Gardener. His quizzes were very well supported. They netted some £3,500 for the Carnival as well as providing additional income opportunities for the venues that supported us. In addition, Wellington College not only gave a generous grant but also ran two fund raising open days, organised and gave us access to the Chapel for the CCA fund-raising schools concert .
6. As reported at the last AGM the number on the Committee was again of concern, but as reported last year a period of successful recruitment efforts attracted some new members. The additional help, knowledge and experience they brought to the team has been invaluable.

7. Not everyone wants to or is able to be on the Committee and we have continued to have the support of a few Associated Members who take on specific roles on our behalf. Mark and Ellen Tims help was invaluable as they once more looked after the IT/website and programme needs for us. Looking forward, the level of membership will once again be a key issue for the new Committee.
8. As one season ends there is always learning to be captured by the new committee. The Newsletters have been well received and we have become ever more reliant upon social media for our comms. We encourage facebook and Instagram followers and publish ever more on our website. Additionally, the Carnival Programme is delivered to some 7,000 local premises and yet we can never seem to get the message across to everyone. I am sure that if anyone has suggestions to help with this need the new committee would be glad to hear them.
9. The Committee database of potentially interested organisations and would-be helpers during Carnival week is now established. If anyone is not getting the newsletter and would like to be kept informed, then please get in touch. The same is the case for any would be sponsors or anyone willing to offer any form of help.
10. The Committee has also captured operational details built on past learning in its Manual of Operations. This collection of documents breaks down the main areas of work, and provides a guide on organising each main area of activity. With a 2-year gap between events it's so easy to forget details. This information and all other Committee business is now managed and shared through Google Drive – perhaps not the best system but it's free!
11. The budget out-turn for the season is, for the first time in a long while, where it needs to be relative to the potential aspirations for the next season. The Committee can't afford to sit back though and will still need to work hard in their fundraising over the next two years to maintain this position taking account of inflationary pressures.
12. Whilst the next Carnival week is not until 2026, the next 12 months provide the time to review, plan and recruit much needed support. Looking forward, a Carnival requires people willing and able to take on roles and specific functions. There are four official roles including the Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and Treasurer to be filled at the Committees first meeting in November. There is a much longer list of functions including leads for the Parade, the carnival fete, fundraising and sponsorship, social media and comms, associated carnival events, carnival programme, carnival website, graphic design etc and these functions can be broken down still further as there is much to do!
13. Details of those willing to continue and any new volunteers will be made known at the meeting but others who may be interested should make themselves known. An information sheet is available on the website explaining what's involved. It is crucial to maintain adequate numbers on the Committee to ensure the Carnival's continued success. Without sufficient volunteers, the future of the event is at risk.
14. And so, as I end my review of the season, as advised at the last AGM, after 6 years I am standing down. There is someone willing to take on my role and I will hand it over to them at the start of the next Committee meeting in November.
15. Reflecting on my time with the Committee, I am deeply appreciative of the support given by fellow committee members, our volunteers, and the public. I am confident that the prospects for 2026 look extremely positive and I wish the new team every success in the upcoming season.