

## WITHERSFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

### CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – MAY 2021

This is the first Annual Report since May 2019. Last year the Government removed the requirement for Parish Councils to hold annual meetings as well as permitting virtual meetings to be held instead of the usual face to face village hall meetings.

As we begin to emerge from the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic, we are beginning to make plans to resume “business as normal” and our next meeting will be held in the Village Hall in July.

We have successfully maintained regular meetings of the Parish Council during the past 24 months via SKYPE which, despite our notoriously slow broadband speeds.

During the first Lockdown we set up a support system for any vulnerable residents who were having difficulties in getting shopping or prescriptions. A number of volunteers joined a WhatsApp group and were able to respond as requests came in. There was a slow but steady flow of requests – all of which were responded to on the same day. This has continued to be available throughout the pandemic restrictions – though has not been used for some time – perhaps confirming that most of our community have friends and family able to support them without the need for the Parish Council's backstop support.

The Parish Council has continued to pursue the most significant issues to our residents – traffic speed and volumes through the village; the impact of planned housing developments across the Parish; superfast broadband roll-out; and the protection of our rural environment.

Our **Traffic Working Group** has continued to work hard and has achieved success in gaining agreement to a 20mph zone through the village. The 40mph buffer zones are due to be implemented this calendar year. Cllr Frank Eve's report follows this report this evening.

The Parish Council is about to appoint consultants to assist us in the development of our **Neighbourhood Plan**. This will cover where and whether further development should take place in the parish and other issues around land use and zoning. Whilst Neighbourhood Plans are not legally binding and have to be consistent with other local planning policies, they do add weight to the Parish Council's voice in commenting on planning applications. With continued pressure for development of additional homes across our region, it is important that we are best placed to be influential and to ensure that we can preserve the quality of our environment. There will be full consultation with residents over the coming year as the plan is drawn up.

Unfortunately, one of the regular activities adversely affected by the Covid pandemic has been our **annual village Spring Clean**. We have encouraged residents to “adopt a stretch of roadside” as an alternative to try to keep on top of the problem of the rubbish that continues to be discarded out of the windows of passing cars. This has had some success as can be seen on Church Street where a resident has taken it upon themselves to do regular litter picks.

Following repeated questions being raised by residents about the restricted **access to the Cricket ground** for walkers, we have reinstated a pedestrian access on the Withersfield to Great Wrattling Road.

The Parish Council continues to work to be **open and transparent**, this includes regular reports in the Parish Magazine, and more information about how we spend the money that we manage on your behalf. We are now in our third year of partnership with the Parish Church in producing the

Parish Magazine which is fully funded by advertising and edited by Elaine McInnes-Rich. There has been a welcome increase in contributions from residents of articles and news. We also continue to publish formal business and records on the Parish Council website:

[www//withersfield/onesuffolk.net](http://www.withersfield/onesuffolk.net)

Attached to this report is a summary of our income and expenditure over the last year and our draft **budget for the year ahead**. The Parish Council's budget comes from a small proportion of the money that we all pay in Council Tax. Our budget is small, but as Councillors we appreciate that we have a duty to use your money well. We hope that we provide value for money but welcome your comments and suggestions for areas that need our attention.

This year the Parish Council welcomed Indunil Wijenayaka, Julia Korona and Sheila Horton as **co-opted Parish Councillors** filling vacancies as others have moved on. A special thanks to Jill Johnson who resigned as a Parish Councillor last month when she moved out of Withersfield. I'm pleased to report that she has agreed to remain on the Village Hall Management Committee so will remain involved in the village.

Thanks go to Cllr Mary Evans our **County Councillor**, and Peter Stevens our **District Councillor** for their attendance at our meetings and for their support over the year. Mary Evans is standing down at this month's elections. Her support to Withersfield has always been strong and enthusiastic and her wise counsel as well as her determination to get things done will be greatly missed.

Also, last but by no means least, thanks to Laura Crump our **Parish Clerk** over the past two years. Laura took over from Jill Johnson in June 2019 and has quickly learnt the role and adapted well to running a "virtual Parish Council" during the pandemic.

We look forward to us all meeting in person - lockdown permitting – in the near future.



Terry Rich Chairman, Withersfield Parish Council 2 May 2021