

WITHERSFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – MAY 2016

During 2015/16 the Parish Council has had a busy year dealing with the day to day management of parish affairs, and progressing important village projects.

We have finally seen the results of the hard work of our Speedwatch volunteers with the new traffic calming measures being installed over the last couple of months. Our Vehicle Activated Sign is now a real visible reminder to inconsiderate speeding drivers. This was a major item of expenditure for the Parish Council and we were also grateful to Cllr Mary Evans, Suffolk County Council and the Friends of Withersfield for contributing towards the cost. A detailed breakdown of the cost of the VAS is included in my Finance report. The Parish Council will be keen to see the analysis that the VAS provides so that we can assess how much of a difference it is having to making Withersfield a safer place.

During the year we have also invested in a new Parish Notice Board, and our village sign on Town Green has been repaired and repainted. We have continued to have our greens and the graveyard kept in good order and have maintained close liaison with the Thurlow Estate's agent Tim Barlow to ensure that our pathways and trees are maintained.

As well as our regular Parish Council meetings, we have had 3 extra meetings. The first was to discuss the planning application for the new home on the site of Twin Cottage, the second was to confirm our final decision on the purchase of the Vehicle Activated Sign (VAS) and the third was to consider the Community Governance Review. This is the proposal from St Edmundsbury Borough Council to change Parish boundaries which could mean that Hanchett End, Barsey Close and the Arboretum developments would move from Withersfield to Haverhill.

We do not know the outcome of this review yet. If the review results in these areas remaining within the Parish, we will need to ensure that as a Parish Council we are actively seeking to represent that part of the Parish along with the village. We are hoping that we can attract a neighbor from that area of the Parish to join the Parish Council.

We had a good turnout in March for our annual village Spring Clean, and for Remembrance Day in November. The Village Hall committee have continued to do a great job managing our hall and ensuring a great range of social activities throughout the year. And a special thanks to Sheila Tibbenham and her team of volunteers for their work in organising the annual village fete. Can I encourage everyone to get involved on 18th June, both helping to set up stalls and during the day.

During the past year the Parish Council has been aiming to be more 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. I am circulating a detailed report of our income and

expenditure for the last year this evening. We also publish our minutes on our web site and welcome all villagers to raise issues that concern them.

What is very apparent though is that the more open we become the more we discover that there is never a single viewpoint on anything! As Councillors we have to seek to balance the different opinions and views of our neighbours and fellow parishioners. For example what many will see as positive traffic calming measures to others are signs of creeping urbanization in the village. Even our repainted village sign raised concerns from one villager about whether the images were relevant and appropriate for Withersfield. The Community Governance Review too raised different viewpoints with some feeling that the Parish and the village were very different and should remain separate from the areas on the other side of the A1307. The Parish Council had to balance these views with those from our neighbours in Hanchett End, Barsey Close and the new residents of the Arboretum who have expressed a strong desire to remain part of our Parish.

In all of these issues we aim to listen to all points of view and to come to fair and balanced decisions. Clearly we can't please everyone all of the time – but we can but try!

All Parish Councillors have been actively involved in our meetings and village activities throughout the year. However, as we enter the new Council year I must report that three councillors have felt that they no longer have the time to commit to Parish Council business. Terri Hardy, David Brookes and Sian Gilligan have all resigned. Thanks to each of them for their work for the Parish and the village over the last few years. I am pleased to say that I have had interest expressed by others to join the Parish Council and I am confident that these vacancies will be filled shortly.

Thanks go to Cllr Mary Evans our County Councillor, and Jane Midwood our Borough Councillor for their attendance at our meetings and for their support over the year.

Also, last but by no means least, thanks to Jill Johnson who has worked tirelessly as our Parish Clerk over the year. She is a major asset to the village and the work of the Parish Council.

Terry Rich
Chairman, Withersfield Parish Council
17 May 2016