

WITHERSFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – MAY 2017

During 2016/17 your Parish Council has been active dealing with day to day management of parish affairs, and progressing important village projects. We have also needed to call on the assistance of our Parish and Borough Councillors to help deal with incidents and events that have occurred.

The most significant of these “events” was the **torrential rain** we faced in June which had disastrous consequences in two parts of our village. Heavy rainfall that lasted just a short time caused the Stour brook to burst its banks at the bridge with water levels rising higher than most people could recall, and completely engulfing the bridge. On Thurlow Road rain water running off fields led to severe problems there too.

We have been hard at work pressing the County Council to come up with long term solutions to provide us with greater safety from such extreme weather events, but also to provide better drainage and management of the river and rain water and so avoid the recurrent problems that we have faced. Works to Thurlow Road are underway as I write, but funding is still being sought to undertake remedial works at the bridge on Church Street and the banks along the Stour brook. Suffolk's flooding team are due to come to our July meeting to present the findings of a period of hydraulic modelling of the Stour flow and the proposed solutions. We will be pressing the County Council to keep to this commitment.

Last year the Borough Council undertook a **review of Parish boundaries**. The initial proposal would have led to the Parish boundary shrinking to exclude Hanchett End, Barsey Close and the new Arboretum development. The outcome of our consultations was that a majority of parishioners considered that the Parish Council should oppose this proposal. In the summer, we heard that the Borough Council had decided to back the views of the Parish Council and to leave the boundary unchanged. This means the Parish's population has continued to grow as the new development has neared completion. It also means the income that the Parish Council receives from Council tax has risen making the Parish Council's finances more sustainable. It should also mean that there are more of us parishioners to get involved and support local events and activities.

There were differing views both within Withersfield and beyond about the Parish Boundary review. July's Haverhill Echo led with an article in which the Haverhill Town Clerk levelled robust criticism at the decision and at our council. However, the Parish Council having asked for the views of its residents felt that it should respect those opinions and back them.

The **Speedwatch** team has continued to work hard assisted by our Vehicle Activated Sign (VAS). Unfortunately, the VAS has not been universally welcomed and it has suffered two spates of damage from vandalism. Luckily the costs of repairs have been met by insurance. The VAS continues to contribute towards combating speeding and so make our village safer.

The Parish Council has invested in a **defibrillator**, partially funded by a grant from the British Red Cross. This will be located at the Parish Hall. Whilst training is not necessary, we are hoping to arrange some sessions for interested villagers to be able to familiarise themselves with the device.

We are also waiting for decision on an application for funding to part fund the restoration of our **war memorial**. Our plan is that it should be restored to its original condition by the time of the 100th anniversary of the ending of the First World War in 2018.

The future of our **village pub** has been a concern raised by residents with the Parish Council. After Lee and Bianca left at Christmas and there were real worries about whether the pub would reopen. At this time, it is good to see it back up and running and we wish the new managers, Adrian and Tracey Collingwood, all the best. I hear that the pub will soon change its name back to the White Horse, which will be welcomed by all. For the future, I guess it's a case of “Use it or lose it” – so I hope to see many of you in the White Horse occasionally.

In the meantime the Parish Council decided that we should apply to register the pub as a **Community Asset**, under the 2011 Localism Act. We are currently awaiting the outcome of the application from the borough council. If successful it gives a period of protection (six months) should there be moves to dispose of the pub for redevelopment or other use.

A few parishioners turned out in March for our **annual village Spring Clean**. This received coverage in the Haverhill Echo which reinforced the message to drivers to respect our environment rather than throwing their cans, bottles and take-away food wrappers along our verges. It would be very much appreciated if more people could contribute to this event next year.

Perry Morley has continued as **Footpath Officer** and his contribution has helped us to ensure that our footpaths are maintained. Perry is standing down from this role after many years of tireless footpath tramping and we thank him for his contribution. We are looking for someone willing to take on this role on behalf of the parish. Maybe it would suit a dog-walker or anyone who enjoys regularly walking our beautiful footpaths. Let me know if you think you could help. Thanks also to Alex Talbot who continues as our **Tree Warden** despite having moved out of the village.

The **Village Hall Management committee** have continued to do a great job managing our hall and ensuring a great range of social activities throughout the year. They have produced a very professional business case to support improvement works to the village hall which when implemented will make the hall even more practical for use by local groups.

Last year's **village fete**, organised by Sheila Tibbenham and her team of volunteers, was enjoyed by all and raised valuable resources that help to maintain the Parish Church. This year there will be a Village Tea Party instead of a fete on June 24th which will I am sure will be an opportunity for parishioners to get together in the summer sunshine. Perhaps there will be people who would be interested in getting together to think about an event for next year?

We have continued to contract for regular **grass cutting** and maintenance of our village greens. We have also budgeted to have money available for additional cuts if the growing season extends due to a warm autumn.

The Parish Council continues to work 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. We have been awarded a grant to support our work to improve transparency – this will include ensuring that more Parish Council documents and information are on our 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.

This year the Parish Council was strengthened by the involvement of three new co-opted councillor – Sheila Tibbenham, Ian Kinloch, and Stuart Murlis who lives at the Arboretum. We will be seeking new councillors in the coming months as Stuart has had to stand down due to work commitments.

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.

