

WITHERSFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – MAY 2018

During 2017/18 your Parish Council has been active dealing with day to day management of parish affairs and progressing important village projects. We have also been fortunate in being able to rely on the support of our County and Borough Councillors to assist us in our work.

Throughout the year we continued to keep the pressure up on **Suffolk Council's flood management team** to come up with solutions to the drainage and flow issues around the Stour Brook at Church Street. After long and often frustrating debates and countless "updates" and reasons for delay, it has been gratifying to finally see significant works being undertaken to renew the drainage around the bridge, works to clear the watercourse along the side of the church, and even works planned to create some natural dams up stream to slow the flow during heavy rainfall. So far these works seem to be having a positive effect and we all hope that past problems won't reoccur.

We are though aware that there remain a number of areas in the village where drainage and run-off from roads continues to cause problems for residents and we continue to press the Councils for action to remedy the situation.

Following the decision of St Edmundsbury Borough Council to retain the existing **parish boundaries**, meaning the Arboretum remained part of Withersfield, the Parish Council has been seeking to find ways to encourage and generate involvement in local affairs by residents in that area. We have now had a new Parish Council notice board installed on Three Counties Way. Now all Parish Council business is displayed in two locations – outside the Church in Withersfield Village, as well as at the Arboretum.

The Parish Council's **defibrillator** has now been installed at the Village Hall and some 20 people have undertaken the training to enable them to use it with confidence. We will be setting up a volunteer scheme for people able to be called upon to assist with its use shortly. (NB the defibrillator is very easy to use even if you haven't had training)

Funding has now been obtained to support the restoration of our **war memorial**. Work is due to commence shortly and will be completed in time for the 100th anniversary of armistice day - in November this year.

The Parish Council has been at the fore in raising issues of concern to our residents this year. We were concerned at the application by the owners of the **Haverhill Research Park** to vary the planning consent to allow for use as "light industrial" rather than being restricted to use as hotel and research use. We were pleased that St Edmundsbury Council's planning committee initially refused the application – but really disappointed when they changed their minds the following month. It was a case where councillors chose to override the very real and serious concerns of local residents for dubious reasons. There remain significant concerns by residents of the Arboretum at the prospects of HGVs accessing industrial units should they ever be built.

This month we are hosting a public meeting with representatives of the local NHS and **GP services** as our residents have been raising serious worries around poor access to primary care services locally. Our local practices seem to have the poorest performance ratings of any across Suffolk. We hope that our local NHS representatives will have a plan to improve matters and will keep pressing that this should happen.

Another local issue of concern has been associated with the use of the Meldham Flood storage area (West Town Park) by members of the local fishing club and others. The Environment Agency have been very helpful in explaining how they are improving matters around the access on Withersfield Road and are going to control access, parking and unlawful activities (including overnight camping). It has also been highlighted that there is a need for more rubbish bins and dog waste bins as more residents take advantage of this very pleasant local asset. However, it seems that no public body has a duty to provide or empty them on the site and the Parish Council will be pressing the Borough and County Councils to assist in resolving this matter.

We had our **annual village Spring Clean** in March. A group of around 15 villagers turned out and cleared the usual mountain of debris thoughtlessly throw out of passing cars as they enter and exit our village. The Haverhill Echo again reinforced our message reporting our efforts prominently in the paper. It would be very much appreciated if more people could join in with this effort next year.

CLlr Ian Kinloch has taken on the role of **Footpath Officer** this year and has been seeking an improvement in public footpath access between the Arboretum and the village. So far there has been no resolution but he remains "on the case". 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 manage our hall and provide a range of social activities throughout the year. They now have planning consent to build an extension to the hall to provide better storage space. It will make the hall even more practical for use by local groups.

The **Sports & Social Club** continues to work to encourage use of our sports ground. We have supported repairs to the pavilion roof and will be hosting a Parish cricket match next month – aimed at encouraging more residents to get involved. On the theme of exercise and fitness, the Parish Council managed to get some funding to support the introduction of **yoga classes** in the village hall.

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 welcomed Hilary Thomas and Russell Wallington as new co-optees on the Council. Following the resignation of Geoff Hayward and Hilary Thomas in recent weeks, the Parish Council is soon to appoint two new co-optees.

Next May will see the 4 year term for Parish Councillors coming to an end and **new public elections** will take place. If you are interested in putting yourself forward and want to find out more about what's involved please do contact me or our clerk, Jill Johnson – it would be good to have a good showing of candidates.

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 2018