



**Website:** [www.whitwickpc.org.uk](http://www.whitwickpc.org.uk)

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15**

**Introduction** - Whitwick Parish Council was established by the District of North West Leicestershire (Reorganisation of Community Governance) Order 2010. This specified that there should be eleven councillors elected in May 2011 and every four years thereafter.

**Councillors** - Parish councillors give their time freely – they do not receive allowances and none have claimed any expenses. There were no changes to membership of the Council in 2014/15. Contact details for all councillors are given on the Council's website

**Meetings** - The Parish Council held 8 ordinary meetings and 2 special meetings in 2014/15, all open to the press and public and commencing with a public question and answer session. The Council currently meets at St John the Baptist C of E School, Parsonwood Hill, Whitwick – Whitwick residents are always welcome to attend.

**Finance** - The Council's precept for 2014/15 was £29,048. The Council banks with HSBC. The opening balance at 1 April 2014 was £34,517. During the year, income totalled £37,124 with expenditure of £46,603 giving a closing balance at 31 March 2015 of £25,039. This includes amounts reserved for contingencies, elections (casual vacancies and 2015 full council) and legal fees. A more detailed balance sheet is available to view on the Financial Information page of the website or by contacting the Clerk.

**General Power of Competence** - Whitwick Parish Council is eligible to exercise the new General Power of Competence introduced by the Localism Act. It passes the two tests of having a sufficient number of elected councillors and a qualified Clerk. This means that the Council can now do whatever a private individual can do without the need for specific statutory powers as had previously been the case. This will need to be renewed in the light of the 2015 elections as the Council will still pass the electoral test.

**Policies and Procedures** - The Council has adopted a Code of Conduct for Members, Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Internal Audit Statement, Risk Assessment, Asset Register, Freedom of Information Publication Scheme, Media Policy, Equal Opportunity Policy, Complaints Procedure, Community Grants Policy, Health and Safety Policy, Protocol for Conduct of Chairman, Staff Disciplinary & Grievance Procedures and a Retention of Documents Statement (all reviewed annually and available on the council's website).

**Memberships** - The Council is a member of the National and Leicestershire and Rutland Associations of Local Councils, the Rural Community Council (Leicestershire & Rutland), the Leicestershire & Rutland Playing Fields Association and Fields in Trust. The Clerk is a member of the Society of Local Council Clerks.

**Website** - The Parish Council has its own website which is regularly updated including news, agenda and minutes and dates of future meetings. There is also an email link to the Clerk. The site has been rated 'comprehensive' by the County Council.

**Staff** - The Council engaged the services of Phil and Lorraine Ellis who both have excellent qualifications, extensive public sector experience and have each previously clerked parish councils. Lorraine holds the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA). Their current fixed term contracts run until 30 September 2015.

**Audit** - The Council has appointed Richard Willcocks of Redwood Pryor Ltd as its Internal Auditor. Grant Thornton have been designated as the Council's external auditors. The Council's accounts are made available for public inspection as part of the audit process.

## **WORK OF THE PARISH COUNCIL**

**Animal Welfare** - The Parish Council has adopted the policy recommended by the RSPCA that no animals are to be given as prizes at any fundraising or other activity held on or in council-owned land or buildings.

**Community Grants** - In 2014/15, the Parish Council budgeted £1,500 to support its scheme for making small community grants. Grants totalling £1187.50 were made to Party in the Park, Woodstock in Whitwick, Whitwick Historical Group, Friends of Holly Hayes Wood and PRIDE. This grants scheme has been suspended for 2015/16 in the light of budget pressures. The Council received a grant of £786 from the County Council towards cleaning the War Memorial.

**Community Policing** - Our local Safer Neighbourhoods Team are invited to attend meetings to have a dialogue with the Parish Council on community policing issues.

**Community Volunteering** - A number of volunteering opportunities have been publicised including tree and footpath wardens, an environmental group, youth council and snow wardens. It was decided to concentrate on litter-picking and 16 local volunteers have registered for the scheme.

**Grit Bins** - The Parish Council financed 2 new bins and one replacement bin with the consent of the County Council.

**Land and Property** - Negotiations with NWLDC to secure the transfer of all parks, recreation grounds and open spaces into parish council ownership were finally completed in 2014/15. Some other sites have also been transferred direct from developers while a new lease in respect of Thornborough Road Allotments has been agreed with Wyggeston's Hospital Charity. A full list of all the sites is included in the Asset Register on the website. The Council has also taken over trusteeship of the King George Fields Charity which covers the Park and part of the Parsonwood Hill Recreation Ground.

From April 2015 maintenance costs will be met by the Parish Council from its precept rather than by NWLDC as a 'special expense'.

A Working Party undertook a review of all land which came into the Council's ownership. One garden extension plot has been sold at Green Lane, a 10 year lease in respect of the Old Railway Station has been entered into with Whitwick Historical Group and the former

railway line off Dumps Road and a grassed area at King Richards Hill/Crusader Close have been identified as surplus and offered for sale.

**Market Charter** - Strong representations were made to NWLDC in respect of a proposed rival markets policy which was based on the market charter rights originally granted to the Lord of the Manor for Whitwick.

**Planning** - The Council considers all planning applications submitted in the parish as a consultee though the final decisions are taken by NWLDC. We have also commented on NWLDC's emerging Local Plan.

There have been 3 major applications for residential development in the Parish to build up to 240 new homes on the Green Wedge off Hall Lane; 44 dwellings adjacent to 86 Loughborough Road (subsequently reduced to 26) and up to 34 dwellings adjoining 191 Loughborough Road. The Parish Council has objected to all 3 which are still awaiting determination by NWLDC.

**Representations to Other Authorities** - We have represented residents' concerns to the County and District Councils on various issues, including urban grass cutting, traffic and parking issues, winter gritting, street cleanliness and dog fouling.

**Staffing** - A working party has reviewed the Council's future staffing requirements. This has visited several larger parishes to benefit from their experience. A job evaluation exercise has been undertaken and permanent recruitment is scheduled for later in the year.

**Street Environment** - A working party has looked into the potential for sprucing up the local street scene with things like hanging baskets, flower beds, public seats and shelters, additional litter bins etc. Subject to a County Council licence, flower boxes will be provided at all village entrance signs though other measures were deferred due to budget pressures.

**World War I and War Memorial** - The Parish Council marked the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War by having the War Memorial professionally cleaned. Half the cost was met by a County Council Historic Buildings Grant. A special event was also held in conjunction with local churches and the Royal British Legion to mark the centenary.

**Workout in Whitwick** - The Council has been successful in winning £10,000 funding from NWLDC which, when added to Section 106 'planning gain' money already available, will enable us to provide new outdoor 'green gym' fitness equipment in Whitwick Park later this year.

**Whitwick Lights Up** – With volunteer support from the Whitwick Scarecrow Festival co-ordinator, the Council was pleased to launch the new "Whitwick Lights Up" Christmas lights competition last year.

## **FUTURE WORK**

**Allotment Management** - The Council will be discussing options for introducing a level of self-management with allotment holders at both Thornborough Road and George Street.

**Parish Office/Community Hub** - The Council has an aspiration to establish its own office. Having visited other parishes and considered alternatives, the conversion of the former

public conveniences in Market Place was identified as the most practical, central and cost-effective option. Grants are being sought to minimise the costs.

**Defibrillator(s)** - The Parish Council has been approached by a local resident who thinks that a community defibrillator which can be accessed at any time of the day or night should be provided in Whitwick. There are a number of ways of doing this such as via the Community Heartbeat Trust ([www.communityheartbeat.org.uk](http://www.communityheartbeat.org.uk)). The Council has pledged to support anyone who wishes to take this idea forward and form a fundraising committee.

**External Funding** - The Council will continue to consider current grant regimes to identify any opportunities to attract grant funding into Whitwick

**Future Service Delivery** - The Council will continue to review options for future service delivery in the Parish as the County and District Councils are looking to reduce the services they provide to meet Government savings targets.

**Grounds Maintenance** - Under the terms of the Parish Creation Order, this work will continue to be undertaken by NWLDC on a rechargeable basis until at least 31 March 2017. As this is the major item in the Council's budget, the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) has been engaged to undertake a full survey and options appraisal to see if there are ways of carrying out this work more economically.

**Local Council Award Scheme** - The Council will consider applying for accreditation under this new scheme which replaces 'Quality Parish Council' status.

**Notice Board** - Midlands Co-op Society have kindly agreed to provide a site for a dedicated notice board on the frontage of their new food store in Market Place to publicise parish council related matters.

**Youth Club** - The Council has agreed to take over the running of the youth club building from 1 April 2015. Thanks to former trustees Alan Clarke and Peter Turner for their many years of dedicated voluntary service. As the County Council's Youth Services have withdrawn all their sessions, a variation of the planning conditions will be sought to allow other community uses appropriate to its location so that the building can pay its way and provide an asset for the village.

## **PARISH COUNCIL ELECTIONS – 7 MAY 2015**

All eleven seats on the Parish Council come up for election this year. For the first time, the Parish will be divided into wards: Broom Leys - 2 councillors; Holly Hayes - 3 councillors; Hermitage - 3 councillors and Thornborough - 3 councillors

When NWLDC published the Statement of Persons nominated, we had a total of 14 candidates. There will be elections in Broom Leys, Hermitage and Holly Hayes Wards with 4 candidates each but not in Thornborough where we had only 2 candidates leaving an unfilled vacancy. Thanks for their services to Councillors Elaine Easom, Nita Pearson and Lindsay Weaver who have not stood for re-election.

***Ray Woodward***

Chairman of the Parish Council