



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

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17**

**Parish Council** – There are 11 seats on the Parish Council and the last election took place in May 2015, with members serving until 2019. The Parish was divided into wards: Broom Leys - 2 councillors; Holly Hayes - 3 councillors; Hermitage - 3 councillors and Thornborough - 3 councillors.

**Councillors** - Parish councillors give their time freely – they do not receive allowances and none have claimed any expenses. Contact details for all councillors are given on the Council's website

**Meetings** - The Parish Council held 11 ordinary meetings and 1 special meeting in 2016/17, and 7 meetings of the Property Management and General Purposes Committee, which has been given delegated powers by the council to make certain decisions. All meetings are open to the press and public and council meetings commenced with a public question and answer session. Meetings were held at Park Hall in Whitwick Park. Whitwick residents are always welcome to attend.

**Finance** - The Council's precept for 2016/17 was £184,634. The Council banks with Unity Trust. The opening balance at 1 April 2016 was £76,480. During the year, income totalled £243,971 with expenditure of £229,672 giving a closing balance at 31 March 2017 of £90,779. This includes amounts reserved for contingencies, elections (casual vacancies and 2019 full council) and earmarked funds. A more detailed balance sheet will be available to view on the Financial Information page of the website or by contacting the Parish Manager.

**General Power of Competence** - Whitwick Parish Council is eligible to exercise the General Power of Competence introduced by the Localism Act, passing the two tests of having a sufficient number of elected councillors and a qualified Clerk. Broadly, the Council can now do whatever a private individual can do without the need for specific statutory powers.

**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, Environmental 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). New policies adopted during the year were Lone Working Policy, Lone Working Risk Assessment (working drafts) and CCTV Policy/IT Policy.

**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, Fields in Trust and the Friends of Charnwood Forest. The Parish Manager is a member of the Society of Local Council Clerks.

**Website** - The Parish Council has its own website which was reviewed last year and migrated to a new provider and new domain name: [www.whitwickpc.org.uk](http://www.whitwickpc.org.uk). The website is regularly updated including news, agenda and minutes and dates of future meetings. There is also an email link to the Parish Manager. The site has been rated 'comprehensive' by the County Council. Community groups and businesses are encouraged to provide their information to the Community Office for inclusion on the website. Whitwick Parish Council also operates a Facebook presence; a developing channel for communicating with local residents.

**Staff** - The Council said farewell to Phil and Lorraine Ellis who both retired after serving the council and the community in an excellent manner. During the year, the Council recruited a new Parish Manager, an Administrative Assistant and a Caretaker to establish a new team to oversee the services the Council provides to the parish. All staff work on a part time basis, being flexible where possible in an endeavour to meet the needs of the council and the community.

**Audit** - The Council has re-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**

### **(a) Priority Projects**

**Whitwick Community Office** -This new facility is now fully functioning and has become an established base for staff, with regular opening hours for public enquiries. The local PCSO also has free access to use the office when on duty in the parish, which the council hope is a useful resource to help better serve Whitwick. A new photocopying and office service has been approved to provide a local facility for the community. A growing resource of community information is being developed and enquiries are welcomed during opening hours. The Parish Manager will endeavour to accommodate enquiries by prior appointment at other times.

The Parish Council continues to develop this ground-breaking facility as a 'one stop shop', enabling local people to be dealt with at the first point of contact wherever possible but otherwise signposted to what services are provided and by whom.

**Whitwick Park Hall** - The Council is proud to have successfully completed the refurbishment of the old youth club building converting it into a well-equipped facility that is available to hire for residents, community groups and businesses. As well as providing a venue for all council and committee meetings, Park Hall is used regularly (nearly every day) for parties, functions and social events. Regular hirers are now established and an increasing number of customers are complimenting the council on how well designed and functional Park Hall is, being particularly attractive in the park setting, with a car park.

Planning permission is being sought for improved lighting on the driveway as the existing illuminated bollards have been damaged beyond repair.

### **(b) Other Work**

**Allotment Management – Thornborough Road** – a new self-management Committee has been successfully launched and the Parish Council is supporting allotment holders in this developing role.

**Community Grants** - This scheme was reintroduced in 2016/17 (having been suspended the previous year due to budget pressures) and grants totalling £1169 were given to Pride Alarm Victim Support, Woodstock in Whitwick, Whitwick Retired People's Fellowship, Howe Court Social Group, Thornborough Road Allotments.

**Community Policing** - Our local Safer Neighbourhoods Team are invited to attend meetings to have a dialogue with the Parish Council on community policing issues. Although attendance is not always achieved, there are reports and advice given on current crime prevention initiatives and latest crime statistics. Information bulletins are shared with councillors and co-operation with investigations has been given by sharing CCTV data.

**Community Volunteering** - A number of volunteering opportunities have been publicised. Sixteen local volunteers have registered as volunteer litter pickers.

**Defibrillator** - the 'Woodstock in Whitwick' Committee have successfully funded and installed a defibrillator, kindly situated at the Co-op food store.

**Grounds Maintenance** – The Council had appointed NWLDC to provide this service on parish land and continue with the 3 year agreement running to 31 March 2019.

**Health and Safety** - Ellis Whittam have been engaged to provide expert advice/support, with guidance on specific areas being received and being implemented on a phased basis.

**Land and Property** - Following transfer from NWLDC and developers, the Parish now owns all parks, recreation grounds and open spaces while Thornborough Road Allotments are leased from Wyggaston's Hospital Charity. A full list of all the sites is included in the Asset Register on the website. The Council is also sole trustee of the King George Fields Charity which covers the Park and part of the Parsonwood Hill Recreation Ground. One area of land was disposed of, following due process and income of £10,155 was received, being set aside for future capital projects.

**Newsletter** – The Council was pleased to support the launch of the new Community Voice magazine and is now regularly providing a full page of monthly news/information to keep you informed about activities and developments.

**Parish Council Notice Board** – This is located on the frontage of the food store, by kind permission of Midlands Co-op Society. Parish council news and community information is also displayed, subject to space being available.

**Parish Charter** - the Parish Manager attended a review meeting of the working group to consider the effectiveness of the adopted NWLDC/Parish Charter.

**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.

During the year, the Council reiterated its objections to two major applications for residential development in the Parish on the Green Wedge off Hall Lane and adjacent to 86 Loughborough Road. These, together with a further application on land adjoining 191 Loughborough Road, are still awaiting determination by NWLDC, which the Parish Council submitted an objection in 2014.

Member of the Parish Council have made representation to the planning inspectorate in the case of planning inquiries pertaining to parish locations.

**Railway Station** – Following survey recommendations, structural repairs have been completed on this historic building owned by the Parish and leased to Whitwick Historical Group.

**Representations to Other Authorities** - We have represented residents' concerns to the appropriate agencies on various issues, including the potential replacement/closure of Hermitage Leisure Centre and traffic/parking issues, particularly when obstructing pavements and damaging grass verges.

Local residents who attend Parish Council meetings to provide their views on contentious local issues are a hugely valuable source of information both to the Council and when we make representations to other bodies. Local residents are urged to attend all Parish Council meetings to make their voices heard during public questions and answers.

**Street Environment** - A County Council licence was finally obtained which allowed flower boxes to be provided at all village entrance signs last summer.

Planters have been in situ now for over a year the Parish Council hope that measures such as this are appreciated by local residents. We would very much welcome your views.

## **FUTURE WORK**

**Allotment Management – George Street** - The Council will be discussing options for introducing a level of self-management with allotment holders at both the George Street location, to be renamed Walkers Flats.

**Directory of Services** – The Council is committed to further develop work on this directory to be made available both in hard copy and on the website, inviting local groups to submit their information for inclusion.

**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.

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

**CONCLUSION:** As Chairman for the year 2016/17 I am minded to mention what a great privilege it is to lead the Parish Council in a civic capacity. Aside from chairing full council meetings and providing a casting vote in the case of a tied decision, something I am delighted to report that I have not had to use, the Chairman of the Parish Council does not have any powers over and above any other councillor.

It is, however, a huge honour to be able to represent the parish at formal events, not least when laying a poppy wreath on behalf of the residents of Whitwick on Remembrance Sunday.

Perhaps the most memorable event of the past year, not least for those residents directly affected, was the flooding that took place last June. On what was one of the worst days in recent memory for many residents of our village I was struck by how agencies and local people pulled together in a time of emergency to support each other in seeking to make a traumatic experience marginally more bearable for those who suffered on that day. It really did show what a special place Whitwick and its people are.

I firmly believe that the honour and privilege of being civic lead should be something experienced by as many councillors as possible and accordingly will pass on the formal ribbon of office at the Parish Council Annual General Meeting to one of the many other community activists that make up your parish council. I trust that my successor will enjoy their year of office as much as I have.

Sadly, due to appearing in a local theatre production, I will be unable to be present at our annual residents meeting. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all parish councillors for their support over the past year and in particular Cllr Ray Woodward, Whitwick Parish Council's former chairman and current vice-chair for his counsel over the past year.

***Councillor Leon Spence***

Chairman of the Parish Council