



Website: www.whitwickpc.org.uk

ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

Parish Council Elections - All 11 seats on the Parish Council came up for election in May 2015. For the first time, the Parish was divided into wards: Broom Leys - 2 councillors; Holly Hayes - 3 councillors; Hermitage - 3 councillors and Thornborough - 3 councillors. A total of 14 candidates stood with elections in Broom Leys, Hermitage and Holly Hayes Wards with 4 candidates each. Thornborough had only 2 candidates leaving a vacancy filled by co-option.

Councillors - Parish councillors give their time freely – they do not receive allowances and none have claimed any expenses. Since the elections, there has been one resignation in the Broom Leys Ward subsequently filled by co-option. Contact details for all councillors are given on the Council's website

Meetings - The Parish Council held 10 ordinary meetings and 2 special meetings in 2015/16. Meetings are open to the press and public and commence with a public question and answer session. Meetings were held at St John the Baptist C of E School, Parsonwood Hill, but in future will be at Whitwick Park Hall. Whitwick residents are always welcome to attend.

Finance - The Council's precept for 2015/16 was £?????. The Council banks with Unity Trust. The opening balance at 1 April 2014 was £25,039. During the year, income totalled £359,931 with expenditure of £300,174 giving a closing balance at 31 March 2016 of £84,796. This includes amounts reserved for contingencies, elections (casual vacancies and 2019 full council). 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 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. 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).

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 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 retained the services of Phil and Lorraine Ellis who both have excellent qualifications, extensive public sector experience and had each previously clerked parish councils. Lorraine holds the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA). Their current fixed term contracts were extended pending appointment of a new Parish Manager.

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

(a) Priority Projects

Workout in Whitwick in Whitwick Park - A new outdoor fitness 'green gym' comprising two different areas – a fitness trail for children and a fitness zone for over 14s - which provide equipment for all ages and abilities including people with disabilities.

After consultation to establish public support, the Council delivered this project worth nearly £32,000 at no cost to local taxpayers by utilising 'Section 106' planning gain money topped up by a further £10,000 grant under North West Leics District Council's '£20,000 for 7' awards which were decided by a public vote and where we came as a 'highly commended' runner up.

This inter-generational project aims to get the whole family active. Provision of a free fresh air green gym gives everyone the opportunity to be more active more often without having to pay expensive gym fees. It's our local contribution to the NHS Change4Life agenda.

Whitwick Community Office - This new facility has been created by converting the former public conveniences in Market Place. The premises, which had stood boarded up for many years, were gifted to the Parish Council by North West Leics District Council and successful grant applications to the National Lottery's Awards for All (£10,000); Leics County Council's Community Solutions (£10,000) and Central Midlands Co-operative Dividend Fund (£728) funded most of the works. NWLDC also donated some surplus furniture.

Having considered a range of options for providing office premises, this conversion was identified as the only practical, affordable and achievable one and followed a visit to see what had been achieved in a similar conversion project by Woodville Parish Council. There is no requirement for a loan or rental of the building to minimise running costs while conversion costs have been kept to a minimum.

The Community Office is ground breaking for Whitwick, establishing our first local public service access point while also regenerating this prominent site in the village centre. The Parish Council intends that it will develop 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 - Following consultations with Leics CC, NWLDC and a number of local groups, this project was agreed to refurbish, refurnish and reopen a modern building that had been standing empty for over a year to provide a multi-purpose community space. This former youth club building reverted to the Parish Council as landowner under the terms of a lease when the long-serving volunteer trustees decided to retire. They also donated £3,100 which was earmarked for the improvement and maintenance of the building.

It was agreed that retaining a building for the sole use by one group was not financially viable, nor did it make best use of a valuable resource for the community. Planning permission for extended use was obtained and a premises licence applied for. The Council is grateful to students from

Stephenson College who carried out the majority of the refurbishment work on a voluntary basis as their community project for the academic year which was a considerable help to minimise costs.

The Community Hall will be available for hire and also to provide a venue to encourage volunteering and setting up new groups so local people can help each other.

(b) Other Work

Big Dig - the Council supported Charnwood Roots in this project to uncover the history of the village by making sites available for excavation.

Chairman's Pendant - thanks to Midland Quarry Products for funding a pendant to be worn by the Chairman at meetings and on civic occasions

Community Grants - This scheme was suspended for 2015/16 due to budget pressures.

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. 16 local volunteers have registered as volunteer litter pickers.

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

Grounds Maintenance - the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) were engaged to undertake a full survey and options appraisal to see if there are ways of carrying out this work more economically. As a result, we were able to negotiate a reduced price with NWLDC and have entered into a further 3 year agreement running to 31 March 2019.

Health and Safety - Ellis Whittam have been engaged to provide expert advice/support.

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 Wyggeston'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.

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

Parish Charter - the Clerk was an active member of a working group which drafted a new NWLDC/Parish Charter which has now been adopted.

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.

Railway Station - a building condition survey was commissioned for this historic building owned by the Parish and let to Whitwick Historical Group.

Representations to Other Authorities - We have represented residents' concerns to the appropriate agencies on various issues, including relocation of the Post Office, Boundary Commission Review of County Electoral Divisions, National Forest tree planting to the rear of Hermitage Road and off Green Lane and traffic and parking issues.

Staffing - A recruitment exercise to appoint a new Parish Manager in the Autumn did not come up with a suitable candidate. The post was re-advertised in the New Year attracting 17 applications of which 6 were short listed for interview. Mr Mike Broad was appointed and took up his duties in April 2016. On behalf of myself and the Council, I wish to record our sincere thanks to the retiring clerks for their creativity and dedication to their work and achievements from creation of the PC to date.

Street Environment - A County Council licence was finally obtained which will allow flower boxes to be provided at all village entrance signs in 2016.

VJ Day - The Council supported a service to mark the 70th Anniversary of the end of World War II held at St John the Baptist Parish Church, Whitwick.

Whitwick Park - there were problems during the year with vandalism to the toilets and overnight parking.

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.

Community Office/Park Hall - It is intended that these new community facilities will be harnessed to unlock community capacity in Whitwick. To this end, the Parish Council is delighted to have already been selected by the County Council for a pilot project relating to adult social care.

Defibrillator - the 'Woodstock in Whitwick' Committee have voted funding to allow a defibrillator to be provided at the new Co-op food store.

Directory of Services – the Council is committed to producing this directory to be made available both in hard copy and on the website.

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.

Website – the Council will be developing a new website which will be a more holistic one focussed on the Whitwick community rather than specifically on the Parish Council

Ray Woodward

Chairman of the Parish Council