



Website: www.whitwickpc.org.uk

ANNUAL REPORT 2013/14

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. Councillor Derek Howe was admitted as the first Honorary Freeman of the Parish to mark 40 years service as a Whitwick councillor.

Meetings

The Parish Council held 8 ordinary meetings and one special meeting in 2013/14, 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 decided to freeze the precept at the same level for 2013/14. The Council banks with HSBC. The opening balance at 1 April 2013 was £27,661. During the year, income totalled £33,920 with expenditure of £27,064 giving a closing balance at 31 March 2014 of £34,517. This includes amounts reserved for contingencies, elections (casual vacancies and 2015) and legal fees. A more detailed balance sheet is available to view on the Financial Information page of the website.

Community Grants

In 2013/14, the Parish Council budgeted £1,500 to support its scheme for making small community grants. Grants of £250 were made to Party in the Park, Woodstock in Whitwick and Whitwick Scarecrow Festival. Our Small Grants Policy and application form are available on the website. The Council received a grant of £1,305 from Leics. CC in respect of the Community Survey.

Policies and Procedures

The Council has adopted a Code of Conduct for Members, Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Risk Assessment, Asset Register, Freedom of Information

Publication Scheme, Media Policy, Disability Discrimination Policy, Complaints Procedure, Community Grants Policy, Health and Safety Policy, Protocol for Conduct of Chairman and Staff Disciplinary & Grievance Procedures (all reviewed annually and are 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) and the Leicestershire & Rutland Playing Fields Association. The Clerk is a member of the Society of Local Council Clerks.

Community Policing

Our local Safer Neighbourhoods Team are invited to attend each meeting to have a dialogue with the Parish Council on community policing issues.

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 Core Strategy (to be renamed the Local Plan).

Although a judicial review dismissed the developer's case regarding building on the Green Wedge, the subsequent withdrawal of the District Council's Core Strategy has again raised fears that further development proposals might be forthcoming. We would again like to thank Whitwick Action Group and all local residents for ensuring that no-one from local to national level has been left in any doubt as to the scale of local opposition to any such proposals.

Website

The Parish Council has its own website which is regularly updated including news, agenda and minutes and 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. Their fixed term contracts run until 30 September 2014. Lorraine holds the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA).

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

Community Survey - With support from a County Council Big Society Grant, the Parish Council commissioned the Rural Community Council to undertake a community opinion survey to determine local priorities. The results will help guide councillors in their future decisions on spending and priorities.

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

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.

Grit Bins - The Parish Council financed one replacement bin and has identified sites for 3 new bins and a further replacement in the coming year subject to County Council approval.

Play Equipment - The Parish Council is looking for opportunities to spend 'Section 106' contributions made by developers for the specific purpose of providing new play equipment. A proposal to site children's outdoor gym exercise equipment in Parsonwood Hill Recreation Ground was withdrawn following objections from local residents.

Real Poppy Campaign – the Council supported the campaign to plant poppies to mark the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War in 2014 by purchasing 100 packs of seeds which were distributed to residents at Party in the Park.

Representations to Other Authorities

We have represented residents' concerns to the County and District Councils on various issues, including speeding traffic on Loughborough Road, parking issues around Parsonwood Hill school, introduction of part-night street lighting; proposed Market Place pedestrian crossing; winter gritting, street cleanliness and dog fouling.

The Council made a robust objection to proposals by the Local Government Boundary Commission to introduce electoral wards for future parish elections. Nonetheless, these have now been submitted for Parliamentary approval which will see Whitwick split between three and a half wards – the top end of Hall Lane being included with the unparished Broom Leys area.

Staffing - A working party has been appointed to review the Council's future staffing requirements. This has visited several larger parishes to benefit from their experience.

Street Environment - A working party has been appointed to look 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. Costed proposals will be brought back to the Council for consideration in due course.

War Memorial - The Parish Council is planning to mark the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War by having the War Memorial professionally cleaned. Maintaining the Memorial scored highly in the recent Parish Survey. An application has been made for a County Council Historic Buildings Grant towards the cost and the permission of the Diocese is being sought before the work can go ahead.

FUTURE WORK

Negotiations with NWLDC to secure the **transfer of all parks, recreation grounds and open spaces** into parish council ownership have been protracted. However, progress is being made and we hope that the transfer will be completed in 2014/15. This would mean that from April 2015 maintenance costs will be met by the Parish Council from its precept rather than by NWLDC as a special expense.

The Council has decided not to seek the transfer of Whitwick Cemetery at the present time but has established liaison arrangements with NWLDC.

The Council is talking to both the County and District Councils regarding **future service delivery** in the Parish as both are looking to reduce the services they provide to meet Government savings targets.

The Council has an aspiration to qualify for '**Quality Parish Council**' status. A new scheme is to be launched later in 2014 when we will review its relevance and achievability.

The Council also has an aspiration to establish its own **office**.

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

Ray Woodward

Chairman of the Parish Council

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