

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – 2019/2020

This has been my sixth year as Chairman of Witherley Parish Council. The ever changing responsibilities of the Council certainly keeps the role both challenging and rewarding. My thanks must go to Cllr. Mark Simpson, Vice-Chairman for the past three years, for all his help and support.

We like to think that this Parish Council is value for money and we're ever mindful of the fact that what we spend is public money. However, despite the 5% increase in the annual precept that we agreed this year, our Parish still has the lowest council tax in the Borough.

So what have we spent your money on? This past year has seen children in Ratcliffe Culey benefitting from new playground equipment which has been installed at a cost of £26,000. Part of the cost was met by a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund and from funds the Council receives from the Ratcliffe Solar Farm.

We've paid for clearing Witherley Brook. No mean feat considering the hoops we had to go through to be granted a licence by the Environment Agency. We've continued to pressure them, Severn Trent and the Lead Local Flood Authority to get a grip on the flooding issues that have plagued the village for so long, and we'll continue to do so.

Funded by this Council, our Parish now has its own dedicated pages on the Leicestershire & Rutland 'NatureSpot' website. It's a wonderful resource for identifying local wildlife and where residents can submit their own sightings. The Parish has also benefitted from the generous donation by a local business to fund an ecological and wildlife survey by ecologist Dave Nicholls.

We've already taken on responsibility for services previously provided by the County Council where it's practical and we can improve the quality of the service by having direct control over the contractors. Mowing the grass verges is a good example. However, the proposal this past year for parish councils to undertake various minor highways maintenance works on the County Council's behalf has not been something we could support without adequate compensation and not placing an undue burden on Councillors.

We're very lucky to have such active and supportive Borough and County Councillors, Kevin Morrel and Ivan Ould. I must thank them both for their steadfast support and numerous interventions on our behalf. Working with them and the police in coordinated action resulted in travellers moving on in a much shorter timescale than experienced elsewhere in the Borough.

However, some battles we haven't won. We've been prevented from installing a path in front of Fenny Drayton Church and along part of Kennel Lane, Witherley, demonstrating that, sometimes, it appears the County Council isn't always on our side.

I'm pleased to report that all our settlements now benefit from a dedicated Tree Warden and my thanks to Councillors Liggins and Flude and parishioners Roger Laine and Mick Humble for taking on this role and for undertaking the necessary training.

And we have a new Flood Warden in Witherley, Tony Carter who has picked up the baton from Derek Walker who has retired. Thank you Derek for your many years' dedication to the role.

This past year we've developed a Community Resilience Plan which has been tested during the coronavirus emergency. And I'd like to pay tribute to all the parishioners who have come forward to volunteer to help their neighbours during this challenging time. On behalf of the Council, thank you. Regrettably, one casualty of Covid-19 has been the great Parish tradition – the Annual Lane Setting and we hope it will be back next year.

Finally, it's just over three years since the Parish Council embarked on the long road to create a Neighbourhood Development Plan. It's proved a fascinating and challenging project for all those many volunteers involved and we're very grateful for their hard work. It has been a real community endeavour and we believe we now have a clear road map to complete it this year.

Witherley Parish Council has achieved much over the past twelve months but none of it would be possible without the dedication and commitment of our Parish Clerk, Anji Forsyth and I congratulate her on achieving her 'Certificate in Local Council Administration'.

We've also been fortunate to have had a group of committed councillors who have been prepared to give their free time for this voluntary role. Thanks to their enthusiasm, humour, determination and a passion for the place where we live, this has been a year of achievements for your Council.

It has been an honour and a privilege to have served as Council Chairman this past year. I believe that our actions have had a continued positive impact on the Parish and will continue to do so in future years.

Cllr Brian Conway
Chairman of Witherley Parish Council