

WITHERSFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – MAY 2025

For a second year, the threat of the **Acorn Biodigester proposal** at Spring Grove Farm has dominated our thoughts. After long delays, the company finally responded to the Council's questions for further information and clarifications in the autumn and we are now awaiting sight of the planning officer's report to committee. Will Suffolk County Council support the huge weight of evidence against the proposal and recommend refusal? The Parish Council will be attending the Planning Committee (in June) and will once again argue our case forcefully.

Unlike our previous MP Matt Hancoick, newly elected Nick Timothy has pledged his support. The Parish Council met with Nick to discuss next steps. He has launched an on-line petition.

Our **Neighbourhood Plan** has now completed its drafting stage and we await confirmation from West Suffolk Council of when the referendum will take place. This has been a long drawn out process, but hopefully coming to a favourable conclusion soon. The plan seeks to strengthen our defence against inappropriate developments in the village and wider parish, ensure Withersfield retains its unique rural characteristics and is not swallowed up by an expanding Haverhill.

Thanks to the somewhat smaller number of volunteers who joined us at the beginning of April to help out with the **annual village Spring Clean**. As ever a mixed array of discarded items and detritus were cleared – bags full of the usual fast food packaging, cans, bottles, car tyres and discarded Road Closure signs left behind by highways contractors.

Remembrance Day saw a fine gathering of parishioners at the war memorial. I was pleased to once again be able to lay a wreath on behalf of the Parish. Each year there are less of our neighbours still with us who were alive during the war. However, Withersfield continues to honour all those who have served to protect our freedoms.

Frank Eve (vice chair) has continued to work tirelessly on seeking solutions to the traffic problems we face in the village. We have approved spending money on reinstating the white gates at each road entering the village. Whilst somewhat short of our desire to see a 20mph zone through the village, this is part of demonstrating that we have used all available means to try to reduce speeds, before Suffolk County Council will agree to the 20mph zone.

We have conducted an on-line survey to get your views on future priorities. Frank Eve will be reporting the findings in detail at the Annual Parish Meeting. However, the survey confirmed interest in developing a children's playground in the village. I'm pleased to say that we have now engaged a consultant to assist us in drawing up a plan and to advise us on funding options. The Thurlow Estate have agreed that we can locate the playground on the village green close to the village Hall. We will need a Project group to steer this important project through. Are you interested in getting involved? Please get in touch and we can discuss next steps.

Parking on our village greens has been a nagging issue over the last year. Of course, parking is not allowed and is mentioned in a lease for the village greens from Thurlow Estate. There is little we can do to prevent it, except through polite discouragement. However we have ordered some No Parking of the Village Green signs and will be arranging for them to be put up on both Town Green – near the War Memorial and the corner with Church Street, and on Burton Green near the corner with Thurlow Road.

The Parish Council has only limited powers and duties and aims to avoid getting involved in areas that are not in its remit. However, expectations of us vary greatly – some expect us to act instantly to deal with a matter that bugs them. Others are ready to cry foul at the first sign of the Parish Council straying beyond strict limits. To try to assist in managing this and in being open and transparent with residents we have drawn up a Guide to role and responsibilities of the Parish Council and its Chair. This is available on our Web site or by email on request.

The Parish Council continues to work to be **open and transparent**, this includes regular reports in the Parish Magazine, and more information about how we spend the money that we manage on your behalf. Our partnership with the Parish Church to produce the Parish Magazine is now in its 7th year and it continues to be fully self-financing through advertising. Thanks to editor, Elaine McInnes-Rich and to Stella Eve who marshals the team of volunteers who deliver it to every home in the parish 6 times a year. We also continue to publish formal business and records on the Parish Council website: www//withersfield/onesuffolk.net

Attached to this report is a summary of our income and expenditure over the last year and our draft **budget for the year ahead**. The Parish Council's budget comes from a small proportion of the money that we all pay in Council Tax. Our budget is small, but as Councillors we appreciate that we have a duty to use your money well. We hope that we provide value for money but welcome your comments and suggestions for areas that need our attention.

This year we have created some reserves of money set aside for particular improvements and projects. This includes a sum to fund traffic calming, money towards developing a children's play area and money that can be used to fund emerging projects.

We are keen to hear from you on what you think should be our priorities in the year to come. Are there things that you would like to see happen in Withersfield that would benefit you and your family's quality of life.? Please do get in touch and let us know.

We have welcomed new Parish Councillor Patricia Mallalieu from Church Street to our number, and we still seek one more person to fill our last vacancy. If you might be interested, please get in touch.

Thanks go to Cllr Bobby Bennett our County Councillor and Cllr Indy Wijanayaka our West Suffolk District Councillor for their support over the past year.

Also, last but by no means least, thanks to Laura Crump our **Parish Clerk** since 2019.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Terry Rich', is written on a light blue background.

Terry Rich Chair, Withersfield Parish Council May 2025