

Annual Parish Meeting May 21st, 2024, Chairman's report.

Ladies and gentlemen welcome to the Annual Parish Meeting of Westhorpe Parish Council may I first of all thank Mark Eggleton as Parish Clerk for all his work on our behalf this past year, having had a short period without a clerk I can say how much he is appreciated.

Thank you too to all the Parish Councillors for their commitment and support over the past year.

We have had 5 meetings during the year including the one immediately after the 2023 Annual Parish Meeting.

The dominating issue over the last year has been the problem of flooding Storm Babet on Friday October 20th 2023 produced almost three inches of rain in around 36 hours this event produced around a million tons of rainfall over Westhorpe in this short period. I produced a report on December 5th the problem was in the main rainfall working its way down the road from Wynwood Cottage to the west it collected outside Fleural Cottage but worse flooded Pheasant Cottage and Paigles.

The middle of the village just about coped but as we all know the village green was flooded with an electric car remained stationary in the road for four days causing considerable inconvenience and damage to the village green.

The Old Cottage suffered sewage back filling into the garden due to being the lowest point. The area outside the Old Crown was flooded.

We took what action we could as a Parish Council opening up blocked gulleys which in the past had been mechanically cleared, I met a representative from Anglia Water with Terry Kempley and the suggestion was a non-returnable valve might help his problem. Our actions eased the problem but reality the level of rainfall in such a short period was unprecedented.

As a result I met Andrew Moore of Suffolk County Council Highways on Monday February 26th 2024 we looked at all the problems but I had to understand that there were other communities much worse effected than Westhorpe.

Clearing gulleys to the west of the village helped reduce the rainfall coming down the street but the central problem is over the years the road side ditches have been filled in without adequate pipes hence much rainfall flows down the village to enter the large pipe east of Pheasant Cottage.

We used drainage rods to help clear the drain outside the Old Crown this may have helped, the level of flooding on the village green will continue to be a problem, I will endeavour to clear the area in front of Fiddlesticks before the autumn.

The Speed Indicator Device has thanks to Richard Brown been in use for much of the time but the batteries proved totally inadequate for the task and thanks to support from Andy Mellon's Locality Fund we have a solar panel charged battery to improve the situation.

The problem of maintenance to the power lines remains a problem despite several emails and letter the overhanging branches are still causing a problem and I know power was lost recently at Church

Farm and Kells House and the engineers report stated that branches need to be removed to prevent future power cuts.

On power the Parish Council commented on the proposed National Grid Power line from Norwich to Tilbury.

We are pleased to welcome the Rural Coffee Caravan to Westhorpe on several occasions during the past year, this is a superb local charity and I am pleased the Westhorpe Trust has been able to support it. A donation well received.

We have been able to reduce the insurance cost by switching to the Zurich a welcome saving.

I would like to thank Andy Mellon for his support and regular attendance at Parish Council meetings I would like to place on record our thanks to him for the £250 `Pride in Your Place` Grant to date the village sign thanks to Steve Christian has been repainted, the three Westhorpe Signs on the entrance to the village have all had attention and the village seats at the village hall will soon be revarnished. I have a seat to replace each one when taken away.

May I also thank Steven Rooney for taking on the task of operating and improving the village website and thanks to the Westhorpe Trust for jointly funding the work.

We commented upon the Bacton Middle School planning application, discussed the application regarding Shepherd's Grove at Walsham Le Willows and also commented upon the proposed improvements to the A 140 at Stoke Ash.

Recently a company named Gigaclear has contacted some residents seeking permission for a modest payment to dig up their drives to install a fibre optic duct, they also contacted me as owner of the village green to which they received a firm refusal in the absence of any explanation of their intentions, there is already a cable running where they suggested after a open and transparent discussion with Openreach, I have asked Trading Standards to investigate the company.

Finally some very good news I do not want to steal Clive Mee's report but first of all thank you to everyone involved in the church yard maintenance and a huge thanks to Clive and Rosemary, Penny Simmonds, Ian Jackson and Haydn Simpson remarkably the church bells are back with additions and I know Clive will emphasise this but this would not have happened without the huge effort of many residents, yes the lottery have been fantastic but the primary funding came from the parish.

We look forward to Bishop Martin Seeley attending a service of dedication on Wednesday September 4th.