

## **Parish Council Report - Annual Parish Meeting 2026**

### **Paul Sharples - Chairman Swilland & Winesham Grouped Parish Council**

**The road goes ever on...**with a nod to J.R.R. Tolkien for those who know the adventure of Frodo and Samwise.

#### **Introduction**

It has been both an interesting and challenging time since I stepped into the role as Chair just over twelve months ago. Getting a better understanding of all the things going on in the community has been a major eye-opener. I am both surprised and pleased with just how much we have done – even with the many frustrations we have encountered.

I look forward to another year of challenges that we can rise to.

#### **Stop The Quarry**

It was heartening to hear that following the major efforts by everyone and in particular the STQ Campaign group, Suffolk County Council received the highest ever number of objections to a development proposal totaling around 2000 individual submissions. Well done everyone!

The PC has provided financial support, helped initiate the campaign and are still involved. It now has excellent leadership-there is stunning expertise in our community. TRU will not give up - so community fund-raising may be needed to pay lawyers.

This has recently gone a little quiet, however in the last few days TRU have submitted a Regulation 25 response to Suffolk County Council which the STQ team are reviewing. Due to upcoming local elections, a public re-consultation won't be happening until after 7<sup>th</sup> May. Those who are interested should visit [www.stopthequarry.info](http://www.stopthequarry.info) to keep up with events. This will most likely mean that another round of objections will need to be submitted following the re-consultation.

#### **Finance**

Times have changed with the PC finances.

The result of increasing local house building has meant that the PC has received over £100,000 in funding as a result of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) on new builds. This amounts to 10% of the total, the lions share going to Suffolk County Council. If a Neighbourhood Plan had been produced like other villages, then it would have been around 50% higher, however repeated invitations to residents to participate have stimulated little or no engagement. There are strict restrictions on how this money can be used, the prime one being that it cannot be used for day-to-day expenditure, general maintenance, salaries, insurance, audit fees etc. We welcome ideas from the community for projects where contributions from this fund could be applied.

Day-to-day expenditure has to be covered almost entirely by the income from the precept, which amounts to around £2 per week per household. Unlike the past where we were able

## **Parish Council Report - Annual Parish Meeting 2026**

to budget to contribute to reserves without precept increases, in recent years we have needed to increase our precept request by around 5% per household.

### **Planning**

After being refused by East Suffolk Council, the Street Farm development for 20 dwellings has been allowed on appeal and preliminary works have begun.

Issues have continued with the Wittens Way development, the latest being the improper felling of trees by contractors near the Barley Mow preparing for the installation of a roadside footway.

East Suffolk Council has started work on the next edition of the Local Plan and in March announced the eight sites that have been put forward by landowners for future development. These can be found on the council web site.

### **Highways & Footpaths**

Referring back to the title of my report, highways over the last year has been a very prominent subject with a lengthy road closure and our roads still suffering from ongoing deterioration with many more potholes. It appears rather shameful too that Suffolk Highways continue to ignore issues for example the incorrect temporary speed limit signage near to Fynn Valley Golf Club.

The closure of the B1077 between Westerfield railway station and the Colchester/Valley Road Ipswich ring-road caused many concerns with originally a proposed closure that would have started last August and ended in January. With very strong objections followed by consultations with Suffolk County Council, Ipswich Borough Council, and Bellway the developer, the duration of the closure was vastly reduced, Changes to Bellway's plans as a result of our discussions permitted a change from full road closure to single lane working under traffic lights for a good deal of the period.

The discussions covered many matters including diversions for buses and communication with the emergency services to ensure full awareness of the closures meaning that in an emergency the response vehicles would be directed to a route away from Westerfield Road to avoid unnecessary delays.

We remain active participants in SAVID (PCs working together on Safer Village Driving) being conscientiously represented by Andy Dungey. The portable Speed Indicator Devices continue to appear regularly, fitted by Andy, to encourage drivers to drive within the 30mph limit on the B1077 and through Swilland. Most residents will no doubt be unaware that the sign changes from green to red if 30mph is exceeded! It is astounding that the highest speed registered in Swilland near to the Moon and Mushroom exceeded 60mph!

A slight disruption in Swilland will occur in the next few weeks whilst Suffolk Highways repaint the zig-zag lines outside the school to make it clearer that vehicles should not be stopping there during the hours of 08:00 and 16:30 Monday to Friday.

## **Parish Council Report - Annual Parish Meeting 2026**

### **Bus Shelters**

In collaboration with SCC, and thanks to financial support from Elaine and Dan our County & District Councillors respectively we were able to replace the two old brick shelters that certain unsavoury members of our community failed to comprehend their purpose, with three modern glass ones with seats. Like the others in the village all three new ones are now maintained by SCC, releasing the PC from the financial liability. Thanks to PC Members David Roots and Tim Burrows for demolishing and clearing the old ones. It would be helpful if residents and local organisations could help to keep the new ones pristine by desisting from fly-posting. I suspect most would be surprised when they learn of the worst culprits.

### **Phone Box Book Exchanges**

We replaced the box that was subject to an arson attack 2 years ago and thanks to the brilliant work of local volunteer Matt Johnson and a donation from our ESC Councillor Dan refurbished the second one near Burwash. Matt also built new shelving for both. Both are well used and kept tidy by brilliant volunteers (Maureen, Caroline and Liz). Unfortunately there are still some individuals who seem to mistake them for recycling bins and leave boxes and bags of books and other rubbish on the ground despite notices asking users to keep them tidy. It would also be helpful if residents could remove such items if they see them when passing.

### **Allotments**

Due to lack of maintenance on some of our Coopers Close allotments – some brambles were over 3m high! – the PC were forced to take drastic action and give notice to tenants in order that we could get them cleared – thanks to Mr David Roots – and then re-open them. One plot was retained as grass and will have some seating provided thanks to a donation from Elaine our County Councillor. This area already has some mature fruit trees and creates a central area where plot holders can gather and children play. The rather wet winter will have caused some rather soggy plots but hopefully with warmer weather approaching, it will turn into a productive and enjoyable environment for those who love the facilities.

### **Playing Field and Car Park**

The potential plans shared last year are under review, however the transfer of the freehold of part of the playing field from SCC is near completion. Things have moved on with the pre-school moving to Otley meaning that financial sustainability is a major concern. It would still be great to hear about any ideas that the community may have for potential developments that could contribute and support our already great villages.

### **Witnesham Village Hall**

Approaching £30,000 of the CIL funds together with a contribution from Witnesham Parish Church have been used to provide a new surface for the Car Park replacing the array of holes and puddles with a smooth, self-draining tarmac surface with marked out parking slots. Much of the damage to the Car Park was caused by turning HGVs. Signage is in place to discourage them and should this fail, a form of physical barrier will need to be

## **Parish Council Report - Annual Parish Meeting 2026**

installed. In addition new extensive damp protection has been installed in the corner of the Hall that it seems 'has always been damp' and the resulting area of the damaged floor reinstated.

Without the significant effort and actions of Richard Nicol the above work would never have got off the ground – let alone be completed and I specifically thank him for the many personal hours he put in to get this completed.

The Hall management itself is severely financially challenged, largely due to extortionate heating costs and reduced bookings. The PC will continue to assist the dedicated Trustees where it can by looking into more efficient heating for example but there needs to be more help and certainly more bookings. If you are thinking of an event you'd like to organize e.g. fund raising, sale, music evening or are keen on sharing a passion or skill with others why not give it a go?

### **Communications**

All Parish Council and committee minutes and financial records are available on the Council website <http://swillandandwitnesham-pc.gov.uk>. All meetings are open to the public. Parish council meetings mostly take place in the Village Hall.

In addition, our Clerk holds an email distribution list of parishioners who have agreed to receive notices, event news, etc. and we make use of the Witnesham Community group on Facebook.

A paper archive of past meetings and Parish Council documents going back 50 years at least is kept in the Village Hall.

### **The Future**

A major local government reorganization has recently taken place creating three unitary councils for our area – we expect it to create more problems than a single council would have done. This new structure is highly likely to result in the Northern By-pass coming up again. The Ipswich MP does not stop talking about it rather than truly representing the opinions of the affected Parish Councils. We believe it will not solve traffic problems in Ipswich. It is such a shame our own MP is not as vocal!

### **Thanks**

Once again, I am most grateful too for the help and support from our County Councillor Elaine Bryce, and District Councillors Dan Clery.

I am particularly grateful for our very efficient Parish Clerk Alison Burrows who, as I've already mentioned, is proficient at keeping us in order.

I conclude by thanking our Parish Councillors, all of whom are volunteers and give up their time to help the community. They bring a vast range of experience, expertise and specialism to the Council. Their individual contributions are many, various and usually unsung. I am grateful to them all.

## **Parish Council Report - Annual Parish Meeting 2026**

As mentioned at the start we have achieved plenty but we could do more with all of our vacancies filled. The Parish Council currently has four positions vacant and we would gladly welcome fresh contributions from new members, so if you want to make a difference, or know of people who do, please talk to me at the end of the meeting or get in touch with our Parish Clerk.

Paul Sharples  
Chairman Swilland & Witnesham Grouped Parish Council.  
22<sup>nd</sup> April 2026