

# Whatton-in-the-Vale Parish Council – Chairman's Annual Report 2007/8

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## Welcome

Welcome to the Annual Parish Meeting, we are required by law to hold a Parish Meeting each year. It is not a Parish Council meeting, but by convention the Chairman of the Parish Council chairs the meeting. Anyone is welcome to attend the meeting, but only Registered Electors of Whatton-in-the-Vale parish may speak or vote.

You are able to raise any issue or express your views on situations affecting the parish.

Before opening the meeting to the floor it is customary for the Chairman to provide a report of the activities of the Parish Council in the preceding year.

## Introduction

2007/8 was the first year of the new Council and my first year as Chairman, I would like to thank my fellow members for their commitment help and support during the last year. This Parish Council has four new members and they have really had a baptism of fire with all the issues that we had had to deal with. All members deserve a vote of thanks for the work and effort they have put in to their council responsibilities this year.

## Communications

This council recognises the importance of communication, public involvement and transparency in the work of your parish council and have during this year instituted:

- An open session at every meeting where members of the public can voice their concerns or suggestions on issues affecting the Parish.
- A Newsletter to keep residents informed about the work of the Parish Council and issues affecting the Parish.
- We have started on the first steps to becoming a 'Quality' Council.
- For the first time in the history of the Parish Council we have published our budget and the reasoning behind the precept level.

## Precept and Budget

We published the budget and the level of precept in our Newsletter. In the main our total income is derived from the precept, although we have received small grants from Cllrs Suthers and Marshall.

In setting the precept for 2008/9 we had to consider a number of factors:

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- Advice from the District Auditor as to the level of our General Reserve – this should be equal to our annual revenue expenditure which is currently in the region of £8,500. Unfortunately previous Councils had not followed this principle, so we are playing ‘catch-up’ and clearly we can only do that over time. Our budget envisages a General Reserve of £2,500 at the end of 2008/9 compared with a target of £8,500.
- The level of the Playing Field reserve – we are in partnership with Aslockton Parish Council in respect of the Playing Field. Unfortunately previous councils have not maintained the same level of provisioning that our partners Aslockton Parish Council have so again we are playing ‘catch-up’. At the end of 2008/9 will anticipate a Playing Fields Reserve of £5,500, against a target of £7,000.
- The need for a Capital Reserve – there has been no provision made in the past to build a Capital Reserve to all the Parish Council to react to the Parishes needs. We have made a small step in this year’s budget by allocating £500 to this reserve.
- The need to maintain and improve services to our residents.

In order to meet these requirements the precept for 2008/9 was set at £10,855.

We estimate that the precept for this year ranks us 29<sup>th</sup> out of 55 Town and Parish Councils in the Borough (no 1 being the highest cost).

## Planning

The local planning authority is only obliged to ‘take note’ of our comments or objections. We take planning applications very seriously and encourage residents to attend our meetings when planning applications are discussed. Where we object to planning applications we have do so purely on planning issues.

This year has seen a number of significant applications.

- The White Villa
  - After objections from the Parish Council and residents the first application for the White Villa was withdrawn.
  - The second application (May of this year) also received objections from the Parish Council and residents. The current status of that application is pending.
- The Mobile Telephone Mast, whilst not is our Parish (it is actually in Aslockton Parish) it did clearly impact on our residents.
  - Following objections from the Parish Council, other local organisations and residents the application was withdrawn.

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## Playing Field

Previously, the playing fields were managed by one of the Parish Councils in rotation (for three years each). Last year, we agreed with our partners Aslockton Parish Council to introduce a new management structure for the Playing Fields. Day to Day Management and Financial responsibility for the playing fields has been delegated to the Playing Field Committee. The Committee consists of four Parish Council appointed members (two from each Parish Council), an appointed member from each of the sports clubs (W&A Cricket Club, Aslockton Cranmers Junior Football Club, Greyhounds Football Club and Whatton United Football Club) plus four elected members (elected at the AGM).

The Committee submits a budget to both Parish Councils in October of each year for approval. The Committee are charged with maintaining the financial management of the Playing Fields within that budget. The Parish Council contribution is now known in advance of the budget setting process which takes place in January of each year.

After ten years of talking phase one of the play equipment project was completed in April. The cost of phase one was met by a grant from the Big Lottery Fund through the Rushcliffe Play Strategy. Phase Two (the Under 6’s) is now in the process of being costed.

We are currently undertaking some remedial work on the pavilion. Our medium term aim is to replace the existing pavilion over the next two years. We will work with other Groups and organisations in the two parishes to try and provide a facility that benefits the community as a whole.

We will also be looking at providing ‘on-field’ parking to reduce the parking problems on Dark Lane.

## Highways

We continue to press the Highways Authority about the conditions of roads and pavements in the Parish. In particular the condition of Conery Lane and Conery Gardens Roads. We have had limited success with the pavements on Beverleys Avenue and Cottage Avenue.

Thanks to the persistence of Cllr Ernest Parsons, the trees on the edge of Ivy Row have at last been reduced.

We also continue to press the Highways Authority on reinstating the verge and green by Whatton bridge and the junction of Dark Lane and Grantham Road. The exposed wires by the Gas Valve have now been repaired.

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## Grass Cutting

Technically we are only responsible for the Green in front of Ivy Row, the verges are the responsibility of the Highways Authority and the amenity spaces (the areas at the end of Azimnghur Road and Green Walk) are the responsibility of Rushcliffe Borough.

We set-up a programme last year to maintain:

- The Green in front of Ivy Row;
- The Green by Green Walk;
- Verges on Beverley’s Avenue, Cottage Avenue and Green Walk;
- The Green are at the Junction of Dark Lane and Grantham Road;
- The verges at the Junction of Main Street and Grantham Road;
- The verges along Grantham Road to Orston Lane; and
- The verges around the Green in front of Ivy Row.

After some initial hiccups the contract is now running smoothly. We will continue to review the areas to be mowed.

## Footpaths

There have been a number of problems in relation to rights of way in our Parish. The Parish Council do not have many powers in respect of Rights of Way, they are owned and maintained by the Local Highways Authority (Nottinghamshire County Council). The Parish Council will continue to lobby the County Council in respect of the problems in the Parish.

The Parish Council has also resolved to take a more proactive stance in terms of Public Rights of Ways in our Parish:

- Requested a copy of the Definitive Map for PROWs in the parish;
- Will appoint voluntary PROW wardens who will:
  - Survey our PROW network and report to the Parish Council;
  - Monitor on a regular basis the condition of the PROWs and any furniture and report to the Parish Council;
  - Act as a local contact point for PROW problems.
- Ascertain our powers in relation to maintaining PROWs in our Parish; and
- Will maintain regular contact with the appropriate Rights of Way Officer on problems in our PROW Network.