

Withington Parsh Council

Chairman's Report 2024 – 2025

Withington Parish Council has continued an ongoing process of renewal, with a number of significant changes to the make up of the Council and the way we work together in service of our community.

It was a year of changing faces as we wished a fond farewell Sue Green to our long-standing Clerk who, having supported my first year as Chair with sage advice and guidance, decided that 2024 would be her last as Clerk and retired in December. This occasion was marked by a presentation at the close of the meeting. I would like to express my gratitude to Sue, who continued her unofficial support to the Council through the January 25 meeting and beyond as we continued our search for a new Clerk, as well as working with Councillors to help us transfer her knowledge into new ways of working. At the same time, we also wished farewell to Simon Green who provided accountancy support for many years.

We were joined in 2024 by Cllr Mike Viney who has since played a leading role in reviewing playground facilities and interfacing with the 2000 Trees Festival organisers. A new accountant has also been appointed.

The Council held 6 public meetings in Jan, Mar, May, Jul, Sep, Nov as well as on-line meetings to discuss specific matters which included the distribution of responsibilities.

In January it was decided that it would be necessary to increase precept above inflation to ensure that the Council has sufficient funds to cover the increased costs of ongoing commitments, as well as allow for upkeep and replacement of assets. At the same time we initiated a review of roles and responsibilities to ensure we collectively act to reduce the Council's operating costs wherever we are able. In addition, the Council has focused on how fundraising can enable improvements to facilities in our community with multiple lines of enquiry currently being followed which we hope will bring in much needed additional funds in 2025/26.

Our review of the roles and responsibilities of both Councillors and Clerk, was undertaken with a view to ensuring we operate more effectively and make best use of the limited resources with Councillors now sharing responsibility for governance and statutory requirements previously held by the Clerk.

Cllr Cathy Boyce and Cllr Bruno Brenninkmeijer led a review of these duties, ensuring that robust supporting processes are in place. We have developed a more streamlined approach to minutes and introduced an Action Log to ensure close monitoring and management of agreed activities.

The Parish Council and Village Hall Committee (VHC) have worked increasingly closely throughout the year to ensure that we are acting in mutual support. A good example has been the Council enabling VAT to be reclaimed for installation of the new Village Hall flooring, representing a 20% cost saving.

In January, Councillors attended a joint event to promote the Village Hall and to encourage community ideas to improve the use of the Hall and our Jubilee Playing Field. The Council has initiated an audit of existing equipment which will continue into 2025 and set out a schedule of maintenance requirements. Sadly, several incidents of vandalism occurred with several windows smashed in the pavilion, holes dug in the cricket wicket, and a fire in the cricket store. We hope that by improving interest and raising a sense of ownership that such incidents will not be repeated. This has provided the Council with plenty of food for thought and opportunities to consider what improvements and additional features can be made in 2025/26 and beyond.

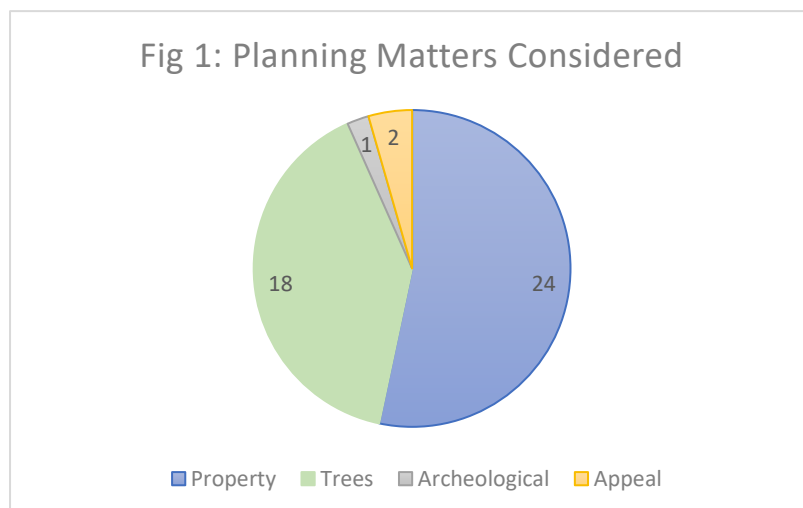
Road closures were a constant theme throughout 2024 with the community's patience repeatedly tested by Thames Water and consequently highlighted in direct discussions between the Parish Council and Gloucestershire Highways. In December the third in a series of Thames Water *emergency* drainage work applications was finally refused on the grounds of the repeated impacts on our community. At the same time residents experienced significant disruption to regular bin collections resulting from poorly implemented changes to long standing rotas. This was compounded by reliability problems associated with the Council's ageing fleet of bin lorries. This required multiple representations from the Council with resident surveys and interventions from County and District Cllrs Paul Hodgkinson and Jeremy Theyer.

Our road safety campaign resulted in further important improvements to the A436 between Seven Springs and Shipton Olliffe with prominent signs erected to highlight the number of serious incidents on this stretch of road. Our efforts to install a Community Speedwatch camera at the Kilkenny junction (led by Cllr Cathy Boyce) looked to have taken a backward step with radio silence on this proposal from Gloucestershire County Council. However, we were later delighted to hear that an important review led to the decision that this approach was inadequate and that instead, in April 2025, this stretch of road

was to become the first non-motorway or dual carriageway in the county to receive average speed watch cameras. I would like to express my gratitude to Cathy for her dedication to achieving these potentially life-saving improvements.

Throughout 2024 the condition of the River Coln has become increasingly concerning, with evidence of record sewage discharges from the Andoversford treatment plant as well as increased levels of pollutants from domestic and agricultural sources. Throughout the year the Council hosted presentations, with Harvey Sherwood of Cotswolds Rivers Trust helping to raise awareness. Cllr Nicky Lowe, together with Margaret Wright have worked hard throughout the year to create The River Guardians volunteer group who began surveying stretches of the Coln. In addition, the Council attended a visit to the Andoversford treatment site. The Parish Council submitted representations to OFWAT expressing concerns at the levels of pollution (amongst the highest in England) and objecting to Thames Water's lack of planned investment in this facility. Our appeal and associated evidence resulted in a reversal of this stance with funds being allocated to upgrade treatment capability in the near future.

The total number of planning matters handled by the Parish Council in 2024/25



more than doubled that in 2023/24 (21), with 45 matters of various categories being considered (see fig 1 and Appendix A). This represented a significantly increased workload for Councillors as well as cost increases attributed to the Parish

Clerk's duties, which represent a significant proportion of the Council's budget.

A separate report on trees will be submitted by Cllr Bruno Brenninkmeijer.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude for the hard work of all Councillors who have worked hard behind the scenes and to fill the gaps left while we searched for a new Clerk.

Dr David Craig
Chair Withington Parish Council

Appendix A

WITHINGTON PARISH COUNCIL - PLANNING APPLICATIONS 2024/2025

Workshop demolition and erection 1 bed dwelling, Lovat Cottage - 28 March	FUL
Barn conversion, Fulford - 9 April	FUL
Trees, Manor Hall - 10 April	TCONR
Design compliance and erection of rear extension, Withington Court -12 April	LBC/FUL
Repairs barn and rebuilding of wall, The Old Rectory - 16 May	LBC
Erection of garden room, office, Dovecote House, Foxcote - 17 May	FUL
Trees, Jubilee Cottage - 26 April	TCONR
Trees, Manor Hall - 31 May	TCONR
Greenhouse replacement, The Close - 13 June	FUL
Trees, Manor Hall - 13 June	TCONR
Extension, The Old Rectory - 24 June	LBC
Extension (variation), The Old Rectory - 26 June	FUL
Trees, Manor Hall - 26 June	TCONR
Extension of conservatory, 17 Brassington Gardens - 22 July	FUL
Trees, Manor Hall - 14 August	TCONR
Variation of plans, Fulford - 10 September	FUL
Trees, Maple House - 11 September	TCONR
Rebuild retaining wall to Churchyard boundary, Church - 25 October	FUL
Trees, Paddock House - 24 October	TCONR
Trees, The Close - 24 October	TCONR
Compliance relating to lean-to structure etc, The Old Rectory - 5 November	COMPLY
Further compliance relating to lean-to structure etc, The Old Rectory - 5 November	COMPLY
Replacement windows, doors etc, 17 Brassington Gardens - 12 November	FUL
Tree, Paddock House - 29 November	TCONR
Ancillary buildings, tennis courts etc, The Old Rectory - 4 December	FUL
Barn repairs etc, The Old Rectory -12 December	LBC
Variation erection garden room, office, Dovecote House, Foxcote - 18 December	FUL
Trees, Manor Hall - 18 December	TCONR
Tree, The Old House - 6 January	TCONR
Compliance, archaeological and other, The Old Rectory - 10 January	COMPLY
Compliance various, The Old Rectory - 23 January (awaits decision)	COMPLY
Oil tank installation, Cherry Tree House - 27 January	FUL
Trees, Manor Hall - 24 January	TCONR
Shed for pump, filtration system, 2 Northfield Cottage - 10 February	FUL
Trees, The Close - 6 February	TCONR
Tree, Last Post - 12 February	TCONR
Tree, Garden House - 17 February	TCONR
Extension, garage conversion Thornbury House - 11 March (awaits decision)	FUL
Compliance, mullions etc, The Old Rectory - 13 March (awaits decision)	COMPLY
Compliance various, The Old Rectory - 19 March (awaits decision)	COMPLY
Amendment to conservatory design, 17 Brassington Gardens - 20 March	NONMAT
Trees, Manor Hall - 26 March	TCONR
Trees, Honeystone Cottage - 28 March	TCONR
Land adjacent to Cleevly Cottage, two dwellings, appeal dismissed - April 2024	
Northfield Farm, five dwellings, appeal dismissed - January 2025	