

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING - CHAIRMANS REPORT FOR 2017/18

Welcome to the 2018 Annual Parish Meeting for Leicester Forest East.

For the record, this Annual Parish meeting is not a council meeting but a meeting open to residents, community groups, businesses etc from within Leicester Forest East.

As the name suggests, this is an annual meeting. The 1972 Local Government Act requires that a meeting is held around this time of year in every parish across the land, whether or not they have a parish/town council.

Residents and Community Group representatives are obviously very welcome to come along and speak at any of our council meetings but particularly so this annual parish meeting. This meeting is an ideal opportunity for local groups to promote themselves to the council and to the wider community. We hope that all reports can be printed in the next edition of the Parish Councils LiFE Magazine.

Before I start my summary of the council year I would like to welcome, and thank, all our parish councillors, our parish clerk and our premises officers for their hard work and commitment over the last 12 months – without their work the parish would, without doubt, be a poorer place.

We had been delighted to welcome several new councillors to our team over the last year or so and our numbers were beginning to look very healthy. Unfortunately, due to a variety of reasons we have subsequently lost the services of several councillors. As a result, we find ourselves back in the same position we were in a year or so ago - I really hope that the councillors we have recently lost, will be able to re-join us if their personal circumstances change.

I would like to extend an invitation to residents living in or close to Leicester Forest East to join us on the Parish Council. We are a friendly council who at all times work towards representing and promoting the interests and the well-being of the parish.

Moving on to what happened in our parish over the last 12 months:

Many of the things that most energise and frustrate residents are exactly the same things that frustrate the parish councillors. Many things happening locally are beyond the control and influence of the parish council. We consistently try to make our voice heard and provide our opinions and recommendations based on local knowledge - all too frequently however our efforts seem to fall on 'deaf ears'.

Local issues such as housing and highways are not within our control. I do believe we could and should be allowed to add more value to the decision-making process particularly given the direct impact county and district council decisions have on the lives of Leicester Forest East residents.

Issues beyond our control but would have benefitted from local input include:

- road layouts in and around Lubbethorpe
- additional housing developments that have been built, are being built and may possibly be built in and around our parish
- traffic issues both on and around the A47
- Unsociable car parking in the area of Stafford Leys school and in Park Drive / Holmfield Road West areas

And now two recent issues:

- (i) Additional housing along the A47 both on and opposite the area of the sports fields
- (ii) Speed bumps along Beggars Lane and Warren Lane as well as in Kirby Muxloe.

Having mentioned things that are not within our control, there are many things that as a Parish Council we have undertaken over the past 12 months that benefit the parish:

Parish Parks

We have continued to maintain and where possible enhance the parks within the parish:

1. We have spent money on both drainage and on clearing the ditch within Forest East Park, although this last Winter, as wet as it was, has shown us that more work may need to be considered
2. The railings around the play equipment have been well received (I received a further compliment on this only this month)
3. Extensive work has been undertaken on the park hedges. They not only look good but the work will ensure the hedges stay looking good as they grow over the coming months
4. At the suggestion of a local resident we have placed both Bird boxes and Bat boxes in the parks in the hope of encouraging wild life
5. A substantial sum of money has been spent repairing the path in Forest East Park

Parish Hall

The Parish Hall continues to be very well used.

1. We have undertaken the first part of a phased re-painting of the halls internal walls as well as completed all items from the 'snagging list' that followed the hall's refurbishment
2. We now have a defibrillator on the outside wall of the parish hall courtesy of the local Rapid Relief Team. A second training session run by East Midlands Ambulance Service on CPR and on how to use a defibrillator was recently held at the parish hall.

We are very grateful to the Rapid Relief Team for both the donation of the defibrillator and also for a recent litter pick they undertook in the parish

3. The parish office is now also located at the Parish Hall which has both financial and logistical benefits to the parish
4. We once again held two theatre productions at the parish hall during the last 12 months. These are professional theatre companies who are undertaking regional tours and we are very fortunate to be able to stage such productions in Leicester Forest East.

We will aim to bring more live theatre over the coming 12 months along with a number of other events such as live music, professionally run quizzes etc – I really hope residents support the events. Anyone with ideas (or organisational skills) for future events would be welcomed with 'open arms'.

Around the Parish

1. The Reality Bus continues to be a big success and is being well used by local teenagers. The parish council and St. Andrews Church share the cost of bringing the bus to the parish and the bus spends equal time in the Parish Hall car park and St Andrews Church car park
2. Last Spring, we purchased several new 'planters' for the parish, some replaced old wooden planters and there was an additional planter placed outside the entrance to the Parish Hall. A further order has recently been lodged which will enable us to replace the planter located in front of St. Andrews Church in time for the 2018 summer bedding plants.

Several Councillors give their time to put plants in the planters twice a year and I'd like to thank each of them for their time

3. We receive favourable comments about the hanging baskets we put up along the A47 and we have recently placed an order for Summer 2018 which will hopefully see an even more impressive display this year

4. 2017 saw us add two additional displays along the A47. Firstly, were the large poppies that were placed on the lighting columns prior to Remembrance Day and secondly the Solar Christmas Trees, once again placed on the lighting columns along the A47

Both of the new initiatives were very well received and will be extended this year.

Resident feedback has encouraged us to widen our offering in 2018 – in conjunction with St Andrews Church we will be purchasing a 'Silent Soldier' which will be displayed in the parish for much of the year – this like the large poppies is a Royal British Legion initiative.

Neighbourhood Development Plan

This is something that became available to us following the enactment of the Localism Bill. There are many parishes around the country preparing plans indeed in the last few weeks Blaby Parish Council had their plan formally adopted.

The Neighbourhood Development Plan has to broadly meet the objectives of the district council and so it won't stop further local housing! Once formally adopted however it will hold weight in respect of planning law and give us some say on things like:

- the types of houses and sizes of houses that can be built in the parish

and

- some element of control as to the design and build conditions that must be applied when planning permission is granted by the district council.

We are ahead of many parishes in the preparation of our plan and I am very grateful for the input that has been made by the many residents that have attended meetings and/or completed our questionnaires.

By the time this annual report is prepared next year I sincerely hope that the plan has been formally adopted. Before we reach that stage however we have some hoops to jump through. The plan needs to go through the final stages of assessment by the district council, be reviewed by an independent inspector and then voted upon by residents. Once those stages have been successfully completed the plan will be formally adopted.

In Conclusion

I believe the parish council has organised its budgets very well again this year and our precept continues to be lower than many neighbouring parishes. We have been able to undertake some great new initiatives in 2017/18 whilst at the same time continuing to fund our on-going financial commitments.

There are many projects that councillors would like to undertake to benefit the parish but we always have to be mindful that our budget is very limited. Having said that, we will continue to make affordable improvements to our parks and to the equipment within the parks for the benefit of all.

Finally, I would like to thank the councillors for the honour of being their council Chair for the past three years. I have thoroughly enjoyed the role and I hope the new incumbent enjoys the role as much as I have.

Paul Fox
Chair, Leicester Forest East Parish Council
18 April 2018

