

Countesthorpe Parish Council Chairs report for 2024 - 2025

The added workload from planning applications and another flooding incident have pushed our council's resources to the limit this past year. I will discuss these issues further, but first, I want to thank our council manager, deputy, and councillors for their hard work and dedication. Their detailed reports for Blaby District Council Planning were thorough, even though B.D.C. approved all new developments without addressing infrastructure concerns. Also, my thanks to the outside staff who work tirelessly in all-weather to maintain our village.

Planning

Has dominated council thinking over this last year as we tried our best to represent the councils and residents' views. Firstly, we saw Foston Road approved without any reference to the ability of Countesthorpe's to cope with the added influx of people. In the council's opinion the village infrastructure was already at breaking point without any additional influx of people although we are always mindful new houses are necessary, somewhere. Our roads, Health Centre, parking and schools are all being stretched to breaking point so our objections to these developments should not be called NIMBYISM, but a reasoned and sensible assessment of the village as it is now.

The Willoughby Road development was approved by BDC based on the chair's vote, despite the area's flooding and sewage issues. There was again no mention of infrastructure considerations by B.D.C. Our government has stated that infrastructure should always be considered, but B.D.C Planning do not appear to address this in their decisions.

Flooding

Mennecy Road residents have experienced flooding twice in the past year due to water from private fields. Initially attributed to storm Henk which was considered a one in a hundred-year event, however, another severe flood occurred in January this year. A meeting in March with our County Councillor, residents (of Mennecy Close) and Davidson's builders resulted in a plan for two balancing ponds with flow restrictors to manage excess water. The Parish Council raised safety concerns about children near the ponds, but the developer assured they include escape routes; however, doubts remain. Let's hope, when it eventually happens, flooding in that area will cease.

Winchester Road has flooded twice since the new buildings were constructed, making it passable only with large vehicles. Willoughby Road also suffers during severe rainfall. The Parish Council has repeatedly raised these issues with the County Council and Flood Management, but no solution has been provided or even offered. Countesthorpe has been completely cut off for the second time in a year, highlighting the need for urgent attention from the authorities.

Estates

Meet monthly to oversee items needing maintenance and attention within the village. It's a busy group who generally have a long agenda of items to look at and then report back to the full council for their comments and agreement before remedial action is taken. The chair of Estates and members keep a close eye on the village so anything needing council attention is quickly seen and wherever possible, corrected.

Buckingham Memorial

On November 7th, we enhanced the Buckingham Memorial and dedicated it with a service led by our Rector and Curate. The council responded to Birkett House's offer of their help, so we suggested the young people plant bulbs and flowers in the new planter. Following this several councillors walked down to our cemetery to place crosses on our war graves to honour those who have given their lives for us, the council has done this for many years. There are over twenty war graves although some are hard to find. St Andrews church supply the crosses and also join with the council in our act of memory and gratitude.

Christmas

Festive Fronts returned for its second year. 'Santa's Sales Pitch' by Paragon Sales Solutions on Leicester Road won the commercial category, while 'A Christmas Display' on Heather Way won the residential category. The village had impressive displays that I was told uplifted many people's spirits. The council also upgraded the Christmas lights at St. Andrews and around the Village Hall.

Net Zero

We have a working group who are looking at ways to reduce carbon emissions. An Energy Audit told us that the Village Hall was under the expectations for carbon emissions for a building of its size. We are, though, currently changing all the lights and fittings (where necessary) to LEDs and exploring changing our outside equipment to batteries from petrol.

Emergency Planning

We have a small team set up to look at ways the council can help in an emergency. Often, we are led by B.D.C. or County councils so we are looking at ways we can continue that chain when required.

Cadent Gas

Throughout the year, various organisations have been conducting roadworks in the village. Cadent carried out essential work, followed by Severn Trent. Drivers often had to wait for the green light to proceed, having often been one of them I applaud their patience. Hopefully our long-suffering residents can now enjoy a time when our roads are not being dug up. Communication between organisations often appear inconsistent as roads were resurfaced and then almost immediately excavated again.

D Day and VE Day

In June last year our council along with the whole country celebrated the D Day 80th anniversary. We held an evening of reflection, thanksgiving and commemoration on the Centenary Paddock.

Our V.E. Day celebrations begin on May 8th this year on the Centenary Paddock with a time of Thanksgiving and Remembrance. On the Saturday we have planned a time of fun with a Picnic on the Centenary Paddock followed in the evening with one of our Rectors now famous quizzes in the Village Hall.

Library

Our library has grown since 2016. We provide children's groups, an adult coffee and colouring group, free internet, copying services, and events throughout the year, especially in summer. Managed by Sophi and dedicated volunteers, we now accept up to date book donations and offer a free jigsaw exchange. Visit our website for more details.

Parking

During this year, our Health Centre implemented an out of hours policy that permits parking for only two hours, with no return within twenty-four hours. Previously, it was communicated to the council that parking would be free outside of working hours and on weekends but that never materialised. Additionally, the influence of companies specializing in camera enforcement of parking fines was also noted at the Co-op car park where the allowed parking duration was reduced from two hours to ninety minutes, one presumed they were not getting enough money through fines. We will not be installing cameras in our car park.

Youth work

We continue to employ two youth workers who work two days a week all year apart from December and January. Two or three of our councillors meet with them roughly every three months. We certainly don't get the complaints about our young people we had before we employed these two youth workers. We get feedback from them on a monthly basis.

Village Hall Charity Trustee

A trust was established to oversee the land on which the Village Hall is situated. A trustee has been serving on the Village Hall Committee to ensure its proper management. However, the trustees now consider their presence unnecessary, given the council's effective management of the trust. Consequently, the council and the trustees are working collaboratively to transfer full responsibility of the trust to the council. The trustees believe this transition is appropriate and have confidence in the council's capability to manage the trust efficiently.

S106 funding

We've just about run out of this money which is offered to councils after a development has taken place. (S106 is part of planning legislation. It enables local authorities to require developers to set aside monies to mitigate the impact of their development.) We have now added new cremation plots and plantings in the cemetery, and a new planter in the Centenary Paddock. Over the last few years additions have been made to both of our

playground sites costing many thousands of pounds along with much of the transition from a barren field to a new usable burial area alongside our current cemetery.

Communication

Our website holds a growing wealth of information, detailing who is who and who is responsible for what and their responsibilities. Along with our notice boards, the council's website and Meta (F.B) site keep residents informed. We do not have the resources to respond to comments on our Meta site though.

Opinions are fine but please contact our office (2779518) for accurate or updated information before posting, as some things posted are merely gossip and incorrect and sometimes cause distress and even anger among our residents. If you have an axe to grind, please make sure you hone it on truth, if not, other people can get hurt, and that's never funny.

Finance

Our costs of employing staff have increased due to National Insurance being raised. Just like every other organisation. We also have the very strange set up of our own budget must be set before the staff pay negotiations have been completed so we often must work on 'best guess' which is far from satisfactory. This year we have raised our budget by 6.8%. I have always believed % increase can be confusing. Last year the requirement for each household was £164.56, this year it is £175.68 which is a £11.12 increase for the entire year. Basically, this means the Parish Council looks after the village and its contents for a cost of just under 48p a day for a Band D property, which I don't think is too bad.

We have also changed our broadband and telephone provider saving us in the region of £2,000 each year. Alongside this we had not been credited with some of the money due to us for our solar panels as we had an issue where only some of the panels had been registering their inputs. One of our councillors has doggedly followed this up and the council is to receive over £6,000 from historical arrears.

Et al

There is, of course so much more but the snippets I have written should underline what a busy life council staff and councillors have running the parts of the village we are responsible for. What of the future, you may have read that Local Government is being reorganised so where that ends up heaven only knows but it would be good if local Parish Councils had more authority to impact what happens in their village rather than have authorities over us who have little knowledge of our concerns and aspirations.

Thank you, Councillors,

I have now chaired the Parish Council for thirteen years, overseeing around 150 council meetings and numerous others. During my tenure, I've witnessed many changes in the village and council. We've gone from using secateurs to cut hedges to modern equipment with well trained staff, experienced almost a complete staff turnover, and now operate like a small business rather than a council. We are fortunate to have such dedicated staff and councillors who know whatever they do or say will be wrong to some people and right to others.

I have not lost my enthusiasm, energy or interest but I have come to believe it's time for me to step down and pass the role to someone else. I thank everyone who has contributed over the years to running our council professionally, both paid and unpaid and in their support and their trust in me. I am happy to still offer my time and experience to the council in whatever way councillors feel is most helpful to the council though.

Just as a reminder the chair of the council does **not** dictate policy, that is always done by the full council, nor should the chair try to mould councillors into their way of thinking, that is against the law. The chair is there to ensure efficiency, effectiveness and make sure the council is run professionally, this I sincerely hope I have managed to do.

Revd. Mick Gillespie: April 2025

Planning Committee Report 2024/2025

This year the Planning Committee agendas have been dominated by the major developments proposed in Countesthorpe. Alongside these applications, we have also considered approximately 35 domestic applications and 10 commercial applications.

Smaller applications include an application by Countesthorpe Academy to construct a 3G synthetic pitch with 14.5m high sports lighting, perimeter fencing, storage container, access path and associated landscaping, which is still being determined. A further application by Countesthorpe Academy for the conversion of an existing pavilion to changing rooms and the siting of a container to form an ancillary kitchen unit has been granted approval.

An application for the siting of four storage containers at the Round House, Leicester Road, which had been refused by Blaby District Council in February 2024, was dismissed at appeal in January 2025.

Leicester GB Tools, Regent Road, was granted planning permission for the erection of one industrial unit.

An outline application for the erection of up to 3 new dwellings and demolition of the existing dwelling on Station Road was granted planning approval.

An application for the conversion and extension of a currently disused ancillary building to form a new C3 Dwelling house at The Water Tower, The Drive was refused.

Despite our best efforts to highlight the negative impacts the proposals for new housing would inevitably create, two of the three housing applications reported last year have been granted planning approval.

The outline application for 170 dwellings on land off Leicester Road/Foston Road was granted approval in September and has now proceeded to the next stage of the planning process. The development will be built by Miller Homes and a reserved matters application has been submitted relating to the layout and appearance of the dwellings together with a second reserved matters application relating to drainage.

Blaby District Council recommended the approval of an outline application for up to 205 dwellings on land East of Willoughby Road. However, the decision was initially deferred due to concerns about the density of the development proposed and the implications for the character and appearance of the area. There was also a request for further information from Severn Trent Water concerning drainage and the capacity of the foul sewerage system. Subsequently, outline planning permission was granted for a reduced number of 185 dwellings. No reserved matters applications have been submitted to date.

The Parish Council made representation at both Blaby District Council Planning Committee meetings to strongly reiterate our objections to the above proposals. However, when recommending approval, the 'tilted balance' approach was used by Blaby District Council. Tilted Balance refers to a policy approach within the National Planning Policy Framework that is triggered when local plan policies are out of date, absent or a five year housing land supply cannot be demonstrated. The balance is tilted in favour of approving sustainable development unless there are compelling reasons to refuse. This, unfortunately, presents opportunities for speculative development to which we appear powerless to defend.

The third application on land off Gillam Butts was revised down to 41 dwellings. This full application was due to be decided in February, also with a recommendation for approval. However, the decision was deferred due to concerns arising from the updated Environment Agency Flood Plan and is still awaiting determination.

Following the pre-application public consultation in August 2023, a formal application was eventually submitted in September 2024 for a 201 acre solar farm at Soars Lodge Farm on land off Foston Road. However, as a result of legal action against the landowner in respect of land pollution and waste offences, a remediation order was issued by the Court requiring the land to be cleaned by December 2027. No development is permitted on this land until the Remediation Order is completed and it is currently unclear as to whether the application for a solar farm will proceed any further.

It was reported last year that there was a fourth proposal for approximately 100 dwellings on land South of Cosby Road. A pre-application public consultation took place in April 2024 but to date a formal application has not been submitted.

The Parish Council is also consulted on applications in neighbouring Parishes which may have an impact on Countesthorpe. An application to build 200 houses on Blaby Golf course was submitted in July 2024 and Countesthorpe Parish Council are pleased to note that its concerns regarding access via Winchester Road have been given consideration. Updated documents now indicate that the proposed vehicular access onto Winchester Road has been removed from the plans, whilst retaining the existing pedestrian and cycle access. The Parish Council will continue to monitor that there is no change to this proposal.

Another potential site for development in Blaby is at Keepers Farm, Winchester Road, opposite the proposed development at Blaby Golf Course. Blaby District Council approved an initial application supporting the developer's view that an Environmental Impact Assessment would not be necessary, although the Parish Council had requested that such an assessment be carried out.

Bonnel Homes have recently been conducting exploratory investigations on the land and it is anticipated that a formal application to build 350 houses will be submitted in the near future. The Parish Council are very concerned that should development be permitted on this site, not only will it have a potentially negative impact on the Country Park, there will be only one field separating Blaby and Countesthorpe.

For the last few years, we have reported on the current position regarding Whetstone Pastures on the edge of Countesthorpe. The proposed applicant, Tritax Symmetry, was also the applicant for the Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange (HNRFI). We still have no further updates concerning the Garden Village but continue to monitor the situation in the light of the recent refusal of the HNRFI by the Secretary of State for Transport.

In addition to commenting on planning applications, this year the Planning Committee have also reviewed and responded to Blaby District Council's Planning Obligations and Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document Consultation, Consultation on Hayes Garden Public Engagement, the Revised National Planning Policy Framework and the Draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland. We have also met with Blaby District Council's Planning and Strategic Growth Group Manager to discuss planning consultation procedures arising from recent applications, in particular Willoughby Road.

Two major issues that will be affecting Parishes over the coming years are the outcome of The Planning and Infrastructure Bill and the Local Government Reorganisation, both of which the Parish Council will be monitoring closely.

The Planning and Infrastructure Bill was introduced by the Government to Parliament in March 2025 and is the government's response to encourage house building. It is expected that a scheme of delegation will be introduced setting out how planning applications will be decided in terms of those being delegated to planning officers for a decision, or those which would be referred to a planning authority planning committee. It may also specify the size and composition of those planning committees.

At the current time, planning authorities with out of date Local Plans are to continue with the process for renewing their Local Plans and it is expected that Blaby District Council will carry out initial consultation on its new Plan during 2025, with a view to it being adopted in 2026.

It is becoming clear that the outcome of the government's decision on the local government restructuring for Leicestershire could cause a significant planning issue. There have been initial recommendations and submissions by the County Council and the District/Borough Councils, recommending localised systems are put in place to review planning applications. However, we will not know more until each authority has made more information available. It is expected that they will carry out consultation exercises over the coming months.

Finally, I would like to express the Committee's appreciation of the input given by people who come to our meetings to add to our knowledge of applications that concern them. My personal thanks go to my fellow Committee members for their commitment and varied expertise in formulating our responses, and the Parish

Council Manager, her Deputy and Assistant for their valued support during what has been an exceptionally busy year.

Sue Kinvig

Chair of Countesthorpe Parish Council Planning Committee

Library Committee report 2024-2025

As the Parish Council enters its ninth year of running Countesthorpe Library, thoughts naturally wander to the 10 year milestone approaching in 2026. It is with great thanks to Sophi, the Library Supervisor, as well as the loyal volunteers who continue to show up and support the library come rain or shine, that it continues to thrive under the Parish Council's remit.

The Summer Reading Challenge continued to be a roaring success with 102 taking on the challenge and 91 of those completing it. It was the decision of the Parish Council to allocate a sum of £500 for the purchase of additional incentives and prizes to encourage as many local children as possible to take part. In addition to this, we found it disappointing that all of the promotional material for the Summer Reading Challenge which had been provided had been digitalised and so it was arranged for bookmarks to be printed and distributed in local schools to actively engage with the target audience, local children.

Other activities taking place over the last year include the summer craft sessions which were extremely well attended with children creating beautiful suncatchers, aeroplanes and unicorn faces! The jigsaw swap which was introduced proved extremely popular, but the Library Committee wanted to ensure that it could be fully enjoyed by all and so a selection of giant jigsaws were purchased to make for a more inclusive target audience. Lastly, but by no means least, as always, the weekly rhymetime sessions have been a favourite with the local children and their parents alike. Unfortunately, one of the volunteers had to step down however the sessions were continued by Sophi on alternate Tuesdays and Thursdays.

This year saw the Parish Council upgrade the lighting in the library to LED, supporting its aim to reduce its carbon emissions, as well as necessary repair work being completed on the internal door. A bigger change also came when a new computer system was introduced, in addition to the new stickering system which, with some hard work from Sophi and the volunteers, is now fully implemented throughout.

Unfortunately, due to the new system changes, the performance figures for the past 12 months cannot yet be confirmed however there have been over 170 new joiners and a 4% rise in junior fiction books issued.

Overall, the library has remained a safe, warm, popular and welcoming space for all with families, children, the local police, tutors, book groups and, most recently, a charity knit and natter group enjoying all that it has to offer.

Martin Smith

Chair of Library Committee

Village Hall Management Committee report 2024-2025

Countesthorpe Village Hall has remained a hive of activity over the last 12 months with residents of Countesthorpe and surrounding villages enjoying the facilities and classes which it has to offer.

There has been little change to the regular bookings with the variety of classes being a source of fitness, fun and friendship for many. Despite the ongoing limited availability of the village hall during weekdays, some new faces have been welcomed with others trialling the space in the hopes of providing new activities to residents, including sound baths, tea dances and workshops.

Weekend hires continue to be varied and particularly popular for those looking to celebrate their little one's milestones! The annual wreathmaking workshop, christmas concerts, sewing socials, various Active Arts events and Church quizzes remain firm favourites with demand ensuring their return. Whilst birthday parties continue to be celebrated also, due to ongoing concerns over proxy sales, the decision was made to no longer permit the celebration of 16th birthdays, in addition to 18th birthdays.

Unfortunately, as is the way of the world, it seems, Countesthorpe Parish Council found it necessary to implement a price increase to its hire fees although this has not deterred anyone from booking! Bar prices were also reviewed and, as always, the Parish Council endeavoured to keep its prices fair, considering average selling price of other venues as well as supplier purchase price.

Following an incident of a fire in one of the Village Hall boilers, the Parish Council was left in a quandary regarding its replacement. Although keen to go green and do all it can to reduce its carbon emissions, after careful consideration of efficiency, both in terms of cost and energy, it was resolved to replace the condemned gas boiler with a like for like with its installation pending.

Other remedial works have been undertaken on the Village Hall as and when required with the next 'larger' projects considered being the replacement of the lights in the main hall, store room and kitchen for LED's as well as the reupholstering of the main hall chairs which are so well used that they are starting to look a little tired.

A hot topic which has been closely monitored by the Parish Council is Martyn's Law. As this has developed, it seems that, currently, no legal action is required to be undertaken by the Parish Council in response to the proposals due to the Village Hall's capacity falling under that stated as the minimum. It's important to bear in mind however that the Parish Council takes seriously the health and safety of its hirers and will continue to take all reasonable steps to ensure the venue and its attendees are protected.

Positive news for the Parish Council came when it was confirmed that the relevant steps had now been taken to become a trustee of the Countesthorpe Village Hall Charity with sums being offered from the Charity to the Parish Council for carrying out improvements to the Village Hall.

Mick Gillespie

Chair of Village Hall Management Committee

Strategy Planning and Policy Committee report 2024-2025

Changes in legislation and procedure continue to be a driving force for the Strategy Planning and Policy Committee with policies and risk assessments remaining a focal point to ensure legal conformity as well as the protection of residents, councillors and staff members alike.

This last year saw the introduction of a Tree Management Policy which details the Parish Council's responsibility regarding the maintenance of trees on its land. The Parish Council takes great pride in its land and the trees that fall within it, and it continually aims to fulfil its duty of care as well as preserving as many trees as possible for future generations to enjoy.

There's no denying that we now live in a digital age which is ever evolving. As a consequence of this, the Parish Council has a responsibility to adapt in order to provide the best service to its residents. Facebook remains a key form of communication utilised by the Parish Council and its residents alike but it is important to remember that any and all communication made by the Parish Council must adhere to criteria set. It is for this reason that the Council's Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy has been updated and is regularly reviewed.

The National Association of Local Councils released an updated model of its Financial Regulations which were necessary to consider by the Parish Council. Playing a crucial role in the safeguarding of public funds as well as ensuring the transparency, efficiency and accountability of the Parish Council's financial operations, these were reviewed and adopted following careful consideration by both the Strategy Planning and Policy Committee and the Finance Working Party.

There was an offer received from Blaby District Council for Countesthorpe Parish Council to accept the transfer of two areas of Countesthorpe Country Park for a nominal sum. After careful consideration of what would be entailed, including financial obligations, staffing requirements, ongoing maintenance and potential future development risk, it was resolved not to accept the offer.

Mick Gillespie

Chair of Strategy Planning and Policy Committee