

Chairman's Report 2025-26

I would like to start by thanking Mick Gillespie for the 13 years he gave to the role of Chairman and the exemplary way in which he performed his duties. Mick oversaw many improvements and modernisations of the council.

I want to also thank our Council Manager, Deputy, all our other staff and all the Councillors for their hard work and dedication.

The membership of the Parish Council, continues to fluctuate with some new Councillors bringing fresh ideas and enthusiasm whilst others have left. We also have a new County Councillor, Graham Cooke.

Local Government reorganisation. This is one of the biggest challenges we will face in the near future. Which ever new model is adopted, it seems that there is likely to be a move to delegate more responsibility to Parish Councils. Blaby District Council will cease to exist in its current form and we will need to build a new relationship with whichever new unitary authority is put in place.

Local Flooding investigations are ongoing and are of great concern to residents. The development on Willoughby Road will be closely watched to see if the proposed works improve the situation as suggested. In the meantime we helped distribute "sandbags" which were thankfully not required. We have liaised with the County Council and we are working on our own Emergency Plan.

Police. There has been increased contact between the Councillors, the Office and the Police via PCSO Kirsty Reid. She has been keen to improve parking issues on Main Street and Gwendoline Drive amongst other matters.

Planning. The Committee along with Joanne have spent a lot of time scrutinising major planning applications. This has continued to be difficult with Blaby District Council willing to sacrifice green fields rather than risking developers appealing decisions. The system of calculating the five year supply of housing seems to be broken and as a result, applications which we were previously able to defend, have been almost nodded through.

In addition to the Miller Homes development, Willoughby Road is starting to progress and applications on Cosby Road and Peatling Road are still pending.

The Foston Road development has already seen chaotic scenes with traffic management, and we continue to push for improvements. The recent move to allow 20 homes to be occupied before the roundabout is completed is concerning given the traffic problems already experienced.

Whilst the Solar Farm cannot proceed until the land is decontaminated, as or when this is undertaken there is likely to be a significant impact in terms of traffic whilst it is constructed/installed and the visual impact from the village and along Foston Road once it is in place.

The new District Local Plan has been delayed yet again and is now expected to go to consultation in the Summer (or later!). The probable inclusion of Whetstone Pastures will mark a significant step towards this development going forward and the plan will need to be considered carefully. Without the plan it is difficult to challenge some aspects of planning applications.

Estates. It has been another busy year for the Estates Committee. Part of the footpath in the Spinney has been repaired and upgraded to tarmac and benches have been installed. Repairs have also taken place to the paths within the closed Churchyard. The Chapel has needed some repointing.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission has accepted the application for a headstone for Herbert Swann and this is currently in production. The next stage of Memorial testing has been completed; it is hopefully a positive sign that this time only three headstones were identified as needing repair.

Some problems with the loose stone surface at the Willoughby Road car park have been addressed in the short term, resolving this could be a big project and as such will need further consideration. Play equipment in Dale Acre is being reviewed, we fitted additional equipment, funded by S106 monies about 15 years ago and some of this equipment is now becoming more expensive to repair and maintain. One consideration will be whether funding could allow for the installation of inclusive equipment.

Community Speed watch, whilst we were not included in the latest round of villages, this is being advertised to see if enough volunteers will come forward and whether the operational guidelines make it a viable option for the village. If successful it would hopefully reduce the speed of cars through the village.

Finance. The Committee worked hard to limit the Council Tax increase and sought to achieve a balanced approach giving us the funding to maintain the village whilst being aware of the need to limit the size of any increased precept.

The Committee are aware that the John Deere is likely to need replacing and are striving to ensure that it continues to offer value for money for the council.

Grant aid applications have been approved for the Cricket Club, Greenfield PTFA and the Fun & Friendship group.

LED lighting has been installed in the workshop/garage.

The Village Hall Committee has had some additional funds to help ensure the hall stays in good condition and continues to be an attractive venue for villagers to hold events.

Martin Smith
Chairman of Countesthorpe Parish Council

Planning Committee Report 2025/2026

Once again, the Planning Committee agendas have been dominated by the major developments proposed in Countesthorpe. We have considered approximately 22 domestic applications and 29 commercial applications. Almost a third of the commercial applications have related to amended plans, the discharge of conditions or reserved matters connected to the proposed housing developments in the village.

A full application for up to 109 dwellings on land off Cosby Road has been submitted together with an outline application for 295 dwellings on land off Peatling Road. These are still progressing through the planning system and have not yet been decided.

The Parish Council continues to highlight the cumulative negative impact that these large scale housing developments will have on Countesthorpe and consulted with residents for their views on the Peatling Road development before submitting our response.

Construction on 170 dwellings on land adjacent to Leicester Road and Foston Road is well underway. An application has recently been approved allowing no more than 20 dwellings to be occupied before the offsite Leicester Road /Foston Road roundabout works and the offsite footway/cycle works between the roundabout and Meadows Sports Ground have been implemented in full. As this application was determined prior to the closing date for public comments, the Parish Council have sent a strongly worded letter to the Monitoring Officer.

The full application for 41 dwellings on land off Gillam Butts was approved in May 2025. Construction has not yet begun and the Parish Council have not been advised of a start date.

The outline planning application for up to 185 dwellings on land East of Willoughby Road was approved in November 2024. Earlier this year, Davidsons Homes held a public consultation to present their reserved matters for this scheme. To date these have not been submitted but an application has been made relating to an archaeological investigation in accordance with the planning conditions.

The Planning Committee also comment on applications in neighbouring Parishes that will have an impact on Countesthorpe. One such applications is for 345 dwellings at Keepers farm, Winchester Road, Blaby. A second application on the opposite side of the road, for up to 200 dwellings on the Blaby Golf Range, was refused by Blaby District Council but has subsequently gone to appeal and will be decided by the Planning Inspectorate.

The application for a solar farm at Soars Lodge Farm, Foston Road was granted approval in September 2025. An application to construct a substation to support this solar farm, on land East of Kilby, has recently been submitted. Despite repeated requests. no details have yet been given regarding clearance of the contaminated land.

A public presentation for the proposed Garden Village, Whetstone Pastures, was held in September 2025. Proposals include up to 5,000 dwellings, logistics warehousing and a new junction on the M1 motorway. It is anticipated that a formal application will be submitted in due course and the Parish Council will keep residents updated.

Cherry Lane on Foston Road have started works to renovate and extend the garden centre. In October they were granted planning approval for the siting of an InPost Parcel Locker.

Other commercial applications included an application by Countesthorpe Community College for a new modular changing room and associated changes to the car park which has been approved. An application submitted by Countesthorpe Academy in August 2024 to construct a 3G synthetic pitch with sports lighting, perimeter fencing, storage container and landscaping was finally approved in August 2025.

Permission was granted to convert a dwelling on Judith Drive into a children's care home to accommodate no more than three children aged between 7 and 18 years old.

An application for advertisement consent for two new freestanding noticeboards within the grounds of St Andrew's Church, Countesthorpe was granted.

An application was approved for the change of use of a machinery store at Soars Lodge Farm for use as a storage and distribution business supplying specialist classic car parts and leisure equipment.

The Round House, Leicester Road applied for a Certificate of Lawfulness for the siting of a storage container which was granted.

An application for the installation of 6 × 15m floodlights around the main football pitch at The Meadows Sports Ground was withdrawn during consideration.

An application for a self-build 3 bedroom detached dwelling and detached single garage was refused by Blaby District Council and a subsequent appeal dismissed.

The long overdue Blaby District Council Local Plan was due to be published mid-April and available for comment by the end of April. However, the Parish Council have been advised that this has now been delayed until Summer 2026. Residents will be updated as we receive further information.

Finally, I would like to express the Committee's appreciation of the input given by Parishioners who attend our meetings to discuss applications that concern them. My personal thanks go to my fellow Committee members for their continued commitment together with all the office staff for their valued support this year.

Sue Kinvig
Chair of Countesthorpe Parish Council Planning Committee

Village Hall Management Committee report 2025-2026

The Parish Council is delighted to see that the Village Hall has remained popular again over the past twelve months. Familiar faces of regular hirers continue to offer such variety to residents of Countesthorpe and surrounding areas. Whether the focus be fitness, strength, relaxation, support, socialisation, discipline or skillset, there's likely a group to suit at the village hall.

And of course, private bookings continue to take place also with many choosing to celebrate birthdays, anniversaries and weddings at the village hall. The nature of these bookings naturally means that their attendance is limited to invitation but there have also been a great number open to Countesthorpe residents including fundraisers, Mum2Mum markets, wreathmaking workshops and concerts.

Unfortunately, as with everything, the village hall is starting to show its age and has suffered with costly maintenance issues this year including a faulty cellar cooler system and hot water system, both of which required a full replacement. This expenditure alone stood at over £4000 and remained a source of frustration for the Council. Although necessary, aesthetic improvements would have been the preference for such expenditure, to be enjoyed by those who frequent the space. It is important to note also that the safety of our visitors remains the top priority and so the installation of additional smoke detectors in the main hall, although costly, was also approved. Unfortunately, this combination, although necessary, meant that some projects agreed in the previous year have rumbled on.

With all of this in mind, the Parish Council made the decision to allocate an additional budget allowance for improvements to the village hall for the coming year and would welcome any recommendations from you, our residents, who enjoy and keep the space alive.

The Village Hall Management Committee has, and will continue to, work hard to make the village hall welcoming and safe and would like to thank all who have chosen to hire with us over the past year.

Mick Gillespie
Chair of the Village Hall Management Committee

Library Committee report 2025-2026

At the time of writing this report, Countesthorpe Parish Council is delighted to have celebrated ten years since taking over responsibility of the library and it couldn't be prouder of what it offers to Countesthorpe residents. Thanks to the dedication of Sophi, the Library Supervisor, and the number of devoted volunteers, it has welcomed 1300 new joiners and loaned close to an incredible 110,000 books during this time.

A ten year anniversary is certainly something to be celebrated and you may have seen the display within the library doing just that. We also hosted an afternoon tea for the volunteers, past and present, who have supported Sophi and its running throughout. We would like to say a special thank you to those volunteers who have been with the library for the full ten years, your dedication has not gone unnoticed.

As in previous years, the summer reading challenge was a great success amongst local children with 107 taking part and 87 completing it. Translating to an 81% completion rate compared to the County average of 60%, these figures easily put Countesthorpe library within the top percentage across the County! It was once again the decision of the Parish Council to allocate an additional sum of money towards both promotional materials, encouraging participation, and additional incentives, to maintain interest. This certainly proved a worthy investment with over 80% of those taking part reporting that they heard about the challenge via bookmarks which the Parish Council had printed and distributed to local schools.

There were also a number of other activities organised by Sophi to keep the local children busy during the summer months, alongside the summer reading challenge. These included an egg box competition, relax kids sessions, craft sessions and a village scavenger hunt, which saw 50 children being awarded a certificate following its successful completion. A big thank you to those local businesses who made this possible.

In addition to the popular RhymeTime sessions, book groups, jigsaw swap and charity knit and natter group, recently we have also seen the introduction of a puzzle book group and the implementation of community delivered health checks being run from the library, keeping the space busy and varied.

In terms of maintenance, 2024 saw the introduction of LED lights throughout and this past year the Library Committee has been keen to continue improving the space. Although difficult to notice, the blinds have been replaced and so are no longer damaged and safer for all users, however, there remains a large expense looming with the requirement to replace the external library door. This remains at the top of the priority list for the Library Committee, however, its cost remains solely the responsibility of the Parish Council. Even with library services being granted a sum of £5133 from the Foston Road development's s106 funding agreements, it remains unclear what portion of this will be awarded to Countesthorpe library itself. Unfortunately, if anything were to be awarded, it could not be allocated to repair or maintenance projects.

During this past year we have welcomed new volunteers, users and groups and are delighted that so many of our residents have enjoyed visiting the library. Our aim is to continue to work hard to keep it the warm, welcoming, safe and happy environment that it is for many years to come.

Mick Gillespie

Chair of the Library Committee

Strategic Planning and Policy Committee report 2025-2026

Countesthorpe Parish Council continues to represent, support, protect and serve its residents, councillors, staff and volunteers, each in their own way. A key tool in doing this is the implementation and regular review of its policies and risk assessments which are required, some by law, some as best practice and some by choice.

This last year saw the introduction of a new mandatory requirement for Parish Councils, included in the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, known as Assertion 10. Focussing on digital and data compliance, Countesthorpe Parish Council found that it already complied to the majority of the requirements but welcomed the introduction of anything with a purpose of better protecting the Council and its residents.

Although the Parish Council already has its own domain name and Parish Council owned email addresses, therefore conforming to the requirement stated in Assertion 10, it has decided to take the next step. Soon enough, we will be moving to gov.uk which will alter both our website and email addresses so keep an eye out for notification of this transition as we wouldn't want to miss any communication from our residents.

Importantly, following the introduction of this new requirement also, the Parish Council undertook an MOT on its website to ensure that it is accessible for all, and will continue to keep it that way.

As expected, Countesthorpe Parish Council has a zero tolerance for bullying or harassment of any kind however the introduction of another duty, to prevent sexual harassment, saw the creation of a separate policy and risk assessment which have been adopted and distributed to all within the Council.

And of course, the hot topic over the last few months, which I'm sure all of our residents are aware of, is Local Government reorganisation. Unfortunately, we don't yet know what the outcome of this will be but we will keep monitoring and providing updates as information is released and, regardless of the outcome, will continue to represent you, the residents of Countesthorpe, as we always have.

Martin Smith

Chair of the Strategic Planning and Policy Committee