

## Chairs Annual Report 2024/25 – Whiston Parish Council

After more than five years as a member of The Parish Council, I was elected as its Chair in January 2025, taking over from Colin Taylor. So I am still settling into the role of assisting and leading WPC in providing services and improving Whiston for all its residents.

Over the last year the activities of Parish Council have included:

- Coordinating the Summer Festival held at Whiston Parish Church Cricket Club in July 2024 and the Christmas Festival/Lights switch-on event held in the heart of the village in late November 2024. Our thanks to the Event Foundry (event management company) and to the Cricket Club for their support in helping to run and promote these events, both of which were well attended and enjoyed by the Whiston community (even though the festival was competing with England playing in the Euros and The Reytors playing in Clifton Park!). The Summer Gala is returning to the village centre this year (on 5 July) with an emphasis on fun for all the family. Look out for publicity and a packed programme.
- An event for veterans and others held in the Parish Hall on Remembrance Sunday with approximately 60 attendees who were served with pie and peas and treated to an afternoon of entertainment & raffle prizes. As I write this, the Parish Council is concluding its arrangements for a similar event in the Hall to mark the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE day on 8 May.
- The Parish Hall continues to be busy with a variety of bookings by community groups and for private parties. These include Brownies, Guides, Dance Groups, Choir, Parent & toddler groups, Whiston Heritage Society, yoga & pilates and various other activity groups. Anyone interested in utilising our excellent facilities can now do so by booking and paying online.
- The Community Café has returned to the Parish Hall, with Linda's Bakehouse offering a range of hot and cold drinks and snacks around lunchtime each Wednesday. Amongst other things, we know that this is helping with our efforts to combat potential loneliness for some of our residents.
- The hall has also hosted consultation and drop-in events for people to hear about and comment on significant local proposals, such as solar farms. Separately, your parish councillors have met with the bodies responsible for such schemes.
- We are continuing to make improvements to Parish Hall. Recent and planned actions include:
  - Upgrading the speed and coverage of Wi-Fi in the hall.
  - Installing a screen in the foyer which will shortly begin providing a range of information and advice.
  - In summer this year the hall will be redecorated and the floor in the main hall will be restored / refinished.
  - We are currently looking into installing solar panels onto the roof as a way of both reducing our energy costs and pursuing our aim of improving sustainability.
- We have established a Strategic Plan to better present and take forward our actions under four headings:
  - Environment
    - Improving the physical environment of the parish
    - Lobbying for effective flood alleviation
    - Climate action

- Community
    - Community cohesion
    - Events and activities
  - Communication
  - Well-being
    - Physical health and active lifestyles
- Each of the sections has a variety of supporting actions. For example, we are planning events (to involve the community) in combatting the spread of Himalayan balsam along the brook, but especially at Whiston Meadows. In developing our priorities and action plan, we are keen to hear if you have any observations or suggestions about what the Parish Council should do or champion on your behalf.
  - We continue to produce and deliver our twice-yearly Parish newsletter to all households in Whiston.
  - We are currently in the process of launching our new website and Facebook page to help in enabling quick and easy access to information about what is going on in the Parish Hall and the village.
  - Whiston Youth Club continues to be something of a model for others in how to run successfully. In addition to weekly (term-time) Thursday evening activities, Jordan Arno and his team of support staff have recently led a residential weekend trip to Hagg Farm in Derbyshire. A full write up of this, with and supporting photographs, can be viewed on our new website.
  - Cowrakes Park: The Parish Council continues to fund upgrade to the Play Area equipment to ensure it is safe (and fun!).

There have been some recent resignations by Parish councillors (for reasons of health and workload) and the vacant positions have been swiftly filled. We thank Colin Taylor and Haroon Rashid for their efforts over recent years and welcome their very able replacements, Paul Bray and Paul Thorp (who, like Cllr Fisher, is also a borough councillor for Sitwell, which helps us in our coordination and liaison with RMBC).

So, in addition to myself, your Parish Councillors are Paul Bray, Tony Dudson, Kevin Elliott, David Fisher, Elaine Reynard, Genaya Smales, Tim Stevenson and Paul Thorp, who all give their time freely to our efforts to continually improve Whiston for all its residents. A big “thank you” needs to go to all of them for their enthusiasm and support (especially to me being new to the Chair’s position). All of us are also hugely grateful to the work of our Clerk, Simon Oldham, and Financial Officer, Angela Harrison, without whom nothing would get done!

Tony Griffin – Parish Council Chair

April 2025