

Willoughby Community Action Report - April 2025

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to celebrate successes in Willoughby Parish over the past year or so. These include two new initiatives, ongoing projects where significant progress has been made and the culmination of two projects. All of the successes are the result of the hundreds of hours given by volunteers in the community who want to add to the social opportunities available to residents, to improve our environment and to preserve our heritage. Some people give many hours of their time; others offer an hour or two here and there, when they can. Without these volunteers, and there are many, none of the progress made would have been possible.

Pop Up Café

The first pop up café opened in the Village Hall on Friday, 2 February 2024 and has proved to be a great success with, on average, 65 - 75 people visiting to enjoy tea, coffee and a range of homemade cakes, savouries and scones at very reasonable prices each month. Guests are waited on at the table and have a beautifully presented menu from which to choose their particular treat. Profits from the café are donated to a variety of local charities who have supported villagers when needed. A total of £1,200 was donated in 2024.

Thank you: Rachel Settle, Karen Skipp, Pete Skipp, Val Taylor, Sheila Aland, and to Lynn Windatt, Tim Settle, and Lorraine and Jack Moyney, who help out behind the scenes.

Village Pond

A project led by the Willoughby Society to redevelop the pond began in October 2024. Residents were asked to volunteer to help with the work to remove overgrown vegetation around the edges and to remodel the island which was a wilderness of rosebay willowherb. They were also asked to sponsor a plant and many offered to do so.

The Warwickshire Conservation Volunteers joined a group of residents on 9 and 16 October 2024 and, together, they did an amazing job of clearing away unwanted vegetation and preparing the margins of the pond for planting in Spring 2025. The Reefkeeper shop on the A45 donated some plants which were planted along the front of the pond as a first step in introducing a much more diverse range of plants around the edges, on the island and in the pond itself. The aim is to create a haven for wildlife and a lovely village scene.

Thank you: Leonie Tromans, John Iles, Steve Palmer, Brian Hall, Andrea Hughes, Richard Heckford, the Warwickshire Conservation Volunteers led by Mike Skinner, and all those who sponsor a plant.

Catherine Marlow Memorial Garden

The Garden is the space in front of the allotments to the left of the pond. Catherine Marlow lived at Ivy House Farm and, sadly, drowned in a swimming accident on 4 October 1994, while on holiday in Greece. When ownership of the pond was transferred to the Parish Council in 2008, the Marlow family requested that they purchase a bench in her memory.

In 2024, the Parish Council arranged for the bench to be refurbished and for the Warwickshire Conservation Volunteers to remove saplings and vegetation that were obstructing the view from the bench across the pond. The garden now offers a place for residents and visitors to sit quietly and to enjoy the view.

Flood Action Group (FLAG)

The first meeting of the Flood Action Group took place in February 2023 and members have met every two or three months since then.

Task 1: create a team of flood wardens to support residents and to manage traffic when the village is flooded. On a number of occasions, wardens have donned their hi-vis jackets and spent hours slowing traffic so that floodwater, contaminated with sewage, is not thrown up against houses and into gardens. A few additional volunteers to provide cover, even for a couple of hours and particularly during working hours, to give the regular team a break, would be very welcome.

Thank you: Ant Ray, Jonnie Taylor, Sandie Ayriss, Brian Hall, Hilly Honess, Sue Johnson, Robin Ledson, Craig McMullen, Billy Taylor, Catherine Taylor, Sam Taylor, Dave Waddington, Darren White

Task 2: clear the dense vegetation and debris choking the brook both before the three culverts at the Lower Street junction and along Moor Lane to the pumping station, to improve the flow of water and to remove the risk to motorists and cyclists, unable to see others approaching the junction when the bulrushes are fully grown.

The great achievement during 2024 and into this year has been the almost complete clearance of this overgrown vegetation. Warwickshire County Council were very clear that, if this work had not been done, they would not have commissioned contractors to remove the deep silt that had accumulated in the culverts over the years and was contributing significantly to the flooding in the village. In the event, contractors came out on 10 and 11 December 2024 and removed an estimated 9 to 10 tons of silt from the culverts. Their recommendation to clear tons of sludge and mud from the brook itself was followed up in December by two local farmers.

Task 3: clear the vegetation growing all around the bridge at the pumping station on Moor Lane and then clear all the way down to the entrance to Manor Farm. Members of FLAG and other residents, even in freezing temperatures, were out Saturday after Saturday over winter and achieved what must have seemed almost impossible - a clear route for flood water all the way from the village to Manor Farm and beyond.

Thank you for your help with Tasks 2 and 3, clearing the brook and managing traffic, as required: Ant Ray, Jonnie Taylor, Darren Dunkley, Sandie Ayriss, James Bayliss, Steve Bendelow, Jack Bird, Gerard Crowley, David Doherty, Zoe Ebbs, Hilly Honess, Sue Johnson, Dale Keeling, Robin Ledson, Craig McMullen, Steve Palmer, Tim Settle, Catherine Taylor, Val Taylor, Kim Taylor, Dave Waddington and Richard Heckford for providing his trailer. Also, thank you to Joss Ray for supplying refreshments (tea, biscuits and bacon butties) numerous times throughout the campaign.

Task 4: produce a Willoughby Flood Action Plan. This was published in November 2024 and approved by the Parish Council on 12 November 2024. The plan can be found on the Parish Council website under Plans/Surveys or willoughbyparishcouncil.org/flood-action-plan and provides essential information for residents in the event of imminent or occurring flooding. The plan has been shared with the Warwickshire County Council Flood Risk Management Team.

Thank you: Bert Ogle and Maggie Beech, as well as members of FLAG who commented and improved various components of the plan.

Upgrading the Street Lighting to LEDs

The project to replace our 26 street lamps with the latest generation of Light Emitting Diode (LED) lanterns was finally completed in March 2024. The latest electricity bills show that the considerable, predicted savings on electricity costs are being made. In addition, there are greatly reduced maintenance costs and as the LED lights, plus the installation works, are guaranteed for 10 years and the photocells for 8 years, the projected maintenance costs for the foreseeable future will be very little, compared to the increasing annual maintenance expense for the previous sodium lanterns.

This has been a remarkable achievement made possible by the diligent and knowledgeable work of the Street Lighting Action Group. *Thank you: Cllr Malcolm Lewis, Bert Ogle, Steve Palmer and Tony Gasser.* Our special thanks also go to Jo Jarman, our Parish Clerk, who masterminded the financial justification that underpinned the whole scheme.

Another outcome from the project was that Electrical Network Contractors Ltd., who installed our lights, has been approached by a number of other parish councils asking about similar installations and Cllr Lewis has written a case study providing an overview of the project to assist them. A copy can be found on the Parish Council website under News - Upgrading the Street Lighting to LEDs: A Case Study www.willoughbyparishcouncil.org

St Nicholas' Church - National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) Bid

The NLHF promised a grant of almost £250,000 in May 2022. The grant was for replacement of the nave roof which had reached the end of its useful life and extensive stonework repairs. Permission to start the project was granted in July 2022 and the conservation builders and stonemasons began work in September 2022. Work also started on the kitchen and the toilet which were funded separately through other grants and which had been twenty years in the planning.

Over the next two years, as well as the building and restoration work, a wide range of activities and heritage events were organised and a community garden was planted. Once the new roof was installed, there was a considerable amount of internal restoration work that had to be carried out because of damage caused by the leaking roof. This involved strengthening the ceiling in the north aisle and replastering walls and ceilings. These were subsequently dried out thoroughly and repainted.

The project was finally signed off in August 2024. All the building work described in the bid has been carried out and the number of activities and events organised surpassed the promises made. The three years from the first drafting of the bid to the signing off of the project have been intense and have seen outstanding dedication and endless hours of volunteer work from many people in the community. Their work means that Willoughby now has a beautiful church for both existing and future generations of local people and visitors, and the community is more aware of the church's history and its historical importance. In addition, the 'Garden Gang', who dug out and planted the community garden, have created a beautiful and peaceful place for visitors to sit behind the church and enjoy the view and the wildlife.

The church has a commitment to organising community events as part of the legacy required in the NLHF bid. The new members of the Parochial Church Council (PCC), under the leadership of

Rev. Phil Price, have undertaken to fulfil this commitment, seeking to build a strong community engagement to progress and elevate the good work achieved already. To this end, the PCC has a range of traditional village activities planned, including supporting the popular Soup and Social held monthly in the Village Hall.

Thank you: Karen Nichols, Andrea Hughes, Sue Waddington, Val Baxter, Malcolm Lewis, Maggie Beech, Kim Gibbard, Richard Jackson, Brenda Oakes and Kathryn Watson as leaders in meeting key requirements of the National Lottery Heritage Fund project and thank you to the many other volunteers who made this project such a success. You are too many to name but the importance of your contributions cannot be overstated.

Conclusion

Although this report describes specific projects, there are many other volunteer 'unsung' heroes and heroines in Willoughby who contribute countless hours to different organisations and activities throughout the year. These include members of the committees for the Cricket Club, the Jubilee Allotment Association, the Thursday Club, the Village Hall, the Willoughby Charities, the Willoughby Darts Team, the Willoughby Society, the Women's Institute, the Woolscott Flower Club and Friends of Willoughby, as well as all those who support their activities.

In addition, there are the residents who publish and deliver the Willoughby Monthly newsletter, administer the Facebook page, organise the Community First Responders, litter pick, manage the telephone box library, provide technical support for the parish council website, administer the willoughbyweb.net website and organise the use of the Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) and the team trained to use them. And last, but by no means least, there are the parish councillors who give many hours of their time to fulfil their responsibilities.

The volunteers noted here may, at times, go under the radar but they are also essential in providing the facilities and activities that we are lucky enough to enjoy as residents of Willoughby.