

WILLOUGHBY PARISH

COMMUNITY ACTION REPORTS

7 MAY 2024

The reports provide residents with information and updates on seven topics

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2. Measures to reduce flooding
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1. Upgrading the street lights in the village to LED

The upgrade of our existing 26 street lights in the village was completed in April 2024. This has been a remarkable achievement made possible by the diligent and knowledgeable work of the volunteers in the Street Lighting Action Group and the Parish Clerk.

As we operate on an unmetered electricity supply, National Grid was notified of the installation of new LED street lights and we received the new KWh electricity load we will be invoiced for based on this installation. The information has been forwarded to our current electricity supplier and we are now obtaining the benefits of the lower electricity usage.

Background

Following a community meeting in 2022, the Street Lighting Action Group was formed to review the street lighting within the village. They established the following benefits of upgrading all the existing street lights to LED:

- Improved Carbon Footprint
- Significant savings on electricity and maintenance costs
- 'Dark Sky' approved street lights to reduce light pollution
- Improved home security due to better quality and more reliable street lighting
- Improved environment

The 26 street lights were mapped and a definitive log of each lights specification agreed with our maintenance provider. Quotations for the LED upgrade were obtained from three companies and Electricity Network Contractors Ltd were awarded the contract at a cost of £19,675 + VAT in December 2023 because they were lowest cost and based on good references for 3 parish councils

The work carried out included:

- Replacing the two remaining concrete poles and one rotten wooden pole with new steel poles.
- Fitting new brackets, 'DNO Cut Outs' and enclosures on 11 lights mounted on wooden poles as these dated back to the 1950s and were past their safe, useful life.
- Replacing 24 outdated sodium lights that are becoming obsolete with new, third generation, Urbis Schreder 13.1 W LED lanterns and photocells that will allow them to be 50% dimmable between midnight and 6.00am (one light had already been replaced)
- Replacing the existing Victorian style lamp with an LED equivalent lantern and painting the pole.

At the Parish Council meeting on 14 November 2023 approval was given to apply for a loan of £15,000 repayable over ten years from the Public Works Loan Board and to pay £4,675 + VAT out of reserves. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities approved the loan in December 2023. The street lighting upgrade is self-funding from the savings on electricity and maintenance of the existing lights. No precept increase is expected related to the upgrade.

2. Measures to reduce flooding

Local initiatives

A great deal of work was done in late 2023/early 2024 to clear vegetation and debris from the brook, from the section above the Village Hall on Main Street to the culverts at the Lower Street/Main Street junction, as well as to clear the lower part of the drain that runs from the A45 behind houses on Main Street and into the brook across from the Village Hall. This has been a combined effort by residents, non-resident landowners, Flood Action Group (FLAG) volunteers, the Warwickshire Conservation Volunteers and a local professional gardener. The Parish Council has contributed financially.

Work with outside agencies

Three issues have been the main focus of communications with the Highways Area Surveyor and a Flood Risk Management Officer at Warwickshire County Council (WCC).

1. Lower the profile of the tarmac at the Lower Street/Main Street junction so that floodwater flows away down Moor Lane rather than diverting into Lower Street and then backing up into Main Street again.
2. Clear the excessive silt buildup in the three culverts at the Lower Street/Main Street junction so that the strong flow down the brook, during periods of heavy rainfall, can pass through efficiently.
3. Remove the bulrush rhizomes on both sides of the culverts as, once fully grown, these pose a significant danger to road users at the junction who cannot see vehicles coming from Moor Lane or Lower Street. They also catch debris and block the flow of water in the brook.

Progress to date

1. Highways agree that work on the junction might help but the schedule for road surfacing has already been planned for 2024/2025 and does not include work on the junction. Cllr Dale Keeling (RBC and WCC) was approached and asked if he had any funding that might expedite the work. He is supportive of work to help alleviate flooding and arranged a site visit today with Highways Officers. It was agreed that engineering contractors would come out in a week and see what, if anything, can be done to improve the situation.
2. The culverts were inspected in February 2023 with no concerns raised. The next detailed inspection is due in the financial year 2024/2025. However, given the concerns of the Flood Action Group, the Structures Team will try to visit when next in the area and assess silt, vegetation levels and any other problems that appear evident. There is no report that this has been done, as yet.
3. During the winter months, volunteers have continually removed much of the debris that flows down the brook, from both sides of the Lower Street culverts, to prevent blockages. However, the exceptionally wet weather and the deep, waterlogged silt means that work to remove bulrush rhizomes has had to be postponed.

Information for Residents

FLAG has produced two information documents for residents.

1. 'Impact of Flooding on Residents'
2. 'Flooding Leaflet for Residents' - what to do before, during and after serious flooding.

The leaflet was distributed to all residents whose properties might be at risk. Both documents can be found on the Parish Council website under Plans/Surveys. FLAG is now working on a new Willoughby Flood Action Plan to accompany the documents above.

3. Highways issues

Introduction

The following issues were raised during a site visit by Rugby Borough Councillor Dale Keeling, on Saturday 30 September 2023, with WPC Councillors Maggie Beech, Malcolm Lewis and Rod Honess

Resolved

Sunken water hydrant on Main Street near College Farm

Repaired by Severn Trent in January 2024.

Woolscott Road/A45 crossroads.

The remaining light on the Woolscott Road was finally connected in February 2024. The reason for the delay from the promised date of November 2023 was the lack of a sensor that turns the electricity off, if the lights are hit by a vehicle.

Woolscott Road

The large 'slump' in the tarmac from the end of Lower Street towards the A45 was resurfaced in February 2024, together with another section of damaged tarmac. New speed markings were also painted on the road.

Some progress

Lowering the tarmac at the Lower Street/Main Street junction

See Flood Action Group 'Progress to date' (item 1. on page 2.)

Grass Verge on Main St adjacent to 5 White Barn Close

The grass verge alongside the road below 5 White Barn Close becomes an ugly quagmire following any significant rain and/or flooding as vehicles mount the curb to park or to pass each other. A significant drop in the surface level of the grass/mud also creates a dangerous 'tripping/slipping' point along the edge of the main road.

During the site visit by Cllr Dale Keeling and the Highways Officers today, the situation was discussed and, if tarmacking is too expensive, the use of Grasscrete might be a possibility as this does not involve removing and replacing the kerbstones. (Grasscrete is a concrete grid through which grass can grow). Carrying out the work will depend on available funding.

No progress to date

Moor Lane between Willoughby Lodge and Fox Covert

The road is not wide enough for vehicles to pass without going off the edge of the tarmac, particularly where heavy lorries and farm vehicles are involved. This has resulted in extensive potholes along the edges of the road which cause damage to vehicles' suspension, tracking, tyres and wheels. This section (as a minimum) needs to be metalled to the full width of the available carriageway.

4. Speeding concerns

Our PCSO, David Banks, is aware of residents' concerns about speeding in the village but has confirmed recently that there is no change to the Warwickshire Police Speed Watch Policy. As reported at the Annual Community Meeting in April 2023, the police decided that there were no suitable sites identified anywhere in the village that complied with the minimum safety requirements for speed watch activities to be conducted.

PCSO Banks has advised the Parish Council that he will carry out speed checks in the area. He has also been informed by WCC Highways that residents with speed concerns should report them directly to the new central reporting system - warksspeedconcerns.org/

5. Footpaths and bridleways

There are **two farm gateways** that need to be infilled to prevent deep flooding in the winter - one between the playing field and Hayward Lodge and the other in Big Ground. The work has been agreed with the WCC Rights of Way Team but progress has been very slow.

There are **three metalled footpaths** in the village that need resurfacing:

1. The path between Main Street and Magdalen Road: This work is likely to be carried out but no timescale has been given by Highways.
2. The Shrubberies Footpath between Lower Street (at Church View) and The Old School House: The Parish Council has been told that this path is unadopted and, therefore, is not WCC's responsibility. The original/recognised path went down the driveway to the Old Vicarage and was, at some point, diverted to its current position. The position now is that no-one has agreed to take responsibility for maintenance although there are WCC finger signposts at both ends of the path.
3. Public right of way from Main Street to The Old School House carport
At the Parish Council meeting in January 2024, a resident provided evidence that WCC Highways owns this PRow and is responsible for the maintenance. Highways has accepted their responsibility to carry out resurfacing although no timescale has been given.

The Parish Council responded to Warwickshire County Council's **consultation on Public Rights of Way** on 1 March 2024. After describing issues in connection with the PRows in Willoughby, the following actions were proposed:

- improved waymarking signs along routes, clearing overgrown paths, reinstating routes blocked by crops, opening up paths which have been deliberately blocked, repairing bridges and steps which are in poor condition, removing stiles or replacing them with gates to make paths more accessible, maintenance of unmetalled/metalled surfaces.

It was requested that WCC should clearly state what they can do to support parish councils in maintaining and improving PRows and that they should provide the funding necessary to make sure the work is carried out.

6. Playing field

The Council was pleased with the results of the latest annual inspection by RoSPA which found only minor issues. The playground continues to provide a safe area for children to play and let off some steam! However, it was disappointing to discover earlier this year that there was graffiti damage in the shelter. Hopefully, this was just an isolated incident and the availability of this valuable asset to the parish will continue to be respected.

7. Climate Change

Individuals

Willoughby residents already contribute individually to measures which address changes in the climate although they may not think of their actions in such terms. Examples include recycling household and garden waste, swapping books through the telephone box book exchange, reusing or repairing items rather than sending them to landfill, planting flowers and shrubs in their gardens and growing food either in gardens or on the allotments.

Organisations

Organisations in the parish have led on a variety of projects which will improve biodiversity in the parish. These include the Jubilee Copse planted as part of the Queen's Green Canopy to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee in 2022, the Amenity Garden which was replanted in 2022/2023, the St Nicholas' Church Community Garden developed in 2023 and the traditional hedge laying along the boundary of the allotments in February 2024.

Parish Council

Councillors have been involved in projects with residents over the past two years which seek to improve the environment in Willoughby. These are the upgrading of all the street lights in the village to LED and flood mitigation measures by the Flood Action Group.

In addition, the Neighbourhood Development Plan has several policies which directly address issues associated with climate change such as biodiversity, sustainability and renewable energy and these will continue to inform comments made on planning applications by the Parish Council.

Future actions

All Councils are being encouraged to declare a climate emergency by local government organisations such as the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Warwickshire Association of Local Councils (WALC).

Before deciding what to do about this, councillors want to ask residents:

1. What are your views on this issue?
2. Is there more you think could or should be done by individuals or the wider community?