

Annual Community Meeting Report

23 April 2026

Introduction

The Annual Community Meeting is for residents in the parish of Willoughby; it is not a parish council meeting. The meeting provides an opportunity to meet other residents to introduce and discuss issues that matter to them.

This report is a summary of some of the significant events that have taken place over the past year and highlights some actions to be carried out later in the year. It is intended to act as a springboard for discussion about the topics in the report and other issues and/or concerns residents may have.

Flooding and Fund Raising in October 2025

Flooding in Willoughby village has been a major problem for many years and, in spite of herculean efforts over many months by members of the Flood Action Group, and other residents, to remove vegetation and debris from the brook, the risk of flooding continued.

The reason for the fund raising was to pay for a contractor to remove tons of silt from the brook from the Lower Street junction down to The Moat, beyond the pumping station, so that the likelihood of the village flooding would be greatly reduced.

The 'Da Tree Fellas' concert on 11 October 2025 was a great success. All those involved in organising, advertising, selling tickets and supporting the event deserve our thanks. And, our thanks also to all those who gave raffle prizes and donations. The total of £1,806 raised, after expenses, is a truly amazing achievement and testament to a community that works together to achieve important local objectives.

A contractor removed the buildup of silt from the brook over three days in October and the outcome has been highly significant. During a very wet winter with what seemed like endless rain, where surrounding villages flooded, Willoughby did not - a remarkable result. Residents who are riparian owners and are, therefore, responsible for keeping the section of the brook that runs beside their property clear, have also played their part and have contributed to the success. They too deserve our gratitude.

Moor Lane / Sawbridge Road

The condition of sections of Moor Lane and much of the Sawbridge Road to Fox Covert and beyond has been very poor for a long time and a cause of great concern to many residents. Cllrs Rod Honess and Maggie Beech, together with Dale Keeling, our councillor on Warwickshire County Council (WCC), met the WCC Highways Area Surveyor on 29 July 2025 to discuss what could be done to improve the situation.

Since the meeting, white edging lines have been painted along the road and SLOW signs painted on the road going into the sharp bend by Willoughby Lodge. Two agreed actions remain outstanding:

1. Depressions within the carriageway areas to be filled in.
2. Planings (stones) to be put in the verges along the edge of the carriageway so that these are filled in. This would include the stretch of carriageway running past Manor Farm on Moor Lane.

The Area Surveyor confirmed that the planings in the verges would be a temporary fix. Roads are scored and if you rank in the top 12, work will be carried out in the current financial year. The Surveyor intimated that Sawbridge Road is close to reaching the top 12; he also confirmed that the use of planings will not impact the scoring and when the road reaches the top 12 it will be tarmacked to its original width.

The Highways Area Surveyor for our area always responds quickly to emails from the Parish Council and has emailed to say that he is following up with the relevant people to get work completed.

Willoughby Monthly (WM)

After three successful years, Hannah Gowney-Hedges passed on the baton for producing the WM at the beginning of this year. Richard Jackson and Bert Ogle took up the challenge and made arrangements for the future production of the newsletter. Their plan is for a small team to be responsible for different aspects of the publication to share the workload, thus ensuring that every household is provided with this important source of information about what is happening in Willoughby each month.

Last year, Michael Nelson volunteered to collate articles for the WM, with Richard Jackson printing it and Pat Atkins and Jean Warner looking after distribution. Printing takes place in the village hall and the Gentlemen's Coffee Group funded the purchase of a printer trolley and other items to keep the printer, ink and paper supplies safe and easily accessible. Our thanks to all concerned. The printer and ink supplies have

been acquired on a subscription scheme from Epson, the printer manufacturer, with the first 18 months funded jointly by the Parish Council and the Willoughby Charity.

After producing the February to April 2026 editions of the WM, Michael has unfortunately had to step back from the role because of time pressures. Richard and Bert Ogle are currently seeking another volunteer to join the team.

As well as seeking another volunteer to collate and produce the WM, Richard has asked for some more volunteers to be available on a 'standby' basis so that, if someone is unable to carry out their usual tasks, they have reserves they are able to call upon e.g. if one of the distributors is unwell. If you would like to find out more with a view to helping, please give Richard a call on 01788 891898 or send him an email at wm@willoughbyweb.net.

Parish Council - New website

The old website fulfilled its purpose for four years but events move on and it became clear that the Parish Council would have to source a new website. The primary reason for this was to meet the most recent Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, issued in October 2024 (WCAG 2.2AA). The previous website did not meet the requirements of WCAG 2.2AA and could not be made to do so. As well as the new website, the Clerk and Councillors have new email addresses for Parish Council business which can be found on the Home Page. www.willoughby-pc.gov.uk

Maintenance Work in the Parish

As well as liaison about the condition of roads in the parish, the Parish Council continues to organise various other work to maintain and improve the Parish environment.

Mowing - Greenstone Contracts regularly mows the verges and the playing field.

Trees and shrubs - the large ash tree to the left of the pond had ash dieback and was pollarded to make it safe in December 2025. The plan is to pollard the willow trees during 2026/2027. Shrubs around the village sign were cut back in December 2025 to tidy up the area and to encourage new growth.

Footpaths

- Footpath on the A45 - cutting back the grass and repairing the path is being followed up by the Highways Area Surveyor.
- Footpath across Big Ground - work to improve the gateway area should take place in the summer, when the weather is better. Volunteers may be needed to ferry stones from the bottom of the field up to the gateway.
- Shrubbery footpath - three gate posts have been replaced, the gap at the kissing gate by Lower Street has been widened by a few inches and signs have been

posted asking dog owners to keep their dogs on leads to ensure everyone's safety.

Hedges - Residents have played their part in ensuring that their hedges and any overhanging branches from trees and shrubs are cut right back next to pavements, public footpaths, grass verges and roads so that pedestrians can pass easily, verges can be mowed and motorists' view is not obstructed. Thank you.

Bus shelters and benches - these are regularly inspected, and maintained as necessary.

Potholes, drain gulleys, facility covers, damaged road surfaces

A survey is carried out regularly and any issues are reported to Highways who either deal with the matter themselves or refer them on to the relevant agency.

Accidents at the Longdown Lane/A45 junction

During January and February 2025, the Parish Council emailed the Road Safety Liaison Officer at Warwickshire County Council Safety Engineering Team about concerns related to the junction. The email included data on collisions attended by the police/ambulance services from 2021 to January 2025, supplemented with data trawled from the village Facebook page where these services were not present at the scene of the accident.

The email exchange with the Road Safety Liaison Officer was posted in the appendix to the minutes of the Parish Council meeting on 11 March 2025. Essentially, the emails from the Officer explain the reasons why nothing more will be done to change/improve the junction at this time. Unfortunately, in spite of the changes that have been made to the junction, accidents continue to happen, largely down to driver error.

Rugby Borough Council Local Plan

Preferred Options Local Plan - Consultation 24 March - 19 May 2025

Representatives from Stand Against Lodge Farm delivered 2,069 letters to the Town Hall on Friday, 16 May 2025. Lodge Farm was not allocated in the Local Plan but the letters objected strongly to the inclusion of Lodge Farm as a 'reasonable alternative scenario', giving many reasons why this was not justifiable. The signed letters came from Willoughby, Grandborough, Flecknoe and Sawbridge, Barby and Onley, other villages, Rugby, Daventry and further afield.

Willoughby's contribution alone was 1,140 letters with a further 115 submitted on 19 May - 1,255 letters in total. For a small village, this was a truly wonderful achievement. Residents really stepped up to do everything possible to ensure the campaign against Lodge Farm was successful. As well as signing letters themselves,

they encouraged neighbours, friends, relatives, people attending social and sporting activities, colleagues in work places, and people they met on the street, to do the same.

As well as the 2,069 letters from SALFV, the campaign group Action for Dunchurch submitted 469 letters and individuals sent a further 248 representations - a total of 2,786.

Proposed Submission Local Plan - Consultation 30 January - 13 March 2026

Lodge Farm was not allocated in this version of the Local Plan although it remains as a 'reasonable alternative'. Once RBC has updated their Consultation Statement, they intend to send this, together with all responses received, to the government by the end of April 2026.

RBC cannot make changes to the Submission Local Plan at this point. If appropriate, the planning inspector at the Examination in Public will make recommendations for modifications based on all the evidence received. Should Main Modifications be proposed, there will be a further public consultation on these proposed changes before the inspector writes their final report and recommendation for adoption.

RBC is hoping that the Examination will take place in autumn 2026 with a view to adoption by Rugby Borough Council in spring 2027.

Willoughby's Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP)

The NDP was made (approved) in December 2019 after more than two years of work by volunteers on the steering group and residents who contributed to the four consultations and has been regularly reviewed every two years to make minor modifications/updates.

The NDP was due for review in October 2025 but this has not been done mostly because of further potential changes to national planning policies and the fact that Rugby's Local Plan has been undergoing reviews and consultations. Advice from RBC and our planning consultant was to wait until the Local Plan is approved. The major problem with any review is that the government has withdrawn all funding for councils to either create or update neighbourhood plans. The Parish Council wrote to our MP, Sir Jeremy Wright, in July 2025 asking him to raise this issue with the government as small parish councils are unlikely to have the funds to pay for a review requiring significant updates and consultations. We have heard nothing since.

Maggie Beech
Chair, Willoughby Parish Council