

East Leake Parish Council
Annual Parish Meeting April 2022
Chairman's Report

Good evening and thank you for coming along to the Annual Parish meeting - the first one that we have been able to hold for two years.

A major concern to the Parish over the past 5 years or so has, of course, been the explosion in new dwellings being built. Once the ongoing developments are finished, we will have seen some 1400 new houses in the village. Rushcliffe Borough Council now have a local plan in place which states no further development in East Leake. However, it remains to be seen what happens when the next local plan is put in place.

However, a new development has been the sudden increase in the number of sites in this area for the potential development of solar farms. The Parish Council will look at each one in detail as they are referred to us. We are certainly not against them, but we are not in favour at any price.

Turning to the amenities in the village that the Parish Council has control over, I must first address the Gotham Road play area which was closed for over two years.

The Parish Council remain convinced that the problem with the surfacing around the play areas was due entirely to poor advice given to us by the suppliers of the equipment. Unfortunately, we were unable to prove that, and eventually our legal advisors recommended dropping the legal suit against them because they felt we only had a slim chance of success. We therefore had to go ahead with the repair at our own expense. We very much regret the delay the legal battle caused, but hopefully the problems are now behind us.

We are already working on plans to add to our play provision for over-12s

Next, I want to talk about the Costock Road playing fields and the associated parking problems on match days. Whilst the majority of the land used for sports pitches is owned by the Parish Council, it is leased to and managed by East Leake Playing Field Charity.

For many years they have wished to replace the old wooden pavilion building (built in 1964) but were not being very successful. If this was ever to happen it was obvious that it needed someone with the time and resources to drive it forward. So, the Parish Council stepped in and asked the previous clerk, Neil Lambert, to project manage the scheme and we agreed to increase his hours to facilitate this.

We already knew that we had some £280,000 of contributions from the housing developers, and we were able to secure a grant from the premier league, the football association, and the government of £375,500.

After the tendering process we were able to sign contracts with the preferred bidder in September and work started in December 2021.

The total cost of the project is some £900,000 but this includes the renovation of the existing two storey brick-built building. The Parish Council have agreed to fund the shortfall by way of a public works loan board loan payable over 10 years, but we do not envisage this leading to an increase in Council tax.

When everything is completed, we will have up to date changing facilities complete with showers and toilets for players and officials, plus a kitchen, bar and two spacious community rooms which will be available for hire.

Parking on Costock Road has long been a problem on match days and the Parish Council have tried to purchase land opposite the pavilion on several occasions. We have finally been successful and now plan to build a 70-vehicle car park opposite the playing fields but have been frustrated by planning problems. These have now been resolved and we should be able to sign contracts shortly.

You will no doubt have noticed the transformation of the Oldershaw Land off Costock Road also, with the planting of over 300 trees and the construction of a new natural children's play area. This was almost entirely funded by developer contributions, and the small working party that drove it forward are to be congratulated.

You will also start to see changes to the small green area in the village centre that previously was known as 'The Rest Garden' but which in future will be referred to as 'The Friendship Garden'.

Plans currently being finalised include the installation of friendship benches, a Covid-19 memorial garden and a custom-made friendship arch for the entrance.

I trust that most of you have noticed the improved floral display in the village centre planters and the extension to the summer blooms, with the addition of the planters on the railings.

Wildflowers were sown in the small grass area in the Gotham Road car park, and they bloomed beautifully, and many happy bees were spotted around the area. More have been sown this year in a few other spots about the village.

The skatepark has had a wonderful facelift due to funding from the Welcome Back Fund. We also ran two family fun days in October in the village with funding from the same source.

Unfortunately, some of our Christmas lights failed last year, so we are planning to replace them to ensure we have a full display this year.

Sadly, our bottle filling tap on the public toilets has been damaged twice by vandals and we are looking into effective and practical fixing options.

East Leake Market has continued with the support of the Parish Council. A big thank you to those who volunteer their time to make it happen.

Look out also for our Jubilee celebrations that will be coming up in June – it's not too late to get involved. Please speak to Cllr Wendy Thompson if you wish to volunteer.

I am also delighted to confirm that construction of the new junior school at the bottom of Kirk Ley Road is well under way and talks are ongoing regarding a new Health Centre and sewerage pumping station.

Finally, I must turn to the question of budgets, finance, and council tax.

Managing the Parish Council funds and setting a budget is the main function of our Personnel and Finance Committee and they work to allow for large, planned projects whilst also providing funds for managing open spaces and parks, allotments, the burial ground, The Friendship Garden, and the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations.

I think the main difference with the current administration to previous ones is that we are much more proactive in ensuring that we get maximum benefit from the various developers who have/are building in the village and other forms of funding that are available. We have been able to undertake some fairly major projects over recent years and will continue to do so over the next 18 months without having to increase council tax - the Parish Council element of which has not increased for 3 years now.

In 2021 the Parish Council declared a climate emergency (more about that later) with the aim of being carbon neutral by 2030. We have already calculated our carbon footprint and have started to offset this with all the tree planting that has been undertaken and will continue.

We have commissioned a review of the Parish office to ascertain what can be done to improve the efficiency of the lighting and heating.

We also intend to replace, when necessary, all the petrol driven power tools our maintenance staff use with cordless electric models and replace the current diesel tractors with electric models in due course.

In the meantime, our grounds maintenance staff have been targeted with reducing our consumption of fossil fuels.

Provision within the budget has and will continue to be made for the capital expenditure that will be required.

Last but by no mean least I must say a massive thank you to the 14 Councillors who give their time freely to drive forward improvements in the village which make all our lives that little bit better.

Also, a very big thank you to our 4 members of staff.

The Parish office is now fully open. Susan Lewis – who incidentally has been with the Council for over 25 years – was appointed as Clerk following Neil’s surprise decision to retire, and we are delighted to welcome to the team the new Assistant Clerk, Ally Moore. Ally has already started to study for the CiLCA qualification (Certificate in Local Council Administration), and we look forward to her being with us well into the future.

Also, of course, we have the two grounds maintenance staff, who continued to work during the pandemic and do their best to keep the village neat and tidy. Thank you to them both.

That concludes my report. Thank you for listening to me and I will be happy to try to answer any questions that you may have.

CLlr Kevin Shaw (Chairman)