

Rowton Parish Council – Chair’s Annual Report 2023/24

Although 2023/24 was expected to be a more ‘normal’ year for the Parish Council, it turned out to be a busy year with Planning and Highways taking centre stage.

Also, the Parish Council still struggles to recruit Councillors and we are continuing to operate without a complete quota of Councillors. We are always looking for new Councillors so please let us know if you are interested.

Planning

Neighbourhood Development Plan

The value of a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) is that it allows the residents to develop a Plan which they believe best meets the needs of the Parish. However, preparing and producing an NDP needs a considerable amount of resource and funds to complete. A small Parish like Rowton does not have sufficient resources to develop the necessary scope of material to allow an NDP to be valid.

As a fallback the Parish Council approached Christleton and Waverton about being included in their Plan.

Waverton do not intend to develop an NDP, And Christleton were already too far along in their preparations to include Rowton in their Planning Area.

However, as a result of our approach to Christleton, a Rowton Parish Councillor will be a member of a Sub-committee involved in developing their NDP.

Although Rowton will not be directly considered in the Planning criteria for Christleton, our views will be taken into consideration. Recently it has been announced that smaller Parish Councils can develop a Neighbourhood Priority Statement (NPS). This document has not yet been fully defined but we expect by preparing an NPS which is in seamless agreement with the Christleton NDP it will offer a high degree of protection from unwanted development.

Manor Bridge Proposal

Towards the end of 2023, a serious concern was raised about a rumoured planning proposal to develop Manor Farm as a housing site with potentially up to a thousand properties. Although it was not possible to get confirmation from the Local Authority, it was deemed prudent to act and pre-empt any defined proposal by making the views of the local community clear.

As the potential development would have an extreme effect on several Parishes. a joint communique was sent which included the views of Rowton, Christleton, Waverton, Great Boughton and Huntington.

A response has been received which focuses on the fact that at that time no formal Planning Application has been received. We will continue to monitor the situation as it develops.

Highways

The good news towards the end of 2023 was that the Average Speed Monitoring Cameras were being installed along the A41. These cameras have now been in place for 6 months and have proved to be effective at reducing the speed along the A41 through Rowton and Christleton. This is a reward for the persistence shown by the Parish Councils involved.

There are still Highways issues that are being addressed including the deterioration of the Pavement along the A41 on the Rowton Lane side. This issue has been raised several times by Rowton Parish Council, with the Local Authority but we have been informed that the deterioration is not sufficiently severe to meet the criteria for action. We will continue to pursue this issue.

Community Events

Unfortunately, both the Coronation event and the Carols on the Green were affected by uncertainty about the weather on the day.

In the case of the Coronation event the Parish Council felt that it could not support the staging of the event due to safety concerns. However, the Residents of Rowton decided to go ahead with the Coronation Event in spite of the uncertainty and a good time was had by all.

The Carols on the Green went ahead but the decision-making process leading up to the final go ahead was unsatisfactory. As a result, a formal decision-making process is to be established to prevent a repeat of the uncertainty and confusion.

The Parish Council is also looking at ways to cooperate with Rowton Hall Hotel, who have offered their support, to make sure that a more successful event is held.

It is worth noting that despite the confusion, there was a good attendance at the Carols on the Green, which was led expertly by Michael Smythe, who I am pleased to say has rejoined the Parish Council. My thanks to Michael for his support for this event.

Finally

At the end of 2023, Bob Knight, who was our longest serving Parish Councillor, decided it was time to step down.

I would like to thank Bob on behalf of our Clerk Christine and the other Councillors for his support and insight, which will be greatly missed.

Additionally, I would like to thank Christine, our Clerk, for all her tireless efforts and expertise to keep the Council operating efficiently.

Cllr Howard Hopwood
Chair – May 2024