

Wollaston-the glass is half full.

As a relative newcomer to Wollaston (11 years) and a Parish Councillor for less than two years I feel my views on the village may be disregarded as the ill-informed utterings of an upstart blow in, but as we still live in a democracy I shall have my say. Firstly, the glass here is definitely half full, not half empty. By that I mean many of the challenges facing us here are mainly the problems of success and prosperity-not enough parking spaces, complaints about expansion, traffic flow, new housing, etc. We all live in a village with fantastic country walks on our door step, historic and thatched houses, good transport links and shops, a pub, clubs, churches, and yes we still have a post office and library! Yet you can be in London (some say it is now the capital of the world) in less than an hour.

Now compare this to many of the blighted former pit villages in my old home, the north east. You can buy a three bedroom Victorian terrace with central heating in some places for £35k or less. The problem is no one wants to live there. The challenges here of a declining population are much worse than issues around a growing village. Yes, there is no parking, traffic or new housing complaints-few own cars and a housing market that is dysfunctional-no one would build there. Worse still, civic society has collapsed as the best people leave first and the invisible social contract breaks down.

I am sad to see in my time in Wollaston we have lost three pubs-but these former mining villages have lost so much more in a seemingly unending depressing circle of poverty.

I strongly believe Wollaston's greatest asset is its strong sense of civic engagement. Fantastic and too little praised work is done through the churches and voluntary organisations, involved individuals and of course the Parish Council. In particular I would like to praise those involved in the Neighbourhood Plan and those reviving the youth club; both in many ways thankless tasks, but both, in my opinion, vital for the village's future. I believe the villages many dog walkers also add to the mix acting as unpaid Bobbies on the beat. Well, except those who don't clean up after their pets and let themselves and their community down.

Finally, if you still hold that the glass is half empty here, then please feel free to visit some other village (or some sink estates in large towns) to see isolated communities without social ties, jobs, shops or basically hope and reflect on what you have got here.

Bernard Rooney
Wollaston Parish Councillor