

Potterspury Parish Council  
Annual Parish Assembly 2022

**Chairman's Report**

*Council Membership*

When I reported last year, I noted that we were about to have our first parish council elections for 6 years due to local government reorganisation in Northamptonshire and the COVID-19 pandemic. However, I also noted that our elections were to be once more uncontested because we had eleven nominations for the thirteen places and the eleven were to be elected unopposed. Thus, in May 2021 eleven members of the former council were elected again and the two remaining places were filled by the co-options of Stephen Dring who decided after all to continue being a parish councillor and a new member, Zara Peasland.

However, during the municipal year Cllr Richard Armstrong, who had been spending periods of time in France, decided to resign and this left a vacancy which was filled by the co-option of Scott Peasland. Once again, we have our full allocation of thirteen councillors and our two new members of the council have taken over roles on finance and street lighting.

*Big Issues – Representing our Community*

Last year I reported on the unprecedented impact of the pandemic, but I also noted that our Parish Plan needed updating. We managed to carry out a survey of residents despite COVID restrictions and other problems. I optimistically reported last year that an updated plan would help us resist large scale developments, but I also reported on the spectre of large-scale predatory developments being initiated by the MK2050. What I think we had failed to recognise was the more immediate changes brought about by our new unitary council West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) who began immediately consulting on a new Local Plan by suggesting that 6,500 houses could be built around the Old Stratford A5/A508/A422 interchange and also that there could be further large-scale expansion south of Towcester. This meant the Parish Council immediately taking on the role of coordinating local opinion and working with others to raise awareness of the possible impacts of this large-scale development on our community. We worked alongside other local parishes to form the A5 Alliance and held public meetings attended by the local ward members of West Northamptonshire Council. We also met with our local MP Dame Andrea Leadsom. Currently we are anxiously waiting for the outcome of the WNC Consultation, but I think it is safe to say that we mobilised villagers as much as we could to have their say on the proposals.

If these possible developments were not enough, over the summer we were also informed of the intention to build a large-scale solar farm on land owned by Queens College Oxford between Yardley Gobion and Potterspury. This application is progressing slowly through the WNC planning process and we have been working with Yardley Gobion Parish Council on jointly discussing proposals with the developer. It has again been a year like no other - last year we had the start of the pandemic and on-line meetings, this year it has been the year of large-scale planning.

*Our Services to our Community*

After the delays due to the pandemic, we finally managed get the collapsed section of the cemetery wall rebuilt. It was a major project for the Council and the contract process was difficult - we were dealing with a retaining wall and the process was protracted because it was difficult to get contractors in the pandemic. We were unable to access grant funding and the costs of the work

came from a significant increase in the Council's precept and our reserves. However, this will mean the financial impact will be short-term, unlike the similar wall repairs for the 1990s where a loan was taken out and which is still being repaid.

The Millpond Conservation Area has progressed well with the wildflower meadow now planted and a village pond working well. Significant planting has also taken place over the last few years with memorial trees now planted, memorial seats installed and a millstone erected in the centre of the area as an icon. We are grateful for the continuing hard work of Cllr Lucas and to Cllr Dring for help with site works. It has not been easy preparing the land with ground conditions and problems with access, but we appear to have reached a point where it can be enjoyed by the village, so we are shortly to open it to the public.

The Council continues to improve the village environment through improved tree maintenance, grass cutting and street lighting. Our landscape maintenance contract was relet to RTM Landscapes and we continue to be grateful for the many environmental works carried out over the years by volunteers. During the recent spate of "named storms" we have had significant damage to trees in the cemetery and play areas and our expenditure on trees maintenance continues to grow.

The Council employs Rob Phillips as the village handyperson and this continues to be an effective way to maintain our play equipment, notice boards, seats, fences etc.

Our allotments continue to flourish and they are fully occupied. We are grateful to Cllr Silvester for coordinating this area. The allotments are, of course, owned by a charity but under the control of the Council.

Councils require a firm financial base to avoid difficulties. We are grateful for the continuing efforts of our Clerk as Responsible Financial Officer, Cllr Giblin has taken over responsibility for overview of the manual ledger from Cllr Armstrong and Cllr Norris acts as Chair of the Finance Working Group. The FWG has been important in managing our reserves, preparing the budget and organising possible grant bids. It was particularly active concerning the rebuilding of the High Street Cemetery wall.

### Thanks

I would once again like to thank all councillors for their support through the year. The new members in particular have joined us during difficult times, but when faced with difficult choices I think we have provided clear community leadership. I would particularly like to thank the Cllr Millidge who as vice-chair has provided unstinting support particularly when faced with the almost overwhelming problems associated with the West Northamptonshire Local Plan and meetings coming thick and fast.

Councils need a firm financial base and we are grateful for the continuing efforts of our Clerk, Jane Spence as Responsible Financial Officer. But beyond that, we must be very grateful for the efficient and friendly manner in which she carries out her administrative duties as Clerk. In the difficult times that faced us this year it is good to know we can rely on our Clerk for sound support and advice.

Cllr Steve Parkin

April 2022