

Potterspurty Parish Council  
Annual Parish Assembly 2023

**Chairman's Report**

*Council Membership*

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 and a new member, Zara Peasland. Later in the year Scott Peasland filled the vacancy when Cllr Richard Armstrong resigned. Thus, this time last year we had our full allocation of thirteen councillors. However, during the last municipal year Cllr Anna Ruck moved away from the village and resigned and Cllr Fred Giblin also resigned. We have recently filled one of our vacancies with Cllr Ian Garbutt recently joining the Council so this leaves us with one vacancy.

*Big Issues – Representing our Community*

Our new unitary council West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) began consulting on a new Local Plan by suggesting that 6,500 houses could be built around the Old Stratford A5/A508/A422 interchange and on plans for further large-scale expansion south of Towcester. The Parish Council immediately took 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. There was major opposition to the proposals but they have not been evaluated by WNC and they still hang over our village over a year later. Allied to these proposals are the plans to construct major warehousing in Cosgrove close to A5 interchange. The plans will directly affect Old Stratford and Cosgrove but it is likely our village will feel the impact on traffic.

The intention to build a large-scale solar farm on land owned by Queens College Oxford between Yardley Gobion and Potterspurty is still under discussion. This application is progressing very slowly through the WNC planning process and we have been working with Yardley Gobion parish council on jointly discussing proposals with the developer.

Last year was the year of large-scale planning announcements – this year we have had no real progress on the plans – they remain threats.

*Our Services to our Community*

After the delays due to the pandemic we finally managed to 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. This is the second year of our financial plan to replenish our reserves. However, we have had to increase our budget for streetlighting repairs and tree maintenance continues to stretch our finances. We have recently invested in an upgrade of the Meadow View Play Area CCTV following concerns about undesirable elements congregating in the car park after dark.

The Millpond Conservation Area is now fully functioning with the wildflower meadow well established and a village pond working well. Significant planting has also taken place over the last few years with memorial trees now planted, seats have been installed and a millstone erected in the centre of the area as an icon. We have also an interpretation board. We are grateful for the continuing hard work of Cllr Lucas and to Cllr Dring for help with site works.

The Council continues to improve the village environment through improved tree maintenance, grass cutting and street lighting. Our landscape maintenance contract continues to be held by RTM Landscapes and we continue to be grateful for the many environmental works carried out over the years by volunteers.

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 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.

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 2023