

Potterspurty Parish Council

Annual Parish Report 2024

Chairman's Report

Council Membership

Last April I reported that the council had twelve members with one vacancy. During the municipal year we had resignations from Cllrs Toni Holland, Zara and Scott Peasland but we coopted Neel Neubersch and Charlotte Nagle. As a result, we have two vacancies. With major planning applications and worrying local plans, not to mention our community initiatives it's an important time for Potterspurty and we hope villagers will come forward and join us.

Big Issues – Representing our Community

Last year I reported that 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. We immediately took on the role of coordinating local opinion and worked alongside other local parishes to form the A5 Parish Alliance. We have recently heard that this development is not going to be incorporated in the Local Plan but it is clear that with developers holding options on sites around Old Stratford, the long-term threat remains. The plans to construct major warehousing in Cosgrove close to the A5 interchange remain undetermined by WNC with impacts on flooding and the response of the Environment Agency a key factor. Although the plans will directly affect Old Stratford and Cosgrove, it is likely our village will feel the impact on traffic, and we remain concerned.

The intention to build a large-scale solar farm on land owned by Queens College Oxford between Yardley Gobion and Potterspurty has not come to fruition with the application not being presented to WNC. It is interesting that a similar development near Gayton was recently refused planning permission by the Secretary of State but against the advice of the Planning Inspector, indicating the contentious nature of some of these applications.

An application to build 23 houses east of Drovers Way along Furtho Lane is in progress. The land is outside the village confines and in the open countryside. The Parish Council has supplied WNC with detailed objections. We believe that the application exceeds the size limit for affordable/starter homes and our detailed objections have been posted on the Parish Council website.

A planning permission in principle for 5-6 self-build dwellings was granted in 2022 on the area formerly occupied by the allotments on Poundfield Road. This was despite our opposition and the local WNC ward member trying unsuccessfully to get it debated by WNC members. We believe the permission in principle decision, made by officers, was based on a misinterpretation of WNC Planning Policy. However, it cannot be rescinded. A further planning in principle application for 7-8 dwellings was refused in 2023. This site is now the subject of an outline planning application that appears designed to assist the developer. The Parish Council remain opposed to this approach and efforts to build outside the village planning confines.

Our Services to our Community

As planned, the Parish Council has now replenished its reserves following the rebuilding of the collapsed wall of the High Street cemetery. As a result, this year our Council Tax element was reduced by 2.7%. We are now turning our attention to tree maintenance in the cemetery. We plan

to pollard the lime trees over the next three years to reduce the environmental impact (and the impact on our cash-flow). The trees have preservation orders.

We invested in an upgrade of the Meadow View Play Area CCTV early in the municipal year following concerns about undesirable elements congregating in the car park after dark. We now have improved CCTV coverage and an ANPR camera covers the entrance/exit.

Following concerns about driver behaviour in the village, the Parish Council initiated calls for volunteers to join a Community Speed Watch. We have started examining how we could install a Vehicle Activated Sign that could be located where there appears to be speeding. We have also been active liaising with John Hellins School, West Northants Council and Northants Police concerning vehicle parking during school pick-up. We remain concerned about the number of vehicles causing congestion around the school and the resulting safety of the pupils.

The Millpond Conservation Area is now fully functioning with the wildflower meadow well established and our village pond working well. There has been unprecedented rainfall this winter and spring and it will be interesting to see how the meadow recovers in the summer. We are grateful for the continuing hard work of Cllr Lucas for maintaining this important village feature.

This year has seen the bus service under stress and a new service being offered by Stagecoach. We hope to promote the new service as much as we can because we recognise the precarious nature of the existing service and how much sections of our community rely on it. The adage “use it or lose it” certainly applies.

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. A Big Help Out volunteering initiative that concentrated on the environment was held during the Coronation Celebrations.

The Council uses the services of Rob Phillips as the village handyman 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 they are 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.

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 it is good to know we can rely on our Clerk for sound support and advice.

Cllr Steve Parkin

April 2024