

## **Potterspurty Parish Council - Annual Parish Report 2026**

### **Chairman's Report**

#### *Council Membership*

This report covers the first municipal year of this Council since elections were held in May 2025. Several councillors, some with significant periods of service, decided not to stand for re-election. Nominations did however produce a good crop of enthusiastic councillors, but we started the municipal year with four vacancies. We subsequently coopted James Soper, and later Pam Russell. Unfortunately, Pam's personal circumstances subsequently changed and she has since resigned.

#### *Big Issues – Representing our Community*

The updated Local Plan from West Northants Council fortunately does not incorporate the large-scale developments earlier suggested around the Old Stratford interchange, but it is clear that the long-term prospects for large-scale developments in the area remain. It is also likely our village will feel the impacts on traffic of many of the larger developments targeted at Old Stratford, Cosgrove and Towcester and we remain very concerned. It is also likely that a number of dwellings will be allocated to our village in the updated Local Plan - a figure of 73 is currently suggested. We remain committed to having our say on the numbers of houses allocated, their design and their location and we hope to coordinate our response with other local parishes.

The intention to build a large-scale solar farm on land owned by Queens College Oxford between Yardley Gobion and Potterspurty has still not come to fruition despite 5 years of deliberation. The developers held a consultation with residents in both Potterspurty & Yardley Gobion in 2024 reviving plans that were presented in 2021 but with some small modifications. Despite the impetus to "get in the queue" for connections to the grid, no progress towards determination has been made. The developers once again had an ambitious timetable, but once again they failed to meet it. With a 10-km long connection to the grid in Milton Keynes we are still waiting to see what will happen. Milton Keynes Council don't appear to be keen, particularly not having been properly consulted on what will be a highly disruptive proposal. Apart from the uncertainty surrounding this application, and the impact it will have on our community, the uncertainty surrounding this development has had a detrimental effect on the farms concerned over the last 5 years.

An application to build 23 houses east of Drovers Way along the Furtho Lane bridle way had stalled over difficulties with road access and a basic interpretation of policy. However, WNC members refused the application but against officer advice. An appeal was lodged and a hearing was set for January with Parish Council representatives scheduled to attend. Unfortunately, the appeal hearing was cancelled at the last minute and we were not informed about any rearrangement despite making enquiries. As a result, the Planning Inspectorate made its decision to allow the appeal without a hearing and without receiving our full evidence. As a result, the Inspector's decision contains omissions and local democracy was side-lined. Potterspurty Parish Council has made a complaint to the Planning Inspectorate on the grounds that the Inspector did not follow correct procedure. We cannot make a formal appeal against the decision because it would require a High Court hearing, which is beyond our means. We are also in conversation with West Northants Council to investigate when they knew that a hearing was not scheduled to take place because we believe they may have been able to inform us.

Last year saw us complaining about the procedures of WNC Planning Committee. We took the matter up with both WNC and NCALC but got nowhere. This municipal year the scenario was repeated with us complaining, this time to the Planning Inspectorate. It would be refreshing if bureaucratic bodies stuck to their published procedures and listened to local consultees. Maybe better planning decisions would be the result – but who knows?

### Our Services to our Community

Last year the Parish Council turned its attention to tree maintenance in the High Street Cemetery and pollarded a third of the lime trees. In the coming year we will complete the job. This incremental method reduces the environmental impact and also the impact on our cash-flow. The trees have preservation orders.

Following concerns about driver behaviour in the village, the Parish Council obtained a Vehicle Activated Sign (VAS) with assistance of the Police & Crime Commissioner. It is portable has been located at suitable approved sites around the village where there are suitable mounting points and a clear range for the radar. Cllr James Soper has been busy analysing the data produced by the VAS and we plan to publish a report.

We continue to be 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 functioning well with the wildflower meadow being well established and our village pond functioning well. We are grateful for the continuing hard work of Cllr Lucas and the help of Tim Dring for help in maintaining this important village feature.

Our allotments in In Blackwell End 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 affiliated to the Council.

The bus service being offered by Stagecoach appears to be working well under the watchful eye of our coordinator Rachael Kingston. We promoted the new service as much as we can because we recognise the precarious nature of the 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.

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.

Cllr Norris acts as Chair of the Finance Working Group (FWG). The FWG has been important in managing our reserves, preparing the annual budget and organising possible grant bids.

### Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer

Councils require a firm financial base to avoid difficulties and they also need good effective administration. We been fortunate over the last 13 years to have had an efficient and friendly clerk in Jane Spence. In the difficult times it is good to know we can rely on our Clerk for sound support and advice. Jane has now decided that it is the time to retire - we will miss her.

We began the process of recruiting Jane’s successor just over a month ago and we have been fortunate to find a suitable successor in Vanessa Thomas. Our new clerk will be at the April meeting but she will take over formally at the Annual Meeting of the Council in May.

### Thanks

I would also like to thank my fellow councillors for the manner in which they have carried out their duties. Working collaboratively for the benefit of our local community is a pleasure when you have friendly colleagues that have the interests of our village at heart. Long may this continue.

Cllr Steve Parkin

April 2026