

# Sarratt Parish Council

## Annual Report

### April 2022

## Chair's Report

*Sarah Dobson*

Welcome to the Sarratt Parish Council Annual Report for the year April 2021 – March 2022.

After 2 years of publishing our Annual Parish Report only on-line, we are delighted to once again be able to present the report at an in-person Annual Meeting being held on 26 April in the Village Hall.

As the restrictions of the last 2 years ease and are hopefully behind us, we are conscious of the difficulties that have been faced and continue to be faced by many of our Parishioners. Sadly, some of us will have lost loved ones, others have lost jobs or seen their business struggle. But what we have been through over the last 2 years has also hopefully helped us really appreciate our families, friends and our local community and the support they provide. Hopefully it has also helped us appreciate where we live. With so many issues affecting us, such as climate change, the war in Ukraine and the devastating impact it's having on its people, together with the huge increase in the cost of living, many of us are grateful to live in such a beautiful corner of the UK, where we can enjoy the peace of the countryside, the beauty of nature around us and the support of our local community.

And we are very much looking forward to coming together as a community for the *Picnic on The Green* on the afternoon of Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> June to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and hope this will be an opportunity to celebrate everything that is great about Sarratt, as well as recognising an incredible milestone in the Queen's reign.

Looking back on the past year, we have had a number of changes to the team. We said farewell to Nick Mortimer and Peter Thorp after many years on the Parish Council and welcomed five new Councillors; Lee Farman, Michael Lowry, Flo Garvey, Angela Coakley and Iain Christie – see more under 'Farewells & Welcomes' below.

We also said farewell to Marilyn Butler as our District Councillor last May. Marilyn has given many years of service and support to Sarratt Parish Council and the residents of Sarratt for which we are hugely grateful. Ciaran Reed was elected as our new District Councillor, and as Marilyn did before, joins us at most of our monthly Council meetings and has been very helpful championing issues with Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) on behalf of Sarratt residents.

We are also grateful for the support of our County Councillor Phil Williams, for his help on a number of fronts, but particularly the Highways agenda which he is the Lead Councillor at County level.

I would also like to thank Lena Mortimer who stepped in as Acting Clerk in November last year to cover the running of the Parish Office

while the Parish Clerk, Caroline is on sick leave.

In turning now to this summary of the last year, you will find in the pages that follow reports from the Acting Clerk and the Lead Councillors for Policy & Resources, Planning, the Environment, Sustainability and Highways, but first some highlights of the past year.

Councillor Michael Lowry has made great progress on improving the Council's finance procedures and led us through the budgeting process for the forthcoming year. Financially we completed the 21/22 year within budget and agreed to once again to hold our budget flat for the forthcoming financial year in recognition of the fact many Parishioners may be facing financial difficulties. Once again, we were the only Parish in Three Rivers District to do this.

On planning we continue to respond to planning applications made to TRDC as a statutory consultee, and Lee Farman our new Lead Councillor for Planning has delivered an excellent planning decision framework to ensure our planning responses are aligned to the Design Codes being developed for the Neighbourhood Plan and are consistent.

We have introduced a new position of Lead Councillor for Sustainability, which is held by Flo Garvey, and Councillor John Rugg has made great progress on the broader Environment agenda, particularly with regard to the development of a 10-year Woodland Management Plan for the Parish,

and dealing with numerous issues concerning our woodlands and trees.

We finally managed to replace 4 of the 7 black & white 'fingerpost' road signs thanks to the efforts of Councillor John Gell, and Councillor Simon Diggins continues to tackle the many issues associated with our local roads, from roadworks to potholes, flooding and safety issues, such as HGVs on the roads and better routes for cyclists through the Parish.

I would like to thank all of the Councillors, the Clerk and Acting Clerk for their help and hard work this year; driving forward new initiatives and resolving issues on all aspects of the Councils work to support our Parishioners, the community and the environment in which we all live.

I would also like to give thanks to Joe Brownsell, our Parish Warden who continues to monitor and keep tidy the footpaths and land around the Parish, as well as undertaking a wide range of maintenance jobs such as repainting the bus shelter opposite the Boot and the railings around the duckpond this year. Thanks also to our contractors, particularly Andrew Whitewood and (the other) Joe Brownsell for all their help, often responding at short notice to address incidents in the Parish. Finally thank you to the Litter Pick volunteers, co-ordinated by former-Councillor Nick Mortimer for their tireless efforts each month to reduce the amount of litter in the Parish.

Together we are a strong team and hope we can continue to serve our Parish to the best of our abilities in the forthcoming year.

## FAREWELLS & WELCOMES

Since the last Annual Parish Meeting in April 2021, we have said farewell to Nick Mortimer, Lead Councillor for Environment and Peter Thorp, Lead Councillor for Policy & Resources. We would like to thank both Nick and Peter for their huge contribution to the Council and to the Parish as a whole over a number of years, and in particular Peter's leadership in establishing the Sarratt Youth Group, now being run every Sunday evening during term time by Sarah Hickles. Nick continues to support the Parish through organizing the monthly litter pick group for which we are very grateful.

We were delighted to welcome five new Councillors to the Parish Council this year

and for the first time in 18 months we now have a full complement of Councillors.

Our new Councillors include:

Lee Farman who has taken over responsibility for Planning from former-Councillor Anthony Soothill, who continues to represent SPC on the Sarratt Neighbourhood Plan Working Group. Lee has done much to bring our new Councillors up to speed with the intricacies of the planning process.

Michael Lowry who has taken over from Peter Thorp as the Lead Councillor for Policy & Resources. As an accountant by profession, Michael brings great expertise to this role which includes the finance and budgeting aspects of the Council's operations.

Flo Garvey who is passionate about sustainability which has resulted in us introducing a new Lead Councillor role for Sustainability and including a new section on this subject in the Annual Report for the first time.

Angela Coakley who is also passionate about the environment and sustainability and provides a strong link between Sarratt Parish Council and the Sarratt & Chipperfield Community Foundation (SCCF) and Holy Cross Church.

And most recently, Iain Christie who joined the Council in March 2022 having moved to Sarratt last year, so brings with him a fresh perspective and a huge wealth of experience particularly from a legal perspective.

## Parish Clerk's Report

### Lena Mortimer

I have had the pleasure of being the Acting Parish Clerk since mid-November. During that time I have been building my knowledge of the procedures and practices of local government, and more interestingly, in the specifics of Sarratt Parish.

Everything from Mining Bees to Ash Die Back, to negotiating how to maintain the integrity of our highways and the safety of livestock and walkers. It has been a pleasure to get to know so many parishioners and I very much enjoy their visits to the office.

It has been a fascinating time.

The overriding thing I have learned is how very important the Parish Council is; how much good it can do; how vital it is to interact with your Parish Council. It is your/our first line of defence against institutions and bodies larger than the little man. It cares about Sarratt.

Experiencing it from the inside, I am so much more appreciative of what democracy in practice can achieve. You have to be in it to win it – vote, participate and keep up a dialogue with SPC and it will serve you well.

## OUR WEBSITE

Meeting agendas and minutes can be found on the Sarratt Parish Council website, together with our policies and other useful information such as upcoming road closures and 'news'.

<https://sarrattparishcouncil.gov.uk>

The Parish Office is currently open:  
Monday - Wednesday 08:00 – 12:00

You can also contact us on 01923 262035 or via email at:

[clerk@sarrattparishcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@sarrattparishcouncil.gov.uk)

# Financial Summary

Michael Lowry

I would firstly like to begin by thanking former Councillor Peter Thorp for his governance and stewardship of the finances last year and in previous years which has enabled me to inherit a good financial position within the Parish Council. Also on a personal note, for his handover and guidance to me on joining the Council in June of last year.

From Figure 1, you will see, the Council has again been able to stay within its annual budget (Precept) for the year which it raises from local parish ratepayers. The annual budgeted amount received from TRDC was £96,557, against which expenditure of £81,386 was utilised. Consequently, unspent expenditure totaled just over £15,000 which will be added towards reserves to contribute towards expenditures for next year.

Figure 1:

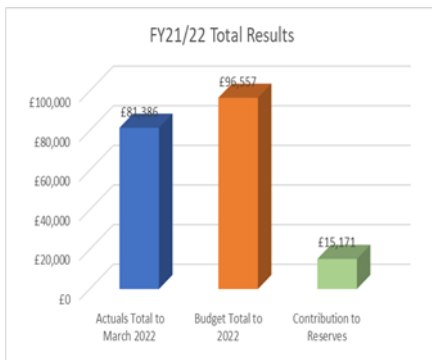
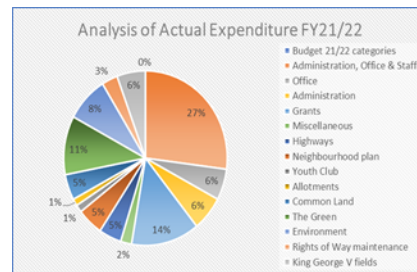


Figure 2, shows an analysis of the different categories where the budget has been spent. As you will see, the largest expenditure has been incurred in the maintenance and staffing of our Parish Office to support the organisation and administration of activities across the Parish.

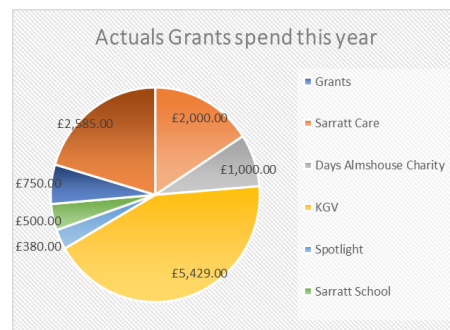
Subsequently the second largest area is grants provided to Parish organisations (more of which below). Interestingly, the remaining expenditure is spread evenly across remaining areas to provide services and fund activities in a broad range of areas across the Parish.

Figure 2:



As mentioned, the second largest area of budget expenditure is providing grants to organisations and groups within the Parish. These groups exist to support individuals, promote leisure and social events and undertake work within the Parish. Their objectives, which are normally important, are even more acute in supporting the Parish community as we transition out of the Pandemic. Actual grant expenditure for the 21/22 financial year is shown in Figure 3 below;

Figure 3:



We recently revised our financial policies to reflect managerial changes approved by the Council in administration of the budget. Council also took the opportunity to revise several other policies and procedures which impact the governance and activities within the Parish. All the policies are available on the Parish Council website:

<https://sarrattparishcouncil.gov.uk>

Looking forward to next financial year (April 22 to March 23), the Council again decided to keep the Parish Precept demand flat, the same as last year. Consequently, this will have been the third consecutive year in which the Council has managed to keep the rateable demand the same as in the previous year.

I would like to commend my fellow Councillors for making this brave decision as little did we know in November of last year, the significant increase in the cost of living now being experienced (one of the drivers behind the decision when setting the budget). We will therefore consequently be monitoring next year's budget performance carefully, especially the impact on the Parish Council's budget of these economic events and price pressures.

# Planning

*Lee Farman*

I took on the planning lead role this year and would like to thank Anthony Soothill for the handover and continuing support he has given.

We have seen an increase in applications this year, including some developers proposing larger developments. The Parish Council, as a statutory consultee, reviewed on average eight applications each month. The majority of Council's recommendations on planning applications were subsequently endorsed by Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) as the Local Planning Authority. However, we have seen a significant number of application results that go against our responses and this demonstrates that the wishes of the Parish are at times diverging from the position TRDC is taking (or the position they are forced to take due to national planning rules).

Every application has unique aspects and our local knowledge is a valuable input into the planning process. We have taken a number of actions to ensure consistency with our responses. One of these is introducing a detailed planning decision framework based on recent work by the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group, and other resources, to guide discussion and production of our responses.

We have encountered challenges with the speed and execution of enforcements in our Parish over the last year. We have used our local knowledge and experience to assist TRDC with the enforcement process and we have seen some improvements to this process with actions taken and outcomes. There is more to be done in this area and although the Parish Council have no powers in this area, we will do all we can to help gain the right outcomes for our Parishioners.

With the TRDC Local Plan moving forwards then backwards a step this year, this has left an uncertain situation with regards to the allocation of land to meet the various targets as well as uncertainty when the TRDC Local Plan will be implemented, possibly 2025 or later. The current situation is that no land in Sarratt Parish is targeted as designated development sites in the plan. However, with the roll back of the plan stages this could change. The expectation is that Green Belt will be under pressure in the next period, but we remain committed to protecting the Sarratt Parish environment.

Another way we have continued to understand what the Parish want with regard to planning issues is by supporting the development of the Sarratt Neighbourhood Plan. The draft Neighbourhood Plan was distributed to all 800+ houses in the Parish in September last year immediately before holding a public consultation in the Village Hall. Approximately 60 people attended and the working group received 56 comments (all positive) from attendees and statutory bodies. In addition, a number of comments were received from TRDC. As a result, a revised set of draft policies will be issued this year for consultation. After which it is hoped to move to a referendum in order to formally adopt the Neighbourhood Plan. Latest information can be found at:

<https://sarrattneighbourhoodplan.org>

The next year may be one of the most significant in Sarratt's planning history. Please engage and support the Neighbourhood Plan to help maintain our Parish as we face that uncertain future.

# Environment

*John Rugg*

The Parish Council continues to spend approximately 35% of the annual budget on the Environment managing the 55 acres of land it owns, including the Green, Woodlands, Allotments, and the Recreation Ground. The budget also includes maintaining a series of physical assets such as bus shelters, benches, dog poo and litter bins. In addition, there are the outgoings for the weekly or bimonthly emptying services. Unlike some neighbouring areas in Three Rivers, we do not receive any financial support from the District Council for any of the above.

Sarratt as a Parish is very fortunate in having a small woodland coverage in public and private ownership making up circa 18.5% of the total Parish land area. This includes 26 Local Wildlife Woodland sites plus 10 Partially Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS). Whilst the total woodland coverage in England averages 10% there is a concerted effort to improve this figure. In Sarratt we have initially focussed upon planting trees and hedgerows for the Queens Green Canopy scheme, led by Councillor Flo Garvey and supported by the Sustainability group.

Sarratt is extremely fortunate to have a dedicated team of Wildlife Volunteers who regularly undertake conservation work in the woodlands, the Green, and ponds to preserve and enhance the flora and fauna. They meet every second Sunday of the month and are keen to attract more volunteers. Details of who to contact can be found on the village website.

The three Sarratt Council owned woodland areas have benefitted from an intensive survey over the past two years on the state of the trees in all three areas undertaken on behalf of the Parish by the Herts County Council Countryside Management Team. This year, despite some delays caused by Covid restrictions, they managed to complete the work and produced a 10 Year Woodlands management Plan. The plan has been compiled in the format required by the Forestry Commission and submitted to them with a request for the Parish to be able to receive a grant under the new Environmental Land Management Scheme announced by the Government following Brexit.

Sadly, a lot of our younger Ash Trees are suffering from Ash Die Back disease that is sweeping the country and now spreading

through Hertfordshire. This is most prevalent in Commonwood where some trees will need to be removed and replaced with alternative species. This work forms part of the 10-year Woodland Management Plan.

The three woodlands managed by the Council are protected registered commons and ongoing maintenance has been carried out, in the main by our local tree surgeon Joe Brownsell, who provided emergency support to the Parish Council to clear up some of the aftermath of the recent storms. It is unfortunate that some unauthorised felling of trees on Council land has taken place. Not only is this an illegal act but the removal of the wood can lead to a prosecution for theft.

We were also pleased this year to replace the Duckhouse on Sarratt pond with the help of a generous donation from local members of the RSPB. Installation courtesy of Sarratt Explorers, former Councillor Nick Mortimer and Andrew Whitewood.



## ***Footpaths, Bridleways and Cycleways routes.***

The County Council are responsible for maintaining the surface of all registered Rights of Way on the 'Definitive Map' and ensuring any blockages are removed. The Parish Council acts as their agent and our contractors, Whitewoods, have been complimented on their efficiency of keeping the vegetation trimmed on most of the footpaths. Whilst the County pay for this service the Parish Council top up the budget and with the help of the Village Warden, Andrew Whitewood and former Councillor Nick Mortimer have plans to replace, or repair, even more gates in the coming months to keep our network of footpaths accessible.

We are grateful for the walkers and riders who feedback information on issues they find

when out and about on our Rights of Way network and anything you come across should be reported to the Parish Clerk who can arrange for a local or County team to investigate.

Councillor Diggins is working with the County and the District Council on a Cycling Strategy as unfortunately Sarratt appears to have been neglected, with the majority of improved or upgraded cycle routes being concentrated in urban areas, rather than improving and interlink rural routes. We have established good contacts with the relevant officials but, it is quite clear, this is not going to happen quickly. One issue is that the model for 'cycling routes', in many people's minds, are the London Cycle Superhighways; please be assured that is not intended! Instead, we are looking at small measures that can make cycling safer for all on our current roads and appropriate tracks.

## ***River Chess***

The Sarratt Sustainability Group, along with Councillors Diggins and Garvey, have taken an active interest in maintaining the pressure for improving the River Chess water quality. This is starting to bear fruit: this year saw the creation of the Chess Valley Special Water Catchment (SWC) Project, sponsored by Thames and Affinity Water and, we are assured, funding will be in place for up to five years. Importantly, Thames Water have committed to major remedial works on the Chesham storm water overflow tanks, by 2025.

The SWC Project covers the whole of the Chess Valley catchment area, from the dry bournes above Chesham, through our Parish and then down to the junction with the River Colne in Rickmansworth. Water quality and water flow are big issues (as you might expect given the sponsorship) but there is a strong emphasis on improving the natural capital of the valley, by limiting invasive non-native species and encouraging native flora and fauna. Underpinning it all is a commitment to encourage the involvement of Citizen Scientists, volunteers and indeed all who live, work and use the area for leisure to become involved. Those who might be interested in getting more involved should contact: [chessCS@chilternsaonb.org](mailto:chessCS@chilternsaonb.org) or Cllr Diggins, direct.

[simon.diggins@sarrattparishcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:simon.diggins@sarrattparishcouncil.gov.uk)



# Sustainability

*Flo Garvey*

With COP 26 having taken place earlier this year, sustainability has been high on the national agenda, and Sarratt is no exception.

The aim of 'sustainability' is to ensure that whatever we do now does not negatively affect future generations – this means working to reduce our carbon footprint, to preserve and enhance our local ecology, and to reduce our waste.

We have been trying to do these things on the local scale – without huge success, but there are a few small achievements that can be highlighted. We have been part of a nationwide initiative called 'The Queens Green Canopy', which encourages people across the UK to plant trees in order to increase the nation's tree cover, bringing the many well-known benefits of trees to every community. Sarratt Parish has had 12 participants so far, with the scheme running until the end of 2022. SPC has planted 7 new trees on the corner of Dawes Lane and Downer Drive and plans to plant a new Oak tree at the village entrance (Micklefield end) There will eventually be a map with the new trees marked on it, including their species.



Thanks are due to the Wildlife Volunteers for their monthly hard graft around the Parish – it is hugely appreciated.



SPC has supported the Sarratt Community Garden (SCG), both with a grant, and by establishing a special license to allow it to take on a plot in the Sarratt Allotments. This is aiming to provide locally and organically grown fruit and veg, as well as providing work experience for interns of local charity 'Mission Employable', and education to Sarratt school and any other groups who might be interested. The SCG is looking into a grant to help it to run as a beacon of gardening sustainably in terms of water usage - funded by the Chess Valley Special Water Catchment project.

As part of sustainability, SPC has been looking into the feasibility of EV charge points in various locations around the village. Nothing has been decided on, but the Village Hall Committee were not keen to have any in their car park at this stage. A conversation is ongoing with the KGV committee.

SPC is supporting the upcoming Queen's Jubilee celebrations, and from a sustainability point of view, I will be working with the village Sustainability group to ensure that the absolute minimum is sent to landfill. On that note – thanks are due to former Councillor Nick Mortimer and his Litter Picking group and to Joe Brownsell the Parish Warden for reporting fly-tipping as soon as it's spotted.



# Highways

*Simon Diggins*

May I start by thanking a few people. To my able deputy, Councillor John Gell, who has continued his indefatigable work to restore some of our damaged or worn-out 'finger posts'; to Councillors Flo Garvey and John Rugg, who have supported the Council's initiatives around rethinking how we use our roads; and to our District and County Councillors, who have been supportive throughout; Councillor Phil Williams, in particular, has been instrumental in enabling us to have a positive and helpful relationship with Herts Highways, which is to our undoubted benefit: I'm very grateful.

The opening-up of work, school and leisure has brought traffic back onto our roads, lanes and byways and welcome though that is, it has also highlighted some of the challenges in our area. There has been a marked increase in road repairs, much left over from the Covid period, and this, I understand, will continue for some time. With the able assistance of Councillor John Gell, we have focused on:

- Supporting residents to get roads repaired.
- Highlighting and seeking remedy for some of our persistent flood spots
- Examining how we can respond to the challenges of climate change, through using our roads better and making them safer for cyclists, in particular.

On the first, we are beginning to get some success and like, last year, can I please encourage all residents to use the Herts County Council (HCC) portal to report Highway faults via:

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/highways-roads-and-pavements/report-a-problem/report-a-highway-fault/what-type-of-fault-are-you-reporting.aspx>

For residents unable to access the internet, then please continue to report faults via the Parish Office and we will then report them; that does delay matters inevitably however, so we really do encourage direct reporting whenever possible.

Fault repair itself may take some time as the HCC system has to send-out an investigating team first to assess and prioritise and then to repair. The fault may not be repaired quickly, depending on priorities, but cumulative fault reporting is also noted and acted upon.

The system does work and, for example, we have seen swift action this year on a faulty speeding sign on Sarratt Green (the sign gave you a 'smiley' if you were under the speed limit but no 'red frown' if you went over!) and removal of dangerous branches, after storms. Additionally, if you report the fault and choose to do so, you can receive an update, which is positive and good practice.

For businesses and residents who need to plan longer-term, perhaps because they have a major building project or the like, and need to know which roads will be closed, that information can be found via this website: <https://one.network> It is free to use, with a simple login procedure but gives the most accurate information possible and you can look several months ahead.

One issue that we are beginning to get some traction on is the flooding on Redhall Lane. I have to declare an interest, I live on that road, but the flooding causes serious disruption, especially during commuting time, and can be dangerous; not everyone drives a 4x4! We've been in a protracted correspondence with the Woodland Trust, who own Harrocks Wood that adjoins much of the road, and who have let the bank and ditch fall into disrepair, but have then sought to say that the resultant water flowing from the wood is not their problem! We're not there yet but they've now agreed to a site meeting, which is a start.

Last year, I reported on our submission of a proposal to establish a network of cycle-friendly routes across our Parish. There has been some local pushback so perhaps I can explain that there is no intent to set-up 'cycle super highways', like those found in London. Instead, the idea is to improve road edges, curb speeding and perhaps, where appropriate, establish cycle-priority lanes.

We have also liaised with Herts CC and taken advice from other councils, so will be bringing forward revised proposals next year.

An outline of the proposed cycle routes in shown below.



More broadly still, for both environmental and road safety reasons, we've been approached to consider establishing lower speed limits on several of our roads: what does the parish think?





# Sarratt Parish Council Annual Report

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