

Sarratt Parish Council

Annual Report
April 2023



Chair's Report

Sarah Dobson

Welcome to the Sarratt Parish Council Annual Report for the year April 2022 – March 2023, prepared for the Annual Parish Meeting held on 25 April 2023 at 7:30pm in the rear room of Sarratt Village Hall which members of the public are invited to.

2022 saw the restrictions of the previous years end, and whilst on a social level life feels like it has got back to normal post the pandemic, 2022 brought a new set of challenges. The war in Ukraine has continued to have a devastating impact on its people and has driven world-wide increases in energy prices and the cost of living, exacerbated by a number of other factors both in the UK and abroad.

Against this backdrop Sarratt Parish Council (SPC) saw an increase in expenditure against its planned budget for 2022/23 as energy and supplier costs increased. SPC also incurred additional costs such as work on trees and woodlands in the Parish delayed due to the pandemic. I would like to thank Councillor Lowry for his thorough management of the Parish Council budget, that kept the impact of these increases to a minimum. The Parish Council has however had to increase its precept (budget) for 2023/24 to take account of these increases, having kept our budget flat for the previous 4 years to support Parishioners during the pandemic. Further

details on this is provided in Councillor Lowry's Financial Summary later in this report.

On Planning we continue to respond as a statutory consultee, to the planning applications for our Parish submitted to Three Rivers District Council (TRDC), who are the Local Planning Authority. The new policy-based planning decision framework introduced last year by Lee Farman, our Lead Councillor for Planning, has created a much closer alignment between SPC's recommendations and the planning decisions made by TRDC.

Great progress has been made by the Working Group developing the Sarratt Neighbourhood Plan, despite delays due to the pandemic and the need for several iterations of the plan as a result of discussions with TRDC. In December last year the Working Group were able to submit their final draft of the Neighbourhood Plan, which is now with TRDC for consultation and external examination before going to a referendum by Sarratt residents later in 2023. If adopted, it will be a powerful tool in influencing development in the Parish. We have also been faced with several multiproperty development applications that could significantly impact the Parish. The outcome of these is still to be finalised during

I would also like to recognise the work of Councillor John Rugg who has made huge progress on the Environment agenda, particularly with regard to the development of a 10-year Woodland Management Plan for the Parish and dealing with numerous issues over the last year concerning our woodlands and trees.

Also, the work of Councillor Flo Garvey our Lead for Sustainability. As a result of Flo's championing of the Queen's Green Canopy initiative we now have many more trees in the Parish than we did a year ago. Flo is also actively involved in the management of the Parish allotments and driving other aspects of the sustainability agenda.

Councillor Simon Diggins, supported by Councillor John Gell has continued to tackle the many issues associated with our local roads, from roadworks to potholes, flooding to speeding, and other road safety issues, including better routes for cyclists through the Parish. We will also soon have in place the remaining replacements for the black & white fingerpost signs which has been led by Councillor Gell.

Lena Mortimer, our new Parish Clerk, formally started in the role in June last year. Lena has done exceptionally well on what was a steep learning curve, having never held the role of Parish Clerk before. I would like to thank Lena for her enthusiasm and support to the many parishioners who contact her for assistance on a huge range of topics.

As well as the SPC Councillors and Parish Clerk mentioned above I would also like to thank Councillor Angela Coakley who provides a valuable link into many of the other Parish organisations, in particular SCCF, and has stood in for me at District meetings during the course of the past year.

Thanks also go 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. Thank you as well 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.

A thank you as well 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 and to the Wildlife Volunteers who help protect many of our sensitive wild fauna areas through their work each month.

We are also grateful for the support of our District Councillors, Ciaran Reed and Philip Hearn, and County Councillor Phil Williams, for their help on a number of fronts.

Finally, 2022 sadly saw the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, a significant moment in time for many of us. Most of us have never known another Monarch. Particularly poignant was the fact it came just a few months after the celebration of her Platinum Jubilee which bought the residents of Sarratt together on the Green to celebrate the event, and the taking of a Parish photo — the first since the millennium. Both are now displayed in the Village Hall.

Equally, the upcoming Coronation of King Charles III at the beginning of May gives us another opportunity to come together as a community and celebrate another moment in history, with what will undoubtably be a wonderful event on the Green on 8 May. Thanks to Roger Dudley and Carol Chorley for mobilising everyone and to the many Parish organisations taking part.

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

FAREWELLS

Sadly, we have said farewell to three of our Parish Councillors since the beginning of 2023.

Councillor Iain Christie joined us in March 2022, but has now moved out of the Parish, which was not expected by him and his family when he joined Council last year. As a Barrister, Iain provided invaluable legal input on a number of issues facing SPC last year for which we were very grateful and wish him and his family all the best in their new home.

We have also said farewell to Councillor John Gell who has retired after 36 years on Sarratt Parish Council (which must be a record!) and two separate terms as Chair of the Council. In recent years John supported the Highways agenda and was instrumental in getting the black & white fingerpost signs around the Parish replaced. In recognition of his many years of public service, SPC were delighted to present him with the "Freedom of the Parish" at his last Council meeting.

Also retiring is Councillor John Rugg after 20 years on Parish Councils both here in Sarratt and in Cheshire. John has had a huge impact on the successful operation of SPC over the last few years. As Vice Chair he has supported me, particularly when our previous Clerk was on sick leave, has been the SPC rep on the KGV Management Committee, and has made an enormous contribution to the environment agenda, leading the development of the 10-year Woodland Management Plan and dealing with a multitude of environment issues too numerous to list. John's ability to thoroughly investigate and research all manner of topics in order to provide valuable input to the Council's decision making has been outstanding. As John retires from SPC we are delighted that he will continue to assist with the Land Management Plan as a former Councillor on a new SPC sub-committee and will continue to support the KGV Committee as a Management Trustee.

We wish lain, John and John all the very best and once again thank them for all the time and effort they have given to SPC.







Parish Clerk's Report

This year has been a time of discovery for me. I took up the post of Clerk to the Council on the 1 June 2022 and am coming up for my first anniversary in the job! I am studying for the CILCA qualification, and I hope that by the end of this process, I will be a confident and knowledgeable Clerk for the Parish.

The big issues facing the Parish continue. One of which is not enough public participation! Many of the organisations in the Parish are desperately in need of new volunteers to deliver their work and activities, and the Parish Council is no exception. SPC now has three vacancies for the role of Councillor - might that be you or someone you know? Why not come to one of our monthly Council meetings held on the second Tuesday of each month at 7:30pm in the rear room of the Village Hall to find out more about what we do and how you could become involved. Even if you don't feel you are in a position to become a Councillor, why not come along to one of our monthly meetings anyway. These are generally poorly attended by members of the public and it would be wonderful to have more people attend so residents are better informed about Parish issues.

I see many people in the office who pop in to speak with me and often to raise issues over which they feel they have no power. As an additional opportunity for parishioners to make contact with the Council, I am hoping, with the help of Cllr Coakley, to hold an informal Clerk's "surgery" at the SCCF Coffee Mornings where parishioners can also raise issues they would like to bring to the Council's attention, that I can attempt to answer – or at least go away and find an answer!

In addition to the updates provided by the Councillors in their reports in this document, there are a number of topics I would like to raise that are not covered elsewhere:

Parking, speeding and inconsiderate behaviour regarding vehicles within the Parish and particularly around Sarratt Green is a constant concern. I have made good contacts with the local Police and with Sarratt School, to assist in reinforcing the message that such behaviour is thoughtless and harmful. Much of my time over the last year has seen me dealing with issues raised by Parishioners regarding trees. My thanks go to Councillor Rugg for his guidance on this and to our contractors, Whitewoods and Joe Brownsell for their help on these matters. Thanks also to Andrew Whitewood for his assistance repairing a number of the gates on our footpaths and other maintenance work.

Fly Tipping also continues to be a problem. Please contact me when you spot incidents of this, which I can report to Three Rivers District Council to get these removed. We are also planning to install additional signage to prevent, or at least minimise future incidents.



On a more positive note, the disconnected BT phone box in Chandlers Cross now has a new home at Sarratt School where it will be used as part of the History curriculum. We have also recently set up a new contract for the servicing of the defibrillators at the KGV pavilion and the Village Hall so these are always in peak condition. New litter bins and dog bins have been installed in the Parish over the last year to encourage residents and visitors to dispose of their rubbish appropriately.

Finally, I would like to thank Mike Edmund for administering the SPC website and making sure it's up to date with the most recent documents and information about the Council.

It's been a great learning year for me. Please get involved with SPC, if only coming to the meetings and giving your opinion or knowledge. I look forward to seeing you there!

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 - Thursday 08:00 – 13:00

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

clerk@sarrattparishcouncil.gov.uk

Financial Summary

Michael Lowry

I have pleasure in reporting the financial overview as part of the responsibilities of the Policy & Resources Lead for the Council.

Figure 1 below shows the final predicted results of the Council, in that it will have stayed mainly within its budget boundaries for the financial year 2022/23 ending in March 2023. However, this does not reflect some of the pressures on the financial resources of the Council over the last year, which I will outline later.

From Figure 1, you will see, the Council has stayed within the budget for FY22/23 which it set in December 2021. Resultant net expenditures at the end of March 23 are predicted at £109,612.

A conscious decision was made to keep the Precept (budget) flat for last year, as had been the case in the preceding three years, to support Parishioners during the time of COVID. This was unique to Sarratt, with other Parish Councils within the Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) increasing their precept. The Council made the decision to fund this by utilising reserves from the previous year(s). Planned use of reserves was in the region of £10k, however the final utilisation for 2022/23 is expected to be in the region of £13k.

Figure 1:

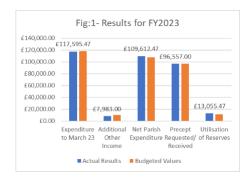
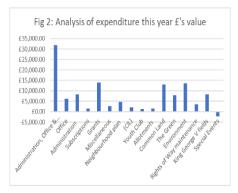


Figure 2 (right) shows an analysis of the different categories and values where last year's budget was spent. These are similar to the year before, with Ad ministration, Grants, Environment, Common Land and the Green accounting for the largest expenditure areas. This is to be expected in order to support the administration and environmental assets of the Parish.

Administration and office costs include the salaries for the Parish Clerk and Parish Warden, two positions crucial to the running of the Council and its delivery of services to residents.

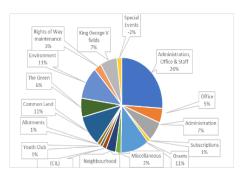
Figure 2:



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. For the 2023/24 financial year grants have been awarded to: Sarratt Music Festival, Sarratt Care, Days Almshouse Charity, KGV, Spotlight, SCCF Community Garden, Holy Cross, Sarratt School and the Mums & Toddlers group.

Figure 3 below shows the expenditure percentages, again, similar to last year, in maintaining the upkeep and condition of the Parish's environmental assets representing the third largest category of expenditure.

Figure 3:



As mentioned, there has been pressure on the Council to keep within its existing budget spending limits this year.

Given the economic environment and current levels of expenditure being experienced, these are expected to continue into and beyond next year.

Three main areas of increased costs and activities experienced last year were;

- Retrospective increase in demand for services and works which had been suspended during the Covid pandemic. These needed to be addressed this year, especially outstanding tree works.
- ii) Increases in supplier costs to the Council, who themselves were also experiencing cost increases.
- iii) Increased use of professional advisors and insurance services to seek correct guidance and provide adequate protection for decisions being made by Council.

Figure 4 below, shows the trend in increased costs over the last five years that the Council has experienced. As a result, Council made the decision to increase its Precept request for next year FY2023/2024 by 10% to match its predicted expenditure levels (highlighted by the blue line below). On face value, this seems a relatively large increase, however SPC felt it necessary to meet these increased expenditure levels without continually utilising reserves, a position which is not sustainable. This increase equates to an increase of £9.18 p.a. for a Band D property on the SPC element of residents' Council Tax. As already mentioned, this is the first increase in the last three years, indeed in comparison with other Parish Councils in Three Rivers, SPC budget has had the lowest increase since 2019.

Figure 4



Council also took the opportunity to revise several policies and procedures which impact the governance and activities within the Parish. I would like to thank our Chair, Sarah Dobson, for revising and updating these policies and presenting these to Council. All the policies are available on the Parish Council website:

https://sarrattparishcouncil.gov.uk

Planning

Lee Farman

We have seen some significant planning applications this year, including some developers proposing large developments in the Parish. It has been good to see many engaging with the planning process and working together to help gain the best outcomes.

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. We have also seen TRDC add sensible conditions to some planning responses, many of which SPC provided input to. Every application has unique aspects, and our local knowledge is a valuable input into the planning process. We have continued to develop the planning decision framework which acts as a guide to discussions and production of our responses. There can often be conflicting aspects in determining the responses, but we have worked hard to provide a balanced and representative input.

The SPC planning decision framework assesses each planning application under the following criteria:

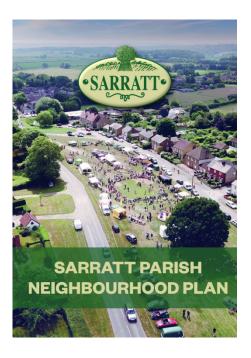
- Designation of the site
- Impact on neighbouring sites
- Design principles
- Historic character
- Contribution to overall housing mix
- Affordable housing status
- Biodiversity
- Local green spaces & community facilities
- Renewable Energy & Green Infrastructure
- Footpaths and Bridleways
- Highways access, traffic & safety
- Car parking

We have had a good relationship with TRDC enforcement officers this year and whilst we understand some of the overheads that legal aspects create, we have encountered challenges with the speed of 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 reached. There is more to be done in this area and although the Parish Council have no direct powers in this area, we will do all we can to help gain the right outcomes for our Parishioners.

The timing and progress of the TRDC Local Plan is still a little unclear, however it does now appear to be moving forwards. Following support from SPC and our TRDC Councillors, the current situation appears to be that no land in Sarratt Parish is labelled as recommended or designated as a development site in the plan. However, this is always subject to 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.

The Sarratt Neighbourhood Plan team has put in a lot of hard work this year and navigated negotiations with TRDC to move it on to the next steps. They produced a final draft that is now going through the formal consultation period and external examination. We hope before the end of the year to be able to move the plan to a referendum in order to formally adopt the Neighbourhood Plan. The plan can already be used as an emerging plan as input to the planning process and each stage it achieves gives it increasing strength in considerations. Latest information can be found at:

https://www.sarrattneighbourhoodplan.org



The next year may see significant choices for Sarratt in terms of planning. While we need to defend Green Belt from large scale overdevelopment, we also need to ensure that appropriate development is enabled in the Parish to allow the area to thrive. Please do engage and support the Neighbourhood Plan to help maintain our Parish for the future.

Environment

John Rugg

Trees and Woodlands

Our rural Parish enjoys an 18.5% coverage of woodlands in both public and private ownership compared to a 10% average coverage for England. Most woods in Sarratt enjoy a protected status with 26 designated as Local Wildlife sites, plus 10 Partially Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS). The initial focus of planting trees and hedgerows for the Queens Green Canopy scheme was led by Councillor Flo Garvey who continues to encourage additional tree and hedge planting projects supported by the Sarratt Sustainability Group.

Sarratt Parish Council maintain 55 acres of land including the Green, three Woodlands, the Allotments and the KGV Recreation Ground plus the associated bus shelters, benches, dog poo and litter bins; and pays for the bins to be emptied either weekly or bimonthly. All the work associated for maintaining such areas and their assets is funded by the Council's Environment budget that was overspent this year and had to be topped up out of reserves.

Extra expensive work included having to again make safe several trees in Commowood following illegal felling plus tree work we had planned to be covered by a Forestry Commission Grant that is unfortunately delayed, but we hope will be received later in 2023.

Several trees on or at the edges of Sarratt Green required approval this year to undertake extensive pruning for safety reasons and / or clearing upper branches from overhead electricity and telephone lines.

Trees located in either of the two Sarratt Conservation Areas on private land or Parish Council land require prior approval from the Tree Officers at Three Rivers District Council before any major pruning or felling is carried out.

Sarratt Wildlife Volunteers are again thanked, having spent another busy year undertaking valuable conservation and maintenance work on the woodlands, the Green, and ponds. They meet every second Sunday of the month and remain keen to attract more volunteers. Details of who to contact can be found on the village website.

Credit is also due to our local contractors who undertake and keep the Parish registered commons and woodlands in good

condition with both regular and emergency maintenance, plus looking after KGV recreation field, the allotments and other areas such as local footpaths and bridleways.

Sarratt is very fortunate in having the support of the Hertfordshire and Middx Wildlife Trust who last year completed an assessment and reviewed parts of Commonwood as well as Penmans Green and confirmed they retain their status as accredited wildlife areas. This provides additional protection, including closer scrutiny if a planning application is submitted for residential or business development close to the boundary of such designated sites.

Cricketers Pond

The Herts County Council Countryside Management Team's resident botanist was extremely helpful in assessing the deteriorating quality of the Cricketers Pond and the surrounding flora. She then produced a fully costed 5-year Action Plan for the renewal of both the reed filtration system and preserving and regenerating existing native flora.

Sarratt School expressed interest in using the pond and surrounding area as part of their environment and nature studies.

An application has been made to the National Lottery Community Fund to cover part of the costs of this project plus a further request is to be made to the River Chess Valley Community Grants fund and these combined with the existing allocation from the Parish Council Environment budget will provide for both the initial renewal and ongoing maintenance.

Footpaths, Bridleways and Cycleways routes.

County Council Rights of Way Officers are responsible for maintaining and signposting public Rights of Way and ensuring access is always available for all users. Their Officers during the past 12 months surveyed several footpaths in the parish and allocated some of their limited funds to undertake improvements as well as assisting in the reopening of the footpath from Rosehall Farm downhill towards the River Chess. The Parish Council is grateful to walkers and riders who provide feedback and information to the Parish Clerk on issues they find when out and about on our Rights of Way network. The

Clerk can then arrange for a local or County team to investigate any issues.

There remains a vacancy for a volunteer Parish Footpath Warden, or wardens, particularly in the outer areas of the Parish to inspect and report back on the condition of their local footpath network. Should this be of interest to you please contact either one of the Councillors or the Parish Clerk.

River Chess

The Sustainable Sarratt 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 nonnative 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 or Cllrs Diggins or Garvey direct.

 $\underline{simon.diggins@sarrattparishcouncil.gov.uk}\\ \underline{flo.garvey@sarrattparishcouncil.gov.uk}$



Sustainability

Flo Garvey

Sustainability is a lens through which all decisions can and should be seen. In Sarratt Parish, we have particularly focussed on sustainable land management, as well as supporting the Sustainable Sarratt group which exists for education and voluntary environmental initiatives. Thanks go to Cllr Farman for his thoughtful planning framework which takes into consideration sustainability in its planning decisions and helps SPC to be consistent.

The allotments fall into the Sustainability brief, due to their vital impact on food production and health. Of the 36 allotments that SPC owns, 5 are vacant, 6 are in need of care, and the other 25 are being well looked after. Regular inspections take place and tenants contacted if their plots are not being maintained appropriately. Parishioners interested in applying for an allotment should contact the Parish Clerk.

The Community Garden plots are thriving, and a new 3500 litre rainwater harvesting system has been erected on the SPC plot, thanks to a grant from the Chess Special Water Catchment project and volunteer time from Simon Hammett. Thanks go to Andrew and Brian Whitewood for their excellent stewardship of the allotment site.



SPC has adopted Plantlife's national pollinator saving scheme – 'No Mow May', which will take place on Sarratt Green after the end of the Coronation weekend. We also took part in the Queens Green Canopy initiative, planting over 100 trees on mostly private land across the Parish, including an oak at either end of Sarratt, and 5 new fruit trees in the Parish allotment and Quickmoor Orchard.



Thanks are due to the Wildlife Volunteers for their tireless dedication to preserving and enhancing our wild spaces.



Thanks also to Nick Mortimer's litter picking team for their litter collection (with a special thanks to Michael Groom, who sorts the litter into recyclable (most of it) and non-recyclable).



Highways Simon Diggins

May I begin by acknowledging all the support I have had this year. Firstly, and most particularly, that of my deputy, John Gell, who held the Highways brief for a number of years, supported me into this role, and has contributed to efforts to look after Sarratt and its community. Latterly John has led the replacement of the old black & white fingerpost signs with the last three to be installed shortly.



John is retiring from the Council this year and I would like to take this opportunity to formally record and acknowledge his many years of service, including two spells as Council Chair: thank you John, and best wishes.

Turning to Highways proper, key issues are:

- Road conditions and repairs
- Road safety
- Road usage and the encouragement of safe cycling, horse-riding and walking.

Road Conditions and Repairs

In general, the Herts CC reporting system works reasonably well. This is best done online, using the following portal: 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

This helps them to prioritise, but it is also useful to show previous reporting. Multiple reporting does not, of itself, hasten repair action as they constantly re-prioritising but it has helped us to point-out 'repeat offenders' and this does, albeit slowly, ensure repairs are done.

Just such reporting has led to repairs on Sarratt Road and Redhall Lane. I'll declare an interest, I live on the latter road, but the repeated and dangerous flooding affected many hundreds of commuters daily and this has now been resolved, with a new ditch, drains and the construction of a drain-away on York House land. To that end, can I thank both the Woodland Trust and York House School for their support in finding a solution.

Road Safety

This remains an unresolved issue. The truth is: we have a rural roads infrastructure with urban levels of traffic; something has to give and currently it's road safety. This is not acceptable and affects us all, regardless of how we use the roads.

We all have a part to play in encouraging road safety but to help us, the Council has signed up to the BRAKE road safety campaign. We will be holding a road safety week this November and, most important of all, reviewing whether, through a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO), establishing a 30 mph order throughout the Parish, with 20 mph limits within Sarratt village on certain minor roads is appropriate. Together, these should fundamentally rebalance the way our roads are used.

Road Usage

Despite the majority of road journeys within Three Rivers being 2.5 miles or less, we have very low levels of cycling, walking and even horse-riding, use. This is mostly due to road safety issues but, alongside the work on TROs, we will be actively contributing to the upcoming Three Rivers infrastructure plan, which looks to create a network of safe cycling routes. To reassure, this does not mean 'cycle superhighways' through our 'green and pleasant land' but, instead, to reprioritise investment so as to create the conditions for non-car use. This won't happen overnight but, unless this is lodged

within the District and County long-term plans, won't happen at all.



There is strong support for these road use rebalancing changes and I'm grateful to all those who have taken the time to write to me in support.

Sarratt Parish Council Annual Report

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