



Sarratt Parish Council

Annual Report

April 2025



Chair's Report

Sarah Dobson

Welcome to the Sarratt Parish Council Annual Report for the year April 2024 – March 2025, prepared for the Annual Parish Meeting held on Tuesday 22 April 2025 at 7:30pm in the rear room of Sarratt Village Hall which members of the public are invited to attend

Firstly, I would like to thank my fellow Councillors for all their help over the past year:

- Angela Coakley as Vice Chair, and for her work with the Sarratt & Chipperfield Community Foundation, including the Community Café until its closure at the end of last year.
- Michael Lowry, our Policy & Resources Lead for his meticulous management of the SPC budget, the SPC bank accounts and working with the internal and external auditors.
- Lee Farman and James Alder for their work each month preparing the review of planning applications for Council to consider and giving up additional time this year on the more in-depth planning applications and appeals.
- Flo Garvey for leading the Environment and Sustainability agenda, whilst running the Community Garden and lots of other projects, not least undertaking a Masters course on an environmental subject.
- Simon Diggins on Highways for his

thankless task of trying to get an improvement to the state of our roads, speeding and better cycle routes.

I would also like to thank and welcome David Zerny, who joined SPC this year as one of our Councillors and volunteered to support Councillor Diggins on the Highways agenda. David has been involved with the Chandlers Cross Residents Association (now to become the Sarratt RA) for many years and is a valued addition to the team.

In addition, I'd like to extend my thanks to Lena Mortimer, our Parish Clerk, for all the work she does, and for always being a cheerful face to our Parishioners who call into the office with a diverse range of requests for assistance.

I would also like to thank a number of people in the Parish who are not members, or are no longer members, of the Parish Council:

- Former Councillor Ant Soothill for his guidance and the many hours he has put into the production of our Neighbourhood Plan.
- Former Councillor John Rugg, who continues to help with all things Environment, as well as some of the administrative aspects of the Parish Office and his ongoing support to the KGV Management Committee.
- Mike Edmund for his support maintaining and updating the SPC website and for his help on "anything media".
- Thanks also go to Andrew Whitewood, our ground works contractor, and to the Litter Pick Group and the Wildlife Volunteers for striving to maintain the footpaths, greens and commonland throughout the Parish and ensuring they are clear and tidy for walkers whilst still preserving the biodiversity our rural Parish offers and allowing the native flora to flourish.

We are also grateful for the support of our District Councillors, Ciaran Reed, Philip Hearn and Oliver Cooper, and County Councillor Phil Williams, for their help on a number of fronts. Phil Williams is not standing for re-election at the May County Elections, so we will have a new County Councillor from mid-May.

Having, and very appropriately, thanked in this report a number of people who have made a huge difference this year to the operation of the Council. I also wanted to reflect on the year as a whole, and it's certainly had its ups and downs.

We received the disappointing news that the Planning Inspector had approved the Burlington planning application on Appeal. And we are mindful that until TRDC gets its new Local Plan adopted, there could be other large speculative planning applications for Sarratt Parish waiting in the wings.

On a more positive note, we have made a great start on the implementation of our 10-year Woodland Management Plan, with the first phase of priority tree work now completed and a grant of £3,000 secured to help pay for the work. Huge thanks go to Jo Deacon who has been appointed as our Woodland Consultant for getting this work started and securing the grant. Jo will continue to oversee the implementation of the woodland plan going forwards.

You will find more details on SPCs activities over the last 12 months in the following reports from the Parish Clerk and the SPC Councillors.

Parish Clerk's Report

Lena Mortimer

This year has been increasingly interesting and busy, with many old issues being exacerbated and new issues surfacing.

But first of all:

- We welcomed a new Councillor – David Zerny, who has taken on the role of Deputy Councillor for Highways.
- I look forward to the renovation work on the Cricketers Pond commencing in the Autumn, after the breeding seasons have finished.
- We welcomed Jo Deacon as our Woodland Consultant, and great progress is being made on the Woodland Management Plan with the removal and remediation of dangerous trees that have fallen prey to Ash dieback and Elm disease.
- Grants were awarded to a wide range of organisations this year. It is wonderful to be able to help so many people who are passionate about Sarratt.
- SPC has produced a report for Herts Highways, detailing many of the extensive issues we have on our roads. Herts Highways and our representatives at County level have been less than dynamic on our behalf and we now look forward to a face-to-face meeting and meaningful discussions about the many obvious issues.
- The Litter Group volunteers have gone from strength to strength, and in co-operation with Sarratt School, have made forays into the Parish for the children to understand their environment.

- The new playground at KGV has been a hit with residents of all ages, and it is an enhancement to the Parish for the younger generation.
- We look forward to the renovation work due to commence next year, on the Pavilion at KGV.
- Interest in the Allotment Gardens, due in large part to the enthusiasm and helpfulness of Cllr Garvey, is at a three year high.
- SPC, due to careful husbandry of resources, is solvent, loan and debt free.

On the other hand:

- I have received many complaints about cars parked on Sarratt Green. Visitors to Sarratt and some residents do not realize the Green is privately owned by Sarratt Parish Council. This means that parking on it, by anyone, is trespass. Certain exceptions can be made if an application is made, in writing, to SPC. For example, if a resident is having building work done and a vehicle needs to be parked on the Green. In which case SPC may grant permission for a specified time and ask boarding to be put down to protect the grass surface. The Green is not a car park. SPC has byelaws relating to parking on the Green, and may be forced to enact them, if politeness and good sense does not prevail. The alternative is to surround the Green with posts, at considerable expense to SPC and ultimately residents through their Council Tax.
- The other complaint I have received is that residents are not kept aware of what is 'going on' in Sarratt. I know that all are not tech-savvy and do not access the Parish Website where a huge amount of information is easily available.

And not everyone receives a copy of Spotlight and so does not read the abridged Minutes of Council meetings. Furthermore, social media sites for Sarratt village and the hamlets elsewhere in the Parish, can be a repository for rumours, misinformation and bad feeling, rather than accurate news. We have almost 100 residents now signed up to the SPC email distribution list to receive immediate and accurate information on issues, both good and bad, and to be kept in touch with situations as they develop. I would like to encourage everyone to send me their email address to be included in this service, so that you can be apprised of important information. All I need is your email address.

- Sarratt has been the target, as have so many other places, of fly tipping. The last large tip cost over £700 to have it removed. May I make a plea for vigilance? If you see/hear anything, please take some photos and report it to SPC. CCTV is out of the question due to the cost of connecting power to the most effected locations.

This year has been fascinating. What comes across is that as residents, we need to continue to support the Parish to maintain Sarratt's character, and rejoice in the beautiful surroundings we are lucky enough to live in.

OUR WEBSITE

Meeting agendas and minutes can be found on the SPC website, together with our policies and other useful information and 'news'.

<https://sarrattparishcouncil.gov.uk>

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

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 initial results of the Council for the financial year 2024/2025 ended March 2025 subject to audit review. The overall expenditure for the year was less than expected owing to the unusually wet weather for the summer this year which reduced ground maintenance activities. This was further supported by other income received, mainly from CIL receipts, in addition to the main precept request. The combined effect of the above two categories is that the Council has performed well against its budget for the year generating a net contribution of £10k to the Council's reserves for this year (16k less 6k CIL transfer to the CIL Earmarked reserve). This roughly equates against the corresponding amount achieved last year of £14k added to the Council's reserves in the previous year.

Figure 1:

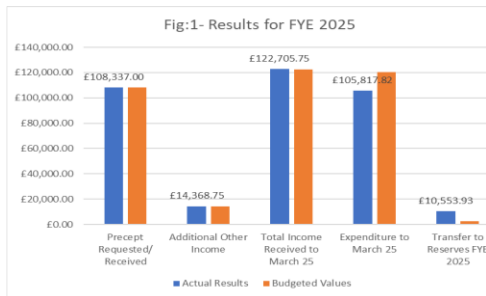


Figure 2, (below) shows an analysis of the different categories where this year's budget was spent. These, like the year before, see Administration, Grants, Environment, Common Land and Green accounting for the largest expenditure areas. This is to be expected to support the necessary administration and environmental activities for the Parish given its rural location.

Figure 2:

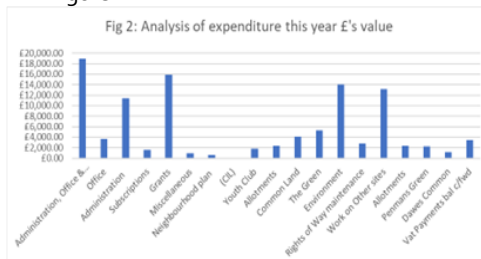
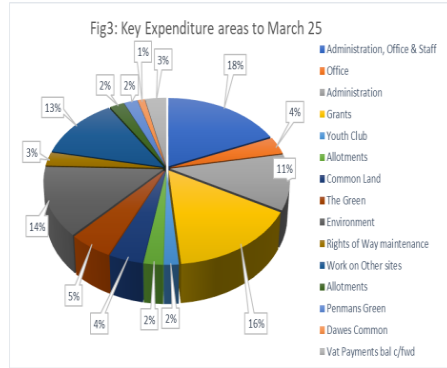


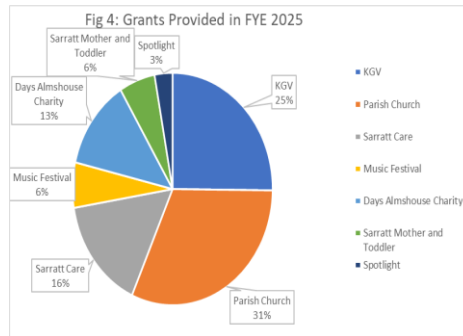
Figure 3 below shows the analysis of expenditure by percentage and can be seen as fairly evenly distributed.



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.

Figure 4 below shows the percentages of grants distributed to these local organisations from the total grants distributed of £15,883.

Figure 4:



During this financial year, the Council was able to complete the regeneration of the playground equipment within KGV fields. This was funded by the generous award from TRDC of £160k (net of vat) generated from its local Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) on building projects within its boundaries. The playground expenditure was also covered by receiving a generous donation of £5k from Sarratt and Chipperfield Community Foundation (SCCF) which enabled the purchasing of additional benches and new bins within the playground perimeters. SPC transferred the balance of £10k from its

general reserves to cover the cost of the remaining equipment purchased for the new playground, e.g. a larger gate entrance. Total income raised for the project from various sources above was £175k against total expenditure of £171k (both net of Vat). Income and costs are shown below in Figure 5.

Figure 5:

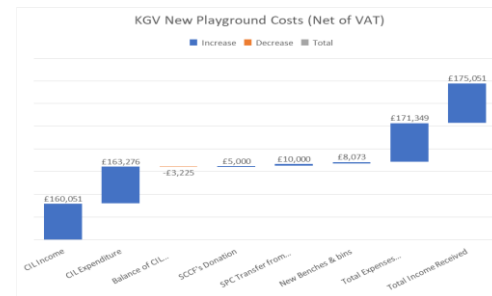
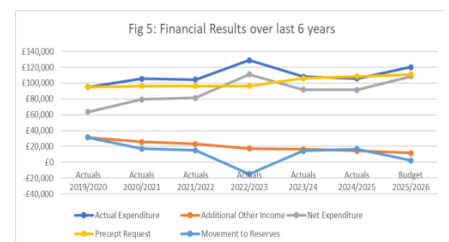


Figure 6 below shows the trend in income and expenditure levels for the last six years. As can be seen the annual precept request is generally in line with expenditure levels incurred by the Council.

In this year's budget, SPC continued to align with its strategic five-year forecast with Council Members reviewing the existing and future areas of expenditure for the immediate next year and subsequent four- years. Increase in precepts and expenditures continue to be aligned and maintained against the Bank of England's predicted inflation rates which enabled a modest increase in next year's precept request for 2025/2026 of 2.2%. I would like to thank the Chair, other Council Members, and the Parish Clerk for their continued support in preparing this year's annual budget and regular reviewing of internal SPC policies available on the Parish Council website: <https://sarrattparishcouncil.gov.uk>

Figure 6:



Planning

Lee Farman

We have worked hard this year to find the right balance between protecting the Parish's character, heritage and Green Belt, while at the same time supporting appropriate investment and development that will enable the community to thrive and enjoy living here.

We have no direct planning powers, but we try to use the collective voice and input we do have to best possible effect by providing detailed and consistent responses. The Parish Council, as a statutory consultee, reviewed on average eight applications each month.

The majority of Sarratt Parish 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 too.

Every application has unique aspects, and our local knowledge is a valuable input into the planning process. We have continued to develop our 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 balanced and representative inputs.

The lack of a new TRDC Local Plan and the land supply it provides, along with significant changes to government planning policies have led to significant development pressure and a series of large planning applications in the Parish, with currently, planning permission granted for over 120 houses to be built in Sarratt. There are more applications in progress including a 600-house development in Sarratt Parish next to Croxley Green.

We continue to do what we can to minimise the impact of any building activity, and the resulting developments, on the community.

We are also working to ensure that any developments approved provide appropriate affordable options and net biodiversity gain to help protect our local and global environment.

We have continued to have a good relationship with the TRDC planning and enforcement officers this year. We understand the overheads the legal aspects of some cases create, as well as the challenges on resources, but we have encountered issues 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. There is more to be done in this area and although the Parish Council has 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 new TRDC Local Plan is still unclear. While the recently approved applications for over 120 new homes in Church Lane may reduce the likelihood of further site designation in Sarratt Parish, the situation is very unclear for all. With the rapidly changing government planning position, it is clear that Green Belt is under potential threat generally.

The Sarratt Neighbourhood Plan Team has put in a lot of hard work this year and navigated some challenges that were not caused by us but have delayed progress. The plan is currently in the final formal inspection stage with the Inspector, prior to it being ratified by TRDC and then going to a referendum.

Adoption of this plan will provide some additional protection and funding for

the Parish. Latest information can be found at: <https://sarrattneighbourhoodplan.org>.

For the coming year we hope the Neighbourhood Plan, that the residents have contributed, reviewed and supported, will be adopted via the required Parish Referendum which we hope will be this Summer – so look out for more information nearer the time. This plan will drive the Parish Council's approach to planning responses, but every resident continues to play an important role in the development of our Parish. We have an email notification system to provide awareness of any significant planning applications and ways to engage. While we need to defend Green Belt from large-scale over-development we also need to ensure that appropriate development is enabled in the Parish to allow the area to thrive. Please engage with and support the Neighbourhood Plan to help maintain our Parish for the future.



Environment and Sustainability

Flo Garvey

This year has seen the beginning of the implementation of the 10 year Woodland Management Plan, with the first tranche of work taking place in Commonwood, felling a large stand of dead and diseased Ash, and dead-wooding potentially dangerous dead limbs from some roadside oaks.

Thanks are due to Jo Deacon at Harbro Project management Solutions for getting this off ground, and to Andrew Taylor for making the process as easy as possible.

The Wildlife volunteers have given yet another year of sterling service, particularly in parts of Commonwood where they have opened up swathes of woodland to bluebells, foxgloves, and herb Robert, by grubbing out the brambles. Their monthly toil does not go unnoticed or unappreciated by the parish – thank you All.

Thanks, are also due to Nick Mortimer



and his litter picking team, who pick up horrifying amounts of litter and arrange for it to be collected by the district council. Each month or so, they collect between 4 and 15 black sacks full of rubbish from the parish, sometimes involving the school –

setting a great example and hopefully influencing future behaviour in those children.

The allotment site is in good order and the number of vacant plots is shrinking, which we are delighted about. We will continue to encourage



take-up this coming year and have tried to make the prospect more appealing by offering half plots, and trying to keep on top of vacant ones. The problem of deer on the site is ongoing, with no easy solution in sight due to the proximity of houses, the road, and horses. The community garden plots are thriving and attracting lots of volunteers, which is excellent, and their plots are due to be enclosed by deer fencing imminently. Thanks are also due to Andrew Whitewood, our land management contractor who knows the job better than I do, and does it so brilliantly. To have such a trusted and knowledgeable person is invaluable – thank you Andrew.

This year has been a tough one for me as a councillor, as I started a full time

MSc in Food Policy in September, finishing in September '25. Thanks go to all those who have supported me, not least Lena who has had to nudge me with reports more than she should have needed to. There are testing times ahead for Sarratt's environment, from an economic and planning perspective, but we hope to weather the storm and do our best to protect and nurture what we have.

Highways

Simon Diggins

In many respects, this has been a very frustrating year. Across the parish, there have been the usual problems with potholes, broken drains, fallen trees and so forth and Herts CC response has also been the 'business as usual' one: some response, often slow, and, more often than not, a 'band aid' fix, rather than definitive solutions. A classic example is the badly damaged road surfaces and curbsides, on the corner of Grove Mill Lane and Langleybury Lane, which regularly floods. After our reporting, some minor repairs took place in the Autumn but, within months, the flooding has returned, the unrepaired potholes, from the Autumn fix, have got worse, and we are, in the round, no further forward; this is not good enough.

As a result, we have attempted to take a more strategic approach. The Council agreed to send a letter to Herts CC and, in the background, has compiled a list of our major problems. An extract from that letter is below:

"Broadly and basically, within our Parish boundaries, we have too many vehicles, travelling too fast, on roads that were never designed to cope with the current and expected levels of demand.

We have a particular challenge in that we are a largely rural parish but, with our proximity to the M25 and with three major 'cut throughs' from the A41 to the A404, we receive a significantly higher volume of heavy traffic than might otherwise be the case. Rush hours are a particular problem, but speeding and inconsiderate driving occurs throughout the day and night.

Our roads cannot cope, accidents are common, as sadly are fatalities; many roads are so poorly maintained that, at the slightest drop of rain, they flood. This last problem is exacerbated by changing rainfall patterns, consequent upon Climate Change. In short, we have a rural road network with urban levels of traffic: this simply does not work.

More positively, we all also wish to encourage more non-motor vehicle usage, in line with longstanding, non-partisan, government policy, but this is stymied by the dangerous road conditions"

Our direct pleas in our letter to Herts CC were these:

- For officials and elected representatives, to take a holistic view of all our route networks and ensure they are fit for purpose in the 21st century, which must include provision for cyclists and other non-vehicle road users. Currently our roads are a bad joke, and it is shaming that, one of the richest counties in the country, has such an abysmal road system
- Support our plan to reduce the speed limit to 30 mph, throughout the area, as a means of increasing road safety for all users.

This letter was sent in December 2024. Disappointingly, despite several reminders, we have not had a substantive response from the County Council.

We completely understand that 'Rome was not built in a day' and our problems may take some time to resolve. However we need something more substantive than piecemeal repairs (particularly when it is as shoddy as currently). We need a proper recognition of our situation, 'rural road network with urban levels of traffic', and the service that we deserve and pay for.

The Council will continue to fight hard for this change; faced with the prospect of more development and more traffic, we have no choice.

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Parish Office
Village Hall,
The Green
Sarratt,
Herts
WD3 6AS
01923 262025
<https://sarrattparishcouncil.gov.uk>

