



Sarratt Parish Council

Annual Report

April
2024



Chair's Report

Sarah Dobson

Welcome to the Sarratt Parish Council Annual Report for the year April 2023 – March 2024, prepared for the Annual Parish Meeting held on 30 April 2024 at 7:30pm in the rear room of Sarratt Village Hall which members of the public are invited to.

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

- Angela Coakley as Vice Chair, and for her work with the Sarratt & Chipperfield Community Foundation, including the Community Café.
- Michael Lowry, our Lead for Policy & Resources for his meticulous management of the SPC budget, the SPC bank accounts and working with the 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 who following the retirement of John Rugg, has taken on the Environment as well as the Sustainability agenda, and has also attended tree and pond management courses this year to enable her to better assess the state of these resources within the Parish.
- 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.

In addition, I'd like to extend my thanks 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 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 the guidance and many hours he has put in on the production of the 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 sits on the KGV Management Committee.
- Steve Bailey and former Councillor Peter Thorp, who between them have project managed the installation of the new playground in the KGV playing fields.
- Mike Edmund for his ongoing support maintaining and updating the SPC website and for his help designing, documenting and producing the new 'men at work' signs, the Information Board for the pump on Sarratt Green and the leaflet for the King Charles III Coronation Walk.

Thanks also go to our Parish Warden, Joe Brownsell and 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 and Philip Hearn, and County Councillor Phil Williams, for their help on a number of fronts.

I would also like to highlight two noticeable events in the Parish this year. Firstly, the celebration of the coronation of King Charles III on 8 May last year which saw parishioners come together in a day of celebration at the Village Hall. Sarratt commemorative mugs and pens were sold, which together with a number of fund-raising stalls generated £700 which is being used to support a Coronation Walk around the Parish. We have also installed a brand new playground in the KGV playing fields. The genesis of this came from a request made by a teenager seeking a local facility that would appeal to teenagers in the Parish. Thanks to funding from Three Rivers District Council (TRDC), the Sarratt & Chipperfield Community Foundation and Sarratt Parish Council itself, we now have a brand new playground in place that caters for children of all ages from toddlers through to teenagers.

Finally thank you for your support of our Parish Council, and please do feel free to contact us about any matters listed in this report.

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.

WELCOMES

SPC were delighted to welcome James Alder as a new Councillor this year. James lives in Sarratt and has taken on responsibility for the Deputy Planning Lead, supporting Lee Farman.

We do however still have 2 vacancies for the position of Councillor and would welcome interest from anyone considering joining our team. In particular we would welcome anyone wishing to support Councillor Garvey on the Environment & Sustainability agenda given the significance of this in our rural Parish. If you are interested in joining the Parish Council, or just want to find out a bit more about what we do and what might be involved, please contact the Parish Clerk.

Parish Clerk's Report

Lena Mortimer

I am approaching my second anniversary in the job and feel that I am somewhat more knowledgeable and definitely more confident in the position. I really enjoy my interaction with Parishioners – some of whom I call my 'eyes and ears'. They are a mine of historical perspective, and useful information!

SPC has made some progress with the issue of Parish participation. We have deployed signage outside the Village Shop to provide a space for 'latest news' and important messages. SPC can also now draw attention to works undertaken by its contractors with a sign indicating, "SPC working for you". We are very excited by the possibility of direct messaging of information and news via an 'opt-in' email distribution list which will be pursued this spring/summer.

I continue to bake cakes for Parish Council meetings – it would be lovely to see more people attending.

'20 is Plenty' signs have been made available to homes around Sarratt Green, Sarratt School and the Cricketer's Car Park. SPC is hoping this signage will drive a reduction in traffic speeds in these areas. The local Police have been helpful to SPC in considering speed control measures along Sarratt Green, especially at rush hours, and this project continues.

Signage has been placed by SPC, in the more popular fly-tipping areas, and TRDC has been speedier at removing the tips this year. We strongly encourage residents to report fly-tips repeatedly.

Greg Edmund has undertaken a survey of a portion of Sarratt Green, by metal detection and unearthed some fascinating finds, which its hoped to be able to display at a permanent venue within the Village.

SPC would like to extend thanks to Mike Edmund for updating the SPC website with

the agendas and minutes of Council meetings, and its policies as well as Parish news.

The fantastic KGV playground project, made possible by a CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) grant from TRDC, is a real enhancement to Sarratt. As a grandmother, I am delighted that there will be a lovely new playground to which I can take my brood! Especial thanks to former Councillor Peter Thorp for his work on this.

I would like to extend thanks to some indefatigable Parishioners who make up the Litter Picking Group. Their work is a valuable contribution to keeping our environment beautiful, safe and wild-life friendly. Thanks to former Councillor Nick Mortimer for leading the group, and special thanks to Simon Martin from Chipperfield, for his enthusiasm and persistence.

There are two vacancies for Councillors; if you have a passion for Sarratt and an interest in the betterment of the village and village-life, please consider joining us! Just contact me.

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

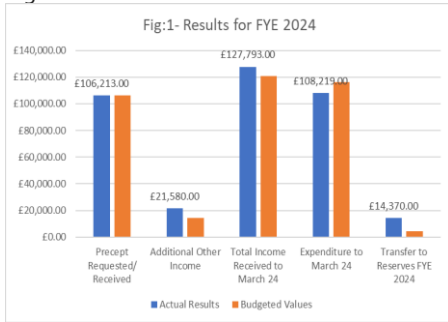
Financial Summary

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 initial results of the 2023/2024 financial year ending 31 March 24 subject to audit review.

Figure 1:



The overall expenditure for the year was less than expected owing to the unusually wet weather during the last quarter which reduced ground maintenance activities. This was further supported by other income received in addition to the main precept payment from TRDC, mainly from CIL receipts.

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 to the Council's reserves of £14k for this year. This roughly equates to the corresponding amount of £15k drawn from the Council's reserves in the previous year.

During the last budgeting round, the Council made a conscious decision to increase its precept request quite considerably to meet the current expenditure levels it is now experiencing. This budgeting decision has enabled expenditure for the provision of Council services to be mainly met by the precept request without having to rely on other sources of income to its meet spending requirements.

Figure 2 shows an analysis of the different categories where last year's budget was spent. These are similar to the previous year, with Administration, Grants, Environment, Common Land and Sarratt Green accounting for the largest expenditure areas.

This is to be expected in order to support the necessary administration and environmental activities of the Parish given its rural location.

Figure 2:

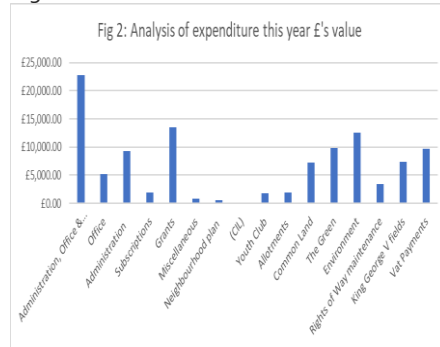
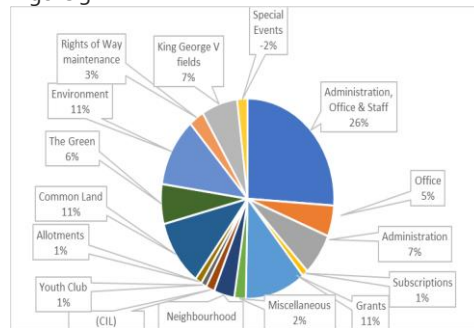


Figure 3 below shows the expenditure percentage categories which are again similar to last year.

Figure 3:



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 shows the percentages of grants distributed to these local organisations from the total grants distributed last year of £13,585.

Figure 4:

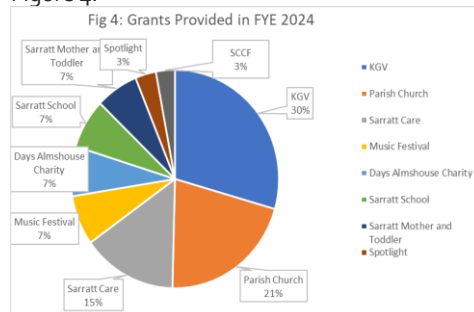
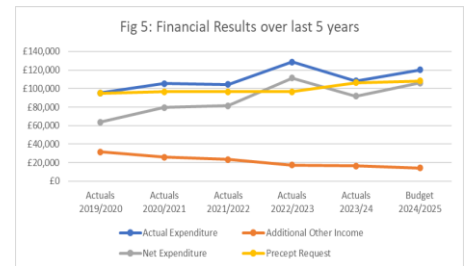


Figure 5 shows the trend in income and expenditure levels for the last five years that the Council has been experiencing. As mentioned, the Council's precept request is now meeting current expenditure levels for the services it provides – demonstrated where the two lines below now start to meet.

Figure 5



This budgeting round the Council also agreed its strategic 5-year plan with Councillors reviewing the existing and future areas of expenditure for the next five years. This gives the Council greater visibility of planned and preferred service areas going forward. Increases in expenditures have been aligned to the Bank of England's predicted inflation rates which has enabled a more modest increase in next year's precept request for 2024/2025 of 2.6%.

This five-year plan is not 'cast in stone' and will be reviewed by the Council during each annual budget round. I thank the other Council Members, Clerk to the Council and our contractor community for their support in preparing this five year plan.

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 and Clerk, Lena Mortimer, 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 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, 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 to. 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 the 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.

We have strongly supported TRDC with the defense of several appeals to significant development applications TRDC refused this year. One appeal for 20 affordable houses in Church Lane was unexpectedly upheld by the Planning Inspector (allowing the development to proceed), with some concerning elements in the Inspector's decision. We will continue to work hard to ensure that any development on that site delivers genuinely affordable houses to meet real local needs for our community. We also spent several weeks of volunteer time supporting TRDC's defense of the appeal by Burlington Property Group. We are still awaiting the decision of this unusually complex and lengthy appeal. Again, this process has raised some concerns relating to the current state of the national planning process, as well as the lack of a current approved Local Plan for the Three Rivers District.

We continue to have a good relationship with TRDC planning and enforcement officers this year. We understand the overheads that the legal aspects of some cases create as well as the challenges on resources, but 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. 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 unclear. Following support from SPC and our TRDC District Councillors, the current situation appears to remain that no land in Sarratt Parish is labelled as recommended or designated development sites in the plan. However, due to the significant delays to finalising the next Local Plan this has effectively reduced protection to all land in the Parish for the next few years. 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 through the later stages of this process including formal inspection to get it to the point where only final few small checks are needed prior to it 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>

We would like to thank all the volunteer contributors to the Neighbourhood Plan, especially Anthony Soothill, and the significant work they have done to get it to this stage. In particular we would also like to recognise the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group Chair, John Carter, who sadly passed away late last year.

For the coming year we hope the Neighbourhood Plan, that the residents have contributed, reviewed and supported will be adopted. 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 will be working on additional ways of providing information 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 do engage and support the Neighbourhood Plan to help maintain our Parish for the future.



Environment and Sustainability

Flo Garvey

This year has seen the completion and adoption of the Parish 5-year Land Management Plan, and the 10-year Woodland Management Plan, both of which will steer us as a Council in looking after our precious local environment. Thanks are due to former Councillor John Rugg and parishioner Stephen Morrill for this, as well as to Andrew Taylor at the Countryside Management service, who has been incredibly helpful.

The Wildlife Volunteers have given yet another year of sterling service, particularly in parts of Penman's Green where they have opened up swathes of woodland to bluebells, foxgloves, and Herb Robert, by grubbing out the brambles. They have also helped to keep Morton's pond in good order, with a visit from the Chiltern Society Volunteer Team adding to their work on the pond.



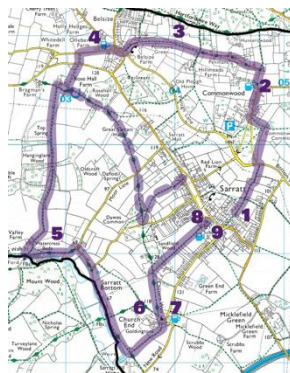
Thanks also go to Nick Mortimer and his litter picking team, who pick up horrifying amounts of litter and arrange for it to be



collected by the District Council. Each month or so, they collect between 4 - 15, yes 15 black sacks full of rubbish from around the Parish.

There are 2 new oaks in the village – one on Rosehall Green and the other at the entrance to the village from the Croxley direction, and the new trees on the corner of Dawes Lane and Downer Drive have been replaced with 2 larger specimens and are doing well – thanks to TRDC for doing this.

2023 saw the Coronation of King Charles III, and SPC decided to use the funds raised by the Village Event last May, marking the Coronation, to create a new circular walk – the Coronation Walk. This is made up of existing footpaths and the money has been spent on a booklet detailing the history of certain points of interest along the way, along with some new posts and way markers. Huge thanks are due to Mike Edmund for his hard work on putting the booklet together, and the Sarratt History Society for their input.



The allotment site is in good order thanks to some extra SPC work, both with contractors and volunteers, but it remains a sadness that we have 6 plots vacant. 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. The Community Garden plots are thriving and attracting lots of volunteers, which is excellent.

Finally, thanks are also due to our Parish Warden, Joe Brownsell, for his ongoing work, and to Andrew Whitewood, our land management contractor who knows the job better than I do, and does it so brilliantly.



Highways

Simon Diggins

Reviewing our annual Highways' reports can, if one is not careful, give a sense of déjà vu: potholes, road repairs or the lack thereof, parking, speeding and road safety. All of these issues have come up again this year and we have attempted to deal with them or at least ensure they are reported. However, especially in the last quarter of the year, we have had significantly heavier rainfall than average (the wettest February on record, and 150% of the average rainfall in March); together, this has shown-up, starkly, that our current Highways repair system is inadequate.

We've had roads like Bottom Lane, off Toms Hill, that have stayed flooded for days and where the sides of the road are completely crumbled away; dangerous corners, such as that on Langleybury Lane, at the corner of Grove Mill Lane, where the curb (on the CEMEX quarry/landfill side) has disintegrated and the floods, which are also persistent, stretch across both carriageways. There are too many other examples.

Part of this may be down to straightforward 'wear and tear': a combination of age, heavier than planned for traffic and bigger vehicles (20-30 cm wider than 20 years ago). Roads have a 'planning life' of between 30-40 years, and surface drainage, about 20 years; many of these planning limits are now routinely broken. Historic neglect, which might include careless digging-up and poor filling-in, may also play a part. However, government research suggests a major factor is the effect of Climate Change. The government's key findings are ¹:

- Drainage systems can be overwhelmed, which can lead to roads being inundated, blocking traffic, and can lead to roads and underlying earthworks becoming waterlogged, leading to premature deterioration
- When road surfaces are waterlogged for a prolonged time, asphalt can become weakened, leading to potholes and faults.
- Scour – the erosion of soil or rock at the foundation of a structure – is the main cause of bridge failure in the UK.
- Earthworks, such as slopes and embankments, can fail when the ground is saturated by water.

Sound familiar? Less 'scour' and the collapse of a bridge, we have experienced all of these ². The challenge is what can we do about it?

Firstly, we must not give up on our normal reporting; whatever the limitations of the current system, it does record issues and a profile of the most problematic locations can be built-up. The link to Herts Highways is here:

<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>.

If you don't have access to the internet, please report it to the Parish Council Office; we will pass it on (using the same system).

More importantly, make clear to your elected representatives at District Level (who hold the responsibility for surface drains), and at County Level (who maintain the Highways), that the current 'patch and repair' system is not adequate. We need to wholeheartedly embrace what is known as Climate Change Adaptation. That does not require us to 'buy-in' to the whole argument, or even all the prescriptions for change, on Climate Change, but we should all recognise that the situation has changed, is changing still, and that the climatic premises upon which roads were built 40 years ago no longer apply.

Practically, we need: better drains, both road, and field; all roads to be sealed at the edges and curbed; more control over weight restrictions on minor roads (to save on wear and tear); and better management of repairs, as poorly executed repairs allow water ingress. We also need to work with farmers, and DEFRA as the farming industry responsible ministry, to establish buffer strips along roads, but especially those liable to flood. Vegetation absorbs water and slows down run-off into the road, allowing drainage systems to cope; there may also be locations, within the Parish, where 'leaky coffer dams' could help. A side-benefit of using natural water control systems is that they also enhance bio-diversity, so there is a bit of win-win too.

All of these measures are well-understood and don't require wholesale re-shaping of our countryside and road networks. Costs may seem daunting at first but, amortised over a 40-year period, are modest and should be offset against the costs of not doing something, including, God forbid, catastrophic failure. Time to change!



1. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6569b274cd4dda000d082fa3/climate-change-and-transport-infrastructure-rapid-evidence-assessment.pdf>
NatCen Study for Dept of Transport, dated 25 April 2022.
2. Though I worry about the regular pooling of water on the abutments over the motorway bridge across Langleybury Lane.

Sarratt Parish Council Annual Report

Parish Office
Village Hall,
The Green
Sarratt,
Herts
WD3 6AS
01923 262025

<https://sarrattparishcouncil.gov.uk>

