



## Sarratt Parish Council

### Annual Report

April 2020



## Chairman's Report

*Sarah Dobson*

Welcome to the Sarratt Parish Council Annual Report for the financial year April 2019 – March 2020.

For the first time that any of us can recall we are not this year sharing our report at the May Annual Parish Meeting due to the restrictions on public gatherings put in place to manage the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Instead we are publishing this on-line and have postponed the Annual Parish Meeting till later this year.

As I write this, we are still in midst of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, as indeed are many other parts of the world. This pandemic has changed our daily lives beyond recognition. We have experienced nothing like this for generations, with restrictions on personal movement to the point where we could not visit many of our loved ones; the cancellation of GCSE and A Level exams; and the worrying financial consequences for individuals, businesses and the economy as a whole. Some of us have also had direct experience of the virus and lost those they love, and our hearts go out to them and their families.

And yet as we deal with this, a new sense of solidarity has emerged. The Parish of Sarratt

has always been a very strong community with over 40 clubs and societies involving residents of all ages. But the last few months has seen that community rise to the challenge of dealing with COVID-19 with unprecedented levels of support from so many to help the vulnerable in our Parish and to keep vital services such as the Village Shop and Sarratt Care going. We have proved beyond doubt that we are an incredible community, and my hope is that spirit of mutual support will continue into the future and that soon we will have the opportunity to come together to celebrate our amazing community.

But turning now to this summary of our last financial year, in the pages that follow you will find reports from our Parish Clerk and the Lead Councillors for Finance, Planning, the Environment and Highways, but first some of the highlights of the past year.

1. In September, we said goodbye to Janice Dawes, our Parish Clerk of 12 years, and welcomed Caroline Owen as our new Clerk.
2. We also welcomed 3 new Councillors to the team – Coral Bloom, John Rugg and Simon Diggins. We also said farewell to our Vice Chair, David Turner who had also been an SPC Chair and served on the Council for many years.
3. We are financially stable, and more details are available later in this report from Peter Thorp, including the Grants that were issued in May.

4. Publication of the Three Rivers District Council (TDRC) Local Plan to meet the Government housing targets through till 2036) originally expected this summer is now expected to be delayed until early 2021. In the meantime, great progress has been made on producing our own Neighbourhood Plan as Anthony Soothill reports.
5. Environment – as always lots for Coral Bloom and John Rugg to report on for this aspect of the Council agenda, including the Tree Survey and the litter group. We are also hoping to appoint a Village Warden soon.
6. Highways – John Gell reports on the good progress on our local roads this year, but as always lots more to be done.
7. Following the MBE Carol Chorley received in 2018, we were delighted this year to present her with 'Freedom of the Parish' recognising the many years of community service she has given to the Parish. We were also sad to learn of the passing of John Goodman in November. John was the Parish Footpath Warden for many years and did his utmost to assist the Council and maintain the village he loved.

In closing I would like to thank my fellow Councillors and our Parish Clerk, plus those who carry out work on behalf of the Council for all their help and support over the last 12 months and particularly to me as a new Chair. We have a strong team and hope that despite the current challenging times we will continue to serve our Parish well.

# Parish Clerk's Report

*Caroline Owen*

I have now been in the role of Parish Clerk for 6 months and what a broad and varied role it has shown to be, covering everything from financial budgeting and setting precept to measuring gates and stiles.

I would like to thank the Sarratt community for showing such a warm and supportive welcome to me. It has made the transition into my new role much easier and I am very grateful.

Sarratt is fortunate to have such an active, driven and knowledgeable team of Councillors and I am looking forward to starting new projects within the community as soon as possible. Could I remind all parishioners that if you have any suggestions for any local community projects, we would love to hear from you.

Unfortunately, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has caused widespread unrest and upheaval. However through this dreadful time it has been demonstrated that as a community we can all work together. I would like to draw attention to the fantastic work our Chair, Sarah Dobson has achieved directing volunteers to help those less fortunate within the community. This is echoed by all the other small businesses and volunteers who are also working tirelessly to help the community. Everyone is very grateful.

As you will see in the Policy and Resources report, a large proportion of your money goes towards maintaining the beautiful woodland, greens and footpaths around the village. This could not continue without the hard work and efforts from our volunteer litter pickers, volunteer conservationists, Andrew and Brian Whitewood, Joe Brownsell and of course the late John Goodman. Thank you all.

I would also like to express thanks to ex Vice Chairman David Turner who helped me get established in my new role and has shown years of dedication to Sarratt Parish Council. We wish him all the best for the future and look forward to seeing him around the village and no doubt entering the jam making competitions at one of the Horticultural Society's shows.

I would like to wish you all well and to remind you that although I am not actively present in the Parish Council Office due to self-shielding, I am still working and am contactable via email at: [Sarratt\\_parish@btconnect.com](mailto:Sarratt_parish@btconnect.com)

## WELCOMES & FAREWELLS

We welcomed Coral Bloom, now Lead Councillor for the Environment.



John Rugg, Deputy Lead for the Environment and one of the SPC representatives on the King George V Trustees Committee.



And Simon Diggins, who will be taking over from John Gell as Lead Councillor for Highways for the new financial year.



We also sadly said farewell to David Turner who has served on the Council for many years and has been both Chair and Vice-Chair. We wish him all the very best and thank him for his unstinting support and advice.



## DID YOU KNOW?

The Parish Council's Website is available at [sarrattvillage.co.uk/the-council/](http://sarrattvillage.co.uk/the-council/)

OFFICE OPENING HOURS  
Monday - Friday 09:30 – 13:30

However, during the current lockdown-period the Parish Office will be open at the following times:  
Monday - Friday 11:30 – 13:00

# Financial Summary

*Peter Thorp*

2019/20 was a year of reconciliation for the Council in as much as this time last year we made some important decisions around how we spend your money and where this money was to come from.

The biggest single decision the Council made was to embark on a Neighbourhood Plan to give us, as a Parish, the best opportunity to state our case with big centrally driven government housing targets coming down the line.

The expected cost of writing and implementing a top quality Neighbourhood Plan is between £20-30k. Some of this is available from grants (we have already been successful in a 9k bid for 2019/20) so we voted to allocate £9k of our annual Council budget towards the plan.

This led to some difficult decisions around grant funding for the year with some applicants not awarded either their total grant or part of what they asked for. All applications were assessed according to financial need based on figures supplied and the following grants shown in the adjacent table were approved.

One or two areas that have increased significantly, where we have endeavoured to maintain standards are:

- Dog waste bags - up from £250 to £891
- Dog waste removal – up from £1,210 to £2,077
- Greens Furniture and Structures - up from £300 to £1,012

Feedback suggests that whether a dog owner or not, parishioners are pleased dog waste is dealt with effectively within Sarratt and the Green is kept in such good condition.

Caroline Owen joined us on October 1st 2019 as our new Clerk and has settled in well, working hard to bring herself up to speed with the huge number of processes and procedures that she needs to operate within.

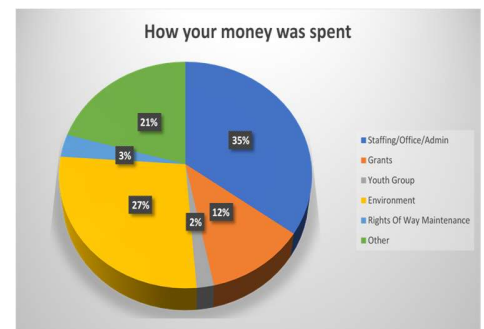
With the exception of grant funding, income ring-fenced for the Neighbourhood Plan and a VAT rebate, expenditure broadly matched income. The resulting potential surplus was allocated to topping up general reserves to meet our policy of holding 50% of precept for a rainy day with the remainder put aside for specific purposes.

2020/21 will present all of us with different challenges and it will certainly throw up some new situations for the Council to deal with.

From a financial perspective we are in good shape, the topping up of our reserves last year is looking an even better decision now and we can move forward confident that, within our remit, we are in a good position to support the parishioners of Sarratt, wherever you are, through this period of uncertainty.

If you would like to have a closer look at the numbers, the accounts will be available for public viewing after completion of the internal audit and subsequent Council approval of the Annual Return.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY 2019/20	
<b>Income</b>	
Precept plus other income	£103k
Exceptional income	£22k
<b>Total</b>	<b>£125k</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>£95k</b>
<b>Reserves</b>	
General (50% of precept)	£48k
Specific/Earmarked reserves	£47k
<b>Total</b>	<b>£95k</b>



2019/20 GRANTS	
Sarratt Festival of Music	£1000
Sarratt Parish Church	£2534
Sarratt Care	£2200
Spotlight Magazine	£370
Sarratt Mothers & Toddlers	£750
Sarratt History Society	£2000
Sarratt Days Almshouse Charity	£200
Sarratt Ducklings	£1500
Sarratt School	£600
<b>Total</b>	<b>£11,154</b>

# Planning

*Anthony Soothill*

Planning is another area the Council spend a considerable amount of time on during the year. Our record of the majority of the Council's recommendations on planning applications being subsequently endorsed by the Local Planning Authority was maintained and we were successful with every one of the applications we called into Three Rivers District Council's (TRDC) Planning Committee.

However, reviewing planning applications is not all we do. Much of the work this year has been spent assessing potential scenarios for new development as TRDC struggles to find space for the central government target of 9,600 additional houses across the district by 2036.

In late 2019, TRDC declared that the sites nominated in their 'call for sites' consultation, would only deliver 40-50% of their target and they were now looking for sites for potential new settlement(s). It is clear that to meet their target, Green Belt will need to be lifted somewhere in the district.

In early 2020, TRDC announced that it had identified 3 potential new settlement site(s) and 17 potential settlement extension sites. The location of these sites is, as yet not known but we continue to plan for the eventuality some may be proposed for the Parish.

In that context, the Parish Council sponsored independent working group, set up last year, to produce a Neighbourhood Plan is even more important to help protect our Parish.

The Working Group has open meetings monthly and was originally aiming to share its draft planning policies in its first public consultation after Easter. As a result of the Covid-19 restrictions this has been postponed, but will be scheduled as soon as possible after public gatherings can resume.

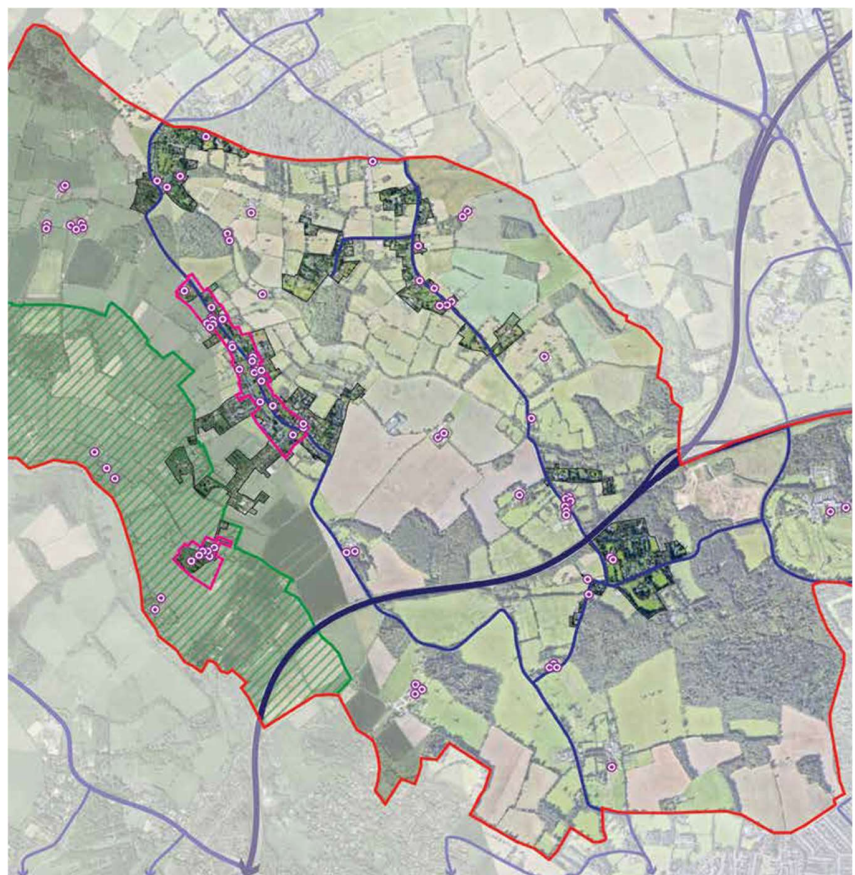
During the year, it has commissioned three independent reports on:

- 1) Housing demand, supply and affordability;
- 2) Design codes; and
- 3) Initial site options assessment.

It has also consulted with a number of local interest groups to seek their input and engaged a professional consultant to help ensure its recommendations are consistent with national and local planning guidelines.

It is hoped that the Neighbourhood Plan will be formally adopted before TRDC's new Local Plan comes into force, probably in 2021.

Before that, it will be subject to a referendum where we will need a majority of residents to support it. Meanwhile, please engage in the consultation process. It is our plan to help determine our Parish's future.



# Environment

## Coral Bloom

As I write this report in beautiful Spring sunshine, I am aware that we are living in extraordinary and difficult times. However, it is clear to me how very fortunate we are to live in a Parish with 78 footpaths totalling some 28 miles as well as many bridleways and rights of way which are still open to us all.

Being new to the role of Environment Lead this year, (and never having been a Councillor before) I have been on a steep learning curve. Fortunately I have had the help of John Rugg who has previous experience of the role. His knowledge and expertise have been invaluable, and I'd like to offer him my thanks.

I'd also like to thank my predecessor Nick Mortimer for all his hard work in Sarratt – he continues to give lots of his time selflessly and has been a mine of information. I've enjoyed picking his brain almost as much as I've enjoyed picking up litter with him and other very jolly volunteers when we meet once a month in our high-vis jackets with grabber sticks and bin liners (thank you everyone, you know who you are). We regularly clear paths and roads of about 4 bags of rubbish in 2 hours and have a lot of fun and banter on the way. If anyone wants to join us we would welcome new volunteers. Please contact our Parish Clerk, Caroline in the office.



Whilst on the subject, Nick Mortier is also very active in co-ordinating our Neighbourhood Watch WhatsApp group and the Three Rivers Rural Watch group for which we thank him.

Sadly, we lost John Goodman earlier this year. I was fortunate to meet him before he passed away - he had kept an eye on all our footpaths and rights of way for many years and was also instrumental in setting up the Chiltern Way. He was very knowledgeable and is sorely missed.

If anybody walking the footpaths or using bridleways notices a problem, please call the Parish Office.

We have candidates waiting to be interviewed for the post of Village Warden which will be progressed when the lock-down eases.

I would also like to thank the Wildlife Volunteers. Set up some 30 years ago and led by Dawn Pitts and Dr Brenda Harold (a mine of information on all things botanical) they have worked tirelessly on our woodlands and commons making such a difference in managing the woodlands and common land plant life and allowing our native plants to flourish. They are always looking for new volunteers and their schedule is available in Spotlight every month.

A big thank you to Andrew and Brian Whitewood. Andrew is always available for advice, is hugely knowledgeable about the area (not just the Parish land but also the people who live here!). He does an enormous amount of day to day maintenance to keep the Parish looking tidy and has managed to keep this going through the current lockdown.

You may have noticed two young willow trees at either end of the duck pond on Sarratt Green. They were donated by the Whitewoods and Adams families in memory of loved ones. These will grow to replace the large willow by the pond which is sadly diseased and we have had to have removed.



Recent changes in the law require all landowners (including SPC) to undertake a risk assessment of trees and woodlands. SPC commissioned a survey by an accredited arbori-culturalist last year which was comprehensive (and costly!). A challenge has been the permanent removal of the substantial Forestry Commission Woodland Improvement Grants we, and many other parishes, have enjoyed for many years. This brings extra pressure on the Environment

budget which is a very large proportion of the Council's annual spend. We have dealt promptly with the few urgent requirements the assessment report highlighted (mainly work on trees presenting an immediate risk to users of footpaths and roads) and are incorporating many of the recommendations into our Wildlife and Commons Management Plans. This work will need to be done over a 3 year period.

Our thanks to our local tree surgeon, Joe Brownsell who has had a busy year clearing up tree damage after two storms as well as responding to the urgent jobs in the Tree Survey and his regular maintenance work.



We had good news in the shape of a gift of 100 trees from St Marys in Rickmansworth who are celebrating their 750th anniversary. These were snapped up by local parishioners.

The Parish allotments in Church Lane are mostly well used by residents and there has been lots of interest since lockdown started – please contact the Parish Office if you are interested. While I'm on this subject, can I remind you of the importance of home composting to deal with domestic kitchen and garden waste – this is one of the most effective individual steps we can take against climate change.

There has been a new group set up called Sustainable Sarratt as a result of a Pints of View gathering at the Plough (advertised in Spotlight) who have met on 3 occasions with a good turnout of almost 40 people. SPC welcomes any ideas or suggestions for making Sarratt more sustainable.

It only remains for me to wish you all a lovely Summer - please stay well in these challenging times. And enjoy the environment of beautiful Sarratt and all it has to offer!

# Highways

*John Gell*

In the early part of the year from May/June 2019 our roads were continually being closed for gas pipe renewals and repairs followed by water leaks of one kind or another. Potholes were not in such abundance as in previous years owing possibly to the warm weather and mild winter although flooding in the usual places was still in evidence despite attempts to control them. One such location was a satisfactory outcome in Redhall Lane at its junction with Sarratt Road. This necessitated making a mini 'lake' in the field opposite into which the excess water could flow via a large trench under the road. However, the continual requests to fix the flooding problem at the top end of Bucks Hill over the last 2-3 years are still to be addressed. This stems from the apparent disintegration of the bridleway surface with water accumulation attempting to enter a drain which becomes continually blocked.

Full road resurfacing has been carried out in:

- Alexandra Road;
- Sarratt Road between the Solesbridge Lane junction and Dimmocks Lane;
- Toms Hill;
- the bottom of New Road up to the Parish boundary at North Hill;
- Bragmans Lane;
- Firtree Hill;
- Grove Mill Lane;
- the blind corner by the Church in Church Lane; and
- Dunny Lane in Belsize.

Regretfully, due mainly to County financial constraints, patching only was carried out in the bulk of New Road plus a number of side roads in the Parish. The main part of Church Lane was due for resurfacing in February/March but, alas this was been postponed until the summer.

The main refurbishment of Rousebarn Lane announced two years ago has as yet failed to materialise plus one part of Sarratt Bottom.

Requests to upgrade Deadman's Ash Lane and the top part of Bucks Hill between Quickmoor Lane and the District boundary have not as yet been considered sufficiently essential to upgrade at present.

On a brighter note we were hoping to install new wooden fingerposts this year and in 2021 around the parish. However, with the virus pandemic it's possible that this will be delayed for a further year.



The dangerous state of Sarratt Road from York House School up to our boundary approaching Loudwater Lane with two fatal accidents in the last two years is causing us some anxiety mostly due to the speed of traffic. We have approached our County Councillor on the matter, and he is discussing with County what suggestions they might have for improvements.



SPC also extends its thanks to Councillor Gell for his leadership of the Highways agenda for many years, and are grateful for his continued support as he takes on the role of Deputy Lead for Highways, supporting Councillor Diggins for the new financial year.

# Sarratt Parish Council Annual Report

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