

Annual Report of Spratton Parish Council 2015-2016





Spratton Parish Council

Annual Report 2015-2016

Chairman's Report

Welcome to this year's Report written after a tumultuous year for Spratton Parish Council. However, it has hopefully resulted in a positive outcome for the village without any detrimental effects being felt from the changes which preceded the present stability. During the year, the Neighbourhood Plan consultation continued until it reached the stage when it went through the formal process of Daventry District Council (DDC) of being vetted by an independent examiner and the DDC Scrutiny committee after which it was put to a referendum and confirmed by the village vote. The result was: 192 (57.49%) in favour and 141 (42.21%) against and the total turnout of an electorate of 960 people with 334 ballot papers issued, was 34.79%.

The Neighbourhood Plan had unfortunately caused a minority of the village to actively oppose it over the three years of its consultation, which resulted in various dramatic changes in the membership of the council and the resignation of three Parish Council Clerks during the last year but we can confidently assure the village that the Council has now emerged all the stronger for the experience. I will attempt to summarise some of the changes which occurred:

At the Annual Parish Council meeting on 19th May 2015 chair of 14 years, Barry Frenchman, stepped down and Cllr Lynne Hogg was elected in his place with Cllr Fiona Keable as Vice chair.

The longstanding RFO and Clerk, Mrs Lynne Compton, stepped down from 7th August 2015 and Mrs Gill Evans was appointed in her place. During the summer, owing to various pressures, the Neighbourhood Plan manager Cllr Heaton stepped down as did Mrs Evans, Cllrs. Blowfield, Hunt, Tindale, McDonald Walker, Keable, Pacey and Bull leaving only one co-opted member, Cllr Vellam. This meant that DDC had to deal with Parish matters pending an election for new councillors and they took physical as well as actual control of all files and parish matters. It did not cause any disruption in parish matters and residents will be pleased to hear that despite all, the annual precept has remained constant and contrary to many parishes has not increased the amount payable by residents for several years.

The election for 9 new councillors took place on 22nd October, 2015 and the results were as follows:

J Hunt	278	14.42%
B Blowfield	267	13.84%
H Mallinder	264	13.70%
J Tindale	248	12.86%
C Chivers	218	11.31%
J Holmes	152	7.89%
J Spence	152	7.89%
J Gaywood	128	6.63%
G Bandy	122	6.33%

A Taylor	<u>99</u>	<u>5.13% (not elected)</u>
	1,928	100.00%

There was a 39.11% turnout.

Mr Gaywood stepped down in January 2016 and Cllr Spence has since left the village. Mrs Sally Wilkes, solicitor and chair of the planning committee, was co-opted so the council currently consists of 8 elected members and two co-opted members.

During the interregnum, Mrs Sue Porter became the Parish Clerk and when she stepped down in March 2016 our new Clerk, Mrs Emma Gibson and RFO, came on board. Emma is a real asset to the Council and carries out her duties with a smile and efficiency that keeps us all on the ball!

The recent annual audit carried out showed all was in good order, though it did emphasise that the meetings we had held in the local pub over the winter were not allowed. We have since reverted to meetings in the Village Hall.

During the year, we have had several discussions about obtaining a public defibrillator in the village, the outcome of which has resulted in having two. One will be in the grounds of the Kings Head and the other at the Social Club. We will also be training a "First Responder" in first aid following a presentation given to the Council by Sandra Cottrell, group leader of the East Midlands Ambulance Service. This First Responder will keep a defibrillator in her possession for use at any time. In addition, the two public defibrillators will be available to the public. Anyone needing the service should first dial 999 and if the need is within 500 yards of one of the defibrillators the caller will automatically be directed to the nearest one.

The Parish attempts to support appropriate community activities and for example continues to give an annual grant towards the Recreation Field maintenance. It carries out a whole list of other activities which are not always obvious to the public in its responsibilities for things like planning, street lighting, maintenance of verges, churchyard and open spaces, burials, footpaths, dog fouling issues, traffic complaints such as speeding, pot holes, parking and road maintenance – and a whole host of other things which come up intermittently.

Dog fouling is a perennial issue and we liaise with DDC over this to try to encourage responsible dog ownership.

Caring for the natural flora and fauna is an ongoing responsibility and we are always on the lookout for opportunities for expansion of natural ecological niches like the Pocket Park and Jubilee Wood.

The village clean-up is still an annual feature but more participation is sought for the coming year.

Our web site has been updated and is very simple to access where you will find current news and events as well as an archive of Minutes of meetings. The Newsletter was suspended at the end of last year during the changes in the Council but is now picking up where it left off with hopefully more articles and diary events fed in to it by residents.

Finally, I must give a big welcome to the many newcomers in village and emphasise that the Parish Council is here to be of service to all and welcomes any questions, comments or suggestions about village life.

John Hunt
Chairman

ANNUAL RESOURCES, STAFFING AND STRATEGY REPORT

Financial performance 2015/16

During the past seven months the present Council have been in office we have administered the day to day running of the parish council's finances.

Advertised, interviewed and have in place a new Parish Clerk and also brought our office up to date with modern working essentials. As a very new Council last November we set in place a cautious Precept for the year 2016/17 which leaves us with a healthy balance to cover certain contingencies.

At the end of May 2016 we will be audited by our external auditors in relation to the 2015/16 accounts and Parish Council practices. Residents can be assured that we are endeavouring to conduct our business well. The Parish Council's detailed accounts are available on request.

In conclusion, public spending pressures together with the unknown result that the June European Referendum will bring may mean that opportunities to finance initiatives may become more restricted and we need to treat with caution. We feel that we have prudently managed our budgets for the year 2016/17 which will leave us in a position to address some future projects, whilst making clear progress on the priorities that are necessary such as the church wall and the necessary upgrading of our street lighting which Council are in the process of assessing. We aim to run and develop our financial plans to ensure we look at ways of achieving the most economic, cost effective and efficient means of doing things.

Jay M Tindale

Chair, Resources, Staffing and Strategy

REPORT PLANNING COMMITTEE MAY 2016

The last year has been a particularly busy time for the Planning Committee and much of the time planning matters were considered by the whole council rather than just the committee. Examples of especially challenging matters concerned the building of two houses between the Walk and Yew Tree Lane, change of use to stables and ménage in open countryside, conversion of agricultural building to a dwelling, various Tree Preservation order applications, demolition and development of cottage, infill of new house between existing houses, car park at Broom Hill, new house in Holdenby Road, footpath in St Andrew's churchyard together with various other applications. So it will be seen that Planning forms a large part of the work of the Council and is rarely an easy job as there are inevitably strong feelings on both sides of most applications. It can be a daunting task to come to a decision as to whether a letter to DDC will be one of "Observations", "Objections" or "support" and it is only by considering all of the relevant factors which have to be based on "material planning considerations" that the council can comment. This year has been particularly difficult in this regard but hopefully fair and sustainable decisions have been made for the benefit of the village as a whole.

The Neighbourhood Plan has been proceeding on its long and sometimes arduous course and for most of the last year it has been the legal procedure in the hands of DDC which has dominated. The process is now coming to an end and the village will have the final say as to whether it wishes the "Spratton Neighbourhood Development Plan" to give it the full title, when it decides in the referendum on 21st July.

CHURCHYARDS, CEMETERIES AND OPEN SPACES REPORT

2016

The mowing contractors, 4 Counties (formerly Countryside Gardens), continue to give a generally good service, helping to give the village a well-kept appearance. We welcome feedback from anyone who has any comments to make.

Following a lot of work during the past months, the records for East View Cemetery burials are now all on computer. This gives us a back-up to the old linen plan and Burial registers, as well as enabling searches to be done almost instantly.

The addition of anti-dog fouling notices alongside the Roly Banks path seems to have had a beneficial effect. The instances of fouling are much reduced.

There has been the usual steady rate of burials and ashes interments in existing graves, but, to-date, no ashes interments in the new area set aside for that purpose.

Bill Blowfield

CCOS Chairman

NATURAL SPRATTON REPORT

It has been a good year for Natural Spratton. At the end of last year, we paid Simon Barnes to cut the long grass in Jubilee Wood even though the trees had grown above the height of the grass. However, it improved the look of the area and we will consider whether it is necessary to cut again towards the end of this year. The owner did cut the north/south hedge between Teeton Road and Holdenby Road with the intention that it should shoot up again. However, the rabbits have stopped the hedge from growing by eating the young shoots and we will have to see what happens to that hedge. In the mean time we did successfully apply to the Woodland Trust for a community package to enable us to plant the last side of the Jubilee Wood with a hedge and put that in at the beginning of the year. The package included a number of Crab Apple trees which were not useful for a hedge so we gave some to the land owner of the large length of hedge which was removed from Brixworth Road to replace some of the trees which were felled. We will be applying for some more hedgerow plants from Woodland Trust to finish off the hedge in the autumn.

The Pocket Park in Brixworth Road is thriving with more species of wild flowers and some of its bird boxes inhabited. At the NGS Open Gardens Scheme on 12th June the Pocket Park is on the visitors' map and we will have information about the flowers in the Pocket Park and also in the church.

FOOTPATH WARDEN REPORT

The few short footpaths we have are well maintained and recently we made the stile at the one which starts in Yew Tree Lane and goes to Brixworth Road, more young and old person friendly by adding a step and reducing the height. Also on that same footpath, the landowner who recently removed the hedge on Brixworth Road, has improved the access to Brixworth Road. We still live in hope that one day there will be a footpath to Brampton Valley Way, either with the good will of the County Council or a landowner.

WELLBEING COMMITTEE

On the 26th April the Wellbeing Sub Committee had their first meeting at the Kings Head, in attendance were Cllr Spence, Mallinder and Holmes and there was an apology from Cllr Chivers.

Item 1. Trying to arrange a Christmas lunch for the elderly of the village in the Village Hall.

Item 2. Arranging a training day on the Rec for the youngsters of the Village, Cllr Mallider was to look into the possibility of someone from the Saints who would be willing to attend and supervise the training.

Item 3. Looking into the possibility of helping to set up a junior football team to encourage the use of the recreation field.

This Committee looks forward to making a positive contribution to the village in the future.