



Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Spratton Parish Council

19th May 2026 at Spratton Village Hall, Spratton at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Cllrs: Marshall (Chair), Ashton, Beynon, Gaywood, Matts, McDonald-Walker & Vellam.

CLERK: Alan Youel.

APOLOGIES: Cllr: Young

PUBLIC: 2 members of public in attendance.

24.26 Election of Chair for the Year 2026/27

On the proposition of Cllr Marshall, seconded by Cllr Gaywood, it was **RESOLVED:** To elect Cllr Marshall as Chair for the year 2026/27. *Chair signed Declaration of Office.*

25.26 Election of Vice Chair for the Year 2026/27

On the proposition of Cllr McDonald-Walker, seconded by Cllr Beynon, it was **RESOLVED:** To elect Cllr McDonald-Walker as Vice-Chair for the year 2026/27. *Vice Chair signed Declaration of Office.*

26.26 Resolution to approve apologies for absence

On the proposition of the Chair, it was **RESOLVED:** to approve apologies for absence received from Cllr Young.

27.26 Members' declaration of interest in items on the agenda

To receive:

Pecuniary: None

Nonpecuniary: Cllr Ashton, (Member of Rec Committee) 51.25 (25a Smith Street neighbour)
Cllr Gaywood, (Member of Rec Committee)

28.26 PUBLIC FORUM:

- A resident questioned what is being done regarding speeding on Smith Street down to School, and outside shop.

29.26 Report from Ward Councillor

Cllr Ware sent apologies. The Chair had circulated Cllr Ware's report to members, noting:

- WNC incorrect on parking matter, with estimated rectification costs of £30,000
- WNC finances continue to be poor
- WNC developing a new policy for community gardening, with no consultation undertaken as yet
- Ongoing issues relating to the five-year housing land supply

30.26 Approval of Minutes

On the proposition of the Chair, seconded by Cllr Vellam, it was **RESOLVED:** to approve minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 21st April 2026.

31.26 Responsible Financial Officer

On the proposition of Cllr Ashton, seconded by Cllr McDonald-Walker, it was **RESOLVED:** To confirm the Clerk as Responsible Financial Officer for 2026/27.

32.26 Internal Control Councillors (ICC)

On the proposition of Cllr Ashton, seconded by Cllr Gaywood, it was **RESOLVED:** To confirm ICC appointments of Cllrs Matts and Beynon.

33.26 Review and Adoption of Standing Orders

Cllr Ashton advised that he had reviewed the Council's policy documents using ChatGPT to obtain a critique of the Council's policy framework. He provided a summary of the resulting 12-page report, which

concluded that the Council has a mature and well-developed governance framework for a parish council of this size, comparing favourably with other councils of similar size.

The report suggested that the framework appears document-led rather than outcomes-led, is relatively dense, and could benefit from greater localisation. It also noted that the framework may exceed the operational capacity of a small council and identified potential issues around member understanding. Recommendations included introducing member governance training alongside other improvements.

Cllr Ashton suggested circulating the report to members to help inform future development of the Council's strategy and policy framework.

Cllr Beynon reminded members that many policy documents are based on standard National Association of Local Councils (NALC) models and templates.

Cllr Matts reminded members that in-person member training had previously been delivered by Northamptonshire County Association of Local Councils (NCALC) and suggested that a similar session relating to the policy framework could be arranged.

On the proposition of the Chair, seconded by Cllr Ashton, it was **RESOLVED**: To confirm and approve the existing Standing Orders for the year 2026/27, whilst taking forward suggestions aimed at improving member understanding.

34.26 Review and adoption of Financial Regulations

Cllr Beynon questioned a previous statement by the Clerk that it may be possible, in certain circumstances, to appoint a specific contractor without obtaining three quotations by suspending the relevant requirements of the Council's Financial Regulations and queried whether this should be expressly incorporated within the Financial Regulations.

The Clerk advised that, in exceptional circumstances, this could be appropriate, for example where the work is highly specialised, there is only one suitable contractor, or continuity and compatibility considerations are important. The Clerk further advised that any such departure from the normal quotation requirements would require a specific resolution of Council together with appropriate recording of the reasons for the decision.

The Clerk recommended maintaining the standard model Financial Regulations without amendment.

On the proposition of the Chair, seconded by Cllr Beynon, it was **RESOLVED**: To confirm and approve the Financial Regulations for the year 2026/27.

35.26 Review of arrangements (including legal agreements) with other local authorities, not-for-profit bodies and businesses

On the proposition of the Chair, seconded by Cllr Beynon, it was **RESOLVED**: To approve arrangements (including legal agreements) with other local authorities, not-for-profit bodies and businesses.

36.26 Review of Code of Conduct – attached

On the proposition of the Chair, seconded by Cllr Beynon, it was **RESOLVED**: To confirm and approve Councillor Code of Conduct.

37.26 Confirmation of arrangements for insurance cover in respect of all insurable risks

On the proposition of the Chair, it was **RESOLVED**: To note confirmation of arrangements for insurance cover in respect of all insurable risks.

38.26 Review of the Council's and/or staff subscriptions to other bodies

On the proposition of the Chair, it was **RESOLVED**: To retain subscriptions to other bodies.

Item	Category	Annual Cost	Recommendation
Scribe	Software subscription/service	£588	Retain
ICO	Data Protection	£47	Retain
SLCC	Membership/support organisation	£268	Retain
Northants CALC	Membership body/professional association	£910.98	Retain

Item	Category	Annual Cost	Recommendation
Northants ACRE	Membership/support organisation	£35	Retain

39.26 Complaints Procedure

On the proposition of the Chair, seconded by Cllr Beynon, it was **RESOLVED**: To confirm and approve the Council's complaints procedure.

40.26 Review of the Council's policies, procedures and practices in respect of its obligations under freedom of information and data protection 13 legislation (see also standing orders 11, 20 and 21)

Cllr Matts questioned whether Northamptonshire County Association of Local Councils (NCALC) had been formally commissioned as the Council's Data Protection Officer (DPO), noting that this was not expressly identified within the Council's data protection policies. Cllr Matts suggested this should be clarified within the relevant policies. Cllr Matts further noted that the DPO service was not listed within the subscriptions to other bodies.

On the proposition of Cllr Matts, seconded by the Chair, it was **RESOLVED**: To add NCALC as Data Protection Officer to the subscriptions to other bodies.

Item	Category	Annual Cost	Recommendation
Scribe	Software subscription/service	£588	Retain
ICO	Data Protection	£47	Retain
SLCC	Membership/support organisation	£268	Retain
Northants CALC	Membership body/professional association Including DPO	£910.98	Retain
Northants ACRE	Membership/support organisation	£35	Retain

Cllr Beynon questioned the printing costs specified within the Freedom of Information Publication Scheme and whether this required review.

Cllr Ashton questioned the Council's Data Protection Data Map, observing that not all listed items appeared to have associated retention periods. Cllr Ashton suggested that all entries should include retention periods, otherwise the default position could imply indefinite retention. Cllr Ashton also referred to observations within the ChatGPT report regarding the importance of ownership of the Council's policy framework.

Cllr Ashton agreed to review the **Data Protection Data Map** and bring forward any suggested amendments.

On the proposition of Cllr Ashton, seconded by the Chair, it was **RESOLVED**:

- To confirm and approve the **Data Breach Policy**.
- To confirm and approve the **Data Protection Policy**.
- To confirm and approve the **Subject Access Request Policy**.
- To confirm and approve the **Freedom of Information Publication Scheme**.

41.26 Review of the Council's policy for dealing with the press/media

On the proposition of the Chair, seconded by Cllr Ashton, it was **RESOLVED**: To confirm and approve the Press & Media Policy.

42.26 Review of the Council's employment policies and procedures

On the proposition of the Chair, seconded by Cllr Ashton, it was **RESOLVED**:

- To confirm and approve the **Home Working Policy**.
- To confirm and approve the **Dignity at Work Policy**.
- To confirm and approve the **Lone Working Policy**.
- To confirm and approve the **Sickness Absence Policy**.
- To confirm and approve the **Disciplinary Policy**.
- To confirm and approve the **Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy**.
- To confirm and approve the **Grievance Policy**.

43.26 Review of the Council's expenditure incurred under s.137 of the Local Government Act 1972

On the proposition of the Chair, it was **RESOLVED**: To note the Council's expenditure incurred under s.137 of the Local Government Act 1972.

44.26 Determine the time and place of ordinary meetings of the council up to and including the next annual meeting of the Council

On the proposition of the Chair, seconded by Cllr Beynon, it was **RESOLVED**: To approve Schedule of Meetings 2026/27.

45.26 Financial Statements

To receive and note financial statements FY25-26.

- Bank Reconciliation Summary
- Summary Receipts & Payments

On the proposition of Cllr Beynon, seconded by the Chair, it was **RESOLVED**: to note the Bank Reconciliation and Summary Receipts & Payments FY25-26.

46.26 Receipt of the Annual Internal Audit Report, YE 31st March 2026 Section 3

On the proposition of the Chair, seconded by Cllr Beynon, it was **RESOLVED**: To receive and note the Annual Internal Audit Report provided by Caroline Holgate.

47.26 Approval of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, YE 31st March 2026

On the proposition of the Chair, it was **RESOLVED**: To approve Section 1 of the Annual Return, Annual Governance Statement. *Chair and RFO signed the Annual Governance Statement.*

48.26 Approval of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, YE 31st March 2026 Section 2

On the proposition of the Chair, it was **RESOLVED**: To approve Section 2 of the Annual Return, Accounting Statements. *Chair signed the Statements.*

49.26 Resources

Bank balances, Bank Reconciliations to 30th April 2026. Receipts and Payments report and confirmation of internal controls checks:

Cllr Matts questioned the charge for business rates at East View Cemetery, suggesting that the premises should either be exempt from business rates or qualify for relief. Cllr Matts further questioned who was authorised to contact West Northamptonshire Council to make enquiries regarding the matter.

On the proposition of Cllr Beynon, seconded by the Chair, it was **RESOLVED**: to approve payments May 2026.

On the proposition of the Chair, it was **RESOLVED**: to note receipts May 2026 including first half precept.

50.26 Governance

On the proposition of the Chair, seconded by Cllr Beynon, it was **RESOLVED**:

- To confirm and approve **Internal Controls Procedures Financial Management.**
- To confirm and approve **Risk Assessment and Risk Management.**

51.26 Planning

Planning Applications to consider and make resolution:

<u>2026/1671/FULL</u>	Ropewalk House 3 The Walk Spratton NN6 8HU	Proposed ground floor extension to rear – No comments.
<u>2026/1588/FULL</u>	North House 25A Smith Street Spratton NN6 8HW	Part conversion of existing garage to form ancillary accommodation with alterations to the front elevation – No comments.

52.26 Grounds Maintenance – Monitoring of Mowing Contract

The Chair provided an update regarding the grounds maintenance contract, with discussion centred on whether the contractor was carrying out the works in accordance with the contract requirements, and whether a councillor could be identified to monitor works undertaken by the contractor.

Cllr Matts advised that whilst some areas may be requested to be regularly cut, other areas may intentionally be left wild for environmental reasons. Cllr Matts suggested that the grass cutting map and associated instructions should be made available on the Council website to provide greater clarity to residents.

The Clerk advised that, following investigation, the original grounds maintenance contract and associated specifications could not be located on file. Using available documentation, the Clerk had compiled a tender specification document which had subsequently been reviewed and finalised by Cllr Ashton. A tender process had then been undertaken and the resulting documentation issued to the contractor.

The Clerk further advised that the Council was now in a better position than previously, as there was now clearer contractual documentation in place. The remaining issue was identifying a councillor to liaise with the contractor to ensure expectations were understood and standards appropriately maintained.

Members considered appointing a councillor to take responsibility for monitoring the contractor's performance and undertaking periodic site inspections throughout the mowing season.

On the proposition of Cllr Matts, seconded by Cllr McDonald-Walker, it was **RESOLVED:** That the Clerk make the grass cutting map and specifications more accessible on the Council website.

<https://www.sprattonpc.org.uk/parish-council/grounds-maintenance>

On the proposition of the Chair, it was **RESOLVED:** To appoint Cllr Ashton as the Council's representative to monitor works carried out and liaise with the grounds maintenance contractor.

53.26 Cemetery Condition and Upkeep

The Clerk provided an update on cemetery maintenance matters.

The Village Handyman had undertaken grass seeding to bare areas within East View Cemetery together with other general tidying works. The Clerk further advised that the Village Handyman had responded to the matter raised and resolved at the previous meeting regarding the broken section of fencing at the East View Cemetery entrance, confirming that the gap would be closed as part of the contracted rabbit-proof fencing project.

Cllr Gaywood advised that he had repaired the gap in the fencing. Councillors expressed their thanks to Cllr Gaywood for undertaking the repair work.

54.26 St Andrew's Churchyard Wall – Condition & Proposed Works

Cllr Beynon provided an update regarding the condition of the churchyard boundary wall and proposed repair works.

A quotation had been received from Tim Foster of Midshires Masons, who had previously undertaken works to the churchyard wall and is identified by the PCC as its preferred contractor for such works. Members noted that the contractor has specialist experience in heritage stonework, an established understanding of the wall and its historic construction, and familiarity with the requirements of West Northamptonshire Council conservation officers. Members further noted that whilst alternative stonemasons may be available, continuity and specialist knowledge were considered important given the nature of the structure and its status within the curtilage of a Grade I listed building.

Members also noted that Tim Foster had advised that the works could be completed within the current year, and that the Council has responsibilities under section 215 in relation to maintenance of the closed churchyard.

Cllr Gaywood advised members that the Church could specify the contractor undertaking works to the churchyard wall.

The quotation provided included:

Repairs to the boundary wall fronting Church Road, to the right-hand side of the gate, where the stonework is becoming heavily eroded. Proposed partial rebuild works using matching weathered Northamptonshire sandstone/ironstone and traditional lime mortar – quoted cost £6,500 including materials and signage.

Repairs to structural cracking in the wall behind the telegraph pole, including reinforcement using rebar and repointing – quoted cost £750. Resetting coping stones, vegetation removal and repointing works using matching materials – quoted cost £750.

Members noted that Listed Building Consent and/or notification to West Northamptonshire Council may be required prior to commencement of the works.

Members further considered the requirements of the Council's Financial Regulations relating to the obtaining of multiple quotations. In view of the specialist heritage nature of the works, the contractor's previous involvement with the wall, the preference expressed by the PCC, continuity considerations, and the contractor's familiarity with conservation requirements, members considered it appropriate to waive the usual requirement to obtain three quotations in this instance.

On the proposition of Cllr Beynon, it was **RESOLVED:** To waive the requirement within the Council's Financial Regulations to obtain three quotations for the reasons stated above. To award the contract to Tim Foster of Midshires Masons, who will liaise with Rachel Booth at West Northamptonshire Council to confirm any listed building consent or related conservation requirements.

Cllr Beynon further advised that the PCC had now confirmed agreement for the churchyard wall monitoring works, as resolved at the previous meeting, and that instruction could now be given.

55.26 Consideration of Steps to Monitor and Address Issues Raised by the Draft Local Plan

The Chair provided an update regarding proposals to establish a working group to consider the implications of the emerging Local Plan and any potential impact upon the Spratton Neighbourhood Plan (NHP).

Draft Terms of Reference had been circulated, including revisions made by the Clerk. Members discussed involvement from residents, with an initial suggestion that the group could comprise four councillors and three residents, and that expressions of interest should be invited. Discussion widened to consider potential landowner conflicts of interest and the impact this could have on the operation of the group when considering future options around the NHP.

The Clerk advised that revisions had been made to the Chair's original draft Terms of Reference to remove the proposed restriction preventing landowner councillors from involvement, as this was considered impractical. Instead, the normal requirements relating to declarations of interest would apply. The Clerk had also removed the proposed delegated authority to spend up to £1,000, advising that such delegation was not appropriate for a working group. The Council may delegate decision-making and expenditure authority to a committee, but not to a working group, which may only make recommendations back to Council.

Cllr Matts suggested that any non-councillor members should reflect a broad demographic range within the village, including younger residents and young families, and that recruitment should be advertised as widely as possible. Suggestions included use of the June community showcase event together with targeted advertising through newsletters, the website and presentations.

The Clerk further advised that members' discussion had at times inferred the establishment of a committee and possible revision of the NHP itself. The Clerk clarified that the proposal under consideration was the formation of a working group only, namely a task-and-finish body with a remit limited to research and reporting back to Council. The group would not possess delegated decision-making powers and would not

itself revise the NHP. Any decisions regarding review or amendment of the NHP would remain matters for full Council. The Clerk advised that the group's role would principally be to consider the implications of the emerging Local Plan and provide recommendations to Council regarding whether review of the NHP may be required and, if so, possible mechanisms for doing so.

Cllr Gaywood enquired whether, should a large number of residents volunteer, all could be accommodated and, if not, what selection criteria would be applied.

Cllr Matts advised that the current adopted NHP did not appear to be available on the Council website. Other councillors advised that it could still be found online. Cllr Matts stressed that the document should be clearly available on the Council website so that residents could understand the context of the working group's activities.

On the proposition of Cllr Matts, seconded by the Chair, it was **RESOLVED:** To publish the made Neighbourhood Plan on the Council website.

The Clerk advised that he did not hold a copy of the made plan on file and that it appeared not to have been displayed on the website since its adoption in 2016. Cllr Ashton located and shared an online link to the document:

<https://www.sprattonpc.org.uk/neighbourhood-plan/spratton-neighbourhood-development-plan-2015-2029>

The Clerk also provided an update regarding the West Northamptonshire Council Local Plan process and suggested that the working group should be given a clearly defined task and timeline.

On the proposition of the Chair, it was **RESOLVED:** To appoint Cllrs Marshall, McDonald-Walker, Beynon and Vellam to the working group to consider the implications of the emerging WNC Local Plan and make recommendations to Council, including recommendations regarding the next stages required to shape the Neighbourhood Plan to integrate with the WNC Local Plan. The working group shall conclude upon adoption of the Local Plan.

On the proposition of Cllr Beynon, seconded by Cllr Vellam, it was **RESOLVED:** To approve the revised Terms of Reference for the working group.

<https://www.sprattonpc.org.uk/neighbourhood-plan/working-group-terms-of-reference-19-05-2026>

56.26 Churchyards, Cemeteries and Open Spaces – Mowing/Maintenance Issues (if any):

- a) **Village Handyman:** Clearing at Brixworth Road, grass seeding at EVC.
- b) **Cemetery Issues:**

57.26 Community Issues

- a) **Defibrillator checks:** *Complete as of 3rd April 2026.*
- b) **Highway Safety:** *None.*

58.26 Consultations Requiring a Response:

None

59.26 Date of next meeting

16th June 2026, Meeting of the Parish Council.

Meeting closed: 20:55

Signed:  16/06/2026