



Draft Minutes of the General Meeting of Spratton Parish Council

21st July 2026 at Spratton Village Hall, Spratton at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Cllrs: Marshall (Chair), Ashton, Beynon, Gaywood, Matts, Young & Vellam.

CLERK: Alan Youel.

APOLOGIES: Cllr: McDonald-Walker

PUBLIC: 2 members of public in attendance.

76.26 Resolution to approve apologies for absence

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

77.26 Members' Declarations of Interest in Items on the Agenda

The Clerk reported that a request for a dispensation had been received from Cllr Ashton in respect of Agenda Item 87.26 – *Cemetery Condition and Upkeep (Rabbit Control Programme)*. Cllr Ashton declared a non-pecuniary/other registerable interest as a Trustee of the Spratton Recreation Field Charity. A dispensation was sought to permit participation in the discussion only, with Cllr Ashton not voting on the matter.

On the proposition of the Chair, it was **RESOLVED:** to grant Cllr Ashton a dispensation to participate in the discussion of Agenda Item 87.26 but not to vote on the matter.

To receive:

Pecuniary: None

Nonpecuniary: Cllr Matts 87.26 (Neighbouring Landowner)

78.26 Public Forum

- A resident, speaking as the promoter of the Gaywood land, referred to recent discussion on social media regarding the Neighbourhood Plan. The resident sought clarification on the Parish Council's process for reviewing, amending or updating the Spratton Neighbourhood Plan in light of the emerging West Northamptonshire Local Plan. Questions were also raised regarding the role of the Local Plan Working Group, the process for appointing village residents to the Working Group, the Council's current position on reviewing the Neighbourhood Plan, opportunities for wider community engagement (including use of *Spratton Let Us Know*), and the timescales for reviewing the Neighbourhood Plan ahead of its expiry in 2029.

The Chair explained that the Council had established a Working Group to consider all aspects of the emerging West Northamptonshire Local Plan and its implications for Spratton, including whether a review of the Neighbourhood Plan would be required. The intention was for the Working Group to include up to three village resident representatives, with one expression of interest having been received to date. The Working Group was expected to meet over the summer to establish its priorities. The Chair advised that the Neighbourhood Plan could be reviewed within two years of the adoption of the Local Plan and that, provided the Parish Council was actively progressing the review, West Northamptonshire Council would not expect immediate completion. It was also noted that no budget had yet been allocated for a review and that professional planning advice would likely be required.

Cllr Ware advised that the proposed two-year period following adoption of the Local Plan had been challenged as potentially being insufficient.

- A resident enquired about the possibility of installing vehicle speed signs on Smith Street.

Cllr Ashton advised that speeding on Smith Street had previously been raised with the Highway Authority. A speed survey recorded an average vehicle speed of 17 mph and, as a result, no further action had been taken.

79.26 Report from Ward Councillor

Cllr Christine Ware – West Northamptonshire Council Update

Cllr Ware reported the appointment of Martin Henry as Chief Executive and David Harris as Director of Place.

The Council's outturn figures had been published and were now subject to external audit. West Northamptonshire Council had recorded an overspend of approximately £7 million, funded from risk reserves. It was noted that the overspend was above the normal budget contingency and was largely attributable to Children's Services and Adult Social Care. Increased borrowing was also anticipated.

Cllr Ware reported that changes to the planning system proposed by Government were expected to take effect from 31 October 2026. Under the proposals, elected Planning Committees would determine only major or genuinely significant planning applications, with the majority of applications being determined by planning officers. Ward councillors would lose the general right to call planning applications before committee.

It was further reported that:

- Schedule 1 applications would be determined by planning officers in all cases.
- Schedule 2 applications would normally be determined by planning officers unless specified referral criteria were met and a senior decision-maker agreed that the application should be referred to committee.
- Referral to Planning Committee would become the exception rather than the norm.

Cllr Ware emphasised that, as a consequence of these changes, Neighbourhood Plans would become increasingly important in influencing planning decisions, although ward councillors would continue to be able to make representations on planning applications.

Cllr Ware advised that a meeting with the Highway Authority was scheduled for 22 July 2026 to discuss highways matters, including issues relating to the A5199.

Cllr Ware also reported that she had recently attended the Town and Charity Trust allotment walk, during which significant evidence of rabbit activity was observed.

80.26 Approval of Minutes

On the proposition of Cllr Beynon, it was **RESOLVED**: to approve minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 16th June 2026.

81.26 Resources

The bank balances, bank reconciliations to 30 June 2026, and the Receipts and Payments Report were presented, together with confirmation that the internal control checks had been completed by Cllrs Beynon and Matts. The bank statements and reconciliations were approved and signed.

- a) On the proposition of the Chair, it was **RESOLVED**: to approve the bank reconciliations to 30 June 2026.

The Clerk advised that an invoice had been received from R&G on behalf of the Recreation Field Charity for preparing and seeding a path through the woodland area. Although included in the payments schedule, the works were not included within the quotation on which the Council's grant award had been based.

Cllr Gaywood advised that the Recreation Committee had identified the invoice as outstanding and then enquired whether a retrospective grant application could be submitted. The Clerk advised that retrospective grant applications were not normally permitted. Cllr Gaywood confirmed then that the invoice should instead be redirected to the Recreation Field Charity for payment. The Clerk was requested

to arrange for R&G to issue a credit note to the Council and reissue the invoice to the Recreation Field Charity.

- b) On the proposition of the Chair, it was **RESOLVED:** to approve payments for July 2026 totalling **£3,612.67**, excluding the R&G invoice relating to the Recreation Field Charity. The Clerk was instructed to request a credit note from R&G and advise that the invoice should be reissued to the Recreation Field Charity.
- c) On the proposition of Cllr Beynon, it was **RESOLVED:** to note receipts for July 2026 totalling **£1,496.89**.

82.26 Financial Review Q1

On the proposition of the Chair, it was **RESOLVED:** To receive and note financial statements & expenditure against budget to 30th June 2026.

83.26 Planning

Planning Applications to consider and make resolution:

2026/2652/LDE

Land South Of Blackmires
Lane Silverstone

Lawful development certificate (existing) for development at the site (access) - Proposed building to be used for purposes associated with a tree surgery and arboriculture business falling within Use Class E (formerly B1(c)). – **No comments. Admin error at WNC**

84.26 Bus Shelter Provision – Welford Road (A5199)

Cllr Beynon reported that consultation letters had been delivered to the five properties closest to the proposed location. Cllr Matts commented that the proposed site was unlikely to be able to accommodate a bus shelter.

The Clerk advised that one objection had been received from the owner-occupier of the property closest to the proposed location. No responses had been received to the online survey.

On the proposition of the Chair, it was **RESOLVED:** not to progress the proposal for a bus shelter due to the lack of public support and concerns regarding the suitability of the proposed location.

85.26 Recreation Field Charity

The Clerk reported that a request had been received from the Recreation Field Charity for the original title deeds relating to the Recreation Field.

Cllr Ashton advised that the request had been made on behalf of the Recreation Committee to assist with progressing the registration of the land with HM Land Registry. It was anticipated that the registration would record Spratton Parish Council as Custodian Trustee.

No decision was required. Cllr Ashton agreed to check the document archives held at the Village Hall for the original deeds.

86.26 Community Speed watch

The Chair reported that Thornby Parish Council had withdrawn from the proposed joint Community Speed watch scheme, having been unable to recruit sufficient volunteers. As a result, Creaton Parish Council had requested that Spratton Parish Council share the cost of the speed detection device equally, at **£75 each**, and continue with a joint scheme between the two parishes.

On the proposition of the Chair, it was **RESOLVED:** to share the cost of the Community Speed watch speed detection device equally with Creaton Parish Council (£75 each) and to continue supporting the joint Community Speed watch initiative.

87.26 Cemetery Condition and Upkeep

a) Rabbit Control Programme – Appointment of Contractor and Land Access Agreement

Cllr Ashton provided an update on rabbit damage affecting both the East View Cemetery and the Recreation Field. He advised that both the Parish Council and the Recreation Field Charity had agreed to adopt the UK Government guidance on rabbit control. A local handyman had been engaged to install rabbit-proof fencing and had also been asked to provide a quotation for ferreting, although this had not yet been received.

Cllr Ashton advised that, under the **Pests Act 1954** and Government guidance, landowners and occupiers have responsibilities to control rabbit populations where they are causing damage. He reported that Liam Wykes, an experienced ferreter with the appropriate licences and insurance, had submitted a quotation for five visits at a cost of **£100 per visit** (£500 in total). It was proposed that the Parish Council and the Recreation Field Charity jointly fund the programme, with each contributing **£250**.

It was noted that agreement had not yet been reached with the adjoining private landowner to permit access for rabbit control. The proposed programme was intended to assess the effectiveness of the works and demonstrate that reasonable action was being taken.

Cllr Matts expressed the view that the use of an air rifle would be more effective. Cllr Ashton advised that no firearms would be used.

Cllr Ware suggested that the matter also be raised with the Town and Charity Trust, as it was experiencing similar issues with rabbits.

On the proposition of Cllr Ashton, it was **RESOLVED**: to instruct Liam Wykes to proceed with the rabbit control programme in accordance with his quotation, subject to agreement by the Recreation Field Charity to jointly fund the works. Cllr Ashton was appointed as the Council's point of contact and would use the Land Access and Pest Control Agreement to record permissions, working arrangements and liaise with adjoining landowners.

The Clerk reported that several funerals had taken place at East View Cemetery in recent weeks. Prior to the most recent service, vegetation along the cemetery access road had been cut back to enable vehicle access, and the family had expressed their appreciation to the Council.

Cllr Matts declared an interest, left the meeting and took no part in the following discussion.

The Clerk raised concerns that the vehicle access gate to the cemetery access road was secured with a padlock, which had caused difficulties for funeral directors and bereaved families. He further advised that the adjoining pedestrian gate, which had previously operated as a swing gate to allow access for pushchairs, wheelchairs and mobility aids, had been modified to prevent such use. The Clerk suggested that easier access via the vehicle gate would therefore be appropriate and confirmed that he would provide the gate access code to anyone requiring access.

Cllr Young advised that she had received similar enquiries, including a recent request from a stonemason who had been unable to gain access.

The Chair deferred further discussion to **Agenda Item 95.26**.

****On the proposition of the Chair, it was RESOLVED: to reinstate the sign at the vehicle access gate advising that access arrangements can be made by contacting the Clerk.**

Cllr Matts rejoined the meeting.

88.26 St Andrew's Churchyard Wall – Condition and Proposed Works

Cllr Beynon reported that Listed Building Consent would be required for the proposed repairs to the churchyard wall. The Council's contractor was due to meet the West Northamptonshire Council Conservation Officer on site to confirm the necessary consents.

Cllr Beynon further advised that the Church had confirmed a faculty from the **Diocese of Peterborough** would also be required before the works could proceed. The associated fee was anticipated to be approximately **£312**.

On the proposition of the Chair, it was **RESOLVED**: to authorise Cllr Beynon to complete and submit the faculty application and incur the associated application fee.

89.26 Village Maintenance

The Chair commented on the general improvement in village maintenance standards and thanked Cllr Ashton for his constructive work as the Council's liaison with the grounds maintenance contractor.

90.26 Local Plan Working Group

The Chair reported that one expression of interest had been received from a village resident wishing to join the Working Group. Members discussed the management of potential conflicts of interest and noted that these could be addressed through the Council's existing procedures for declaring interests.

A general discussion followed on encouraging wider community engagement. Cllr Gaywood suggested using the **Spratton Let Us Know** Facebook group, noting that administrators could tag all group members to maximise visibility. He also observed that many prospective volunteers might have interests connected with the Local Plan and that efforts should be made to attract residents without such interests.

Cllr Ashton emphasised the need for a communications strategy to support community engagement and suggested that the Working Group prepare proposals for consideration by the Council.

Cllr Young proposed that a simple communication be drafted for publication on the Parish Council website and social media channels, with a progress update to be reported to the September Council meeting.

On the proposition of Cllr Beynon, it was **RESOLVED**: to appoint Mary Anne Constable to the Local Plan Working Group.

On the proposition of the Chair, it was **RESOLVED**: to prepare a communication for publication on the Council's website and social media channels inviting expressions of interest, and for the Chair to propose dates for the first meeting of the Working Group.

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

a) Village Handyman

Cllr Ashton reported that the previously instructed works to reset a manhole cover at East View Cemetery and repair the noticeboard latches remained outstanding.

Cllr Matts advised that the village handyman had approached him regarding Parish Council work, suggesting that he had not received any recent contact from the Council. The Clerk advised that he passes council resolved tasks directly to the village handyman but preferred to communicate with contractors by email rather than telephone in order to maintain an appropriate audit trail. The Clerk further invited councillors to forward the contact details of any alternative service providers for future consideration.

b) Cemetery Issues: No matters were raised

92.26 Community Issues

- a) **Defibrillator checks:** *Complete as of 13th July 2026.*
- b) **Highway Safety:** *None.*

93.26 Consultations Requiring a Response

Northampton & Lamport Railway – Sponsorship Request

Members considered a request from Northampton & Lamport Railway for financial sponsorship of up to **£500** from the Council's community budget.

On the proposition of Cllr Beynon, it was **RESOLVED**: to decline the request for financial sponsorship.

94.26 Exclusion of press and public

On the proposition of the Chair, it was **RESOLVED**: Pursuant to Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 and having regard to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, that the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting for agenda items 95.26.

Cllr Matts declared an interest in this item, left the meeting, and took no part in the discussion or voting.

95.26 Litigation Update

The Clerk reported that the Council continues to follow the advice of the instructed solicitor. Members received the update.

No further resolution was required.

****Members further discussed cemetery access gate deferred from Agenda Item 87.26.**

96.26 Date of next meeting

15th September 2026, Meeting of the Parish Council.

Meeting closed: 21:00

Signed: