

Brafield on the Green Parish Council
Annual report for 2022/2023
(1 April 2022 - 31 March 2023)

**General Council operations and business
excluding Finance**

Parish Council Meetings

- **6 Public meetings of the Council.** May, July, Sept, Nov 2022; Jan and March 2023 . The meetings were held in the Sargeant Memorial Hall.
- **Adoption** of Annual Return, Risk Assessment, Standing Orders and Financial Regulations, Code of Conduct, Procedure for handling requests made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Data Protection (subject to some amendments), and Complaints Policy were all reviewed and adopted. Some procedural and updating changes were made to the Standing Orders.

Personnel

- **Clerk and RFO (Responsible Financial Officer).** Vivien Hartley
- **Chair/Vice-Chair.** Chair: Cllr. Gill Morgan until the June meeting when Cllr Gerald Couldrake took over as Chair. Cllr Dawn Allingham remained as Vice-Chair
- **Internal Financial Control Officer and Risk Assessor.** Cllr. Dawn Allingham
- **Councillors.** All Councillors in office - Full elections held in May 2020 with all councillors being returned unopposed
 - Gill Morgan
 - Dawn Allingham
 - Gerald Couldrake
 - Sarah Dorey
 - Françoise Copsey
 - Celia Turner (resigned at the January meeting)
 - Caroline Nelson

- **Councillor representation and principal assigned responsibilities**
 - **Newsletter and publications editing; local environmental matters.** Cllr. Caroline Nelson
 - **Church and Poors Land Charity nominees.** Cllrs. Francoise Copsey and Dawn Allingham
 - **Highways Warden & Website.** Cllr. Francoise Copsey
 - **Street lighting.** Cllr. Sarah Dorey
 - **Planning** – strategic (Cllr. Caroline Nelson) and local (Cllr. Gill Morgan)
 - **Police liaison.** Cllr Gill Morgan
 - **Village FB Page.** Cllr Gill Morgan

- **Employment** (employees and regular contractors/sub contractors)
 - **Viv Hartley – Parish Clerk - EMPLOYED**
 - Barbara Osborne – payroll service provision
 - Rebecca Aldridge – bus shelter cleaning - EMPLOYED
 - Sue Gautrey - Play Area litter picking – EMPLOYED -
 - JS Landscapes - Play Area grass and hedge cutting/maintenance
 - Wickstead Ltd - annual play equipment inspection
 - Brown and Barden - grass cutting of village green
 - Aylesbury Mains - Street lighting maintenance/repairs – taken over by Forde & McHugh limited in Oct 21 when AM withdrew from the Highways Electrical Sector.
 - Village Green/Pond Conservation. Parishioner Stephen Pittam on a voluntary basis has undertaken the odd jobs required.

Volunteer support

- **Police Community Support Officer.** PCSO from SN Neighbourhood team
- **Parish Paths Wardens.** Richard Sheward, and Jeff Marlow but they have now resigned and replacement wardens are to be appointed

- **Delivery of village newsletters.** Volunteers from the village undertake delivery of the newsletter
- **Village Website.** Vacancy exists
- **Farmers.** Rights of way maintenance and reinstatement after cropping
- **Play Area maintenance** – weekly check and log. Sue Gautrey.
- **Village Sign flowers, provision and maintenance.** Various Parishioners mainly Deryth Clements & Liz Ingham

Other

- **Subscriptions** to Northamptonshire Association of Local Councils (NCALC) and the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE). Other subscriptions are shared with other PCs managed by our clerk.

Village communication

Newsletter

- Production and distribution of the **Parish Council Newsletter** to every household
- **Newsletters** included an amazing variety of news items including the promotion of the following:

Parish Council

- Parish Council meetings and business throughout the year;
- the installation of the new benches within the village
- Planning Matters
- Parking issues on Church Lane
- Re:Store food bank
- The amazing work of the village volunteers
- The recent changes in law on dog fouling
- Litter Wombles

Parish events/activities

- St. Laurence Flower Festival (and Fete) and Horticultural Show and Fete and the Christmas Tree Festival
- the Village Open Gardens event

- The Platinum Jubilee Celebrations.
- The Village Hopper Bus Service

Police and Community Safety

- Updates on crime incidents in Brafield and vicinity; and associated crime prevention advice
- Fraud scams,
- The traffic issues surrounding the users of Church Lane

West Northamptonshire Council

- Information obtained through our regular liaison with WNC Councillors

Website

As yet we have not re-instated the village website, consideration needs to be given as to if this is something we wish to re-instate.

The standalone PC website is up and running which is now maintained by the Clerk.

Surveys

- None within this year

Financial business - Efficiency/Value for Money

- Total expenditure for the year was £24,108 against income of £18,566 including a **precept of £17000**. The balance of funding came from donations from the Church and Poors Land Trust (for newbenches and play equipment) together with £3,300 received from the Community Infrastructure Levy.
- The expenditure can be summarised as follows:

Subject of expenditure
Employment of Clerk and other personnel to support the volunteer Councillors

Other administrative costs – insurance, audit, room hire, fees, subscriptions etc
Communication/website
Village infrastructure and environment – maintenance and development*
52 street lights; 3 bus shelters Village seats (4 on pond/green area, 2 street, Grove Rd, 4 play area – 1 fixed, 3 moveable)
Greenspace mowing, village green and pond and general estate maintenance
Play area support/management
Total
Precept for 23/24 set at £20,000

Further detail about any aspect of expenditure can be requested from the Clerk to the Council including s.137 expenditure and the Council's accounts are all open to the electorate for viewing.

- Continued participation in the **NALC internal audit scheme**
- **Setting of precept** for 2022/23 at £20,000 – currently with escalating fuel and energy costs it was agreed we needed to increase precept accordingly
- Examples of in-year efficiencies:
 - **Councillors'** withholding expenditure claims for printing, travel and other PC related tasks.
 - Use of **volunteers** – see above
 - Changing street lighting to energy efficient fittings continues to save energy costs
 - Shared membership of Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) – 50% contribution

Environment

Estate management

- **Street lighting** (52 streetlights)
- **Bus shelters** (3 shelters).

- **Children's Play Area** – occupying land rented from Brafield Church and Poors Land Charity at a peppercorn rent – currently stands at £60 pa
- **Verges, Village sign and Village Green**

Village green and pond

- **Village Green** – grass cutting contract (as above);
- Specialist **maintenance of the pond** was not required this year due to Steve Pittams ongoing assistance – the pond is now thriving after years of it being clogged with silt – nature has returned as have a significant amount of ducklings!

General

- **Nothing to report**

Trees [wardenship]

- Nothing to Report

Planning

Strategic

National Planning Policy, Joint Core Strategy development, Neighbourhood and Local Planning

Nothing to report, pending consultation and policies being produced by WNC.

Parish planning

Planning applications

The Parish Council did not make any objections to the planning applications that were made for land within the Parish, but did make comments on some where it was felt that it was in the best interests of the Parish to do so.

Licensing applications

None

Highways

- Regular Warden engagement with NCC as Highway Authority through continued reporting on the state of Roads and Footpaths, and their accessibility including reporting items for actions - highway reporting is managed by Cllr Copsey
- Noting that WNC are proposing to impose a 50mph speed limit on the A428 through the Parish.
- Because of concerns raised by Parishioners about the volume and speed of traffic along the Billing Road, the Parish Council has liaised with WNC Highways to understand what would be permitted to alleviate the speed of traffic. The liaison included a site visit by their community support officer and many Parishioners met and spoke to the officer when he visited the village and walked along Billing Road. The outcome was that a Vehicle Activated Sign was recommended which could be moved to different locations within the village. Sites have been identified along Billing, Bedford and Horton Roads which have been approved by WNC Highways. The Parish Council set up a sub-group of Councillors and Parishioners to look at a shortlist of VAS suppliers and a preferred supplier has been identified. WNC Highways do not provide funding for a VAS and the Parish Council does not have the funding to purchase it (circa £5,000). Therefore the Parish Council is in the process of applying for grant funding from the Police & Fire Commissioner, who have a fund for local road safety initiatives.

Rights of way

- Continued support to the **Parish Path volunteer wardenship scheme who do a sterling job for us**

Community support

Rural Bus Service – Reporting of the withdrawal of the Stagecoach Bus service and information regarding the Cogenhoe & Whiston Village Hopper Scheme which appears to be working well and appears to be well used by parishioners – outside of our initial small donation for support the village hopper it is being funded by a rural transport grant and as such no further

donation has been requested. The Parish Council nominated two Councillors to attend meetings to discuss an alternative service to Stagecoach, but such meetings have not occurred. It is likely that any replacement of the Stagecoach service will only occur on a much reduced basis.

The Parish Council assisted the village Jubilee Committee to put on community events to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee of the late Queen. This included obtaining a temporary road closure order for Church Lane and obtaining a grant from WNC to hold a pensioners tea party. For the Coronation of King Charles III a temporary road closure order has again been obtained.

Community Safety: see also Newsletter above

- Reporting of various safety concerns affecting residents – the major one being traffic issues in Church Lane – a subject which is frequently raised by residents along Church Lane but this is not an issue within the Parish Council's remit.
- The "no cycling" status of Bridle Path has been reinforced by the repair of the no-cycling signs at either end. However we are aware that certain on-line maps may show Bridle Path as being cycleable.

Children and Young People

Play Area

- Regular maintenance (contractor – JS Landscapes) including weekly and daily safety checks and 'diary' logging of checks and Annual Inspection (Wicksteed Ltd) of the village play area. Additional swings and seats have been installed, as well as trees planted to mark the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

Grant donations

- Donation to the British Legion towards the Remembrance Sunday wreath (s.137 payment)

Finally, this year completes my first as the Chair of the Parish Council. My sincere thanks goes to my fellow Councillors who have given freely of their time and have supported me as the Chair. The WNC Highways Community Officer who visited us to look at Billing Road commented to me on what a lovely village Brafield is, and most importantly, how nice and friendly the Parishioners were that he met. A village is a community of people and I am always struck by how friendly everyone is and appreciative of what we have in our village. We are lucky to live in a beautiful village surrounded by footpaths

through some glorious countryside, and we should never take this for granted. Your Parish Council works to keep it in good order, but please remember we are unpaid volunteers!

Cllr Gerald Couldrake
Chair to the Council
May 2023
AGM