

Brafield on the Green Parish Council
Annual report for 2023/2024
(1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024)

**General Council operations and business
excluding Finance**

Parish Council Meetings

- **6 Public meetings of the Council.** May, July, Sept, Nov 2023; Jan and March 2024 . 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: Gerald Couldrake. 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
 - Francoise Copsey
 - Martin Andrews (appointed from the meeting held in May 2023)
 - Caroline Nelson

- **Councillor representation and principal assigned responsibilities**
 - **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
 - **Newsletter and publications editing.** Cllr Francoise Copsey
 - **Footpaths.** Cllr Martin Andrews

- **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.
 - Village Green/Pond Conservation. Parishioner Stephen Pittam on a voluntary basis has undertaken the odd jobs required.

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| Volunteer support |
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- **Police Community Support Officer.** PCSO from SN Neighbourhood team
- **Parish Paths Warden.** Cllr Martin Andrews

- **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

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| Other |
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- **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.

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| Village communication |
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| Newsletter |
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- 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 £15516 against income of £26385 including a **precept of £20000**. The balance of funding came from donations from the Church and Poores Land Trust together with £3,300 received from the Community Infrastructure Levy.
- The expenditure can be summarised as follows:

| Subject of expenditure |
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| Employment of Clerk and other personnel to support the volunteer Councillors - £6191 |
| Other administrative costs – insurance, audit, room hire, fees, subscriptions etc - £3069 |

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| Communication/website |
| Village infrastructure and environment – maintenance and development* - £412 |
| 52 street lights; 3 bus shelters Village seats (4 on pond/green area, 2 street, Grove Rd, 4 play area – 1 fixed, 3 moveable) £3332 |
| Greenspace mowing, village green and pond and general estate maintenance - £2420 |
| Play area support/management £132 |
| Total |
| Precept for 24/25 set at £20,500 |
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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 2023/24 at £20,000 – 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!
- During the winter months the road around the pond was subject to severe and sustained flooding. After liaison with the representative of the Davidge Usher Trust (who we assumed own the land affected) it was agreed that they would fund a survey of the drainage pipe. The survey revealed that the pipe is blocked most likely by tree roots. However the land above the pipe is registered as Common Land meaning that repair works cannot be commenced on Common Land without the consent of the relevant Secretary of State, delegated to the Planning Inspectorate. The Chair has prepared the relevant form but it cannot be submitted because there is uncertainty as to the legal ownership of the land. This is being looked at by the Solicitors to the Trust and it is hoped that the position can be clarified soon to enable the relevant consent to the works to be obtained and the works effected prior to next winter.

General

- **Full Fibre Broadband.** Early in 2024 Gigaclear began works to install full fibre broadband cabling throughout the village. Many parishioners were un happy at how the works were being carried out. The Parish Council brought together representatives of WNDC and Gigaclear to discuss the works and this resulted in an improvement. Thanks go to WNDC Cllr Andrew Grant for assisting in setting up that meeting.

Trees [wardenship]

- Nothing to Report

Planning

Strategic

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

A small working group of councillors met and formulated a response for the village to send into WDC regarding its rural planning policy.

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 have imposed 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 obtained a grant from the Police and fire Commissioner to purchase a Vehicle Activated Speed Sign, which can be moved around to different locations within the village. Currently we await the grant of a licence from Highways to be able to fix mounting brackets to various locations around the village. The Council has also approved the purchase of infrastructure works to create a village sign and dragons teeth at the entry point to the village on Billing Road, at a cost of £4666.54 paid for from reserves built up and judged as no longer required for any other specific use.

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 was pleased to see that a trial period of a reinstated but reduced service by Stagecoach has occurred but note that if the service is not well used it will be withdrawn.

The Parish Council assisted the village Jubilee Committee to put on community events to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III, for which a temporary road closure order was 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 second 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. I should also thank our WNDC liaison councillor, Andrew Grant who is always very helpful when we need assistance at District Council level. 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 2024
AGM