

Sparsholt Parish Council Annual report 2024/25

Welcome to the Annual Report for Sparsholt Parish Council. My report will explain where we obtain money and what we do with it on your behalf and what we are planning to do in the next year.

The Parish Council Precept that is money collected from householders through the Council Tax, for 2024/25 was £22,608 an increase of 5.6% on 2023/2024 reflecting the higher rate of inflation at the time. In addition, the Parish received £24,600 in Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) on the completion of the Church Farm Development. The CIL money has been put into Reserves earmarked for Road Safety improvements which are being pursued with Hampshire County Council.

The Parish Council spent in total £22,729 in 2024/25. The largest items totalling £19,929 being salary for the clerk, maintenance of footpaths, the playground and the Well House and the rental of the Speed Limit Reminder. Insurance and Audits added a further £1345. The remaining £1,455 being for other administrative items. The salary for the clerk was higher than budgeted as we had a 6-week overlap as our previous clerk Nicky resigned and our new clerk Becky took on the responsibilities. All figures are estimates and subject to Internal and external Audit.

The Parish Council has budgeted for no increase in the Parish Precept for 2025/26 although householders may note a percentage decrease in the Parish Precept component of their council bill, as the amount is now collected from more households following completion of Church Farm Barns.

The Parish Council has been involved in a number of key projects this past year most significantly contributing to the WCC Local Plan and trying to make the village safer.

The Church Farm Development is now complete with only a few properties left for sale. We have been discussing some landscaping matters with Alfred Homes and are pleased to say many of them have now been resolved. Over time we have been assured that the site will blend into the countryside.

Highways matters are being addressed but progress is hindered by on-going incidents of vandalism within the village which is not helping. The SLR which we hire from Hursley Parish was recently severely damaged and understandably this caused concern for both parishes and has impacted on our ability to secure the SLRs and ultimately to slow traffic for the safety of our residents. We know from the data the SLR provided in stealth-mode that the SLR in display-mode reduces the speed of passing vehicles through the village.

The other issue is that road signs are repeatedly being removed by persons unknown but believed to be within the village. The thefts have been reported to the police but we do rely on residents also reporting any unacceptable or suspicious activity directly to the police.

After all the cost of replacing damaged signs and equipment comes at a cost to us all through our local taxes.

We are in the process of obtaining data from the SLR's to support the possibility of having a 20mph limit in the village. Residents will be consulted on whether they are in agreement, where the area for the 20mph should be and how the scheme will be monitored.

Our City Councillor Caroline Horrill and County Councillor Jan Warwick took up the matter of the replacement signs and missing bollards in the village but like many parish councils we are still waiting for this work to be completed.

In the mean-time the traffic/highways team are working on the next steps to making the village safer. We will be recommending installing - white gates at the entrance to the village near Lainston House and at Ham Green to reinforce to drivers that they are entering a village with no footpaths and alerting them to horse-riders and walkers on the road.

Planning applications continue to be one of the main-stay of the Parish Council activities. The Parish Council is a Consultee on all planning applications within the Parish. This year we attended WCC planning committee to argue against the siting of the proposed Solar farm at Sarum Road. This was not a case of opposing Solar Farms per se but saying that that it was in an inappropriate place. This went to the planning committee twice and was only finally approved by a casting vote by the chair of the planning committee.

Currently HCC have a planning application for a dog walking field on Sarum Road just past Beechcroft Farm Shop which because of the number of objections will be going to the planning committee. WCC have objected to this application along with a number of the local residents and supported by the Parish Council. For the majority of planning applications, we are pleased to support parishioners seeking to develop their properties in keeping with the Local Plan and the Village Design Statement (VDS). We encourage homeowners to come to Parish Council meetings to discuss any potential development prior to submitting a planning application. This can save time and cost.

Some of you may recall that last year I recorded that we had responded to Reg 19 of the WCC Local Plan by asking that Sparsholt be protected from Development by being considered for a strategic gap around the Parish Boundary. We were reliably informed that there was no need for such a gap because no development was forecast to threaten our boundary. Well as we all know that is now not the case. Langham Lane has an outline proposal for 188 houses between Lanham Lane and Westview Road. The residents of Teg Down and the surrounding area have formed an extremely active watts-app group with more than 600 objections which we have also contributed to. Half of this proposed site is within Sparsholt Parish the other half is in the City boundary.

Now there is a Consultation regarding a proposal for around 300 houses on the field between Salters Lane and Sparsholt which is within our Parish Boundary. The application is

yet to be submitted but is a clear sign of Developer led reaction to the national government policy of building houses on green field sites. However, WCC Local Plan countryside policies should prevent these speculative sites being developed. The developers are claiming that these sites will deliver the new targets set by the government that are not yet included in the Local Plan. WCC are currently working on the next Local plan to include the new targets which will be done by sites agreed with all the local parishes. Sparsholt Parish Council will again ask that the strategic gap is included in the next iteration of the local plan to prevent us losing our identity and being absorbed into Winchester City boundary.

As you have heard we are kept busy with outside influences that could impact on the life we choose to live here in our lovely village. If you are interested in helping us to preserve and enhance the village please come and join us. We have a vacancy for a Parish Councillor now.

This brings me to who gives their time and effort on your behalf.

In December 2024 we said goodbye to our clerk Nicky Breen who was also the clerk for Crawley PC. We thank Nicky for her four years with the Parish Council having taken over at a very challenging time – the beginning of Covid Lockdown. We are pleased to welcome Becky Pickles who joined us in November and took over as our new Clerk and Financial Officer in January 2025. Becky has previous experience and remains an assistant clerk to Colden Common Parish Council.

A huge thank you to the following Councillors. Without you and your time and commitment Sparsholt would not develop and grow.

John Little as Deputy Chair, Communications, Newsletter editor, Finance Chair, IT Consultant and all round go to person. John's efforts are greatly appreciated by us all, but especially by me. Without his wise and supportive counselling my role would undoubtedly be impossible.

John Cooper who walks all the footpaths and authorises all necessary work to the footpaths in our parish. HCC are no longer responsible for this work which as a Parish we now have to budget for. John also liaises with the Ham Green Team led by Malcolm Hewson. Malcolm you and your team do a wonderful job in all weather conditions to keep Ham Green nature area so well maintained. John is also a member of the finance sub committee

Nigel Reid looks after the Shop building maintenance and security and is our unofficial 'Legal Advisor' to the Parish Council to ensure we are compliant with the law. Nigel is also a member of the planning sub-committee and will take the lead on updating the VDS statement once the Local Plan is agreed.

Mark Himbury is our Memorial Hall liaison person and a member of the finance team. Since joining us he has become Chair of the Memorial Hall committee, a member of the Parochial Church Council, Sparsholt Fete committee and a Sparsholt school governor. Each of these roles offers great volunteering opportunities that many residents might enjoy – why not get involved and help make a difference in our community?

David Brown- Looks after the Woodman Close playground which has had further significant investment this year in updating repainting and replacing worn parts. Residents will have noticed that improvements to the safety of the area for the children and residents have also been made by WCC. Increased parking has been completed with further parking and landscaping to be done once the development in Bostock Close is completed. David is also a member of the road safety and road signage team.

Jon Walthoe is a member of the planning sub-committee and of the traffic/highway team looking at the signage and road safety. Jon is also the portfolio holder for Neighbourhood watch and Security.

Sam Culhane has been with us for a year now and is an active member on major planning issues. Sam has recently agreed to join the finance team and I'm sure we will involve her in more activities in the future.

A sincere thank you to you all and for your support to me as Chair.

Within the community I must say thank you to a few special people too

Alistair Barron and **Jeanette Davis** and the team of volunteers at the Shop. Well done on maintaining the high standards and keeping our community shop alive. Here's to another successful year ahead.

Cllr Horrill and **Cllr Warwick** thank you for your support and attendance at our meetings to keep us informed of City and County matters and giving us advice when we need it.

Liz Hanratty Headteacher at Sparsholt Primary School is leaving at the end of the school year. We thank you for all your contribution to the education of local children over a number of years and wish you all the very best for your future.

If I have forgotten any one my apologies. Thank you for listening and coming along this evening.

Sue Wood

April 2025