



Pirton Parish Council

Edward Roberts, Parish Clerk
36 Heathfield Road
Hitchin
Hertfordshire
SG5 1TB

parishclerk@pirtonparishcouncil.org.uk

Annual Report 2022 - 2023



Pirton Parish Council Annual Report gives a review of the activities of the Council and the financial report for the year ending 31st March 2023.

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www.pirtonparishcouncil.org.uk

Chairman's Report

Once again, this has been a busy year for the Parish Council, with all members working hard towards fulfilling their roles as representatives of the local community and the village of Pirton.

Members of the public are always welcome to attend Parish Council meetings and the initial item on the agenda is always Public Participation. There is no necessity to stay for the whole meeting! Examples of items discussed have included the bus service from Pirton to Hitchin, particularly the overcrowded conditions on the Number 89 service in the mornings. Parking in the village, planning, footpaths and the Great Green track have all been topics for discussion. The Parish Council cannot guarantee a solution to any problems brought forward, but can often highlight a way forward.

The new Pavilion has been high on the list of topics for discussion. Planning permission was granted, with some conditions. The cost of building has escalated as many of you who have had building work done recently will know. This has made the challenge of fundraising even more important. Please look out for any fund raising events and support them as best you can. The Pavilion Working Group are looking to apply for further suitable grants and have been considering cost saving measures, although the scope for these is limited.

The Parish Council have agreed to apply for a loan from the Public Works Loan Board for up to £300,000 to cover any shortfall. To meet the cost of the loan repayments the Parish Council part of the precept we pay will need to increase slightly.

Steve Bright, who has worked so hard as a Councillor for the past few years resigned this year. I would like to thank him for his tireless work, particularly for the Pavilion project. Steve always had a considered opinion on most topics that we all appreciated. I am sure I will not be the only Councillor who will miss his wise counsel at meetings.

Following the elections in May 2023, we welcomed Alice Stirling as a Parish Councillor. I would like to thank her for standing for the Parish Council and we all look forward to working with her. There are still two vacancies on the Council. It really is very interesting and rewarding work and does not necessarily take up too much of your time. If anyone is considering working for their local community and 'putting something back' please come and talk to any of the Councillors, or contact our Clerk. You will be made most welcome!

Finally, a big 'Thank you' needs to go to all who make my job as Chairman so much easier. The Parish Councillors who work so hard for our village. Ted, the Parish Clerk who keeps us on the straight and narrow. Tony, our street cleaner, who does an extraordinary job keeping our streets and public areas so clean and Steve, the Tree Warden and 'Groundsman', who keeps the footpaths and other Green areas in the village open and accessible. I look forward to working with them all for the year ahead.

Jill Rogers

Parish Council Round-up

MUGA (Tennis Courts)

The MUGA was resurfaced and painted about 5 years ago, and was repainted a year or so later when the paint started to wear away. The contractor agreed that the initial paint finish was faulty, and so repainted the courts at zero cost.

A sustainable financial plan is in place to cover maintenance and renewal over the long term. The tennis club pays the Parish Council a little over £3k a year (increasing with inflation each year), and the Parish Council budget £500 a year.

The floodlights were replaced with LED lights a couple of years ago following failures of some of the sodium lights. The new lights reduce energy consumption, and don't have a warming up time so are a much better arrangement.

A debrillator was fitted on the outside of the MUGA a year or so ago. This was a second hand one that was kindly supplied at a low cost by the PSSC when they procured a new one. The Parish Council paid for the temperature controlled and locked cabinet.

There is usually an annual pressure wash and weed treatment application for the court surface, paid out of the income detailed above. Keeping the surface in good condition resulted in the last surface lasting 16 years before renewal. The general expectation of surface life is about 12 years. Because the pressure washing last year had started to remove some of the paint finish it was agreed that the annual maintenance would not be carried out this year. Instead, the tennis club have blown and swept the leaves and seeds from the courts, washed away bird droppings, and applied some weed killer. It is hoped that this will allow the painted surface to remain in good condition for longer, without any detriment to the surface life (and saving c£800).

In the long-term financial plan there is allowance for a mid-life surface repainting. If we assume a c14 year life for the surface this will be due in a couple of years. The actions above have hopefully deferred this for a year.

Recreation Ground Development

The project to replace the pavilion is progressing well, although the rampant building cost inflation over the last couple of years is adding to the funding challenge. Planning permission was achieved in February. Following a competitive tender, RLP (based in Hitchin) have been selected as Quantity Surveyors for the project. Peter Walker, a previous resident of the village, and a former user of the sports and social club had provided very valuable QS support to date and the Parish Council are very grateful for his considerable support.

The next stage is for the Architect (Simon Knight Architects) and Engineers to do the detailed drawings, and submit for building regulation approval. This will take 3-5 months, and will be preceded by the Quantity Surveyors assessing a number of possible cost-saving measures, allowing decisions to be taken on the final design.

The Parish Council has agreed to the funds for this next stage following some negotiations to bring costs down, but even so they have increased by £10k.

Fund raising is continuing with a total of c£850k now raised or considered likely. This includes a grant of £250k from the Football Foundation if we are successful with our application, and a

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long-term loan of c£300k by the Parish Council if approved by villagers, and the Public Works Loan process. There is about £180k of funding from the housing developments which is for a new pavilion. NHDC have agreed a grant of £50k, and we have received £1k so far from Herts County Council's funds. The Sports and Social Club have been raising money from its various activities including fireworks, summer fair and bar takings.

The highly successful Art for the Pavilion raised c£3k, and seemed to be enjoyed by a large number of people – over 400 artworks were submitted. Thanks go to all of the organisers led by Penny Picken and Peter Cole – including Mandy Pynn, Sheila Brooks, Steve Jones, Owain Lister, and David Joyce. Thanks to the Pumpkin Club for supplying canvasses, the Youth Club for taking part and their displays, St Mary's church and the Pirton Players for helping on the display boards with Ade Law and David Thomas, and particularly to Pirton School which embraced the project completely.

In total, c£20k has now been raised by donations/pledges and fund-raising activities.

Two or three years ago the total raised/envisaged to date would have been sufficient, but we now need 25-30% more to cover inflationary increases. If you have donated, pledged or helped, thank you very much. If not please do!

This is an important project for the village community, with the aim of providing facilities for sports, social and leisure activities for all of the village (and beyond) for the future as our existing pavilion reaches the end of its useful life. The number of villagers has increased significantly over the last few years with about 33% more houses, and we want to be able to cater for increased use, including social, fitness and sports opportunities from a wider range of people, with all ages and abilities catered for. We are not seeking to compete with other village facilities (eg Village Hall, pubs, chapel) but to add to the village's overall amenities.

Key to when building can start is the raising of the funds necessary, and we are applying for a number of grants, seeking sponsorships for various parts of the pavilion, as well as holding a number of fund-raising activities. If all goes very well we will be able to commence building in early 2024.

If you can help in any way please contact the Parish Clerk or Simon Maple.

Cllr Simon Maple
New Pavilion Working Group

A Report from our Member of Parliament

When I sat down to write my Annual Report this time last year, I could not have predicted what 2022/23 would bring. In a year of highs and lows, it has been fantastic to see the way that our community has come together.

Clearly, the most notable event of the past year was the passing of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. For most of us, her enduring example and service – to nation, neighbour and family – had been all we had ever known. As we came together to mourn her passing, I saw how deeply her loss was felt in our communities – but also how her legacy of dedication to duty will live on in our communities.

Earlier this month, we came together again as a community to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III. I joined residents at events right across our villages and it was fantastic to see people uniting – not just to celebrate the Coronation, but also supporting each other and our community. It is what makes our area such a special place to call home.

Keeping our area as a place we can be proud to call home has been the main theme of my work and campaigns this year. Working alongside our local Conservative Councillors, I have been tackling the issues you have told me are important to you.

That includes our campaign to expand the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – which already borders Pirton – across North Hertfordshire, ensuring that our beautiful countryside is protected and the historic character of our villages is recognised and enhanced.

It includes our campaign to oppose the plans to nearly double passenger numbers at Luton Airport – which would blight Pirton and nearby villages with increased noise and air pollution and inappropriate volumes of traffic on our rural transport networks.

And it includes our continued opposition to the plans by North Herts District Council to cut the frequency of general waste bin collections – which would cause more of the fly-tipping and littering that we all know does immense damage in our rural area.

Over the past year, it has been great to engage with local residents on these and other issues. In particular, I have been working with concerned residents on improvements to our bus services, helping to tackle over-crowded morning bus services and ensure that Pirton children are able to safely get to school in Hitchin on public transport.

It has been a great pleasure to visit the village a number of times this year – in addition to visits to discuss the issues mentioned previously, I came to find out more about the plans for the new pavilion at Pirton Recreation Ground and to open a new outdoor play area at the Pre-School. I also thoroughly enjoyed attending last year's Summer Fair and meeting so many local people there. I look forward to coming again this year.

I continue to work hard to make Pirton, Hitchin and all the villages a great place to live. If you need my assistance as your Member of Parliament with any issue, please do get in touch with me.

Bim Afolami MP
Member of Parliament for Hitchin & Harpenden

County Council Report from Councillor David Barnard

Another busy year, and despite National happenings, I am pleased to have been of assistance to several residents in the Pirton area. At Hertfordshire County Council, we have experienced massive financial pressures, but have, by prudent budgeting and prioritising essential services, managed to reach the financial year end without a large deficit.

Adult Care, which encompasses many responsibilities has, with accompanying Child Care, has seen a large increase in numbers of residents who need help. Additionally, the County have confirmed that students in receipt of free school meals, will be given vouchers to the sum of £165 to cover food purchases in school holidays, up to February next year when it will be reviewed.

Our Carers have worked skilfully, and with dedication, to bring comfort to those in need. Carers are golden nuggets in our organisation, and have been rewarded with increments, which helps retain them, and encourage new recruits.

Potholes remain a problem, which has been enhanced this year by the icy conditions in winter. It is unfortunate that our lanes are used by very wide, heavy lorries and farm vehicles which erode the soil banks and verges, causing “chipping away of the tarmacked edges. These are the main causes of concern, and are repaired as soon as possible! It is a national problem, and the Government have supplemented the £3 million set aside by the Highways team, with a further £3 million. That sounds like a large sum, but with nearly 3,400 miles of roads and lanes in Hertfordshire, it literally is spread thinly! So, with the better weather in summer, we can hope that the work teams will be able to concentrate on repairs and upgrades.

Grant pots for local clubs, Parishes, and community groups will re-open towards the end of May, and I will be happy to help wherever I can. I continue to negotiate the implementation of a 20mph speed area in Pirton. We are getting there, and it's just the “fine tuning” to agree.

I am registered to oppose the siting of a Solar Farm at Wandon End. Renewable Energy is to be encouraged, but it must be in the right place, ... not causing harm to our valuable food producing land, and putting farm employees jobs and homes at risk, and potentially making tenancy farm at risk of becoming unviable! The proposed solar farm will feed towards Luton airport and beyond, with no advantage to North Hertfordshire residents! Self sufficiency in food production should be a priority, and reduce reliance of imported foods at the mercy of foreign producers, and increasing our carbon footprint!

Luton Airport has applied to increase its capacity to 32 million passengers per annum. This would cause so many problems, including congestion in our little lanes from supply vehicles and passengers through our villages. Airborne and ground pollution, Night flights, and noise! Luton's Gain,... Our Pain!

I will continue to press the Council to employ more Enforcement Officers, cameras, and other methods of reducing the curse of criminal fly tipping. Fines have been increased to £1000, and costs awarded on top.

There's much to do to continue to maintain our rural standards, and as your County Councillor, I will strive to serve the community to the best of my ability.

David Barnard

District Council Report from Councillor Claire Strong

These are some of the highlights from the last year.

Probably the most important vote taken at full council this year was to adopt a new local plan. The plan will form the basis for all planning decisions going forward and will define where new homes will be built. It has taken an Inspector over 5 years to review the plan but it was found to be sound with modifications. Many could argue that the plan was not perfect but the council desperately needed to have a plan in place as it had virtually run out of a land supply of sites for much needed homes. I voted to adopt the plan and now, with the plan in place, the council can refuse hostile applications on sites that are in the green belt or outside village boundaries. The council is committed to reviewing the plan and this is expected to start later this year.

The boundary commission has proposed a revised district council with 51 councillors with a new two member ward to comprise the parishes of Pirton, Offley (with Cockenhoe), Lilley and Hexton. Comments were fed back to the commission and the final report should be with the council next month. This will mean all out elections in 2024 and thereafter district will elect its councillors every 4 years.

The secretary of state called in the decision on the expansion of Luton airport from 18 to 19 million passengers and this decision is still waited. In the meantime, the airport is planning further expansion to 32 million. The council is objecting to the expansion.

The waste service contract is now up for renewal and the administration are looking at the details of the new contract that will be going out for tender. The administration is proposing to move to 3 weekly initially in 2024 and then to a 4 weekly cycle for residual waste (purple bin). I am not supporting this change as I believe that families will not be able to cope with the reduction of this vital service.

The leisure contract is also up for renew and this will be awarded early next to run the swimming pools and leisure services throughout the district.

The Southern Rural Committee has again given grants to various organisations throughout our area and had presentations from the Police and the Citizens Advice for rural areas. I was pleased the council has given Pirton £50,000 towards the new pavilion project and I have been supporting the fund-raising group with contacts for fund raising.

This year I took part in the Holwell to Pirton litter pick and also the action day where I was painting a bench on the recreation ground with Cllr Diane Burleigh - very therapeutic for a Sunday morning.

I will continue to come to all your Parish meetings where they don't clash with NHDC meetings and support the parish and residents.

Cllr Claire Strong

Rural Police Report



Hitchin Rural Police Report April 2022 – February 2023

There have been a number of changes within the rural Safer Neighbourhood Team that continues to be based at Hitchin Police Station.

Chief Inspector (CI) Hannah Treadwell based at Hitchin Police Station took over from Chief Inspector Jon Roche at the beginning of 2023. CI Treadwell is responsible for all of the Policing teams based in North Herts.

The Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) is headed up by Inspector James Lant.

Sgt Guy Westwood has recently transferred to another department and has been replaced by Sgt Taranvir Gill who is based at Hitchin Police Station, with responsibility for the day-to-day management of the Hitchin Rural teams of Police Constables (PC's), and Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's).

PC Clare Wallace continues to have responsibility for CODICOTE and KNEBWORDH wards. There is currently a shared responsibility amongst the Rural policing team for HITCHWOOD, CHESFIELD and KIMPTON wards. (Whitwell, St Pauls Walden, Bendish, Kimpton, Blackmore End, Peters Green, Wymondley, St Ippolyts, Graveley and Chesfield, which includes part of the Great Ashby estate in Stevenage).

PC Claire Ross continues to have prime responsibility for OFFA, HOO and CADWELL wards (Pirton, Offley, Hexton, Lilley, Cockernhoe, Tea Green, Ley Green, Kings Walden, Breachwood Green, Preston and Holwell).

PCSO Stuart Stone is responsible for the Codicote, Knebworth, Chesfield Wards and part of Hitchwood.

PCSO Heather Burrows continues to support OFFA, HOO, Kimpton, Cadwell (Holwell) and part of Hitchwood

Please find below a breakdown of recorded crime across the villages and rural locations in North Herts policed by the Hitchin Rural SNT.

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All information taken from www.police.uk . Currently the stats only go to the end of FEB 2023

PIRTON

Burglary 2
Criminal Damage 5
Theft 5
Public order 14
Vehicle crime 2
ASB 5
TOTAL 33

HOLWELL

Burglary 2
Theft 1
Public Order 6
Vehicle Crime 4
ASB 4
TOTAL 17

KIMPTON/PETERS GREEN

Burglary 8
Criminal Damage 2
Theft 4
Public Order 17
Vehicle Crime 9
ASB 10
TOTAL 50

ST PAULS WALDEN/WHITWELL

Burglary 3
Criminal Damage 1
Theft 4
Public Order 6
Vehicle crime 6
ASB 28
TOTAL 48

Hitchin Rural Policing Team

Financial Report - Ted Roberts Clerk and RFO

The council finances are still in a strong position, despite major expenditure on the new pavilion project. Costs are continuing to increase and the Parish Council, with the New Pavilion Working Group, is continuing to look as ways of reducing costs where possible. An increase in precept last year enabled the planning stage to be achieved with planning permission granted in February. The next stage of the project will be funded from existing reserves (to be later refunded by part of the loan from the Public Works Loan Board) and an increase in the precept, with the loan to be taken out later in 2023. The precept increase for 2023-24 amounts to just over £13 for the year for a Band D property.

Our auditors for the last 4 years have decided to pull back from much of their parish council work and earlier in the year, following a number of quotes for the work, the Council appointed April Skies Accounting as the internal auditor for 2022-23. This will be reviewed after the audit, but is hoped to prove satisfactory.

Income on the balance sheet shows a significant increase over the previous year, mainly due to the donations received towards the new pavilion project. These have been accounted for separately to allow for the eventuality of the project not going ahead, meaning the monies would be returned to individual donors.

Council expenses showed a £1500 increase from the previous year, partly due to increased website and IT expenses and partly to increased costs for the newsletter. More copies are now needed and there were additional printing costs for an insert. Other grants included a significant sum spent on Jubilee mugs for the school, a decision that went down well with the children. A similar scheme for the Coronation this year was not agreed.

Village maintenance costs were up from the previous year. Grass cutting and strimming contracts had been renewed for 3 years at the previous costs, while for the Recreation Ground a new 2-year arrangement at a slightly higher cost is in place with the existing contractor, but for an additional two cuts a year. Some monies have been spent on the maintenance of Blacksmith's Pond with more microchalk treatment envisaged and some clearance of vegetation. A significant expense was the repair of the worst potholes on the access track to the Recreation Ground. The costs were split with the landowner.

Salary costs were up, following a realistic national pay award for the Clerk. It should be noted, though, that the Clerk's remuneration is still below that of some neighbouring parishes. Office expenses were little different. Councillors themselves, of course, receive no remuneration for their work. Subscriptions to professional bodies and publications were on a par with previous years.

The Council awarded some grants, including another £200 to Essex & Herts Air Ambulance, £200 to Pirton Players and £900 to help maintain the nature reserve by the vicarage. The Council supported the Royal British Legion, providing a wreath for Remembrance Day. Village organisations are encouraged to apply to the Parish Council for grant funding. Application forms are available on the Council's website under Parish Council/Policies, or from the Clerk.

Parish Council finances are subject to local accountability and annual audit. An independent Internal Auditor (AprilSkies) verifies the Council's financial procedures. The annual accounts were approved at the Parish Council meeting held on 13 April 2023. The Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2023 will be placed on the Parish Council notice board and website and examined by the External Auditor, PKF Littlejohn.

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Income and Expenditure 2022-23



Pirton Parish Council Income & Expenditure 2022-23

	<u>2022-2023</u>	<u>2021-2022</u>
Balance Brought Forward:	63,484.97	51,563.00
General Fund		
Income		
Precept	43,280.84	41,226.52
VAT Recovered	5,231.50	5,972.79
Rental Income	3,332.34	2,558.99
Grants	719.16	773.48
Donations	1,000.00	350.00
Miscellaneous	96.35	6,287.67
New Pavilion	11,239.29	<u>0.00</u>
Income sub-total	64,899.48	<u>57,169.45</u>
	64,899.48	57,169.45
Expenditure		
Clerk's Salary	9,389.05	8,449.96
Office Expenses	1,112.12	1,060.91
Council Expenses	6,540.35	4,957.33
Other Grants	2,142.93	475.00
Village Maintenance	8,844.83	7,730.22
Recreation Ground	5,757.20	4,895.57
Play Areas	131.28	650.00
Allotments	203.14	187.55
Subscriptions	928.93	784.54
VAT to HMRC	0.00	6,000.00
VAT Input	<u>5,587.06</u>	<u>2,042.40</u>
Expenditure sub-total	<u>40,636.89</u>	<u>37,233.48</u>
Projects & Sub-Committees		
Net Expenditure		
Bury Trust	730.00	750.00
Contingency	0.00	0.00
Hedges, Trees & Planting	0.00	0.00
Legal Fees	0.00	0.00

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Tennis Courts	495.00	2,160.00
Neighbourhood Plan	0.00	0.00
Parish Paths (P3)	0.00	0.00
Playground	0.00	0.00
Pond Maintenance	420.00	0.00
Sports Pavilion	19,403.20	5,104.00
Youth Council	<u>0.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>
Net Expenditure Sub-Total	<u>21,048.20</u>	<u>8014.00</u>
	61,685.09	45,247.48
Surplus/(Deficit) for the Year	3,214.39	11,921.97
Balance Carried Down:	66,699.36	63,484.97

Edward Roberts
Responsible Financial Officer
Date: 13 April 2023

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Contact Details

PARISH COUNCILLORS (2022-23)

Jill Rogers (Chairman)	jill.rogers@pirtonparishcouncil.org.uk Hunters Lodge, Little Lane, Pirton, SG5 3QR
Steve Bright	steve.bright@pirtonparishcouncil.org.uk 20 Royal Oak lane, SG5 3QT
Diane Burleigh	diane.burleigh@pirtonparishcouncil.org.uk 10 Cromwell Way, Pirton, SG5 3RD
Amanda Goodman	amanda.goodman@pirtonparishcouncil.org.uk 46 Royal Oak lane, Pirton, Sg5 3QT
Simon Maple	simon.maple@pirtonparishcouncil.org.uk 18 Royal Oak lane, Pirton SG5 3QT
Marilyn Parkin	marilyn.parkin@pirtonparishcouncil.org.uk 7 Shillington Road, Pirton, SG5 3QJ
Nick Rowe	nick.rowe@pirtonparishcouncil.org.uk 14a Shillington Road, Pirton, SG5 3QJ

PARISH CLERK

Edward Roberts	parishclerk@pirtonparishcouncil.org.uk 36 Heathfield Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 1TB
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COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILLORS

County Councillor David Barnard	barnard.david@gmail.com Lodge Cottages, Lilley Bottom, nr.Luton, LU2 8NH
District Councillor Claire Strong	strongcpa@aol.com Ashroy, Pirton Road, Holwell, SG5 3SS
District Councillor Faye Frost	faye.frost@hotmail.com Glebefield, Lilley Bottom, nr.Luton, LU2 8NH