

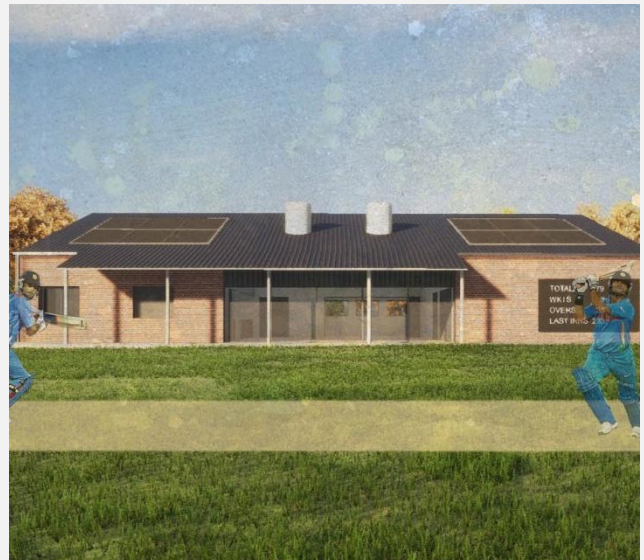


Pirton Parish Council

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Annual Report 2023 - 2024



Pirton Parish Council Annual Report gives a review of the activities of the Council and the financial report for the year ending 31st March 2024.

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www.pirtonparishcouncil.org.uk

Chairman's Report

As always, 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. After our very wet winter, it has been lovely watching the daffodils begin to flower around the village. That always makes me think that spring is on the way, bringing better weather and those lovely long evenings.

The new pavilion plans are coming along. The revised plans were submitted to North Herts Council at the start of the year and we now have planning permission. The next phase will mean much fund raising as costs continue to rise, but hopefully once a charity has been established there will be more grants available to us. It will make it much easier for us all to make donations too.

The Parish Council have agreed to apply for a loan from the Public Works Loan Board for up to £400,000 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.

I do hope that you have had the chance to reply to the consultation about the 20mph speed limit in the village. It is something that the majority of people wanted, but the Highways engineers have insisted that speed cushions are required in certain areas for the scheme to go ahead. The Parish Council objected to these cushions, although we agreed with the reduction in speed limit to 20 mph. We are still awaiting the outcome of the consultation.

I am sure that you are all as fed up as we are with the flooding in various roads in Pirton during the very wet period we have experienced. Anglian Water has been and looked at the situation and we are awaiting a survey to assess the problems. We hope they will then come up with a solution.

We have also complained to the Council about the lack of cleaning of the gutters. The damage to the roads with deep potholes has been a nightmare, although some small repairs have been done. Please keep reporting them on the Herts County Council website. The more reports they receive, the more likely it is that something will be done.

I would like to thank the continued hard work and support of my fellow Parish Councillors. It is rewarding and it can be fun serving on the Council. At present we still have two vacancies. 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.

It is always good to see members of the public at our monthly meetings and 15 minutes are set aside for items raised from the floor. You don't have to stay for the whole meeting unless you want to! The Parish Council can't always come up with a solution, but can often point the way forward.

Finally, a big 'Thank you' needs to go to those who help to oil the wheels of the Parish Council. Ted, the Parish Clerk, Tony, our street cleaner and Steve, the Tree Warden and 'Groundsman', who keeps the footpaths in the village open and accessible. I look forward to continuing to work with them all in the year ahead.

Jill Rogers

Parish Council Round-up

Pavilion update

The project to replace the pavilion at the Recreation Ground is gathering pace, although we continue to have cost/fund raising challenges.

We redesigned it to reduce the cost, making it squarer but with the same functionality. This allows us to keep the existing pavilion open while we build the new one and can therefore continue with our normal events, and continue an income stream. The new design was submitted for planning permission at the end of January, and planning permission has now been granted.

Detailed design is proceeding and is due to complete by mid-June. We will then go out to tender and select a contractor by the end of September. Provided that our funding and tender prices are acceptable we will apply for a substantial grant from the Football Foundation in October, for a decision in January 2025. Provided that we are successful, build will commence in Feb/March 2025, with completion 9-12 months later.

In addition to the £50k grant from North Herts we have been granted a £12.5k grant by Rands Educational Foundation. £3k was raised at an Art for the Pavilion event and over £3k at a Burns night event. Other events, pledges and donations have provided valuable funding, and the Pirton Sports and Social Club have made a provision for £80k towards the pavilion.

The Parish Council currently has agreement for a £300k loan, but is planning to increase this to £400k. The application for approval for this will go in to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in June. An increase in the annual precept for the Council was necessary in order to cover the repayment costs once the loan is drawn down.

We are currently about £200k short of funding, but hope to save some money through value engineering of the design, and are moving forward with plans to form a pavilion charity which will enable us to apply for a much larger number of grants.

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, Bim Afolami MP

Every year as your Member of Parliament brings new opportunities to deliver for our communities. Since my Annual Report last year, I have been delighted to see some real progress being made on the issues that Pirton residents have told me matter to you.

We've successfully campaigned to protect ticket offices at Hitchin Station and across the country. We fought off the Mayor of London's plan to axe the Day Travelcard. Combined, these wins will make it much easier and more convenient for Pirton residents to travel into London and beyond.

You've told me how important our beautiful local countryside is to your enjoyment of life in Pirton. Raising my family in a nearby village, I get it. That's why we're pushing forward with our campaign to extend the Chilterns National Landscape (formerly the AONB). And it is why I worked so hard this year to hold the District Council to its promise to review the North Herts Local Plan. After securing intervention from Government, the Council has now voted to begin a full review of the Plan, and I'll be fighting to secure further protections for our countryside.

With lots of people working from home now, I know that the quality of our rural broadband needs to improve. That's why I've been working so hard for a couple of years now to ensure that we get gigabit broadband into all corners of our constituency. This year I've been very pleased with the progress we've been making – with the latest news a new contract with CityFibre to get better broadband to some of the hardest to reach areas, including in Pirton.

Tackling rural crime is another topic that comes up regularly when I'm in Pirton. This year we've secured £17.4m more funding for Herts police and built on the record number of police officers on the streets across our county. I'll be working with Jonathan Ash-Edwards, our new Police & Crime Commissioner, to ensure that they are deployed visibly across our communities, including on the streets of Pirton.

You've told me that our local roads need some significant repairs. That's why this year we committed to invest nearly £90m to repair Hertfordshire's roads over the coming years. I'll be fighting for Pirton to get its fair share of that investment.

Another topic that comes up a lot when I speak to Pirton residents is local healthcare. This year I'm delighted that we've made some really good progress on investment in our local NHS. That includes the new hospital in Hertfordshire and the new Cancer Hospital for our region that I've been campaigning for – both with confirmed Government funding this year. I'm also working to secure a new GP surgery should Councillors give the East of Luton development planning permission – this will serve our villages and help to cut GP waiting times. The developer has already agreed to include a surgery in the scheme.

Keeping active is always important and this year I was delighted that we were able to secure funding for grassroots sport in Pirton. Our constituency has secured more funding than any other in Herts and Beds since 2021 from this grassroots sport fund – a great example of the progress we are making.

In Westminster, this year I was honoured to be asked to become Economic Secretary to the Treasury. This is a big job – overseeing things like financial services, which is one of the biggest employers in our constituency. In the Treasury I've been delighted to play a part in the National Insurance cut – worth £1,250 to the average earner in our constituency – and the retention of the Triple Lock – a £902 boost to eligible pensioners this year.

County Council Report from Councillor David Barnard

The last year has been a busy one at County level, and sometimes it has proven difficult to prioritise Pirton's needs alongside others.

Your Parish Council, after much deliberation, and amendments to the scheme, approved the introduction of a 20 mph scheme in Pirton. This is proceeding to be implemented.

There have been local flood occurrences, and we are pressing for works to be carried out to minimise these in the future.

The school has problems with leaking roofs, and, although it has taken too long, there will be new works installed imminently. The process is slow, because there has to be a planning application approved before works can take place.

Along with most other Authorities, Herts County Council has a huge task to balance its budget in difficult economic climates. Over £1.1 billion is spent on Adult and Child care, Highways maintenance and improvements, Education, Libraries, support for Police and Fire Services, and much more.

Locally, I am given a Locality Budget, which can be shared amongst Parishes, clubs, and community groups, which might need a little financial assistance. Groups and clubs in Pirton have received benefit from this "pot", and I will be pleased to support again, as possible.

Pirton has a strong Parish Council and Clerk, who work hard for the benefit of the community, and I am pleased to have been able, once again, to support them.

David Barnard

District Council Report from Councillor Claire Strong

Firstly I would like to thank the voters of Pirton , now part of the new Offa ward, for re-electing me as your District Councillor for the next 4 years. North Hertfordshire District Council has had a boundary review with new wards and there are now 51 councillors from across the district elected every 4 years.

The Council now has a new service provider operating the Hitchin gym and swimming pools and they have made a few changes, so do check the web page if you want a swim and make a booking to avoid disappointment. When the outdoor pool is open at the end of May the bookings will be for morning or afternoon sessions.

The Local plan is now being reviewed to make any changes needed across the district. I will continue to question where any new housing is proposed with brown field sites and infill the preferred options and to avoid inappropriate development of the Green Belt.

I will continue to object to the over expansion of Luton airport as there is no new infrastructure to support the growth.

The waste contract which collects garden, residual and recycled materials is changing in April 2025 and the details of these changes will be communicated early next year.

As always, I am here to respond to the concerns of residents and I look forward to working with the Parish Council over the next year.

I normally attend Parish Council meetings and also the police community surgery, so do come along if you want to raise anything with me.

You can contact me via email on claire.strong@north-herts.gov.uk.

Cllr Claire Strong

Rural Police Report



Hitchin Rural Police Report April 2023 – February 2024

There have been several changes within the Rural Neighbourhood Policing Team that continues to be based at Hitchin Police Station.

Chief Inspector (CI) Hannah Treadwell continues to be based at Hitchin Police Station and is responsible for all the Policing teams based in North Herts. The Neighbourhood Policing Team (NPT) is headed up by Inspector James Lant.

Sgt Taranvir Gill 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 the Codicote and Knebworth wards.

PC Natasha Redman currently has responsibility for Kimpton, Hitchwood, Offa and Hoo. (Whitwell, St Pauls Walden, Bendish, Kimpton, Blackmore End, Peters Green, St Ippolyts, Pirton, Offley, Hexton, Lilley, Cockernhoe, Tea Green, Ley Green, Kings Walden, Breachwood Green, Preston)

PC Greg Graham joined us at the end of 2023 and has prime responsibility for the Chesfield ward, (Graveley, Great Ashby, Great Wymondley, Little Wymondley, Todds Green & Titmore Green).

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PC Callum Ellis who's recently joined us this year has responsibility for the Cadwell ward, (Holwell & Ickleford).

PCSO Stuart Stone continues to support the Codicote, Knebworth, Chesfield and Hitchwood Wards.

PCSO Heather Burrows continues to support Hitchwood, Offa, Hoo & Kimpton.

The rural policing team can be contacted by email on Hitchin@herts.police.uk, calling 101, or online at www.herts.police.uk/contact

The Rural policing priorities for this year are, Fly tipping, ASB related to drug usage and Speeding.

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

PIRTON

Burglary 1
Criminal Damage 3
Theft 1
Violence & P.O. 15
Vehicle crime 3
ASB 3

TOTAL 26

PRESTON

Criminal Damage 1
Violence/Public Order 7
ASB 1
Burglary 1
Theft 1

TOTAL 11

HOLWELL

Burglary 1
Violence/Public Order 10
Other crime 1
ASB 9
TOTAL 21

KIMPTON/PETERS GREEN

Burglary 12
Criminal Damage 3
Theft 2
Violence/Public Order 6
Vehicle crime 14
ASB 13
Possession of weapon 2
Theft 2
Other Crime 2
TOTAL 56

ST PAULS WALDEN/WHITWELL

Burglary 3
Criminal Damage 9
Theft 2
Public Order 21
ASB 20
TOTAL 55

Hitchin Rural Policing Team

Financial Report - Ted Roberts Clerk and RFO

The council finances are in a strong position, despite significant expenditure on the new pavilion project. Overall expenditure in many areas was slightly down on the previous year. Costs continue to increase and the Parish Council, with the New Pavilion Working Group, works to reduce these where possible. To that end, the pavilion design was simplified and planning permission sought again. No fee was paid to NHDC for this, although we had of course to pay the architect's and other professional fees relating to the re-design.

The increase in precept last year was intended to cover loan repayments to the Public Works Loan Board. Although the Council obtained approval for a £300k loan from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, a pause in the project meant that this loan was not drawn down, the monies instead funding the re-design and other necessary work on the project. It was agreed that a loan of £400k would allow the project to have a contingency of around £100k, making decisions on cash flow easier and more flexible. A precept increase was therefore implemented for 2024-25 amounting to an extra £12 a year for a Band D property. This will cover the repayments for the increased loan, which will be applied for in June 2024, with a high expectation of success.

April Skies Accounting, our new internal auditor for 2022-23, proved most satisfactory and continues to audit our accounts. An interim audit was conducted in November 2023 and all was found to be in good order. The end of year audit was carried out successfully last month.

Income on the balance sheet shows a near 22% increase over the previous year, partly due to the donations received towards the new pavilion project and partly the increase in precept.. A separate record of donations has been kept to allow for the possibility of the project not going ahead, meaning that monies could be returned to individual donors. The reference to internal transfers concerns some room hire and Urbaser bin emptying charges that are transferred on a monthly basis to the new pavilion project. Details may be obtained from the Clerk.

Council expenses showed an £800 drop from the previous year, almost balanced by the increase in the Clerk's salary. Other expenditure was similar to the previous year.

Village maintenance costs were little changed from the previous year. Grass cutting and strimming contracts had been renewed for 3 years at the previous costs. For the Recreation Ground grass cutting a new 2-year arrangement at a somewhat higher cost is now in place with a new contractor, the previous one having decided not to renew at year end. Microchalk treatment at Blacksmiths Pond is set to continue.

Salary costs were inevitably up, following the Local Government national pay award for the Clerk, giving him an increase of £1 per hour. Office expenses were little different. Councillors receive no remuneration for their work and little in the way of expenses was claimed. Subscriptions to professional bodies and publications were little changed from previous years. The Council awarded grants of £200 to Essex & Herts Air Ambulance, £150 to Pirton Pre-School and a second tranche of £900 to the vicarage nature reserve. The Council also supported the Royal British Legion, providing a wreath for Remembrance Day.

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 9 May 2024. The Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2024 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 2023-24



Pirton Parish Council Income & Expenditure 2023-24

	<u>2023-2024</u>	<u>2022-2023</u>
Balance Brought Forward:	66,699.36	63,484.97
General Fund		
Income		
Precept	54,199.64	43,280.84
VAT Recovered	3,867.12	5,231.50
Rental Income	3,535.32	3,332.34
Grants	800.36	719.16
Donations	75.00	1,000.00
Miscellaneous	119.70	96.35
New Pavilion	17,228.18	11,239.29
Income sub-total	79,825.32	64,899.48
Less internal transfers	1,003.80	
	78,721.52	64,899.48
Expenditure		
Clerk's Salary	10,112.54	9,389.05
Office Expenses	1,162.05	1,112.12
Council Expenses	5,750.36	6,540.35
Other Grants	1,285.00	2,142.93
Village Maintenance	8,701.58	8,844.83
Recreation Ground	5,442.20	5,757.20
Play Areas	990.46	131.28
Allotments	212.07	203.14
Subscriptions	934.38	928.93
VAT Input	5,886.40	5,587.06
Expenditure sub-total	40,477.04	40,636.89
Projects & Sub-Committees		
Net Expenditure		
Bury Trust	0.00	730.00
Contingency	0.00	0.00
Hedges, Trees & Planting	0.00	0.00
Legal Fees	0.00	0.00
Tennis Courts	0.00	495.00
Neighbourhood Plan	0.00	0.00

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Parish Paths (P3)	0.00	0.00
Playground	0.00	0.00
Pond Maintenance	420.00	420.00
Sports Pavilion	25,027.28	19,403.20
Youth Council	<u>0.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>
Net Expenditure Sub-Total	<u>25,447.28</u>	<u>21,048.20</u>
	65,924.32	61,685.09
Surplus/(Deficit) for the Year	12,797.20	3,214.39
Balance Carried Down:	79,496.56	66,699.36

Edward Roberts
Responsible Financial Officer
Date: 10 April 2024

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Contact Details

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COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILLORS

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District Councillor Claire Strong	strongcpa@aol.com Ashroy, Pirton Road, Holwell, SG5 3SS
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