

# 2024 Reports from Clubs, groups etc. for Annual Parish Meeting

## Chairman's report from West Wrating Parish Council

It's been a year of change for West Wrating Parish Council. Three of the five current councillors joined last July, and by the end of this evening we may have two more new councillors.

In January four of us attended the CAPALC new councillor training day, and were more than surprised to hear what is expected of a Parish Council today - even from a small village Parish Council. What ensued was lots of work revising the various mandatory documents that are needed by every Parish Council to abide by Local Government law - which we absolutely must do. Many of our documents were well out of date, despite the fact that they should have been reviewed annually.

The Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, data protection rules, etc., could be considered unnecessary bureaucracy, but they are as they are because they've evolved over the years to deal with difficult situations experienced elsewhere by other Parish Councils, and to try to bring best-practice to all councils.

I'm usually the sort of person who gets frustrated with stupid rules, and because of my engineering job I'm always looking for better and more efficient ways of working. So it's perhaps surprising that the Parish Council rules haven't caused me too much grief. I think that's because with some thought I can usually see why they might be necessary, and as an inexperienced councillor it would be arrogant to not try doing things the way that's recommended.

So as you'll see in the AGM later this evening, we're trying to "play it by the book". It's not to everyone's taste, but for now I still have faith that it will make us a better Parish Council for the village. As part of learning how good Parish Councils operate I've been visiting neighbouring parishes when they have their meetings. From that I've seen different parish councils tackle their work in different ways, but some do take the rules seriously, and they seem to be good role models to try to follow.

Having said there's been lots of change I've also realised how the same old things keep coming around for the Parish Council. Reading back through [minutes from the last 10 years](#) I saw there are familiar recurring topics: the cost of grass cutting, potholes, footpaths for pedestrian safety, and speeding traffic. We do have various initiatives underway to try to help with the traffic, including applications for "20's

Plenty” signs, a local highways initiative (LHI) for gates and sharks’ teeth, trial use of our speedwatch team’s MVAS data by the police, and the Six Mile Bottom Road footpath now being on a council waiting list for funding.

A subject that you might think the Parish Council would have some influence in - planning applications - turns out to be quite the opposite. The Council’s opinion on planning matters has no more weight than any single parishioner. So having found this out it seems that the best use of our time is to keep you informed and explain how to make your opinions and comments count. We’ll try to achieve this by having informative and useful web pages, and articles in Challenge. The [Streetly Hall Farm Anerobic Digester proposal](#) was the first example of this.

This brings us on to the subject of the [Solar Farm that's proposed to be built in West Wrattling](#). It’s a huge development - about 2000 acres in size. Not only will there be a sea of glass panels, but several hundred container lorry-sized Lithium storage batteries. It’s such a big project that it won’t be decided by the usual planning process, but instead the pros and cons need to be presented in reports for the Secretary of State to make a decision.

There’s a very similar project near Newmarket that’s about 2 years further down the development path than the one for West Wrattling. The government’s decision keeps being delayed, but is now scheduled for 20th June 2024. We’re waiting on that outcome with interest. Either way, it will probably be worth talking with the people from those parishes to see what we can learn from their experience.

That’s actually a good example of how a Parish Council can’t possibly please all the people, all of the time. We’ve already received criticism for making information about the Solar Farm project available on our website because it could put people off wanting to buy in the village and so making it hard to sell property. That seems to me like shooting the messenger. I believe it’s our duty as a Parish Council to keep you, our parishioners, informed of what’s going on. It’s a reminder though that being a Parish Councillor is unlikely to make you friends.

Another change this year was saying goodbye to Rachel and Pete at the Chestnuts and welcoming Mark and Joanna as the new publicans. Somehow that change of ownership caused SCDC to mistakenly take away the pub’s Asset of Community Value (ACV) status. The Parish Council - with help from a parishioner - were able to challenge this decision and get it corrected. The Parish Council would like to thank the parishioners who show interest in what we do, and who regularly attend the Parish Council meetings. A big thankyou to those parishioners who aren’t on the council but help us so much, particularly Cobby for his attention to the footpaths and litter picking; and to Martin and Tim for their work with the village hall and with speedwatch. My personal thanks to the other Councillors who’ve been burdened by

the amount of work I've asked them to do; updating documents and restructuring with working groups and a committee to try to become a modern and efficient Parish Council. None of us are experienced parish councillors, so it's been a steep learning curve for us all.

*Simon Chandler, 13th May 2024*

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## **West Wratting Village Hall**

### **Report from outgoing Chair, Mike Rowland, at December 2023 AGM**

The management committee has again held five face-to-face meetings this year. Village hall bookings have been well sustained, and I am delighted that these can once again be viewed on the calendar page of our recently improved village website. Our regular weekly sessions are for Tai Chi, dog physiotherapy, FitSteps and the monthly Saturday Café. Following the cessation of the Keep Fit sessions, we have been grateful to have a second FitSteps session. Two of the Saturday Cafés have been very successfully augmented to Café Studios, displaying art and craftwork. Despite increased energy costs we have still not increased our hire fees. Our bank balance is similar to this time last year and our financial situation remains healthy. Maintenance issues are always with us. Replacing missing or cracked tiles by Price Right Roofing has cured the leak from the porch roof. More seriously, cracks continue to appear in the end walls of the main hall. A structural survey has been carried out by Andrew Firebrace & Partners and, following their recommendations, trial holes will be sunk to investigate the footings. We hope that further deterioration can be prevented by the use of helix reinforcing rods and brick ties. When this work is carried out we will have the brick wall bordering the front steps repaired, and the small front gate reinstated. Painting the north façade of the hall has been deferred until next year.

Internally, routine servicing of the fire alarm system and of the boiler has been done. Consideration is being given to putting in an additional ventilation point to address the persisting problem of oil fumes at the far end of the toilet block. A leak in the disabled toilet has been repaired and a faulty door lock replaced in another toilet.

Following numerous reports of people staying away from social events because of the impossibility of holding normal conversations in the main hall, the longstanding problem of acoustics is at last being addressed. Three quotes were obtained for the installation of acoustic panels and a grant application for the installation of adherent panels has now been submitted to the Cambridgeshire Priorities Capital Fund, with an additional component for simple external storage.

We are delighted we now provide a free Wi-Fi broadband connection to our users and this has already been put to use. In the kitchen two unusable microwave ovens have been removed and replaced by a simple user-friendly model.

Externally, in addition to regular grass and hedge cutting, Ash Tree Services have dealt with trees overhanging the hall roof and further tidied the boundary hedges. The Lamb Yard site has now been sold for development and we are waiting to see what S106 monies will come available.

I mention no names in this, my valedictory report. Members and officers alike have done sterling work throughout the year. I am happy to stand down after 18 years on the committee, with the past 11 years as chairman, knowing that our much-loved village hall remains in good hands and will continue to receive the care and attention it needs and deserves. My sincere thanks to all.

### **Additional report from current Chair, Martin Davey, April 2024**

The boundary with the Lamb Yard still remains unclear regarding the East gable wall where the footings have recently been undermined through site levelling activity. Geo located boundary posts have been placed in position and agreed with the Parish Council and The Chair of the Hall Committee but straight lines between them as "site Boundaries" have been put in place and site levelling appears to following the original red outline and "kink" as set out on a previous version of the developers site plan. The boundary with the gable wall may require a "Party Wall" agreement with structural support carried out by the developer. The Parish Council is working with the developer on these issues.

We were unsuccessful regarding the bid to the Cambridge Capital Fund which was 100 times over subscribed. Going forward are looking to use other funds.

We were successful in being awarded a government energy assessment grant and this subject is currently under review.

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### **West Wrattling d,Abo Tennis Club**

The Club continues to thrive with the court being used on a regular basis by a strong family membership. A free kid's coaching day last summer was well attended. The Club's finances are sound with a reserve being built up to pay for a new court in the future. The court surface will be repainted in the spring of this year and it continues to play well. New members are always welcome and existing and new members can sign up and pay online via our website.

*Cally Wilson.*

Further information for prospective members is available on our website –

<http://www.westwrattingtontennis.co.uk/>

### **West Wratting lunch group.**

Following Pete and Rachel's departure from The Chestnuts in early December, we are so fortunate to have Mark and Joanna provide us with wonderful lunches and excellent service, since they arrived in January. This has allowed us to continue meeting every third Thursday of the month as we have done for the last 15 years (or is it 16?!). Group numbers stay stable, ranging between 22-30. If anyone would like to join us, they are very welcome - whatever their age!

*Suan Rowland*

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### **Report of Saturday café**

The Saturday morning cafe has been taking place on the first Saturday of the month for eight years. It is run by people from the village who kindly offer to bake cakes or serve at the cafe. The cafe is very well supported by residents of West Wratting.

This year we have included two 'cafe studio' sessions. One in July and another in December. The cafe team prepared and served the meal for the Auction of Promises / Harvest Supper in October. Several cafe mornings have also included home made soups.

The cafe is well supported and donations to the café are used to support local charities and initiatives.

*Sherry and Jan*

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### **West Wratting Football Club**

#### **First Team - Manager Lee Miller reported**

We are currently 3rd in the league with 2 games remaining. If we win our remaining games we will finish 3<sup>rd</sup> although we were hoping to be 2nd, but this is still a great achievement after winning the league last season.

Sadly we lost the League Cup final on penalties after leading the game 2-0, which was very hard to take.

We also reached the semi finals of the Cambs County Cup, but unfortunately losing that on penalties as well!

(We will probably practice our penalties in the summer!!)

The current group of players that represent the First Team are a great group of guys who are a credit to this football club - if everyone sticks together I am sure we will win another trophy next season.

### **Reserves Team - Andy Gage & Brian Holmes reported**

With 2 games left we are currently second in the league which is great achievement considering we only got promoted last season

We have a great bunch of players of all ages from 16-36 who have formed a strong bond with each other and personally this has been the most rewarding part of our season so far

Whatever happens in the next couple of weeks it has been a pleasure to manage this team and be part of West Wratting FC.

PS: Following our latest game the Reserves are now 3<sup>rd</sup>, a very good result.

Amazing achievement from both Teams

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## **District and County Councillor's Annual Report 2024**

### **County Council**

#### **A1307**

After some 10 years since the finances were secured for the projects, the upgrades to the A1307 completed in 2024. Over the last 12 months we saw completion of the roundabout on the A1307 at Linton, as well as the remodelling of the Dean Road junction between Linton and Horseheath.

There was some good (we hope) progress made on the final leg of the 'Greenway', which is the off-road path that caters for all non-motorised users, and links Linton to Abington and beyond. The original plan was to direct the route along Linton Road, Abington through the middle of the village and then out along Bourne Bridge Road. This option was rejected after public consultation and the new route was decided to be along Pampisford Road. The downside of this is that it will take longer to construct, as there are compulsory land purchases required, which involve lawyers, and always take time. However, the section along Newmarket Road, Abington is less contentious, and work is planned to begin this summer.

Full detail can be seen at -

<https://www.greatercambridge.org.uk/sustainable-transport-programme/public-transport-schemes/cambridge-south-east-transport>

### **Greater Cambridge Partnership**

The big news that came from the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) this year, and last, was that Cambridgeshire were offered a large sum of money (many many millions) by central government to help improve the local public transport network in and around the city. The reason for this wasn't random - Cambridge scores very poorly on congestion and pollution metrics – some saying it is the 3<sup>rd</sup> worst city for congestion in England and that it emits over 25% more pollution than the national average.

A solution to this, that the government were looking to support financially, was get a very reliable and cost-effective public transport system, as has been seen to work in other cities. This would eventually have had to be self-funded and the proposed way to achieve this would be to charge for road usage, a congestion charge, or what was being labelled as a Sustainable Travel Zone (STZ).

After having undertaken the largest public consultation in Cambridgeshire's history on the subject and as a result not having enough political support to move the scheme forward, the proposals fell and are highly unlikely to be revived.

### **Civil Parking Enforcement**

After applying to government several years ago to take on the responsibility of parking enforcement in South Cambridgeshire from the Police, this year it was finally implemented. As of February 2024 there are now dedicated traffic wardens patrolling the villages and towns of South Cambs issuing parking tickets for poor and illegal parking. As the scheme is still in its infancy there aren't huge numbers of officers, so the impact is unlikely to be immediate, or completely solve the issue, but they are aware of the 'hot spots' for bad parking and will be prioritising these areas. Anyone can report areas of bad parking on the County Councils website -

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/parking-services/south-cambridgeshire-civil-parking-enforcement>

### **Solar Farm**

In the summer last year, the County and District Councils were approached by a solar farm company who had plans to build a solar farm on some of the land between West Wrattling, Balsham and the A11. The size of the proposal is fairly significant, 900 hectares, and if approved today would make it the largest solar farm in the UK.

The scheme has been altered somewhat since the first iteration of the plans and at a public presentation by the applicants in Balsham, the areas being considered had changed. Essentially the area will be from the edge of West Wrattling to the A11, where the current solar farm is.

The reason that we get a lot of green energy schemes proposed for this area (the wind farm, existing solar farm etc) is because the main power line runs parallel to the A11 here – meaning that energy can be fed directly into the main power grid without having to pipe it miles away.

The obstacles that the other scheme have come across in this area is the impact on the countryside and the loss of high-grade agricultural land. A formal planning application is yet to come but when it does, given the scale of it, it will be decided by the Secretary of State rather than the local planning authorities.

### **Anaerobic Digesters**

Over the last year we have had two planning applications in our area for anaerobic digestion plants in our area. One is in Streetly End, West Wickham and the other just over the Suffolk border outside of Haverhill on the A1307.

The proposals are slightly different in scale with the Suffolk application being larger but the principle of location of these plants seems to be the main cause for concern from those living near to the sites. These plants tend to be in the open countryside, rather than close to villages and towns and the residents have written into the relevant local planning authorities to make these points.

At time of writing neither has been decided, so please do write to the planning officers directly if you would like to comment on either:

Acorn, Haverhill – [Andrew.rutter@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:Andrew.rutter@suffolk.gov.uk)

Streetly End, West Wickham – [helen.wass@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:helen.wass@cambridgeshire.gov.uk)

### **District Council**

#### **Cambridge 2050**

For those of you who read our monthly reports, you will be aware that there is currently a proposal from central government to attract international science and tech companies to the Cambridge area making it the UK's version of 'Silicon Valley or Boston' (their words not ours). To facilitate this there would need to be housing for these companies to utilise and the currently proposal is to build 150,000 houses in and around Cambridge to make the area as attractive as possible to these companies and to do this by the year 2050.

To put this into perspective, Cambridge city is currently 56,000 houses, meaning that if these plans went ahead it would quadruple the size of the city and could make villages like Abington suburbs of the city.

There will be, of course, major issues to overcome such as water scarcity, electricity scarcity, existing infrastructure and local planning issues such as impact on the Green



Belt. The plans are some way off being finalised but the local councils that will be directly affected, South Cambs District Council, Cambridge City Council and Cambridgeshire County Council are currently battling to 'stay at the table' and maintain a voice in how these proposals are formulated.

### **Four Day Week**

As of January 2023, the District Council have been trialling a 4-day working week for their office-based staff. The reason for this was because our area is an expensive one to live in, and local authority wages being set nationally, it was very hard to attract and hold onto staff, specifically specialist roles such as planners. The trial is an attempt to see if this makes the role more attractive and ultimately employ people on permanent contracts rather than using expensive agency staff. There are also health and wellbeing benefits for the staff as well as the fact that this is quite a pioneering pilot scheme, as the council are the first public sector body to try this.

Before starting the trial there was extensive performance benchmarking undertaken to ensure the council had something to compare the results to, as an indication of the trials success or not. The results are all independently assessed by the Bennett Institute of Cambridge University.

The waste collection service moved to a four-day week in September and the transition went extremely smoothly, a lot smoother than expected.

The government has taken a position of being against the concept of a four day week and has requested that SCDC send performance data to them every week, which is also made public on their website -

<https://www.scambs.gov.uk/your-council-and-democracy/four-day-working-week> - a decision on whether to make the trial permanent, or not, will be made later in the year.

### **Elections**

In May 2024 there will have been an election for the Police & Crime Commissioner for Cambridgeshire. Also in 2024 there will be a General Election – at time of writing the date of this is unknown but likely to be in the autumn.

In May 2025 there will be elections for the County Council and the Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.

In May 2026 there will be District Council elections.

### **Contact Details**

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