

Chairman's Report 23-24

Present at the meeting:- Cllr G Harker, Cllr S Storie and clerk to the council D Rolfe

Cllr C Cassapi and CCllr N Begy sent apologies

15 Members of the public were present

We started the year with an election at which six good candidates were elected and I believe the Parish council has made tremendous progress over the last year. For this, I have to thank our clerk, Debbie Rolfe and all councillors for the work they put in. I am sorry to say that we have lost three councillors in the past 2 months which has clearly set us back. Nonetheless, we have just completed the annual audit of the council and I am pleased to say we have passed with no serious concerns on our governance processes.

Notably, Debbie, has put together a complete suite of supporting policies, including a reserves policy and risk assessment. There was also a significant amount of work on our financial management policies and, overall, we are in a much better place with a much more structured approach to setting the precept.

I must also mention the new parish council website. Our old website had been administered free of charge by Andrew Haynes and Penny Isaacs. However, the ownership was criticised in last year's audit for not being by a third party and so we were required to have an independent site. Thanks to Debbie's work, the new website is up and running – This is at a higher cost, but this is something that had to be done.

We have also formed focus groups to look at primarily highways issues and planning issues. The idea here is that the focus groups can spend more time looking at detail and, hopefully, save more time in the main parish council meetings and share the workload. We also held an emergency planning seminar, organised by Leics & Rutland Fire Brigade and also a Surgery Day with our ward councillor open to all to discuss any aspect of life in Stretton Parish.

Storm Henk came in January and highlighted that the two roundabouts on the A1 as well as the top end of the Stocken Hall Rd are susceptible to flooding, particularly when the drains have not been cleared. After highlighting the issues with RCC, they have at least cleared out most of the drains, but there is more work to do here, particularly with deciding how to deal with the flooded roundabouts.

There are three issues which remain and which the future council will need to keep in mind.

1st and of most concern is the potential within the local plan to introduce a traveller site adjacent to Stretton Woods. This was discussed at a public meeting in the Hub in December and the parish council has already written formally objecting to the proposal. We have also asked RCC to complete their evaluation as soon as possible so that those who are planning to sell their houses are not affected by the prospect of a traveller site next door. The response I had from RCC was that once in the local plan it would need to be evaluated objectively. I am sure that the parish council will return to this subject over the coming months and probably years, but I must make the point to you that we need to have evidenced, material objections.

The second issue is that of speeding on both the Clipsham Road and the Stocken Hall Rd. On the Clipsham Rd, I believe that Rutland County Council accept that there are problems that need to be addressed but that all solutions are likely to be costly and we have to take our priority alongside the many other demands on the RCC funds. We raised the topic of speeding on the Stocken Hall Rd with Alicia Kearns during her recent visit. She said that she fully supported our campaign to reduce the speed on the Stocken Hall Rd and that she would take it up with the police and the police and crime commissioner. Nonetheless, we must continue to lobby for traffic calming measures on both roads.

The third issue is the question of the upgrade to the Stretton sewage pumping station. HMP Stocken has been increased in size four times since it was first built and yet the sewage pumping station here in Stretton has not been upgraded despite promises. The upgrade was a condition of the planning approval for the latest expansion but once planning permission was granted, Anglian Water applied to have the condition removed. The council needs to continue to lobby and press Rutland County Council, Anglian Water, HMP Stocken, and our MP who again recognises that we have a problem and said she will arrange a meeting for us and Anglian Water.

I must also briefly mention a couple of other strands of work:

First the cycle/foot path between here and Greetham which also has the support of our MP. It has not been forgotten about but we need to look for opportunities for funding as it is likely to be in the region of £250,000 to build.

Second: We have made contact again with HMP Stocken governor and we must continue to have a dialogue about some of the issues that affect them and us. For example, speeding, street lighting, flooding and infrastructure.

A quick mention for the introduction of Mailchimp to help us improve communication between the council and the parish.

Finally, I would like to thank our ward councillor, Nick Begy, who has been an absolute rock for us over many years. For sure, we have had some real difficulties over the past year, but I must acknowledge his sage advice and help through all of the difficult times.

We end the year with only three councillors and therefore, 3 vacancies. As I am sure you are all aware, there will be an election for the vacancies on the 13th of June. The cost of this election is likely to be more than £2,000 and this money will come from our precept. It is, of course, a democratic right to hold an election, but the normal process for filling vacancies between statutory elections is by Co-option. And the precept, which has not been increased for two years will, almost certainly, need to be increased for the year 25-26.

I'd now like to open up the meeting to invite you to perhaps comment on what I've said or suggest ways in which you would like to see the parish council move forward.

County Councillor Update

Dear Stretton

Firstly, my sincere apologies, it is not often I cannot attend, but a chest infection has now tested as Covid over the weekend, and the cough-strewn conversation with the Chair earlier supports this. I have therefore written a quick update on various matters to be read out and as ever I am at the end of an email or phone if anyone wants to chat.

I have worked tirelessly with Stretton for over 8 years now since my father passed. I am passionate about all villages in the ward, and Stretton has so much to offer.

Let me start with the local plan and the concern that Stretton has. To date, we have gone through Regulation 18, and a number of objections to the proposed site in the village have been submitted as well as an objection from the Parish Council. These are being assessed and the outcome of this will be known over the summer. All sites have to be considered on material planning grounds. IF, and it is an IF, the site makes it to the next stage there is another consultation where objections based on the process can be put forward, or supported if so minded.

My ask to you is we work together as a community. I am here to represent the residents and in particular to voice concerns, or support, and to help with the process. As Chair of Planning, I am well-placed to help with the ins and outs of the planning process.

The other big issue is highways. Firstly, the current position is highways have huge constraints on their resource and it is hard to recruit nationally. However, the issues of highways are the same across the county and there is a lot of call on their time. To this end all wards and the Parishes are now all working together as a unified voice to fight speeding and HGVs. I feel a combined voice will get more attention. Stretton has been the driving force in this, and this is to be commended.

This group will also push for a Stretton to Greetham cycle path. Much needed. This route has been seen as a strategic priority, and RCC is bidding for funding – so things are more positive than they were.

I must also thank Stretton for their voice in the Rutland Quarry Forum another ward-led initiative to have a combined voice for mineral extraction across the county. Our ward in particular has rich reserves so we have secured country-leading conditions on a recent expansion in Greetham which will be rolled out to other quarries. We are also fighting for stronger enforcement.

Over the years I have spent a great deal of time supporting Stretton, and with an upcoming election I hope the village can turn over a new leaf and work together for a better future, and in many ways put the past behind us. I hope to see an increased engagement between the council and residents, and for the Parish council to be seen as a positive driving force. I think we have to remember that all of us either on the Parish Council and RCC are volunteers. We all do this for the right reason, and though we may not always agree, it is always with the best intentions. I have not seen anything here or across the ward to suggest this is not the case.

Again, apologies I cannot be there. I did ask if we could find a way to make it happen, but was agreed this was not fair or safe.

To sign off, please, please let's all work as one for the best possible Stretton.

Nick

ACTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED BY THE PARISH COUNCIL

The council should consider whether litter bins would be effective on the Stocken Hall Rd as most rubbish was thrown out of car windows.

There was significant concern about the quality and frequency of grass cuts. These are early days for the contract and in the first instance, feedback should be provided to the contractor about what areas must be cut and policies about areas left to grow. There was a general view that 6 cuts per year is not adequate, particularly in the early growing season. Leaving too long a period between cuts was counter-productive and definitely left areas very untidy. the Parish Council should consider augmenting the RCC cuts with additional ones, but this would be at extra cost and might affect only Stretton (as opposed to Stretton Woods and Stocken Hall).

ANY OTHER BUSINESS: -

A member of public gave thanks to Cllr C Cassapi for her work in obtaining agreement with Mick George to put up restriction signs for their lorries.

Greg Harker

Chair to the Council

May 2024