

Report for the year 2023-24 from the Chair of Stretton-on-Fosse Parish Council

Much of the last financial year felt as if the parish council was just chipping away at the same old problems – roads, parking, dog poo, but there has been progress in some areas.

We have been waiting for months for the sale of the Pitstop site beside the Rowborough Service Station, after a difficult few years of disagreement with the owner. It has now been sold and the site is currently being renovated and we expect planning permission to come through to us shortly, probably for storage units at the back of the site and display and sale of classic cars and automobilia, with a little café at the front.

There have been several highways issues which seem to take forever to be resolved and at least we now have some progress towards this: the state of south end of Hoppers Lane which is now impassable by vehicles, parking on our grass verges, the potholes along the gated road, HGVs following Satnav trying to negotiate the top end of Belcony. Watch this space for any progress!

A sad piece of news is that Stan Dawes, who mowed the playing field and the green with such care for years, retired from ill-health in November and died in early December. We now have a new contractor, Clive Lockton, carrying out the same work.

And the good news:

Our village website (strettononfosse.com) is looking great, thanks to Jon Holdback's work on this. We are experiencing some difficulties in updating it but we hope in the coming year, those of us who champion specific areas can be trained to take some of the work off his back.

Our footpaths have been considerably improved thanks to the tenacity and effort of Richard West, our footpath officer – thank you, Richard. He is giving us a separate report.

We celebrated as a village the Coronation of King Charles III and simultaneously crowned our village May Queens with the obligatory Stretton teas, cake, games, and maypole dancing. The Jubilee village tapestry was on display in the hall: an inspiration of Christine Holyhead who master-minded the project and put a huge amount of work into its completion. She badgered the talented (and, in my case, seriously untalented) to contribute a square to show a house, a family, an event, a village activity, even the bus stop. It is now hung in the hall on high days and holidays with a view to it being displayed permanently soon. Thank you, Christine.

Our village pub has now been bought from Steve and Mandy Aubrey, is still in the process of being refurbished, but currently is doing well and we are relieved to still have a pub in our village after several years of doubt.

Thank you to all those unpaid in the village who have given their time to mend, paint, weed, and put on events, and all who turn up to support our events. These are the people make this village a proper community.

I am grateful to my fellow councillors, Jon Holdback, Penny White, Chris Long-Leather, and Richard Eedle for their help and support over the last year, to Trevor Harvey our District Councillor, and Jo Barker our County Councillor for their advice and information, and in particular to the Parish Clerk, Sue Finlay, who kept me on the straight and narrow, and had to put up with us five unruly councillors.

Izzi Hazelwood

Chair of Stretton-on-Fosse Parish Council

Stretton-on-Fosse Village Hall AGM Joint Chair Report – 8th April 2024

The last 12 months have been dominated by attempts to make progress with the project to insulate and refurbish the hall and meeting room. At the same time, continuing with many community events: the Wednesday Warm Hub Lunches which have been a place of comfort, friendliness, and security for some; also the Sunday afternoon teas, Browns events, films, May Day and Coronation Celebrations, Halloween and Christmas parties, to name but a few, together with the regular activities for toddlers, line dancing, the gardening club, circuit training, Pilates, the Monday prayer group, and Tuesday Orchestra.

After two false starts with builders who were unable to proceed with the work on the hall, it was finally closed for February and March and the majority of the work has now been completed. The Village had the opportunity to see the transformation at a Spring Celebration event. We are extremely grateful to the team who have led this project and we will report more on this next time.

Our meeting room has the benefit of more new furniture and with some additions to the technology facilities - this will be a great room for hire.

I know this can sound like we are repeating ourselves each year, but we believe if it isn't broken, then don't fix it, and that is certainly the case with the committee and the support that we have here. We have a great team and are certainly grateful for the time and knowledge you give as volunteers. It can feel like hard work but everyone pulls together and wants to help make the hall the best it can be.

Izzi, you have been fantastic again, multi-tasking with bookings and admin, this has been a sterling effort and thanks are truly deserved.

Thanks to Rod, for being the backbone of the maintenance and if you can't do it, arranging for the works.

Thank you, Janice, for another year in the role of Treasurer.

We have said goodbye to Sharon and Sue, and want to record our appreciation for the contribution they have made to the hall.

Great progress has been made with the bookings process by adding much more to the website. Including a bookings calendar, so people can see for themselves when the hall is available and the facility to obtain bookings forms without having to request them, then submit them online. This is now working well.

Information about what is available in the hall plus the terms and conditions for hiring are all now available on the website to avoid having to keep providing this information. We are extremely grateful to Jon Holdback for all his continued patience and persistence with this matter.

We are fortunate that during this challenging time to still have financial reserves to cover our fixed costs and with the improvements to the hall, we will soon see increased income.

Our army of helpers in the kitchen at events or helping to keep the garden in a manageable condition have not gone unnoticed by all who visit and we are grateful for their support.

The Trustees are a continued support and their research into procedures and systems, along with our committee looking after the day to day operations is making the venue a better place and an even greater village asset. This is going to be an exciting 12 months; moving forward we now look to encourage more events and bookings into our hall, which will increase our revenue and we look to see the return on the investment.

The improvements that have been made will only benefit us, as the main hall feels so much more homely and welcoming. With this mind, there are other areas of the hall that would benefit from investment. The entrance could look more inviting and the toilets, especially the gentleman's, could do with a refit. With this in mind - it would be great to get some ideas and feedback from the community about events they would like to see and attend.

Along with May Day, we could look into further community activities to raise investment now that we have been able to show the results of the grant applications.

We have a great asset in our community and the future of the hall looks promising.

Apple-juicing

The Apple-juicing Crew are now in their ninth year. This last September we were not able to make as much juice because of a local shortage of apples. However, all profit goes to Stretton causes. This last year we sold 345 bottles (£670) and donated £150 for the new field gate on the edge of the playing field and £280 for a thermal imaging camera.

Allotments

Excellent progress has been made on most allotments especially by the new tenant. However, when allotments are overgrown with weeds, notice is given to the tenants as happened last year. The rent was increased from £20 to £30 per allotment to allow for

maintenance costs giving an income of £330 and a total of £453 in the maintenance fund out of which £30 has been spent to date. Fortunately, volunteers have been mowing the main path which reduces costs. Disappointingly, two trees in the orchard have died due to weather conditions. Currently, all the plots are occupied, but if you would like to be on the waiting-list please contact Izzi on strettononfossepc@btinternet.com

Stretton Bees

After the departure of one household to New Zealand, two households were left looking after our community bees. We had only two hives last summer and managed to extract about 80 lbs of honey from them, still leaving them with a good store for the winter. The honey all sold out by Christmas as usual. Beekeeping is an expensive business so we don't make much profit at all on selling the honey – materials, jars, etc., have to be bought each year. Both hives died in the winter – we are not sure why – but we are keen to carry on if we can find swarms to replace them and four villagers are interested in helping to keep the hives going. If you are interested in joining us, please contact Izzi on strettononfossepc@btinternet.com

Stretton Sustainability Initiative (SSI)

We are a small group of villagers who meet regularly and try to get various initiatives off the ground in Stretton. So far, we have, for example, installed EV chargers at the village hall, planted (with varied success) and monitored wild-flower areas and fruit trees, installed our mini recycling centre at the bus stop, held cream teas together with the biodiversity group to provide information on sustainability. This last year we have distributed newsletters a couple of times a year and we purchased, with a grant from the apple-juicing profits, a thermal camera for use in people's homes to establish where insulation is needed or the cold spots are. It can also be used to detect damp and water in the wrong places. Its best use is when the temperature outside is less than inside so early winter is the ideal time to make use of this. It is available to all households, with full instructions or attached to a trained human, as the householder prefers.

Fuller information of the SSI is on our website so have a look on:
[strettononfosse.com/activities/Stretton Sustainability Initiative](http://strettononfosse.com/activities/Stretton%20Sustainability%20Initiative)

To contact us email: sustainability@strettononfosse.com

Community Activities 2023 - 24

Over the past year, we have held monthly cream teas over the summer months and fortnightly soup lunches during the autumn/winter months. Our thanks go to the dedicated group of volunteers who help with cooking, baking, shopping, setting up the hall, and assisting older members of the community to attend if they are unable to get to the hall unaided. Although the number of people who attend these get-togethers varies, we regularly get 30+, and we know that it is an important part of the lives of some elderly people who are otherwise more or less housebound.

The Stretton community is generous and with these events plus the proceeds from the milk and egg sales from the hall, we have raised in excess of £1,500 over the past 18 months. These funds are available to be spent on other community activities and, so far, we have assisted the Toddler Group to cover costs for a couple of months when their numbers were low and we have made a contribution of over £800 to the purchase of a commercial dishwasher for the village hall kitchen.

A couple of our volunteers have moved out of the village since we started the soup lunches, but I feel confident that, with a bit of advertising, we will be able to recruit some new people, so we have every intention of resuming these in the autumn.

Geri Hunting

Stretton Biodiversity Group: Report for 2023 / 2024

Over the last year the Biodiversity Group has continued to maintain the wildflower areas on the Green opposite the Village Hall. The display of wildflowers in the summer and bulbs in late winter have been excellent.

In July we held our annual moth trapping event. This was well attended as usual. Three traps were set around the village. There is still a healthy population of moths. Thanks to Owen Lewis for his expertise

The pond dipping was held at the pond in the Court House Garden. There was a record attendance. The families with young children really seemed to enjoy themselves. Thanks to Penny White for hosting and thanks to Anna Lewis for her identification skills.

We held our annual cream teas in November at the Village Hall. This included our annual talk which this year was an illustrated talk by Fiona Nourse of Blackdown Farm on "Restoring Nature with Regenerative Farming." We had a good attendance of around 40 people.

We organised the Stretton Big Garden Birdwatch for the 14th year. Thanks go to Marianne & Paul Robinson for hosting the group session at their house. Ten residents responded to our survey – this showed that the diversity of birds over the last 15 years has been maintained. In addition, this year there was excitement at the spotting of the rare lesser spotted woodpecker twice.

An experiment was started at Hoppers Lane Wood devised by Professor Owen Lewis to find the best way of introducing native ground flora into the wood is still on going. Negotiations to purchase the wood and put it into a Trust for the benefit of the village is on-going.

David Passingham

Chair Stretton Biodiversity Group

The Stretton Greenfingers Garden Club

The Stretton Greenfingers Garden Club resumed in November 2023 and has had a very enjoyable few months of events including a Wreath Making Workshop, social get-togethers, and garden visits. The most recent event, a plant sale, raised £156.60. Garden visits include a trip to the King's beautiful Highgrove garden on 30th May. Looking forward, it is intended that there will be speakers to inform and entertain, further social events and a village open gardens day (22 June). Funds raised will be used to cover expenses, and subsidise visits and workshops for members, along with raising money for various charities and our own Village Hall.

Marianne Robinson

Footpath Report

Along with a number of other issues which Rights of Way attended to in early 2023, we are still awaiting a resolution on the opening up of the sealed path SS131, which runs adjacent to Tankards Lane and exits opposite Cottage Farm and also replacement of the stile leading off The Fosse + a new way marker post on SS127, being the path leading to Todenham. Both issues raised again Jan/Feb this year.

Along with the above two historic issues, a further four matters were raised with Rights of Way (ROW) in Jan/ Feb this year to which we received an acknowledgement of receipt.

These were:

1. SS174 - the path leading off the Campden Road down to Far Longdon - replacement of damaged way marker post.

2. SS174 - ditto above – new waymarker post at Far Longdon House.
3. SS134a – the route of the last section of the path between the junction of SS135 and SS134 has been altered by the landowner.
4. SS129a – the last section of the path running behind the gardens of the barns in Manor Road, which links to SS129, needs to be cleared by the landowner. The current width does not conform to ROW regulations.

As there had been no further action re the above issues, I chased ROW on the 22nd May and received the following response – I quote “ your query will be passed to the relevant officer in the ROW team who will prioritise the reports received and attend to them in a geographical sequence in order to use our resources as efficiently as possible” !!! Watch this space.

I have now surveyed SS132, being the path leading from our Village Hall up to Charingworth Grange, and can report that it is clear along its entire length past the county boundary and exiting onto the Campden Road linking SS178 down to Compton Scorpion Manor. The landowners have maintained the path through the crops so all that is now required are footpath direction arrows on stiles and gates. We could approach ROW re providing waymarker posts at a future date. I would ask for feedback from the Parish Council as to whether a new kissing gate would help at the exit of the first field where a new waymarker post was installed last year. Again, if this is agreed, I would approach ROW.

SS136, being the footpath linking Manor Road to School Lane, needs new direction arrows. I still have some in stock and will deal with this accordingly.

We finally resolved the access from the playing field to the start of footpath SS132 by removing the bridge rails and installing a new pedestrian gate at its field end. This has vastly improved access for all users.

Richard West

Footpath officer