



# STRATFORD ST MARY PARISH COUNCIL

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## ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

**MONDAY 28<sup>th</sup> of April 2025 at 1930hrs at the Parish Room, Upper Street, Stratford St Mary**

## **DRAFT MINUTES**

### **PRESENT:**

Cllr R Barrell - Chairman  
Cllr W Davies  
Cllr D Robinson  
Cllr L Shead  
Cllr G Robinson  
Cllr M Pearce  
Cllr N Woodard  
Cllr R Carvalho  
District Cllr J Ward

### **IN ATTENDANCE:**

F Hall - Clerk

Members of the Public - 7

**1. Apologies for Absence.** Apologies received from County Cllr Georgia Hall, Peter Dawson, Philip Wyncoll and Cllr Nick Wright.

**2. Approval of Minutes of Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2024.** The minutes of the APM held on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2024 were approved as a true record and were signed by the Chairman.

**3. Cllr Roger Barrell – Chairman’s Report, Stratford St Mary Parish Council.** The full report is attached in Appendix A.

**4. Report on Parish Council Accounts.** The full report is attached in Appendix A.

**5. Reports from County Councillor Georgia Hall, Suffolk County Council and District Councillor John Ward, Babergh District Council.** Suffolk County Councillor Georgia Halls report is attached in Appendix A. District Councillor John Ward (JW) was happy to provide locality grants to the Village Institute for the acoustic panels and to the PC towards the new speed sign. Budget – Babergh are struggling due to government funding and have increased council tax by the max amount of 2.99%. Council tax makes up 25% of their budget. JW highlighted waste collection system changes which will come into effect next spring March-June where there will be changes to number of bins and how often waste is collected. Government have increased housing quoters – Babergh have gone from 416 houses per annum to 775. Babergh are encouraging all villages to do neighbourhood plans either as individuals or with other villages. Devolution – Government wants to see the removal of 2 tier system County/District Councils and have a unitary Council. Babergh are putting together proposals for a 2 or 3 tier system and believe that this is the best option. Parking problems at the Swan – enforcement is being stepped up and enforcement patrols are being done at busy times to try and manage the impact on residents.

**6. Report from Stratford St Mary Primary School.** No report received.

**7. Report from Stratford St Mary Community First Responders.** The full report is attached in Appendix A. Peter Dawson sent his apologies for absence and the Chairman read out the report.

**8. Neighbourhood Watch.** Councillor Bill Davies advised that the crime rate in Stratford St Mary continues to be low. Not many people are involved in the Neighbourhood Watch scheme and if anyone would like to get involved then please contact Bill / Parish Clerk. Stratford St Mary have a community police officer called Niall Johnson. Some of the Neighbourhood Watch signs have been replaced around the village to enhance the message.

**9. Report from Stratford St Mary Ramblers.** The full report is attached in Appendix A. David Umfreville sent his apologies for absence and the Chairman read out the report.

**10. Report from the Stratford St Mary Community Trust.** The full report is attached in Appendix A.

**11. Report from Bowls Club.** Norman Woodard presented the report. The carpet Bowls Club meet on a Tuesday and Thursday 2pm-4pm at the Parish Room. Membership is £5 and it's £2 per session. Membership is closed at the moment and there is a waiting list. If you would like to go on the waiting list then please contact Norman.

**12. Report from Stratford St Mary Chapel.** The full report is attached in Appendix A. Philip Wyncoll sent his apologies for absence and the Chairman read out the report.

**13. Report from the Parochial Church Council.** The full report is attached in Appendix A.

**14. Report from the Village Institute Committee.** The full report is attached in Appendix A.

**15. Report on Community Speed watch.** Councillor Bill Davies presented the report – the Speed watch team have been running since February 2013. Please see Appendix A for Speed watch statistics.

**16. Report on Village Life.** The report was presented by David Pooley. Village Life was set up in 2013. If you have an event that you would like to promote, then Village Life can help. Village Life can lend money to organisations and then recuperate from ticket sales. Some of the events coming up are the May Ball, Midsummer concert. For 2025 it has been decided to donate any profits to Stratford St Mary Parochial Church fabric repair fund. All events are advertised in the Quartet and they are looking to recruit new members so please contact David Pooley if you are interested.

**17. Report from Orchard Barns.** No report received

**18. Report from Pylon campaign.** No report received

**19. Parishioners Questions and Answers.** The Parish Council have now moved to monthly meetings so if anyone would like to raise anything then please speak to a Councillor or email the Clerk – [parishcouncil@stratfordstmary.org.uk](mailto:parishcouncil@stratfordstmary.org.uk).

Meeting closed at 2035hrs

# Appendix A – reports

1. Chairman's Report
2. Parish Council accounts
3. County Councillors report
4. Stratford St Mary First Responders
5. Stratford St Mary Ramblers
6. Stratford St Mary Community Trust
7. Stratford St Mary Chapel
8. Parochial Church Council
9. Village Institute Committee
10. Community Speed Watch

## Annual Report for Stratford St Mary Parish Council 2025

This is a report on the activities of the Parish Council in the last 12 months.

The Parish Council has three new councillors bringing the council to full compliment. The new councillors were co opted onto the council as the positions were undisputed.

The Parish Council has found that with meetings every two months that the agenda and outstanding issues were being left too long. It has therefore agreed to meet every month for the time being.

The accounts were audited in the last period and were signed off.

The precept was considered in January 2025 against expenditure. The Parish Council has not raised the precept for a number of years, having supplemented costs by using the reserve. The reserve is now at a level where it would be unwise to continue to draw down from it and together with increased costs for services it was found necessary to increase this by 1.4%.

In the last 12 months the Parish Council has purchased new notice boards, one on upper street at the Anchor and the other on Lower Street at the weir.

The Parish Council has also purchased a new illuminated speed sign with a Photo Voltaic cell for power, which is permanently positioned beside Weavers Cottage. This has a data logging system to monitor traffic speeds in and out of the village. This has proven to be very effective, although from the data it is clear that the village continues to get speeding vehicles. We are looking to purchase a further sign for the lower Dedham Road when funds become available.

The Parish Council prepared a very detailed report for the Pylon consultation which was submitted and continues to monitor the National Grid proposal.

The Council has been working with Suffolk County Council Highways over issues with flooding off the A12 down the B1029, making the B1029 more pedestrian friendly and looking to improve the sharp corner at Lowe Hill House.

The Council have been having on going meetings with Dedham Parish Council, the Police, Babergh, Essex, Suffolk and Colchester Council representatives over the parking and river use opposite Dedham Boat House. This continues to be monitored.

The reduced Babergh grass cutting schedule in the village last year resulted in a lot of complaints over the condition of the green areas. There has already been one cut by Babergh this year and we have organised additional resources to supplementary cutting if needed.

The condition and vandalism of Weavers Cottage has caused the Parish Council concern, and this is now being addressed with a potential enforcement notice through Babergh's Historic buildings team. On Wednesday last week there was a contractor securing the property.

John Ward has kindly provided funds from his locality budget for the refurbishment of the village sign. Georgia Hall has kindly provided funds for the replacement of the speed roundels on the roads leading into the village.

The Parish Council has set up a site for recording works required around the village. This is in a trial stage at the moment and the council are looking at options of funding contractors to do the work or for teams of volunteers to do it.

## FINANCE REPORT FOR ANNUAL PARISH MEETING: 28<sup>th</sup> April 2025

Income from the last financial year 2024-2025 has been generated by a Precept of £16,100. Other sources of income have been a VAT refund of £3,312.95 and interest earned amounted to £191.83. The Parish Council also received a cleansing grant from BDC relating to litter picking of £1,825.85, £25 compensation from Santander, £925 from the District Councillors locality budget and £119.13 from the SCC Community Self Help Scheme. Total Income received was £22,499.76.

<b>Expenditure for 2024-2025</b>	
<b>General Admin</b>	£8,668.56
<b>S137 Donations</b>	£2,305
<b>Playground</b>	£5,731.20
<b>Village Maintenance</b>	£5,711.20
<b>Subscriptions/Training/Publications</b>	£1,495.20
<b>Institute Hire</b>	£147
<b>Village Lighting / maintenance contract</b>	£2,430
<b>Insurance</b>	£606.72
<b>Rent for the River Garden noticeboard</b>	£25.00
<b>Misc</b>	£4,022.18
<b>Stationery</b>	£38.39
<b>Dog/litter bins and emptying</b>	£1,224.20
<b>Other</b>	£500
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>£32,904.65</b>

On Expenditure the Parish Council used £2,289.60 for playground maintenance / repairs, £3,345.60 for replacement bark in the play area, £1,656 for tree pruning on Millennium Ave, grass cutting £1,855.08, £2,430 was used to repaint some of the Parish Council owned streetlights and £3,523.07 was used to purchase a new speed sign and post.

The Parish Council made its annual donations to the Parochial Church Council, Suffolk Accident Rescue Service, Dedham Vale and Stour Valley Project and Suffolk Preservation Society. Donations were also made to the Village Institute Committee and the Quartet magazine. Total donations were £2,305.

The accounts for 2024-2025 will shortly be audited via an internal audit and relevant documentation will be issued once complete. All documents once issued, will be available to view on the Stratford St Mary Parish Council website and available from the Clerk upon request.

This year we have not been in receipt of any new funds via the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), but there is remaining CIL of £348.05 that will be carried forward to 25-26.

In January's meeting this year, the Parish Council agreed to set the precept for the next financial year (2025/26) at £18,100 and will use money in the Parish Council's reserves to cover any cost increases.

Faye Hall  
Parish Clerk  
Stratford St Mary Parish Council

# Samford Division Annual Report for 2025

## March 2024

**Idling Campaign:** On March 1, 2024, Suffolk County Council launched a campaign urging drivers to switch off their engines when parked, particularly outside schools, to protect children's lungs from unnecessary pollution. This campaign was supported by pupils and staff at Castle Hill Infant and Junior School.

**Bus Services Funding:** Suffolk County Council announced a £3.6 million investment to strengthen and expand the county's bus network. This funding was allocated to support operator- and community-led proposals for new or enhanced services across the county.

**EV Charging Infrastructure:** The council secured £7.3 million to develop electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure across Suffolk. This investment aims to provide solutions for residents without off-street parking, including kerbside charging points, community charging hubs, and car park charging stations.

**Pothole Repairs:** Suffolk Highways began trialing new pothole repair methods using the Roadmender Elastomac solution, which results in sealed, longer-lasting repairs and lowers the carbon footprint of repairs by 80%.

## April 2024

**Road Resurfacing Project:** The council commenced its largest ever resurfacing project, aiming to upgrade 421 roads across Suffolk. This project includes surface dressing and machine resurfacing to prolong the life of road surfaces and improve skid resistance.

**Primary School Admissions:** On National Offer Day, 99.36% of children were offered a place at one of their three preferred primary schools, and 96.52% were offered a place at their first preference school.

**SEND Reform:** Kathryn Boulton was appointed as the new independent chair of the Local Area Partnership's SEND Improvement Board, tasked with overseeing the implementation and review of plans aimed at improving SEND services in Suffolk.

## May 2024

**Six New Projects for Ipswich:** Suffolk County Council announced funding for six new community projects in Ipswich, including a viewing platform on Stoke Bridge, lighting and sound equipment for music gigs, and a theatre project to bring together young people from across the town.

**Suffolk Business Board:** A new Suffolk Business Board was established to represent the local business community, help steer Suffolk's economic strategy, and create a stronger, higher-skilled local economy.

## Samford Division Annual Report for 2025

**New Cabinet Changes:** Matthew Hicks, leader of Suffolk County Council, announced changes to his Cabinet at Suffolk County Council with immediate effect.

**Funding for Digital Tech Innovation:** Suffolk County Council, working with Norfolk County Council and Connected Innovation, secured funding from Barclays Eagle Labs Ecosystem Partnership Programme to boost support for the region's digital technology sector.

**Foster East Initiative:** Eleven local authorities across the East of England joined forces to recruit more foster carers to look after some of the region's most vulnerable children.

### June 2024

**Rogue Trader Prosecution:** A rogue Suffolk trader admitted taking thousands of pounds from customers for work that was never carried out or which was sub-standard.

**Fire Safety Breaches:** An Ipswich property management company and its director were found guilty of breaches of fire safety legislation.

**Cold Caller Warning:** Suffolk Trading Standards reminded residents to stay alert to the risk of being ripped off by cold callers knocking on their doors.

### July 2024

**Suffolk Youth Climate Conference:** On July 3, 2024, 250 young people participated in the Suffolk Youth Climate Conference held at Suffolk One Sixth Form College. The event was organized by the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership and featured guest speakers like Chris Packham, Lord Deben, Kids Against Plastic.

**Local Visitor Economy Partnership Status:** Suffolk and Norfolk were awarded joint Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) status by Visit England. This accreditation supports collaborative working locally and nationally to grow the local visitor economy.

### August 2024

**SEND Services Investment:** Suffolk County Council's Cabinet discussed a further investment of £9.1 million over three years to expand special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services at its meeting on July 24, 2024. The investment would pay for new permanent SEND staff and contracts to secure more educational psychology capacity. This follows an Area SEND inspection by Ofsted and CQC in November 2023, which found widespread failings across the Local Area Partnership.

**Baby Friendly Award:** Suffolk County Council's Children and Young People's Community Health Service received the prestigious Baby Friendly Award from the UK Committee for UNICEF (UNICEF UK) Baby Friendly Initiative. The service achieved Stage 3 accreditation, recognizing its

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high standards of care and support for infant feeding. The award was presented at an award ceremony on July 16.

### September 2024

**Council's actions bring hope to local communities despite pylon project approval:** On September 12, 2024, the Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP, Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, approved National Grid's Bramford to Twinstead pylon project. Despite objecting to the application, Suffolk County Council's influence led to the Secretary of State acknowledging the importance of local authorities' approval of National Grid's detailed construction and environmental management plans. This recognition sends a strong message to National Grid and other project promoters that they cannot just do as they wish.

**Plans unveiled for A12 Major Road Network improvements in East Suffolk:** Suffolk County Council unveiled its proposals for improvements to the A12 in East Suffolk, between the A14 Seven Hills junction and A1152 Woods Lane in Melton. The scheme is designed to upgrade key junctions on the A12, enhance bus journeys, and improve local walking and cycling connections. These improvements will provide greater access to the east coast, easing congestion and network disruption during construction.

**Suffolk County Council launches £500,000 Culture Project Fund:** Suffolk County Council announced the launch of its new £500,000 Culture Project Fund aimed at strengthening and supporting local arts and museum projects across the county. The fund offers three tiers of grants to ensure both grassroots ventures and larger, more established organisations have equal opportunities to access funding. The fund supports projects designed to reach, engage, and inspire people and communities to take part in and enjoy arts and museums.

### October 2024

**Flood Prevention Investment:** Suffolk County Council announced its intention to invest another £1.5 million to carry out important flooding prevention work. This follows extensive work already completed since Storm Babet, including clearing more than 111,000 drains and significant road repairs. The council has written to the Flooding Minister, Emma Hardy MP, demanding the government step up and provide the additional £20 million needed to complete the work.

**Pothole Prevention Programme:** The council launched a pothole prevention programme to target areas of Suffolk's Road network that could worsen when the winter weather hits. Teams with additional resources and the latest technology have started visiting and treating locations susceptible to deterioration. The programme aims to treat areas of Suffolk's roads earlier to

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reduce the number of more substantial defects that may cause safety concerns to road users throughout the winter.

**Royal Opening for the Gull Wing Bridge:** Her Royal Highness, The Princess Royal, officially opened the Gull Wing Bridge in Lowestoft. The new bridge opened publicly to pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles in September and is already bringing huge benefits through reduced congestion and improved mobility around the town.

### November 2024

**Warm Homes Suffolk Loans:** Suffolk County Council is offering interest-free loans to help make residents' homes warmer, safer, and cheaper to run. The £3 million project fully opened to homeowners across Suffolk on November 1, 2024. The loan scheme supports Suffolk's Climate Emergency Plan by increasing the number of properties with energy-efficient and low carbon energy measures installed.

**Department for Education welcomes SEND improvements:** The Department for Education (DfE) met with senior leaders from Suffolk County Council and the NHS to review the impact of wide-ranging improvement plans for special educational needs and disabilities services (SEND). The DfE welcomed the improvements and the evidence of impact but recognized the considerable challenges that remain to reach the required targets.

### December 2024

**Suffolk communities to suffer from lack of energy project coordination:** National Grid's decision for the LionLink interconnector project to make landfall at Walberswick will have serious implications for Suffolk's coastal and inland communities, and environment. The interconnector is a new subsea cable, creating an electricity link with the Netherlands, and connecting to a Dutch offshore windfarm. The county council has raised concerns about the lack of coordination between National Grid's own projects, LionLink and Sea Link.

**Suffolk County Council Cabinet approves £2.7m funding for Benacre flood protection scheme:** A vital scheme to protect the A12 and surrounding homes near Lowestoft from being regularly flooded can now proceed. The council had already pledged £2m to the Benacre flood relief scheme, but the extra £2.7m will ensure it can now go ahead. The scheme will see 82 hectares of grazing land transformed into saltmarsh, along with the construction of clay embankments and two new pumping stations.

### January 2025

Co-ordinators report.

The group has continued to provide cover on the Essex and Suffolk border throughout the year. In 2018 the cover was an average of 36 hours a month, 2019 48 hours, 2020 80 hours, 2021 128 hours and in 2022 the average was 106 hours. In 2024 we saw a decrease in hours, it went down to 90.8125 a month or 1089.75 for the year. This was split between the two bags, one doing 30.29 and the other 90.8125 monthly averages.

The hours are down from last year as we only have 2 active responders operating. One responder left due to a change in personal circumstances and the other one has moved out of the area on a temporary basis, he is still doing training and assessments. He is also hoping to move back into the area at some point. We are recruiting at present and have one person who hopefully will be starting training soon.

The finances remain in a healthy state with just under £4100 in the current account and £533 in the trust account. Fund raising has been good over the last year, predominantly from Charity boxes at The Birchwood Farm Shop, Dedham Vale Garage, Langham Community Shop and the Swan in Stratford St Mary.

The group continues to train monthly in Stratford st Mary. This training is important and it keeps the responders updated on techniques, re-enforces skills and gives us new skills. The 3 responders have recently passed the annual assessments. The trainer we had will be standing down as our trainer in June, we are still waiting to hear about a replacement trainer. I am trying to find out if I can train to become our group trainer.

I have recommended that the Village Emergency Telephone system is not renewed again. This has been cancelled in Langham and I have made the recommendation to the SSM Parish Council. The system has been running for nearly 10 years and has not really been utilized as well as it could have been. We still have the Goodsam system for responders, which will alert them of a cardiac arrest even if they are not on duty as a CFR.

With the defibrillators I look after, if somebody has called 999 and the ambulance service gives them the access code to one of "my" defibrillators, I get an email at the same time, so if I am about but not on call, I normally head to the defibrillator in question, to see what is going on and if I can assist. The group still maintains four defibrillators in Stratford st Mary, Langham, Great Horkesley and Dedham, these are all checked on a monthly basis.

Peter Dawson.

Group Coordinator.

## **Ramblers Report for 2024/5.**

Over the last twelve months we arranged thirty-five rambles, each approximately four miles, in and around Dedham Vale, with a couple as far afield as Felixstowe and Harwich. In addition, we enjoyed a Christmas lunch and ended the year with a mulled wine and mince pie gathering on New Years Day. For the coming year we have programmed rambles every ten to twelve days starting as usual from the Parish Room at 9.45, and for those who wish we usually end with a pub lunch. We are always pleased to see new members and details of our activities can be obtained from me on 01206 322656.

Sincerely,

David Umfreville.

## Stratford St Mary Community Trust

### Annual Report for the Stratford St Mary Annual Parish Meeting

on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2025

The Stratford St Mary Community Trust remains an active charity supporting those in need of financial assistance or additional training for new jobs who live within the village. This could be retraining after redundancy, funding a laptop for university or funding a school trip for those unable to attend.

The Trust raises funds through the ownership and rent of property and land within the village and as such has funds for one off payments for support.

There are 6 trustees who manage the property and the fund in accordance with the Charity Commission regulations. These trustees live or actively work within the village, they are: -

Shaun Baker (Chair)

David Issacs

Gill Robinson

Rachelle Jones

Norman Woodard

Roger Barrell (Secretary and treasurer)

Any of these trustees can be approached for help or for information on those that may need help and the whole process is handled with complete confidentiality.

E mail contact details; - [rhbarrell@gmail.com](mailto:rhbarrell@gmail.com)

## **STRATFORD ST. MARY CHAPEL**

### **ANNUAL REPORT TO STRATFORD PARISH COUNCIL**

We run the following activities primarily for the benefit of the community.

#### **Little Sparks:**

This is a Mums & Tots group which is run throughout the year on a Thursday morning between 9 am- 11 am. It caters for young children and their parents/grandparents. It is patronized by those living in the village and others from outside of Stratford.

#### **Sparks:**

This is a Children's Club catering principally for children between the ages of 7 – 10. Usually between 25- 30 attend. The club takes place during term time from 5 – 6.30 pm on Friday evenings. Most of the children who attend are local to Stratford St. Mary.

#### **Ignition:**

This is a Youth Club which caters for young people aged 11 – 15 and runs during term time on Friday evenings from 7.30- 9.00 pm. Around 25 – 35 usually attend most of whom come from the village.

#### **Coffee Pot:**

This is a Coffee Morning taking place in the Chapel Lounge between 10am – 11.30am each and every Tuesday morning. Refreshments served are free and we have an attendance of between 10 – 15 people most Tuesdays. Most of those attending come from the village.

## **Stratford St Mary Parish Church**

### **Report for the Annual Parish Council Meeting - Monday the 28th of April 2025**

Thank you for this opportunity to provide an update on the activities of St Mary's Parish Church over the past year.

Our parish church is part of a 4 parish Benefice, along with Higham, Holton St Mary and Raydon. As a Benefice we share one part-time priest. Our church is open every day for parishioners and visitors alike and our minister Rev Manette Crossman is always happy to receive enquiries about Weddings, baptisms confirmations and funerals. Our Churchwarden, Sandy Ranson and assistant warden, Christine Cousins may also be contacted about any of the above. Information about our services and forthcoming events and activities can be found on our '4 Mary's' website and on our Facebook page.

2024 was a very busy year in the life of our church particularly so as our 5 yearly 'Quinquennial Inspection' fell due. This inspection, involves a detailed and professional architectural assessment of each aspect of the church building and it revealed a number of major issues to be addressed, some of which were urgent. Our church is a Grade 1 listed building and of significant historical and cultural importance; a church in Stratford St Mary featured in the Domesday Book and we owe much to Benefactors back in Tudor times, for the main construction of the building and the particularly the North and South Aisles, added by 11th & 12<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Work has been underway to repair and restore a south facing window in the Lady Chapel, deal with internal plasterwork and remove the pinnacles from the tower, which had deteriorated to the extent that they were in danger of falling from the building. Such repairs require the skills of heritage craftsmen which are often in short supply. We have been fortunate to call upon the skills and expertise of our Quinquennial architect, to help us identify and commission skilled and excellent contractors to help us with these repairs.

The next project in hand is to reinstate new pinnacles to replace the fractured and damaged originals, which of course involves working at height. To help us with this work, a fund-raising appeal was launched last year and we so very grateful to local and community benefactors and to local village organisations who have provided funding to help us repair restore and maintain our beautiful heritage building for future generations.

We continue to make as much use as we can of the church building as a venue for musical concerts and events - the acoustics are excellent, and our church is regularly included in cultural tours of the area. Last year we held very successful events featuring the Wattisham Military Wives Choir and a summer concert by the Suffolk Phoenix Brass Band. Please watch out for our next concert on June 8<sup>th</sup> again with the Phoenix Brass band – your ticket will include refreshments and a cream tea.

We look forward to seeing you!

On a final note we have been delighted and grateful to have so much support from the village community not just for the fund raising, but for getting involved in the concerts and events and helping to build the community spirit in our Village. – Thank you!

Sandy Ranson - Churchwarden.

## **Stratford St Mary Village Institute Charity**

### **Report to the Annual Parish Meeting April 2025**

#### **Committee and Governance**

This year has seen positive changes within our Committee and Trustee membership. While we said farewell to some longstanding members whose contributions we warmly acknowledge, we have been delighted by the growing enthusiasm and support shown by new volunteers and Trustees joining the Institute. Their skills have already made a real difference, particularly in communications, administrative support, and event organisation.

We continue to encourage additional members to join our happy and enthusiastic team, particularly those keen to contribute to shaping the future of the Institute.

Alongside these changes, we have continued to strengthen our internal policies and governance arrangements. These improvements will support our work as we seek future grants and move towards a sustainable business plan for the long-term maintenance and development of the Charity.

#### **Hall Maintenance and Improvements**

Following the major refurbishment works completed last year, maintaining the hall to a high standard remains a priority. A full inspection of the building and grounds was completed earlier this year, highlighting areas for attention including resurfacing the car park and renewing the bathroom facilities.

We have undertaken a wide range of improvements large and small, including the creation of a more attractive and better-lit hall frontage, working on health and safety best practice, and improving external lighting. We also completed the installation of professional acoustic panels in the main hall early last year, significantly enhancing the usability of the space for events and hirers.

Importantly, we have now formally accepted responsibility for the field and playground. This represents a major new area of stewardship for the Committee, and we are working hard to ensure these facilities are maintained appropriately for community use.

Monitoring systems have also been strengthened, with regular inspections and a new reporting framework helping us to identify and address maintenance issues promptly. Future works under consideration include fencing repairs and the renewal of external signage.

## **Financial Overview**

We are pleased to report that the Institute's finances continue to improve with careful management. Increased bookings, modernised payment options, and tighter financial controls have all contributed to a stronger financial footing.

Hall hire fees have been increased modestly to reflect rising operating costs. We have also initiated work on building a capital reserve for future major maintenance needs. We have introduced a card reader to enable digital payments and have taken steps to improve cash handling procedures. We have also registered for gift aid for the first time which we hope will maximise the impact from donations.

Community fundraising has been a vital support this year, particularly towards the acoustic panel project, where contributions from various groups helped us to achieve the project within a prudent budget.

The future of the 100 Club is under active review. Managing such schemes has become increasingly complex for small charities, and following the resignation of the 100 Club secretary, we are exploring alternative community fundraising initiatives. Further communications will follow once a decision has been reached.

In addition, we continue to manage energy costs carefully; this year we took the step to replace the outdated coin meter systems, which allowed us to charge the true cost of heating to hirers- something we had not done since before the pandemic. Whilst hirers did feel the impact, it was substantially less than it could have been before the improved energy efficiency measure we put in place with the refurb project.

## **Hall Bookings and Usage**

Since the hall refurbishment, we have seen a significant increase in bookings, particularly for weekday evening and weekend use. This growth has been instrumental in helping us to meet rising costs and maintain financial sustainability. Hall users have been highly complimentary about the new look and better facilities.

We are keen to encourage greater use of the hall during weekday afternoons and would welcome enquiries from individuals, clubs, or organisations seeking a flexible, accessible venue.

## **Events and Community Engagement**

Our events programme continues to grow:

- Our **breadmaking workshops** have remained very popular, with further sessions planned and discussions underway to expand into Friday evening events and new styles of cookery.
- Our **Quiz Night**, jointly held with Shelley's Riding School and the Happ Café, was a lively success, raising £960 to be shared between the organisations.
- We are particularly excited for our forthcoming **VE Day Community Event on 5th May 2025**, which will feature a bring-and-share buffet, swing dancing, historical displays, and community stalls.

We are trialling the use of **Eventbrite** for event ticketing, with a view to making it easier for community members to book and attend future activities.

Plans for the coming year include developing **creative evening workshops**, such as painting events, and exploring further opportunities to bring new activities and experiences to the village: expanding our remit beyond the static provision of hall hire into actively supporting community engagement in Stratford.

Meanwhile, we have taken a more active role in promoting Institute activities through the publication of monthly schedule of events in the Quartet as well as on our Facebook page. We are about to embark on a project to **renovate our website**, with the aim of creating a live events calendar and enhancing access to information for the community.

### **Looking Forward**

Our priorities include:

- Continuing essential maintenance works, particularly resurfacing the car park and upgrading bathroom facilities.
- Expanding the range and diversity of hall events to serve all ages and interests.
- Completing our website project to improve communication and marketing reach.
- Further strengthening our financial resilience and planning for long-term sustainability.
- Welcoming new volunteers and community partners to join us in shaping the future of the Institute.

The Stratford St Mary Village Institute remains at the heart of our village community. We are proud of what has been achieved this year and look forward to building on this progress with energy, commitment, and enthusiasm.

**Emily Barrell**

Chairperson, Stratford St Mary Village Institute Charity

April 2025

# Speed watch statistics

From our start in February 2013 until August 2018 we didn't have a clicker so we never kept any statistics on numbers of vehicles etc. However, here's what we do have on a year-by-year basis:

Period	number of sessions	number of vehicles	number speeding	ratio
2022 all year	85	18703	843	4.5%
In 1 session on 7/4/2022 86 vehicles were caught speeding when A12 was closed and vehicles came through the village past the Black Horse				
2023 all year	77	17035	524	3.08%
2024 all year	85	17687	453	2.56%