

Annual Report 2025–26 Presented by the Chair at the Annual Parish Meeting – May 2026

Chair’s Foreword

It has been a busy, productive and sometimes challenging year for Steeple Aston Parish Council. Looking back across the months from April 2025 to April 2026, we should be just a little bit proud of what we have achieved together – as councillors and a community. So onto my report...

Our Council

We have been very well served by our County and District Councillors Gareth Epps and David Rogers, whose meeting attendance, written reports, and action on behalf of the village in wider forums has really bucked a trend. We are very grateful for their consistent engagement and advocacy.

Sadly, Peter Dammermann resigned as a councillor in March 2026 due to ill health and Mat Watson will not be standing again due to wider commitments. We thank both for their time, energy and service to the council. We wish them well.

On a happier note we welcome Andrew Gibson to the fold and look forward to him working with us. That is assuming this, his first meeting, doesn’t put him off. This means we will be seeking to co-opt up to two new councillors and would encourage any resident who is interested to come forward.

Our Finance

This year saw us finally start spending the S106 contributions resulting from the Townend Development. A significant element of this was the major playground refurbishment, however funds also delivered a complete refurbishment of the Sports & Rec kitchen, improvements to Village Hall AV and lighting, not to mention the indulgence of a much needed tall ladder for the Village Hall and blinds for the Sports & Rec.

The precept for 2026/7 was set at £39,743.60 which we are pleased to say represents a modest increase of just 2.7% year on year. We should take time out here to thank Cathy Fleet, our clerk, for her guidance in all matters of finance and administration as well as Helen White for her careful steering of our audit process.

Our Playground & Recreational Facilities

A highlight of the year has undoubtedly been the major refurbishment of the village playground. After a prolonged period of negotiation with the contractor Kompan, the refurbishment was completed in autumn. This included new boundaries in recycled plastic moulded sleepers, resurfacing to improve safety and maintenance. The journey was not without difficulty, not least because our approach to the boundary was a first for the playground contractors.

That's not to mention the everyday maintenance of what is now a well loved and used space - from fixing baby change units and stabilising water pump features to repairing damaged benches. Special praise must go out to school children and their parents that took to the pouring October rain to spread 12 cubic metres of bark.

Our Buildings

Maintaining and improving our community buildings is an ongoing responsibility. This year we made real progress on several fronts underscored by a desire to be more front footed and less reactive. A comprehensive condition survey of both the Village Hall and Sports & Rec was commissioned giving us a clear picture of the works required over the coming 1, 5 and ten years. The primary purpose being to aid budgeting and planning.

In advance of this, the council addressed roof repairs to both buildings, dormer windows and brickwork repairs at the Sports & Rec as well as the external decoration of the Village Hall which had been deferred from the previous year. We were also pleased to appoint an individual to work on maintenance around the Village Hall and playground. David Lamb will be carrying out this work on an ongoing basis.

At our last annual report the Village Hall had not yet secured a replacement chair following Barbara Brewer's departure. We are delighted Vicky Clifton took up the role and thank her for working so well with the council to protect and maintain the hall. Similarly we thank Torquil McLusky and his committee for their continued hard work across the Sports & Rec.

Planning

Planning has been a particularly active area this year, dominated by several large and controversial applications in the wider area. The council submitted objections to the Heyford Park expansion and the Puy du Fou theme park application at Bucknell. We attended a round-table meeting thankfully organised by Cllr Epps in September at which local parishes coordinated their responses to major planning developments.

We find ourselves however at a truly unique moment. So many large scale development proposals happening in tandem, has the potential to fundamentally shift our experience of

everyday life in mid Cherwell. The challenge is that each application is viewed on its own merits rather than the cumulative impact should more than one project go live.

Many parishes will be affected should one or more applications be granted and each will have its individual concerns. The step change in 25/26, was for those parishes to start self funding research required on cumulative impact in order to defend their arguments. To that end, we have part funded two professional assessments. The first, is a Transport Assessment Report, steered by parishioner John Bentley, to review the cumulative impact of traffic across multiple parishes. The second is our agreement to cofund the MCNP's evidence into the employment and housing assumptions held by the Oxfordshire Strategic Rail Freight Interchange proposal near Ardley.

We remain active members of the Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan (MCNP) Forum, which awaits news on its revised Neighbourhood Plan from Cherwell District Council – an important milestone.

All this is not to ignore the monthly reviewing of village planning applications, tree consultations and hopefully acting as an informed and impartial facilitator, as with Grange Park residents recently.

And onto Our Highways, Footpaths & Traffic

Alongside planning, highways and traffic continue to be some of the most active areas of the council's work – and among the issues that matter most to residents. This is no surprise: the same themes emerged as the top priorities at our Village Improvements Workshop in January 2026 (more on which to follow).

Sometimes, however, it is the smallest of victories that count. Ripples of joy were palpable when the speed camera displays were finally updated from 30mph to 20mph after a year and half of Councillor Greg Elphick's pester power. We are also pleased to say working with Oxfordshire Highways, drains and gully cleaning were actioned with a little more preparedness for Winter than usual. Pot holes are a constant source of aggravation but we and the wider community must take time to thank Graham Porcas for his time and expertise as a Fix My Street Superuser, marking and patching where possible.

Engaging Our Community

One of the most encouraging events of the year was the previously mentioned Village Improvements Workshop held on 30th January 2026. This attracted 35 residents and invited those who could not attend to contribute ideas to how they would improve life in our village. Generating over 60 ideas, the top themes were transport and traffic, the environment,

infrastructure, and health services. Councillors will be working through these ideas over the coming months to identify what can realistically be taken forward. It was heartening to see democracy at its best – residents in discussion to shape the future of their village.

Mrs Miggins from Steeple Aston Life (SAL) has attended meetings throughout the year, ensuring the wider community is abreast of council discussions. It was especially exciting this year that Mrs Miggins introduced the youngest member of the public to council life, at just age 12. Having now attended two meetings, perhaps we have a politician in the making.

Our Environment

Many ideas generated at the workshop focused on the environment and in turn have been passed onto the council's Environment & Sustainability Committee. Thanks must go out to Carl Tomlinson for chairing this in recent years. In turn we welcome Chris Neville who now takes the reins with new energy and focus.

The council remains committed to the environmental wellbeing of the village. The Blandford Fly project, a public health concern for many residents, was actively canvassed by Greg Elphick and Mat Watson, but after much work sadly stumbled. We thank all those involved.

It would be remiss to forget the day to day work from Nigel Prickett and Will Pryse's maintenance to the WI's support for the village litter blitz and the Orchard and Allotment Committees' care for our precious communal green space. We thank all those who give their time to this.

Our Emergency Plan

The limitations of our previous village Emergency Plan came to light when a widespread power outage hit the village in January 2025. Over the past year Martin Lipson has led the work reviewing and improving this, resulting in a document including, but not limited to, registering the council as a priority contact with SSE, a community phone tree for cascading actions in case of emergency, a list of vulnerable households and helpful preparation advice for all on the village website.

Our Website & Communications

Work is underway to migrate the parish council website and email addresses to the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) domain, as required by the national standard for parish councils. Greg Elphick has taken ownership of this project which progresses hand in hand with a recently redrafted village IT Policy to comply with audit requirements.

Let's also pause here to thank Jenny Bell and her committee who keep villagers up to date through the website and social channels.

A Word of Thanks

The work of this parish council depends on people who give generously of their time, expertise and huge reserves of energy. I want to express my heartfelt thanks to my fellow councillors Martin Lipson, Greg Elphick and Charlotte Powell. This wouldn't happen without your willingness to roll up your sleeves.

And so we look to the year ahead which will no doubt have its healthy mix of challenges and rewards. We hope to see as many villagers participate as possible and if anyone younger than 12 is interested then the youngest participant crown is there for the taking.