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# RUSKINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

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ANNUAL REPORT 2024/5



Annual Report 2024/25 by Councillor Owen Ditch  
Chairman Ruskington Parish Council

Introduction.

Welcome to the 2024/25 Ruskington Parish Council Annual Report which I hope will provide an interesting account of some of the challenges and achievements during the last 12 months, as well as giving some insight to our ambitions and plans for the future.

As I start this, my third Annual Report since taking up the position of Chairman of the Parish Council, it is with a sense of relief that, apart from one significant flooding event in early January this year, we continue to recover from the devastating impacts of Storms Babet and Henk in October 2023 and January 2024. Understandably, there continues to be great apprehension throughout the village that the increased frequency of flooding events will continue but after recent meetings with specialist authorities, I believe we now have cause for optimism that real progress is being made.

As we are painfully aware, historically, formal investigations into flood events (as contained in Section 19 Reports) can be frustratingly tortuous and prolonged, often delivering 'soft' recommendations rather than authoritative, properly funded remedial directives; however, at time of writing, I am aware that Lincolnshire County Council has commissioned and authorised a specialist Company to visit Ruskington in Spring (13 May 2025), as part of the requirements of the Floods and Water Management Act 2010, the results from which will positively contribute to the Section 19 report so watch out for updates on the RPC website. Perhaps this still falls short of the cast-iron guarantees we desire, but I believe that this is progress!

As with all such emergencies, through experience, we become better equipped to cope and therefore, to mitigate the worst impacts. As such, we have worked very closely with the Lincolnshire Flood Resilience Team to further develop our Emergency Plan which covers every aspect of potential emergencies from initial assessment, to planning, execution and, if necessary, evacuation to temporary shelters. The *Plan* is a Village document which needs volunteers and Marshals to make it work so please contact our Parish Council Clerk if you would like to help or need more information.

Again, this year, Councillors and Team Members have been very busy, not only looking after the daily business, but taking forward environmental initiatives, securing Lottery Funding to refurbish the cemetery Lychgate, building a new bridge in Horseshoe Hallow, and overseeing the completion and 'letting' of the commercial offices at the rear of the Parish Council building to name but few. Also, plans to redevelop the Parkfield Pavilion continue apace which we hope to incorporate into a wider recreation facility with Section 106 funding (see Finance) that will shortly come available as a 'windfall' payment from the Flaxwell Fields building development. Read on for more details.

Before I get into the Annual Report in detail, let's start with a brief history lesson of how we started, who we are and what we do.

Firstly, a textbook definition:

*A parish council is the lowest level of Government in England' acting as direct representative for the community. It's a statutory body, meaning it's established by law and has specific powers and duties. Parish councils are responsible for managing their own budgets and providing services to meet local needs, while also giving the community a voice and representation.*

Where did it all start?

- Some forms of church-run local councils have been around since the sixteenth century, mainly as a safety net for the poor and needy.
- In 1894, an Act of Parliament established PCs as we know them today to look after the more practical needs of their community such as roads, footpaths, green spaces and common recreation areas etc, leaving the churches to look after the spiritual and religious needs of the community.
- There are now about 10,000 local councils throughout the country ranging in size from those serving a handful of parishioners to Northampton which has over 135,000 inhabitants with an operating budget of over £1,000,000 per annum.
- The first Ruskington PC Meeting was held on 20 April 1931 Chaired by Councillor RE Hudson. Currently we have over 6000 residents, 2000+ domestic dwellings – and counting – classifying us as a Large Parish.

Who are we and what do we do?

RPC has 13 established councillors who provide an excellent, value-for-money service to their community for the 2 main reasons:

- We live, and/or work in the village so have a good grasp of the wants, needs and challenges we face and, therefore, are better placed to make informed representation to higher authority; and
- We work for no pay or reward save for the satisfaction of serving our community.

Are Parish Councillors Volunteers?

Although unpaid, Councillors are *not* technically volunteers as we are formally appointed Government councillors so must to abide by Laws, Regulations, Policies, Standing Orders and Codes of Conduct.

What powers do we have?

- As individuals, we have no legal powers but, together we act as a *Corporate Body* which, in a formally convened setting (official meetings guided by the

Parish Clerk) can make democratic decisions on actions and expenditure on your behalf.

Who makes sure we do what we're legally supposed to?

To ensure Councillors operate legally and appropriately, by law we must employ and be guided by 2 highly skilled and formally qualified members of staff:

- A *Proper Officer*, better known as the Parish Clerk, a position that must hold Certification in Local Council Administration (CiLCA); and
- A *Responsible Financial Officer* (RFO) who is also the Deputy Clerk so also holds CiLCA qualifications.

People.

People continue to be our greatest asset and we are particularly fortunate to have, not only highly a skilled and well-motivated Parish Clerk (Kathryn Locke), a talented Financial Officer (Kirsty Sinclair), ably supported by our gifted Administrative Assistant, (Scott Johnson), but we also enjoy excellent support services. In particular, our 'Jack of all Trades' (and master of many) Environmental Caretaker (Andy Doughty) has brought a new dimension to our Environmental ambitions and understanding, and our Caretaker for Buildings and Equipment (Steve Collett) has given us the benefit of his exceptional practical craftsmanship resulting in many benefits and cost saving to the community.

Our Councillors continue to be the unsung heroes giving their time and skills for no tangible reward, and I am delighted to welcome 2 new members to our ranks: Sue Hislop, an experienced Government Support Worker and keen archaeologist; and Bernard Harrison, who only a week in post, has expressed a keen interest in Finance and Recreation.

So that's the 'Who-and-What', now for the detail

RPC areas of responsibility fall into 5 main areas or committees:

1. Finance
2. Estate Management and Planning
3. Environment
4. Recreation
5. Human Resources

## Finance

To run a successful PC, we need cash, the majority of which we get from you<sup>1</sup>, the Parishioners, through a 'Precept' which is a small percentage of your Council Tax.

Deciding how much cash we need and how it should be spent is a detailed and complicated procedure – requiring the input from each of the above 5 committees, under the direction of the Responsible Financial Officer.

Once the outline budget is locally agreed, recommendations are made to Full Council and, if supported, we request this amount from North Kesteven District Council. Once our annual finances are agreed at District level, the RFO provides monthly income and expenditure data for scrutiny and endorsement by Full Council which is published on the RPC website. In addition, our Finance Committee meets 4 times per year to conduct in-depth financial reviews and, if necessary, recommends adjustments to the Financial Plan for consideration by Full Council. Further, no-notice 'spot checks' are carried out by Councillors at irregular periods and formal internal and external Audits area conducted by suitably qualified accountants, accredited by the National Association of Local Councils. Finally, Annual Governance and Accountability Returns are submitted each year.

A detailed account of income and expenditure is included at Enclosure 1 to this report but, in broad terms, the calculations for 2025/26 are included at Diagram 1



<sup>1</sup> Some income is derived from Allotment receipts, hire of sports venues, burial services and office hire, but these are mainly 'breakeven' undertakings

## Estate Management and Planning

Over the past year, the council has undertaken several initiatives to enhance community spaces, secure funding for important projects, and ensure responsible planning in the village. The council continues to closely monitor planning applications to ensure they align with existing policy and planning regulations. This oversight is crucial in maintaining the village's character and sustainable development. In reality, RPC can have little influence on the larger scheme building projects as many are Central Government initiatives and form part of national building targets. We can, and do however, question supporting infrastructure claims, (transport, education, medical dental etc) scrutinise Biodiversity Net Gain and Flood Zone data and comment on building materials and energy efficiency targets. Such projects invariably deliver some financial benefits to our village in the following ways:

- Community Infrastructure Levy - The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a charge which can be levied by local authorities on new development in their area. It is an important tool for local authorities to use to help them support community development in their area. We receive 15% of any CIL contribution collected by NKDC which can be spent on a variety community projects. Last year we received £9149.
- Section 106. Similar to CIL, a Section 106 (S106) Agreement is a legal agreement between developers and local planning authorities (NKDC) that require developers to contribute towards a range of infrastructure and services, such as community facilities, public open space, transport improvements and/or affordable housing. There are discussions in place with NKDC regarding Section 106 money available for RPC. The stipulation on this fund was to create additional recreation grounds/playing fields. As there is limited land to buy in the area adjacent or nearby the development site, ideas are being discussed to enhance existing sites such as Parkfield. There are strict criteria to meet to qualify for the Section 106, but options are being looked into.

Office Leasing. The council has successfully leased two of the rear offices within the council building, generating additional revenue while supporting local businesses and organizations that utilize the space. The photos below show the refurbished office and the communal kitchen







Cemetery Lychgate Refurbishment. We are extremely grateful to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for their kind donation of almost £13,000 which will allow for the full refurbishment of the Cemetery Lychgate. This restoration project aims to preserve the historical significance of the structure while ensuring its longevity for future generations.



In other Estates Management and Planning News

Public Toilets on Church Street. The leasing agreement for public toilets with North Kesteven District Council has been extended for another 25 years providing essential sanitary facilities remain for residents and visitors. Although somewhat basic in function, we have plans to seek funding through the 'Changing Places' scheme if and when central funding becomes available.

Cemetery Expansion and Garden of Remembrance Upgrades. With full burials no longer possible in the cemetery because of capacity and ground conditions, additional cremation plots are planned to extend its use. Furthermore, upgrades are being planned for the paths within the Garden of Remembrance, enhancing accessibility and maintaining the dignity of the space.

## Environment Issues

As covered in the introduction, recent flooding and the threat of future events has occupied the minds of our Environmental Team who have worked diligently in collecting data and looking for ways to help mitigate the worst impacts. A programme of judicious tree planting and Land Management projects have helped us meet our targets and a recently declared full mechanical clearance of drains, pipes culverts and gullies – accompanied by a full-system' CCTV inspection - has been funded and will be completed by this Autumn. Also, an expert team of specialist engineers will map our watercourse areas creating detailed models of flood prevention solutions which aim to provide a longer-term and lasting solution. Most importantly, there is now a general consensus between all specialist parties and the Ruskington Parish Council Environmental Team, that there is a need to slow down or store the flood water down to the West of our village, so that there can be controlled release when circumstances allow.

Horseshoe Hollow continues to be the focus of the Environment Teams; it is green space, approximately 1.94 ha, located quite centrally within the village of Ruskington (Grid Reference TF 07783 51261 – see below) and, as well as providing a place for nature and an enjoyable place to visit, it is a vital component in our overall flood-defence effort.



It is dissected by The Beck which enters on the north-west boundary and flows out of the southern boundary. There is a main footpath which runs from the entrance at Horseshoe Close to the entrance at Manor Street, a footbridge crosses the Beck (pictured below) built by the RPC caretakers





There has been a drive to improve the biodiversity of Horseshoe Hollow for several years, and in recognition of those efforts, Ruskington Parish Council received a *Highly Commended* from Lincolnshire Environmental Awards in 2021. The original management plan was developed by Dr Sheena Cotter, a Ruskington Parish Councillor, who along with the Environment Committee, has been striving to improve the grassland species richness. The Plan has evolved since then and we now have a good basis on which to build for the coming years; visible improvements have definitely been made. Horseshoe Hollow boasts a range of habitats including mature trees, open woodland, scrub, hedgerow, calcareous grassland, seasonal flooded grassland/wetland, and The Beck – a small but healthy limestone stream channel. Our objectives are to build upon this and improve the heterogeneity of this valuable area. We intend to continue to improve Horseshoe Hollow in both ecological and practical ways. In the near future, we intent to seek approval from NKDC to gain Nature Reserve status and further down the line, to achieve Green Flag status.

Looking after the Trees. Ash dieback, *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* was first identified in the UK in 2012. It is now widespread throughout the country and an ongoing, serious threat to all of our Ash trees. In the UK we have an estimated 125 – 150 million Ash trees and it is possible we could lose 80% of them causing a huge ecological and cultural disaster.

Ruskington Parish Council has a duty to closely monitor the Ash trees for which it is responsible, notable the line of mature Ash that occupy the central hedge in Parkfield playing fields. Following advice from The Tree Council, RPC has agreed to adopt an 'Ash Dieback Action Plan', making us the first local authority in Lincolnshire to do so.

The action plan would consist of an initial mapping and cataloguing of our Ash trees then conducting regular inspections to identify any signs of infection. If infection is found then targeted surgery can be undertaken so that the infection can be dealt with promptly, hopefully before transferring infection to any neighbouring trees<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Research and technical information in this report is the work of Mr Andy Doughty, the RCP Environment Caretaker, abridge by Cllr Owen Ditch

### RPC Gratefully Receives Student Donation for Flood Relief Fund

On a related theme, on 24 June 2025, I paid a special visit to St George's Academy at the Ruskington campus and met with enthusiastic student representatives from years 7 to 10 to receive a presentation cheque. Earlier this year, the Academy students took part in the Kindness Campaign, where each year group raised money for the victims of Storm Babet which, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 2023, which had a devastating impact on many Ruskington folk causing severe flooding. Their efforts included sponsored swims, sponsored silence, temporary tattoos, football penalty shootouts, and a Year 9-led London Mini Marathon around the school field (2.62 miles).

The students explained that many of them knew individuals directly affected by the floods so wanted to donate the £428.63 raised in the hope that it would help those who lost possessions in the flood and contribute to future flood prevention efforts. We are incredibly thankful for this generous donation which will go a long way in supporting our community and strengthening our flood prevention initiatives. This act of generosity was a shining example of the positive impact that young people's initiatives can have on the wider community.



Litter and the NKDC Litter Picking Grant. The problems with littering and dog fouling continues. Council recognises that it is a minority of people who discard litter or let their dogs foul the village. However, over the last year, Council Caretakers are reporting and removing increasing amounts of litter, especially cigarette butts, disposable vapes, and dog faeces from the pavements and paths, highways, open spaces, play areas and sports fields. Undertaking such tasks diverts our Team from their other duties and increases the cost to the taxpaying residents

In 2024, Council organised an Anti-Dog Poo Poster competition for the younger members of the community. The Admin Staff approached the village schools, and thirty-four creative and colourful anti dog poo posters were submitted. The entries were of such a high standard that Council agreed to use all the posters, and these can be found, displayed, throughout the village in areas known to have dog fouling issues.



A sample of the Dog Fouling Poster Competition.

Entries were from pupils at Winchelsea Primary School, Chestnut Street CofE Primary Academy and 1<sup>st</sup> Ruskington Beaver colony.

34 entries were received and Council agreed to use all the posters

In the meantime, Council remains grateful to the enthusiastic group of volunteers, including staff members, who routinely help to collect litter throughout the village.

Community Litter Picks. On 15 March 2025, Cllr Chris Bain led the first, very successful, Community Litter Pick on behalf of the Parish Council. 25 residents took part, and six bags of litter were collected. Afterwards the litter-pickers returned to the parish office for light refreshments and a chat with the councillors and staff who took part. It is planned for the Community Litter Picks to become a regular feature on the RPC calendar – please look out for information on Council's social media pages, website and noticeboard.

Acknowledgement. Ruskington Parish Council works closely with NKDC to remove and prevent littering and dog fouling incidents in the village, and gratefully acknowledges the NKDC Annual Litter Picking Grant which goes towards the equipment, additional bins, and people power to keep Ruskington clean, tidy, safe, and litter and dog poo free.



## Recreation

The need to rationalise some RPC project activities, has meant the Recreation Committee has been heavily involved in both Environment and Estates Management and Planning projects, such as the Village Sign competition, (North and South approaches to our Village and are shown below), the Pavilion Project and the Dog Poo Poster campaign.



Sports Pavilion Refurbishment Proposal. Efforts are actively underway to secure funds for the refurbishment of the pavilion on Parkfield, with the goal of introducing café facilities. This development is intended to create a welcoming social space for visitors, encourage community engagement, and support local recreational activities. Some artists impressions of how it might look are included for illustration only.



Because the overall refurbishment plan seeks to create additional carparking areas within the Parkfield footprint<sup>3</sup>, when submitting plans for the proposed pavilion modifications, the Recreation and Environment Committee had to demonstrate that we could meet the Biodiversity Net Gain Requirement for this area outlined in white in the diagram below:



This required detailed evaluation of the entire area (Thank you Cllr Sheena Cotter for leading on this) and the completion of a Small Sites Survey Matrix on completion of which, the Team were able to show the overall project would not only reduce parking congestion in the area but would improve sporting and recreational facilities whilst having a positive environmental impact. A sample of the data required is on the Matrix is included below:

- The total area of land of each habitat and total length of hedging within the planning area
- The number and size of trees within the planning area

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<sup>3</sup> Proposed carpark surface would comprise of interlocking grass reinforcement system to allow drainage, not tarmac or similar.

- The amount of land to be lost by the introduction of proposed extended car parking areas
- Length of hedgerow to be lost
- Habitat type to be lost (low quality grassland)
- Strategic significance of losses (assumed very low)
- Ecological justification
- Areas to be retained and enhanced (offset)
- Condition and target condition for areas to be enhanced

At the time of writing, we still await the results of the NKDC Planning department but we remain optimistic.

Other Recreation Activities. Much of the routine Recreation focus concentrates the daily maintenance of play and recreational equipment, vital activities as all apparatus must be safe to use and carry compliance certification issued by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA). Such is the enormity of this task with play parks in Beckside, Parkfield, Elmtree and Hillside, we employ the services of specially trained caretakers to make regular checks and carryout maintenance. The latest addition to the Ruskington inventory is the Parkfield Playpark facility, complete with 'zip-wire' and picknick seating area. This continues to be well-used and – generally – well looked after apart from the daily challenge of combatting the dog poo and litter accumulations. The playpark at Hillside continues to be the 'poor-relation' of our recreational facilities, not through a lack of effort on our part, but because the ownership of the land was in dispute, meaning any village investment could have been wasted. We now have an undertaking that NKDC have no alternative plans for the site meaning we are now in a position to explore funding opportunities to improve this area.

## Human Resources

The Human Resources (HR) Committee continues to play a vital role in supporting the well-being, development, and fair treatment of Parish Council staff. Over the past year, we have worked proactively to enhance employment conditions, strengthen internal policies, and ensure that Ruskington remains an excellent place to work and serve.

In 2024, we introduced improved pension contributions for Council staff as part of our commitment to offering a fair and competitive employment package. These contributions will be reviewed annually, with the aim of aligning with or exceeding standards set by similar councils nationally.

We also implemented a temporary enhancement to staff sick pay entitlement during 2024. This support was further extended in early 2025, anticipating forthcoming legislative changes and reflecting the Council's commitment to supporting staff health and well-being.

The Committee continues to meet regularly and maintain oversight of recruitment, training, performance, and employee relations. A key area of focus remains the



ongoing review and improvement of Council HR policies, many of which have been updated over the past 12 months to benefit both staff and parishioners.

As always, we are grateful to our dedicated staff team for their professionalism, care, and commitment to the residents of Ruskington. The HR Committee remains committed to promoting a supportive, inclusive, and high-performing working environment that reflects the values and objectives of the Parish Council.

## Conclusion

This has been yet another challenging and rewarding year for the RPC with Environmental and Recreational projects taking centre stage. I remain optimistic that the various specialist authorities are making real progress with regard to finding solution to our flooding problems, and I am confident that, by continuing to work together, we are as well-prepared as we can be. Central Government building programs continue to test the limits of our support networks and we continue to work hard to highlight the issues and minimise the effects. As I said previously, people continue to be our greatest asset so I'd like to close this report by extending my sincere thanks to all who have worked so selflessly and diligently in making our successes possible. Here's to another great year.

## Enclosures:

1. Ruskington Financial report
2. Staying In touch – Methods of Communication

## Enclosure 1

### Ruskington PC Annual Report

dated 20 May 2025

### **Last Year's Expenditure**

Total income: £304,599

Reserves and projects: £73,106 (includes solar panels at pavilion, horseshoe hollow bridge, part of the office refurbishment, toilet and office roof repairs, guttering for office and pavilion)

Sports and Recreation (including Pavilion & Changing Rooms and play areas):  
£12,828

General parish costs (including admin, audit, van costs, training and finance costs):  
£59,728

Environment (including horseshoe hollow, allotments, cemetery and toilets):  
£25,802

Admin staff costs: £108,328

Maintenance Staff Costs: £65,833

Total expenditure: £345,626

### **Grants and Donations**

#### Received in 2024-25

CIL - £9149

LCC Grass Cutting Contribution - £4382

NDKC Litter Picking Grant - £1254

St Georges Academy – Flood Initiative Donation - £429

Planter Sponsorship - £171

Virgin Media – Christmas Lights - £500

Lottery Heritage Funding – Lychgate Renovation - £12,536

Total - £28,421

Other donations received include 60 paving slabs, Christmas lights, 1000 daffodil bulbs, various free trees and hedging (Andy was going to look at how many).

#### Awarded to community groups in 2024-25

Short mat bowls - £250

Grant applications from local clubs are welcomed before the October meeting. Information can be found on Council's website or by contacting the Clerk.

## Enclosure 2

### Staying In Touch

Dated 20 May 2025

#### **How to Stay Informed About Ruskington Parish Council**

There are lots of ways for residents to keep up to date with the work of Ruskington Parish Council, ask questions, and get involved:

##### **Parish Noticeboards**

- To the left of the Parish Office entrance (High Street North)
- Winchelsea Centre car park (High Street North)

##### **Website**

- Homepage: <https://ruskington.parish.lincolnshire.gov.uk>
- Latest news: <https://ruskington.parish.lincolnshire.gov.uk/news>

##### **E-Newsletter**

- Sign up for email updates straight to your inbox:  
<https://mailchi.mp/ruskingtonpc/sign-up>

##### **Social Media**

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/RuskingtonPC>
- Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/ruskington\\_parish\\_council](https://www.instagram.com/ruskington_parish_council)
- Nextdoor: <https://nextdoor.co.uk/pages/ruskington-parish-council>
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/ruskington-parish-council>

##### **Contact Us Directly**

- Email: [clerk@ruskington-pc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@ruskington-pc.gov.uk)
- Phone: 01526 834483

##### **Attend a Meeting**

- Residents are welcome at all Council and committee meetings. Details and agendas are published online and on our noticeboards.