

Rushmere St Andrew Parish Council

Annual Report — May 2025

1. Message from the Chairman

Reflections on the Past Year

It is with great pleasure that I present this Annual Report for 2024–25, reflecting on a year of progress, collaboration, and commitment to our community.

Rushmere St Andrew Parish Council continues to work hard to enhance local services, support residents, and ensure that our parish remains a thriving, sustainable, and welcoming place for all. None of this would be possible without the dedication of our councillors, hardworking staff, and the invaluable support of our Vice Chairman, Cllr James Wright. I extend my thanks to them all. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the many community groups, volunteers, and residents who have contributed their time, energy, and ideas to making Rushmere St Andrew such a special place to live.

The past year has shown what can be achieved when councillors, staff, and residents work together with a shared purpose. We have delivered projects that truly enhance life in our parish. Highlights include:

- Installation of welcoming gateway signs at key Parish entry points
- The organisation and support of the annual Remembrance event
- Delivery of an agility trail to promote outdoor activity and play
- Hosting of Chinwags, supporting social connection for residents aged 60+
- Establishment of bee cafés, in collaboration with the local Women’s Institute, to promote pollinator-friendly planting
- Ongoing development of the Kelvedon Sensory Garden, due for completion in summer 2025
- Consecration of the Lawn Cemetery extension, ensuring capacity for future parish needs

These achievements demonstrate the Council’s commitment to inclusive facilities, environmental sustainability, and preserving the community’s character.

Thank John Westrup & welcome John Squirrell. Thank Chris Griggs.

Looking Ahead

Together, we are building a stronger, more connected community, and we look forward to continuing this journey in the year ahead.

Our priorities for the coming year include:

- Further development and enhancement of green spaces through rewilding and biodiversity projects
- Continued upgrades to play areas and community facilities, including the completion of the Kelvedon Sensory Garden
- Management and improvement of newly transferred land and public rights of way
- Delivering improvements to local infrastructure such as pathways and parish signage
- Strengthening community engagement through inclusive community events
- Exploring options for a Parish Office to enhance accessibility and service delivery

Signed:

Cllr Robert Whiting, Chairman

2. Your Councillors

Parish Councillor Roles

Your Councillors represent all residents and are committed to looking after the parish, ensuring that it remains a pleasant place to live and that council operations are conducted efficiently.

Councillors have a range of responsibilities, including:

- Setting the Parish Council's budget and precept
- Approving local policies
- Making decisions on service provision
- Responding to planning applications
- Supporting community projects

- Maintaining assets and public spaces
- Representing residents' views

Council Membership

Village Ward:

- Cllr S Taylor
- Cllr P Blundell
- Cllr R Whiting

Beech Ward:

- Cllr N Barber
- Cllr P Phillpot

Tower Ward:

- Cllr K Barber
 - Cllr M Brown
 - Cllr K Driver
 - Cllr D Francis
 - Cllr M Newton
 - Cllr R Nunn
 - Cllr M Odam
 - Cllr B Ward
 - Cllr J Westrup
 - Cllr J Wright
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3. What the Council is Here to Do

Our Purpose and Responsibilities

Rushmere St Andrew Parish Council is the first tier of local government, closest to the community it serves.

As guided by statutory powers and duties under legislation such as the Local Government Act 1972, The Council is responsible for:

- Managing allotments, play areas, the cemetery, and open spaces
- Acting as a voice for residents to principal councils and partners
- Responding to planning applications
- Maintaining public amenities and managing public assets such as dog waste and litter bins
- Organising community events for wellbeing and engagement
- Overseeing financial management and transparency
- Leading biodiversity and rewilding schemes

How We Work for the Community

The Council operates through meetings, committees, and working groups, supported by a dedicated staff team. The council work for the community by representing residents, delivering local services, and acting as a voice on wider local issues. Made up of elected or co-opted councillors, they address concerns such as planning, road safety, and public services. They manage and maintain local amenities like play areas, allotments, cemeteries, street furniture, and green spaces, using a portion of council tax (the precept) to fund these services and support local projects. Parish councils engage residents through consultations, meetings, and transparent communication, while working with other authorities and partners to tackle local priorities. They also promote environmental responsibility through initiatives like biodiversity and rewilding, and maintain good governance through proper procedures, policies, and financial controls. Public participation is encouraged.

4. Financial Report

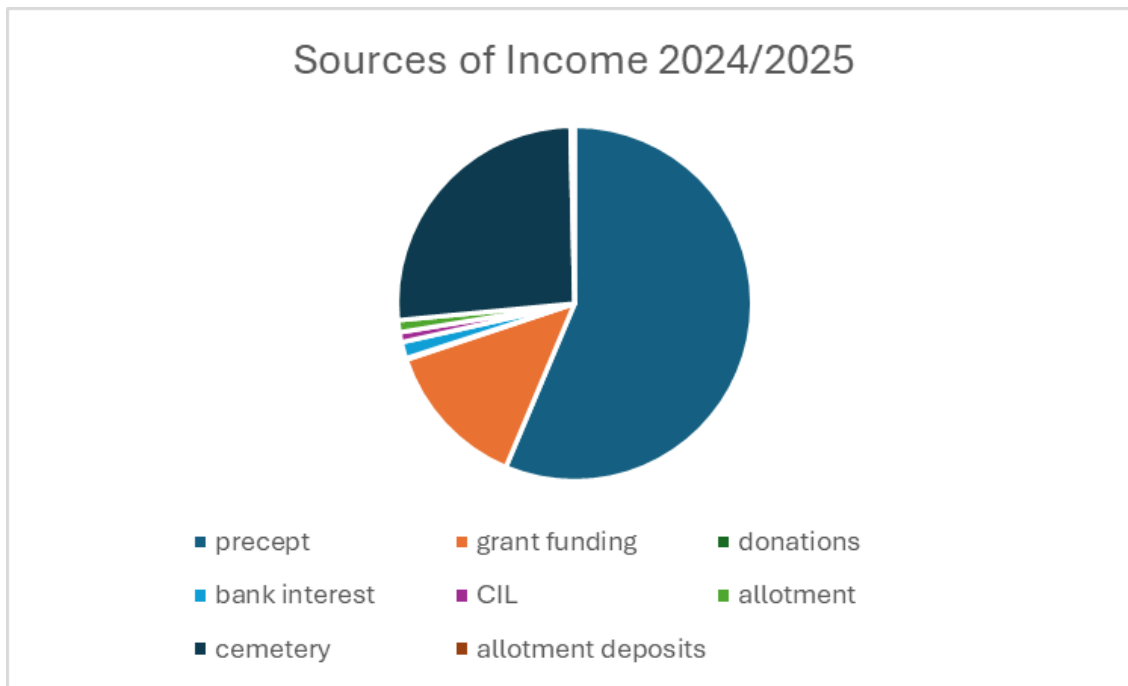
Summary of Income and Expenditure

The table below provides a summary of the Council’s balances, income and expenditure over the last two years and predictions for the current year.

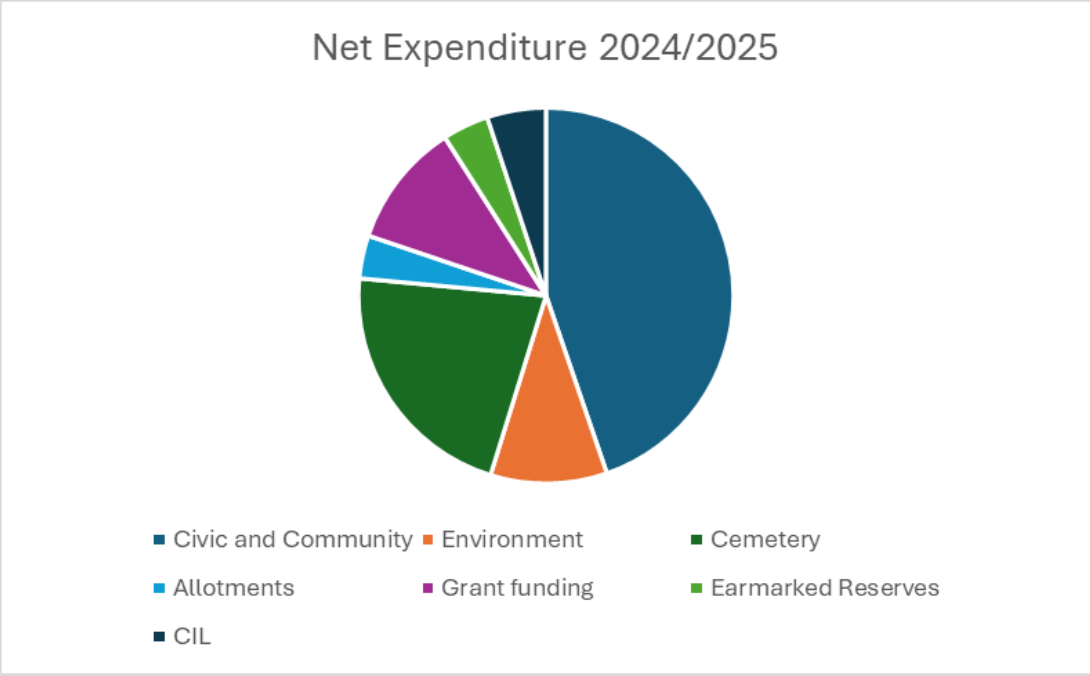
	2023/2024 Actual	2024/25 Actual	2025/26 Budget (est)
Opening Balance at 1 April	£385,219	£346,261	£332,551
(of which Earmarked Reserves)	£275,711	£275,711	£269,276
Total income	£226,591	£224,620	£175,410
Total expenditure	£251,545	£238,624	£175,410
Closing balance at 31 March	£346,261	£332,257	£332,551
(of which Earmarked Reserves)	£275,711	£264,276	£241,776

(Figures rounded to the nearest pound.)

Sources of Income 2024/2025



- **Net Expenditure 2024/2025**



Value for Money and Cost Efficiencies

The Parish Council continues to make efficient use of public resources through:

- Competitive tendering for contracts and major works
- Careful contract management and ongoing cost reviews
- Proactive maintenance to extend the life of assets
- Proactive grant seeking, which resulted in securing approximately £30,000 in external funding to support local projects

Rushmere St Andrew Parish Council demonstrates value for money and cost efficiency through strong financial management, effective budgeting, and practical decision-making. The Council operates under comprehensive Financial Regulations, supported by regular reviews to ensure compliance and good financial governance. The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) manages day-to-day finances, supported by bank reconciliations and internal checks, with councillors reviewing the accounts regularly to maintain transparency and control.

The annual budget is carefully prepared and aligned with community needs. The Made Neighbourhood Plan plays a key role in shaping priorities, helping to ensure that funding is directed towards projects that reflect residents' aspirations. Budget

performance is monitored throughout the year, and any variations are reported to the Council for consideration and action.

The Council follows national procurement guidelines to secure best value for money, obtaining quotes and using competitive processes where appropriate. Preference is given to local suppliers when feasible, helping to reduce costs and support the local economy. Environmental impact and sustainability are also considered when purchasing goods and services.

Cost efficiencies are achieved through in-house maintenance work carried out by the parish handyman, reducing reliance on external contractors. The Council also works in partnership with bodies such as East Suffolk Council and the Greenways Countryside Project to share resources and deliver services collaboratively, helping to reduce costs and improve outcomes.

An internal audit is carried out annually, and the Council submits the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) in accordance with national requirements. Audit findings are reviewed and addressed promptly. Through these practices, the Council ensures that public funds are managed prudently and deliver meaningful benefit to the local community.

The Parish Council maintains General Reserves and Earmarked Reserves. General Reserves are held to ensure we have sufficient funds to cover our operational needs and provide financial stability. Typically, these reserves represent between three and nine months of our usual operational expenses.

Earmarked Reserves, on the other hand, are funds set aside for specific projects not included in our annual budget. These reserves might be designated for particular purposes—such as Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds, which have specific spending timelines—or reserved more generally for anticipated expenses related to certain assets, such play areas.

Both types of reserves help us manage the council’s finances responsibly, ensuring that we can continue to support and enhance our community effectively.

5. Committee Reports

5.1 Planning & Transport Committee

Meeting Schedule

Meets regularly to review planning applications and monitor highways and transport matters.

Aims and Objectives

- To review planning applications
- To protect parish character and resident interests
- To respond to consultations from East Suffolk Council
- To monitor transport issues affecting the community

Key Achievements 2024–25

- Reviewed 80 planning applications
- Submitted comments to:
 - Land East of Humber Doucy Lane (traffic concerns)
 - 155 The Street (overdevelopment, heritage impact)

Priorities for 2025–26

- Continue reviewing applications and monitoring local transport
 - Liaise with Suffolk County Council on footpath safety
 - Advocate for appropriate development and highway improvements
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5.2 Environment & Services Committee

Meeting Schedule

Meets quarterly and as needed to manage parish assets, play areas, the cemetery, and environmental projects.

Aims and Objectives

- Maintain safe and attractive public spaces
- Deliver biodiversity and rewilding improvements
- Ensure cemetery infrastructure is maintained and future-ready
- Oversee play areas and amenity assets

Key Achievements 2024–25

- Replaced play equipment (climbing walls, swings)
- Installed new noticeboards; carried out graffiti removal

- Extended bee cafés and wildflower planting
- Worked with SCC on public rights of way
- Cemetery: consecrated new extension and improved path safety
- Supported local nature reserve management via financial contributions
- Installation of community hut at allotment

Priorities for 2025–26

- Complete Kelvedon Sensory Garden
 - Expand rewilding and planting schemes
 - Assess further play upgrades
 - Improve biodiversity corridors
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5.3 Community Engagement Committee

Meeting Schedule

Meets quarterly to coordinate inclusive events and promote resident involvement.

Aims and Objectives

- Foster community spirit and inclusivity
- Deliver events that promote wellbeing and engagement
- Encourage resident participation in council activity

Key Achievements 2024–25

- Hosted regular monthly Chinwags for residents aged 60+
- Organised the Parish Remembrance Service
- Promoted 30 Days Wild campaign
- Maintained noticeboards and signposting for residents

Priorities for 2025–26

- Continued delivery of inclusive community events
- Promote and support Council-led projects

- Strengthen partnerships with community organisations
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5.4 Allotment Panel Working Group

Meeting Schedule

Meets periodically to manage allotment provision and oversee tenancy matters.

Aims and Objectives

- Ensure fair and effective site management
- Support tenant communication
- Encourage safe, accessible, and well-used sites

Key Achievements 2024–25

- Maintained waiting lists and site inspections
- Supported access and path improvements
- Agreed to transition to advance tenancy payments
- Reviewed site needs with input from tenant representatives

Priorities for 2025–26

- Implement advance payment system
 - Review tenancy agreements to align with best practice
 - Monitor occupancy and maintain site conditions
 - Explore signage improvements
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5.5 Forward Plan Working Group

Meeting Schedule

Meets as required to lead long-term planning for the Parish Council.

Aims and Objectives

- Support development of the Business Plan 2025–2028
- Coordinate cross-committee strategic direction
- Ensure projects are future-proofed and community-focused

Key Achievements 2024–25

- Began development of the Business Plan with emerging priorities:
 - Parish Office feasibility
 - Limes Pond biodiversity proposals
 - Play area upgrades
 - Sensory Garden development
 - Planning for newly acquired public open spaces

Priorities for 2025–26

- Continue Business Plan development
- Identify delivery milestones and resource needs
- Begin long-term planning beyond 2028