

GAWSWORTH PARISH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC PLAN



2023-2027

www.gawsworthpc.org.uk

Gawsworth Parish Council

Strategic Plan 2023-2027

Adopted May 2023

Version 1.0

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Introduction

About Gawsworth Parish Council

Gawsworth Parish Council was established in 1894 and has served the local community as the most local level of government for almost 130 years. Gawsworth sits within the unitary authority of Cheshire East Borough.

The Parish Council has few statutory duties but a wide range of powers, bolstered since 2013 when the council adopted the General Power of Competence. Responsibility for the majority of areas, such as housing, planning, roads and transport belongs to Cheshire East Council.

The Parish Council comprises nine councillors elected by residents every four years, elections took place in May 2023. The parish is split into two wards; Gawsworth Village (village and rural) and Gawsworth Moss which elect five and four councillors respectively. The boundary of the wards, and number of councillors elected to each, was reviewed as part of a borough wide community governance review in 2022. Parish Councillors are unpaid and receive no allowance for their duties.

The Parish Council meets monthly (except in December) on the second Tuesday of the month in the Village Hall. The council appoints working groups to further projects/key ambitions, such as improvements to the park and the delivery of communication improvements. These working groups often involve the wider community too.

The Parish Council elects a Chairman and Vice-Chairman annually and appoints its members to represent the council on a number of bodies. The Parish Council employs a part-time Parish Clerk who undertakes the administration of the Council.

Gawsworth Park is owned and maintained by the Parish Council and in 2013 the council purchased and undertook improvements to Nancy's Wood. The Parish Council also owns two small amenity green areas: the Pleasance and Memorial Green. Whilst the Council is sole trustee to the John Upton Charity, as required by law this is administered independently of the council and operates as an independent charity. The Parish Council also owns the land upon which the Scout Hut and Village Hall stands as well as the car park. The Village Hall is managed by a voluntary management committee on behalf of the Parish Council. The Parish Council has a contract to deliver general maintenance around the parish.

The Parish Council is funded through a precept; collected by Cheshire East Council as part of the Council Tax on residents. The precept set for 2023/24 is £29,190 which sees a Band D household paying £35.35 per year to the Parish Council.

About Gawsworth

Gawsworth is a rural parish in the north of Cheshire East with a population of just over 1,700. It is one of the largest parishes by area in Cheshire East, and the Gawsworth Neighbourhood Plan identified three areas; Gawsworth Moss, Gawsworth Village and Gawsworth Rural.

The parish abuts Macclesfield and through this it is set to receive a large area of housing as part of the Cheshire East Council Local Plan which will increase the population of the parish. Whilst not universally popular this does present opportunities which could benefit the parish.

Listed as *Gouesurde* in the Domesday book of 1066, the historic core of the village is a designated Conservation Area. This part of the village includes the Grade I listed buildings Gawsworth Old Hall, Gawsworth Rectory and the Church of St James and Grade II* listed Gawsworth New Hall. The Conservation Area remains a distinctly separate settlement surrounded by agricultural land. Warren is shown on Victorian tithe maps and rapidly grew in the 20th century now part of the village.

Gawsworth in 2023 boasts a village hall, primary school, two public houses, two churches (Methodist and Anglican) each with their own halls, two small public woodlands, a play park and the Gawsworth Hub, a community shop saved by the community in 2010 with adjoining community café. The majority of these facilities are in Gawsworth Village.

About this plan

Gawsworth Parish Council is a proactive and ambitious council, seeking to deliver the best for the community. This plan aims to guide the work of the council over the ensuing four years and sets out how the council believes it can best serve the residents of Gawsworth.

The plan was developed through an informal workshop of councillors in 2022, from this, key priorities were developed and a series of objectives which could be achieved to deliver them.

This plan is a working document and aims to guide the council in its work over the next four years. It is separate from other plans and will be reviewed regularly to ensure it still represents the wishes of the parish.

This plan is a statement of intent, however the Parish Council may have to make decisions contrary to our stated commitment in events such as budget constraints, new legislation or changes to our policies. In particular, we will monitor any shortfall in services provided by Cheshire East Council. Any changes will be reflected in an updated plan.

Our Vision

In 2027, Gawsworth will be a tidier and better cared for parish than in 2022. The natural environment will have been enhanced as part of a community wide initiative to be a more environmentally aware parish and the built heritage of the parish will have been better understood and conserved by the community.

Gawsworth will be a healthy and resilient community with access to the affordable housing it needs. Active travel networks will have been improved and people will feel safer using roads and footpaths to travel and there will have been a focus on improving accessibility across the parish.

The Neighbourhood Plan will continue to be effective in ensuring appropriate development and there will be a welcoming rural feel across the entire parish. Any new residents from the LPS15 development will feel part of Gawsworth community.

The parish will have a strong civil society with an actively engaged community. There will be evidence strong partnership working across the various organisations operating in the parish.

Our Mission Statement

Supporting a strong and vibrant community.

Our Strategic Aims

These core aims will guide our work over the next four years.

- GPC1 To enhance the natural environment, built heritage and open spaces within the parish.
- GPC2 To deliver a healthy, strong and resilient community
- GPC3 To play an active role in the planning system and protect the rural identity of Gawsworth
- GPC4 To enhance accessibility and active travel across and outside the parish
- GPC5 To improve the standards of maintenance across the parish
- GPC6 To maximise the use of IT and promote skill sharing the community

Delivering this Plan

The Parish Council is committed to delivering its strategic aims by December 2027. Below, we set out more detailed objectives which will contribute to these aims and each year we will agree an action plan setting out the specific actions we will undertake that year.

We will review our priorities and action plans regularly to ensure they continue to meet the needs of the local community. This strategic plan and the annual action plans will be used as a tool for setting the annual budget.

Enhancing the natural environment, built heritage and open spaces within the parish

Complete a review of the Gawsworth Conservation Area

In 2022 we commissioned an independent consultant to undertake a review of the Gawsworth Conservation Area. This was completed and submitted to Cheshire East Council and is now awaiting formal consultation.

We will work with Cheshire East Council to support the consultation and adoption of the new Conservation Area appraisal document, including the implementation of a revised boundary and management plan. We will work with landowners to conserve the character of the area through the implementation of the management plan.

We will press for the Locally Valued Heritage Assets identified in the Gawsworth Neighbourhood Plan to be added to the Cheshire East Council Local List of Heritage Assets.

Develop a Green Gawsworth Strategy

Like many councils and individuals, we consider that caring for the natural environment and leaving it in a better condition for future generations is highly important.

We will develop a community-led strategy for reducing Gawsworth's impact on the environment and enhancing the natural environment. This will include measures to reduce the carbon footprint of Gawsworth, preserve trees and hedgerows whilst planting new ones where appropriate, and introducing measures which help enhance the ecology of the local area. We will look to increase the number of formally protected trees (TPOs) in the parish.

Develop a business case to create a new public open space on the former depot at Maggoty Lane

We have in principle agreement from Cheshire East Council for a 125-year lease for the former council depot on Maggoty Lane.

Our vision is to convert this into a new community space and micro-nature reserve, providing a peaceful place for residents to enjoy and converting redundant land into an actively used space.

Continue to deliver on its park and woodland management plans

We have prepared 10-year management plans for our two open spaces. The Park Management Plan (2020-2030) sets out our commitment to continued improvement of this greatly valued space including upgrading the play equipment, adding additional facilities and making it better serve the community. To date, we have created a community orchard and understood the ecology of the site. We plan to make significant progress in improving the play equipment during this plan period.

The Nancy's Wood Management Plan (2021-2031) sets three key aims and a number of small projects to enhance the woodland. The majority of these actions should be completed in the early part of this plan.

Delivering a healthy, strong and resilient community

Support a healthy community

We will work with the community to enable residents to access community-level interventions which support healthy lives.

Develop stronger links between the parish council and community organisations

We recognise that by working together, the community can achieve more and are keen to use our position to support local community organisations. We are keen to develop stronger links between the various community organisations and the parish council to ensure we are able to support one another.

We will look to ensure we understand what groups operate in the parish and how best to ensure they are connected with the parish council.

Ensure that community groups have the support they need to be successful

Through developing stronger links, we hope to be able to ensure community groups are well supported to ensure their continued success. We would like to see strong independent community organisations working within the parish and will look to tackle any barriers to their success as appropriate.

Support the development of organisations/networks to fill gaps

Whilst supporting existing groups, we will also look to support the creation of new groups or networks that further enhance the civil society of Gawsworth. This could include taking a leading role in helping to found a group, providing advice or helping promote new groups as they take their first steps.

Develop a communications strategy

Key to ensuring we have a strong community is ensuring those living within the community know what is going on.

We will build on our success with the Gawsworth Gazette and Gawsworth Life social media to develop a strategy that maximises the reach of communications across the entire parish with the objective of ensuring local news and opportunities are heard about by all those who wish to stay tuned in to Gawsworth matters.

Develop a Community Resilience Plan

The coronavirus pandemic taught us all how important locally provided support can be. Many towns and villages across the country have developed resilience plans that ensure that, in the event of civil emergencies, the community is readily prepared and able to respond swiftly.

We will develop a Gawsworth Community Resilience Plan to ensure the parish is prepared, whilst hoping it never needs to be activated.

Ensure a strong and skilled Parish Council

Whilst this plan predominantly looks outward at what we do in the community, it is also important to look inward at us as an organisation to ensure we are well positioned to deliver for Gawsworth.

We are committed to providing appropriate training for our councillors and clerk and will continue to seek accreditation under the Local Council Award Scheme to demonstrate we meet best practice for the sector.

We will work to ensure we are well positioned to serve as a voice for Gawsworth with external partners such as Cheshire East Council.

Our ambition is also to see elections to the council contested (more people wanting to be councillors than seats available) as a sign of a healthy local democracy.

Playing an active role in the planning system and protect the rural identity of Gawsworth

Uphold the policies of the Gawsworth Neighbourhood Plan

The Gawsworth Neighbourhood Development Plan was approved by referendum in May 2021. This is a community led planning document that is used by Cheshire East Council to determine planning applications within the parish.

We will review every planning application submitted in Gawsworth, providing comments to Cheshire East Council as to whether it should be approved or refused and, in particular, seeking to ensure that the policies approved by this community are met with every planning decision.

Seek to influence local planning policy where appropriate

The majority of policy which determines how planning applications are decided is set by the Government or Cheshire East Council.

Where we believe it could impact Gawsworth, we will seek to influence the local policies developed by Cheshire East Council. This will include reviewing proposed changes to the Local Plan Strategy and responding to consultations on supplementary planning documents. Central to this objective will be to preserve the rural character of the parish.

We will monitor the implementation of policy and how it affects Gawsworth. Where necessary we will lobby for changes and seek to ensure our interpretation of policy is followed or it is clearly explained why that is incorrect.

Undertake a review of the Gawsworth Neighbourhood Plan

The Neighbourhood Plan covers a 10-year period (tying in with the period of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy) through to 2030.

We will undertake a mid-point review to ensure the policies set by the community are working and assessing whether additional policies are needed to meet the objectives of that plan. This will include reviewing the current local policy framework following any revisions to the Local Plan Strategy.

Working to ensure access for Gawsworth residents to any affordable housing developed in the parish

The strategic development site 'LPS15' (land to the west of the Rising Sun) is a major development which will include a percentage of affordable housing.

We will seek to ensure the development delivers the maximum number of affordable units possible to meet local needs and to ensure that this affordable housing is available for those with a connection to Gawsorth who wish to remain in/return to the parish but are currently unable to afford to do so.

Enhancing accessibility and active travel across and outside the parish

Undertake a survey of the PROW network to identify improvements

Gawsorth has a number of public rights of way (footpaths, bridleways and byways) which provide both recreational and practical routes off road. We want to make this network even better.

We will conduct a survey of the existing network to understand it fully. We will look for how the network could be improved, whether that is by physical improvements to the paths and features or improved connectivity. We will then develop an improvement plan, working with the Cheshire East PROW department and local landowners on its implementation.

Explore the creation of permissive path routes to enhance the PROW network

Following our survey of the network, we will identify desirable routes that link existing PROW and create walking routes that provide greater access for both leisure walking and travel.

This will include working with landowners to establish new paths that are available to use by the public with the general consent of the landowner.

Explore the submission of DMMO applications to register new PROW

We are aware of some routes which are well used but not officially recorded as public rights of way. Where appropriate, we will work with users to develop an application to modify the definitive map (a definitive map modification order application) and register these routes as official PROW.

Undertake an accessibility audit across the parish

We want to ensure those with accessibility needs are not disadvantaged when it comes to accessing community facilities, services and moving around the parish more generally.

We'll therefore audit the accessibility of the parish and work to implement measures that tackle any issues identified, this will include working with Cheshire East Council to ensure the highway is accessible and easy to navigate and partners who deliver community facilities.

Identify and lobby for improvements to promote cycling to/from Macclesfield and Congleton

Many Gawsworth residents commute to Macclesfield and Congleton to access employment, leisure and key services. We want to encourage more people to be able to make this journey by bike.

We will work with neighbouring councils and Cheshire East to identify and then lobby for network improvements that will make cycling safer and more desirable.

Ensure bus shelters and crossing points (etc) are well maintained

To encourage people to travel other than by car requires doing so to be pleasant and easy and we want to remove as many obstacles to sustainable transport as we can.

We will seek to ensure bus shelters are well maintained to provide users with adequate protection from the elements and we will work with Cheshire East Council aiming to ensure pavements and crossing points are safe, accessible and well maintained..

Improving the standards of maintenance across the parish

Create a definitive list of the maintenance that needs to be undertaken across the parish

We are committed to keeping Gawsworth well maintained and tackling as many of those small niggling jobs as efficiently as possible.

We'll develop a schedule of maintenance tasks that need to be undertaken in the parish each year and then work to ensure that responsibilities are clearly understood. Where the standard of public maintenance demanded by Gawsworth is not being met by Cheshire East Council, we will consider addressing this directly as a community.

Investigate employment/contracting of a parish ranger to deliver a parish maintenance plan

It is increasingly common for parishes to take improving maintenance into their own hands as it is recognised that the resource at Cheshire East Council is under significant pressure and lobbying alone will not secure the services that may have been enjoyed historically.

Since 2019, we expanded our Parish Maintenance contract to include more duties across the parish. In tendering our 2023-2026 contract we have further expanded the range of duties we will directly arrange to be tackled. As part of agreeing this contract we will explore whether an employed ranger would provide better value for money.

Review the provision of litterbins

Ensuring the adequate provision of litter bins helps responsible dog walkers, visitors and residents dispose of their waste.

We will undertake a review of where litterbins are situated to identify if additional bins are required and whether existing bins are not being used. Where necessary, we'll then install new bins.

Maximising the use of IT and promote skill sharing the community

Explore ways to take advantage of existing data

Every organisation develops a resource of data which supports its operation. We are conscious that in a small community, it makes no sense for these to be siloed.

Whilst meeting data protection requirements, we will work to ensure information is shared across different organisations so that all groups are well informed about the local community and its needs.

Actively seek local community-based partners when delivering projects

This plan set out a number of projects that we know will be best delivered by working in partnership. This provides opportunities for the parish council to benefit from the skill and knowledge within the community, but also for us to share the skill and knowledge we hold with more people.

When delivering projects, we will appraise how it could be delivered with greater community involvement, whilst at the same time never seeking to abdicate responsibility.

Develop a community skill directory

We know that Gawsworth has some incredibly talented, knowledgeable and skilled residents many of whom are willing to share their skills for the benefit of the parish.

We will develop a directory of such people, seeking to support local businesses and build upon the goodwill of such residents to support community activity and help their fellow neighbours.

