

**PARISH REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2015/16**

The Watton-at-Stone Parish Council comprised of 10 members in the year 2015/16, namely:

Mr. Mike Smith(Chairman)  
Dr. Emma Waltham  
Mr. Denis Filer  
Mr. Ian Knight  
Mrs. Margaret Stanley

Mr. John Meischke(Vice-Chairman)  
Mrs. Christine Dinnin  
Mrs. Catherine Hammon  
Mrs. Helen McCash  
Mr. David Stock

It is my intention that this report should never extend beyond one page of A4, this has been sorely tested this year. I look back over the minutes and am amazed at not so much the width and breadth of our deliberations but the depth of discussion that is undertaken before decisions are made.

The constant to-ing and fro-ing between us and the County Council concerning Station Road, particularly in this past year, has been frustrating to say the least and still no definitive answer. How difficult can it be? We like some aspects of the proposals for both Station Road and the High Street but an overall strategy eludes us. Similarly, proposals for the A602 improvements were very positive and well advertised, but still no 'final plan' although some planning permissions are being sought.

The renovations of the Great Innings Play area by East Herts Council looked good on paper, designed by professionals in the field, what could possibly go wrong? Thankfully the worst excesses of antisocial behaviour seem to have moderated.

And the deliberations and soul searching concerning the Child Safeguarding Policy we had. Our only aim was to ensure that the vulnerable were protected. Eventually we resolved that it was our duty to ensure that hirers of our facilities are made aware of their responsibilities towards the vulnerable by asking them to assert that they are cognisant of the requirements.

On a brighter note we gained almost by default two exceptional additions to our 'Team'. Namely Catherine Hammon as a co-opted Parish Councillor and Michael Freeman as our very committed District Councillor. During the last civic year they have contributed above and beyond what could reasonably be expected. They could not be more different, (apart from the obvious!), Catherine being new to the village with a young family and Mike being a long term resident and old hand.

The Nigel Poulton Community Hall is of great importance to the Parish Council. Whilst it is effectively managed by Trustees and will submit its own report, the parish council is ultimately responsible for its finances and direction. Even with a letting income of some £12,000 it requires a top up subsidy in the region of £6,000 just to operate. We are agreed that as a public asset financed by our share of Council Tax this is entirely appropriate but recent expenditure on the fabric of the building has left our finances in a precarious position. It was always intended that the New Homes Bonus should only be used for the enhancement of local organisations and indeed this year another £10,000 was distributed. It was a disappointment to us that a similar amount had to be put towards these repairs from that fund. The replacement of pavilion windows and roof section will, with new heating boilers, cost in the region of £37,000 in a twelve month period.

The Community Hall is there for the community to use and not to make money. I take this opportunity to thank the Trustees for their efforts in promoting the hall for all age groups and wish them well in their endeavours.

The pressure on our local planning authority to provide more housing has not escaped us. Unless expectations change it is almost inevitable that there will be some building on Green Belt land around the village. Our Green Belt has been judged important in relative terms and it is our intention to retain as much of it as we can. Despite previous attempts to forge a Neighbourhood Plan committee, it was not until a village meeting in November that quite unexpectedly sufficient numbers expressed an interest in forming such a Committee. This offers the Community an opportunity not only to have a say in where development should be but also what it might include and look like. This has come as a relief to the Parish Council that found itself increasingly having to cover all eventualities. This group is currently in a period of consultation and will be talking to stakeholders in the coming weeks.

At times the Parish Council finds itself at odds with other agencies and becomes particularly frustrated when, in spite of its efforts, very little seems to happen. Rest assured it is not and will not be for want of trying, and to this end I thank all Parish Councillors and our Clerk for their efforts in the past year and in advance for their efforts in the year to come.

**Mike Smith (Chairman)**