

## Watton at Stone Parish Council

### Parish Report for the Year 2023/24

The Watton at Stone Parish Council comprised 8 members at its year end on 31 March 2024, namely:

Cllr Nicola White (Chair)	Cllr Richard Lewis (Vice Chair)
Cllr Mark Richardson	Cllr Catherine Hammon
Cllr Annabel Kirk	Cllr Darren Appleby
Cllr B Michael Brooks	Cllr Emma Waltham

As this civic year ends, it with a heavy heart that we mourn the recent death of one of our own. Dr Emma Waltham remained a Councillor and part of our team throughout her illness. Emma began the year as Chair of our Parish Council, and her competence and dedication to the role meant that she passed on stewardship of the Council in November 2023 in excellent financial shape and running smoothly for which I sincerely thank her. Emma worked with passion, perseverance, and unstinting commitment to our beautiful village and as a leading member of the Neighbourhood Planning Steering group worked successfully over eight years through consultation, referendum and finally adoption by the East Herts District Council on 13 December 2023. We are all proud that the village now has a Neighbourhood Plan that will shape our future for the next ten years at least.

It has been a year of considerable change. Long standing councillors have stepped down, Ian Knight, Helen McCash, Christine Dinnin and John Meischke, and I thank them all for their dedication to our village of Watton at Stone over too many years to count. Also stepping down was more recently appointed Clive Bell. Our Parish Clerk, Jane Allsop, retired from office at the end March 2024 after 31 loyal years of service ensuring we meet our obligations to the village in a legally compliant manner. I also thank Jane for her endless support helping us all settle into new roles. True villagers: every one of them has remained supportive, helpful, and guiding, as we welcomed our new Councillors, B Brooks, Richard Lewis, Mark Richardson, and Darren Appleby. Abi Brown started as our new Parish Clerk just before year end, and I wish her future success in her challenging role. And finally, we also have a new team in the Nigel Poulton Community Hall. John Meischke who we all claim knows the building inside out, switched from Councillor to Caretaker in December 2023 and we also welcomed Debi Lee as our new Community Hall Cleaner.

Our Council continues to ensure that we have a village to be proud of. Managing hedges and trees, our sports-field, investigating and supporting all residents with the impact of planning applications, managing the allotments and the environmental oversight of our common land, The Lammas, Watton Green and our Cottage Site. The continued guidance and leadership from former Councillor Mike Smith and Tony Bradford, ensure we spend funds appropriately on these areas and I am very grateful for their support.

Maintenance costs for the cutting of the sports-field Meadow and management of our hedges and trees have risen this year. We also have the unexpected and unwelcome costs associated with vandalism at the Community Hall.

Safety and wellbeing have been talked about a lot this year. We have provided child pads for our defibrillators in the village and our Monthly Reports take in all aspects of paths, roads, dog fouling and litter that we report to the appropriate authorities for action. And we are now

working far more closely with the Woodhall Estate. Woodhall contribute so much to our village that goes unnoticed and the Council is keen to further opportunities for collaboration on environmental and educational aspects of village life.

The opening of the A602 improvements has to be acknowledged. A long period of roadworks and disruption finally finished in September last year. The bus stop in the High Street has been moved to facilitate safety and visibility for both road users and pedestrians and a new SID device on the High Street is making road users aware of their speed entering the village. There is still a lot more to do with parking, traffic calming and traffic flow through our busy streets.

I must also thank our Herts County Council Councillor, Ken Crofton, and our East Herts District Councillor, Joe Thomas for their continued support, both on individual issues and at our Council Meetings.

And finally, I want to thank the Council teams – Budget and Finance for ensuring that we keep our precept as low as possible and reduce impact on our Council Tax; Environment for the wide range of activities they cover looking after our village and open spaces; Planning, for due diligence, and of course, the Trustees of the Nigel Poulton Community Hall with their vision and stewardship for a better well-used facility for our community and ensuring all our sports teams are served to the best of our ability. And as we await the outcome of the Fairview planning application, release of green belt land, and anticipate the 60 new Fairview homes being built in Walkern Road later this year conforming to the design principles in our Neighbourhood plan, I thank the Steering Group and all the volunteers that stay with the vision.

Nicola White, Chair