

Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held in the Community Hall on Tuesday 18th May 2021

Present:	Cllr. Michael Smith (Chairman)	Cllr. John Meischke (Vice-Chairman)
	Cllr. Stephen Block	Cllr. Christine Dinnin
	Cllr. Catherine Hammon	Cllr. Ian Knight
	Cllr. Kay Jancey	Cllr. David Stock
	Cllr. Emma Waltham	District Cllr. Sophie Bell
	Clerk: Jane Allsop	

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies: Cllr. Helen McCash.

2. Public participation

None.

3. Chairman's/ Clerk's report

None.

4. Declaration of interests

None.

5. Minutes of the last meeting

a) Acceptance

- **Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on Tuesday 20th April 2021**
Parish Councillors agreed that the minutes be approved.

b) Review of actions

1. Inspect the Community Hall roof during heavy rain for any leaks

Cllrs. Smith and Meischke said that this item was outstanding.

However, during the meeting heavy rain occurred and it was evident that there was a problem of water overflowing the gutter between the meeting room end of the building to the main entrance doors. A gutter extension has already been fitted to the other end of this section along the Pavilion stretch. Cllr. Meischke said that the gutter extension might need to be extended along the whole of the existing guttering on this side of the building. Cllr. Smith suggested that if the upper downpipe is twisted round, it might alleviate the problem. Cllrs Smith and Meischke to liaise to rectify the problem. **Action: M. Smith/J. Meischke**

2. Purchase felt backing for inside of the notice boards

Cllr. Smith and the Clerk have been investigating ways to install felt backing in two of the Parish Council notice boards. The best option would appear to be inserting a frameless noticeboard. The current felt backing no longer allows Velcro hooks to be used as the surface has gone smooth with UV and heat. The approximate net cost is £70 per board.

Parish Councillors approved the purchase of three frameless notice boards. Two for use in the Parish Council notice boards (one at the Community Hall and the other outside Londis) and the third for use in the notice board by the Tennis Courts. The Clerk to order the noticeboards. **Action: J. Allsop**

- **Willowdene brick wall**

Cllr. Smith confirmed that there has been no response to their letter, hand-posted to 4 Willowdene properties, concerning the brick wall that is in danger of falling on the adjacent footpath. Parish Councillors again expressed their concern about safety to the public and animals should the wall fall.

District Cllr. Sophie Bell said that she would report this as a safety issue to the Environment Department at East Herts Council. **Action: S. Bell**

c) Action points resolved

1. Arrange for the Community Hall accounts be submitted for external audit
2. Amend June and July 2021 meeting dates on the Watton-at-Stone website
3. Reimburse the Clerk for Microsoft 365 software
4. E-mail all allotment holders if the person who dumped material under a blue tarpaulin cannot be found
5. Seek quotations for work around the sportsfield

6. Planning

a) Applications

The following planning application was dealt with via e-mail and letters put through the doors of residents as and when required.

i) **4 Newman Court (3/21/0934/LBC)**

Replacement of windows and external doors. Installation of new rooflights to rear

The Parish Council agreed a no comment response. The Clerk to notify the planning department accordingly. **Action: J. Allsop**

b) Decisions**i) 2 Aylott Court (3/21/0370/HH)**

Proposed conservatory

-EHDC permission granted

ii) 16 High Street (3/21/0610/HH)

Single storey rear extension

-EHDC permission granted

7. Reports**a) Report from District Councillor Sophie Bell**

Cllr. Bell said she did not have much to report.

East Herts Council held their AGM last month and nothing at that meeting related directly to Watton-at-Stone. She said that she had been re-elected to the Scrutiny committee and expected Council business to return to normal in the near future.

Next month East Herts Council will be holding their first person to person meeting since 2020.

Cllr. Bell said that she had submitted a highways fault report re the dreadful state of the road from Watton-at-Stone to Hooks Cross.

Cllr. Smith thanked her for representing the best interests of the village at East Herts Council.

- **Parking at Rectory Lane**

Cllr. Smith said that the grassed area of land in Rectory Lane is being regularly used for parking by residents and now looks a mess. This area desperately needs additional parking. He contacted County Cllr. Crofton who said that the land belongs to EHDC and as the land is not a County asset, they therefore have no rights to manage the land or control the parking.

Cllr. Bell said that she has spoken to EHDC about this land before and they claim they would need HCC to engage with this. She agreed to speak to officers again to try and resolve the matter.

Action: S. Bell

b) Neighbourhood plan and Benefits Committee – progress reports

Cllr. Waltham said they did not have much to report on this month.

Cllr. Hammon wrote to the Woodhall estate asking them to confirm their commitment to providing land for football in Mill Lane or not. They have been given a deadline date of 21st May to make their response.

The NP group will be meeting again next week to discuss what to do, depending on the outcome from the Woodhall estate.

Briefing notes on the following gains for the village have been sent to District Cllr. Bell, County Cllr. Ken Crofton and Parish Councillors.

- **Football pitches and facilities**
This provision is within the gift of the Woodhall Estate and talks are ongoing.
- **Wetland meadow**
This area of land between Stevenage Road and the River Beane is in the gift of Mr. Ryan but there is no indication that this will be forthcoming.
- **Circular walk**
This is largely agreed but to complete the walk requires a bridge over the river and discussions are in progress with the Environment Agency who have concerns over flooding.
- **Out-of-hours school facility**
This would complement provision of care for children allowing working parents more flexibility.
- **Pathway from the Gatekeeper development to Glebe Road**
Install a non- restricted path allowing access from Gatekeeper to the footpath network.
- **Community Hall Car Park extension**
This provision along with improvements to the play area will improve the viability of the Community Hall by providing dedicated parking for users of the hall as part of the hiring fee.

The Parish Council has been informed that East Herts Council is not collecting community infrastructure levy (CIL) and therefore benefits will have to be via S106 provision agreed in consultation with the District Council and developers. It will be advantageous to link S106 directly to the projects above rather than claim against a general pool held by the District Council which could be diverted to other claimants within the district.

c) Footpaths

Cllr. Block provided the following report.

- **High Street footpaths**

Work has re-commenced on the improvements with work at the War Memorial end of the High Street.

Cllr. Stock provided the following report.

- **Hazeldell Footpaths**

Cllr. Stock reported that further to his complaint to HCC, the area of footpath missed by the Contractors during their recent visit has now been micro-surfaced; thus, completing the 'project'.

However, he remains concerned about the growth of weeds through the new surface and has highlighted this again to HCC and asked for an indication of when weed killer is to be applied to the footpaths. A response is awaited.

d) Parish Council meeting dates

This item was left on the agenda in error.

e) Sports and Social Club

Cllr. Meischke said this item remains on the agenda as a reminder and has been delayed due to Covid restrictions. He said he would get into discussion with Cllr. Knight in the near future.

This item to remain on the agenda.

Agenda: 06/2021

f) A602 improvement scheme

Cllr. Meischke asked Linzy Outtrim to send him a A602 report, he also asked her to update her on three items and received the following responses.

- **Village gateway** - 'The village signage design has been sent to the manufacturer, and new sign-plates will be delivered to site for placement around November 2021 when this section is expected to be complete. These will be installed by the contractor and are replacing the existing signage.'
Cllr. Meischke said that although he e-mailed Linzy Outtrim a few times on the subject, she only confirmed that a new village sign was on order, not the agreed gateway.
- **New footpath** - 'A new footway, between the south side of Ware Road to Watton House, will be installed.'
- **Dog bin** - 'The provision of dog bins is managed by East Herts District Council. We are liaising with East Herts to seek their support to provide new bins.'

Cllr. Meischke will continue to pursue Linzy Outtrim for clarification on the village gateway.

Action: J. Meischke

8. Reports

a) Sub-Committees

Budget & Finance

Cllr. Block reported on the following items.

- **Monthly accounts**

Watton-at-Stone Parish Council		
Petty Cash – Receipts		Petty cash - Payments
None		None
Payments		
Wages and salaries	April 2021	1365.83
Microsoft	365 software	59.99
Amazon	100 disposable gloves for Rosemary Brown use	11.80
Frank Cooper & Son	Sportsfield grass cutting - April 2021	372.00
Grassroots	War Memorial maintenance – April 2021	48.00
Stuart McCash	Annual internal audit of Parish Council accounts	260.00
HCC Debtors	Alcohol wipes and heavy-duty sacks for R. Brown re litterpick	17.42
		2135.04
Receipts		
Jean Tomlinson	Allotment rent and deposit	88.80
East Herts Council	Precept - ½-year payment	18,582.50
Nationwide	Interest	16.79
Santander	Interest	0.21
		18,688.30
Watton-at-Stone Community Hall		
Petty Cash – Receipts		Petty Cash -Payments
Floodlighting donations	66.00	None
Archery – Main Hall	105.00	
	171.00	
Payments		
British Gas	Gas - incorrectly invoiced	130.98
Wages	April 2021	275.00
James Turner Ltd	Repair leak from cricket pitch outside tap	487.38
BSWW Parish News	Community Hall advert	100.00
British gas	Electricity	60.98
Mark Blacktin	repair and repainting external windows and doors	770.00
		1824.34

Receipts		
Santander	Bank interest	0.08
		0.08

Parish Councillors approved the payments.

- Internal Audit of the Parish Council accounts for the year ended 31st March 2021**
 Stuart McCash has completed the internal audit of the Parish Council accounts for the year ended 31st March 2021 with a clean bill of health.
- Annual Return of the Parish Council accounts for the year ended 31st March 2021**
 The AGAR form was e-mailed to Parish Councillors on 15th May.

Section 1 – Annual governance statement		
We acknowledge as members of the Watton-at-Stone Parish Council our responsibility for ensuring that there is a sound system of internal control, including the preparation of the accounting statements. We confirm, to the best of our knowledge and belief, with respect to the accounting statements for the year ended 31 st March 2021 that,		
1. We have put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year, and for the preparation of the accounting statements.		Yes
2. We have maintained an adequate system of internal control, including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness.		Yes
3. We took all reasonable steps to assure ourselves that there are no matters of actual or potential non-compliance with laws, regulations and Proper Practice that could have a significant financial effect on the ability of this authority to conduct its business or on its finances.		Yes
4. We have provided proper opportunity during the year for the exercise of electors' rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations.		Yes
5. We carried out an assessment of the risks facing this authority and took appropriate steps to manage those risks, including the introduction of internal controls and/or external insurance cover where required.		Yes
6. We have maintained throughout the year an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems.		Yes
7. We have taken appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit.		Yes
8. We considered whether any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events, or transactions, occurring either during or after the year-end, have a financial impact on the authority and, where appropriate have included them in the accounting statements.		Yes
9. Trust funds including charitable. In our capacity as the sole managing trustee, we discharged our responsibility fund(s) assets, including financial reporting and, if required, independent examination or audit		N/A

Cllr. Block asked the Parish Council to approve the Annual Governance questions as listed below.

Parish Councillors agreed that the Annual governance statement detailed in section one (listed above) of the Annual Return, together with section two, the accounting statement 2020/2021, be approved and signed by the Chairman and the Clerk.

The Clerk will send the completed Annual Return and relevant documentation to PKF Littlejohn (official auditors) by 2nd July 2021.

Action: J. Allsop

- Audit of the Community Hall accounts for the year ended 31st March 2021**
 All Parish Councillors were e-mailed (on 15th May) a copy of the audited Community Hall accounts for the year ended 31st March 2021. Parish Councillors approved the audited Community Hall accounts and agreed that Cllr. Smith sign two copies of the accounts, one of which will be returned to McCash and Hay.

Action: M. Smith/J. Allsop
- BHIB - Annual Insurance**
 The Parish Council entered into a 3-year long-term undertaking with BHIB Insurance Limited on 1st June 2019. Parish Councillors agreed to renew the policy at an annual cost of £1,406.28.

Action: J. Allsop

Community Hall Trustees

Cllr. Meischke reported on the following items.

- Reopening of hall**
 The Community Hall re-opened its doors to covid restricted adult classes from Monday 17th May. The library, child karate classes and archery tuition returned to the hall in the week commencing 12th April.
- Windows repair and repaint**
 Parish Councillors approved Mark Blacktin's quotation of £770, to repair and repaint some of the external windows and doors at the Community Hall, via e-mail. This work has now been completed.

- **Hall outside toilets**

James Turner and Son have fitted new flushing systems to both the external toilets and hopefully this will rectify all the drain blockage problems.

Cllr. Meischke asked Cllr. Knight to relay a message to the Tennis Club about locking the external toilet door. He said that they, more often than not, fail to lock the door on the timed locking system after using the facilities. This means the toilets are left unlocked all night and could potentially be a target for vandalism.

- **Play area repairs**

Mark Blacktin has quoted £490 to repair the Rainbow multi-play and slide as follows.

- Replace 5 no. of 5 inch arched - round timbers to play equipment and secure with coach bolts
- Replace 8 no of 6-inch half round timbers to play equipment steps and secure with coach bolts or other safe alternative. Treat underside prior to installation

Material £90, Labour £400

Parish Councillors agreed to accept Mark Blacktin's quotation.

Cllr. Meischke to notify him accordingly.

Action: J. Meischke

Recreation and Amenities Sub-Committee

Cllr. Knight reported on the following items.

- **Tennis Club**

The Tennis Club is asking the Parish Council to agree to a further priority time on the new Tennis Court. The request is for 1300 to 1530 on a Saturday afternoon for the single (new) court – there is already a priority time on the double (old) court.

The Tennis Club has a lot of pressure from its members for play on a Saturday afternoon.

It has been noted that on many occasions that the people playing on the court on a Saturday afternoon come from outside the village and often are from other local tennis clubs who know the court is available and free of charge.

Current Priority Usage Times:	COURT A - Old Courts	COURT B - New
Monday	1400 to 2130	1730 to 2130
Tuesday	1400 to 2130	
Wednesday	1400 to 2130	1730 to 2130
Thursday	1400 to 2130	1730 to 2130
Friday	1400 to 2130	
Saturday	1300 to 2130	
Sunday	0900 to 1300	

Parish Councillors approved the additional priority usage on Court B of 1300 to 1530 on Saturdays.

- **Notice saying "NO Scooters" on tennis courts**

There have been a few instances recently of scooters being ridden on the courts. When asked to leave the response has been where is the notice saying 'No Scooters'. I think we could combine with a "No Cycling".

After discussion it was agreed that the notice should say 'Tennis only except by prior agreement of the Parish Council'.

The Clerk to arrange for both notices to be made, one copy of for change in court priority times and two copies of the 'Tennis only sign.

Action: J. Allsop

Environment Sub-Committee

Cllr. Dinnin reported on the following items.

- **Allotments**

I visited the allotments on Sunday 16th May and the area is looking very productive and cared for, with the exception of 6 plots which need watching.

To date 25 people have signed and returned their new Allotment Agreement, which leaves 26 outstanding. I re-let one of the allotments yesterday, leaving one more vacant.

Cllr. Jancey said it was disappointing that the Parish Council did not warn the allotment tenants of the changes, prior to sending out the new agreements, or what those changes were going to be.

Cllr. Dinnin said that Allotment tenants have up to 1st October to sign the new agreement.

- **Grass work quotations on the sportsfield**

Quotations for work carried out by David Payne have been obtained from Frank Cooper and Son and Greenwood Tree Care (Adam Welch).

The work is outlined below.

Perimeter of Sports-field around the Tennis Courts, Bike Ramps and Seats and mow between Tennis Courts and hedge.

Perimeter of the Tennis Courts, clear out stone drain remove weeds, leaves and rubbish.

Clear out any leaves and weed from inside of the Tennis Courts.

Three times a year or when necessary or asked.

- Frank Cooper £105 plus VAT per visit
- Greenwood Tree care £240 per visit

Cut the grass where the gang mowers cannot go from the gate, around the Community Hall to School Lane.

Every other week unless not required or when necessary or asked.

- Frank Cooper £30 plus VAT per visit
- Greenwood Tree care £60 per visit

Weed around the play area/safety surface and weeding around the Community Hall footpaths.

Twice a year when necessary or asked.

- Frank Cooper £35 plus VAT per visit
- Greenwood Tree care £40 per visit

Pruning the Community Hall garden, by front entrance doors.

Twice a year in May and November or when necessary or asked.

- Frank Cooper £30 plus VAT per visit
- Greenwood Tree care £50 per visit

Estimated annual cost

- Frank Cooper £745 plus VAT
- Greenwood Tree care £1500

Parish Councillors agreed to accept Frank Cooper & Son's quotation.

The Clerk to notify both contractors accordingly.

Action: J. Allsop

• **Grass on the Lammas**

There is still some water lying on the grass, near the Weeping Willow and Chestnut trees, but the ditches are now dry.

Cllr. Dinnin will ask Nick Fox (Woodhall Estate) to look at fallen branch on cracked Willow tree identified by Cllr. Waltham.

Action: C. Dinnin

b) Routine Reports

i) **Emergency escape lighting tests and manual alarm call tests**

Cllrs. Meischke and Block will carry out this check on Monday 24th May. **Action: J. Meischke/s. Block**

ii) **Gas and electricity meter readings**

Cllr. Meischke gives the Clerk gas and electricity meter readings at the end of each month and she uploads these readings to the providers websites.

iii) **Weekly reports - Fire Inspection and shower tests**

Done.

iv) **Monthly village-report**

Cllr. Smith completed the report on 14th May 2021, with very little to report

- There were no overflowing dog bins, some of the litter bins were full but I saw the bin man on his rounds.
- The sportsfield does need a bit of strimming in some areas, but we are looking at that.
- The tennis court boundaries need some chemical intervention, but I think we should leave the banks at the moment, they are full of buttercups and other pollinating flowers will follow.
- The big tree top end of School Lane has gone, without any intervention from us.
- I notice a salt bin at the entrance to Clappers Lane. We will wait and see if HCC pick it up, it may be a management issue.
- Some of the wooden benches need a lick this year if we can.

Cllr. Waltham reported that one of the seats on the sportsfield had a loose plank, and if you sat on the wrong end of the bench, it lifted up. Also, that there are nettles growing up under the benches.

- v) **Weekly sportsfield-report**
Nothing to report.
- vi) **Weekly defibrillator inspection**
Cllr. Smith confirmed that the defibrillator was in working order when he inspected it.
Cllr. Hammon continues to do regular checks.
- vii) **Website/Facebook**
The Parish Council held their first face to face meeting since February 2020 **Action: J. Allsop**
- viii) **Highway issues**
Willowdene brick wall Refer to item 5 b Review of actions, bullet directly after item 5b2.
- ix) **Dog fouling reports**
Nothing to report.
- x) **Police reports**
All Parish Council have been e-mailed a copy of PCSO Sally Brook's police report dated 15th May.

9. Correspondence received

- **EHDC - Litter picking equipment offer**
The Clerk forwarded the following e-mail from Louise Overington (Shared Waste, EHDC) to all Parish Councillors on 14th May.
'North and East Herts council have supported thousands of volunteers over the years who have wanted to litter pick their local areas. The council held a supply of litter pickers, safety equipment and sacks with pick-ups of the litter collected.
We are now finding that residents wish to do more to look after their local areas, so we will soon be launching an Adopt an Area scheme. This will mean the council can support those people who wish to regularly litter pick a local area. We will be launching this soon so more information will follow.
With this in mind, we will shortly be ordering more sets of litter picking equipment so wanted to give you the opportunity order your own equipment should you wish to make local arrangements with residents in your area. We can offer you 10 kits (consisting of a litter picking, hi-vis, and a collection hoop) for £125.
The council can be contacted to arrange the collection of litter from organised litter picking and we would suggest that anyone borrowing the equipment read our guidance on how to do so safely <https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/bins-waste-recycling/street-cleaning-and-litter-community-litter-picking-form>
If you would like to order 10 kits, please let us know by 21st May or if you have any questions please e-mail us wasteandrecycling@north-herts.gov.uk'
Parish Councillors agreed that to the purchase of 10 kits and the Clerk has placed an order by e-mail.
Cllr. Meischke suggested we get groups together to do a monthly village litterpick and target certain areas. This was agreed.

10. Village organisations

- **Youth Club**
Cllr. Meischke was sorry to report that it is unlikely that the Youth Club will reopen because they have failed to get adult volunteers to come forward to run the Club.
Cllr. Meischke has agreed that the Parish Council will store all the Youth Club equipment in the Community Hall for the time being and keep hold of their funds, which are approximately £2,000, in the hope that the Club will reopen again.
Parish Council agreed with this decision.

11. Items for Parish News

- Cllr. Knight will be including the annual Parish Reports, for both the Parish Council and Community Hall Trustees, in the June edition. **Action: I. Knight**
- Cllr. Smith agreed to write an entry for the Parish News to include the closure of the Youth Club. **Action: S. Smith**

The meeting closed at 2012.

The date for the next Parish Council meeting is Tuesday 22nd June 2021.