

Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held in the Community Hall on Tuesday 22nd June 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	Clerk: Jane Allsop
Public:	Helen McCormick (HCC) & Anthony Diment (Tilbury Douglas)	

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies: Cllr. Helen McCash.

2. Public participation

Cllr. Smith welcomed A602 representatives Helen McCormick (HCC project sponsor) and Anthony Diment (Senior engineer, Tilbury Douglas, the contractor) to the meeting.

Helen McCormick gave a slideshow presentation on the progress of the A602 improvement scheme project and answered questions from Parish Councillors.

Helen McCormick agreed to e-mail a copy of her slideshow to the Clerk, for forwarding to Parish Councillors.

3. Chairman's/ Clerk's report

None.

4. Declaration of interests

None.

5. Minutes of the last meeting

a) Acceptance

- **Minutes of the Annual meeting of the Parish Council held on Tuesday 18th May 2021**
Parish Councillors agreed that the minutes be approved and signed.
- **Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on Tuesday 18th May 2021**
Parish Councillors agreed that the minutes be approved and signed.

b) Review of actions

1. **Resolve overflowing gutter issue at the Community Hall during heavy rain:**
Ongoing. **Action: M. Smith/J. Meischke**
2. **Purchase three frameless notice boards**
The frameless notice boards have been received and need installing in the external notice boards.
Action: J. Allsop

c) Action points resolved

1. Purchase three frameless notice boards
2. Report safety issue of wall at Willowdene adjacent to footpath
3. Write to planning department re 4 Newman Courts
4. Speak to EHDC officers re use of land at Rectory Lane to resolve parking problems
5. Continue to pursue Linzy Outtrim for clarification on the village gateway
6. **E-mail completed Annual Return and relevant documentation to PKF Littlejohn:** outstanding.
Action: J. Allsop
7. Renew annual insurance with BHIB
8. **Accept Mark Blacktin's quotation to repair play area equipment**
Cllr. Meischke said that the work has not been completed yet because they were unable to source the 6-inch half round timbers required for the play equipment steps. 5-inch half rounds will now have to be used instead.
9. Arrange for new Tennis court priority signs to be made
10. E-mail contractors who quoted for work around the sportsfield and Community Hall area
11. **Contact Nick Fox (Woodhall Estate) re fallen branch on cracked Willow tree**
Cllr. Dinnin said she did ring Nick Fox about the fallen branch but has not inspected the site yet to see if the work has been done.
Action: C. Dinnin
12. Include Parish Reports in the June edition of the Parish News
13. Write entry for Parish News to include the closure of the Youth Club

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.

The Parish Council agreed no comment responses to all the applications below.

The Clerk to notify the planning department accordingly.

Action: J. Allsop

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

Replacement of windows and external doors. Installation of new roof lights to rear

This item was reported on at the May 2021 Parish Council meeting and is on the agenda in error.

ii) George & Dragon, 82 High Street (3/21/1495/LBC)

Erection of 5 x externally illuminated wall mount signs; 1 x trough light to existing house, plus 2 trough lights to existing projecting signs; 6 x building light.

iii) Barn 2 Gregorys Farm (3/21/1451/FUL)

Change of use of existing holiday letter accommodation building to single residential dwelling house.

iv) 1 Watton House (3/21/1517/HH)

Demolition of detached garage and side entrance way; Construction of single storey and two storey side extension; loft conversion with roof lights new front porch

The following application was received after the agenda was published.

- 14 Hazeldell (3/21/1556/PNHH)

Single storey rear extension: Depth 4.30 metres, maximum height 3.45 metres. Eaves height 3.00 metres

- 3 Rectory Lane 3/21/1506/HH

First floor side extension single storey rear extension and front porch

b) Decisions

i) 1 Watton House (3/21/0776/HH)

Demolition of detached garage and side entrance way; erection of two storey side extension; loft conversion with roof lights to rear; alterations to fenestration and creation of front entrance way with porch.

-EHDC permission refused

7. Reports

a) Report from District Councillor Sophie Bell

District Cllr. Bell did not provide a report for this meeting.

However, she did provide an update on her action point re the wall at Willowdene.

Refer to item 7 f, Reports -Condition of wall at the entrance to Willowdene.

b) Neighbourhood plan and Benefits Committee – progress reports

Cllr. Waltham provided the following report.

‘The NP Steering Group has received a response from its letter to Woodhall, where the NP group set about clarifying that green belt land will only be released if the scheme results in benefits to the community, i.e., a football pitch and circular war. Woodhall has replied to say that is acceptable but raising some further points. Councillor Hammond is now drafting a letter to respond. EHDC is yet to give the NP Steering Group a response on its question, sent in April, of whether the Plan requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment. We are not able to proceed to Regulation 14 until this question is answered. Despite following up several times, the Group has not received a response. We have asked our District Councillor, Sophie Bell, to intercede, as this is delaying adoption of our Plan.

The guidance to Neighbourhood Plans has changed resulting in the need for us to update our proposed housing policy. Our consultant is revising our draft Plan accordingly.’

Parish Councillors agreed that regulation 14 should not proceed until after the Strategic Environmental Assessment has been carried out.

There is an ongoing problem with the bridge over the River Beane plan because the Environment Agency have objected to it, due to its current classification, unless we build a bridge spanning 60 metres. The Strategic Environmental Assessment may show that the river is wrongly classified, and this should remove the Environment Agency’s objections. This technical package will be done for free but will take quite a few months to come through and severely delay Regulation 14.

Cllr. Waltham estimated that another £10,000 is needed to complete the NP. We already have £3,000 of funding available from the £18,000 we are allowed. The remaining £7,000 will probably be available from locality because we are releasing two pieces of land and the affordable housing budgets should cover the shortfall. Most of the NP expenditure is Jacqueline Veater’s. Cllr. Waltham said that the Parish Council may need her services to implement the things we were expecting to gain from the plan after it has been granted.

If the Environment Agency does not agree to the bridge over the river, the NP would need to have villagers opinion on what they would like instead. The release of Green Belt is tied to village benefits.

Cllrs. Waltham and Hammon said they are sticking with the bridge plan for the moment and do not want to introduce doubt to Fairview because the NP is based on having a circular walk around the village and they do not want to do anything that could potentially stop this from happening.

c) Footpaths

Cllr. Block provided the following report.

- **High Street footpaths**

The improvements to High Street and Great Innings footpaths are now complete. It is now much easier for anyone with additional mobility requirements to move more freely around the Village.

Cllr. Block e-mailed County Councillor Ken Crofton (3rd June) to thank him for his efforts in getting the improvements carried out.

Cllr. Smith said that the hedges behind the George and Dragon pub are in a terrible condition.

It was agreed to e-mail the Woodhall Estate requesting that any overgrown hedges are cut back.

Action: M. Smith/J. Allsop

It was also agreed to ask Dist. Cllr. Bell to get EHDC contractors to cut back their hedge that runs between Station Road and the Hockerill footpath at the top of the pump slope. Also asking her to contact the residents in Hockerill whose hedges about this footpath asking them to cut their hedges back and lower the height to increase the light level.

Action: M. Smith/J. Allsop

d) 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: 07/2021

e) A602 improvement scheme

Refer to item 2 – Public participation.

f) Condition of wall at the entrance to Willowdene

District Cllr. Sophie Bell agreed at the May 2021 meeting to report the condition of the Willowdene wall as a safety issue to the Environment Department at East Herts Council. Following this action, she received the following e-mail on 15th June from Godfrey Mandibaya (Graduate Surveyor at Hertfordshire Building Control).

“Thank you for your e-mail. We attended site on the 26th May 2021 and examined the wall. However, in line with our company guidance on dangerous structures, we are unable to take any further action as during the inspection the wall was not loose or unstable.”

g) Parking issues in Rectory Lane

At the May 2020 meeting Dist. Cllr. Bell agreed to speak to EHDC officers again to try and resolve the matter.

It was agreed to chase Dist. Cllr. Bell for a response.

Action: J. Allsop

Cllr. Smith suggested that obtaining additional parking in Rectory Lane could be added to the list of Neighbourhood Plan gains. Cllr. Hammon agreed to consider adding this to the list.

Action: C. Hammon

8. Reports

a) Sub-Committees

Budget & Finance

Cllr. Block reported on the following items.

- **Monthly accounts**

Watton-at-Stone Parish Council		
Petty Cash		Petty cash - Payments
None		None
Payments		
Wages and salaries	Wages and salaries	1,365.83
Magi Board	3 Frameless Notice boards	237.50
Frank Cooper &	Pitch marking	84.00
BHIB	Annual insurance premium	1,406.28
East Herts District	Empty dog waste bins	477.07
Frank Cooper &	Sportsfield grass cutting on 6, 14, 21, 28th May 2021	297.60
Frank Cooper &	Football pitch line marking on 19/5/21	42.00
Frank Cooper &	grass cutting in and around the sportsfield	162.00
Grassroots	War Memorial maintenance – April 2021	48.00
Emma Waltham	Moonfruit website hosting + plus £300 paid in error - see income below	386.40
Charles Clark	return of allotment deposit	50.00
North Herts DC	Litterpick kits	125.00
Castle Water	Allotment water supply – ½ year supply – April to October	391.52
		5,073.2

Receipts		
Alex Cornish	Allotment rent and deposit	69.40
Kevin Priddis	Allotment rent and deposit	69.40
Nationwide	Interest	17.35
Santander	Interest	0.22
Emma Waltham	Return of overpayment – see expenditure above	300.00
		456.37

Watton-at-Stone Community Hall

Petty Cash – Receipts		Petty Cash -Payments	
Floodlighting donations to 26/4	52.00	None	
Archery – Main Hall	230.00		
Table tennis/Bowls – Main Hall	121.00		
Geoffrey Sullivan – Pav 24/06	28.00		
	431.00		
Payments			
McCash and Hay	Annual audit		163.20
Rosemary Brown	8 hours cleaning @ £10 per hour		120.00
H. D. Cleaners	May daily cleaning of outside toilets and weekly hall cleaning		370.00
British gas	Electricity		70.23
British gas	Gas		4.63
			728.06
Receipts			
Talbott Fitness	Use of toilet and changing room facilities		180.00
Santander	Bank interest		0.09
East Herts Council	Pavilion hire for election		168.60
HMRC	VAT rebate		20.31
Peter Khera	Main Hall		95.00
Ildiko	Main Hall		144.00
Talbott Fitness	Use of toilet and changing room facilities		70.00
Paula Sutton	Main Hall		68.40
Janine Gildersleve	Main Hall		106.88
Thereza Curtis-	Main Hall and Pavilion		144.00
			997.28

Parish Councillors approved the payments.

- **CPRE annual membership**

Parish Councillors agreed to renew the CPRE annual subscription of £36.

Action: J. Allsop

- **Allotment Lease**

The Parish Council have been paying £670 per annum for the annual allotment rent since 2016.

Bidwells have increased this rent to £762.68 per annum from June 2021. This is an increase of 13.8% which is in line with the RPI increase between January 2016 and January 2021. This is the last rent review before the lease expires in 2026 and a new lease will be requested.

Community Hall Trustees

Cllr. Meischke reported on the following items.

- **Report on hall bookings**

Cllr. Meischke said that all regular hirers have returned to the hall.

Requests for casual hiring bookings is beginning to pick up, with two being held this week. One of these bookings has brought in a revenue of £144 for an 8-hour booking of the Main Hall, Pavilion, and kitchen.

- **Minutes of the Trustees meeting held on 26th May 2021**

The Trustees agreed that the minutes be approved and signed by the Chairman of the Trustees.

- **Update to Play Area and Car Park extension report from Trustees**

Cllr. Meischke had e-mailed all Parish Councillors details, including illustrations and quotations for upgrading the play area and the car park extension and asked if they had all read this information.

At their meeting held on 26th May, the Trustees made the following recommendation that the Parish Council accept the following quotations

- Wicksteed Leisure's quotation for work to the play area - £19,700 plus VAT.
- Grassroots quotation for the car park extension and footpath to tennis courts - £30,000 plus VAT.

Wicksteed and Grassroots are the only ones who quoted as requested.

Cllr. Meischke said that the installation of the car park will take the swings further away from Glebe Court. Residents often complain about the noise the children make.

Cllr Meischke said we should be able to get the picnic benches from the same people we bought the other two rainbow benches.

Cllr. Block is looking into what external funding streams might be available.

Cllr. Meischke said that unless new funding could be sourced from via the Neighbourhood Plan, co-funding from Community Hall reserves and our Community Development Fund might be the only option.

Cllr. Meischke briefly explained that the car park would be reserved for hirers of the hall. The existing car park would suffice but signage clearly stating that the car park is solely for the use of hirers is routinely flouted causing frustration and income loss for hirers and of course the Community Hall.

Cllr. Smith reminded Cllrs. that in March 2021 it was agreed that funds be allocated to the car park and other projects from the Community improvement fund (New Homes Bonus) all be it in slightly different proportions now that the quotes are in.

Cllr. Waltham expressed that in her opinion the car park would be visually detrimental to the sports field. She said that at the Neighbourhood plan exhibition in January 2020 the car park extension had not been well received, although at this stage there were no actual plans available.

Cllr. Smith agreed that this was the case but in the final analysis had been given a 68% approval rate.

Cllr. Waltham did not agree that the proposed £24,000 expenditure is justified, saying that any increase in revenue due to adding in more parking spaces, will not be enough to cover this large capital expenditure and the business case for the Hall no longer requiring a subsidy due to the additional parking spaces was not compelling. She also disagreed with encouraging more people to drive to the Hall due to the environmental impact.

Cllrs. Waltham and Hammon said that they would like the village to see the car park and play area plans so they can voice their own opinions on the matter.

In conclusion Cllr. Waltham stated that if the council were minded to adopt the proposal she would not stand in its way.

Cllr. Smith was of the opinion that this decision was within the remit of the Parish Council to decide but in consideration of Cllr. Waltham's views further publicity would be forthcoming.

Cllr. Meischke agreed to put an article together that could be put on both Facebook and the Parish Council website and some signage produced showing the Parish Council's plans to upgrade the play area and car park extension.

It was suggested that a referendum be pursued but was not approved but the possibility of a leaflet drop could be considered if negative comments were received. **Action J Meischke**

It was agreed that Cllr. Smith should proceed with submitting a planning application for change of use on the sportsfield. **Action: M. Smith**

Recreation and Amenities Sub-Committee

Cllr. Knight reported on the following items.

- **Tennis Club notices**

The new notices agreed at the last Parish Council meeting regarding use of courts and changed Tennis Club priority times have been obtained and put up.

Environment Sub-Committee

Cllr. Dinnin reported on the following items.

- **Allotments**

The track into the allotments and the covering to the car park has now been completed and looks very good.

There are two people on the waiting list and nearly all the allotments are in a good state of cultivation.

We do have a problem with three overgrown plots, one has been given back and they now want to know if they are entitled to get their deposit returned. They have done no work other than to cover the plot with G-tex since they took the allotment on last year, and the surrounding area is covered with weeds.

We need as a Parish Council to decide our position on returning deposits with regard to overgrown plots. Also do we expect new tenants to take on a plot as seen or are the Parish Council expected to get them cleared before re-letting.

The Clerk has sent an e-mail to ask all allotment holders to keep their pathways cut.

Cllr. Jancey, who is an allotment holder, said that she had read some articles about allotments in other areas and some of the joy of taking on a new allotment seems to be transforming it from an overgrown wilderness to a cultivated plot. She said that new tenants should take on plots as seen. Cllr. Meischke suggested that if a new person is willing to take on a plot as it is, then the former tenant should have their deposit returned. Cllr. Block felt that deposits should not be returned if it will cost us something to clear the plot.

Parish Councillors agreed that if an allotment is left in a state that makes it difficult for them to find a new tenant willing to take it on, then the deposit will be used to return the plot to an acceptable condition.

One of the other plots that needs attention is a second plot which they have done nothing too. The tenant has done some work to their original plot. The Clerk said that this tenant has not signed a tenancy agreement, although they have paid for both plots.

Cllr. Dinnin to e-mail all three tenants.

Action: C. Dinnin

- **Grass work on the Sportsfield**

Frank Cooper & Son have started their additional work on the sportsfield. However, grass cutting around the Community Hall appears to have only been cut once on 17th May and badly needs doing again. The work schedule states that the grass be cut 'every other week unless not required or when necessary or asked'. The Clerk to contact Frank Cooper & Son Limited accordingly.

Action: J. Allsop

b) Routine Reports

i) Emergency escape lighting tests and manual alarm call tests

Cllr. Meischke carries out the emergency escape lighting and manual alarm call tests on a regular basis. He continues to inspect the hall regularly including running the water every 2-3 days to prevent the risk of legionnaires disease.

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. Waltham completed the report on 20th June 2021.

- **Sportsfield** - overgrown on play area. Bench behind big swings is broken. Cllr. Smith to inspect the seat and organise any temporary repair work as this seat will be replaced soon. **Action: M. Smith**
- **War memorial** - needs a bit of attention hedge needs a trim and a few weeds in stone area. Cllr. Stock to inspect and contact Grassroots if required. **Action: D. Stock**
- **Public footpath** - the gate in Church Field entering on to the footpath by Kimberley and into the allotments is overgrown. Cllr. Dinnin to ask Adam Welch to cut back overgrowth. **Action: C. Dinnin**
Cllr. Dinnin to speak to Tony Bradford for the name of the footpath officer. **Action: C. Dinnin**
- **Litter bin emptying** - The litterbins in the village are not being emptied regularly and are currently all full. It was agreed to contact EHDC to resolve this problem. **Action: J. Allsop**
- **Air Ambulance clothes bin** – needs emptying and there are bags all around its base.

Cllr. Dinnin to give the Clerk the number on the side of the clothes bin so she can report that it is full.

Action: C. Dinnin/J. Allsop

Cllr. Stock said that the Mill Lane site has been broken into again. The Clerk to report this to EHDC.

Action: J. Allsop

v) Weekly sportsfield-report

Nothing to report.

vi) Weekly defibrillator inspection

Cllr. Hammon continues to do weekly regular checks.

vii) Website/Facebook

Plans for upgrading the play area and car park.

Action: J. Meischke

viii) Highway issues

Report condition of road between Watton-at-Stone and Hooks Cross. **Action: Parish Councilors/J. Allsop**

ix) Dog fouling reports

None.

x) Police reports

All Parish Council have been e-mailed a copy of PCSO Sally Brook's police report dated 19th June.

9. Correspondence received

a) E-mail from Jo Bateman re tree adjacent to her property

Jo Bateman e-mailed on 14th June as follows.

'I was wondering if you would be able to advise with regard to the trees in Hockerill they are on the common land behind the pump.

These trees are very large and block the sunlight from our garden and our 2 neighbours.

As you will see from the pictures, they also cover the street lighting and block the public footpaths.

The trees used to be pollarded, but this has not been done for many years.

I did contact the EHDC over a year ago, they did come and look at and informed me that it was a very fine specimen of a tree!! The tree is now another year older and taller the branches are coming into our gardens, and you can only imagine the amount of leaves that need clearing in the autumn.

Any help with getting the trees maintained would be greatly appreciated.

I look forward to hearing from you.'

The Clerk contacted Highways faults about foliage obscuring the streetlight and they have e-mailed stating they have attended to the matter. Cllr. Smith will inspect the work to see if it has been done properly.

Cllr. Smith confirmed that a small amount of foliage has been cut back and left dumped near the base of the tree.

It was agreed to forward Jo Bateman's e-mail to Cllr. Bell.

Action: M. Smith/J. Allsop

b) E-mail from Alan Headland re memorial seat in memory of John Waring

Alan Headland e-mailed on 11th June asking if they could install a memorial seat, near the Nigel Poulton seat at the Community Hall, in memory of John Waring, (who passed away in February 2021).

It was agreed that there was no objection to this suggestion, but it would be better if the new seat could replace one of the seats that need replacing in the village.

Cllr. Smith agreed to contact Alan Headland to discuss a mutually beneficial site for the seat.

Action: M. Smith

• E-mail from Sarah King re Lack of Speed signage

The following e-mail was received on 17th June, after the agenda had been published.

"I am extremely concerned about the speed of traffic passing through our village.

Please, please, please can this be raised on the agenda at the next Parish Council Meeting.

When driving through the villages of Stapleford and Waterford, there is clear evidence of electronic speed signage. I believe there may be one of these devices installed within the Walkern Road. However, the rest of Watton seems sadly lacking in this respect.

I regularly see vehicles travelling to and from Stevenage at ridiculously fast speeds. My worry is that one of these days a child, or elderly person, or some other person, may be seriously injured in an accident.

When Chris and I first moved into the village 4 ½ years ago, there was a group in existence that carried out speed checks using a radar gun. But this appears to have been disbanded. It would seem a good thing to bring to bring back.

Thank you in for passing on my message."

It was agreed to forward Sarah King's e-mail to Dist. Cllr. Bell.

Cllr. Bell to be asked to arrange for the speed sign in Walkern Road to be moved to its original location near the former Waggon and Horses pub. Also asking her to investigate getting a new speed sign for the southern end of the village.

Action: M. Smith/J. Allsop

10. Village organisations

• Youth club

Cllr. Meischke confirmed that the Youth Club is closing because of lack of adult volunteers to run the Club.

All the Youth Club equipment will be stored in the Community Hall for the time being. The Youth Club funds of approximately £2,000 will be transferred to the Parish Council for them to hold in reserves in the hope that the Club will reopen again. If they do not open again within a few years, then the funds could be put towards another youth venture such as equipment for the Scout Group.

11. Items for Parish News

No items were identified for inclusion in the September issue of the Parish News. There is no issue distributed in August.

The meeting closed at 2223.

The date for the next Parish Council meeting is Tuesday 27th July 2021.