

Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held in the Community Hall on Tuesday 18 April 2023

Present:	Cllr. Emma Waltham (Chairperson)	Cllr. John Meischke (Vice-Chair)
	Cllr. Stephen Block	Cllr. Christine Dinnin
	Cllr. Catherine Hammon	Cllr. Ian Knight
	Cllr. Annabel Kirk	Cllr. Helen McCash
	Cllr. Nicola White	Clerk: Jane Allsop
	Mark Jackson (until 1930) Jane Dodson, Michael Brooks	

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies: None.

• Fairview New Homes

Cllr. Waltham introduced Mark Jackson (Director of Planning at Fairview New Homes) to Parish Councillors.

Mark Jackson said he is trying to work with the Environment Agency re the principal of a foot bridge over the river Beane, so it can link up with the High Street. It is slow progress, but he hoped they would soon be at the stage when the basis of an agreement can be made.

The Environment Agency when originally approached had stipulated that a 60-metre bridge would be required. This would have been a visual eyesore and Fairview New Homes have been striving to get permission to install something more appropriate that will fit in with the village.

They will be putting designs together ahead of planning permission and will ensure that the Parish Council see these plans prior to submission. However, they will not do this before the NP has been ratified.

One thing that will slow things up is if EHDC insist on them completing a master plan policy. This is required for all sites larger than 50 dwellings. However, the Watton-at-Stone Neighbourhood plan covers all aspects of a masterplan but would need EHDC's permission to use it.

Archaeologist have completed their geophysical survey of the Walkern Road site. The next stage is that HCC archaeologist will need to do some trial trenches. It is thought that there may be some burial mounds on the site but much of the archaeology is likely to have been lost due to many years of ploughing this field.

Fairview New Homes have offered to help with the footpath link up at the school, to give a permanent access from the Gatekeeper estate to footpath 17 at the end of Glebe Close.

Mark Jackson left the meeting.

2. Public participation

Cllr. Waltham welcomed Michael Brooks to the meeting. He will become a member of the Parish Council in May, due to the uncontested Parish Council elections.

3. Chair's/Clerk's report

One additional item.

- Planning application – 44 High Street Refer to item 6 a, Planning applications.

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4. Declaration of interests

Cllrs. McCash declared a pecuniary interest in the following items.

- 5 b 6, Review of actions - Submit the Parish Council accounts for the year ended 31 March 2022 for annual internal auditing
- 5 b 6, Review of actions - Submit the Community Hall accounts for the year ended 31 March 2022 for annual auditing
- 8 a, Budget, and Finance Sub-Committee – Annual Audits.

5. Minutes of the last meeting.

a) Acceptance

- **Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on Tuesday 14 March 2023**
Parish Councillors agreed that the minutes be approved and signed.

b) Review of actions

1. **Remove litterbin post on the sportsfield when the weather improves and inspect bin by teen shelter**
Outstanding due to the wet ground conditions. **Action: J. Meischke/M. Smith**
2. **Inspect notice board & adjacent seat at Great Innings junction re making a protective cover**
Cllr. Meischke said he had inspected the area and it would be possible to put both the notice board and bench under one protective cover, possibly as a King's coronation project.
This item to be deferred to the June 2023 agenda. **Agenda: 06/2023**
3. **Fit parts supplied by Wicksteed Leisure**
Outstanding due to the wet ground conditions. **Action: J. Meischke/M. Smith**
4. **Relocate junior football goal**
Outstanding due to the wet ground conditions. **Action: J. Meischke/M. Smith**
Cllr. Knight said that the goal post needs to be relocated as soon as possible as it is causing problems with tennis league matches.
5. **Chase North Herts Council for litterbin map**
The Clerk said she had chased North Herts Council by e-mail, but they have failed to reply.
The Clerk to chase again. **Action: J. Allsop**
6. **Submit the Parish Council accounts for the year ended 31 March 2022 for annual internal auditing**
Refer to item 8 a, Budget and Finance Sub-Committee – Audits.
7. **Submit the Community Hall accounts for the year ended 31 March 2022 for annual auditing**
Refer to item 8 a, Budget and Finance Sub-Committee – Audits.
8. **Ask Mark Blacktin to quote for preparing and painting the wooden benches**
Refer to item 8 a, Environment Sub-Committee - Wooden benches – refurbishment.
9. **Inspect damage to horses' field fence**
Cllr. Meischke said that Michael Smith contacted Bidwells, who confirmed that the Diocesan tenant is responsible for repairing the fence between the horses' field and the sportsfield. The tenant has been made aware of the situation, but to date have taken no action to repair it.
10. **Write to the owner of the holly hedge at the top of School Lane to ask them to cut it back**
Refer to item 10 b, Correspondence received - Letter and photos from Stephen Skelhorn re Holly hedge on footpath 17 and condition of grass verges on Rectory Lane
11. **Loosen Holm Oak stake tie**
Cllr. Dinnin said that Michael Smith has removed the Holm Oak stake tie.

c) Action points resolved

1. Publish the new bus service when start date and bus times are known
2. Write to planning department re 5 Lammas Road
3. Update Cllr. White about decision that the High Street Work in Group meet again
4. Update Financial regulations document and upload to website
5. Update Risk Assessment & Financial management document and upload to website
6. E-mail all Parish Councillors the updated asset register
7. E-mail all Parish Councillors the revised Long-term capital expenditures
8. Accept NCD Ground Maintenance Services quotation for grass cutting and maintenance work
9. Inspect branch overhanging the carriageway from the Church Graveyard
10. Ensure that branch overhanging footpath from Old School Orchard property has been removed
11. E-mail Parish Councillors a copy of the March monthly village report
12. Photograph fly tipped bedhead at the top of school Lane and e-mail to the Clerk to submit to EHDC
13. Put up EHDC notices advertising upcoming District and Parish Council elections on 22 March
14. Submit article for inclusion in the April issue of the Parish News

6. Planning**a) Applications**

Cllr. McCash reported on the following planning application

- i. **30 Moorymead Close (3/23/0572/HH)**
Conversion of integral garage and insertion of window to the front and patio doors to the rear
After discussion, Parish Councillors agreed a no comment response. **Action: J. Allsop**
- ii. **14 High Street (3/23/0616/HH)**
Conversion of loft insertion of dormer with Juliet balcony to rear elevation. Insertion of 2 rooflights to front
After discussion, Parish Councillors agreed that this latest application is an over development of the site
Action: J. Allsop

The following planning application was received after the agenda was published.

- **44 High Street (3/23/0750/HH)**
Replacement of shed with garden room
After discussion, Parish Councillors agreed a no comment response. **Action: J. Allsop**

b) Decisions

- i) **62 Hazeldell (3/23/0093/HH)**
Proposed single storey front extension, replacement roof for existing single storey element and alterations to fenestration
- EHDC permission granted

7. Specific items

a) Neighbourhood plan

After discussion, Parish Councillors agreed that Cllr. Waltham speak Jacqueline Veater about the master plan issue. If she agrees that Fairview New Homes should not need to submit a masterplan but use the Watton-at-Stone Neighbourhood plan instead, Cllr. Waltham to draft a letter to Laura Guy (Principal Planning Officer at EHDC) and e-mail it to Parish Councillors for their approval. **Action: E. Waltham**

Cllr. Waltham said that Fairview New Homes have been very accommodating, and she was concerned that should they have to wait too long to submit their planning application for the Walkern Road site, they may sell the site as it is not financially viable for them. A new owner might not be as accommodating to the Parish Council when executing the conditions of the NP and the village might not acquire any benefits (i.e., Footbridge over the River Beane).

Cllr. Waltham said that she is meeting with Thomas Abel Smith on 2 May and hopefully can progress the plans for 3G pitches.

Jacqueline Veater made the 3G site a local green site in the NP. The group will need to work through how to change this if the 3G courts are to progress and another body, not the Parish Council, must be responsible for submitting a planning application.

Cllr. Waltham said she would need to set up another meeting of the NP group as they have not met for a while and a lot is now happening.

b) High Street traffic issues

Cllr. White said that the High Street working group will meet on Friday 28 April, in the Community Hall. They will discuss engaging with local businesses and discuss proposals for improving the High Street flow of traffic and parking issues.

c) Bus service update

Cllr. Waltham was pleased to report that the extra bus service to Ware has now started. Her son used the service both yesterday and today and was impressed by the journey times, which was around 15 minutes. However, it is early days for this new service.

She said her son was only charged £2 for a return journey. Cllr. Block said that adult single fares are all currently £2, but this reduced fare will finish at the end of June.

Jane Dodson asked she could advertise the new service in Datchworth, as they currently have no bus service. Parish Councillors agreed she could share the Parish Council's Facebook post on the Datchworth page.

d) Meeting with Scout Group leader- Richard Wing

Cllr. Meischke said that he and Cllr. Dinnin met with Richard Wing. The meeting had been arranged to discuss the possibility of the Scout Groups using the Community Hall rather than upgrading their own facilities. However, due to the current evening bookings at the hall, this would not be possible.

They have several different options open to them, including keeping the old Scout Hut for storage, as it will be an expensive building to demolish, as it contains asbestos. One idea is to build a scout hut that could be built with funds already promised, plus some additional funding. The other option is to wait until sufficient funds are available to complete the original proposals of a multi roomed facility with changing rooms etc.

Cllr. Dinnin said that she was sure the overall costs could be kept down with some of the labour being provided by local contractors like builders, plumbers, electricians and landscapers.

Cllrs. Meischke and Dinnin confirmed to Richard Wing that the Parish Council's funding of £25,000 towards a new Scout hut still stands.

8. Reports

a) Sub-Committees

Budget & Finance

Cllr. Block reported on the following item.

- **Monthly accounts**

Watton-at-Stone Parish Council			
Petty Cash –		Petty cash – Payments	
None	0.00	BT phone calls to 28.03.23	23.73
	0.00		23.73
Payments			
Govresources Ltd	Neighbourhood Plan - consultation work		306.00
Wages and salaries	March 2023		1,558.30
J. Allsop	BT phone charges February 2023		23.48
HMRC	Tax & NI -January - March 2023		279.81
East Herts Council	Planning application-Woodhall Land (paid from Groundwork grant for High St)		662.40
Castle water	Water charges - charges estimated due to no meter		177.51
E A S Transport	Youth football pitches (paid from Groundwork grant for High Street)		3,000.00
Agripower	Survey of A602 site (paid from grant for Youth Football)		4,356.000
Govresources Ltd	Consultation work (paid from Groundwork grant for High Street)		1,260.00
Marine Goudoffre	Design and illustration work (paid from Groundwork grant for High Street)		1,500.00
Groundwork Trust	Return of grant (High Street)		2,058.00
Groundwork Trust	Return of grant (Neighbourhood Plan)		1,530.00
Adam Welch	2nd leaf clearance work		150.00
GoogleCloud	Google workspace - direct debit - April 2023		9.20
			16,870.70
Receipts			
Nationwide	Interest		101.85
HMRC	VAT rebate 09.2022 to 02.2023		1,585.72
Santander (deposit	Interest on deposit account on 01/04.2023		15.88
			1,703.45
Watton-at-Stone Community Hall			
Petty Cash – Receipts		Petty Cash -Payments	
Tony Silverstri – Pavilion	45.00	HCC cleaning materials	53.29
Archery – Main Hall	80.00		53.29
Table tennis -Main Hall	128.00		
Floodlighting 14.03.23 to 29.03.23	49.00		
	302.00		
Payments			
British Gas	Gas		295.40
Wages	March 2023		325.50
BSWW Parish News	CH annual advert fee		100.00
British gas	Electricity		245.75
HMRC	VAT rebate - February 2023		49.13
East Herts Council	Rates - payment 1 of 10		53.23
			1069.01
Receipts			
Patricia Parson	Pavilion - 1 April		58.50
Janine Gildersleve	Main Hall hire - February 2023		161.50
Fabiana Mezzaroba	Yoga classes 20 & 27 March 2023		25.00
Suzie Pilgrim (Reed)	Main Hall hire - 25.03.2023		77.00
Ben Talbott	February and March		176.00
Mike Chapman	2nd 50% payment for hire - 30 Mar Pav		15.00
Janine Gildersleve	Main Hall hire - March 2023		187.63
			700.63

Parish Councillors approved the payments.

- **12-month accounts for the Parish Council and Community Hall for year ended 31 March 2023**

These were e-mailed to Parish Councillors on 15 April 2023.

Cllr. Block highlighted the main items in both the Parish Council and Community Hall accounts for the year ended 31 March 2023.

The Parish Council bank position was £26,585 lower than at the start of the financial year due to spending from the New Homes Bonus funds. The Parish Council has £10,075 in reserves and there is £52,068 left in the New Homes Bonus.

The Community Hall's bank position improved by £802 to finish the financial year at £26,072.

The cost of the ramps by the playground and tennis court resurfacing work were funded via New Homes Bonus.

The overall Community Hall expenditures were lower than budgeted due to Cllrs. Meischke diligence with programming the heating system each week and reduced cleaning costs.

- **Annual Audits**

- **Parish Council internal audit**

- The Clerk will deposit the Parish Council accounts for the year ending 31 March 2023 with Stuart McCash for the internal audit on Thursday 20 April.

Action: J. Allsop

- **Community Hall audit**

- The Clerk will deposit the Community Hall accounts for the year end 31 March 2023 with McCash and Hay for auditing on Thursday 20 April.

Action: J. Allsop

- **PKF Littlejohn – external audit papers for year ending 31 March 2023**

PKF Littlejohn e-mailed, on 20 March, informing us of the details for the annual audit for the year ending 31 March 2023. The completed Annual Return and all relevant documentation needs to be submitted to them by 3 July 2022. The Parish Council have not been selected as part of the 5% sample subject to intermediate review.

- **Microsoft software – annual renewal**

The Microsoft 365 software on the Parish Council's Dell laptop automatically renewed at the beginning of April at a cost of £59.99. The Clerk to be reimbursed the cost.

Action: J. Allsop

Community Hall Trustees

Cllr. Meischke reported on the following items.

- **Heating**

Cllr. Meischke said that he has managed to keep the heating costs down because the Clerk gives him the hiring times each week and he programs the heating timers accordingly.

Currently the Main Hall and changing room heating has been switched off. Heat is still being provided for the Pavilion and meeting room hirings.

- **Outside Toilets**

The outside toilets were vandalised again two days after the Easter holidays. The toilet roll holders were ripped from the wall and put down the toilet, excrement on the floor and drug paraphernalia too.

Cllr. Meischke said that he has carried out repairs to the toilets which reopened today.

It was agreed to put an article on Facebook and the Parish Council website about the recent vandalism.

Cllr. Kirk agreed to draft an article to post on Facebook and upload to the website.

Action: A. Kirk

Both Cllrs. Kirk and White have been approached by members of the public when the toilets have been closed. It was agreed that both Councillors be given a set of keys to allow them entry to the changing room corridor, so they can allow members of the public to use those toilets if the external ones are locked. They will both ensure that the building is locked directly after each use.

Action: J. Meischke/ J. Allsop

- **Outside Lighting**

The outside lighting clocks have been changed so they do not come on until 20:30.

- **Showers**

The showerheads have had their six-month clean.

- **Next season Football usage**

Junior football would like to make a commitment to using the Community Hall and sportsfield facilities next season. Steve Betts is also hopeful that he will be able to put a Ladies football team together and the Cronies Football Club (Stevenage) have also shown an interest in hiring the football pitch. It was agreed to inform the latter that the Parish Council will discuss their request further after the new Parish Council comes into place in May and new Trustees have been appointed.

Action: J. Allsop

- **Appoint 2 new Trustees**

In May 2023, the Parish Council will need to elect two new Trustees to replace David Stock and Stephen Block.

- **Arrange Trustees meeting**

Cllr. Meischke said he would arrange a meeting of the Trustees after the May Parish Council meeting.

- **Goal mouths**

The football goal mouths need reseeding. It was agreed to obtain quotations for this work. **Action: J. Allsop**

Recreation and Amenities Sub-Committee

Cllr. Knight had nothing to report.

Environment Sub-Committee

Cllr. Dinnin reported on the following items.

- **Sportsfield grass cutting**

The sportsfield grass has now been cut by our new contractor Nick Darter (NCD Ground Maintenance Services Limited). However, areas around the sportsfield and by the Community Hall need attending to. Cllr. Meischke said that he had already instructed the Clerk to ask Nick Darter to do this work as soon as possible.

- **Wooden benches – refurbishment**

Cllr. Dinnin said that there are five wooden benches that need cleaning and painting. Mark Blacktin has quoted £200 per seat to do this work. It was agreed to look at the seats to decide if all the seats should be cleaned and painted or one of the wooden benches replaced. **Action: Environment Sub-Committee**

- **War Memorial Garden**

Cllr. Dinnin said that she and Cllr. Meischke met with Simon Nicholls of Grassroots at the War Memorial site and agreed which plants needed replacing. The dead shrubs have now been removed and will be replaced by Simon Nicholls, except for the dead Rhododendron bush, Cllr. Meischke will source a replacement.

Action: J. Meischke

b) Routine Reports

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

Cllr. Meischke continues to carry-out the emergency escape lighting and manual alarm call tests monthly. He also continues to inspect the hall regularly including running the water every 2-3 weeks to prevent the risk of legionnaires disease.

- ii) **Gas and electricity meter readings**

Although smart meters are fitted, Cllr. Meischke continues to give the Clerk gas and electricity meter readings at the end of each month. The Clerk uploads the readings to the providers websites.

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

Done.

- iv) **Monthly village-report**

Cllr. White completed the report on 16 April 2023. and reported on the main items highlighted in the monthly village-report. All Parish Councillors have been e-mailed a copy of her report.

- **Grass** – healthy looking grass, has had first cut.
- **Hedges** – look good, cut and edges tidy.
- **Cricket nets** - in place tidy and weed controlled.
- **Play area Litter bin by tennis court end** – full.
- **Community Hall** – weeds at foot of all walls, grass bank needs cutting, doors looked scuffed and in need of painting.
- **Allotment area**- good, new fencing at church field end looks smart.
- **Culverts in Mill Lane** – Litter (drink cans) in Lammas culvert, other culverts clear.
- **Recycling clothes bin** – litter still stacked together with bedstead.
- **Dog waste bins** – High Street by War Memorial – bin cracked open at back and top front.
- **War memorial** – very tidy and looking really lovely with red tulips out
- **Ornate village sign** – post OK but concrete foundation is cracked in two places and can be moved.

Cllr. Meischke to inspect.

Action: J. Meischke

- **Holly hedge at the top of School Lane** – Cllr. White found it difficult to confirm this Holly hedge was actually impeding the pathway. She provided supporting photographs of the area with her report.

Refer to item 9 b, Correspondence received – Letter and photos from Stephen Skelhorn re Holly hedge on footpath 17 and condition of grass verges on Rectory Lane.

- **Footpath near entrance of Watton House** – Cllr. White took supporting photographs of the area with her report. She suggested that any debris on this footpath has been cleared by recent wind and rain.

Refer to item 9 b, Correspondence received - E-mail from Julian Humphreys re condition of footpaths near the War Memorial roundabout.

- **Works to the River Beane by Walkern Road bridge** – to gain access to the river Beane to install new gabion baskets, the Environment Agency contractors have cut down trees and shrubs on the Woodhall Estate side of the river. This has caused a catastrophic loss of privacy to the Lammas Road properties that back onto this stretch of river, as they are now fully exposed to the public footpath.

- **Community Hall toilets** – Cllr. White was asked by two families while checking the sports / play areas about opening the toilet facilities at weekends. The junior football team were also training. Refer to item 8 a, Environment Sub-Committee – outside toilets.

Additional items discussed

- **Footpath behind the George & Dragon** – in a very bad state. Contact Ken Crofton to find out when the resurfacing of this footpath will take place. **Action: J. Allsop**
- v) **Weekly sportsfield-report**
Nothing to report.
- vi) **Weekly defibrillator inspection**
Cllr. Hammon continues to do regular defibrillator checks.
- vii) **Website/Facebook**
Write article re vandalism of the outside toilets. **Action: A. Kirk**
- viii) **Highway issues**
Nothing to report.
- ix) **Dog fouling reports**
Nothing to report.
- x) **Police reports**
None.

9. Correspondence received

- a) **E-mail from Liam Phillips, Cronies Football Club, Stevenage**
Refer to item 8 a, Community Hall Trustees - Next season Football usage.
- b) **Letter and photos from Stephen Skelhorn re Holly hedge on footpath 17 and condition of grass verges on Rectory Lane**
Cllr. Dinnin said that on the previous occasion this hedge was cut back, it was done by the owner of the Holly hedge and not its tenant. Stephen Skelhorn is the current tenant. Cllr. Dinnin agreed to inspect the hedge again and draft a response to Stephen Skelhorn. Also informing him that the condition of the grass verges on Rectory Lane will be placed on the June agenda, after the newly elected Parish Council comes into place. **Action: C. Dinnin / Agenda: 06/2023**
Parish Councillors agreed to continue to monitor the condition of the Holly hedge.
- c) **E-mail from Julian Humphreys re condition of footpaths near the War Memorial roundabout**
Julian Humphrey's (Chairman, Watton House) e-mailed on 1 April as follows.
'I wonder if I can enlist your help please.
My elderly neighbour had a fall last weekend on the mud on the path opposite the War Memorial (by the mini roundabout). The paths have not been cleared since the autumn and the leaves have gone to mush and created slippery and dangerous surfaces right up to the entrance to Watton House.
My hope is that the paths can be cleared and maintained to avoid any further accidents.
Thanks in advance for your help and support.'
Cllr. White said she inspected the area (taking photographs, which have been forwarded to all Parish Councillors) when she was doing the monthly-village report and could not see a problem with this footpath. She said that it looked as though recent bad weather, with rain and wind, has helped clear a lot of the debris. It was agreed that Cllr. White should draft a response expressing the Parish Council's concern and advising Mr. Humphreys that this is an HCC responsibility. **Action: N. White**
- d) **E-mail from EHDC – notification of uncontested election**
The Watton-at-Stone Parish Council had an uncontested election of nine people and will therefore need to co-opt a 10 person.
The Clerk read out an e-mail from East Herts that clarified that the Parish Council can co-opt another person after the May elections, but best practise would be to advertise the vacancy within the parish. Parish Councillors agreed to do this with a view to co-opting a new member at their May Parish Council meeting. **Action: J. Allsop**

10. Village organisations

None.

11. Items for Parish News

No items were identified for inclusion in the May 2023 issue of the Parish News.

Meeting closed: 2116.

The date for the next Parish Council meeting is Tuesday 16 May 2023.