

Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held in the Community Hall on Tuesday 10 October 2023

Present:	Cllr. Nicola White (Vice-Chair)	Cllr. Michael Brooks
	Cllr. Annabel Kirk	Cllr. Catherine Hammon (left at 20:20)
	Cllr. Richard Lewis	Cllr. Mark Richardson
	Cllr. Darren Appleby (after 20:10)	Clerk: Jane Allsop

In the absence of Cllr. Waltham, Cllr. White took the Chair.

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies: Cllrs. Emma Waltham, John Meischke and Clive Bell.

2. Public participation

None.

3. Chair's/Clerk's report

One additional item.

- Planning application - 49a High Street, refer to item 8 a, Planning decisions.

4. Declaration of interests

None

5. Co-option of one Parish Councillor

The Parish Council has one applicant for co-option as a Parish Councillor. As reported at the July Parish Council meeting, Cllrs. Meischke and White have already interviewed Darren Appleby.

Cllr. Kirk proposed that Darren Appleby be co-opted. Cllr. Lewis seconded the motion and all present were in favour. Parish Councillors unanimously endorsed the co-option.

Cllr. Darren Appleby signed the declaration of acceptance of office on his arrival at the meeting at 20:10.

6. Minutes of the last meeting

a) Acceptance

- **Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on Tuesday 12 September 2023**
Parish Councillors agreed that the minutes be approved and signed.

b) Review of actions

1. **Arrange a meeting to discuss parking issues outside the school in Rectory Lane**
Cllr. Kirk said that at the beginning of the Autumn term, the school put signs up near their Rectory Lane entrance stating, 'no parking'. This did deter parking outside the school for a short while. However, the original offenders have now started to park outside the school again. Cllr. Kirk agreed to monitor the situation and contact the police if required. **Action: A. Kirk**
2. **Obtain quotations for replacing the main entrance door & windows in the Pavilion and meeting room**
A quotation has been obtained. This item will be covered under Community Hall budget items for 2024/25.
3. **Obtain quotation from Mark Blacktin to repair safety-surface edges by Palace Fortress equipment**
This item will be covered under Trustees minutes and reported on at the November Parish Council meeting.
4. **Monitor condition of footpath outside Newmans Court & near the Ornate Village sign**
Cllr. Kirk to inspect the footpath outside Newmans court **Action: A. Kirk**
5. **Contact Dan Tancock (HCC) re extending 907 bus service`**
Cllr. Waltham was not present at the meeting to report on this item. **Action: E. Waltham**
6. **Chase Scout & Guide Group re awarding of the Parish Council's 'Outstanding Effort Award' trophy**
Cllr. Kirk said the trophy has been returned to the Beaver leader and she would arrange to get the Trophy back and give it to the Clerk. **Action: A. Kirk**
7. **Obtain quotations re referendum and oversee publicity:** completed
8. **Submit Locality UK grant application re Neighbourhood Plan:** completed
9. **E-mail County Cllr. Ken Crofton re installation of speed SID sign and 2 sockets**
The Clerk e-mailed County Cllr. Crofton, who did not know anything about the SID sign.

Subsequently an e-mail was received on 22 September from Stephanie Evans (Business Support Officer, on behalf of Grants and Funds Team, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire) in which she states

“It has been agreed that the best location is outside numbers 134 and 134a High Street subject to there being no underground obstructions. With regard to this location please could you confirm that you are content with this site and if so, please could you notify the residents of these properties of what will be happening.”

Cllr. Kirk agreed to visit the residents at 134 and 134a High Street.

Action: A. Kirk

10. Purchase new laptop: new dell Inspiron laptop is on order at a cost of xxx plus VAT.

A Dell Inspiron 15 laptop is on order, at a cost of £607.50 plus VAT.

11. Repair Junior football goalpost net

Cllr. Meischke was not present at the meeting to report on this item.

Action: J. Meischke

12. Select and appoint a new self-employed cleaner and litterpick person

Cllr. White said that Debbie Lee has been appointed the new self-employed cleaner out of two possible candidates.

13. Obtain quotations (for budget purposes), for the repair of the Community Hall crack in the wall

A quotation will be obtained. This item will be covered under Community Hall budget items for 2024/25.

14. Reposition tree seat on Watton Green to allow for tree girth growth

The Clerk to ask Michael Smith if he has done the work yet.

Note: Michael Smith has confirmed that the tree seat has been repositioned so no damage will occur to either the tree or the seat due to tree growth.

15. Chase HCC regarding the possible use of the Gatekeeper meadow area for a Community Orchard

This item has not progressed further. It was agreed that this should remain on the agenda under Environment Committee.

Agenda: Env

16. Investigate with Environment Committee members which benches need staining or replacing

Refer to item 9 a, Environment Committee.

17. Contact the Woodhall Estate re repair and maintenance work required to the village pump

Cllr. White said she had spoken to Terry Gotobed (Site Foreman, Woodhall Estate) to find out if repairs works will be scheduled.

18. Discuss with Fairview management of their land on Stevenage Road as a diversity gain

Cllrs. Waltham and Bell were not present at the meeting to report on this item.

Action: E. Waltham/C. Bell

19. Contact Allotment Association about request for a BBQ on the allotments

Cllr. Kirk said that she had told the Allotment & Garden Association that they could have a BBQ providing they inform the Parish Council of the date, prior to the event.

c) Action points resolved

1. Obtain permission from company to become a Trustee
2. Notify EHDC of resignation of Christine Dinnin
3. Write to planning department re Station Road (3/23/1494/FUL)
4. **Arrange for Santander change of bank signatory forms to be completed following Cllr. Dinnin's resignation:** outstanding **Action: J. Allsop**
5. **Obtain Nationwide change of bank signature forms:** outstanding. **Action: J. Allsop**
6. Reply to Dr. Norden's e-mail concerning car parking on the sports field
7. Speak to Tony Bradford about the Lammas steps
8. Accept Grassroots quotation for replacing and planting new shrubs
9. Contact the owners of the hedges overgrowing School Lane
10. Upload articles to Facebook and website re resignation of one Parish Council and co-option of 2 new ones
11. Write article for Parish News

7. Specific items

a) Neighbourhood plan

Cllr. Hammon went through the items listed in Cllr. Waltham's report.

Referendum

We were advised by Jacqueline Veater and EHDC that the PC should remain impartial during the run up to the referendum on 12 October. Therefore, campaigning for a Yes vote was left to the Steering Group, who put up banners and leafleted the village. The PC puts forward some factual, impartial, information to the public via Facebook posts and the PC website.

If the referendum result is Yes, then the Plan will be ratified by EHDC in December.

Master Planning

The NP Steering Group has engaged with EHDC in a master planning process for the Walkern Road site. The process comprises two meetings and a Hertfordshire Design Review Panel meeting. The first meeting took place in WAS on 4 September. The review by the Hertfordshire Design Review Panel is underway. The final meeting will take place on 17 October. The masterplan requires approval by EHDC Executive on 28th November 2023 to avoid the process over running to January 2024. Therefore, the masterplan requires to be finalized and submitted w/c 30th October 2023.

It is anticipated that Fairview will submit their planning application in the New Year if the NP is adopted by EHDC and the site is released from its Green Belt designation.

Document Storage

The PC needs to agree and implement a plan to store all the documentation from the NP process.

The Clerk agreed that she could upload the documents to One Drive. Cllr. Richardson suggested they could also be added to GSuite. **Action: J. Allsop**

Village Assets

Hearing that the Methodist Church is to be sold prompted EW to ask our consultant what protection the facility has, given that it is identified as a Valuable Community Asset in the Neighbourhood Plan and as such is covered by policy WAS 11:

WAS 11: "Permission for a change of use of these facilities would need to be supported by evidence that the facilities were no-longer used with no likelihood that re-use was possible or desirable, or that their active use was to be replaced elsewhere and would still benefit village residents, in accordance with East Herts District Plan Policy CFLR8. Alternative provision should be provided within walking or cycling distance of the existing facility."

Also outlined in the Appendix:

"The Church holds a service every Sunday. A number of groups use the hall during the week including a Lunch Club for older residents, Card Companions, Knit & atter and a Craft Club. The hall and Church are available for hire for day groups of up to 50 people to run self-led, retreats, quiet days and meetings. In addition, the hall can be hired for children's parties. "

JV advised that there may be a planning application involved at some point, where we could use the policy but that does not apply in the case of a change of ownership.

She recommends that the PC applies for the Neighbourhood Plan inspired valued assets, to be listed as Assets of Community Value. Listing does not protect them as such, but it is the only tool we have to try and retain facilities that are put up for sale. The listing also helps when East Herts are considering planning applications, particularly change of use. See this link to the register: <https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/community-and-health/assets-community-value-acv/assets-community-value-register>

There is a form on East Herts website: <https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/community-and-health/assets-community-value-acv>

You would need to use Parish Online to produce the maps. You also need the relevant Land Registry documents for each application. Additionally, we would need to make the case for the community facilities to be listed by East Herts. Most applications are successful. Also, we should not be put off when we see the note on East Herts website about the assets having to be currently in use. They do not.

Cllr. White said that she felt that, as a Parish Council, we should separate ourselves from this subject and wait to find out what the Methodist Church are going to do.

She suggested that the Parish Council should consider Jaqueline Veater's advise and ask the Steering Group to look at this issue. The Parish Council would support the Methodist Church in any way they can but cannot be financially committed.

b) Appointment of Representatives to other Organisations

Cllr. Kirk was appointed as the sole representative to the Scout and Guide Group.

c) Village directory

Cllr. Brook agreed to update the Village Directory.

Action: B. Brooks

d) Code of conduct

Cllr. White said that she had compared the EHDC Model Code of Conduct with the Watton-at-Stone Parish Council version and felt that ours is more than adequate. She said that it was nice for us to have our own Watton-at-Stone version and we could add a reference to the EHDC code.

Cllr. White agreed to modify the Watton-at-Stone Code of Conduct and e-mail it to all Parish Councillors for approval at their November Parish Council meeting. **Action: N. White**

8. Planning

Cllr. White provided the following report.

a) Applications

i) 5 The Beanside (3/23/1310/HH)

Demolition of conservatory and construction of single storey rear extension

Parish Council agreed a no comment response

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

- **49a High Street (3/23/1752/HH)**

Construction of single storey rear outbuilding

Cllr. Lewis agreed to contact the neighbouring properties and e-mail Parish Councillors re responding to

EHDC planning department.

Action: R. Lewis

b) Decisions

i) 3 Blue Hill Cottages High Elms Lane Watton at Stone (3/23/1393/HH)

Demolition of conservatory. Erection of a single storey rear extension incorporating roof lights and steel flue

EHDC - Permission granted

Catherine left meeting at 20:20.

9. Reports

a) Committees

Budget & Finance

Cllr. White reported on the following items.

- **Monthly accounts**

Watton-at-Stone Parish Council			
Petty Cash –		Petty cash – Payments	
None		None	
Payments			
Concord Trophies	Engrave 1 cup and 1 keep sake cup		37.99
Grassroots	War memorial Maintenance – August 2023		50.40
JRB Enterprise Ltd	10 boxes of dog bags		261.60
BT	BT phone charges - September		22.49
Google Cloud	Google workspace - direct debit		13.95
NCD Ground	Grass cutting work on sportsfield		792.00
GeoXphere Ltd	Parish online - annual mapping subscription		180.00
Castle Water	Allotment water charges		210.29
Wages	September		352.00
Govresources Ltd	Neighbourhood Plan - consultation work		1,224.00
			3,144.72
Receipts			
Santander	Interest		14.93
Victor Sell	Use of PC land on Walkern Road		400.00
EHDC	Precept		21,272.50
			21,687.43
Watton-at-Stone Community Hall			
Petty Cash – Receipts		Petty Cash -Payments	
Tony Silverstri – Pavilion	15.00		
Rosemary Brown – Pavilion &	67.50		
Archery – Main Hall - September	64.00		
Table Tennis – Main Hall (August)	£128.0		
	£274.0		
Payments			
British Gas	Electricity		114.18
Post office	payment error		22.50
East Herts Council	Rates - payment 6		55.00
Mark Blacktin	Painting of external doors on the car park side of the Com		535.00
HCC	cleaning materials and supplies		84.70
Cleaning	September		297.00
British gas	Gas		15.87
			1124.25

Receipts		
Santander	Interest	14.91
Ildiko Imre-Karda	Meeting room on 21.09.23	28.00
Tennis Club	Use of CH facilities	440.00
HMRC	VAT Rebate	11.79
Lucy Ward	Main Hall & Pavilion on 11.09.23	38.00
Maia Hobbs	50% deposit for Saturday 18 Nov	28.50
Talbott Fitness	Use of CH facilities June	170.00
Imagination Dance	Main Hall - July – September	216.00
Tracy Jenkins	75% on Sept/Oct - Pavilion hire	13.50
Janine - Bounce	Main Hall hire - August 2023	161.50
Alison Arnold	Main Hall & Pav - final payment for 23.09.23	118.75
Peter Khera -	Main Hall - July to September 2023	254.60
Begoña Garcia	Meeting room - September - November	76.00
Eleni Stylianou	2nd pay MH & Pav -30 September	33.25
Cricket Club	Annual hire of the Community Hall facilities	615.00
Zumba	Main Hall hire – July - September	219.45
		2439.25

Parish Councillors approved the payments.

- **6-monthly statement of accounts for the Parish Council and Community Hall**
Cllr. White said that the 6-month accounts figures show that we are hitting budgets well.
 - Parish Council – 50% of budget has been spent – on target
 - Community Hall – 35% of budget spent (but summer months so power costs low). Currently income keeping up with expenditure although down on budgeted expected income. NB Parish Council grant not paid yet.
- **6-monthly inspection of accounts**
The Clerk has yet to give Helen McCash the accounts for inspection
Note: Helen McCash inspected the accounts on 17 October and gave them a clean bill of health.
- **PKF – Annual audit for year 2022/2023**
The Parish Council has received ‘a clean bill of health’ from the auditors PKF Littlejohn LLP, who have signed off the annual statutory approval of the Parish Council accounts for the year ended 31st March 2023.
The Clerk has uploaded the conclusion of audit notice to the Parish Council website.
Parish Councillors approved payment of PKF’s invoice of £504.00 **Action: J. Allsop**
- **Request for Budget items for 2023/2024**
Cllr. White asked all Parish Councillors to submit their budget requests before the end of October.
Action: Parish Councillors/J. Allsop
- **Trustees’ indemnity insurance cover**
Cllr. White reported that the Trustees’ Indemnity Insurance Cover is up for renewal on 20 October at a cost of £436.11 an increase of £38.69 compared to last year. Parish Councillors approved this payment.
The Clerk to renew the policy. **Action: J. Allsop**
- **Renewal of subscription for 123 sheets - VAT returns**
Parish Councillors approved the renewal subscription for 123 sheets at a cost of £39.50, PLUS vat.
- **Bank accounts**
The Clerk said she has not yet submitted the change of bank signatories’ forms to Santander and Nationwide.
Action: J. Allsop
- **Financial regulations**
Budget Committee will be reviewing the financial regulations and looking to simplify approvals for payments by the entire council. We will probably look to adopt any change in line with new budget and Committee ownership of budget section.
- **Renewal of SiteGround website hosting**
Cllr. White said that the website hosting from SiteGround is up for renewal in November. The renewal subscription costs are: 1- year - £167.88, 2-year - £287.76 (excluding VAT).
The Clerk said that her son had set up the SiteGround hosting over 15 years ago. Cllr. Richardson suggested the Parish Council could get their website hosted for much less and that our current hosting is probably more suited to a complex website that for example has online shopping facilities. He recommended that we renew for one year and investigate a new hosting for 2024.
Action: J. Allsop

Community Hall Trustees

Cllr. Meischke was not present at the meeting to report on the following item.

- **Report and minutes of meeting held on Sunday 8th October 2023**

The Trustees minutes will be distributed to all Parish Councillors before the November Parish Council meeting.

Cllr. Lewis said that the Trustees discussed improving communications. They will be putting together some wording, for approval by the Parish Council, to enable the ability for cars to park on the sportsfield when special events are being held in the village.

It was also suggested that the Parish Council throw a party for Rosemary Brown, who finished working for the Parish Council and Community Hall in September. Cllr. Meischke has been actioned to contact Rosemary. **Action: J. Meischke**

Environment Committee

Cllr. Kirk e-mailed her Environment Committee to Parish Councillors on

- **Benches:** Cllr. Brook inspected the 5 benches identified by Christine Dinnin, which are still in working order (Harry's bench needs one new slat), so it seems sensible to sand and varnish them rather than replace them. The one by the High Street/Great Innings roundabout is covered in bird poo – are we wasting our money varnishing it if it continues to be unusable or should one of us try to give it a clean intermittently when we walk past it? The Clerk to find out who owns this bench. **Action: J. Allsop**
- **Pump:** Cllr. Smith spoke to Terry Gotobed, who agrees the pump needs some attention and is going to speak to Jennifer at Woodhall.
- **Allotments:** no update from the allotment association regarding BBQs. There is a cherry tree which is causing some concern. I'm in the process of trying to find out the best way to deal with it. **Action: A. Kirk**
- **War Memorial:** the planting has been done and looks great.
- **Community orchard:** no update.
- **Lammas**
 - **Steps:** Tony Bradford will not have capacity in his team to address this for quite some time, so we have requested quotes from Mark Blacktin and Adam Welch. The Clerk to chase. **Action: J. Allsop**
 - **Riverbank:** opposite the McPhersons: we met with Mr and Mrs McPherson by the riverbank and discussed their concerns. We initially suggested that they should speak to Affinity Water, but this was queried by Natalie afterwards by e-mail as she believes – rightly – that the riverbank is our concern. I replied to her e-mail to say that I would investigate this further and get back to her this week.

I think the best way forward is to narrow the gap slightly by planting suitable plants on the right-hand side. I did suggest to the McPhersons at the meeting that they could immediately improve the privacy situation by adding some plants on their side of the riverbank.

Mike Smith has e-mailed round some information for us all to look at. Parish Councillors agreed that the gap should be narrowed and Cllr. Kirk investigates some suitable planting. **Action: A. Kirk**

- **Condition of the grass verges on Rectory Lane**

This item is deferred to the November Parish Council meeting. **Agenda: 11/2023**

- **School Lane**

- **Overgrown hedges:** owners on both sides have been contacted (by letter for the holly hedge and in person for the other side). Susanne Wood agreed that her side needs attention and they will do it themselves.
- **Tree overhanging School Lane:** Susanne Wood mentioned that one of the trees on the sportsfield is affecting the light in her garden. After visiting with Cllr. Meischke this week, I will ask Tree Smiths and Adam Welch to quote for cutting back some of the branches. **Action: A. Kirk**
- **Japanese knotweed encroachment onto the Cottage Site:** It is not an offence to have knotweed on your own land, but it is an offence to let it spread to neighbouring properties. Tony Bradford has suggested we contact the owner to ask for a written agreement about what they plan to do about it. He said the next approach was to ask the police to see if the Rural Team will take action. WCA (Wildlife and Countryside Act) or ASBO legislation might be used in this regard.

I think we should get a quote for having it removed and give this to the owner. They might be happy for someone else to deal with the legwork and they just pay the bill. Tony mentioned that there are various companies who specialise in removing knotweed. We need to be careful not to sign up to a lengthy contract of having it treated as some companies are incentivised by the contract not to remove all the knotweed so that they have to keep returning.

The Clerk to investigate the Parish Council's communication with the Crowbury and e-mail this to the Environment Sub-Committee. **Action: J. Allsop**

- **High Street traffic issues, including the Bus Stop outside the Bull public house:** Cllr. White said that she is very disappointed that the planned bus stop has not been installed. She continues to chase this down, but so far is not getting any responses.

- **High street footpaths:** I think we should ensure East Herts clears leaves as soon as possible after the leaves have all fallen so that we avoid any mishaps on the slippery surfaces this winter.
The Clerk said that part of Adam Welch's schedule of works includes clearing leaves in certain parts of the village. The first leaf clearance work is carried out prior to Remembrance Sunday each year and again in January/February. Adam's three-year contract comes to an end after the January/February 2024 leaf collection. The Parish Council can then decide to ask EHDC to clear the leaves which is an option we were not aware of until Cllr. Crofton informed us.
- **Surface water flooding along High Street due to drainage problems:** County Cllr. Crofton copied the Parish Council in on e-mails concerning surface water flooding along the High Street, particularly between Mill Lane and Beaneside. The drains have been cleared and cameras put down to see where the problem is. It would appear that part of the route doesn't take water down into the River Beane but routes it back to the drains in the High Street. Plans are being drawn up to modify the drainage system to alleviate the problem. The Parish Council will monitor the situation
- **Tree policy**
Cllr. Lewis said he is willing to help write a Tree policy. He agreed to speak to Tony Bradford for advice.

Action: R. Lewis

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. These readings are uploaded to the providers websites.

iii) Weekly reports - Fire Inspection and shower tests

Done.

iv) Monthly village-report

Cllr. Brooks completed the report on 7 October, under the guidance of Cllr. White. The main points identified in the report are highlighted below.

- **Cricket nets** – quite a few nettles growing at the bottom. Ask Cricket Club to remove. **Action: J. Allsop**
- **Toddler area** – one screw loose on PC sign. Safety surface decay
- **Teen shelter** – small amount of graffiti. Cllr. Meischke to inspect and remove. **Action: J. Meischke**
- **Allotments** – a few untidy plots.
- **Recycling clothes bin** – bed head still behind bin. Ask Woodhall estate to remove. **Action: J. Allsop**
- **Culverts** – perhaps a tad overgrown.
- **Salt bin** - the one at the end of Moorymead close needs a top up.
- **War Memorial - plants** look great.
- **Ornate village sign** – colour faded on sign.

v) Weekly sportsfield-report

Nothing to report.

vi) Weekly defibrillator inspection

Cllr. Hammon continues to do regular defibrillator checks.

vii) Website/Facebook

Upload link to Highways faults to Facebook

Action: J. Allsop

viii) Highway issues

Nothing to report.

ix) Dog fouling reports

Nothing to report.

x) Police reports

Nothing to report

10. Correspondence received

None.

11. Reports from other organisations

None.

12. Items for the Parish News

The following item were identified for inclusion in the November 2023 issue of the Parish News.

Co-option of Cllr. Darren Appleby.

Action: J. Allsop

Meeting closed: 21:25.

The date for the next Parish Council meeting is Tuesday 14 November 2023.