

Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held in the Community Hall on Tuesday 9 January 2024

Present:	Cllr Nicola White (Chair)	Cllr Richard Lewis (Vice-Chair)
	Cllr Michael Brooks	Cllr Annabel Kirk
	Cllr Catherine Hammon (arrived at 1930)	Cllr Mark Richardson
	Cllr Darren Appleby (arrived at 1932)	Clerk: Jane Allsop
	District Cllr Joe Thomas	

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies: Cllrs Emma Waltham and Clive Bell.

2. Public participation

None.

3. Chair's/Clerk's report

Cllr White said she had two additional items.

- Bank signatories to be discussed under 9 a, Budget & Finance.
- Funding for Youth Football to be discussed under 8 a, Specific items – Neighbourhood Plan.

4. Declaration of interests

None

5. Elections of:

- **Vice-Chair of the Watton-at-Stone Parish Council**

Cllr White nominated Cllr Lewis for the election of Vice-Chair.

Cllrs Brooks seconded the motion and all present were in favour.

Cllr Lewis was duly elected and signed the declaration of acceptance of office.

The following two elections were deferred to directly after item 6 b 6, Review of actions – Measure some of the allotment plots to establish an average pole size.

- Trustee of the Watton-at-Stone Community Hall
- Member of Environment Team

6. Minutes of the last meeting

a) Acceptance

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

b) Review of actions

1. **Send any village directory updates to Cllr Brook**

Cllr Brook said that he had not received any updates from Parish Councillors. However, two locally run businesses have been added to the village directory.

Cllr Brook agreed to continue to update the village directory as and when required.

2. **Write Facebook post re commercial enterprises advertising in the Village Directory**

Completed, refer to above item.

3. **Create a draft document to capture the objectives of Publicity and News Dissemination for the PC**

Refer to item 7 i, Specific items - Parish Council Policies.

4. **Source some suitable dog fouling stickers/posters**

Cllr Thomas said he had spoken to EHDC who don't have any dog fouling stickers. The Clerk has found a poster that might be suitable. She agreed to email a copy to Cllr Thomas.

Action: J. Allsop

5. **Speak to Scout & Guide Group re refurbishment of wooden benches**

This item is outstanding.

It was agreed to defer to the March 2024 agenda.

Agenda: 03/24

6. **Measure some of the allotment plots to establish an average pole size**

Cllr Hammon arrived at the meeting.

Cllr Kirk said that she had taken measurements from several allotments.

It was agreed to compare these measurements with the standard pole size of 5.5 yards x 5.5 yards to work out how many poles each of the measured plots are. This information can then be compared to the

allotment prices obtained from other councils in East Herts.

Action: A. Kirk/ M. Richardson

The current allotment charges for a half plot are £16 per annum and £32 for a full plot. Increasing the hire charges to £17.50 for a half plot and £35 for a full plot, to be considered.

This item to be placed on the February agenda under Environment.

Agenda: 02/2024

Cllr Appleby arrived at the meeting.

Deferred items

5. Election of:

- **Trustee of the Watton-at-Stone Community Hall**

Cllr White nominated Cllr Appleby for the election of Community Hall Trustees.

Cllr Lewis seconded the motion and all present were in favour.

Cllr Appleby was duly elected.

- **Member of Environment Team**

Cllr White nominated Cllr Appleby as member of the Environment Team.

Cllr Richardson seconded the motion and all present were in favour.

Cllr Appleby was duly elected.

7. Chase Wicksteed Leisure re see-saw repairs

Refer to 8 a, Community Hall Trustees.

8. Request a copy of the Youth Football teams insurance policy from Derek Hill

Derek Hill has provided a copy of the Youth Football teams insurance policy.

9. Chase Mark Blacktin re like-for-like quotation to repair Lammas steps

Cllr Kirk said she had chased Mark Blacktin but received no reply. Refer to item 8 a, Environment.

10. Obtain quotations for work to Maple Tree at the top of the sportsfield adjacent to School Lane

This item is outstanding

Action: J. Allsop

11. Contact PCSO Sally Brooks re Japanese knotweed encroachment onto the Cottage site

Cllr White said she had shared the Parish Council's letter to the Crowbury re Japanese knotweed encroachment with PCSO Sally Brooks but has not had any updates. She agreed to chase.

Action: N. White

Cllr Thomas said that he knows someone at EHDC that might be able to push this forward for the Parish Council and agreed to contact them.

Action: J. Thomas

12. Arrange for the High Street Working Group to regroup again

Cllr White said that she will be reforming the High Street working group.

This item to be placed on the agenda under Environment.

Agenda: Environment

13. Find out how much money was transferred to HCC for management of Gatekeeper land

Cllr Thomas said that HCC, who own the Gatekeeper land, had £163,700 of S106 funds transferred to them to maintain this land.

Cllr Kirk agreed to find out from County Cllr Crofton what the maintenance plan is for this land.

Action: A. Kirk

Cllr Thomas to find out what the rules and regulations are for planting an orchard on this S106 land.

Action: J. Thomas

14. Carryout measurement checks to the War Memorial

Cllr Lewis and John Meischke will wait for warmer weather before completing this action.

This item to be placed on the April 2024 agenda

Agenda: 04/2024

c) Action Points resolved

1. Write to EHDC planning department re 19 Walkern Road
2. Contact neighbours re planning application for Lane Croft, Perrywood Lane
3. Sign Budget & Finance minutes
4. Email contractors who submitted quotations for work in 2024
5. Inform Sports Clubs of annual charges for 2024/25
6. Amend precept figure on Budget notes for 2024/2025
7. Email David Wilkinson re allotment public liability insurance cover
8. Renew CDA for Herts annual subscription
9. Accept Adam Welch's quotation for cut down Cherry tree
10. Ask Tony Bradford to proceed with grant application for trees on the Cottage site and the Lammas
11. Contact Highways to ask them to fill salt bin at the end of Moorymead Close
12. Add new salt bin at the top of Great Innings to the monthly village-report template
13. Report leaf clearance required near Ornate village sign
14. Carryout monthly village report in January
15. Email all Parish Councillors a copy of the monthly village-report and 6-monthly report
16. Purchase new kettles
17. Place notice on Facebook and website re resignation of Cllr John Meischke

7. Specific items

a) Neighbourhood plan

Cllr Hammon reported on the following.

1. The Watton-at-Stone Neighbourhood plan was formally adopted by EHDC on 13 December 2023.
2. All members of the Steering Group have confirmed that they are happy to support the Parish Council in relation to matters relating to the NP, particularly developments provided for under it.
3. Jacqueline Veater has advised the Parish Council to register the community assets contained in the Neighbourhood Plan. Without registration, the protections set out in the NP won't take effect.
Cllr Hammon said that this registration does not mean that the Parish Council is committed to taking any particular action in relation to the assets concerned, were they to change from their current use, but would ensure that we had the option to step in to preserve them if that was the wish at that time. Proceeding with registration was agreed by Parish Councillors.
4. Charles Clark is happy to submit an application to register the Methodist Church building as a community asset and not a listed building.

5. Parish Council response to:

Fairview New Homes planning application on Land at Walkern Road (3/23/2108/FUL)

Erection of 60 residential units (Use Class C3) with creation of access, car parking, landscaping, amenity and open space, substation, pedestrian/cycle paths and associated development. Provision for footbridge across the river

Cllr Hammon said that the Fairview application is broadly in line with the NP. She said that all Steering Group members have now given her their comments on the application, the last of which she received today. She had also noted concerns raised by members of the public who attended the Fairview public event on 23 November. Since she had not had sufficient to put together the Parish Council's draft response for discussion during the meeting, she discussed with Parish Councillors the comments raised by the Steering group and at the public event on various aspects of the application, including the use of S106 funds and the pedestrian bridge. Concerns included the proposed gated entrance, the extra traffic use on Walkern Road during and after the build, including speeds entering and exiting the village, road narrowing, pedestrian footpaths, historical and potential flooding, aspects of the design of houses and landscaping.

It was agreed that Cllr Hammon will put together a draft response letter, which will take into account the Steering Group's, Parish Councillors' and members of the public's comments.

Action: C. Hammon

Once the letter is approved by Parish Councillors via email, the Clerk to email the letter to the planning department at EHDC.

Action: J. Allsop

- Separately in relation to the plot at Walkern Road, Councillor Hammon reported that Fairview New Homes have been given permission by EHDC to start archaeological investigation works on their land at Walkern Road, with a start date of 8 January.

• Meeting and funding for football 3G courts

Cllr White attended the Youth Football meeting on 4 January where they were reviewing the status and next steps after receiving a very positive pre-planning application response from EHDC. The next steps were a meeting with the Football Association, which was held last Friday. A summary of this meeting was emailed to all Parish Councillors, together with Cllr White's report on the Youth Football meeting.

Cllr White suggested that the Parish Council should be open to help with initial funding of the Youth Football scheme from surplus New Homes Bonus funds. This would be prior to any grant applications being submitted for the 3G courts.

The Parish Council hold £2,415 of former Youth Club funds, which could be used towards the Youth Football project.

Cllr Thomas said that EHDC currently have a grant scheme for Health and Wellbeing. The maximum grant per application is £3,000 and could be used towards the 3G football facilities. Cllr White to inform Derek Hill.

Action: N. White

b) Update on the 907-bus this includes service

Cllr Kirk said she had no update.

c) Parish Councillor Vacancy and Co-option

EHDC have confirmed that the Parish Council are free to co-opt a new Parish Councillor. The Parish Council will need to advertise the position again. Cllr White agreed to update the last advert she wrote. **Action: N. White**

d) Recruitment/Handover plan/team for new Clerk

On 28 December, Cllr White received the following letter of resignation from the Clerk, Jane Allsop.

“The time has come for me to resign as Clerk to the Watton-at-Stone Parish Council.

Although my formal notice is one month, I am giving the Parish Council a three-month notice period, with termination of my employment being 31 March 2024.

It has been a pleasure to work for the Parish Council over the last (almost) 31 years and I will miss my involvement in village life. But I must now fulfil other things in my life while the opportunities are still available.

If you need any assistance, you know you can always contact me.

You have a good team of Parish Councillors on board, and I am sure that Watton-at-Stone will be well served in your hands.”

Prior to the meeting Cllr White emailed all Parish Councillors a notice she had put together to advertise for a new Clerk. Cllr White then read out her draft and Parish Councillors made comments on the document. The deadline for applications will be 24 January 2024.

Cllr White to email the advert to the Clerk for posting on the website, Facebook page and notice boards.

Action: N. White/J. Allsop

Cllrs White, Richardson and Brooks will be the interviewing Team with Cllr Brooks taking the lead in arranging interviews etc.

Note: Due to holiday commitments, Cllr Brooks stepped down from the interviewing team and Cllr Kirk took his place, with Cllr White taking the lead.

e) Meeting dates in the Civic year 2024/25

It was agreed that the Parish Council meetings in the Civic year 2024/25 shall be held on the second Tuesday in the month.

• Tuesday 14 May 2024	• Tuesday 12 November 2024
• Tuesday 11 June 2024	• Tuesday 10 December 2024
• Tuesday 9 July 2024	• Tuesday 14 January 2025
• No meeting in August 2023	• Tuesday 11 February 2025
• Tuesday 10 September 2024	• Tuesday 11 March 2025
• Tuesday 8 October 2024	• Tuesday 8 April 2025

The Parish Council meeting in May 2024, will be preceded by the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council and the Annual Parish Meeting.

f) Parish Council storage – Drop Box

Cllr White said the Parish Council’s Dropbox is almost full and asked for suggestions on how to save documents, whilst also making them accessible to all Parish Councillors.

Cllr Richardson said the workspace was a good option and agreed to show the Clerk how it works.

Action: M. Richardson

More storage options to be discussed after the new Parish Clerk is in post.

Agenda: 04/2024

g) New / additional defibrillator for the village

There are currently four defibrillators in the village.

- BT phone (24hr access)
- Watton Place Clinic
- Watton-at-Stone Primary School
- Watton-at-Stone Station (24-hour access)

Currently there are grant funding sources for defibrillators.

It was agreed to find out how accessible each one of these machines are before deciding if additional defibrillators are needed and possible locations.

Action: J. Allsop

The Clerk said she would be ordering a new set of defibrillator pads because the current set needs replacing before 28 January 2024. John Meischke has agreed to fit the new pads.

Action: J. Allsop

h) Gov.uk domain

Parish Councillors agreed to defer discussion on this item until the new Parish Clerk is in post.

This item to be placed on the April agenda.

Agenda: 04/2024

i) Parish Council Policies

Prior to this meeting, Cllr Lewis emailed all Parish Councillors his draft document, titled 'Objectives, approach, policy for Parish Council News and Publicity'. He went through the various aspects of this document. Parish Councillors agreed to study the document so that it can be discussed further. **Action: Parish Councillors**

Cllr Lewis also emailed members of the Environment Team a copy of his draft Tree Policy, which he said is progressing well.

He said there is a significant difference between protocols and policies.

Protocols are a set of rules or guidelines that dictate how tasks are performed or how communication takes place in an organisation. They are usually specific to a particular process, and they outline the steps or procedures that should be followed to ensure consistency and efficiency.

Policies, on the other hand, are broader guidelines that set out the rules and expectations. They are usually more far-reaching, and they often relate to compliance, security, or ethical issues.

Having well-defined policies can be crucial for organisations that need to comply with legal and regulatory requirements.

Cllr Hammon said that the Parish Council needs to be careful how many policies they have in place because they can also have a very restrictive effect and tie your hands when making decisions.

It was agreed that a tree policy is a good option and that our hedge protocol could be expanded to include trees. This policy is a common-sense risk assessment; however, it cannot ever reduce the risk to 0.

The Tree Policy is for review by the Environment Team.

Agenda: Environment

The Parish Councillors agreed to consider drawing up a Volunteering policy. This would enable them to use volunteer labour to help undertake tasks within the village. It might also serve to bring parishioners together and give them a greater sense of belonging.

Cllr Lewis asked all Parish Councillors to look at the current Parish Council policies and make suggestions on what policies might be beneficial to the Parish Council and which might be restrictive.

Action: Parish Councillors

It was agreed to regroup on these issues once a new Clerk has been appointed and is in office.

Agenda: 04/2024

8. Planning

a) Applications

i) Land At Walkern Road (3/23/2108/FUL)

Erection of 60 residential units (Use Class C3) with creation of access, car parking, landscaping, amenity and open space, substation, pedestrian/cycle paths and associated development. Provision for footbridge across the river

This item was discussed under 7 a, Neighbourhood Plan.

b) Decisions

None.

9. Reports

a) Teams

Budget & Finance

Cllr Richardson reported on the following items.

- **Monthly accounts**

Watton-at-Stone Parish Council		
Petty Cash – Receipts	Petty cash – Payments	
None	Mobile phone – December 2024	11.00
	Amazon – Velcro tabs – 1550 hook coins)	31.00
		42.00
Payments		
Google	Google workspace – direct debit	13.80
Wages & salaries	December 2023	1722.98
JRB Enterprise Ltd	underpayment of invoice 25915	33.60
ICO		35.00
Bidwells	Allotment rent – 6 months	381.34
HMRC	Tax & Ni for the Clerk – October – December	667.54
Concord Trophies	engrave 1 cup and 1 keep sake cup	28.99
CDA for Herts	Annual membership subscription	36.00
		2919.25

Receipts		
Santander	Interest	14.79
Cricket Club	Cricket pitch maintenance donation	1,270.00
Denise Burrows		72.00
Nationwide	interest on deposit account	139.64
		1,496.43
Watton-at-Stone Community Hall		
Petty Cash – Receipts		Petty Cash -Payments
Floodlighting donations	182.00	Amazon –2 x 2.7ltr electric kettles
Tony Silverstri – Pavilion	30.00	
Table Tennis – Main Hall	232.00	
Watton Woollies – Pavilion	13.50	
	457.50	
Payments		
HCC	cleaning materials and supplies	73.92
British Gas	Electricity	260.73
HMRC	VAT return – October	443.27
Wages	December cleaning	264.00
HCC	cleaning materials and supplies	132.05
British Gas	Gas	315.42
		1489.39
Receipts		
Santander	Interest	16.24
Ildiko Imre-Karda	Meeting room on 21.12.23	28.00
Peter Khera	Main Hall & Pavilion hire – Oct – Dec 2023	261.25
Janine Gildersleve	Main Hall – Nov 2023	161.50
Paul Sutton	Main Hall – Oct – Dec 2023	219.45
Bob Thornton	Meeting room on 19.10.23	12.00
Talbott Fitness	Use of CH facilities Sept to Dec 2023	292.60
Herts & Middx	Pavilion hire - Dec 23	20.00
		1011.04

Parish Councillors approved the payments.

- **Approval and signing of Precept forms for 2024/25**

At its December 2023 meeting, the Parish Council agreed the provisional precept requirement for 2024/2025 were £46,165.

Parish Councillors agreed to formally adopt this figure and the Precept form was duly signed.

A copy of the signed precept form to be emailed to East Herts Council.

Action: J. Allsop

- **9-monthly statement of accounts for the Parish Council and Community Hall**

All Parish Councillors were emailed a copy of the accounts on 6 January 2024.

Cllr Richardson said that the Parish Council looks as though it will go over the expenditure budget by approximately £1,200 by the end of the financial year. The overspend has largely been caused because the new sportsfield grass contractor did more grass cuts and strimming work on the sportsfield than he quoted for. This problem has now been addressed.

An additional cost may be incurred due to the Clerk's resignation. If someone is found to fill the post before the 31 March 2024, they might be asked to work alongside the current Clerk.

The Community Hall income is expected to exceed the budget for 2023/24. Expenditure should be within budget even though there will be nearly 4 months of caretaker fees to pay, which were not original budgeted for in 2023/24.

- **9-monthly inspection of accounts**

Mrs McCash conducted the 9-month inspection of the accounts on 11th January 2024, and they were in good order.

- **Bank signatories**

It was agreed that Cllr Richardson be added as a bank signatory on the Parish Council's Nationwide account as well as the two Parish Council and two Community Hall Santander accounts.

Action: J. Allsop

Community Hall Trustees

Cllrs Lewis reported on the following items.

- **Date for Trustees meeting**

The Trustees will meet on Sunday 4 February.

Cllr Lewis said that once the new Parish Council Clerk has been appointed, he will arrange another two meetings this year.

Environment

Cllr Kirk reported on the following items.

- **The Lammas**

A sapling that fell down in the recent storms had its trunk cut up by members of the public using a chainsaw, without the consent of the Parish Council. The Clerk said she believed that one of the people involved was a neighbour of hers. It was agreed that members of the public should not do this sort of work without permission from the Parish Council.

Cllr Kirk said that although the trunk had been cut up and the wood stacked, the remaining branches needed removing. The Parish Council could pay Adam Welch to remove the tree, or it could be done by volunteers. It was agreed Cllrs Kirk, Richardson, and Lewis will clear the fallen branches.

Action: A. Kirk/M. Richardson/R. Lewis

- **Steps on bank**

Cllr Kirk said that she had looked at the repair needed to the Lammas steps again and believes that we could do this work ourselves. Cllrs Kirk, Richardson, Lewis, and Appleby agreed form a volunteer working party to repair the steps.

Action: A. Kirk/M. Richardson/R. Lewis/D. Appleby

- **Planting on riverbank opposite Mr & Mrs McPherson**

The planting has been completed.

- **Rectory Lane parking**

Cllr Thomas said that the EHDC parking enforcement manager will be looking at the grass verge. He has a meeting scheduled with his line manager, John Hart, later this week.

Cllr Thomas said he did not believe that it would be possible to create finger parking on the grassed area due to the proximity of the trees and their roots. Therefore, the best option is likely to be bollards to prevent vehicles parking on the grass. This of course will not resolve the parking issue, just push it somewhere else instead.

- **Tree overhanging school lane – no progress. Quotations to be obtained.**

Action: J. Allsop

- **Japanese knotweed encroachment onto Cottage site**

Refer to item 6 b 11, Review of actions - Contact PCSO Sally Brooks re Japanese knotweed encroachment onto the Cottage site.

- **High Street traffic issues, including Bus Stop outside the Bull public house**

Refer to item 6 b 12, Review of actions - Arrange for the High Street Working Group to regroup again.

- **Land for a Community Orchard**

Refer to item 6 b 13, Review of action - Find out how much money was transferred to HCC for management of Gatekeeper land.

- **Cover for High Street bench and notice board near the Great Innings roundabout**

A cover for the High Street bench to incorporate the Parish Council notice board was discussed.

It was agreed that more discussions need to take place about the location of the notice board and the seat. The ideal position for a notice board, with or without a seat, would be on the grassed land at its junction with the High Street and Walkern Road. This location might not need to have a protective cover over it. It might be possible to have this project financed from S106 funds.

- **War Memorial – measurement of tilt**

Refer to item 6 b 14, Review of action - Carryout measurement checks to the War Memorial.

- **Volunteer group to deal with small maintenance / environment matters around the village**

Cllr Kirk suggested that the Parish Council could use volunteers to help deal with maintenance issues such as repairing the Lammas steps.

Parish Councillors agreed in principle; however, they would need to draw up a volunteering policy to safeguard the Parish Council and volunteers, including any children who are involved.

Cllr Lewis agreed to look into this.

Action: R. Lewis

b) Routine Reports

- i) **Monthly village-report**

Cllr Lewis completed the report on 7 January. The main points identified in the report are highlighted below.

- **Condition of grass** – bearing up
- **Childrens play area**
 - **Condition of surface** – some puddles.
 - **Small swings** (1 x 2 bays) – screw loose, John aware.
 - **Seesaw** – OK.
- **Community Hall: Exterior** – ask John about drainpipe.

- **Allotments: Access** – some branches on drive.
- **Culverts on Mill Lane** – Small amount of litter. Green waste nut still flowing.
- **Recycle clothes bin** – small overflow - no trash.

The Clerk to request that the recycle bin be emptied.

Action: J. Allsop

- **Ornate village sign** – small crack in concrete base

Note: This problem was highlighted by Cllr White in April 2023- “post OK but concrete foundation is cracked in two places and can be moved.” Former Cllr John Meischke agreed to inspect and reported his findings at the May 2023 meeting. Minute extract as follows.

“Cllr Meischke said he had inspected the Ornate village signpost foundation. The foundation itself is strong and the post does not move. However, the concrete collar installed to protect the post from grass trimmer damage is cracked. As the collar serves no structural purpose, only protects the post, no action is required.”

ii) **Caretakers’ report**

Cllr Lewis read out items highlighted in the Caretaker, John Meischke’s report for the period 13 December to 9 January 2024.

Community Hall – internal

- **Kitchen** – repaired 2.5 litre kettle, installed luncheon club equipment in the hall and their serving trolley is stored in the library/meeting room.
- **Main Hall** – rolled out carpets, stretch them and rerolled.
- **First Aid kit** – updated with items already in store.

Community Hall - external

- Gutter DP leak – report bottle blocking but investigation ongoing.

Play- area checks

- Small swing repair
- Graffiti removal
- Seesaw repair: reference Wicksteed Leisure – outstanding (video taken and sent to Wicksteed).
- **CCTV** equipment fault being investigated.

Defibrillator: reported as used and reset.

iii) **Defibrillator inspection**

Cllr Hammon continues to do regular defibrillator checks.

iv) **Website/Facebook – feedback**

Nothing to report.

v) **Highway issues**

Nothing to report. – great innings -

vi) **Dog fouling reports**

Parish Councillors agreed that dog fouling was not any worse, however it had not ceased.

Cllr Thomas sad that he had been given some footage of an owner allowing their dog to foul and not disposing of the fouling.

vii) **Police reports**

PCSO Sally Brooks emailed the A6 Crime Reports for December 2023. Watton-at-Stone had four items identified in this report, which included a dog dangerously out of control, theft, harassment, and criminal damage.

10. **Correspondence received**

a) **Letter of resignation from the Clerk, Jane Allsop**

Refer to item 7 d, Specific items - Recruitment/Handover plan/team for new Clerk.

11. **Reports from other organisations**

None.

12. **Items for publicity**

The following item was identified for inclusion on the website and Facebook and Parish Council notice boards.

- Election of a new vice-chair
- Advert for a new Clerk
- Parish Council vacancy

Action: N. White/J. Allsop

Meeting closed: 22.21.

The date for the next Parish Council meeting is Tuesday 13 February 2024.