

Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held in the Community Hall on Tuesday 12 March 2024

Present:	Cllr Nicola White (Chair)	Cllr Richard Lewis (Vice-Chair)
	Cllr Darren Appleby	Cllr Michael Brooks
	Cllr Annabel Kirk	Cllr Catherine Hammon
	Cllr Mark Richardson	Clerk: Jane Allsop
Members of public	Jane Dodson, Helena Owen and Anne-Marie Steven	

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies: Cllrs Emma Waltham (on leave of absence).

2. Public participation

None.

3. Chair's/Clerk's report

Cllr White said she had six additional items.

1. This is the Clerk's last meeting before leaving at the end of the month. Cllr White presented her with a plant and thank you card, as a token of her 31 years of service.
2. Cllr White attended the Herts Parish, Town and Community Councils and County Councillors - Annual Meeting 05 March on Zoom.
 - Slides will be available from presenters which Cllr White will share when available. Some interesting stats:
 - 3,200 miles of highways
 - 3,000 km of rights of way
 - 500,000 tonnes of waste
 - Sustainability - many grants for trees, hedges, community orchards, etc
 - No responsibility to prevent flooding - but enormous support to residents affected.
 - Ware Town Council - "you said, we did" campaign.
 - Importance of notice boards - they represent us (notice boards how good)
 - Use of QR code
 - Engagement - go out! don't invite in
 - Devolution - Government not supportive
 - Gilston (10,000 homes) - will be joined up and not split across Herts and Essex
3. Stand at the village fete for councillor engagement event - Refer to item 6 b 4, Review of actions -Progress Engagement event for the village and proposal team.
4. RVTV – CCTV repairs – refer to item 9a, Community Hall Trustees.
5. PAT testing charge – refer to item 9a, Community Hall Trustees.
6. Kompan quote for replacement swing seat – refer to item 9a, Community Hall Trustees.

4. Parish Councillor Vacancies

Cllrs White and Lewis met with Terry Askew and Jane Dodson to talk about the Parish Councillor role.

Cllr White said that the Parish Council will not be co-opting new members tonight as they are concentrating on appointing a new Clerk.

5. Declaration of interests

None.

6. Minutes of the last meeting

a) Acceptance

- **Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on Tuesday 13 February 2024**
Parish Councillors agreed that the minutes be approved and signed.

b) Review of actions

1. **Speak to Michael Smith about dog waste bag dispenser**
Michael Smith has agreed to speak to the person who fills the dog bag dispenser asking him to reduce the amount he puts in it. The Parish Council will need to monitor the situation when the bags run out and decide if they want to continue purchasing dog bags.
2. **Contact EHDC re reinstatement of bin outside the shops**
The Clerk said that she had emailed Jon Hart today. A copy of the email to be forwarded to Cllr White.

Action: J. Allsop

3. Update Standing orders

This item to be placed on the April agenda for approval at the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council in May.

Action: N. White

4. Progress Engagement event for the village and proposal team

Cllr White confirmed that she had booked a stall at the village fete on Monday 27 May for the Parish Councillor engagement event. She asked fellow councillors to come up with suitable ideas for the event and for volunteers to put together the event.

Action: Parish Councillors

5. List keyholder and which keys they hold

The Clerk said she needs to progress this item.

Action: J. Allsop

6. Consider CCTV system

Refer to item 9 a, Community Hall Trustees.

7. Look at giving a special booking rate to major events booking

This item will be on the agenda for the next Trustees meeting.

Agenda: Trustees

8. Ask Caretaker to inspect barrier at back of tennis court and take action as required

Refer to item 9 a, Community Hall Trustees.

9. Ask Michael Smith to look at the post of the ornate village sign

The Clerk said that John Meischke has looked at the post and agreed it is rotting. She spoke to Michael Smith today, who has agreed to look at the post. He suggested applying a barrier treatment to the post to prevent it rotting further.

If in another year or two the post is deemed to need replacing, it would be an opportunity for the ornate village sign to be returned to Glyn Mould. It has been noted that the sign is looking dull, and its colours need reviving and the surfacing revarnished.

It was agreed to ask Michael Smith to proceed with the suggested works.

Action: J. Allsop

c) Action Points resolved

1. Contact EHDC about leave of absence extension for Cllr Waltham
2. Notify Emma of agreed leave of absence extension
3. Speak to owners of Budgens re High Street litter problem
4. Contact applicants re Parish Council vacancies
5. Notify all allotment holders that the rent will be increasing on 1st October 2024
6. Contact contractors who quoted for work in School Lane
7. Contact PCSO Brooks re Japanese knotweed encroachment and write to Mr. Heffer
8. Send County Cllr Crofton email re S106 usage of land at rear of gatekeeper estate
9. Contact the chair of the Gatekeeper residents' group re land at gatekeeper estate
10. Ask Charles Clerk to register the Neighbourhood Plan's Community Assets
11. **Purchase child defibrillator pads**
The Clerk confirmed that the child defibrillator pads had been purchased and John Meischke had put them in the defibrillator box.
12. Write to planning department re 49a High Street (3/23/1752/HH)
13. Write to planning department re Home Farm Cottage (3/23/2075/HH)
14. Write to planning department re 35 Moorymead Close (3/24/0095/HH)
15. Write to planning inspectorate re Watton Mill (LPA Appeal Ref: 23/00110/REFUSE)
16. Write to planning inspectorate re Barn 2, Gregorys Farm (LPA Appeal Ref: 23/1451/REFUSE)
17. Update Financial regulations document and upload to website
18. Update Risk Assessment & Financial management document and upload to website
19. E-mail all Parish Councillors the updated asset register
20. Meet with Mark Blacktin rework to windows and doors
21. Meet with Mark Blacktin rework to discuss safety surface repair work
22. Look at options for a vandal resistant door for the external toilets
23. Contact Tennis Club re leaf clearance
24. Send letter of thanks to Tony Bradford re tree planting on the Lammas
25. **Ask Helen McCash for details of how to obtain the name of horses' field tenant**
Helen McCash advised contacting Bidwells who lease the land to the tenant. However, the tenant was not contacted, instead a 'do not feed the horses' sign has been purchased by the Parish Council and installed on the sportsfield fence by John Meischke.

Since then, the tenant has put up more notices on the fence asking people not to feed her horses with carrots.
26. Report blocked drain in Church Lane
27. Email Cllr Hammon's report to the caretaker
28. Write articles re items for publicity

7. Specific items

a) Neighbourhood plan

Cllr Hammon reported on the following.

1. Charles Clark has agreed to register the Methodist Church and Hall as an "Asset of Community Value". This will complete the designation of this asset which was made in the Neighbourhood Plan (Policy WAS 11). He will register this to understand the process before registering all the other valued community assets listed in the Neighbourhood Plan.
2. Cavendish Consulting, who are agents for Fairview New Homes, have emailed two dates for a Zoom meeting to discuss the revised plans for the Walkern Road site.
Cllr. Hammon to contact members of the Steering Group to find out if they can attend a Zoom meeting on the suggested dates. **Action: C. Hammon**
3. The Clerk said that there is an underspend of £510 on the Groundwork Trust grant for the Neighbourhood Plan work, which will need to be returned if the money is not spent by the end of this month. Councillor Hammon agreed to liaise with our Neighbourhood Plan consultant Jacqueline Veater to check for any outstanding work. **Action: C. Hammon**

b) Appointment of new Clerk

The three members of Public left the meeting while this item was discussed under exclusion of public and press.

Exclusion of the public and press

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for consideration of item 7 b Appointment of new Clerk, as it contains exempt information as defined in Section 100a of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by Section 12A of the Local Government Act 1985); namely information relating to any consultations or negotiations in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the council and employees.

Summary of exempt/confidential proceedings

Cllr White said that since the Parish Council withdrew their offer of employment to Victoria Dover, four candidates had been interviewed for the position of Clerk. One of those applicants has now withdrawn.

Cllr White proposed that Abigail Brown be offered the position of Parish Clerk to the Watton-at-Stone Parish Council. Cllr Lewis seconded the motion, and all Parish Councillors were in agreement.

Cllr White to notify all applicants accordingly.

Action: N. White

The three members of Public returned to the meeting.

c) New /additional defibrillator for the village

This item was placed on the agenda in error and will be discussed at the September Parish Council meeting.

Agenda: 09/2024

d) Disaster recovery plan

This item was placed on the agenda in error and will be discussed at the May Parish Council meeting.

Agenda: 05.2024

e) D- day celebrations on 6 June

Cllr White to contact Ken Crofton to ask him what other D-Day celebrations are happening in this area.

Action: N. White

Cllr Kirk suggested that the Parish Council could give money to the Scout Group to organise a D-day BBQ event as a fund raiser towards building their new Scout Hut.

8. Planning

Cllrs Lewis reported on the following items.

a) Applications

i) 130 High Street (3/24/0285/HH)

Demolition of outbuilding and construction of replacement outbuilding.

Cllr Lewis said that this item and the item below are to replace an outbuilding with a garden room.

After consultation with Parish Councillors, a no comment response was agreed.

ii) 130 High Street (3/24/0286/LBC) Listed Building Consent

Demolition of outbuilding and construction of replacement outbuilding.

Refer to the above item.

iii) 19 Walkern Road (3/23/1849/HH) AMENDED

Creation of driveway and vehicular access way

The amended plans detail the actual driveway, which was not shown in the original application.

Parish Councillors agreed a no comment.

Action: J. Allsop

b) Decisions

- i) **Home Farm Cottage, Woodhall Park (3/23/2075/HH)**
Removal of conservatory. Proposed replacement conservatory EHDC -Permission granted
- ii) **49a High Street (3/23/1752/HH) –RECONSULTATION**
Construction of single storey rear outbuilding EHDC -Permission granted

9. Reports

a) Teams

Budget & Finance

CLr Richardson reported on the following items.

• **Monthly accounts**

Watton-at-Stone Parish Council			
Petty Cash – Receipts		Petty cash – Payments	
None		FastHost – watton-pc.org.uk domain	14.39
		The British Horse Society – don't feed horses sign	9.49
		BT phone calls	23.25
			47.13
Payments			
Google	Google workspace - direct debit		13.80
SLCC	New Clerk's membership		200.00
Ella Cicero and May	return of allotment deposit		50.00
DefibStore	Child defibrillator pads		108.00
Wages & salaries	February 2024		1,650.88
			2,022.68
Receipts			
Santander	Interest		15.26
Michael Inman	Allotment rent 2023/2024		44.00
Dr Norden	Allotment rent - paid in error		17.50
Nationwide	interest on deposit account		149.02
			225.78
Watton-at-Stone Community Hall			
Petty Cash – Receipts		Petty Cash -Payments	
Tony Silvestri - Pavilion	45.00	None	
Bob Thornton - Meeting room	18.00		
Archery - Main Hall	120.00		
Floodlighting - Donations	146.00		
Luncheon Club - Pavilion	45.00		
Watton Woollies - Pavilion	54.00		
Mark Blacktin - Main Hall	10.00		
Table Tennis - Main Hall	268.00		
	706.00		
Payments			
Wages	February 2024		264.00
British Gas	Electricity		157.29
Castle Water	water supply		52.40
HCC	Black bin bags		13.54
John Meischke	Caretaker duties - 16 x £15		277.50
HMRC	VAT return - December		163.63
Kompan	swing part to repair cradle seat		109.28
British Gas	Gas		413.04
			1450.68
Receipts			
Santander	Interest		20.32
Ildiko Imre-Karda	Meeting room on 18.02.24		28.00
Janine Gildersleve	Main Hall - December 2023 + January 2024		239.58
Dance & Mobility	Pavilion hire		216.00
Paula Sutton -	Main Hall - January to March 2024		259.35
Begona Garcia	Meeting room - January to March 2024		83.60
Peter Khera -	Main Hall - January to March 2024		261.25
Epping Forest	Main Hall - 16 March 2024		24.00
Herts & Middx	Pavilion hire - Meeting room		117.00
			1249.10

Parish Councillors approved the payments.

- Bank signatories**
It was agreed to ask Santander bank to confirm the signatures they currently hold. **Action: J. Allsop**
The Clerk to arrange to have her name removed as signatory on all Parish Council and Community Hall Santander accounts as well as the Parish Council's Nationwide account. **Action: J. Allsop**
- Appoint auditor for the Internal audit of the Parish Council accounts for the year ended 31st March 2024**
Parish Councillors agreed that McCash & Hay is appointed as the internal auditor of the Parish Council accounts.
The Clerk to arrange for the Parish Council accounts, for the year ending 31 March 2024, to be submitted to McCash & Hay for auditing. **Action: A. Brown**
- Appoint auditor for the External audit of the Community Hall accounts for the year ended 31st March 2024**
Parish Councillors agreed that McCash and Hay are appointed as the external auditor of the Community Hall accounts.
The Clerk will arrange for the Community Hall accounts, for the year ending 31 March 2024, to be submitted to McCash and Hay for auditing. **Action: A. Brown**

Community Hall Trustees

Cllr Lewis reported on the following items.

- Date for Trustees meeting** - The date for the next meeting to be arranged.
- Increase in hire chares for 2024/2025** - The Cricket and Tennis Clubs have both been notified of the 10% increase in hiring charges.
The Trustees need to get into discussion with both the Youth and Ladies Football teams about the use of the sportsfield for the season 2024/2025 before discussing the hire charges.
This item will be on the agenda for the next Trustees meeting. **Agenda: Trustees**
- Tennis courts** - The Tennis courts are all in need of cleaning. The single court was last cleaned in January 2022 and the double courts were resurfaced in Autumn 2022.
Sports Courts have quoted £1,125, plus VAT to pressure wash and moss kill all three Courts.
Cllr White proposed that Sports Courts quote be accepted. Cllr Kirk seconded the motion and all present were in favour. The Clerk to instruct Sports Courts. **Action: J Allsop**
There are some small sections of surface damage on the courts. This to be assessed in liaison with Rebecca Hall (Tennis Club) after the cleaning work has been completed. **Action: R. Lewis**
- Water meter** - John Meischke will take a meter reading when the ground has dried up. **Action: J. Meischke**
- PAT testing** – D. P. Electrics have completed the annual PAT testing of the Community Hall items as well as the Parish Council office equipment housed at the Clerk's address.
This year the PAT testing also included hirers items stored in the hall. Specifically Bounce and Lunch Club items. As suggested by John Meischke, Parish Councillors agreed to charge hirers £3 plus VAT per PAT tested item. The Clerk to invoice both Bounce and the Lunch Club and copy them with the PAT testing results. **Action: J Allsop**
- Community Hall gutters** – Cllr Lewis said that during heavy rainfall, the water comes down very fast on the overlay roofs and often missed the gutters altogether, as they appear to be too small for purpose. He asked Parish Councillors to inform him if they see this happening.
- CCTV repairs** - Parish Councillors discussed the pros and cons of repairing the broken CCTV equipment together with the cost involved. Parish Councillors agreed to give the Community Hall Trustees ownership to resolve the CCTV system. **Action: Trustees**
- Vision for the future** – the Community Hall Trustees will, at their next meeting, discuss their vision for the future of the hall and outline a 10- and 20-year vision. **Agenda: Trustees**
Toilet door – The Trustees are looking into obtaining a metal vandal resistant door for the outside toilet. **Agenda: Trustees**
- John Meischke's caretaker report**

 - External toilet** – John has been unable to source a replacement pad for one of the toilet seats and a replacement seat will need to be purchased. This was agreed by Parish Councillors. **Action: J. Meischke**
 - Boot scraper** – the brushes on the boot scraper by the Community Hall need replacing. There is a replacement set in the storeroom, which John will fit. **Action: J. Meischke**

- Sunflower hammock** – Cllr Kirk noted while carrying-out the monthly village-report that the toddler’s sunflower hammock seat was splitting. John has removed the hammock part leaving the two upright supports in place. He has obtained a quotation from Kompan totalling £196.39 (after a discount of £182.84), plus VAT. Cllr White proposed that Kompan’s quote be accepted. Cllr Lewis seconded the motion and all present were in favour. The Clerk to instruct Kompan accordingly. **Action: J Allsop**
- **Barrier at the back of the tennis courts** – John has agreed to remove the barrier when the weather improves. **Action: J. Meischke**
 - **Leaves at rear of Tennis Court** – Cllr Lewis will negotiate the clearance of leaves with the Tennis Club. **Action: R. Lewis**
 - **Kettle** – One of the bases on the two kettles, purchased from Amazon in January, has died. The Clerk has returned the kettle and base for a refund and purchased an identical kettle.

Environment

Cllr Kirk emailed her Environment report to all Parish Councillors on 6 March.

- **Allotments**

We have now let all but one half of a plot on the allotments. Further to our discussion on plot rent rises, I recently let a plot to a lady who is soon to give up a plot in Stevenage. The rent on that plot was over £100 so I think our rise to £35 should be fine!

- **Rectory Lane – grass verges**

Cllr Appleby said that he had noted the registration numbers of four vehicles parked on the grassed area. One has no tax or MOT. Another had only weeks to go before its MOT runs out.

It was agreed that the more we can get locals to engage in complaining about the parking issue, the more likely it is to get resolved.

- **Work to tree overhanging School Lane**

Tree Smiths carried out the work to the overgrown hedge on Tuesday. Dave said he plans to return to trim a few straggly branches and to remove the logs as he couldn’t fit everything into his vehicle. It has certainly increased the light onto the alleyway at the top of the lane. Dave said we must get it cut when the rest of the hedge is flailed as this will encourage the hedge to thicken.

Update on Japanese knotweed encroachment onto Cottage site

Cllr White said that this matter is now with EHDC and the Police. The Parish Council has acted correctly in everything they have done and have minuted the action they have taken.

District Cllr Joe Thomas is also taking this matter forward with EHDC, who own the Cottage site. The Parish Council lease the land from them.

- **Update on Land for a Community Orchard**

On Sunday I met with 9 residents whose properties overlook the field at the edge of the Gatekeeper estate. They were unanimous in their concerns at my suggestion to plant apple trees on the land.

The neighbouring piece of HCC land (including the area which the school uses as a forest school) has issues with antisocial behaviour and they are worried about this spilling over onto the land in front of their properties should we plant trees and encourage local people to visit. They also raised the concern that rodents would be attracted by any fallen apples.

They are keen for the land to be a wildflower meadow – this is what they were assured it would remain when they bought their properties. They are disappointed that the land has not been very well maintained over the years. I said I would investigate what could be done to improve the biodiversity of the field. We talked about the ownership and management of the land and the pros and cons of the Parish Council taking over the management. They said it would be useful if the field could sometimes be cut more frequently than once a year should the need arise. For example, there was an occasion one summer when the pollen from the field was very overpowering.

They also expressed their concern about the flooding on the far edge of the field which may be exacerbated by the ditch not being properly maintained - it seems to have slowly filled in over the years, so the water has nowhere to drain away. This is the assumption; it might be worth checking with someone with more knowledge to check this is correct.

The trees which are already planted in the field have not grown well in the last 10 years. Although the residents think this is down to poor soil, on reflection I think it is more likely due to the trees not being planted properly in the first place and not enough care by the maintenance team over the years.

The residents also asked about the hedgerow which runs along the boundary with Church Lane. They would like it to be denser so I suggested we could investigate whether there is a grant available for this.

Obviously with all of them being against the idea of planting the orchard I do not see that it is in anyone's interests to pursue this. However, we did discuss whether it might be feasible to plant the trees on the HCC land next to forest school. Does anyone know what the latest is with this piece of land?

Since writing this report, Cllr Kirk has found out that the HCC contractor has advised they cut the grass 6 times per year.

Cllr Kirk said she would talk to Tony Bradford to see if we can do anything about extra hedge planting along the Church Lane stretch and the overflowing ditch.

Action: A. Kirk

None of the Parish Councillors know if there are any plans to develop the land that had been earmarked for a doctor's surgery when Gatekeeper Meadow estate was built. Cllr Kirk to investigate.

Action: A. Kirk

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

Cllr Richardson said he had spoken to Peter Knight (Scouts and Guides) who could see no problem with the group helping with the refurbishment of the wooden benches in the village. However, the final approval would need to come from Richard Wing.

There are two caveats that would need fulfilling. A risk assessment which Peter Knight would be happy to do and the assurance that the Parish Council have the necessary liability insurance cover. The Clerk to give Cllr Richardson a copy of our current insurance policy.

Action: J. Allsop

b) Routine Reports

i) Monthly village-report

Cllr Kirk completed the report on 12 February. The main points identified in the report are highlighted below.

- **Grass** - ok given amount of rain recently - some holes and bumps. The grassed area between the Community Hall and School Lane needs cutting.
- **Children's play area**
 - **Safety surface** - hole next to toddler swing.
- **Toddler area**
 - **Palace fortress** - yellow lion felt slightly wobbly and is slightly out of place - maybe missing a part?
 - **Sunflower hammock** - seat has 2 cracks and needs to be replaced, caretaker has been informed.
 - **Junior climbing frame** - One hold on the climbing wall is split and my son (aged 12) said it is generally a very difficult wall to climb and no one uses it because of the awkward holds.
- **Trim trails**
 - **Sit up bench** – right hand post is not secure so bench wobbles.
- **Tennis Courts – refer to item 9 a Community Hall Trustees**

Cllr Appleby agreed to do the April monthly village report with the new Clerk

Action: D. Appleby/A. Brown

ii) Caretakers' report

Refer to item 9 a Community Hall Trustees.

iii) Defibrillator inspection

Cllr Hammon continues to do regular defibrillator checks.

iv) Website/Facebook – feedback

Cllr White said that she had received several positive interactions from members of the public following the Facebook article with her presenting the Parish Council trophy award to a Beaver Scout.

v) Highway issues

The Clerk to report the following faults.

- Blocked drain at junction of Station Road and Rectory Lane.
- The surface of the roundabout near the War Memorial is cracked

Action: J. Allsop

vi) Dog fouling reports

Dog fouling is on the increase around the village.

vii) Police reports

On 3 March, PCSO Sally Brooks emailed the A6 Crime Reports February January 2024. Watton-at-Stone had one item was identified in this report.

10. Correspondence received.

a) **Email from Cavendish consulting re Fairview planning application for Land at Walkern Road**

Cavendish consultation, who are acting on behalf of Fairview New Homes, have offered to meet remotely on Tuesday 19th or Thursday 21st March. Cllr. Hammon will be contacting members of the Steering Group to see if they can attend. Cllrs White and Lewis hope to also attend this remote meeting.

Action: C. Hammon

b) **Email from Paul Atton (Weldon Beesly) re land adjacent to The Willows, Perrywood Lane**

Paul Atton emailed on 4 March attaching plans for two dwellings in Perrywood Lane on the old Monk's yard site. This site has seen several applications refused the last being submitted in November 2018. The Parish Council were in support of their last application.

Parish Councillors will wait for an official planning application before reviewing the plans.

11. Reports from other organisations

- **River Beane Restoration Association**

Nicola Thompson, from the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, advised they are going to be doing some further monitoring on the River Beane, which may include the Lammas. They have requested permission from the Parish Council for them to 'walk along the river' if needed. Parish Council approval sought and granted. Clerk to advise Nicola and send a map of the Lamma/PC land. Any other residents concerned will be directly notified by them.

Action J. Allsop

Affinity Water are working with Woodhall Estate for river restoration which will focus on the public areas of the estate/river which will include a 're-wiggling' of the river to reconnect it with the flood plain on the Woodhall estate (hopefully reducing flooding downstream).

12. Items for publicity

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

- Appointment of new Clerk.
- Tennis Court cleaning.

Action: N. White/R. Lewis

Meeting closed: 21.15.

The date for the next Parish Council meeting is Tuesday 9 April 2024.