

PARISH REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2011/12

Watton-at-Stone Parish Council is made up of ten elected members.

Mr. Mike Smith(Chairman)	Mr. John Meischke(Vice-Chairman)
Ms. Emma Waltham (co-opted)	Mrs. Christine Dinnin
Mr. Denis Filer	Mr. Iain Harris
Mr. Ian Knight	Mrs. Helen McCash
Mr. Nigel Poulton	Mr. David Stock

All members of the Parish Council were shocked to hear that Nigel Poulton had been taken seriously ill whilst on holiday last August. We have come to realise how much he actually did, quietly and modestly, not only for this council but also for the village and villagers, not to mention other charitable organizations. His presence at our meetings is sorely missed.

This has been quite a year for the Parish Council. The Diamond Jubilee celebrations, much of which was planned last year, took place on the 3rd June. Held on the sportsfield it gradually turned into a paddy field but spirits held and was much enjoyed by the participants. Less reliant on the weather was the successful establishment of the Elm trees on the Lammas and the planting of a Jubilee wild flower area with three Silver Birch trees.

We also gave commemorative mugs to the children of the village.

The conservation of the 300-year old Oak tree on the sportsfield, long in the planning, was also completed and surrounded by low-level warning fence.

These two items along with some catch up items from last year and a late VAT rebate lead us to an overrun of some £5000 at the financial year end but the Council agreed that given the circumstances, this was justified. As these events will not be repeated, our Budget and Finance sub Committee was happy to recommend a precept of £30,065, only £70 more than last year.

The planning sub committee looked at some 17 applications, which were responded to by the council. Once again, we weathered an appeal for a wind turbine, which was refused.

Under the banner of localism, the Chairman has attended several meetings concerned with the Local Plan Development Framework within the much vaunted National Planning Policy.

If we have strong views on Watton-at-Stone’s future then we may have to at least officially record these or develop a neighbourhood plan.

Sports and Recreation are pleased with the survival of a reinvigorated Cricket Club with new members and a new ethos based on village cricket. It has a full summer of fixtures.

The MPPA surface is to be revitalised at considerable cost, which justifies the reserves we hold.

The environment committee continues to manage our green spaces and more formal areas.

The planting of 25 acres of Jubilee woodland between the village and the bypass is much appreciated so our thanks go to the Abel Smith Estate for that, and for encouraging villagers and village organizations to participate in the planting. At last, it seems that some serious plans for improving the River Beane are in place, particularly through the Councils Lammas field.

Early in the year, Nigel Poulton and Mike Smith met with C.I. MacDonald where we discussed crime in general. There has been a general reduction in crime levels, largely due to prevention and monitoring the movements of known undesirables. To this end, we have improved the lighting around the Community Hall to combat petty vandalism and disturbance.

The Youth Drop Inn, established by Nigel Poulton, went through a quiet spell but with encouragement from John Meischke, volunteers and a temporary freeze on venue hire fees, it has continued.

I cannot let the year go by without mentioning the loss of Nigel Poulton as our District Councillor due to continuing illness, and Brian Hammond as our County Councillor due to retirement. Congratulations are therefore in order to Ken Crofton from Benington as our new County Councillor and to Rik Sharma as our District Councillor. Rik has woven himself into the fabric of Watton-at-Stone by being at its centre in the Post Office and has proved to be a great ‘villager’.

The above is barely a snapshot of Parish Council activities over the last year. I sometimes wonder if people realise how much effort is made by the Parish Councillors to keep this village functioning.

In recognition of that I thank you all for your support and of course thanks to Jane who continues to ‘keep’ the record straight’.

Mike Smith (Chairman)