

PARISH REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2013/14

The Watton-at-Stone Parish Council comprises 10 members, namely:

Mike Smith(Chairman)	John Meischke(Vice-Chairman)
Emma Waltham	Christine Dinnin
Denis Filer	Iain Harris
Ian Knight	Helen McCash
Margaret Stanley	David Stock

Nigel Poulton

It is my sad duty to record in this report that Nigel Poulton died in the early hours of Sunday, March the 16th. We extend our deepest sympathy to all of his family. He leaves behind a legacy of unparalleled service to this community and beyond. The Parish Council has decided that the Watton-at-Stone Community Hall shall be renamed The Nigel Poulton Community Hall in his memory.

New Member

We are pleased that we were able to enlist the services of Mrs. Margaret Stanley. By popular vote she agreed to become a member of the Parish Council where her experience and first hand knowledge of the village is put to good use.

The Council continues to maintain the fabric of the Village, practically where it has responsibilities and in consultation with other agencies where appropriate. It has attended meetings with the police to discuss a more visible presence within the Village and appears to be keeping the worst excesses of inappropriate behaviour at bay. Thank you Helen for your efforts.

We are now immersed in the debate over further housing requirement in the Village. The conclusion after a Village meeting was that this requirement in the District Plan be opposed and we are about to make a submission to the District Council. The Council is pleased that over a hundred families have found a new home in Gatekeeper Meadow and welcome them to the Village. However, it is less pleased that this development does not count towards future development in the Village.

The other burning issue is that of Station Road and our continuing battle with the County Council over fears for pedestrian safety, particularly children, when trying to cross this busy thoroughfare.

Also a very thoughtless alteration to the road layout has encouraged residents and commuters to park therein causing needless difficulties to vehicles and pedestrians alike.

The Council has commented on 24 planning applications and has updated its protocol on dealing with applicants and neighbours, thank you David and Iain for that. We have endorsed our protocol for dealing with overgrown hedges, a problem which often causes friction.

Encouraged by the efforts of the ‘Play Funding Group’ and the availability of 106 funding, grants from BIFFA and the District Council, the recreation field is about to see a major improvement to its play facilities. A rejuvenated Cricket Club has also updated its facilities with the aid of grant money. Thanks to Ian and Emma for their efforts in co-ordinating ever increasing demands on the field.

Apart from the day-to-day tasks to keep the village tidy, the environment portfolio, headed by Christine, also looks after our open spaces. With water abstraction in the Beane valley due to be reduced by 80%, (thanks to the River Beane Restoration Society to whom we donate), the river and its course through the Village will take on a new life. Ambitious plans to redirect the river to its original course and improve the Mill Pond are in-hand with the Environment Agency. Funding for this will come again from 106 money to be spent on Green Spaces. We also experienced our worst flooding event for decades and the continuing need to maintain flood plain areas was self evident.

The Council acknowledges the efforts of Dennis, as head of Budget and Finance, to keep us on the straight and increasingly narrow path. I know that he will be the first to recognise the efforts of Jane, our Parish Clerk, in keeping the accounts in order and in compliance with regulations. After three years of flat-line precept, an increase this year was inevitable but at 2.8% acceptable.

I try to keep this resume to one page so have not delved into the minutiae of Council proceedings, but I cannot finish without expressing my thanks to John for his unwavering support as Vice-Chairman. He is ‘The Fourth emergency service’.

Mike Smith (Chairman)