

**PARISH REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2014/15**

The Watton-at-Stone Parish Council comprised of 10 members in the year 2014/15, namely:

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

**It** is hard to believe that a year has past and I am writing the 2014/15 report. Looking at last year’s report so many major issues are still ongoing that they force one year to run into another.

**Last** year we resolved to remember Nigel Poulton by renaming the Community Hall which has now been confirmed with two plaques to that effect. We have also installed a commemorative bench and a tree on ‘The Meadow’ in his memory.

**At** this point I think it only right that we thank Rik Sharma for stepping up to the mark as District Councillor, it was never going to be easy in the wake of his predecessor. In the end he felt that he could not commit sufficiently and stood down. The good news is that Michael Freeman was persuaded to stand, was elected and is now our District Councillor. We wish him well.

**We** bid farewell to one of our Members, Iain Harris. He has chaired the Community Hall Trustees and was principal planning coordinator. His legal expertise has frequently enabled us to formulate concise replies and policies. He has kindly offered his help on an ad hoc basis should we require it.

**This** is of course the end of the civic cycle and it would have been gratifying to see more people taking an interest in becoming a councillor. With one resignation there remains a place to fill as the only applicant decided not sign the declaration and so will not be joining the Council. As a result the Council will be looking to co-opt its tenth member.

**Last** year we made best effort to engage with the Police more fully. I think it appropriate that we thank Sergeant Duncan Wallace for his regular attendance at our meetings and despite cuts, a far more visible presence in the village. Every incident seems catastrophic, and for somebody it probably is, but overall I think we have much to be thankful for.

**Play** areas in the village have been significantly upgraded and at last the Parish Council has a play area consistent with peoples expectations. At Great Innings a considerable sum was spent on upgrading the District Councils play area, hopefully its users will come to appreciate the facility.

**Our** thanks must go to the River Beane Restoration Association who have after some twenty five years managed to persuade Affinity Water to reduce abstraction in the river valley to improve the year round flow. With some £3.5 million being spent on this the Parish Council has had sufficient confidence to improve its section of the river flowing through the Lammas. We have also planted 7 new trees on Watton Green. (one commemorative).

**The** Parish Council was extremely pleased to be able to award over £10,000 pounds in total of monies accumulated from the New Homes Bonus to various village organisations which included, Beane Valley, Dots and Tots, Youth Football, Cricket, the War Memorial Hall and the Parish Church.

**We** seem to be making some progress addressing the problem of poor highway design in Station Road. A high profile meeting took place on site with our MP, Oliver Heald, County Councillor, Ken Crofton, District Councillor Rik Sharma, David Burt and other officers from Herts County Council and members of the Parish Council. At least it was agreed that something needed to be done and a timetable has been set. Frustratingly slow I admit, but we will get there!

**A** new lease covering the sportsfield extension has been signed which also covers the land reserved for a new Tennis Court. We hope to progress this project in this civic year.

**The** overwhelming issue this last year has been the submission of our response to East Herts Council’s District Plan. At a Village Meeting the mood was very much against further development and our eventual response reflected that with cogent argument. The Parish Council organised protest by encouraging personal letter or email and petition. This was so successful that our submission produced nearly 500 responses to East Herts and was second only to the ‘North of Harlow’ response where several villages face the prospect of being swallowed up. There is no doubt that this response, particularly the green belt issue forced the District Council to commission an independent review of its green belt policy. Waiting for this has set the production of the deposit plan back by six months and is now unlikely to appear before November.

I mention no Councillors by name as everyone has stepped up to the mark in a sometimes testing year.

I thank you for your support and advice throughout the year and course that of our Clerk, Jane.

**Mike Smith (Chairman)**